

Turkey's New Horizon: Turks Abroad and Related Communities

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Communities

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About the Author

Kemal Yurtnaç is the Chairman of the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities. He was born in 1965 in Tokat/Turkey.

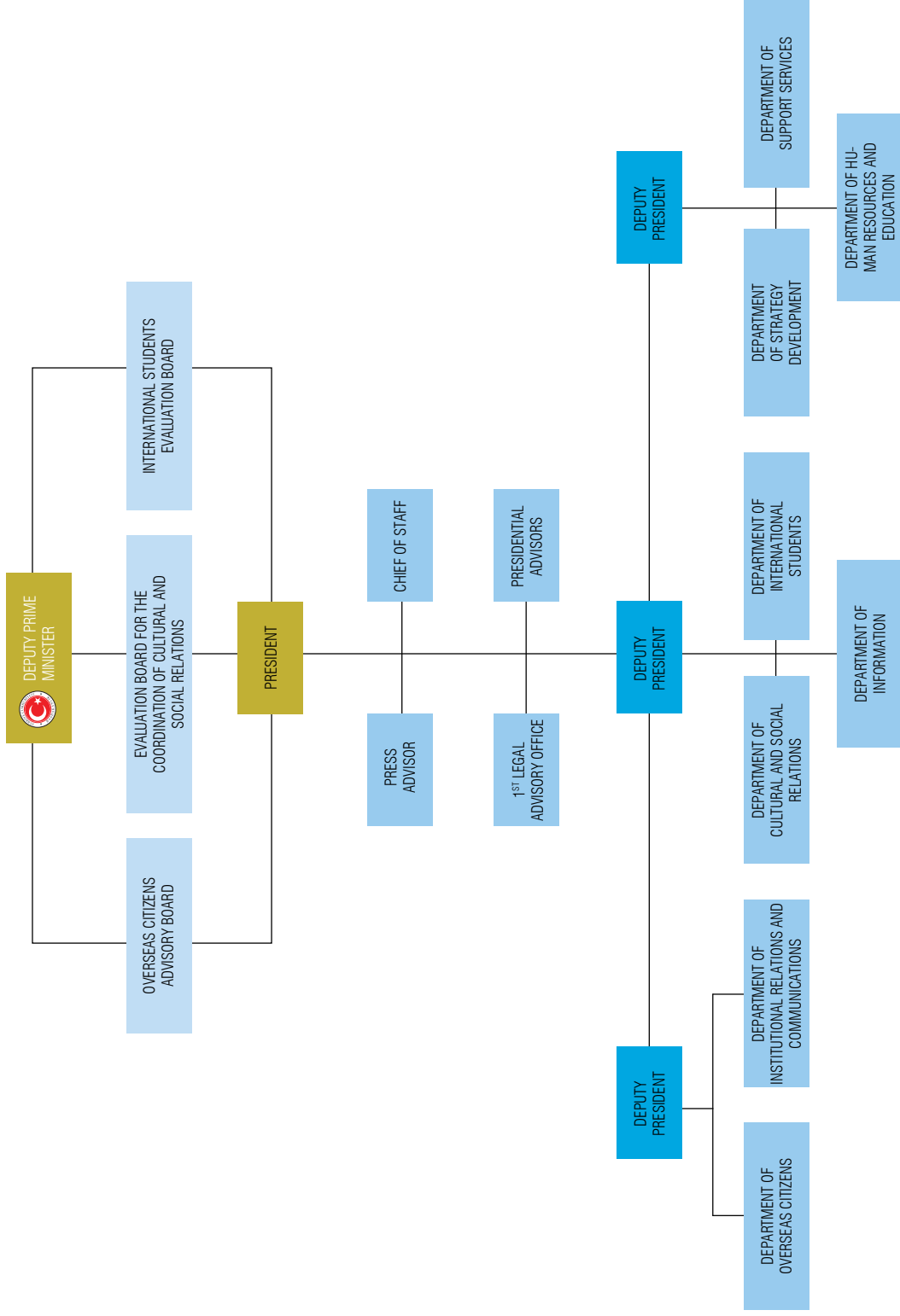


He graduated from the Faculty of Political Science at Ankara University and joined the Ministry of Interior as head of the civilian administration in 1988.

He served as advisor to the Minister of State between 2007 and 2010. He was appointed as Chairman of the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities in 2010.

His articles related to jurisdiction, management and restructuring bureaucracy has been published in the publication outlets of various national and local media associations. Yurtnaç is married with two children and knows English.

Organization Chart



Turkey's New Horizon: Turks Abroad and Related Communities

Kemal Yurtnaç

Across the world, there are many countries that have established institutions to serve and engage with their citizens and kin living abroad. Such institutions are called Diaspora Ministry/ Department in some cases, while in others they operate as independent units under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The dissolution of the Soviet Union in the late 1990s paved the way for the birth of a set of new countries that have their nationals or ethnic kin beyond their borders, and consequently increased the need to establish such institutions. The ensuing process of globalization facilitated countries in their efforts to establish closer ties with their citizens and kin communities. Today many countries work to strengthen their public diplomacy efforts, or “soft power,” and expand their sphere of influence through their diasporas.

Progressively, Turkey also went through a similar process. Parallel to the activism in its foreign relations, Turkey's awareness and ties with the citizens and kin communities beyond its borders have seen an enormous increase. On the one hand, millions of Turkish people have emigrated to various countries, while maintaining their citizenship ties to Turkey. On the other hand, given the unique historical experience of the Turkish Republic, its people enjoy ethnic, religious and cultural ties with several other communities throughout the world. At the same time, with the rising quality of its secondary and higher education institutions, Turkey has been a major destination of international students seeking a better education abroad. As it conducted a proactive foreign policy in its surrounding regions and worldwide, Turkey has come to recognize the importance of forging more intense relations with those various groups of people.

Developing policies addressing the needs of those communities partly stemmed from a sense of historic responsibility, while in other occasions it was a good way to bolster Turkey's public diplomacy efforts and soft power. In any case, the transformations in Turkish foreign policy in recent years facilitated its quest to have richer relations with the citizens and kin communities abroad. On the one hand, Turkey has given up the inward-looking vision and adopted a more internationalist understanding of international politics. On the other hand, Turkey has been in a process of restructuring its foreign policy whereby it has deliberately sought to expand foreign policy instruments at its disposal, coming to acquire new tools in such fields as public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, development aid and humanitarian assistance. With these new capabilities, supported by the growth of its economic power, Turkey has developed a growing volume of projects to reach out to these people.

In the past, Turkey conducted the relations with kin communities and citizens living abroad through different state establishments and institutions. In line with the restructuring of its foreign policy instruments, there emerged a greater realization for streamlining the institutional mechanisms tasked with such duties. This quest led to the establishment of the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities. Founded in 2010, the Presidency aims to carry out this duty with a wide range of activities ranging from offering the required services to citizens and kin and related communities living abroad to international scholarship programs offered by Turkey.



Organizational Structure

The Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities is established as a public institution under the Prime Ministry. After its establishment, Turkey's relations with its citizens living

in different parts of the world, as well as with kin communities with whom Turkish people share a common cultural and historic heritage, have been firmly restructured on a more institutional foundation. Of its various responsibilities, the Presidency's coordination responsibilities include defining strategies to meet the needs of related communities and Turkish citizens living abroad, and implementing steps in accordance with the planned strategies.

The Presidency is comprised of a Legal Advisory Office and eight departments, each functioning in the respective areas of Overseas Citizens, Cultural and Social Relations, Institutional Relations and Communications, International Students, Human Resources and Education, Support Services, Strategy Development and Information Technology.

The ensuing process of globalization facilitated countries in their efforts to establish closer ties with their citizens and kin communities.

In order to formulate policies pertaining to its areas of responsibility and increase its efficiency and productivity, the Presidency has formed three separate boards. These boards are

the Overseas Citizens Advisory Board, the Evaluation Board for the Coordination of Cultural and Social Relations, and the International Students Evaluation Board. With the participation of relevant stakeholders, these three permanent boards have carried out extensive work to formulate strategies in these issue areas. The decisions of these boards are taken in coordination with relevant state institutions and organizations.

The Presidency's structure is designed to ensure the systematic execution of planning, coordination, monitoring and evaluation of subjects that fall within its scope of responsibilities.

Coordination and Collaboration

The Presidency collaborates and cooperates with different institutions that also have responsibilities pertaining to the Turks

and related communities abroad. The Presidency mainly works closely with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Directorate of Religious Affairs, Turkish International Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), The Council of Higher Education (YÖK), The Yunus Emre Institute, the Public Diplomacy Office, and other institutions and organizations.

Although countries face similar problems in the rapidly globalizing world, their people have different cultural traditions and there are different laws in place in each country. In its work, the Presidency takes into account those local differences. Within the Presidency, various desks focusing on different countries and regions communicate with relevant institutions when they face challenges or possible obstacles, and strive to provide solutions. Conclusions reached at the end of each activity are evaluated in cooperation with the relevant institutions, thus saving time through the implementation of a proactive process.

Areas of Operation

The Presidency concentrates on four main areas:



Overseas Citizens

Citizens living abroad constitute one of the main areas of focus for the Presidency. Under this category, the Presidency assists the citizens who over the years have emigrated to different countries for a variety of reasons. It develops strategies directed towards them, identifies and analyzes the problems they face abroad, and coordinates related domestic and international activities.

In its work with the citizens living overseas, the Presidency encourages them to actively participate in public life in their respective host countries while preserving their own culture, and supports all efforts in that direction. The Presidency is also responsible for ensuring that Turkish citizens benefit equally from

legal rights in the countries they reside in, and provides support if they encounter unjust treatment such as discrimination, assimilation and xenophobia.

This latter focus is understandable, if we consider how discrimination, assimilation, and xenophobia have recently been on the rise across the world. Such acts can be prevented if measures are taken to ensure that citizens living abroad fully participate in public life on an equal basis with others, increase their educational and cultural competence, and improve their social awareness and ability to act together.

Integration of immigrant communities is a key concept that is frequently discussed. However, different interpretations of the term constitute a fundamental problem. Integration should be understood as “harmony” that encourages a two-way interaction

Integration should be understood as “harmony” that encourages a two-way interaction between the immigrant community and host society.

between the immigrant community and host society. Immigrant communities should be able to vote, participate in government structures, and benefit from the legal environment, which will ensure the preservation of their cultural values.

The Presidency’s efforts to strengthen cultural and social relations with the Turkish citizens serve this purpose. By establishing effective communication with the citizens abroad, providing them with better services, and ensuring coordination, the Presidency infuses dynamism into its areas of focus.

Kin and Related Communities

The Presidency also focuses on kin and related communities. Aware of the responsibilities that come with inheriting a rich history and a distinguished civilization, Turkey constantly interacts with those communities with whom it shares a common cultural heritage and sentiment across the globe. The Presidency coordinates services provided to kin and related communities, while ensuring the efficiency and productivity of those services.

The Presidency ascribes utmost importance to improving the economic, social and cultural standing of kin and related communities living in different parts of the world. It fully supports and respects these communities' efforts to build their own cultural identities in harmony with the social fabric of the countries in which they reside, while ensuring their right to enjoy cultural, social and political rights, and to live a secure and productive life.

In recent years Turkey's ties with kin and related communities in the Balkans, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Middle East, and Africa have acquired new dimensions. Turkey has not only strengthened relations at the level of state institutions and organizations, but also cultivated closer bonds with civil society and media organizations, municipalities, universities and even individuals in these regions. By coordinating those multi-faceted interactions, the Presidency aims to strengthen scientific, cultural and social cooperation with kin and related communities abroad. Improving information-sharing with kin and related communities, increasing interactions among the region's communities, and strengthening social, cultural and scientific partnerships are among the Presidency's priorities.

The Presidency aims to strengthen scientific, cultural and social cooperation with kin and related communities abroad.

International Students

The Presidency also focuses on international scholarship students, coordinating services such as accommodation, Turkish language instruction and academic counseling, tuition (cost-free), medical services (cost-free), monthly stipends, and round trip airline tickets. Among its responsibilities the Presidency is tasked with creating the conditions for those students on scholarship to successfully continue their education in Turkey, and ensuring the continuity of their relationship with Turkey during and after the completion of their studies.

Every year thousands of students come to study in Turkey. A majority of them are from countries considered as kin and related communities, while the rest come from different parts of the world. The Presidency aims to help international scholarship students foster strong ties with Turkey, and to coordinate domestic and international efforts to make sure those relations last even after the completion of their studies.

Non-Governmental Organizations

The Presidency's focus on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) supports and complements the other three areas. The Presidency supports those NGOs established in Turkey or abroad, either by Turkish citizens, members of kin and related communities or international scholarship students, and encourages these institutions to actively participate in public life in the countries where they are established, preserve their ties with Turkey, and carry out successful projects. Aware of the importance of the role NGOs play in establishing social dialogue and advanced democracy in the 21st century, the Presidency ascribes the utmost importance to the flourishing of the work of NGOs.

In line with these objectives, the Presidency aims to support NGOs through capacity development programs to help them launch successful projects, and become better equipped and functional. The Presidency also aims to help improve the political, cultural and socio-economic statuses of our citizens, kin and members of related communities by providing support to those NGOs whose work fall within the Presidency's areas of focus.

Future Perspectives

There are more than six million Turkish citizens living abroad, and the number of kin and members of related communities exceed 200 million. Turkey sees great potential for developing mutually beneficial projects among these communities. In the future, the Presidency will continue prioritizing efforts to help Turkish citizens become prominent forces in the countries they

reside in, work towards ensuring their equal participation in public life, as well as foster a common consciousness amongst them.

The Presidency focuses on strengthening common historic and cultural values shared with the kin and related communities who live in different regions of the world, and works towards planning activities and services to achieve this goal. The Presidency will also continue coordinating efforts to provide educational opportunities for those international scholarship students primarily hailing from regions where the kin and related communities live. It will provide them with both moral and material support throughout their education, and ensure the continuity of their relations with Turkey.

Supporting NGOs to improve their working conditions and efficiency will also add momentum to these efforts. Moreover, the Presidency believes participation in public life of those NGOs is an essential building block of a pluralistic democracy.

The Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities responds to one of Turkey's most important needs in a globalizing world.

The Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities responds to one of Turkey's most important needs in a globalizing world. Carried out in line with the parameters of Turkey's new foreign policy and within the framework of the contemporary global dynamics, the Presidency's efforts will not only serve citizens living abroad, kin, members of related communities and international scholarship students, but also contribute to Turkey's public diplomacy. The Presidency's motto explains its vision, and its ways of reaching out to people across the world: "*Wherever we have a citizen, kin or relative, there we are.*"

About SAM

Center for Strategic Research of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey (SAM) is a think-tank and a research center which is chartered by law and has been active since May 1995. SAM was established as a consultative body to provide Turkish Foreign Policy decision makers with scholarly and scientific assessments of relevant issues, and reviews Turkish foreign policy with a futuristic perspective.

SAM conducts research, organizes scholarly events relevant to the ever expanding spectrum of Turkish Foreign Policy in cooperation with both Turkish and foreign academicians, its counterparts from around the world as well as various universities and government agencies. SAM provides consultancy to the foreign ministry departments as well as some other state institutions in foreign policy issues while also establishing regional think-tank networks.

In addition to its role of generating up-to-date information, reliable data and insightful analysis as a think-tank, SAM functions as a forum for candid debate and discussion for anyone who is interested in both local and global foreign policy issues. Increasingly, SAM has become a center of attraction since it successfully brings scholars and policy makers together for exchange of ideas in panels, in-house meetings, seminars and training programs for young diplomats.

SAM has a widening range of publications. Along with its traditional publication, Perceptions, which is a quarterly English language journal that hosts distinguished Turkish and international scholars within its pages, SAM recently initiated Vision Papers which expresses the views of H.E. Prof. Dr. Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, and SAM Papers that will cover the current debates of foreign policy by various scholars.

With its commitment to contribution to the body of knowledge and constructive debate particularly in Turkish Foreign Policy, SAM will continue to serve as an indispensable think-tank and research center given its role promoting interaction and mutual benefits among the MFA, NGOs, other think-tanks and the broader scientific community and hence strengthen the human and intellectual capital of Turkey.