

Cell Biology in Turkey

“Turkey exhibits a significant contribution to global research. Since the mid 1990s the average citation rate of the papers (total citations/total papers) has risen consistently, and it looks to continue a steep movement into the world scientific community.”

These words are from a 2008 “Thompson Reuters Web of Knowledge” report. Graph 1 and 2 from this report (see below) also demonstrate how fast research has grown in Turkey.

This rise also reflects the development in cell biology. Many cell biologists in Turkey are continuing to make contributions to science and receiving distinguished awards all around the world.

Supporting Research in Turkey

There are three important organizations that support researchers from different fields of science, including cell biology, in Turkey:

First, universities and public research and development establishments requiring support for infrastructure investment and expensive scientific equipment apply directly to the Turkish Prime Ministry State Planning Organization (DPT).

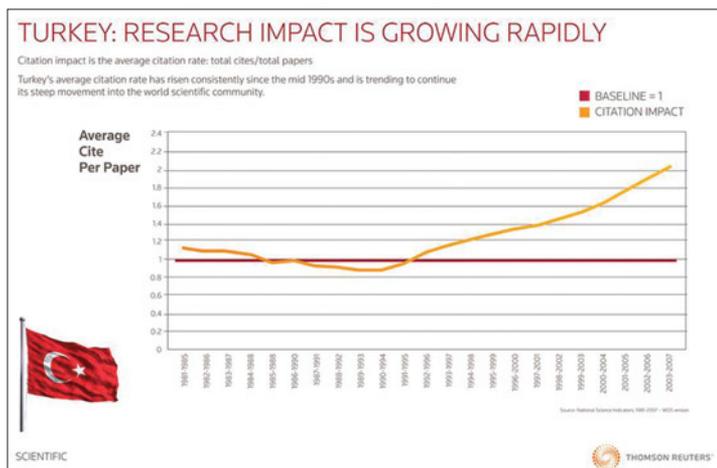
Second, the Turkish Academy of Sciences (TUBA) is an autonomous scholarly society acting to promote scientific activities in Turkey. TUBA’s mission is to encourage and promote research activities in all fields of science, to raise the social status of scientists, and to raise Turkish science to international standards.

Third, the implementation and management of actual research programs is carried out by the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TUBITAK). TUBITAK is responsible for the development and coordination of

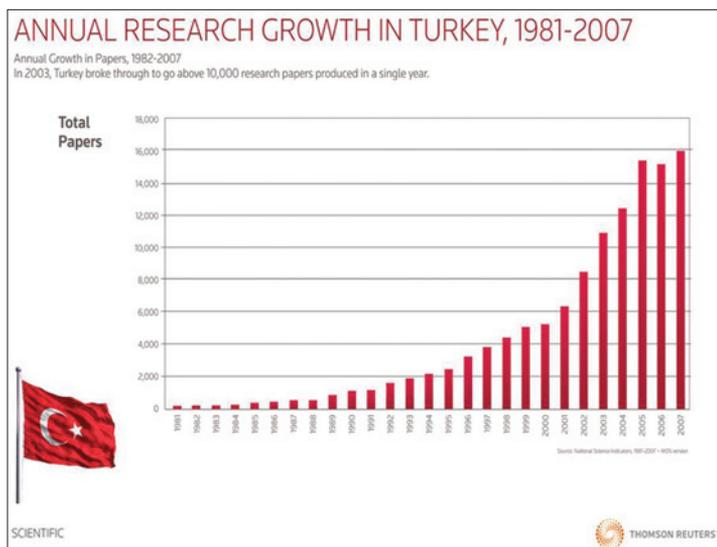
scientific research in line with national targets and priorities. TUBITAK also represents Turkey in international research efforts, including memberships in the European Science Foundation and the European Union Framework Programmes for Research and Technological Development. Besides providing grants for research and fellowships at different educational levels, the Council also organizes and promotes symposia, seminars, and congresses.

TUBA and TUBITAK support Turkey’s participation in international scientific dialog, which is provided by joint authorship of Turkish scientists with partners from other countries. Scholarship programs, sabbaticals, and grants for collaborative studies provide opportunities for international studies.

Turkey is at a turning point with regard to research and development policy. Instead of direct government input and output, the public sector is now to play a supporting role in science. There are private



Graph 1. Reprinted with permission from Thomson Reuters Web of Knowledge



Graph 2. Reprinted with permission from Thomson Reuters Web of Knowledge

[T]he ratio of female scientists to male scientists was 41% in 2009. This ratio is above the world average.



Students from the School of Medicine at Koc University with Ranan Gulhan Aktas talked about the results of a study.

institutions that support researchers and give awards to outstanding Turkish scientists.

Some of them support women scientists in particular.

Where Research Occurs in Turkey

In Turkey, research mainly takes place at universities and in research institutions. There are 167 universities and academies in Turkey: 123 of them are state universities and 44 are private foundation universities.

Koc University is one of these private universities, founded by Vehbi Koc, a leading Turkish businessman. It is committed to the pursuit of excellence in both teaching and research. The vision of Koc University embraces and incorporates the dramatic changes that cell biology has undergone recently. The university is now fully equipped for modern cell biology research and offers attractive PhD programs to students from all over the world. Genomic, proteomic, transcriptomic, structural, and dynamic functional analysis of cells is performed in these laboratories. Groups at the university are working on molecular and cell biology, cellular immunology, tissue engineering, stem cell biology, histology, pathology, developmental biology, cell differentiation, cell division, and cancer biology. The main aim of cell biologists here is to integrate separate disciplines and find new approaches to solve complex cell biological problems. Koc University offers excellent facilities and services to Turkish and foreign research groups or individual scientists, who are expected to develop their projects and form their groups autonomously.



Nurhan Ozlu (right) and Ranan Gulhan Aktas at her lab at Koc University.

The university has international faculty members with doctorate degrees from universities like Harvard, Princeton, Middle East Technical University, Hacettepe, and many others from all around the world. Nurhan Ozlu, one of my colleagues, did a postdoctoral fellowship with 2010 ASCB President Tim Mitchison at Harvard and then decided to return home and work at Koc University. She has set up her own lab and focused on her own ongoing research. The number of Turkish female scientists contributing to science is increasing day by day. Reports evaluating the data about Turkish female scientists demonstrate that the ratio of female scientists to male scientists was 41% in 2009. This ratio is above the world average. The number of international awards given to Turkish female scientists suggests that their success is continuing to rise.

Reasons to Visit/Work in Turkey

Turkish people are generally very open and amicable. Knowledge of the English language is common, especially among the younger generations. This makes it easy for foreigners to adapt to life in the country. A rich cultural life and history are other attractive sides of Turkey, which is a bridge between Europe and Asia.

I hope this brief summary makes you consider visiting Turkey someday. We are looking forward to collaborating with more scientists around the world, making more friendships, advancing collaborations, and furthering international success in cell biology. ■

—Ranan Gulhan Aktas, School of Medicine, Koc University, Turkey