



Chris Patten

Chris Patten, the last British Governor of Hong Kong and a former EU Commissioner for External Affairs, is Chancellor of the University of Oxford.

Turkey and the Future of Europe

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LONDON – This is my last column for a while. I am off to become Chairman of the BBC Trust – the strategic authority of one of the greatest broadcasting organizations in the world. So I have to take a Sicilian vow of *omerta* on controversial issues for the term of my chairmanship. That makes for boring commentary: better to put down my pen.

It's in my hand on this occasion as I look out over the Bosphorus on a glittering March morning. Yesterday, there were flurries of snow in Istanbul. But today the sun glints across the water to the Asian coastline of the city; the seagulls bank in the breeze; a great liner sails majestically north towards the Black Sea. It's a "good-to-be-alive" sort of day.

But I always feel like that in Istanbul, a great city where so much world history has been forged. And it's the city where Europe's future may be shaped – Istanbul, not Brussels, Paris, or Berlin. Let me explain.

Europe's current political identity emerged from its recent history. In the nineteenth century, the Continent's share of the world's population increased from one-fifth to one-quarter. That helped European countries dominate the century as expansionist colonial powers. But it also created competitive pressures for living space, with much of the struggle crystalizing in the antagonism between France and an emerging Germany.

The result was three wars in 70 years. You can see the consequences in the sprawling cemeteries of northern and eastern France and the borderlands of central Europe. And we dragged others into our struggles. Look at all the Indian names carved on the memorial arches in Picardy. I recall the war memorial in a tiny village north of Queenstown in the heart of "Lord of the Rings" country on the South Island of New Zealand. Thousands of miles from the bloody fields of France, 26 young New Zealanders who died there are remembered on a granite cross.

So, in the days when Europe worshipped Mars, the God of War, the rest of the world was often drawn into our continental battles. We Europeans were dangerous to each other, and it was often even more dangerous to be one of our friends.

The creation of the European Union was how we Europeans tried to prevent another war. France and Germany were joined at the hip – economic cooperation was meant to lead to closer political union. Around this historic compromise other countries circled, including those, like the United Kingdom, that were originally skeptical of the entire enterprise. We were already all drawn toward it, and our peace and prosperity were consolidated.

It worked far better than the doubters ever imagined was possible – indeed, perhaps even better than its progenitors expected. A vast single market was created. Sovereignty was shared and transformed in areas like trade and the environment. A union with 7% of the world's population produced 22% of its output, a larger share than the United States, almost twice that of China, and 4-5 times that of India.

The European economic giant aspired to a global political role, but here reality swept in. The Mars of the twentieth century is a lot less sure of itself in the twenty-first. Until the United Nations-backed Libyan intervention, Europe seemed increasingly a bystander in international affairs, and even its participation in Libya is largely a Franco-British affair, with Germany opting out and choosing a quiet life.

So what is the point of Europe today? Tell my children that the EU is there to prevent us from fighting one another again, and their reply is blunt: "Of course we are not going to fight." Europe's moral purpose today is an existential question that all Europeans must consider.

For me the answer is to be found in Turkey. Europe with Turkey as a member would naturally be a more dynamic economy. Turkey is a regional energy hub. It has clout and respect in its own region with formidable fighting forces. And, above all, Turkey is now a role model for other Islamic societies striving to accommodate democracy, civil liberties, the rule of law, an open economy, pluralism, and religion.

As an EU member, Turkey would add a new dimension of massive historic importance. Europeans would show that we could embrace an Islamic democracy and build a strong bridge between Europe and Western Asia.

That, in turn, would create a new European identity and narrative, a new reason for the EU to exist in this century, a way of rejecting the divisive politics of old. I hope that by the time I take up my pen again, we will be on our way to this destination. If not, then many of us will find it increasingly difficult to see Europe as anything more than a glorified customs union with political ambitions that are far too big for its boots.

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