



...the information report relating to

STRENGTHENING FRENCH-TURKISH RELATIONS TO ACT JOINTLY FOR PEACE

A delegation of five senators from the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Armed Forces Committee visited Turkey from 8 to 12 October 2024. It consisted of Christian Cambon, Olivier Cigolotti, Nicole Durantou, Sylvie Goy-Chavent and Jean-Marc Vayssouze-Faure.

The delegation began its trip in Izmir to visit the French detachment of the NATO Allied Land Command (LANDCOM) and hold discussions with the local authorities and our consular representatives, before going on to Ankara. There, it had discussions with ministerial and parliamentary representatives. This trip took place as part of a shared desire to restore high-level dialogue following the accumulation of numerous subjects of disagreement in recent years. It provided both parties with an opportunity to reassert the importance of their relationship, without denying the difficulties that were recalled, particularly during the discussions held with the Grand National Assembly of Turkey.

Despite these differences which are well known and accepted, dialogue enabled the senators to better appreciate Turkey's ambivalent stance. Situated both in the Middle East and Europe, wanting to strengthen its ties with the European Union while pursuing its own specific path in the Muslim world, inheriting the modernising and secular policy of Mustapha Kemal Atatürk, but also profoundly transformed by the political project implemented by President Erdogan, mediating in the conflicts by which it is surrounded but also supporting certain belligerents in the Caucasus and in Syria, Turkey plays a unique role in the region.

Turkey is still an important member of NATO and ensures the Alliance's presence on Europe's southeastern front, but its stance with regard both to its allies and its neighbours can be unpredictable (I). Secondly, it is an essential partner of the European Union which needs a sustainable and ambitious relationship, failing the possibility of membership within a reasonable future (II). Lastly, Turkey is asserting its position as a competitor of France both on the shores of the Mediterranean, in the Caucasus and in Africa, and this could prompt both partners to rethink their relationship in order to restore trust which has been eroded and undertake joint actions to foster peace in a region still marked by conflicts (III).

At the crossroads of the Western, Slavic and Muslim worlds, Turkey is capable of managing its numerous affinities according to the circumstances in order to strengthen its influence, and is therefore a key partner to help stabilise a region that is at present profoundly destabilised.

The members of the delegation consider that development of trust between the two countries should be a primary objective to maintain the political dialogue restored on the occasion of this senatorial visit. This necessary trust, based on mutual respect and recognition of the indispensable role of both countries in the Mediterranean world, should be consolidated by major decisions with regard to economic, military, cultural, educational and decentralised cooperation, but also by the assertion of shared convictions concerning respect for international law and the will to settle regional conflicts through dialogue and to strive for just and fair compromises. Parliamentary diplomacy could support these closer ties by fostering mutual understanding and facilitating the necessary steps forward.

1. AN ESSENTIAL BUT SOMETIMES UNCERTAIN NATO ALLY

A. AN ESSENTIAL MEMBER OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC ALLIANCE IN WHAT HAS AGAIN BECOME A KEY REGION

1. A major NATO presence in Turkey

Since it joined NATO in 1952, Turkey has enabled the Alliance to strengthen its presence in the eastern Mediterranean and in the Dardanelles and Bosphorus Straits which are the essential gateway for ships travelling from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, and vice versa. The Turkish authorities also emphasised that the Turkish army is the second-largest NATO army in terms of manpower.

NATO's presence in Turkey is materialised mainly by the **Incirlik Air Base** which hosts US Air Force units contributing to the support of NATO assignments in the region. In addition to the aircraft, the base apparently still houses a large number of **American B-61 thermonuclear bombs**.

The senators asked to visit the land command headquarters (LANDCOM) in Izmir, which houses a contingent of French military personnel. During this visit they were able to hold discussions with the French military personnel in order to assure them of their support and learn about the conditions in which they perform their assignment, on both the personal and professional levels. While the French military personnel we met all expressed their great satisfaction with this assignment, they also mentioned schooling problems for their children given the lack of a French educational establishment in Izmir, economic difficulties due to the fierce inflation experienced by the country, and problems finding housing in the vicinity of the NATO headquarters.

With regard more specifically to the role of LANDCOM, the senators attended a presentation of the work in progress on the transformation of NATO to respond to new threats. They were thus able to understand the extent of the work carried out by the Alliance in recent years to update its assessment of the threat and rescale the efforts to be made to respond in the shortest possible time. More specifically, the major challenge for the Alliance is to be able to organise a swift, powerful and continuous power build-up in order to respond sustainably to a high-intensity threat, which requires the **definition of a new model of strength**. In light of the changing context, the new plans are systematically tested by means of increasingly large exercises. These new plans also take hybrid war threats into account.

The members of the senatorial delegation consider that the strengthening of LANDCOM's role fully justifies a build-up of the French contingent, paying special attention to the families' conditions of residence in order to increase the attractiveness of the assignment, making sure to fill all the positions allocated to our country and considering the assignment of general officers in order to exert an influence more in line with our weight in the Alliance.

2. A key actor in the war in Ukraine

The attack on Ukraine by Russia on 24 February 2022 spurred Turkey to act as mediator, notably by bringing the chief Russian and Ukrainian diplomats together in March 2022 at Antalya, then by making several attempts at mediation. Turkey's special position in the conflict can be explained by the **close ties** that it maintains **with each of the two protagonists**. Committed to military cooperation with Ukraine and a client of this country from which it imports cereals, Turkey must also take into consideration its dependence on Russia for energy (gas transported via the TurkStream gas pipeline, Russian nuclear power plant at Akkuyu, etc.) and the economy (Russian tourists, Russian building and construction market, etc.). It therefore refused to apply the international sanctions, while condemning the Russian aggression, and it takes care to maintain dialogue with all the parties.

For example, while the closure of the Dardanelles and Bosphorus Straits¹ decided by Turkey as of February 2022 meant that it prohibited vessels of non-littoral countries from entering the Black Sea, it also complicated the movements of Russian vessels. The Turkish authorities have reported that around 28 Russian vessels have been denied passage into the Black Sea since the start of the war. Turkey also played an important role to allow the enactment of an agreement under UN authority, which established a safe maritime corridor in the Black Sea taken by more than a thousand vessels loaded with cereals and other foodstuffs from July 2022 to July 2023. In this regard, the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Melmet Kemal Bozay, told the delegation that **food security through the continuation of cereal exports and maintaining freedom of movement in the Black Sea still constitute two priorities for the Turkish authorities.**

B. A STRATEGIC PARTNER FACED WITH NEW RESPONSIBILITIES IN AN UNSTABLE REGION

1. Turkey's fundamental contribution to NATO to stabilise the Middle East

a) An ally aware of its growing geopolitical influence

Although Turkey's presence in NATO and its essential role in ensuring a balanced defence for the member countries are not now disputed, several recent events have shown that Turkey could, in certain circumstances, have its own interpretation of the obligation of solidarity inherent in any military alliance.

For example, **the purchase of several Russian S400 surface-to-air missile systems in September 2017** was seen by some members as impairing the military cohesion of the Alliance, because these systems are not compatible with those used by the member countries and, as is often the case with sophisticated military technologies, they could enable the producer country to obtain access to information on the use of the systems sold. This purchase resulted in a deterioration of Turkey's relations with the United States, reflected, in particular, by a halt to Turkey's participation in the F35 fighter plane development programme, and then by the adoption in December 2020 of broader sanctions notably providing for a ban on exports of American arms to Turkey.

While the episode of the purchase of S400 systems left its marks within the Alliance, **Turkey's veto on the NATO membership of Finland and Sweden** raised doubts as to Turkey's determination to ensure the strengthening of the Alliance against the backdrop of Russia's war in Ukraine. Although Finland was able to join the Alliance as of 4 April 2023, Sweden had to wait until 7 March 2024 to join, following complicated discussions with Turkey which demanded that Sweden change its policy of hospitality towards certain political refugees. This condition placed on the membership of these two European countries directly threatened by Russia did not help to erase memories of the unease created by the episode of the S400 missile system purchase.

b) Turkey's desire to contribute to the major European arms programmes

Turkey's ambiguous position within the Alliance is undoubtedly one of the reasons why **military cooperation between Turkey and the other NATO countries is at present limited.** While in October 2024 Germany agreed to the export of Eurofighter planes to Turkey, the planned sale of French-Italian SAMP-T surface-to-air systems was unable to be finalised despite the requests of the Turkish authorities. The Turks reiterated to the members of the senatorial delegation their interest in this surface-to-air defence system, regretting that the lack of an agreement could have the effect of weakening NATO.

Just like the European countries, Turkey has also drawn lessons from the war in Ukraine, identifying the supply problems which it could face in the event of a conflict. **The Turkish government therefore decided to increase the budget for military spending in 2024 by 150% to \$40bn, which represents an unprecedented effort** despite the high level of

¹ On 28 February 2022, after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, Turkey decided to prohibit access to the Dardanelles and Bosphorus Straits for all military vessels, citing the 1936 Montreux Convention designed to reconcile the principle of freedom of passage with the need to "safeguard" the security of Turkey and the Black Sea littoral states.

inflation. These extra resources will be able to **reinforce Turkey's DTIB** which expects to export \$11bn worth of defence equipment in 2024, 83% more than in 2023, while imports are expected to stand at \$6bn.

The discussions held by the senatorial delegation with the Presidency of the Defence Industries, equivalent to the French government defence procurement and technology agency (DGA), gave an idea of the diversity and expertise of the Turkish arms firms which enable the country to have a wide range of drones, missiles, rockets and armoured vehicles. The representatives of the Presidency of the Defence Industries also mentioned that Turkey wanted to develop a fifth- or even sixth-generation fighter plane and was interested in contributing to the FCAS, reiterating that Turkey had been a partner of the Cougar and A400M programmes and was working on the development of a Göktürk satellite constellation.

2. A regional power faced with fundamental security challenges

a) Turkey's desire to exert more influence on its immediate environment

Turkey's role in the eastern Mediterranean has changed since the end of the cold war. The break-up of the USSR led not only to the independence of Ukraine but also to that of the various Caucasus states, while the conflicts in Iraq and then Syria and Libya made the region extremely unstable. This led Turkey to become involved in stabilising its immediate environment in line with its interests.

Since 2013, moreover, the Turkish authorities have implemented a new geopolitical strategy called "**Mavi Vatan**" – **the Blue Homeland** – instigated by former admiral Cem Gürdeniz to claim sovereignty over the continental shelf in the Aegean Sea and assert Turkey's intention to exert its influence in the eastern Mediterranean. Cem Gürdeniz defines the "Blue Homeland" by the following features:

- Use of the navy as a tool of military diplomacy;
- Development of an arms industry, in particular in the naval and aeronautics sectors;
- Use of seismic research vessels and drilling vessels to explore mineral deposits;
- Creation of legal frameworks, notably via treaties, to obtain international recognition of Turkey's maritime jurisdiction zones.

The implementation of the "Blue Homeland" doctrine was partly responsible for exacerbating tensions with Greece and Cyprus. However, relations between Greece and Turkey have calmed down and dialogue has been resumed at the highest level. The question of management of the continental shelf and the demarcation of maritime zones is still topical, however, and Turkey has not ruled out negotiating treaties with bordering countries containing provisions relating to the demarcation of maritime zones.

The members of the senatorial delegation noted that the Turkish authorities they met were all pleased by the warming relations with Greece and the revival of economic and commercial cooperation, with ongoing dialogue concerning the demarcation of the continental shelf and the EEZ. However, the delegation noted that whereas federal cohabitation solutions were still being explored a few years ago, Turkey continues to call for the recognition of a state in the northern part of the island occupied by Turkey.

Turkey remains attentive to the situation in the Caucasus, which constitutes a second "buffer zone" with Russia, in addition to Ukraine. Turkey and Azerbaijan maintain very close relations within the "Turkic Council", while authorities in both countries have no hesitation speaking of "*a single nation, two states*". Their military cooperation led Turkey to provide Azerbaijan with numerous Bayraktar TB2 military drones for its attack on Nagorno-Karabakh.

Turkey's position regarding the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia seems to have changed in recent months, because the Turkish government supports the principle of a peace agreement between the two countries. For example, the President of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Fuat Oktay, stressed before the delegation "*the importance of open dialogue despite disagreements*" and "*the very important role that Turkey could play*" to reach an agreement. **The members of the delegation consider that Turkish support for the endeavour to reach an agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan represents a major**

breakthrough at a time when there is still some temptation to establish territorial continuity between the various regions of Azerbaijan.

b) The special role of Turkey in bringing about a stable and inclusive regime in Syria

Syria is a strategic matter for Turkey given the longstanding relations between the two countries, the close links between their populations, and the presence of more than three million Syrian refugees in Turkey. Since 2011, Turkey has been involved in the Syrian conflict, notably to organise the various forces of opposition to Bashar al-Assad's regime and to carry out actions in Syrian territory against Kurdish forces. Its main aim was to stabilise the north of the country sufficiently to be able to send back there the millions of refugees settled on its territory. The fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime on 8 December 2024 therefore owes a lot to Turkey's military support for the coalition headed by the Islamist group *Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham* (HTS).

Given the role played by Turkey in the political change in Syria and its influence with the new government authorities, it has a major responsibility for contributing decisively to a peaceful transition. The challenges are huge, because the aim is both to lay the foundations for a stable and inclusive political regime, to protect Syria's territorial sovereignty, and to raise the necessary resources for reconstruction of the country.

The senatorial delegation took note of Turkey's commitment to Syria's territorial integrity and subscribes to the concern of the Turkish authorities for ensuring the security of Turkey's own borders. Nor did it fail to recall the role played by the Syrian Kurdish forces in combatting the so-called Islamic State and Bashar al-Assad's regime, and the need to allow all the communities to take part in the functioning of the new Syrian institutions.

2. AN IMPORTANT PARTNER FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF A RELATIONSHIP TO BE CLARIFIED

A. TURKEY'S STABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT REMAIN A PRIORITY FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION

1. Turkish democracy between a strong executive and powerful opposition at the local level

a) Political debate structured by the presidential election of 2028

Turkish political life remains marked by the figure of the President of the Republic, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Prime Minister from 2003 to 2014, then President of the Republic, re-elected on 28 May 2023 for five years with 52.2% of the vote in the second round of the presidential election. In the legislative elections of 14 May 2023, the government alliance comprising the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* or AKP) and its allies of the Nationalist Movement Party MHP retained its absolute majority, winning 323 of the 600 seats in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. The Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* or CHP), founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1923, won the municipal elections of 31 March 2024, meanwhile, and now governs the five most heavily populated provinces (Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Bursa and Antalya).

Turkey's political and institutional situation remains a subject of controversy both for the various Turkish political authorities and for human rights organisations. According to numerous observers, the opposition's success in the municipal elections of 31 March 2024 in the big cities does not close the debate regarding the fairness of election contests and the independence of the justice system. According to these observers, journalists and local politicians are still prosecuted on political grounds.

b) An opposition pleading for a "democratic, secular, European and predictable Turkey"

The success of the Kemalist CHP in the local elections of March 2014 can apparently be explained mainly by the growing rejection by public opinion of the presence of more than 3 million Syrian refugees whose presence adversely affects the functioning of certain public

services. The fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime following the offensive of the HTS supported by Turkey could therefore speed up the process of the refugees' return, which is a priority for the government with a view to the presidential election of 2028.

In the wake of its success in the municipal elections, meanwhile, the CHP is calling for early elections and is preparing to exercise power after a political transition which it considers possible. The Kemalist group told the senatorial delegation that it wanted to draw inspiration at national level from its local experience which had enabled it to create innovative models, and externally to *"turn Turkey's face towards Europe."* The leaders of the CHP consider that a stable, democratic Turkey turned towards Europe is possible and they plan to put an end to what they consider to be *"Turkey's present unpredictability."* They plan to create a "Circle of Peace" around Turkey in order to provide stability in the Mediterranean, the Middle East and the Caucasus.

The main opposition party also considers that the constitutional framework should be revised in order to better ensure the separation of powers and respect for regular functioning of the institutions. As regards French-Turkish relations, the CHP expresses a hope for more cooperation and less competition with a democratic, secular, European and predictable Turkey.

The members of the senatorial delegation noted that there is still real political pluralism in Turkish society, as illustrated by the opposition's success in local elections, even if the separation of powers is admittedly not applied in the same way as in EU countries.

2. An economy undermined by inflation and international economic upheavals

The Turkish economy faces a difficult situation on both the domestic and external levels. While it had experienced a growth rate of between 4% and 5% since the Covid-19 crisis, due to an expansionary monetary policy, the Turkish economy entered into recession in 2024 following the tightening of monetary and fiscal policy. Specifically, to **combat inflation, which reached 72% in 2022 and then 54% in 2023**, resulting in particular in **83% depreciation of the Turkish lira**, the Turkish Central Bank increased its policy rate from 8.5% to 50% and the government increased certain taxes, notably on petrol.

This economic environment is increasing the cost of living for workers whose pay is not fully indexed on inflation, and this increases inequality. One year after the **earthquakes of 6 February 2023** which caused around **60,000 deaths, 3.3 million displaced people and the destruction of 650,000 homes**, the government is also faced with the cost of reconstruction, estimated at over \$100bn.

French-Turkish economic relations remain vigorous, with 35 CAC40 companies present in the country, but they are far weaker than the relations existing between Turkey and Germany. Commercial exchanges between France and Turkey amounted to \$21.9bn in 2023, with a decreased deficit of \$1.3bn on the French side. The aerospace industry is the main export to Turkey, followed by chemical and automotive products, while France mainly imports motor vehicles and textile products. The growth of the Turkish economy, despite the present difficulties, is a sound reason to encourage French firms to invest in this market.

B. A UNIQUE RELATIONSHIP TO BE CONSOLIDATED BETWEEN TURKEY AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

1. An application for European Union membership that is still problematic

Turkey became an associate member of the EEC in 1963 and entered a Customs Union agreement with the EU in 1996; it was officially recognised as a "candidate country" in 1999. Accession negotiations between the EU and Turkey were opened in October 2005 based on a framework specifying that they *"are an open-ended process the outcome of which cannot be guaranteed beforehand."* These negotiations depend on Turkey's ability to comply with the obligations involved in membership (full compliance with the Copenhagen criteria, including political criteria – human rights, the rule of law, democracy) and the EU's capacity for assimilation. At present, 16 out of 35 negotiation chapters have been opened and a single one has been temporarily closed. However, **the membership accession negotiations with Turkey are currently at a standstill**, due to the situation regarding the rule of law and also

due to changing public opinions both in Europe and in Turkey, which are less favourable to this prospect.

The Turkish authorities reaffirmed during the discussions with the senatorial delegation their desire to see the membership accession process finalised, even though the political project pursued by them may seem to be in conflict with this objective in several respects. Moreover, as was recognised by several Turkish authorities, changing public opinions in a growing number of European countries make the prospect of Turkish membership of the European Union less foreseeable in the near future. The members of the delegation added that European public opinions had become reluctant regarding the very idea of receiving new EU members. **This increasing discrepancy between a membership process based on technical criteria and a lack of political support in public opinion is creating a sort of wait-and-see attitude among the Europeans that is regretted by the Turkish authorities;** for example, the President of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Fuat Oktay, complained that *"the European Union has no strategic vision regarding Turkey."*

However, the European Union and Turkey do cooperate effectively on the issue of migration. For example, the European Union agreed to contribute to the reception of refugees in Turkey and a readmission agreement was reached concerning illegal migrants leaving Turkish territory. This cooperation was backed by a €6bn aid package since 2016 for the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRIT), added to which is a total extra amount of €3bn for the period 2021-2023 completely funded by the European budget, to enable the continuation of projects in the fields of humanitarian assistance, healthcare, education and socio-economic support.

Moreover, the European Council meeting of 17 and 18 April 2024 held a strategic debate on the relations between the European Union and Turkey in which it reiterated that *"The EU has a strategic interest in a stable and secure environment in the Eastern Mediterranean and in the development of a cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship with Turkey."* The European Council also called for the resumption of discussions to settle the question of Cyprus in accordance with the resolutions of the UN Security Council. The Turkish authorities contested the link thus made between the situation on Cyprus and the future of the relationship between Turkey and the EU, and asserted their approach to dialogue with the EU: *"In the coming period, we will review our dialogue with the EU on the basis of reciprocity, taking into account the pace, level and scope of the EU's steps towards Turkey."*

The discussions held by the senatorial delegation with the Turkish authorities confirmed the ministerial statements of last June. The interlocutors we met reiterated, for example, that Turkey wished to join the European Union, although without suggesting that this application had any real chance of materialising in the near future. The members of the delegation noted the extent to which this situation is a source of frustration for the Turkish authorities, who nevertheless outlined no alternative strategy to this application for membership in case it might not succeed. At the very most they mentioned that they wished to modernise the Customs Union and facilitate the issue of visas. The Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Melmet Kemal Bozay, considered that the negotiations on the modernisation of the Customs Union would take at least three years, and that it was therefore possible to enter into these negotiations independently of discussions on the future of Cyprus. Several Turkish interlocutors also emphasised the need for the European Union to continue supporting Turkey financially for the management of migration flows.

Regarding cooperation on defence matters, the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mehmet Kemal Bozay, deplored the fact that Turkey does not benefit from the European Peace Facility, while the President of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Fuat Oktay, regretted that Turkey is *"the only candidate country for which there has been no liberalisation of visas."*

The members of the senatorial delegation consider that new partnerships could be sought between the European Union and Turkey regarding visa policy to encourage exchanges of students and skilled professionals, management of migration flows with a renewal of the European aid packages, and the development of major cooperation programmes, notably in the fields of local infrastructure (sanitation, public transport), defence and the space industry.

2. High Turkish expectations of greater support from the EU

The discussions held between the senatorial delegation and the Turkish representatives also shed light on Turkey's expectations of the European Union regarding the **Middle East**. For example, the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mehmet Kemal Bozay, considered that **"if the European Union was not more active, it would lose its influence."** He also stressed the consequences of the ongoing conflicts, giving a reminder that 50% of the population in Lebanon are refugees, many of whom are considering emigrating to Europe or North America.

The future of the war in **Ukraine** represented a large part of the always frank discussions held between the senators and the Turkish authorities. For example, the President of the Defence Committee, Hulusi Akar, stated that **"if the European Union had reacted to the occupation of Crimea and Ossetia, we would possibly not be where we are."**

The members of the senatorial delegation could not but agree with the observation by the Turkish authorities that it is urgent for European countries to mobilise in order to exert more influence over the conflicts underway on the boundaries of the European continent.

3. A STRATEGIC COMPETITOR OF FRANCE CONCERNED ABOUT ITS IDENTITY, ITS INFLUENCE AND ITS INTERESTS

A. A RELATIONSHIP TO BE REVIVED BETWEEN TWO VERY OLD ALLIES

1. A demanding political dialogue to settle disputes and turn towards the future

As was recalled by the Vice-Chair of the Turkey-France Friendship Group, Tuba Vural Çokal, the establishment of diplomatic relations between France and Turkey dates back to 1484, while the Alliance Treaty between François I and Suleiman the Magnificent was established in 1536. **This long history explains why, apart from the inevitable disputes generated by international relations, the authorities of both countries maintain mutual esteem and the firm conviction that the power of mutual interests should prevail in the long run.** That is why the trip by the senatorial delegation was awaited and desired by both parties in order to revive a political dialogue that was losing momentum.

This dialogue is especially necessary in that the influence of Turkey in France itself has constantly increased in recent years, and the Turkish political representatives met with opportunely reminded us that **France has 800,000 Turkish nationals on its territory, half of whom have dual nationality.** The President of the Defence Committee of the Grand National Assembly, Hulusi Akar, stressed the role of this community in bilateral dialogue.

The high-level political discussions conducted in Ankara were also an opportunity for Turkish leaders from the AKP to list their numerous complaints against France. For example, the President of the Foreign Affairs Committee deplored the positions taken by the two French Houses of Parliament regarding the Armenian and Assyrian-Chaldean genocides, believing that **"it was not the role of parliament to judge historical matters."** French foreign policy was also criticised, whether it be its support for Armenia when it occupied Nagorno-Karabakh, its support for Greece and the Republic of Cyprus in its dispute with the Turkish Cypriots in the northern part of the island, or the situation in Africa.

The members of the senatorial delegation consider that the resumption of political dialogue could not take place without sincere discussions that do not pass over differences of opinion in silence. Leaving aside the listed complaints which usually reflect different points of view, they consider that Turkey is entitled to better recognition of its contribution to the solidity of the North Atlantic Alliance, the role it played for the stability of Europe on the occasion of the migration crisis in Syria, and its interest in the exploitation of maritime resources, in accordance with international law.

2. An image of France to be enhanced with regard to Turkish public opinion

The members of the senatorial delegation were able to realise the extent of the weakening of the French-Turkish relationship, which does not concern merely political dialogue but also the

change in Turkish public opinion. The increasing number of diplomatic disputes and controversies on subjects such as the role of secularism in France have increased misconceptions of our country, which is also regularly denigrated by certain media.

This "unpopularity" among a large fraction of Turkish public opinion has made French products, France as a tourist destination and French culture and education less attractive. We may note, however, that France still has a positive image with the categories of Turkish citizens that are the most connected or the most internationally mobile.

The members of the delegation consider that this situation is not satisfactory and that it requires a redoubling of efforts to improve France's image in Turkey, whether by pursuing the plan for broadcasting information in Turkish by France Médias Monde, or by supporting the action of French cultural institutions in Turkey and maintaining the presence of French educational institutions.

B. A NEW FRENCH-TURKISH DYNAMIC IN RESPONSE TO UPHEAVALS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN WORLD

1. Strengthening trust by reviving bilateral cooperation arrangements on all fronts

a) Encouraging decentralised cooperation arrangements, both cultural and educational

The members of the senatorial delegation are convinced that **the concrete development of bilateral cooperation arrangements notably on the local level could make a useful contribution to strengthening French-Turkish relations.** In Izmir, for example, they were able to assess the measures carried out in the economic, cultural and educational areas with the support of the Agence française de développement (AFD) and our diplomatic personnel. The city of Izmir and its 3.5 million inhabitants thoroughly embodies this modern Turkey open onto the Mediterranean and committed to meeting the new environmental challenges. The Mayor of Izmir, Cemil Tugay, accordingly described to the members of the delegation its projects particularly in the fields of transport and water treatment, mentioning the expertise of French groups in these fields.

The French presence in Izmir is based on the commitment of several influential local people who help to develop France's presence, and on an extensive francophone and francophile network around the Institut français and the Lycée Saint-Joseph which maintain an attractive offer for school pupils and students who want to learn French at a time when it has become more difficult to obtain access to French in public schools.

The members of the delegation were also able to have a discussion in Ankara with the principal of the Lycée Charles-de-Gaulle, who mentioned discussions with the Turkish authorities about maintaining the possibility for Turkish students to enrol in French establishments. The President of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Fuat Oktay, considered that the source of the problems was due to the failure to respect the principle of reciprocity, because Turkey experienced difficulties in setting up Turkish educational establishments in France.

The members of the senatorial delegation reaffirm the importance of French educational establishments for the future of French-Turkish dialogue and their desire that an agreement should be found to maintain the broadest possible access to this education which has always actively contributed through its alumni to strengthening the relationship between the two countries.

b) Agreeing to start discussions on cooperation agreements in the area of defence

While the strengthening of trust between France and Turkey can be achieved by economic investments and cultural and educational activities, **it should also be possible through bilateral military cooperation arrangements which require the highest level of trust and constitute a priority for the Turkish interlocutors we met.**

General İlkay Altındağ, Director General of Defence and Security at the Ministry of National Defence, gave a reminder that Turkey had entered into several cooperation agreements with European states, notably with Spain for helicopter carriers and with Germany for submarines, adding that it planned to launch new programmes, notably for undersea drones. He therefore expressed the hope of renewed exchanges with the French government defence procurement

and technology agency DGA to examine to what extent cooperation agreements could be established between Turkish and French firms given the projects planned by Turkey. This dialogue was suspended in recent years as the French-Turkish relationship was strained by incidents such as that which occurred on 10 June 2020 between the French frigate *Courbet* and the Turkish frigate *Gökova* off the coast of Libya. Given the extremely long lead times involved in the development of military programmes, it could be highly appropriate to carry out a joint strategic review in order to examine matters of mutual interest and signal that a page has well and truly been turned.

The members of the senatorial delegation consider that the resumption of this dialogue would be useful given the shared goals, the respective levels of expertise of the Turkish and French defence industrial and technological bases, and the need to bolster the industrial capabilities of NATO member countries. Revived cooperation in this sensitive area in which sovereignty issues predominate could be a major factor in strengthening trust between the two countries. Parliamentary diplomacy should be able to play its role in consolidating this dialogue in conjunction with the Ministry of Defence and the industrial firms concerned.

2. Giving fresh impetus to French-Turkish relations through greater coordination of initiatives concerning ongoing conflicts

a) Converging positions on Ukraine and Gaza

The disagreements that might have existed regarding foreign policy in recent years should not obscure the fact that **both countries also share converging views regarding the future of several regions in which serious conflicts are endangering collective security.**

For example, the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Melmet Kemal Bozay, recalled that both countries face the same issues of global warming, energy transition and the digitalisation of society. He stressed the **need to strengthen the French-Turkish relationship to help settle crises and expand trade between the two countries.** He expressed the hope that mutual trust can be established in order to adopt a different approach to the settlement of regional conflicts.

"We may have differences of opinion but we have Peace as the common denominator."

Melmet Kemal Bozay, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs,

France and Turkey, which both condemned the Russian assault on Ukraine on 24 February 2022, are working constantly to put an end to this war by creating the conditions for negotiations respecting the interests of Ukraine. **The members of the delegation mentioned on several occasions the eminent role that Turkey could play in these negotiations to reach a fair and enduring peace, in accordance with the fundamental principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations.**

Another major point of convergence **concerns the situation in Gaza, because the discussions we held showed that France and Turkey both called for a halt to the fighting in Gaza and consider that a two-state political solution is the only possible solution for restoring lasting peace.** For his part, the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mehmet Kemal Bozay, considered that Israel would be well advised to allow the emergence of a new Palestinian leadership by releasing Marwan Barghouti. While the Turkish authorities expressed their fear that a veritable regional war might begin in the Middle East, the members of the senatorial delegation insisted on reminding them that Hamas, due to its attack on 7 October 2023, and Hezbollah, by repeatedly firing rockets on northern Israel, were both responsible for the deterioration of the situation, while recognising the excessive nature of the action taken by Israel in Gaza since then.

Regarding other geopolitical developments underway in recent months, the senatorial delegation welcomed the improvement in relations between Turkey and Greece, while understanding Turkey's wish - reiterated by the President of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey - to see *"recognition of the legal rights of all the actors in the Aegean Sea"* which should be settled through further dialogue and negotiations. **The**

members of the senatorial delegation also referred to the influence that Turkey could have with Azerbaijan to at last achieve the terms of a lasting peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

b) Aid to Syria as an example of a new French-Turkish relationship?

While last October, during the delegation's trip, the Turkish authorities had stressed the importance for them of the situation in Syria, notably because of the security and immigration implications, the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime and the establishment of a new power close to Turkey have created **a new situation which changes the outlook in the Middle East**.

France and Turkey share a mutual interest in the stability of the new Syria while protecting its international borders and continuing actions designed to curb the influence of the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) there; Turkey has already neutralised 4,500 ISIS fighters, as was mentioned by General İlkey Altındağ, Director General of Defence and Security at the Ministry of National Defence.

While there is still uncertainty regarding the policies that will eventually be adopted by the new Syrian authorities, the members of the senatorial delegation consider that Syria's stability will be all the greater if it can quickly regain its full territorial sovereignty and adopt institutions capable of reconciling insofar as possible its national interest with the demands of local autonomy. Secondly, they consider that, against the backdrop of the removal of sanctions envisaged by the members of the European Union, cooperation arrangements between French and Turkish firms could be imagined in numerous economic and social sectors of activity (energy, transport, water, agriculture, healthcare, etc.) in order to swiftly improve Syrians' life and lay the foundations for sustainable economic development. **The members of the delegation express the wish that exemplary cooperation may open a new page in relations between the two countries.**



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Foreign Affairs, Defence and Armed Forces Committee

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