

Press release

German-Turkish Youth Bridge launched in Istanbul with Federal Foreign Minister Dr Frank-Walter Steinmeier

Strong bridges: together with partners from civil society and the public sector, the German-Turkish Youth Bridge will further improve understanding between Germany and Turkey.

Essen/Istanbul, 21 June 2014 – The number of young people visiting Turkey from Germany should be increased and there should be more exchange programmes for youngsters from Turkey – the idea is that a lack of information, support or funding should no longer prevent this goal from being achieved in future. With this objective in mind, Stiftung Mercator initiated the German-Turkish Youth Bridge – with immediate effect, it will be supporting, informing, advising, interlinking and training anyone interested or involved in bilateral exchange. The aim is to improve understanding and further strengthen relations between the two countries. Stiftung Mercator is investing around 2.5 million euros in expanding school and youth exchange programmes between Germany and Turkey and in bilateral communication. Additional financial support is being provided by Germany’s Federal Foreign Office. The Youth Bridge was officially launched on Saturday in a ceremony attended by Federal Foreign Minister Dr Frank-Walter Steinmeier, its partners from civil society and the public sector, as well as many young people and supporters from both countries.

In view of the close and multifaceted relations between the two countries, there is scope for further developing the culture of intensive school and youth exchange, especially as compared with some of Germany’s other key partners. This is where the DTJB comes in: it serves as a point of contact for anyone involved in German-Turkish school and youth exchanges in both countries and indeed for anyone interested in such exchanges – such as pupils and young people, apprentices, students, teachers, youth workers and parents. The objective of the German-Turkish Youth Bridge is to intensify German-Turkish school and youth exchanges and to improve the possibilities for reciprocal exchanges by launching concrete measures and combining existing programmes. It makes funding easily available to third parties who meet transparent criteria and finances its own exchange and youth encounter programmes with a view to providing innovative impetus to stimulate the development of offerings for new target groups. Its bilingual website contains information about all aspects of exchange: institutions can network with one other via its online database, advertise their projects and apply for funding, while young people and other interested parties can find exchange programmes there.

“Together with strong partners in both countries, we are committed to further improving understanding between Germany and Turkey – to which end we need young bridge-builders”, said Dr Catharina Duft, the director of the German-Turkish Youth Bridge, at the launch ceremony on Saturday. “We want more young people to be excited about German-Turkish school and youth exchange and we want to give such exchanges lasting support.”

“Mutual relations between Germany and Turkey play a very important role in the future of Europe”, said Michael Schwarz, CEO of Stiftung Mercator, explaining why the initiative was established. “Although exchange already takes place on many levels between the two countries, far more is still possible. Our aim is to take even greater advantage of the existing

opportunities and potential so that school and youth exchange enjoys the profile and visibility that its importance for bilateral relations warrants.” Stiftung Mercator is investing around 2.5 million euros in the Youth Bridge from 2012 to 2018.

“The Youth Bridge has the potential to become another flagship project in our relations with Turkey. From the outset, the Federal Foreign Office has supported Stiftung Mercator in setting up and preparing the German-Turkish Youth Bridge. Through projects such as this one, and through our commitment to the Turkish-German university and the Tarabya cultural academy, our aim is to strengthen cultural and above all human relations between our two countries”, said Federal Foreign Minister Dr Frank-Walter Steinmeier at the official launch of the Youth Bridge. His Turkish counterpart, the Republic of Turkey’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Professor Ahmet Davutoğlu, likewise stressed the importance of this initiative in his message to the Youth Bridge: “I am convinced that the intensive relations and friendships that will come about between the younger generations as a result of the German-Turkish Youth Bridge will further advance the wide-ranging bilateral relations between the Turkish and German peoples. The new bridges that this will build will facilitate and deepen the interaction and the friendships between our societies.”

The German-Turkish Youth Bridge receives state funding from the Federal Foreign Office and from the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth. Representatives of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and of the Turkish Ministry of Youth and Sports are members of the binational advisory board, as are additional partners in both countries who play a central role in the work of the Youth Bridge. The advisory board, which provides strategic advice and support to the DTJB, is chaired by Ambassador Dr Klaus Scharioth (retired): “The German-Turkish Youth Bridge stands for understanding and friendship. It makes encounters possible between young bridge-builders and, with its partners in both countries, can go a long way to promoting mutual understanding.” In Turkey, the Youth Bridge is run by the civil society youth organization Toplum Gönüllüleri Vakfı (TOG, Community Volunteers Foundation). “International school and youth exchanges are character-building for young people and help them develop their skills. Above all, such encounters contribute to eliminating prejudice, bring people together and allow them to learn from one another”, commented Yörük Kurtaran, TOG’s director.

The Youth Bridge has an office in Germany and an office in Turkey. The Turkey office is based at TOG in Istanbul, while the German office is currently in Essen but plans to move later this year into the offices of North Rhine-Westphalia’s Ministry of Family, Children, Youth, Culture and Sport in Düsseldorf.

About the German-Turkish Youth Bridge:

The objective of the German-Turkish Youth Bridge is to intensify German-Turkish school and youth exchanges and to improve the possibilities for reciprocal exchanges by launching concrete measures and combining existing programmes. The Youth Bridge serves as a central port of call for school and youth exchanges between Germany and Turkey. It is a German-Turkish cooperative venture and a state-funded civil society initiative. The Youth Bridge is a Stiftung Mercator initiative.

About Stiftung Mercator:

Stiftung Mercator is a private foundation which fosters science and the humanities, education and international understanding. It specifically initiates, develops and funds projects and partner organizations in the thematic fields to which it is committed: it wants to strengthen Europe, improve integration through equal educational opportunities for everyone, drive forward the energy transition as a trigger for global climate change mitigation and firmly anchor cultural education in schools. Stiftung Mercator feels a strong sense of loyalty to the Ruhr region, the home of the founding family and the foundation's headquarters.

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