



## Week of building bridges with Europe

**Gila Benmayor** Turkish Daily News

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Three European capitals -- Brussels, Paris and Berlin -- talked about Turkey this week. With the anniversary of the start of talks with the European Union, Turkey was on the agenda for an entire week with its politics, arts, and hopes for the future. I could only participate in the Brussels leg of the "Turkey@Europe" program organized by the Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen's Association (TÜSİAD).

The week of "conquering Europe," led by TÜSİAD's honorary president Bülent Eczacibasi, its executive board director Ömer Sabancı and introduction committee president Ümit Boyner seems to have reached its goal, if one looks at the picture in Brussels.

The interest shown in the meeting, which took place in the European Policy Center Hall, was so high that some of the audience could not be seated.

### And who attended that meeting?

Former British Foreign Minister Jack Straw, European Parliament member and former French Prime Minister Michel Rocard, the European Commission's Enlargement Director Michael Leigh, European Parliament member Joost Lagendijk and Turkish State Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Abdüllatif Sener, among others.

Foreign speakers were particularly sensitive about two issues: Article 301 and Cyprus.

Lagendijk, who's set to marry a Turkish girl in the near future, underlined double standards concerning this article in two European countries.

One of these double standards is the proposal the French Parliament will vote on Oct. 12, which would criminalize denying claims of an Armenian genocide. The other one is the pressure applied on Dutch parliamentary candidates of Turkish origin to force them to accept Armenian genocide allegations.

According to Lagendijk, both France and the Netherlands' attitude is a violation of freedom of expression.

Another surprise which came in that meeting was State Minister Sener's speech delivered in "French."

The minister, who read out the text in front of him quite well, surprised those in the meeting hall.

However, it soon became apparent that the minister -- who learned French in his student years and even wrote a doctoral thesis in French -- can read that language very well but cannot speak it spontaneously.

Sener, who stumbled when addressed by Enlargement Director Leigh in French, clearly demonstrated the weakness of our educational system in teaching foreign languages.

Indeed, foreign languages are the most important tool for building a bridge to Europe.

The other instrument is undoubtedly music. I am writing so under the influence of that spectacular night I witnessed in Brussels.

The final activity of the Turkey@Europe program was a concert given by the Borusan Istanbul Philharmonic Orchestra with director Gürer Aykal at Bozar Palace, which hosted the Female Sultans exhibition from Turkey a couple of years ago.

The orchestra of the Borusan Group -- the main sponsor of the International Istanbul Music Festival for 10 years -- played pieces from Schubert, Mozart and Ferit Tüzün.

Some 1,200 guests were present at Bozar Palace that night. Judging by the applause, the audience had an unforgettable night.

The final piece chosen by director Aykal was extremely significant: "Habudiyara," composed by Ferit Tüzün.

Like I say, if language is one way to build bridges, music is the other.

### The state of German and Austrian support:

The European Stability Initiative (ESI) announced the results of a survey on Turkish membership shortly before German Chancellor Angela Merkel's visit to Turkey.

According to the results, 81 percent of Austrians and 69 percent of Germans oppose Turkish membership.

Germans who earlier opposed Turkish membership on the basis of cultural differences are now citing Islam and honor killings as the bases of their objection.

However, according to ESI's findings, some among the social democrats of Austria are positive about Turkish membership, such as Vienna's mayor and the governor of Salzburg.

However, nobody from Turkey has contacted these people

Romania and Bulgaria, which are to join the club in 2007, are organizing campaigns emphasizing the cultural wealth of their countries, but Turkey has done nothing.

We are simply sitting and making no effort.

We can't win the minds and hearts of Europeans with only TÜSİAD's conscientious initiatives.