

PERCEPTIONS OF TURKISH EXCHANGE STUDENTS OF THE EUROPEAN
UNION'S ERASMUS PROGRAM

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Perceptions of Turkish Exchange Students of the European Union's Erasmus
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Thesis Abstract

İmge Şahin, “Perceptions of Turkish Exchange students of the European Union’s Erasmus Program”

This qualitative case study investigated what perceptions outgoing Turkish students have of their Erasmus exchange experience. This investigation examines whether Erasmus program meets its objectives at the individual level, to what extent it satisfies students’ expectations and to what extent this European experience with Erasmus affects students’ understanding of and attitudes towards Europe. The research questions were: (1) What are the perceptions of Turkish Erasmus students regarding the Erasmus program itself? and (2) What are the perceptions of Turkish Erasmus students regarding the European aspects of their experience within Erasmus program?

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews in Turkish from ten Erasmus exchange students. Participants were interviewed during single meetings that were recorded and transcribed fully. The data was analyzed using a content analysis approach.

Results indicated that all the participants were extremely satisfied with their period abroad with Erasmus program. According to the findings, Erasmus is regarded as an important opportunity as it provides students with an international experience and grants. Although Erasmus is primarily an academic exchange program aiming at mobility of students and recognition of studies around Europe, Turkish students did not attribute an academic importance to their Erasmus experience. Instead, they value the socio-cultural aspects of their exchange experience better. They found their experience especially crucial in terms of gaining them more autonomy and self-confidence, a cross-cultural perspective and broadening their horizons. Their time abroad changed their understanding of and attitude towards the host country considerably to an extent that they developed a sense of attachment and belonging to the host country. Based on their experience in the host countries, the participants had a perception that a regulative system and order exist in every aspect of life in Europe and they held the opinion that there was a lack of solidarity apparent in Europe resulting from weak interpersonal relations. All participants complained about the existence of a great amount of prejudice against the Turkish. However, they did not sense discriminated as a result of these bias. They all see Erasmus program as a way of eliminating these bias and promoting Turkey’s image in the international arena, thereby facilitating accession to the EU. Students generally favor Turkey’s accession to the EU and reported no change in their opinion in consequence of their exchange experience.

Tez Özeti

İmge Şahin, “Avrupa Birliği’nin Erasmus Programına Katılan Türk Öğrencilerin Programla ilgili Algıları”

Bu niteliksel vaka çalışması, Erasmus programına katılan Türk öğrencilerin program dahilindeki yaşantılarını ve programla ilgili algılarını incelemektedir. Bu inceleme, temel olarak, Erasmus programının öğrencilerin beklentilerini ne derece karşıladığını, bireysel boyutta amaçlarına ulaşip ulaşmadığını ve bu Avrupa deneyimleri neticesinde programa katılan öğrencilerin Avrupa ile ilgili tavır ve düşüncelerinin ne derece değiştiğini içermektedir. Bu çalışma, (1) Erasmus programına katılmış ve geri dönmüş Türk öğrencilerin programın kendisiyle ilgili algıları nelerdir? ve (2) Erasmus programına katılmış ve geri dönmüş Türk öğrencilerin programın Avrupalılık boyutuyla ilgili algıları nelerdir? araştırma sorularını cevaplamayı amaçlamıştır.

Çalışma dahilinde, veri toplamak amacıyla, Erasmus programına katılan 10 öğrenciyle türkçe olarak görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Katılımcıların her biriyle bir defa görüşülmüş ve bu görüşmeler kaydedilmiştir. Kaydedilen verilerin daha sonra transkripsiyonları çıkarılarak içerik analizi yapılmıştır.

Araştırma sonuçları, bütün katılımcıların Erasmus programı dahilinde ev sahibi ülkedeki yaşantılarından son derece memnun olduklarını göstermiştir. Buluntulara göre, Erasmus programı sağladığı uluslararası ortam ve burs olanakları açısından önemli bir fırsat olarak görülmektedir. Erasmus programı, temelinde, Avrupa içerisinde öğrencilerin hareketliliğini ve akademik çalışmaların tanınmasını öngören bir öğrenci değişim programı olmasına rağmen, çalışmaya katılan Türk Erasmus öğrencilerinin program dahilindeki deneyimlerine akademik bir önem atfetmedikleri görülmüştür. Bu öğrenciler için programın sosyo-kültürel boyutları daha öne çıkmaktadır. Bu öğrenciler, program dahilindeki deneyimlerinin kendine güvenlerini arttırması, kültürler arası bir perspektif kazandırması ve ufuklarını geliştirmesi açısından faydalı olduğunu vurgulamışlardır. Yurt dışında geçirdikleri bu zaman dilimi, katılımcıların ev sahibi ülkeyle ilgili bilgi düzeylerini ve bu ülkeye karşı tavırlarını büyük ölçüde değiştirmiştir öyle ki katılımcıların bazıları bu ülkeye karşı bir yakınlık ve bağlılık hissi geliştirdiklerini belirtmişlerdir.

Bu değişim programına katılımları neticesinde, öğrenciler Avrupa ile ilgili daha önceki görüşlerinin daha güçlendiğini belirtmişlerdir. Buna göre, öğrencilerin Avrupa ile ilgili izlenimlerinden iki ana başlık öne çıkmaktadır: birincisi hayatın her alanına yansıyan hakim bir düzenin varlığı; diğeri ise zayıf insan ilişkileri ve neticesine birlik anlayışının düşük oluşudur. Bütün katılımcılar, Türk kimliğine karşı öne çıkan bir önyargının varlığından söz etmişlerdir. Ancak, bu ön yargının ayrımcı bir tavra yol açmadığını belirtmişlerdir. Öğrenciler, Erasmus programını bu ön yargının giderilmesi, Türkiye’nin uluslararası arenada imajının iyileştirilmesi ve dolayısıyla Avrupa Birliği’ne üyeliğinin kolaylaşmasını sağlayacak bir araç olarak görmektedirler. Katılımcıların çoğunluğu Türkiye’nin Avrupa Birliği üyeliğini desteklemektedir ve bu programa katılımlarının bu konudaki fikirlerinde değişikliğe yol açmadığını belirtmişlerdir.

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ABBREVIATIONS

EC	European Community
ECSC	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
EEA	European Economic Area
EILC	Erasmus Intensive Language Courses
ESN	Erasmus Student Network
EU	European Union
EURATOM	European Atomic Energy Community
EURYDICE	Information Network on Education in Europe

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Turkey's formal application to join the European Community—the organization that has since developed into the European Union—was made on April 14, 1987. Turkey was officially recognized as a candidate for membership on December 10, 1999 at the Helsinki summit of the European Council, having been an Associate Member since 1963. It started negotiations on October 3, 2005, a process that is likely to take at least a decade to come to a close. Its possible future accession is now the central controversy of the ongoing enlargement of the European Union (Vardar, 2005)

The European Union (EU) summit in Copenhagen in December 2002 was a turning point in the relations between EU and Turkey. Turkey lobbied actively before and during the Copenhagen Summit in order to start accession negotiations. It had also initiated a set of almost revolutionary legal, constitutional and institutional changes in the summer of 2002 to make its political system compatible with the EU (Vardar, 2005). At the end of the year 2004, accession negotiations started after Turkey announced a renewed National Program and a series of democratic reform packages to meet the Copenhagen criteria. The issues surrounding Turkey's possible accession to the EU stem not only from the country's problems adapting to the criteria set down for all candidate countries, but also from some other cultural and social concerns. These focus around the identity problems inherent in Turkey's "Europeanness". The relationship between European and Turkish citizenship is at the

center of the debate in Turkey, concerning the role of the EU in altering the content and scope of the republican understanding of citizenship (Kadıoğlu, 2005). For instance, Eurobarometer, the public opinion survey of the European Commission (2004)¹ conducted among candidate countries revealed that only the Turks fear the loss of national identity and culture (49%) when asked their three most widespread fears connected to the building of Europe. The debates about the geographical, cultural, spiritual or political boundaries of Europe are very well known. Thus the question of potential Turkish membership forces European elites to confront fundamental questions about their own identity, what values bind the EU member states together as a collectivity, and how diversity can be reconciled with unity.

While on the macro level, the country is experiencing an integration process by discussing these concerns, on the micro level, in the field of education, Turkey joined the Bologna Process in May 2001. The Bologna Process is a European reform process aiming at establishing a European Higher Education Area by 2010. It is an unusual process in that it is loosely structured and driven by the 45 countries participating in it in cooperation with a number of international organizations, including the Council of Europe. The Bologna Process tries to establish bridges that make it easier for individuals to move from one education system or country to another.² In addition, many Turkish Higher Education institutions have participated in EU-created student programs aiming to steer university students towards a European future. One of such program is ERASMUS (European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students), which was launched in 1987. It represents the most popular scheme of student mobility at the European level. In

¹ Retrieved June 2, 2006 from http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb61/eb61_en.htm

² Retrieved April, 27, 2007 from http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/EHEA2010/BolognaPedestrians_en.asp

addition, it has been considered as the flagship of all the educational programmes administered by the EU (Teichler, 2004). Furthermore, Teichler (2004) reported claims made by experts that SOCRATES/ERASMUS has been the most successful single component of EU policy.

With the aim of enhancing the quality and “reinforcing 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”,³ Erasmus Program has been active around the Europe since 1987, now with the participation of 27 member states, 3 European Economic Area countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) and Turkey as a candidate country.

ERASMUS intends to increase the number of mobile students within the European Community in order to produce a pool of graduates who are experienced in intra-Community cooperation, and to strengthen the interaction between citizens in Member States. It emphasizes, as its unique objective, the promotion and enhancement of European dimension of higher education and the creation of a shared European identity. The European dimension is defined to be a dynamic and evolving concept, which is concerned with educating pupils about Europe, in Europe and for Europe (Philippou, 2005). This definition thus encompasses educational goals of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Student mobility and accompanying academic recognition are assumed to be necessary prerequisites for an open and dynamic European educational area that will aid European integration and labour market mobility.

³ Retrieved April 25, 2007 from http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/erasmus/what_en.html

Before Turkey's participation in the European Union itself, Turkish universities participated in this program with incoming and outgoing students and teaching staff. Today, with the participation of more and more Turkish higher education institutions, Erasmus is the most popular exchange program in most of the Turkish universities.

Purpose of the study

This study intends to investigate and discover the perceptions of those students who participated in the Erasmus program regarding the program itself and their experiences about Europe within the program, with a view to assessing their feelings on Turkish integration into the European Union. It attempts to explore the extent to which such mobility contributes to the formation of a European consciousness of the students. This thesis study analyzes whether Erasmus program meets its objectives at the individual level, to what extent it satisfies students' expectations and to what extent this European experience with Erasmus affects students' understanding of and attitudes towards Europe. Given that Turkey's integration process towards a European future is going on with its concerns about "Europeanness", Turkish students' accounts of their European experience, in a program which has an overt aim of enhancing "Europeanness", gain importance and show the extent to which the mobility outcomes of the students at the individual level match the objectives of the program and the EU discourse on student mobility.

Given that there is hardly any research on Turkish academic mobility to European countries, the present study is expected to gather invaluable information on the perceptions and experiences of Turkish exchange students.

In addition to the academic interest of the study, the study aims to serve the policy makers in Turkey who can make use of the research findings to reconsider the implementation of this program by revising the objectives and their practice.

Research Questions

The present study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of Turkish Erasmus students regarding the Erasmus program itself?
2. What are the perceptions of Turkish Erasmus students regarding the European aspects of their experience within Erasmus program?

Definition of Terms

Academic Mobility refers to students and teachers in higher education moving to another institution inside or outside their own country to study or teach for a limited time.⁴

European consciousness is being aware of sharing a common cultural heritage, common values, and global responsibilities throughout Europe. (Ertl, 2003)

European integration is the process of political, economic (and in some cases social and cultural) integration of European states, including some states that are partly in Europe. For centuries, there have been proposals for some form of integration, but currently the dominant force in European integration is the European Union.⁵

Europeanization refers very generally to 'becoming more European like'; the growth of a European continental identity or polity over and above national identities and polities on the continent.⁶

Student exchange programs can be defined broadly as “the international movement of scholars and students” (Harari, 1992, p. 69)

Perception refers to becoming aware of something via the senses; physical sensation interpreted in the light of experience.⁷

⁴ Retrieved May 16, 2007 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academic_mobility

⁵ Retrieved May 16 2007, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_integration

⁶ Retrieved May 16, 2007 from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Europeanisation>

⁷ Retrieved May 16, 2007 from <http://www.webster.com/cgi-bin/dictionary?va=perceptions>

The European Union formerly known as European Community (EC) or European Economic Community (EEC) is a union of twenty-five independent states based on the European Communities and founded to enhance political, economic and social co-operation. (Tudor, 2005)

CHAPTER II

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The conceptual background of this study includes information related to the European Union's educational policy and to student mobility which has become the focus of this policy. It sets the context and background for the Erasmus program. The final section provides the review of the literature related to student mobility within the Erasmus program.

The European Union

The European Union or EU is, in part, an inter-governmental and supra-national organisation made up of European countries, which currently has 25 member states. The Union was established under that name by the Treaty on European Union (commonly known as the Maastricht Treaty) in 1992. However, many aspects of the EU existed before that date through a series of predecessor organisations, dating back to the 1950s. Formerly known as the European Community (EC) or European Economic Community (EEC), the European Union is a union of twenty-seven independent states based on the European Communities and founded to enhance political, economic and social co-operation. According to Tudor (2005), The European Union represents one of the most integrated, economically-based, free trade partnerships. The European Union is structured as a common market and thus purports to allow for the free flow of goods, services, capital and labor.

In 1957, the European Union was created by six member states: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxemburg and Netherlands. In 1973, Britain, Ireland and Denmark joined the union. In 1981, the accession of Austria, Finland and Sweden to the European Union was adopted (Dunkerley et al., 2002). These countries joined the European Union in 1995.

On May 2004, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia joined the EU. This was the largest number of countries accepted into the union at once. In the year 2007, the total number of member states reached 27 with the participation of Bulgaria and Romania.⁸ In order to join the European Union, a state needs to fulfill the economic and political conditions generally known as the Copenhagen criteria (named after the Copenhagen summit held in June 1993). These basically require a secular, democratic government, rule of law, and corresponding freedoms and institutions. According to the EU Treaty, any enlargement must be agreed to by every current member state as well as by the European Parliament. Turkey is an official candidate to join the European Union.

The European Union and Europeanization

Before discussing Europeanization and the role of the European Union in the Europeanization process, it is important to define what “Europe” means. There is not a common shared idea of Europe along all European states. This multiplicity of definitions is partly due to the different, but often crosscutting dimensions of Europe, namely territorial, political and cultural.

⁸ Retrieved May 10, 2007 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_union

According to Delanty (1995), the dominant discourses on Europe can be classified into five main sections: the role of Europe as a geographical concept, the concept of liberty, Europe as Christendom, the balance of power and European civilization. He defines Europe as more than a region and policy, it is an idea and an identity.

According to Wallace (2002), what Europe means to a European depends on where he/she lives in that continent. "Europe" is a moveable set of myths and images, both positive and negative, rooted in histories and vernacular literature. It can be claimed that being European or the definition of European identity, depends on which part of Europe is taken into consideration while making these definitions.

As Schimmelfenning and Sedelmeier argued, "Europe has increasingly come to be defined in terms of the EU; the Europeanization or the 'Europeanness' of individual countries has come to be measured by the intensity of institutional relations with the Community and by the adaptation of its organisational norms and rules" (2002, 501). In the post-war era, what "Europe" means has become increasingly bound up with the process of European integration. "Europe" has come to be used as shorthand for the EU (Dunkerly et al., 2002).

Europeanization commonly refers to the growth of a European continental identity or polity over and above national identities and polities on the continent. Europeanization in political science has been referred to very generally as "becoming more European like". More specifically than this, it has been defined in a number of ways. One of the earliest conceptualizations of the term is that Europeanization simply is an incremental process of re-orienting the direction and shape of politics to

the extent that EC political and economic dynamics become part of the organizational logic of national politics and policy making.⁹

Delanty (1995) suggests that “with the foundation of EEC in the 1950s, for the first time in history, the idea of Europe was institutionalized in a political framework with which, in time, it inevitably became wedded: the idea of Europe finally ceased to be merely a cultural model and became a reality.” According to him, in the second half of the twentieth century the idea of Europe articulated in a particular way of life which can be said to have been distinctively European.

Brock and Tulasiewicz (1999) claim that the mid 1980s was a defining point for the emergence of a European identity and a need for Europeans to start perceiving themselves as European. In 1985 the Single European Act was signed, eliminating trade barriers between countries, leading to the creation of a common market. The European Community, which was renamed the EU, became increasingly politicized and a European identity was assisted by the often directly linked campaigns to give the EU a public persona: a European passport, Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony as the unofficial anthem of the Community, and the EU flag were adopted and became the symbols of the EU. For a sense of European identity to develop, the EU must acquire a psychological existence in the minds of its citizens. The most high-profile effort in this sense has been the EU notion of “unity in diversity” as the basis of European identity. Europe is identified with the EU; denial of accession to the EU is thus seen as a denial of the claim to share a European identity.

However, while the effects of the EU on the identity construction are being discussed, it is difficult to reach valid conclusions on the degree of support.

According to Waever et al. (1993), how much the EU affects the social and cultural

⁹ Retrieved May 10, 2007 from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Europeanisation>

life of EU citizens, how much support people in Europe give to the EU, how much they identify themselves with the common European goals and/or with the institutions should be detected at first to show the degree of identitive support of the EU. It is hard to say a common European identity or formation of such an identity has taken place through a connction with European institutions as there has not been any decisive change towards forming a new European identity.

Castano (2004) adds that the integration processes or the treaties such as the Treaty of Rome may cause the emergence of a Union among the people of Europe but it should not be taken as the creation of a European people. However, it should not be overlooked that through its institutions, economic, legal and educational, the European Union may motivate behavioral or identity changes.

The European Union and Education

The history of European Community policy-making in education is understood to have started in the 1970s. In 1971, the EC ministers of education, meeting for the first time, agreed to political cooperation, taking a lead from the EC leaders at the 1969 Hague Summit who committed their governments to work to “widen” and “deepen” the Community beyond the original economic objectives of the EEC (Corbette, 2003).

Education and training are areas in which Member States have largely preferred to go their separate ways. Each Member State remains indeed responsible for the content and organization of its education and training systems. The European Treaties do not provide for "a common education policy" and harmonization of the laws and regulations of the Member States is formally excluded. The tool used to

promote closer co-operation in education policy matters is the "open-method of co-ordination". Even though the guidelines are set by the Commission, it is up to the Member States to decide how they want to implement them.¹⁰

In the early years of the European Union, education was only of indirect importance until the launch of the Action program in 1976. The main objectives of a European education policy were defined as this framework; for example, improving education and training facilities, foreign language teaching, achieving equal opportunities for free access to all forms of education and promoting closer relationships between educational systems in Europe.¹¹

The 1980s showed considerable progress in terms of co-operation. Individual mobility increased, European programs for research and technology were launched and implemented, as well as programs like Comett in 1986 (higher education and industry co-operation), Eurotecnet in 1985 (professional education and information technology) and Lingua (Language program) in 1990.¹²

A breakthrough came in 1986 with the signing of the Single European Act, which led to a new dynamism within the European Community. It stated the broad objective: the creation of a European Union. Many action programs were launched in the late 1980s in order to prepare the way for the training of the human resources needed to achieve this objective. These included programs such as Comett, Erasmus, and Petra.¹³

¹⁰ Retrieved April 2, 2007 from http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/higher/higher_en.html

¹¹ Retrieved April 2, 2007 from http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/evalreports/education/2005/erasmus-inst/erasinstintrep_en.pdf

¹² Retrieved April 2, 2007 from http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/evalreports/education/2005/erasmus-inst/erasinstintrep_en.pdf

¹³ Retrieved April 2, 2007 from <http://www.eduvinet.de/eduvinet/irl007.htm#History>

In 1987, attention turned from information exchanges to student exchanges with the launch of the Erasmus Program in 1987, often cited as one of the most successful initiatives of the EU. Yet it was not until 1992 that education became recognized formally, in the Maastricht Treaty, as a legitimate area of EU responsibility in its own right.

“The Maastricht Treaty” (1992) created the legal bases for education and training. In these fields, the role of the European Union is to:

- Contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary by supporting and supplementing their action (article 149 Treaty).
- Implement a vocational training policy which supports and supplements the action of the Member States (article 150 Treaty)” (cited in Savvides, 2006).

According to this legal basis, the EU develops a European dimension in education with these tools: multinational education, training and youth partnerships, exchange schemes and opportunities to learn abroad, innovative teaching and learning projects, networks of academic and professional expertise, a framework to address cross-the-board issues, such as new technologies in education and the international recognition of education, a platform for consensus, comparisons, benchmarking and policy-making (Savvides, 2006).

European Dimension in Education

Even though educational activities within the European Union have been developed over the years, it is significant to note that in the original articles of the Treaty of Rome as a founding treaty of the organization, no comments referring to education are present. According to Ryba (1992), the efforts in the Europeanization of education began to increase in the 1950s. This process was evaluated as slow and continued to be difficult.

Brock and Tulasiewicz (1999) accepted that the original text of the Treaty did not mention education even though this was a somewhat false distinction because in fact it enabled progress in preparing for the appropriate development of human resources for technological requirements especially in the further and higher sectors of education.

The “European dimension” first appeared officially in 1976 as European Economic Community (EEC) policy in the first action program in education and later in 1977, in an EEC policy statement entitled “Towards a European Education Policy” (Philippou, 2005). This conception of the European dimension remained unchanged until the late 1980s, when the Community showed that it aspired to define itself in cultural, social and political, and not merely in economic terms, as had previously been the case (Hansen, 1998). A sense of common European culture and identity thus began to appear in policy documents, whereas the economic arguments were de-emphasized. The main purpose of the European dimension within education Brine (1995) stated was ‘to build a shared cross-national understanding of what it means to be “European”’ (cited in Hansen, 1998).

Ertl (2003) states the general aims of this concept as to enhance young people’s awareness of their European identity and to prepare them to take part in the economic and social development of the Community, to create awareness of the advantages and challenges of the Community, to improve knowledge of the community as well as the individual members and to emphasize to them the importance of co-operation with the wider international community.

According to Philippou (2005), another important initiative in promoting the European dimension was the 1988 ‘Resolution of the Council and the Ministers of Education meeting within the Council on the European dimension in Education’.

This document was important in that it redefined the educational goals of the European dimension. The goals included democracy, social justice and respect for human rights as well as ‘strengthening a sense of ‘European identity’ as part of the preparation of pupils for making “concrete progress” towards European union’

Ryba (1992) claims that by the 1980s two major kinds of development occurred. The first and most significant of these was the setting up of a number of exchange programs. The second major development with which the European Community concerned itself was related to schools as well as other institutions. Teaching a European dimension in education within the curricula of educational institutions at all levels, but particularly at the levels of schools and teacher training, is the second major development.

After Maastricht in 1992, general education was for the first time an officially expressed goal of the community policy and action programs were established or renewed. These programs encouraged the development of a European dimension in education, mainly via a range of strategies such as the teaching of languages of the member states; the exchange of technology and experience; the modernization of curricula; the cooperation of educational institutions; the encouragement of distance learning; the specialization and further education of teaching staff; the mobility and exchange of pupils, students, teachers and administrative officers of education and the recognition of subjects, titles and periods of study of tertiary and post-compulsory education (Hansen, 1998). The introduction of numerous community programs like YES III, Leonardo, Socrates and others showed the passage of the EU from policy to action.

The Council of Europe adopted the term ‘dimension’ to replace more vague notions such as ‘about Europe’ or ‘European education’, which existed from as early as 400

years ago (Philippou, 2005), in the ideas of educators like Comenius and ‘those educationalists, thinkers and politicians who believed in the fundamental unity of European culture across the frontiers of its constantly warring nations and who sought to achieve a more peaceful and cooperative future of the continent as a whole’.

Ryba (1992) provided a broad definition, saying it as a process of making Europe a focal point of normal school experience. Phillipou (2005) saw the European dimension as a dynamic and evolving concept, which is concerned with educating pupils about Europe, in Europe and for Europe. Hansen (1998) has also proposed that “it is comprised of knowledge (pupils should be better informed about the continent of Europe), skills (linguistic, communication, social, negotiation, travel and so forth) and attitudes (which will enable pupils to confirm a commitment to Europe, to develop a European identity and consciousness)” (p.8). As Convery et al (1997) suggest education could now be expected to involve pupils in “thinking, feeling, doing” Europe (p.95).

Yet, although many efforts are being made to prepare the new generation for a new Europe, evidence shows that much work must still be done by the European institutions in order to reach young people at universities. Fernandez (2005) conducted a study analyzing the perceptions that European students have of the idea of Europe, European citizenship and European integration. University students’ views suggested that a clear majority of those interviewed (70%) favored an open and integrated Europe. However, only one third of those interviewed claimed to have a real understanding of the EU, and most seemed to be quite unreceptive to its media coverage. Their idea of the EU is very vague. Young Europeans value the basic ideas

of building a united Europe, but they do not really believe that these will become concrete (Fernandez, 2005).

The European Union and Higher Education

The symbolic starting point of the EU's higher education policy was the first meeting of the ministers of education of the then six member countries of the European Community in 1971. Subsequent meetings resulted in the establishment of an Education Committee in 1974 and the adoption of the Action Program in the Field of Education in 1976 (Corbette, 2003). The action program remained the framework of reference for all EU educational programs until the Treaty of Maastricht was signed in 1992. The program set out three priority areas regarding higher education: The most important grant program established on the basis of this framework was the Joint Study Program Scheme. It supported student exchanges for periods of study abroad as part of the normal curriculum, teaching assignments for staff, and joint curricular development (Corbette, 2003). The JSP scheme acted as a pilot program for the later ERASMUS program.

Starting from 1983, a series of events made possible an enlargement of the scope and the weight of the EU's higher education programs. From the meetings of the Council of Europe and the Council of Ministers in 1983 onwards, cooperation in higher education was seen as a means for promoting the free movement and mobility of teachers, students and researchers (Teichler, 1999). As a consequence, several programs were established, such as SCIENCE and Human Capital and Mobility that provided for training of R&D staff through mobility in networks of institutions and TEMPUS, the student mobility scheme based on ERASMUS but targeted at Eastern and Central Europe.

The governments of the EU included education and training in the Treaty on European Union signed in Maastricht in 1992 (Teichler, 1999). At this point, the right of the EU to act in the field of education and training was firmly embedded in the treaties. Many of the previous programs were extended, but brought together in a coherent framework and supplemented with new program in areas previously not included in the legislation (for instance, secondary education). The framework consisted of three tracks; the programs include the traditional activity tracks of promoting student mobility, building cooperation networks, and improving language skills.

European student Mobility

In general, international education can be defined as activities and programs that encourage the flow of ideas and people across cultural and international boundaries (Harari, 1992). Internationally mobile students are students who have crossed a national border to study or to undertake other study related activities, for at least a certain unit of a study programme or a certain period of time, in the country to which they have moved (Kelo et al., 2006). Goodwin and Nacht (1988) state that the goals of student exchange programs can range from being a grand tour to exploring one's roots to improving international relations.

According to the research literature, the benefits of student exchange programs are many and varied. Research from the 1950s primarily focused on the effects of exchange programs with respect to students and regarding "cross-cultural interactions . . . the increase in knowledge and language skills of other countries and changes in attitudes and career goals" (Kraft et al., 1994, p. 29). These researchers found that students who participated in exchange programs were more reflective,

more prepared to help others, more knowledgeable with respect to international affairs, and more self-confident. Nevertheless, with respect to the attitude toward the host country, researchers cited in Kraft and others state that although there was increased understanding, student attitudes were not necessarily positive.

From the European decision makers' perspective, mobility represents a form of secondary socialization which relies on the individuals. Being mobile means changing environments, eventually one's sense of belonging, and multiplying possibilities to benefit from this variety. Mobility involves encounters and confrontation with differences, requiring a broad range of individual adaptive responses, and also encouraging their renewal. Geographical mobility broadens the individual's horizon, stimulates intellectual agility and raises the general level of learning. It can only reinforce the ability to learn, which is so necessary to develop (European Commission, 1995, as cited in Papatsiba, 2005).

International student mobility has considerably gained currency as a major policy in Europe during recent decades. The promotion of internationalisation and of international mobility in particular, has come to be regarded as important elements of higher education policy. This applies to higher education institutions and to national governments in Europe, but even more so it is true of the European Union (EU) and other supra-national actors in Europe. (Kelo et al., 2006)

In the 1980s, the development received a big boost through the launch of the Erasmus Programme (1987), the original aim of which it was to enable a minimum of 10% of all higher education students in Europe to study for a period of time in another European country. The Sorbonne Declaration (1998) demands an increase in European mobility as a chief priority, and the Bologna Declaration (1999) continues in this vein. The EU's "Education & Training 2010" agenda, the educational

manifestation of the Lisbon Process, likewise names mobility (and European cooperation) as one of its “concrete objectives” for European education.

In 2006, the Academic Cooperation Association, with support of the European Commission, produced the Eurodata study (Kelo et al., 2006), which presents the student mobility data identified, and, based on an analysis of these data, it tries to depict a picture of the main trends in international student mobility into and out of 32 European countries. The Eurodata study covers 32 European countries: the 25 member states of the EU, the three countries (Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey) that were “candidates” for joining the EU at the time of the study, and the EFTA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland). These countries were referred to as Eurodata countries in the study.

According to Eurodata study, the number of students with Eurodata nationalities enrolled at foreign universities throughout world amounted to almost 575,000. This corresponds to 3% of all students with Eurodata nationalities enrolled in their home countries. The total number of study abroad students with Eurodata nationalities is about half the number of foreign students in the Eurodata region. Therefore, the Eurodata countries together hosted about twice as many foreign students as there were students with their nationalities enrolled abroad. Students from Eurodata countries enrolled abroad concentrate on a limited number of foreign countries. The overwhelming majority studied in another Eurodata country (82%): 471,000 students with Eurodata nationalities were enrolled at universities in Eurodata countries different from those of their nationalities (see Table 1).

Table 1 Eurodata Students Enrolled Abroad 2002/2003

Host countries Countries of nationality	Total EURODATA		Other European countries		Non-European countries		...including USA		...including Japan		...including Australia		Total (73 countries)		
	Abs.	%	Abs.	%	Abs.	%	Abs.	%	Abs.	%	Abs.	%	Abs.	%	%
EURODATA countries															
AT Austria	11 256	89.1	3	0.0	1 369	10.8	1 060	8.4	36	0.3	226	1.8	12 628	100.0	2.2
BE Belgium	10 468	91.0	0	0.0	1 034	9.0	847	7.4	40	0.4	98	0.9	11 502	100.0	2.0
BG Bulgaria	18 055	81.8	45	0.2	3 972	18.0	3 725	16.9	121	0.6	67	0.3	22 072	100.0	3.8
CH Switzerland	6 874	78.4	4	0.1	1 887	21.5	1 562	17.8	28	0.3	244	2.8	8 765	100.0	1.5
CY Cyprus	14 995	88.7	18	0.1	1 891	11.2	1 834	10.9	0	0.0	56	0.3	16 904	100.0	2.9
CZ Czech Republic	5 434	79.9	0	0.0	1 366	20.1	1 180	17.4	32	0.5	126	1.9	6 800	100.0	1.2
DE Germany	50 451	80.3	18	0.0	12 352	19.7	9 302	14.8	268	0.4	2 049	3.3	62 821	100.0	10.9
DK Denmark	5 400	80.2	0	0.0	1 333	19.8	901	13.4	25	0.4	307	4.6	6 733	100.0	1.2
EE Estonia	2 079	86.7	0	0.0	320	13.3	298	12.4	9	0.4	6	0.3	2 399	100.0	0.4
ES Spain	23 613	85.5	1	0.0	4 012	14.5	3 633	13.2	63	0.2	158	0.6	27 626	100.0	4.8
FI Finland	9 412	90.2	0	0.0	1 018	9.8	739	7.1	33	0.3	158	1.5	10 430	100.0	1.8
FR France	44 746	84.1	4	0.0	8 438	15.9	7 223	13.6	227	0.4	610	1.2	53 188	100.0	9.3
GB United Kingdom	13 442	47.0	2	0.0	15 152	53.0	8 326	29.1	370	1.3	5 968	20.9	28 569	100.0	5.0
GR Greece	47 808	95.1	8	0.0	2 468	4.9	2 341	4.7	18	0.0	80	0.2	50 284	100.0	8.7
HU Hungary	6 828	82.9	7	0.1	1 402	17.0	1 200	14.6	108	1.3	82	1.0	8 237	100.0	1.4
IE Ireland	14 241	90.0	24	0.2	1 558	9.9	1 055	6.7	18	0.1	471	3.0	15 823	100.0	2.8
IS Iceland	2 420	81.1	1	0.0	564	18.9	537	18.0	6	0.2	18	0.6	2 985	100.0	0.5
IT Italy	39 353	91.4	2	0.0	3 706	8.6	3 287	7.6	67	0.2	288	0.7	43 061	100.0	7.5
LI Liechtenstein	654	98.3	0	0.0	11	1.7	9	1.4	0	0.0	2	0.3	665	100.0	0.1
LT Lithuania	4 127	85.7	1	0.0	689	14.3	647	13.4	20	0.4	21	0.4	4 817	100.0	0.8
LU Luxembourg	6 428	98.7	0	0.0	85	1.3	73	1.1	3	0.1	8	0.1	6 513	100.0	1.1
LV Latvia	2 060	80.1	0	0.0	512	19.9	447	17.4	10	0.4	53	2.1	2 572	100.0	0.4
MT Malta	543	86.9	0	0.0	82	13.1	38	6.1	5	0.8	39	6.2	625	100.0	0.1
NL The Netherlands	10 232	81.9	1	0.0	2 253	18.0	1 672	13.4	62	0.5	450	3.6	12 486	100.0	2.2
NO Norway	9 785	63.3	4	0.0	5 664	36.7	1 568	10.2	21	0.2	3 859	25.0	15 453	100.0	2.7
PL Poland	23 153	88.1	33	0.1	3 081	11.7	2 744	10.5	77	0.3	227	0.9	26 267	100.0	4.6
PT Portugal	11 051	91.4	1	0.0	1 034	8.7	881	7.3	31	0.3	77	0.7	12 086	100.0	2.1
RO Romania	14 779	77.1	739	3.9	3 663	19.1	3 407	17.8	119	0.7	111	0.6	19 181	100.0	3.3
SE Sweden	9 534	62.5	1	0.0	5 719	37.5	3 709	24.3	58	0.4	1 665	10.9	15 254	100.0	2.7
SI Slovenia	1 966	82.4	145	6.1	274	11.5	238	10.0	9	0.4	19	0.8	2 385	100.0	0.4
SK Slovakia	13 686	94.9	0	0.0	743	5.2	610	4.2	23	0.2	109	0.8	14 429	100.0	2.5
TR Turkey	36 160	70.7	94	0.2	14 863	29.0	11 601	22.7	126	0.3	277	0.5	51 117	100.0	8.9
Subtotal	471 033	82.0	1 156	0.2	102 515	17.8	76 694	13.3	2 033	0.4	17 929	3.1	574 704	100.0	100.0

Source: Kelo, Teichler, & Wächter (2006).

The most preferred study abroad countries of Eurodata students are Germany and the United Kingdom, hosting together 40% of all study abroad students from other Eurodata countries. In absolute numbers, more than 100,000 students from other Eurodata countries study in each of these two countries. France and Spain follow at a considerable distance. Among the non-Eurodata study abroad countries, only Australia and the United States host a considerable number of students with Eurodata nationalities. Almost 77,000 Eurodata students study in the United States. This figure corresponds to 13% of Eurodata students abroad. Australia, in turn, hosts 18,000 Eurodata students (3% of all Eurodata students abroad).

Since the 1980s, student mobility within Europe has been the subject of unusual political promotion. Scholars and analysts have suggested that, even from the 1970s onwards, the EU became the most active political actor in Europe in

stimulating student mobility and reinforcing recognition of studies abroad within Europe (Papatsiba, 2005). The development of the 'European dimension' in education in order to reinforce the European identity/citizenship, to increase awareness of common socio-political issues and to enhance knowledge of the historical and cultural aspects of Europe has become the rationale for student mobility (Teichler, 2005).

The latent idea is that of the training of new future elites who advocate the economic and political project of the EU (Papatsiba, 2005). Having acquired scientific and cultural competences, they would accelerate European integration and contribute to the creation of a Europe that is strong and open to the world.

With regard to mobility, the EU has created several programs, such as ERASMUS or Leonardo da Vinci, to steer university students towards a successful European future. They encourage young people to collaborate in joint cultural, social or other projects. They emphasize the transnational character of these projects, which aim to help young people to develop a sense of European identity and European solidarity.

Socrates

Socrates is Europe's educational exchange program and involves 31 European countries including Turkey. Its main objective is precisely to build up a Europe of knowledge and thus provide a better response to the major challenges of this new century: to promote lifelong learning, encourage access to education for everybody, and help people acquire recognized qualifications and skills. In more specific terms,

Socrates seeks to promote language learning, and to encourage mobility and innovation.¹⁴

The specific objectives of SOCRATES, as set out in the Decision which established the program are as follows:

- to strengthen the European dimension in education at all levels and to facilitate wide transnational access to educational resources in Europe while promoting equal opportunities throughout all fields of education;
- to promote a quantitative and qualitative improvement of the knowledge of the languages of the European Union, in particular those languages which are less widely used and less widely taught;
- to promote cooperation and mobility in the field of education, in particular by: encouraging exchanges between educational institutions, promoting open and distance learning, encouraging improvements in the recognition of diplomas and study periods, developing the exchange of information, and to help remove the obstacles in this regard; to encourage innovation in the development of educational practices and materials and to explore matters of common policy interest in the field of education.

Socrates consists of eight actions: COMENIUS- School education, ERASMUS - Higher education, GRUNDTVIG - Adult education and other educational pathways, LINGUA - Language teaching and learning, MINERVA - Information and communication technologies in education, Observation & Innovation - Educational systems and policies (Arion, Naric), Joint Actions with other Community programs and Accompanying Measures.

¹⁴ Retrieved April 23, 2007 from http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/socrates/socrates_en.html

The Erasmus Program

Erasmus (European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) is the European Commission's educational program for Higher Education students, teachers and institutions. It was introduced in 1987 with the aim of increasing student mobility within the European Community, subsequently the European Economic Area countries, and also candidate countries such as Turkey. It was named after the philosopher, theologian and humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam (1465-1536). In 1995, Erasmus became incorporated into the new Socrates program which covers education from school to university to life long learning.¹⁵

Erasmus provides mobility grants to cover the additional costs of study abroad. While enrolled in the Erasmus program, students do not have to pay university fees abroad. The Erasmus program is open to all academic disciplines, all types of higher education institutions and all levels of higher education. Institutions have to be recognized by the national authorities as eligible for Erasmus activities and also must obtain an Erasmus University Charter, which is a certificate signed by the European Commission.¹⁶

Universities should maintain the required conditions and have a mobility agreement to send students via the Erasmus Program to another university of a participating country. Every student has the right to choose the host university. Partnership between universities is not the required condition. However, while

¹⁵ Retrieved on April 25, 2007 from http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/erasmus/erasmus_en.html

¹⁶ This information is taken on April 23, 2007 from http://www.ua.gov.tr/portal/page?_pageid=218,35571&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL

choosing the host country, the discretion of the universities is significant, it does not just depend on the student's choice.¹⁷

Socrates-Erasmus can involve student mobility, teacher mobility and curriculum development and is based on co-operation agreements between Higher Education Institutions in different participating states. It represents the most popular scheme of student mobility at the European level. In addition, it has been considered as the flagship of all the educational programs administered by the EU (Teichler, 2004). Erasmus contributes to the field of educational exchange through introducing for the first time in a major way the concept of joint curricular planning as the foundation for the exchange programs.

Every student who is at the higher education level leading to a degree of a diploma in one of the participating countries and has successfully completed at least the first year of his/her university studies can participate in an exchange via the Erasmus program. This period can be between three and twelve months. The host university facilitates language courses and also academic advice to students or assistance with practical matters, but all these kinds of support depend entirely on the host institution. In addition, preparatory language courses are eligible either at the students' own university or at the host university before beginning of the study abroad period.

Erasmus intensive language courses (EILCs) supported by the European Commission are in the less widely used and less taught European languages and the languages of other countries participating in the Erasmus program. The EILCs give

¹⁷ Retrieved April 16, 2007 from http://www.ec.europa.eu/education/programs/socrates/erasmus/answers_en.html

Erasmus participants the opportunity to study the language of the host country for three or eight weeks in the host country.¹⁸

History and Development of Erasmus

The Erasmus Program started in 1987, and according to the council decision, it was completed on June 30, 1991. It was a four year program but in 1989 it was decided to extend the program to five years. The Council of the European Communities launched the program in order to increase significantly mobility in the Community and to promote greater cooperation between universities.¹⁹

The objectives of the Erasmus Program were stated in the decision of Council no: 87/327/EEC as follows:²⁰

- (i) to achieve a significant increase in the number of students from universities as defined in Article 1 (2) spending an integrated period of study in another Member State, in order that the Community may draw upon an adequate pool of manpower with first hand experience of economic and social aspects of other Member States, while ensuring equality of opportunity for male and female students as regards participation in such mobility;
- (ii) to promote broad and intensive cooperation between universities in all Member States;
- (iii) to harness the full intellectual potential of the universities in the Community by means of increased mobility of teaching staff, thereby improving the quality of the education and training provided by the universities with a view to securing the competitiveness of the Community in the world market;
- (iv) to strengthen the interaction between citizens in different Member States with a view to consolidating the concept of a People's Europe;
- (v) To ensure the development of a pool of graduates with direct experience of intra-Community cooperation, thereby creating the basis upon which intensified cooperation in the economic and social sectors can develop at Community level.

¹⁸ Retrieved April 17, 2007 from http://www.ec.europa.eu/education/programs/socrates/erasmus/eilc/index_en.html

¹⁹ Retrieved April 17, 2007 from <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:31987D0327:EN:HTML>

²⁰ Ibid

The Community action program Socrates was established on March 1995 with decision no:819/95/EC of the European Parliament and of the council for the period I January 1995 to 31 December 1999.²¹ Erasmus became incorporated into the new Socrates program. Socrates program included three areas of action. The first area was higher education, Erasmus program. The second area was school education, Comenius; and the Third area was defined as horizontal activities in the areas of language skills in the Community (Lingua), open and distance education, the promotion of the exchange of information and experience (including Eurydice and Arion). The budget conserved from the Erasmus program was 55 % of the overall budget.²²

In 1995, the number of the member states increased to fifteen when Austria, Finland and Sweden joined the European Union. Higher education institutions in those 15 member states, and those signatory to the agreement on the European Economic Area (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) implemented the Socrates I/Erasmus program.

The European Parliament and the Council of European Union launched the second phase of the Community action program in the field of education, including Socrates with decision no.253/2000/EC. The program was adopted on January 200 for the period until December 31, 2006.²³

²¹ Retrieved on 23 April, 2007 from <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:31995D0819:EN:HTML>

²² Retrieved on 23 April, 2007 from http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/socrates/socrates_en.html

²³ This information was retrieved on April 24, 2007 from http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2000/1_028/1_02820000203en00010015.pdf

Socrates II was open to students from all member countries of the European Union, the EEA countries, the associated countries from Central and Eastern Europe (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia) and pre-accession countries (Malta, Cyprus and Turkey).

The program main objectives were to promote lifelong learning and develop Europe of knowledge. Specific objectives were stated in Decision no 253/2000/EC as follows²⁴:

- (i) to strengthen the European dimension in education at all levels and to facilitate wide transnational access to educational resources in Europe while promoting equal opportunities throughout all fields of education;
- (ii) to promote a quantitative and qualitative improvement of the knowledge of the languages of the European Union, in particular those languages which are less widely used and less widely taught, so as to lead to a greater understanding and solidarity between the peoples of the European Union and promote the intercultural dimension of education;
- (iii) to promote cooperation and mobility in the field of education by: encouraging exchanges between educational institutions, promoting open and distance learning, encouraging improvements in the recognition of diplomas and periods of study, developing the

²⁴ This information was retrieved on April 24, 2007 from http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2000/1_028/1_02820000203en00010015.pdf

exchange of information, and to help remove the obstacles in this regard;

- (iv) To encourage innovation in the development of educational practices and materials including, where appropriate, the use of new technologies, and to explore matters of common policy interest in the field of education.

Socrates and also Erasmus have played fundamental roles in the preparation for EU enlargement. Thirty-one countries have been brought as close as possible through the program. The second phase of the program ended in 2006.²⁵ The Commission has offered to run new generation programs from 2007 to 2013.

The principal objective was to increase university cooperation withing the EC to promote students mobility, with the target of involving %10 of European students in an academic program in another country under the sponorship of their home universities. Erasmus provides grants to universities for faculty visits to the universities in other countries to carry out joint planning activities for the curricula to be taken in common by the students in each of the cooperating universities. A stimullus to student participation has been the creation of a scheme of student grants desinged to provide the additional funds needed to study abroad, assuming the normal financial aid for study at home would be available to finance major expenses involved.

“Higher education plays a crucial role in producing high quality human resources, disseminating scientific discovery and advanced knowledge through teaching, adapting to the constantly emerging needs for new competences and qualifications, and educating future generations of citizens in a European context. All such functions are of vital importance to the long-term development of Europe. The increasing speed at which

²⁵ Retrieved April 26, 2007 from http://ec.europa.eu/education/programs/evaluation/intsocrates_en.pdf

existing knowledge becomes obsolete, and the rapid changes in the means by which it is delivered and renewed, will require the higher education sector to adopt new methods and commit itself wholeheartedly to the provision of lifelong learning. Against this background, ERASMUS contains a wide range of measures designed to support the European activities of higher education institutions and to promote the mobility and exchange of their teaching staff and students.”²⁶

Adopted on 24 January 2000 and spanning the period until the end of 2006, SOCRATES and its Erasmus action are now open to the participation of 31 countries:

- the 27 Member States of the European Union
- the 3 European Economic Area countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway)
- Turkey as the candidate country

In order to participate in Erasmus higher education institutions have to apply for an Erasmus University Charter. This Charter entitles them to apply to the Commission for centralized Erasmus funds and to their National Agency for decentralized mobility funds.

While the promotion of 'physical mobility', mainly of students, constituted the main thrust of Erasmus Phase I and II, the higher education Chapter of Socrates seeks to integrate such mobility into a wider framework of cooperation activities which aim at developing a "European Dimension" within the entire range of a university's academic programmes. "Bringing students to Europe, bringing Europe to all students" is the new spirit of Erasmus: while student mobility retains a position of central importance within the programmed, stronger incentives are now available

²⁶ Retrieved April 23, 2007 from http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/structure/erasmus_en.html#1

to encourage universities to add a European perspective to the courses followed by students who do not participate directly in mobility.²⁷

More emphasis is consequently placed on teaching staff exchanges, transnational curriculum development and pan-European thematic networks. Wider dissemination of and participation in the results of this work are sought through specific support. Erasmus also encourages universities to associate other public and private bodies from their surrounding regions with their transnational cooperation activities, thereby enhancing opportunities for inter-regional cooperation between the participating countries.

From 1987/88 to 2003/2004, more than 1 million university students had spent an Erasmus period abroad and 2,199 universities (or other Higher Education institutions) are presently participating in the program. The EU budget of Socrates/Erasmus for 2000-2006 amounts to around 950€ (of which approximately 750 Mio € for students grants).²⁸

The recognition of studies and diplomas is a prerequisite for the creation of an Open European area of education and training where students and teachers can move without obstacles. That is why the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) was developed in a pilot scheme established within the Erasmus program as a means of improving academic recognition for study abroad. The external evaluation of ECTS has demonstrated the potential of the system and the European Commission has decided to include ECTS in its proposal for the Socrates program, in particular in Chapter I on higher education (Erasmus). ECTS is now moving from its restricted

²⁷ Retrieved on April 23, 2007 from http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/structure/erasmus_en.html#1

²⁸ Retrieved on April 2, 2006 from http://www.ua.gov.tr/portal/page?_pageid=218.35571&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL

pilot stage towards a much wider use as an element of the European dimension in higher education.²⁹

ECTS provides an instrument to create transparency, to build bridges between institutions and to widen the choices available to students. The system makes it easier for institutions to recognize the learning achievements of students through the use of commonly understood measurements - credits and grades - and it also provides a means to interpret national systems of higher education. ECTS is based on three core elements: information (on study programs and student achievement), mutual agreement (between the partner institutions and the student) and the use of ECTS credits (to indicate student workload).

The rationales underlying ERASMUS student mobility can be described under two main headings (Papatsiba, 2005):

- “An economic and professional rationale of student mobility. It is seen as a means to promote the European labour market. It would predispose individuals to cross borders more easily during their professional lives;
- A civic rationale of student mobility in the light of creating European citizens. Student mobility would forge European consciousness and would be a means to reach international understanding.”

Papatsiba (2005) claims that student mobility serves the purpose of economic cooperation within the EU, since the Erasmus program aims at the training of European-minded professionals. He adds that despite the dominant utilitarian approach, the social and political aspects of student mobility were not neglected. These were acknowledged in the discourses which introduced the idea of a “Europe of knowledge” that was closely related to the notion of a “People’s Europe”. (p.176)

Bruter (2005) evaluates this action programs as the guarantee a balance between the economic and the socio-political aspects of European integration. Those

²⁹ retrieved on April 23, 2007 from http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/socrates/ects/index_en.html

programs are designed as both cultural and educational exchanges. The names of the programs such as Socrates are referring to Ancient times and also referring to concepts and values such as Eureka, Tempus, and Lingua. The Erasmus program which uses the name of the great philosopher of the Enlightenment is a co-operation program between universities. Bruter says that the choice of names for the programs of the European Union is relatively minor: however, it should not be negligible.

Turkish Universities in the Erasmus Program

A European Union Desk was formed within the scope of the Ministry of National Education which aims at the harmonization of the Turkish educational system with the educational systems of EU countries. The activities are being carried out with the following aims³⁰:

- To provide Turkish citizens and their children with the best educational services
- To improve the exchange of educational information between EU countries and Turkey
- To gather data and documents about the educational system of EU countries and Turkey
- To cooperate with the EU in higher education
- To spread foreign language education throughout Turkey
- To sustain equal accession conditions for all educational institutions
- To prepare children for a work life
- To eliminate unemployment

A preparation period of 18 months is required for Turkey's active participation in the EU Youth and Education programs. The preparation period includes the establishment of a National Agency which would be responsible for the

³⁰ Retrieved on November 3, 2006 from <http://www.byegm.gov.tr/REFERENCES/EDUCATION-system.htm>

implementation of the education and youth programs; training for the members of the National Agency; promotional and informative activities about the program; translation of all the documents into Turkish, establishing an information network.³¹

Agreement was reached with Turkish officials that the Community's financial aid in 1999 would focus on a limited number of priorities. The aim was twofold: to be able to allocate sufficient resources to achieve the projects' objectives, and to enhance the impact of EU action.

Turkish universities applied for an Erasmus University Charter in 2003 for the first time. In the 2003-2004 academic year, Erasmus was piloted with the participation of 15 Turkish universities. These universities were selected by a temporary commission initiated by Ulusal Ajans (the Center for the European Union's Education and Youth Programs). Since 1 April 2004 Turkey has been able to participate fully in the Erasmus Program as well as all other EU programs under the umbrella of Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci and Youth. During the 2004-2005 academic year, total number of Higher Education Institutions that could participate in the program was 65.³²

³¹ Retrieved November 3, 2006 from <http://www.byegm.gov.tr/REFERENCES/EDUCATION-system.htm>

³² Retrieved May 10, 2007 from http://www.ua.gov.tr/socrates/docs/tur/Ogrenci_ogrenim_Hareketiligi.doc

Table 2 – Erasmus Program- The Number of Outgoing Students and Academicians 2004-2006³³

**ERASMUS PROGRAMI
GİDEN ÖĞRENCİ VE
ÖĞRETİM ELEMANI
SAYILARI**

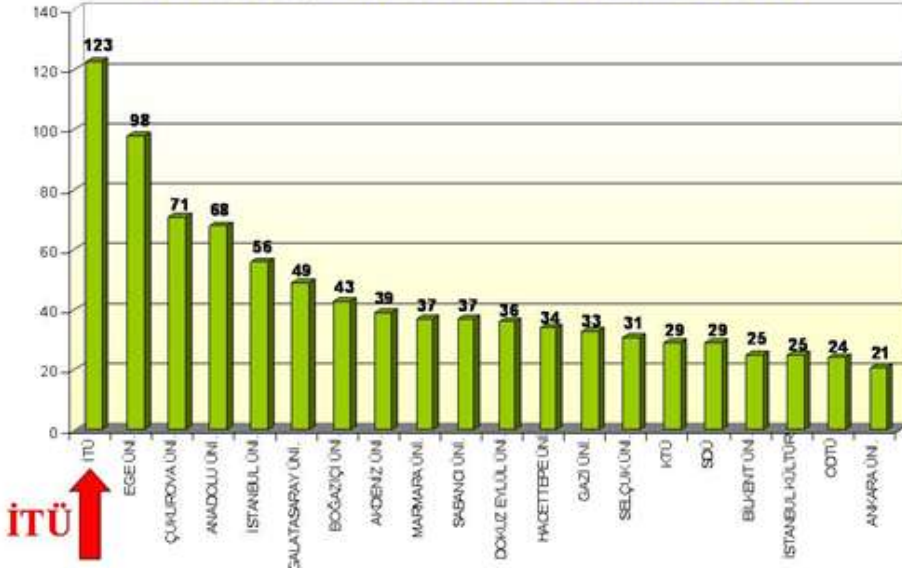
Yüksek Öğretim Kurumu	2004/2005		2005/2006	
	Öğrenci Değişimi	Öğretim Elemanı Değişimi	Öğrenci Değişimi	Öğretim Elemanı Değişimi
1 ABANT İZZET BAYSAL ÜNİVERSİTESİ	0	0	8	
2 ADNAN MENDERES ÜNİVERSİTESİ	0	0	5	
3 AFYON KOCATEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ	0	7	14	20
4 AKDENİZ ÜNİVERSİTESİ	40	17	79	19
5 ANADOLU ÜNİVERSİTESİ	68	33	185	40
6 ANKARA ÜNİVERSİTESİ	21	3	73	21
7 ATILIM ÜNİVERSİTESİ	5	2	6	
8 BAĞÇEŞEHİR ÜNİVERSİTESİ	21	3	24	4
9 BALIKESİR ÜNİVERSİTESİ	0	1	6	
10 BAŞKENT ÜNİVERSİTESİ	3	0	10	4
11 BEYKENT ÜNİVERSİTESİ	4	0	8	
12 BİLKENT ÜNİVERSİTESİ	25	0	67	4
13 BOĞAZİÇİ ÜNİVERSİTESİ	43	6	84	4
14 CELAL BAYAR ÜNİVERSİTESİ			0	
15 CUMHURİYET ÜNİVERSİTESİ	2	1	5	
16 ÇAĞ ÜNİVERSİTESİ			0	
17 ÇANAKKALE ONSEKİZ MART ÜNİVERSİTESİ	11	5	19	9
18 ÇANKAYA ÜNİVERSİTESİ	9	4	19	4
19 ÇUKUROVA ÜNİVERSİTESİ	71	20	131	18
20 DENİZ HARP OKULU	0	0	2	
21 DİCLE ÜNİVERSİTESİ	0	0	4	
22 DOĞUŞ ÜNİVERSİTESİ	1	1	17	1
23 DOKUZ EYLÜL ÜNİVERSİTESİ	36	23	70	26
24 DÜMLUPINAR ÜNİVERSİTESİ			6	
25 EGE ÜNİVERSİTESİ	98	44	193	46
26 ERCİYES ÜNİVERSİTESİ	0	0	2	
27 ESKİŞEHİR OSMANPAŞA ÜNİVERSİTESİ			26	8
28 FATİH ÜNİVERSİTESİ	15	7	25	9
29 FIRAT ÜNİVERSİTESİ	0	0	0	
30 GALATASARAY ÜNİVERSİTESİ	49	6	87	6
31 GAZİ ÜNİVERSİTESİ	33	11	30	2
32 GAZİANTEP ÜNİVERSİTESİ	20	4	27	6
33 GAZİOSMANPAŞA ÜNİVERSİTESİ			0	
34 GEBZE YÜKSEK TEKNOLOJİ ENSTİTÜSÜ	0	0	15	5
35 GÜLHANE ASKERİ TIP AKADEMİSİ			0	0
36 HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ	34	14	129	39
37 HALIÇ ÜNİVERSİTESİ	0	0	0	
38 HARRAN ÜNİVERSİTESİ	0	0	0	
39 IŞIK ÜNİVERSİTESİ			0	
40 İNÖNÜ ÜNİVERSİTESİ	0	0	1	
41 İSTANBUL BİLGİ ÜNİVERSİTESİ	16	1	42	5
42 İSTANBUL KÜLTÜR ÜNİVERSİTESİ	25	5	23	8
43 İSTANBUL TEKNİK ÜNİVERSİTESİ	123	5	205	14
44 İSTANBUL TİCARET ÜNİVERSİTESİ			9	

³³ Retrieved May 10, 2007 fromhttp://www.ua.gov.tr/socrates/docs/tur/GIDEN_OGRENCI_SAYILARI_2004-2005_2005-2006.pdf

45	İSTANBUL ÜNİVERSİTESİ	56	12	131	13
46	İZMİR EKONOMİ ÜNİVERSİTESİ	0	0	20	1
47	İZMİR YÜKSEK TEKNOLOJİ ENSTİTÜSÜ	0	0	16	3
48	KADİR HAS ÜNİVERSİTESİ	5	0	16	2
Yüksek Öğretim Kurumu		2004/2005		2005/2006	
		Öğrenci Değişimi	Öğretim Elemanı Değişimi	Öğrenci Değişimi	Öğretim Elemanı Değişimi
49	KAFKAS ÜNİVERSİTESİ	83		0	
50	KAHRAMANMARAŞ SÜTÇÜ İMAM ÜNİVERSİTESİ			25	2
51	KARA HARP OKULU				
52	KARADENİZ TEKNİK ÜNİVERSİTESİ	29	2	57	4
53	KIRIKKALE ÜNİVERSİTESİ	0	0	17	3
54	KOCAELİ ÜNİVERSİTESİ	18	4	29	2
55	KOÇ ÜNİVERSİTESİ	9	0	13	0
56	MALTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ	0	0	11	4
57	MARMARA ÜNİVERSİTESİ	37	8	121	18
58	MERSİN DENİZ VE TİCARET MESLEK YÜKSEK OKULU			4	
59	MERSİN ÜNİVERSİTESİ	13	2	25	5
60	MİMAR SİNAN GÜZEL SANATLAR ÜNİVERSİTESİ	11	5	25	4
61	MUĞLA ÜNİVERSİTESİ	5	2	32	5
62	MUSTAFA KEMAL ÜNİVERSİTESİ	8	5	28	5
63	NİĞDE ÜNİVERSİTESİ			5	
64	ONDOKUZ MAYIS ÜNİVERSİTESİ	1	2	15	11
65	ORTA DOĞU TEKNİK ÜNİVERSİTESİ	24	14	97	11
66	PAMUKKALE ÜNİVERSİTESİ	7	8	27	12
67	POLİS AKADEMİSİ	0	0	5	
68	SABANCI ÜNİVERSİTESİ	37	10	54	11
69	SAKARYA ÜNİVERSİTESİ	3	1	30	11
70	SELÇUK ÜNİVERSİTESİ	31	22	68	20
71	SÜLEYMAN DEMİREL ÜNİVERSİTESİ	29	10	72	25
72	TOBB EKONOMİ VE TEKNOLOJİ ÜNİVERSİTESİ			0	
73	TRAKYA ÜNİVERSİTESİ	7	2	18	10
74	ULUDAĞ ÜNİVERSİTESİ	17	4	88	8
75	YAŞAR ÜNİVERSİTESİ	0	0	13	11
76	YEDİTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ	8	0	22	1
77	YILDIZ TEKNİK ÜNİVERSİTESİ	6	0	110	6
78	YÜZÜNCÜ YIL ÜNİVERSİTESİ				
79	ZONGULDAK KARAELMAS ÜNİVERSİTESİ	0	0	2	
TOPLAM SAYI		1.142	339	2.852	581

Table 3 – The first 20 universities in Turkey according to number of exchange students

2004-2005 DÖNEMİ
ULUSAL AJANS'IN TÜRKİYE ÇAPINDA ÖĞRENCİ DEĞİŞİMİ KARŞILAŞTIRMASI
ÖĞRENCİ DEĞİŞİM SAYILARINA GÖRE İLK 20 ÜNİVERSİTEMİZ



Referans: Erasmus Bahar Toplantısı, AB Eğitim ve Gençlik Programları Merkezi Başkanlığı, 13-14 Nisan 2006,
34 Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi

Studies

Surveys were conducted about the ERASMUS students under the umbrella of SOCRATES who studied in another European country in 1998–99 (Teichler, 2004) Asked about the reasons which had a strong influence on their decision to study abroad, the 1998–99 ERASMUS students gave the following seven answers (out of the 14 stated in the question):

- Learning a foreign language,
- Opportunity for self-development (87% each),
- wish to gain academic learning experience in another country (82%),
- wish to improve understanding of the host country (73%),

³⁴ Retrieved May, 10, 2007 from <http://www.eucentre.itu.edu.tr/Icerik.aspx?sid=1181>

- wish to improve career prospects,
- wish to travel (71%), and
- wish for a break from usual surroundings (Teichler, 2004).

Students obviously appreciated the broad spectrum of experience they had during temporary study abroad. For many of the activities mentioned, there are no clear borderlines between targeted study and extra-curricular activities. More than two thirds of the students surveyed reported frequent activities of the following kind:

- Listening, watching, reading news about the host country,
- going to the theatre, cinema, museums, etc.
- having conversations and discussions with host country students and teaching staff,
- having conversations and discussions with other host country people,
- travelling in the host country,
- sports and other leisure activities with host country nationals.

The results also reveal that another problem mirrors problems of integration abroad: 18% of the ERASMUS students considered it as a serious problem that they had too much contact with people of their own country. Most ERASMUS students, both those surveyed around 1990 and those in the late 1990s, considered the study period abroad as worthwhile. They rated positively the cultural experience, the foreign language learning, the personal experience and the expected professional value of the temporary study period abroad. However, they assessed its academic value more cautiously, although more positively than negatively on average. 93% of the 1998–99 ERASMUS students stated that they were satisfied with the ERASMUS-supported period abroad. Only 2% said that they were dissatisfied.

The results of ESN (Erasmus Student Network)³⁵ survey conducted in 2005, with the aim of evaluating the experience of studying abroad and the quality of services offered to foreign exchange students in European universities, indicated that motivations for going abroad varied for different groups of students. While the top motivations were generally to practice a foreign language, to have new experiences and to enhance future career prospects, female students and students from Central and Eastern Europe were more often academically oriented. Most of the respondents (68%) were very satisfied with their stay abroad and 26% were rather satisfied. Students neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, rather dissatisfied or very dissatisfied constitute a clear minority (4%, 0,9% and 0,5% respectively).

The participants of the study were most satisfied with the social dimension of their stay (social life, atmosphere of the city and country, contact with the host country culture). As far as learning processes are concerned, students considered study abroad program an opportunity to acquire cultural skills and knowledge (92% of respondents believed they have learned more about the culture of the host country) and to enrich one's academic life. It was a time for self-development, and becoming more independent. Students not only learned new skills but also developed social networks. Furthermore, it gave them an opportunity to explore new places and new possibilities and to decide about future career tracks.

Papatsiba's (2005) analysis of the accounts of 80 French ERASMUS students on their mobility experience revealed that professional motivation was often coded as an important reason for participating in the program. Students generally did not seem aware of the ERASMUS program's objectives, except for those who studied Law, Political Science or Economics. In addition, they rarely expressed interest in the

³⁵ Retrieved April 20, 2007 from http://www.esn.org/survey_2005

construction of Europe. For those few students who did mention anything related to the political and civic rationales of the mobility, they approached the topic of European integration not only as the union of markets and companies but also of citizens. They mainly evoked peace and political stability and mutual knowledge of countries and people. Only one student evoked the birth of a European identity by underlining the possibility for several identities (national, European, international) to co-exist.

King and Gelices' study (2003) with Erasmus students focused on the effects of this European experience on students' knowledge and opinions on European affairs and on the possible formation of a European identity as well as on students' subsequent migration behavior after graduation. The results of the study indicate that with regards to both students' motivation to studying abroad and the value retrospectively seen as accruing from their year-abroad study, three key benefits stand out: linguistic improvement, the cultural experience of living in another country, and general personal development. Career prospects are also seen as having been improved by the year abroad. Academic learning was evaluated as less significant. Also, Erasmus graduates showed a greater knowledge of, and interest in, European affairs than their non-Erasmus counterparts. Moreover, they are somewhat more favorably inclined towards European integration, and a majority sees themselves as belonging to a European cultural space. Regarding identification, the study reveals that Erasmus graduates are more likely to see their identities as at least partly European.

Summary

The literature review began with the examination of the educational policy of the European Union and the European dimension which became a key concept in this policy. Secondly, a review was conducted on higher education in Europe and rationales for student mobility as a primary component of higher education. The first two parts set the context and background for the Erasmus program which is the focus of the present study. A review of mainly survey studies was also conducted. Finally, within the context of Turkey-EU integration, Turkey's participation in the Erasmus program was examined.

The review of the literature reveals that the European Union, formerly initiated to enhance economic and political cooperation among European communities, has come to emphasize the development of a sense of common European culture and identity in policy documents beyond the original economic objectives. This aim has been embodied in its educational policy with the conceptualization of the European dimension of education. The main purpose of the European dimension within education is “to build a shared cross-national understanding of what it means to be ‘European’”. The literature also reveals that the EU has long promoted mobility-enhancing policies over curricular reforms to enhance the European dimension and the emergence of a shared European identity. The ERASMUS program which represents the most popular scheme of student mobility at the European level and has been the most successful single component of EU's educational policy has been launched with the same emphasis to enhance European awareness. However, studies in the literature show that students all around Europe Young Europeans value the basic ideas of building a united Europe, but they

do not really believe that these will become concrete and their idea of the EU is very vague. Still, studies also indicated that Erasmus graduates showed a greater knowledge of, and interest in, European affairs than their non-Erasmus counterparts.

Turkey, on the other hand, has started its accession negotiations with the EU in 2005. The issues surrounding Turkey's possible accession focus around identity problems with the question of Turkey's Europeanness. Under these circumstances, Turkish Universities have joined the Erasmus program and thousands of students have gone to Europe to study for 1-2 terms. Given the rationales and objectives of Erasmus with its emphasis on the European dimension, this study attempts to investigate Turkish students' accounts on their European mobility experience within Erasmus.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study is to explore the perceptions of ten outgoing Turkish Erasmus exchange students regarding their experiences in the program and various aspects of the program. This chapter focuses on the research design that underlines the procedures and specific data collection method used in my study. Specifically, this chapter includes a description of the sampling process, participants, data collection and data analysis procedures.

Design

As the purpose of this study is to gain an insight into the views and perceptions of Turkish students who participated in the ERASMUS Exchange Program, it utilizes a qualitative methodology to explore the perceptions of Turkish exchange students.

According to Patton (1990), qualitative research design assumes that the phenomena under study are not quantifiable. Thus, the researcher focuses on describing and understanding subjects' subjective experiences which are considered unique and complex. In an effort to avoid bias, a qualitative study does not define hypotheses a priori. He states that the object of qualitative study is to reconstruct the complex and unique reality experienced by the subjects of the study (1990).

My research questions require an in-depth examination of specific experiences and perceptions in a specific setting. This type of inquiry fits the strengths of qualitative research rather than any forms of quantitative research.

Patton (2002) indicated that the purpose of using qualitative inquiry is to gain deep understanding and obtain a holistic picture of the phenomenon under study.

Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meanings people have constructed about a particular phenomenon, the experiences they have had, and how they make sense of the world around them (Merriam, 1998).

Qualitative inquiries usually study very small numbers of individuals or situations because it is necessary to understand the particular context within which the participants act, and the influence that this context has on their actions. It is important to figure out how unique circumstances shape the actions and attitudes of participants or events. (Maxwell, 2005)

Qualitative research methodology was chosen for this study as it provides a means to gather the perceptions of Turkish Erasmus students. This research uses a case study approach to qualitative research (Merriam, 1998) to investigate the topic in depth and detail. Case study is an ideal methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is desired. (Yin, 1984, cited in Merriam, 1998)

Stake (1998) discussed the complexity and focus of a case study:

A case study may be simple or complex. It may be a child or classroom of children or mobilization of professionals to study a childhood condition. It is one among others. In any given study, we will concentrate on the one. The time we may spend concentrating our inquiry on the one may be long or short, but while we concentrate, we are engaged in case study.

The case in this particular study is the group of outgoing Turkish exchange students who participated in the Erasmus program. In Yin's definition of case studies, he defines individuals within a case as units of analysis, because they are often the focus of the study (1984, cited in Merriam, 1998).

Individual and group interviews are considered the main methods for collecting data in a qualitative study. There are three basic approaches to collecting

qualitative data through open ended interviews. These are the informal conversational interview, the general interview guide approach and the standardized open-ended interview (Patton, 1980). As Tuckman (1972) describes it, “By providing access to what is inside a person’s head, interview makes it possible to measure what a person knows (knowledge and information), what a person likes or dislikes (values and preferences), and what a person thinks (attitudes and beliefs)” (p.79). Since the current study mainly attempts to investigate Turkish Erasmus students’ perceptions of the program, their likes and dislikes about their experience and their attitudes on a European future, it is appropriate to take an interview approach to data collection.

Stake (1998) stated that a good case study presents people as complex creatures through their data. The term data refers to the rough materials researchers collect from the environment they are studying. The interview data in this study includes the materials the participants provide during the study such as audio tape recordings and interview transcripts.

For the purposes of this study, the standardized open-ended interview approach was used to collect the data. Semi-structured interviews (Appendix B) will be conducted as data gathering technique and the interview format is built around a core of structured questions from which the researcher branches off to explore in-depth. Participants were also asked to fill in a demographic questionnaire form.

The basic purpose of the standardized open-ended interview is to minimize interviewer effects by asking the same question to each participant. Also, the interview is highly focused so that the interviewee time is used efficiently. Moreover, it is systematic and the necessity for interviewer judgment during the interview is reduced (Patton, 1990).

However, the weakness of the standardized approach is that it does not permit the interviewer to pursue topics or issues that were not anticipated when the interview was written (Patton, 2002). In order to eliminate this limitation to some extent, the researcher made use of a combination strategy which involves using the standardized interview format in the early part of the interview and leaving the interviewer free to pursue any part of their exchange experience in the last part of the interview.

Sampling

Undergraduate and graduate students from various universities in Istanbul who participated in the Erasmus exchange program for one semester between the years 2004-2006 constitute the sample of the study.

In order to be able to reach these students, the International offices of four universities with an Erasmus University Charter, namely Boğaziçi University, Istanbul Technical University, Marmara University and Bilgi University were contacted and asked for the list of students in their database who had participated in the program and returned. These universities were chosen to participate in the study as they have been taking part in the program since 2004 including the pilot process, they have an active Socrates/Erasmus Center within their International Offices and their database is readily available and up-to-date with the e-mail addresses of all the participants. In addition, due to the difficulties of reaching the population, the study was carried out in İstanbul.

Three of these universities, namely Boğaziçi, Bilgi and İstanbul Technical Universities, agreed to provide the contact information of outgoing Erasmus students. Marmara University International Relations Office Socrates/Erasmus

Center officials were not voluntary to share contact information of their students because of confidential reasons. Apart from contacting with international offices, the researcher made use of snowball sampling using friendship networks of those who agreed to participate in the study and can refer the researcher further to their friends. When the researcher has all contact information, these students were contacted via e-mailing and invited to participate in the study. The researcher utilized purposeful sampling to select 10 people to be the sample of the study on the basis of gender, type of university they attend in Turkey and the host country. Patton (2002) indicated that the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information rich cases for study in depth.

In this study, data collection and analysis was done simultaneously. When each category that is developed becomes saturated so that new information becomes redundant, adequate sampling is said to be achieved (Patton, 2002).

Although the sample size the researcher will study is too small to allow far-reaching generalizations which are not the basic concern in a qualitative study, the researcher tried to make sure that gender variation, type of institution (private versus state) and different host countries are represented in the study. Therefore, the sample includes both male and female students studying both in state and private universities in Turkey, having participated in the program in different European countries. By attempting to increase variation among the sample; the researcher had more confidence in those patterns common patterns which emerged, while at the same time being able to describe some of the variation that can emerge.

Participants

While more complete and vivid descriptions for each participant are provided in the findings and discussion chapter, the basic demographic information is summarized below. Ten outgoing Erasmus exchange students who participated in the program between the years 2004-2006 for at least one academic term constitute the participants of the study. Gender variation was represented equally in the study; namely, half of the participants were female and half of them were male. 3 of these participants were students from Istanbul Technical University, two were from Boğaziçi University, two of them from Istanbul University, and two were from Bilgi University and one participant studied at Yeditepe University. Among the participants, one participated in the program as a graduate student. The others were all undergraduate exchange students. The age of the sample ranged between 22 and 25.

With regard to the host country, three of the students participated in the program in Germany; two of them participated in Norway, one participant in Belgium, one participant in Holland, one participant in Denmark, one of them in Portugal and one in Italy. Table 4 displays participant information on gender, home country and the host country.

Table 4: Participants' Demographic Information

Name	Gender	The host country
Mine	F	Germany
Semih	M	Portugal
Derya	F	Belgium
Buse	F	Holland
Öykü	F	Germany
Emre	M	Italy
Tarık	M	Norway
Meral	F	Germany
Salih	M	Denmark
Bülent	M	Norway

Procedure

Throughout the study, the researcher got in touch with those students who had participated in the program and whose contact information was provided by the International Offices via e-mail, and tried to arrange a convenient time to conduct an in-depth interview with the students who agreed to participate. Each participant was interviewed once. However, they all agreed to have a follow-up interview to clarify their answers, if needed.

Before the interview, the participants were asked to fill in the demographic questionnaire form (see Appendix A) and the purpose of the interview was conveyed to each participant in an opening statement. In this way, the interviewer showed respect for the interviewee by explaining why the questions are being asked. It was also assumed that understanding the purpose of interview would increase the motivation of the interviewee to respond openly and in detail.

The interviews were conducted during April, 2007. They lasted 35 to 55 minutes, the average interview duration being 40 minutes.

The primary data of in-depth, open-ended interviews are quotations, so the purpose of each interview is to record as fully and fairly as possible that particular interviewee's perspective (Patton, 1990). Therefore, the present study made use of a digital tape recorder during the interview to increase the accuracy of data collection.

However, the use of the tape recorder does not eliminate the need for taking notes especially in the event that the tape recorder malfunctions. Therefore, the researcher took notes during the interview, which helped to formulate new questions as the interview moved along, and facilitated later analysis after the interview. These notes were being recorded on an interview protocol. (See Appendix C)

Instrument

In this study, data was gathered in Turkish, using mainly two instruments: a demographic questionnaire form (Appendix A) and a semi-structured interview form (Appendix B). As previously described, interview method was chosen to gather data on the subjective experiences of the participants. There are 11 questions designed to explore the experiences and opinions of the participants.

In the demographic questionnaire form, there were 7 questions through which demographical data was obtained in a written format. This part included information on age, sex, major, degree, host institution and country, period of stay. (Appendix A)

The interview form was derived from the research questions and constructed on the basis of a review of related literature and especially in the light of previous studies; those of Teichler's (2004), Papatsiba's (2005), Langan's (2000) and King & Gelice's (2002), all of which were discussed in detail in the literature review part

earlier. The results of these studies guided the researcher when formulating the interview questions.

For the purpose of exploring students' perceptions regarding their Erasmus experience and its European aspects, a semi-structured interview form was developed by the researcher. The form includes the questions that point out research questions. Specific questions focused on the following domains: (1) Erasmus Program (2) European experience and (3) Turkey's integration to the EU (Appendix B).

In the Erasmus domain, the participants were encouraged to remember their expectations about the program and the host institution prior to going there, and to discuss the discrepancies between their expectations and the reality as well as their reasons for participation and the highlights of their experiences. The European experience domain includes questions concerning the change in their knowledge, thoughts and attitudes regarding Europe as an entity. The final domain questions their opinions regarding Turkey's integration to EU.

Pilot Study

The interview form was tested before the actual interviews were conducted by the researcher. The objective was to check the interview questions in terms of comprehension, organization, approach and content. It also aimed at helping the researcher with the interview process as she considered herself novice when using such a method. A pilot study of one exchangee was conducted in March 2007 for this purpose. Corrections were done in line with the difficulties that emerged in the pilot interview, and the interview form was finalized.

Data Analysis

Since the raw data of interviews are quotations, the most desirable data to obtain would be full description of interviews (Patton, 1990). After the completion of each interview, the recorded interviews were transcribed fully. After the data was transcribed, the researcher analyzed the content of each interview in itself. Individuals within a case are defined as units of analysis, because they are often the focus of the study. In this case study, all of the interviews are considered as individual cases. As Patton (1990) asserts, “Content analysis is the process of identifying, coding, and categorizing the primary patterns in the data” (p. 381). It is the process of bringing order to the mass of collected data. For this purpose, first, the researcher made within case-analysis to obtain the full understanding of individual cases. At this stage, there was a focus on classifying and categorizing. In the light of the interview questions, sub-categories were formed. These sub-categories include: participation, education, hardships of the experience, effects of the experience, attitudes towards the host country, impressions of Europe, being a Turk in Europe, definition of Europeanness, retrospective look on Turkey and Turkey’s possible integration into the European Union.

Later, the researcher made cross-case analysis to compare and contrast the perspectives of the whole group of interviewees. At this stage, the researcher cross-analyzed the responses of subjects for each category. At the end, the researcher synthesized the answers of the subjects and reflected them in an organized whole in the “results and discussion” chapter. Here, quotational data are presented to better illustrate and support the analysis.

The analysis of data started with the first interview and continued through the subsequent interviews. As Patton (2002) suggests, data analysis was done concurrently with data collection.

The data were further organized under three subsections based on my research questions: 1) Perceptions of Erasmus Program, 2) Perceptions of the European experience, and 3) Turkey's Integration to the EU

Validity and Reliability

According to Maxwell, (2005) validity refers to the correctness or credibility of description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sorts of account. In the present study, the audio recordings of interviews and verbatim transcription of these recordings were undertaken to ensure accuracy and completeness of description. Interpretation of data is important for meaning to the participants not perceived by the researcher. The researcher acknowledges and understands that the main threat to valid interpretation is imposing one's own framework or meaning rather than understanding the perspectives of the participants. Qualitative research and data analysis must be accomplished in a thorough and transparent manner.

According to Patton (1990), the validity and reliability of a qualitative study to a great extent depend on the methodological skill, sensitivity, and integrity of the researcher. The researcher in a qualitative study is also the research instrument; therefore, the researcher may bring his/her biases, preconceptions or assumptions to the study. On the other hand, in this study, the fact that one person conducted all data collection and analysis increased the internal validity of the study because of the consistent point-of-view applied to the data.

As mentioned by Patton (2002), when each category that is developed becomes saturated so that new information becomes redundant, adequate sampling is said to be achieved. Therefore, collecting more data does not necessarily provide a more detailed understanding of the phenomenon. In the present study, the number of participants was not fixed; data collection was to continue until the data was saturated. During the study, common themes began to appear after the fifth interview. After conducting ten interviews, data was accepted to be saturated.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the empirical findings derived from the interviews with Turkish Erasmus students are presented. First of all, the key background information of all participants is being described. For the sake of confidentiality, the researcher kept the participants anonymous and they were given pseudo names which are used in this section to present the findings. Secondly, following the analysis of the in-depth interviews with the Erasmus students, major findings were structured around three discussion themes based on the research questions and the sub-sections of the interview form. These three discussion themes are Erasmus experience, European experience and Turkey's possible accession to the European Union. In this chapter, the findings and the discussion on the emerging patterns are presented together. Quotational data are presented to better illustrate and support the analysis. As the interviews were conducted in Turkish, the translations are provided following each quotation, accompanied with the fake name of the participant and the host country.

Participants

The information on the participants is listed below in the order of the interview date.

The First interviewee (Mine, Istanbul University): was 23 years old at time of the interview. She graduated from the Teaching English department in Istanbul University in 2006. Currently, she is teaching in the preparation program of a state

university. She participated in the Erasmus program as an undergraduate student in her sophomore year which happens to be 2004. Her host country was Germany and the host institution was Bremen University. German and English were used as the medium of instruction there. She was an Erasmus exchange student during the summer term for 5 months. Following her Erasmus mobility experience, she participated in other Youth Programs initiated by the European Union. In addition, she made a presentation on her Erasmus experience in the seminar held by Istanbul University International Office to inform and encourage fellow students.

The Second interviewee (Semih, Bilgi University): was 23 years old. He is an undergraduate student at Bigi University. He studies Politics and is a senior student planning his graduation. In 2005, as a junior student in his third year, he went to Universidade Fernando Fessoa in Porto, Portugal with Erasmus exchange and his stay lasted one year. Portuguese and English were used as the medium of instruction in his host institution. During his stay there, he worked as a DJ in the school radio.

The Third interviewee (Derya, Bogazici University): was 26 years old. She studied Electrical Electronical Engineering at Bogazici University and graduated in 2004. Currently, she is receiving her master's degree in the same department at Bogazici University, writing her thesis and also working for a private company as a product manager. She participated in Erasmus as a graduate student at the Catholic University of Leuven in Leuven, Belgium and stayed there for 5 months during the fall term. Dutch was the official language of instruction; however, some of the courses were held in English. During her undergraduate years, she studied in Australia for a year within an exchange program between Bogazici University and Victoria University in Melbourne.

The Fourth Interviewee (Buse, Istanbul Technical University, F): was also 24 years old. She studies Management Science and Engineering at ITU. She participated in Erasmus in her third year and within the program she spent 6 months during spring term at InHolland University in Rotterdam, Holland as an exchange student. She did not speak Dutch when she participated in the program. The language of instruction was English at InHolland University. The Erasmus experience was the first time she had been abroad.

The Fifth interviewee (Öykü, Bilgi University, F): was 24 years old. She is doing her double major in Economics and Communication Systems. She is in her senior year at university. She also works for Bahçeşehir University Lifelong Education Center. During the fall term of the academic year 2005-2006 in her junior year, she participated in the program in European University Viadrina in Frankfurt, Germany in her junior year at university and stayed in the host country for 5 months. Before her Erasmus experience, she had been to many European countries including France and Sweden as a tourist; however, this was the first time she joined a student exchange program and she was away from her family for a long time. Therefore, she values her Erasmus experience from this aspect as well.

The Sixth Interviewee (Emre, Istanbul Technical University, M): was 23 years old. He is a senior student in Management Science and Engineering at ITU. During the spring term of academic year 2005-2006, he became an Erasmus student. The host institution he studied at as an exchange student was Università degli Studi del Sannio in Sannio, Italy. The language of instruction was Italian at this university. He spoke some Italian when he participated in the program as he had taken Italian courses in Turkey. He spent six months studying there and this was his first time abroad.

The seventh interviewee (Tarık, İstanbul Technical University, M): was also 23 years old. He studies Management Science and Engineering at İstanbul Technical University. He participated in the program in Norway at Agder Univesity College in Kristionsand, where he spent 6 months. The langauge of instruction in the host institution was both English and Norwegian. The courses he took were all in English. He also took gradute courses in the host institution.

The Eighth Interviwee (Meral, Istanbul Unversity, F): was 22 years old. She studies Teaching English at Istanbul University and she is about to graduate. She studied at Bremen University in Bremen, Germany for six months as an Erasmus exchange student. The language of instruction was German; yet, the courses she attened were instructed in English as they were all in the Foreign Language Education Department.

The Ninth Interviewee (Salih, Bogazici University, M): was 23 years old. He studies Mechanical Engineering at Bogazici University. He is a senior student who is to graduate in July. He participated in the program in Denmark. The host institution was the University of Southern Denmark in Sonderborg. He was an Erasmus exchangee there during the spring term of the academic year 2005-2006 and spent 5.5 months. During his stay, he took courses from the Mechatronics program, which he thinks to be a promising area. To be able to attend this program, he took graduate courses in the host institution. The language of instruction was English.

The Tenth interviewee (Bülent, Yeditepe University, M): was 23 years old, too. He studies Economics at Yeditepe Univesity. He is a senior student now. He joined the program during the spring term of the academic year 2005-2006 at Agder University College in Norway. He did not have any other exchange experience. He took 6 courses there and he was an Eramus exchangee for 6 months.

The Erasmus Experience

Participation

Discussing the reasons for participation in the Erasmus program means raising two questions at a time: the first one is why students chose to study abroad as a part of their education and the second one would be the reasons underlying their choice of exchange program, in other words, why the Erasmus program was preferred from among the other alternatives and why they chose the specific host country and university for exchange. As there are hardly any prior studies concentrating on Turkish student mobility in the literature, the first part of the question is useful in terms of addressing the motivation behind Turkish student mobility in general. In addition, the factors that have a strong influence on host country preferences of participants were also discussed in this section.

Almost all (9) participants stated that they participated in this exchange program in order to live in another country for a while, to meet different cultures and people and to discover their lifestyle. One of the participants defined his purpose as being primarily “experimental”. By experimental, he meant escaping from the usual surroundings and experimenting with new, different ways of living.

My reason for participating in an exchange like this was quite sudden and experimental indeed, it wasn't a planned decision. Being bored by doing the same things in Istanbul, from school to home, we decided in an instant. (Semih, Portugal)

Oğrenci değişim programına katılma sebebim çok ani ve deneysel oldu. Çok bilincli bir şekilde değil yani. İstanbul'da bir nevi aynı şeyleri yapmaktan sıkılıp, evden okula okuldan eve, bir anda karar verdik.

I wanted to know better what was going on in other countries and wanted to get to know other countries and cultures and wanted to experience them by living there. (Buse, Holland)

Diğer ülkelerde neler oluyor, başka ülkeler ortamlar, kültürler tanıyayım hem yaşayayım nasıl birşey olduğunu tadayım istedim.

I've always had this desire to go abroad, the desire to escape for a while.
(Emre, Italy)
Zaten epeydir bir yurtdışına çıkma isteği vardı içimde kaçıp gitsek bir süre şeklinde.

Although this was stated as a primary reason, other purposes accompanied it for each participant. Half of the participants stated career prospects as being influential in their decision. However, they thought Erasmus to be influential in different ways. Two of the participants studied Teaching English and they indicated that being a part of such an international experience would benefit them and make them better language teachers. One of them raised the concept of CVs and claimed that the Erasmus experience would look good on her resume.

As I would be an instructor of language after all, I thought I should definitely have overseas experience to be more helpful to students in the class, and you know, you'll be a more preferable candidate for schools I think." (Mine, Germany)
"Sonuçta ben bir dil öğretmeni olacağım için mutlaka bir yurtdışı deneyiminin olması gerektiğini düşünüyordum. Hem sınıfta öğrencilere daha faydalı olabilmek açısından hem de biliyorsun okulların da daha çok tercih edeceğini düşünüyorum."

The other three participants who mentioned career prospects emphasized the social dimension of such an experience and thought that it would benefit them through the career ladder as social, versatile persons with international experience, which counts more than academic success or person's educational background.

To be honest, when you apply for a job in the future, what counts is not your academic background, but your social skills, or whether you've ever been to different social environments and you can adapt yourself to such things... (Buse, Holland)
Dürüst olacağım bu konuda ilerde bir iş başvurusunda bulduğumuzda daha çok akademik ne yapmışız değilde sosyal yönleri nelerdir, başka ortamlarda bulunmuş mu, adapte olabilir mi böyle şeylere daha çok önem verdikleri için...

Other reasons are also mentioned by the participants, but these can all be considered as secondary motives for these students since they initiated their sentences stating these reasons by additional signals like “also, in addition ”. One of these motivating factors is language. Half of the participants thought the exchange experience as a way to either learn another language or practise it. Another factor mentioned is personal development. Two of the female participants stated that they hoped their participation in this exchange program would improve their personality and enhance their autonomy as this was an opportunity for them to be away from their families and to be all by themselves.

I'm a university student staying with my own family. I both wanted to live away from my family, my friends for a while and improve my personality. (Meral, Germany)
Ben üniversiteyi ailemin yanında okuyorum hem biraz ailemden uzak kalayım arkadaşlarımdan uzak kalayım kişiliğimi geliştireyim istedim.

Two of the participants also stated that encouragement from the previous participants has an effect on their decision to participate in the program. They said that positive experiences of their friends who went abroad as exchange students motivated them to participate.

We had a friend who had attended a double exchange programme, but he wasn't an Erasmus student. Talking about it all the time, he recommended the programme strongly. (Semih, Portugal)
Bir tane de Erasmuslu değil ama daha önce ikili değişim programıyla gitmiş arkadaşımız vardı. O çok tavsiye ediyordu sürekli anlatıyordu.

Except for three of them, the participants stated that they were in no way pursuing academic goals and that as far as their motivation was concerned, an academic perspective was not in their agenda. Two participants who mentioned academic purposes were both students in English teaching department and said that with this exchange experience they could compare themselves with other prospective English teachers and gain academic experience in another country. The other participant also

had the intention of comparing himself to European students. In his case, this comparison meant proving his capacity to himself in another context.

Convertibility in life; that is, the state of being valued and respected by everyone, is highly crucial. The important point for me here, in terms of education, was to compete with others and be at the same level as the students there. Joining this programme proved that it wasn't too hard, and that you could achieve it there, as well. (Salih, Denmark)

Hayatta convertibilite çok önemli yani bir şeyin geçer akçe olması. Eğitim açısından burada benim için önemli olan rekabet etmektir. Oradaki öğrencilerle aynı seviyede olmak, ordaki eğitimin bir şekilde sana ağır gelmeyeceğini orda da başarabileceğini ispat etmektir benim için bu programa katılmak.

As for the second part of the question, the reasons why participants preferred Erasmus among the other possible programs, almost all (9 of them) mentioned the availability and the current popularity of the program. They said that they all felt fully informed about it and that every student in the campus knew about the program.

I've preferred Erasmus, because at Bilgi I've learned it is quite a popular and preferable programme that students are satisfied with. (Öykü, Germany)

Bilgi'de öğrendikten sonra bunun oldukça popüler ve tercih edilen, öğrencilerin memnun kaldığı bir program olduğu bilgisini edindiğim için Erasmus'u seçtim.

Because this (Erasmus) is the most common; most of my chances let me learn about it. I don't know how to apply for the others. I'd need to learn about them and make effort. (Bülent, Norway)

En çok bu (Erasmus) yaygın olduğu için, en çok bunu tanıma imkanım olduğu için hani diğerlerine nasıl başvurulur onu bile bilmiyorum araştırıp bulmam gerekir. Çaba sarfetmem gerekirdi.

Four participants thought that the opportunities the program provides such as the grant and recognition of studies, were quite encouraging.

The facilities it provides, plus the scholarship opportunity and such things seemed so attractive. (Öykü, Germany)

Sağladığı olanaklar artı burs imkanı vesaireler de çok cazip geldi.

An issue of money is involved as well. 'Student, as his/her definition suggests, is a creature,' says Murat Belge. Even if I'm not in dire need of the money to be provided by them, the fact that a sum of money will be given is something satisfying for your conscience. (Salih, Denmark)

Bir de para mevzusu var. Öğrenci tanımı gereği fakir bir yaratıktır der Murat Belge. Oradan gelecek paraya çok ihtiyacım olmasa bile, para gelecek olması insanın vijdanını tatmin eden bir şey.

Three of the participants emphasized their desire to go to a European country due to geographical proximity and curiosity. Thus, Erasmus was a good opportunity. Two students from Istanbul University stated that there were no other exchange possibilities.

The biggest reason is its proximity; it's in Europe. The USA is more complicated; it's a frightening place for me. Europe is closer. I always say that I wanted to have the chance to come back if anything happened to one of my elder family members or relatives. (Salih, Denmark)
En önemli sebebi yakın olması, Avrupa kıtasında olması Amerika ne bileyim daha karmaşık beni korkutan bir yer Avrupa daha yakın hep söylerim bir büyüğüme bir şey olsa atlayıp gelebilme şansım olsun istedim.

All of the students were informed by the International Offices of their universities. Announcements, posters and informative conferences were the means used by the offices. In addition, former participants of the program encouraged and motivated them as prospective exchangees.

The reasons the participants mentioned bear some paralellism with the results of studies in the literature. In Teichler's (2004) study, asked about the reasons that had a strong influence on their decision to study abroad, the 1998–99 ERASMUS students gave the following seven: learning a foreign language, opportunity for self-development, wish to gain academic experience in another country, wish to gain understanding of the host country, wish to improve career prospects, wish to travel and wish for a break from usual surroundings. Although many of these motives are obviously shared by the participants of this study, it is apparent that there are differences in terms of priorities. Given the fact that Turkish students stated wish to learn a foreign language and to gain academic experience in another country as only

secondary to their decision to participate in the program, they value the social aspects of the program more.

Students who are willing to participate in the program contact the International Relations Office of their home university. This office provides them with information on all the exchanges their institution is involved in, i.e. which universities, which faculties, in which countries etc. Students also check on the website of their home university about its partner institutions. Students can select a partner institution of their home university from one of the thirty participating countries. However, there are a certain amount of places and grants available at each host university which are given to the students after a selection process organized by their home university. Students are required to select three partner institutions in order of preference and their home university decides on their host institution after the selection process.

Concerning the factors that have a strong influence on the host country preferences of participants, the most influential factor turned out to be the limited alternatives depending on the major the participants study. Seven out of ten participants underlined that they had very limited number of alternatives, thus had almost no self-control in the selection process.

Our department had agreements only with Holland and Norway. We had no other alternative. Even I had no idea how to write 'Norwegian' while writing Norway for my second choice. Checking the word on the Net, I filled in the form. (Bülent, Norway)

Bizim bölümün sadece Hollanda ve Norveçle anlaşması vardı. Onun dışında başka bir seçeneğimiz yoktu. Ben hatta ikinci tercihe Norveç yazarken dahi 'Norwegian' nasıl yazılır hiçbir fikrim yoktu. Gidip internetten kontrol edip formu öyle doldurdum.

We can make choices, but the scope of our choices is limited. Chances weren't so extensive as it's today. Depending on your department, your

chance of making choices is low. For example, I studied at the department of Economics. Two or three universities were available; they were in Norway, Czech Republic and Germany. (Öykü, Germany, F)
Tercih yapabiliyoruz ama tercih alanlarımız kısıtlı oluyor. Şu anki kadar çok fazla seçenek yoktu. Bölümünüze bağlı olarak tercih yapma şansınız az oluyor. Mesela Ekonomi bölümüne gittim ben iki-üç tane üniversite vardı. Norveç, Çek Cumhuriyeti bir de Almanya vardı.

This was the only school I could go to.”(Salih, Denmark)
Gidebileceğim tek okul buydu.

Out of this finite number of alternatives, there were still some factors mentioned by the participants as being influential on their preference for the host country. Two of them stand out: one of these raised by three of the participants is the location of the host country. By location, two of these students meant the centrality of the host country; its proximity to other European countries, increasing the chances of intra-European travel.³⁶

Why did I choose Belgium? The main reason is that it is so central, in the very heart of Europe, so I thought I could also easily reach the other countries. (Derya, Belgium)
Neden Belçika'yı seçtim”? En büyük sebebi çok merkezi Avrupa'nın göbeğinde olan bir ülke, dolayısıyla diğer ülkelere de kolaylıkla ulaşma şansım olur diye düşündüm.

Germany, because it's close to the other countries, I thought my chances to visit them were higher. (Meral, Germany)
Diğer ülkelere yakın olduğu için Almanya hani gidip görme gezme şansım daha çok olur diye düşündüm.

Besides location, half of the participants stated language as a factor in the selection of the host country. Two of them thought that as they spoke the native language of the host country to some extent, they could survive easily as well as practice the language. Three of them emphasized the role of the language of instruction and said that they had to choose host institution, depending on the availability of instruction in English.

³⁶ The other participant, who stated that his preference was formed by where the host country was located explained that it meant proximity to the Mediterranean Sea.

Only two of the participants mentioned previous information on and interest in the host country as influential on their decision.

They let us choose our countries. I wasn't so enthusiastic about studying a lot. I knew that education would be so strict if I went to northern countries, and I like hot countries better. I know a little about their climate and people. As I had already warmed up to Portuguese, Spain and Iberia Peninsula, I chose Portuguese. (Semih, Portugal)

Ülke seçimini bize bıraktılar. Çok okuma meraklısı değildim. Kuzey ülkelere gidersem çok sıkı bir eğitim olacağını biliyordum ve sıcak ülkeleri daha çok seviyorum. Hem iklimi hem de insanlarını biraz biliyorum Portekiz, İspanya İberya yarım adasını zaten kanım ısıtıyordu o yüzden Portekizi seçtim.

One of the participants stated that his preference was shaped as by his strategical approach to the competitive situation. He thought selecting a country which is less likely to be preferred by most students would increase his likelihood of being chosen to participate in the program, which, in his own words, turned out to be “a useful strategy”.

They put a list on the schools website. To be honest, the reason why I chose Norway is that I thought less people would apply and if I chose it, I could have a greater chance of being chosen. I mean I didn't have any prior choice in my mind in terms of host country; I just wanted to go out. (Tarık, Norway)

Bir liste yayınladılar internet sitesinde. Açıkçası Norveç'i seçmemin nedeni rekabetin az olacağını düşündüm orada. Daha az kişinin başvuracağını düşündüm ve tercih edersem seçilme şansımın yüksek olacağını düşündüm. Yani her hangi bir ülke seçimim yoktu tamamen yurtdışına çıkmak istiyordum.

Participants' reasons for preferring the host countries also revealed that in terms of their exchange experience, academic aspects were not priority for them, as none of them mentioned academic preferences regarding the host institution.

According to their responses, the basic concern in the selection of the host country on which almost all participants seemed to agree is limited alternatives. This can be attributed to the fact that although the program completed its twentieth year, Turkey's participation is quite recent with the pilot process in 2004, and official

participation in 2005. The participants of the study became exchange students with the program between the years 2004-2006. Hence, the prospective students might have a wider selection of choices with the participation of more and more Turkish universities every year.

Academic Experience

In order to receive the grant provided for them to finance their Erasmus experience, all Erasmus participants are required to complete certain amount of credits in the host institution. Therefore, all of the participants, including the graduate student, took courses in the host institution. The average number of courses taken by the participants of the study was 6 per semester as they all joined the program for one academic term.

Recognition of studies is an issue for Erasmus students since they spent this one term in another country and they could not attend the courses they were supposed to be taking according the schedule at their home university. According to “the learning agreement” between universities, full academic recognition should be given for the study period abroad. Participants stated that they all received full recognition at their home universities and their study abroad period in no way affected their studies in Turkey adversely except for one student. She had to extend her study period in Turkey a semester due to her Erasmus exchange. However, the reason why she was affected was that she was doing a double major in Economics and Communication Systems. Hence, it was not a surprise for her as she had known about this before she participated in the program.

The language of instruction varied depending on the host institution. In only one of the host institutions, the medium of instruction was only English. In one of the host institutions, the medium of instruction was only Italian. In other host institutions, the language of instruction was both in the native tongue of the host country and in English; the courses Erasmus students took were held in English.

Almost all (9) of the participants took language courses on the native tongue of the host institution. These courses were a part of the program and students did not need to pay for the courses. Only one student who participated in the program in Denmark did not take a language course because he claimed that students were charged for the foreign language instruction they received.

During their academic experience in the host institution, one of the striking points most of the participants (eight of ten) emphasized was that they felt a certain amount of flexibility was allowed to them since they were regarded as temporary students.

Your status as an Erasmus student provides you with some flexibility there. For instance, at the last moment I had a problem with one of my courses. My knowledge of German wasn't satisfactory to understand one of the courses in German. I'd thought I could make extra effort for it till the end of the term, but the exam was so difficult. Then we chose to take another course at the last moment and attended the last class hours; we prepared its project and passed the exam. I couldn't have done that at Bilgi; it wouldn't have been possible for a German student there, either. (Öykü, Germany)

Orada Erasmus öğrencisi olmanız size bir esneklik payı kazandırıyor. Mesela benim son dakikada bir dersle ilgili problemim oldu. Mesela Almanca bilgim bir tane Almanca dersi anlayabilecek yeterlilikte değildi. Hani ben onu dönem sonuna kadar takviye ederim diye düşünmüştüm. Ancak çok zor bir sınavdı olduğumuz sınav. Son dakikada biz başka bir ders aldık mesela hani son derslerine girdik projesini hazırladık ve sınavı geçtik. Bunu ben Bilgi'de yapamazdım bir Alman öğrencisi de orada yapamazdı.

When students were asked to compare the education in the host institution and in their home institution, they all raised only the perceived differences. These perceived

differences concentrated on four main aspects of academic life which are instruction, content, teacher student relations and evaluation.

The first issue most of the participants (8) stressed when they were asked to comment on the education in the host institution was the content of courses and the educational material. They said that the host institution provided the students with less theoretical and more practical information compared to their universities in Turkey. They said that the courses were designed to be much more connected to work life.

It was a highly practical, practice-oriented class. While everything is rather limited to the theoretical level at my own school, the content of the material there was quite practical, let's say, presented in such a way that is related to industry. (Derya, Belgium)

Son derece pratik, pratiğe yönelik işlenen bir dersti benim kendi okulumda herşey gayet teorik düzeyde kalırken oradaki materyalin içeriği gayet pratik ve sanayi ile diyelim ilişkilendirilmiş bir şekilde hazırlanmıştı.

You put what you learn here at the theoretical level into practice there. For instance, while we learn about the term 'e-learning' here in the class, you learn to use it there during the class. (Meral, Germany, F)

Burada teorik olarak gördüğünüz herhangi birşeyi orada pratiğe döndürüyorsunuz. Ne bileyim mesela e-learning forum dediğimiz şeyi burda derste öğrenirken orda ders içinde uyguluyorsunuz.

Education at ITU is much more theoretical and difficult; education is much more practice-based there. (Buse, Holland)

İtu'deki eğitim çok daha teorik ve zor oradaki eğitim çok daha pratiğe dayalı.

Students take 4 courses there as well; I take 6 courses here. Let's talk about marketing class. They study one book or two books on the course; they discuss the current issues, studying on examples, so they learn in a full-fledged way. Here we covered chapter 1 in the course book, moved to the second chapter. Then, we learned everything by heart and passed the course. (Bülent, Norway)

Orada da öğrenciler 4 ders alıyor ben burda 6 ders alıyorum. Mesela Marketing dersi diyelim onunla ilgili proje yapıyorlar, onunla ilgili bir-iki kitap okuyorlar, güncel konuları tartışıyorlar örnekleri inceliyorlar adam gibi öğreniyorlar. Biz burada ders kitabımızdan chapter biri bitirdik chapter ikiye geçtik ezberledik ezberledik geçtik.

Four of the participants also claimed that the content covered in courses was less loaded including only basic information than the courses they had taken in their own university. They claimed that this made it easier to be a student in Europe.

Their syllabus content is much more limited. Here we learn a lot more from the same course. They cover much less, but they talk to the point trying to present the basics. I think they gave only what was essential. (Tarık, Norway)

Ders içerikleri çok daha kısıtlı, biz aynı derste çok daha fazla şey görüyoruz. Orada çok daha az ama öz söylüyorlar temelleri vermeye çalışıyorlar. Bence sadece gerekli olanı veriyorlardı.

The content of the courses was unbelievably easy. (Emre, Italy)
Dersler inanılmaz kolaydı.

The mentality of the guys is so right. The courses were related to industry and all of them were interrelated. However, the content was definitely not heavy; on the contrary, they were a piece of cake although they were master courses. (Salih, Denmark)

Adamların mentalitesi çok doğru. Dersler endüstriyle alakalı ve hepsi birbiriyle bağlantılı. Ama içerik kesinlikle yüklü değil tam tersine master dersleri olmalarına rağmen çok kolaydılar.

Another thing on which almost all participants (9) agreed as an important difference from their home university was regarding teacher-student relations; students claimed to observe a total absence of power distance between the teacher and students. They stressed that there were no strict rules shaping the relationship, it had a rather informal nature and teachers were much more approachable when compared to Turkey.

We were making a presentation with a friend from Switzerland. It was the last course and everyone had limited time as the presentations had accumulated. The instructor wanted us to keep it short skipping some slights and choosing 8 out of the whole to cover the presentation. We found it quite natural and did what we were told to, but a friend from Switzerland objected harshly for the sake of the big efforts we'd made. In the end, the instructor was so gentle; (s)he even apologized to us. If it had occurred here, it might have been a reason for dismissal from school. (Buse, Germany)

İsviçere'den gelen bir arkadaşla sunum yapıyoruz. Son ders ve sunumlar birikti herkesin kısıtlı zamanı kaldı. Hoca kısa kesin bazı slaytları atlayın sadece 8 slayt seçin onların üzerinden anlatın dedi. Biz gayet normal karşıladık ne diyorsa yaptık ama İsviçere'den bir arkadaş gayet sert bir

tavırla karşı çıktı biz o kadar emek harcadık şeklinde ve sonuçta hoca çok yumuşak davrandı ve hatta özür diledi. Burada olsa okuldan atılma sebebi olabilirdi.

Firstly, the student-instructor relationship is so different there. To say the least, even the style of address is very important, I think, because it sets the course of that relationship. For instance, even the fact that you address your instructor by his/her name reflects the flexibility there; it is not a formal environment. (Meral, Germany)

Bir kere öğretmen öğrenci ilişkisi çok farklı orada. En basitinden hitap şekli bile çok önemli bence çünkü o ilişkinin gidişatını belirliyor. İsmiyle hitap ediyorsun hocana mesela bu bile ordaki rahatlığın gösteriyor formal bir ortam yok.

For example, a Danish student used to address the instructor with his/her name all the time, which seemed quite weird to me. I think I'd have to enter OSS (university entrance exam) again if I behaved in the same way in my own department here. (Salih, Denmark)

Bir tane Danimarkalı öğrenci hocasına hep ismiyle hitap ediyordu mesela çok garibime gitmişti. Hani ben düşünüyorum böyle bir şey yapsam bizim bölümde OSS ye yeniden girmek zorunda kalırdım heralde.

However, they also felt the need to add that it did not mean a lack of discipline and they perceived this absence of power distance as a positive factor fostering education.

It did not mean that there was no authority or classroom management it functioned pretty well.

The instructor is still strict; there is no flexibility, but when you explained your problem, she used to present options rather than just talking quickly and finally. (Öykü, Germany)

Hoca yine çok disiplinli hiç bir esneme payı yok ama siz derdinizi izah ettiğinizde size opsiyon tanıyabiliyordu kestirip atmıyordu.

They don't have strict rules as we have; like for instance, you can't drink coke during the lesson here. The instructors were very friendly yet the students weren't undisciplined. (Mine, Germany)

Bizdeki gibi kurallar yoktu mesela işte derste kola içme falan gibi, hocalarda rahattı arkadaş gibi ama öğrenciler öyle disiplinsiz değildi.

Another thing the participants (7 of them) pointed out when comparing home and the host institutions was that the instruction at the host institution was much more student-centered. They described that teachers tended to speak less during the classes

and students were encouraged to speak more instead. The interviewees held the opinion that student participation was essential at their host institutions; hence, lessons were much more interactive. Courses were designed in a way to actively involve students in the during the class no matter what the subject matter was.

Here in Turkey, even the qualitative disciplines are instructed as if they were quantitative. There isn't an emphasis on dialogue in the agenda and there isn't an interactive classroom atmosphere. However, the lessons are much more interactive there." (Tarık, Norway)

Bizde sözel dersler bile sayısallaştırılıyor çok fazla hani işin arka tarafında diyalog kurma ya da etkileşimli bir sınıf ortamı yok. Ama orada çok daha etkileşimli bir sınıf ortamı var.

The instructors there try to bring the students to the foreground rather than themselves. To give the students a chance to express themselves has top-priority. (Meral, Germany)

Daha çok şunu yapmaya çalışıyor hocalar kendilerinden çok öğrencilerin ön planda olmasını sağlamaya çalışıyorlar. Öğrenci kendini ifade edebilmesi çok ön planda orada.

9 of the participants also mentioned the difference in the evaluation of performance.

They stated that while traditional paper-pencil exams are still the primary way of making assessments in Turkey, in their host institutions the way they evaluate the performance varies a lot. Although there were still paper-pencil exams, greater importance was being given to projects and presentations. Research was an integral part of assessment. 3 of the participants said that they had no written tests. They had oral examinations instead of written exams.

You constantly have presentations there, you need to carry out a lot of projects and present for each course during the term. All these compose the greatest part of the evaluation. (Tarık, Norway)

Sürekli prezantasyon yapıyorsunuz zaten, her dersten dönem içinde bir sürü proje hazırlıyorsunuz sunum yapıyorsunuz değerlendirmenin büyük bir bölümünü oluşturuyor bunlar.

We had oral examinations there. I liked this system better because you are face to face with the instructor and you have nothing to do but to know the subject matter well. (Emre, Italy)

Sözlü sınav sistemi vardı. Sözlü sınav sistemini çok beğendim yapacak hiç bir şeyiniz yok hocayla yüzyüzesiniz kesin bilmeniz lazım.

The most important difference, as far as I'm concerned, was the way they conduct the examinations. The principal part of assessment is the oral examination there. In all of the courses I had many projects during the term and we didn't take a written test. Instead, on the day of the examination, the instructor met everybody individually and we discussed everything covered during the term. (Derya, Belgium)

En önemli farklılık benim gördüğüm sınavları yapış biçimleriydi. Oradaki uygulamada asıl değerlendirikleri yer sözlü sınav. Benim aldığım derslerde dönem içinde birden fazla proje yaptık en sonda da yazılı bir sınav olmadı. Sınav günü gittik sıraya girdik hoca tek tek aldı dönem boyunca konuşulan konular tek tek değişti.

Although comparison by its nature includes the similarities and differences between two things, when the participants were required to compare the education in the host insitution and their home university, they concentrated only on the differences.

Considering the fact that there was a consensus on almost all of the educational differences mentioned by participants and they participated in the program in different countries of Europe outgoing from different universities in Turkey, it is obvious from students experiences that the systems in the host countries bare alot of similarities whereas their practices differ from the Turkish educational system in certain important aspects. In addition, between these different applications, it seems that the participants favor the European way better.

Hardships of the experience

When participants were invited to comment if they facesany difficulties during their exchange experience regarding the program or other aspects of the experience, they all mentioned various difficulties. However, their approach to most of these difficulties was rather one that regards these as minor, unsurprising problems which did not overshadow their experience.

Except for one aspect of the program mentioned by two participants, all of the participants emphasized that they had no problems directly related to the Erasmus program itself. The problems they had mainly stemmed from living in another country.

I can say that I had no troubles. (Emre, Italy)
Hiç bir zorluk yaşamadım diyebilirim

I didn't have a problem specifically related to Erasmus program but there were some hardships resulting from being a foreigner. (Semih, Portugal)
Specific olarak Erasmus programıyla ilgili bir zorluk yaşamadım ama yurt dışında olmanın getirdiği bir takım zorluklar vardı.

There were no problems with the program. You have more than whatever the program promised. (Salih, Denmark)
Programla ilgili bir problem yok. Programın öngördüğü vaadettiği herşeye fazlasıyla ulaşıyorsunuz.

One of the participants described that he experienced some health problems and had to go to hospital, even in this situation, there were no complications and he did not have a problem as an Erasmus student.

I went to the dentist for the first time in my life in Portugal. I had my teeth that came out at 20s pulled. I didn't have any problems there. We were each given a card so that we could stay at hostels; it was like an insurance card for 8 Euros. The insurance of that card covered all the expenses at hospital, for example. It had made no sense to me. I seriously had an operation there. As I was an Erasmus student, I wasn't charged anything at all. (Semih, Portugal)
Hayatımda ilk defa dışıye Portekiz'de gittim. Yirmilik dişlerimi çekirdim. Orda da hiçbir problem yaşamadım. Bir kart vardı hostellerde kalabilmemiz için çıkartıkları sigorta kartı gibi birşey, 8 euroluk bir karttı. O kartın sigortası bütün hastane ücretlerini karşıladı mesela. Buna hiç anlam verememiştim. Ciddi ciddi ameliyat oldum ben orda ve Erasmus öğrencisi olduğum için hiçbirşey ödemedim.

The only aspect of the program perceived by two of the participants as problematic was the bureaucratic procedures in the application and selection process. They thought too much procedure and paperwork was involved in the exchange.

The process of attending Erasmus was indeed difficult. There are many bureaucratic issues and it takes a lot of time. That period is boring. It is

time-consuming and boring until you pack your suitcase and arrive at the airport. (Semih, Portugal)

Hakikaten çok zor bir süreçti Erasmus'a gitme süreci. Çok bürokratik işler var ve çok uzun sürüyor. O süreç sıkıcı bavulu alıp havaalanına gidene kadarki süreç hakikaten çok uzun ve sıkıcı.

It is worth mentioning that participants of the study reported no financial difficulties at all. Finance is expected to be an issue for exchange students who are away from their parents and their homeland for some time. Taking this into consideration, grants are provided for Erasmus exchangees. For the academic period the subjects of this study participated in the Erasmus program, the amount of grant provided was 400 euros per month. They all received this same amount, %80 of the total before they left for the host country and %20 following their return. Although participants discussed that this amount could in no way cover all their needs, seven of the participants thought this amount was reasonable. The students noted as a significant criteria that adequacy of this amount of grant depends on the host country. However, they stressed that 400 euros would still be enough in terms of basic needs. Their point was that if, as an Erasmus student, one chooses to take part in social activities in the host country; he/she needs to finance these themselves. Three of the participants, on the other hand, claimed that this amount was not enough as they had to spend most of it for accomodation.

Being mobile means changing environments, eventually one's sense of belonging, and multiplying possibilities to benefit from this variety. Mobility involves encounters and confrontation with differences, requiring a broad range of individual adaptive responses, and also encouraging their renewal. Suprisingly enough, participants raised no major adaptation problems which might be expected from mobile students. The reason for this might be the nature of the program as also stated by the participants. Unlike the other mobility possibilities which involve

exchange of students from two universities with an agreement, Erasmus involves exchange of a lot of students from different countries at the same time, thereby creating an international environment full of students sharing the similar concerns which stem from being an exchangees. Most of the students (7) said they adapted to the environment almost immediately.

There are a great number of Erasmus students. There are tens of students who have left their families, friends and seemed like fish out of water to spend one of their semesters there and seemed like you do not feel alone because you get to know the others as soon as you arrive there. Everyone understands each other and knows about their conditions. That is why you feel at ease. (Buse, Holland)

Oraya gelen bir sürü Erasmus öğrencisi var. Hani resmen böyle sudan çıkmış balığa dönmüş, ailesini, arkadaşlarını bırakıp bir dönemini orada geçirecek olan onlarca öğrenci var. Zaten gittiğiniz anda kaynaştığınız için bir yalnızlık bir sıkıntı çekmiyorsunuz. Herkes birbirini anlıyor ne durumda olduğunu biliyor. Dolayısıyla hiçbir sıkıntı yaşamıyorsunuz.

Even though students reported that they experienced no major adaptation problems, they still stated some problems, most of which resulted from living in another country.

Three of the participants stated that they somehow had difficulty especially at the beginning of their experience, resulting from differences in lifestyle, language and viewpoints. In other words, they reported the difficulties in consequence of living in another country. They said differences in lifestyle influenced them negatively as they had to change their habits and some things were confusing for them.

The language difference is something tiring. You get bored with explaining yourself in a different language; after some time you really get tired. You want to speak Turkish, but you cannot. For instance, there were a few Turkish students at school. Although I was unfamiliar with them, we used to talk for a long time when we came across each other. It was an opportunity for us to get relieved. It was hard in that sense. (Salih, Denmark)

Dilin farklı olması yorucu birşey. Sürekli olarak kendini başka bir dilde ifade etmek artık sıkılıyorsun bir süre sonra hakkaten yoruluyorsun yani. Türkçe konuşmak istiyorsun konuşamıyorsun yani. Mesela okulda bir iki

tane türk çocuk vardı ben çocuklarla hiçbir münasebetim olmamasına rağmen yolda karşılaştığımız zaman uzun uzun konuşurduk yani. O bir ferahlama imkanı oluyordu. O açıdan zordu.

Although I have knowledge of German, people who speak German all the time and make jokes in German firstly give you a different feeling. It seems a little hard in the beginning. (Meral, Germany)

Almanca bilmeme rağmen etrafımda sürekli Almanca konuşan, Almanca espri yapan hani ilk başlarda farklı bir duygu uyandırıyor insanda. İlk başlarda biraz zor oluyor.

In Europe there is a fact that restaurants are open between 16.00-23.00, and you have to get used to it. When you want to have lunch, it is impossible. On Sundays everywhere is closed. Just think about it; it is so hard compared with here. You feel you have to buy bread because it isn't available after a certain hour, and you may end up with no bread. (Salih, Denmark)

Avrupa'da şöyle bir olay var lokantalar 4'den 11'e kadar açık ve buna alışmak zorunda kalıyorsun. Öğle yemeği yiyeceksin yok yani. Pazar günü mesela her yer kapalı. Düşünsene buranın üzerine çok zor gidip koşa koşa ekmek alıyorsun. Çünkü adam satmıyor belli bir saatten sonra ekmek ve ekmeksiz kalabilirsin yani.

Another aspect regarded as a difficulty by three of the participants was the feeling of loneliness as a result of being away from their family, friends, country and all the loved ones. They said they missed their families a lot and felt homesick from time to time.

I was away from my family and friends. I felt a little lonely. Except for it, I didn't have a problem with getting adapted. I immediately got used to the environment, feeling as if I had lived in that country before. I only missed my family a little, and that's all. (Buse, Holland)

Ailemden uzaktım, arkadaşlarımdan uzaktım biraz yalnızlık yaşadım. Onun dışında çok fazla adapte olma sıkıntısı yaşamadım hemen uyum sağladım sanki o ülkede yaşamışım gibi. Sadece ailemi özledim biraz o kadar.

Two of the participants reported visa problems. One of them who went to Belgium experienced difficulty even before she could participate in the program. The other participant said he could not travel to some other countries during his exchange because he could not get a visa. They claimed that it was disappointing as only Turkish citizens experience such problems.

I needed to visit the Consulate of Belgium every day in a month to get my visa. They were not much helpful. (Derya, Belgium)
Vize almak için 1 ay boyunca hergün Belçika konsolosluğuna gitmem gerekti. Çok yardımcı değillerdi.

I tried to travel a lot; I wanted to make use of my opportunity, but I sometimes had problems with visa. This is indeed not a problem related to Erasmus. However, when you join Erasmus, it may be a problem for a Turkish student. For example, I know a friend who couldn't join the programme just because (s)he could not manage to get a visa. In my own case, I could not go to Ireland although I tried hard. I did not experience a highly serious problem, except for the issuance of visa. (Semih, Portugal)
Çok gezmeye çalıştım mümkün olduğunca değerlendirmek istedim ama bazen vizeyle ilgili problemler yaşadım bu da pek Erasmusla ilgili bir problem değil açıkçası. Ama Erasmus'a gittiğinde bir Türk'ün yaşayabileceği problem bu olabilir. Mesela vize alamadığı için Erasmus'a gidemeyen arkadaşım oldu. Ben de mesela İrlanda'ya gidemedim mesela çok uğraştım. Vize haricinde çok ciddi bir problem yaşamadım.

In addition, the interviewee who participated in the program in Belgium stated that she had problems with accomodation and residency permit. These problems stem from Belgium's policy about foreign students as she stated all of the foreign students in Belgium experienced the same hardships.

The school that I attended didn't provide accommodation at dormitories to exchange students, so having arrived there, we all had to find a place for rent as if we'd been moving to a new city. They also gave us a list of houses to be helpful and going over the list, we called the owners of the houses to make appointments with them. Then, we needed to see the place and decide if we would rent it or not, so it was a difficult process. I got disappoinded. (Derya, Belgium)
Benim gittiğim okulda öğrenci yurtlarını değişim öğrencilerine açmıyorlardı. O yüzden biz hepimiz gittiğimizde sanki yeni bir şehre taşınyormuşuz gibi kiralayacak bir yer bulmak ve bundada size yardımcı olmak adına bir liste veriyorlar bu liste üzerinden sen telefon açıp ev sahipleriden randevu alıp o yeri bulup gidip tutup tutmayacağınıza karar vermeniz gerekiyordu.o yüzden zor bir süreçti. Beni hayal kırıklığına uğrattı.

It was a long and cumbersome process for all the exchange students, including those from the European Union members, who went to Belgium, yet it was a little easier for them. (Derya, Belgium)
Belçika'ya giden bütün exchange öğrencileri oarak Avrupa Birliği üyeleri de dahil olmak üzere. Onlar yine bizden bir nebze daha kolay hallettiler ama. Çok uzun ve çok zor bir süreçti.

It is rather surprising that the participants reported very few problems relating to the program despite the fact that Turkey was a new participant in the program and these were among the first outgoing Turkish exchangees of the program. Moreover, even though they stated differences in some aspects of education between host and home institutions, students reported no cases of difficulties in academic adjustment.

Effects of mobility experience on students

Academic mobility can be productive for the students in many aspects. According to the research literature, the benefits of student exchange programs are many and varied. Holman (2001) divides the merits of student exchange programs into educational and organizational benefits. The former consists of personal development, increased language proficiency, and “the cultivation of a comparative perspective and cross-cultural understanding” (p. 1)

When the participants of this study were invited to discuss the effects of their Erasmus exchange experience on their personality, attitudes or life in general, most of them (8) stated as a primary gain that this experience enhanced their autonomy and self-confidence. They thought that many aspects of this mobility experience such as being away from family or being in an international environment made them a mature, self-confident person who could survive any hardships.

I lived in an international environment and achieved many things. What can say about my gains? It increased my self-confidence. Leaving behind everyone that you've known till that time, those with whom you are familiar, you take your suitcase on your own and go to live in a different place with its new environment, people, and its language, which are totally unfamiliar to you, and you have to deal with everything that you may encounter. (Semih, Portugal)

International bir ortamda yaşadım ve çok şeyler başardım gerçekten. Ne kazandım diyebilirim sana biraz daha kendine güvenim arttı. Bir yıl boyunca hayatında o zamana kadar tanıyor olduğun, alışık olduğun hiç

kimse olmadan, tek başına bavulunu alıp gidiyorsun hiç tanımadığın bir ortam, hiç tanımadığın insanlar, hiç tanımadığın bir dil, yeni bir yerde yaşıyorsun ve başına gelebilecek herşeyle kendin mücadele etmek zorundasın.

I've gained much more self-confidence. I now feel that I can handle everything and manage to stay alive wherever I go in the world. (Buse, Holland)

Çok daha fazla bir özgüven kazandırdı bir kere hani dünyanın neresine gidersem gideyim ayakta kalırım herşeyle başa çıkarım gibi geliyor.

Most of the participants (6) also stated that this experience broadened their horizons and gave them a cross-cultural understanding. They were grateful that due to the study abroad period, they could now approach many things from different points of views. They went on to claim that they have less bias if any controlling their attitudes towards others. Compared to the pre-Erasmus period, they felt themselves more broad-minded.

I stayed at the dormitory, where Erasmus students were accommodating. I had the chance to meet such a lot of countries and people with totally different perspectives that I learned something from all of them. I got the opportunity to view the world from a point I'd never seen and this made me highly colourful. (Buse, Holland)

Yurtda kaldım kaldığım yurtda yine Erasmus öğrencilerinin kaldığı bir yurttu. O kadar çok ülkeden o kadar çok farklı kişiyle tanışma imkanım oldu ki hepsinin dünya görüşleri bambaşka hepsinden birşeyler öğrendim dünyaya hiç bakmadığım bir bakış açısıyla bakma imkanım oldu. Bu beni çok renklendirdi.

I've always been open-minded, but now I feel that I can look at events and people from a wider perspective. (Tarık, Norway)

Zaten açık fikirli bir insandım ama artık olaylara ya da kişilere daha geniş bir perspektifden bakabildiğimi hissediyorum.

This has influenced my attitudes as well. I don't behave according to certain forms of any more. (Buse, Holland)

Bu hareketlerime de yansıdı artık belli kalıplara uygun hareket etmiyorum.

Increased language proficiency was also mentioned by two of the participants. They said such an international experience was beneficial primarily in terms of improving their foreign language skills.

I'd learned Italian before, but when I went there, I both took Italian courses and spoke Italian most of the time, so I improved my Italian a lot. (Emre, Italy)

İtalyanca biliyordum ama orada hem italyanca dersi aldım hem de çoğunlula İtalyanca konuştum dolayısıyla epeyce ilerlettim İtalyancamı.

Two of the participants thought the experience was significant as it provided them with a wide social network. They regard it as a personal gain that they have friends all over Europe.

I had many friends from various other European countries. I'm still in touch with most of them. One of them even came to Turkey. (Emre, Italy)

Farklı farklı ülkelerden bir sürü arkadaşım oldu hala görüşüyorum çoğuyla hatta Türkiye'ye geldi bir tanesi.

The research literature focusing on the effects of exchange programs primarily yielded results regarding cross-cultural interactions, the increase in knowledge and language skills of other countries and changes in attitudes and career goals. These researchers found that students who participated in exchange programs were more reflective, more prepared to help others, more knowledgeable with respect to international affairs, and more self-confident. In the current study, there is a similar tendency. It is obvious that the exchange period was perceived to be effective in a positive way by the participants since they all revealed the effects which they regard as benefits. The effects of the mobility period discussed by the participants are parallel with the results of student exchange indicated in the literature. However, it is apparent from the discussion on the reasons of participation and from this discussion on the effects of international mobility that these Turkish students do not relate their experience to job-related issues on which the literature reveals that student exchange leads to changes in students' career goals.

Among its objectives, the Erasmus program targeted increasing international understanding among European countries. With the Erasmus program, policy-makers

seek to promote language learning. With these regards, the Erasmus program seems to have reached its goals to some extent with the participants of the study.

European Experience

Attitude towards the host country:

First of all, it is important to underline the fact that the participants of the current study picked their country out of a limited pool of alternatives. At this point, it would be appropriate to emphasize that only two of the participants mentioned previous information on and interest in host country as influential on their decision. In contrast, most of the participants emphasized a total lack of knowledge about the host country to such an extent that one of them even had hard time filling in the application form as he did not know how to spell the name of the host country.

Considered within this framework, it may not be surprising that all of the students reported an increased knowledge and understanding of the host country as a result of their exchange experience. By increased knowledge and understanding, participants meant being more informed about its history and culture, life-style, values and people. None of them seemed to be interested in political affairs.

People are similar to Turks. They speak loudly; everyone is active, excited. Portuguese may be the least European country of Europe.
(Semih, Portugal)

Insanlar benziyor Türklere işte bağıra çağıra konuşmaları, hareketli heyecanlı falan herkes. Portekiz'de Avrupanın en avrupalılaştırmamış ülkesi olabilir.

I stayed there for six months, but if you ask me about the political events or what was on the agenda, I cannot say anything. (Semih, Portugal)
Ben orada atı ay kaldım ama sorsan politik olaylarla ya da gündemde ne olduğu ile ilgili hiç bir şey söyleyemem.

Germany already brings a normative and systematic lifestyle to mind. If a bus is scheduled to depart at 10.53, it doesn't leave at 10.54. (Mine, Germany)

Almanya deyince akla zaten kuralcı düzenli olma akla geliyor. 10.53'te otobus kalkacak deniyorsa 10.54'te otobus kalkmaz.

With respect to the attitude towards the host country, researchers cited in Kraft et al. (1994) and others state that although there was an increased understanding, student attitudes were not necessarily positive. The present study does not mostly confirm these findings as except for one interviewee, all the participants of this study felt positive towards the host country and three of them even stated that they would like to visit the host country as soon as they have another chance. Moreover, one of them indicated his desire to live in the host country for a while. Participants claimed that as a result of 5-6 month-period of studying and living in the host country, one gets used to the unique way of life in the host country and starts to develop a sense of attachment and belonging towards it.

You take a liking to the country anyhow; you feel as if it were your own country. For instance, if you go to Holland, you feel something different whenever there is any mention of Holland. You see yourself as a part of the country. (Emre, Italy)

Gittiğin ülkeye karşı ne olursa olsun bir sempati duyuyorsun kendi ülkenmiş gibi. İşte Hollandaysa bir yer de Hollanda lafı geçtiğinde farklı bir şey hissediyorsun. Kendini oranın bir parçası olarak hissediyorsun.

On the other hand, one of the participants reported dissatisfaction with the host country and drew a negative image of the country and was full of negative feelings towards it. The host country was Belgium. She said her negative attitude resulted from the problems she faced about regulations and from the indifference of people and officials to her problems. Moreover, she also felt deceived as the landowner overcharged her with the gas bill and she could not do anything to pursue her rights as a foreigner.

The landowner took some cash for the heating service when I first moved there. He said that at the end of my stay he would calculate the exact

amount and pay the rest of my money back because he said that heating couldn't cost more than what I had paid in advance. At the end of my stay, he checked the number and charged me threefold in spite of the fact that I hadn't spent much time in my room as I traveled a lot. When compared to what the other students paid, mine was a seriously high amount. I resisted paying, asked International Office to help but nothing changed. Finally, I had to pay that tremendous amount. (Derya, Belgium)

Eve girerken kirayla birlikte benden ısınma yakıt parası aldı ev sahibi belli bir miktar dedik ki çıkarken saate bakıp tam rakamı hesapladıktan sonra ona göre tekrar hesaplarız. Ama bana dediki zaten bu civarda olur daha az olursa ben sana geri ödeme yaparım. En son çıkarken saate baktı ve ödediğim rakamın 3 katı kadar bir miktar çıktı ki ben sürekli gezdiğim oda da olmadığım için çok az kullanmıştım. Ve evdeki diğer öğrencilerle karşılaştığımda benimkisi muazzam bir rakamdı. İtiraz ettim okulun Uluslararası İlişkiler Ofisinden yardım istedim ama bir şey farketmedi ve ben muazzam bir rakam ödemek zorunda kaldım.

Impressions of Europe:

The participants of this study were invited to share their impressions of Europe as a result of their European experience with Erasmus. Although students studied and lived in one of the European countries for a relatively short period of time; the average length of stay was 6 months in this study, each one of them had the opportunity to travel around Europe. Except for one of them who did not leave Italy during his exchange experience due to "love affairs" as he called it, all the other participants traveled to neighboring European countries as well as to the other major cities in the host country. When we look at the whole picture, we can see that the participants had the chance to TRAVEL in a wide range of European countries located in a wide area stretching from Sweden and Norway in the North to Spain and Italy in the South and to England and Portugal in the west and East. The average number of countries the participants traveled to per person was three.

I really spent most of my time traveling. To tell the truth, I made use of this opportunity as much as possible. (Semih, Portugal)

*Çok fazla gezmeye çalıştım, mümkün olduğunca değerlendirdim
açıkçası.*

I traveled almost every weekend; I can clearly say that I traveled around Europe. (Derya, Belgium)
*Hemen hemen her haftasonu bir yerlere gittim Avrupa'yı dolaştım
diyebilirim.*

When they were invited to discuss their impressions of Europe, the results indicated that there was a consensus on several of the ideas they had or comments they made. In addition, there was a tendency in all participants to share their experiences by making comparisons to Turkey. Except for two of the participants, they indicated that there was not a major change in their thoughts of Europe after their experience. Most of the experience reinforced what they had in mind.

In terms of the impressions the subjects have of Europe, two issues stood out. One was the regulative systems in their host countries and the other one was weak interpersonal relations. The principal emphasis was put on the organization and order evident in the host countries countries. 8 of the participants held the opinion that the system was functioning in an orderly fashion in all European countries they had been to. They emphasized that in all aspects of life there were rules and regulations.

Compared to us, they have settled many issues such as democracy or social security. One can easily sense the huge difference between us and them. There is an order there. (Öykü, Germany)
Bize oranla hallettikleri oturttukları şeyler çok fazla hani demokrasi anlamında olsun sosyal güvenlik gibi konuşarda olsun aradaki farkı bariz hissedebiliyorsunuz. Bir şeyler daha oturmuş daha düzeli bir sistem.

Let's say we are supposed to meet at 5. At 4.58 there is no one at the meeting spot but everybody arrives at 5. (Bülent, Norway)
Mesela bugün 5 buluşulacaksa 4.58 hiç kimse yok ama 5'te herkes orda.

As an addition to this impression, three of these participants claimed that this much order brings uniformity, monotony which in turn makes life boring and routine there.

Yes, there are rules; everyone obeys them, but this refers to a highly monotonous life. I think it is so boring; Turkey seems much more exciting to me. (Buse, Holland)

Evet kurallar var kurallara herkes uyuyor ama çok tekdüze bir yaşam demek bu. Bence çok sıkıcı Türkiye çok daha renkli geliyor bana.

Another perception majority of participants (7) seem to share is that relationships between people are weak. They compared it to Turkey and said that people depend on each other in Turkey and have strong relations with their friends, family members, co-workers or neighbours. In Europe, however, participants observed a lack of solidarity and defined it as individualism. They thought the relations were superficial instead of being deep and sincere.

A university student, after graduating from high school, lives in a different house there even if his/her family is in the same country and tries to make money in a way by working at cafes or pubs. Although the student becomes an individual, she is left alone. I am graduating from university, but I am still living with my family. (Meral, Germany)
Orada liseden mezun olduktan sonra üniversite öğrencisi aynı şehirde de yaşasa ailesi ayrı bir evi oluyor barlarda cafelerde çalışarak kendi parasını bir şekilde kazanmaya başlıyor bir birey oluyor ama yalnız kalıyor. Ben üniversiteyi bitiriyorum hala ailemle yaşıyorum.

They are, of course, pretty different in terms of personal relations. There aren't closely and sincerely connected. (Buse, Germany)
İnsan ilişkileri açısından çok farklılar tabi. Çok sıcak samimi bağlar yok aralarında.

They are not that close in their relations. There is no sincerity. For instance, one day, one of the two students from Holland were to depart and needed help to carry the luggage to the train station. The other student from Holland, who was his best friend by the way, kissed him goodbye and that was it. That guy had 4 suitcases; how could he carry them all? We helped him. (Bülent, Norway)
İnsan ilişkilerinde o kadar yakın değiller, samimiyet yok. Mesela aynı gün iki Hollandalı'nın biri uçağa gidecek onu trene kadar götürmek gerekiyordu, eşalarını taşımak gerekiyordu. Diğer Hollandalı, en iyi arkadaşı bir de, öptü hadi kardeşim iyi yolculuklar dedi çekildi. Adamın 4 tane bavulu var nasıl götürecektirene. Biz götürdük.

Another striking difference between Turkey and Europe according to the participants is regarding European people's point of view. They stated that in Europe people have less personal limits; they look at the world from a different, wide and uncensored

perspective. The participants had a perception that European people are more open-minded and well-educated.

People were more polite. Yes, you see very different classes as well as highly undereducated people there. Though it's like Turkey, it is perhaps more civilized. As far as I know from my female friends' experiences, you, as a woman, can do on your own whatever you like, without any problem. They are much more open-minded. (Semih, Portugal)

İnsanlar daha yontulmuştu. Evet orda da çok farklı sınıflar var, orda da çok eğitimsiz insanlar var. Türkiye'ye benziyor belki ama bir şey var hani biraz daha medeni belkide. Kız arkadaşlarımın yaşadıklarından biliyorum orda bir bayan olarak tek başına her istediğini yapabiliyorsun hiç de problem yaşamadan. Çok daha açık görüşlüler.

What is more, 4 participants indicated that in Europe, "people cherish their life".

Although they seem to work hard during working hours, they equally seem to save time for themselves; for quality time, entertainment and sports. Students emphasized especially the entertainment aspect that people in their host countries seemed to value in their lives. They stated that people in Europe can distinguish fun from hardwork.

They definitely know how to entertain. They party till morning on Sunday and go to work or school in the morning. (Semih, Portugal)

Eğlenmesini çok iyi biliyorlar kesinlikle, Pazar günü sabaha kadar parti yapıp Pazartesi sabahı derse ya da işe gidiyor insanlar.

Every citizen lives at comfortable houses. On Sunday, all shops are closed, for instance, they spare time for themselves. (Salih, Denmark)

Herkes ferah rahat evlerde oturuyor. Pazar günü her yer kapalı mesela insanlar kendilerine zaman ayırıyorlar.

3 of the participants underlined that people in Europe seem to respect other people, their life and their rights. In consequence, they seem to be tolerant of different ideas and mistakes. The participants appreciated the tolerance and respect they were shown during their stay and were upset that they couldnot preserve the same way of living with their own people upon their return to their homeland.

They are very respectful. They act according to certain forms whether they warm up to people around or not. They don't show their anger immediately to avoid the tone that will lead to fights. (Tarık, Norway)

Çok saygılılar insanları sevselerde sevmeselerde belli bir standartta davranıyorlar. Hiç bir şekilde kavgaya varacak boyutta öfkesini hemen göstermiyorlar.

When you bump into a woman while shopping in the market there, the woman turns back and says; ‘Please, pardon me.’ with a smile on her face. When you do that to someone else here, you see hard looks and ‘ugh’s, which means there is a prejudiced insensitivity here in Turkey, but you see sheer sympathy there. (Buse, Holland)

Orada markette alış-veriş yapıyoruz bir kadınla çarpışıyorsunuz kadın dönüp ayy çok pardon çok özür dilerim diyor gayet güler yüzlü bir şekilde. Burda çarpışsan biriyle sert bakışlar oflamalar. Yani burda önyargılı bir anlayışsızlık söz konusu Türkiyede orada da yani orada tamamen anlayışlı.

Two of the participants also emphasized that contrary to what is commonly and stereotypically believed in Turkey, their observations and contacts showed that people are helpful in Europe. They admitted that they had had this prejudice before they participated in the program but their ideas changed during their exchange.

You know the prejudice that Europeans aren’t helpful, but it’s not the case at all. For example, we wanted to buy a television for my friend and purchased it online for 10 Euros. We went to the seller woman’s place with a wheeled suitcase to carry the television. Yet, it was too big to fit in the suitcase. Then the woman said; ‘Let me take you to your dorm in my car. I am not sure if a Turk would have done that. The television was already 10 Euros and she also spent her petrol. (Buse, Holland)

Bir de hani Avrupalı yardımsever değildir diye bir önyargı vardır hiç öyle bir şey yok. Mesela arkadaşşıma televizyon alacaktık, internetten 10 euroya kullanılmış bir televizyon aldık. Kadının evine gittik bittik işte böyle bavulla gittik tekerlekli taşımak için. Ama bavula sığmayacak televizyon bayağı bir büyüktü kadın dedi durun ben sizi arabayla yurduzuza kadar bırakayım. Hani bir Türk bile bunu yapa mı bilmiyorum zaten 10 euro televizyon birde üstüne benzin parası verdi.

The interesting thing is that they made unbelievable efforts to help as soon as you got off the plane. (Semih, Portugal)

Şey çok enteresandı mesela uçaktan indiğin anda yardım etmek için inanılmaz bir çaba sarfediyorlar.

The interviewees tended to discuss their perceptions of Europe by making comparisons to Turkey. They seem to think that there are differences between Turkey and the host countries in many aspects.

Definition of “Europeanness”

The debates about the geographical, cultural, spiritual or political boundaries of Europe are very well known. Delanty (1995) and Wallace (2000) have stated that Europe is more than a region and it is a set of values and has no clear outer limits. According to them, it is possible to state that a specific definition of European would be difficult to delineate. That can be one reason why participants had a hard time when they were required to make a definition of “being European” based on their experiences in Europe.

Four of the participants referred to the common passport and the right to travel without showing a passport having the same laws and regulations with other countries. It was said that having no borders was the key to the definition. This definition of theirs, however, implies that although they did not explicitly state it, they associate Europeanness with being a member of the European Union.

It involves being part of a common order or a certain system. Also, it probably means having the freedom to travel without a visa problem. (Derya, Belgium)

Belli ortak bir düzenin, sistemin bir parçası olmak demek bir de vize problemi yaşamadan rahat ve özgürce seyahat edebilmek herhalde.

I figured out that freedom of travel is the essence of being European. It is a project that facilitates the life of the citizens: You can travel easily, trade easily, go and live out there easily and in the future you may be ruled with the same constitutions. Thus the aim is that borders will not exist anymore, but each culture would survive. (Salih, Denmark)

Anladım ki Avrupalı olmanın özü seyahat özgürlüğü. Vatandaşların hayatını fazlasıyla kolaylaştıran bir proje bu. Kolaylıkla gezebilirsin, ticaret yapabilirsin ya da gidip bir yerlerde yaşayabilirsin ve hatta ilerde

aynı anayasayla yönetilme ihtimalleri bile var. Dolayısıyla, amaç sınırların olmaması ama aynı zamanda her bir kültür varlığını sürdürmeye devam edecek.

Three of the participants chose to define the concept by stating what “Europeanness” is not. They indicated that being European does not necessarily mean being a member of the European Union. They named some of the relatively new members of the Union to illustrate their point and claimed that students from these countries were different from and far beyond their European counterparts of theirs in terms of educational background, culture and values. At this point, they felt the necessity to differentiate between Eastern and Western or Central European countries. Eastern countries like Poland and Lithuania which are relatively new members as result of the Union’s integration policy were considered to be much less European.

I don’t think that you are European if you’re under that structure. Students from the East were greatly different from those who came from, let’s say, France or England. (Meral, Germany)
O çatının altında olmak demek Avrupalı olmak değil bence. Doğudan gelen öğrencilerle diğer işte Fransa olsun ingiltere olsun gelen öğrenciler çok farklıydılar.

I don’t think that being European involves only being a member of the European Union. For example, we had a Polish friend who told me, ‘I can never think of going to Turkey; you aren’t already a member of the European Union.’ I said, ‘But you’re European.’ ‘Yes, we’ve entered the EU, so we’re European’, he said. There’s no definition like this. (Öykü, Germany)
Avrupalı olmak demek sadece avrupa birliği üyesi olmak demek değil bence. Mesela Polonyalı arkadaşlarımız vardı. Şey demişti bana ben Türkiyeye asla gitmeyi düşünmem siz zaten Avrupa Birliği üyesi değilsiniz demişti. Siz dedim Avrupalısınız yani evet dedi biz avrupa birliğine girdik avrupalıyız. Böyle bir tanım yok.

Two of the interviewees referred to the life standards in Europe. One of them stated that being European means having higher life standards and living in welfare. She added that being able to integrate fun into life is a part of it. The other one also

associated Europeanness with a prosperous life; however, he attributed it a negative connotation and claimed it to be boring.

It means living under good and civilized conditions, knowing to live well, enjoying the best of your life. (Buse, Germany)
İyi ve medeni yaşam şartlarına sahip olmak demek hayatını iyi yaşamayı bilmek, eğlenmeyi bilmek demek.

It means getting bored when you're in comfort. (Salih, Denmark)
Ferah koşullarda sıkılman demek.

One participant claimed that there is no such concept of Europeanness and stated that it is just in economic and political discourse.

I don't think there's such a concept of being European. It seems to me that it's completely an issue of politics and economics. I think there are countries and identities. (Semih, Portugal)
Avrupalı olmak diye bir konsept yok bence tamamen politik ve ekonomikmiş gibi geliyor bana. Ülkeler var milli kimlikler var diye düşünüyorum.

The literature reveals that people from member countries tend to define "being European" by referring to the geographical definition of the continent, the values, shared culture and history. According to Wallace (2000), what Europe means to a European depends on where he/she lives in that continent. "Europe" is a moveable set of myths and images, both positive and negative, rooted in histories any vernacular literature. It can be claimed that being European or the definition of European identity, depends on which part of Europe is taken into consideration while making these definitions.

According to Delanty (1995), the dominant discourses on Europe can be classified into three main sections: the role of Europe as a geographical concept, the concept of liberty and Europe as Christendom. He defines Europe as more than a region and policy, it is an idea and an identity.

Given these concerns, however, it is important to note that none of the participants referred to any of these when defining "being European". They did not

relate the European identity to the European Union directly or to a shared history and culture, therefore the definitions they gave were more like the observations of an outsider and more representative of the common sense attributed to the West in Turkey.

The definition of the concepts of Europe and Europeanness always contain the elements of inclusion and exclusion. This means that the definition of “Europeanness” automatically determines the concept of Europeans about “otherness” as well as the concept of the “others” about the Europeans. In this sense, Turkish students definitions of European and their impressions on Europe clearly reflected the perceptions of otherness; reflections of people encountering the other.

Self-Identity

More and more EU citizens are likely to include the idea of ‘Europeanness’ in the description of their identity. Austrian demographers studying Eurobarometer (EB) statistics from between 1996 and 2004 found that younger people are more likely than older generations to claim, at least partially, a ‘European’ identity in addition to their national one.³⁷

Following the discussion on the definition of Europeanness, participants were invited to comment on their own identity , and were asked if they felt European. At this point, all of the participants hesitated for a moment and had hard time answering. They claimed it to be a very difficult question.

³⁷ Retrieved April 23, 2007 from http://ec.europa.eu/research/infocentre/article_en.cfm?id=/research/headlines/news/article_06_11_10_en.html&item=Science%20%26%20society&artid=2637

6 of the participants stated that they felt European. These participants tended to make their points by comparing themselves to other Turkish people. The rationale they gave for their Europeanness was that they were educated, civilized people with a vision. One of them stated that she has Bulgarian origins and she had a double citizenship; therefore she felt European.

I feel I'm European. In terms of vision, the way of thinking and approaching events, I think I'm different from an average Turkish citizen here. (Bülent, Norway)

Kendimi Avrupalı hissediyorum buradaki ortalama bir Türk vatandaşından farklı olduğumu düşünüyorum hem vizyon olarak, hem düşünce tarzı olarak, hem olaylara yaklaşım olarak.

I feel that I'm European as I'm a foresighted, open-minded and flexible person. (Mine, Germany)

Ben Avrupalı hissediyorum çünkü ön görüşlü, ufku açık, rahat bir insanım.

For some of the participants, their answers seem to contradict their definition of "European". Beyond all the discussions on Europeanness and identity, it seems that participants' answers to this question were shaped by the characteristics they attributed to being European; in other words to being a westerner. Considering all the discussion above which obviously concentrated on how different Turkish people and European people seem to be and considering the definition of being European given by the participants, it seems that their answers concerning their identity as a European reflect common sense. The connotations of Europeanness, or of being a westerner, as they are used interchangeably, are positive. European is like a symbol which represents being more civilized, broad-minded and free.

One of the participants emphasized his national identity and indicated that he is a Turk, not a European.

No, your identity does not change with your status, rank, welfare or participation of different unions. I'm neither European nor Asian. I'm a Turk, and this is what I inherited. (Salih, Denmark)

Hayır, kimlik sizin mevkimize, gelir düzeyinize ya da herhangi bir birliğe üye olmanıza göre değişen bir şey değildir sonuçta. Ben ne Avrupalı'yım ne de Asyalı'yım. Ben Türk'üm.

Another participant defined himself as Istanbuler. He said he neither feels European nor Asian, but rather inbetween closer to Europe, just like the city of Istanbul.

I'm not European. They're so weak in terms of human relationships, despite their good life standards. This's the most outstanding point where we differ from each other and relationships are so important for me. However, I'm not Asian, either. If I need to define myself, I'll probably say I'm from İstanbul; it's nearer to Europe than Asia, but I'm also willing to keep some parts of my culture. (Tarık, Norway)
Avrupalı değilim bütün o güzel yaşam standartlarının yanı sıra insan ilişkileri açısından çok zayıflar ayrıldığımız en önemli nokta bu ve benim için insan ilişkileri çok önemli. Ama asyalı da değilim kendimi tanımlamam gerekse sadece istanbulluyum derim heralde. asyadan çok avrupaya yakın belki ama bunun yanı sıra kültürümün bazı öğelerini devam ettirmek isteyen biriyim.

Although the participants were invited to talk about themselves, one of the participants preferred to comment on Turkey's Europeanness.

This question is rather difficult.. I don't think Turkey is an Arabian country, and in the same way, I don't think either that Turkey's totally a European country with its style, a common culture and history. I think it's a country that can integrate with Europe. (Öykü, Germany)
Bu oldukça zor bir soru ben Türkiye bir arap ülkesidir diye düşünmüyorum; aynı şekilde tamamiyle Avrupa tarzına, ortak kültür ve tarihe sahip bir ülkedir diye de düşünmüyorum. Avrupayla entegre olabilecek bir ülkedir diye düşünüyorum.

In accordance with his stand in the previous discussion, one participant said there is no such concept of being European; that is why he could not be European

Being a Turk in Europe

Turkey's integration to Europe is being discussed in Turkey as well as around Europe. Although the principal focus is on the problems in the fulfillment of the Copenhagen criteria, there are loud voices both in Europe and Turkey saying that the

basic obstacle to this integration is inherent identity problems. The concerns focus around Turkey's Europeanness.

Under the shadow of all these concerns, these Erasmus students indulged in a European experience by spending five to six months in a European country with students from different countries. With respect to all these concerns above, they were invited to discuss what it was like to be a Turk in Europe. This discussion mainly encouraged them to talk about their experiences they perceived to be resulting from their identity, culture or habits and attitudes of people towards them as Turkish people.

The major impression on which all of the participants agreed was that European people were to a great extent prejudiced against their Turkish identity. Participants indicated that their prejudice resulted from the fact that they were not well-informed about Turkey. The participants emphasized that they felt the reflections of this biased way of thinking especially in the first encounters.

It was hard to be a Turk on its own, because there's a prejudice especially in the beginning. 'Where are you from?' 'I am a Turk.' If we were sitting as a group, if there were Greeks, for example, in the group, or those from Czech Republic, Italy, something directly related to Turkishness was on the agenda. They say 'you actually wear headscarf, you don't have it now, is it because you are here'? (Mine, Germany)

Başlı başına Türk olmak bir zorluktu. Çünkü bir ön yargı var ilk başlarda özellikle. Nerelisin? Türküm? Grupça oturuyorsak mesela yani yunanlılar varsa işte çek cumhuriyetinden, italyanlar varsa direk konuşulan Türklükle ilgili bir şey oluyor. Siz aslında kapalısınız da buraya geldiniz diye mi açıldınız?

Being a Turk in Europe is so nice unless you tell you are a Turk. (Buse, Holland)

Avrupa'da Türk olmak Türk olduğunuzu söylemezseniz çok güzel.

There were biased opinions at first, but towards the end it was quite good, indeed. For example, we got on so well with the French. These guys have nothing to do with the claim against Turkey's accession into the European Union. A Greek student was my best friend. I also had very good relations with an Armenian friend. When we were together there, we realized that the key point was in fact the politics. We are brothers. (Bülent, Norway)

İlk başta önyargı vardı ama sonlara doğru gayet iyiydi aslında. Mesela Fransızlarla o kadar samimi olduk ki hani Türkiye Avrupa Birliğine girmesin diyorlar ya bu insanların hiç böyle bir şeyle alakası yok. Yunan benim en yakın arkadaşım oldu. Ermeni bir arkadaşla o kadar samimiyiz ki..Oraya gidince farkettilik aslında herşey politikada bitiyor. We are brothers.

Their attitudes in the very beginning and later changed greatly. For example, there were quite modern female students from Bilkent. They told they'd thought for the first 3 months or so that the students normally wore headscarves, but they uncovered their heads after arriving in Norway. They were firstly biased, but then their opinions changed a lot. (Tarık, Norway)

O kadar farklıydı ki ilk başta ki ve daha sonraki davranışları, mesela Bilkentten gelen gayet modern Türk kızlar vardı. 3. aya kadar falan onların normalde kapalı olduklarını Norveç'e gelirken açıldıklarını düşünmüşler. İlk başta ön yargıları vardı ama sonra değişti çok.

I'll tell the extreme cases that I'd experienced. There were people who supposed that we were writing the letters of the alphabet from right to left. I also saw a highly desperate person who asked if there was television in Turkey. Of course, these cases are from the street, the people I chatted with in the pubs or at nightclubs. However, university students told me they didn't want to come to Turkey as they'd have to wear headscarves here. There was also another one who asked me if women in Turkey could get divorced after I'd said my father was my mother's second husband. (Semih, Portugal)

Yaşadığım ekstrem örnekleri söyleyeyim ben sana hani sağdan sola yazdığımızı düşünen insanlar vardı. Bir tane çok umutsuz bir vaka vardı televizyon var mı Türkiye de diye sordu. Tabi bunlar sokaktaki halk bir şekilde barlarda publarda muhabbet ettiğim insanlar. Ama mesela üniversite öğrencileride türkiyeye çarşaf takmak zorunda olduğu için gelmek istemediğini söylemişti. Bir tane daha vardı ben bir şekilde bir muhabbetin içinde annemin ikinci kocasından olan çocuğu olduğumu belirttim ben bir şekilde kadınlar boşanabiliyor mu Türkiyede dedi.

Half of the participants also underlined that as a result of this bias, most of the people they met were surprised to hear that they were Turkish and resisted the idea that they were indeed typical, average Turkish youngsters for a while.

Firstly, no one believed me when I arrived there and told them I was a Turk. They said things like 'How come?' The only thing that we can associate the image of a Turk with you is that you're brunette. We cannot associate anything else about a Turk with you. They'd been expecting to see Turkish girls with clothes covering themselves from head to feet, so some of them baffled when they saw those girls in mini skirts. (Semih, Portuga)

Bir defa ben inip Türküm dediğimde kimse inanmadı. Nasıl olur falan dediler. Kafamızda Türk imajına uyan tek şey esmer olman, bunun dışında kafamızda oluşturduğumuz hiç türk ile ilgili hiç bir şey yok. Bayağı çarşafli bekliyorlardı türk kızlarını mini etekli falan görünce bocalayan bir kısım oldu.

However, it is important to emphasize that 7 of the participants felt an urge to clarify that even though there were bias in people's mind, they were not discriminated against their Turkish background. Except for the first encounters, these never affected their life in a negative way. The same participants also added that although European people were biased against their identity, but it didn't mean that they were biased against them personally and they did not reflect their bias in their behaviors.

They didn't show direct attitudes towards us. Nothing unpleasant happened to any of my friends from Turkey. When we were in a group, we never heard things like 'Oh, you're a Turk.' Actually, there's no need to dramatize the things. However, their questions or some of our observations at the time show that there's a Turkey image in minds. They observe Turks abroad and say this's the image of a Turk from our perspectives. You know, the one that is aggressive and unable to get adapted to the place where they live. What I mostly experienced was the question 'Do you drink alcohol?' when they saw me drinking beer. (Öykü, Germany)

Bize karşı direk bir tavır yoktu. Türkiyeden gelen hiçbir arkadaşım ile ilgili olumsuz bir olay yaşanmadı. bir ortama girdiğinizde bir dışlanma aa türk diye bir şey olmadı. Çok dramatize etmeye gerek yok açıkçası. Ama size yönelttikleri sorular ya da sizin o anda yaptığınız bir iki gözlem bile şeyi gösteriyor. Hani insanların kafasında bir Türkiye imajı var. Yurtdışındaki türkleri gözlemliyorlar ve bizim gözümüzdeki Türk imajı bu diyorlar hani saldırgan, yaşadığı yere adapte olamamış. Bana en fazla yaptıkları şu oldu elimde birayı görünce aa siz alkol içiyormusunuz diyorlardı.

Two of the participants, however, felt that they were discriminated or avoided for at least for some time.

During my first month I thought I began defeated with a score 1-0. Indeed, I felt I got excluded. Italian, Dutch, French students would come together to watch movies, but they wouldn't invite us because of the image in their minds. Then, we slowly warmed up to each other. (Bülent, Norway)

İlk bir ay boyunca Türk olarak bir-sıfır geri başladığımı düşündüm açıkçası kendimi dışlanmış hissettim. İtalyanlar, hollandalılar, framsızlar bir yerde toplanıp film izliyorlardı bizi çağırıyorlardı. Kafalarındaki imajdan dolayı. Sonra yavaş yavaş kaynaştık.

Another point raised by this discussion is that 4 of the participants felt that it is important to differentiate local people from university students in terms of the stereotypes they have about the Turkish. People in the street were biased in its real sense. However, students were moderate and better informed about Turkey.

Seven of the participants went on to claim that this prejudice originated from and triggered by Turkish citizens who migrated to different countries in Europe in 1970s. Participants claimed that these Turkish people led a conservative life in their own community rejecting to adjust to the society and as the time changed, they did not make any progress. Especially three participants from Germany and one participant from Holland indicated that in their encounters with the local Turkish community, even they were surprised. Therefore, they thought that it was no wonder that European people have prejudices.

They wouldn't believe us when we told we were Turkish, coming from Turkey, but I cannot blame them as they're so right, and Turks would live in the district where our dorm and school were situated. I also had a chance to observe them. It may be so wrong to say this, but even I felt ashamed of my nationality. When I went out, I used to see a Turkish family with their shalvars sitting on the pavement, eating seeds and throwing their hulls away. (Buse, Holland)

Türküz Türkiye'den geliyoruz dediğimizde inanmıyorlardı. Ama onları asla suçlayamam çok haklılar çünkü bizim yurdumuzun ve okulumuzun olduğu mahalle Türk mahallesiydi. Onları bende gözlemleme fırsatı buldum ve belki bunu söylemek çok yanlış ama Türk olduğumdan ben bile utandım. Sokağa çıktığımda bir Türk aile görüyorum kadınlar kaldırıma oturmuşlar şalvarlarla çekirdek yiyerek sokağa atıyorlar.

There used to be parties every Saturday in the town. When we went out, we used to see guys passing words to girls, and Turks used to speak Turkish among themselves, so they were in the pole. (Tarık, Norway)

Orada her Cumartesi partiler oluyodu kasabada, dışarda geziyoruz iki kişi kızlara laf atıyor. Bakıyorsun Türkler aralarında türkçe konuşuyorlar kutupta Türk yani.

A guy from Holland told; 'I'm unbiased towards people all the time. It doesn't matter at all whether they are Turkish, Dutch or German. Considering the religious aspect, I'm an atheist, but it doesn't matter for me, either, whether you are a Moslem or Christian. However, there's

another picture. I think you have religious feasts.’ He told that one day one of his firends had seen a sacrificing ceremony on a balcony and the blood of the animal was pouring down. Then he said, ‘Until you know Turkish people like you, you think Turks are such kind of people who aren’t considerate enough to pay attention to that. (Öykü, Germany)
Hollandalı bir çocuk şöyle bir şey söyledi bana, ben dedi hiç bir şekilde ön yargılı davranmam insanlara Türk yada Hollandalı ya da Alman beni hiç ilgilendirmez dedi. Hani din olarak yaklaşırsan da ben ateistim hani müslüman ya da Hristiyan olman da beni ilgilendirmez dedi. Ama dedi şöyle bir görüntü var. Sizin sanırım dini bayramlarınız oluyor dedi bir gün söyle bir şeye şahit lmuş balkonda kurban kesiyorlarmış onunda kanları aşağıya damlıyormuş. Sen dedi onu gördükten sonra sizler gibi insanlar tanıyana kadar diyorsun ki demekki Türkler böyle bunu bile düşünmüyorlar.

Besides prejudices, some participants stressed the differences in lifestyle which made it difficult to survive in the host country as a Turkish person. The elements specific to culture were pointed out by participants such as cuisine, working hours and habits. Their point was that they had to change their routine and get accustomed to the way of life in the host country, which was felt as frustrating from time to time.

You cannot go to the market after 20.00. Why can’t I go shopping at any hour I like? Here we’re used to the markets open all the time.
(Meral, Germany)
Markete saat sekizden sonra gidemiyorsunuz. Yani ben niye istediğim saatte alışveriş yapamayayım ki biz alışmışız burada her saat açık marketler.

It was tiring to live as a Turk there. Especially, the Scandinavian cuisine was totally different from that of Turkey. I had to learn how to cook, which took a whole month for me. (Salih, Denmark)
Orada Türk olmak yorucuydu. Özellikle de İskandinav yemek kültürü Türkiye’dekinden tamamiyle farklıydı. Yemek yapmayı öğrenmek zorunda kaldım tam bir ayımı aldı.

Moreover, as Turkish Erasmus students, even though they felt that they made a lot of friends from all European countries; four of them reported a slight tendency to get along better with students from Mediterranean countries like Italy and Spain. They said that they had more in common and they felt that students from these countries and Turkish students share interests and habits, thereby having a lot to talk.

Everybody[Turkish students] who participated in Erasmus has an Italian friend. (Buse, Germany)
Erasmus a giden herkesin bir italyan arkadaşı vardır.

Retrospective Thoughts on Turkey

Dolby (2004) discusses that national identity shifts from a passive to an active identity in the global context. She argues that students who study abroad reconstruct their national identity by “encountering the other”.

Following the discussion focusing on issues like Europe and Europeanness, the focus of attention was turned to Turkey and the participants were required to discuss their experience in terms of its effects on their thoughts and viewpoints about their own country. By this discussion, students were encouraged to assess if their attitude towards Turkey differed due to their European experience.

Students reported some changes in their thoughts concerning Turkey and Turkishness. Although none of them stated a radical change in either negative or positive way, six of them defined their experience as enlightening in terms of raising their awareness. Four of these participants thought that following their experience they realized better the defects of the system in Turkey and how it affects citizens' lives. Among the defects they mentioned were lack of opportunities, the insufficient education system and flaws in democracy. For these participants, this awareness was accompanied by a desire to escape and live in Europe at least for a while.

It has shown the negative aspects of Turkey. Sometimes I wish I had a chance to live in Italy. I may want to live there in the future. I've been more aware of the problems here. (Emre, Italy)
Türkiyenin kötü yönlerini gösterdi. Bazedn diyorum keşke fırsatım olsa da gidip İtalya da yaşasam. İlerde yaşamak isteyebilirim diyorum. Buradaki aksaklıkları daha çok farketmemi sağladı.

I've realized that the opportunities are seriously limited. (Buse, Germany)

İmkanların çok kısıtlı olduğunu farkettim ciddi anlamda.

A student with Erasmus experience will definitely want to be in an international environment for the rest of his/her life. And everyone tells, 'I won't leave Turkey completely, but I'd like to have one foot abroad. Yes, we all love Turkey, but it seems like an escape. (Semih, Portugal)
Erasmus yapan bir öğrenci hayatının geri kalanında mutlaka uluslararası bir ortamda olmak isteyecektir. Ve herkesin dediği de şudur: Türkiye'yi asla tamamen terketmem ama bir ayağım yurt dışında olsun. Evet hepimiz Türkiyeyi çok seviyoruz ama bu bir şekilde kaçamak gibi geliyor.

Most of our people are uneducated; fields in education are based on an empty system. Our biggest problem is education and we see that it's not impossible to resolve. (Tarık, Norway)
Bizim insanımızın çoğu eğitimsiz, eğitim alanlarda zaten içi boş bir eğitim sisteminden geçiyor. En büyük sorunumuz eğitim ve görüyoruz ki halledilemez değilmiş.

On the other hand, for two of these participants, awareness worked on the positive side. They stated that they realized how Turkish people value their culture and tradition, which is of great importance. They think that this makes Turkish people more humane. According to these students, close relations between people in Turkey is the core and all other positive things about Europe pale next to it.

As for the rest of the participants, this Erasmus experience Europe endowed them with a critical way of thinking when it comes to their own country. They indicated that they reviewed their beliefs, stereotypes and thought of Turkey following their return from the program and they thought that they had acquired a more critical, realistic approach to many matters. However, this does not necessarily imply a negative approach.

There is such a change: I've stopped being a nationalist for its own sake alone. I can never give up defending my country, but after coming back, I started to think more on what was going on abroad, if we were doing something wrong. If it's the case, what are those mistakes? I also think we need to make some corrections, but it's not to the extent that Europe imposes on Turkey. (Öykü, Germany)
Şöyle bir değişiklik oldu kuru kuru milliyetçilik yapmaktan vazgeçtim. Hiç bir zaman kendi ülkemi savunmaktan vazgeçmem kesinlikle ama biraz da

dışarda ne olup bitiyor, bir yerlerde yanlış yapıyormuyuz yapıyorsak da o yanlışlar nedir bunları biraz daha fazla düşünmeye başladım döndükten sonra ve biraz düzeltmemiz gereken şeyler var diye düşünüyorum. Ama bu hiç bir zamanda Avrupanın Türkiyeye empoze ettiği yoğunlukta değil.

Whether you like it or not, you begin to question the system in Turkey. You ask, 'Why is this the case? What are its reasons?' Even when you come back, you find the system here strange. You have to get used to it once more. (Meral, Germany)

Türkiyedeki sistemi sorgulama yoluna gidiyorsun ister istemez bir kere niye bu böyle oluyor, sebepler ne hatta ilk döndüğünde burada ki sistemi garipsiyorsun bile yeniden alışman gerekiyor.

Turkey's integration into the European Union

Does Turkey belong to Europe? This question has frequently been asked in the debates about the possible EU-membership of Turkey, from the early days of European integration until today. The Turkish case is still the looming question with the principal opposition against membership being the concerns about Turkey's Europeanness. Given that the participants spent an academic term in a member country with students incoming from members states as students from a controversial candidate country, they were invited to comment on Turkey' integration into the European Union. The question specifically probed their personal opinions on Turkey's integration and how their experience affected their thoughts on the issue. First of all, they indicated that their experience in Erasmus did not change their opinions about integration. On the contrary, it reinforced what had been in their minds.

Except for two students, all of the participants supported integration. However, they were pessimistic about the results. They thought that Turkey would not be accepted, considering the huge discrepancy between Turkey and European countries. In addition, it might be noteworthy that although they supported the

integration, half of the participants did not exhibit an enthusiastically supportive attitude. They rather thought that it would be a good thing yet not an indispensable, urgent goal, and if it happened they would not expect miracles to happen. The rationales of those who supported the integration were various. Two of them raised the issue of travel opportunities without visa problems. Three of them thought that becoming a member might increase the welfare status of Turkish people and might provide them with better educational opportunities as well as a more democratic system.

There's a path here and Turkey has to walk on this path. It's an issue of convertibility. As is the case in the equivalence of Boğaziçi and Mun Universities, Turkey is equal to France or Germany. Its people should be as much well-off, free in expressing themselves and satisfied with their lives as the people in such countries. The important thing is to walk on this path. (Salih, Denmark)

Bu bir yoldur ve bu yolu Türkiye yürümek zorunda. Convertibilite meselesi nasıl Boğaziçi üniversitesi Mun üniversitesiyle denkse, Türkiye de bir Fransa bir Almanya ya denk işte insanları o kadar müreffeh, ifade özgürlüğü o kadar geniş ve insanların hayatından o kadar memnun olduğu bir ülke olması lazım. Önemli olan bu yolda yürümek.

Of course, I believe we should enter the European Union, but I don't think Turkey deserves it. Special rules are told to be issued, yet it's not true. It's natural that they have worries. I met so well-intentioned people there. Even those people's opinions about Turkey are so different. Istanbul is OK, but the average conditions in Turkey refer to uneducated population. Even the poor can have a good education there. (Öykü, Germany)

Tabiki Avrupa Birliğine girmeliyiz diye düşünüyorum. Ama Türkiye'nin hakettiğini düşünmüyorum bize özel kurallar çıkarıyorlar deniyor ama öyle bir şey yok. Kaygıları olması normal, orda çok iyi niyetli insanlar tanıdım bu çok iyi niyetli insanlar bile çok farklı şeyler düşünüyor türkiyeye ilgi. İstanbul okey ama türkiyenin ortalama durumu eğitimsiz. Orada fakirler bile iyi eğitim alabiliyor.

I'd like Turkey to enter the EU. I don't think it'll help us to develop in the long term. (Tarık, Norway)

Türkiye'nin AB'ye girmesini istiyorum. Uzun vadede bizi kalkındıracağını düşünmüyorum.

I think they'll never accept Turkey into the Union. I used to believe that; now my belief is stronger because we're so different from them; everything, including both our culture and perspective, is different. Our

religion, our culture, our vision and whatever belongs to us are different.
(Buse, Holland)

Türkiyeyi asla kabul etmeyeceklerini düşünüyorum önceden de düşünüyordum şimdi daha da kuvvetlendi bu düşüncem. Çünkü çok farklıyız onlardan hem kültürümüz farklı bakış açımız herşeyimiz farklı. Hem dinimiz farklı hem kültürümüz görüşümüz herşeyimiz farklı.

Two of the participants did not support Turkey's integration into the EU by stating that Turkey and EU members do not have many things in common both culturally and historically which makes the integration of so such disparate beings under the same entity meaningless.

Personally, I don't want to enter the European Union. This's perhaps because of my strong feelings of nationalism. I don't want to be a part of Europe. I don't think we have many cultural junctures. Why should we belong to the same union then? (Emre, Italy)

Kişisel olarak Avrupa Birliğine girmeyi istemiyorum. Belki fazla milliyetçiliğimden kaynaklanıyor. Avrupanın bir parçası olmak istemiyorum. Kültür olarak çok kesiştiğimiz yerler olduğunu düşünüyorum o zaman niye aynı birlik içinde olalım ki.

I know that we can't be like Holland or Greece in financial terms. They'll never regard us as a full member. Even if we're accepted as a member, they'll stipulate some conditions like conditioned membership and they'll limit us in some issues. That's why I don't want the membership. In other words, we'll be named as a member, but in practice we won't be able to be entitled with real membership. (Buse, Holland)

Ekonomik açıdan da bir Hollanda gibi bir Yunanistan gibi bir üye olmayacağımızı da biliyorum bizi asla böyle % 100 bir üye yapmayacaklar. Üye olsak bile koşullu üyelik gibi şartlar getirecekler bazı konularda kısıtlayacaklar bizi o yüzden üye olmak istemiyorum yani ismimiz üye olacak ama asla uygulamada gerçek bir üye olamayacağız.

However desperate the participants who favored Turkish integration to the EU were, they thought that educational exchange programs like Erasmus formed the basis for a better understanding and future integration as they helped to promote Turkey's image in a positive way.

All in all, all of the participants were highly satisfied with their Erasmus experience.

They thought that they had the experience of a life time as they were promised and recommended it to all students.

I met so many people from so many different countries. I think every student should experience it at least once. (Buse, Holland)

O kadar çok ülkeden o kadar çok farklı kişiyle tanışma imkanım oldu ki her öğrencinin mutlaka tatması gerekli bu deneyimi.

As a student who hates studying Political Science, I had the pleasure of passing the hardest courses ,which I was supposed to take in Turkey, easily. I can say that I had the best days of my life there. (Semih, Portugal)

Siyaset bilimi okumaktan nefret eden bir öğrenci olarak burda alacağım en zor dersleri orda alıp, kolay bir şekilde geçmenin ve çok fazla çaba sarfetmeden geçmenin keyfini yaşadım açıkçası. Hayatımın en güzel dönemini geçirdim diyebilirim.

This period is totally different from what you might experience here in Turkey in 6 months time, and much more productive. I'm extremely satisfied with my time there. I wish ITU could send more students with Erasmus. Everybody should experience it. (Emre, Italy)

Burda yaşayacağın 6 aydan çok farklı ve çok daha fazla şey katacak bir dönem. İnanılmaz memnun kaldım keşke Itu daha fazla öğrenci gönderebilse, herkesin yaşaması lazım.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The main question guiding this study was, “What are the perceptions of Turkish Erasmus students regarding their experiences within the program?” The purpose of this case study was to present and analyze the perceptions of these students, based on the responses to the questions posed in individual interview sessions. As a result of the heightened political importance attached to international mobility, and the manifold practical attempts to increase it, the collective European effort generated the Erasmus program. It introduced a major concept of joint-curricular programs and recognition of studies in a wide-spread network. 17 years after the establishment of the program, Turkish universities began to participate in the program in the year 2004. Participants of this study are those students who became Erasmus exchangees between 2004 and 2006. the findings of the present study provide a detailed description of the experiences of the Turkish Erasmus students within the program and enable a better understanding of the students’ perceptions about the program and Europe. The researcher reached the following conclusions based on the findings from the collected data.

The qualitative information collected in this study indicates that the primary motivation that led Turkish students to participate in such an exchange program was the desire to go abroad and live in another country. They attached an experiential importance to the program as it was considered as an opportunity to experience new and different ways of living as well as to meet new people and cultures. Among the secondary motives that were influential in their decision to participate were career

prospects, the desire to learn a foreign language and personal development. Obviously, students did not attach an educational importance to the program. Therefore, although Erasmus is an academic exchange program, cross-cultural and social perspectives stood out for Turkish exchangeees.

The Erasmus program was preferred among the other exchange possibilities due to its popularity at the home universities and convenience as it also provides students with a grant to help finance their expenses. Moreover, the fact that Erasmus is a European initiative was a factor that influenced students' preference considering the geographical proximity of the continent. Their choices of the host country were basically shaped by limited alternatives. As a result, the emerging fact was that most of the participants did not have previous information on or interest in the host country.

As for the academic aspect of the participants' experience, it is important to note that students reported no major difficulties with academic adjustment. However, the dominant perception among students was that there are striking differences between the higher education system in Turkey and the ones in European countries. With regard to content, they found the courses offered in the host institutions less demanding, easier and more practice-based when compared to the ones in their home universities, which are mostly theory-oriented. Moreover, they claimed the courses they attended abroad to be much more student-centered, giving student participation the outmost importance. In terms of teacher-student relations, students noticed a lack of power-distance, setting the tone of the relation as a less formal one. Another remarkable perceived difference concerned the assessment of performance. Participants indicated that written tests weren't seen as the sole means of assessment in their host institutions. Instead, presentations and projects as well as oral

examinations together composed the final assessment, with greater importance assigned to the first two.

The program satisfied the expectations of students to the extent that when they were invited to talk about the hardships with which they confronted during their exchange experience, they uttered almost none regarding the program itself. Only two of the participants only complained about the paperwork and tiring procedure during the application process. It is important to emphasize that participants did not have any major adaptation problems and did not report any financial difficulties. However, three of the participants found it confusing to adapt the new way of life in the initial period of their experience; three of them felt homesick and lonely from time to time and two of them experienced visa problems.

The study abroad-period was considered to be beneficial by the participants in terms of enhancing their autonomy and self-confidence, giving them a cross-cultural perspective and increasing their language proficiency. In parallel with their expectations and motives for participation, students perceived no academic gains as a result of their exchange experience.

Regarding the European aspects of their experience, participants reported a significant change in their understanding of and attitudes towards the host country. They defined this change as increased knowledge on and understanding of the host country's history, culture and lifestyle. Almost all of the participants had positive feelings about the host country and they felt themselves somehow attached to it. With respect to Europe as an entity itself, students did not think that this exchange experience caused a considerable change on their thoughts about Europe; they rather felt that it confirmed their pre-existing thoughts. Participants were generally positive about Europe. There was a consensus on students' impressions of Europe and these

impressions concentrated on the aspects they perceived to be different from Turkey. In terms of the impressions the participants have of Europe, two issues stood out. One was a civilized, regulative system dominating all aspects of life and the other one was weak interpersonal relations. In addition, participants found European people well-educated, civilized and respectful with a broad, uncensored point of view. When asked to give a definition of “European”, the perceptions of the participants differed to some extent from the research findings of the previous studies. None of the participants referred to a geographical definition. Mainly two different definitions emerged: some of the participants related being European to the European Union, as they referred to common regulations and a common passport in their definitions. The other participants related being European to a high-standard, well-educated and civilized way of life. Most of the participants said that they feel European rationalizing it with the second definition given above. Two participants indicated that they did not feel European; one of them emphasizing his national identity as a Turk, the other one defining himself as an “Istanbuler”.

All subjects of the study, without exception, indicated that people in Europe were poorly-informed about and to a great extent prejudiced against Turks and Turkishness. Participants also emphasized, however, that although people had difficulty in compromising with their Turkish identity, it was never accompanied by a discriminative attitude; participants in no way felt discriminated as a result of the stereotypes in the minds of people. Moreover, students observed an increase in the biased ways of thinking against Turks in those European countries where Turkish guest workers live in great numbers.

Concerning their thoughts on Turkey and Turkishness, participants regarded the Erasmus experience to be enlightening in terms of raising their awareness. For

most of the participants, this awareness worked on the negative side, magnifying the defects of the system in Turkey. Students also claimed that they developed a more critical, impartial and unbiased approach to issues in Turkey as a result of their experience in Europe. Most of the participants supported Turkey's integration into the European Union; however, they were pessimistic about the result considering the discrepancy between Turkey and European countries. They indicated that this exchange experience did not change their opinion of integration; it only reinforced their pre-existing opinion.

All in all, participants were highly satisfied with their exchange experience in the Erasmus program. In that sense, when the participants of this study are concerned, the participation in the program seems to have reached its objectives in terms of providing a cross-cultural understanding and raising European awareness.

Limitations of the Study

The most important limitation of this study is that although the research findings can be useful in understanding experiences of individual Turkish Erasmus students from different universities (both state and private) who participated in the program in different host countries, they cannot be generalized to all Turkish Erasmus students or even to all Erasmus students at their home university because, first of all, the sample includes participants only from universities located in İstanbul. Lastly, the number of participants in the study is too small to be representative of the population.

Another limitation is that since the study makes use of a semi-structured interview method to have an in-dept understanding of participants' experiences, the quality of the data collection and the analysis of the data are highly dependent on the skills of the researcher herself and on the rigor of the analysis. Because all of these

methods are dependent on interpersonal exchanges with respondents, any number of variables, including the dress, demeanor, and language used by the interviewer may influence the quantity and quality of information given by respondents.

Time is another factor, because the interviewees might have forgotten what thought and experienced before considering the fact that some of the interviewees took the program 2-3 years ago. Lastly, the researcher was the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing the interview data. Therefore, personal values and attitudes of the researcher might have affected the research procedure. Although the researcher tries to stay out of it, the researcher bias enters into the picture as there is an interaction between the researcher and the researched.

Recommendations

The course of this study reveals several directions for future research. First, the findings of this study provide a basis for regarding the impact of the Erasmus exchange experience. Yet, the lasting impact from such a limited experience is unknown. To further examine this impact and the perceptions of these students, this study can be extended to include interviews at the beginning and at the end of the exchange experience as well as longitudinal follow-up studies.

Second, since the results of this investigation may not be generalized beyond these participants, certainly a similar study would be more meaningful if conducted with a larger sample. Thus, conducting a similar research study with a larger randomly selected sample may provide deeper insight into this issue. Group interviews might be offered as well.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE FORM

KİŞİSEL BİLGİLER FORMU

Kişisel Bilgiler

- Lütfen cinsiyetinizi belirtiniz
- Lütfen yaşınızı belirtiniz
- Bölümünüzü belirtiniz
- Öğrenci değişim programına hangi düzeyde katıldığınızı belirtiniz.

Lisans

Yüksek Lisans

- Öğrenci değişim programına katıldığınız üniversitenin adı
.....
- Üniversitenin bulunduğu şehir/ülke
- Bu üniversitenin öğretim dilini belirtiniz
- Programa katıldığınız eğitim yılı/dönemini belirtiniz
- Değişim programı dahilinde ne kadar süre geçirdiniz?
- Daha önce, Erasmus haricinde bir öğrenci değişim programına katıldınız mı?
.....
- Eğer katıldıysanız programı ve katıldığınız yılı belirtiniz.
.....

APPENDIX B

THE TURKISH INTERVIEW FORM

GÖRÜŞME FORMU

Erasmus Programı ile ilgili konular

1. Erasmus programına katılma nedeniniz/nedenleriniz nelerdir?
2. Ev sahibi ülkeyi/üniversiteyi seçmenize sebep olan faktörler nelerdir?
3. Türkiye'deki eğitim sistemiyle karşılaştırdığınızda ev sahibi kurumdaki eğitimle ilgili neler söyleyebilirsiniz?
 - Eğitim öğretim teknikleri açısından
 - Eğitimci
 - Ders içerikleri
 - Değerlendirme
4. Genel olarak Erasmus değişim programı dahilinde yaşadıklarınızla ilgili neler söyleyebilirsiniz?
 - Bu deneyiminizin öne çıkan noktaları nelerdi?
 - Yaşadığınız başlıca zorluklar nelerdi?
5. Sizce bu deneyimin sonucunda ne gibi edinimleriniz olmuş olabilir?

Avrupa Deneyimleriyle ilgili konular

6. Erasmus programı dahilinde yaşadıklarınızın ev sahibi ülke/ Avrupa/ Avrupa Birliği ile ilgili bilgi düzeyinizi ve bunlara karşı tutumunuzu etkilediğini düşünüyor musunuz? Eğer evetse, nasıl ve ne ölçüde?
7. Avrupalı olmak ne demektir? Tanımlayabilir misiniz.
8. Sizce, bu deneyimlerinizin kendi ülkenizle ilgili düşüncelerinizi etkiledi mi?bu konuyla ilgili neler söyleyebilirsiniz?
9. Avrupa'da Türk olmak size neler hissettirdi?
10. Kendinizi Avrupalı hissediyor musunuz?

Türkiye'nin Avrupa Birliği üyeliğiyle ilgili konular

11. Türkiye'nin Avrupa Birliği'ne üyeliğiyle ilgili düşünceleriniz nelerdir?
12. Bu değişim programı çerçevesindeki yaşantılarınız bu düşüncelerinizi etkiledi mi? Eğer etkilediyse, ne yönde etkiledi?
13. Bu değişim programı dahilindeki deneyimlerinizle ilgili eklemek istediğiniz başka bir şey var mı?

THE INTERVIEW FORM

Issues concerning Erasmus

1. Can you tell me the reasons why you participated in Erasmus program?
2. What were the factors that influenced your decision in choosing your host country/university?
3. Compared to your study experience in Turkey, what do you think about the education in your host institution?
 - In terms of instruction
 - Content
 - Teacher-student relations
 - Assessment
4. What do you think about your exchange experience in Erasmus overall?
 - What were the highlights of your exchange experience?
 - What were the main challenges of your exchange experience?
5. Do you feel that your experience abroad benefited you, and if so, in which ways?)

Issues concerning European Experience

6. Do you feel that your knowledge/attitudes about Europe/host country have changed after your exchange experience?
7. From your point of view, who is European? Can you describe it?
8. Do you think this experience affected your thoughts about your own country?
9. How was it like to be Turkish in Europe?
10. Do you feel European?

Issues concerning EU and Turkey

11. What do you think of Turkey's integration to EU?
12. Did your experience affect your opinion? If so, in what way?
13. Are there any other further comments you would like to add?

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interviewer Follow-Up

What is my own general impression of this interview? (Reflections, initial analysis and summary)

What are the outstanding points of this interview?

What lessons should I learn from this interview to make the next one better?

What other questions do I think are also necessary for further data collections?