

Burak AKBAŞ, International Sales and Corporate Reputation Executive at Meteksan Defence:

## "The key to our export success is right strategies, detailed analyses and tailor-made approach to our users."



MSI TDR: Mr. Akbaş, could you first give us your opinions of Meteksan Defence's recent export activities? Burak AKBAŞ: Since its establishment in 2006, Meteksan Defence has developed into a company that devises subsystem projects for platforms and carries out R&D works into advanced technologies. Although the company's vision and long-term strategies have always included the provision of solutions also to foreign users, as a natural outcome of our focus on R&D and product development in the Although the company's vision and longearly phases of the company, Meteksan Defence, until quite recently, operated only in the domestic market. As our R&D projects were completed and started to ≒ turn into products, the company took steps to take on a more product-based structure, which led us to set targets for foreign markets and to begin working towards those goals.

In the past, our goal when undertaking projects was to be a company that operates in areas that have not yet been exploited by other companies, and our approach to productisation follows the same path: Our main objectives are to come up with products that make a difference in areas containing only limited existing solutions, and to ensure these products stay ahead of their competitors in the market. If you develop products based on these criteria, you will certainly gain a stronger position in all markets, both at home and abroad.

Once we had developed our products and solutions, we started to turn to foreign markets in the 2015-2016 period, when our Damage Control Simulator in particular came under the spotlight. Our Retinar Perimeter Surveillance Radar family was added to the list of export products in 2016, followed by our Radar Altimeter product family in 2017, and subsequently, we signed contracts for all these products with foreign customers. In 2018, we launched international

In this era of high-level international competition, Meteksan Defence has come to stand out from its competitors in the sector by expanding its foreign user base. Over the last three years, the company's Damage Control Simulator, Retinar Perimeter Surveillance Radar and avionics products have all garnered significant interest in the foreign markets, and have been selected by many users abroad. We spoke to Burak Akbas. International Sales and Corporate Reputation Executive at Meteksan Defence. about the company's competitive strengths in the foreign markets and how it secured its current position.

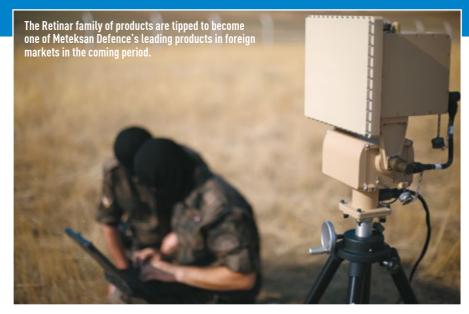
Ümit BAYRAKTAR ubayraktar@milscint.com promotional and marketing activities for our Automatic Take-Off and Landing System (OKİS), our PELIKAN Missile Seeker Simulator and our YAKAMOS Hull-Mounted Sonar System.

Our target for the coming years is to increase both the number of exportable products in our product range, and the share of systems delivered to international users in our turnover through the signing of new contracts. We are aware that there is much to do if we are to achieve these goals. Our sector has a particular deficiency: We are good at developing highly competent products, but we need to improve ourselves in terms of branding and sales & marketing. One of our priority targets is to raise the profile and exposure of both Meteksan Defence and our products - like Retinar – in the global market.

#### MSI TDR: Could you elaborate on the branding issue?

Burak AKBAŞ: Unlike other sectors, we do not talk much about branding in the defence sector, but if we want to achieve sustainable success, to build on this success every passing day and to stand out from our competitors, we, as defence companies, need to consider branding as a strategic issue.

At this point, we aren't talking only about advertisements and logos, but rather about the influence we have over our customers and all other stakeholders based on the value of our company name – Meteksan Defence. This is, of course, a long-term process, and in this sense, we are trying to create our brand identity based on a framework of quality, innovation and the trust we build among our customers. To ensure that Meteksan Defence maintains



these qualifications, we build on a variety of factors, including our products, solutions, corporate communication activities, and performance in tests and operation, as well as the knowledge and experience of our technical and administrative teams that keep in contact with our users.

Of course, our primary means of explaining and demonstrating these capabilities is through promotional activities, for which we try to use the most appropriate channels. Naturally, we have a limited budget for promotional activities, and to ensure we use this budget in the most efficient manner, we act very selectively. Recently, there has been a rise in the number of defence and aerospace exhibitions held around the world, but we prefer to take part only in those that are in line with our strategy and targets and from which we can really benefit.

Our approach to sectoral publications is similar, in that we work only with publications that are read by the user, and we put great effort in the preparation of our promotional materials.

The second tool we use is social media, in which we are very active, and both the sector as a whole and people outside the sector show great interest in our activities. We can say that our social media activities have contributed a great deal to raising the profile of Meteksan Defence, especially over the last year; and as a result, our products are now very well known.

Social media is not just a platform for the sharing of messages, as it also encourages interaction, and we endeavour to answer any questions that are posed to us, while monitoring the impacts of our posts. Every day, a number of messages are sent to our social media accounts offering suggestions of how our products could be improved in certain aspects, and we forward such messages to the relevant teams in our company.

To date, our social media accounts have addressed only the domestic market, but we will soon activate our English language accounts. Moreover, we plan next year to share an English version of our

Meteksan Newspaper with our foreign connections in the form of a bulletin. In brief, we are working on creating a company brand with a holistic approach that takes into account the company's vision and mission, quality policy, core values, working principles, corporate communication activities, customer and supplier relations, human resource policies and social responsibility principles, endeavouring to take Meteksan Defence brand forward, both in terms of its corporate identity and in the foreign markets.

# Another Success for the Damage Control Simulator MSI TDR: Should the sector expect to hear about new contracts between Meteksan Defence and foreign customers?

Burak AKBAS: I will take this opportunity to reveal for the first time the signing a new contract in June with a foreign customer for our Damage Control Simulator. As you may know, Meteksan Defence has surpassed its competitors in terms of the countries in which it has signed contracts - Turkey, Oman and the Republic of Korea – in the field of damage control simulators. We offer the most up-to-date solution in this field and are using the latest technologies. Our users are highly satisfied with our products, and are opting to work with us also in the maintenance of our products. Our activities in this respect have turned Meteksan Defence into a global brand in the field of damage control simulators. At the exhibitions at which we take part, the commanders of the naval forces of various countries have visited our stand to ask about our simulator.

For the Damage Control Simulator, we sought to sign one new contract every year for five years, and we have already accomplished this goal in 2017 and 2018. We are in talks with our most recent user about the sharing of contract details with the press, and once we receive the required permission, we will be able to provide you with more detailed information.

MSI TDR: Can we expect to hear about any developments regarding OKİS, PELIKAN or YAKAMOS, for which you launched promotional activities abroad this year?

**Burak AKBAŞ:** We have commenced work on these products, but in the defence and aerospace sector it takes time



to reach the contract phase. We have already submitted offers and have entered into talks with some potential users. We expect to see these efforts turning into concrete contracts in the coming years.

MSI TDR: What is the share of foreign sales in the turnover of Meteksan Defence, and do you have a specific target in this regard?

**Burak AKBAŞ:** As I mentioned, we launched efforts to address foreign users in the 2015–2016 period, when the share of foreign sales in our turnover was less than two percent. After signing a series of export contracts in 2017, this ratio now reached over 10 percent, and this success has led naturally to higher targets. In the short term, we are aiming by 2020 to increase this ratio to 15–20 percent, although it should be around 30 percent if we are to ensure sustainability in the defence and aerospace sector, and so this is our goal for 2023.

The Key to Success
MSI TDR: Recently, Meteksan Defence
has signed a series of contracts abroad
for its Damage Control Simulator,
Retinar Perimeter Surveillance
Radar Family and avionics systems.
Considering the size of Meteksan
Defence and the range of resources
it can allocate to overseas business
development efforts, how would you list

the factors lying behind its success?

Burak AKBAŞ: International sales are, by their very nature, long-term activities requiring considerable financial resources. While this applies to all companies, in those that are similar in scale to Meteksan Defence, the budget and human resources that can be allocated to such activities are quite limited. At this point, the support provided by our company executives and technical teams stands out, and if need be, our president and vice presidents offer their direct support to export efforts. All of the other departments in our company are motivated towards overseas projects, and provide significant support in this sense. We are working as a team with all the relevant departments responsible for the supply chain, integrated logistic support, engineering, financial affairs and contract management, all of whom are valuable members of our export team. Working with abroad has become a part of the corporate culture, and this understanding keeps improving. Furthermore, each new overseas sales contract is considered a source of pride among our employees, and building on this support we receive from our staff, we carry out all our works in line with a certain strategy.

Considering the resources we are able to allocate, we don't have the luxury to say "Let's go to that country" or "we received an e-mail from this country, let's go and meet them" or "let's participate



Our main objectives are to come up with products that make a difference in areas containing only limited existing solutions, and to ensure these products stay ahead of their competitors in the market. If you develop products based on these criteria, you will certainly gain a stronger position in all markets, both at home and abroad.

at all relevant exhibitions". We carry out a detailed market analysis related to our products and determine the countries most likely to be interested in our products. When we go to these countries, we try to work with local reliable business partners with expertise in their respective areas of operation, and we are very selective in this regard, which is a significant factor in our success.

Needless to say, we also receive valuable guidance and support of our government and from the Undersecretariat for Defence Industries (SSM).

MSI TDR: Could you share with us more detailed information about your market analysis process?

**Burak AKBAŞ:** We have developed a systematic approach in which we rank and score numerically different vari-

ables, including the countries' defence budgets, their trade of defence industry products with Turkey, political relations, the size of the armed forces, whether or not they have products similar to ours in their inventory, and whether or not any of them have been procured recently. We also carry out a product-specific analysis. For example, for Retinar, we analyse terrorism activity in the country of concern and assess their border security needs, while for our Damage Control Simulator, we evaluate such criteria as the size of the related country's navy and the level of training received by the naval staff. We also add comments as well as any other information we collect from sectoral reports and open sources. After ranking and scoring these criteria, we obtain a total country score for each country, and determine our priority target countries accordingly. The results of these analyses have always been accurate, and they have led to such efforts being turned into firm contracts.

Such works also guide us in the efficient use of our budget. Of course, we may sometimes encounter unforeseen opportunities, and we may hear about the needs of some other countries, and in such cases we immediately adapt to the situation and develop our strategies accordingly.

MSI TDR: Are any of your overseas sales a result of the respective country's offset commitment to Turkey?

Burak AKBAŞ: All the contracts we have signed abroad were awarded to us as a result of a competitive bidding process. To date, we have been awarded no project as a result of an offset obligation to Turkey. That said, in our market analyses, we take into consideration the respective country's offset obligations, if any, to Turkey, and if we encounter such an opportunity in the future, we will of course take it into consideration.

MSI TDR: The countries with which you are cooperating are spread over a wide geography. How do you handle cultural differences in your

business development efforts?

Burak AKBAŞ: It is not possible to apply the same strategy to all countries, as we need to develop different market access strategies for each of our

Addressing a wide spectrum of products, including tactical-class unmanned aerial vehicles, OKİS has attracted the attention of foreign countries as a result of its technical specifications and easy integration features.



## VISI INTERVIEW

target markets. In some countries, we find local partners with which to work, while in others, we work with prime contractors or engage directly with the

I attach special importance to cultural differences. If you want to do business in another country, you must learn about the culture of that country. How to eat, how to greet people, how to shake hands and how to present business cards – all of these should be learned by the foreign marketing departments of all companies, and I believe our sector needs to improve itself in this respect.

If we want to increase our competitive power in the international arena in the future in terms of sales and marketing, we must analyse world markets very well and be ready to work based on such models as joint ventures, or to establish a company in country in question, and work with a much larger and diversified team abroad.

MSI TDR: Which competitive feature of Meteksan Defence makes it stand out from its competitors in the foreign markets?

Burak AKBAS: We develop our products mainly for the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF), which is a highly selective user, and so is a key reference for us. Our projects are managed very well by the SSM, and as a result, we are able to develop highly qualified products in all aspects, ranging from levels of technology to life cycle process, and can access international markets from a very advantageous approach.

Furthermore, as we are operating in an area in which there are a limited number of solutions on the market, we have a level of competitive power, and in my opinion we offer a good balance between price and quality. For example, in one of the tenders in which we entered, we received the highest technical score, but came third in terms of financial score. but we were selected by the user when the customer evaluated both scores. In another country, Retinar outperformed its competitors, which had proposed lower prices, during field tests, and after being shortlisted alongside our technically mature European competitors, we won the tender by beating them on price.

MSI TDR: There is a general belief in the sector that it is very difficult to export products that have not yet been used in



the home country, however Meteksan
Defence managed to export the Damage
Control Simulator it had developed
for the Turkish Naval Forces, during
its construction phase, as well as the
Retinar Perimeter Surveillance Radar
family and avionics system prior to them
being offered for use in Turkey. How did
Meteksan Defence achieve this?

Burak AKBAŞ: Having the TAF as a reference is, of course, very important in this regard. When we go abroad, we are often asked, "Do your own Armed Forces use this system?", and if the answer is "no", then you need to do certain things. The user needs to trust you, and this is related to how you promote your company and products.

In order to gain the trust of the user, we give them a sample and ask them to use and test it, and to share their feedback with us, if any. We take their comments into consideration and do our best to satisfy their requests. This serves to eliminate any questions they may have in their minds.

We take our technologies to countries that are in need of them. I can say that first, we gain the trust of these countries by carrying out high quality works, and having achieved that, we attract more interest, leading to more success.

MSI TDR: The latest export news about Meteksan Defence was that your Retinar Perimeter Surveillance Radar has been selected by a European country. In the

field of defence and aerospace, Turkey is playing quite an active role especially in the Middle East, Central Asia and Far Eastern markets, while Europe and North America are all but closed to indigenous Turkish solutions, other than those covered under offset obligations. How can we interpret this success of Meteksan Defence, and do you envisage it continuing in the future? Will it open new doors for you, especially in Europe? Burak AKBAS: America and Europe in particular are very challenging markets in terms of platform and system exports. The domestic defence market in Europe is shrinking and most of the companies there are looking to foreign countries for business, resulting in high export ratios. We decided to develop a specific strategy for this market, thinking that if we want to make sales to Europe, we need to cooperate with prime contractor companies that are looking for cost-effective solutions embodying advanced technologies. In the Retinar example, we introduced ourselves to a European company with significant market share in integrated airport security solutions and were proposed as their radar solution partner in a tender that they had won, resulting in the signing of a contract. We are keen to expand our cooperation with this company, and if we can achieve this, when they win jobs in Europe or other regions, we will also take part in those projects with Retinar.

The fact that this prime contractor select-

ed Retinar in such a highly competitive bid that involved global competitors, and which took into account both technological capacity and cost-efficiency, is testament to how qualified our product is.

Whether for the United States or Europe, our priority target for other products is the same: To make exports with main integrators or platform manufacturers as a team.

I would like to emphasize another point. If we tried to become an integrated security solution provider, based only on having a product like Retinar, we would not have been able to work with a prime contractor in such a cooperation model. In other words, if companies can draw an appropriate line to demarcate their area of operation, their foreign sales activities can be shaped accordingly. This is one of the points we take into account when defining our strategies.

## Platforms and Systems Need to Dominate Foreign Sales

MSI TDR: On your social media accounts, you frequently share interesting developments in the sector and in foreign sales activities, raising awareness among your followers. How do you think the sector can improve, especially in terms of exports?

Burak AKBAŞ: The defence and aerospace sector recorded \$6.7 billion in turnover in 2017, and we can say that \$1.7 billion of this came from foreign sales, while the remainder represents the size of the domestic market. Although we all agree a faster growing and sustainable sector demands an increase in foreign sales, our share of for-



eign sales in total turnover is not at the desired level. The situation is the same for all players in the sector – from prime contractors to Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs).

We are fully aware that the \$1.7 billion of foreign sales includes both the defence and civil aviation sectors, and that a significant proportion of this comes from aircraft and helicopter components and parts sold as part of offset obligations. The Defence and Aerospace Industry Manufacturers Association's (SaSaD) 2017 report shows that of the total foreign sales, only 38 percent of sales are made to the end user, and the share of sales made to the United States and Europe is around 60 percent. Over the last five years, the bulk of our exports have been made to the United States, and there have always been three or four European countries in the top ten. In other words, we cannot claim to have achieved a desired level of success in our sales of platforms to the end user or in system exports.

Taking all of this into consideration, it is apparent that offset constitutes a



Meteksan Defence achieved export success in 2017 with its radar altimeter family.

significant share in the foreign sales of Turkey's defence and aerospace sector. This is not a criticism but a fact, and we all need to be aware of this situation and to express it explicitly, as only by doing so can we address the problem correctly and realise that we have yet to reach the desired level in terms of platform and system exports.

Accordingly, we have already taken significant steps in 2018. Our sector took significant steps in this direction with the contracts signed during the DIMDEX 2018 International Maritime Defence Exhibition and Conference held in Doha, the capital of Qatar, on March 12-14, 2018, and with the sale of T129 helicopters and MİLGEM corvettes to Pakistan, hot on the heels of those contracts. I attach special importance to the sale of platforms, in that they embody the products and subsystems of many other companies. Platform sales have a positive impact on the entire sector, and I consider 2018 to be a milestone in this

I believe that from now on, we will see Turkey moving forward with a rapidly increasing trend in terms of foreign sales, and of platforms in particular.

# MSI TDR: How do you think the sector should act in the coming period to achieve this goal?

Burak AKBAŞ: In the defence and aerospace sector, you need to bring together all parts of the puzzle to create success stories in foreign sales. Going to a country and saying "My product is very competent!" or participating in exhibitions is not enough, as we should first

- Carry out an analysis of the target market and the competition.
- We certainly need to work with reliable local business partners that are experts in their area of operation, or that have an active office in our target countries, and





- Business development teams need to have a good grasp of the culture and purchasing dynamics of the respective countries.
- A good knowledge of state incentives, such as credit mechanisms, export incentives and lobbying routes, as well as the activities of the attaché offices, are also very important. For example, extending credit is not enough, as the terms of the credit should be appealing.
- Now, all countries are keen to improve their indigenous industries as much as possible, and we need to keep these dynamics in mind. Turkish companies should be ready to take their technologies to other countries, to the extent permitted by our government, and to carry out joint projects there.
- We have recently seen that even if you have an indigenous platform, you may still be subject to export licences for its subsystems. Unfortunately, we are dependent on abroad for some of the critical subsystems used on some of our indigenous platforms, and this may be an obstacle to our foreign sales. It is for this reason that when we want to talk about fully independent indigenous platforms, we need to indigenise also the critical subsystems under the coordination of the SSM, and in line with the needs of the TAF. To achieve this goal, having a sector with a broad diversified base is of great importance.

Perhaps the most critical question will be "Do we have any products to sell?", and you gain such products through R&D and innovation. If you can develop innovative products that satisfy client requirements, as a natural consequence of this effort, you also open doors to foreign sales.

Perhaps the most critical question will be "Do we have any products to sell?", and you gain such products through R&D and innovation. If you can develop innovative products that satisfy client requirements, as a natural consequence of this effort, you also open doors to foreign sales. The shrinkages seen in the defence budgets of some developed countries have urged the players in those countries to be more open to foreign markets. China's export figures are on the rise, and it is a fact that conditions will become much tougher in the competitive market. In such an environment, only countries that stand out by creating different, innovative and cost-effective products will be able to increase their competitive power.

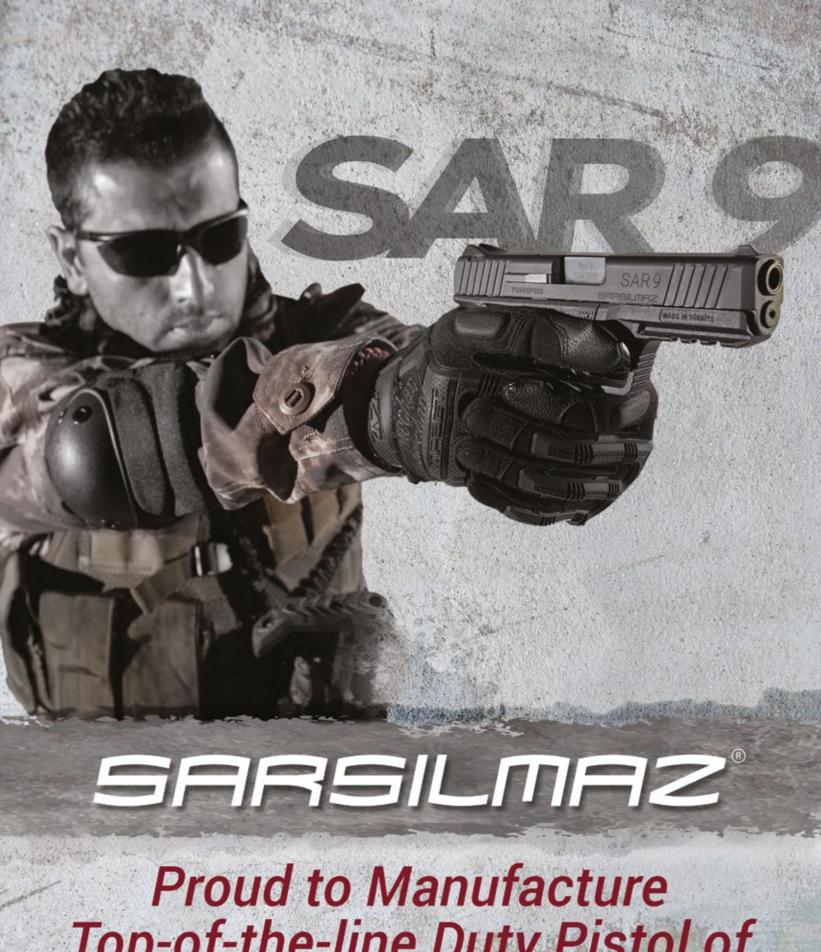
These are the areas in which Turkey needs to improve itself, and we cannot achieve our planned export goals without improvements in these areas. Recently, we have seen an increase in our foreign sales, especially with regards to land vehicles, and this success is a result of the efforts of the companies, which have been operating in the sector for many years, and have been developing quality products. These companies have long been in contact with foreign users, although it required a certain amount of time and the completion of complex

processes before they were able to go to certain countries, establish offices there and form local partnerships. We can ensure the sector's foreign sales through such critical processes, but they require patience. We need to expand upon our successes in the provision of land vehicles to affect the whole sector.

## MSI TDR: What do you think will be the position of offset obligations in the future?

Burak AKBAŞ: As you know, offset implementation refers to the situation in which, while conducting a project in Turkey, foreign contractor companies are obliged to outsource some of the work to local companies in their respective areas of interest, or to support these companies in exports. If the offset process is duly applied, it can serve as a great opportunity for local companies to make considerable exports. For example, a company is producing a subsystem as part of an offset obligation, and when the prime contractor sells it around the world, it can have the potential to provide significant export potential. Furthermore, you also benefit from know-how transfer when producing a subsystem for a main platform, developed by a foreign manufacturer. In this way, you improve your company and enhance your knowledge on how to do business with foreign companies. The





Top-of-the-line Duty Pistol of Turkish Army & Police



SSM has taken significant steps through offset implementations, contributing greatly to the development of the sector. It should be noted, however, that as the ratio of indigenous products in Turkey has been on the rise in recent years, there has been a continuous decline in offset obligations. As we can now meet some of our needs through local manufacturers, the offset obligations of foreign companies are, naturally, decreasing. Increases in the competencies of our local sector will result in a natural interest in such foreign companies in Turkey with a view to cooperation, and without a need for offset obligations. We can say that this is a much healthier way of doing business.

Now is the Turn of Africa MSI TDR: Do you have any export targets for the coming period with regard to certain regions or countries? Burak AKBAS: Our first priority is to increase and maintain our presence in the countries to which we are already exporting. We attach great importance not only to the technical capacity of our products, but also to customer relations until delivery, and to after-sales support. Our engineering units, as well as our project management and ILD teams, are doing a great job in this sense. I believe that if we can further improve the concept of after-sales support in the defence and aerospace sector, it will have very effective consequences in terms of the development and sustainability of

I believe that if we can further improve the concept of after-sales support in the defence and aerospace sector, it will have very effective consequences in terms of the development and sustainability of the market. We take a long-term approach to projects abroad, and so our goal is not to deliver a single project and then leave the country.

the market. We take a long-term approach to projects abroad, and so our goal is not to deliver a single project and then leave the country. Our goal in such situations is to sustain our presence with different projects, and to continue acting as a solution partner in those countries.

In my opinion, our target markets for the coming years should be African countries. An examination of the defence purchases made by African countries reveals that Russia ranks first, with 39 percent of sales, followed by China (17 percent) and the United States (11 percent). China has more than doubled its market share on the African continent when compared to five years ago, and we can also be successful on the African continent due to our cost-effective and advanced technology products. As a sector, we need to enhance our cooperation works on the continent, especially in Algeria, Morocco and Nigeria, and we have already carried out preliminary works to this end, secure in the knowledge that we need to enter the market in a correct way. We are continuing to work towards this goal, and one of our target markets will be this region in the coming period.

MSI TDR: Let's stick with the upcoming period and talk about which of your solutions you believe will stand out in foreign markets.

Burak AKBAŞ: We are continuing our efforts to promote the members of our Retinar product family in foreign markets, including OPUS and KAPAN. In the coming two-year period, there are at least two countries with which we're planning to reach a deal.

We are also continuing our works on new products, including OKİS (Automatic Take-Off and Landing System), YAKA-MOS and the PELİKAN Missile Seeker Simulator. Among these, YAKAMOS has a special position, as it needs to be marketed with a platform.

The flagship of our foreign sales is the Damage Control Simulator, although it is not a product with a wide market that you can sell to a country more than

once. Accordingly, we are thinking of integrating our Fire Simulator into our Damage Control Simulator in countries that have selected our products, like we did for the Turkish Naval Forces. Another of our goals for the upcoming period relates to the provision of complete training solutions, including both damage control and fire training, to our users

This picture shows that after the Damage Control Simulator, Retinar will become the new leader in our export sales in the coming period.

We are also developing other products that are allowing us to look to 2019 and beyond with great expectations. I should, of course, note that all these export activities are challenging and long-term processes.

#### MSI TDR: Is there anything else you would like to mention?

Burak AKBAS: Turkish defence and aerospace companies need to cooperate with each other if they are to find success in the foreign markets. When we go abroad, we garner commercial intelligence that is useful not only for our own products, but also for other Turkish companies. I believe we need to create a platform from which we can exchange such information with each other. We, as companies and as the salespersons of these companies, should support each other. As the existing institutions and organisations in the sector are not structured to meet such a need, maybe the sector will need to be restructured with this in mind. It is very important that we, as the sector, handle this issue properly and form a new structure to increase the level of coordination between our companies.

Thank you, MSI TDR, for this pleasant interview.

On behalf of our readers, we would like to thank Burak Akbaş, International Sales and Corporate Reputation Executive at Meteksan Defence, for taking the time to answer our questions and for providing us with such valuable information.

