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STUDENTS LEARNING ABOUT THE EU PROJECT

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

TURKEY AND EU COMMON VALUES:
REFLECTIONS ON
THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

16 -17 DECEMBER 2015 / ANKARA



“We are living in the lands where values that the EU stands up for were born”

“We are not strangers to the norms and standards that are supported by either Europe or the EU. On the contrary, we are living in the lands where principles and values that the EU stands for and are taken as a basis by her were born. We are more experienced at pluralism and crucial areas like different cultures’ living in harmony.” said Nabi Avcı, Minister of National Education, at the international conference in Ankara titled “Turkey and EU Common Values: Reflections on the Education System” which was organised within the scope of the project “Students Learning about the EU” under the management of Ministry of National Education.

Minister Avcı placed emphasis on the importance of such a conference at a time when negotiations between Turkey and the EU have gained impetus. He expressed that “after refugee crisis, they saw plainly that security of the European Continent starts in Anatolia. In accordance with the universal principles declared by the EU, obstacles for Turkey’s full membership should be removed. Since the beginning of accession process, political and cognitive barriers have been the issue. We are expecting the same degree of cooperation as with our alignment with the *acquis*, the EU needs to know us. This conference will provide the means for us to express ourselves, and for the EU and her public to get to know us.” Minister Avcı reminded the audience that Turkey is not a stranger to EU’s common values. Values like pluralism, which are taken

as a basis by them have been born in these lands. He went on by saying “We have enough experience in education, too. Proficiency of our young people who graduate from universities is self-evident. Misgivings on our education were broken by the statement given by Nobel prized Prof. Aziz Sancar. Sancar told how the education he received in Turkey was influential on him. There are national and universal sides to education. Those are not contradictory to each other, on the contrary, they are complementary and enriching elements for each other. You don’t necessarily become a stranger to whole humanity when you feel you belong to a nation.”

Minister Avcı stated that works that Turkey is doing together with the EU show her intention to comply with universal values. “As a part of great humanity, we are ready for any kind of cooperation for progression of science, education, and arts. This conference is an indicator of our good will and our desire for cooperation.” he said. Minister Avcı said that the EU and Turkey will give the final decision on Turkey’s membership and added, Ithaca poem of Greek poet Kavafis (Cavafy) will show the way to Turkey in this decision. Then he read the poem.

“Turkey should embrace EU common values during accession process”

Head of Delegation of the European Union to Turkey, Hansjörg Haber, gave a speech at the conference and stated that the EU has moved beyond the goal of having a single market and now it is a community with shared values. He said that transparency and good governance are also very important along with freedom of



expression and right to live, and all decisions must be accountable, legitimate, and transparent. He went on with his remarks and said "This puts responsibility on both our delegation and Turkish authorities and civil society in carrying out these values. All these values must be embraced also by Turkey during accession process. Turkey conforms to those values during accession. Turkey has the capability to comply with the acquis, however, this is a process that will take time. There are also nonconformities with the acquis. This is a natural part of EU process."

"Refugee crisis and Greek crisis are tests for EU member countries that will show their views on the future of the Union" said Ambassador Haber. He expressed that Turkey's accession negotiations have gained momentum during last two months and underlined that when Turkey becomes a member, she will affect this dynamic process directly and enrich it.

General Director of EU and Foreign Relations of MoNE, Ziya Yediylidiz, said that education is one of the prioritized subjects of EU adjustment policies and added "In the future, in case there is a referendum on EU membership, it is important that the youth is knowledgeable on the EU."

Acting President of Central Finance and Contracts Unit, Emine Döğer, expressed that Students Learning about the EU Project fulfils an important function for increasing knowledge level of society about the EU values.

Team Leader of Students Learning about the EU Project, Willem Kolthof, mentioned that countries within the EU have come to an agreement over respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law, and respect for human rights and rights of the minorities. He also said that "What will we

choose to teach? Can we teach values without indoctrination? Can a teacher teach the values contrary to his/her own? Values change during the course of time. Treating others in the way you want to be treated. This is the basis of most things."

The main focus of the conference that lasted for two days between 16th and 17th of December was on how the education could be an instrument in increasing the awareness of Turkish society about common EU values. Many experts on education and EU attended the conference.

Coordinator teachers from 81 provinces, provincial directors of Ministry of National Education, Ministry staff and representatives from related institutions attended the conference that was held in Ankara HiltonSA. 250 people participated in the conference, 100 of them coming from outside of Ankara.

With its full name Technical Assistance for Students Learning about the EU Common Values, Fundamental Rights and Policies Project, is a project that includes many activities like quiz, slogan and short story competitions to increase awareness about the EU with a budget of 3 million 256 thousand Euros and which will be completed between December 2014 and December 2016.

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"Both us and Europe would prosper"

Head of Department of Education Policies, Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Daria Duilovic Rowe, made the thematic speech of conference and gave

information on appearance of EU common values and their history. Rowe emphasized how education can be used relaying common values of EU to the society. She said "Notion that we call EU values is changing. As the EU changes, as new members join her, values also change. When Turkey and Bosnia and Herzegovina joins the EU, we will also contribute to those values. Turkey and Bosnia, rightfully for example, can contribute with notions like solidarity. We have lots of common traits and this is important for our common future within the EU." Rowe went on with those remarks "At a Eurobarometer that was conducted with people of ages between 16 and 25 in 2008, it was asked which three values would represent the EU the best. Human rights, peace, democracy took the first three places. After the war, peace is at the top of that order in Bosnia. Priority of each country is different. Also the ranking changes as the times change." Daria Duilovic Rowe mentioned that the EU is defined with "unity in diversity" and EU tries to define a common identity for peoples of Europe and create a kind of feeling of "us" and underlined that this partnership does not consist of contradicting identities but rather of complementary identities. According to the recommendation of European Council there are 4 goals of education and those are:

1. Sustainable employment
2. Active citizenship in democratic society
3. Personal development
4. Development of advanced knowledge base through education, training and research

Rowe expressed that Turkey accepted the EU 2020 Strategy in 2014 and listed the key competencies in European Reference Framework for Life Long Learning:

- Communication in mother tongue
- Communication in foreign languages
- Competence in the fields of mathematics and science
- Digital competence

- To learn how to learn
- Social and civic competencies
- Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
- Cultural awareness and expression

Rowe continued her words as "We need competencies framework because our population is getting older. We need to develop lifelong learning. Technology moves forward too fast. We have to keep up with it. How will be the reference framework implemented? How will we keep up with the change? With transparent, reliable and comprehensible competencies." Rowe finished her words by saying "Education is not a onetime thing, it's a process, a journey. If we harmonise our systems with European values, there will be two winners. We enrich ourselves and Europe becomes enriched with us."

Director of Ministry for EU Affairs, Turkish National Agency, Mesut Kamiloğlu, gave information about Erasmus+ Programme. He said that in order to cope with the global economic crisis of 2010 that led to economic contraction, European Commission published "Europe 2020 Strategy" which stipulates economy of the EU must be based more on knowledge and has a more sustainable structure. He also mentioned that in this strategy it was emphasised on the importance of proper investment in human resources to get out of this economic predicament. As with regard to education he said that below goals are indicators:

- Decreasing school dropout rates below 10 percent (from 15 to below 10)
- Increasing employment rate of university graduates from 69 percent to above 75 percent and share of the research to 3 percent
- Increasing the percent of higher education graduates for people between ages of 30 and 34 (graduating from tertiary education or its equal, from 31 percent to 40 percent)



Kamiloğlu explained that Education and Youth Programs, which are immensely important for development of human capital and qualified human resource that is in line with targets of Europe 2020 Strategy, are gathered together under the title of Erasmus+ for years between 2014 and 2020. With its 14.7 billion Euros budget, 4 million people will benefit from it until 2020 (abroad education, internship, voluntary works, teaching, etc.). Kamiloğlu stated that between 2004 and 2013, approximately 100 thousand project proposals were received and around 24 thousand of them received close to 600 million Euros of support. During the same period, more than 400 thousand citizens from 81 provinces benefitted from the same programmes, and opportunities of abroad education, internship, voluntary works and cooperation activities were provided for almost 300 thousand of these people.

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Method for mainstreaming: “open coordination”

EU expert from Slovenia, Mr. Sergij Gabrscek, at his speech that was titled “The Mainstreaming of the EU Common Values in Secondary Educational Systems,” put emphasis on the importance of European values defined within the scope of 2007 Declaration of Berlin, like peace, freedom, rule of law, mutual respect and common responsibility, welfare and security, tolerance and participation, justice and brotherhood. Gabrscek stated that to have experts on European values doesn’t necessarily mean they are of the same mind and he also said that in addition to European values there are also other values like personal, cultural, and national ones. He defined the values as

“important and continuous beliefs that define what is good or bad, desirable or undesirable, and shared by members of a culture.” He also mentioned that values have a profound effect on attitudes and behaviours of people and constitute some kind of guideline that could be used under any circumstances. He continued his words by saying: “When they are asked, Europeans listed the most important personal values according to them as such: Peace (52%), respect for human life (43%), and human rights (41%). When it was asked with respect to the EU; human rights (38%), democracy (38%), and peace (36%) were listed as the most important values. Values like democracy, human rights, rule of law and equality are the most important gains of European civilization.”

The model of the EU is “unity in diversity” and this means: 1. Unification at totality of common values; and 2. Variety in values. Sergij Gabrscek emphasized the existence of different cultural, personal, national, regional values in Europe and the necessity to preserve this diversity. He reminded the audience that ministers of education of EU member states signed the “Declaration of Promoting Citizenship and the Common Values of Freedom, Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Through Education, in Paris on 17 March 2015” and mentioned that also the spirit of freedom, which values critical thought as much as respect for others, is important for the Union. Gabrscek stated that EU member states utilize Open Coordination Method in order to have a common policy on mainstreaming the common values. Components of this method can be listed as:

- Drawing a road map and preparing a timetable for short, mid, and long-term goals,
- Preparation of qualitative and quantitative indicators in accordance with member states’ needs in order to compare good practices,
- Adaptation of European guidelines to national



and regional policy levels through identification of goals with specific measures,

- Periodical monitoring of the progress achieved in order to put in place mutual learning processes between member states.

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“Turkey is a European nation”

Following Gabrscek, EU Affairs Expert Ms. Arzu Akar from Ministry for EU Affairs, Social, Regional and Innovative Policies Directorate took the stage. She gave a speech on “Chapter 26, Education and Culture Negotiation Phase in the Pre Accession EU.” She mentioned that for the next year, it is expected to develop new strategies to take measures in order to reduce early school dropouts, especially of girls and to increase quality of education at all levels and enhance students’ acquisition of new skills. She also stated that there is no official opening and closing criteria for Education and Culture Negotiation Phase but plans are made to increase enrolment rates, and quality of vocational education, to mitigate gender inequality and to intensify studies in order to come closer to EU averages in education statistics.

Akar listed the EU cooperation priorities as: “To support development of the education systems of member countries that aim to provide for personal, social, and professional success and satisfaction of all of their citizens; and for democratic values, social cohesion, active citizenship, intercultural dialogue. Following this, she listed strategic tools in order to achieve these goals: “Fulfilment of lifelong learning and mobility; increasing quality of education system; supporting equality, social

cohesion and active citizenship; increasing efforts in all levels of education towards creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship.”

Head of Turkey Office, Council of Europe Programme Office, Michael Ingledow, based his speech on the Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education in Turkey Project that was concluded in-between 2011 and 2015 together with the Ministry of National Education. At the end of this project, a structure in which democratic school culture is encouraged was established. This project is not only important for Turkey but also for other 46 member states of the Council of Europe. Ingledow stated that project was successfully implemented in 126 schools and with the achieved success, MoNE has applied for another project within scope of IPA 2015. He said they are glad that this new project will be implemented in more than 35 thousand schools.

Prof. Sanem Baykal’s, Director of Ankara University European Research Centre, speech was titled “The Education Policy of EU in the Light of the EU Common Values.” The EU system necessitates unavoidably mutual recognition of diplomas and for this, minimum standards must be defined. It is also important to train employable human resources and direct them according to the needs. Baykal mentioned that education has been the primary focus of the EU since 1990s in order to achieve economic objectives. To be able to compete with other regions in the world, it is crucial for the EU to improve education policy. Also, developing a common education policy is important in supporting EU values during the political integration process. Baykal mentioned that at the Brussels meeting that took place on 29 November 2015, Prime Minister Davutoğlu expressed Turkey’s attachment to the common



values of the EU and said “Turkey is a European society and a part of those values. Thus, we are here to share the burden on Europe and maximize her potential.”

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“Does EU membership harm the cultural texture?”

The last speech of the first day of the conference was given by Senior Statistician of Council of Europe, Mr. Oğuzhan Akyıldırım, who is also one of the experts of Students Learning about the EU Project. He shared survey results at his speech, titled “EU Awareness in EU Countries and Turkey.” As the level of education increases, so does the affinity with joining the EU. The desire to join the EU was 70 percent in 2004 whereas following years saw a drop of support to 47-48 percent of the society and this change was caused by the conjuncture. He stated that when internal problems of the EU increase, a decrease in support for membership among Turkish population can be observed and when the situation is contrary to this, a more positive perception can be observed. He also expressed that within the scope of the project, they conducted a survey in 21 provinces, at 291 schools with 8,971 lower-secondary school students and 21,200 secondary school students and measured their awareness levels about the EU. Akyıldırım continued his speech by expressing that “According to the survey results, 60 percent of students who have a positive perception of the European Union said “Turkey should join the EU” whereas this support decreased to 30 percent for those who had a negative perception. The reason behind this result can be explained as such: The youth thinks that joining the EU might harm the

cultural structure. 60 percent of whom had a negative, and 40% of whom had a positive perception was also worried about the same issue. If this situation is addressed also in other European Projects, there might be some success.”

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New approaches in education in the EU were discussed

The second day of the conference continued with interactive seminars where participants were able to participate more actively. There were two work groups in parallel sessions. Moderation of the session titled “New Approaches in the Education System in EU Countries: Exchange of the Best Practices” was done by Assoc. Prof. Zafer Çelik from Department of Sociology, Yıldırım Beyazıt University, and Ass. Prof. Erhan Akdemir, Deputy Director of Anatolia University EU Centre. In the morning and in the afternoon, group had participation of around 70 and 30 people respectively. This seminar group had a flow that at first moderators made short presentations and then there were questions and answers phase.

EU Expert Dr Sergij Gabrscek and Senior Statistician of Council of Europe Oğuzhan Akyıldırım were moderators of the second session, titled “The Mainstreaming of the EU Common Values in Secondary Educational Systems.” This session had participation of 30 people in the morning, and 70 in the afternoon. At this work group, EU common values were discussed as a concept. Studies were made about which values were there in Turkey and how they could have reciprocity in the

curriculum. Gabrscek expressed that when they talked about values, they didn't imply in any way that EU countries were in ideal positions but they also had problems.

At the plenary session, results achieved at interactive seminar sessions held during the day were discussed. Assoc. Prof. Zafer Çelik,

Ass. Prof. Erhan Akdemir, EU expert Dr Sergij Gabrscek, and senior statistician Oğuzhan Akyıldırım were speakers of the plenary session whereas Serkan Körezlioğlu, Head of Department of EU and Project Coordination, General Directorate of European Union and Foreign Relations, was the moderator.



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