

LYMEC Digital Assembly Outcomes Report

(Hybrid - Online and Istanbul, Türkiye)

7 February 2026

10h-12h30 CET (Brussels time)

12h00 to 14h30 GMT+3 (Istanbul time)

Security across Europe: The role of Türkiye

The 2026 LYMEC Digital Assembly convened in hybrid format on 7 February, bringing together young liberals, experts, and partners from across Europe and Türkiye.

Participants joined online from 09:45 CET ahead of a full programme dedicated to European security, Türkiye's geopolitical role, and the state of youth activism and liberal engagement under challenging political conditions.

Opening of the Assembly

LYMEC President **Ines Holzegger** opened the session by welcoming participants and situating the Assembly within both the historical and current political context for liberals in Türkiye. She emphasised LYMEC's solidarity with communities still affected by the devastating hurricane three years prior, and highlighted the significance of holding the Digital Assembly in Türkiye at this moment - both as a gesture of support and as recognition of the country's strategic importance for European liberalism.

Representing the Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF), **Jeroen Dobber**, Head of the Global Security Hub, addressed Europe's evolving security landscape, particularly the rise of AI-driven warfare. He stressed the need for deeper cooperation between Europe, Türkiye, and other strategic partners to address these challenges effectively, while acknowledging Türkiye's longstanding contributions to European security.

From FNF Türkiye, **Aret Demirci** offered a candid reflection on the risks faced by young liberals in the country. He revisited the wave of arrests in the previous year and the long-term consequences these events have had on the careers and lives of politically active youth. His remarks grounded the Assembly in the lived reality of Türkiye's liberal community and the courage required to remain engaged.

Panel Discussion: European Security and the Role of Türkiye

Moderated by **Ines Holzegger**, the panel brought together three distinguished speakers:

- **Burak Dalgın**, Member of Parliament
- **Prof. Dr. Çiğdem Üstün**, Secretary General at EDAM

- **Prof. Salih Bıçakçı**, Nişantaşı University

Türkiye as a Security Actor

The discussion opened with an exploration of the obstacles preventing a more stable and trust-based EU–Türkiye security partnership.

Burak Dalgin argued that the relationship remains overly transactional, with the EU engaging Türkiye primarily on migration and military matters. He called for a more consistent and respectful approach that recognises Türkiye as a full partner. **Prof. Üstün** highlighted the fragility of trust between the two sides, noting that the EU's lack of clear policy direction complicates cooperation. **Prof. Bıçakçı** traced the shift in security dynamics since the Cold War and pointed to the ambiguity in Europe's expectations of Türkiye. He stressed the need for a structured, functional relationship rather than ad-hoc engagement.

Strategic Autonomy and Diverging Concepts

The panel examined whether the EU and Türkiye share a common understanding of “strategic autonomy.” **Dalgin** reiterated that the transactional approach has eroded public trust in the EU within Türkiye. **Prof. Üstün** expanded on the economic and foreign policy dimensions, arguing that the EU's tendency to focus on concerns rather than opportunities limits meaningful engagement.

Türkiye's Balancing Act in the Ukraine War

The war in Ukraine has reshaped perceptions of Türkiye's security policy. **Burak Dalgin** emphasised Türkiye's commitment to NATO and the need for equal treatment within the alliance. He also reflected on the domestic political landscape ahead of Türkiye's elections, noting the importance of credible leadership and trust-building with the electorate. **Prof. Üstün** described Türkiye's longstanding role as a facilitator, rather than mediator, between Russia and the West, driven by geographic proximity and economic interdependence. **Prof. Bıçakçı** warned of the political temptation to use security narratives as a shield for restricting freedoms, especially when public fears are heightened.

Hybrid Threats and Cognitive Security

The panel concluded with a discussion on hybrid threats, disinformation, and algorithmic governance. **Prof. Bıçakçı** outlined the risks posed by major technology companies' control over data and the impact this can have on democratic processes. He stressed the vulnerability of societies to cognitive manipulation and the lack of state capacity to respond quickly. The speakers collectively agreed on the need for multidisciplinary cooperation and the development of a new generation equipped with critical digital skills.

Audience Question

An online question prompted reflections on Türkiye's relations with Armenia. **Burak Dalgin** noted encouraging diplomatic progress and the potential for deeper cooperation. **Prof. Üstün** emphasised the importance of modernising the Customs Union and argued that the

EU must take a more active leadership role in advancing constructive engagement with Türkiye.

Keynote: Youth Activism and Freedom of Expression

At 11:15, **Sıla Demiral Özel**, Foreign Relations Communications Specialist at Istanbul Municipality, delivered a keynote on youth activism and civil society under pressure. She spoke about efforts to ensure that the voice of Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu remained present despite his detention, and reaffirmed the commitment of young activists to a democratic future for Türkiye.

LYMEC Bureau Updates

The Assembly reconvened at 11:40 for updates from the LYMEC Bureau.

- Willemijn and Dimi introduced ongoing work to address the persistent challenge of female participation within LYMEC.
- Bureau members provided updates on their portfolios, after which President Holzegger opened the floor for questions.

In response to a question from a member about regrets and lessons learned:

- Ines reiterated the importance of improving female participation as a long-term priority.
- Willemijn stressed the need for continued focus on Ukraine, encouraging greater member engagement in the “Voices from Ukraine” initiative.
- Sean highlighted the Code of Conduct as a key tool for strengthening safety and accountability within LYMEC.
- Marten emphasised the importance of fundraising, particularly in the lead-up to LYMEC’s 50th anniversary.
- Alex encouraged members to seize upcoming opportunities to reflect on LYMEC’s past achievements and future direction.