



Turks in Britain: experience of the last 10 years and expectations for the next 10

A panel discussion to mark the 10th anniversary of Anglo Turkish Association for Academics and Professionals

Date: 2 December 2004

Time: 5.30 for 6.00pm till 9pm

Venue: The Board Room, University of Westminster

Reception: after 9pm at Ozer Restaurant, Regent Street

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Our main sponsors: Sofra Restaurant, Ozer Restaurant, SABanci Bank

Our sponsors: Turkishbooks.com, Anglo-Turkish Society

Our designer: Mr Murat Arli who designed the panel logo and brochure

Our website (which was launched at the panel) designer: Mr Ersin Akartuna

This is the summary report of the ATA's 10th anniversary panel. The summary contains:

- Introduction
- Welcome speech by Suna Akartuna, on behalf of ATA Executive Council
- Chair's opening remarks
- Biographies of the speakers and summaries of their speeches
- Summary of discussions; and
- Chair's closing remarks and suggestions for ATA's next 10 years.

1. Introduction

Established in 1994, Anglo-Turkish Association of Academics and Professionals is a non-profit, independent voluntary organisation. Our primary objective is to bring together Turkish and British academics and professionals in order to encourage a closer understanding and harmony by stimulating interest in Turkey and the Turkish community in Britain.

To achieve this objective, we organise seminars and conferences on social, political and academic issues of common concern to the two countries and on our respective arts and cultures. Since our foundation, we have organised 16 seminars / conferences and several social events. In addition, this year we started a careers programme, to assist Turkish speaking students in the UK in their search for job opportunities and prospects.

We have a newsletter, Platform, where we publish articles by members and writers who are keen to share their expertise and experience with our readers.

ATA does not discriminate against nationality, race, religion or political view. Anyone supporting the aims of ATA and willing to participate in our activities is welcome to be a member.

2004 marks the 10th anniversary of ATA. We organised a panel discussion to reflect on how the Turkish speaking community in Britain has evolved in the last 10 years. In order to gain insight in the main areas of interest to ATA members, i.e. politics, business, academia and the arts, we have invited five prominent speakers to lead this debate. This panel discussion "Turks in Britain: our experiences of the last 10 years and expectations for the next 10" will ask the speakers two questions: 'How has the relationship between the Turkish speaking community in Britain and the rest of the society evolved over the last 10 years?' and 'What challenges lie ahead for this community and how can these be turned into opportunities?'

We hope that you, the audience, will also take an active part in this discussion and share your experiences and views. Most important of all, we hope that this celebratory panel discussion will be an event to remember over the next 10 years, as all of us continue to do our part in improving relations between Turkey, Britain and the Turkish speaking community here.

2. Welcome speech

Suna Akartuna, a co-founder of ATA and co-ordinator in the ATA Executive Council, welcomed the speakers and the audience to the Panel with the following speech.

Good evening.

On behalf of Anglo-Turkish Association of Academics and professionals, I would like to welcome you all to Anglo Turkish Association's 10.th year anniversary event..

It is great pleasure for us to have you and our four¹ distinguished speakers with us this evening to mark this important event.

This evening, we would like to create a discussion platform to review and examine what the Turks in the UK have experienced in the last 10 years and what our expectations are for the next 10 years. We would like to keep the presentations short so that we can have plenty of, time for discussion in which your active participation is very welcomed.

Before asking Ece (Ozdemiroglu) to take over, I would like to talk about ATA's past 10 years. The driving force behind the idea of founding ATA was the realisation of a need for an organisation which could bring people from academia and business together to discuss matters of interest to both Turkish and English alike.

So, a group of us, after months of preparation, called the 1st Annual General Meeting in July 1994 to establish ATA as a non-profit making independent voluntary organization. Our aim was, and still is, to bring together Turkish and British academics and professionals in order to encourage a closer understanding and harmony between them by stimulating interest in Turkey and the Turkish speaking community in Britain.

During our past ten years we have also organized a range of social activities to allow our members to get together and meet each other in an informal environment, where they can share ideas and areas of interest and expertise. We also managed to publish several issues of our newsletter Platform, which have been sent to both members and others who were

¹ In fact, five speakers were engaged for the panel. However, the fifth speaker, Dr Ihsan Yilmaz (School of Oriental and African Studies - SOAS) could not attend.

interested in Anglo-Turkish relations. Members and friends of ATA are invited to contribute to the newsletter through academic (or non-academic papers, articles or literary studies. You can find our latest issue in your folders and we welcome your contribution for the next issue.

During past 10 years ATA also raised some money towards earthquake disaster relief efforts through CYDD in Istanbul, for Kosovo Appeal and more recently raised money, with the help of TFUK, TBCCI and TBA for activities of Egitim Gonulluleri Dernegi.

ATA has also had a quieter time mainly because of a lack of resources. During that period which lasted for about two years, ATA almost stopped functioning. But the need for such organisation was so intense and the desire for its revival was so strong that we decided to revive it in the summer of 2001.

What we have planned and organised during this revival period have so far proved to be very successful. We have not only organised several activities but also we have now launched the Careers Seminars, which aim to provide guidance to Turkish students who are seeking to start or develop their careers here.

Ten years ago most of us were students and had no family tasks. This allowed us to spend more time on ATA issues, but now things are different for many of us. All of us working actively for ATA have full time jobs and some of us have family responsibilities too. Although better technology helps us a lot with administration and communication, we need new people to help us take ATA into the future. We need members who would like to take an active part and help us, in every aspect of ATA's activities. We also would like to see new ideas and fresh initiatives to keep the association alive and vibrant, and which will in turn bring in new and younger members.

I believe that I can speak for all of the Executive Council members when I say that despite the amount of time we have spent and the effort all of this has taken, we all still derive a great deal of satisfaction and enjoyment in working together to achieve and to further the aims of ATA. We look forward to hearing your suggestions and comments and your offers of help for the next 10 years.

3. Chair's opening remarks

Ece Ozdemiroglu, a co-ordinator in the ATA Executive Council, started the panel discussion with the following opening remarks.

Iyi aksamlar, good evening ladies and gentlemen

I have neither the academic training nor the professional expertise about the study of Turks in Britain but I have the personal experience, like many of you, as a Turk living in London. I've lived here for 13 years and have been a member of ATA for eight of these years. As such, I have the great honour and pleasure of chairing this evening's panel.

After my brief introduction, each of our speakers will talk for ten minutes or so each, then we'll open the floor for discussion. I will then try to wrap up with a summary of the discussions.

The first five years of my life here I didn't have any Turkish friends. At the time I used to think I didn't have the opportunity. But with hindsight I think I was focusing on learning the gap between the culture I was brought up in and the culture I was now living in. After five years I found my Turkish so rusty that I could not speak even a few sentences without putting English words in them. This is when I luckily came across ATA and never looked back since.

That was my personal change over the last 10 years and I can say that I can carry on like this - benefiting from two cultures simultaneously- should I remain in the UK for another 10 years.

At a social level though the most significant change for me has been the colleagues' and clients' reactions upon learning that I was from Turkey. Until the last few years, the first reaction at least was one of surprise: I was too tall, too pale, my English accent was too good, I could not have studied in Turkey, was I escaping prosecution or abject poverty, was someone in the family a torturer or tortured or, my 'favourite', could I belly dance?!

These were the questions / remarks I heard rather than questions / remarks about my career. Now, however, when I say I am from Turkey, most people don't even show any reaction. It's normal to be from Turkey. In my life at least I see some of the stereotypes being abolished.

But what has happened to cause this change (if indeed this change is experienced by at least some others)? What factors were at play at personal, professional, social and political levels? These are questions that may be echoed by others this evening.

My personal hope and wish for the next 10 years and beyond is that future will be better for us or rather we'll have the strength to make it better for ourselves. But what can we do?

To give a more professional and objective approach to answering the questions I've just posed and many others that will follow no doubt, we have invited five prominent speakers. They will part with their knowledge of what's happened in the last 10 years and what we can do / expect from the next. So without further a do, let me introduce our first speaker.

4. Biographies of the speakers and the main points of their presentations

Dr Mehmet Ali Dikerdem

Dr Dikerdem is a social scientist who has taught Development Studies, Race and Ethnic Relations and Social Policy since the mid-1980s. He is also a governor at a North London specialist school with a high percentage of Turkish-speaking pupils and liaises regularly with the Aim Higher Group at Middlesex University set up to encourage wider participation in higher education.

Dr Dikerdem set the context for the panel by summarising the changing policies of the UK governments towards ethnic minorities. He covered the policies towards Black and Asian migrants in the 1960s to more recent migrants from various war zones in the world. He gave a comparative account of how some of the many ethnic communities in the UK have become a part of the British society and what lessons from this process can be drawn for the future of the Turkish speaking community.

He mentioned that there were the two different states for an ethnic minority: segregation (from the mainstream society) and a 'negotiated integration'. The latter is only possible if the ethnic community starts this negotiation within itself first in terms of assessing what it expects from integration and how it can achieve its aims. Two important aspects of this negotiation are (i) the social structure of the ethnic group itself - which in the case of the Turkish speaking community carries many resemblances to the structure in Turkey (e.g. in terms of interaction between different social classes) and (ii) relations with the mainstream society: whether or not there is institutional racism and the involvement of the Turkish speaking community in the UK public life and politics fall within this context.

Mr Yusuf Cicek

Yusuf Cicek has been working for Business Link for eight years as a Business Support Agent for Small Business Services of central government. He is specialised in Black and Minority Ethnic business, particularly Turkish Speaking Business. He has been providing professional services to businesses of all types and sizes, ranging from catering to textile and from wholesalers to import-exporters and food retailers. Services delivered to these clients are: access to finance, import-expert business planning, training, marketing planning, and legislation for SMEs market etc. Prior to joining the Business Link, Mr Cicek ran his own retail clothing and import-export/wholesale business for seven years in the UK and textile business for nine years in Istanbul. He studied Law, Public Management and English law system and European Community law. He has been involved in many projects which are related to Business Support market.

Mr Cicek talked about the business performance of the Turkish speaking community in the UK. Full text of his speech can be found in his article in the December 2004 / January 2005 issue of the Platform.

Mr Sumer Erek

Sumer Erek is a multi-disciplinary artist currently working and living in London. Born in Cyprus, studied art in Istanbul and St Martin's School of Art in London. Some of his recent art projects and exhibitions include: "Upside Down Hose - 2001" (London, Glasgow and Liverpool); "The Bath-2002" (2nd Liverpool Biennial); "Mangal-2002" (London); "Stitch - 2002" (London); "Split - 2003" (Gozo, Malta); "Domestic Dreams - 2003" (Berlin and Düsseldorf, Germany); "Resuscitation - 2004" (London); "Insula Ovinium-2004" (Sheppey, England) and "Ash Seeds - 2004" (Berlin and 3rd Liverpool Biennial). He is also a co-ordinator of ATA Executive Council.

Sumer Erek gave examples of Turkish speaking artists in the UK from Kutlug Ataman who was short listed for the 2004 Turner Prize to Tracey Emin. He made some very acute and interesting observations about the role of arts in the social life in Turkey and Cyprus and its reflection in the Turkish speaking community in the UK. The bottom line of these observations was that, beyond the entertainment functions, arts are not among the top priorities of the community (here or in Turkey / Cyprus) and that this could be explained by the socio-economic status and the needs of the community.

Despite this historical tendency, however, he emphasised the role of arts in finding and promoting the community's identity and the need to promote arts for this reason first within the community itself.

Ms Ayfer Orhan

Ayfer Orhan is a specialist and a trainer in Equal Opportunities, Race Equality and disability legislations in education, employment and in the 3rd (the voluntary and community) sector. She has also been involved in Transport in London seminar, Westminster Briefings on disability, Race Equalities Act and Raising Standards in Education, the Tomlinson Report and 3rd Age. She served a period as an elected member in the London Borough of Enfield. During this period she served as a deputy council member of housing, a women's officer, a member of the board of trustees on a voluntary organisation, member of the Association of London Government, PCS and GMB union member. She is currently a Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for the Labour Party in North West Cambridgeshire.

Ms Orhan gave her personal experiences of growing up and working in the UK public sector organisations. In addition to her personal experiences, she also gave an account of her own and other Turkish speaking politicians' involvement in local politics. She compared their political involvement in the UK with the involvement of those living in other European countries where the community has a longer history.

She urged the members of the audience to be politically involved in the British life. She stated that this does not have to be a formal involvement as a politician or a member of a political party but can take the form of membership of the boards of public organisations or those which are open to public involvement. She emphasised the close links between involvement in public life of a society and political representation.

She also made the point that 'Turkish' does not exist as a separate category in the ethnic minority grouping of the Census. Therefore, our community is somewhat hidden in the policy discussions. Our active involvement in the political life will contribute to changing this.

Further points about Ms Orhan's message can be found in the December 2004 / January 2005 issue of Platform.

5. Summary of discussions

The speeches and some of the discussion (parts that were captured by the sound and recording system) were recorded during the panel. The recording is not transcribed here but the main points of discussion were the following:

- Is there institutional racism in the UK or is the current situation (described as less than desirable) the fault of the ethnic minorities themselves (including the Turkish speaking community)?
- How can we take advantage of the opportunities offered by UK policies towards ethnic minorities and how can we make more of our own social capital to strengthen our community? In the discussions around this and the earlier question, it became apparent that while there is a certain level of institutional racism, some of the problems faced by the Turkish speaking community in the UK are simply reflections of the social structure in Turkey and hence (at least some of) the solutions and responsibilities also lie within the community.
- One of the most important steps we can take in this respect is to acknowledge the need of the young members of the Turkish speaking community for role models that can show them different paths of life.
- What is the role of a Turkish speaking politician in the British Parliament?

6. Chair's closing remarks and suggestions for ATA's next 10 years

In summarising the discussions, Ece Ozdemiroglu reminded the participants the question posed by the panel brochure 'Mind the Gap?'. She made the point that if we acknowledge the gap (between the Turkish speaking community and the rest of the British society) then we also need to acknowledge that there are two sides to any gap. In this case, just as the Turkish speaking community has to expend some effort for being integrated and closing the gap. It also needs to campaign the rest of the British society and the institutions to do their part this.

As it is not possible for one single individual or (voluntary or other) organisation to undertake to close (or even narrow) this gap single-handedly, we should all play our part. The ATA Executive Council has learnt some very valuable lessons and interesting ideas about what we can do as ATA.

Based on these, the following is a short list of objectives that is based on a single word INTEGRATION:

- Integration within the Turkish speaking community;
- Integration within British institutions - involvement with boards of public organisations, census polls; and
- Integration with other ethnic minorities.

This is a short list but will require a lot of work - in fact enough work for the next 10 years! But we should start to plant the seeds as soon as we can.

- **Integration through education / mentoring project** - the seeds of this project were planted within ATA a few years ago. During this time, the connections with other groups have become stronger. Given our lack of experience in setting up such a demanding scheme, the best way forward would be to collaborate with other organisations. Our main contribution would be to encourage our members who can be excellent role models, given their diverse backgrounds and current professions. One such organisation to collaborate is the Turkish Education Consortium set up in Islington (contact person: Mr Hidayettin Ertanch) got in touch with ATA to take this idea forward. Links with this organisation should be established in 2005 and what ATA Executive Council and members can do should be assessed. One option could be to arrange meetings at schools with Turkish speaking students and informal presentations / discussions with these groups on topics / professions that are likely to be of interest to the given age group. Once these topics are identified, EC could match it with the skills, experience and willingness of ATA members. We could also benefit from the experience and human resources of the Aim Higher Group at the Middlesex University, which aims to promote participation in academic education (Dr Dikerdem is our contact point in this respect).
- **Integration through business community** - based on the success and popularity of the career seminars in 2004, ATA should continue in 2005. A useful addition to these seminars would be to talk about personal experiences, and opportunities for state support for self employment. This could include sectors that the community has been traditionally involved in and, possibly in other sectors which are new to this community.
- **Integration through involvement in British public life** - based on the suggestion by Ms Orhan, we should promote becoming members of the boards of public organisations. A seminar should be organised to allow for an expert to put across this information to interested ATA members and others.
- **Integration with other organisations of the Turkish speaking community and other ethnic minority organisations** - Whilst ATA has been very active organising a number of events which has become increasingly popular, it should make a more concerted effort in staying in touch with other organisations. This will strengthen the ties within our community and enable cross-learning between different ethnic minorities.
- **Integration from within the Turkish speaking community** - based on the suggestion by Mr Erek, ATA can explore the ways in which art can help us define and strengthen our community identity. ATA has already organised a variety of cultural events. These have so far focused on the output of the individual artist and on the entertainment value of arts. Future events which would help Turkish speaking community in the UK and the Turkish community in Turkey and Cyprus understand better one another should be planned. Artists and authors such as Orhan Pamuk and (perhaps more feasibly) Kutlug Ataman and others who are known in the UK will also attract British audiences and help with integration in promoting our community in Britain.