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**‘The Linkage Between Multiculturalism and Higher Education  
in Turkey-EU Relations’**

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**INTERCULTURALISM**

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*‘The Linkage Between Multiculturalism and Higher Education  
in Turkey-EU Relations’*

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## **Content**

Introduction	3
I. Historical Background and Theoretical Framework for Multiculturalism in Europe	4
II. Relationship Between Multiculturalism and Education	7
III. What the Students Think about Multiculturalism, Education in the Framework of Erasmus Exchange Programme	8
Conclusion	12
Bibliography	13

## INTRODUCTION

As it is used as a normative and descriptive term, Multiculturalism has an important place in society and in social sciences because it intends to answer the question of ‘ how to live together? ’. Normatively, multiculturalism implies a positive endorsement of communal diversity, based either on the right of different cultural groups to respect and recognition, or on the alleged benefits to the larger society of moral and cultural diversity. As descriptive term, it refers to cultural diversity arising from the existence within a society of two or more groups whose beliefs and practices generate a distinctive sense of collective identity.

Based on common democratic, political and economic values, defined in Copenhagen Criteria, EU contains a multi-cultural society, with respect the ‘unity in diversity’ motto. Although there is debates about whether multiculturalism is death, in this paper I will focus on the existence of multiculturalism in higher education, specifically Erasmus Program.

In the first part, historical background and theoretical framework will be held and because I would like to provide an overview, I will not be focused on only one theory. In the second part, I will explain and underline the linkage between multiculturalism and education due to the fact that education, as its members are the future of the society , is very related with multiculturalism. After all, I will share the results of my personal interviews with some students from my university, who experiences living and studying in a European country thanks to the Erasmus Program. By following this route, I will have been provided both theoretical and practical perspectives about The Linkage Between Multiculturalism and Higher Education in Turkey-EU Relations.

## **I. Historical Background and Theoretical Framework for Multiculturalism in Europe**

International migration in post-1945 period had significantly widened cultural diversity in many societies. In the early post-1945 period as western states sought to recruit workers from abroad to help in the process of post-war reconstruction, the migration routes were shaped by links between European states and their formal colonies: from West Indies and Indian subcontinent to UK, largely from Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia to France, and as *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers) from Turkey and former Yugoslavia to Western Germany, in 1950s and 1960s.<sup>1</sup> In 1980s migration continued in the form of family unification. The situation has changed since the 1980s when the integration of world economy, the globalisation of capital and labour and the rapid development of transport and communication networks have contributed to new types of migration movements. As different from the older ones, the new types of migrant are characterised by their fragmented nature: they include new forms of flexible labour, insecure legal status, variable duration, new gender roles and multiple destinations.<sup>2</sup> In 1989, the implosion of communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe provide an other opportunity for more dynamic and mobilised population in Western and Eastern Europe. With respect to these issues, migrant communities has become more complex, differentiated in terms of their origin, status, educational levels. As it can be seen, Europe started to live with others/foreigners from 1950s whereas it was not easy for two sides: Europeans and immigrants. Due to the hesitancy about the threat of deterioration of their life styles due to the existence of illegal labour force, although it was ‘a source of happiness’ according to Ayhan Kaya<sup>3</sup> and concern about the adaptation of the new people to the existent political, economic and social structure. In 1990s, the term multiculturalism has gained reputation to answer the question of how to live together in a multicultural society as it implies positive endorsement of communal diversity based on right of different cultural groups. Therefore we can say that multiculturalism supports the idea that in stead of the domination of one common culture, a tolerant and peaceful society which accepts diversity

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Heywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction.5th Edition* (London:Palgrave Macmillan,2012). pp. 311-313.

<sup>2</sup>A. Triandafyllidou, T. Modood and R. Zapata-Barrero, “European Challenges to Multicultural Citizenship: Muslims, Secularism and Beyond”, in T. Modood, A. Triandafyllidou and R. Zapata-Barrero (eds.), *Multiculturalism, Muslims and Citizenship – A European Approach* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 8

<sup>3</sup> Ayhan Kaya, “Multiculturalism: The culturalisation of What is Social and Political”, vol. 18, (Perceptions Autumn 2013 no.3), p.64.

and differentiation of other cultures should be created. In 2000, ‘unity in diversity’ became the motto of the European Union to explain the target of working together for peace and prosperity in European Union while enjoying the rich, different cultures in the continent.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, before providing theoretical approach to multiculturalism, it would be useful to mention the foundations for identity politics and for the ideas of multiculturalism with which it is commonly associated, were laid by the post-colonial theories that emerged in post-1945 era because postcolonialism sought to challenge and overturn the cultural dimension of ‘eurocentric’/‘imperial rule’ by establishing the legitimacy of non-western political ideas and traditions. Franz Fanon saw decolonisation not as a political process, but one through which new ‘species’ of man created. Edward Said developed a critique of Eurocentricism with its concept of Orientalism that highlights the extent to which western cultural and political hegemony over the rest of the world, but over the Orient in particular. Orientalism had been mentioned by elaborating stereotypical fictions that belittled and demeaned non-western people and culture, notions such as ‘mysterious East’, ‘instructable Chinese’ and ‘lustful Turks’.<sup>5</sup> For multiculturalism in Europe, it is also necessary to mention Jürgen Habermas as it is against to German jus soli principle and argues that only within the constitutional framework of a democratic legal system, different ways of life can coexist equally and only democratic citizenship can prepare the way for a condition of world citizenship which does not close itself off within particularistic biases, and which accepts a worldwide political communication.<sup>6</sup>

Although there is no settled view of how multicultural societies should operate, the central theme within all forms of multiculturalism is that individual identity is embedded, which underlines the importance of culture, in which people live and develop, as the basis for perceptions of, perspectives for the world and the framework of moral beliefs from their culture. Therefore, it accepts that we all belong to distinctive cultures and therefore these distinctive cultures deserve to be protected and strengthened. Specifically, we can identify three types of multiculturalism, which are liberal multiculturalism, pluralist multiculturalism and cosmopolitan multiculturalism.

Liberal multiculturalism is committed to freedom and tolerance to choose one’s moral beliefs, way of life, regardless of whether these are disapproved of by others. As an important name, Will Kymlicka supports the idea of “multicultural citizenship” as a way of integrating

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<sup>4</sup> [http://europa.eu/about-eu/basic-information/symbols/motto/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/about-eu/basic-information/symbols/motto/index_en.htm)

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Heywood, *Politics Third Edition*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) pp.212-213.

<sup>6</sup> J. Habermas, “Citizenship and National Identity: Some Reflections on the Future of Europe”, in R. Beiner (ed.), *Theorizing Citizenship* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995). pp 258-259 and 278-279.

of different groups into the society and expressing their group-differentiated rights.<sup>7</sup>: self government rights, polyethnic rights and representation rights. Self government rights are recognized for the people who are territorially concentrated, possess a shared language and share a full range of human activities. Polyethnic rights belong to ethnic groups and religious minorities which have developed through immigration, to provide them an opportunity to express and maintain their cultural distinctiveness. Thirdly representation rights aims to solve the underrepresentation of minority or disadvantaged groups in education and in higher statute in political and public life.<sup>8</sup>

Pluralist multiculturalism is based on the idea of value pluralism which means that there is no single conception of the good life. Isaiah Berlin writes on that people are bound to disagree about the ultimate ends of life. For this approach there is no greater moral authority than rival beliefs. This gives the way to a form of live-and-let-live multiculturalism or politics of indifference.<sup>9</sup> In Parekh's view dialectic between human nature and culture produces cultural diversity. Whereas human beings are natural creatures; who shares common species-derived physical and mental structure they are also culturally constituted in terms of their behaviour and lifestyles are shaped by the groups to which they belong. Awareness of complexity of human nature provides an acceptable basis for politics of recognition.<sup>10</sup> Therefore we can see more emphasis on maintenance of cultural distinctiveness rather than providing coexistence within same society.

Thirdly, cosmopolitan multiculturalism endorses cultural diversity and identity politics but focuses on more transitional states in a larger reconstruction of political sensibilities and priorities. For this approach personal self-development offered by a world of wider cultural opportunities and lifestyle choices provides the grounds of what each culture can learn from other cultures. According to cosmopolitan multiculturalism culture is fluid and responsive to changing political and social circumstances, it is not fixed as pluralist multiculturalists would argue. This brings the 'melting-pot' portrayal of society rather than 'cultural mosaic' of different ethnic or religious groups. Because people share the same environment and are faced

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<sup>7</sup> W. Kymlicka and N. Mayhew, "Return of the Citizen: A Survey of Recent Work on Citizenship Theory", in R. Beiner, ed., *Theorizing Citizenship* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), p. 305.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Heywood, *Politics Third Edition*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 214-215.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p. 216

<sup>10</sup> Bhikhu Parekh, *Çokkültürlülüğü Yeniden Düşünmek, Kültürel Çeşitlilik ve Siyasi Teori* (Ankara: Phonix Yayınevi, 2002)

with very similar challenges and experiences regardless of their origins, hybridity is embraced.<sup>11</sup>

If we start to make some critiques to multiculturalism first we can mention liberal individualism as they oppose to assumption that personal identity is embedded in group or social identity. Secondly; from conservative and nationalist point of view we can argue that shared values and common culture are necessary preconditions for stable and successful society. We can see this assumption in David Cameron's speech in 2008.<sup>12</sup> He says that multiculturalism weakened the power of collective identity. In addition, says if states see insecurity about their national interests they choose the unfair way of treatment for their own minorities.<sup>13</sup>

From times of breakup of Yugoslavia in 1990s, the record of multicultural societies suggest that inter-ethnic conflict or hostility is something natural and inevitable. However the importances of political and economic factors should also be considered, here multicultural societies seen as having capacity to fuel ethnic hostility as in the case of Yugoslavia.

Also the concept of tolerance may cause a hierarchy among different cultures, as the culture of majority seen as higher and to be expected to 'tolerate' or 'bear' other 'lower' cultures.

## **II. Relationship Between Multiculturalism and Education**

The recognition of cultural diversity and the promotion of a multi-cultural Europe is not only a moral good in its own right, but is also an important aspect in the development of European identity and citizenship as aspects of EU polity-building and constitutionalisation. Because the European identity can be over the national or ethnic identities by this way. As education provide flow of culture to the next generations, and the continuity of values, as it also changes and interacts, transacts over time with different cultures, education has important place in social lives, and also multiculturalism. On the other side education is an arena of where national sensitivities are particularly apparent. However, using education and culture to add a European dimension to individual identity, through policies such as educational mobility, promotion of language learning, the support of cultural co-operation projects with an European dimension is a way to strengthen multiculturalism and European identity. This is

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<sup>11</sup>Andrew Heywood, *Politics Third Edition*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan,2007), p.217

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2008/feb/26/conservatives.race>

<sup>13</sup> Cited in the article of Ayhan Kaya, "Multiculturalism: The culturalisation of What is Social and Political", vol. 18, (Perceptions Autumn 2013 no.3), p.64.



because education, particularly education for children and young people, is a prime means of transmitting wider culture. The type of school or university attended can have an important effect on the cultural background of an individual, either confirming or, in some cases, competing with, the culture absorbed through family background. In addition, education can give people the knowledge of and confidence in their cultural identity. For example, education through the medium of a minority language encourages the continuity and growth of that language and, through that, of the cultural identity expressed through that language. Education in the context of and/or which is respectful of particular cultural identity has the effect of encouraging children to feel confident within their culture and see their culture validated, rather than marginalised.<sup>14</sup> We have already argued that education has an important role to play in the developing of common cultural identity. However, the question of European identity remains contested. One of the explicit roles of EU education and cultural policy is to help in the development of that European identity, through, by and large, initiatives which promote that which is common amongst Europeans, rather than that which divides us. It could be argued, indeed, that this aspect of EU cultural policy tends towards the assimilation of the different national cultures into an abstract ideal of what it is to be Europe, at the expense of their individual cultural identities. In addition to multi-national structure of EU at the state level, immigration forms are another aspect of its pluralistic character as it has been mentioned in the beginning, and this issue can lead to exclusion of immigrant cultures for the goal of building European identity, at the educational level, on shared common culture, because the immigrants do not share the same heritage.

### **III. What the Students Think about Multiculturalism, Education in the Framework of Erasmus Exchange Programme**

Since 1987, the Erasmus programme provides a chance for the students and professors and universities' staff, from member states of the EU, candidate states and EFTA/EEA members, to live abroad and experience in a foreign culture and it also covers internship mobility. Erasmus is a part of the Lifelong Learning Programme which contains Comenius, Grundtvig and Leonardo da Vinci, since 2007 and it was determined for the years

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<sup>14</sup> Chloë Wallace, 'Education, multiculturalism and the EU Charter of Rights' *Webpapers on Constitutionalism & Governance beyond the State 2002*, no.5. pp8-9.

of 2007-2013.<sup>15</sup> For the years of 2014-2020, these exchanges and the grant supports will continue under the name of Erasmus Plus with the goal of Europe 2020 Strategy. The Project aims to strengthen cooperation within higher education and business world and also to increase the quality of higher education.<sup>16</sup>

Thanks to Erasmus exchange, individuals can seize an opportunity to see how the life goes on in another country, to meet other people and to speak about, to change their lives, ideas, cultures and also may open the way to breakdown of the prejudices. This gives a dynamism for personal development, to cope with and also to enjoy the differences, and to learn how to live together.

In this part, I will share the results of my personal interviews<sup>17</sup> with the students from my own university and department, who studied abroad in an academic year or a term in the years of 2012-2013 and in the fall term in 2013-2014.

I have asked 12 questions to the students about the time and period they have been in Erasmus, their language capacity; if they know the language of the host country or they just speak English, their adaptation, social lives, during Erasmus times, sensitivity for the foreign students before and after Erasmus, the words that can summarise Erasmus experience, and what they think about the relationship between multiculturalism and education during Erasmus times.

Before starting, it is necessary to say that, only two person, in twenty, speak the language of the country they have been and only five of them lived during one year, the others lived during one term.

When I asked them the level of their harmony in the social life and adaptation to the city they went, only one person answered as 'too bad'. The rest choosed good, very good and excellent.

About their sensitivity and interaction for the Erasmus students, everyone said it was increased after my Erasmus, although only two of them said they had also relations with foreign students.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.esn.org/content/erasmus-programme>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.ua.gov.tr/programlar/erasmus-program%C4%B1/erasmus-program%C4%B1>

<sup>17</sup> To be clear for the methodology of my interview I would like to say that the questions were determined after general discussions with the students who came back and because these questions were asked one by one, sometimes this led to other informations for example one student said about he will try to shape his work life in the country he had been during Erasmus, one mentioned about another student who have been able to obtain reference from an academician from her host university, Science Po Paris for her CV. However, the common questions were as explained in this section.

According to all of them, their universities were concerned about the foreign students and opened to the activities of foreign students. In addition, the city which they had been were important when I asked the attitudes of the local people to the foreign students. For example, if the city were very attractive for the tourists generally, (in the sample of the interview the examples were Paris and Prag for this idea) they thought that people are used to foreigners. On the other hand, they have also witnessed the dissatisfaction of the citizens when the city were very crowded.

They had more interaction with other Erasmus or exchange students rather than the students from the country they have been. Only two of them had the same level of interaction and one of them had it more with the local students. The cause of this would be the importance of common language, which was English for this Project, common sense of foreigners and also similar experiences at the same time. However, for the person who had more interaction with local students it was due to the more interest in the local culture and the activeness of the student club created by the local students for the new comers.

When I asked three words to summarise the Erasmus times, the most repeated ones were: experience, self-confidence, different perspectives, meeting with new people, friendship. Tolerance, language, patience, wrestle and loneliness, new perspectives were also in the answers.

I asked lastly what they would say multiculturalism and education when they elaborate their Erasmus times.

All of them saw a positive correlation between them as their classes included individuals having different cultural backgrounds. They also underlined that experiencing different education style provided new perspectives and it was seminal. They also stated that they could learn different examples about one subject from other students and according to one, it was an opportunity for rest of life to predict how a situation could be perceived in different cultures.

Lastly, if I would share my opinion about the relationship between multiculturalism and higher education especially in Turkey- EU relations, I could say that Erasmus is very efficient way to strengthen the relations at the cultural/educational level and to give basis for the willingness to participate to the Union as Erasmus provides an arena to youngs to meet, to interact and to share their perspectives, experiences. It can also give opportunity to compare our own country and an other in terms of their governance, cultures, the policies for minorities and to see the situation of minorities who share similar identity and culture with us, in a different country. In my Erasmus adventure, I could easily observe the relationship between a

nation-state and a supranational as well. Nation-state, with its all bureaucracy, restricts, controls and manages the actions of its citizens, and another nation-state does it to the foreigner although she/he is subject to part of a common supranational body. For example, although multiculturalism supports the idea that instead of the domination of one common culture, students are expected to continue in the educational system of the 'host' country, whereas there are attempts to create a system which is applicable and suitable for students who have different backgrounds. Within nation-state, we also see the differentiation of universities in terms of their applications for the students, whereas the documents are common, for example the time on which the students obtain their grants is very different. I think that these competencies are the most compelling factors to create a better world for different cultures, ethnicities to live together.

## CONCLUSION

In accordance with the changes in social composition caused by international migration and decolonisation in post-1945 era, multiculturalism started to be seen as a way to live together even if there are cultural, ethnic and identitical differences. Although there is no agreement about how multicultural societies should operate, culturally embedded individual identity is seen as central theme for multiculturalism.

Education is very related with multiculturalism due to the fact that education, as its members are the future of the society. Therefore particularly education for children and young people, is a prime means of transmitting wider culture. The type of school or university attended can have an important effect on the cultural background of an individual, either confirming or, in some cases, competing with, the culture absorbed through family background. In addition, education can give people knowledge of and confidence in their cultural identity. Therefore, education can be considered as a tool to promote and to widen the perception of multiculturalism.

As an efficient way to observe and elaborate the relationship between multiculturalism and education in the higher education, Erasmus students and their experiences were discussed. As a result we saw that although there are problems to work on due to the status of the states, e.g.membership to the Union, and also tension between sovereignty of the states to control bureacracy, and the Program to organise activities of the students , Erasmus Program is a good way to develop relations among individuals who have different cultural backgrounds as they are future of the societies.

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