



Turkey's International Cooperation, Expertise and Forward Vision in Aviation

In this exclusive Aviation Turkey interview, Suat Hayri Aka, the Permanent Representative of Turkish Republic of Turkey to the International Civil Aviation Organization discusses how Turkey's active participation in international cooperation is building national visibility with a target to become a member of the Council and Aviation Navigation Commission. The next Council members will be elected in 2022 in the elections at the General Assembly and preparations are underway engaging the ICAO community as well as Turkey to join back with Council membership.

✈️ Aviation Turkey: Mr. Suat Hayri Aka, you have assumed the role of the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Turkey to the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and we wish you success in your new position. Could you please briefly introduce yourself to our readers?

Suat Hayri Aka: Thank you. I was appointed as the Ambassador - Permanent Representative of the Republic of Turkey to the ICAO with the Presidential decree dated December 7, 2019 and I took office in Montreal on January 1, 2020.

Previously, I was working

in the Ministry of Transport. I served as a Deputy Undersecretary between 2006 and 2016 and as Undersecretary of the Ministry since 2016. While I was Deputy Undersecretary, I was responsible for the aviation and maritime sectors and our Ministry's Foreign Relations and EU affairs, and related departments. When I became an Undersecretary, my responsibilities also included matters such as the construction and regulation of Highways and Railways, as well as Communication and Information Technologies and Satellites.

✈️ Aviation Turkey: Mr. Aka, you have had an important professional Maritime career. In addition, you assumed responsibilities in the field of Aviation and Air Transportation in the past as well. What would you like to say about this?

Suat Hayri Aka: Yes, I assumed various roles in various branches of maritime, both during my education and as a long part of my professional career. I worked at sea as a seafarer, lectured at various universities for many years as an academician, engaged in maritime trade at various fields on my own behalf for 16 years

and I've served as an executive in top levels of management during the last 13 years. This is a long career in transportation. I became familiar with Aviation in 2006 after I was appointed as Deputy Undersecretary. Although I had some hesitation at the outset, I had the chance to learn and accommodate myself to aviation rather quickly thanks to the operational and technical similarities in the Maritime and Aviation sectors.

Maritime is a much older discipline than aviation; it has a history of more than two thousand years, whereas aviation

is a discipline and service industry developed in the last 150 years. A branch developed in many aspects being inspired by maritime rules and procedures in areas such as law, technique, operation, security and safety. Life, Property and Environment safety and security constitute the core of the basic rules considered as the constitution of both branches.

I can say that being a licenced Ocean Going Master is one of the factors supporting this rapid adaptation.

As one of the decision makers on behalf of



Dr. Fang Liu - ICAO Secretary General met with Suat Hayri Aka

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the Ministry for 12 years, I was involved in the activities of the General Directorate of Civil Aviation and the State Airports Authority. We worked closely with Turkish Airlines, our private airline companies, service organizations delivering ground services etc., and with sectoral non-governmental organizations at all times. We teamed up with our stakeholders on issues such as planning and construction of airports, training, supervision, authorization and certification of airline companies, negotiations and decisions for national and international flights, aviation safety and security, and international cooperation.

Many issues such as safety, environment, education, licensing, traffic and supervision are highly similar, but when you look at the two sectors together, you see that the relative speed is very high. This requires a new way of thinking, a new approach in most cases.

In addition, areas such as unmanned aerial vehicles, the use of artificial intelligence in aviation, high-altitude operations, novel technologies and cyber security

contain unprecedented opportunities and risks as well. I also have the opportunity to improve my know-how on such issues.

✈️ Aviation Turkey: As of January 1, 2020, you assumed a significant role during a time when Turkey had lost its membership in ICAO Council. Could you please inform us briefly about the current daily activities of the Permanent Representation, duties and responsibilities, and organizational structure?

Suat Hayri Aka: First of all, I would like to point out that Turkey did not lose its Council membership; Turkey did not nominate at own request. This was because of an organization made within the European ECAC group in the previous period. While I was the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Transport, Maritime Affairs and Communication, Turkey was elected as the Council member of in 2016. we carried out collaborative work for this goal together with our Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Turkey was elected the Council member after 66 years.

Turkey, however, has maintained its position among the leading countries globally

thanks to its location on the route of the world's busiest air transportation, as well as the success of its airlines. Of course, the achievements of our regulatory bodies and airport administrations should not be disregarded. In our activities, we focus primarily on providing a representation equivalent to this leading position in the ICAO and having a voice in the ICAO's decision-making bodies.

We say Turkey should and will become a member of the Council and Aviation Navigation Commission, which determine the global civil aviation standards and take important decisions. The next Council members will be elected in 2022 at the General Assembly, in which 193 member countries will attend. We strive to work on the ICAO community as well as Turkey to join back with Council membership.

Additionally, we inform our sector and institutions about the developments in the ICAO, and we exert utmost efforts to incorporate in their contributions with their expertise and experience in the activities of the ICAO. This is a very important point, since

national visibility has enormous significance in the preparation of the Council elections I just mentioned.

✈️ Aviation Turkey: What will Turkey's vision be towards its Council membership again in 2023? What would you like to tell about the process and the planned campaigns?

Suat Hayri Aka: The process for the Council elections in the ICAO is different than those in the other UN agencies like IMO and others. First, it depends on the consensus reached within the regional organizations that the states are a member of. At this stage we will strive to achieve a general consensus in the European Civil Aviation Conference (ECAC) for Turkey to become a member in the Council. As a strong member of the European civil aviation community, we do not want to achieve an election success "despite" our European counterparts. Even though many Europeans allied states take Turkey's membership to the Council naturally, it can sometimes be difficult to ensure the reflection of a collective consensus to the elections. The only way to achieve this is to engage



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in genuine dialogue and uninterrupted exchange of views. It is our success that our country is effective and is not ignored, however being fair enough not to ignore this success is the duty of our European allied states. In addition, there is an alternative for us to withdraw from the regional formations and participate in the elections as an independent candidate.

If an agreement is reached regarding the Council elections within the ECAC, the votes of the European region would be towards backing Turkey's membership to the Council. But of course, the number of votes is not enough for us to be elected. The ECAC has 44 members; you need to get over 110 votes to be elected. At this point, we plan to carry out campaigns before all ICAO stakeholders in coordination with our Ministry of Foreign

Affairs. We have bilateral, multilateral relations with each country and every region, we have economic, military, commercial cooperation, we are the members of international organizations other than the ICAO and we have highly structured relations with various stakeholders.

We will contribute to conducting a membership campaign for 2022, the details of which will be designated by our institutions taking into account these factors, as in the process that lead up to our Council membership in 2016. We will strive to inform our institutions on all processes, from political decision-making, to ECAC consensus, campaign preparations, campaign conduct and the policies we will follow during our membership period.

✈️ Aviation Turkey: What are the activities being carried out

by the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Turkey to the ICAO regarding the participation of Turkish associates in the ICAO's processes and organizations for aviation safety and security?

Suat Hayri Aka: The role of our experts on Turkey's achievement in civil aviation is incontrovertible. We really owe much to the work discipline and dedication of our expert staff. We want to contribute to expanding our experts' vision and to increase their professional experience by making use of the international working environment that the ICAO offers and the global portfolio it has, and in doing so, we want them to take an active role in setting global aviation standards.

There are two methods for the assignment of our experts in the ICAO; one

of them is the assignment in the Organization's units provided that the costs are covered by Turkey (i.e. secondment) and the other is the acceptance by the ICAO as a contracted employee. In the last decades, more than 10 experts have served in the Headquarter and regional offices of the ICAO through the secondment method. In order to increase this figure, it is our duty to maintain Turkey's active position and good relations in the ICAO. It is also our responsibility to be in close communication with the top management of the Organization, to act as a bridge between them and our institutions, and to conduct negotiations to propose the most suitable candidates for vacant positions within the ICAO.

I am pleased to say that our officers that who are temporarily

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assigned to ICAO units through secondment are appreciated for their work discipline, performance and good communication skills, and their term of office is requested to be extended by the Secretary General. Our institutions evaluate such extension requests as per their personnel requirements. We want to increase this figure.

✈️ Aviation Turkey: Dear Ambassador, Montreal is a very important center where all stakeholders performing activities in the field of aviation are able to work in areas in addition to Permanent Representation, and aviation experts from Turkey also work at different levels and posts in the ICAO. What do you think about the number of Turkish employees, their level and status, and their effectiveness in contributing to ICAO processes? Do you have plans for improvement in these areas?

Suat Hayri Aka: As you said, in Montreal there are organizations established by states such as the European Union, as well as representatives of sectoral associations. The most commonly recognized organizations of this type are the International Air Transport Association (IATA), the Airport Council International

(ACI World) and the Civil Air Navigation Services Organization (CANSO). There are nearly 50 civil sector organizations invited to ICAO activities. Currently, there are four Turkish specialists working at the IATA, one of which is at the executive level.

I should also mention here about the effectiveness of such organizations in ICAO processes. In the ICAO, it is almost compulsory to involve industry organizations in the process of setting aviation standards. At the end of the day, there are not only national official civil aviation regulators among the implementing agencies to implement the related norms you set here; there are also operators (the private sector in many countries), airport terminal operators, air navigation service providers, and of course aircraft manufacturers. These sector organizations participating in ICAO activities express their opinions on behalf of the sector they represent during the decision-making process. They make very significant contributions.

Also, while setting or updating a standard, a consultation process called "State Letter

Consultation" is followed. In this process, the ICAO does not only receive written opinions from member states, it also receives contributions from sector organizations. These organizations do not have the right to vote like a member state, but their contributions may, in some cases, be more effectual than member states.

The success of our country's operators and airport terminal operators necessitates them to be active in global organizations in this field and requires the assignment of our experts there. As an addition to what I have just said about our experts working in the IATA, we also want our experienced personnel working in airport operations to work at institutions like ACI for example, in order to make Turkey's competent staff more visible. We have just made initial contacts to this end.

✈️ Aviation Turkey: What is the number of Turkish employees currently working at the ICAO? What is the ratio of the permanent staff on the ICAO payroll? If we accept the Secretary General's position as the top level, what is the level of the Turkish employees?

Suat Hayri Aka: Currently, 2 experts work in the central units of the ICAO and 2 in the European and North Atlantic Office in Paris, under a secondment method. In addition, as permanent staff - even if not directly from the aviation industry - the ICAO's Internal Audit Director (Lead Auditor) is our citizen. The Lead Auditor is a member of the Senior Executive Group where the Secretariat's important decisions are taken.

Here, there is a point to which I would like to draw attention. The fact that we become more active in organizations such as the ICAO, IATA, ACI World and CANSO depends on the increase in the number of our qualified aviation experts. As you would appreciate, a country becomes capable to train more personnel for such organizations only after it reaches the level of managing its own expert needs. Today, human resources strategies are being discussed and global initiatives are being taken that can support the increasing demand for air transportation worldwide. Our country also takes an active attitude under the initiative of "Next Generations of Aviation Professionals" initiated by the ICAO and it also

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involves its academic institutions in the process. Making and keeping the sector attractive for the new generation is a matter of comprehensive planning, training and investment. In this context, we continue to make awareness-raising contacts for our institutions and stakeholders.

✈️ Aviation Turkey: As a result of the New Type Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, which is a global pandemic, we see that the aviation industry is affected the most by this crisis. Many airlines have grounded their aircraft and flights have been suspended to many countries. What activities are being carried out within the ICAO to address this crisis? What are the responsibilities that you assume as the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Turkey to the ICAO for this kind of disaster and state of emergency?

Suat Hayri Aka: First of all, we have to say that in the ICAO, like many other organizations such as the United Nations, many member states have been going through an unprecedented crisis, the aftermath of which is difficult to predict. Even though the ICAO has established the Crisis Response Policy based on



such events and disasters that civil aviation previously managed to overcome, such as Ebola and SARS, the novel Coronavirus stands as an uncommon challenge before us. What will happen in civil aviation in this regard depends very much on the decisions to be taken at national level on public health and economic performance. On the other hand, national governments make their decisions almost instantaneously as per the developments and findings. In a nutshell, a complete uncertainty prevails.

In this context, the ICAO has multidimensional functions. The Council -the political decision-making body- made a declaration on this matter. In its call, it stressed the importance

of ensuring that response actions and measures are based on science and facts, expressed strong support for the calls by the World Health Organization (WHO) and affirmed the importance of strengthening international cooperation and solidarity.

The Collaborative Arrangement for the Prevention and Management of Public Health Events in Civil Aviation (CAPSCA) has already been established here, which is a concrete contribution of the ICAO in the field of international cooperation, is a network in which states, non-governmental organizations and United Nations institutions participate, and it is a platform for effective sharing of current data.

The ICAO Secretariat

also conducts awareness-raising and informative activities for all stakeholders to ensure that ICAO standards are fully implemented under the current circumstances. It opens some points for discussion in relevant units whether the Chicago Convention and its annexes need to be updated, and the ways in which they are rearranged bring about better results, and it reinforces international and cross-industry dialogues.

In addition, the ICAO's Air Transport Bureau assesses the economic effects of the pandemic, its potential impacts on the industry and possible consequences for the global economy. As you know, according to the organizations working on the data and

forecasts in this regard, one-unit value created in the civil aviation industry reveals as a growth of 3.25 units in the overall economy. In other words, the contraction of this industry results in a larger contraction with a multiplier effect on the overall economy.

In its economic impact studies, the ICAO conducts analysis based on the SARS and Ebola virus outbreaks that previously emerged and affected the world and strives to develop some possible inferences according to good and bad results by creating scenarios through the data received from institutions and operators of member states. However, as I mentioned previously, COVID-19 is an unprecedented pandemic. Since its course and the policies of the states towards it vary, what it will bring for the future of civil aviation remains unclear.

Our duty as a national delegation is also to inform our country's institutions on all these developments, to encourage the active participation of our country in the international cooperation process, and to transparently inform the international civil aviation organization about the measures taken in Turkey and the background.



Suat Hayri Aka

✈️ Aviation Turkey: Mr. Suat Hayri Aka, is there any message you would like to convey to Aviation Turkey readers?

Suat Hayri Aka: Firstly, I wish mercy to all our citizens who lost their lives due to the pandemic and I extend my condolences to their families. I would like to express my gratitude to all our healthcare workers. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to our aviation workers working under great risks for their dedication.

I would like to convey three messages to your readers. Firstly, I advise them to realize the meaning that civil aviation has for the world and humanity. Against the adverse point of view about the aviation to led to the spread of COVID-19, we should bring to mind the impossibilities that occurred due to the

flight cancellations, and the emerging "black market" transportation alternatives during the volcanic eruptions in Iceland in 2010. We should keep our confidence in the positive contributions of civil aviation. We should bear in mind that if this sector shrinks, it means many other sectors also shrink or even disappear.

My second message is for young professionals and educators and trainers. One of the sectors that will maintain its effectiveness as long as the human species survive on earth will undoubtedly be the logistics sector. I advise them to consider the latest trends of this sector and contribute to the policies that will bring success to our country for training the new generation professionals together. Our country can be a center for

training Next Generation of Aviation Professionals (NGAP); the Turkish Civil Aviation Academy (TCCA) exists for this objective; the training centers of our operators can lead us to a new position in the international arena.

Lastly, I would like to say that I attach particular importance to the activities of media that have a significant role in informing the public about developments in air transportation like you and I wish them to continue. Aviation Turkey Magazine plays a key role in this sense and fills a gap. On this occasion, I would like to convey my sincere regards to your team. I would be glad to cooperate with you as the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Turkey to the ICAO 🇹🇷