



Generation Europe Debate

"What is European Culture?"

Date: 21-23.11.2008

Number of people: 7

The symposium entitled "What is European Culture", which was one of the events organised in relation to the election of Istanbul as the European Capital of Culture for 2010, took place in Istanbul on **13, 14 and 15 November** with the participation of international academics and experts. Having concentrated on the issue of European identity in an atmosphere of increasing cultural diversity within the context of enlargement of the EU, several important topics such as "The Role of Tradition and Law in European Culture", "The Perception of Turkey in European Culture" and "EU's challenges on migration, cultural and religious variety" were discussed and different opinions were revealed.

In the light of this symposium we wanted to ask Turkish people the following questions on behalf of Generation Europe: Is there any such thing as European Culture? If there is, what is it and where is Turkey's place in it? These questions were sent to different student and professional networks on **21, 22 and 23 November** through e-mail (including our names, e-mail address and GE's web-site links). The email addresses of the participants are kept in our computers and may be given away upon request. The answers we received are as follows:

Halit Basar (Lawyer-29): While it will not be very accurate to speak of a homogeneous European culture, it may be possible to identify some of the basic underlying features which have shaped the European society throughout the history. If we take culture in a broader meaning, these features may be referred to as; the emergence of individual against the society as a value in itself, emergence of science against dogma as a way of understanding the universe and emergence of law against the absolute authority of the ruler. Seen in this perspective, Ataturk's reforms gave Turkish people the framework to adopt these notions into the Turkish society as their own values (not as foreign-dictated or imported values as seen elsewhere). It is for Turkish people to decide whether to embrace these modern values or not and unfortunately, we still do not have a common response to this crucial issue.

Arzu Coskun (Environmental Engineer-26): Turkish Society is caught in the middle of different cultural streams, mainly Eastern and Western cultures. Due to this situation, Turkish society is quite receptive towards any kind of cultural and ideological trend. Another reason for this easy-adaptability is that the majority of Turkish People have recently become foreign to their own cultural identity, including hundred-year-old traditions. European Culture has been able to internalise different cultural aspects and reflect them into its own existence. As a result, there appears a structure covering various life styles and ideas. In this structure, Turkey aims at being

a part of Europe and thus behaves like other European countries. Nevertheless, sometimes, it does not go beyond a mere desire for imitation.

Ekrem Acuner (Businessman-44): However primitive it is, every society has its own culture. At present, European Culture has two main features: 1) Questioning everything to find an answer through experience and applying it into practice. 2) Broadening individual's life span within the law system shaped by the individuals themselves. Turkish Society's place in the European culture may be assessed according to its contribution to these features.

Berkan Yolbulan (Chemistry Engineer-27): Each society has its own culture reflecting its history, geographic location, dominant religion etc. and the important point is how a society perceives this culture. As our society has an affected mind, people prefer to adopt certain aspects of European Culture which suit their short-term profits rather than long-term benefits. Therefore, there is an ambiguity with regard to the Turkey's place within European Culture. There seems to be a clash of cultures in Turkey, as well.

Askın İnci Sokmen (PhD Student-International Relations): In Today's world, facing different threats that exceed the capacity limits of individual states, more secure societies have to be built through international-relations mechanisms and by developing new common values. In this respect whilst the mutual dependence increases among the states, the European Union, as a community of states that have gathered with common aims, has been disseminating security not just within its own region but also on the regions of its neighbouring countries. Developments in democratisation, respect for fundamental human rights, increase in international cooperation, supremacy of law are the values of the European Culture. According to Democratic Peace Theory, states with liberal values create less instability. Therefore, by allowing the candidate states which have embraced the European cultural values to take part in the integration process, the European Union contributes to the international security. On the other hand, it is not convincing to regard the European Union as a Christian community. In post-modern thinking, religion should not be used as a tool for exclusion. European Union has united states which had long been separated from each other with different ideologies on the European Continent, in the same integration process. The idea of the European Union has emerged from European Coal and Steel Community established to prevent wars in Europe. The European Union has in its essence the criteria to prevent wars and improve security. Previously, the European Union has realised its enlargement process and its security problems, which emerged after globalisation and went beyond individual nation states, through integration. Since an individual state's security is entirely depended upon the other states' security, it is not right to reduce European cultural values to identity problem such as religion. As underlined by the English school, global community aims at creating a more peaceful world community by embracing new states with liberal values. In combating with terror affected by religious ideas, it is important to integrate Islamic countries which are under threat. European cultural values are the expression of liberal values as long as there is security.

Esat Umit Tuncer (Environmental Engineer-31): What is European culture? Do you mean Northern European Culture, Mediterranean Culture, Balkan Culture or Scandinavian Culture? In my opinion Turkey is closer to Mediterranean and specifically Balkan culture. In the last Ottoman Parliament there were 67 MPs with Balkan origin out of 250 MPs in total and the Ottoman Empire organised only 3 military expeditions to the East throughout its long history. Thus, it is obvious that Turkish culture interacted more and converged with Mediterranean and Balkan cultures. The most striking example of this fact can be revealed by comparing Turkish and Greek cuisines. Where is Turkey's place in this culture? When you look at our alphabet and government system you can see that Turkey is in Europe.

Kerem Yalkin (Mechanical Engineer-34): Common European Culture captures all varieties addressing our senses, like the mosaic bowls in Roman baths. It is a kind of mirror reflecting Turkey. Many historical monuments and art works in Anatolia today were created during the Roman period. In the light of similar cultural sharing, now there are lots of historical masterpieces in the Balkans made by Ottoman architects and artists. These are just a few examples which make it undeniable that Turkey is the most important and inseparable part of European Culture and will remain so in the future.

Best Regards,

Feyza Basar