

New Casino initiative in Turkey

Article by Rob van der Gaast

The Turkish Mayor of Mersin, which is located opposite of the North-Eastern part of Cyprus, wants to realize a Casino in his Erdemli district.



Mayor Mutlu said, according to the Anatolia news agency, that it might be regarded as a bit unusual since he is a conservative and a supporter of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), which has an Islamic pedigree.

Noting that if such a proposal were to be accepted, it would open the door for foreign currency access to Turkey. An old citadel known as Kızkalesi could be restored and turned into an international casino.

In 1983, the Turkish government granted permission to first-class holiday villages and five star hotels to open casinos on their properties. At the peak there were more than 80 casinos in Turkey in tourist facilities located in Antalya, Izmir, Istanbul and Ankara. In 1997, more than 14 billion US dollars were wagered in Turkey's casinos, surpassing gambling income in many European countries.

Turkish parliament voted, however, on August 8, 1997, to close all casinos within six months. Even after the Islamic government was replaced by a secular, center-right

administration, the parliamentary vote to close them overrode a veto by the then President Suleyman Demirel.

From mid-February 16, 1998, the government decree closing the casinos went into effect, putting an estimated 20,000 people out of their jobs. The closing led to a gambling boom in „Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus² (TRNC). At this moment some 20 casino¹s are operated in North Cyprus. Citizens are not allowed to enter the casino¹s.

Mutlu noted that he would discuss the implementation of his project with Culture and Tourism Minister Atilla Koç. The mayor has suggested to turn the historic Kızkalesi into an international casino. Kızkalesi is well known as the Sea Castle and was constructed by the Byzantine commander Eusthathios in 1014 to protect the city against attacks. The castle had been built on small island and is 75 meters high.

Lottery, Milli Piyango, which will be privatized in 2007 (www.millipiyango.gov.tr), Sportsbetting via Sportoto (www.sportoto.gov.tr) and horseracing via the Jockey Club of Türkiye¹ (www.tjk.org) are very popular.

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