

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

*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.*

Laurent Fabius\*



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### *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 fifth 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, Thalès 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 Décathlon are becoming household names in Turkey, and the list goes on.

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### *A Model of Vibrant Cultural Cooperation*

France has an impressive network of ten world-class French-speaking establishments in Turkey. Its flagships are 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,

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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 30 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 EU***

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 anticipating 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.

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I subscribe, in this regard, to President Gül’s words to the Turkish Grand National Assembly on 1 October 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 sensitive 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 disappearance 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 irreconcilable, have set an example in this, by persevering with a sometimes painful labor of remembrance and truth and making a considerable effort to educate 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 Minister 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 bilateral 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 relations, 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 linguistic outreach tool.

In the scientific field, it is necessary for us to strengthen 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, to set up a partnership between our research funding agencies. I hope that our two countries' universities can develop joint degrees further in innovative areas, in association with our respective economic players, and can ramp up student exchanges for greater mobility.

France 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 small and medium enterprises (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.

*“Ahmet Davutoğlu: ‘The Armenians have before them someone who is listening. This Foreign Minister does not claim that nothing happened in 1915.’”*