

## GLOBAL RELATIONS FORUM 15<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY EVENTS AND GRF BOARD MISSION TO LONDON

As the Board of Directors of the Global Relations Forum (GRF), we held a series of high-level visits, contacts, meetings, and events with the participation of GRF members on 7-8 May 2024 in London.

To commemorate the 100th anniversary of the re-establishment of diplomatic ties between Turkey and the United Kingdom, as well as the 15th anniversary of the Global Relations Forum, we came together in London with the representatives from civil society and the private sector, researchers, diplomats and politicians, who work, think, and produce ideas and projects on Turkey-UK relations.

During our meetings, we discussed different dimensions of the Turkey-UK bilateral relations such as economic partnership, investment, trade, defense, security, migration and youth. With experts from Turkey and the United Kingdom, we discussed ways to strengthen bilateral relations beyond their current level and we evaluated the role that the GRF can play in this regard. During our meetings with our British counterparts, we emphasized the strategic nature of bilateral relations between Turkey and the United Kingdom, and their importance for the wider European geography. We expressed Turkey's priorities in the process of updating the Free Trade Agreement between our countries.



We discussed further developing the economic partnership between Turkey and the United Kingdom, as well as partnerships in the energy, defense and manufacturing industries with foreign investors, entrepreneurs, senior company representatives and policymakers we met in London. We evaluated the potential of bilateral relations, and the important economic and political roles that both non-member states of the EU which are located at two different ends of the continent, can play in wider Europe. We also examined their contributions to the prosperity, security and stability of the continent, as well as the issues on which they can cooperate in different geographies of the world.



On the first day of our visit, we met with more than 130 Turkish and British guests hosted by Turkey's Ambassador to London, H.E. Osman Koray Ertaş, at the Residence of the Turkish Embassy. As representatives of civil society in Turkey, we presented the work of GRF to our guests. We celebrated the 15th anniversary of GRF by discussing Turkey-UK relations and developing new ideas for the future. This special gathering successfully brought together a large and diverse crowd.

On the second day of our visit to London, we organized a special meeting entitled *"Turkey-UK Roundtable: Turkey and the UK in the International Environment at a Time of Extraordinary Flux"* in collaboration with the influential think tank, Chatham House. The two-session event brought together policymakers, representatives from the diplomatic community, civil society, and the private sector, as well as researchers and young people from Turkey and the UK.



In the first session, we had the opportunity to discuss the outlook for UK politics in the run-up to the elections, the economic and foreign policies of the new government, and the UK's post-election relations with the US, the EU, and Turkey. We also touched upon the bilateral economic, investment, and trade relations between Turkey and the UK, and the future of these relations. We examined the Free Trade Agreement between the two countries and the ongoing negotiation process.



The speakers highlighted several key points during this session. They mentioned that post-Brexit UK is facing challenges, particularly in the manufacturing industry. Additionally, the economy is heavily reliant on the service sector. Despite these issues, the business and corporate sectors remain dynamic and resilient against crises and shocks. Moreover, the economies of Turkey and the UK share similar characteristics in this regard. It was emphasized that both economies are 'open economies,' with a high share of foreign trade in their GDP, despite facing crises and difficulties. Over the past 15 years, both countries have increased their openness to foreign trade, yet their trade with each other has decreased. Additionally, both economies struggle with a structural current account deficit, making them dependent on external financing.



It was emphasized that Turkey had experienced serious economic and financial difficulties in the last two years. The new economic team has initiated a 'return to orthodox policies,' which has been positively received by London-based financial circles. Despite this progress, challenges remain in combating inflation, establishing a sound fiscal policy, and improving the quality of growth. Foreign investors are beginning to show confidence in the Medium Term Program, leading to a renewed interest in the Turkish market. Additionally, it was highlighted that partnerships in energy, clean energy, green transformation, low carbon economy, digital economy, defense procurement, and the defense industry present important cooperation opportunities between the two countries.

In the second session, we discussed the security and stability of Europe, and the roles that two NATO member states can play in these areas. The speakers emphasized that Turkey has lost an important supporter in the EU after Brexit. It was noted that Turkey and the UK have been 'Strategic Partners' since 2007



and that mutual trust has been built between the two countries. The communication channels between the two governments are always open, with officials and bureaucrats maintaining an open, transparent, and responsible dialogue on common issues. Both countries have strong synergies in foreign and security policies, as they are 'non-EU NATO allies'.

It was discussed that the UK continues its political, military and diplomatic consultations in geographical areas where Turkey is politically active. The ongoing conflict following the invasion of Ukraine by Russia is a focal point on the foreign policy agendas of both NATO member states. Notably, Turkey supports Ukraine's political sovereignty and territorial integrity while maintaining relations with Russia, supplies significant military resources to Ukraine, and has successfully implemented the Black Sea Grain Initiative in collaboration with the United Nations. It was evaluated that the UK is a key partner in Turkey's military equipment procurement, and their collaboration holds substantial promise for the development of advanced military technologies.



During our engagements in London, we also had the opportunity to meet with think tanks and civil society organizations to explore potential joint activities in areas such as the Turkey-UK partnership, European security and Middle East developments. Through our meetings with Sir Adam Thomson, Director of the European Leadership Network (ELN) and Karin von Hippel, Director of the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), we discussed possible areas of future cooperation. Throughout our two-day program, we also met with

policymakers, ambassadors and bureaucrats who have previously served in Turkey, as well as representatives of major companies doing business with Turkey.

On the evening of May 8th, we came together with GRF Community members who participated at GRF's youth and community programs, and have shaped their education and careers in various cities in the UK. The community meeting brought together alumni whose paths crossed with GRF programs in the past. We decided to reconfigure the 'GRF Communities Meetings' which are held abroad for the first time, as annual gatherings in various countries. This would facilitate experience sharing and create new opportunities to establish an intergenerational dialogue between our alumni who have different backgrounds and different areas of expertise.



Our board mission to London proved highly successful, leaving us with renewed perspectives and a set of new tasks to pursue. We are committed to sustaining similar programs and activities in the UK throughout 2024 and beyond, while also expanding our efforts to other countries.

The delegation that visited London included Zeynep Bodur Okyay, Chairperson of the Board of Directors; Ambassador (R) Ahmet Üzümcü, Vice Chairperson; Ambassador (R) Selim Yenel, President of GRE; Board Members Feride Acar, Taşkın Osman Aksoy, Sibel Asna, Gülay Barbarosoğlu, Tayfun Bayazıt, Altuğ Bilgin, Canan Ediboğlu, Gözde Küçük Adıyaman, Rona Yırcalı, the GRF Secretariat and the GRF members.

