

The Role of Educational Mobility Programs in Cultural Integration: A Study on the Attitudes of Erasmus Students in Turkey toward the Accession of Turkey to European Union

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ABSTRACT Erasmus is the EU's education program enabling European students to study abroad. This study aims to find out *Attitudes of Erasmus Students in Turkey toward the Accession of Turkey to European Union*. The study has used the analytical research design. The study group is the Erasmus students who studied in three different universities in Turkey in 2011-2012 session and number of participants is 61. A questionnaire which asks the opinions of student about the expressions related to the accession of Turkey to EU is used. The items of the questionnaire have been borrowed from the Standard Eurobarometer's and Special Eurobarometer's researches which were used successfully to demonstrate the EU public opinion on Turkish membership to EU. For this reason it is expected that the scale has sufficient validity and reliability. The findings stated that the Erasmus students see Turkey as a part of EU, they think Turkey's accession to the EU would favor the mutual comprehension of European and Muslim values and big majority of the students approve the accession of Turkey to European Union unlike the EU community. We concluded that educational mobility programs have a positive effect on the cultural integration and recommended that Turkey's capacity for Erasmus exchange program should be increased and the European students who want to visit Turkey through Erasmus should be given priority. Other cultural and mobility programs between the Union and Turkey should be included and Turkey has to improve the level of the human rights to increase the acceleration of the integration.

INTRODUCTION

European Union and the Enlargement Process

The European Union started as an economic integration in the 1950s and has been transformed into today's structure in the past six decades. As an economic organization the EU -15 was very successful indeed. However, after the enlargements in 2004 and 2007 with the accession of 12 new members, it seems to be hard for the EU to integrate the newcomers especially in the economic aspect. Eastern enlargement of the EU can be analyzed through two competing versions of new institutionalism. That is, the enlargement policy is examined from the lenses of rational institutionalism on the one hand and the sociological/constructivist institutionalism on the other hand. There is a group of utility driven actors

in the rational institutionalism, such as bargaining for their own national interests in the issues concerning the enlargement policy. The primary consideration is the relative weight of costs vis-à-vis the benefits for each individual country in matters of enlargement. Since the social players act as utility-maximizers (that is, doing what is most beneficial for their own national interests) these players are expected to make use of strategic bargaining and negotiations among them. In other words, logic of consequentiality is the driving force behind the entire enlargement process. As for sociological/constructivist institutionalism, social players are supposed to follow the logic of appropriateness through the guidance of norm/principle entrepreneurs like the European Commission. Decisions on enlargement policy are thus supposed to be taken in accordance with the constitutive norms, principles and the shared identity of the Union. In other words, logic of appropriateness governs the entire enlargement policy and the subsequent process (Taskin 2006).

According to Schimmelfennig (2001), although rationalism can explain most actor preferences and much of their bargaining behavior; it fails to account for the collective decision for enlargement. Sociological institutionalism, in

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turn, can explain the outcome but not the input. He proposes a novel approach, rule/norm-based explanation of the Eastern enlargement, in which the Eastern enlargement is considered as the expansion of the liberal community.

Sjursen has also admitted that norms have played a part in the decision of the EU to enlarge eastwards. She has likewise investigated a mechanism through which these norms have had an impact on the decision to enlarge in particular and the enlargement process as a whole. Sjursen concludes that ethical-political reasons which basically refer to a feeling of shared identity, common history, political values, and sense of wholeness are the main driving forces behind the Eastern enlargement of the EU. In other words, sense of kinship-based duty has played a key role in mobilizing the member states for enlargement (Sjursen 2002).

According to Torreblanca, throughout the whole Eastern enlargement of the EU a middle-ground has been found to accommodate interests and principles in the EU. In other words, EU enlargement policy has found a middle ground to move in a normative direction (hence meeting the EU's constitutive norms and principles) and, in the mean time, let member states protect and maximize their material interests (Torreblanca 2002).

Turkey as a Candidate Member of EU and a Participant of Erasmus Program

For the Turkish accession to the EU the Eastern enlargements can be taken as the basic theoretical reference points in economic aspects but in social and cultural aspects the matter is a bit more complicated. Turkey's European vocation started almost two hundred years ago during the Ottoman time and became apparent in the early 1950s. First, Turkey joined the OECD in 1948; this was followed by membership of the Council of Europe in 1949 and NATO in 1952. The next step for Turkey to follow was not to limit ties with diplomacy but also to extend them to the field of economy. With this aim Turkey applied to the European Economic Community in 1959. Until the December 2004, the main concern of the EU was about the fulfillment of the Copenhagen criteria by the Turkish government. There was little need to refer to historical/cultural/religious arguments about whether Turkey could ever be 'European'; it was enough to note that

on strictly political grounds, Turkey was not yet 'European' enough (Kubicek 2005). Since the start of accession negotiations on October 3, 2005, Turkey-EU relations have entered a new phase. Turkey as a country aiming to join the EU, with the longest history of waiting to join the Union, is now an official candidate bargaining to be a full member of the EU.

Culture, Identity and Accession of Turkey

It is a universally acknowledged truth that being European does not only refer to living in a particular region of the world- that is, Europe, but also refers to sharing and practicing of a common history, norms, traditions and values. A common spirit between the EU members should be created because the enlargement of the EU will place new burdens on the existing member states (Biedenkopf 2006).

When the EU-27 is considered, although there are different religious sects among its members all the members of the EU are Christian. It can be said that since the Roman Empire, Christianity has always been important in the European history but today in order to become a global leader, Europe has to refer to universal values like the progress of democratization, human rights, freedom of thought. In order to close the cultural gaps between east and west, the European Union cultivated some symbols to strengthen the European identity like European flag, anthem, European motto, Exchange programs and Eurozone. These symbols have been developed by the Council of Europe in order to strengthen the sense of belonging to the EU. These symbols are defined as secular symbols but in these symbols there are implications to the European cultural heritage. European identity does not seem to be prevailing over the national identities. That is to say, national identities are still at the fore front and do not appear to be eroding in favor of the newly emerging European one. In this context, European identity is a new layer of self-identification, added on top of national identities without necessarily challenging them (Hooghe and Marks 2004).

Forming a European identity is getting much more critical today than it was before. Naturally, at the very first beginning of this unification, no one had even dreamed of such a grand union. Since the 2004 Brussels European Council Meeting, in which the decision on the formal opening

of negotiations between Turkey and the EU was taken, opponents to enlargement have invoked a supposed historical and cultural identity, especially with regard to Turkey (Mayer and Palmowski 2004). Since a European identity is not based on a common historical memory, it is difficult to argue that Turkey should be excluded on these grounds. As long as Turkey can fulfill the requirements for membership, all of which are necessary to meet other conditions such as human rights, Turkey is not principally excluded from a European identity which has been shaped so decisively by the institutions and the law of the EU (Mayer and Palmowski 2004).

Public opinion in the EU towards Turkish accession is timely and appropriate. In both the Special Eurobarometer and Standard Eurobarometer of July 2006, there are several questions on Turkey aiming to demonstrate the EU public opinion on Turkish membership in depth. When the citizens of the EU are asked as regards to their choice of future members of the EU; the lowest level of support has been observed for Turkish membership to the EU. The question is as follows: "For each of the following candidate countries, would you be in favor of against becoming part of the European Union in the future" (Standard Eurobarometer 2006). With the 31 percent of support level, Turkey has been found to be the least desired country in the list of the EU citizens as to which country they would like to see as future member of the EU (Standard Eurobarometer 2006).

Here is the most critical question of the Special Eurobarometer survey. It is critical in the sense that it measures whether or not the citizens of the EU are willing to see Turkey as a future member even if Turkey complies all the condition set by the EU. The question is as follows: "Once Turkey complies with all the conditions set by the European Union, would you be... to the accession of Turkey to the European Union?" Summary of the results of the question are compiled below (Special Eurobarometer 2006):

- ♦ 39% of the respondents are in favor of the Turkish accession while 48% oppose this.
- ♦ The cultural differences between Turkey and the EU Member States are too significant to allow for this accession": 55 % agree and 31% disagree.
- ♦ Turkey's accession to the EU would favor the mutual comprehension of European and Muslim values": 38 % agree and 47 % disagree.

European Union is a secular supranational organization, discussions on Turkey's not belonging to the European family or hints on its Islamism are not essential barriers in front of the Turkish membership. To assert that Turkey cannot be a member of the EU because of its culture and, especially, because it is Muslim, would be an intrinsic and insurmountable incompatibility with democratic values and respect for human rights (Torreblanca 2004). Such claims on Turkish membership are mere reflections of Europe's own confusion, disorientation about its own identity (Ballin 2004).

Education, Erasmus and European Integration

According to the international integration theory developed originally by Karl W. Deutsch, a high volume of international transactions prolonged over a period of time may eventually lead to the formation of an integrated community of states and nations, because it allows direct contact between people of different nationalities, which, in turn, could lead to a 'we-feeling' and make institutional integration easier (Sigalas 2010). Fligstein (2008) is another theorist who makes a very similar statement and maintains that increased interactions between Europeans can lead to a common European identity. As a result of the interpersonal contact people will see each other less as a member of their nation, and thus foreign, and more and more as sharing common interests, a process that eventually will lead to seeing themselves more as Europeans and less as having merely a national identity' (Fligstein 2008: 139). The assumption that direct contact between people from different national and cultural backgrounds can redress past animosities and promote international cooperation has always been popular. It is not difficult, therefore, to understand why the original transactionalists identified international mobility as an essential condition for the success of international integration (Sigalas 2010).

Education is one of the most consequential factors that can be used to strengthen the European identity, to create a sense of belonging and a common culture to hold the union together (open democracy.net 2011). By raising the standard of education and training systems, the EU aims to cultivate more conscious generations (Education and Training 2010). The European Commission has been having a policy in employ-

ing education-related programs in order to promote a sense of European identity amongst Europeans and candidate members to strengthen public support for European integration (Petit 2007). Lifelong Learning (LLL) program supports transnational mobility of people in the field of education in Europe; pilot projects based on transnational partnerships, designed to develop innovation and enhance quality in education; promotion of language skills and understanding of different cultures; use of information and communication technologies in education; transnational cooperation networks facilitating the exchange of experience and good practice; observation and comparative analysis of education systems and policies; activities for the exchange of information and the dissemination of good practice and innovation (Education and Training 2010).

ERASMUS (European Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) lifelong learning program is a higher education program. It seeks to enhance the quality and reinforce the European dimension of higher education by encouraging transnational cooperation between universities, boosting European mobility and improving the transparency and full academic recognition of studies and qualifications throughout the Union. Erasmus action is targeted at higher education institutions and their students and staff in all 27 Member States of the European Union and candidate members including Turkey (<http://ec.europa> 2011).

Erasmus is the EU's flagship education and training program enabling 200,000 students to study and work abroad each year. In addition, it funds co-operation between higher education institutions across Europe. Many studies show that a period spent abroad not only enriches students' lives in the academic and professional fields, but can also improve language learning, intercultural skills, self-reliance and self-awareness. Their experiences give students a better sense of what it means to be a European citizen (<http://ec.europa> 2010).

Aim of the Study

The start of accession talks between Turkey and the European Union has forced Europeans to reconsider the European integration project. Today one of the most important questions for the EU is how the accession of Turkey is going

to affect the Union and how it will be possible to integrate both societies. Discussions and studies about European identity and the accession of Turkey are very popular now in Europe including Turkey. The research done in Europe, shows that the opinion of European public on the accession of Turkey to EU is mainly negative. Do they have prejudice because they did not have enough contact with Turkish society, can this approach be changed by interactions especially educational mobility programs? This study aims to find out *Attitudes of EU Citizen Erasmus Students in Turkey toward the Accession of Turkey to European Union*. This study also aims to show how educational mobility programs are effective ways of cultural integration.

METHODOLOGY

Model

The study has used the Analytical Research Design. Analytical research involves careful survey of opinion and related available data, in order to provide a balanced analytical and objective conclusion, by subjecting the collected data empirical analysis.

Participants

The study group of this research is the European citizen Erasmus students studying in three different universities located in different regions of Turkey, namely Akdeniz University in Antalya, Ondokuz Mayıs University in Samsun and Fatih University in Istanbul, where first two are government owned universities and the last one is a private foundation university. The study has been carried out on the students who visited Turkey in 2011-2012 session and number of students who participated to the study is 61.

Data Collection Tool

As a data collection instrument, this study used a questionnaire which consists of two sections. In the first section demographic information, namely gender and nationality of the students were asked. In the second section there were ten expressions, some of them were in favor of the accession of Turkey to EU and some against. The participants are asked to choose one of the alternatives (Disagree=1; No Idea=2; Agree=3) for each expression.

The items of the scale (the questionnaire which measures the attitudes of participants toward the accession of Turkey to EU) is borrowed from the Standard Eurobarometer (2006) and Special Eurobarometer (2006), and were developed by the experts of the above mentioned research groups and used successfully to demonstrate the EU public opinion on Turkish membership to EU, hence it is assumed that the scale has sufficient validity and reliability to be used in the research. The questionnaire is applied to the students by the assistance of the Erasmus coordinators of the above mentioned three universities.

Data Analysis

The data collected through the scale used in the study were analyzed by means of the statistical analysis software, SPSS 20.0. Frequencies and percentages are calculated and relevant statistical analysis are carried out and related tables and graphs are prepared.

RESULTS

First section of the questionnaire was consisting of demographic information. The distribution of students according to their gender is shown in. As it can be seen in Table 1; 45.9% (n=28) of the participant students are male and 54.1% (n=33) are female.

Table 1: The descriptive data on the study group

<i>Gender</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Male	28	45.9
Female	33	54.1
Total	61	100.0

The distribution of the students according to the country they are coming from is shown in. According to Table 2; 29.5% (n=18) of the participant students are from Germany, 13.1% (n=8) from Poland, 11.5% (n=7) from Romania, 9.8% (n=6) from Lithuania, 6.6% (n=4) from Czech Republic and Slovakia, 4.9% (n=3) from Netherlands and Portugal, 3.3% (n=2) from Hungary and Italy, 1.6% (n=1) from Bulgaria, Slovak Republic and Spain and 1.6% (n=1) student did not mentioned the country s/he is from.

In the second section there were ten expressions about the accession of Turkey to EU and

Table 2: Distribution of students according to the country

<i>Country</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Germany	18	29.5
Poland	8	13.1
Romania	7	11.5
Lithuania	6	9.8
Czech Rep	4	6.6
Slovakia	4	6.6
Netherlands	3	4.9
Portugal	3	4.9
Hungary	2	3.3
Italy	2	3.3
Bulgaria	1	1.6
Slovak Rep	1	1.6
Spain	1	1.6
Not given	1	1.6
Total	61	100.0

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation of the answers

<i>No</i>	<i>Opinion</i>	<i>Std. deviation</i>	<i>Mean (m)</i>
1	To join the EU in about 5 years, Turkey will have to respect systematically Human Rights	0.42	2.86
2	To join the EU in about 5 years, Turkey will have to significantly improve the state of its economy	0.93	1.88
3	Turkey's joining could risk favouring immigration to more developed countries in the EU	0.95	2.01
4	The cultural differences between Turkey and the EU Member States are too significant to allow for this accession	0.86	1.50
5	Turkey partly belongs to Europe by its geography	0.71	2.70
6	Turkey partly belongs to Europe by its history	0.76	2.57
7	Turkey's accession to the EU would favor the mutual comprehension of European and Muslim values	0.65	2.67
8	Turkey's accession to the EU would strengthen the security in this region	0.83	2.27
9	Turkey's accession would favor the rejuvenation of an ageing European population	0.80	2.29
10	Once Turkey complies with all the conditions set by the European Union, I would approve the accession of Turkey to the European Union	0.78	2.52

students were asked to express their opinion by choosing an alternative among *Disagree=1; No Idea=2; Agree=3*. The means of the scores given to each expression is shown in.

As it can be seen from Table 3 the items which has a meaning against the membership of Turkey such as *The cultural differences between Turkey and the EU Member States are too significant to allow for this accession* (m=1.5) got low score where the items in favor of the membership such as *Turkey partly belongs to Europe by its geography* (m=2.70) got high score and participants declared their opinion that *to join the EU in about 5 years, Turkey will have to respect systematically human rights* (m=2.86). The most critical item *Once Turkey complies with all the conditions set by the European Union, I would approve the accession of Turkey to the European Union* (m=2.52) has a high score, so we can conclude that EU citizen Erasmus students in Turkey supports the membership of Turkey to the Union.

The percentages of the opinions of students are shown in. As it has been indicated in Table 4 the opinions of the students on the membership of Turkey to EU are as follows:

- ♦ *To join the EU in about 5 years, Turkey will have to respect systematically Human Rights:* 90 % Agree and 3% disagree.

- ♦ *To join the EU in about 5 years, Turkey will have to significantly improve the state of its economy:* 38% Agree and 51% Disagree.
- ♦ *Turkey's joining could risk favoring immigration to more developed countries in the EU:* 46% Agree and 44% Disagree.
- ♦ *The cultural differences between Turkey and the EU Member States are too significant to allow for this accession:* 25% Agree and 74 % Disagree.
- ♦ *Turkey partly belongs to Europe by its geography:* 85% Agree and 15% Not Agree.
- ♦ *Turkey partly belongs to Europe by its history:* 74% Agree and 16 % Disagree.
- ♦ *Turkey's accession to the EU would favor the mutual comprehension of European and Muslim values:* 77% Agree and 10% Disagree.
- ♦ *Turkey's accession to the EU would strengthen the security in this region:* 52% Agree and 25% Disagree.
- ♦ *Turkey's accession would favor the rejuvenation of an ageing European population:* 51% Agree 21% Disagree.
- ♦ *Once Turkey complies with all the conditions set by the European Union, I would approve the accession of Turkey to the European Union:* 71% Agree and 18% Disagree.

At that point it may be useful to compare the opinions of the EU community which has been determined by the researches of Standart Eu-

Table 4: Percentages of the answers

No	Opinion	Opinion of Erasmus students in Turkey percentage (%)		
		Disagree 1	No idea 2	Agree 3
1	To join the EU in about 5 years, Turkey will have to respect systematically Human Rights	3	7	90
2	To join the EU in about 5 years, Turkey will have to significantly improve the state of its economy	51	11	38
3	Turkey's joining could risk favouring immigration to more developed countries in the EU	44	10	46
4	The cultural differences between Turkey and the EU Member States are too significant to allow for this accession	74	1	25
5	Turkey partly belongs to Europe by its geography	15	0	85
6	Turkey partly belongs to Europe by its history	16	10	74
7	Turkey's accession to the EU would favor the mutual comprehension of European and Muslim values	10	13	77
8	Turkey's accession to the EU would strengthen the security in this region	25	23	52
9	Turkey's accession would favor the rejuvenation of an ageing European population	21	28	51
10	Once Turkey complies with all the conditions set by the European Union, I would approve the accession of Turkey to the European Union	18	11	71

Table 5: Comparison of the opinions of European community and Erasmus students in Turkey

No	Opinion	Opinions of EU community(%)		Opinions of Erasmus students(%)	
		Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
1	To join the EU in about 5 years, Turkey will have to respect systematically Human Rights	83	7	90	3
2	To join the EU in about 5 years, Turkey will have to significantly improve the state of its economy	76	10	38	51
3	Turkey's joining could risk favouring immigration to more developed countries in the EU	63	23	46	44
4	The cultural differences between Turkey and the EU Member States are too significant to allow for this accession	55	31	25	74
5	Turkey partly belongs to Europe by its geography	54	35	85	15
6	Turkey partly belongs to Europe by its history	40	45	74	16
7	Turkey's accession to the EU would favor the mutual comprehension of European and Muslim values	38	47	77	10
8	Turkey's accession to the EU would strengthen the security in this region	35	48	52	25
9	Turkey's accession would favor the rejuvenation of an ageing European population	29	50	51	21
10	Once Turkey complies with all the conditions set by the European Union, I would approve the accession of Turkey to the European Union	39	48	71	18

robarometer (2006) and Special Eurobarometer (2006) with the opinions of EU citizen Erasmus students who visited Turkey in 2011-2012 session. As it has been seen in Table 5, both groups have the opinion that Turkey has to respect human rights. 76% of EU community thinks Turkey has to improve its economy but only 38% of Erasmus students agree this. 55 % of EU community thinks that the cultural differences between Turkey and the EU Member States are too significant to allow for this accession but 74% of Erasmus students don't agree that. 54% of EU community sees Turkey as a part of Europe by its geography the number is 85% among the students. Only 38% of EU community thinks Turkey's accession to the EU would favor the mutual comprehension of European and Muslim values, this number is 77% among students. According to most critical item of the questionnaire only 39% of EU community approve the accession of Turkey to the European Union even if Turkey complies with all the conditions set by the European Union and this ratio is 71% among the EU citizen Erasmus students who visited Turkey.

DISCUSSION

There were some limitations of the study. The students were not representing all the members

of the EU, there were students from 13 different countries and the attitudes or opinions of the students were not measured before they came to Turkey for their study. It is likely they have already a positive attitude toward Turkey because they have chosen this country for their study. Stroebe et al. (1988) confirmed that students participating in international exchange programs tend to be biased in favor of their host country and its people, even if their main motive appears to be improving their language skills or learning about other cultures (Stroebe et al. 1988: 182). Despite these limitations we believe that findings of the study tell something significant and mobility of people especially in the field of education is one of the effective ways of the cultural integration among the societies.

International student mobility program is not a new phenomenon, it has long been used as instruments of foreign policy by national governments (Merritt 1972) but some researchers claim that the study abroad experience does not necessarily help to improve visiting students' attitudes towards the host country and its people. Of course there are others like Green (2007) and King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003) who concluded that the study abroad sojourn had a positive effect on their European identity and the year abroad has a 'Europeanizing' impact on students' self-identity. But Sigalas (2010) criticized both

Green (2007) and King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003), for not drawing their empirical evidence from a longitudinal study.

Actually successful adaptation in the new environment plays a role in the effectiveness of Erasmus in promoting a European identity and the quality of personal contact during the encounter with other Europeans is also likely to be an important determinant of the Erasmus outcome (Sigalas 2010).

CONCLUSION

The aim of the study is to determine the attitudes or opinions of the European Union citizen Erasmus students on the accession of Turkey to the European Union and to compare this with that of the EU community to be able to determine the effect (or role) of the educational mobility programs (such as Erasmus) on the cultural integration of societies. The findings of the study stated that the Erasmus students see Turkey as a part of EU; they think Turkey's accession to the EU would favor the mutual comprehension of European and Muslim values and big majority of the students approve the accession once Turkey complies with the conditions set by the European Union. But researches done in EU shows that EU community do not agree this opinion and do not approve the accession. It is possible to conclude that mobility programs may have a positive effect on the cultural integration of the societies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The EU members identify themselves with the rule of law, respect for human rights, freedom of speech and democracy but the union keeps Turkey waiting at the door because of the reaction of the society on cultural and religious matters. To make our world a peaceful place democracy and human rights should be disseminated to the other parts of the world and EU should appear as a model for that, but many parts of the world have different religions. EU is not very effective on those parts of the world because it appears as if it is a religious organization. To express that EU is not a religious organization but representing universal humanitarian values like democracy, respect for human rights and rule of law, membership of Turkey seems to be very essential. With the membership of Turkey, the

Union will show that it is not a religious organization but representing the above mentioned universal humanistic values so it will have a better influence on the other parts of the world. According to the definition of EU, Turks or Islam cannot be Europe's other; racism, fascism and every kind of fundamentalism in and out of Union are others of Europe. Only with the accession of Turkey EU can fulfill its universal mission. For this reason the ways have to be found to integrate the two societies especially young generations.

Culture and identity formation through education, will play an important role in this integration. Especially Erasmus, a sub program of LLL for university students, enables young European students to visit Turkey, have some part of their education in Turkey and get in touch with Turkish society. The same is also possible for Turkish students visiting Europe. At that point we recommend that positive discrimination has to be done; Turkey's capacity and budget for Erasmus students and staff exchange program should be increased and the European university students who want to visit Turkey through Erasmus program should be given priority. Other cultural and mobility programs between the Union and Turkey should be included and Turkey has to improve the level of the human rights in the country through some reforms to increase the acceleration of the integration.

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