

## **Turks Put Their Mark on Washington Summit**

**Thursday, 29 April 2010**

The entrepreneurship summit in Washington was not only attended by Turkish entrepreneurs from Turkey, but also by Turks living and working as successful businesspeople abroad. The Turkish government's offer to host next year's summit strengthened Turkey's position in the initiative.

Turkey put its mark on the "Presidential Summit on Entrepreneurship" held in Washington, D.C. this week, as Turkish entrepreneurs were not only in the six-strong Turkish delegation, but also in other countries' delegations. Turkey's offer to host next year's summit was also welcomed by participants.

The event was held under the leadership of U.S. President Barack Obama, who is striving to mend ties with Muslim-majority countries.

Aside from Turkey's own delegation, the German delegation included Cem Özdemir, the co-leader of the Alliance '90/The Greens and Nihat Sorgeç, deputy president of the Turkish-German Chamber of Trade.

The Netherlands delegation included Atilla Aytekin, chief executive of Triodor Software, while the Norway delegation included Dilek Ayhan, general manager of Alarga. Thus, Turkey displayed once again its entrepreneurs are scattered all around the world.

Ayhan's family went to Norway from Turkey in the 1970s, while she was born there. Speaking to Anatolia news agency, Ayhan said she has been an entrepreneur for the past eight years while her work involves finding the necessary human resources for companies which expand abroad.

"They generally choose foreign students at universities," Ayhan said. "We are finding the best. Among them are those that can speak five, six languages."

The summit was very positive in showing that the United States is interested in the Muslim world in the sense of business and entrepreneurship, according to Aytekin, the CEO of Triodor.

"In the past 10 years we have not seen such a step [from the U.S.] This was the first such message," he said. "The next summit will be held in Turkey and this also makes us proud."

### Overlap with developing markets

"The Muslim world can also be described as the developing markets," Aytekin said. "Nearly 80 percent of all developing markets are included in the Muslim world. Thus, Turkey is aiming to be the leader of developing markets while also giving the message that its development policy is based on business and entrepreneurship, as opposed to social policies."

Turks are "the most successful entrepreneurs in the Netherlands," Aytekin said: "When the U.S. Embassy called me, they said the reason is that they have seen the success of Turks and their contribution to the Netherlands in entrepreneurship and social benefits."

Aytekin's company employs 150 people, two-thirds of them locals. He said the U.S. companies wish to invest in small- and medium-sized enterprises, or SMEs, rather than big companies. "They only want the right sector, the profitable sector," Aytekin continued. "They see the

development of SMEs as part of democratization and strengthening the middle class.”

Şirin Elçi, the Turkey director of the Technopolis Group, said they are ready to support Turkey in next year's summit in any way they can. “The responsibility over Turkey's shoulders has increased,” Elçi said.

Özdemir, meanwhile, said such a summit could not have been organized during the presidency of George W. Bush. “We see the difference of the Obama administration,” he said. “Obama is extremely persuasive.”

Meanwhile, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said Tuesday the U.S. plans to build ties with Muslim-majority countries and help improve conditions within them through new programs linking American companies with entrepreneurs around the world.

The new programs include mentoring backed by Ernst & Young and Intel, a global entrepreneurship program, a Silicon Valley effort to fund start-up companies, as well as a collaboration with Coca-Cola to get businesses involved in State Department programs, Clinton said.

“Relationships between nations are sustained by the connections between their peoples,” Bloomberg quoted Clinton as telling a gathering of the entrepreneurs in Washington. “You have the power not only to drive economic growth, but promote shared prosperity, call for open and accountable governance, help expand access to services like health care and education.”

A new approach

The summit reflected “the new approach to foreign policy that President Obama described last year at Cairo University,” Clinton said. “One that we have been putting into practice through partnerships based on shared values, mutual respect and mutual responsibility.”

The Global Entrepreneurship Program will provide “concrete support” to entrepreneurs in Muslim-majority countries, eventually expanding worldwide. The program will sponsor business plan competitions, help with access to credit and facilitate exchanges between U.S. business schools and those in other countries. The program will be in a dozen countries in the next two years, Clinton said.

The State Department will also work with Partners for a New Beginning, a non-profit led by former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright that will spearhead the effort to have private businesses become more involved in State Department programs.

Partners for a New Beginning is co-chaired by Coca-Cola Chief Executive Officer Muhtar Kent, who is of Turkish origin himself.

“Global corporations have an important role to play in small business development and in helping to create sustainable communities where they operate,” Kent said in a statement read by Coca-Cola executive Barclay Resler.

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