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## Editorial

*Perceptions* is publishing its second issue with its new design. The editorial team and board have worked hard on improving the style and quality of the journal. *Perceptions* has a new deputy editor, Dr. Mesut Özcan, who recently joined the Center for Strategic Research (SAM). The SAM staff continues their hard work in restructuring the center so that it can establish itself as an influential and leading research institution. This particular special issue, featuring five articles, examines both Turco-Italian perspectives on regional and global issues as well as bilateral relations between the two countries. This issue looks at the current state of Turkish-Italian relations, the changes in the nature of this relationship, and the potential areas of cooperation on regional and global issues, particularly security in the Middle East and North Africa. Distinguished researchers and academics from Turkey and Italy have worked extensively for over a year to bring together this collection of essays which, among its many other strengths, offers new data as well as genuine analyses of the various issues. This issue owes much to guest editor Özgehan Şenyuva of the Middle East Technical University, as his invaluable help was crucial in bringing this issue together.

We believe that this special issue will contribute to increased dialogue and cooperation between the two countries, whose political, socio-cultural, and economic relations have a long and rich history. In 2006, we celebrated the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of Turkish-Italian diplomatic relations. The volume of bilateral trade, cooperation in political and economic spheres, and cultural exchanges are also increasing and getting stronger every year. Italy remains a strong supporter of Turkey's bid for European Union membership. Each year, millions of Italians and Turks are travelling for touristic and cultural purposes to each other's countries, and especially the number of young people travelling for study and language learning has been steadily increasing. The universities from the two countries have been actively building stronger cooperation in the fields of education and research through joint research projects and student and faculty exchanges.

Reflecting the ever-closer political dialogue between the countries, there is now an annual Turkish-Italian Forum. The forum offers a unique opportunity for sustained dialogue between the two countries by bringing together academics, journalists, researchers, representatives from business circles and

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NGOs, and opinion leaders as well as political figures. The first Turkish-Italian forum was organized in 2004 and since then has been continuing to offer a space for further cooperation. In 2011, we will be hosting the Eighth Turkish-Italian Forum in Istanbul, with the participation of high-level delegations from both sides.

Despite all these strong and positive indicators, Turkish-Italian relations are not free from challenges. As some of the studies in this volume indicate, the level of support for Turkish membership in the EU and the overall positive feelings towards Turkey is in slight decline among the Italian public. Studies also show that the level of knowledge of each other is rather low among the respective publics. Although political and economic dialogue and cooperation are strong and dynamic, the socio-cultural dimension of the relationship requires more attention and mutual effort. Hence, in the future the sides might be well advised to develop projects to further socio-cultural exchanges so that a more sustainable relationship could be established.

Another challenge pertains to the lack of systematic studies that focus on bilateral relations between Turkey and Italy. Although there are numerous experts from both countries working on Turkish-Italian relations, the publications that examine the multi-dimensional issues affecting bilateral relations are very limited in number and quality. We sincerely hope that this special issue will form an important contribution

to this field and will have a multiplier effect, encouraging similar studies with empirical and analytical depth.

In this issue, Roberto Aliboni presents an overview of the current state of economic and political cooperation between Turkey and Italy, with a special emphasis on the Mediterranean and Middle East regions. Emiliano Alessandri takes the analysis of Turkish-Italian partnership one level further and makes a critical evaluation of the limits and challenges that these countries face in their strategic thinking on regional and global issues. The joint article by Margherita Marcellini and Özgehan Şenyuva deals with Italian public opinion and the representation of Turkey by the Italian media and offers insights into the link between public opinion and media agenda setting. Ebru Şule Canan - Sokullu provides an extensive analysis on Italian public attitude towards Turkey and its membership to the EU, based on her detailed analysis of Eurobarometer data. And Çiğdem Üstün focuses on a crucial element within Turkish-Italian relations as she analyzes the role and importance of the energy sector in the equation.

Soon we will publish new special issues, looking at, among other issues, security in the Middle East, new developments in Turkish foreign policy, and Turkish migration to Germany. Stay tuned for more!

**Bülent ARAS**  
Editor-in- Chief