Conversation with

Cavidan Karaca

Chief Executive Officer
Kimpur, Turkey

In this issue of PU Review, we are honored to feature an exclusive conversation with Ms. Cavidan Karaca, Chief Executive Officer of Kimpur, Türkiye's first 100% locally funded polyurethane systems house. A Mechanical Engineering graduate from Middle East Technical University (METU), Ms. Karaca brings nearly three decades of leadership experience spanning procurement, production, management consulting, crisis management, and corporate transformation.

Since joining Kimpur as CEO in 2015, she has led the company through a remarkable transformation — evolving it into the largest polyurethane systems house in the region in terms of production capacity. Her professional journey from from diverse industrial roles to the polyurethane sector reflects both strategic foresight and a deep understanding of material innovation. Under her leadership, Kimpur's growth has mirrored the dynamic expansion of the polyurethane industry itself.

As one of the few female CEOs in the polyurethane sector, Ms. Karaca represents not only business excellence but also inspiration for the next generation of women leaders in manufacturing and advanced materials.

In this exclusive interview, she shares insights into her professional journey, the transformation of Türkiye's polyurethane industry, global market dynamics, the outlook of the PU systems business, and the future vision shaping the industry.


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Leadership & Professional Journey

You began your career in procurement and production before moving into senior leadership roles and eventually leading Kimpur. Looking back, how did these early operational experiences shape your strategic thinking and leadership style as CEO?

I began my career as a production engineer at an automotive company. I then took on roles in planning and procurement. I had the opportunity to work with very strong leaders as role models. However, the most significant experience I gained was between 2001 and 2014, when I founded my own consultancy company focusing on "*turnaround management*."

During this period, without limiting myself to a specific sector or function, I had the chance to observe many manufacturing and service companies, as well as their established leaders. Observing different management styles and the paths leading to both success and failure made a significant contribution to developing my strategic perspective as a senior executive.

Taking a strategic, big-picture view, my analytical approach—moving from data to analysis, interpretation, and action—along with my discipline and persistence, have all played a key role in shaping my leadership style.

Since assuming leadership of Kimpur in 2014, what has been the most defining transformation under your tenure, and what leadership principles guided you through that journey?

Our first priority was to define Kimpur's vision, how we should position ourselves both in our domestic market and in export markets, which sectors and product groups we should prioritize, and to identify our target competitors through benchmarking studies, along with assessing our corporate risks.

Following this, we focused on establishing our R&D structure, becoming an official R&D Center, building our international organization in line with our export targets, and shaping our investment plans. In order to achieve these goals, we also prioritized strengthening the company's corporate structure and transitioning to a more systematic management model. In this context, we focused on structuring our processes more effectively, improving cross-functional coordination, and building an organizational structure that supports sustainable growth. Throughout this transformation, agility, teamwork, and a long-term perspective became our core principles.

Today, seeing Kimpur recognized as a preferred and leading solution partner, becoming a benchmark in the industry, reaching a production capacity of 281 kt, and positioning ourselves among the top 10 polyurethane system houses globally, as well as establishing a strong international presence with exports to more than 60 countries across five continents, represents our most important achievement.


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Evolution of Kimpur & Strategic Positioning

Kimpur has grown into the largest polyurethane systems house in the region in terms of production capacity. What were the critical strategic milestones that enabled this scale and competitiveness?

Several strategic steps have been decisive in Kimpur's growth journey. First of all, our investments in production infrastructure and capacity expansion enabled us to respond more effectively to the needs of different industries. At the same time, our strong focus on R&D allowed us to develop application-based and flexible solutions for our customers.

Another important step was our export-driven growth approach. By developing new markets across different geographies, we strengthened our international presence. As a result, our sales volume increased from approximately 27 kT in 2016 to around 144 kT in 2025. This growth clearly demonstrates that the strategic steps we have taken are moving in the right direction.

The combined progress in these three areas has played a key role in positioning Kimpur as a strong and competitive player in its region today.

In a market where both multinational chemical giants and regional system houses operate, how does Kimpur differentiate itself in terms of agility, customization, innovation, and customer proximity?

One of the most important priorities for us is to fully understand our customers' production processes. This allows us to analyze their needs quickly and develop the right solutions in a short time. Our agile organizational structure also accelerates our decision-making processes, enabling us to provide faster and more flexible support in both solution development and delivery.

In addition, we offer on-site technical support to our customers in many countries. Our teams can work directly on the production floor when needed, contributing to more efficient processes. The application tests we carry out in our R&D and simulation center also help us validate the systems we develop under conditions close to real production environments.

Our geographical presence is another key advantage in terms of customer proximity. Our production facility in Latvia plays an important role in our spray foam systems activities in Europe, while our offices in the U.S., the U.K., and Germany strengthen our regional presence and enable us to provide closer, tailored support to our customers.

"Our growth is driven by a clear strategy—investing in capacity and R&D, expanding globally, and staying close to our customers through agility, customization, and on-the-ground technical support."

How do you balance capacity expansion with technological advancement and sustainability objectives?

We do not see capacity expansion simply as increasing production volume. When planning our new investments, we aim to evaluate technology and sustainability together. Our Düzce facility, which we officially inaugurated in 2023, is a strong example of this approach. We built the facility with an Industry 4.0-compatible, fully automated production infrastructure, and prioritized green energy and green building principles during the design phase.

Through the solar power plants installed at both our Düzce and Gebze facilities, we are able to meet a portion of our energy needs from renewable sources. As part of our collaboration with Ravago last year, we also strengthened our production infrastructure during the integration of the reactors transferred to our Düzce facility. By integrating all auxiliary systems and establishing backup structures, we brought our processes under full automation control.

This enabled us to improve energy efficiency while ensuring continuous and reliable production. With these investments, we have reinforced our facility infrastructure to support our future growth plans. At the same time, we have achieved a more flexible structure that allows us to scale our production capacity in line with customer demand. In addition, at our Düzce facility, the reactors we installed for the production of rPET-based systems also support our efforts to develop more sustainable products.

Turkey Polyurethane Industry Perspective

Over the past two decades, how has the Turkish polyurethane industry evolved in terms of technological capability, export strength, and integration into global supply chains?

Over the past two decades, the polyurethane industry in Türkiye has shown significant development both in terms of technological capability and export capacity. The presence of strong manufacturing sectors such as white goods, automotive, footwear, and insulation has driven the increased use of polyurethane, while at the same time accelerating the growth of technical know-how and application expertise.

Today, we see that the polyurethane market in Türkiye has reached a volume of approximately 600,000 tons, including slabstock. During the same period, many Turkish producers have expanded into international markets and become part of global supply chains. Kimpur has played a major role in this transformation. For many years, we have been positioned as the leading polyurethane systems house exporter in Türkiye.

"We approach capacity expansion as a combination of technology and sustainability—investing in smart, energy-efficient infrastructure while building a flexible system that supports future growth and customer needs."


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Türkiye sits at a strategic crossroads between Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. How does this geographic positioning create both opportunities and competitive pressures for PU system houses?

Türkiye's geographical position has steered the polyurethane industry towards a highly export-oriented structure. Being able to serve both European markets and the Middle East and surrounding regions simultaneously has enabled manufacturers to gain experience in operating across diverse markets. At the same time, this has required system houses to adapt to a wide range of applications and customer expectations.

Demand from different industries and geographies has significantly contributed to the development of technical know-how and application expertise. I believe that this geographical advantage has played a key role in strengthening both the export capabilities and application diversity of polyurethane producers in Türkiye today.

Among these producers, Kimpur stands out as a clear leader. With our ability to provide solutions across all product groups and industries, manufacture our own system components, and serve more than 60 countries across five continents, we also represent a strong benchmark for the industry.

What structural strengths does the Turkish manufacturing ecosystem offer to polyurethane producers, particularly in sectors such as insulation, automotive, footwear, and white goods?

Türkiye has a strong manufacturing ecosystem, which provides significant advantages for the polyurethane industry. For example, in the white goods sector, Türkiye is one of the largest production hubs in the world. This creates a strong foundation for the large-scale use of polyurethane insulation systems and the continuous advancement of technology.

In the insulation segment, both the scale of the construction industry and the increasing focus on energy efficiency continue to drive demand for polyurethane solutions. In the automotive sector, the presence of a developing supplier base and supply chain enables the advancement of polyurethane applications across various components.

The footwear industry has also long been an important application area for polyurethane sole systems, with Türkiye serving as a regional production hub, similar to white goods. Although the market has experienced some contraction in recent years, the technical know-how and production experience developed within this sector still represent a valuable asset for polyurethane producers.

"Positioned at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, Türkiye offers a unique advantage—combining export strength, manufacturing scale, and deep application expertise across industries."


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What policy, regulatory, or investment priorities would you recommend to further strengthen Türkiye's polyurethane industry on the global stage?
As a system house operating in a challenging regulatory environment, we support efforts to make the industry more sustainable and safer. However, we believe that for this transformation to be successful, innovation and industrial transformation need to be further supported.

In particular, strengthening incentive mechanisms for companies investing in bio-based and low-emission solutions would be highly beneficial. In addition, more predictable regulations, realistic transition timelines, and policies that encourage the use of recycled or alternative raw materials would contribute to the development of the sector.

As an agile, customer-focused company that continuously develops new technologies, we also see value in increasing platforms where industry players and regulators can collaborate more closely. This would make it possible to achieve sustainability goals while maintaining the sector's growth momentum.

Global Polyurethane Industry Dynamics

From your perspective, what are the most significant structural shifts currently shaping the global polyurethane industry — whether in raw materials, sustainability regulations, end-use demand, or regional production patterns?
Since the pandemic, one of the key factors affecting the global polyurethane industry has been the volatility in raw material supply. In recent years, wars and geopolitical tensions have been directly impacting energy prices and logistics processes. This can make both lead times and pricing for key raw materials more unpredictable. As a result, industry players are increasingly focusing on building more flexible and resilient supply chains.

At the same time, we are also seeing significant changes on the regulatory side. In Europe, regulations on building energy performance are driving demand for insulation materials, while in the automotive sector, recycling and circular economy targets are requiring materials to be designed in a more sustainable way.

On the other hand, economic fluctuations and the industry's dependence on imported raw materials continue to create challenges. Geopolitical developments and shifts in global trade further amplify these risks. Nevertheless, I believe that companies investing in sustainable solutions, circular economy practices, and smart manufacturing technologies will gain a significant advantage in this environment.

"To strengthen Türkiye's polyurethane industry globally, we need supportive policies for sustainable innovation, predictable regulations, and closer collaboration between industry and regulators—while building resilient supply chains in a volatile world."


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How are sustainability requirements, particularly in insulation efficiency, carbon reduction, and circular economy principles, redefining the future of PU systems?

Sustainability requirements are significantly transforming the polyurethane industry. In particular, increasingly stringent energy efficiency and insulation standards in Europe are driving demand for high-performance insulation materials. Polyurethane plays a key role in this transition thanks to its superior thermal insulation performance.

At the same time, carbon reduction targets and circular economy principles are reshaping the raw materials used and formulation approaches within the industry. There is a growing interest in polyurethane systems that incorporate renewable and recycled raw materials.

These developments are not limited to Europe and North America. In emerging markets such as Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, rapid industrialization and large-scale infrastructure projects are also driving demand for insulation solutions. We also observe that recent geopolitical developments in the Middle East may influence regional dynamics.

Overall, I believe that sustainable and high-performance polyurethane systems will play an increasingly important role in the years ahead.

Raw material volatility and geopolitical uncertainty have become recurring challenges. How should polyurethane system houses strategically manage these risks?

I believe that polyurethane system houses need to make their supply chains more flexible and resilient. Increasing supplier diversity and ensuring access to resources from different regions play an important role in managing these risks.

At the same time, inventory management and operational planning are becoming increasingly critical. Companies need to build structures that can adapt more quickly to market fluctuations. Due to geopolitical risks, price volatility has become quite frequent in the polyurethane industry. In this context, it is essential to maintain discipline in target costing and gross margin structures, while also building a model that allows companies to adapt to these changes without compromising sustainable profitability together with their business partners.

"The future of polyurethane lies at the intersection of sustainability and resilience—driven by advanced insulation performance, circular materials, and flexible supply chains."


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Do you foresee consolidation in the global PU systems market, or will regional specialists continue to thrive alongside multinational producers?
We are already seeing consolidation across global polyurethane system producers, and we expect this trend to continue with new opportunities emerging. In addition, we anticipate similar consolidation in the Turkish market. Geopolitical risks are making access to working capital more challenging, which is likely to accelerate mergers and acquisitions. We remain open in our approach and continuously evaluate potential opportunities in this area.

That said, the system house model is inherently customer-focused. Developing application-specific solutions, providing technical support, and working closely with customers are essential aspects of this business. For this reason, I believe that regionally specialized system houses will continue to play an important role in the market. Looking ahead, it is quite likely that we will see a structure where large global players and agile, application-driven regional system houses coexist.

Outlook of the PU Systems Business

Which application segments do you see as the strongest growth drivers for PU systems over the next five to ten years, and why?
In the coming years, I believe that insulation applications will be one of the strongest growth areas for polyurethane systems. Energy efficiency and carbon emission reduction have become key priorities in many countries, which is driving demand for high-performance insulation materials, particularly in buildings and cold chain applications.

Refrigeration systems and household appliances also continue to be important growth areas. The increasing focus on food safety and the expansion of cold chain infrastructure are further supporting the demand for polyurethane insulation solutions.

In the automotive sector, lightweight materials and comfort-related applications are becoming increasingly important. I expect continued growth in the use of polyurethane solutions in areas such as acoustic insulation, seating systems, and various interior trim applications.

In addition, the polyester and CASE (coatings, adhesives, sealants, and elastomers) segments in construction are also showing growth in industrial applications.

"Driven by energy efficiency and sustainability, insulation, cold chain, and automotive applications will be key growth engines for polyurethane systems in the coming decade."


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How will innovation in formulation technologies — such as low-emission systems, bio-based content, or improved insulation efficiency — shape competitive advantage?

Today, innovation is no longer limited to developing new formulations. Digital transformation and data-driven working models are becoming increasingly important in the polyurethane industry. With digital systems that enhance production efficiency and advanced modeling tools, it is possible to better analyze processes and identify potential issues at earlier stages.

On the R&D side, AI-supported tools are accelerating formulation development processes. These tools can analyze multiple parameters much faster, enabling quicker development and optimization of new systems.

At the same time, technologies aimed at reducing carbon emissions and the use of sustainable raw materials have become an integral part of innovation. Companies are now focusing not only on performance but also on developing solutions that take environmental impact into account.

Overall, the use of AI and digital tools across production, R&D, planning, and even financial processes significantly improves decision-making speed and problem-solving capabilities. This provides companies with a strong competitive advantage in terms of both operational efficiency and innovation.

How important is R&D capability for a systems house compared to production scale, and how should companies structure their innovation pipelines?

R&D capability is absolutely critical for a system house. Unlike raw material producers, system houses develop tailored solutions for specific customer applications. Therefore, having a strong R&D infrastructure and application development capability is essential for maintaining a competitive edge.

Innovation processes also need to be closely aligned with customer needs. A significant portion of new product development is driven directly by application requirements or evolving regulations.

When structuring the R&D pipeline, it is important to strike the right balance. On one hand, companies need to respond quickly to current customer needs, while on the other, they must continue investing in future-oriented areas such as sustainable raw materials, low-emission systems, and new technologies.

"Competitive advantage today comes from integrating AI-driven R&D, sustainable materials, and digitalized operations to accelerate innovation and deliver smarter polyurethane systems."


KIMPUR

To what extent is digitalization — including process optimization, data-driven formulation development, and customer technical support — transforming the PU systems business model?

As I mentioned earlier, digitalization is significantly transforming the polyurethane systems business model. Data analytics, modeling tools, and AI-supported solutions not only enable more efficient management of production processes but also accelerate formulation development.

These technologies make it possible to identify potential issues at earlier stages, optimize processes more effectively, and provide faster technical support to customers. As a result, digitalization enhances not only operational efficiency but also the speed of innovation and problem-solving capabilities.

Vision, Strategy & Future Opportunities

What is your long-term strategic vision for Kimpur in terms of geographic expansion, product portfolio evolution, and sustainability leadership?

At Kimpur, our long-term vision is to further strengthen our presence in global markets by leveraging our strong production infrastructure and R&D capabilities. Today, we are the largest polyurethane systems house in our region in terms of production capacity and are among the top 10 system houses globally. Our goal is to further solidify our position among the leading system houses worldwide.

Following our collaboration with Ravago, our production capacity has reached 281,000 tons. This capacity provides a strong foundation to support our five-year growth plans. In this context, we are focusing on strengthening our warehouse and logistics infrastructure, particularly in markets where we can be closer to our customers.

Our inclusion in the Turquality program, Türkiye's state-supported brand development initiative, has been an important step supporting our international growth strategy. Through this program, we benefit from significant support in areas such as brand communication, warehouse investments, employment, sustainability, and digital transformation in our target markets. This will further strengthen our global brand presence and enable us to grow more rapidly in international markets. In line with this, we aim to increase our export share to 50% by 2028.

Sustainability is also at the core of our strategy. Under our 2030 Climate Change Roadmap, we aim to increase the use of renewable energy, reduce unit energy consumption, and lower our Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions by 22%, taking 2022 as our baseline. R&D is a key part of this transformation. We are particularly focused on carbon reduction and sustainable raw materials. By 2030, we aim for at least 25% of our product portfolio to consist of systems incorporating renewable or recycled raw materials, as well as low-carbon solutions. At our Düzce facility, preparations for the production of polyester polyols using recycled PET waste are nearing completion, and we target 5,000 tons in sales for this product group by 2030.


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Where do you see the most promising new business opportunities emerging — new markets, new materials, or new application areas?
The polyurethane industry covers a wide range of applications, which means new opportunities can emerge across different areas. In particular, energy efficiency, insulation, and sustainable materials are expected to be key growth areas in the coming period.

At the same time, the need for experienced talent in R&D and technical support is increasing across the industry. Polyurethane systems require a high level of expertise, and the limited availability of skilled technical professionals in this field actually creates an important opportunity.

How do you define responsible growth in today's polyurethane industry, balancing profitability with environmental and social responsibility?
Today, environmental and social responsibility is no longer a choice for companies; it has become an integral part of how business is conducted. I believe that an approach focused solely on short-term profitability is not sustainable in the long run.

Especially in production-intensive sectors such as the chemical industry, companies need to take greater responsibility for reducing their environmental impact. Energy efficiency, emission reduction, the use of sustainable raw materials, and circular economy practices are all key elements of this transformation.

I define responsible growth as creating economic value while also reducing environmental impact and contributing to society. In the long term, strong and sustainable companies are those that are able to strike this balance.

As one of the few female CEOs in the sector, what message would you like to share with the next generation of leaders — particularly women aspiring to leadership roles in advanced materials and manufacturing industries?
In my view, one of the most important aspects of a leadership journey is developing a strong strategic perspective and emotional resilience. Especially in technical sectors such as manufacturing and advanced materials, women in leadership roles are often expected to prove themselves more.

For this reason, I believe the focus should not be on constantly proving oneself, but rather on creating value, developing the right strategies, and making an impact together with teams. In the long term, sustainable leadership is built on this approach.

I also believe that having more women in these fields creates significant value both for the industry and for organizations. That is why I strongly encourage young leaders to have confidence in themselves and not to hesitate to take on responsibility.