

An Enduring FRIENDSHIP

By Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mehmet Öcal

Centuries of good will
provide a solid foundation for
improved relations between
Turkey and Germany



Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, right, meets German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Berlin in October 2012. Erdoğan attended the opening of Turkey's new embassy and underscored the need for Turkish integration in Germany.

GETTY IMAGES

After more than a century of close and friendly relations, it would not be an exaggeration to say that Germany and Turkey share a uniquely long and mostly fruitful history. With 3.5 million ethnic Turks living in Germany for decades, and more than 4.8 million German tourists visiting Turkey in 2011, the two countries are also bound by a “human factor,” creating a bond of multifaceted, cultural, human interconnectedness and diversity. In addition to the long history of friendly relations, Berlin plays a crucial role in Ankara’s aspirations to become a member of the European Union. This long-standing tradition of friendship and cooperation is mirrored by a multitude of strong ties in the fields of economics and politics.

According to the Center for Studies on Turkey, more than 700 German companies have branches in Turkey and approximately 80,000 Turco-German companies are doing business in Germany. In 2010, they employed more than 400,000 workers and generated about 36 billion euros. Because of its strategic location, Turkey plays a prominent role in German foreign policy, especially related to the Middle East and Caucasus, with their substantial energy resources. In the cultural sphere, German-Turkish filmmakers, actors, entertainers and footballers such as Fatih Akın, Birol Ünel, Kaya Yanar and Mesut Özil enjoy great popularity in Germany. Currently, however, friendly relations have been overshadowed by the malicious

arsons on Turkish-owned houses and the neo-Nazi killings of eight Turks in Germany.

Owing to this high level of interdependence, the domestic and external policies of Germany and Turkey have significant impact on the policies of the other. But this relationship is shaped by historical Turkish-German relations and by volatile and ambivalent current issues such as Turkey's EU accession efforts, Turkey's conflict with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the integration of Turks living in Germany. These issues affect future relations and national priorities concerning their political, economic, and strategic preferences.

A LONG RELATIONSHIP

German-Turkish relations go back more than 800 years, and it is significant that for more than 300 years there have been no violent conflicts between the two peoples. Given the plethora of European wars in previous centuries, this history of peaceful cohabitation and good relations is quite noteworthy.

The first encounter of the Germans and Turks (if we exclude the relations of German and Hunnic tribes in the fourth century) occurred when the leader of the third crusade and emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Friedrich I "Barbarossa," went to Konya, Turkey, in 1190 to make peace with Sultan Kilicarslan. But the German emperor drowned in the Göksu River on his way south after defeating the Turkish Seljuks.

The disintegration of the Seljuk Empire in the ensuing centuries brought a new Turkish tribe, the Ottomans, to rule over the majority of Turkish nomadic princedoms spreading across Anatolia. They created a great empire that stretched over three continents and occupied the Balkans in Europe and wide parts of the Middle East and North Africa.

The expansionist policies of the Sublime Porte in Istanbul threatened the German states, whose foreign policy toward the Ottoman Empire was consequently largely shaped by military issues. Nevertheless, the Germans were always reluctant to join alliances against the Ottomans. The last time German armies fought Turkish armies was when the

Ottoman troops of Kara Mustapha Pasha's besieged Vienna in 1683.

PRUSSIA AND THE OTTOMANS

Following the founding of the Kingdom of Prussia in January 1701, Istanbul sent the first diplomatic endorsement and the first delegation of Ottoman diplomats to intensify bilateral relations. During the reign of Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm I, a treaty of friendship was signed with the Ottoman Empire, and in 1721 the first Prussian liaison officer arrived in Istanbul. In 1751, the first permanent political diplomats were exchanged. After signing a treaty of peace and friendship with Prussia in 1790, the Ottoman Empire intensified military ties, especially during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II.

In the late 19th century, Ottoman-British relations deteriorated, and Istanbul renewed the treaty of friendship and reinforced bilateral relations with Germany. Impressed with sympathy shown for the Sublime Porte by Prussia at the signing of the 1829 Peace of Adrianople, the Ottoman sultan invited a Prussian delegation of military advisors to Istanbul in 1833. Helmuth von Moltke, later hero of the wars of German unification, led the group that arrived in November 1835. These Prussian military advisors were assigned to reorganize the increasingly outmoded Ottoman army. Reciprocally, Ottoman officers were sent to visit Prussian military academies in Berlin. In addition to military cooperation, political, economic and even cultural relations were established. The first generation of German settlers, the so-called Bosphorus Germans, began immigrating to Istanbul not long after the arrival of the military advisors.

THE AMBITIONS OF WILHELM II

In the later decades of the 19th century, many Germans worked at German-run construction sites as craftsmen, industrialists and engineers. However, the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and ongoing French and British colonial expansion in the Middle East and North Africa could not be prevented by reinforced Turkish-German ties. The ambitious Emperor

Wilhelm II pursued a policy of colonial expansion, to which the Ottoman territories, and especially Anatolia, were of great importance. Economic cooperation resulted in the construction of the Berlin-Baghdad railway and the German Emperor was convinced the “Baghdad Bahn” would facilitate access to the natural resources of the Middle East and open up markets for the German arms industry. The railway was also part of the German strategy to break the British transportation monopoly in the Middle East.

The 19th century was a period of cultural discovery for Germans and Turks alike. The increased German presence at the Sublime Porte in the late 19th century did not signal the loss of Ottoman domestic control; instead, by supporting Ottoman renewal projects, the Germans made the Baghdad Railway a cornerstone of the emerging Turco-German cultural partnership. Kaiser Wilhelm’s several state visits in the Ottoman Empire, the construction of German schools and hospitals in Istanbul, and the presence in Berlin of 1,300 Turks — mainly students and workers — made it a harmonious time for German-Turkish relations. Two Turkish newspapers were printed in Berlin before World War I, and a German-Turkish Association was founded in 1914 to promote cultural and economic cooperation.

THE WORLD WAR I “WAFFENBRÜDERSCHAFT”

Military relations between the German and Ottoman empires culminated in the German-Turkish alliance during World War I. The very pro-German, though inexperienced, Young Turks overthrew Sultan Abdülhamid II and took control of the government in Istanbul in 1908. The Young Turks saw the German Empire as an enemy of their enemies, and therefore took an undisputed pro-German position. With the signing of the August 1914 Turco-German Alliance, the Ottoman Empire joined the German-led Central Powers to form the Triple Alliance. Turkey formally entered World War I on October 28, 1914, when the Ottoman Navy — composed mainly of two German warships, the Göben (Yavuz) and Breslau (Midilli), led by German Adm. Wilhelm Souchon and crewed by Germans — launched an unprovoked attack on the Russian Black Sea ports of Odessa and Sevastopol. The Triple Entente declared war on the Ottoman Empire on November 4.

Despite the friction with the Triple Entente, the Ottomans had no major stake in Great Power conflicts being waged in Europe. The Turkish decision to ally with Germany undoubtedly stemmed

from a desire to preserve the empire, and Ottoman leaders hoped to use the war to restructure and protect it from further invasion. With social structures coming apart at the seams, they understood the empire might not emerge intact from the conflict. Turkish-German military relations in the prewar years had created a special bond, a “Waffenbrüderschaft,” or “brotherhood of arms,” between the two empires’ armed forces. German generals commanded Turkish troops in the important battles. In 1917, Emperor Wilhelm II wore an Ottoman uniform when he visited Istanbul for the third time.

Germans and Turks fought together, but also lost together. Painfully defeated in the war, both had to cope with the trauma of harsh peace treaties imposed by the victors. The treaties of Versailles and Sèvres disrupted German-Turkish relations for some time. Berlin had to accept the Treaty of Versailles and suffered its consequences throughout interwar period. But the Turks, under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Pasha, did not accept the Treaty of Sèvres and instead started a victorious war of independence that led to the founding of the Republic of Turkey on the ashes of the Ottoman Empire.

INTERWAR PERIOD AND WORLD WAR II

After the Turkish republic was founded in 1923, Ankara began to refresh ties with Germany. A new trade agreement was signed in 1929, and diplomatic relations were renewed but remained at a relatively negligible level until after World War II.

Following Adolf Hitler’s rise to power in Germany in 1933, Turkey provided refuge to Germans of Jewish descent, left-wing and liberal academics and engineers fleeing their homeland. These intellectuals played important roles in the reorganization of universities and the foundation of industrial plants and companies in Turkey. Among those emigrants were Ernst Hirsch, later president of the Free University of Berlin; Ernst Reuter, later mayor of Berlin; Dankwart Rustow, who later became an American political economist; and the famous poet Carl Zuckmayer.

The relatively young Turkish republic had learned from the experience of World War I, when it had fought and lost with Germany. Because it wanted to stay out of international wars, Turkish president İsmet İnönü remained neutral during most of World War II. Nevertheless, a non-aggression pact was signed June 18, 1941, between the two countries. Ankara maintained diplomatic relations with Berlin throughout most of the war until Turkey

declared war on Germany in August 1944 as a condition for membership in the United Nations.

TURKISH MIGRATION TO GERMANY

As World War II ended and Germany was divided, the Cold War period helped develop and intensify military, commercial, economic and cultural ties between the Republic of Turkey and the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany). Germany suffered an acute labor shortage after the war, and in 1961, Bonn officially invited Turkish workers to Germany to fill the void, particularly in factories that helped fuel Germany's economic miracle. Turkey had a surplus labor force, and the cooperative labor force agreements benefited both countries and resulted in a great number of Turkish citizens immigrating to Germany. The German authorities named these people *Gastarbeiter*, or guest workers. Most Turks in Germany trace their ancestry to Central and Eastern Anatolia. Today, with an estimated population of 3.5 million, Turks constitute Germany's largest ethnic minority and most of Germany's Muslim community.

In the early 1970s, the status of most Turkish immigrants in Germany shifted from temporary to permanent. However, Germany's need for foreign laborers declined in the 1970s and 1980s, while Turkey still had an excess labor supply. Germany and Turkey moved away from the cooperative model of labor exchange, making it difficult for Turkish citizens to obtain entry. Germany restricted labor force immigration and encouraged already admitted immigrants to either return home or reunite with their families and integrate into their communities.

XENOPHOBIA, ISLAMOPHOBIA AND INTEGRATION

As mentioned, Turkish immigrants were regarded as temporary settlers from the onset. Consequently, Germany did not put into place structures to facilitate integration of the immigrants into the new society, nor did the Turks work toward integrating themselves. For Turks in German society, patterns of discrimination

maintain the disadvantages of low economic and social status and restrain social advancement. Despite their long-term residency, Turks continue to face hostility, which has intensified since the mid-1970s.

In Germany today, there is an undercurrent of xenophobia in public opinion and an open emphasis on xenophobia in right-wing and neo-Nazi organizations. A wave of xenophobic violence that saw offenses triple between 1991 and 1993 claimed several Turkish lives. After reunification, the number of violent acts by right-wing extremists in Germany increased dramatically. In the 1990s, at least eight Turkish residents were killed in neo-Nazi fire bombings in Mölln and Solingen. However, most Germans condemned these attacks on foreigners and marched in candlelight processions, and the killers were sentenced to many years in prison.

Deadly neo-Nazi attacks continued after 2000; members of the neo-Nazi National Socialist Underground (NSU) were allegedly responsible for 10 murders – eight Turks,

one Greek and one German police officer – between 2000 and 2007. The still unsolved murders resulted in allegations of deliberate official inaction and strong demands for the identification and conviction of the perpetrators, and for implementation of strong, effective measures to prevent similar incidents from happening. It has raised suspicions and doubts about the German state among both Turks and Germans. Indeed, the loss of trust in German institutions will have a negative impact for the integration of all non-German communities.

Considering that one in five people living in Germany hails from an immigrant background, according to figures released in 2012 by the German Federal Statistical Office, Berlin has no alternative than to invest in the integration of immigrants to discourage segregation and radicalization among the population. According to Gökçe Yurdakul, a Humboldt University social scientist specializing in diversity and social conflicts, many politicians and policymakers see integration politics as a way of creating a homogenized society rather than encouraging equal



Turkey's Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, left, meets with German counterpart Guido Westerwelle to discuss the creation of a Strategic Dialogue Mechanism between their two countries in May 2013.

political and social participation for everyone in Germany. Integration is well-intentioned but ill-implemented.

This issue has also driven a wedge between Berlin and Ankara in recent years, most notably when former German President Christian Wulff was told by his Turkish counterpart, Abdullah Gül, during a visit to Turkey that Germany should do more to help Turkish residents integrate into German culture. This followed claims by the German Chancellor Angela Merkel that multiculturalism had failed.

On the other hand, many experts agree that integration is a slow-moving process and a two-way street; both sides have to make their own efforts to live together in peace and harmony in a diverse society. Therefore, it is important to fight discrimination, Islamophobia and work together to improve the culture of coexistence. On the local level, there are many projects that provide support for education, communication, counseling and language training. Nevertheless, Turkish migration will remain an important issue in relations between the two countries.

POLICY ISSUES

For decades, Turkey's elites have sought membership in the EU. Germany's political support of Turkish EU aspirations, however, has not been consistent. Former Chancellor Helmut Kohl openly expressed opposition to Turkish EU membership, while his successor, Gerhard Schröder, favored it. Chancellor Angela Merkel has opposed full membership, but advocates a vaguely defined cooperation, the so-called privileged partnership, between Turkey and the EU. She has not explained in detail the meaning of "privileged partnership."

According to Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdoğan, Ankara is already a privileged partner of the EU and anything less than full membership is unacceptable. It will be difficult to offer Turkey anything less than full membership that is also attractive enough to bind them permanently to the EU. Turkey already has a kind of privileged partnership with the customs union. In the ensuing elections for the German Bundestag (parliament) in September 2013, the debate on Turkish-EU membership will continue among Turkish migrants and German political parties.

The PKK and its practice of fundraising in Germany is another point of contention. Turkey complains that the PKK, considered a terror

organization by both governments, has raised millions of euros in Germany over the years to support terrorist activities in Turkey and recruits militants there. Ankara has accused Germany of not doing enough to prevent it.

But Turkey and Germany have many more interests in common, including in regions with proximity to the EU such as the Balkans, the Middle East and the Caucasus. These regions are very important to Germany because instability there affects the stability of Europe. Some countries are also rich in raw materials. It should be noted that Turkey is an important connector, not only between Europe and Asia, but also between the Occidental and Oriental cultures. Consequently, a good partnership between Western countries and Turkey should also improve relationships between European and the Asian states.

Political and economic stability in the Balkans is vital to the EU. And in the Middle East, Germany primarily focuses on stability and finding a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Berlin and Ankara consider Iran's nuclear ambitions to be a threat to stability in the region and a potential danger to the world, and both countries seek alternative solutions to the military option. Farther east, both countries are engaged in Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, where they share a common interest in securing a stable Afghan state. And energy and raw materials, especially crude oil and natural gas, increase the importance of the South Caucasus region. Lying between the energy-rich Caspian Sea basin and the Black Sea, Turkey and Europe, the South Caucasian countries would like to move closer to the EU and view Turkey as a valuable bridge to the region.

ECONOMIC RELATIONS

Germany and Turkey have shared strong economic ties for more than 300 years, and Germany remains Turkey's most important trading partner. Germany was Turkey's largest market in 2011, with exports of goods valued at \$13.9 billion (10.8 billion euros), an increase of 21.6 percent from 2010. Total trade volume between the two countries was \$36.8 billion (28.5 billion euros). Turkey's principal exports to Germany are apparel and clothing accessories, vehicles and automotive parts, textile yarn, fabrics, manufactured articles, fruits and vegetables and power-generating machinery and equipment.

Turkish imports of German goods also increased 30.4 percent in 2011, to \$22.9 billion (17.7 billion euros). Machinery, electrical goods, motor vehicles and automotive parts account for a particularly large portion of German exports to Turkey. Germany is also a significant market for Turkish contractors, with Turkish firms working on 43 projects in Germany for a total value of \$831.9 million (643.8 million euros). German foreign direct investment (FDI) in Turkey was substantial at nearly \$605 million (468.2 million euros) in 2011 and Turkish FDI in Germany was about \$91 million (70.4 million euros).

CONCLUSION

Turkish-German bilateral relations have had an important impact since the predecessor states of both countries first made contact during the Middle Ages. Despite eras of volatility and tense relations, Turkey and Germany nevertheless share much history and remain interconnected in many spheres of contemporary society. They currently maintain friendly, wide-ranging and robust relations. Furthermore, the two countries are bound together by the “human factor,” with Turks being Germany’s largest ethnic minority.

An environment of social, economic and human insecurity influenced Turkish migration to Germany during the last five decades, but shifts in Turkish society, economy and security are attracting a return migration. Since 2006, Turkish emigration from Germany has surpassed Turkish immigration. Improved human rights and implementation of many democratic reforms offered to the Turks, Kurds and other ethnic and religious groups, as well as sustained economic growth, now makes Turkey an attractive destination for immigrants.

Huge numbers of Turks and Kurds consider Germany their country and the country in which their children will grow up. The great popularity of filmmakers, actors and footballers of Turkish descent could help Germany overcome its negative reputation as a nation hostile to minorities. Unfortunately, especially after reunification, the number of neo-Nazi killings rapidly increased. To maintain its image as a democratic and friendly country, Germany must strive to protect innocent people against these cowardly attacks.

The number of Turks living in Germany, and German tourists visiting Turkey, shows that there is an extraordinary interconnectedness between the two countries and peoples, as well as great cultural and economic potential. Decades of human, intercultural and economic encounters make close and friendly relations the only rational option.

For Europe, Turkey has a very important role in spreading peace, stability and even wealth in Turkey’s region. Germany is among Turkey’s most significant

partners in European security and political structures, including NATO, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Council of Europe. High-level visits between Turkey and Germany are frequent. The Turkish and German foreign ministers recently signed a joint declaration to build a mechanism for strategic dialogue that should strengthen bilateral cooperation amid the stalemate in Turkey’s EU accession process. It aims to help bilateral relations flourish, solve current problems and come to a consensus on conflicting positions between the two countries. It also aims to improve cooperation on regional and global issues.

It would be ill-advised not to use this heritage to shape future relations between Germany and Turkey. And this kind of mutual strategic relationship would have wider positive implications for Trans-Atlantic relations. These developments show that Turkey should progress on a policy path friendly to Germany and the EU. Considering the ongoing economic crisis in Europe, Turkey — a country with a prospering economy and political stability, located in a strategic geographic region — can be considered a gain for the “old continent.” □

The views and opinions expressed in this article are solely those of the author.

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