



INTERVIEW with HE Tunc Ugdul, Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey to Poland

Mr. Ambassador, how long have you been in Poland as a Turkish diplomat? How do you perceive Poland as a diplomat whose goal is to maintain the best possible relations with our country?

I have been representing the Republic of Turkey in this beautiful country since October 2016, almost for four and half years. With Poland, we have a very particular relationship. Our relations are based on a legacy of more than six centuries. As you know, Turkey and Poland have celebrated the 600th anniversary of the establishment of the diplomatic relations between them in 2014. These relations, except a period of 25 years of conflicts in total, were mostly friendly, cooperative and based on mutual respect and solidarity throughout the ages. Moreover, in the Polish collective memory, Turkey is the only country that never recognized the partitions of Poland.

So, based on this history, it was and still is, very privileged to be the Turkish Ambassador in Poland. Especially if the national poet of the host country, namely Adam Mickiewicz, expresses his affection for your kinsmen in such words:

“During the days when all countries remained silent to the partition of our State, our only friend were the Turks. We have affection for the Turks as a superior nation because they never bent before our enemies and refused to accept the occupation.”

Is this diplomatic mission in Poland by a Turkish diplomat different than the previous one, and if so, how is it different?

Turkey and Poland, during our history were, for a considerable period, also immediate neighbours. Today it is not anymore the case. Now, they are two sizeable countries of Europe, with large territories, important human resources and according to many observers, with very bright futures. There are lots of similarities between our countries. During my tenure, I was able to witness the dynamic growth of Poland in all fields, the betterment of infrastructures, quality of life and the steady development of our mutual relations.

The number of Turks living in Poland also continued to increase. Approximately twelve thousands of our compatriots are living in Poland. Most of them have dual citizenship and been living here for many years even decades. There are mixed families. They are divided into two main groups. Business people and university students. The number of well educated Turks working in Poland is on rise. These people also constitute a connecting factor for our nations.

In responding directly to your question, I must say that this period was different than the previous one. Not because of Poland, but it was different for everybody, everywhere. For two main reasons; the first one was the general volatility witnessed in the international relations during the period, due to the rise of populist, exclusionist tendencies around the world. We faced with more volatility and challenges in

doing our jobs. The second is the coronavirus pandemic which affected all of us by preventing many activities.

Coming back to my own case, I had my term in Poland in a peaceful and friendly environment, worked with people willing to cooperate. Certainly, I will miss Poland and my Polish friends.

When in your life did you decide to become a diplomat and what influenced this decision the most?

I decided to become a diplomat at a very young age. I was around twelve years old. I was inspired by a family relative who was a diplomat. Now before my departure from Poland, exactly the 20th of February, will be the 40th anniversary of my work as a diplomat at the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I never regretted my choice of profession and proudly worked for and represented Turkey in different parts of the world.

Of course, I must admit that it was not an easy task. I believe that being a Turkish diplomat could be comparatively a more difficult task than those of many of our western partners. Turkey's location and geography gives us many opportunities, makes us the proud inheritors of civilizations, but also gives us lots of challenges, uncertainties and crises to cope with.

Dear Mr. Ambassador, how do you evaluate Turkish-Polish bilateral relations on the political, economic and cultural levels? What is your assessment of the current relationship?

Turkey and Poland enjoy deep-rooted and excellent relations dating back to 1414. This positive spirit prevailing in our relations always facilitate our endeavours to carry forward our cooperation in every area. This is my general observation, to start with. Then again, we have a great potential to fulfil and we need to work hard to achieve much more.

In the upcoming period, we would like to give a fresh momentum to high level visits. We look forward to the visit of President Duda to Turkey, which we hope to realize soon.

We have been enjoying strategic partnership since 2009, as well as our complementing roles and model cooperation in NATO which is of utmost value for us. Within this framework, we welcome Poland's recent decision of contributing to "Tailored Assurance Measures for Turkey".

As Turkey, we are willing to increase our cooperation with Poland in regional fora, for security, economic development, and infrastructure. We are in fraternal solidarity with Poland vis-a-vis COVID-19 pandemic.

We attach great importance to the trilateral consultation mechanism including Romania, V4+Turkey dialogue and cooperation, Three Seas Initiative and Via Carpathia project.

In terms of bilateral trade volume, we could soon reach the "10 billion US Dollars" target set by our Presidents. Besides, there is a vast potential for cooperation in infrastructure, construction, transportation and innovation technologies. Turkish companies are interested in expanding their role in the Polish infrastructure sector. Turkish firms are also interested in defense industry cooperation, where we can offer a lot in terms of mutual productions.

Tourism relations are also flourishing. We have successfully conducted "Safe Tourism Certification Program" last year. Under the pandemic conditions, thousands of Polish families enjoyed their holidays

in Turkey. This year, we are ready to offer safest and healthiest travel and holiday opportunities to Polish guests, with our unique facilities in the Mediterranean basin.

As the Turkish Ambassador to retire soon, I am also glad to witness Poland's becoming number one destination for Turkish Erasmus+ and high education students.

Last but not least, as the Embassy, we have been striving to diversify and enhance the cultural dimension which highlights the perpetual friendship between Turkey and Poland. It is my humble opinion that we require Turkish symbolic monuments in Poland, similar to "Polonezköy" – "Adampol", Adam Mickiewicz Museum or various Polish mausoleums in Turkey. To this end, in consultation with our Polish interlocutors, we have designed and proposed a friendship monument to be erected in Warsaw, and a friendship fountain to be constructed in Krakow. We have also offered to



restitute or renovate the existing or once existed elements of Turkish heritage in Poland, such as the restitution of the historic Turkish House in Łazienki Palace gardens or erection of a symbolic monument at the place of the tombstone commemorating our fallen soldiers at the Galicia front at the Rakowicki Cemetery in Kraków. I am sure that these projects will come to fruition soon.

Will the visits planned for 2021 in Polish-Turkish relations take place despite the pandemic?

I hope so. We have foreseen several high level contacts. They are either planned or in the process of preparation. We all should have fingers crossed for the hope that things will not get worse.

Is the amount of the so-called big businesses between Poland and Turkey is satisfactory in your opinion?

Turkey and Poland produce and export in similar sectors to a great extent. As our annual foreign trade volume in 2019 reached 5,89 billion Euros, our exports to Poland elevated to 3,99 billion Euros and imports from Poland was at the level of 1,89 billion Euros.

It is safe to say that in spite of the adverse effects of the pandemic throughout almost all of 2020, spilling over also to this year, the decline in our trade remained negligible.

It appears that our vibrant and dynamic countries will overcome this crisis with less problems compared to other countries. Business and commerce could swiftly make up the lost ground during the post-pandemic period. With its short transportation time, geographical proximity and low stocking costs, Turkey will continue to utilize its own advantages in the Polish market. Especially the activation of the production capacity in the automotive sector will facilitate the rapid progress of spare part producer firms. Moreover, we foresee that the demand for commodities such as food products will be reinvigorated. A boom in the machinery sector could also be anticipated.

We are convinced that, globally renowned Turkish construction and infrastructure firms could implement successful projects in Poland in the upcoming period, as they have proven until now. Our

firms have already carried out their works during the crisis period thanks to their experiences, as well as the advantages of engineering and qualified labour.

With the gradual lifting of travel restrictions and adjustment of pandemic measures to a more amenable level, our business people and firms could rapidly resume their activities aimed at new cooperation and investment opportunities.

How do you evaluate the cooperation between Turkish and Polish economic self-government institutions (maybe on the example of TOBB and Polish Chamber of Commerce)?

TOBB and the Polish Chamber of Commerce have carried out an exemplary relationship over the years. They have organized periodically business fora, sectoral visits and they have explored common subjects. So, thank to these efforts, they enjoy by now also personal relations and friendships among their members, which I believe, help a lot in the advancement of bilateral economic cooperation. We encourage other institutions to follow up more extensively this example.

Polish Chamber of Commerce is involved in a very active way in a European business project the name of which is “Turkey Europe Business Dialogue”. Poland constantly support Turkish aspirations to become a member of EU. Could you be so kind and say us a few words about current state and the future of relations between Turkey and EU?

The current state of affairs of Turkey-EU relations are not satisfactory or sustainable. We need to normalize and upgrade our relations.

We are grateful for longstanding Polish support to our quest for EU accession. We will need this support in a more vocal manner this year. The EU should approach bilateral issues from the wider perspective of strategy, international law and universal principles such as fairness. We appreciate Poland’s stance in favor of moderation, de-escalation and intensified dialogue on these matters.

Turkey and the EU have indeed a symbiotic relationship. When we succeed to cooperate in any field, it turns into a win-win situation for both sides. Keeping the accession perspective open for Turkey will be the best geopolitical investment of the EU. The upgrade of the Turkey-EU customs union is also a short term priority which will be beneficial for both sides.

Bilateral problems and the main elements of Turkey-EU relations should be de-coupled. This is the only way to surmount the obstacles to Turkey-EU relations. Linking every aspect of our relations to the Cyprus issue or the Eastern Mediterranean will lead us only to dead ends. Bilateral problems should be solved through bilateral talks. EU should facilitate dialogue and engagement.

A stable Turkey in terms of its economy, political and legal system, and security is crucial for the stability of Europe as well. Turkey and the EU should cooperate and collaborate more, not less, to reduce the political, economic and security-related uncertainties. It is the responsibility of visionary leaders in Europe to take bolder steps to improve relations with Turkey. If Europe slides into the stream of populist, reactionary tendencies, there will not be any beneficiaries at all.

In your opinion, Mr. Ambassador, is your ending diplomatic mission crowned with success? Is there anything else you would like to achieve?

It should not be up to me to answer this question. But if I may, yes I think so. The friendly relations between Turkey and Poland have continued to develop at a steady pace, without any problems, we were able to organise several high level visits etc. But diplomatic missions of all of us, were adversely affected by the pandemic.

One more, traditional question that I have to ask a foreign ambassador accredited to Poland. Which of the Polish cities did you like the most and why?

I most liked Warsaw, the city I lived. Because it is a very nice and comfortable city to live. It is like living at the same time in a very pleasant natural environment and in a very dynamic modern city altogether. I also very much appreciate the investments by local authorities to the infrastructure and to the greenery of city, particularly in the recent period. The history of Warsaw and the sacrifices and efforts of its citizens to rebuild the city after the WW II period is also commendable.

After Warsaw, of course I like Kraków. I have been there many many times. I even had private biking tours with the aim of discovering different neighbourhoods. In addition, Wrocław, Gdańsk and Torun also were my favourite centres in Poland. I must also add that I consider Zamość as a hidden gem to be discovered by those visiting Poland.

Four museums in Poland impressed me a lot; namely, Polin Jewish Museum and Warsaw Rising Museum in Warsaw and Second World War and Solidarity Museums in Gdańsk. Of course German Nazi death camps, to begin with Auschwitz that I have been many times, and also Majdanek and Treblinka reminds all of us the immense sufferings occurred in these lands and the lessons which should be drawn.

I would like to thank you very much Mr Ambassador for the interview as well as for fruitful and friendly contacts with Polish Chamber of Commerce. I wish you Excellency healthy and peaceful life at the period of well-deserved retirement

Interview taken by ambassador Jerzy Drozd, Director of Foreign Relation Department at Polish Chamber of Commerce

