

Focus on: TURKEY

Civil society organisations in Turkey: From tradition to modernity

Few can be unaware that Turkey, the vital and dynamic state which unites Europe and Asia, has long been a major player in the Mediterranean and further afield. What is perhaps less well-known is that Turkey has been host to foundations for centuries, and this country's 'third sector' will continue to play an essential role over the coming decades. Üstün Ergüder, Chairman of the Third Sector Foundation of Turkey (TÜSEV), explains.

TÜSEV is honoured that EFC has chosen Istanbul, the capital city of two great empires, Byzantium and Ottoman, as the venue for its 19th Annual General Assembly. Besides being a beautiful city, Istanbul was and is a meeting place of great cultures and civilisations. The city's population currently exceeds 10 million. In addition to its many attractions, Istanbul encounters problems similar to if not greater in dimension, than those challenging many metropolises around the world. An important, and often unheeded, aspect of the Ottoman culture and social system was the role played by foundations ('VAKIF' in Turkish) in the administration of this great city and the complex empire. This unique role of traditional foundations in the Ottoman system was to share responsibility with the central Ottoman administration for the provision of important public services such as education, health, religion, construction of roads, bridges, fountains, canals, palaces, mansions, public baths, inns, dykes and monuments.

A significant point to note here is that foundations played a key role in the decentralisation of the Ottoman system. The positive feature of this system was that over centuries significant social ideas were nurtured in the non-profit sector. The flip side, from the central administration's perspective, meant that this decentralisation proceeded almost unchecked over centuries to the detriment of the imperial treasury. Beginning in the 19th century, to supplement their depleted Treasury, sultans gradually began to regain authority over the foundations. The supervision of foundations was transferred to the Imperial Ministry of Treasury. The history of 100 years of philanthropic foundations ended after the establishment of this Ministry, and an era of

liquidation started. The vast revenue of the foundations began to be shared and appropriated by the Ministry of Treasury to meet the costs of its over-staffed bureaucracy.

Furthermore, the state levied heavy taxes on the foundations' revenue-bearing properties. This ultimately led to a situation where philanthropic foundations found themselves with negative balance sheets. This revered tradition of 'foundations' re-emerged in the second half of the 20th century under the Turkish Republic when new foundations were established. This rich and important history of foundations from which Turkey has benefitted can and should teach us important lessons in today's world where globalisation is the order of the day. More than ever, voluntary associations and foundations are being relied upon for better governance both within the nation-state and in support of growing international and supranational organisations.

Unfortunately, the Turkish state has tended to regard civil society organisations with suspicion, as if they were in opposition to and critical of the state, despite the long-standing Turkish tradition of foundations.

It is commonly accepted that in the contemporary world the state is responsible for providing social services. Nevertheless, foundations and voluntary associations could supplement this effort by encouraging citizens' participation and involvement. Furthermore, promoting citizen participation is a very important contribution to the development and consolidation of



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democracies and for better governance, as foundations and voluntary associations can serve as a training ground for developing the responsible citizenship which is so vital to stable democracy.

The human problems of cities, towns and villages in under-developed and developing countries are overwhelming and are an important threat to sustainable development. Furthermore, in the aftermath of September 11th, promotion of better mutual understanding between cultures has emerged as an important task to be accomplished. Foundations and voluntary associations can play a very innovative and effective role in promoting international understanding and peace by addressing problems of inequity in the world. Active, responsible and participating citizens are the basis of a society trying to solve very complex problems that face our world. They will form the base of an innovative society that is able to adapt to changes, withstand shocks, and seize opportunities.

Citizens are also the basis for a society that cares, a society that can organise itself to address social problems, be it through fund-raising or organised activity in delivering services and support when necessary. Turkish civil society passed with flying colours on this count during the aftermath of the August 1999 earthquake. Unfortunately, the Turkish state has tended to regard civil society organisations with suspicion, as if they were in opposition to and critical of the state, despite the long-standing Turkish tradition of foundations. Despite these bureaucratic attitudes shared by some among the political elite, there have been encouraging developments. On the legal front, two important laws have been passed. This brought the Turkish legal framework into closer accord with the Copenhagen criteria. First, the law on associations, passed in 2004, eased restrictions on freedom of association. And the law on foundations enacted in February 2008 after lengthy political debate filled an important gap by coming up with a comprehensive framework for both old (Ottoman era) and new foundations (established after the founding of the Republic).

On the political and the social front, important developments have also taken place. Women's voluntary associations are being increasingly effective, especially on gender issues and women's rights. Many foundations and civil society organisations have start-

The voluntary sector has an important role to play in democracies, between the state and the private sector. Organised action is indispensable.

ed networking on policy and advocacy concerning issues ranging from education to human rights. Local initiatives for regional and local development are becoming increasingly common in finding solutions to local problems.

Turkey has always had social mutual-support organisations based on primordial ties emanating from territory, religion, and lineage. These organisations have somewhat eased the transition of Turks from the countryside to towns and cities. The new civil society organisations are increasingly 'modern' in the sense that they are formed to pursue specific policy goals transcending primordial ties.

TÜSEV, or the Turkish Third Sector Foundation, is a case in point. It was conceived as an umbrella organisation standing up for the rights, and promoting the interests and causes of all kinds of voluntary organisation in Turkey. The founders believe the voluntary, or third, sector has an important role to play in democracies, operating between the state and the private sector. TÜSEV believes organised action is indispensable to defend the voluntary sector's interests in a pluralist participatory democracy. In addition to its lobbying role, TÜSEV also sees itself as a resource centre for the Turkish voluntary sector, and is currently working on capacity-building projects. International cooperation with similar philanthropic associations is also among TÜSEV's major goals. It sees Turkey's accession to the European Union as vital for the development of Turkish civil society and closely follows efforts in Ankara, the national capital, to meet the Copenhagen criteria. TÜSEV strongly believes international cooperation between civil society-based NGOs is conducive to peace by building understanding and friendship across national borders.



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Current trends and a 'futurist' perspective: Foundations and philanthropy in Turkey

By Filiz Bikmen, Third Sector Foundation of Turkey (TÜSEV)

Foundations ('vakıf' in Turkish) in Turkey date back to the Selçuk and Ottoman periods, and many continue to exist today. If we consider this period to be the first 'golden age' of philanthropy, the period following the establishment of the Turkish Republic and the creation of a new legal system for foundations marks the onset of the second one. Looking back to the late 1990s, we can see the seeds were planted for yet another new phase of growth.

Current trends suggest we are now on the brink of a third golden age. This article summarises the current context, major trends and offers a 'futurist' perspective on the issues that will characterise this new golden age for philanthropy and foundations in Turkey.

New mandates, new actors

Today, Turkey faces many new and more complex challenges which are being addressed by a host of new actors and models. More experienced 'implementing' non-state actors such as NGOs providing services and input on policies, a greater emphasis on public administration reform and capacity, private-public partnerships and the increasing importance of corporate social responsibility, are drastically changing the way these new challenges are being addressed. Taken together, these developments have important implications on the operating environment of foundations and the philanthropic sector. Three trends which highlight the onset of the 'third' golden age for foundations and philanthropy are:

- More formalised strategies for traditional foundations to make the shift from programme support for 'hardware' (buildings, facilities) to addressing the 'software' needs, (programmes which address root causes and policy issues)
- New forms and models for giving to accommodate 'new philanthropists' as well as increased funding needs for innovative programs and projects at local and national level
- New partnerships and collaborative initiatives - both within Turkey and across borders, to maximise leverage of financial and non-financial resources in achieving impact

New roles for traditional foundations

Traditional 'charitable' foundations, mainly those established by Turkey's industrialists from the late 1960s onwards, tend to channel their funds as needed and mainly for 'hardware' needs, buildings and institutions, and individual support in the form of educational scholarships. The funds channelled towards these objectives are not minimal, with some of the largest foundations contributing over €30m (US\$47,500) per year. Undoubtedly, these philanthropic investments have contributed much to society, thousands of students having greater access to education, and a vast number of schools constructed. In fact, almost one-third of Turkey's universities have been built and operationally sustained by private foundations.

Yet given the current context, it is increasingly less feasible for foundations, especially those with significant assets and close ties to industry, to carry out their philanthropic investments without considering the implications of their corporate social responsibility, or to build yet another school or provide an educational scholarship without considering Turkey's significant challenges and needs in education reform. However, these considerations require more capacity, specially formalised strategies, and a more sophisticated array of tools (eg grant-making, fellowships, research), as well as the professional management to carry them out.

Efforts to increase capacity in foundations represent a new trend, and are likely to gain even more momentum in the near future as in the case of the Sabancı Foundation, we will be seeing more foundations creating formal programme strategies and scaling-up professional infrastructure (upgrading technology, increasing communications and foundation operations, etc). Along these same lines, we can expect to have foundations integrating more diverse types of support to include grant-making, fellowships, and publications to realise their programmatic goals.

New horizons for philanthropic models

While foundations established over 15-20 years ago are thinking about how to 'refresh' their approach, others are considering new models for realising philanthropic goals. Although economic growth does not necessarily run parallel to wealth generation, there is certainly an increase in the number of new donors, and new potential donors, which are looking for ways to make a difference.

One primary example of new emerging models is the community foundation. Some traditionalists look at the 'give through, not to' approach as a breach of the very ethos of philanthropy. However, those who realise how difficult it is to establish and effectively manage philanthropic institutions, are keen to explore the new horizons this model can offer. Still in their pre-mature stages, commu-

Still in their pre-mature stages, community foundations have started to attract significant attention. A small group of leaders in the town of Bolu are making strides toward establishing Turkey's first community foundation, with TÜSEV's technical support. As in many other countries which have adopted the community foundation practice, over 50 according to WINGS, some will survive, others not, and all in all, it will take some time to settle in. But without doubt, this model, and what it stands for, will be an important milestone in the trend of 'alternative' giving.

Foundations have much to gain from working together, given Turkey's potential EU membership, but more importantly the 3 million Turks living within Europe's borders

Another similar example of innovation on this frontier is the Turkish Philanthropic Fund (TPF), based in New York. Established in early 2007, TPF aims to 'help donors realise their philanthropic goals to meet community needs in the US and in Turkey.' While it is the first professional advisory fund for philanthropists in the USA, it is not the first 'cross-border' initiative to have emerged in the past few years. Looking ahead, we're likely to see a great proliferation of such mechanisms as TPF, especially within Turkey's borders, which focus on developing new donors and facilitating effective giving. Some will be thematic (rights, youth, environment), while others will be specifically geographically-based.

Heightened sensitivities about corporate social responsibility and an increase in corporate giving initiatives is yet another area of growth. Yet their lack of formal structure will most likely result in the creation of more specific corporate giving mechanisms, payroll giving, for example, as companies try harder to make their giving more effective.

The value of partnership and cooperation

Today, more foundations are looking outwards at what other sec-

tors and organisations are doing, as well as where the world is heading. As part of this trend, we are witnessing more public-private partnerships, like the Sabancı Foundation and the Ministry of Interior in promoting 'Women-Friendly Cities'; the Koç Foundation's support for vocational education with the Ministry of Education; and the Doğan Foundation's organic farming programme with the Ministry of Agriculture. The coming years will probably bring even more partnerships of this nature, while also expanding to include NGOs and other private foundations.

In terms of cross-border partnerships, things are also brewing. Over the past few years, there has been an increase in initiatives between European and Turkish foundations. Yet this potential has yet to be fully tapped. It goes without saying that foundations have much to

gain from working together, given Turkey's potential EU membership, but perhaps more importantly, the 3 million Turks living within Europe's borders. With a heightened political focus on promoting closer links between the third sectors of Turkey and the EU, and an increased sense of sharing the same 'neighbourhood', we will most certainly see more partnerships and cooperation developing across borders.

International meetings and events have acted as important catalysts in helping mobilise such partnerships. In 1996, the 'Habitat' congress was held in Istanbul, bringing with it a dramatic increase in the vibrancy of Turkey's NGO sector, especially in terms of its links with the global civic sector. This event is often referred to as a

'milestone' in the development of Turkey's NGO sector. EFC's forthcoming Annual General Assembly in Istanbul promises to have a similar effect, with many Turkish foundations popping up to see what is happening in the European and global foundation sector. This event will also be a milestone in the Turkish foundation sector, for having brought in fresh ideas and perspectives, and providing fertile ground for new partnerships and collaborative initiatives.



Celebrating 15 years of promoting philanthropy: Spotlight on TÜSEV

- Established in 1993, founded with 23 of Turkey's largest private foundations
- 120 members with collective assets over €3bn (US\$4.7bn) (estimated)
- Members working in areas of education, health and social assistance
- Programme areas: research, social investment, law reform, international relations
- EFC Governing Council member and member of EFC since 1994
- Member of the WINGS network and CIVICUS
- More information: www.tusev.org.tr

Valuing environmental and cultural heritage in Turkey

By Ken Wilson PhD, Executive Director, The Christensen Fund

Turkey is crucial to the long-term diversity of the planet. It plays a central role in generating and moving about biological and cultural diversity, connecting the bio-geographic regions of Eurasia, the Mediterranean, the Middle East and Africa. Some 75% of all plant species in Europe are found in Turkey; persisting there while the climate oscillates between ice ages - finding refuge in extraordinary landscapes that range from coast to desert to steppe, from moist deciduous forest to conifers, and then to mountains above 4,000m. Even the bird species that so characterise European summers only do so by virtue of the bridges provided by its wetlands as two of the most important West Palearctic bird migration routes pass through Turkey.

The Caucasus in Turkey's north-east is the assumed origin of the Indo-European languages, and still the centre of linguistic diversity for all Europe. Important early experiments with agriculture, urban living, and cultural and religious thought occurred on the Anatolian Plateau. This was one of the places where wheat, and many legumes, fruits, nuts and melons were domesticated, and where auruchs were bred into cattle. It is from this heartland of civilisation that the first records of the earth goddess arose; and from where tulips were first recognised as not only beautiful but a commodity. It is Turkey that connected Mesopotamia with the Mediterranean; and later linked Europe with Asia via that 'internet of the Middle Ages', the

Silk Road. No one from the West can visit Istanbul and not realise they had significantly misunderstood the history of the last several millennia.

Valuing Turkey's rich tapestry

It is in this context that The Christensen Fund (TCF), a private foundation based in California with a 50-year history of international philanthropy in the cultural, environmental and educational arenas, included Turkey among its priority countries in 2003. To date TCF has made 21 grants totalling €1.05m (US\$1.6m) and expects to make a further €361,995 (US\$550,000) this year. Most grant-making focuses on the north-east, a beautiful region almost unknown to the outside world. TCF grant-making does not focus on prob-blems or weak-



Ken Wilson PhD, Executive Director, The Christensen Fund

nesses. It builds on Turkey's assets.

In recognition of Istanbul's historic role as a generator and bridge of cultural ideas, TCF has supported the participation of Central Asian artists and curators at the renowned Istanbul Biennale in 2003, 2005 and 2007, contributing to, and benefitting from, the re-emergence on the global stage of the extraordinary creativity of Central Asia and Afghanistan. TCF has also included Turkey in Paul Winter's musical explorations through the Great Rift Valley Flyways project that culturally connects the countries through which birds migrate from Africa to Europe.

In connecting the cultural presence

The Black Sea coast of north-east Turkey is famous for music. People gathered in stunning woodland villages to renew friendships, flirt and dance.

in landscapes to their biological integrity, TCF has also financed practical conservation of these migration routes through partnerships between renowned ornithologist Dr Cağan Şekericioğlu and the communities and local government leaders of Kars and Iğdır. Now through a new local Turkish NGO called Kuzeydoğa, school children and local university students are monitoring bird migration and securing the crucial wetlands, demonstrating the value of environmental



education that actually involves people in discovery. TCF also collaborates with the ANG Foundation of Turkish philanthropist Nihat Gökyiğit in environmental education, through a remarkable botanic garden in the city of Istanbul and through botanic illustration. Synergy between initiatives has led to botanical illustration courses in Anatolia, to culminate in a book of Kars's plants to be illustrated by local students.

Renewing culture and economy

Kars is an historic city that became a backwater on the Cold War frontier. In partnership with other Turkish and US agencies, we have contributed to the municipality's urban renewal programme, including co-funding restoration of an important Ottoman building, and former home of the celebrated writer Namık Kemal, to provide space for cultural programmes facilitated by Anadolu Kültür, an important NGO led by Turkish philanthropist, Osman Kavala. TCF also supports a new NGO, the Anatolian Foundation, led by Beti Minkin and Dr Şekericioğlu, to uncover with local communities the extraordinary agro-biodiversity of the region and link it to livelihood development.

Current programmes include production, processing and marketing of heirloom wheat, flax and barley (an elderly local farmer was found to be the last cultivator of an emmer wheat variety 8,000 years old), honey from the Caucasian race of honey bees (specially adapted to altitude), organic certification; and work on wild herbs. This NGO-led effort complements the provincial and municipal government's work we support through the Institute of International Urban Development to generate policy frameworks and pilot programmes for agriculture, livestock and tourism.

The Black Sea coast of north-east Turkey is famous for music. Here livestock from villages in the valleys was taken up to fatten on the spring and summer flowers of the high mountain pastures (the Yayla) where people gathered in stunning wooden villages to renew friendships, flirt and dance 'horon'. TCF has underwritten the emergence of a Turkish NGO called Yayla (GOLA) led by

renowned bagpipe-player Birol Topaloğlu to revitalise these traditions among the Laz, and develop the annual Green Yayla Festival, to share this heritage, and, in collaboration with local municipalities and businesses, engage young people in revitalising the local culture and economy.

It has not always been easy to make grants as a US foundation during an ill-advised and disastrously prosecuted war in neighbouring Iraq.

Embracing partnerships

So, what have we learned from five years' activity in Turkey? Certainly, the value of collaboration with Turkish philanthropists, of partnerships with local governments given the pace and direction of change at that level, and that civil society is poised to make great contributions. Needless to say, it has not always been easy to make grants as a US foundation during an ill-advised and disastrously prosecuted war in neighbouring Iraq. But quality long-term relationships with Turkish partners, on-the-ground results, and the advice provided by TÜSEV, have all assisted. We are delighted EFC has chosen Istanbul for its 2008 conference, and anticipate that European foundations will be as motivated as we are by these opportunities.

Christian heritage in Turkey - A photo exhibition at EFC's Annual Conference

By Pavol Demeš, German Marshall Fund United States

Did you know where the Apostle Paul and St Nicholas were born, where the Apostle John died and the Apostle Peter celebrated mass in a cave church, and where followers of Jesus first became known as Christians? Although few people would imagine it, these and other important events in the history of Christianity all took place in present-day Turkey.

Like many other foreigners, my image of Turkey was long shaped by the rich Ottoman heritage which is on display in Istanbul. Yet little did I know about the fascinating sites and stories to be discovered all across Anatolia. Among these, I was particularly attracted to the Mediterranean city of Tarsus, the ancient place where my namesake, the Apostle Paul, was born.

In November last year, my plan to see Tarsus and other Christian sites in Turkey finally materialised. A week-long study tour, sponsored by the Turkish Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Culture & Tourism, took me across three thousand kilometres and numerous



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Taking the long-term approach in Turkey

By Rana Zincir Celal, Vice-President, Programmes, Chrest Foundation

On a cool September evening four years ago, the Chrest Foundation President and I scrambled up a steep goat path towards Kars Castle in north-eastern Turkey in the hope of catching up with the founder of Anadolu Kültür, Osman Kavala. After easing our way through the crowds, we found an empty spot along the castle walls from which we could view the third Transcaucasus cultural festival along with an exuberant audience of thousands. Our partnership with Anadolu Kültür, an organisation that supports cultural vitality and new forms of creative expression in cities across Anatolia, has also taken us to film premiers on frozen lakes in minus-twenty weather, to summer school outings with a local fine arts high school, and on a field visit for a group of leading medieval art history experts from the region for the very first joint examination of the cultural heritage of Eastern Anatolia.



Rana Zincir Celal, Vice-President, Programmes, Chrest Foundation

places including Ephesus, Selçuk, Pamukkale, Tarsus, Demre, Antioch, Cappadocia and, naturally, Istanbul. My visit took place on the eve of the European Union's year of intercultural dialogue, and the 2000th anniversary of St Paul's birth, both of which are being celebrated in 2008.

The results of this trip are a series of photographs. These mostly focus on Christian heritage sites in Turkey, including numerous excavations and churches, all of which are very well preserved and protected. In addition to depicting these historical objects, I couldn't resist also capturing the faces of people who live in those ancient places today.

As a regular participant at meetings held by the European Foundation Centre, I much appreciate the decision by EFC's leadership to hold its 2008 annual meeting in one of the most vibrant and diverse cities of Europe, and also its 2010 Cultural Capital, Istanbul. Most certainly, the multicultural nature of this megalopolis and the emerging

modern philanthropic sector in Turkey will create an excellent backdrop to the discussions.

With great honour, I accepted the offer by Gerry Salole, EFC's Chief Executive, to exhibit a collection of the photographs from my recent Turkish trip at EFC's forthcoming Annual Conference. I hope these images will make a small contribution to better understanding our host country, its fascinating culture and heritage, and its aspirations to join the European Union.

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What began as a modest exploratory trip in 2005 to sites across the Caucasus, including Baku, Gence, Tbilisi, and Kutaisi, has flourished into dozens of regional projects, leading to a new effort to open a third art centre in Istanbul (after Kars and Diyarbakir) to harness the energy from its initial regional projects to further sustain and deepen dialogue across borders. The Chrest Foundation's collaboration with Anadolu Kültür very much reflects both the range of possibilities and the depth of experience that emerges from a long-term relationship.

Strengthening society

The considerable strides made by civil society organisations in Turkey in recent years present many opportunities to develop fresh and unique approaches to society's most systemic problems. As Turkey undergoes core debates that will ultimately define the fundamental values guiding its future, the need for civil society to engage in this process is ever more pressing. Working in Turkey since 2001, the US-based Chrest Foundation relies on the energy, talent, and dedication of civil society organisations to advance a vision of a future where women are empowered, children are safe and hopeful, and cultural diversity is celebrated and appreciated.

The Chrest Foundation concentrates its grant-making in two areas: gender equality and communication and dialogue through arts and culture, while also supporting two



additional initiatives concerning at-risk children and rural development.

The Foundation believes a healthy civic infrastructure is critical to increasing the impact of civil society's efforts. We seek to build this infrastructure by using two major approaches in our work: the support of cross-cutting projects, such as research, convenings, training, or issue-based platforms that benefit a range of organisations, as well as the development of long-term partnerships with organisations that have the potential to serve as anchor institutions in their respective fields.

Small seeds, big trees

We have learned that both approaches are important. NGOs from the grassroots to national level need opportunities to come together and share experiences, develop agendas, and coordinate activities. Specifically, in the area of gender equality, this approach has led us to support a needs assessment of the women's movement, human rights training in community centres across the country,

and an emerging platform concentrating on policies to increase women's participation in the workforce.

Likewise, we have also seen how the stability of long-term support allows organisations not only to achieve depth and scale with their core programmes, but also to take risks by experimenting with new approaches, hosting independent projects, mentoring newer organisations, and facilitating communication within and across fields.

For example, Diyarbakir's Development Centre was established in 2005 by a group of development practitioners concerned with the livelihoods of impoverished communities in the south-east region. The Foundation provided initial seed-funding for the Centre when it was uncertain exactly what programmes the organisation would implement. Over time, the Development Centre designed a complex three-year rural development initiative that bridges technical assistance with human-centred approaches to communities living in target villages



Development Centre staff, villagers, and Turkish Government officials discuss ways to increase vegetable production. Photographer: Lou Anne King Jensen



Chrest Foundation and Development Centre staff with women villagers from the Development Centre's Rural Development project. Photographer: Lou Anne King Jensen

around Diyarbakir. The second year of this initiative was marked by a seminar in March 2008, which drew on best practices in Turkey and worldwide to discuss strategies for the future.

Research gap on scale-ups

One core challenge we realised through our involvement in this project is the lack of literature and analytical research that exists on successful civic initiatives that



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Turkey's new foundation law

By Başak Ersen, Third Sector Foundation of Turkey (TÜSEV)

Civil society in Turkey is currently experiencing a wave of legal reforms. The latest arrival came on 20 February this year, when the Turkish National Assembly adopted a new law on foundations. This follows the adoption of a very progressive associations law in 2004, and is an important milestone on the road to a more legally-enabling environment for civil society and philanthropy in Turkey.

The new law introduces a single set of rules embracing the different types of foundation spanning the Ottoman and Republican eras. The new provisions will cover 'old' foundations (those established during the Ottoman era), minority foundations (foundations set up by non-Muslim communities during the Ottoman era), and 'new' foundations (private cash foundations, established according to civil code provisions after the Turkish Republic's creation in 1923).

The new law on foundations is basically compatible with international standards of freedom of association, and introduces major innovative changes to procedures covering the

establishment, membership, asset management, international relations and tax exemption of foundations in Turkey.

On the question of establishment, the minimum endowment for newly-established foundations will now be determined annually by the Council of Foundations, a new organ affiliated to the General Directorate of Foundations. It will be the highest decision-making body on foundation issues. The old law set a minimum endowment for all foundations, regardless of their mission and activities. Turkish foundations may now carry out international relations more easily. The new law allows branches and representative offices to be opened



Chrest Foundation representatives and grantees on a team building picnic in Bingöl.
Photographer: Lou Anne King Jensen



Students express themselves at Anadolu Kultur's Youth and Cultural Heritage summer school project.
Photographer: Anadolu Kultur

have achieved scale in Turkey. While there is plenty of literature on community projects that have made a difference at local level, we have yet to see a comparative overview of initiatives that have been able to effectively transcend the local level to operate on a national scale. More opportunities to reflect on best practices, particularly for donors and their grantees, could further our thinking and approaches to critical problems.

Listen, learn, link, leap

For the Chrest Foundation, a long-term approach means much more than providing financial resources for a core project. Far too often, funders in Turkey and elsewhere in the region offer only project financing, which may allow for wonderful work to take place, but meaningful change can only be sustained when organisations are resilient and strong, and this takes time to achieve. Organisations working on a complex scale and on difficult issues are often faced with numerous

challenges: finding and retaining reliable and capable staff, navigating the political environment, the shifting sensitivities of public opinion in Turkey, and increased demands to do more at a local/regional/national/trans-national scale.

Opportunities to build capacity, to reflect on programme design and impact, and to explore new partnerships and approaches can often be as important as project implementation itself. Celebrating success is easy, but admitting and moving on from failure, which is another reality of grant-making, is a far more difficult process. Knowing how best to engage with a grantee in assessing progress requires a relationship built on trust, understanding and equality, where as a grant-maker, instead of simply measuring performance and outcomes, we seek to listen, learn and grow together.

Visit the Chrest Foundation's website:
www.chrestfoundation.org

abroad with just prior notification of the authorities. Previously their prior authorisation was required. Turkish foundations can now receive grants from foreign funders, and cooperate with foreign foundations. The common denominator of these international activities is that they should be included in the foundation's by-laws.

The new law also lifts the ban on foreigners establishing foundations in Turkey and replaces it with the principle of *de jure* and *de facto* reciprocity. The exact definition of reciprocity remains to be clarified, but it paves the way for foreigners to establish foundations in Turkey as long as their home country's laws allow Turks to establish foundations there. Foreigners may also serve as foundation board members, on condition that the majority of executive board members actually live in Turkey.

Board members may now only be removed by court order based on evidence of criminal acts. 'Terminated' board members cannot serve on any other foundation's board or be elected to the Council of Foundations for five years.

The new law makes fundamental changes to asset management. Under the former law, foundations needed regulatory approval before acquiring or selling assets. The new law allows foundations to acquire or dispose of property based on guidance from an independent expert (to ensure fair market value) and their executive board's decision. For endowment assets put forth at the time of establishment, foundations no longer need regulatory agency approval. They may proceed directly to the courts. Nor is it necessary any longer to obtain prior approval by the regulatory authorities to become partners in economic enter-

prises. The new law allows foundations to do so merely with prior notification.

The new law also regulates important provisions on gift and inheritance tax and income tax exemptions. Donations to all foundations, with or without public-benefit status, will be exempt from gift and inheritance taxes. In addition, grants or expenses made by real or legal persons for the maintenance, reparation, restoration and landscaping of cultural properties belonging to foundations (regardless of their public-benefit status) will be fully deductible from income or corporate taxes. This is a notable break from earlier regulations which allowed tax deductions of up to 5% of yearly taxable income by real persons or corporations to foundations with public-benefit status.

Turkey's journey towards a more progressive foundations law has been long, and foundations have been the focus of intense public debate. Discussions on reforming the law on foundations had been underway since 2002. Following parliamentary approval in 2006, the former President vetoed nine provisions and returned the law to the National Assembly for further deliberation. So the new law awaited approval for over a year. Meanwhile, although the vetoed articles affected both minority foundations and new foundations, public debate mainly centred on minority foundations, charged with implications and perspectives on Turkey's relations with its minorities.

Though a new era for foundations has dawned, the major challenge is to draw up new regulations relating to the new law. These will be published within six months of the law's ratification and will form the backbone for implementation.