

The post-Covid-19 era: will there be more competition or more cooperation?



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Turkey, under the leadership of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has successfully completed the first phase of its fight against the coronavirus pandemic and has entered the second phase. This can be described as “regulated social life,” starting a gradual process of returning to “a new normal.” The extent of this challenging task and our success story so far is a clear demonstration of Turkey’s organizational and operational capabilities.

Turkey’s inclusive health system, well-equipped hospitals and health workers have been instrumental in successfully tackling the pandemic. The country’s success lies in the comprehensive transformation of Turkey’s health system and investments in hospitals over the last 19 years under the leadership of President Erdoğan.

Since the beginning of the crisis, the Turkish Foreign Ministry, with 251 missions

in 143 countries, has been playing an active role. Our Ministry has been especially instrumental in assisting Turkish citizens abroad and coordinating Turkey’s Covid-19 related efforts with other countries and relevant international bodies.

To tackle the challenges of the pandemic, we have mobilized our resources, established a Coordination and Support Center (CSC) and refocused the work of the Consular Call Center according to the instructions of Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu.

The CSC is equipped to carry out multiple functions, such as bringing back our citizens from all corners of the world, supporting Turks abroad whose lives have been disrupted by the pandemic, overseeing Turkey’s medical aid to other countries and communities and solving problems related to border crossings and the flow of trade. The CSC serves as the hub of the multi-agency work that has resulted

in the largest evacuation operation in the history of our Republic.

While over 100,000 Turkish citizens have been brought back from 142 countries since the beginning of the pandemic, a total of 6,992 foreign nationals have been assisted in reaching their home countries on board Turkish repatriation flights. We have also helped 91 countries repatriate over 37,000 of their citizens from Turkey.

We are dispatching air ambulances free of charge for our nationals who have fallen ill and bringing them back to Turkey for medical care. Wherever conditions prevent one of our citizens from being repatriated, we support every single one of them. Guided by its enterprising and humanitarian foreign policy, and recognizing the need for cooperation and solidarity, Turkey has extended medical assistance to 157 countries and 12 international organizations¹. This has made Turkey the 3rd largest provider of medical aid and assistance in the world. The medical equipment that we have provided includes Turkey's domestically produced ventilators, which are vital for saving lives in Intensive Care Units. Turkey has also actively participated in international efforts to find a vaccine for the virus. In short, Turkey has once again proven that it is a global player and a reliable partner for the common good of all humanity.

In addition to logistical undertakings for the welfare, safety and security of our citizens, the Turkish Foreign Ministry has also been engaged in strategic thinking to ensure Turkey's safe navigation through these rough waters. International relations experts have been sharing their opinions and the literature regarding global

politics in the face of Covid-19 has been building up fast. We have been following and benefiting from these analyses, as well as actively contributing to the newly emerging literature. The Foreign Ministry's Center for Strategic Research (SAM), acting as a bridge between our Ministry and the academic world, has published two edited books, titled "*The Post-Covid-19 Global System: Old Problems, New Trends*," and "*The World after Covid-19: Cooperation or Competition?*" which included articles from 55 distinguished scholars from Turkey and various countries of the world.

Today, governments all over the world are overburdened with the substantial responsibility of protecting their citizens from a highly contagious, deadly virus. We have no choice but to restrict human interactions and redesign our daily lives accordingly, regardless of any social and economic repercussions. International relations are not immune to the virus either. Indeed, the level of uncertainty in today's international environment is unprecedented. Covid-19 has already affected nation states, international organizations, global governance and great power rivalry, among other things. What will the world be like after Covid-19? Will there be more competition or more cooperation?

It is not an easy task to seek an answer to this question, as we are still going through the pandemic and no one can tell for certain when we will leave it behind. Nonetheless, early signs unfortunately indicate that the pandemic is reinforcing previously existing competitive trends in international relations. Before Covid-19 arrived, states, especially richer ones, had grown more self-centered and less inclined to take responsibility on global issues. Glo-



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bal governance was already under strain. International organizations had already been struggling to stay relevant. Decreasing global cooperation had coupled with increasing nationalism and great-power politics. Deglobalization had intensified, universalism and the rule based international order had been struggling. Covid-19 has highlighted and accelerated these developments.

It is now clear that the current international system has proven ineffective in assisting the international community to overcome the Covid-19 crisis and deal with its social, political and economic effects. What remains unclear is what we will do about it.

There are two alternatives: *increased isolationism* where states go their own ways or *fostered multilateralism* in which states reform international organizations and pool their resources to find global solutions to global issues. We need international organizations with ample abilities, resources and a strong will to tackle not only global political and economic problems, but also environmental, cultural and health-based issues. The pandemic has made this necessity crystal clear. Reflecting on institutional approaches that would enable all countries to work together in accordance with their needs and capabilities could be a good starting point.

Covid-19 has already caused tragic losses of human lives, global economic recession, soaring unemployment rates and rising levels of poverty in the developing world, and more difficulties lie ahead. However, it is not the first crisis of this scale. Humanity has already suffered several other pandemics. The good news is that we have managed to recover and emerge stronger from each crisis. So, there is no reason to be overly pessimistic this time and abandon what we have collectively built. It is in every country's interest to help reform and strengthen international institutions. With the world heading toward further uncertainty, the need for countries to work together is urgent. The initial task is to wipe out Covid-19. Then we should focus on reforming the international system to ensure that we will be sufficiently prepared to face future global challenges, including health emergencies, provide humanitarian and development assistance, deal appropriately with migration and refugees and attend to conflict resolution.

It has become obvious to everybody once again that we need a just world order, recalling President Erdoğan's apt remark that "the world is bigger than five." The pandemic has demonstrated that humankind is in the same boat and that it is our duty to safely bring this boat to a harbor of health, justice and prosperity. Given its successful track record in dealing with the Covid-19 health crisis and its active role in the international coordination efforts, Turkey is ready to bring its contributions and expertise to this endeavor.

Like every major global crisis, the pandemic has generated certain threats and has presented new opportunities. We must be prepared for the risks and seize the opportunities so that the international community does not suffer again in the future as it does today, and states do not need to fight the next pandemic on their own. Cooperation and solidarity are therefore indispensable. 🌐

Notas

1. Turkey received requests for assistance from 158 countries, approximately 4/5 of all countries globally.