**İzmir is destined to be the winning candidate**

Turkey’s Aegean coast is a land of sunshine, beautiful landscapes, and ancient cities stretching back to the time of Homer and the Iliad. It is a leading tourist destination that already welcomes millions of visitors each year. But in 2020 Izmir, the region’s capital, could have a special role. It could be host to the World’s Fair (EXPO), taking its place in the roll call of distinguished cities that have hosted great international Exhibitions since the 19th century - the last major one being the Shanghai World Fair of 2010. Next November, delegates from across the world will vote in [Paris](http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/tag/Paris) at the BIE (Bureau International des Expositions) General Assembly to decide where the 2020 World EXPO will be held.

If it wins, İzmir and its fair park will become a glittering showcase for a World’s Fair, which will measure up to the highest standards set by its predecessors. Every EXPO, since the original London Exhibition of 1851, has put its stamp on world history and made the host city famous. The best of these have helped pool knowledge and ideas, bringing together people from different continents and countries. They have also stimulated art, architecture, technology, and design in the building of splendid parks and national pavilions.

Each World’s Fair has a theme, and Izmir has chosen “Health for All” as its theme. As a first step, it has earmarked a 275-hectare site for the EXPO on the coast at İnciraltı, just a short distance from the city centre. Following the completion of the Expo activities, this area will be turned into the biggest city park in Europe. The world-famous Anglo-Iraqi architect, Dame Zaha Hadid, has designed the breathtaking lagoon setting for the EXPO, in which sky, sea, and land come together in stunning harmony. Over the course of the EXPO’s six months, the national pavilions will complement a scene of unique natural beauty.

And beautiful it will be. The site and its access facilities are being designed to be environmentally-friendly and to have a very low carbon footprint, in keeping with the highest 21st century standards. This will be a “green” EXPO, and work to enhance the local environment should ensure that the EXPO leaves İzmir and the sea around the site cleaner than before.

But the main focus is on health. İzmir 2020 EXPO is intended to go down as the largest-ever exhibition on health, medicine, and ensuring a better life for all. By doing what Expos have always done – helping the people of the world to pool their know-how and experience in a particular area - this EXPO is likely to help improve the lives of people everywhere, but particularly those in lower income countries who have until now perhaps not had enough access to modern medical services.

Why “health for all”? The explanation is simple. Two decades ago, Turkey had a rather inadequate health service, especially outside the country’s main metropolitan areas. But over the last decade, Turkey’s health services, imaginatively combining the private and public sectors and relying on a successful social insurance scheme to finance them, have surged forward. Now, more Turks than ever enjoy easy access to good medicine and health services, even in the countryside. Turkey is also now one of a number of countries whose ultra-modern hospitals attract “health tourists” from the West.

A few statistics give an idea of the changes that we have lived through in the last decade. Since 2003, the country’s health coverage rate has increased from 70 percent to 98 percent, while life expectancy has reached 74.5 years in 2011, over four years higher than the 2000 figure. Turks know that they have seen a dramatic improvement in their medical services: patient satisfaction went up by a remarkable 33.6 percent over seven years, reaching 76.1 percent in 2011.

Campaigns against some traditional causes of high mortality, like smoking and infant deaths, as well as obesity and diabetes have yielded remarkable results. A campaign against infant mortality in the countryside and villages between 2003 and 2011 brought Turkey’s infant mortality rate down from 28.5 to 7.7 per 1,000 births. An anti-smoking drive since 2006 has brought smoking down rapidly to 27 percent.

So now İzmir – and Turkey – would like to share their transformative experiences in health with the rest of the world, creating a platform for exchanging ideas with both the prosperous advanced industrial economies and the developing nations. The world’s largest countries tend to dominate EXPOs, but Izmir wants to ensure that smaller nations – and those most in need of improved health services - can also be represented if the World’s Fair is held there in 2020. After all, health care is the highest priority in countries which do not yet have sufficient access to it. It is therefore creating ways to help lower-income countries attend and benefit.

Among Izmir’s vibrant population, the campaign to support the EXPO bid is backed enthusiastically by business leaders, unionists, students, and NGOs. The city’s people see EXPO 2020 as a chance to put their city and the region around it firmly on the world’s map – and also to share an enviable and healthy lifestyle with the rest of the world. The sunshine of İzmir makes it possible for local farmers to grow three different kinds of crops a year, and Turkey’s Aegean region is overflowing with grains, fruits, wine, and perhaps most famously, high quality olive oil - the last of these is locally regarded as the secret of local longevity.

İzmir is also a city where different religions and communities exist in harmony side by side. If the EXPO is held there, it will be the first one to be held in a Muslim country, but in a city which rejoices in its diversity.

The city is very peaceful, being among the safest cities in the world. With nearly $50 billion investment for infrastructure and other related projects and nearly 30 million visitors expected, İzmir Expo would create a win-win situation, beneficial for everyone.

The excitement is growing. Work is continuing. People in İzmir and in the rest of Turkey are earnestly hoping they will win the vote in [Paris](http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/tag/Paris) next autumn. If they do, 2020 should see a major EXPO which may delight and astonish the world – and open the way to a healthier life for people everywhere.

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