



**Speech by Federal President Joachim Gauck
at the opening of the Turkish-German University
in Istanbul
on 29 April 2014**

Ladies and gentlemen,

Whoever feels the spirit of internationalism and enterprise on this wonderful campus in Beykoz may well think of the words of the Turkish poet Nâzım Hikmet – “The most beautiful sea hasn’t been crossed yet.” Daring to try something new always entails great effort, yet it is also exciting and exhilarating in a very positive sense.

With this ceremony we are now also providing an official opening for the Turkish-German University. Just how important this day is to my country is highlighted by the presence of the Federal Minister of Education and Research, Prof. Johanna Wanka. Together, Turkey and the Federal Republic of Germany are opening a new chapter in our two countries’ relations in the field of academia. We are founding a university in the spirit of partnership and dialogue. Of course this step has been carefully prepared – negotiations have taken place, agreements have been reached and as early as last autumn the first students began their studies here. Of course each and every beginning has a long history behind it.

In the history of the very diverse links between Turkey and Germany, academia has often played a special role. Our two countries have cooperated in this field since the time of the Ottoman Empire. In the Federal Republic we will not forget that many Germans who fled repression and persecution at the hand of the National Socialist regime found refuge in Turkey. And some of them even found new jobs at Turkish universities – one example is the man who would later become the Governing Mayor of Berlin, Ernst Reuter. As professor of municipal policy at the Faculty of Political Science at Ankara University, from 1938 he helped to further the development of Turkish cities. Many of those who returned to Germany after the war retained links with

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Turkey, regardless of whether they went on to work in business or academia, in culture or in politics. And so it is fitting that the Ernst Reuter Initiative for Intercultural Dialogue and Understanding provided a crucial impetus for the foundation of this Turkish-German University.

Relations between Turkey and Germany have become steadily closer and more intensive. This is also why today, Germany is second only to the United States as a destination for Turkish students. Vice versa, Turkish universities attract many students from Germany. I am delighted at the closeness of relations between our countries in the fields of education and science – something which also finds expression in the German-Turkish year of academia. It is only together that we can successfully ask ourselves the key questions of the future and the internationalisation of academia and research is crucial for this.

Within a generation the opportunities available to young people to study abroad have improved drastically. Today, they can undertake internationally-oriented studies in their own country, in other countries in Europe and in other parts of the world. They can also network with other young people across country borders. I have heard that the Middle East Technical University where I spoke yesterday offers a social sciences degree course in conjunction with the Humboldt-Universität – a course with an intercultural dimension: students spend one year studying in Ankara and one year in Berlin.

The Turkish-German University marks the next step on the path to internationalisation – as is the case with other universities with a connection to Germany, it is an instrument of bilateral cooperation. This means that the Turkish-German University is already an example of a successful partnership between our countries. Through exchange with German partner universities as well as excellent performance in research and teaching, it has the chance to become a “lighthouse” for academia. Through close cooperation with Turkish and German companies it can also help to boost and further strengthen economic relations between our countries.

This is how the Turkish-German University can manage to send a signal that cooperation makes all partners stronger. This university is something quite special as it serves as a forum for dialogue as well as exchange of knowledge and ideas between Turkey and Germany. It lies at the interface between Europe and Asia. It is a place of intercultural contact, a place that is designed to bring young people from Turkey and Germany together. Many of the connections that will be made here will last a lifetime and will push people forward.

It is in the interest of both our countries to make studying at the Turkish-German University attractive to more young people from Turkey, from Germany as well as from other countries. I hope that this university will give many young Turks the chance to learn German and perhaps even to come to Germany for a longer stay. I am firmly

convinced that multilingualism – with Turkish, German and English – can be one of this universities great strengths.

Ladies and gentlemen,

My hope for the Turkish-German University is that it may become a place of excellence and a place of meetings. I thank all of those who have worked to enable us to officially open this fantastic institution today – the Turkish partners as well as the members of the German consortium.

You, the students of this first year group, the lecturers and all members of staff of the Turkish-German University are standing at the beginning of a path. This path may not always be straight. It follows a roadmap, but today we do not fully know when and how the next steps forward will come about. For you, students and teachers alike, I hope that you will be able to use imagination and determination to help shape upcoming developments. For this I wish you courage, composure and a great deal of joy in teaching and learning.