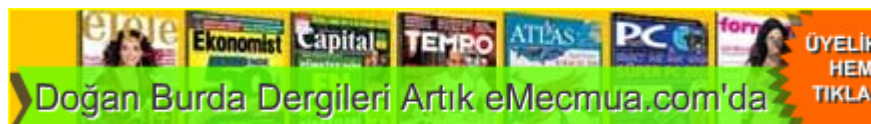


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İzmir fights war of 'mass attraction'

Monday, November 26, 2007

Dennis Redmont

MILAN - Turkish Daily News

Do you want to know who is winning the titanic battle between stylish Milan and historic Izmir for the Expo 2015?

Punch your TV remote control to Rai 1 TV on Dec. 7 and watch the glittering gala opening of La Scala Opera House, a ceremony which always brings the rich and the powerful of Milan and of the world to the temple of Bel Canto. Guess who is invited? The U.S. First Lady, Laura Bush!

Plus four heads of state, four heads of government, and ten foreign ministers.

So why should we watch?

Because in the bitter battle between Izmir and Milan, the governments of Italy and Turkey are pulling no punches and using "weapons of mass attraction" to capture every single vote of the countries who will cast their ballots on March 31, 2008 in Paris at a "sudden death" vote at the Bureau International Des Expositions (BIE).

Never has "Mors Tua, Vita mia" (Your Death, My Life), one of Italy's most popular proverbs, been more appropriate.

Turkish President Abdullah Gul and Italian Premier Romano Prodi will be fighting it out Monday at the next to last presentation at the Paris Exhibition Hall

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before all the delegates.

Right now, the list of voting countries has grown all of a sudden from 103 to 139 as frantic lobbying takes place around the world and Turkey and Italy court the new joining countries.

Italy has a budget of 7.5 million euros just for promoting the candidacy. One month ago it gave a show of unity by helicoptering seven of the executives of BIE on an inspection to Silvio Berlusconi's Milan suburban villa.

"There is total unity and team spirit in Italy on the 2015 bid," says Paolo Glisenti, Italy's Secretary General for the candidacy. "The center left and the center right is compact and together," he said.

Then, Berlusconi sat down at the piano and showed the delegates his talent as a former cruise ship crooner singing a few French and Italian tunes and took them into his family chapel and the private museum he keeps stuffed with all the cups his M soccer team won through history.

"I've won everything," Berlusconi quipped. "Don't allow me to lose Expo2015!" The last Expo M won was in 1906.

The guests were also treated to an electronic laser show with the Milan skyline designed to outline what the city could look like in 2015.

Even Berlusconi's political nemesis, Premier Prodi continued the courtship in Rome. Strangely enough both Izmir and Milan have mayors from the opposition party but the central governments of both countries are giving them full support.

The love fest of the past few weeks between Italy and Turkey might be put aside over this rivalry. That means engaging in stiff competition shortly after the two countries set several economic and political goals at the Italy-Turkey forum in Istanbul last week.

After all, the current battle means over 15 billion Euros for road construction, new real estate, and an estimated 100,000 new jobs for the city that wins the bid.

"This is a nice little problem," says Umberto Vattani, Foreign Trade Agency (ICE) president who is in Istanbul this month to inaugurate Italy's new gleaming foreign trade offices.

Another asset for Italy is Vittorio Craxi, (nickname Bobo) the son of former Prime Minister Bettino Craxi and currently the undersecretary for foreign affairs. He has travelled to over 59 countries, including Haiti and Surinam, to convince governments to cast their votes for Milan.

The Italians are banking on the fact that not all in the Muslim world will automatically vote for Turkey. Italian officials I spoke to have been told that many countries in North Africa, for example, really

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not want Turkey to get any bigger or stronger with its 30 percent share of Mediterranean trade. ! they may well vote for Italy to favor their own self-interest.

Milan's real problem is that it has heavily staked its own urban renewal plan in function of a win the Expo. And it will only get funds from the central government if it wins the bid.

So, will "a night at the opera" (this year, Wagner's Tristan and Isolde open the season) end in c like the famous Marx Brothers film? Or like the Fellini movie about "the orchestra rehearsal" whic a symbol of the fractious Italian political scene?

We will not know until the last minute.

So why doesn't Turkey unveil some secret weapons including La Scala's legendary soprano who maintains a respected position at the opera house: Leyla Gencer.

Then it won't be over until the fat lady sings.

Dennis Redmont, an executive at the Council for U.S. and Italy, is an American journa and consultant, who divides his time between Rome and Istanbul. He can be contacted mediadennis@libero.it.

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