

## **ISO CHAIRMAN ERDAL BAHÇIVAN ASSEMBLY MEETING SPEECH**

As we stated in various assembly meetings before, the violence created by terror continues to bring great suffering to humanity with each passing day. Turkey is among the countries that has been experiencing this suffering for the longest time. The ongoing wave of violence, including the recent terrorist attack in Ankara that shook us to the core, reveals once again the foul and inhumane face of terror.

Being a nation means being united in destiny, in grief, and in jubilation. We believe wholeheartedly in Turkey's ability to stand tall once again despite these attacks on our unity and solidarity. Terror will never prevail. We offer our prayers to those who lost their lives, and wish a speedy recovery to the wounded. We offer our deepest condolences to our nation.

I would like to welcome Mr. Nabi Avcı, the Minister of National Education, to our assembly meeting of this month, titled "The Importance of a Quality Education System and Vocational Education for the Future of the Industry and the Economy in an Era of Global Competition and Information". Mr. Minister, you have honored us with your presence.

Mr. Minister, I would also like to welcome your distinguished colleagues who are with us here today as well.

It is a great pleasure to see you retain your post as the Minister of National Education in the Sixty-Fourth Government formed after the elections of November 1. As Istanbul Chamber of Industry, we would like to extend our heartfelt congratulations and our hope that your guidance would herald an auspicious future for our country, our people, and our education.

We are going through a period of revolutionary developments in a great many areas, including information and communication technologies. However, advancements in these areas are not limited to their respective branches, but affect life in general. Due to the profound impact of these changes on our lives, the era we live in is aptly named the "Information Age".

This great change affects humanity at the global as well as national and local level, and production and economy in the changing world are based on the concepts of sustainable growth, development, and improvement.

There is another key component that accompanies those concepts, one that leaves its veritable mark on the process: information. In fact, what we are witnessing is the birth of a new, information-based economy.

As we talk about the Information Age and the key role of information, we must keep in mind another important issue: those who name our current era as the Information Age note the risk of languor brought about by technological advances. Developing countries in particular must remain vigilant against the pitfalls of lethargy.

In the Information Age, we, as industrialists, strive to understand the interrelationship between production, economy and information. I think it goes without saying that, for us, understanding these interactions is a must. The fact is clear: our existence in tomorrow's world depends on our ability to act in accordance with the zeitgeist of today. As I draw

attention to this fact, I would also like to stress that having Mr. Minister of National Education here with us today is quite meaningful and valuable.

Economic competition is growing fiercer around the world. It is not an exaggeration to claim that countries with low-quality education and lacking in knowledge, R&D capacity and innovation will suffer significant losses and problems in the future.

Taking into account this fact, I believe that we must struggle harder than ever to create a Turkey that has gained competitive strength in the global arena. This effort is vital for the future of our country, given its current position as the 51<sup>st</sup> among 140 countries on the latest "Global Competitiveness Index".

Besides information, the other most important component of economic development today is a highly educated workforce.

Today, the workforce of a production-oriented, developed country is distinguished by the following qualities:

Ability to achieve optimization,

Adaptability to economic and technological changes,

Capability for long-term thinking,

Being in a constant state of renewal,

Capability for cooperation,

Capacity for global-level thinking,

Being informed and productive.

Such a profile is only possible through a quality education system. At this point, we believe that it is particularly noteworthy that Mr. Minister used the words "libertarian, productive, and competitive" to define a competent education system while stressing its importance as one of the prerequisites of this age.

We are undergoing a period that redefines our classical understanding of schools.

Today, the single most important function of schools is to impart vision. Based on this fact, a new concept for schools is being shaped, building upon the understanding of education as a "process of developing the mind, rather than simply filling the memory".

Thanks to technological advances, schools are tearing down their walls through distance-learning and online learning opportunities, while education itself becomes a lifelong process.

Also through technological advances, information is available to us at all times. Thus, the role of schools must evolve from simple conveyors of information into guides for accessing and using that information.

As Istanbul Chamber of Industry, we have always given, and will continue to give priority to education. As a necessity of this commitment, we have been making intensive efforts on education recently, some of which I would like to share with you:

First, I would like to mention some of the activities of the Istanbul Chamber of Industry Foundation, which recently held its general assembly. Our Foundation, a source of pride for us, has given us great joy on its 22<sup>nd</sup> anniversary with its successful initiatives so far.

Such activities place special emphasis on education as well as on youth, the foundation of our future.

The consumer culture continues to pervade our society, the youth in particular. Looking at our environment, we can see that the culture of production is waning as social status comes to be defined by the items one possesses. Our country needs young people that will make a reputation for themselves with what they produce, rather than what they consume.

It is an exalted goal to ensure the persistence of production culture between generations by establishing, supporting and developing education institutions that will train the qualified individuals needed by our country and imbue our youth with modern knowledge and skills.

We realized the "Life is in the Classroom" project in pilot schools. The project, a first in our country, aims to increase achievement rates and address student-related problems.

Istanbul Chamber of Industry Foundation continues to offer scholarship opportunities for high achieving students at every level. This year the number of scholarship students increased to five hundred. In 2015, we provided scholarships to doctorate level students for the first time.

Another initiative launched last year is the "ICIF Scholarship Student Discussions". Our esteemed and seasoned guests share their wealth of experience with the youth in these organizations, which we believe to be very meaningful in many aspects.

Our support for scholarship students goes beyond merely financial assistance. We also provide them with the opportunity to participate in the monthly meetings of our ICI Chamber Assembly in order to bring them together with industrialists to help them learn about the culture of production.

Now, I would like to mention some of ICI's initiatives in education.

Last November, we organized a workshop titled "A New Roadmap for Education" under the coordination of former minister and our consultant, Mr. Ömer Dinçer. The workshop, aiming to deliver innovative ideas for the education system of Turkey, saw the participation of numerous experts from the private sector, public sector, universities and NGOs of Turkey.

The workshop addressed the importance of education for our economy and industry and evaluated proposed solutions for current problems facing our education system. The workshop delivered various proposals for a better education, and its results will help guide our efforts in this regard.

As production regains its importance worldwide, transitioning into a high-added value production and import structure is a top priority for both our government and us industrialists. High-value-added production is only possible with a highly trained, qualified workforce.

Access to qualified workforce is still a challenge for industrialists. Being unable to find qualified personnel despite the ongoing issue of unemployment is quite thought provoking in itself. Sad but true: our country still lacks a strong bridge to fill the gap between education and employment.

We believe that the struggle for building this bridge should focus explicitly on vocational education. One of the most significant aspects of this focus is the need to address the lack of connection between the school and the workplace.

The first step we have taken in this important issue is the "School-Industry Cooperation Istanbul Model", launched in November with your valuable contribution and support. It gives us great pleasure to say that, since then, the project has been gradually coming to life.

A unique aspect of the School-Industry Cooperation Istanbul Model is its approach to governance. School-industry cooperation projects have long been an agenda item, yet past projects offered no guidance as to how educational processes of vocational schools should be managed in collaboration with the industry. In this regard, our project offers schools a vision that goes far beyond than simply providing support with technical infrastructure opportunities.

The School-Industry Cooperation Istanbul Model brings together more and more vocational high schools and industrial enterprises every day, building stronger bonds.

We are offering our industrialists the chance to open their doors to vocational high schools in order to contribute to the development of qualified personnel they seek. At the same time, educators are able to visit the factories to refresh their knowledge with practical applications of the latest advances in the production process. This cooperation also allows stakeholders to share their experiences and develop curricula together.

Another aspect of this model is its contribution to technological collaboration between the school and the industry. In this model, companies support the technological infrastructure of school workshops and laboratories, while students benefit from modern facilities and better training and internship opportunities offered.

The number of cooperation protocols between companies and vocational high schools has increased considerably in a short period, due in no small part to the ICI's participation in the process as an assurance for the companies. I would like to note that our goal for the upcoming period is to increase the number of these success stories.

Having shared with you our ongoing efforts on education, I would like to stress one particular point: Istanbul Chamber of Industry has been, and will continue to be a part of the solution through an inclusive and participative approach.

Based on this approach, we are committed continue working with the Ministry of National Education to drive even more efficient initiatives on this topic. Having you here with us today, we believe wholeheartedly in our ability to achieve this efficiency in the upcoming period.

As I conclude my thoughts on our main agenda item, I want to provide some brief information about this month's activities.

With the aim of evaluating opportunities and potential in our economy and industry, we carried out visits on February 19 and February 20, 2016 in Ankara and Istanbul with participation from our Chamber Assembly and Board of Directors. As part of these visits we met Mr. İsmail Karaman, Speaker of the Grand National Assembly; Mr. Naci Ağbal, the Minister of Finance; Mr. Mustafa Elitaş, the Minister of Economy; and Mr. Ziya Altunyaldız, Head of the Grand National Assembly Industry, Trade, Energy, Natural Resources, Information and Technology Commission. We also have meetings planned with other relevant ministers as well, and these will be taking place in the days ahead.

On another note, the Chambers of Industry Council of the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB) convened for its first meeting of 2016 in February 9, hosted by Mr. Rifat Hisarcıklıođlu, President of TOBB. The Council meeting was attended by Mr. Fikri Işık, the Minister of Science, Industry and Technology; and Mr. Bülent Tüfenkci, the Minister of Customs and Trade, and council members from our chamber assembly were present as well.

Finally, I would like to mention a recent organization. On February 13, 2016, Istanbul Chamber of Industry held a conference titled "The Next Generation of Economic Diplomacy: The Growth of Regional Free Trade Agreements and TTIP Negotiations Worldwide", addressing the significance of such agreements for our country.

The conference was attended by Mr. Volkan Bozkır, the Minister for EU Affairs, and Mr. Pascal Lamy, Former Director-General of WTO, as well as other esteemed speakers from Turkey and the world, providing us with a wealth of knowledge with their perspectives.

As I conclude my words, I would like to once again welcome our Minister of National Education Mr. Nabi Avcı, and extend my warmest greetings to all of you.