

## Turkey, 2.-16. September 2006

I've been a devoted shortwave listener to the Voice of Turkey (TRT) from Ankara for 35 years now. Over the years a true friendship has been established on both sides. This Radio



station doesn't only provides the listener with first class information in German, it also organises „essay competitions“ enabling the listeners to express their point of views on various themes. This year's theme was “Does religion play a constructive and instructive roll among the various nations worldwide?”



Having been a yearly ritual up to now I didn't fail to participate this year, and see there, I was all the more overjoyed to receive a phone call sometime in July 2006 from Dr. Ufuk Geçim,



Head of the German language program of the Voice of Turkey telling me that I've won the main price, a fortnight tour across Turkey. The other seven winners were: Ruzhdi Begaj from Albania, Elena Kurbanova from Turkmenistan, Christopher Lewis from England, Saleem Sabah El

Saray from Iraq, Nazir Ahmad from Pakistan, Sayed Awad from Egypt and Filiz Ismetova Yuseinova from Bulgaria.

Due to the fact that I had been to Seychelles from 1<sup>st</sup> till 28<sup>th</sup> August 2006 together with my family, visiting my in laws and having had to work from 29<sup>th</sup> August till 1<sup>st</sup> September, I didn't have much time to prepare myself for this exceptional journey which was to take place from 2<sup>nd</sup> till 16<sup>th</sup> September 2006.

Very early on 2nd September I was picked up by a shuttle service which took me to Frankfurt Airport. Once there I was able to relax and to observe the “hustle and bustle” a distinguishing feature of this airport, before boarding an Airbus 321 of Turkish Airlines (TK 11588) at 11.45h a.m. finally on my way to Istanbul. The 2 ½ hour flight went by very smoothly actually and the airport formalities in Istanbul



didn't take that long either and there I was being warmly greeted by Firat Isbir, a member of the German language service of the Voice of Turkey. Since the international Atatürk Airport is situated on the outskirts of the 15 million metropolis Istanbul, it took some time before our taxi fought it's way through the heavy traffic. Finally we arrived at my hotel “The Keban” in the Siraselviler Caddesi not far away from the Taksim Place, a very important traffic junction in Istanbul. Having taken my luggage to my room (703) Firat and I strolled down the nearby

shopping street Istiklal Caddesi. We had something light to eat and then we went back to the hotel, where Saleem from Iraq and Kamunan Baban, his travelling companion from the Arab



Winners of the TRT Contest: Volker, Saleem, Sayed, Elena, Filiz, Nazir, Chris, Ruzhdi

Service of the Voice of Turkey were already waiting. Later we met the other participants with their respective companions and translators likewise as well as Mrs. Engin Asena, head of the foreign language service of TRT. We “portrayed” an international lot!

After the obligatory introduction we all gathered in a restaurant in the mentioned Istiklal Caddesi Street where we enjoyed our first Turkish meal. By the way, one must

give credit where the credit is due, the Turkish cuisine is no doubt one of the best worldwide, that is my opinion. At around 2.00h a.m. we went back to our hotel.

The next day (3rd September 2006) we headed for Istanbul, Turkey’s largest city and worldwide the only city which lies on two continents, namely Europe and Asia. Our first highlight was a visit to the Dolmabahçe Palace, the former residence of the sultan. The palace was built mid 19<sup>th</sup> century during the reign of Sultan Abdülmecit I. It stretches as far as 600 meters across the European side of the Bosphorus, the waterway which links the Black Sea to the Marmara Sea. One stood like being cast under a spell in the innumerable, gigantic halls and chambers which set one back in the splendour of the past.. The vast reception hall with its 56 pillars and its crystal candlestick with its 750 candles bearing the eight 4.55 tons left everybody



Volker and Engin Asena (Dolmabahçe Palace)

dumbfounded. This is where Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic died on 10<sup>th</sup> November 1938. One can’t make up one’s mind whether to envy him or not.

Leaving the palace we crossed the Galata Bridge where numerous anglers were trying their luck, each one hoping to make the „catch of his life“ to the Topkapi Museum. The Topkapi Museum used to be the residence of the Ottoman rulers. One had the unique opportunity to admire precious objects, jewellerys, ceramics, a wide collection of arms, calligraphies and relicts of Mohammed. The highly located Topkapi Museum also provided us with a breath



taking view across the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn.

After the lunch we visited the Hagia Sophia, once a basilica in the Byzantine Empire. The imposing dome which was build during the reign of Constantine the Great (4<sup>th</sup> century) and restored during the reign of Emperor Justinian has a diameter of 31 meters and a majestic height of 55 meters. Mehmet the Conqueror converted it into a mosque. He decided that it should obtain additional four minarets. We left Hagia

Sophia and our next step was the Yerebatan cisterns which are supported by 335 columns. In 532 it was built by emperor Justinian in order to re-elevate the water shortage. It was accidentally discovered 25 years ago. Who knows what other treasure is still hidden in this town...

The last highlight of the day was the Sultanahmet Mosque, also called the “Blue Mosque”, actually the most famous mosque of the city, located opposite the Hagia Sophia. It obtained its name from the magnificent ceramic display on its walls and minarets. Construction works carried out on the mosque were finally terminated in 1616. This long day at the Bosphorus finally came to an end with an excellent dinner in the downtown area called Ortaköy.



The following day started with a visit to Minitürk. The compound is at the end of the Golden Horn and offers its guests a journey to all famous spectacles in Turkey within a short time. These have been built and complied with the original buildings in Turkey. After our mini journey through Turkey we drove back to the ancient city of Istanbul where we had the opportunity to admire the colourful happenings in the lively closed and Egyptian bazaar and of course we didn't fail to buy some souvenirs for loved ones. Time went by so quickly and we were once more

heading for the Bosphorus still lost in the scent and oriental inspiration gathered during our short stay in the basar. To the sound of Turkish pop music and the pleasant company of the

other winners and co-workers of TRT the three hour boat trip across the Bosphorus was far



Volker, Firat and Saleem (Dolmabahçe Palace)

from being boring. The setting sun, the magical twilight and later on the moonlight contributed to the romantic part of the journey. All too soon the trip came to an end and as usual we ended the day with a festive dinner in a fish restaurant and everybody had the chance to choose his or her fish speciality.

Heavy hearted we took leave of Istanbul on the 5th September. This meant packing our luggage while everybody was wondering what would come next. The coach took us

on a 400 km journey at first heading north, past Marmara Sea making for Dardanelles, the waterway which links the Marmara Sea to the Aegean Sea.

The famous Dardanelles have unfortunately a very sad history due to the dreadful sea battle in 1915 where 500,000 lost their lives. In order to remind the world of this terrible incident a promontory north of the Dardanelles has been established as a national park, known as Çanakkale National Park. Whoever sets foot here, let it be Turks or foreigners shares a common closeness. On our way through this region we stopped every now and then because the merging of the Dardanelles into the Aegean section presented a picturesque background which couldn't be ignored all together. On the peak of the promontory north of Dardanelles – in Arbide to be more precise – there is a memorial which has the important function to remind the people of the past incident and at the same time acting as a sort of warning for the future.



Bosphorus Trip



In good mood (Sayed, Saleem and Nazir)

Leaving the small town Eceabat we embarked the ferry „sticking to the Asiatic side“ heading for Çanakkale, the capital of the province bearing the same name and, there we spent the night in a very beautiful hotel Büyük Truva (Trojan horse) situated directly at the promenade which presented us with a unique view of the Dardanelles and the European side

of Turkey. After dinner we celebrated Hatice Ağlaç birthday, the representative of TRT's Bulgarian section.

After this very short stay in Çanakkale the next day (6th September) took us to Izmir. For the first time we decided to partially amend the day's plan and stopped in Troy. It would have been crucial to drive past without having a glimpse of the famous horse. Troy owes its popularity to Homer's Ilias epos. People came to settle 3000 before Christ and until 500 after



Christ it has been destroyed and reconstructed as often as nine times. Actually it is only possible to visit the 6<sup>th</sup> "version" of the city. The archaeologist Manfred Kormann from the Tübingen University is continuing the excavation of the place, which started in 1870 by the German Heinrich Schliemann. Dominating the excavation site is a replica of the Trojan Horse and its interior accommodates its visitors which quite a few comfortable seats. We thought it wouldn't be a bad idea to imitate Achilles and his followers and we also had our share of fun in the horse's belly.

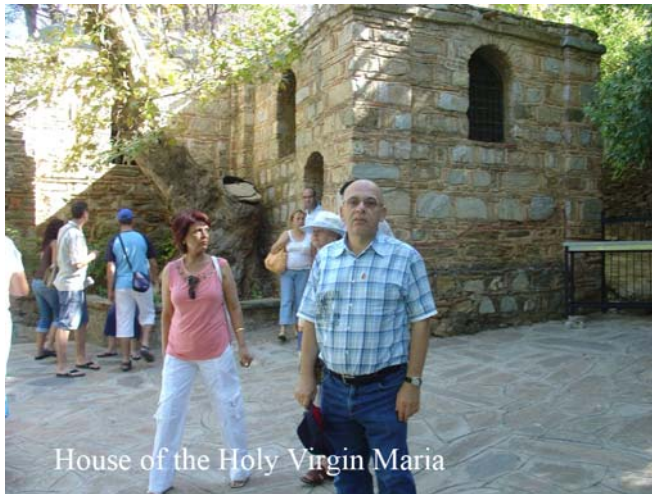
Late in the afternoon we arrived in Izmir which is Turkey's third biggest city. We spent about an hour strolling around in the city centre and in order to give our aching feet some deserved rest we sat along the promenade enjoying some tea and having a go at the water bong. We then headed for our

main destination actually set for this day, the small town Kuşadası, the tourist stronghold of the Aegean. We were taken to Hotel Atınç which is situated directly at the promenade and from my room I had a splendid view of the bay. Accompanied by Firat and Engin I went for a stroll in the pedestrian zone after dinner and the numerous shops and centres of entertainment were overwhelming altogether.

On the next day (7th September) I just couldn't believe my eyes, because when I looked out of my window, there were two cruise liners somewhat majestic which had lain anchor in the bay. The day promised to be one specially dedicated to archaeology, a visit to Ephesus was planned. The ruins of the monumental Artemis Temple from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD have established their names in history as being one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. It was specially worth seeing the theatre, the baths, the agora and the Celsus library. The apostles Paul and John worked there for quite a while. It is now possible to visit a patrician house from the first century AD which bears a protective roof. And one should point out that its mosaic like floor is still in a very good condition.

We also had the opportunity to visit the house of the Holy Virgin Mary and it is also said to be the place where she died. The foundation walls are said to originate from the first century AD. It lies about 7 km south west of Selçuk and its a place of pilgrimage for both Christians and Muslims.

We didn't miss the chance to visit the small idyllic town Silince with its houses depicting Greek architecture. It was also there that we were interviewed by the Turkish TV. Back in Kuşadası I strolled around for a while and made use of the unique opportunity to visit an Internet Café to deal with my latest emails. On this very evening, Engin Asena, Firat Isbir and



Trashëgim Serdar Husejni from the Albanian section of TRT took leave of us. They went back to Ankara to be replaced by other colleagues. Hüseyin Bol from the German section was supposed to join us the following day.

The 8<sup>th</sup> September promised to be a long drive of 500 km to our next destination being Antalya on Turkey's south-west coast. The first highlight of the day was to visit Pamukkale which offered a wonderful natural spectacle, snow-white terraced lime basins which originate

through the deposit of the lime from the thermal springs. It's supposed to have a healing effect

which was profitable even to the Romans who had the city of Hierapolis built in 200 AD. Unfortunately there was not enough water which meant that not all the basins were filled. It is in Pamukkale that Hüseyin Bol joined us. He was to be my constant companion for the next days to come. We set off for Antalya via Denizli and we reached our destination this very evening. It was pitch dark when we reached TRT's own vacation camp somewhere in Lara. Earlier I had the opportunity via telephone to take part in "Turkey Live", a TRT German program which offered me the opportunity to express



my impressions concerning the journey in the course of time.



TRT's holiday camp happens to be directly on the Mediterranean coast and the compound also includes the "Tourist Radio Lara" which broadcasts in different languages, including German and is specially established for tourists who spend their holidays on Turkish side of the Mediterranean Coast. As accommodation I had a beautiful and huge apartment where I was to spend the next three days.

After being practically “on the run” for such a long time it did extremely good to spend a while on the beach and to have a swim in the Mediterranean Sea. Yes this is what I did first thing on the next day (9<sup>th</sup> September). It was so refreshing and we all felt like “newborns” as we set off for the city of Antalya where we had a substantial breakfast.. We even had time to spare for a stroll around “Old Antalya” and its port. Hüseyin who accompanied us proved to be a great help. Leaving the good old Antalya we headed for Aspendos. It’s theatre with its 30000 seats we were told is one of the best preserved objects in the antique world. Due to its excellent acoustics it provides the adequate background for ballet and theatre performances. Even the German TV Show “Wetten dass” took place there once. It’s a special feeling to walk around and at the same time picturing things these walls had heard and seen already. If only they could tell stories... Soon everybody was screaming and howling and acoustically it was like being in a horror film.



Leaving Aspendos we continued our journey to Side, a seaside resort along the Mediterranean coast. Since we had time to spare we strolled up and down the pedestrian zone admiring the numerous shops, boutiques etc. Next we were invited to take our seats and relax in an amphitheatre enjoying a performance of traditional Turkish dances which had something to do with the 6<sup>th</sup> Side Cultural Festival going on at that time. The spectators were presented with traditional dances from seven different regions from

Turkey. The oriental music, the exotic traditional costumes and the atmosphere as a whole made it an unforgettable evening

We were back in Antalya early on the next day (10<sup>th</sup> September). I started the day with a refreshing swim, actually nothing much happened on this day, which was entirely dedicated to the radio and everything to do with it. As I mentioned there is Radio Lara installed on the TRT compound. This very morning we had the special opportunity to be the guests of the above mentioned radio station. A live interview was carried out with every winner, and I had the pleasure to be interviewed by Mrs. Ümit Gülhan from the German section. It was an easy going, pleasant chat concerning the journey. We were also interviewed outside the radio building by the Turkish TV.



After taking lunch in Antalya we made use of the opportunity to visit a nearby exhibition, called Sand City with its sand sculptures. It depicted huge sand-made imitations of important sights and happenings (the Dardanelles war, the Trojan war etc). Back at the camp we had some leisure time to go swimming, to relax, actually what we felt like doing. Unfortunately our English winner Christopher decided to fly back home due to personal reasons.



TV Interview in Lara (Antalya)

On the next day (11<sup>th</sup> September) we left the TRT Lara Camp heading for Cappadocia. In order to reach our destination we had to travel through cities like Konya, Aksaray and Nevşehir.

We made our first long break in Konya, the Anatolian islamic centre. The Mervlana holy order also known as the “dancing dervishes” have their roots there. Their belief is based on tolerance and peace. We didn’t fail to visit the Mervlana order’s convent one

of the most frequented museums in Turkey. During the 13<sup>th</sup> century the founder Celaledin Rumi managed to find numerous supporters through his mystical sermons and peaceable nature. His grave is the centre of attraction.

Having been inspired by the Mervlana Museum we next went to Cappadocia – to be more precise to the small village Ürgüp not far away from the district town Nevşehir where we spent the night (Hotel Mustapha). After supper we hanged around the place accompanied by Hüseyin and for all internet freaks high time to look for an internet café.

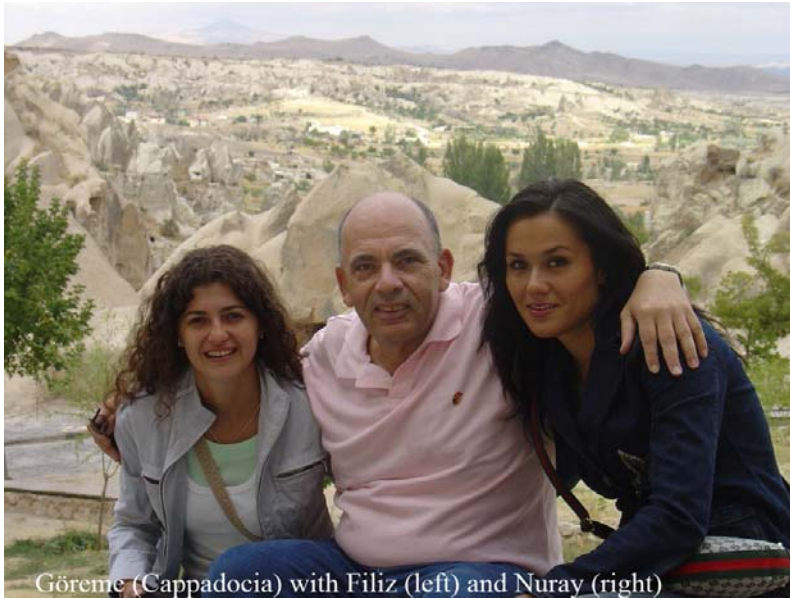
The next day was dedicated to Cappadocia, unique in the world due to the morphology of its soil. Jutting out of the ground were peculiar shapes and figures, some of them looking like mushrooms others looking like chimneys and some of them even providing lodgings to various people.



Cappadocia

After checking out of the Mustapha Hotel in Ürgüp we drove to the Göreme National Park. The region Göreme was inhabited even in ancient times. In recent times it witnessed the settlement of the Christians who had been put under pressure due to attacks carried out by Moslems. The peculiar geological shapes and forms provided the perfect hide outs. The oldest churches from VI century have partially collapsed. Göreme and its surroundings have been declared as a national park and its one of the favourite sightseeing destinations for tourists.

Leaving Göreme we drove to Avanos where we visited a pottery workshop. There was a demonstration of the various stages involved in the pottery trade beginning with the rough handling of the clay to the throwing of vases, plates etc. Then they were baked, manually painted and glazed. We were specially taken aback by the painting process, the skilfulness of these people was unbelievable.. We had lunch in Avanos, the restaurant quite posh a replica of a caravanserai.



Göreme (Cappadocia) with Filiz (left) and Nuray (right)

Driving through Cappadocia we came to a region dominated by mushroom-shaped objects which came into being due to erosion of the rocks over the years. Travelling through the provincial Nevşehir we reached the small village Saratli and for a change we spent some time „underground“ visiting a city which was a place of refuge for people in the past. It was quite tight down there but on the other hand very impressive. The idea as a

whole to protect themselves from the outside world was quite a clever one.

Next we headed to Aksaray and then further north to Lake Tuz. By the way, Tuz is the Turkish word for salt. And there it was, enormous, the sea-bed almost dried up leaving a snow white surface to dominate the landscape.

It was quite late when we arrived in the capital-city Ankara. We went straight to the TRT private grounds, which lie quite high above the city in the district called Çankaya. All the studios and editing departments of the Turkish broadcasting company are found in a huge building looking down majestically upon the city. We had the privilege to find accommodation in a guest house which is integrated in this building where we spent the next four days.



The next day (12<sup>th</sup> September) was totally dedicated to broadcasting and everything to do with it. TRT

has a very extensive foreign language program. They broadcast and provide information worldwide on short wave in 25 languages. Each program has its own editing department and

what they do is to structure the programs as interestingly as possible so as to establish faster contact to the listeners.

The German department which is one of the biggest is being conducted by Mrs. Dr. Ufuk Geçim who has been part of it for the past 20 years. Other members of the “crew” are Jülide



Ayık, Hakan Ören, Fırat Isbir, Hüseyin Bol and Ünal Çicekdağ,

It was such a great pleasure for me to visit the German department early the next day and to be able to meet Ufuk, Jülide Hakan, Hüseyin and Ünal.. I felt at home immediately in their company and after the warm welcome we had the chance to chat to each other and this feeling that each one was a part of the big TRT family, on one side

the listener and on the other side the “creators of the programs, was overwhelming. The other winners also had the chance to meet the makers of the programs of their respective departments personally and they were all impressed.

We had lunch in the TRT cantina and later all eight winners were introduced to Mr. Osman Dilekçi the director of TRT Foreign Department accompanied by the employees of the respective editing department. After being warmly greeted by Mr Dilekçi we had the opportunity to tell about our experiences and to express our impressions during the past few days in a small speech. We were even presented with a gift, a ceramic plate from the pottery in Avanos and a guide book about Turkey in English.

Accompanied by our respective interpreters, Saleem (from Iraq), Sayed Awad (from Egypt) and I had our next rendezvous in a television studio in the centre of Ankara. First of all we had to undergo the “make up” procedure and I must say, the make-up artist did pretty good work. We were taken to the



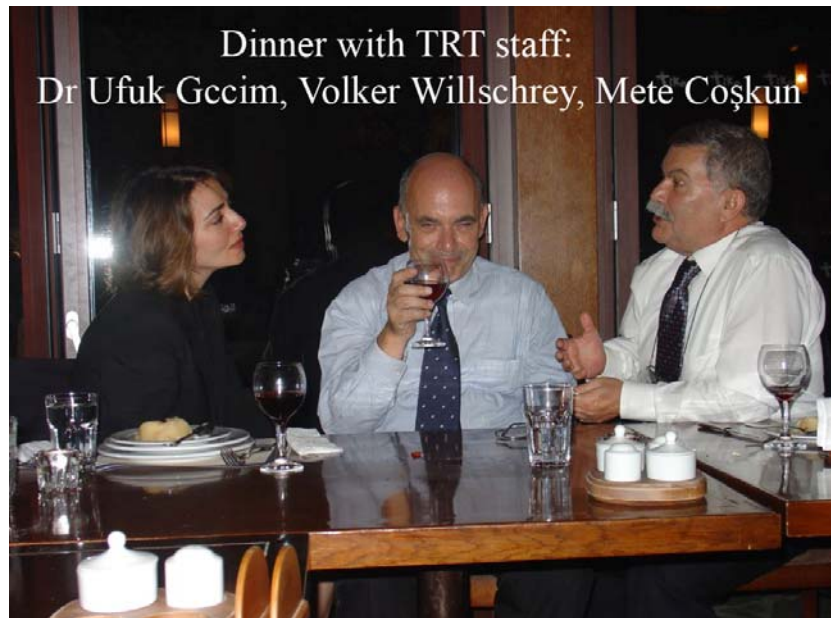
studio, where the presenter of the program was waiting for us. Saleem had to answer questions concerning his homeland Iraq and I had to explain my motives for participating in the TRT essay competition and naturally I found myself talking about the impressions gathered during the trip. It certainly cost Saleem and me some nerves to take part in our first live show, but my companion Hüseyin, also experienced his first “live go” at it in his function as interpreter.



In the TRT TV-Studio in Ankara

After our TV interview which lasted about 25 minutes (to my great pleasure I received a DVD copy of it) we were taken back to the TRT headquarters. To crown the evening, all the winners and representatives of the various departments (on my part I was accompanied by the sympathetic Ufuk) were invited to dinner in a very posh restaurant in Ankara. Once again I

was overwhelmed by the excellent quality and the almost magical composition of the Turkish cuisine and I know I’m repeating myself but I think its one of the best in the world. The atmosphere was what one would call *légère* and after the welcoming speech everybody was immersed in long chats with each other. I had also the opportunity to have a profound and interesting conversation with Mr. Mete Coşkun, the Deputy General Manager, with Ufuk acting as interpreter, a big help I must say. I pointed out the importance of shortwave listening as a main source of information and how it helps to establish links and even friendship among its members.



Dinner with TRT staff:  
Dr Ufuk Gccim, Volker Willschrey, Mete Coşkun

On the 14<sup>th</sup> September 2006 we had the chance to undertake a one day bus trip to Safranbolu, a very picturesque village north of

Ankara. This time the trip took place without my participation. I decided to spend the time left with my new found friends from the German editing department. It was worth the while because Ufuk, Jülide and Hüseyin had a big surprise in store, a first class breakfast with delicacies like tomatoes, cucumber, olives, cheese, sausages etc. You name it and you had it. While enjoying it we had a pleasant, cosy chat.

In the afternoon I was back again in the studio taking part in a program “Turkey Live” a program which is broadcasted twice a week and during which listeners have the chance via telephone to participate. The program was nothing new to me but it was something else being there in the studio in Hüseyin’s company and being a part of it.



After the program I was accompanied by Hüseyin, Ufuk and Hakan to the city centre of Ankara. The huge shopping street Tunali Hilmi Caddesi left me dumbfounded. There they were the postcards I was looking for and I certainly bought my share. We visited the pastry shop Elizinn with its large variety of sweets and pastries, the very

thought of it makes my mouth water. Ufuk had to leave us at this point, because she had an appointment but Hüseyin and Hakan showed me some posh centres with excellent shopping facilities, the best from the very best. One must point out that Ankara is a very modern city and its shopping areas differ in no way from the big European cities. In the evening we had dinner in a small restaurant.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> September I joined the group again and we went to Ankara to visit the Atatürk Mausoleum which dominates the city. It incorporates a museum with an exposition of various articles which had in one way or another to do with the founder of the Turkish republic. Finally we visited the Anatolian Museum of Civilisation . In the afternoon Hakan and I went for a walk past the Atakule TV Tower and a shopping centre bearing the same name to end up in the nearby botanical garden.



The next day (16<sup>th</sup> September) meant saying goodbye to Turkey and heavy-heartedly I took leave of everybody. Ruzhdi, Sayed and I were picked up at 8.00h a.m. to be taken to the airport in Ankara. At 11.00h I left Ankara on flight TK 012 for Istanbul and after a long stopover I flew to Frankfurt at 16.35h on board flight TK1589. I landed at Frankfurt Airport at 18.30h where I was picked up by the shuttle service Leroux and at exactly 20.30h I arrived home in Dillingen.

That was it, a wonderful vacation was at an end and I was left with thousand memories and impressions which had to be assimilated. Unforgettable the hospitality of the new found Turkish friends from the Turkish Department and the family-like bond and solidarity among the winners. We promised to keep in touch!