FRANCE AND TURKEY:
NEW HORIZONS FOR A LONG-STANDING RELATIONSHIP

As part of a partnership with the Turkish Policy Quarterly, the Robert Schuman Foundation has published a text by French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius entitled "France and Turkey: new horizons for a secular relationship" published in this review on 30th November last as well as an article by Nigar Goksel, editor in chief of this review on Euro-Turkish relations.

Abstract:

The President of the French Republic has marked France’s will to establish a "stable and trusting relationship" with Turkey. This relationship should reflect the centuries-old friendship between our countries, our dense economic ties and our concurring analyses of many current issues, especially the Syrian crisis. In preparation for a visit by the President of the French Republic, I would like to encourage us here and now to drive forward our bilateral relations.

A RICH, AGE-OLD FRENCH-TURKISH RELATIONSHIP

On both sides of the Mare Nostrum, France and Turkey can pride themselves on a centuries-old diplomatic relationship – symbolized by the alliance between Francis I and Suleiman the Magnificent in 1536. We have seen a growing body of knowledge circulating between our two countries in a vast range of areas. We all know about the influence France, and especially the Age of Enlightenment and the ideas of the French Revolution, had on the Ottoman Empire reformers and then on the young Republic of Turkey. For its part, Turkey has always fascinated France, as shown by the successful "Turkish Season" in France, which is still fresh in our country’s mind. Today, while the Muslim world is in a sweeping change, we are again seeing a renewed interest in the "Turkish Model".

A SOUND ECONOMIC FOUNDATION

We often find that little is known about the importance of our economic and trade relations. The French Chamber of Commerce in Turkey –France’s oldest abroad–has just celebrated its 127th anniversary. Who today knows that Turkey is our 12th customer worldwide, and our 5th largest market outside the EU and Switzerland, well ahead of emerging countries such as Brazil and India? In recent years, our trade has flourished with exports to Turkey having increased by two and a half times in just ten years. France is Turkey’s seventh supplier and one of its leading investors. Nearly 400 French firms –many of which are the flagships of the French industry– are established in Turkey and they employ approximately 100,000 people. Aéroports de Paris recently became TAV’s leading shareholder. The French have a significant presence in the high-tech sectors: Renault is set to produce its first electric family saloon car in Bursa, Alstom has one of the world’s most modern electric transformer plants in Gebze and is highly active in both the transport and wind turbine sectors. Turkish Airlines has become one of Airbus’ main customers, for the A318-320 and the A330-340 in particular. Turkish Aerospace Industries has partnered up with Airbus to develop ailerons for the A350 and is a member of the Airbus Military consortium for the A400M with 5.8 percent of the holdings. Among other leading companies, Thales and GDF Suez are well established in Turkey. Schneider Electric, Air Liquide, Safran and Dassault Systèmes offer their solutions to their Turkish customers. French firms such as BNP, AXA and Groupama are also working on developing the banking and insurance sector in Turkey. In the mass retail sector, Carrefour, Leroy-Merlin, and Decath-

1. Laurent Fabius is the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the French Republic. This text was originally published in Turkish Policy Quarterly on 30th November 2012. http://www.turkishpolicy.com/displayfile/vol_11-nc_%20fabius.pdf
FRANCE AND TURKEY: NEW HORIZONS FOR A LONG-STANDING RELATIONSHIP

France has an impressive network of ten world-class French-speaking establishments in Turkey. Its flagship is the Lycée Galatasaray established in Istanbul in 1868, a descendant of the imperial schools, and the university with the same name, established in 1992. Our cultural institutes in Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir, and the Alliance Française in Adana also contribute to the vitality of our cultural exchanges. The Erasmus program promotes growing mobility for French and Turkish students, and this is also encouraged by grant and scholarship programs.

In the scientific field, we conduct joint world-class projects every year on the Programme Bosphore. The famous French Institute of Anatolian Studies, working in Istanbul for nearly a century now, attracts human and social science researchers specialized in the Turkish civilization.

Close Foreign Policy Cooperation

As NATO allies, France and Turkey take part in joint missions in Afghanistan and the Balkans, to name two. Our relationship offers all the more opportunities to work together, since Turkish foreign policy has largely broadened its horizons this last decade. Turkey and France share a common interest in many regions such as the Near and Middle East, the Caucasus, the Balkans, as well as some countries in the African continent which has become a priority for Turkish foreign policy in recent years and could become a new area for French-Turkish cooperation.

The Arab Spring has challenged some well-rooted principles and views. The idea of an Islamic world stuck eternally in a status quo due to authoritarian regimes impervious to democratic processes is a thing of the past. The people have rallied, and shown that the aspiration for freedom and justice is universal.

France and Turkey have acknowledged this sea change by providing their support for the legitimate aspirations of the Arab peoples and supporting their move towards democratic, pluralistic institutions. Today, in the "Group of Friends of the Syrian People", our two countries are among the most active in seeking a resolution to the Syrian conflict, increasing the pressure on Bashar Al-Assad’s regime for him to stand down, and working for a more united opposition.

I would like here to tell the Turkish people how much I appreciate the huge efforts made by their country to receive Syrian refugees on their soil. I realize what a challenge this growing influx of refugees represents. This is why, following my visit to the Kilis camp in August, I took the initiative to convene a ministerial meeting of the United Nations Security Council on 30th August 2012 in order to discuss the humanitarian issues involved. Ahmet Davutoğlu attended this meeting I chaired.

STRAIGHT TALK ABOUT SENSITIVE QUESTIONS

Our two countries have demonstrated exemplary cooperation over the Syrian crisis. Despite tensions in our relations, we have kept the dialogue going between our capitals. In an interdependent world, Turkey and France should look to the future together in a relationship that manages to resolve our differences, or at least to accept them.

Turkey’s Negotiations for Membership of the European Union

My government, as President François Hollande has said, is keen to develop our relations with Turkey, which is a key partner to France and the European Union and an important player on the international and regional scene. The future of our nations is interlinked. The European Union needs a strong Turkey with a sound, buoyant economy, just as Turkey needs the European Union, which represents nearly 50 percent of its foreign trade and 90 percent of its foreign investment.

With the adoption of the "Positive Agenda," and the prospect of visa liberalization, we have a certain
number of useful tools on the table. We are set to take
the negotiations forward on Turkey’s accession in good
faith, considering the past commitments without anti-
cipating the future in all its details. At the end of the
day, it will be up to the Turkish people and EU member
states to decide. Since the protection of individual and
collective freedoms is a pillar of the European project,
human rights and civil liberties need to be promoted
further, and we are willing to work with Turkey on these
issues.

I subscribe, in this regard, to President Gül’s words
to the Turkish Grand National Assembly on 1st Octo-
er 2012, when he said that Turkey’s relations with
the EU, the United States and its NATO allies are not
just a foreign policy and security choice, but are based
on common values which, he concluded, should lead
Turkey to continue down the road of reforms.

The Question of the Armenian Genocide

The question of the Armenian genocide is a sensi-
tive and difficult subject that has all too often cast a
shadow over our bilateral relations.

In Turkey, many criticize France for embracing the
“Armenian theses.” In France, many feel that Turkey
is trying to minimize, –if not deny– the tragedy that
befell the ancestors of our compatriots of Armenian
origin.

Things are changing. My colleague Ahmet Davutoğlu
has made encouraging statements, which I believe
are meaningful. I quote; “The Armenians have
before them someone who is listening. This Foreign
Minister does not claim that nothing happened in
1915.”

For myself, I am not unaware of Turkey’s share of
suffering during the gradual dismantlement of the
Ottoman Empire, with its succession by massacres
and exoduses. However, I do believe that the disap-
ppearance of the Armenian civilization from Anatolian
soil warrants some thinking on Turkey’s part, as to
what is needed to heal the wounds opened in 1915.

I hope that one day soon, we can achieve a calm,
fair reading of history. In the meantime, we should
try to learn to live with respect for the diversity of the
legacies of which we are the guardians.

France and Germany, which we thought irreconci-
lable, have set an example in this, by persevering
with a sometimes painful labour of remembrance
and truth and making a considerable effort to edu-
cate the younger generations to put aside the old
prejudices, and develop a European consciousness.

THE NEW WAY FORWARD FOR FRENCH-
TURKISH RELATIONS

A Rich Political Dialogue

When President Hollande took office, he wasted no
time in stepping up the high-level meetings. He met
with his opposite number Abdullah Gül on the sidelines
of the NATO Summit in Chicago and with Prime Minis-
ter Erdoğan during the Rio Conference on Sustainable
Development. I attended these positive meetings and
I have also had the pleasure of meeting my colleague
and friend Ahmet Davutoğlu three times, in Istanbul,
Paris, and Ankara.

In recent months, our political discussions have
concentrated on the regional crises, top of the agenda
of which is Syria. More generally, the tensions in the
Middle East and the processes embarked upon in the
Arab Spring countries make it all the more necessary
to have an ongoing dialogue that could lead to concrete
three-way cooperation, especially in support of the
reconstruction and modernization of these countries’
infrastructures.

We should set to work forthwith on improving our bila-
teral relations in preparation for the forthcoming visit
to Turkey by the President of the French Republic. This
visit will be especially significant in our bilateral rela-
tions, since there has not been a French state visit to
Turkey in over 20 years.

Legitimate Ambitions for Our Cooperation

We have a great deal to do and to develop in all sectors
of our cooperation, in the cultural and scientific areas,
in internal security, in justice, and in business.

The prospect of a Turkish cultural center (Yunus Emre
Center) opening in Paris forms an important step in
this direction. It will give Turkey a cultural and linguis-
tic outreach tool.

In the scientific field, it is necessary for us to streng-
then our relations in the most strategic sectors such as
energy, convergence technologies, the food industry,
and space. It would be to our advantage, in this area,
Neighbour states
FRANCE AND TURKEY: NEW HORIZONS FOR A LONG-STANDING RELATIONSHIP

The Foundation has long actively cooperated with Turkey in anti-terrorism, drawing on substantial judicial and police resources. We intend to keep up this work, encouraged by the achievements to date and in connection with the internal security agreement signed by the interior ministers in 2011.

In justice, these coming months could find us working together on our respective judicial systems, international drugs trafficking and the administrative justice system, with targeted actions in such areas as combating terrorism, cases concerning detention pending trial and domestic violence.

We still have much to do in business, in particular to encourage French businesses, especially SMEs, to work with the Turkish market and to encourage Turkish firms to invest in France. Among the sectors in which we would like to step up our work, I will make special mention of the food sector. Agricultural trade currently represents less than five percent of our bilateral trade. This is way below the potential of our two countries as major agricultural powers. We have just appointed an agricultural advisor to our embassy in Ankara to develop our agricultural trade and cooperation in this area.

French and Turkish firms boast internationally renowned expertise and know-how. The French and Turkish ministries for foreign trade are currently analyzing the financial instruments that we could use on what we call "third country" markets, especially the French Export Credit Insurance Company (COFACE) and Türk Eximbank, to develop joint economic partnerships to conquer new markets together.

The progress made in these areas, and the progress ongoing, means that today we can look forward to our future relations with optimism and ambition. I welcome this progress and will personally work on further developments with strength and conviction.

Laurent Fabius
French Minister for Foreign Affairs

Link to the article by Nigar Goksel, Editor in Chief of this review on Euro-Turkish relations:
Turkey - Europe’s Estranged Sibling?

You can read all of our publications on our site:
www.robert-schuman.eu

Publishing Director: Pascale JOANNIN

THE FONDATION ROBERT SCHUMAN, created in 1991 and acknowledged by State decree in 1992, is the main French research centre on Europe. It develops research on the European Union and its policies and promotes the content of these in France, Europe and abroad. It encourages, enriches and stimulates European debate thanks to its research, publications and the organisation of conferences. The Foundation is presided over by Mr. Jean-Dominique Giuliani.