

From the Desk of the Editor

In this issue of Turkish Policy Quarterly we focus on one of our salient priorities: Youth. In particular, we concentrate on youth participation -within Turkey and the EU – in politics, social change, cultural exchange and economic development. We question whether today's youth is more sceptical about shaping the future than past generations; lay out the structural and cultural obstacles they face, inquire into the extent to which the plentiful Turkish youth constitute added value in Turkey's bid for EU membership, and explore the important role of youth in engendering tolerance, enriching democratic practices, enlivening the economy and motivating Europeans to a stronger Union.

TPQ makes a conscious effort to include articles from young people. We believe the worlds of young people and the older generations need to be more intertwined, as there is much for both to learn from the other. Investing in youth and giving them a voice is an important security valve for Turkey's democratic, social and economic development.

With every issue, TPQ promotes critical thinking and increased understanding of different perspectives- attributes fundamental for increasing communication, sustaining tolerance and enlivening democratic participation. These are qualities that are also among the most important to be fostered among youth in Turkey.

Recently, an upswing of violence among Turkish youths has been witnessed. These incidents may reflect the growing political strain in the country and an absence of mechanisms to deal with the frustration brought about by socio-economic change. Increased exposure to different lifestyles can challenge traditional values and practices in urban and global milieus. Sports can be an effective means to develop teamwork and self confidence. However, the increasing degeneration in the Turkish sports sector, as seen in the frequent outbreaks of violence at football games, claims of administrative corruption, and unethical practices such as steroid use, is not heartening. It is imperative that activities channeling the energy of young people in productive ways, especially in impoverished inner cities, be initiated and that Turkish youth are presented with more positive role models to emulate.

As a society becomes more open, fostering critical thinking among its youth and treating young people as individuals becomes increasingly important. The public educational system has a large role to play in this endeavor. The Turkish educational system is not known for cultivating creativity. Right now, it is especially critical to complement existing educational deficiencies by channeling youth to take part in civil society. The traditional expectation of unquestioning obedience from youth should be replaced with a constructive and vigorous exchange between generations.

Having younger Turkish parliament members will go a long way in bringing the concerns of youth to the political arena. As a first step in this direction, bringing the age to stand for election in parliament down from 30 to 25 could be an important move. However, current politicians have not exhibited the will to go in this direction, despite it being brought to the parliament by a youth initiative in 2003.

For Turkey to compete in the global economy it will be essential for students of all backgrounds to have access to higher levels of education, where leadership skills can be cultivated alongside technical expertise. Today, Turkey knows all too well how to follow

emerging trends in the global market. What is vital is that Turkey's youth learn the critical skills needed to *lead* in this competitive environment.

Over the last 15 years, Turkish youth has witnessed tense political discourse and infighting in Turkey's political sphere. Disenchantment with politics and inward-looking approaches have spread. Imbuing youth with self confidence and interest in, as well as skills of, leadership is fundamental in breaking this cycle.

Unfortunately, universities have been and continue to be one of the fronts of confrontation in the political sphere. Universities should be areas of free thought and should neither be apoliticized nor seen as spaces for political exploitation. We invite all institutions of Turkey, and specifically the political establishment, to take a more responsible approach towards this end. Restrictions imposed upon university students, based on the conflicts experienced in the late 70s, have outlived their usefulness; and in some cases even backfired - leading to the polarization and politization, that were intended to be prevented. Since the 1980 coup, universities are considered part of "public space", thus political propaganda and certain dress codes such as those interpreted as religious "symbols" are disallowed. It is due time to have open debate on some measures, such as the ban of headscarves in universities. Turkey must trust its young people; allowing them to develop self confidence should be a priority.

Education and Culture (Chapter 26) was the second chapter to be examined during the EU's screening process with Turkey. It is a chapter that involves relatively few regulations to be harmonized. The Commission has already expressed a positive opinion regarding the opening of negotiations on this chapter. However, the European Council has not yet made a decision. There is a degree of hesitation within certain EU countries, in particular France and Austria, to starting these negotiations this spring. Unfortunately, this has brought about new tensions in the EU-Turkey relationship.

Despite there being a minimal amount of *acquis* to be adopted, education and civil society is one of the most important elements of Turkey's integration with the EU. Imbuing the Turkish youth with qualities that will render its young population a positive addition to the Union and fostering links between the youth of EU member states and Turkey will help break down biases entrenched in history. Indeed, is this not what the European Union is all about?

This issue of TPQ is co-financed by the European Commission within the framework of the project titled *Youth is the Key*, led by ARI Movement, the Liberal Institute of Austria, and CDRSEE Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in South East of Greece. The project aims to disseminate information about Turkey's accession to the EU specifically in Austria and in Greece and to promote the EU in Turkey by creating broader dialogue between Turkish and European Youth, and entails activities such as publications, university forums, NGO workshops, panels, and press meetings.

We would like to thank Fortis, Yapı Kredi Bankası, Borusan, Uzel, Finansbank, Yapı Kredi Koray İnşaat, Aras Kargo, the American Turkish Society and Unit Group for their valuable contributions.

We hope you, our young and young-at-heart readers, enjoy this issue and look towards the future of European space with increased confidence in younger generations.

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