

# Turkey, France and Sarkozy

Wednesday 19 October 2011, by [Suat Kimkhoğlu](#)

**Turkey's relations with France throughout history have had many ups and downs. There are numerous linkages between these two countries that are not always adequately articulated. For instance, one of the greatest French thinkers was Jean-Jacques Rousseau.**

Did you know that Rousseau's father was looking after the Ottoman palace's clocks in the Sublime Porte? Indeed, from 1705 to 1711 Rousseau's father, Isaac Rousseau, who was a watchmaker, served the Ottoman sultan in Istanbul. Turkey and France established diplomatic relations in 1525, and this bilateral diplomatic relationship constitutes one of the oldest diplomatic relationships in history. If we move on to the more recent past we see that there is a strong economic dimension to Turkish-French relations. France is one of the greatest investors in the Turkish economy. French moviegoers follow Turkish cinema closely, not to mention the more than 5,000 words we have imported from French.

These linkages, be they in the economic, cultural and even political field, suffered an immense blow in 2007 when Nicolas Paul Stéphane Sarközy de Nagy-Bocsa — that is his full name — was elected president of the French Republic. The rise of Nicolas Sarkozy to the French presidency has dramatically altered the atmosphere between our nations. Within a very short time the French president became the personification of European opposition to Turkey's bid to join the EU. He argued vehemently that Turkey was not part of European identity from the past to today. Worse, he frequently employs discriminatory and Islamophobic language vis-à-vis Turkey.

Of course one reason behind Turkey bashing à la Sarkozy is that there is almost no cost for French domestic politics in doing so. Despite the 500,000 Turks who live in France, they wield little political influence. On the other hand, the well-established Armenian community projects much more influence than its numbers would suggest. So, when President Sarkozy started preaching to Turkey about the unfortunate events of 1915 in Yerevan last week and urged Turkey to revisit its history, even the French press was blunt about Sarkozy's timing, which was described as "calculated provocation" aimed at wooing the Armenian vote in France.

Despite the war on Muammar Gaddafi and the hastily arranged visit of Sarkozy and Cameron just one day before Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was scheduled to be in Libya, public opinion polls in France are not looking good. Although it is still too early to write Mr. Sarkozy off, he does seem to be in genuine trouble. According to a recent Economist piece, 68 percent of respondents told a Viavoice poll that they do not want Sarkozy to be re-elected. Undoubtedly, Turks would be extremely happy to see him lose, but there is plenty of time left in the campaign.

Of course should he lose and Merkel be pushed out of the German chancellorship there could be a remarkably different picture at hand in the heart of Europe. Turkey's EU membership aspirations could get an unexpected boost, but I do not think anyone is betting on this right now.

Under the leadership of Sarkozy, France has come to represent the essence of opposition to Turkish interests. This opposition was not limited to blocking Turkey's negotiation process, but is visible wherever Turkey's growing power and influence can be observed. Ranging from North Africa to the Levant, from the Balkans to the Caucasus, Sarkozy's France seems to be operating in a sort of "contested neighborhood" framework. It is self-evident that France loses from this staunchly anti-Turkish approach. Sarkozy's roots go back to the Ottoman city of Salonika. He is a descendent of the Mallah family. "Mallah" means messenger or angel in Hebrew. Sarkozy has been no angel to Turkey. His legacy is likely to remain one of greatest disappointments to what could have been a mutually beneficial Turkish-French partnership.

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## Sources

Source : Todayszaman, 14 October 2011, Friday