

Happy Anniversary? EU-Turkey relations at age 50

An appeal

Berlin – Istanbul
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Coral reefs are sturdy structures, able to withstand massive waves while hosting some of the richest ecosystems on the planet. They are also the collective product of the efforts of millions of organisms. As Charles Darwin noted in his diaries in 1836, reefs are “the accumulated labour of myriads of architects at work night and day, month after month.”

The right political structures are, at their best, similar to such reefs: foundations, developed every day by the efforts of millions of individual architects, creating opportunities for communities and individuals to flourish as they pursue their lives.

On 12 September 1963 leaders of the European Economic Community and Turkey met in Ankara. They signed an [Association Agreement](#) – the Ankara Agreement – with the objective “to promote the continuous and balanced strengthening of trade and economic relations between the Parties.”

Half a century has passed but the institutions created then are still around. The Association Council, where the governments of Turkey, the EU member states and European institutions are represented, continues to meet every year. A Customs Union, only a distant goal in 1963,

was set up in 1995 and has since been taken for granted by countless entrepreneurs. Economic and trade relations have deepened at an ever accelerating pace. This has made a difference to the lives of millions of individuals. Meanwhile the European Court of Justice continues to adjudicate crucial cases, brought by individuals on the basis of rights confirmed in the Association Agreement.

Europe has changed tremendously in this period. In 1963 Turkey was reeling from the consequences of its first military coup and the execution of its first elected prime-minister, Adnan Menderes, which took place less than two years before. It was an overwhelmingly rural and very poor country. The European Economic Community, on the other hand, was itself only six years old. It had six members then. Germany was divided, the Berlin Wall just two years old. France was emerging from dramatic confrontations: a long colonial war, an attempt coup in 1961 and Algerian independence. Spain and Portugal, far from being members of the new European club, were firmly ruled by the dictators Franco and Salazar, while Central and Eastern Europe was in the hand of communist regimes. Most of Europe's regimes then were autocratic.

In the half century since 1963 regimes have collapsed (fascist, communist, military dictatorships); states have disappeared; borders have been redrawn across the European continent. Throughout tumultuous periods the EU has continued to grow, from six members with a population of some 170 million to twenty-eight members with half a billion people.

Turkey's transformation has been no less dramatic. In 1963 the majority of Turks, and the large majority of Turkish women, was illiterate. Its companies produced and exported very little. The total population was less than 30 million. The average life expectancy stood at 48 years. By 2010 it had risen to 74 years. This in itself is an extraordinary change.

This anniversary is thus a good moment to take stock: where does the Turkish-EU relationship stand today? And where is it going?

The [Panglossian vision](#) is that EU-Turkey relations have always been, and will necessarily remain, an indispensable anchor for both. The vision behind the Ankara Agreement, ever closer integration, has become a reality. Far from slowing down, this process accelerated in the past decade. This is obvious from statistics on trade, on travel, on the stock and flow of foreign direct investment – and, of course, from the launch of accession talks in 2005. Since 1963 one change has begotten another, in what appears to be a chain of reaction. The Ankara Agreement has created a community with mutual interests as well as tensions bringing further convergence of norms and ambitions.

There are no fireworks, however, to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Ankara Agreement. In the view of many, the association it created never fulfilled its potential, lacking the trust that it needed to flourish. From this perspective EU-Turkey relations are a succession of missed opportunities, miscalculations and serious disagreements. In the mid-1970s, when some West European leaders urged Turkey to submit an application for full membership (together with Greece), [Turkey refused and missed a golden opportunity](#). In the early 1980s, while Spain shed the remnants of an authoritarian tradition, Turkey was ruled by a military junta after yet another coup. In the 1990s, as Central Europeans embraced democracy and human rights, and set out to “return to Europe”, Turkey fought an internal counter-insurgency that included horrific human rights abuses, population displacements, widespread torture and state-sanctioned killings. And how often have European nations shown Turkey the cold

shoulder, breaking promises, ignoring their own commitments? The result is sour relations, marked by distrust.

What is 1963 to Turkey's young?

While it is true that much has been achieved, many opportunities have also been wasted; the bonds created in 1963 are solid, and yet the relationship suffers from enduring and deep distrust.

Taking this reality into account, the real question is, what is the future of this unloved agreement? What will it mean to a new generation of Turks, the 31 million young people below age 24 in one of Europe's youngest nations? This is a generation born after the end of the Cold War, which does not remember the days when ties between Turkey and the West were based on fears of a common Soviet enemy. It is this generation that will still be around when the Ankara Agreement reaches the ripe old age of one hundred in 2063. Will the association between Turkey and the EU matter to them; then and until then? How much life, how much promise is there still in that relationship? One might conclude that the real test for this relationship *is yet to come*.

Portrait of a rising generation

Today Turkey has a population of 76 million people whose median age is 30 years (the median age of the EU-27 is 42). This young generation is the most educated in Turkey's history. 20 million Turks attend school; 3.5 million go to university. The number of pupils attending Turkish secondary schools has doubled in one decade. The number of university students has more than tripled, between 2000 and 2012, from 1 million to 3.5 million.

University students in 2000 (in 1.000)¹

Countries	2000
1. Germany	2,055
2. UK	2,024
3. France	2,015
4. Spain	1,829
5. Italy	1,770
6. Poland	1,580
7. Turkey	1,015
8. Romania	452

University students in 2010 (in 1.000)²

Countries	2010
1. Turkey	3,529
2. Germany	2,556
3. UK	2,479
4. France	2,245
5. Poland	2,149
6. Italy	1,980
7. Spain	1,879
8. Romania	999

¹ Data retrieved from [Eurostat statistics database](#).

² Data retrieved from [Eurostat statistics database](#).

This is a society hungry for educational opportunities. A recent survey found that nine in ten Turkish respondents considered higher education “attractive”, one of the highest numbers in Europe.³ In 2010 more than 1.7 million people took the Turkish national university admission exam. Of these only 560,000 were able to enrol.⁴

Public policy is struggling to keep up with this demand. In 2006 Turkey had 93 universities (25 private). In 2010 the number was 166 (now 61 private).⁵ Public expenditure on education budget keeps growing. From 2003 to 2013 it increased from 14 to 63 billion Turkish Lira.⁶ The share of education spending in the central budget went from 9 to 16 per cent.

The distribution of free textbooks for primary education was launched by the state in 2003.⁷ In 2006 it was extended to secondary schools, and in 2009 to distance and adult education.⁸ Thus in 2012 the Ministry of National Education distributed 187 million free textbooks to approximately 16 million pupils.⁹

Besides new books, there are new teachers: a whole generation of mostly young people. Their number has increased sharply in just one decade. This also reflects the increase in the years of mandatory schooling, which first went from five to eight years in 1997, then to twelve in 2012.

A new generation of teachers¹⁰

	2000	2010
Primary education teachers	345,015	503,328
Secondary education teachers	140,969	222,705

Such rapid growth creates challenges. Raising the quality of education in all these new institutions is one of those challenges. In the OECD’s PISA tests, which measure pupils’ competency level in science, mathematics and reading, Turkey ranked 32nd among 34 OECD countries in 2009.¹¹ But here also lies one of the big opportunities for Turkish society: there is a lot of room to improve the education of the current generation of pupils, and this is certain to have an immediate, potentially dramatic, impact on the Turkey of the future. It is the biggest development challenge the country faces today.

³ Flash Eurobarometer. [Youth on the move, analytical report](#), European Commission, May 2011, p. 15.

⁴ Turkish National Agency, The Centre for EU Education and Youth Programmes. Studying and living in Turkey for Erasmus 2012, Ministry of EU affairs, p. 5.

⁵ [Turkish Education System 2012](#), Strategy Development Department, Turkish Ministry of Education, 10th February 2012, p. 174.

⁶ This includes the budget of the Ministry of National Education, the budget of the High Education Council in charge of the supervision of universities and the budget for public universities. [National Education Statistics, Formal Education 2012-2013](#), Turkish Ministry of Education, pp. 228. The 2012 GDP estimate is from the Central Government Budget Law.

⁷ Bayrakçi, Mustafa, [Ders Kitaplar Konusu ve İlköğretimde Ücretsiz ders Kitabı Dağıtım Projesi](#) (Textbook Free Distribution Project and Primary School Books). Milli Eğitim Dergisi/Journal on Education, issue 165, Winter 2005.

⁸ CNN Türk, [“Ders kitapları burslulara ücretsiz dağıtılacak”](#) (Textbooks are distributed free of charge), March 2012.

⁹ Hurriyet Daily News. [“Öğrenciye bedava 187 milyon kitap”](#) (187 million free books for students), September 2012.

¹⁰ [Education statistics](#). Turkish Statistical Data.

¹¹ Köseleci Blanchy, Nihan & Şaşmaz, Aytuğ, [PISA 2009: Where does Turkey stand?](#), Turkish Policy Quarterly, Volume 10, Number 2, pp. 125-134.

Association and mobility

So where does the EU relationship fit in against the background of a rapidly changing Turkey? The core idea of the Ankara Agreement was that mobility and interaction would lead to growth and prosperity. The central vision is one of people meeting, communicating, and trading freely as part of one community in one common regulated economic space. This vision has never been more relevant than today, as Turkey is challenged to continue to raise its average income while creating millions of new jobs for a new generation.

It is in the areas of mobility and people-to-people contacts that we find huge, untapped potential to take this association to a different level. While students are often the most mobile part of the general population, Turkey's 3.5 million university students remain surprisingly isolated.

With the exceptions of some elite universities in Istanbul most Turkish students are unlikely to meet many other Europeans at their own universities. Only 3,500 full time students in Turkey are from EU countries.¹² Many of these are ethnic Turks from Bulgaria and Greece. Even the number of all foreign students at Turkish universities, 26,000 – with most from Azerbaijan, Iran and Turkmenistan – is far from impressive. This is as many as in Jordan, which has a population of 6 million. Erasmus students, who come only for a few months, confirm this trend, with only around 4,000 a year coming to Turkey.

At the same time only 48,000 Turkish citizens studied abroad for a degree in 2010. This is 1.4 per cent of the country's total number of students: a very low number compared to other European countries. Even more striking is the trend: there has been no significant increase between 2000 and 2010. By contrast the number of students going abroad to study from South Korea went from 70,000 to 121,000 in ten years.

Turkish students studying abroad¹³

Year	Students abroad
2000	46,939
2005	50,079
2010	48,309

The European Union's Erasmus exchange program, the biggest university exchange program in the world, also shows much untapped potential for contacts. Turkey joined it in 2004. Since then the number of Turkish students spending from 3 to 12 months at another European university has gone from 1,100 to 10,100 in six years. However, while the trend is positive, the potential for further exchange is huge. The number of Turkish Erasmus students is just one third of the number of German Erasmus students, and much lower than the number of Erasmus students from (much smaller) Poland.

¹² Leaving aside Cypriot students.

¹³ Data retrieved from [UNESCO Institute of Statistic](#).

Erasmus student sent per country, 2010¹⁴

	Outgoing	Total population (million)
1. Spain	36,186	46
2. France	31,747	65
3. Germany	30,274	82
4. Italy	22,031	60
5. Poland	14,234	38
6. UK	12,833	62
7. Turkey	10,095	72
8. Netherlands	8,590	17
9. Belgium	6,824	11
10. Portugal	5,964	11

It is not only students who have limited contacts with their European counterparts: this is true for a whole generation of young Turks, who have no personal experience of the EU. A recent survey found that only one in ten young Turks (age 15 to 29) ever left the country.¹⁵ Even in Istanbul only 13 per cent of young Turks have been abroad. Twice as many young men than women travelled. And those who travel mostly go to neighbouring, non-EU countries.

This is then an area where European and Turkish civil society institutions and foundations can take a lead to bring together the young generations. As a step to push forward the debate on how to increase mobility particularly for the young generation European and Turkish foundations might set up a high-level group – inspired by the [International Commission on the Balkans in 2005](#) – to explore how to further the official commitment to increase contacts between people further: to look into national European experiences on how to foster exchange between teachers, pupils, students, vocational schools.

It's still visa, stupid

Meanwhile, what can the EU and Turkey do? A lot, it turns out.

It is paradoxical: the number of Turks travelling abroad increased from 3.5 to 6 million between 2003 and 2012. However, the biggest increases were travellers going to Georgia, Syria, East Asia, Iran and Azerbaijan!

¹⁴ [Erasmus statistics](#). European Commission. Total population number for 2010 retrieved from the [World Bank](#).

¹⁵ SETA, *Gür et al. Türkiye'nin Gençlik Profili*, March 2012, p. 53. The Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA), in cooperation with the Youth and Sport Ministry, released this survey on Turkey's young people in March 2012. It surveyed 10,174 Turks between 15 and 29 years old in seven regions of Turkey in early 2012.

Where Turks (are able to) travel more (in 1,000)¹⁶

	2003	2012	Increase
Georgia	3	583	+ 580
Azerbaijan	132	439	+ 307
Greece	171	450	+ 279
Syria	261	474	+ 213
West Asia	781	959	+ 178
Italy	91	248	+ 157
Central Asia	45	160	+ 115
South Asia	12	124	+ 112
All travel worldwide	3,520	6,020	+ 2,500

There are only two EU countries which saw a similarly strong increase in Turkish visitors in this period: Greece and Italy. It is hardly a coincidence that the EU countries which saw the strongest increase in the number of Turkish travellers, Italy and Greece, are also countries with very low visa application rejection rates.

Refusal of requests for Schengen short-stay visas by Turkish nationals, 2011¹⁷

Visa-issuing states	Refusal rate in 2011	Short-stay visas applied for	Short-stay visas issued
Greece	0.5%	62,329	62,039
Italy	1.2%	100,242	99,032
Hungary	1.4%	14,314	14,116
Spain	2.4%	32,598	31,828
France	3.4%	117,919	113,913
Poland	4.1%	7,414	7,111
Netherlands	7%	41,523	38,601
Czech Rep.	7.2%	18,027	16,728
Germany	9.6%	156,165	141,114
Austria	9.7%	13,242	11,961
Sweden	11.6%	7,860	6,946
Belgium	14.3%	12,412	10,631
All Schengen countries	5.2%	624,361	591,950

¹⁶ “[Citizens Visiting Abroad by Destination Countries 2003-2012](#)”, Turkish Statistical Institute, Main Statistics.

¹⁷ The visa statistics are available on the website of the Directorate-General for Home Affairs of the European Commission, section “[Schengen, Borders & Visas](#)”, subsection “Visa policy”. On this “Visa policy” page, the statistics are at the bottom of the page.

The visa requirement is an obvious obstacle. It requires applicants to collect and submit a pile of documents, pay a fee of 60 Euro and wait. In particular young, unmarried people run the risk of being rejected.

In 2011, the share of multiple-entry visas issued by Schengen countries was 37 per cent, ranging from 6 and 13 per cent (visas issued by Spain and Germany, respectively) to 92 and 98 per cent (Italy and Austria). However, even many of these visa had a validity of only a few months.

The percentage of multiple-entry visas and visa rejection rates can – and should – be monitored and discussed regularly by the EU and Turkey. A decreasing trend in the refusal rate and an increasing trend in the issuance of long-term multiple-entry visas would show that the EU is serious about increasing people-to-people contacts.

However, the most important step to be taken for increasing people-to-people contacts would be to move to full visa liberalisation. At the moment, this particular ball is in Turkey's court. The EU launched a new visa liberalisation policy in 2008 and applied it first to five Western Balkan countries. This policy is based on a deal: a country carries out various reforms in the home affairs area and the EU then lifts the visa requirement. The conditions are listed in a “visa liberalisation roadmap” or “visa liberalisation action plan”. Five Western Balkan countries successfully underwent this process between 2008 and 2010.¹⁸

In June 2012, the Council finally offered Turkey a visa liberalisation process. In the second half of 2012, the European Commission and EU member states agreed upon a roadmap. However, Turkey hesitated – and it still hesitates. Above all, it fears signing a readmission agreement, one of the EU's conditions.

As ESI has shown in a previous report this is an irrational fear. In [“Cutting the Visa Knot. How Turks can travel freely to Europe”](#) from 21 May 2013 we argued that Turkey needs to formulate its own firm but constructive response to the EU's proposal and cut the Gordian knot of visa-free travel.

The 50th anniversary of the Ankara Agreement is an appropriate occasion for both the EU and Turkey to finally get serious about increasing contacts and making the European idea of free movement and exchange – central to the vision of 1963 – a reality for Turkey's young generation.

Association and communication

The ability to speak to each other is certainly another central element in bridging gaps in understanding and building bridges between Turkey's young generation and their counterparts in today's EU. Besides a hunger for education, young Turks are in fact eager to learn foreign languages. According to a survey by Eurobarometer in 2006, 95 per cent of Turkish respondents believed that learning a foreign language would be useful for them.¹⁹ In the EU the percentage was 83.

¹⁸ Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia.

¹⁹ [Special Eurobarometer: Europeans and their languages](#), European Commission, February 2006. Most Turks consider English the most useful language, followed by German.

However, so far this eagerness to learn languages does not translate into skills. The same survey found that Turkey had the highest number of people not speaking any foreign language in Europe: 67 per cent compared to 44 per cent in the EU.²⁰

*Knowledge of foreign languages, 2006*²¹

Country	No foreign language (per cent)
Turkey	67
Ireland	66
United Kingdom	62
Spain	56
Romania	53
France	49
EU25	44
Poland	43
Germany	33
Estonia	11
Luxembourg	1

This has not changed since. A 2012 report by TOEFL²², the international standardised English testing company, showed that Turkey had the lowest scores in Europe, on the level of Sudan, Ethiopia and Algeria.

This problem has been recognised in Turkey. Efforts have been announced; some steps have been taken.²³ This is certainly an area where efforts by Turkey itself could create a significant impact on the EU-Turkey association. Improving language skills would increase the number of Turks who can study abroad, take part in EU programs, engage in international business, and take part in European debates.

At the same time European institutions, and civil society organisations interested in the future of the EU-Turkish relationship, should also look more closely at what might be done to help Turkey bridge his linguistic gap. Some European countries, such as Poland and Estonia, have a recent experience in closing the foreign language gap. Exploring ways of supporting Turkish efforts to catch up is certainly another area worthy of focus by civil society institutions in both Turkey and the EU.

At the same time, it is not only Turks who should be concerned about communicating better in other languages; European institutions should also, finally, embrace Turkish.

As of today, the EU has 24 “official and working languages”:

Bulgarian, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Irish, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovak, Slovene, Spanish, Swedish.

²⁰ [Special Eurobarometer: Europeans and their languages](#), European Commission, February 2006.

²¹ [Special Eurobarometer: Europeans and their languages](#), European Commission, February 2006.

²² [Test and Score Data](#): Summary for TOEFL iBT Tests and TOEFL PBT Tests, January 2012–December 2012 Test Data, Educational Testing Service, 2013.

²³ Today’s Zaman, [Turkey to hire 40,000 native English speakers as guest teachers](#). 25th March 2011.

It would take little to add Turkish to this list. The EU regulations are clear; any official language of an EU member state is also an official EU language. Any EU member state that has more than one official language can apply to the EU to recognise a second language as an official EU language. This goes back to a regulation from October 1958.²⁴ Three countries have so far indicated that they have more than one official language: Finland (Swedish and Finnish), Belgium (French, Dutch and German) and Ireland (English and Irish).

When Ireland became a member in 1973, Irish was not made an official working language of the EU. In June 2005 Irish was made the 21st official EU language. Legislation approved by the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers is translated into Irish. Interpretation is available at European Parliament plenary sessions and some Council meetings. The cost of making Irish an official EU language was estimated at just under €3.5 million a year.²⁵

In early 2004 it was already widely expected that Turkish would soon be added to the list of EU official languages. In case the [UN \(Annan\) plan for Cyprus](#) would have been accepted, officials in DG Enlargement explained, “There will be no need for formal proposals. It will be automatic.” Pat Cox, then the president of the European Parliament, stressed during a visit in Ankara on 2 March 2004 that the parliament was ready and that “this should mean that from 3 May [2004] at the European Parliament's first plenary session after enlargement, the Turkish language will enter the European Parliament.”

In fact, according to Article 3 of the Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus, Greek and Turkish *are* even now the two official national languages:

1. The official languages of the Republic are Greek and Turkish.
2. Legislative, executive and administrative acts and documents shall be drawn up in both official languages and shall, where under the express provisions of this Constitution promulgation is required, be promulgated by publication in the Official Gazette of the Republic in both official languages.
- ...
5. Any text in the official Gazette of the Republic shall be published in both official languages in the same issue.
- ...
7. The two official languages shall be used on coins, currency notes and stamps.
8. Every person shall have the right to address himself to the authorities of the Republic in either of the official languages.

Today Cypriot passports contain text in Greek as well as Turkish and English. The Cypriot EU Presidency website had a Turkish [version](#). Both languages could be found on Cypriot money in use before it adopted the Euro. Thus, all it would take would be for Cyprus to put its second official language forward for the EU institutions to “speak in Turkish.” This is one of the least costly and most visible ways to make Turkey and young Turks feel part of the common Europe.

Why would Cyprus do this? It would be a simple recognition of its own constitution. It would also be a signal to Turkey’s next generation, born more than two decades after the conflict on the island. It would above all be an investment in another, different relationship in the next half century to the one in the past.

²⁴ [Regulation determining the languages to be used by the European Economic Community](#) (OJ L 17, 6.10.1958, p. 385).

²⁵ Finfacts Ireland, ["EU to hire 30 Irish translators at cost of €3.5 million"](#), 13 June 2005.

Instead of a conclusion

“Down in the valley, the view was the one offered by a valley, with all the particulars of the enclosed scene. Only when one had moved out of the valley, or rather when action had created a new context, would new options heave into sight and stimulate new views.”

Francois Duchene, *Jean Monnet – The First Statesman of Interdependence*

To appreciate the solidity of the bonds created between the EU and Turkey it suffices to contrast this relationship with the turbulent evolution of Turkey’s relations with other countries in the past five years, whether Iran or Iraq, Russia or Armenia, Syria or Lebanon, Israel or Egypt.

In the case of the relationship between Turkey and the EU, [as ESI wrote in 2010](#), divorce is simply not an option. Like a coral reef, the structures of association established fifty years ago between the then European Economic Community and Turkey have continued to develop through myriad individual efforts. So much so that they are today mostly taken for granted.

This appeal has a simple message: the best way to commemorate this anniversary is not to revisit the past but to focus on the future. To look to the generation – in Turkey and in the EU – that will shape the next half century; and to propose concrete ideas that highlight the potential that continues to exist in the Turkey-EU relationship.²⁶

²⁶ This is also what ESI, supported by [Stiftung Mercator](#), is planning to do for the rest of 2013: with further publications and public events in Berlin, Brussels and Istanbul.