



## ENTERTAINMENT

# TURKEY PLAYING ITS A-GAME

With an active gamer population in excess of 20 million, Turkey ranks among the top ten countries worldwide

BY CAN GÖRSÜ

**I**N PARALLEL WITH THE relentless pace of technological advancement, the games industry likewise grows every day. The size of the industry worldwide is reaching record levels, together with its contribution to supporting industries. One of the youngest industries in the world with a history of only 30 years, the games industry, has already left the much older film and music industries behind with an estimated \$80 billion volume. Due to the lack of comprehensive studies, experts say this figure is just the tip of the iceberg and that the industry's true size exceeds

\$100 billion. Whatever the industry's specific size may be, it's clear that it developed at a much faster rate than expected. A 2009 report by PwC, Global Entertainment, and Media Outlook predicted very modestly that the size of the industry in 2012 would be just \$68 billion—clearly too modestly for this fast-growing, young industry, which is becoming more and more important for Turkey, one of the world's youngest countries.

One of the most important features of the industry is that it is remarkably tolerant of crises in comparison to other industries. The industry



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escaped the global economic crisis with minimal damage, a fact proven best by its growth. "The entertainment industry is always growing because people always need to have fun," says SOBEE Studios CEO and Digital Games Federation of Turkey (TUDOF) President Mevlüt Dinç. "Entertainment is an inescapable need." People need entertainment most when they are under stress. More than one billion people worldwide play games on their computers, consoles, or cellphones. According to figures provided by the Entertainment Software Association (ESA), Turkey ranks among the top ten countries in the world with more than 20 million active gamers.

The games industry in Turkey, though new, exploits this large segment of gamers together with the country's generally young population to develop very quickly. "Turkey is a country that likes to play

games," says Emek Kepenek, director of Middle East Technical University (METU) Tech-Atom. There are more than 31 million Facebook users in Turkey, and more than 70% of them play games, he says. According to data released by Facebook, Turkey ranks seventh in terms of users, with Istanbul coming in third as a city with 7.5 million users. The relatively low cost for which Facebook games and applications allow individuals to develop without having to invest large amounts to enter the market. These low barriers of entry are also behind the games industry's shift toward mobile platforms. But it's not just about the little guys—Facebook is gaining importance as a lucrative platform for the industry's heavyweights as well.

"I Man 1 Team", a management game Sobee Studios developed for the Facebook platform, is one of the most recent examples of this phenomenon. Founded by the renowned game developer Mevlüt Dinç, who entered the industry as it was being born in the 1980s, Sobee Studios was later bought by Türk Telekom—one of Turkey's leading tech companies—and today continues with more strength behind it than ever before. "Istanbul Kıyamet Vakti", which was the first online game made in Turkey, and "I Can Football", the first soccer game that could be played 11 to 11 online, are just a few of the successful games the company gave to the industry. "Istanbul Kıyamet Vakti", which has more than one million registered users, notably features a realistic rendition of the city of Istanbul and its historical buildings. Game development companies in Turkey have been advancing rapidly since

2010, and they are growing in number by the day.

Many of Turkey's leading universities are establishing academic programs and game development centers inside their technological parks in order to support the games industry. One of these is the Animation Technologies and Game Development Center established within Middle Eastern Technical University in Ankara, METU Tech-Atom. Founded with the purpose of preventing the loss of creative ideas in games and animation, the center serves as a successful bridge between academia and industry. Emek Kepenek says, "Seven of the companies established in Turkey are companies that were created thanks to the support provided by METU Tech-Atom." He adds, "In a short time, thanks to its talented young population, Turkey will soon become a country that will be able to compete with the rest of the world." The companies established within the center are already among the world's best.

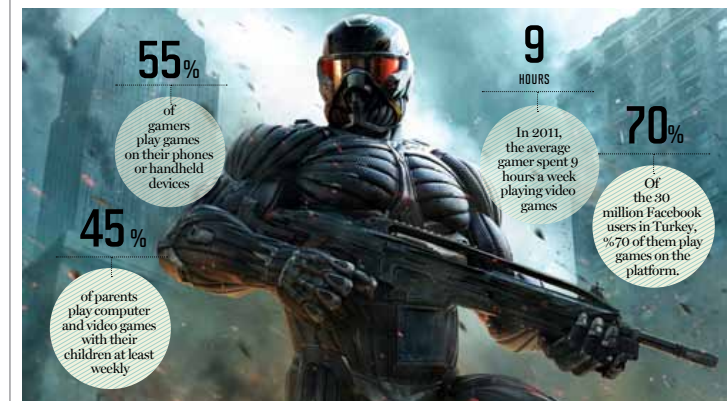
One Turkish game called "Mount & Blade: Warband", named one of the best 100 games ever by PC Gamer, entered the ranks of the top ten best-selling games on



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the Steam platform, which is the world's largest and most popular digital games storefront and distribution system. İkisoft Software Company/TaleWorlds, which was born inside METU Tech-Atom, has been exporting its games for years now. Ali Erkin, the company's director of communications, says, "We develop our games completely with local engineers in our studio, which is founded within METU Tech-Atom," and he tells us of the successes they achieved in an international arena where global giants wield budgets expressed in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Canada, Europe, China, Australia, and most especially the USA account for 98% of TaleWorlds' sales.

Another leader in the Turkish games industry is CeiPrime Entertainment, the creator of such games as "Umaykut Online", "Céiron Wars: Origins", and "Sovereign Symphony Online", with a total of more than 2.5 million online subscribers. CeiPrime Entertainment Chairman Erkan Bayol says they opened offices in America and Russia to scout for game developers from all over the world. Their plan is to publish the games they de-





velop first in Russia and then with partners in Germany, Poland, North America, and the rest of Europe, he states. Numerous companies have realized Turkey's potential, too, and have started preparations to enter Turkey themselves.

The first company that contacted TUDOF for this purpose was Riot Games, which holds the rights to League of Legends, one of the world's most popular games. The company, which opened an office in Turkey in



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2012, is not alone in noticing Turkey's potential—Blizzard Entertainment, the world's third-largest games company, announced that it was looking to hire Turkish-speaking developers. Despite entering this race comparatively late, Turkey is clearly rising rapidly toward the top. Always known for accomplishing firsts, Turkey is also preparing to make waves worldwide with the world's first digital gaming olympics under the leadership of TUDOF.



**ERKAN BAYOL**

Chairman, C&I Prime Entertainment A.Ş.

Our most important plan concerning the near future is to enter the mobile gaming segment. We have ideas both for our current game, C&I Wars, and for new projects. For this reason, we are expanding our team. Furthermore, our efforts to become a publisher that will publish other companies' games first in Turkey and then the EMEA region are in the works, too.



**ALİ ERKİN**

Communications Director, İkisoft Software Company/TaleWorlds

Continuing our successful game series, which has become a recognized brand abroad, is among our essential goals. Games are developing rapidly in the mobile field too, today. We have some mobile projects that we are thinking of realizing in time. Hopefully, we will present games that will be successful worldwide in this area, too, to gamers as soon as possible.



**EMEK KEPENEK**

Director, METU Tech-Atom

As METU Tech-Atom, we await our new entrepreneurs and prepare a term in which there is intense training for them. This year, we are receiving applications in the mobile applications field, too, for the first time ever. We partnered with Turkcell Technology. An intense process of support now awaits our entrepreneurs. Additionally, we received project support for the games industry from the Ankara Development Agency. An industry report was prepared for this project, and we are conducting efforts to establish a training academy specific to the industry.



**MEVLÜT DİNC**

CEO, SOBEE Studios, and President, Digital Games Federation of Turkey

As Sobee, we place a lot of importance on edutainment. "Süpercan," a character we created, is a character made so that children can learn about and gain awareness of important subjects as they have fun. We plan for all the games to take place in historical locations in Turkey. We want both our own children and foreigners to get to know Turkey as they play games. Soon, we will bring the games to other languages, too. Additionally, we are focusing on efforts concerning many different platforms such as mobile, Facebook, and Kinect.



**BARIŞ ÖZİSTEK**

CEO, JOY GAME

The industry is growing rapidly and Turkey is one of the few countries which stand out in terms of growth in online games industry. Today Turkey, Brazil and Poland is being talked in the world. We are a star in terms of growth pace but the market is not big enough yet. So there is too much work to do. Because it is accurate that the potential is very high.