



## CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND THE PERCEPTION OF EUROPEANNESS AMONG UNIVERSITY YOUTH IN TURKEY

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**ABSTRACT:** *Turkey's candidacy for the European Union began with its application to the European Economic Community on July 31, 1959. The fact that the negotiations between Turkey and the European Union have not been concluded in the intervening years has led Turkish society to question its perspective on the EU. What does Europe mean for Turkey? Can Turkey's EU membership be realized? If so, when? In this study, university students in Turkey were asked about their views on Europe and the European Union. The study provides clues on how Generation Z in Turkey views the European Union and whether the long-awaited EU membership of Turkish society can finally be realized. Since the young people who participated in this research will enter working life in a few years and take part in decision-making positions in the country's administration, the findings of this research will also project Turkey's perception of Europe in the future.*

**KEYWORDS:** Communication, European Union, Turkey, Europe, EU, Cross-cultural communication



## INTRODUCTION

When Turkey applied to join the European Union, perhaps many of their parents were either not yet born or were babies. That generation grew up listening and reading about Turkey's attempts to join the European Union. Yesterday's children grew up, got married, and became parents, but their children shared the same agenda as their parents. Maybe the children of the first years of Turkey's application to the EU will soon become grandfathers and mothers and fathers, but Turkey is still not a member of the EU. Some issues are still unresolved. There is no definite acceptance commitment or date on the horizon. This chaotic relationship with the EU affects the whole perception of Europe in Turkish society. Especially the young people of Generation Z. University students. The findings of this research will be the voice of young people in this context.

### **The European Union in A Nutshell**

Achieving political unity in Europe has been among the most important goals of many federalists. Some Europeans longed for the establishment of a "United States of Europe" with a longing that dates back to the Middle Ages (Bozkurt, 1992). Many thinkers, statesmen, and clergymen such as Charlemagne, Dante, and Churchill have advocated the establishment of a union in Europe for political, economic, and religious reasons. Winston Churchill put forward the idea of a "United States of Europe" in a speech he made in Zurich in 1946. However, he argued that Britain should stay out of this union and that the formation should be realized especially between France and Germany (Deniau & Druesne, 1994). Especially after World War II, an important factor that brought Western European countries together was the Soviet threat (Bozkurt, 1992). The powerful states of Europe realized that it was not enough just to be citizens of their own countries, and with the support of the United States of America, the idea of unity in Europe was put forward. This idea was primarily supported by professional or religious organizations with political leanings in the trade union, parliamentary settings, or government (Deniau & Druesne, 1994).

In 1949, the International Ruhr Authority was established to manage the coal and steel resources in the Ruhr Region of Germany. However, after the failure of the authority and its disintegration, Jean Monnet, Chairman of the French Economic Planning Commission, put forward an alternative plan, the Shuman Plan, linking Germany to Western Europe. (Dinan, 2005) Based on this proposal, in 1950, French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman invited European states to delegate decisions on coal and steel production to an independent international organization. On May 9, 1950, as European states were coming together to recover from the devastation of the war, French Foreign Minister Schuman declared that a supranational organization would be set up for the operation of the rich coal deposits and steel plants in these countries, of which European countries would be members. With France and Germany becoming members of this organization, the long-standing feud between these two countries would be eliminated and new conflicts in Europe would be prevented (Oran, 2009). Shuman's famous declaration and proposal was a historical turning point that paved the way for a new European organization based on the Franco-German rapprochement. In 1951, the European Coal and Steel Community was established with the Treaty of Paris signed by Germany, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Italy, and Luxembourg. Later in 1957, the same countries signed the Treaty of Rome, which led to the establishment of the European Economic Community and the European Atomic Energy Community (Uysal, 2001). The European Parliament is based on the 78-member executive in the Treaty on the European Coal and Steel



Community and the European Parliamentary Assembly, which met in Strasbourg in 1952. This assembly was later renamed the European Parliament in 1962 (Tezcan, 2005).

Some argue that EU integration and policies have distorted the relationship between countries and ethnic groups and reduced their power. The Maastricht Treaty and the Schengen Treaty caused member states to cede some of their rights to the EU. The Schengen Treaty abolished border controls between EU countries and created an area of freedom, security, and justice (Noi, 2007). According to some, the European Union has also created its image. Although the European Union looks like a confederation of states, it also has nation-state characteristics.

According to some views, the European Union can only be successful if it can establish a bond of love among its members. Today there is a need to develop a fairer political and social order, and this requires a different approach than nation-states (Pagden, 2010).

The aim of the European Economic Community was the creation of a common market in Europe with free movement of goods, labor, services, and capital, the harmonious development of economic activities through the convergence of the economic policies of the member states, continuous and balanced growth, stability, raising the standard of living and establishing closer relations between the member states. The aim of the EEC was later expanded with the formation of the European Union and a step was taken toward political integration (DPT, 2004).

### **Turkey's Eu Adventure**

Turkey's request to join the union was also an indication of the young Turkish Republic's search for security in the reshaped world map, as it sought to protect and improve its position in the western world (Özer 2009). After the Second World War, Turkey applied to NATO in 1949 due to Stalin's claims on Kars, Ardahan, and Artvin and demands to change the status of the straits. In the same year, Turkey also intended to apply to the Council of Europe and signed the European Convention on Human Rights in 1954.

On July 31, 1959, two months after Greece, Turkey applied for association with the EU, the EEC. Turkey's application was seen as the best option due to the economic and political difficulties the government faced after the mid-1950s (Balkır & Williams, 1993). The main purpose of the application was to once again strengthen its role as a "friend and ally" of the United States and the West in a bipolar world through membership in the EEC, which had not yet been defined (Alpan, 2015).

Signed on September 12, 1963, and entered into force on December 1, 1964, the Ankara Agreement constitutes the legal basis of the relations between Turkey and the European Union. (EU, 2003) The purpose of the Association Agreement was stated in the second article as "to ensure the development of Turkey's economy and the enhancement of its employment potential, to raise the standard of living, and to encourage the continuous and balanced strengthening of trade and economic relations between Turkey and the Union" (Koçak, 2009) According to the Ankara Agreement, Turkey's accession to the European Union was a three-stage process: the preparatory period, the transition period and the final period. The preparatory period meant a period during which Turkey would strengthen its economy. The transition period was a period in which a customs union between the parties would gradually become established. The final period was the period in which the coordination of economic policies



between Turkey and the member states would be strengthened based on the customs union. (Göçmen, 2016)

The 1980 military coup had a very negative impact on Turkey's relations with Europe. The Council of Europe told the military government to return to civilian democracy. Turkey decided to continue its relations and cooperation, but its voting rights were frozen. These reactions convinced the Turkish government to take democratic steps (Colella, 2020). On April 14, 1987, Turkey officially applied for full membership in the European Union. As the first stage of integration with the European Union, Turkey joined the Customs Union on January 1, 1996.

The Cyprus problem has also negatively affected Turkey's relations with the EU. (Türkdoğan, 1998) The so-called "Cyprus Problem" was first tried to be solved between Greece, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. However, since the early 1960s, the European Economic Community became involved in the Cyprus Problem and the problem changed its dimension. Although Turkey did not oppose the admission of Cyprus to the association, it insisted that this could not take place without internal reconciliation and that Turkey should be admitted to membership on the same date (Hale, 2003). Due to Greece's "Europeanization" of the Cyprus Problem during Turkey's candidacy and then membership process to the European Union, the Cyprus problem has remained an insurmountable obstacle between Turkey and the European Union (Güner, A. 2020). Cyprus is divided between the Republic of Southern Cyprus, an EU member state, and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, controlled by Turkey. On April 14, 1987, when Turkey officially applied for membership, Turkish public opinion was very positive. However, newspapers portrayed the application as if Turkey had become a member of the EC, creating an atmosphere of undue optimism. There was a rapid increase in the support of the public, who only knew the EC through newspaper reports, for full membership (Oran, 2010).

After a long and difficult process, full membership negotiations between Turkey and the European Union started on October 3, 2005. However, although the negotiations are legally ongoing, in practice they are stalled. So far, only 16 of the 35 negotiation issues have been opened. However, there is no consensus within the European Union on Turkey's full membership. Strong prejudices that Turkey's population and economic potential could be an obstacle to unification are often expressed in European public opinion. Moreover, the EU's internal governance problems, the disappearance of the unification perspective, the economic troubles in the eurozone, and Brexit (De Ville & Siles-Brügge, 2019) also negatively affect the full membership negotiations with Turkey.

One of the EU's chronic problems is its uncertain future perspective. After the UK departed from the EU, it has become uncertain how the integration will proceed. While deepening cannot be achieved due to economic difficulties, progress cannot be made in the areas of defense and security. Military cooperation among EU countries is limited and many members oppose military cooperation. Moreover, the EU's use of NATO's infrastructure and capabilities in peacekeeping operations requires the approval of non-EU NATO countries. In the case of Turkey, the EU has not been able to overcome prejudices and has not reached a consensus among its members on its future (Ülger, 2020).



## Uncertainty of the Process and Chaos

Starting in 1959 with Turkey's application for an association with the European Economic Community, the process, which has not yet concluded, has led to the questioning of the European Union Turkey. In particular, the attitudes and statements of some European countries and politicians against Turkey's EU membership have deepened this question. In Europe, the discourse against Turkey's EU membership is widespread among far-right parties. Especially in countries such as Germany and Austria, where Turkish immigrants are concentrated, public opinion has a negative view of Turkey's EU membership. According to Eurobarometer public opinion surveys, Muslim immigrants are the least desired immigrants and Turkey is one of the least desired countries to join the EU. Far-right parties claim that Turkey's EU membership is an important tool for the Islamization of Europe (Öner, 2014). In a statement made by Merkel in 2015 while she was the Chancellor of Germany, she stated that the issue of whether Turkey should be a reliable country or not was being consulted within the EU. Merkel said that she had previously expressed her opposition to Turkey's full membership in the EU, but this did not mean that she would not meet with Turkey (Dünya, 2015). Bruno Lemaire, the then French Minister of State for EU Affairs, who participated in a program of France Inter radio, stated that he was firmly opposed to Turkey's EU membership and demanded that the EU's enlargement should stop indefinitely after the integration of the Balkan countries. In an interview published in Le Monde Newspaper, Marine Le Pen, the politician daughter of France's far-right leader Jean-Marie Le Pen, when asked about the main reason for her rejection of Turkey's EU membership, replied "It is not a European country, neither geographically, nor culturally, nor historically". Le Pen said that Europe should have borders and that more than a dozen countries from Albania to Morocco, including Israel, have nothing to do with Europe even if they want to join the EU (Cumhuriyet, 2009).

Despite negative attitudes and opinions towards Turkey, there are European states that would like to see Turkey in the EU. Jose Manuel Barroso, one of the former EU Commission Presidents, reminded that Turks established an empire in Europe and stated that Turks have an important place in European history. According to Barroso, despite the Asian dimension of the Turks, the fact that they established an empire in Europe and have been in relations with Europe for centuries distinguishes them from other Asian and African countries. In Europe, many governmental and non-governmental groups, especially the Greens and socialist groups, support Turkey's EU membership (Ataman, Ayhan & Dalar, 2010)

As the process dragged on, different opinions and grumblings began to be heard in Turkey. A large part of the society believes that EU membership will bring stability to Turkey, make income distribution more equitable, reduce regional disparities and improve many aspects of social life. There are also those who argue that membership of a powerful union such as the EU would strengthen Turkey's position and role in the world. However, there are also radical views that argue that the EU will disintegrate the nation-state and that it sees Turkey as a region to be exploited (Özer, 2009).

For example, Davutoğlu argues that Turkey already has its own strategic orientation and position and that the EU is only a part of this orientation. Therefore, regardless of how the EU will be shaped, Turkey has to determine its own strategic orientation. Otherwise, Turkey will remain in a very limited space within the EU's common foreign policy vision. Davutoğlu also argues that Turkey has foreign policy options other than the EU and that since the future of the EU is uncertain, Turkey should determine its own strategic orientation; Turkey is not a



strategically optionless country and the EU is only one of its different foreign policy alternatives (Davutoğlu, 2013).

According to some opinion leaders, it should be determined whether the public really wants to join the EU. A referendum in Denmark revealed that less than half of the population did not want to join the EU. In Turkey, although a referendum has not been held, opinion polls show that we are in favor of EU membership, but some people participate in the debate in Turkey by heavily criticizing the EU and accusing it of hostility. These people accuse the EU of dividing Turkey and supporting terrorism and claim that the EU does not want Turkey to become stronger (Belge, 2003).

Ortaylı argues that Turkey is already a militarily and economically advantageous country capable of major industrial breakthroughs and technology transfer, and therefore does not need to join the European Union to be successful. Ortaylı argues that Europe is an aging world and that the Council of Europe has become an obsolete organization. According to Ortaylı, everyone knows that a 30-member Europe will not work, so some countries can leave the European Union and form a new group (Ortaylı, 2008).

Öymen, on the other hand, points out that the EU does not represent as great an economic power as it is believed to be. Stating that the total budget of the United Nations, the World Bank, the IMF and various aid agencies of the United Nations is 18.2 billion dollars and that this amount is only one percent of the annual budget of the United States, Öymen argues that the total budget of the EU is around one percent of the national income of the EU countries and that it is not possible to overcome the great need for aid in the world with this money (Öymen, 2003). Kissinger also claimed that the European nations, which formed nation-states in the nineteenth century by uniting on a common language and culture, do not have the necessary resources to play a global role today. Kissinger argued that a united Europe would continue to play the role of a great state, while a Europe divided into nation-states would be relegated to a secondary status (Kissinger, 2000).

So, what do Turkish youth think about this whole process? What is Generation Z's perspective on Europe? To what extent does the generation that will have a say in the future of Turkey feel European? The research on "Perception of 'Europeanness' by University Students in Turkey", the findings of which are the subject of this article, revealed very striking findings on the opinions of young people about Europe and the EU. Although there are differences in the answers to some of the questions of the research due to the value judgments of the region in which the students grew up or the education they received, it has been observed that the opinions of university students are largely parallel.

### **Method and Sample**

467 students studying at universities in Turkey were asked for their opinions on Turkey-Europe relations within the scope of this quantitative research, which was conducted in the spring academic year of 2022 and lasted for two months. The online survey was conducted on two separate samples: students studying at public universities and students studying at private universities. Only 32% of the students who responded to the research questions had been to a European country before, while the remaining 68% had never been to Europe. The group with the highest rate of having been to Europe is students from private universities with 42%. 73% of students from public universities have never visited a European country before, even as



tourists. This finding reveals that university students in Turkey do not have much experience of traveling abroad and observing the cultures of Western countries. Of the young people who have visited a European country, 70% of them have done so for touristic purposes, while the rest have visited to visit friends and relatives or to research education and job opportunities. The length of stay of young people in European countries is concentrated between one week and ten days. 56% of the young people who responded to the research questions stated that they have a European friend whom they know personally and with whom they meet frequently. The rate of university students who stated that they have a European friend whom they met through the internet and with whom they are in constant communication through social media is 47%.

## **FINDINGS**

### ***The Dream Of Living In Europe***

In the light of the results of the survey, it is seen that young people have a significant pessimism about the future. 92% of university students think that their European peers start their working life after graduation with much more advantages than them in terms of finding a job, earning a high salary and building a career.

This is an opinion shared by students studying at both private and public universities. As a matter of fact, 62% of young people think that they could find a job much more easily in a European country. The 58% "yes" response to the question "Would you live in a European country?" supports this finding. The "yes" response of state university students to this question is 3% lower than their peers from private universities, but more than half of them, 55%, think in the same direction as their peers and state that they would live in a European country for a better future.

### ***The Lure of Germany***

Which European country attracts young people the most and where they would like to live? According to the responses, Germany comes first with 35%. Germany is followed by the Netherlands, Italy, the UK, Spain and France. 72% of university students think that if they settle in a European country, they can easily adapt to life there. This rate rises to 79% among students from private universities, while it drops to 68% among students from public universities. Do young people believe that the education they received in Turkey is sufficient for them to be able to practice their profession in a European country? There is a partial decline in the "yes" responses to this question, with 42% of students thinking positively, 30% saying "no" and 28% being undecided. "No" responses reach 48% at public universities. Students' confidence in their foreign language skills is in line with their views on the adequacy of the vocational education they receive at university. While 43% of university students think that their foreign language skills are sufficient, 37% find themselves insufficient in this regard. Students from private universities are the most confident in their foreign language skills with 57%. 51% of students from public universities do not consider their foreign language level sufficient."



### ***Turkey And The European Union Are Moving Away From Each Other***

64% of students do not consider Turkey to be "European" in the full sense of the word. The rate of students who believe that Turkey is European is only 18%, and the rate of the undecided is the same. 56% of university students think that Turkey and the European Union have moved away from each other in recent years. 26% think that Turkey has neither moved closer nor further away, while only 10% think that Turkey has moved closer to the European Union. In response to the question "Do you find Europeans close to you in terms of culture and lifestyle?" 42% of the students answered "no", 41% said "yes" and 17% were undecided. The responses of university students studying at state universities are slightly different from these rates, with 61% saying "no". 75% of university students in Turkey would like their children to be born in a European country and receive an EU passport. The majority of students who would like their children to have EU citizenship are private university students with 81.6%. This rate decreases to 65% in public universities.

### ***Only 6% Believe That Turkey Will Be Accepted To The Eu***

Within the scope of the survey, young people were also asked many questions about Turkey-Europe relations. The majority of the university youth, 65%, think that Turkey should join the EU. 25% do not think that EU membership is necessary, while 10% are undecided. But will Turkey be accepted into the EU? In response to this question, young people are not very hopeful. 63% of the students think that Turkey will not be accepted to the EU. The rate of those who are undecided is 21%, while only 6% believe that Turkey will be admitted to the EU. When those who think that Turkey will be admitted to the EU are asked when they think this will happen, 24% say in 20 years or more, 18% in five years, 10% in 10 years, 6% in 15 years, while 42% are undecided.

### ***The Eu Is Not Sincere But Turkey's Efforts Are Insufficient***

40% of the students hold the EU responsible for Turkey's long wait and non-acceptance into the union and think that European states are not sincere in their attitude towards Turkey. In second place, 26% think that Turkey has not fully fulfilled the necessary conditions. The rate of those who think that Turkey is not sincere even though it seems to want to join the EU is 16%. So why is Turkey not accepted into the EU? More than half of the students, 53%, say that this is because human rights and law in Turkey have not reached the desired level. This is followed by 17% saying that the Turkish economy is not at the desired level, 12% saying that the population is too large, 6% saying that the level of education is low, while 12% of the students are undecided. When asked whether the fact that Turkey is a Muslim country poses an obstacle to EU membership, 24% of the students stated that it does not, while 22% were undecided. The rate of students who think that religious differences are also a factor is 54%. The rate of private university students who think that religion is a factor is above average at 58%.

### ***The Future of the European Union***

How do university students see the future of the EU? Among the university students who participated in the survey, 28% think that the EU will become a stronger organization in the future. 25% think that it will maintain its current position, 17% think that its effectiveness will decline, 8% think that it will disintegrate, while 22% are undecided. What are the personal expectations of university students if Turkey is admitted to the EU? The rate of those who say





"If Turkey joins the EU, it would be easier for me to settle and live in a European country" is 27%, followed by 26% who say "I would be able to travel to European countries without a visa" with a difference of only 1%. 24% of the students say "I would have the chance to work easily in Europe" and 14% say "I would continue my education in a European country". 9% of the students have no opinion."

According to university students, which countries should Turkey strengthen its relations with on the international platform in the light of its interests? 46% of young people think that Turkey should cooperate with European countries. This is followed by the United States with 22%. 10% of young people think that Turkey should cooperate with China and 6% think that Turkey should cooperate with Russia. 16% of young people answered "No opinion" to this question.

## DISCUSSION

The fact that Turkey's relations with the European Union have been uncertain for years has sometimes caused the Turkish society to question its perspective on the European Union. Public opinion polls have been conducted at different times in order to reveal the views of the public. Through these surveys, the Turkish public's perspective on the European Union has been tried to be determined.

For example, the results of the "Perceptions of the European Union" survey conducted by the Marshall Fund's Turkey, Europe and Global Issues Program clearly show that 75% of young people between the ages of 18-24 support Turkey's accession to the EU. According to the results of this survey, three out of every four young people stated that if a referendum were held today, they would vote "yes" for Turkey's full membership to the European Union. While there is strong support for Turkey's accession to the EU, the belief that Turkey can become a member remains low (BloombergHT, 2022). This finding of the Marshall Fund survey is in line with the finding of the survey that is the subject of this article. According to the findings of this study, a majority of the university youth, 65%, stated that Turkey should join the EU, while the belief in Turkey's ability to become a member was quite low.

In a survey conducted in 2005 among final year students of public and private universities in Istanbul, 69% of the students stated that they support Turkey's EU membership. "When asked what they would most like to see happen if Turkey were to become a full member of the EU, "the development of social, political and cultural rights" ranked first with 21%. 16.5% of the students expressed a desire for "economic aid", 16% for "free movement", 10% for "the opportunity to study in Europe", and 8% for "the opportunity to find and establish a business in Europe" (Hürriyet, 2005). In this survey, the rate of those in favor of joining the European Union is in parallel with our survey. Moreover, the personal expectations of young people from Turkey's EU membership are similar in both surveys.

According to a survey on Turkey-EU relations conducted by Metropol Research Company in 2020, 53.7% of the public in Turkey are in favor of Turkey joining the European Union (EU). When we look at the 18-34 age group, i.e. young people, the rate of those who say "Yes, it should" is 56.3%, while the rate of those who say "No" is 30% and the rate of those who are undecided is 13%. However, the results of a survey conducted by the Metropol Research Company on the same subject in 2022 are quite different. According to this survey, the rate of those in favor of EU membership has fallen below 50% again. As of today, the rate of those in



favor of Turkey's EU membership is 49%. The rate of those against membership is 40%, the highest rate in the last 5 years (Metropol, 2022). One of the findings in Metropol's survey is very similar to our survey. 63.2% of the respondents think that the European Union will not accept Turkey as a member. In our survey, 63% of young people also stated that they did not think Turkey would join the European Union.

According to the results of a similar survey conducted by TESEV in 2007, 64% of the Turkish public would support EU membership in the event of a referendum. 30% said they would vote against EU membership in a referendum (NTV 2007).

## CONCLUSION

While there are many problems within the EU and uncertainties are increasing in the international arena, it would be a better strategy for the EU to improve its relations with its partners and be open to new collaborations. Turkey's accession to the EU will benefit both the EU and Turkey in many political, economic and cultural ways. Overcoming the obstacles to Turkey's full membership is possible through mutual communication. Both sides need to get rid of their prejudices and focus on the potential synergies.

The findings of the study reveal that university students in Turkey tend to prefer European countries in terms of finding a job and building a career after graduation. This finding shows that Turkey faces the risk of a brain drain. Governments need to be more sensitive to the future concerns of young people and put forward policies that will pave the way for young people preparing to enter the working life.

Although 65% of the young people who participated in the survey think that Turkey should join the European Union, 63% of them think that this will not happen. The rate of young people who find the European Union leaders insincere and hold them responsible for Turkey's failure to join the EU is 40%. In other words, there is despair among the Turkish youth. This hopelessness will lead to a decrease in the rate of those who think that Turkey should join the EU in the future. If the European Union does not want to lose Turkey, it needs to implement some facilities. One of the most important demands of young people in this context is to travel to Europe without a visa. For example, making an arrangement on this issue will help young people to maintain their belief in the EU. In order to maintain the sympathy of young people towards Europe, it is important for the European Union to take some encouraging and incentivizing steps. The finding that 26% of the respondents hold the Turkish government responsible for this situation shows that Turkey should be more willing and sincere in overcoming the obstacles to EU membership. In other words, both sides should make an effort to get to know and understand each other better and do their part to build mutual trust.



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