

Turkish Canadian Youth Congress Attracted Great Interest

NOTRE ANATOLIE
TORONTO BUREAU

Second Annual Turkish Canadian Youth Congress was held in Toronto during the weekend of 16, 17 and 18 January, 2009. The Youth Congress organized by Council of Turkish Canadians attracted huge interest, with the attendance of more than 140 participants. Young Turkish Canadians and their friends came to the congress from all across Canada. There were delegates from Vancouver, Halifax, Montreal, Ottawa and Waterloo. A big majority of the youth participated from Toronto.

The congress which took place at the Delta Chelsea Hotel in downtown Toronto, started on 16 January Friday, at 6pm, with a reception. The guest of honour Turkish Ambassador to Canada, Mr. Rafet Akgunay made the opening speech and welcomed the youth to the conference. Mr. Akgunay emphasized the importance of Multiculturalism in Canada, the theme of the conference: **"Successful multiculturalism rests on mutual respect; and mutual respect comes from mutual understanding and dialogue."** Mr. Akgunay continued by saying that through the richness of multiculturalism we would be able to improve our collective wisdom. The ambassador also addressed the youth in Turkish and encouraged them to maintain and im-



rove their mother tongue, a definite asset in this age of globalization, which is being spoken by millions of people beyond the borders of Turkey.

"Next year's congress will take place in Montreal"

The conference continued on Saturday and Sunday, the 17th and 18th of January, with many speakers from academic and political domains. Dr. Umut Uzer and a member of Turkish Coalition of America, lawyer Mr. David Saltzman, came from United States to speak to the youth on Turkish Foreign Policy and Tur-

kish History, respectively. Hon. Dan McTeague, Member of Parliament from Pickering-Scarborough East was among the speakers. Mr. McTeague urged the

young Canadians to get involved in politics. One of the stars of the conference was Nil Köksal, a reporter with CBC Morning News. Another young and bright Turkish Canadian, Ayda Eke, an M.A. on Human Rights was a huge hit with the young audience. Public relations expert Gail Haarsma made a presentation on

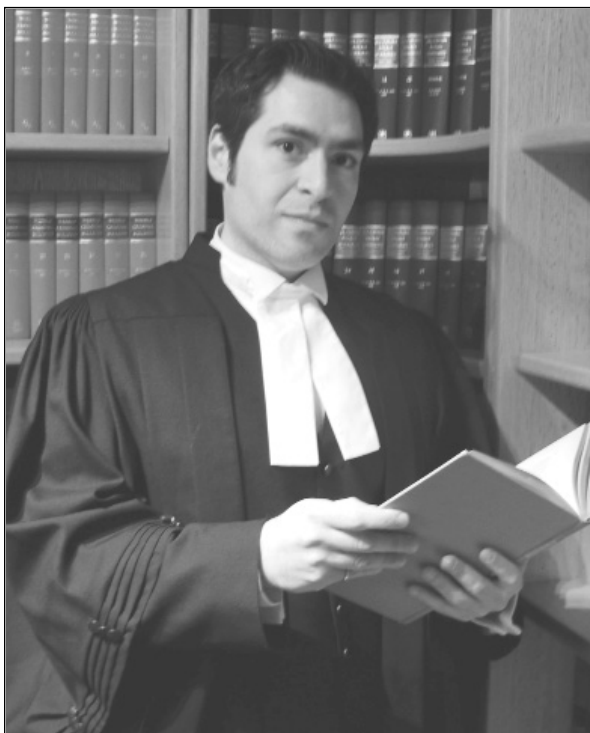
how Canadians view Turkey and Turkish people. Other guest speakers included Demir Delen, Prof. Murat Saatcioglu, Prof. Ozay Mehmet, Hon. Gar Knutson, Dilek Kayaalp, Michael A. Dobbin, Dr. Ertugrul Alp and Yaman Uzumeri.

Throughout the congress, where young people got a chance to meet one another and socialize, the engagement level stayed high and the interaction with the presenters seemed to be the most desired activity. Many delegates, in the evaluation forms, said that they wished for longer Q&A sessions in future conferences. Executive Director of Council of Turkish Canadians, Lale Eskicioglu told Bizim Anadolu that the youth, while being very happy and appreciative of the conference, had not hold back on their constructive criticism in the feedback forms. **"Ninety eight percent of them said that they would like to attend future conferences and that they would encourage their friends to do so as well. Seventy three percent said that they would like to participate in organizing future conferences. Then they listed what they want and how they want it. We will listen to them."** said Lale Eskicioglu. **"They demand younger presenters and contemporary topics. They want to be a part of the planning as well. This is great news. Next year we will do it together with them. Or rather, they will do it and we will help them."**

Lale Eskicioglu concluded by saying that the youth had already started forming a Youth Conference Planning Committee to organize next year's congress which will take place in Montreal. **"We did the first one in Ottawa, and the second one in Toronto,"** said CTC president Dr. Kevser Taymaz, **"It is only natural that the next one should be in Montreal. We hope to take this great event to a different town every year."**

What did the youth say about the Second Turkish Canadian Youth Congress:

- I would like to see more young scholars presenting in future conferences.
- The general atmosphere of the conference was great, perfect location and very good organization.
- The people I met and the topics that were presented were really valuable. I would like to keep in touch with all these people.
- The sessions should be more interactive. Youth should be involved in the organization.
- It was an amazing experience for me. Thank you so much for giving me this opportunity to learn about this wonderful country.
- At the end of the first day of the conference, there should be an organization for the participants that include dinner, music and dance.
- I would like to have more discussions and workshops with people I don't know.
- The conference was perfectly organized, however, in order to collaborate more with the other Turkish delegates from different cities, there should be more activities that would bring them together. For example, on Saturday night there could be a dinner at a Turkish restaurant.
- I appreciate the fact that there were so many speakers with extraordinary backgrounds and in high positions of different organizations.
- The conference environment was very friendly. Since this is a youth conference there should be more young presenters. Also, I'd like to see more young volunteers.
- In addition to annual conferences, there should be more frequent, local meetings.



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