



Interview with Seyfi Onur Sayın, Manchester Consulate General of the Republic of Türkiye, Turkish Consulate, Manchester, 16 March 2024.

Çiğdem BALIM¹

1. How did you become a diplomat? Could you tell us about your professional background?



I graduated from the International Relations Department of Middle East Technical University. Evidently, pursuing a diplomatic career was one of the most desired options for me and many of my classmates. A couple of months after my graduation in 2005, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that it would recruit new diplomats. I applied for and succeeded in the exams and joined the Ministry the same year. For the last 18 years, I have worked at several diplomatic missions including Bahrain, the U.S., and Greece, besides assuming positions in various departments of the Ministry. Finally, in September 2021, I was assigned to Manchester for setting up a new consulate and I have been serving as the Turkish Consul General in this city since then. This is a new experience for me as it is my first chief of mission role in my career.

2. Why did Türkiye decide to open a new consulate in Manchester?

There are several reasons. The first reason is the growing presence of Turkish citizens in the northwest of the UK. Türkiye already has two consulates in the UK, one in London and another in Edinburgh. However, it was costly and time-consuming for our citizens residing in the northwest to travel to these cities for consular services. It was also difficult for our consulates to reach out to those citizens. Our records indicate that there are almost 50 thousand Turkish citizens residing in our consulate's catchment area, which covers a vast territory from Newcastle to Coventry, including Wales and Isle of Man. Some years ago, they petitioned for the opening of a consulate in Manchester, to which our government responded favourably. The second reason is the rising importance of Manchester. Manchester was a prominent production and trade centre of manufactured goods during the Industrial Revolution. Records show that the Ottoman Empire had a consulate in Manchester back in the 19th century. Although the city may have lost its global popularity during the de-industrialization period, we believe it is regaining its rightful place. There are a lot of investment projects going on in the city. For the last two years, I have witnessed the changing skyline with many high-rise buildings being constructed in the city centre. Manchester is also a commercial hub in the region. It is at the intersection of logistical routes and offers a lot of opportunities with its production facilities. Many MNEs are represented in the city. Also,

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when we talk about Manchester, it is impossible not to mention its world-class universities. The University of Manchester and Manchester Metropolitan University are celebrating their bicentennial this year and continue to attract thousands of foreign students each year with other universities in the region. We have quite a few Turkish students in these universities who pursue good quality education for relatively lower prices compared to London. These are a few reasons why Türkiye chose Manchester to open a new consulate.

3. How was the experience of setting up a new consulate in Manchester?

It was quite a learning process. First, I started by exploring the city and its people. Then, I began looking for an office to rent for our consulate and started the leasing process. I also started hiring local staff. The leasing of the office was finalized in July 2022 and after the preparations, our Consulate officially opened its doors on 6 February 2023. Unfortunately, it coincided with the devastating earthquake in Türkiye. So, we needed to handle the consular operations and aid efforts at the same time. A couple of months later, we set up ballot boxes in Manchester and Leicester for our citizens to vote for the presidential and general elections in our country. We received about 15 thousand voters. On the one hand, these were challenging times for our new consulate. On the other hand, we found the opportunity to get to know many people and discover the city in a short time. Certainly, we received a good deal of assistance from our Ministry, Embassy in London and our colleagues in our other consulates in the UK. I also should mention the support given by the Manchester City Council, our community members and the Muslim community in Manchester.

4. What can you say about the Turkish community in your consulate's area?

A large number of Turks in the UK live in and around London. The Turkish community in our consular district is relatively new. A big portion of them work in food sector or own small or medium-size enterprises. It is important to note that the number of Turkish immigrants who came to the UK within the framework of the Türkiye-EU Partnership (Ankara) Agreement displayed a steep rise during the last 15 years. Most of these people are white-collar professionals such as engineers, IT professionals, medical doctors etc. Also, after the Covid-19 pandemic, there is a tendency to move from London to the cities in the northwest. The increasing use of home offices and remote working capabilities facilitated this process. This applies to our community as well. It is difficult to say that the Turkish people are concentrated in one city or region. They are quite dispersed. We have community associations in big cities such as Manchester, Leicester, Newcastle and Hull, while some of them are in the establishment process such as the ones in Birmingham, Stoke-on-Trent and Wrexham. We support these civil community associations and their activities. Our children are provided Turkish language courses there. We also support new initiatives to set up community associations in other cities. I think this is the way to empower the organisational structure and the unity of the Turkish community. We also encourage our citizens to



participate in local politics. Our wish is to have a Turkish community, who is well-integrated in the British society and keeps strong bonds with Türkiye.

5. What are your objectives in Manchester?

Certainly, the main objective is to complete the establishment of the Consulate. There are a few consular services we do not offer yet and some works are still in progress. My aim is to bring the consulate to a fully-functioning stage before I leave. Another objective is to raise community awareness among the Turkish people. We will continue to support their initiatives and activities with the conviction that this will strengthen the Turkish presence in our area. Similarly, we attach importance to the presence of our students. They constitute the young and dynamic part of our society. We keep interacting with them and encouraging them in their efforts. For example, we cooperated with the Turkish and North Cypriot Student Association at the University of Manchester to start a panel series called “Vision and Strategy” and their first guest speaker was the Turkish media entrepreneur Mr. Acun Ilıcalı. Another important aspect of our portfolio is sports diplomacy. We receive quite a few Turkish sport teams every year to compete at the tournaments in our consular district. We have Turkish football players playing in the UK. We also organize cultural activities to introduce Turkish art, music and cuisine. Last December, we organized the “Spirit of Istanbul” concert at the Manchester Cathedral which attracted a large number of guests. We will certainly keep supporting the trade and tourism cooperation between Türkiye and the UK. There is a big potential to explore and we will try to achieve our objectives one by one.



Başkonsolos Seyfi Onur Sayın'ın Özgeçmişi

Başkonsolos Seyfi Onur Sayın 1982 yılında Ankara'da doğdu. İlkokulu Acıpayam Cumhuriyet İlkokulu'nda, ortaokulu Denizli Anadolu Lisesi'nde, liseyi Aydın Adnan Menderes Anadolu Lisesi'nde bitirdi. Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi Uluslararası İlişkiler bölümünden 2005'te mezun oldu. Aynı yıl Dışişleri Bakanlığı'nda görevine başladı.

2006-2007 yılları arasında Doğu Avrupa Genel Müdür Yardımcılığı'nda aday meslek memuru olarak görev yaptı. 2008 yılında askerlik hizmetini tamamlamasının ardından, kısa süre Çok Taraflı Ekonomik İşler Genel Müdür Yardımcılığı'nda çalıştı. 2008-2010 yılları arasında Manama Büyükelçiliği'nde ataşe ve üçüncü kâtip, 2010-2013 yılları arasında Chicago Başkonsolosluğu'nda muavin konsolos ve konsolos, 2013-2015 yılları arasında Orta Doğu Genel Müdür Yardımcılığı'nda şube müdürü, 2015-2019 yılları arasında Atina Büyükelçiliği'nde büyükelçilik müsteşarı, 2019-2021 yılları arasında Bakan Özel Müşavirliği'nde daire başkanı olarak görev yaptı.

1 Eylül 2021'den beri Manchester Başkonsolosu olarak görev yapmakta olan Başkonsolos Sayın, evli ve bir kız çocuk babasıdır.

Curriculum Vitae of the Consul General Seyfi Onur Sayın

Consul General Seyfi Onur Sayın was born in Ankara in 1982. He completed primary school at Acıpayam Cumhuriyet Primary School, secondary school at Denizli Anatolian High School, and high school at Aydın Adnan Menderes Anatolian High School. He graduated from Middle East Technical University, Department of International Relations in 2005. He started his duty at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the same year.

Between 2006 and 2007, he served as a candidate career officer at the Deputy General Directorate for Eastern Europe. After completing his military service in 2008, he worked for a short time at the Deputy Directorate General for Multilateral Economic Affairs. He worked as attaché and third secretary at the Manama Embassy between 2008 and 2010, as an assistant consul and consul at the Consulate General of Chicago between 2010 and 2013, as branch manager at the Middle East Deputy General Directorate between 2013 and 2015, and at the Athens Embassy between 2015 and 2019. He served as embassy undersecretary at, and as head of department at the Minister's Special Advisory Office between 2019 and 2021.

Consul General Seyfi Onur Sayın, who has been serving as Consul General of Manchester since September 1, 2021, is married and the father of a daughter.