

FICAC Congress Chairman Aykut Eken looking forward to World Congress

Friday, November 13, 2009

ANKARA/ISTANBUL – Hurriyet Daily News

'We chose İzmir for the congress in order for the city to continue the impetus it had developed and so that it could join Istanbul and Antalya in emphasizing congress tourism,' Eken says

We all know what consuls do: coordinate, plan, solve crises and chase many a last-minute detail. So when 250 consuls come together for an annual global meeting, who plays "consul" for their designs?

The answer is Aykut Eken, his wife Gonul and his staff, the "sherpas" to the summit of the Ninth World Congress of Consuls, FICAC, which begins in İzmir this weekend. In addition to being the worldwide forum for this group of diplomats, FICAC also holds formal observer status at the United Nations.

Eken is himself the local honorary consul for the Caribbean's St. Kitts and Nevis. Three years in the making, the summit will bring together 150 honorary consuls, including 20 from Turkey and 100 career diplomat consuls from around the world.

"We chose İzmir for the congress in order for the city to continue the impetus it had developed and so that it could join Istanbul and Antalya in emphasizing congress tourism," Eken told the Hürriyet Daily News & Economic Review. "This encourages further investment in İzmir for congress tourism in addition to İzmir and its environment being one of the most important places in the world for historical tourism. Gaining this region for congress tourism has to become one of our country's national policies."

Eken, who handles the chairmanship of the congress's organization has been in the administration of FICAC for nine years, is the organization's general secretary and treasurer. He said the effort to bring FICAC's annual meeting to İzmir was greatly aided by the head of Turkish Honorary Consuls Association, Turgut Koyuncuoğlu.

Eken explained he and others were part of the group that lobbied hard to get İzmir chosen for the 2015 Expo, a bid ultimately lost to Milan. But the experience, the lobbying, the traveling the globe in search of votes, was a good dress rehearsal for the assembly that formally begins Monday in the Aegean capital.

He has two expectations for the upcoming congress. First, it will be an effective lobby effort for Turkey's international relations. This is the diplomatic role honorary consuls and their wives commonly play, now to be conducted on a grand scale.

"Such a meeting provides a way to identify your country and promote relations of friendship," Eken said. "The congress organizers are doing everything so that the visitors leave with a positive image. The congress is an investment in diplomatic, economic, social and cultural relations.

The honorary consulate system was established under the Vienna Convention in 1963, now nearly 50 years old. The congress will be reviewing the convention now that time has passed to see what has to be changed or removed given changes and globalization. Eken is proposing that the roles and duties of the honorary consulates be reviewed.

Eken believes the congress will help Turkey in many ways. In addition to communication in the realms of the economy and culture, this year will also include discussion of an expansion of FICAC's existing international student exchange program. He is also seeking to create an international student's network project with the İzmir Economy University and Turkish Airlines.

Institutions supporting this year's summit include the Foreign Affairs and other ministries, the İzmir Governor's Office, the Police Department, the İzmir State Opera and Ballet, the Turkish Jockey Club and both national and regional chambers of commerce. Private company support has come from Coca Cola, Koc Holding and ENDA.

In addition to his diplomatic and international efforts, Eken runs his own business, the 30-year-old Beta International S.A. involved in stainless steel, tourism, textiles and yachting. He is also active in Turkish civil society organizations including Foreign Relations Council, or DEIK, the Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen's Association, or TUSIAD, the Marmara Foundation and the Caribbean and Latin American Trade Organization. He is the chairman of DEIK's Turkish – Brazilian Business Council.

