

A FIRST FOR TURKEY

Serkan Oral is well-known as a journalist in Turkey, having won a string of awards in his journalistic career and written a number of books. As Editor in Chief of Turkey's TV network **6News**, he has stirred up the Turkish media scene with 6News' international multi-lingual format and pioneering use of 3G technology



left Ankara University with a masters degree in journalism in 1994 and since then have worked in both TV and the press reporting, presenting, writing, editing, directing and producing. In 2008 Mr Mehmet Kurt set up private news channel 6news in Turkey and I joined 6News shortly afterwards as Editor in Chief.

My interest has always been international news – I have worked in some of the most problematic regions of the world, countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan, Cuba, Iraq. But there have also been other highlights: I reported for 6news when President Obama was elected president of the United States.

What's the concept behind 6news?

6News looks at the world from Turkey, and at the same time follows the global viewpoint on Turkey very closely so it plays a crucial role as a regional provider of news and information.

Turkey is a region with a rich and varied heritage – from a historical, political and religious perspective. As it says in our mission statement on the website, at 6News we care about diversity, we believe in bringing civilisations together and see dialogue as the path to creating a more tolerant world. For Turkey specifically, it means dialogue with neighbouring countries. When I took over as

Editor in Chief I put more focus on key interviews, and in our output we give priority to stories which contribute to trust and peace in the global structuring of the 21st century. The first year has been good – we got more attention than we expected.

Why did you choose the multi-lingual approach?

We are like the United Nations – we have people from 13 different countries working at 6News. That's very different to the other TV networks in Turkey. We currently broadcast in English, Turkish, Russian and Arabic. The choice was for obvious reasons. Russia is a neighbour of ours and there are Russian-speaking countries in Central Asia. In many regions close to Turkey people speak Arabic, and North Africa is very important for us. English is an international language of course, Turkish for Turkey.

In the 21st century we are becoming a global village and it is very important for people to better understand one another. We plan to increase the number of languages to six in the very near future.

How does this four language format work in practice?

We are live 24 hours. Besides the news bulletins we are broadcasting certain programmes in different languages. We have time slots for

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6News was the first network in Turkey to use 3G technology

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each of the languages, say for example English at 10 o'clock, Arabic at 11 o'clock, and then Russian at 12 o'clock, and so on. The length of language slots varies – it might be an hour or three hours. We don't broadcast in four languages at the same time but we have subtitles and we have simultaneous translation for captioning so the output percentage per language also depends on what's happening in the world on any given day.

How many staff work in your Istanbul headquarters?

We have about 130 people – and correspondents around the world. We have our own bureaux in London, New York, Washington and Moscow, and correspondents in African and Central Asian cities. We are increasing that number to other capitals. We also use freelance journalists from different parts of the world.

Looking at your news content, what are your priorities?

We try to be objective, to see the two sides of the coin. The top priority is to bring peace to the region, so we are careful not to be controversial, not to offend anyone. We are trying to unite, not divide people. In terms of editorial perspective for all the four languages that we broadcast in – say if there are three big news



stories breaking today - we place different stress on different stories in each language output. So if it's a story that's important for the Arab world, then we emphasize the story more in the Arab bulletins.

We also cover a wide range of non-news topics as well - from health and lifestyle to design and travel - and we have talk shows in English and Turkish hosting ex-pats as well as politicians, visiting musicians and other personalities in the arts. But first and foremost we are a news channel, so the main thrust is news.

Among the special news programmes that we broadcast, one is a retransmission from CNN International - *News with Clint DeLoatch* - every weekday. There is my programme about politics and international relations called 'Change with Serkan Oral', and also Turkey's first White House correspondent, Ozlem Temiz, has a news programme on 6News.

What platforms are you available on?

You can watch 6News all over the world. Coverage via internet streaming is from the Chinese border to the Adriatic, and from North Africa to Scandinavia the channel is carried on the Turkish cable system, and through the whole region with Turksat 3A and Turksat 2A. We have viewers in Armenia, Europe, Iran, Afghanistan. We are getting viewer feedback

from all over the world, via emails, and we'll have the first set of viewing figures in early 2010.

How do you use the online platform?

The internet is part of our strategy to communicate and connect with viewers. It's been successful - we won an award from Aydin University in Turkey for the best news Internet website. At the moment, you can watch our channel live on the web, but it's not interactive yet and it's not at the level that we want. With 3G technology we are going to be on the iPod and BlackBerry.

What about 3G technology?

6News was the first network in Turkey to utilise 3G technology, and this was covered extensively by the Turkish press. It caused quite a stir and now other major national networks have begun to use 3G in their news reporting. I have used 3G mobile phone broadcasting for live reporting from around the world, for example during the US elections and the Royal Ascot races.

Do you have strategic partners?

ABC News and Russia Today are our main content partners at the moment, RT in English and Arabic. These partnerships are very important for us. 6News has a close working relationship with ABC News. We provide interviews for use by ABC News, and we also

▲ Left: Serkan Oral in front of the White House with, left, Gunay Evinch, Director of the Turkish-US Friendship Association and Omer Taspinar from Brookings Institute
Above: Bosphorus Bridge, Istanbul

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broadcast their news programmes, and breaking news. Our broadcast cooperation agreement with Russia Today encompasses exchanging news, products, and documentaries. Recently we worked together on an interview with Nobel Prize winner Orhan Pamuk, and an exclusive interview with the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. We also produce shows for RT when they are in Turkey and in the region.

What's your business model?

We are a private broadcaster. The owner is Turkish businessman Mr. Mehmet Kurt, he is financing 6News network. We also have income from commercials and sponsors for individual programmes.

Let's look at the media scene in Turkey in general...

The big media conglomerates in Turkey are changing hands, new players are coming onto the scene. Some of them look as though they are on the side of the government. Turkey is very rich with regard to TV networks - there are over 100 TV networks, and counting the local TV networks that number goes up to 500. It's also interesting to note that recently foreign investors from Western countries have shown great interest in the Turkish media.

What is your own media consumption on a typical day?

I am a real technology fiend, I constantly talk on my BlackBerry to our journalists! I still love to read newspapers but I live with the internet. The radio is on in the background, and in my office I have 10 TV channels running.

Looking ahead, what is your goal?

We are going to show that we can do international broadcasting from Turkey. We want to be the most important TV network in the region - the channel of reference for the region.

Serkan Oral, thank you. ■