

Ahmet Eke – President Central & Eastern Europe, Getinge



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Getinge's president for Central and Eastern Europe, Ahmet Eke, comments on the strategic importance of the region for the Swedish company, the evolution of healthcare infrastructure in Turkey, and how Getinge competes in emerging markets against European and American medtech players.

Can you begin by explaining the scope of your responsibilities as president for Central and Eastern Europe for Getinge?

I work within Getinge's global sales organization, which accounts for almost half of the company's 11,000-strong workforce. The Global Sales Organization is divided into 10 Global Sales Regions. My region is Central and Eastern Europe, it consists of 30 countries, the biggest being Russia, Turkey, Greece, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Israel and Romania. The 30 markets are managed from four different hubs, Russia, Turkey, Poland and Czech Republic.

The region is quite complex since it has EU and non-EU members, some with fluctuating currencies, and different levels of political stability. I enjoy working with all of them because they have the potential to grow.

While I do not oversee Getinge's production facilities, the company has two in the region, one in Antalya, Turkey, which produces part of our acute care therapy and cardiopulmonary portfolios, and the other in Poznan, Poland, doing mostly surgical workflow products.

Is there a particular reason why the entire region is managed from Turkey?

I first became involved with Getinge in 2011 when I joined Maquet (part of the Getinge Group) and later have been the president for this region for over six years. While I am based in Istanbul, it is not a requirement, although it is certainly an important country and market for Getinge, but it makes sense because of my experience, the ability to travel easily across the region and the possibility to work efficiently from a distance due to digital tools.

Speaking about digital tools and their impact on the internal operations of companies in the sector, how have they changed the way your salesforce interacts with customers and stakeholders?

Digital tools have made interactions within the organization easier during the pandemic since travel was restricted, but the situation for our salespeople is different. My estimation is that, in the future, interactions with customers will be a mix of physical and digital, but we need to wait and observe. I am very much pleased with having digital visits meetings but we will continue doing them in-person in certain circumstances because in-person interactions are almost always better.

Of Getinge's three main business areas (Acute Care Therapies, Life Science and Surgical Workflows), which ones are being prioritized in Turkey?

All of our business areas are present here although life science's presence is limited; the majority of our revenue is coming from acute care therapies and surgical workflows business areas.

Within Surgical Workflows, we currently offer almost our full portfolio, from products for sterile reprocessing, operating room equipment, to IT systems. For Acute Care, we offer our solutions for intensive care, such as ventilators, hemodynamic monitoring and extra-corporeal life support; and cardiovascular surgery, such as heart-lung machines, intra-aortic balloon pumps, and several important and life-saving products.

Part of the company's Life Science business is directed towards biopharmaceutical manufacturers. Does the fact that Turkey has a robust manufacturing base make it a good business opportunity?

Turkish manufacturers can be customers, yes, but multinational companies often rely on global agreements that might have other priorities. For local companies, we do see opportunities and have already done demonstrations and certain contracts with them; it is a promising market for us, but we must increase our sales force and take a progressive approach.

What are some of the main challenges shared by the countries in your region and how do you perceive the Turkish market, considering the huge investment in healthcare infrastructure that has been made in the last two decades?

Like many emerging markets, monetary resources are limited in the region, which makes it hard for us considering our high-tech products. Therefore, our strategy has been centred around suggesting mid-segment products besides premium ones; we need to find affordable solutions and alternatives for our customers.

Another characteristic of the region is that most of the largest hospitals are owned by the public sector, making tenders a priority. Of course, we are present in private hospitals, too, but they have different dynamics.

The challenge is always to find a good way to go out and promote our solutions because Getinge is producing breakthrough innovation that many healthcare professionals remain unaware of, and for that, we need to invest in training.

The case of Turkey, as a market, stands out. The country made big investments in recent years to build hospitals through public-private partnerships, creating 30 hospitals with thousands of beds and hundreds of operating rooms. Getinge has contributed to 14 PPPs with many products and solutions.

As a company that is participating in them, can you elaborate on the status Turkey's PPP hospital projects?

Out of the 30 PPP projects, 14 have been finalized, 5 are under construction and 11 are in the planning phase, meaning that tenders are yet to be finalized. The government will look closely at the productivity, profitability and patient satisfaction to evaluate the projects that are already functioning and make decisions for the future. It has been a successful initiative so far because such large-scale hospitals are a difficult endeavor.

Regarding the Turkish government's ambitions, how does Getinge fit into Vision 2023 which aims to provide world-class healthcare to its citizens?

Turkey's and Getinge's visions are perfectly aligned since we are looking to contribute to patient safety and provide quality healthcare. The quality must be the same regardless of the size of the hospital. By providing quality products, we will have the opportunity to increase doctor's know-how and deliver better patient outcomes, of course, if we can do it at reasonable and acceptable price levels, the better it will be for everyone.

Getinge wants to continue being a supportive partner for Turkey, one that provides very high-quality and affordable solutions.

How does Getinge separate for the competition when it comes to tenders for such large projects?

It depends on the competition because it varies from market to market, Russia and Turkey are a good example to analyze. One side, Russia has a very long registration time, up to two years, which means that new products cannot be imported and sold rapidly in the country. On the other side,

Turkey is more open to competition since it only asks for CE mark and, once you have it, registration is straightforward with certain set of processes.

In Turkey, we face high, mid and lower product quality competition coming from the United States, Europe, Far East and even local companies.

The company differentiates by making better products, by innovating, we do not measure our value by what is on the market but by what can have the most positive impact on patients and the way healthcare is delivered; most of the time not only with price, but through better solutions.

Historically healthcare innovation has been synonymous with new therapies, drugs and devices. But in recent years the definition of value creating innovation in healthcare also incorporates digitalization and more productive ways of working and sharing opportunities and risks together, through performance-based compensation models.

Can you comment on Getinge's financial performance in the region under your command, particularly since many countries are part of the "emerging markets" that the company's CEO, Mattias Perjos, described as growth drivers to PharmaBoardroom?

Although the pandemic has changed the dynamics of our industry, we are growing by double digits. On one side, we had an uptake in demand for ventilators by governments, but that cannot be sustained forever.

The healthy growth in the Central and Eastern Europe region is coming from many markets, not only Turkey but also Russia and Poland. The region will continue to grow but it will depend on opportunities because big healthcare projects are not made every year; our salesforce must be ready to seize on the opportunities when they arise with the right category of products and technical expertise. We believe in the potential of our region. And we will continue to contribute to the healthcare of our people with passion for life!

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