



**Ambassador Koray Ertaş's Interview to the Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations,
(13 December 2023)**

Çiğdem BALIM¹



As the new Turkish Ambassador to the UK, could you please tell the readers about your background and career?

I started my diplomatic career in 1997 at the Policy Planning Department of the Turkish Foreign Ministry. I served in the Turkish Embassies in Sofia, Washington, and Bucharest, as well as the Turkish Permanent Mission to the UN Office in Geneva. While in Ankara, I served as the Chief of Staff to the President and Chief Advisor to the Foreign Minister. It has been almost a year now that I have been serving as Türkiye's Ambassador to the UK.

After completing my bachelor's degree in political sciences at Ankara University, I obtained my MA degree in Contemporary European Studies at Sussex University in 1996. I later completed my PhD degree at George Mason University's School of Conflict Analysis and Resolution during my tenure in Washington, DC.

Returning to the UK now after almost 27 years, I am honoured to be appointed as the Turkish Ambassador to a country where there are vast opportunities for cooperation. With my colleagues at the Embassy and three Consulates, we do our best to promote and enhance our relations across various spheres. And, of course, I feel lucky to be the Turkish Ambassador in this important capital, as we have proudly celebrated the centenary of the Republic of Türkiye through several events in this country.

Based on your experience, could you tell us a bit about the nature of the diplomatic work?

For an outsider, the life of a diplomat is probably charming and fancy. The reality is that diplomacy is quite a demanding effort that requires dedication and sacrifice.

Serving in various geographies and in different political and cultural settings requires hard work, perseverance, empathy, a strong ability to adapt, as well as good negotiation, communication, and social skills.

A diplomat should know a bit about everything. You should be able to talk about world affairs, culture, technology, defence, and the academy, among others. While at times you

¹ Emerita, Indiana University, E-mail: cbalim@indiana.edu. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0771-9865>



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work like a logistical staff, dealing with protocol and critical scheduling issues, often times you need to grasp deep technical files and excel in diplomatic negotiations, in addition to consular work that requires a strong legal background.

Being a Turkish diplomat and carrying the Turkish flag in far-away geographies is a privilege and a big responsibility. It requires additional skill sets. Given the heavy agenda of our foreign policy, a Turkish diplomat should have in-depth knowledge on various issues in different parts of the world.

Although some traditional features of diplomatic work are still in place, diplomats should also adapt to the rapid changes in the world. Diplomacy is no longer a field that only a select few operate in. There are different layers and various actors that need to be taken into account.

As diplomats, we should also adopt to new technologies. We already have mechanisms such as large language models at our disposal, that can support us in our daily work. Therefore, now we can work on adding new skill sets to our diplomatic toolbox. And, as the Turkish diplomatic service, we are also adapting to these new realities.

What can you say about Turkish-UK relations?

Our relationship is deeply rooted in a history spanning over 400 years. The British Empire was one of the first to appoint an ambassador to the Ottoman Empire. William Harborne was sent in 1583 to the Court of Murad the Third. Likewise, Yusuf Agah Efendi was the first resident ambassador of the Ottoman Empire, and he was appointed to London in 1793.

Today, we are NATO allies, strategic partners, and two pivotal powers geographically located at both ends of Europe. Our relations have gained momentum in all areas with the 2010 Strategic Partnership Document.

After Brexit, the strategic value of the relationship has increased even more.

Economy, trade, tourism, investments, energy, defence industry and cooperation on security are the driving forces of our close relations. We look forward to strengthening and diversifying our bilateral relations in every possible field. Areas such as the defence industry, AI, and green technology have huge potential in that regard.

Has anything related to the bilateral relationship changed after Brexit?

As I mentioned earlier, things have developed in a positive direction since Brexit. Türkiye and the UK have emerged as two major non-EU European powers and NATO Allies that can make a real difference for the safety, security, and welfare of the entire continent.



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Our countries already have a significant trade volume, reaching 20 billion dollars. We are now working on updating and expanding the existing Free Trade Agreement. That alone is a concrete outcome of Brexit.

The UK is the third largest foreign investor in Türkiye. We are pursuing major long-term strategic projects in defence and green energy.

Another area of focus is tourism, with Türkiye being among the top 10 favourite tourism destinations for British tourists. Britons continue to be the third largest group visiting my country.

Green transformation, AI, innovation, and health are critical areas that we have huge potential to develop partnerships in. We look forward to working with various actors in all these areas.

How about the Turkish community in the UK?

The Turkish community in the UK is a half-million-strong group that contributes to our relations. We are happy to see their increasing presence in many areas, including the economy, finance, trade, culture, sports, arts, politics, and science. They have a reputation for being hard-working, practical, and skilled.

In addition, we also have over 5,000 students at UK universities.

I attach importance to getting to know the Turkish community and actively engaging them in our activities. We have been organising at our historic residence many networking events for various groups, such as students, academics, teachers, and IT professionals. We will continue these outreach events.

Together with my colleagues, we also continue to offer extensive consular, educational, and cultural services to our community.

Turkish Cypriots also have a special place in our community. Although they have a separate representation office, I always take pride in their achievements and being part of the larger community.

Lastly, let me take this opportunity to thank you and the Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations for this interview. I appreciate your efforts contributing to the Türkiye-UK relations and I look forward to working with you.



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OSMAN KORAY ERTAŞ

Ambassador O. Koray Ertaş serves as Turkish Ambassador to the UK since March 2023. He previously served as the Turkish Ambassador to Romania (2014-2019), Special Advisor to the Foreign Minister (2019-2023), and Chief of Staff to the President (2011-2014). Prior to that he worked at the Turkish Embassy in Washington, D.C. (2008-2011), Turkish Permanent Mission to the UN Office in Geneva (2003-2005), Turkish Embassy in Sofia (2000-2003), and the Policy Planning Department at the Turkish Foreign Ministry (1997-2000). Mr. Ertaş also worked at the U.S. State Department as a Transatlantic Fellow (2008-2009).

O. Koray Ertaş has a PhD degree from George Mason University's School of Conflict Analysis and Resolution. He has an M.A. in Contemporary European Studies from University of Sussex and a bachelor's degree in International Relations from Ankara University.

Ambassador Ertaş was born in Iskenderun, Türkiye, in 1974. He is married with three children.