

CHESS IN SCHOOLS TURKEY

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Chess and Education
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TÜRKİYE  BANKASI

Ali Nihat Yazici



President of Turkish Chess Federation
20 November 2000



TÜRKİYE  BANKASI

I first met Ali Nihat Yazici at the Istanbul Olympiad in 2000. The Olympiad closing ceremony was on 12 November. Eight days later he was elected President of the Turkish Chess Federation (TSF), a post he has held ever since, being re-elected in 2004 & 2008. He acquired a small federation of about 300 members and a budget to match.

It does not surprise me that he has been successful. I had been impressed by the immense energy and organizational ability that he demonstrated during that Chess Olympiad. I recall one occasion when he and I were the last people still working late at night one evening during the event, a rare occurrence for me, but an everyday event for him.

By 2002, Ali and his small team succeeded in growing TSF membership more than 20-fold! Then he got an appointment to meet the Minister of Education. He told the Minister that the TSF wanted to make chess an elective course in all primary schools. The Minister asked "Why?" and Ali replied that it was because they wanted Kasparovs and Karpovs to emerge from Turkish schools. The Minister's response was: "Go to the Sports Ministry!" Everyone makes mistakes. The clever thing is to learn from them.

Three years passed. The TSF was apparently developing nicely, more than trebling membership again to 24,000. A new Minister, a retired Associate Professor, Dr. Hüseyin Celik, had arrived at the Ministry of Education in 2003. In 2005, Ali fluked a meeting with him and told the man, just like his predecessor, that he wanted to make chess an elective course in all primary schools. He got the same initial response: "Why?" Chess players rarely repeat losing variations, and Ali had done his homework on a new variation, telling this Minister that it was because he wanted Turkish children to become more intelligent.

The opening was followed up with a strong middlegame plan. Ali gave him a short brief, explaining the educational and social benefits of chess and how all this could be achieved. Even so, the position did not look promising and Ali thought there was little or no chance that the Minister would get back to him BUT ...

Next morning at 08:00, Ali's mobile rang - it was the Minister "I want to see you in my office." At this meeting, the Minister joked that, as a politician he did not necessarily want a more intelligent electorate, but said that if the details in the

brief were correct (and his staff were checking them), then we have to start this project. The Ministry was so keen, they wanted to make chess a compulsory part of the curriculum. The TSF refused. For a start, it was simply not practical instantly to train up 100,000 teachers or more to cater for 70,000 primary schools and 16,000,000 children. Second, and most important, was the idea that chess should be fun for the kids, something they choose to do and that the project would be more successful if chess was an elective subject.

PROTOCOL SIGNING 2 JUNE 2005



The official protocol was signed on the 2nd of June. The project went full steam ahead immediately; it had to if they were to have a presence in classrooms at the beginning of the school year in the autumn.

Dr. Olgun Kulaç, a member of the TSF Education Committee, set to work writing three books; a first year class book, a follow-on class book and an accompanying teacher's guide – more than 500 pages in all, and he had all of three months to do it, less the time needed for book design and printing! FIDE Senior Trainer Mikhail Gurevich, undertook to train up 100 trainers who would then train the teachers. From the announcement, on the TSF web site on June

5, of that training course in Ankara, a mere 25 days elapsed until the 100 trainers were ready to be unleashed on the teachers in seminars held the length and breadth of the country.

There was no shortage of teacher applicants, all wanting to go on this training course, although they had to pay TRY 70 (about USD 40, €50) for the privilege. They have to get a TSF seminar certificate in order to teach chess in the schools. They knew that they would earn about TRY 80 (about USD 45, €60) a month by teaching chess two hours a week and it is possible for those earnings to reach almost TRY 150 per month. Here the Turkish experience enjoys a clear advantage compared with many other countries and from those teachers the TSF earns a lot of money, not least because each teacher pays a TRY 15 licence fee each year. The money is ploughed back into the “business” to build the future of the federation, which is a not-for-profit organization.



The 100 trainers taught groups of 30 or so teachers each week during the late summer. The schoolteachers are taught how to teach chess. Even though very

few of them are chess players, it is quite easy; for a start, they already know how to teach! It does not matter that they are not strong players (or even not players at all), you don't have to be an Einstein to teach physics in school, especially in primary school.

By the time those courses were completed, at the end of September, some 10,000 teachers had been trained in time for the start of the academic year. That brought in some TRY 700,000 (about USD 400,000) to the coffers of the federation.

The training has continued apace, and there are now more than 50,000 certified teachers. Their licence fees, together with the fees from those attending the new seminars, amounts to well in excess of TRY 1million a year (some USD 600,000).

Of course, there are a lot of expenses. 30% of the seminar income covers the seminar expenses and trainer's stipend. The rest goes to the federation.

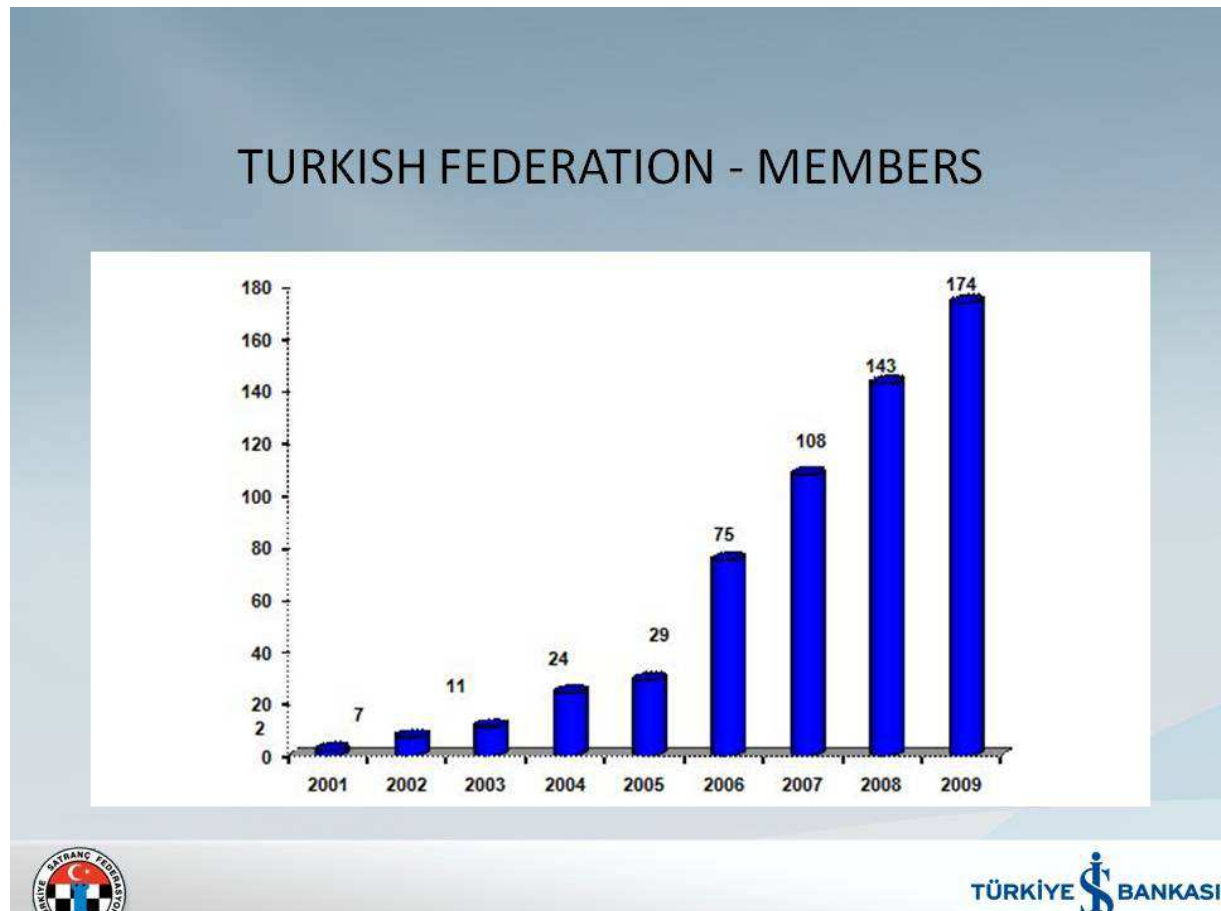
With all those teachers trained, it was essential to have kids clamouring to be taught, so a one minute TV commercial was prepared. That was aired by the Public Broadcasting Service, starting in August 2005.

<http://cis.fide.com/en/videos/98-tsf-advertising>

Just weeks later, that first batch of 10,000 teachers was introducing chess to more than half a million kids.

Those teachers are only part of the equation; they could not do much chess teaching without materials. The other core element is the provision of 'chess classrooms', consisting of a demonstration board, a bunch of boards and sets, books for the children, and, of course, books for the teachers, with the answers inside! Initially, the federation provided a large quantity of these. Later, after a sponsor emerged, the sponsor took responsibility for these, installing 200 in 2007. 200 may not sound much, but the number doubled in 2008, and each subsequent year (although it's running a bit behind this year – 2011). Also, those classrooms are used by multiple classes. [Some schools already had equipment.]

It should come as no surprise that all this led to a huge growth in TSF membership.



Press coverage soon built up, averaging 15 column inches a day (almost 500 feet a year) with an enormous reach (detailed figures are commercially sensitive). By the end of the year, chess in schools was making its impact felt all over the country, so it was not really a miracle when a major sponsor appeared.

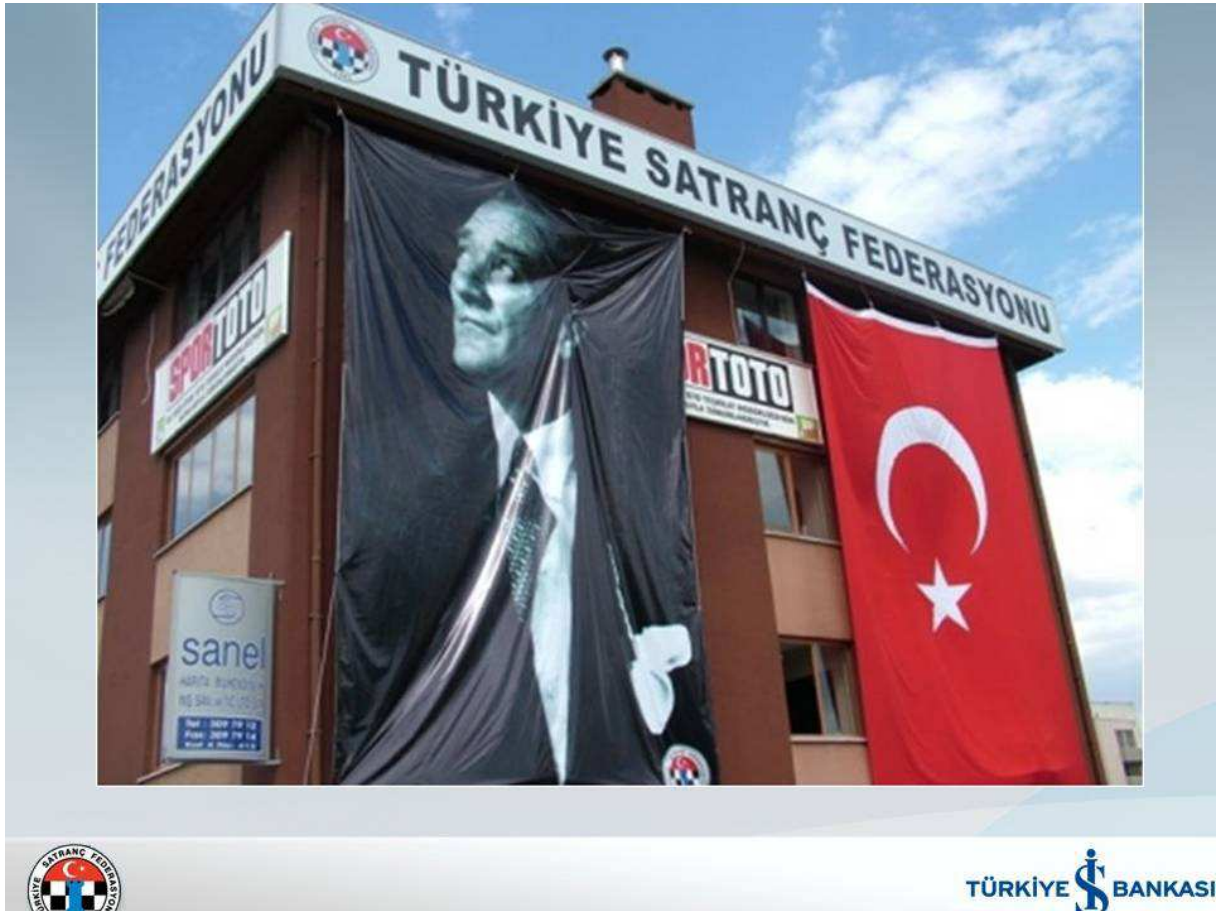
Here you can see the benefit of big numbers. It was those numbers that attracted Türkiye İş Bankası (Bank of Turkey), the largest bank not only in Turkey, but in Eastern Europe and maybe in the Middle East. The bank approached the TSF - not the other way around! Half a million kids equals about three million people when you add in parents and grandparents, almost all of them consumers and voters. The kids themselves are all potentially future customers of the bank.



The first contact came in July of 2005, after the bank saw the news that chess was to be introduced to the curriculum. At first, they were interested to print the books, in return for including their advertising in them. However, that was not acceptable to the Education Ministry. As time went on, and the number of children involved began to be clear, so the bank was happy to print the books, 250,000 of them, as part of its social responsibility programme.

The bank officially became the TSF's sponsor on 23 December 2005. The following day, the bank announced that it was ending its sponsorship of Turkish football (soccer). Chess has gone on to become the biggest sport in Turkey, and the bank now sponsors the TSF to the tune of well over €1,000,000 (USD 1.5M). The bank is very happy with the arrangement and worked with the TSF on producing an annual TV advertisement, but in 2009, the TSF got a surprise ... The bank produced this advertisement as a 'surprise present' for the federation.

<http://cis.fide.com/en/videos/101-cis-advertising-2009-turkey>



That was the year that Spor A.S was founded. This limited company is 99.6% owned by the TSF, with the rest held by its senior management. The TSF itself can earn money from organizing chess events, from entry fees, memberships, seminars, licence fees, sponsorship, even selling its expertise and know-how in event organization (for example, providing an accreditation service to the organizers of a big bicycle rally), but it is not permitted to sell chess books and equipment. Nonetheless, the federation needs to purchase a lot of material, much of it for the school classrooms, but also for its members who “buy” the equipment with the points (like Air Miles) that they receive when they pay their membership dues (1 point for each TRY) or buy other services. Spor manufactures boards and sets, both for the TSF and for export, imports chess material that it does not manufacture and sells it on, as almost the sole supplier, to the TSF. The company is very definitely a for-profit organization and if, as anticipated, it makes a profit of USD 600-700,000 next year, then it will be floated on the Turkish stock exchange.

Chess in Schools has had a major impact in many countries around the world, but, so far, Turkey is the only one where the synergy between the development

of chess among a country's youth, and the growth of a genuine chess 'industry' has been demonstrated. Although the contributing factors do not all exist in every country, none of them is unique to Turkey. Naturally, there are problems in managing all this, but these are nice problems to have.

The Ministry wants to see EVERY school with a chess classroom and there is a strong demand from schools. Teachers are applying at the rate of 30-60 per day. A cycle of renovation of the existing chess classrooms has begun. This is a project without end.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE



Each house a sports centre
5.000.000 Players
100.000 Trainers

Many FIDE events are held in Russia; some say too many. But it is no coincidence that Russia is almost alone as a country that has built both an audience and a vault of potential sponsors. Practically all the leading businessmen know about chess, they can play the game, they were brought up with it. Turkey has begun to build in the same way. In 30-40 years, all the top politicians, businessmen and academics will know about chess, as will most of the population, and their children will be learning chess in the schools. Even if

chess never becomes a popular TV sport, there will be a huge audience for other media. Other countries are beginning to follow suit. We are generating our own audience and our own future sponsors.

The project has no end and it continues to evolve. The TSF now has more than 200,000 active members, 80% of them kids. The conversion process from school classroom to TSF membership has been 8-10%. You will hear about the ideas inspired by Turkish developments in the second half of my talk, but I will mention now that they have come full circle and the TSF is about to launch a new promotion, based on our latest ideas, with posters going out to every one of the 100,000 schools in Turkey, in the firm belief that this will boost the conversion rate to something in the range 20-30%.

