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4 YEARS OF EXPERIMENT... & EXPERIENCE

IN THE EURO-MED YOUTH PROGRAMME:

Euro-Med Youth Action Programme, Training Strategy

Or... confessions of an ex-National Coordinator

It was 1999 when I started to work with Euro-Med. I was a fresh research assistant in the Department of political science and Public Administration of the Middle East Technical University - METU, where I had spent 10 valuable years of my life...

I still remember the day that I was criticised because of my “academic pedagogical approach” or being “highly academic” in a ‘training’ context. I had never been involved, ever in my life, in any informal learning experience neither as a trainee nor as a trainer. Until then, the only way was the “academic way of doing it” for me.

In this article, two stories go hand-in-hand. One of them is the story of a Turkish National Coordinator (NC); and the other that of the development of a Programme called Euro-Med Youth Action Programme (Euro-Med) in Turkey. Both stories sum up to one: the story of a “strategy” in Turkey. This strategy in itself was not a ‘training’ strategy only, but also included many other information and support measures taken to develop the youth work in the country towards an ‘international’ direction, hence the ultimate aim - the mobility of young people in Turkey.

► Research phase

After being nominated, I did some research on the Programme. I found many documents in the internet and even a guide to the Euro-Med Programme published by the European Youth Forum. I read them all, sometimes without being able to attribute them a meaning or image; and tried to present them to others (especially the members of the NC Nomination Committee). In the end, I was appointed as the NC, approved by the European Commission (EC), and started to work in the Euro-Med under the roof of the university where I also continued to work as a research assistant.

However I needed to visualise what I read. By chance, I talked to a friend whose organisation was involved in Euro-Med years before it was called Euro-Med; within the old Youth for Europe Programme under Action D, which referred to the youth exchanges

with "third countries". We spent some time discussing the projects, the concepts and the philosophy behind it. I even saw the photos of the previous projects and had a chance to examine some final reports. I learned a lot in this process.

► The Programme and the faces behind it:

It was not until November 1999 that we met the people in the Commission. The very first NC meeting with the Commission was organised then, with the Euro-Med NCs already appointed by their governments. I think we were 6 NCs - Jordan, Malta, Israel, Turkey, Tunisia, Morocco - in that meeting, nearly all of whom are still in the field. There, I firstly realised that the world of Euro-Med is a very political one. In addition, we saw that we would not be alone for the establishment and implementation of such a Programme in the future. If we could prove that the outcomes were successful in the Pilot Phase, the Programme could continue in the future.

In the pilot phase, the Programme was constructed on the basis of the previous “Youth for Europe” and “European Voluntary Service”. The second phase coincided with the emergence of the new “YOUTH” Programme where the Euro-Med Programme was placed under the new Programme, attributing a priority to it. The main feature was that the organisations from the Mediterranean partner countries could also directly apply for their projects, which was not the case under Action D of the old Programme. It was a real priority because in the old Programme, when a Turkish organisation would like to host a project in Turkey, they should first find a partner from the Programme countries and convince the partner to submit this project to the Commission.

This difference with the Euro-Med Programme has been vital to the work of the NCs. It intended to increase the project preparation/implementation/evaluation skills of the beneficiary NGOs in our countries.

The NCs had a similar role to the National Agencies (NA), which are in charge of the implementation of the YOUTH Programme. NCs were (and still are) responsible for the establishment of an office for Euro-Med, dissemination of the information, implementation of the Programme. It was too much for a single person as NC to conduct all those duties. But many of us managed!

► Action plan...

The story of the strategy in Turkey formally started with the preparation of a work plan for a 12-month plus 6-month activity



list and related budget. Together with an expert assigned by the Commission, the plan for Turkey was made, which focused on the “information meetings” to disseminate information about the Programme and to raise awareness about it. There were also training courses envisaged. However, only one could be realised because of lack of experience in organising trainings; lack of good knowledge of and cooperation schemes with potential local partners; and lack of a comprehensive understanding of the needs of potential beneficiaries in different regions of Turkey. Maybe that’s why only 69% of the total budget was spent in the first contractual period.

► **Warming Up...**

The first work plan originally included 6 Info meetings and 5 training courses at the national level. However, as soon as the real work started, I realised that was nearly nothing for a country, with a population of around 14 million youngsters (aged 15-25), plus the youth workers and leaders, on a territory of around 780.000 km². Even before the contract was signed in June 2000, I was invited to many different meetings as a speaker, where I had the opportunity to disseminate information, but more importantly to see different realities and to meet beneficiaries of the Programme. I even had a chance to participate in 3 Euro-Med projects in Turkey, which helped me to get fully acquainted with the programme. The first information note was prepared and a Euro-Med Türkiye database list emerged with the data I collected in those information meetings. I was still far away from organising an event by myself. At this stage, the support of various public and civil society organisations helped me to survive. The support of the Delegation of the Commission in Ankara was very valuable. As the contact list was growing day by day, the information to be disseminated to the beneficiaries in Turkey was reaching a wider audience.

Another characteristic of the first work plan was the support proposed by the EC for the NCs to equip them with the necessary skills to implement the Programme. However, for the pilot phase of the Programme, the Commission organised only a 2-day training given by the Technical Assistance Office (TAO) combined with the selection panel meeting in October 2000. The second training experience for me was the 15-day job-shadowing in TAO in February 2001. Those activities helped me to understand the technical part of the job that the NCs were supposed to accomplish in their countries. I can never forget the help and support provided by the lovely people in TAO. Whenever I received an enquiry that I did not feel comfortable to answer, I contacted the TAO people and I was never left without an answer.

► **The turning point**

A strategy should be the outcome of an accumulation of knowledge, experience, even the world view. The turning point in this story was my involvement in the SALTO Euro-Med Cooperation Training Courses in March 2001. Two of the NCs were proposed and then invited to the SALTO Euro-Med Training Courses as observers and I was supposed to attend the very first one. I had no idea what was waiting for me...

► **A story in itself...**

When I arrived at the end of the final preparation day, I found the team members waiting for me in the garden, looking at me very

strangely. Nobody told me before that I was supposed to be in the team (moreover, I never imagined that you should have a team and trainers in a training course!). In fact, I was ready to observe and take my notes throughout the training and never thought of being responsible for anything else. My team mates were so kind to inform me about what they did until then and who would do what and then gently disappeared to prepare their own sessions. That day, I saw the very first ‘poster’ in my life, sine-qua-non of trainings, which since then has been on the wall in my office.

The rest was like a dream. I did whatever they told me to do: I facilitated workshops, had a reflection group everyday, gave feedback to projects and even made the participants play a game! I also felt very comfortable making my points in the team meetings although sometimes my approach was found a bit “academic”. After the evaluation, the team asked me if I would be interested in taking part in the team of the second training in June 2001, although I insisted that I was not a trainer at all. However, their support was enormous and I would not be able to resist because I simply loved it.

Only then was it that I grasped that a set of trainings in Turkey was essential. There was a huge interest in the Programme, and in Turkey youth work needed support. I saw in this experience that Euro-Med is a world in itself, with different political connotations, and training was the biggest tool we had to maximise the benefit for the participants. This was the *raison d’être* of an NC.

► **Action again...**

When I came back from the second SALTO Euro-Med TC, I started to think of the strategy. In September, October and December 2001, we held the three most significant events of the Euro-Med Türkiye work plan: an Evaluation Meeting for all Euro-Med beneficiaries in Turkey involved in projects as applicants or partners; a very first Basic Training Course in Izmir, and we hosted around 30 international participants who took part in the 3rd European Youth Festival. However, still none of those activities were organised by the NC alone. For each of them, a different NGO took the responsibility of organising it, with the support of the NC, in line with the priorities of the Euro-Med Türkiye.

► **Action Plan revisited: 2001-2003**

Before preparing the second work plan for Euro-Med Türkiye, I sat down and recalled the experience gathered in the pilot phase of the implementation. Without assessing the actual situation of the youth work in Turkey, it would not be possible to prepare a strategy. Working for the last 2.5 years as the NC helped me to get in touch with the field. A picture of needs and then any possible action to satisfy them needed to be drawn up. For instance, a pre-departure training was urgently needed when for the first time 7 EVS volunteers from Turkey were ready to leave the country.

Background for "the strategy"

Youth Work in Turkey 1999-2003 - Some Impressions:

I realised that there are not many “youth” organisations in Turkey. There have always been civil organisations established for their own reasons but very few of those had the ultimate aim of working “only” with youth. However, many of the organisations cover

"working with and for youth" within their own field of activities. I simply categorised the organisations in Turkey, although they may not be solely working in the youth field: Associations (which are subject to Law of Associations); Foundations; Student Clubs (which are subject to the regulations of the universities that they are founded in); and, Youth Clubs (registered with the Directorate for Youth and Sports). More recently, local youth councils and new youth centres have been established, mostly associated to the municipalities. One common characteristic is that they are all non-profit-making, voluntary organisations. They work at local/regional/national/international levels. Representatives from all of those categories were involved in Euro-Med projects in the last 4 years.

Regarding the institutions in charge of youth affairs, there is not a sole governmental body, neither a ministry of youth. There are many departments in different public institutions which work on youth-related issues. This situation sometimes makes the picture complicated, especially when it comes to policy-making. We still don't have a particular youth policy in Turkey but many people (governmental and non-governmental) believe in its benefits. For a long time, youth work was under the shadow of sports. Any sports activities such as tournaments and competitions were more appreciated (and financially supported) than a youth gathering. Hopefully this is changing, especially with the demand coming from young people themselves.

In Turkey, a national youth council does not yet exist. For many years, different organisations and governmental bodies worked to establish one but none of the attempts have been successful and inclusive enough until now.

The themes that youth organisations work on cover a wide range: from environment to culture, from local development to gender issues. Youth work itself is composed of many different types of activities, sometimes organised and realised by young people themselves: local/national festivals, campaigns, local projects designed according to the needs of the young people... In recent years, work conducted on and with disadvantaged young people is increasing, including young people with disabilities.

Last but not least, unfortunately in Turkey, there are no particular financial support schemes from government for youth organisations. Most of the finances come from contributions of the members and sometimes from sponsors. Recently, Turkish organisations discovered the opportunities of being funded by international organisations under various budget lines. Euro-Med has been one of them...

Preparation of "the strategy"

To prepare the second work plan to submit to the Commission took an enormous amount of time. I don't remember how many drafts and how much constructive feedback I got from the Commission. Many aspects of it were discussed with the Commission: content and reasoning of the support activities; documents to be

translated; activities to be hosted in Turkey... and last but not the least, the budget. Once we had agreed with the Commission on the work plan and it was approved, Euro-Med Türkiye had a 3 times bigger budget than the first one, and, it included some signs of a strategy.

What was the strategy then?

The strategy in the second work plan consisted of support measures of various types, concentrated more on training courses: international TCs (hosting one SALTO First Steps and sending participants to trainings organised by other NAs or NCs); hosting a Contact Making Seminar; national TCs (local/regional/national basic and advanced); evaluation meetings (national for Euro-Med beneficiaries; EVS volunteers; and the participants of international activities); and last but not least, a training for Turkish trainers. In addition, regular activities were to be continued: info meetings (national, local or even organisation-based); site-visits to projects; production and translation of resource materials (newsletter, three T-Kits, User's Guide etc). At the end, some activities were added (e.g. EVS Volunteers' Mid-term and Final Evaluation Meeting); and some of them were extended (e.g. Advanced Training for Turkish Trainers turned out to be a "3D Training Process in Turkey" with 3 consecutive stages).

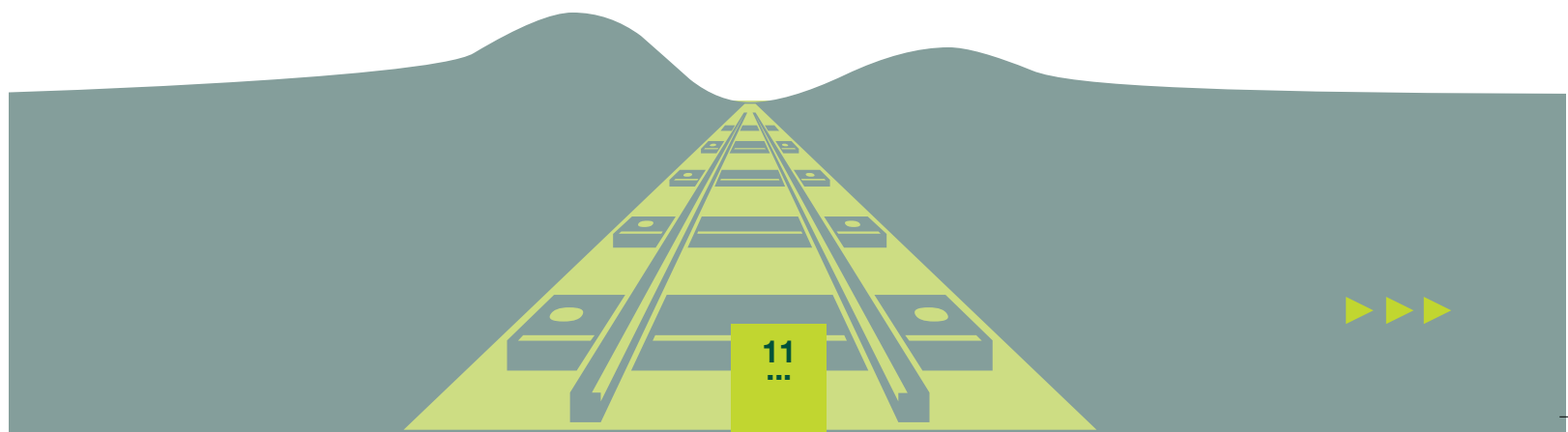
Realisation of "the strategy"

All of the above events, plus some additional ones, were realised in 18 months (1 January 2002-30 June 2003), and work was especially intensive in the last 8-10 months.

Could an NC do it alone? Not really. This strategy had to be realised in cooperation with the help of experienced organisations and institutions. Support of the SALTO-YOUTH-Injep was so valuable. Different support schemes were displayed in the realisation of "NGO Youth Training Project 2002-2003" (including 8 Basic and 2 Advanced Training Courses as well as a final evaluation meeting) in close cooperation with the British Council in Ankara, Connect Youth, Euro-Med Türkiye and Youth Services Centre; and the translation of T-Kits (Intercultural Learning, Project Management and International Voluntary Service) in cooperation with the History Foundation in Istanbul and with great support from the Council of Europe/European Commission Partnership secretariat. These proved to be precious reference materials for course participants.

Support from actors: There are "Trainers" in Turkey!

However, the biggest support I got was from the dedicated, experienced, ambitious and mostly young youth workers and/or trainers; mostly involved in NGOs and who had often been exposed to Euro-Med in the past. They were trained in various international trainings such as the Training for Trainers programme of the Council of Europe or in their own "international" organisational



Those nice clever people always offered help for Euro-Med events and sometimes worked for Euro-Med Türkiye on ad-hoc basis but it was not until the “3D Training Process in Turkey” that this help was formally structured. The 3D process in Turkey brought together 3 components: Turkish trainers; the NC and the newly established YOUTH NA in Turkey; and 2 European-level trainers. At the end of the second stage of 3D in Turkey, among other things, we devised a list of TCs to be organised by Euro-Med Türkiye and Turkish trainers to be involved in them. The plan worked quite well and we had a total of 8 big training activities with 8 different trainers’ teams at 5 different cities in Turkey, and all in 2 months!

Support from the institutions: the European Commission and METU

Support from the Commission continued into the implementation phase of the plan. There was constant communication between Euro-Med Türkiye and the responsible person in the Commission. I contacted the Commission to take their opinion on any changes in the original work plan or an additional activity to it. I tried to inform them about the results and outcomes. The attitude of the Commission was always helpful and I always felt very safe and supported.

My university was the beneficiary of Euro-Med in Turkey. Thus, they were also formally responsible for the actions of Euro-Med Türkiye. I always had to be mobile, which is unavoidable for an NC, and people in the Department were extremely encouraging rather than discouraging. The autonomous structure of the university made many things easier in terms of realisation of the strategy.

Looking back to "the strategy": An overall evaluation

When I look back at the second work plan of Euro-Med Türkiye, there are of course some ambitions that could not have been realised. But to work with Euro-Med, even in one country context, means different realities. When I assess the outcomes of the strategy, **I see that the general objective of the Euro-Med Youth Programme was met: some young people are more actively participating now, especially in their own local communities; they are gaining new skills in, and more importantly a new notion of, youth work and non-formal education, which will in turn help them to integrate into social and professional life. They are now learning by doing, by benefiting from mobility opportunities and by being exposed to very different cultures, they are getting to know themselves and each other better.**

Recently a friend of mine asked: **“Did Euro-Med have a place in your world view?” Yes indeed.** I perceived it as a way of changing the world, even though it was the ‘small’ world of mine and many youngsters in my country. It was unbelievable to see (twice!) three support measures realised on the same days in three different locations in Turkey. **I would not even believe someone telling me that there would be 61 projects submitted from Turkey in 4 years.** In 1999, I would have never ever imagined witnessing that one day.

The end, but a new beginning...

What will happen to Euro-Med Türkiye, if I am an “ex” NC now? Turkey has benefited from the Euro-Med Youth Programme as being a Mediterranean partner country in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership process and will continue to benefit from it in the future. However, the picture gets a bit complicated when Turkey is also considered as a candidate country to join the EU. In fact, Turkey, since 2002, is an eligible country for the YOUTH Programme too.

If Turkey does her homework well, full participation to the YOUTH Programme will be possible in 2004. To ensure this, a National Agency in Turkey has been established and has already started to work actively to accomplish the "preparatory measures" and to get the necessary infrastructure in place. In addition to its responsibilities for the YOUTH Programme, the Turkish NA will take over the Euro-Med Türkiye in 2004 and Turkish youth and organisations will still benefit from the Euro-Med Programme, within its specific context and particular criteria.

Youth work in Turkey was previously not very open to an international dimension for several reasons. One of those reasons was the very restrictive nature of the legislation, which had limited international events and acceptance/use of international funds. However, the vision has been changing with the changing world. There were youth exchanges, particularly bilateral ones, with countries such as Germany, due to the bilateral agreements between governments. However, with the general trend with the EU candidacy of Turkey, this has also changed remarkably. In the recent years, international activities, bilateral or multilateral, have increased not only due to the Euro-Med Programme but also as a result of the willingness of young people to know more about the "others".

I believe that the existence of the NA in Turkey will encourage more and more international youth activities in Turkey.

Yes, there are also challenges, fights and competition in youth work in Turkey, as anywhere in the world. However, the attempts to create reliable networks have been undertaken as initiatives of the youth organisations. **Now, organisations feel the need to share their knowledge and expertise with others and come together to develop youth work together.**

Now activities are not only organised in Istanbul or Ankara but in many different cities of Turkey, from east to west, north to south. Now, not only the youngsters from big cities or big universities but also the youngsters from very small cities and secondary schools are getting involved in voluntary activities. The meaning of being a volunteer is grasped as well as the benefits of working as a volunteer. Non-formal education is now getting into the picture and many valuable trainers are working to satisfy the needs of the youngsters in Turkey. ■

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