

A special Olympic welcome

By HE DAVID REDDAWAY CMG MBE

BRITISH AMBASSADOR TO THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY



DAVID REDDAWAY studied history at Cambridge University and joined the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in 1975. His career has included assignments to Iran (during the Iranian revolution), India, Spain, Argentina and Afghanistan. He served as British High Commissioner to Canada between 2003 and 2006 and as Britain's Ambassador to Ireland prior to his appointment to Turkey in 2009.

President Gül's State Visit confirms the strength and importance of the modern partnership between the UK and Turkey. We are delighted to welcome the President and Mrs Gül to Britain. It will be a tremendous sight to see the Union Jacks and Turkish flags displayed together down The Mall, symbolising our friendship.

Elsewhere in this edition of FIRST Magazine, others will be writing about the overall UK/Turkey relationship and the State Visit. So I will instead aim to draw your attention to another important event to which London looks forward to welcoming our Turkish friends: next summer's London 2012 Olympics.

The final countdown has already begun as we approach the climax of a remarkable journey since London won the bid to host the Games in Singapore six years ago. The vision that brought the Olympics back to London was that we would use the power of the Games to inspire lasting change – putting athletes at the heart of planning; getting young people around the world to choose sport; and permanently transforming East London and its

communities. With eight months to go, we are on track to deliver on these commitments.

The London 2012 Games is already changing lives around the world through the International Inspiration programme, set up to fulfil our promise to connect young people to the power of sport. The programme has now reached over 12 million children in 17 countries and has introduced them to high quality and inclusive sport and physical education, many for the first time in their lives. In Turkey, 'International Inspiration' is using sport to help young people realise their potential as leaders, engaging them in positive activities in their schools and communities.

While in the UK, President and Mrs Gul will see for themselves that a remarkable regeneration project has taken shape in East London. Striking new sports venues have been completed, on time and on budget. Designed by some of the world's greatest architects and engineers, these not only offer outstanding facilities for the world's top athletes but also demonstrate a remarkable commitment to put sustainability at the heart of the build, making London 2012 the 'greenest' Games



The Bosphorus Bridge linking Europe with Asia

in history. The largest new urban park created in this country in over a century is literally taking root, with over 2,000 trees and thousands of wetland plants creating a colourful backdrop for the 2012 Games and a haven for local people and wildlife in the years to come. We look forward to sharing with our Turkish friends the experience we have gained from this extraordinary Olympic project.

Many people in Turkey perhaps know the UK best for our castles and cathedrals, our history and our heritage. As we saw with the Royal Wedding earlier this year, tradition is alive and well in Britain. But the Royal Wedding also reflected the modern side of our story, looking ahead and building on our rich history. So will the Olympic Games. We see them as a tremendous opportunity to showcase the “Great” in today’s Britain, both modern and historical.

As part of that showcasing, we want to demonstrate the great products we already offer the world. And we want to highlight the opportunities for world-leading businesses from Turkey to invest and grow in Britain. So we will be holding a ‘Global Investment Conference’ for investors and business leaders in London on the eve of the Games; an innovative programme of business summits, including the ‘British Business Embassy’ highlighting key sectors for global growth; and an on-line ‘British Business Club’. We will be very keen to have Turkish companies represented in these activities.

If you are a Turkish entrepreneur or investor, it’s a chance to discover new opportunities in a country which is rolling out the red carpet for people like you. We are determined to make the UK the best place to start up a new business. We’re cutting corporation tax to the lowest rate in the G7; we’ve increased tax incentives to favour start-ups and high-growth companies; and we’ve brought in a new visa especially for entrepreneurs, to attract the best to our shores. You can now set up a company in Britain in less than two weeks – that’s twice as fast as the average time it takes in Europe. Little wonder that a new company starts up every 100 seconds in the UK.

If you’re a Turkish student, 2012 offers a chance to find out more about a country which has four of the top ten universities in the world. We’ve already got more than 80 Nobel Prizes for science and technology to our name – and with investments in science, research and innovation centres, we want to see that number grow. One of the biggest draws to Britain’s universities are their close links with major global brands in everything from pharmaceuticals to engineering. So if you’re looking for fantastic opportunities to learn and get on, please look at what we’ve got to offer.

For everyone else – tourists and visitors – we’re inviting you to take a fresh look at Britain. This is a country with breathtaking landscapes and fascinating heritage, where you can walk in the footsteps of figures like Henry VIII and Winston Churchill. Three of the top five museums in the world are in the UK, and beyond that there is cutting-edge music, theatre and art to be enjoyed in every city and town. Above all, Britain is a country that is tolerant, open and friendly – a place where you’ll get a warm welcome, as the ever-increasing numbers of Turkish visitors will know.

Some say that the British are reticent and reserved. Whether or not that is true, in 2012 we will have plenty to celebrate, shout about, and be proud of as we host the Olympics. It will be a great moment for Britain. We are determined that the whole world can be part of it. The Games are already bringing people together in celebration and anticipation of the momentous year to come. Over 3.5 million tickets have already been sold. The atmosphere will be incredible throughout the Games, as we watch world class athletes in world class settings.

The Games will not just be about the world’s athletes, nor about VIPs. They will be about sending a message to people in Turkey, and across the world, that Britain is a dynamic and creative place in which to live, study, work, visit, invest and do business. With eight months to go, Britain stands ready to welcome the world to London – and Turkey is invited.

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London’s 2012 Olympic Stadium

