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# Turkey and the European Union: Approximations of university students on the European Union

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This study was carried out in order to evaluate the political and socio-economical views of students studying in the School of Physical Education and Sport in Gazi University, on Turkey's membership to the European Union. The population consisted of 1453 students studying in the school of physical education and sport and a questionnaire of 42 questions was applied to 338 students by random sampling method. Data obtained from the questionnaires were processed in SPSS 10.0 to determine whether the data is in proper distribution, then frequency (f), percentage (%) and questionnaire items were evaluated in political and socio-economical terms and independent sampling t-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) values were checked. Also the averages of answers given by the participants to items relating to the European Union and Turkey were considered. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was found 0,75 for the questionnaire. Based on the findings of the research, it can be seen that 51.5% of university population are "male" (N=174) and 48.5% are "female" (N=164). It was determined that views on the socio-economical and political sub-dimensions of the approach that Turkey's EU membership will not be accepted do not vary by gender ( $p > 0.05$ ). Socio-economical levels of the students' view that Turkey' EU membership will not be accepted exhibit a significant difference by the age variable [ $F_{(2-335)} = 4,97$  ;  $p < 0,05$ ]. Political sub-dimensional levels of the participants' view that Turkey' EU membership will not be accepted exhibit a significant difference by the class variable [ $F_{(3-334)} = 1.48$  ;  $p < 0,05$ ]. In conclusion, it can be said, in political and socio-economical terms, that Turkey's EU membership will not be accepted.

**Key words:** Turkey, EU membership, student, political, socio-economical.

## INTRODUCTION

The candidacy process for Turkey, which is candidate for full membership to the European Union (EU), represents an important and challenging period. Although the strategies adopted by Turkey in the beginning and development stages of the process have differed in various periods, the ambition of candidacy continues. Even if Turkey has not entered the European Union, it has entered the EU through sports and sportsmen and has gained an EU-country status in all sports organizations held in Europe.

Sports have experienced a rapid development in Europe and increasing economic and commercial trends of sports have made a real transformation. While the European Union battles against unemployment, the sports industry is one of the fields in which new businesses can be formed and EU's infrastructure

investments, new technology, education and exchange programs can be supported for positive impacts (Balci, 2003).

The term "European Union" was brought forward by the Treaty of the European Union signed on 7 February, 1992 in Maastricht. The phrase "European Union" is used to express the objectives and policies followed through European Communities (European Coal and Steel Community, European Atomic Energy Community and European Community) and objectives and policies within the scope of two new fields of actions set out by Treaty of the European Union (Common Foreign and Security Policy/Cooperation in the Fields of Justice and Home Affairs) (Özdemir, 2001).

The European Union is an institutional system with supranational common institutions and decision

mechanisms consisting of 25 member countries (Germany, France, England, Ireland, Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Austria, Greece, Malta, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, Poland, and Cyprus) joined together for the establishment of sustainable peace, providing higher life standards through economic and social development and realization of political integration (Aydiner, 2006).

As a strategy of self-representation and a device of power, Europeanization is fundamentally reorganizing territoriality and peoplehood, the two principles of group identification that have shaped modern European order. It is the result of a new level and intensity of integration that has been a reaction to the destruction of this century's first and second world wars and the collapse of the cold-war division of Europe into an East and West. Driven above all by the organizational and administrative power of the European Union (EU), Europeanization is still distinct from the EU. Neither Europeanization nor the EU will replace the nation-state, which, for now, remains a superior form for organizing democratic participation and territoriality. Nonetheless, they will likely force states to yield some questions of sovereignty—above all, military, political, and economic—to the EU or other transnational bodies. Nations are now being brought into new relations with each other, creating new alliances and enmities, and are even recreating themselves (Borneman et al., 1997).

From a sociological point of view, European integration is specifically a process of transforming deeper structures of solidarity, legal order and justice away from the segmentally differentiated European family of nations and towards an emerging European society (Munch, 2008).

In recent years, Turkish-EU relations are frequently discussed in public opinion. These discussions have a positive direction at one time and negative at another in parallel with the processes of relations. The public interest has concentrated on the subject at certain times and it remained on the agenda (Güreşçi, 2006). At first glance, the fact that Turkey's application is the longest-term application among all the other applications to the European Union seems against logic. It is only natural that member countries will look out for their own benefits for mutual political dialogue (Brewin, 1997). The main goals of the European Union can be listed as follows:

- i. Form a single European market
- ii. Strengthen economic and social integration and bring the economy policies of member countries closer to each other
- iii. Form an economic and monetary union,
- iv. Implement a common foreign and security policy,
- v. Establish the notion of European citizenship,
- vi. Implement a firmer cooperation in the fields of justice and home affairs,
- vii. Acknowledge human rights as the general principle of community law,

viii. Preserve the acquisitions of the community and perform activities accordingly (Aydiner, 2006).

The phenomenon of Europeanization used to define a two-way process and, formerly defining the process of convergence among European countries and unification within the framework of the EU and which distinguishes by its bottom-up characteristics, has gradually gained a much more attractive position with its bottom-up quality in consequence of different causes coinciding in the same period of time in the last 15 years (Samur, 2008).

The European Union whose foundations were laid in the late 50s and gained its current structure by evolving and developing up to this day is the most widely known example of supranational organizations. The organization which attacks the nation state independence most with its distinctive structure uses some the authorities which legislative, executive and judiciary powers possess by its own bodies (Batir, 2006).

The EU is a supranational regional organization, which not only has economical and political but also a socio-cultural role in the international arena and improves this role by setting new goals for itself every day. The Republic of Turkey has been wishing to be a part of the EU integration for over forty years both due to the goal of integrating with the West which has become a government policy and the political and economic necessities arising from the conjuncture. Within the scope of the official discourse of the parties, the ultimate goal is claimed to be the realization of Turkey's membership to EU as opposed to the contrary opinions put forward in the form of identity, religion, population and economic reasons. The progress of EU-Turkey membership negotiations will determine whether the ultimate goal will be achieved or not (İskender, 2007).

The objective, direction and content of negotiations to be carried out with the EU are obvious; full membership. Of course this will take some time, but this time is necessary for Turkey's compliance with the *acquis* and for the European public to be prepared to the idea of Turkey's membership. After all, we have a Turkey which will start its preliminary negotiations with the EU. We are somewhere totally different. This is Turkey, with a firm economy, a dynamic political scene, increasing performance of democracy and human rights and increasing reputation and activity in the region and throughout the world (Dağı, 2005).

Turkey applied for the European Economic Community in 1959 in order to take its stand in the changing world and Ankara Agreement was signed in September 12, 1963 between the parties. With Ankara Agreement the "associate membership" status was established between the parties, and Turkey's full membership to the EU in the future was envisaged with this Agreement. In January 1, 1996, customs union (CU) was formed between the EU and Turkey and the European Council decided to initiate membership negotiations with Turkey in the Brussel

**Table 1.** Personal findings.

Factor	Variable	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	174	51.5
	Female	164	48.5
	Total	338	100.0
Age	17-20	69	20.4
	21-24	222	65.7
	25 and above	47	13.9
	Total	338	100
Grade	1 <sup>st</sup> Grade	44	13
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade	93	27.5
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade	155	45.9
	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade	46	13.6
	Total	338	100.0
Department	Physical education and sports teaching	113	33.4
	Sports management	144	42.6
	Coaching education	81	24
	Total	338	100

Summit held on December 17, 2004 and Turkey's negotiations for membership to the EU were started on October 3, 2005 (Baklacioğlu, 2009). Europe distinguishes by its Greek and Roman civilizations, and such values as Christianity, Renaissance, Reformation, and Continental Europe. The integration process under the influence of these values can even be followed by the formation of the United States of Europe in the future. French lawyer Giscard d'Estaing who is the most fervent defender of this idea and is one of those who prepared the European Constitution, has confined Europe to its geography and history in his speech in 2002 and claimed that this integration will come to an end with Turkey's membership (Özaydin, 2007). The idea of forming a unity in Europe seriously emerged after the Second World War. The most significant attempt on this point was made by Jean Monnet, who was the Chairman of French Planning Organization after the war. Monnet advocated the idea that the production of steel and coal, which are the two most fundamental substances in the production of war materials be controlled and the powers on this issue be delegated to a higher authority in order to maintain peace and order in Europe. Monnet has developed the offer to establish an organization endowed with supranational powers entitled European Coal and Steel Community together with the German professor Walter Hallstein (Aydinler, 2006).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study consisted of 338 students studying physical education and sports in the University selected by random sampling. Pilot scheme was applied to a preliminary group of 40 people by 5-point

Likert scale which was prepared based on expert opinion. Following the pilot scheme, the deficiencies in the questionnaire corrected and with a re-arranged 42-item questionnaire, the views and knowledge of 338 students on Turkey's EU membership were evaluated in political and socio-economic terms.

Statistical evaluation of the research was processed in SPSS 10.0 to determine whether the data is in proper distribution, then frequency (f), percentage (%) and questionnaire items were evaluated in political and socio-economical terms and independent sampling t-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) values were checked. Also the averages of answers given by the participants to items relating to the European Union and Turkey were considered. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was found to be 0.75 for the questionnaire.

## RESULTS

Distribution of personal information of the participants is given in Table 1. Based on the data, it can be seen that 51.5% of participants in the sample group are "male" (N=174) and 48.5% are "female" (N=164). Three different ranges of age were used in the research. If we look at the age categories of sample group, we can see that students within the age group of "21 to 24" (N=222) have participated actively in the research at the rate of 65.7% and students within the age group of "25 and above" (N=47) have shown the least participation rate of 13.9%. It was determined that 45.9% of the students from physical education and sports high school were in "3rd grade" (N=155) and 42.6% of them were studying in the department of "Sports Management" (N=144).

In Table 2, no significant difference by gender was observed in the socio-economical and political sub-dimensions of the approach that Turkey's EU membership

**Table 2.** T-test results on the views of participants on socio-economic and political sub-dimensions by "gender" variable.

Dimension	Gender	N	$\bar{X}$	S.d	t	P
Political dimension	Male	174	2.93	0.578	0.025	0.95
	Female	164	2.92	0.488		
	Total	338				
Socio-economic dimension	Male	174	3.19	0.521	1.11	0.26
	Female	164	3.13	0.497		
	Total	138				

**Table 3.** ANOVA test results on the views of participants on socio-economic and political sub-dimensions by "age" variable.

Dimension	Age group	N	$\bar{X}$	S.d	F	P	Difference Tukey
Political dimension	17-20	69	2.98	0.44	2.61	0.075	
	21-24	222	2.94	0.52			
	25 and above	47	2.76	0.68			
	Total	338	2.93	0.53			
Socio-economic dimension	17-20	69	3.27	0.38	4.97	0.007	
	21-24	222	3.17	0.49			1-3*
	25 and above	47	2.97	0.66			2-3*
	Total	338	3.16	0.51			

( $F_{(2-335)} = 4.97$  ;  $p < 0.05$ ).

will not be accepted ( $p > 0.05$ ). In other words, regardless of the views of participants on the political and socio-economic subdimensions, it was determined that the view that Turkey will not be accepted to the EU is common. In Table 3, no significant difference by age was observed in the political sub-dimensions of the approach that Turkey's EU membership will not be accepted ( $p > 0.05$ ). Socio-economical levels of the participants' view that Turkey's EU membership will not be accepted exhibit a significant difference by the age variable [ $F_{(2-335)} = 4.97$  ;  $p < 0.05$ ]. Tukey HSD multiple comparison test was applied in order to determine between which groups there are significant differences. According to this, it was found out that there was a significant difference between the average of the views of participants in the age group "17 to 20" ( $\bar{X} = 3.27$ ) and the average of the views of participants in the age group "25 and above" ( $\bar{X} = 2.97$ ) in favour of participants who are "17 to 20". Also, it was found out that there was a significant difference between the average of the views of participants in the age group "21-24" ( $\bar{X} = 3.17$ ) and the average of the views of participants in the age group "25 and above" ( $\bar{X} = 2.97$ ) in favour of participants who are "21 to 24".

In Table 4, when examined by "department" variable, approaches of participants on socio-economic ( $\bar{X} = 3.16$ ) and political ( $\bar{X} = 2.93$ ) subdimensions where the view that Turkey's EU membership will not be accepted did not

exhibit any significant difference ( $p > 0.05$ ).

In Table 5, no significant difference by age was observed in the socio-economic sub-dimension of the approach that Turkey's EU membership will not be accepted ( $p > 0.05$ ).

Political sub-dimensional levels of the participants' view that Turkey' EU membership will not be accepted exhibit a significant difference by the class variable [ $F_{(3-334)} = 1.48$  ;  $p < 0.05$ ].

Tukey HSD multiple comparison test was applied in order to determine between which groups there are significant differences.

According to this, it was found out that there was a significant difference between the average of the views of participants in 1<sup>st</sup> grade ( $\bar{X} = 3.03$ ) and the average of the views of participants in 4<sup>th</sup> grade ( $\bar{X} = 2.74$ ) in favour of participants in 1<sup>st</sup> grade. Also, it was found out that there was a significant difference between the average of the views of participants in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade ( $\bar{X} = 2.98$ ) and the average of the views of participants in 4<sup>th</sup> grade ( $\bar{X} = 2.74$ ) in favor of participants in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade.

## DISCUSSION

While struggling against domestic and foreign issues on one side, Turkey seeks a place for itself in the new world

**Table 4.** ANOVA test results on the views of participants on socio-economic and political sub-dimensions by “department” variable.

Dimension	Department	N	$\bar{X}$	S.d	F	P	Difference Tukey
Political dimension	Physical training and sports teaching	113	2.95	0.565	0.253	0.777	-
	Sports management	144	2.90	0.513			
	Coaching education	81	2.93	0.537			
	Total	338	2.93	0.535			
Socio-economic dimension	Physical training and sports teaching	113	3.19	0.529	0.545	0.580	-
	Sports management	144	3.13	0.498			
	Coaching education	81	3.19	0.506			
	Total	338	3.16	0.510			

**Table 5.** ANOVA test results on the views of participants on socio-economic and political sub-dimensions by “class” variable.

Dimension	Grade	N	$\bar{X}$	S.d	F	P	Difference Tukey
Political dimension	1 <sup>st</sup> Grade	44	3.03	0.489	3.40	0.018	1-4*
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade	93	2.87	0.492			
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade	155	2.98	0.560			
	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade	46	2.74	0.535			
	Total	338	2.93	0.535			
Socio-economic dimension	1 <sup>st</sup> Grade	44	3.20	0.404	1.48	0.220	3-4*
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade	93	3.13	0.503			
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade	155	3.21	0.505			
	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade	46	3.04	0.612			
	Total	338	3.16	0.510			

( $F_{(3-334)} = 1.48$  ;  $p < 0.05$ ).

order on the other. In today's international relations network now explained by globalism, there is the struggle to become an EU which still has not been clarified in Turkey's foreign politics agenda. Turkey is a powerful country; but does not have enough power to face the effects of the international system where the acceleration of cooperation goes higher and higher alone. Of course, the EU is not an ideal, utopia or heaven on earth; but is one hope and struggle for democratization and development (Serter, 2007).

One of the developments which left their marks on the first period of the EU-Turkish relations, in terms of human rights, was the military coup on 12 September, 1980. The relations have come to a breaking point due to this coup. While getting heavy criticism both from the European Parliament and the European Council due to its notoriety for human rights and democracy during this period, Turkey also drew the reaction of European countries and faced such criticism and accusation from them (Tali, 2008).

In a public opinion poll made by Financial Times

newspaper and the company Haris in connection with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formation of the EU, 44% of the EU citizens think they are "not happy" living in a member country and that has gotten worse after their country became an EU member. According to the Eurobarometer surveys conducted in the EU member and candidate countries; the rate of those thinking that "it is a good thing to be an EU member" has fallen back from 71 to 49% in 3 years. A great decline was observed in the rate of those thinking that Turkey will benefit from the EU membership. The rate which was determined to be 62% in the previous Eurobarometer survey has fallen back to 53% with a decline of 9% (Gökbunar et al., 2008).

Turkey is on a regional junction point with high strategic importance from the perspective of the EU. It is located on a transit position for land and air transportation with the Middle Asia, the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean and maritime transportation with Russia and Ukraine. Turkey's neighbors with significant water reserves provide vital energy supply for Europe (Gökbunar et al., 2008).

Political, economic and socio-cultural dynamism which Turkey will provide the EU will make the role the union will assume in the future more effective. The biggest contribution to making the peace Europe of the century a global political, economic, military power will be made by the full membership of Turkey who is the "anchor of stability" in the most unstable places in the world. Both Turkey and the EU will improve their security and efficiency in a "win-win" relationship (Gökbunar et al., 2008)

According to the "EU perception survey" conducted by international strategic research organization (ISRO) by sampling method, 78% of Turkish citizens believe that Turkey has already fulfilled the criteria for starting membership negotiations with the EU; whereas only 4% of the public think that the EU behaves to Turkey "sincerely and fairly" (Köylü 2004).

In the items of this research, the rate of people who say "I do not believe the European Union will accept Turkey as a member" was determined to be 62.8%.

According to the research conducted by international strategic research organization, of the people who answered the question 'Has Turkey fulfilled the criteria for starting membership negotiations?' 44% answered 'Yes', 10% answered 'No', 34% answered 'Partially' and 12% answered 'I have no idea' (Köylü, 2004).

According to the research conducted by international strategic research organization, of the people who answered the question "Does European Union behaves Turkey sincerely and fairly?" 55% answered 'No', 4% answered 'Yes', 29% answered 'Partially' and 12% answered 'I have no idea'. Which means a vast majority of Turkish citizens find the policies of the EU regarding Turkey partial and prejudiced (Köylü 2004).

According to the data acquired from this research, the rate of people who agreed with the statement "The EU does not behave Turkey sincerely and fairly" was determined to be as high as 80.5%.

According to the research made by international strategic research organization, of the people who answered the question "What is the time span for Turkey's expected membership?", 14% said 'Very soon (in 5 to 10 years)', 22% said 'Near Future (in 10 to 15 years)', 36% said 'In the Long Run (in 15 to 20 years)' and 28% said 'Never'. According to the experts in ISRO, Turkish public is 'realistic' about full membership to the EU. The people believe that Turkey will 'sooner or later' become a full member (Köylü 2004).

Based on this research, it was determined that 44.1% are of the opinion that "Turkey's overpopulation interferes with our membership to the EU". In the research made by international strategic research organization, one of the questions 'Which three states in the EU do you think oppose Turkey's full membership to the EU?'. According to the participants of the survey, the state which opposes Turkey's membership to the EU most is France and which support Turkey's EU membership most is

Germany. 33.5% were of the opinion that France opposed the most, Austria the second, and Greece the third. Greece was followed by the Netherlands, Southern (Greek) Cyprus. Participants who state that the greatest support to Turkey was given by Germany, count Italy, England and Spain next (Köylü, 2004).

According to this research, the European Union is a "Religious Union" to 46.7% and an "Economic Union" to 24.5%. In a research conducted by Youth Services Center in Turkey on 1022 young people between the ages of 18 to 24, it was determined that as many as 60,8% of the young people think about living in the EU once (GSM, 2008).

Based on the findings, 41.2% of the participants said "I support Turkey's membership to the EU".

In a research conducted by Arslan, the rate of those supporting Turkey's EU membership and of those opposing to it are extremely close to each other. In other words, while 40% of university students (prospective teachers) support Turkey's full membership to the EU, 37% of them are opposed to it. It is also striking that the rate of the doubtful and abstainers is as high as 22% (Arslan, 2007).

Despite the fact that human rights abuses, coups, overpopulation, weak economy, and handicaps caused by Aegean and Cyprus issues are brought forth against Turkey's efforts for full membership to the EU, it can be seen obviously that the EU makes decisions by political, cultural and psychological factors rather than objectively after the European door have opened to Eastern European, Balkan Countries and lately to Croatia. It is a fact that, today, there are negative views and beliefs on Turks who lived in various countries in Europe and on Turkey in general. While Turkey has many practices failing to comply with the EU criteria in many fields, yet Romania's, Bulgaria's, Lithuania's, Latvia's and Slovakia's situations is not better than Turkey's (Çelik, 2006).

A full membership process in which Turkey will have to fulfill its obligations will be waiting for Turkey ahead. Both obligations arising from Customs Union and activities of compliance with the Copenhagen criteria will necessitate political, economical and administrative reforms and each step to be taken in these matters will bring Turkey closer to the Union. If Turkey does not wish to be excluded in the future map of the European Union, it will be the correct decision to immediately take action for all changes which seem hard to make for the time being (Uysal, 2001).

Turkey will have been an asset which has ensured the environment of trust, realized the economical and political stability based on the country's potentials, acquired the capability to use efficient production methods, with a high value in its region and which ensures an economic development at a level even higher than that of Germany or France, or both in the process of EU membership (Gökbunar et al., 2008).

In conclusion, although Turkey tries to fulfill the criteria for membership to the European Union, it can be said that the European Union constantly comes up with new criteria and does not act that "sincerely and fairly". Turkey will be a country which the European Union will not be able to give up for its geo-political position, but keep as a candidate country forever.

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