




## THE INDUSTRY OF JOY

Though the games industry in Turkey is very young, it is developing quickly and holds a significant share particularly in the Middle Eastern market. Turkish companies are expected to be competitive players in the games market, one of the fastest-growing markets in the world, within a few years. Currently, the industry leader in Turkey is Joygame, with Barış Özistek at the helm as CEO.

BY ALİ HALİT DİKER

**T**HE VIDEO GAMES industry is one of several new areas to emerge in Turkey during the past decade and develop rapidly. The games industry in Turkey is worth roughly \$300 million. Joygame is the largest company in Turkey's games industry. It was founded in 2009, locally funded in full, and today it is a leading company in the Turkish and Middle Eastern market. Since 2011, Joygame—a developer and publisher of massively multiplayer first-person shooters and role-playing games, as well as mobile games—has been under the leadership of Barış Özistek as CEO. Something happened this year that would accelerate Joygame's expansion beyond Turkey and the Middle East to the

global market—on May 24, 2013, CJ Games, the world's second-largest mobile games company, purchased a 50% share of Joygame with a \$15 million investment. “Modoo Marble,” the first fruit of this partnership, was released worldwide on September 13. A localized version was developed for the Turkish market. Also recently, “Battle of Immortals,” a massively multiplayer online role-playing game, was released in beta form to the delight of gamers around the world.

### FROM ZERO TO HERO

When Joygame was founded in 2009, it was a small company. One of the few entirely locally funded companies to enter Turkey's games market, Joygame grew with leaps

and bounds over the course of four years. At the time of its founding, all the games companies with popular, mass-audience games were nonnative companies investing in the region. Joygame, now Turkey's leading games company, has offices in three countries and plans to open another office soon in Dubai. The Middle East is an important market to Joygame, says Barış Özistek. He adds that as the company exhibits growth paralleling that of the market in Turkey, it is growing even faster—much faster—in the Middle Eastern and North African markets in particular.

One of the most important reasons behind the rapid growth of Joygame and the widespread appeal of the games it publishes is that these games, most of which are developed in Asia, are proven successes in their markets of origin. Instead of translating the games into Turkish directly or from English, however, Joygame focuses on meticulous localization, working with its own design and programming crews. For instance, “Wolfteam”—a massively multiplayer online first-person shooter—features “maps” of Taksim and Topkapı Palace in Istanbul: the fact that such localized maps (as added by Joygame) can be added to a game developed by a Korean games company is among the reasons why it gained popularity in the Middle Eastern market. Another game localized for the Turkish market is “ZombiRock.” The members of the Turkish rock band maNga worked in Joygame's studios during the process. Gamers are able to select and play as members of the band. Another Joygame-published game, “Goley,” features Sabri Ugan, one of Turkey's best-known voice actors.



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Clearly, localization is an important aspect that influences the popularity of a game in the market in which it is released. Özistek says it takes around four to eight months to localize a game. Throughout this process, the game is tested continually against inconsistencies and errors. Joygame's biggest localization challenge and longest-running project so far is "Battle of Immortals"—it took a year and a half to finish the localization process. "It was almost as arduous as developing the game from scratch," says Özistek.

Quickly rising up the ladder of success through its localization and marketing strategies, Joygame became a leader in the Turkish, Middle Eastern, and North European games markets. This led to a partnership agreement with CJ Games of South Korea, which was signed on May 24. Joygame's first global release, "Modoo Marble," developed by CJ Games, is one of the most successful games in the Asian market. The South Korean company entrusted the game's title and distribution rights to Joygame, believing in Joygame's ability to handle a global marketing campaign. Özistek expresses hope that the CJ Games partnership will produce the result of Joygame becoming a leading player in the European and South American markets.

#### THE GAMES MARKET IN 2023

In Turkey, video games are considered part of the IT sector. Worldwide, however, they are seen as part of the entertainment industry. The likes of television and cinema magnates such as Warner Bros. and Walt Disney have made significant investments in the video games market as of late.

Özistek says video games do not contribute much to the current \$35 billion volume of Turkey's IT sector yet, but he adds that the industry's rapid development could provide a great boost to the \$160 billion export target set for the IT sector. "When what is essentially zero today is doubled or tripled, this contribution will be much easier to grasp."

One of the requirements for Turkey's \$160 billion export target in the IT sector by 2023 is to increase the rate of software investment from 20% to 50%. This would contribute to growth in game development as well. Additionally, the Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Economy, and TÜBİTAK are providing significant incen-



tives to the games industry in every stage from development to marketing. Özistek says that while certain aspects may be overlooked, it is possible for the games industry to obtain state support in every stage of the process. Therefore, though this support contributes significantly to the development of the games industry, further optimization is necessary. As an example, Özistek points to South Korea—once China duplicated Korea's system, it became one of the world's top three games exporters



#### ONE OF THE RISKIEST INVESTMENTS

Though the games industry may appear to present a delightful and relaxed working environment, it is one of the riskiest areas of investment. Particularly if a game developed from scratch is unable to reach its targets in the market, nearly all of the investment may have to be written off as a loss. Investing in games is not like building a factory, says Özistek: "If a factory project fails, you could still recover as much as 80 percent of your investment."

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over the course of six or seven years through its support of the industry. Key to South Korea's strategy is not only material support but also expert crews dedicated to improving the field, offering training to companies through state institutions. For instance, when a company starts developing a new game in South Korea, state-assigned engineers come to examine the game, design an optimal server configuration needed for it, and test it. The state's support thus reduces the cost to buy or lease the required expertise and qualified expert consulting. Such policies to support the video games industry could be optimized in Turkey, too. This would contribute significantly toward the objective of becoming a global leader in a \$75 billion worldwide market.

According to Özistek, the entry into the Turkish market of such companies as Crytek—responsible for several AAA blockbusters—and their pursuit of local production and exports will contribute both to the development of the games industry in Turkey and toward a larger role in the global games market.

One of Joygame's dreams is to develop a massively multiplayer online role-playing game based on Ottoman history. This would require a team of 100–150, three to four years of production time, and an investment of \$15–20 million. The talent and capital needed to develop such a game from scratch is not yet available in Turkey, says Özistek. With Joygame's partnership with CJ Games, however, they might be able to turn this dream into a reality sooner than thought, he indicates, but he adds that a start date for such a project has not yet been set.