



# THE SPIRIT OF KAVALA ZOOM MEETING

Thursday, 14 May at 19:00 (GMT+3)



**FRIEDRICH NAUMANN  
FOUNDATION** For Freedom.

Turkey



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## Meeting Report

In December 2019, the 5<sup>th</sup> Greek-Turkish Young Leaders Symposium took place in Kavala over the course of five days. On Thursday, 14 May 2020, over 30 Greek and Turkish Young Leaders gathered to revive the “Spirit of Kavala” as a collective follow-up discussion due to the new COVID-19 era via a Zoom meeting. The initiators were Ronald Meinardus (Friedrich Naumann Foundation Turkey) and Dimitrios Triantaphyllou (Kadir Has University), while Andreas Kotelis (University of Malta) served as the moderator of the meeting. During the meeting, the attendees shared their opinions, thoughts, and suggestions regarding the current situation in both countries, the role of the media and public opinion, the state of bilateral relations, and how to move ahead in the post-COVID-19 situation. For each topic, there was one discussant from each side.

The first discussion focused on an update of the COVID-19 situation in both countries and the respective responses from the government and political class”. Selen Eşençay (TR) and Grigoris Miliadis (GR) provided the chronology of the coronavirus in their respective countries by presenting the cases, the measures, the political context, the effective actors, the state of the health system, the lockdown itself, and the economic impact of the crisis. In the Q&A part, the participants focused on and discussed the effect of Covid-19 on the economies of both countries with a particular concern about its negative impact on their tourism sectors as well as government revenues.

The next two discussants were Rafaela Papastergiou (GR) and Yüksel Serdar Oğuz (TR) on the topic of “How does the public/media in Turkey view and report about the related situation in Greece and vice versa?”. The Greek media has been providing information regarding the functioning of the state, relations between Turkey and the international system, the social impact of the COVID-19, Turkish trade, domestic and external politics, tourism, and the so-called “Mask diplomacy”. The assessment was that coverage has been, by and large, neutral. The Turkish media has focused on how ordinary Greeks were affected, the cost to the public health system and the economy, and the expected global economic crisis and the potential

shrinkage of the Greek economy. Greece was also described as a country with a successful state response to the crisis, but with public apprehension about the negative economic forecasts in the aftermath of the pandemic. To sum up, the coverage regarding both countries has essentially been balanced and focused on both the health and economic impact of COVID-19.

Nikos Markovitis (GR) and Abdullah Arslan (TR) talked about the state of bilateral relations in the third session. Nikos suggested that the economy and tourism are crucial for both countries, that tensions have been reduced and that both countries need to focus on ensuring economic growth. Abdullah concentrated on energy security, refugees and irregular migrants, the economy, and military drills. He intimated that COVID-19 will not necessarily reduced tensions between the two countries, although these have subsided as the priority for both the public and the governments is on combatting the pandemic. This, in turn implies less coverage regarding disputes with the other side and the opportunity for civil society in both countries to take the lead and seek to improve Greek-Turkish relations.

The last session was on “How do we as a group move on? How can we shape projects to address the COVID-19 reality and our cooperation in a post-COVID-19 era?” with Ayca Kâhya (TR) and Stavroula Oustoglou (GR) as discussants. Ayca strongly promoted the use of new digital era needs tools, such as, fact-checking and a long-term action plan with online education on media literacy and freedom of media (such as FNF Turkey’s Human Rights Academy). Stavroula outlined five priority areas of focus which could be incorporated into joint projects: automation and COVID-19-related stress, the significance of asylum and migration flows in the post-COVID-19 era, the emergence of economic isolationism, the protection of privacy and individual rights, and the security of the individual.

The Zoom meeting ended with some general comments that the pandemic crisis has created opportunities such as, for example, virtual meetings, seminars, and projects. Disinformation campaigns, migration and asylum, trade, and tourism are issues that concern both countries and the fact that this group maintains dialogue and attempts to formulate joint projects is promising. The process of interaction, even in its increasingly digital form, is just as important as the content as the objective is to focus on the human potential of Greeks and Turks to reach out to each other and work together.

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