

Comparison of the personal and cultural change taking place between EU Erasmus students and Turkish Erasmus students (within the sample of Adam Mickiewicz University in city of Poznan, Poland)

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Abstract

This study is based on a questionnaire that is implemented to measure and evaluate the cultural and personal changes experienced by Turkish students and Adam Mickiewicz University students who receive education within the framework of the Erasmus Student Exchange Program in the city of Poznan, Poland. Our objective was to make a comparison of the personal and cultural change taking place between European Union (EU) students and Turkish students throughout Erasmus Student Exchange Program. The subjects of this research included EU member students from Adam Mickiewicz University and Turkish Erasmus students. A total of 257 Erasmus students were included. With 102 randomly selected students, face-to-face interviews have been conducted. As this was a comparative study, data has been categorized under two titles: Turkish Students and Students of European Union member countries. Frequency values of obtained data have been detected and the comparison of each group has been descriptively made over these values. Our research findings validate that throughout the Erasmus program certain personal changes occurred among students from the EU countries and from Turkey. Although Turkish students experienced many individual changes during the Erasmus Program, this present study determined that the state of belonging to religion, nation and country is top priority in the minds of Turkish students. Our data has shown that this state of belonging observable in Turkish students was not so intense in EU students.

Keywords: *Cultural change, prejudice, Erasmus exchange program, EU, Turkey*

Introduction

Regardless of political and economic unity, due to dissimilar cultural and educational policies, European Union (EU) member countries have failed to develop a common

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educational policy and strategy. For this reason, they determined it essential they get to know one another better and share resources and ideas and recently developed the Erasmus Student Exchange Program, which facilitates increased student mobility. Education has been reformed by the European Higher Education Bologna Process and during the last twenty years, over half a million students have benefited from education abroad. Student exchange between EU member countries facilitates the movement towards the Great EU (Brock and Tulasiewicz, 1999). Sixty million youngsters between the ages of 15-25 in EU countries constitute the future of Europe. In order to secure the future of EU, education must be provided to those young people; which is why, according to Brock and Tulasiewicz "*Education in a single Europe*" should be supported. The Erasmus Education Program of EU does not only aim to enable professional collaboration, quality development and knowledge competition among the universities of member and candidate countries; but it also intends to unite the societies around a European mentality by encouraging and strengthening interactions between citizens of different member countries (Reilly, 1993). The Erasmus Student Program seeks to unite Europeans around a "European consciousness" (Michael, 2001) and attempts to reach this objective by ensuring intercultural dialog by means of student and instructor exchanges.

EU member countries have resisted handing over control of their educational systems to the EU and have objected to the process of standardization. This resistance can be observed throughout the standardization process. Instead of handing over control of their educational systems, through the Erasmus Student Exchange Program, educational systems that are not the same have attempted to make concessions; and the process has undergone a moderate evolution under a more humble purpose which ensures transparency among member countries. Attempts have been made to make educational systems more compatible (Phillips and Ertl, 2008). From a global perspective, the educational policy of the EU aims to integrate a European dimension to national and regional educational systems by ensuring intercultural harmony. This approach assumes international qualities to be more effective in economic and political spheres. It has also been emphasized that a new curriculum that creates awareness of this European identity should be developed in the field of education (Brock and Tulasiewicz, 1999).

Student mobility is a means of European reconstruction. During this mobility process, youngsters have to cope with many challenges. Processes such as settling in to a new place, adopting a new culture and language, achieving social interactions, successful adaptation etc. are all components of this experience (Lejeune, 2001). Lejeune regards traveling students as a new type of immigration. According to Lejeune, immigration is movement to a different country due to several reasons that lead to changes in legal status and residence. Student mobility however, is a different notion and a more general concept than movement from national lands to another country. It is a free and easy change characterized by flexible mobility. Student mobility usually suggests the student is easily movable and adaptable to different places, and this mobility extends into linguistic, social, psychological, intellectual, professional and cultural spheres as well. Immigration on the other hand implies absolute and long-term social integration and assimilation (Lejeune, 2001) According to research, two thirds of Erasmus students commented positively on integration into a foreign environment whereas 10% reported negatively (APA, 2006). As the findings of present research indicate as well, students adapt to the social, cultural and intellectual structure of their host country in quite a brief period of time. The experiences that excite Erasmus students most are meeting new people and cultures and seeing and exploring new places. Most Erasmus students also reported that they

spent time dancing, having fun, screaming, studying, chatting, traveling and tasting new foods (www.20erasmus.eu/experiences/view). As these reported experiences suggest, cultural activities take center stage; which is why it has been suggested that in the Erasmus program the financial status of universities and students should be improved. Information and support, linguistic and cultural preparation and academic admissions in particular should be improved as well (De Castro e Brito and Palma, 2008).

Lejeune (2001) has stated that he believes that a student in the Erasmus program should be regarded as a “foreigner,” and that anthropologists and sociologists should intensely focus on this issue. From this perspective, the Erasmus student exchange program stands as a separate component of educational sciences; and can be viewed as an issue closely related to social and cultural anthropology. Many of the research studies conducted in this field have illustrated that throughout this process, students have given precedence to their interpersonal experiences rather than physical and material experiences (Figlewicz and Williams, 2005). Experiences such as learning about different cultures, having fun, meeting new people, being independent and living in a foreign country shapes students’ career objectives, enriches their academic knowledge, increases their job prospects and provides them with an opportunity to practice a foreign language (Kropnik and Krzaklewska, 2006).

According to research, a shift has been observed in students’ motivation during the last three years. There has been a decrease in career plan and academic environment motivation and an increase in motivation to meet the challenges of a new environment (APA, 2006). In these students, the desire and willingness to live abroad and meet new cultures in particular are highlighted. This experience enables students to develop a higher threshold for personal adaptation, change, ambiguity and diversity (Michael, 2001). As our research findings indicate too, students have reported that they learned to live in a new culture with new people and learned to cope with the troubles they faced.

Method

This study is based on a questionnaire that is implemented to measure and evaluate the cultural and personal changes experienced by Turkish students and Adam Mickiewicz University students who receive education within the framework of the Erasmus Student Exchange Program in the city of Poznan, Poland. After isolating the questions deemed most favorable for interview form, a pilot study has been conducted within a group of 10 people in order to discover semantic and structural defects which might possibly arise during the completion of the form. In light of data obtained from this research, the questionnaire form has been revised and reformed to be implemented in the field study. The subjects of this research included EU member students from Adam Mickiewicz University and Turkish Erasmus students. A total of 257 Erasmus students were included. With 102 randomly selected students, face-to-face interviews have been conducted via a 29-question form. The data gathered from a sampling group has been analyzed and the questionnaires have been transferred to a SPSS statistical program on computer. In this present research, certain topics have been compared between students of EU member countries and Turkish students. As this was a comparative study, data has been categorized under two titles: Turkish Students and Students of European Union member countries. Frequency values of obtained data have been detected and the comparison of each group has been descriptively made over these values.

Results and Interpretations

Based on table interpretations, the findings have been given by comparing frequency values descriptively. It would take too much space to include all of the tables, so their interpretations alone have been given. The few tables that are considered to be significant examples have been shown.

The distribution of students by countries and gender was given in Table 1. Seventy-five percent of Erasmus students are from European Union member countries¹ and 24.5% are Turkish students. And, 49 percent of students are female, 51 percent are male.

Table 1: Distribution of students from Turkey and EU with respect to gender

	Female		Male		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Turkey	12	24.0	13	25.0	25	100.0
EU Country	38	76.0	39	75.0	77	100.0
Total	50	100.0	52	100.0	102	100.0

Socioeconomic status

According to research, compared to other students who receive training abroad, Erasmus students have a lower socioeconomic status (Kropnik and Krzaklewska, 2006). Thanks to the Erasmus exchange program, students who have a low socio-economic status are eligible to receive education abroad. It is a great opportunity for them as their living expenses are paid for by the program.

In general, 75% of students reported that their family income is within the limits of their home country's average. The number of students who reported that their family income is above average was 12% for Turkish students, and 20.8% for EU member students. We see the same divergence in their monthly income as well. An income distinction has been detected between EU member students and Turkish students. Among Turkish students a high ratio (40%), of students reported their monthly income as 501–750 PLN² whereas in EU member students only 11.7% and 23.4% of EU students stated to have above 1001–1250 PLN income while 18.2% stated to have more than 2000 PLN income. None of the Turkish students however, reported to have an income exceeding 2000 PLN.

This indicates that in Turkey, the families of students who go abroad within the framework of the Erasmus program do not have a high financial status.

Social, political and religious attitudes

In this research, 40% of Turkish students and 27.3% of EU students answered the question "How would you describe yourself?" as humanist (Table 2). Sixteen percent of Turkish students described themselves as nationalistic whereas among EU students this ratio was 6.5%. A striking discovery was that 20% of Turkish students regarded themselves as modernist whereas the same ratio was 13% in EU students. Turkey has a traditionalist social structure, but orientation towards Western culture has been continuing since the Period of Reforms. For that reason, while "being modern" is a social and historical choice for Turkish students, for EU students who constitute the

¹ These countries are: Germany, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Spain, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Portugal, Romania, and Slovakia.

² PLN is Poland's currency and on the date of research Poland was not using Euro yet.

very origin of modernism, “being modern” is an already existing, usual phenomenon they live within. Furthermore in Turkey, selecting “being modern” as a way of life means at the same time climbing the social ladder. One possible rationale for the self-description of Turkish students as modernist is the desire to “climb the social ladder.” One of the other noteworthy answers is that compared to 8% of Turkish students who reported to be individualistic, this ratio was lower amongst EU students: 6.5%. On the whole it was expected that EU students would be more individualistic. Since Turkish students regard being individualistic as a condition of being modern, this ratio was higher among Turkish students compared to EU students.

Table 2: Distribution of students from Turkey and EU with respect to “Would you describe yourself as ...” option

	Turkey (%)	EU Country (%)
Nationalist	16.0	6.5
Patriotic	4.0	13.0
Individualist	8.0	6.5
Revolutionary	8.0	11.7
Humanist	40.0	27.3
Feminist	--	5.2
Modernist	20.0	13.0
Traditionalist	4.0	5.2
No answer	--	11.7
Total	100.0	100.0

With regards to political attitude, 22.5% of students (24% of Turkish students and 22% of EU students) selected the choice “I have no idea.” Of all the students 2.9% were conservative, 8.8% socialist, 16.7% social democrat, 21.6% democrat, 11.8% liberal, 2% communist, and 2% anarchist. Although amongst Turkish students none defined themselves as liberal, communist or anarchist, within EU countries this ratio was respectively 15%, 2.6%, and 2.6%. While the political sphere is wide for EU students, in Turkey due to the ambiguity of some political concepts and meanings attributed by society to these concepts, we can assume that political choices of Turkish students are restricted to a narrower sphere.

In this research, 44.6% of students (52% of Turkish students and 42.1% of EU students) reported that they regarded themselves as citizens of the world. 21.8% (32% of Turkish students and 18.4% of EU students) reported that they were a part of their nation. The ratio of students who considered themselves independent was 8% among Turkish students and a higher ratio of 15.8% among EU students. It has been observed that sense of belonging is more noticeable among Turkish students. Eight percent of Turkish students and 18.4% of EU students defined themselves as a part of Europe. While world citizenship is a more abstract perception, EU is a more practical construction thanks to its economic and political approach. It is possible to deduce that delays in the EU membership process of Turkey and negative statements made by some EU representatives about Turkey might have been influential in the reactions of Turkish students.

Concerning religious faith, 36% of EU students stated that they had no religious belief while this ratio was rather low, 4%, amongst Turkish students. On the whole research, the highest ratio 39.2% (64% of Turkish students and 31.2% of EU students) can be attributed to students who have stated that they have a religious belief but failed to practice its obligations. The ratio of Turkish students who reported to be quite religious in theory and practice was 20% whereas the same ratio was 7.8% for EU

students. It can be deduced that among Turkish students a religious sense of belonging is stronger than in EU students.

When students were asked a question about the most important thing in their life, 65.7% answered family, 14.7% reported friends, 3.9% politics, 2.9% religion, 6.9% reported their nation, 3.9% reported free time and 2% reported that work was the most important thing in their life. The ratio of students who regarded family as the most significant thing in their life was 56% amongst Turkish students while the same ratio was 68.8% among EU students. This ratio paints quite an interesting picture of Turkey where the sacredness of family has always been a central part of its culture. Another striking point is the ratio of students who feel their free time is the most important thing in their life: 12% for Turkish students, and only 1.3% among EU students.

Cultural and personal changes

When the students were asked about the motives behind their choice of the Erasmus program 26.5% of students reported a desire to improve their academic knowledge, 26.5% reported they wished to gain new experiences, 5.9 % reported a desire to learn about new cultures, 2% reported they wanted to have fun, 2.9% reported a desire to meet new people, 13.7% reported they wished to improve their foreign language skills, 2% reported a desire to be independent, 52.9% reported they wanted to experience living in a foreign country, 1% reported a desire to increase job prospects, 2% reported a desire to experience adventure and 14.7% reported they wanted to acquire personal development. Among Turkish students the ratio of academic improvement was 24% while the same ratio was 27.3% for EU students. Gaining new experiences was 20% for Turkish students and 28.6% among EU students. The ratio of students who reported to choose Erasmus program for the experience of living in a foreign country was 12% for Turkish students yet the same ratio was 0% among EU students. Among Turkish students none selected prospective job opportunities as their motivation for choosing the Erasmus program and only 1.3% of EU students selected this choice. Personal development was chosen by 12% of the Turkish students and by 15.6% of the EU students.

The question "Have you faced any discrimination as an Erasmus student while abroad?" was answered negatively by 74.5%. Sixty four percent of Turkish students reported that they experienced no discrimination whereas the same ratio was 79.9% among EU students. Of Turkish students, the causes of discrimination were reported as religion by 12%, language skills by 12%, being a foreigner by 8% and being an exchange student by 4%. Of the EU students who reported discrimination, the causes were origins by 1.3%, religion by 2.6%, language skills by 6.5%, being a foreigner by 9.1% and being an exchange student by 2.6%. Compared to EU students, the reason of stronger discrimination towards Turkish students can be attributed to the cultural and religious distinction; however, at this point we are observing quite an optimistic picture of discrimination. This does not necessarily mean that there is no discrimination abroad. As illustrated above, 25.5% of EU Erasmus students have faced discrimination and 36% of Turkish Erasmus students have been discriminated against. It can be assumed that throughout this process, students face less discrimination since they spend most of their time in an intellectual environment at university which is a better protected area. On the whole, the question related to the most frequent activity the students were engaged in was answered as education by 42.2% (36% of Turkish students and 44.2% of EU students) and Erasmus parties came second by a ratio of 29.4% (28% of Turkish students and 29.9% of EU students). The activity held and the place where their time is spent were in similar ratios for both groups. In general, 64.7% of students reported their contentment with Poznan's social life and 55.9% with its

cultural life.

When the students were asked about the personal and consciousness changes introduced after this experience, we see that particularly in Turkish students a high ratio of change has been observed.

The majority of Turkish students, reported that they have achieved “individuality” whereas the ratio among EU students remained at 51.9% (Table 3). The ratio of Turkish students who reported that their “sense of self” developed was 88% whereas the same ratio was 58.4% for EU students. The ratio of students who reported “I have learned more about myself” was 84% for Turkish students and 54.5% among EU students. The ratio of students who reported “I discovered my real self” after this experience was 88% among Turkish students and 27.3% for EU students. The students who answered neither “Yes” nor “No” constituted 8% of Turkish students and 31.2% of EU students. The students who answered “No” were 4% of Turkish students and 26% of EU students. The ratio of Turkish students who reported “I had elevated self trust” after this experience was 88%, and 42.9% among EU students. Turkish youth raised under a nation-statist educational system in Turkey, having a traditionalist family structure with restrictive and directive values and social norms can rid themselves of such pressures once they are abroad; hence the experiences they gain in a more liberal social ambiance enables them to feel more individualistic, successful, self-confident and self-aware. These ratios are noticeably high among EU students to. There is no doubt that despite the similarities in their social and historical structures, abroad experience can influence personal development of EU students as well.

Table 3: Distribution of students from Turkey and EU with respect to “After this experience I became a real individual” expression

	Turkey (%)	EU Country (%)
Yes	84.0	51.9
Neither yes nor not	12.0	18.2
Not	4.0	15.6
I don't know	--	14.3
Total	100.0	100.0

The responses given to our question concerning the changes of prejudices after the Erasmus experience indicated that the shift in the prejudices of Turkish students was dramatically higher than for the EU students. The ratio of Turkish students who reported that during this process “I broke my prejudices towards new things and people” was 88% and 49.4% among EU students (Table 4). The ratio of the ones reporting “I got away from my prejudices” was 76% among Turkish students and 45.5% among EU students. The ones reporting that after this experience “I realized my own culture and prejudices” were 84% among Turkish students and 54.5% among EU students. In the formation and maintenance of a prejudice, not knowing the other and being closed to the other are effective. Failure to communicate with a person different from oneself and objectifying this person are the kinds of attitudes that form prejudice. Once students start communicating with different individuals from different cultures and different countries during their exchange experience, and share things with them, then prejudices can be partially eliminated as well. Considering the fact that Erasmus students spend most of their time after school at Erasmus parties, it is impossible not to be affected from this fun, friendship and sharing. In such atmospheres tolerance ripens and prejudices eventually disappear.

Table 4: Distribution of students from Turkey and EU with respect to “After this experience I broke my prejudices towards new things and people” expression

	Turkey (%)	EU Country (%)
Yes	88.0	49.4
Neither yes nor not	4.0	27.3
Not	4.0	14.3
I don't know	4.0	9.1
Total	100.0	100.0

Breaking down prejudices brings with itself tolerance and understanding. The ratio of students reporting that after this exchange experience “I became more tolerant of the unseen” was 92% among Turkish students and 58.4% among EU students. The ratio of Turkish students reporting “I became more understanding” was 92% and 57.1% for EU students. Turkish students who declared they had “no difference in understanding” had a ratio of 4% and EU students had a ratio of 24.7%. These ratios reveal that before going abroad Turkish students were prejudiced against the Western world and Western values and it can be asserted that our own historical and cultural realities themselves nourished these prejudices. The Crusades are one example. Based on research findings, it is possible to deduce that EU students who share a common history and culture entertain fewer prejudices compared to Turkish students. Still, these ratios are overwhelmingly high for EU students as well. Regardless of their common cultural and historical heritage, the First and Second World Wars, socialist-capitalist conflicts brought about the emergence of prejudices in European societies too. We can assume that throughout the Erasmus exchange process, EU students also managed to lose some of their prejudices. Tolerance and understanding is a reciprocal process however. Students who feel they are treated with tolerance and understanding can act tolerant and understanding in return.

The students were asked about their attitudes towards different cultures and people after their Erasmus experience. Those reporting “I became more open to new things” were 88% among Turkish students and 72.7% among EU students (Table 5). The ratio of those answering “I have learned to live in different cultures” was 92% among Turkish students and 76.6% for EU students. The ratio of Turkish students reporting “I have learned to live with others” was 92% among Turkish students and 75.3% among EU students. The ratio of those reporting that with the Erasmus experience “I am willing to learn foreign languages” was dramatically high among Turkish students: 96%. The same ratio was 71.4% for EU students. The ratio of students reporting “I want to have friends from different cultures” was rather close to each other in both groups: for Turkish students it was 84% and for EU students 81%. Since the students were all together in dormitory, at university, and at the Erasmus parties, they developed adaptive skills that enabled them to live in a different culture

Table 5: Distribution of students from Turkey and EU with respect to “After this experience I became more tolerant of the unseen” expression

	Turkey (%)	EU Country (%)
Yes	92.0	58.4
Neither yes nor not	8.0	26.0
Not	--	6.5
I don't know	--	9.1
Total	100.0	100.0

with different people, and they also become more eager to learn foreign languages and make friends from other cultures.

The ratio of Turkish students reporting that after the Erasmus experience “my philosophy of life got affected by different cultures and people” was 88% and 70.1% for EU students. The percentage of those who declared that during this process “I revised my political and social stand” was 60 among Turkish students, and 40.3 among EU students. The ratio of those stating “I can now perceive life from different points of view” was 88% among Turkish students and 75.3% among EU students. Since young people’s global, social and political views can easily change forms compared to elderly people, it is inevitable that their opinions and perspectives can be affected by new cultures and students. Whether or not the changes to the students’ social and political views stemming from this interaction remains the same after their return home however, is a matter of wonder and also another research topic. Is the effect of a short, yet intensely experienced social environment such as Erasmus permanent or temporary?

The ratio of Turkish students reporting “I can control my actions and behaviors better now” was 84% while the same ratio was 46.8% among EU students. The percentage of those declaring that their life choices were affected by this experience were 76 for Turkish students and 51.9 for EU students. The students reporting that from this experience “I learned to cope with problems I face in different spheres of life” constituted 96% of Turkish students and 54.5% of EU students. Those reporting that from this experience “I learned to take risks” had a ratio of 88% among Turkish students and 51.9% within EU students. In traditional Turkish social life, in addition to various norms, youngsters are continuously warned to be cautious at all times, not to take risks unless one can see the result, avoid any adventures to keep oneself safe and sound, stay away from any obscure or blurred situation. Consequently we can assert that the adventurous character of the experience Turkish students go through while abroad may assist them in learning to take risks. On the other hand, the low ratio of learning to take risks reported by EU students can be explained by the fact that an already existing liberal tradition throughout Europe has facilitated risk-taking lifestyles for them before the Erasmus experience. As an example, in Western societies young people abandon their parents’ homes at early ages and take risks, whereas Turkish students have a more statist tradition and tighter family bonds.

The ratio of Turkish students reporting that after the Erasmus experience “I can look at the future much happier” was 64% and the same ratio was higher among EU students with 76.6%. This lower percentage among Turkish students can be explained by the socio-economic conditions of Turkey. Although Turkish students express their multitude of acquisitions through the Erasmus experience; they are well aware of the fact that once they return to their homeland, they will still have to cope with many problems –the foremost of which is unemployment.

Approximately one third of the students answered the open-ended question of “Did you bring anything special when coming to here?” Special things included local foods, photos of family and friends, uniforms of their favorite teams, heaters, beverages and flags of their countries. The most favorite item was country flag. Forty-four percent of Turkish students and 14% of EU students brought their countries’ flag. Once again, the feeling of belonging is demonstrated most strongly in Turkish students.

Discussion

Based on research findings it is possible to assert that both Turkish students and EU

students were successful in adapting to a new a culture and environment. The high ratio of personal development and cultural change among Turkish students compared to EU students can be related to the historical and cultural differences. Indeed, although EU students share a common culture and heritage and similar political and economic structures to the host country, Turkish students who are not yet members of the EU come from a more traditionalist and statist approach. Consequently the rate of change, of shaking off prejudices, of becoming more understanding, of achieving individualism and self-realization, of forming different world views and learning to take risks is higher among Turkish students.

Regardless of the fact that as an outcome of the fun atmosphere and friends Turkish students experienced many personal changes; still on social, national and religious grounds their sense of belonging stood out. Despite the fact they reported to get rid of their prejudices and learned to live within new cultures, the ratio of students reporting that after the Erasmus experience they became more nationalist was 56% among Turkish students whereas the same ratio was only 10% among EU students. This sense of belonging appears before us in the answers given to the question about considering going to any EU country as well. Sixteen per cent of Turkish students answered "No" whereas 7.8% of EU students answered "No." Among Turkish students the ratio of students considering visiting as a tourist was 48% and the same ratio was 36.4% for EU students. Although they were happy to meet new cultures and people and eliminate their prejudices, none of the Turkish students considered settling in any EU country. They would rather stay as a tourist or as a student in a EU country.

It is a matter of debate as to what extent the social environments that liberate students from their prejudices and make them more tolerant, reflect reality. Social activities like having fun together, dancing, tasting new foods and traveling provide a convenient setting for the eradication of prejudices; and the absence of conflicts of interest among students and the presence of equality in relationships inevitably foster tolerance and understanding.

It is striking that although the choice "I do not know" was available in the questionnaire form and EU students marked it with a changing ratio of 8-20%, almost none of the Turkish students selected the "I do not know" option. Once again our cultural patterns can explain this practice. The "Do not let them know that you do not know" or "we know everything" mindset is a prevalent cultural pattern in our society and these patterns as well are reflected in this study. Conversely, we should consider that perhaps some students did not select the "I do not know" because they are self-assured and confident in their decisiveness.

Conclusion

One of the basic objectives of the Erasmus Student Exchange Program is to eradicate prejudices by presenting opportunities for student mobility and intercultural dialog, and by strengthening the interaction within EU member citizens to unite societies around a European mentality and a European consciousness. The results of this present study provide conclusive evidence that the Erasmus program has reached that objective. The findings of many other research studies also support our thesis. "According to obtained data, students in general have been really satisfied with their studies within the framework of the Erasmus programme" (APA, 2006). Similarly, according to another study, "Erasmus students assessed their Erasmus period abroad very positively. Around 87% of students considered their overall experience abroad to have been positive/very positive" (Otero and McCoshan, 2006).

Our research findings validate that throughout the Erasmus program certain

personal changes occurred among students from the EU countries and from Turkey. As the results of a study conducted in 2006 indicate, “The Erasmus period has shaped the attitudes and values of Erasmus students substantially, and more in personal values than in career aspirations on educational competences” (Otero and McCoshan, 2006). The findings of this present research, that throughout the Erasmus experience students were open to new cultures and that their prejudices were broken down, to a large extent, parallel another research study in Turkey. According to this research a majority of students stated that “they are open to new cultures and any type of differences” (Yağcı et al., 2007).

Although Turkish students experienced many individual changes during the Erasmus Program, this present study determined that the state of belonging to religion, nation and country is top priority in the minds of Turkish students. Our data has shown that this state of belonging observable in Turkish students was not so intense in EU students.

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