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CONTRIBUTOR
MARK R. KENNEDY

The world needs more people like Mustafa Koç

MARK R. KENNEDY

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Many men and women have tried to leave a lasting impact on commerce, society and our next generation. Mustafa Koç, through his successes in business, cultural advancement, and education, set the standards by which scores of future leaders will judge their own efforts.

I have had the pleasure of knowing and working with leaders in business and politics around the world during my time in government, the private sector and in education. Mustafa stood in a league of his own for his intellectual appetite and business savvy, but more importantly for his humanity.

Few business leaders understand the need to imbue a company's profit with purpose as well as Mustafa did. As our world continues to become more interconnected, such a vision will be essential for success and he realized that before many others.

Koç Holding A.S. is one of the largest companies in Turkey and the partner through which many international corporations introduce themselves and interact with the Turkish market. In that way, Mustafa knew that any contract was more than a business deal; it was an opportunity to present the character and work ethic of the Turkish people to the rest of the world. If you were to create such an emissary from scratch, it would be difficult to make a cultural ambassador as skilled as Mustafa.

We spoke in December 2015 about a study abroad course George Washington University (GW), his alma mater, offered several years ago. Mustafa cut short a vacation to fly back to Turkey to speak with our students about engaging business and society in the region during a visit to the Rahmi M. Koç Museum. That a man of his wealth and power would cut short what was surely limited leisure time to share his expertise, but more importantly his love of his homeland, resonated deeply with us all. It was an experience that I will never forget.

During a GW alumni reception with university President Steven Knapp in Istanbul in 2014 I was struck by the time he spent engaging in his inimitable way with the attendees. Dr. Knapp noted, "There is no doubt that the large turn-out was a tribute to his prominence in the community. The admiration of his fellow alumni was palpable, and he spoke with warmth and enthusiasm about his love of GW. With his passing, the university has lost a great friend as well as a very distinguished alumnus."

Mustafa and the Koç family have an unceasing hunger for education. The fact that Koç University has become an educational powerhouse in Turkey is not an accident, not just luck. It is a testament to his understanding that scholarship is the key to success in our interconnected world. I have had the privilege of teaching there the last four years and am always inspired by the school's mission and its commitment to the Turkish youth.

Throughout my travels around the world I always make it a point to talk to taxi drivers. You can learn a lot about a society from the people that ferry its people across town. In Turkey, I always ask, "What do you think of Mustafa Koç and the Koç family?" Every single one has said they are a family of the utmost respect and committed to doing what is best for Turkey. In an era of division between the person on the street and elites, to maintain that reputation is a reflection of a life well lived.

**Hon. Mark R. Kennedy (@HonMarkKennedy) leads George Washington University's Graduate School of Political Management and is chairman of the Economic Club of Minnesota. A member of the Council on Foreign Relations, he previously served three terms in the U.S. House of Representatives.*

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