

## Call for Papers

# **The Relocation of the French Embassy from Istanbul to Ankara: Spatial, Political, and Symbolic Dimensions (1925–1937)**

International Symposium at Institut français d'études anatoliennes (Istanbul)

September 25, 2025

**Submission Deadline: August 10, 2025**

### **Presentation of the Symposium**

Marking the centenary of the initial transfer of the French Embassy from Istanbul to Ankara, this symposium invites critical reflection on the political, diplomatic, architectural, and symbolic implications of the relocation. Initiated in 1925, the transfer occurred in the broader context of the founding of the Turkish Republic and the geopolitical reconfigurations following World War I. It reflected France's recognition of the new regime established by the Treaty of Lausanne, as well as its adjustment to a rapidly evolving capital city designed to embody the ideals of a modernizing republican project. This symposium seeks to examine this moment of transition at the crossroads of international relations, urban history, architecture, and cultural exchange. It aims to shed light on the forms and meanings of French diplomatic presence within a redefined symbolic and political space.

### **Overview**

The symposium will take place in 2025, marking the centenary of the beginning of the transfer of the French Embassy from Istanbul to Ankara. This process, initiated with Albert Sarraut's first visit to Ankara in 1925 and completed with the establishment of the current embassy building in 1937, unfolded against the backdrop of the profound transformations brought about by the First World War—most notably, the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the founding of the Turkish Republic under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. This shift followed the failure to implement the Treaty of Sèvres and the adoption of the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, which established the borders of modern Turkey and affirmed its status within the international community.

For France, the decision to relocate its embassy to Ankara represented more than the diplomatic recognition of the new political and administrative order ushered in by the Turkish Republic. It also reflected France's acknowledgment of new geopolitical realities and its adjustment to the deep changes that had reshaped the region after three years of governmental duality (1919–1922). This move came in the wake of a contentious process during which Ankara emerged as the political and administrative center of Turkey, exemplifying Atatürk's desire to break with the Ottoman imperial past and to inaugurate a new era of modernization and Westernization.

The emergence of Ankara as the new capital was accompanied by ambitious urban planning and architectural initiatives aimed at embodying the modern and secular identity of the newly founded Republic. Urban development and construction projects adopted architectural styles influenced by contemporary European movements, marking a deliberate break with traditional

Ottoman and Islamic architecture. In this context of political transformation, the establishment of the French Embassy in Ankara acquired an additional layer of significance, reflecting not only France's recognition of Turkey's efforts to reinvent itself but also its engagement with a modern architectural and urban vision. The construction of the embassy further underscored France's emphasis on the aesthetic and symbolic dimensions of diplomacy

This period of intense transformation in the city of Ankara provides a fertile ground for examining the restructuring of relations between Turkey and Europe, as well as the dynamics of cultural and political interaction. The architecture and urban planning of Ankara not only reflect Turkey's national ambitions but also reveal a convergence of diverse artistic and cultural influences. As such, they offer a valuable lens through which to explore the foundations of Franco-Turkish diplomacy and cultural exchange during this era of geopolitical and aesthetic transition.

## **Research Themes**

As part of the international symposium on the transfer of the French Embassy from Istanbul to Ankara, we propose four main research themes aimed at exploring the implications of this relocation and its impact on Franco-Turkish relations. Particular attention will be given to the diplomatic, urban, and cultural dimensions associated with this significant historical event.

### **Theme 1: Spatial Reconfigurations and Political Legitimizations**

This first theme aims to examine the spatial reconfigurations brought about by Ankara's emergence as a diplomatic center and their impact on Franco-Turkish relations during the period of the embassy's relocation. Emphasis will be placed on the political, administrative, and human dimensions of the relocation. By exploring the motivations behind and stakes of this diplomatic shift, the theme will also consider the regional and international implications of selecting Ankara as the new diplomatic capital.

How did Turkey promote Ankara as the new capital to France, and what instruments were used in this promotion (press coverage, conferences, diplomatic correspondence, official visits, interviews)? What role did anti-republican circles within Turkey, as well as exiles in France, play in the debates and controversies surrounding Ankara's designation as the capital, and how did these dynamics influence diplomatic relations with France? On the diplomatic front, how did the process of France's political recognition of the Turkish Republic and its new capital unfold? Who were the key actors involved, particularly within the French Embassy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and among French political leaders? How was the transfer of the capital perceived by French diplomats and political figures? Was there unanimous acceptance, or were there forms of resistance within French political and diplomatic circles? How did the French media cover the transfer of Turkey's capital to Ankara, and in what ways did this coverage shape public opinion and political discourse in France? Did the move to Ankara represent a break from Ottoman diplomatic practices, or can we observe elements of continuity and adaptation? To what extent did the relocation of the French Embassy to Ankara influence France's diplomatic priorities in the Middle East and the Mediterranean, during a time of major political change in the region?

How did this transfer affect France's political, strategic, and economic interests in Turkey, particularly in terms of diplomatic presence and political influence? What compromises or adjustments were required on France's part to maintain its interests following the proclamation of the Republic and the capital's relocation? Finally, what impact did the embassy's relocation

have on France's relations with other diplomatic powers present in Turkey, particularly regarding rivalries or diplomatic cooperation?

## **Theme 2: Relocation of the Embassy: Logistical and Human Dimensions**

This theme explores the logistical challenges and strategic approaches associated with the relocation of the French Embassy from Istanbul to Ankara, with particular attention to the practical and organizational aspects of this transition. It examines the planning processes, transportation choices, resource management, and the adaptation to local infrastructure to facilitate the embassy's establishment in the new capital. The aim is to understand how these logistical efforts reflect the efficiency and adaptability of diplomatic operations in the face of major change, while also considering the impact on staff, services, and the continuity of diplomatic missions amid national and urban transformation.

How did French diplomatic authorities plan the relocation of the embassy from Istanbul to Ankara between 1925 and 1937, and what logistical strategies were implemented to ensure the continuity of diplomatic missions during this transition? What became of the premises of the French Embassy in Istanbul during this transitional period? Were they still used for diplomatic purposes, or were they reassigned to other functions? What were the various temporary locations occupied by the French Embassy in Ankara before the construction of the permanent building, and in which parts of the city were these sites located? Given the limited transportation infrastructure of the time, what means were used to transport diplomatic equipment to Ankara (by train, road, etc.)? Were there any notable losses, damages, or incidents during these transfers?

On a material level, what types of items were transferred from Istanbul to Ankara (furniture, archives, books, etc.), and for what reasons were certain objects or documents left in Istanbul (political, cultural, or logistical considerations)? What items or materials were imported directly from France for the establishment of the embassy in Ankara (furniture, artworks, books, etc.), and how were these imports carried out, both logistically and administratively?

What were the initial premises occupied by French diplomatic representatives in Ankara, and were these buildings provided by the Turkish government or acquired independently? How did the construction process of the current French Embassy building in Ankara unfold, and who were the main actors involved in its design and execution (architects, engineers, craftsmen, etc.)? What materials were used in the construction of the French Embassy in Ankara, and was there a preference for local materials (such as marble, wood, etc.) as part of an effort to integrate into the Turkish architectural context? What architectural styles were adopted in the various buildings used by the French Embassy in Ankara, and how did these choices reflect specific political or cultural motivations? How was the interior decoration of the French Embassy in Ankara selected (furniture, paintings, ornaments), and to what extent were local artistic elements incorporated to convey diplomatic or cultural messages?

What political and cultural symbols or messages did France seek to convey through the architecture and decoration of its embassy in Ankara, particularly in relation to its evolving relationship with the new Turkish Republic? How did the logistical challenges associated with relocating the embassy to Ankara reflect the effectiveness and adaptability of French diplomatic operations in a context of political and urban transformation in Turkey? Why did the construction of the current French Embassy building in Ankara span such a long period, and do we observe similar patterns among other foreign embassies established in Ankara at the time?

### **Theme 3: Cross-Cultural and Intellectual Influences of the Long-Term Establishment of the French Embassy in Ankara**

This theme invites exploration of the impact that the long-standing presence of the French Embassy in Ankara has had on cultural, artistic, and scientific exchanges between France and Turkey. Proposals may address collaborations and intellectual, artistic, and scientific interactions, examining how the embassy functioned as a bridge between the two countries—both reflecting and shaping the dynamics of bilateral relations.

What role did cultural diplomacy play in the design and establishment of the French Embassy in Ankara, and how did the embassy contribute to fostering Franco-Turkish cultural exchange beyond its strictly diplomatic functions? How did the French Embassy in Ankara collaborate with Turkish authorities to promote scientific and academic exchange, particularly given the absence of a local university in the early years of the Turkish Republic? What tools and institutions did the French Embassy implement to disseminate French culture in Ankara (such as the Institut Français, French schools, cultural programs, churches), and how did these initiatives strengthen intellectual and artistic ties with local elites, especially in the absence of a university in Ankara at the time? To what extent did the cultural and intellectual exchanges promoted by the embassy influence the cultural policies of the Turkish Republic—particularly regarding the adoption of certain French practices or values in education, the arts, or science?

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What role did the embassy play in promoting French literature in Turkey, and how did it support the translation of French literary works into Turkish (and vice versa) to strengthen intellectual ties between the two countries? What kinds of specific artistic and scientific collaborations emerged between France and Turkey through the embassy, and what contributions did they make to the respective fields of culture and science in both countries? What types of events were organized at the various premises of the French Embassy in Ankara (such as dinners, balls, art exhibitions, concerts), and how did these events contribute to the dissemination of French culture within the political, social, and economic circles of the new capital? Which Turkish and French artists, writers, and scientists visited the French Embassy in Ankara, and what were the purposes of their visits (collaborations, intellectual exchanges, cultural projects)? What role did they play in the development of bilateral relations between France and the Turkish Republic?

### **Theme 4: The Urban Impact of the French Embassy in Ankara**

This theme focuses on the significant impact of the French Embassy's establishment on the urban transformation of Ankara, highlighting its role in the modernization and internationalization of the Turkish capital. It examines the embassy's integration into the urban landscape, its aesthetic and functional contributions to the city fabric, and its catalytic effect on the development of surrounding areas. By exploring Franco-Turkish collaborations in the realization of this project, this theme sheds light on the interplay between diplomacy and urban

planning, emphasizing the role of diplomatic architecture in shaping a modern and cosmopolitan capital.

How was the establishment of the French Embassy in Ankara perceived by local authorities (such as the prefecture, municipality, and ministries), and what were their responses to this diplomatic integration within the capital? To what extent did the presence of the French Embassy influence the urban development of the surrounding areas? What specific transformations—economic, social, or architectural—can be attributed to its presence? Did the French Embassy play an active role in local urban development projects in Ankara, particularly through funding, knowledge transfer, or technical collaboration with Turkish authorities? What are the main contrasts between the diplomatic geography of Istanbul and that of Ankara, especially regarding the impact of the French presence on urban planning and local political dynamics? To what extent did the architecture of the French Embassy in Ankara influence or reflect local architectural trends, and how did it contribute to the visual identity of the city as a modern capital? How does the French Embassy fit into the broader efforts to modernize Ankara, and to what degree did it contribute to the city's internationalization?

What types of collaborations between French and Turkish architects, urban planners, or engineers emerged during the construction of the embassy, and how did these collaborations influence the urban landscape and the perception of the project? What similarities or differences can be observed between the urban planning projects surrounding the French Embassy in Ankara and those of other foreign embassies located in the city?

### **Institutional Partners**

Institut français d'études anatoliennes (Istanbul), Embassy of France in Turkey, Istanbul  
Technical University, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne.

### **Submission Guidelines**

Paper proposals should be submitted in Word format to the following address:  
duransa@itu.edu.tr

### **Deadline for Proposals: July 10, 2025**

The working languages of the symposium will be French and English. Proposals may be submitted in either language.

Paper proposals should include:

- A title
- An abstract (maximum 2,800 characters)
- First and last name of the author(s), including institutional affiliation, academic status, and email address
- Keywords: 5 to 7 keywords

In addition to the title and abstract of the proposed presentation, submissions should also include a short CV indicating the researcher's institutional affiliation. A preliminary version of the paper is expected to be submitted approximately one week prior to the symposium.

### **Scientific Committee**

- Ahmet Kuyaş (Université Galatasaray)
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