

# DOING BUSINESS THE EDGE OF EUR



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**W**hy go all the way to Turkey to go to a trade show? It was certainly a question on my mind as I hurtled for an hour along miles of bus-only expressways on one of Istanbul's Metro buses, which are both terrifyingly fast and constantly carry a crush-load of passengers.

If you've been watching the news recently, you'll know that the country has had a period of instability. Tensions between secularists who want the country to resemble Western Europe and conservative Islamists who do not, have been bubbling under the surface for years, leading to a number of chaotic and occasionally violent protests. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan politically survived an

attempted coup d'etat last year, after which he purged the country of most of the judiciary and any journalists that dared to question his strategy were thrown in gaol — all of which puts the UK's bickering about the snap election in the shade.

#### **IMPORTANCE**

However, the importance of the motor trade in Turkey cannot be understated. It is both a huge producer and a consumer of parts and complete vehicles, and so the organisers of Automechanika chose to franchise a show here.

The show has the look and feel of other non-Frankfurt editions with a mixture of big OE brands, smaller and more specialist suppliers plus a mix of diagnostic tool dealers, car wash suppliers and accessory brands — of which a disproportionate number seem to sell little but garish curtains for trucks, complete with tassels and pelmets. It takes little more than a cursory look through the programme guide to note that regional and Far-Eastern producers have the lion's share of stands and space. Turkish companies were by far the

largest exhibitors, in terms of number of exhibitors with the Chinese coming in second place. Between them, the two countries took up two-thirds of stands. So did other exhibitors get a look in?

The answer according to some of the other exhibitors was yes. "Everything here rolls on rubber" Paul Aylett, a Sales Manager at UK rotating electrics firm Prestolite told us, explaining why Turkey was important. His statement is correct, road freight makes up the vast bulk of the infrastructure in what is both a highly industrial and geographically vast country. A look at Istanbul, a city of some 15 million people, shows that there is seemingly no end to the number of light vehicles snarled up in constant horn-tooting traffic.

But why would any of Turkey's distributors, all of which we noted were present at the show, choose to take on products from smaller UK brands? "It is about quality, but it is partly down to brand UK" said Chris Cameron from BGA Automotive. "The service people receive from British companies is noted for being consistent,

which is a strength". This point is repeated when we visit Land Rover parts distributor AllMakes 4x4. Richard Howe, the MD is keen to tell us about the 'added value' that firms like his can provide. "It's all about knowing the standards and service that you can expect from a firm like ours" he said.

That isn't to say that doing business in Turkey is easy, regardless of whether you are importing or exporting. Wherever there is political instability, there will be a fluctuating currency and when considering the value of our own plummeting pound, it might be that the bulk purchase you shook on a few months previously, suddenly seems not such a great deal after all. A chat with the team on the Autopumps UK stand revealed that the prices of some castings from Turkey had increased by a third in recent months — and while the quality is good, there are other options.

Another point worth mentioning is the language. If you have ever been to trade shows further east, in Dubai for example, you'll know that English is widely spoken and the de facto language of business. In Turkey, this doesn't seem to be

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## CAT STATS

**33**

Countries exhibited at the Istanbul show

**383k**

Square footage of space at show. 44% for international

**43,874**

Visitors to Automechanika Istanbul

**12**

International Pavilions at the show

# ON SCOPE

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the case, so whether you are planning to exhibit, do business, or simply visit a trade show in the country it would be wise to bring someone who speaks the lingo with you.


### CULTURAL BUSINESS

There are other cultural factors to be aware of when doing business in Turkey as well as Sezin Ata of FM Consulting told us, following a presentation at the show. "The decision process is long, but don't push it" she warns, adding that people rarely like to say 'no'... and you'll find that out when they don't say 'yes'. She said that most business leaders in the country trust their individual contacts rather than written agreements – which is not unlike the UK aftermarket, but it does stress the importance of making the effort to get out here and shake the boss man's hand, even if the deal value is low.

Another point Ata made was the form of business meetings. "Very often there will be more than one person at the meeting – the boss and a senior engineer is typical. However, you might note that the engineer doesn't say anything... Doesn't he have anything to bring to the meeting?" she says.

"Actually, this is because businesses in Turkey often have a strong leader and submissive employees. They'll give their opinion on the meeting when the boss asks them later" she explained.

All this sounds like it is a matcho culture, but Sezin believes that business in Turkey is on the whole 'more feminine than masculine' because of the numerous decisions based on human relationships, rather than simply the balance sheet.

It is ironic that as Britain has been seeking to leave the EU that Turkey has been attempting to join it – although the brakes seem to have been put on that process for now. As both countries are on the periphery of the Eurozone, it seems logical that both will want to do deals and ties with each other. 

\* **Greg Whitaker**



**BGA Automotive stand at show**

## COUNTRY PAVILIONS

Noticeable by its absence was any form of UK Pavilion, although the UK businesses that were exhibiting were mostly grouped in the same hall.

Until recently, SMMT would arrange an area for members to exhibit at various international trade shows, under the banner 'Business is GREAT Britain'. The reasons for dropping this varied depending on who we spoke to, but what you couldn't avoid noticing was how 'brand Germany' brought it's A-game.

The gleaming white pavilion with a well-designed and uniform theme was a focal point for visitors who made a bee-line for the Teutonic gear (although they always scattered every time I tried to point a camera

at them).

Another small but important point about the German stands was that the Board of Trade had been organised enough to produce some decent printed material in the form of a booklet that gave a short and serious explanation of each of the companies and how they can help. This document aped the style of all of the official Messe Frankfurt literature – it was a top job.

Brexit means that British companies are going to have to seek business outside the EU and it is my opinion as Editor that the DTI should pay close attention to the Germans and offer something similar at cost price.



**Sculpture in Tuap Expo Centre**



**Everything rolls on rubber in Turkey**