

25 years of ITEA

Two Public Authorities share their views
of the ITEA experience

*“The family feeling in
ITEA, not only from
the point of view of
the companies and
research institutions
but also on the
side of the Public
Authorities.”*

In this edition, ITEA Chairwoman Zeynep Sarılar invites Wilbert Schaap (Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate policy) and Dr. Ayda Kara Pektaş (TÜBİTAK) to look back at the past 25 years of ITEA. Welcoming both Wilbert and Ayda, Zeynep turns first to Wilbert, who has been an ITEA ‘ally’ since day one, and hopes that his story might be “a kind of learning process for me.”

Mission impossible? Not at all!

Wilbert explains how it all began in 1998. “As account manager for Philips in the Ministry of Economic Affairs, I learned that Philips was thinking about making a proposal for a Eureka Cluster for the software industry. I thought: this is fantastic because that’s what we need. We already have a hardware Cluster to reinforce the European Semicon industry, and that was doing very well. I went to my director then in the ministry and I said I was very much interested and asked if I could do this new programme. I think within an hour he said, Fine, go ahead. So that’s why I got involved in ITEA. And in the beginning, we also had some new ideas that you can still see reflected in ITEA today. For example, we introduced the idea of a roadmap for software. This was completely new in the year 1999. It was all about hardware because you can talk about nanometres and measurable stuff like that. Then you can make a roadmap. But for software? Impossible. Well, it’s not impossible. The last 25 years have shown it to be a good idea. In all that time I have known all five ITEA Office directors from Pieter Dekker at the start to Jan Jonker today. So far I think the Dutch government is very pleased with ITEA. After all, we have been supporting all these 25 years with an annual budget.”

A labour of love

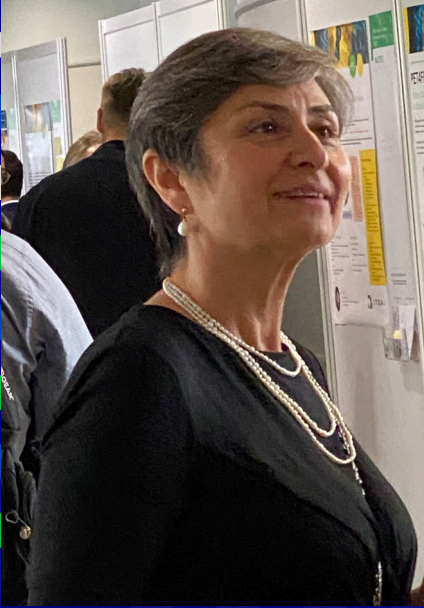
For Ayda, her involvement with ITEA is much more recent. “While I have been working for TÜBİTAK for almost ten years, I have only been working closely with ITEA for almost four years. But I can say that I really love this part of my job coordinating all the internal and external things related to ITEA. I enjoy being in touch with the people in the Cluster, and also the work that we do in ITEA is very satisfying for me, very fruitful. I really love it.”

Zeynep clearly appreciates the commitment from both the Dutch and Turkish Public Authorities, and comments that getting such commitment and support is very valuable. “The Netherlands has been a real mainstay for 25 years and is an example to other countries like Türkiye to continue supporting ITEA and enabling the Cluster to flourish.”

“Yes,” Ayda says, “this commitment and support from Türkiye is strong because we see how ITEA contributes to the software and software-intensive sector in Türkiye. This is very important for us, certainly from the point of being a candidate country for the European Union. I mean Türkiye participates in the projects within the scope of the ITEA programme, and the Cluster helps to build networks and partnerships between Turkish and European companies as well as research institutions. It provides a collaborative environment with joint research projects carried out by Turkish companies and with European partners. This is what we want to encourage. We want Turkish companies to be active as well as interactive in the ecosystem. So, this is why we support Clusters programmes and, in addition, facilitate technology transfer and cooperation between Turkish and European companies and help to strengthen the capacity of the Turkish software industry by participating in the development of new software products and services by Turkish companies. This is what we really care about.”

Family feeling and trust

Wilbert echoes the importance of this element of collaboration. “From the very start I think there was a good atmosphere of collaboration and, of course, the family feeling in ITEA, not only from the point of view of the companies and research institutions but also on the side of the Public Authorities. I think that really works well because, as you know, family feeling and trust, they’re very well connected to each other. And when you can trust each other, the collaboration can also go deeper as well as easier, faster and broader. This is certainly one of the areas in which ITEA excels. It’s an ITEA gem! I’m heavily involved in European Union programmes and projects and this family feeling is quite unique to ITEA. It’s good to see that ITEA is maintaining that. And happiness, which is also very important as we know. Furthermore, effectiveness and the flexibility are unique to ITEA. Let’s take the effectiveness: We did an evaluation three and a half years ago on Eureka programmes as a whole and there it showed that companies that participated in ITEA indicated that their participation in Eureka



^ Zeynep Sarılar
ITEA Chairwoman



^ Wilbert Schaap
Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs
and Climate policy



^ Ayda Kara Pektaş
TÜBİTAK

Clusters promotes and advances more and better international R&D collaboration and the acquisition of new technological knowledge leads to a faster turnaround time for innovations.”

Environment for cross-border collaboration

The tangible impact of participating in collaborative ITEA projects is also felt in and by Türkiye. Ayda: “For us, the ITEA programme has contributed a lot to the development of software and software-intensive systems in programme member countries. It has helped achieve the realisation of numerous joint research projects between European companies and research institutions. So, in this way it has provided an environment for the development of advanced software technologies and thus helps to strengthen the software industry in member countries. And another important aspect is encouraging innovation. ITEA has helped to carry research projects in emerging fields such as IoT, AI, 5G communications, big data, data mining and augmented reality, and thereby keeps member countries at the forefront of those important technological developments as well as promotes cross-border collaboration. This is something that ITEA does very well, creating the environment for networks and partnerships between companies and research institutions, thereby expediting the transfer of knowledge and technology between countries. In this way, ITEA has become a facilitator of cross-border collaboration in the software industry.”

Music to Zeynep’s ears. “In this international environment we always emphasise that the challenges of the moment are so urgent and the problems are really big. It is not easy to solve them

on your own as a company, but also not easy to do it only within your own country. So, this international collaboration is necessary for this.”

High Tech Campus Eindhoven

On the subject of collaboration, Wilbert also reflects on the reason why Eindhoven came to be the venue of the ITEA Office. “Actually, in the beginning the French also wanted to have the ITEA Office in Paris but after a bit of haggling and arm wrestling, we managed to settle on the Netherlands. Eindhoven, in fact. Why Eindhoven and the High Tech Campus? Well, Amsterdam proved too expensive and looking at the whole infrastructure and value chain of software companies along with the collaborative DNA of the region, the smartest square kilometre in Europe was a perfect fit. And still is.”

“It’s a good campus,” Zeynep agrees, “and we like to be there. I’m curious about one thing by the way. When I talked with Karlheinz Topp and Luc Desimpelaere in the previous [ITEA magazine](#), they mentioned having monthly meetings, that from the industrial side there was a commitment to have discussions with the Public Authorities for one and a half years on the relevant procedures and aspects. Is this something you recall?”

Taking off

“At the time I thought, what’s the best way of gathering information from my counterparts, from the ministries?” Wilbert replies. “And well, that’s to convene a meeting of the people from government in ITEA. So, I went to Paris and there in a very small back room in the ministry I asked my colleagues to bring me into contact with their software colleagues.

And the response was quite interesting. Some of the Public Authorities had their doubts and rejected the idea while others thought this was a very good idea. Opinion was mixed on whether this software Cluster could take off. But as you have noticed, it took off quite well. And I'm very pleased with the way it worked out."

We feel this, too," says Zeynep, "also within a project when everybody just takes off their jackets and rolls up their sleeves to focus on the problem. It creates a very equal environment with open collaboration and trust among large industry, SMEs, research institutes."

Platform for SMEs

Ayda takes up this point about the mix of participants in projects, and the role of SMEs. "Thanks to the programme, small, medium and large enterprises in the software industry are encouraged to work together. This is not very easy in all platforms because some programmes are just for large companies. Some of them just focus on SMEs. But in ITEA projects we can focus on all of them, and we can bring them together to cooperate well. In this way it helps SMEs to work in the same field with large and very experienced companies and show their talents and abilities as well as pave the way for potential future collaborations and compete with them. And you know, some SMEs can work together with very big companies like Airbus or Philips, which is not very easy for SMEs to get such an opportunity most of the time. But in a Cluster, this is possible."

Another unique selling point, according to Wilbert, is the flexibility and speed with which ITEA projects come together. "If you look at the flexibility in subjects that can be put in a programme project, that is excellent, of course, but so is the speed. That is something we already started working on six or seven years ago, speeding up the time for putting projects together as well as decision-making from the Public Authority side. It is a real USP for ITEA. And why has the Dutch government been supporting it over the last 25 years?" Echoing Ayda, Wilbert confirms that "we feel that this is a unique programme that offers a lot of Dutch SMEs a very good platform to go European-wide and to make connections with other European companies. And even broader than Europe, of course, because Eureka is not only Europe, but it goes much, much further. And the fact that it's not a closed shop. We see so many new players. This is extremely important also for the Dutch government, to see that the base of companies and research institutions or universities is expanding all the time."

As Zeynep, almost unwillingly, draws this tête-à-tête to a close, she invites both Wilbert and Ayda to share

a final recollection or comment. Wilbert kicks off.

Sold-out symposium and walking dinner

"Well, going back to the first ITEA symposium in Toulouse in France. It was perfect. And I must say that the French government played a very important role in the startup of ITEA. The fact that it was in Toulouse with its Centre for Aircraft Development, including software development for aircraft and beyond, was a very good showcase. The turnout was fantastic, more than 200 people for the first symposium. And that really kicked off, I think, the family feeling not only between Public Authorities but also between Public Authorities and companies, research institutions and universities. There was a good flow and this flow has been going strong for 25 years now. I must compliment you [Zeynep] because you're also very instrumental in keeping this flow going. You always have new ideas, new ways of thinking. And one more recollection, the Digital Innovation Forum in 2017 in Amsterdam. It was a wonderful event and there was a huge turnout. My director gave a speech and you introduced a new way of having dinner. Not static with everybody sitting on their chairs and only talking to the person left or right of you but a new idea of having a walking dinner going to the marketplace in Amsterdam and meeting a lot of people was fantastic. I still remember that it was also very, very warm as I recall. And one of the great meetings of the many we have had in the last 25 years."

Zeynep also recalls this walking dinner and the experience of family and friendship. "Sometimes it's just a little change like this that gives more people the opportunity to meet at dinner. It was wonderful. Maybe we'll do something new in future. After all, life is change and change is life. So this fits ITEA well."

Pleasure from results

Ayda shares that "from a personal perspective, as I stated at the beginning, I really like what we do in the environment and it is very satisfactory to see the outcomes, to see how companies collaborate together with the main pillars of the ecosystem, even with very big companies and this is very good. So, when the outcome is so clear, then this is worth getting tired for. When the outcome is so intense and visible, this is reflected in the pleasure I get from the job."

Zeynep: "Thank you both. I mean, it is really critical for us to get your feedback as the Public Authorities and also as a member of the Community because we are all shaping the future together and we are all shaping the future of ITEA. Let's do it together for the next 25 years!"