

ÖZBİR A.Ş. : The Success Story of a Journey in Rail Systems

Dr. İlhami Pektaş

Founded in 2005 in Arifiye district of Sakarya with the aim of carrying out maintenance, repair, and modernization of all types of vehicles used in railway transportation, ÖZBİR serves the sector near the Ankara–Istanbul railway line with 15,000 m² of open area and 8,500 m² of indoor facilities. Initially established with a focus solely on maintenance and repair of railway vehicles, ÖZBİR—thanks to visionary management—expanded its production range and became one of the preferred companies in the industry. Extending its scope from conventional wagon repair to the production of parts and equipment for modern train sets and wagon assembly, ÖZBİR aims to manufacture railway construction and maintenance vehicles under its own design and own brand.

Establishment and First Steps: The Year the Foundations Were Laid

In 2005, ÖZBİR's foundations were laid as accumulated knowledge, discipline, and experience in the rail systems sector were brought together in a common vision. Özgür Şolpan, Zeki Çelebi, Burhan Bektaş, İsmail Şolpan, and Ramiz Esen... Each of these five founders were professionals who had worked for years in the manufacturing of rail system vehicles, learned the sector's dynamics in the field, and deeply internalized the importance of engineering discipline.

Formed from the initials of their names, “Ö-Z-B-İ-R” is not merely a company name; it symbolizes a shared vision, solidarity, equality, and a culture of producing together.

The founding purpose was to establish a strong, expertise-based service center providing maintenance and repair solutions for rail system vehicles. Although the company's early years focused only on maintenance and repair activities, the founders' experience soon became the spark for a much larger journey. This foundation would later serve as the basis for a broad development path extending into manufacturing, assembly, and engineering.

Growth Phase: The Journey from Maintenance to Manufacturing

Only a few years after its establishment, Özbir began evolving from a service-focused structure into a manufacturing and engineering-driven organization. Today, its modern production facilities—covering 15,000 m² of open area and 8,500 m² of indoor space—stand as the most concrete evidence of this transformation.

The year 2014 marked a new chapter for the company. Following the departure of one of the founders, Özgür Şolpan, and the transition to a joint-stock company structure, Senior Mechanical Engineer Zeki Çelebi assumed the role of Chairman of the Board. This change initiated a period in which institutionalization accelerated, professional management practices were reinforced, and growth strategies became clearly defined.

The new vision set the following targets:

- To increase production capacity,
- To transform from a company focused solely on maintenance and repair into a manufacturer capable of producing parts, components, systems, and complete vehicle assemblies,
- To continuously strengthen R&D and engineering capabilities,
- To become a brand manufacturing in accordance with European standards.

Today, the company offers a broad production spectrum including electrical and mechanical equipment manufacturing, welded constructions, vehicle assembly, painting, cabling, commissioning, and factory testing.

Thus, Özbir has evolved from a small maintenance workshop into an integrated manufacturing and engineering solutions provider with a strong position in the sector.

Achievements and Milestones: From Production to Export

Özbir's growth journey includes many important milestones. The most pivotal achievements can be summarized as follows:

Parts, Systems, and Complete Vehicle Assembly

For wagons, trams, light rail vehicles, and electric train sets:

- Parts and component manufacturing
- Cabling
- Welded constructions
- Interior cabin equipment
- Painting and surface treatments
- Final assembly and factory testing

These capabilities represent one of the key achievements that make Özbir internationally competitive today.

Major Completed Projects:

Istanbul Metro Inc. – T4 Tram: assembly of 16 sets (32 vehicles)

Harsco AG – Assembly of 36 track maintenance vehicles for Swiss Federal Railways

Socofer France – Cabin assembly for 32 track maintenance vehicles

Manufacturing of various equipment and systems for metro and tram vehicles produced by Hyundai Eurotem for IBB (Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality), İzmir, and Antalya municipalities (Brake modules – 894 vehicles / Cable trays – 1576 vehicles / Electrical panels and boxes – 720 vehicles / Skirts – 95 vehicles / Driver consoles – 72 vehicles / Ceiling panels – 666 vehicles)

TÜRASAŞ – For the Gaziray Suburban Project: 18 driver consoles / skirts for 36 vehicles (upper and lower) / floor coverings for 36 vehicles

Ongoing Major Projects

Harsco AG – Assembly of 11 Universal Track Maintenance Vehicles produced for Swiss Federal Railways / Manufacturing of 11 WC modules

Harsco AG – Assembly of cabins for 23 track maintenance vehicles produced for Deutsche Bahn (Germany) / Manufacturing of 46 driver consoles / Manufacturing of 23 WC modules

Müller AG – Turnkey delivery of 5 fully equipped locomotive cabins for the private sector

Hyundai Eurotem – Manufacturing of various equipment and systems for 144 metro vehicles

produced for IBB (Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality) (driver consoles – cable trays – body painting)

TÜRASAŞ – For the Gaziray Suburban Project: FRP interior panels for 36 vehicles / cable trays for 32

vehicles / complete vehicle assembly for 8 vehicles

TÜRASAŞ – For national train projects: 40 driver consoles / upper skirts for 95 vehicles

Revision & Modernization Projects

Özbir has become a strong reference point in the modernization, refurbishment, and life-extension of existing rolling stock. Major projects include:

- Taksim Tunnel Vehicle
- Gaziulaş Alstom Trams
- TCDD – Alstom E14000 Suburban Train Sets

Turnkey Solutions

Process management covering the entire production lifecycle—combined with the ability to deliver to customers from a single source, on time, and to high standards—is one of Özbir’s strongest competitive advantages.

A Trusted Brand in International Markets

Having successfully completed major projects in four countries (France, Germany, Switzerland, and Czechia), Özbir has particularly stood out with its export performance after 2024.

Key international deliveries include:

- 8 next-generation catenary maintenance vehicles and 28 crane-equipped track maintenance vehicles for Swiss Federal Railways (SBB)
- Hybrid track maintenance cabins for Deutsche Bahn (DB, Germany)
- Hybrid locomotive cabin for Müller Technology, Switzerland

These projects have firmly established the company as a reliable solution partner manufacturing to European standards.

Strategic Approach: Quality, R&D, and Sustainable Growth

Behind Özbir’s transformation into a strong player in its sector lies a consciously implemented set of strategies:

Manufacturing and Engineering-Focused Growth

The company’s initially repair-oriented structure has been gradually expanded to include engineering, welded fabrication, electro-mechanical manufacturing, cabling, assembly, and testing processes. This has significantly extended the company’s value-added chain.

Full Compliance with International Standards

Özbir conducts its production in accordance with European norms through robust quality management systems. This approach forms the foundation of its export capability and international collaborations.

R&D and Innovation

Beyond implementing existing solutions, developing new technologies, new vehicle designs, and new systems is among the company’s strategic priorities.

Environmental Responsibility and Future-Oriented Production

Energy efficiency, clean production processes, and an environmentally responsible approach are at the core of all planning activities.

Focus on Boutique and Niche Projects

Especially during the pandemic period, Özbir identified a manufacturing gap in specialized, boutique, or niche projects that large-scale mass producers tended to overlook and strategically positioned itself in this space. This approach helped the company establish a strong “special solutions partner” position in the market and received notable demand particularly from Europe.

Export and Global Expansion: Opening the Door to Europe

In recent years, Özbir has become a reliable supplier not only for Türkiye but also for the European and global markets. Projects in Switzerland and Germany have demonstrated that the company’s technical capability, quality mindset, and process management competence are internationally recognized.

Today, the demands directed to Özbir reflect the confidence of organizations seeking not merely products but integrated engineering and manufacturing solutions.

Future Vision: Becoming a Designer and Manufacturer of Its Own Vehicles

ÖZBİR’s strongest vision for the coming period is to manufacture railway construction and maintenance vehicles under its own design and brand.

R&D activities for these projects have already commenced. Once this goal is realized, Özbir will no longer be solely a manufacturer but will evolve into a fully fledged vehicle producer.

Vision & Mission: The Road to the Future

Özbir’s vision is to become a leading brand that shapes the future of the railway industry by delivering sustainable, innovative, and reliable solutions.

Its mission is to create value for customers, society, and the environment by developing high-technology products aligned with the rail systems of the future.

Within the framework of this vision and mission, Özbir aims to invest not only in today’s projects but also in the future of railway transportation, energy efficiency, environmental responsibility, and smart solutions. The company is building a sustainable and flexible production structure by positioning itself across multiple segments such as electric train sets, light rail systems, maintenance & modernization vehicles, and track maintenance machinery.

Sustainable production is targeted across a broad product range including electric train sets, light rail systems, modernization vehicles, and track maintenance machines.

Lessons for Young Entrepreneurs: What to Learn from Özbir’s Journey

Özbir’s story offers important insights, especially for young people who aspire to become entrepreneurs in the railway or heavy industry sectors, or who are planning a career in manufacturing.

- **Specialization and sector experience are fundamental:** All founders had prior experience in rail vehicle manufacturing. This ensured the company was established in the right field with

the right know-how. Entering a sector therefore requires either solid experience or a strong learning plan.

- **Flexible vision and transformation capability:** A structure initially focused on maintenance and repair evolved over time toward manufacturing, assembly, exports, and engineering solutions. This demonstrates the importance of not remaining confined to a narrow field and of adapting to market demands.
- **Quality + compliance with standards = differentiation:** Özbir set out with production aligned to international norms, quality control, and certification. This built trust in the domestic market and enabled competitiveness internationally.
- **Invest in R&D and innovation:** Simply performing existing work is not sufficient. Investment in new technologies, sustainable solutions, and engineering capabilities is essential. Özbir's emphasis on R&D has driven its sectoral advancement.
- **Focus on niche/boutique manufacturing:** Positioning in specialized, high-quality, engineering-focused projects tailored to customer needs—especially those overlooked by large mass producers—creates competitive advantage.
- **Future-oriented vision & sustainability:** Considering not only today's but also future needs—embracing energy efficiency, environmental responsibility, and sustainable production—provides long-term advantage.
- **Courage and patience:** Starting small does not prevent achieving major success in the long term. Özbir's example demonstrates the results of patience, determination, and planned growth.

Key advice to young entrepreneurs: “Specialize in your field, prioritize quality, remain flexible, stay open to innovation, be patient, and always have a vision.”

The Secret of Success: The Strengths That Make Özbir Stand Out

A series of key factors and strategic choices have enabled Özbir to reach its current position:

1. **Sectoral experience and technical know-how** — The founders' background in rail vehicle manufacturing provided a strong foundation.
2. **Institutionalization and professional management** — The transition to a joint-stock structure after 2014 enabled more effective strategic decision-making.
3. **Production infrastructure and facility scale** — With 15,000 m² open and 8,500 m² indoor space, the company has the capacity to perform manufacturing, assembly, testing, and commissioning at full scale.
4. **R&D and engineering-driven expansion** — Moving beyond repair toward an integrated service model including design, manufacturing, assembly, and testing created added value.
5. **Quality, standards, and certification** — Compliance with international norms strengthened reputation in the domestic market and competitiveness abroad.
6. **Flexibility, customer focus, and niche positioning** — Undertaking specialized projects, particularly those aligned with European standards and overlooked by large players.
7. **Export vision and international expansion** — Rather than remaining limited to domestic success, the company moved into international projects, strengthening its scale and brand value.
8. **Future-oriented investment: sustainability, environment, new technologies** — This positions the company ahead of competitors.

9. **Strong human capital** — A capable engineering team supported by experienced manufacturing personnel.

Together, these elements have transformed Özbir from “a maintenance company” into a strong, engineering-driven manufacturer ready for international competition in integrated railway solutions.

Conclusion: Strength Born from Unity, Success Reaching the Future

The story of Özbir Vagon Sanayi A.Ş. proves what can be achieved when a vision established at the right time is supported by the right knowledge and guided by disciplined, determined management.

Today, Özbir is not only a trusted brand in Türkiye but also across Europe—a producer, developer, exporter, and innovation-driven force.

With its goal of domestic and national vehicle manufacturing, its environmentally friendly production approach, and its investments in sustainable transportation solutions, Özbir will continue to be an influential actor sectorally, socially, and economically.

Özbir’s story is not yet finished. In fact, the real journey is just beginning.