

ERASMUS STUDENT MOBILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: THE EUROPEAN UNION AND TURKEY

by Dr Gönül Oğuz

About the author

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Abstract

Although the Erasmus student programme envisaged high level of the balance in terms of incoming and outgoing placement, data from the European Commission shows that student mobility from the EU to Turkey has remained low. Such mobility has yet to be taken for granted. A question then arises as to what can be done to make the Turkish higher education more attractive to the European students, who may understand the social culture of Turkey as well as benefit from learning conditions not available in their institutions. This study explores the key mobility challenges for student mobility between the European Union (EU) and Turkey. Its main goal is to shed light on existing social, cultural and financial barriers to mobility, and to suggest how the scheme can be further improved in qualitative and quantitative terms. The study is based on a comparative analysis of indicators from the European Commission as well as other individual studies.

Key words: European Union, Higher Education Institutions and Student Mobility

Introduction

The Erasmus student mobility for studies, which is the most common action, enables students to spend a study period of 3 to 12 months abroad. So, the Erasmus programme offers students the possibility of studying at another higher education institution. Initially, with the launch of programme in 1987, cross-border mobility in Europe became very popular among young people in higher education. The programme is not only relevant at the EU level, but efficient promoters of internationalisation of education. Erasmus is part of the EU's Lifelong Learning Programme. During the academic year 2009/2010, 32 countries took part in the Programme: the EU-27 Member States, Croatia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Turkey. With the addition of Switzerland in 2011, the number of participating countries rises to 33 (European Commission 2010: 5). Given this, more young people are encouraged and supported to make use of the programme in the non-European countries as well. In short, the programme aimed to promote the exchange of good practice of learning mobility between the higher education institutions in the EU and non-EU member states.

Expansion of the scheme to the none-EU borders may lead to the persistent phenomenon of regional imbalances of outgoing and incoming student mobility in the non-EU countries. This is particular applied to Turkey. The participation of Turkey into the Erasmus programme offers significant theoretical and empirical insights into the way in which extending student

exchange to geographically or culturally different area, the policy of Erasmus student mobility may further be contested and reviewed. In order to understand how mobility might be increased, the study investigates key mobility barriers between the EU and Turkey. Thus, the focus of analysis is the mobility drivers where the mobility decision of the European students is related to both benefits and costs. As for data sources, this study contains information on students mobility from the European Commission.

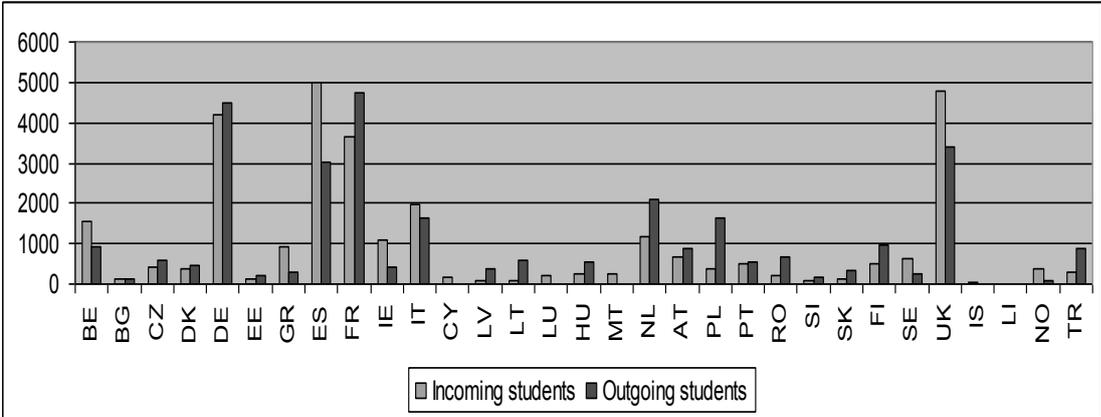
Quantitative Trends

It is difficult to assess the quantitative trends due to the lack of reliable data on the Erasmus student mobility. Since most of data is come from national statistics offices, it cannot easily be compared. Despite these limitations, data obtained from the European Commission provides some data provide some insight into the main trends and issues regarding mobility.

The Commission statistics suggests that the Erasmus student mobility within the EU-27 has steadily increased since 1987. This is with the exception of 1996/07 academic year when mobilities decreased on the previous year. In 2009/2010, 213,266 Erasmus students went abroad on a mobility to study in one of the 31 participant countries. This figure represents a year-on-year increase of 7.4 %. The annual growth rate was 8.7% in 2008/09. It is estimated that the total number of mobility flows would be approximately 3 million (6.15%) by the end of the academic year 2012/2013. In part, this success is a consequence of the EU’s enlargement.

While acknowledging the importance of outward mobility by the participant countries, 18 countries in the academic year 2008/09 experienced higher numbers of students going abroad for placements than coming to their respective countries, while 13 countries received the higher numbers of incoming students than outgoing (see Figure 1). The relative imbalance in incoming and outgoing teaching assignments was markedly low in Turkey. Many countries, notably Malta, Cyprus, Liechtenstein, Iceland and Norway had the high imbalance. In particularly, Lithuania had one student as inward mobility for every five going abroad for a placement period. The balance was one in three in Turkey and Romania, and one in four in Poland and Latvia. The most balance between outgoing and incoming students was observed Germany followed by Portugal, Bulgaria and Italy.

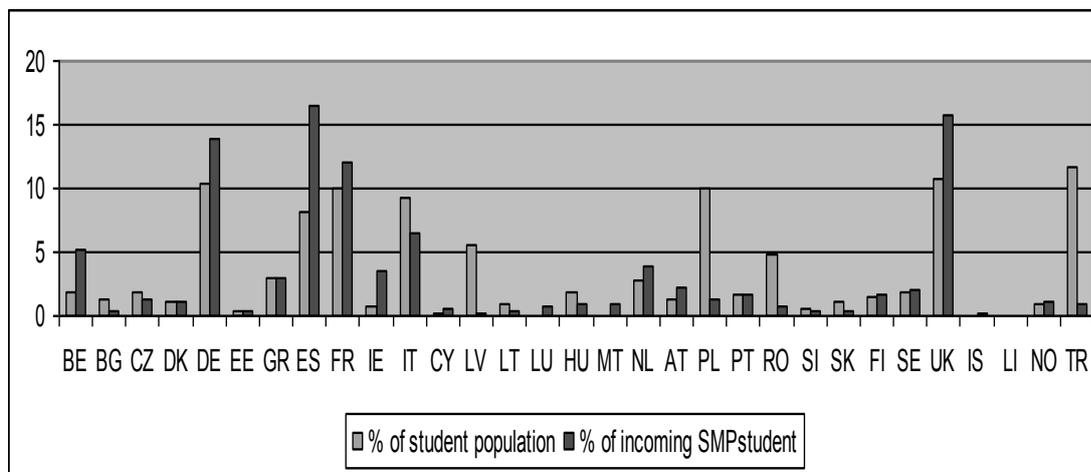
Figure 1. Outgoing - incoming Erasmus student mobility for placements in each of the 31 participating country in 2008/09



Source: European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2010

It can be seen that the share of Erasmus students to the share of each countries's total student population varies strongly over 31 participating countries. Figure 2 indicates that most countries had almost half of participating countries had a higher percentage of incoming placement students than their share of the student population in 2008/09 academic year. The Figure also indicates that 19 countries received a higher number of students for placements than their country's share of the student population, while Belgium, Ireland and Spain experienced the greatest imbalance. By contrast, very few incoming Erasmus mobility placements in comparison to the size of the country's respective student population were recorded in Turkey, Poland and Romania. This implies that Turkey has a low percentage foreign students, with outgoing students outnumbered incoming mobility.

Figure. 2. Share of incoming Erasmus placement students in 2008/09 in comparison with each country's share of the total student population in 2008/09



Source: European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2010

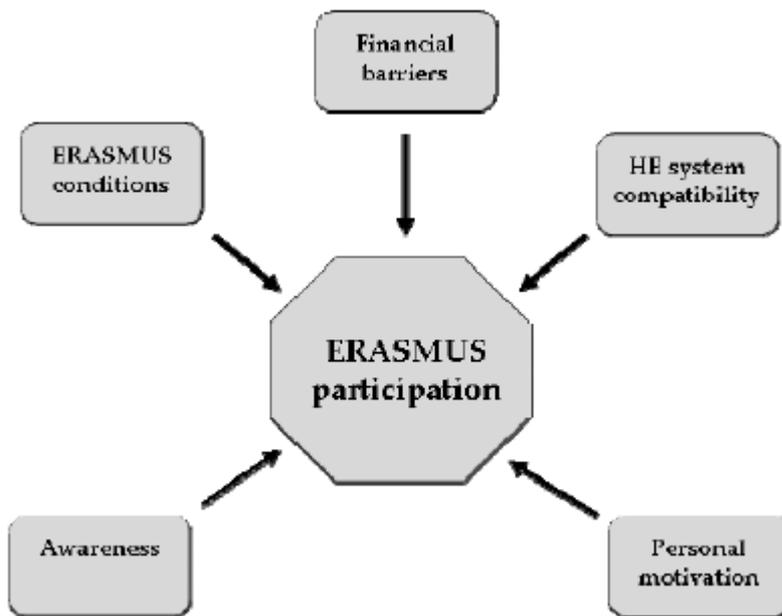
Although some small member states display similar patterns of mobility level, one might expect an increasing trend of inward mobility over the next decade, as far as Turkey is concerned. This is based on the intensified relations between the EU-Turkey. Following the formal opening of accession negotiations with Turkey on 3 October 2005, an extensive reform process has been launched within the Accession Partnership framework. Clearly, the EU's decision to grant Turkey candidacy generated a new wave of optimism and great incentives for Turkey to initiate reforms in order to meet the Copenhagen criteria (Christensen 2009: 7). In parallel to the intensified relations between the EU and Turkey, mobility is expected to be levelled of compared to previous years. These developments may have a very positive impact on student mobility. With mobility at current level, it is fair to say that Turkey is the main country of supplying students to European countries rather than receiving it.

Some Literature Findings

The relationship between the Erasmus student mobility and performance of the students in terms of their personal as well as professional development aspects has been intensively studied in recent decades (Souto-Otero and McCoshan 2006; Findlay et al. 2006). Mostly, analysts have come to perceive the student mobility as one of the major innovations for growth and jobs (Rosenzweig 2006). The primary rationale behind the scheme can then be understood as a rational choice made by the individuals, who aim to gain economic benefits, coupled with personal development.

Vossensteyn *et al* (2010) investigated the reasons for Erasmus students mobility and came up with five dimensions for potential barriers (see Figure 3). Such barriers included financial issues, personal motivation, transparency, conditions of the the Erasmus grant, and incompatibility between Higher Education systems. All the factors identified by the authors seem to be crucial to hinder or facilitate students' choice to go abroad as part of their studies.

Figure 3: Factors affecting Erasmus participation



Source: Vossensteyn *et al* (2010).

In general, most studies claim that individuals will unlikely to decide to migrate if the expected utility of moving is lower than the expected utility of staying pointing to the net of migration costs. According to Naidoo (2006), the academic qualifications that studens gain abroad is an added value for competition in the labour market, either in their home, host or a third country. Specifically, many authors focused on the role of spending time abroad to the extent of which students acquire new skills that are valued by employers, in favouring those with higher level of adaptability. Here, the prospect of learning foreign languages is considered as a market value, as mobility broadend young people's horizons in terms of adaptability and initiative (Michel 2008; Teichler and Janson 2007; ADMIT 2002). It is sensible to conclude that mobility boosts job prospects and stimulate labour market mobility in the medium or long run, while broading greater intercultural awareness as well as intellectual scope of the students at the end of their stay (Papatsiba 2005).

Equally important, some studies underline the importance of geographical distance. For mobility to deliver its potential benefits, a balance must be struck between risks or costs of movements and value of expected returns. Thus, from an geographical perspective, mobility serves as an equilibrating factor between regions. In general, distance carries in a major

positive effect of avoiding the cost in terms of closer locations (see Sjaastad 1962). This is because the costs of movement tend to rise with distance. It is probably fair to say that mobility is an investment decision to the extent of which movement will unlikely to take place when a net of the discounted costs of movement is larger in a destination country than the returns in the country of origin.¹

All these studies give significant emphasis to the relationship between the Erasmus programme and the internationalisation of the European higher education system. It is perhaps not surprising that some commentators argue that what mobility supported by Erasmus really means is modernisation and improvements in quality (Harzing 2004 and Bratch et al. 2006). For King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003), the benefit of mobility has been “diluted”, such that it has not been equally distributed across the participating countries. As their study suggested, the UK has more positive returns from the scheme than other Western European countries, so far, although the level of outgoing students mobility has been decreased in recent years. At the same time, other studies show that Central and Eastern European countries have, on average, a substantial income result from Erasmus participation for students than students from Western European countries (Rizva and Teichler 2007; Bratch et al. 2006).

Erasmus Drivers

Quality of Mobility

The literature suggests that the quality of mobility (e.g. linguistic diversity or recognition of study achievements abroad) plays a key role in restraining or stimulating student participation in the Erasmus programme. For universities, participation in Erasmus has often been related to increasing their attractiveness and, in some cases, quality improvement (Vossensteyn *et al.* 2008). As described in the previous section, the quality of education abroad is regarded as “pull-effects” due to differences in curricula and quality assurance etc.

It is worth stressing that the Bologna Declaration of June 1999 has put in motion a series of reforms needed to make European higher education more compatible and comparable, more competitive and more attractive for Europeans and for students and scholars from other continents. Reform was needed then and reform is still needed today if Europe is to match the performance of the best performing systems in the world, notably the United States and Asia.² The main responsibility for delivering reforms in higher education rests with the member states and education institutions themselves. However, the Bologna Process, the EU Agenda for the modernisation of universities and the creation of the European Research Area show that the challenges and policy responses transcend national borders (European Commission 2011: 15).

In short, the purpose of the Bologna reform has been the compatibility of higher education systems, which among other effects facilitates student mobility. When addressing mobility from the EU member states to Turkey, obtaining credits or credit transfer is cause of concern. Most students in EU-27 now follow a Bachelor-Master structure in their study programmes

¹The costs of movement comprise of financial costs (i.e. travel expenses), psychological costs (i.e. the separation from family and friends) and differences in the costs of living, and foregone earnings, while moving.

²European Commission, The Bologna Process - Towards the European Higher Education Area, Education and Culture DG, Retrieved in February 24 2011, from http://ec.europa.eu/education/highereducation/doc1290_en.htm

and they obtain European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits³, which originally is a major tool to foster mobility that is used throughout Europe. Potential obstacles emerge when the academic calendar does not match, if the study programme at home does not have flexibility to include courses from abroad, and the recognition of credits as part of the required is limited (Vossensteyn *et al* 2010: 67). As Turkey's progress report in 2011 noted, there has been no progress on legislative alignment with the EU's *acquis communautaire*, although Turkey has shown a strong participation in the Erasmus programme. By the European standards, the Turkish HEIs curriculum are poorly designed and too slow to respond to changing needs. So, the compatibility of ECTS is recognised as an obstacle that limits inward mobility in Turkey.

Some studies suggest that there is a high correlation between good foreign language skill levels and the desire to move (see Dastmann & Fabbri 2003). This correlation reinforces the assumption that European students have higher level of language skills than Turkish students. Table 1 shows a result of survey study in 2007 regarding self-perceived knowledge of foreign languages and average numbers of foreign languages per respondent. It should be noted that the European average is approximately one, while national averages range from 0.3 to 2.5. Slovenia, Belgium, Estonia and Slovakia stood out as the countries with the highest number of foreign languages (1.5 and above), compared with low averages countries including Turkey, Hungary and Romania (below 0.5). These results are merely reflections of greater emphasis on creating language learning capacities in Europe countries. This is because most European children are required to learn at least one foreign language during their compulsory education. In 2002, the Barcelona European Council recommended that at least two foreign languages should be taught to all pupils from a very early age. In September 2008 the European Commission adopted a Communication titled Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment.⁴

Table 1. Self-perceived known foreign language of adults (25-64 years), 2009, percentages.*

	English	French	German	Spanish	Russian	average number of languages
BE	56.8	38.2	25.2	7.4	0.6	1.5
BG	20.7	9.0	10.4	1.0	40.2	0.9
CZ	33.4	2.8	33.4	1.4	34.6	1.1
DK	83.4	7.0	47.1	2.8	0.3	1.6
DE	56.3	15.0	13.4	4.6	9.4	1.1
EE	46.1	1.2	14.4	0.7	57.8	1.7
EL	45.3	6.1	3.9	0.7	1.1	0.7
ES	32.4	15.6	2.5	11.9	0.4	0.8
FR	44.3	13.3	9.0	12.2	0.4	0.9
IT	45.5	33.9	6.4	7.7	0.4	1.0
CY	80.7	10.8	4.6	2.0	2.8	1.2
LV	41.2	1.3	17.7	0.2	61.4	1.6

³Teaching and learning in higher education is expected to be more transparent across Europe via the ECTS which reinforces the recognition of all studies. With the transfer of learning experiences between different institutions, greater student can participate in the Erasmus programme. This is more flexible routes to gain degrees.

⁴Eurostat Yearbook, Education and training, 2011.

LT	37.9	5.5	20.1	0.9	87.2	1.9
HU	14.5	0.9	21.1	0.1	2.6	0.3
AT	67.8	12.8	12.8	4.0	2.5	1.2
PL	25.0	3.2	17.7	0.6	41.5	0.9
PT	36.1	29.3	3.3	13.4	0.2	0.9
RO	18.9	12.8	2.4	0.8	3.5	0.4
SI	60.3	4.3	46.1	1.7	2.9	2.1
SK**	30.0	2.2	31.4	0.8	47.6	2.0
FI	80.3	9.6	31.6	5.8	6.5	2.1
SE	89.8	10.4	30.2	6.4	1.5	1.7
UK	6.6	39.7	6.3	4.7	0.0	0.7
NO	92.6	11.4	47.5	7.7	1.3	2.5
HR	43.7	3.3	30.9	0.9	4.5	1.1
TR	74.0	7.1	11.0	0.2	2.0	0.3

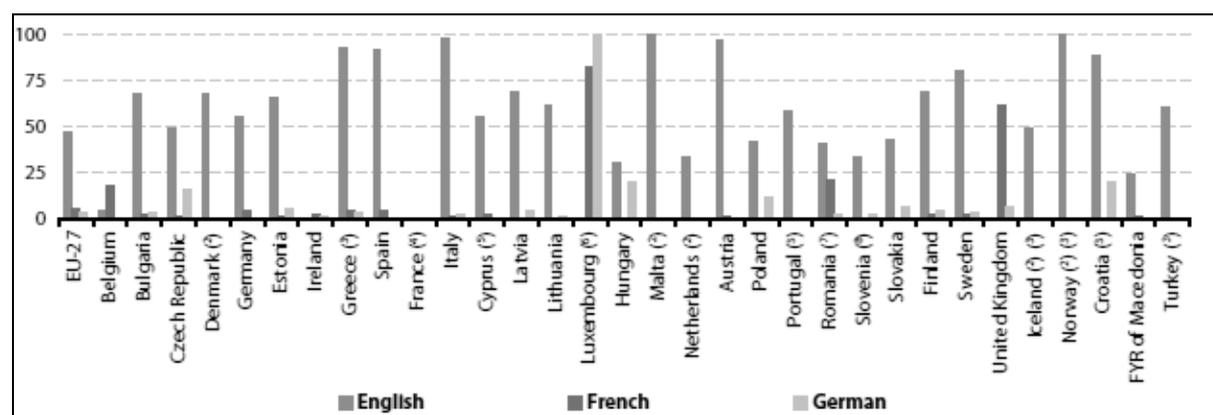
Source: Eurostat, Adult Education Survey (AES), 2009.

*The proportion of respondents can use up to 7 languages regardless of level of knowledge.

**Although Slovakian was not recorded as a foreign language in the Czech survey, Czech was regarded as a foreign language in the Slovakian survey

As a matter of fact that, with the prospect of the EU membership, linguistic diversity has actively been encouraged in Turkish HEIs. Figure 3 suggests that the proportion of students (59.4 %) who learnt foreign languages in primary education in 2007 is by no means negligible, compared to the EU-27 (83.5 %). However, English is only mandatory language in Turkey, with primary education institutions. The lack of linguistic diversity in Turkey implying language barriers in turn means a lack of encouragement for foreign students in terms of their plans to study abroad.

Figure 3. Proportion of pupils learning foreign languages in primary education, by language, 2007 (1)



(1) Refer to the Internet metadata file (http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_SDDS/en/educ_esms.htm).

(2) French and German, not available, (3) 2006, (4) Not available, (5) German, not available, (6) English, not available, (7) German, 2006, (8) French, not available.

Source: Eurostat (educ_ilang), Unesco, OECD

On the main, the question of quality assurance often relates to capacity of participating countries to compete with the HEIs in Europe. A survey evidence from the European

Commission demonstrated in 2009 that the quality of higher institutions were important in Poland (89%), Ireland (85%) and Luxembourg (84%) for the students where to study, while the lowest level of support was recorded in Malta and Estonia (both 58%) and Hungary (61%). Overall, 74% strongly or rather agreed in all EU-27.⁵ According to the latest Academic Ranking of World Universities, 200 of Europe's 4000 HEIs are included in the top 500 - recognised as world class in the current, research oriented global university rankings - and 3 in the top 20. By comparison, however, Turkish HEIs lacks popularity, as only İstanbul University is included in the world top 500 universities. In fact Turkey signed the Bologna Process in 2001 and, since then, a wider range of reforms have been undertaken to cover all aspects of performance to meet the EU's quality assurance standards. The prospects for student mobility are closely bounded up with the quality of the HEIs. The prospect for this will likely fade away equal conditions for inward mobility as far as Turkey is concerned.

Transparency of the HEIs

From theoretical point of view, mobility occurs on the condition that information is fully available for people who have desire to move (see Harris and Todaro, 1970). Individuals might miscalculate the expected individual net welfare gains that enter their geographic mobility decision, because of incomplete information. It is possible that they are not fully aware of the actual opportunities in the destination, or that they overestimate the costs involved in moving. And even if the information to calculate the expected net gain is in principle available, its acquisition imposes a (psychological or actual) cost on the individual, which must count as a moving cost. Provision of better information or provision of relevant information at a lower cost for the individual, therefore constitutes relevant geographic mobility policies (Bonin 2008: 104).

Applying this logic to the Erasmus participation, a general awareness about the scheme is an important prerequisite for outgoing and incoming mobility. It is essential to create effective information for students regarding finding an institution, application procedure and the financial support that the programme offers. Table 3 gives an overview of the main problems encountered by the Erasmus students. It is clear that the lack of information is regarded as a medium to major obstacle in most cross-border regions. The lack of knowledge about the higher education institutions, misleading information regarding housing and the quality of education abroad, and the small number of information centres are considered as the biggest information deficits. This emphasis on the transparency signals a harmonized higher education system within the Erasmus participating countries.

Table 3. Obstacles on mobility (mean values), (1 = minor obstacle; 5 = major obstacle)

	All cb regions	Within EU-15 cb regions	Within EU-12 cb regions	Between EU -12 and EU-15 cb regions
Language	3.03	2.86	2.65	3.34
Lack of information	3.01	3.01	2.75	3.26
Tax systems	2.83	2.73	2.96	3.01

⁵European Commission (2009), Students and Higher Education Reform Survey Among Students in Higher Education Institutions, in the EU Member States, Croatia, Iceland, Norway and Turkey Special Target Survey Summary, Directorate-General Education and Culture and February 2009

Infrastructure	2.74	2.83	2.87	2.4
Acceptance of qualifications	2.69	2.54	1.94	3.11
Other rights to social insurances	2.58	2.65	1.84	2.75
Labour market restrictions	2.44	2.03	1.81	3.34
Rights to pensions	2.4	2.42	1.6	2.74
Mentality	2.24	2.2	2.09	2.45

Note: white minor obstacle (1.00 - 2.25) yellow medium obstacle (2.26-3.00) orange major obstacle (above 3.00).

Source: Scientific Report on the Mobility of Cross-Border Workers within the EU-27/EEA/EFTA Countries, European Commission DG Employment and Social Affairs, Survey on cross-border workers' mobility, 2010.

The underlying question is then whether European students have sufficient information to help them to choose Turkey. Studies point to Turkey's weaknesses in extending and improving the network with the participating countries. There is also a lack of the knowledge base related to impacts of information activities. As Turkey's progress report noted (2011), some progress are reported in the field of electronic communications and information technologies. The Information and Communication Technologies Authority (ICTA) continued to align with the electronic communications *acquis*, which is a key element in the accession process. In spite of this, several inconsistencies remain in the main Electronic Communications Law as part of the harmonisation process. Further clarifications on some aspects of spectrum management, including digital broadcasting and digital dividend policy, or broadcasting frequencies at the border are needed. The scope and implementation of universal service obligations are not in line with the *acquis*.⁶

Some commentators highlight the link between transparency and clearness, honesty and openness (see Hallak and Poisson, 2007). This approach implies some of the apparent obstacles to the Erasmus participation. According to Transparency International, Turkey scores less mark in Global Corruption Ranking than European countries. In 2009, index included 180 countries, of which Turkey's ranking fell to 61 from 2008. This placed Turkey at number 58.⁷ Some progress can be reported on anti-corruption. As such, the Government adopted a 2010-2014 strategy for enhancing transparency and strengthening to fight against corruption in February 2010. The Strategy aimed at developing preventive and repressive measures against corruption as well as improving public governance by introducing more transparency, accountability and reliability into the public administration (European Commission 2010: 6). Turkey launched its Third National Programme in 2008 to overcome the corruption practices. Despite these positive measures, the corruption gap between the EU and Turkey is often quite large. This situation seriously lowers Turkey's status in the EU and thus impact on the student mobility becomes inevitable.

Addressing these problems may potentially make participation in the Erasmus programme less attractive given the significant relationship between corruption and mobility. Individuals consider mobility, but often have no access to the required information (see Fassmann and Hintermann, 1997). There is no question that the European students will

⁶European Commission, Turkey 2011 Progress Report, Brussels, 12.10.2011 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2011-2012, SEC(2011) 1201 final.

⁷Transparency International, The Global Coalition Against Corruption, <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2010/results>

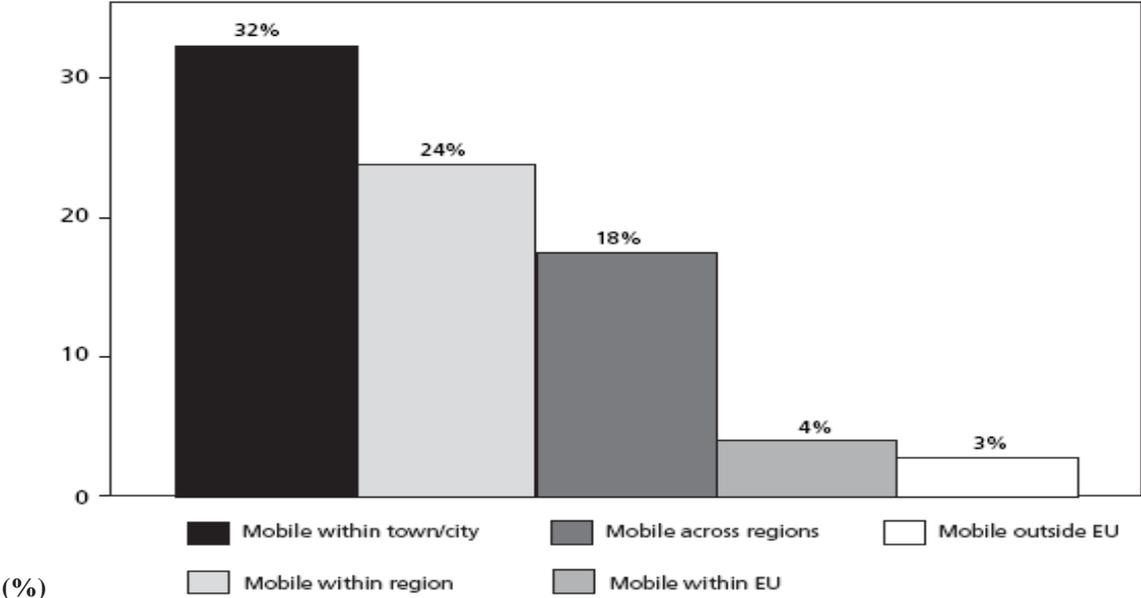
unlikely move as long as Turkey remains a “closed society” and is “open to misinformation” regardless of transformation its high education.

Geographical Distance

Studying the issue of Erasmus participation requires both an geographical and a cultural perspective. This observation points toward a sense of “geographical identity” in determining attitudes towards cross-border mobility. In this sense, long-distance movement can play a crucial role in this context, but is characterised by some untapped potential so far. It can however be claimed that the goal of the Erasmus scheme has partly been achieved, given the mobility level. As much of mobility has occurred within the EU regions, it is still difficult to assess the optimal level for the Erasmus participation with regard to the non-EU regions.

An empirical evidence from the Eurobarometer survey on geographical mobility in 2006 showed that around 18% of respondents indicated that they moved outside their region (see Figure 4), while only 4% had ever moved to another member state. It is interesting to note that less than 3% had ever moved to another country outside the EU. This result implies that short-distance mobility is common amongst Europeans, since level of mobility between regions within the EU appears to be higher than mobility between the EU and non-EU regions. This may be a useful indicator for the extent of inward mobility in Turkey, as it currently stands. The cost of mobility appears especially relevant in situations of geographically long-distance country. In the EU context, the Erasmus participation may become less attractive relative to the cost mobility entails.

Figure 4. Past mobility, by distance of move

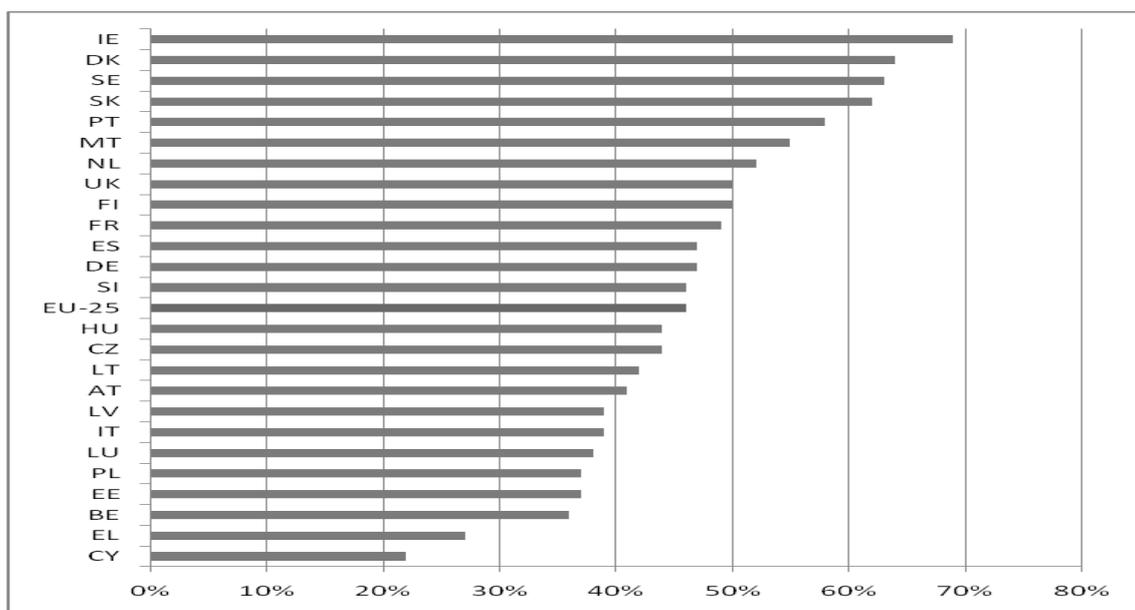


Source: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2006), Analysis of Eurobarometer survey on geographical and labour market mobility, Mobility in Europe.

To obtain a better picture of long-distance mobility, it is important to analyse the mobility intentions of Europeans. As Figure 5 shows, around 46% of participants had rather positive

views on the benefits of mobility⁸, against 11% of those had negative views about mobility. The Figure also shows that over 60% participants in Denmark, Sweden, Ireland and Slovakia indicated a positive view about the idea of long distance mobility, compared to 30% participants in Greece and Cyprus who supported the view that mobility experience is positive. This evidence suggests that Europeans prefer to move to the EU regions rather than to move outside the EU regions.

Figure 6. Percentage of people who think that long-distance mobility is a good thing for individuals, by country



Source: Eurobarometer (survey) 64.1 on geographical and labour market mobility, September 2005

While it is practically impossible to determine what impact geographical distance can have on the Erasmus participation in relation to Turkey as a long-distance country, it appears that the current situation is less optimum. In view of the substantial imbalances between the inward and outward mobility, there seem to be a perceived risk in movement that occurs outside the EU regions. There is at least some evidence to suggest that geographical distance is important reason for reducing mobility from the EU to Turkey. For instance, at least half of the respondents of the survey undertaken by the European Commission stated that factors such as location and cost were considered in choosing where to study.⁹ This is mainly due to the costs of mobility (i.e., travel), often exceed the substantial gains from the Erasmus grants.

Erasmus Budget

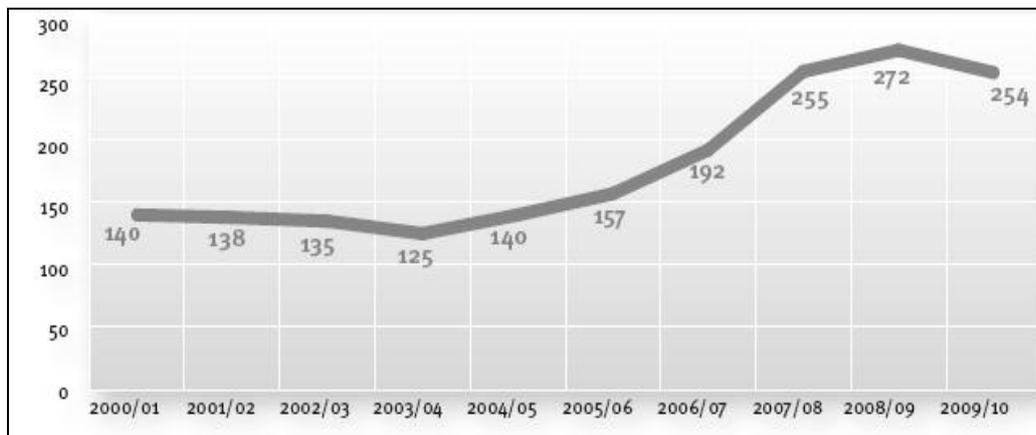
⁸Analysis of Eurobarometer survey on geographical and labour market mobility, 2006, Mobility in Europe, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, www.eurofound.europa.eu

⁹European Commission (2009), Students and Higher Education Reform Survey Among Students in Higher Education Institutions, in the EU Member States, Croatia, Iceland, Norway and Turkey Special Target Survey Summary, Directorate-General Education and Culture and February 2009.

From an neoclassical approach, individuals who wish to maximise their utility often budget constrains. In the context of the Erasmus participation, it is usually assumed that mobility only because of higher financial support. This highlights to the link between financial sources and mobility incentives. To the extent that a variety of potential factors may hinder or facilitate students' choice to participate in the Erasmus programme, the tight budget in the home country is a push factor that drives outward mobility.

As regard to the level of funding, the Commission statistics on student funding in 2010 indicates that mobility accounts for 85% of the annual Erasmus budget. This means that almost 4% of students from the participating country receive Erasmus grants at some stage during their higher education. Figure 7 shows that the average monthly EU grant received by the Erasmus students in the 31 participating countries since 2000. It is clear that an upward trend was observed between 2004/05 and 2008/09 academic year. It is also clear that, in 2009/10 academic year, the Erasmus funding was decreased by 6.7% on the previous year. Although this is a relatively low rate, it reflects the limited participation of students in higher education in general.

Figure 7. Average monthly EU grant for student mobility (€) from 2000/01 to 2009/10



Source: European Commission (2010) Erasmus – Facts, Figures & Trends, Lifelong Learning Programme, Education & Culture DG.

It can be argued that the financial barriers clearly limit inward mobility as far as Turkey is concern and will continue to do so if the additional sources of funding is not provided. The Commission, in focussing EU spending closely on the priorities of the Europe 2020 Strategy and on the key drivers of growth and jobs, has proposed a substantial increase in the budgets for education programmes (European Commission, 2011, p.10). The EU has a budget of EUR 3.1 billion for the period 2011/2013 (European Commission 2010: 15). This is a substantial increase in the budgets for the Erasmus participation, which will likely to trigger mobility. Besides the balancing effect of inward and outward mobility, improving the the scale of funding may result in increasing Turkey's popularity to attract foreign students in the short run. However, the increase of the cost of living index in the EU member states will be higher than the Erasmus budget increase, as the Commission estimated. In short, the restrictive budget is an issue of costs and benefits for students. Taking into account of the geographical distance between the EU and Turkey, the students, who have fewer resources to cover the cost (i.e., travel) may choose to stay put.

Policy Recommendations

Based on these findings, the study points at the crucial importance of the following policies to maximise student mobility between the EU and Turkey:

Strengthening the Institutional Preconditions of Mobility: As quality insurance remains high on the agenda of EU's lifelong learning programmes, reflected on the Erasmus participation, Turkey must be better aligned with the higher education system of the Union, in particularly curriculum development. As regard to an efficient recognition of credits, comparable and consistent use of ECTS in Turkish HEIs should actively be encouraged and even become a positive requirement for inward mobility.

Increasing Linguistic Diversity: The Erasmus student mobility between the HEIs in the EU and Turkey can always be reinforced by some linguistic diversity. This establishes a need for strong emphasis on creating language learning capacities in Turkey. Turkish policy makers and education experts should encourage individuals to learn at least two foreign languages and Turkey should also encourage adults to maintain improve their language skills.

Creating Effective Information and Social Networks: Usually, students in higher education have no plans of going abroad for educational purposes if there is no an explicit policy framework specifying use of educational resources. This observation points towards the necessity to support information and transparency of the HEIs in Turkey in order to create opportunities for mobility. An emphasis should be given to the establishment of social networks between the EU and Turkey for the facilitating mobility. This can be done via European exchange or sharing schemes (virtual mobility), building on the existing European cooperation frameworks.

Developing Closer Ties with the Erasmus Partners: The process of Erasmus scheme involves cooperation and collaboration between the participating countries. It is only establishing closer ties with its Erasmus partners that Turkey can become an attractive country of destination. An effective mechanism for dialogue and coordination among Erasmus partners should be established in order to develop and share good practice on successful learning mobility strategies. Attention should also be directed towards Europeanization of its HEIs, with emphasis placed on "internationalisation at home".

Investment in Higher Education: One way of facilitating mobility would be to increase funding of the Erasmus students. The EU Erasmus funding policies should be reviewed in face of the changes prompted by the profound shifts in the world economy. This will inevitably promote and mainstream workers mobility within the EU and other participating countries.

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