

TÜSİAD acts faster than Sarkozy

mardi 15 février 2011, par [Gila Benmayor](#)

Turkish Industry and Business Association, or TÜSİAD, representatives are in France to lobby for business interests just two weeks ahead of French President Nicolas Sarkozy's Turkey visit.

This time the meetings are not in Paris but in another important city, Lyon.

The TÜSİAD team includes members of the Boğaziçi Institute, founded one-and-a-half years ago in Paris.

I think I should better give a reminder about the Boğaziçi Institute.

TÜSİAD decided to set up a platform to include the French against "souring" relations between Turkey and France.

Founded according to French law, the Boğaziçi Institute is led by two co-chairs : Kemal Derviş of the Brookings Institute and Henri de Castries, a leading French businessman and Axa CEO.

Among the members of the institute, which acts as a think-tank organization, some support Turkey's European Union bid and others don't.

For instance, a new member, French Defense Minister and Bordeaux Mayor Alain Juppe, does not support Turkey's full membership to the bloc.

Why the visit to Lyon is important

Claude Fischer, on the other hand, is a passionate defender of Turkish accession to the EU. Fischer joins TÜSİAD efforts in Lyon.

The idea of having a visit to Lyon, the second largest metropolitan area of France, came from a businessman from İzmir, Lucien Arkas, in the TÜSİAD team.

Arkas is Turkey's representative of Renault-Trucks, headquartered in Lyon.

Lyon is a good choice for a visit because it is located in the Rhone-Alpes region, one of the richest in France and a quite assertive in innovation.

Additionally, about 90,000 Turks live in Lyon.

Despite such a crowded Turkish population, the city doesn't know much about Turkey.

It was even pointed out by Rhone-Alpes Regional Assembly Vice President Bernard Soulage that Turkey is most of the time confused with North African countries.

"We as politicians should explain that Turks are different," says Soulage.

Turkey's Lyon Consul General Mehmet Bilir agrees with Soulage.

He says Turks are considered the same as North Africans.

And one of the reasons for that is that the number of French visiting North Africa is three or four times more than those visiting Turkey.

French go to Gaziantep

Let's not miss the fact that the Turkey image gets blurrier as we step outside Paris.

So, the TÜSIAD and Boğaziçi Institute visit to Lyon is important.

Soulage, the chairman of the European Parliament Committee of the Regions, Working Group on Relations with Turkey, took about 10 businessmen from the Rhone-Alpes region to the southeastern Anatolian province of Gaziantep two months ago.

"When they saw how modern a city Gaziantep is, they were so surprised," says Soulage.

The group visited the Industrial Zone in Gaziantep and witnessed modern baklava production. According to Soulage, the French businessmen couldn't get over their astonishment for a while.

Yes, the French public doesn't know Turkey well enough.

However, the other side of the coin is a fear of Turkey, which increases in world politics due to the increasing economic power of the country.

France is panicking in the face of the speed of globalization. It is aware of falling behind in many areas. For this reason, French businessmen are afraid of Turkey as a new rising power, Soulage comments.

Unfamiliarity is on one side and fear on the other.

All right, but what will Turkey do to gain the support of French people for its EU membership bid ?

Unless Ankara supports the lobbying activities of TÜSIAD and the Boğaziçi Institute, this is very difficult.

But of course the bottom line is if Turkey really wants membership to the EU.

Sources

Source : TdZ, Friday, February 11, 2011