

THE IMPACT OF EU-FUNDED STUDENT EXCHANGE PROGRAMMES ON  
THE EU INFORMATION DEFICIT

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BURCU AKPINAR

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Prof. Dr. Tlin Gen z  
Director

I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of  
Master of Science

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Assoc. Prof. Dr.  zgehan Őenyuva  
Head of Department

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully  
adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Science

---

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sevilay Kahraman  
Supervisor

**Examining Committee Members**

Assist. Prof. Dr. G�zde Yılmaz	(Atılım Uni., IR)	_____
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sevilay Kahraman	(METU, IR)	_____
Assist. Prof. Dr. Asuman G�ksel	(METU, ADM)	_____



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Name, Last name : Burcu Akpınar

Signature :

## **ABSTRACT**

### **THE IMPACT OF EU-FUNDED STUDENT EXCHANGE PROGRAMMES ON THE EU INFORMATION DEFICIT**

Akpınar, Burcu

M.S. Department of European Studies

Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sevilay Kahraman

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In addition to often-mentioned democratic deficit, the information deficit- an absence of knowledge about EU policies symbolizes one of the other significant complications of the Union. Despite the fact that EU laws and policies have effect on the national schemes of member states, the researches show that most of the European citizens are unable to understand the name and functions of the EU institutions as well as the policy areas planned at the Union level. The researches also show that the communication policies of the EU institutions are hardly influential about bringing Europe closer to its citizens. In that respect, this study argues that European exchange programs can be considered as another means to increase the awareness and knowledge of the young Europeans about the EU and an end to deal with information deficit as well as to increase support for European integration.

So as to analyze the influence of exchange programs on the knowledge of the EU, a questionnaire was organized within the framework of this study on a sample group composed of students participating in Erasmus mobility programs. The questionnaire was distributed electronically in four of the most well-known universities in Ankara; Ankara University, Bilkent University, Hacettepe University and Middle East

Technical University (METU) before and after the mobility periods. The results of the paired sample t-test which compares the pre-test and post-test results suggest that participating in the Erasmus program can be effective in terms of the knowledge of the participants about the EU to a large extent.

**Keywords:** Erasmus, information deficit, legitimacy, awareness, knowledge

## ÖZ

### AB ÖĞRENCİ DEĞİŞİM PROGRAMLARININ, AB'YE YÖNELİK BİLGİ AÇIĞI ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİSİ

Akpınar, Burcu

Yüksek Lisans, Avrupa Çalışmaları Bölümü

Tez Danışmanı: Doç. Dr. Sevilay Kahraman

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Sıkça bahsi geçen demokrasi açığına ek olarak, AB'nin politikaları hakkındaki bilgi açığı da Birliğin sorunlarından bir diğerini temsil etmektedir. AB yasaları ve politikaları üye ülkelerin ulusal sistemlerini etkilese bile, pek çok araştırma, Avrupa vatandaşlarının AB kurumlarının işleyişi ve Avrupa düzeyinde düzenlenen politika alanlarını genel olarak anlayamadığını göstermektedir. Yapılan araştırmalar ayrıca AB kurumları tarafından organize edilen iletişim politikalarının, Avrupa'yı vatandaşlarına daha yakın hale getirmek konusunda pek etkili olmadığını göstermektedir. Bu kapsamda bu çalışma, öğrenci değişim programlarının da genç Avrupa vatandaşlarının AB hakkındaki bilgi ve farkındalık düzeylerini ve Avrupa entegrasyonuna yönelik desteklerini arttırmak ve bilgi açığı ile mücadele etmek için bir araç olabileceğini iddia etmektedir.

Bu çalışma kapsamında, öğrenci değişim programının AB'ye yönelik bilgi düzeyi üzerindeki etkisini ölçmek için Erasmus programına katılan öğrencilerden oluşan bir örneklem grubuna yönelik anket çalışması düzenlenmiştir. İlgili anket çalışması Ankara'daki 4 üniversitede-Ankara Üniversitesi, Bilkent Üniversitesi, Hacettepe Üniversitesi ve Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi (ODTÜ)- hareketlilik döneminin



başında ve sonunda olmak üzere elektronik olarak uygulanmıştır. Program başındaki ve sonundaki verileri karşılaştıran eşleştirilmiş örneklem t testi sonuçları, Erasmus programına katılmanın katılımcıların AB hakkındaki bilgi düzeyi üzerinde büyük oranda etkili olabildiğini göstermektedir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Erasmus, bilgi açığı, meşruiyet, farkındalık, bilgi

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ADM	Political Science and Public Administration
BREXIT	Short portmanteau for the British exit from the EU
DG COMMS	Directorate-General for Communication
DGX	Information Communication Culture and Audiovisual Media
EB	Eurobarometer
EC	European Commission
EP	European Parliament
ERASMUS	European Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students
EIS	Erasmus Impact Study
EU	European Union
ICO	International Cooperations Office
IR	International Relations
LLP	Lifelong Learning Program
METU	Middle East Technical University
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
UK	United Kingdom





## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The definition of the information deficit on the European Union (EU) can be expressed in a way that “European citizens are ill informed about the reasons, the goals and the achievements of European policies, laws and measures” (Europedia, 2011). In addition to often-mentioned democratic deficit which refers to the lack of legitimacy of popular representation and generalized degree of public consent or trust towards the EU as a political system, the information deficit- an absence of knowledge about EU policies symbolizes one of the other significant complications (Thiel, 2008). It is a well-known fact that EU’s policies have a direct influence on the daily lives of the European citizens because of its rules and regulations on policy areas like free movement, environment, health system, transportation and so on. Moreover, the majority of EU laws and regulations are directly binding for EU citizens (Yalcin, 2014). Nevertheless, although the Union level policies affect the lives of the European citizens, they are not always aware of those rules and regulations (European Parliament, 2014). Despite the fact that EU laws and policies have effect on the national schemes of member states, the researches show that most of the European citizens are unable to understand the name and functions of the EU institutions as well as the policy areas planned at the Union level. Because the EU citizens perceive the EU-related subjects as quite complicated and abstract, they are mostly unable to have an effective role in the Union level and stay alienated.

The utilitarian/rational theories argue that citizens of some of the EU member states are much more supportive of the European integration because of the benefit that their countries enjoy from the European project. However, such an argument assumes that EU citizens are able to think rationally on themselves about the costs and benefits of

the EU membership. On the contrary, since this requires a great deal of knowledge, the majority of Europeans are unable to calculate whether their country benefit from the EU membership or not (Guerra & McLaren, 2016). Moreover, as most of the debates take place behind closed doors, there is a low degree of information shared with European public in general. It is also difficult for ordinary citizens to understand the functioning of the Union, because the system is composed of numerous political actors. In addition to EU's own legislative, executive and judicial institutions with its own Treaties, there are member states' governments, national bureaucracies and national and European political parties effective in the whole system. Moreover, EU political system has an evolving character; it has not only enlarged with the admission of new members but also increased the policy areas under its competence (Birben, 2005). In this regard, it may be suggested that to a certain extent, information deficit on EU is at the same time a structural deficit which is an inevitable consequence of its complex and ever evolving institutional system and policy expansion.

Now, the European Union is much beyond a pure economic union. Today, it also represents a political and cultural community. Compared to its original economic goals established in 1957 with Rome Treaty, the EU has considerably enlarged its powers and capacities (McGowan & O'Connor, 2004). Considering that the capabilities of the Union have been enlarged meaningfully and the threat of Communist Russia as a common enemy has been eliminated, being informed about the EU is more crucial today (Europedia, 2011). Under these circumstances, as its legitimacy depends on the endorsement and support of the European citizens, the EU must establish further actions to extend the awareness of the European citizens about the EU matters and to maintain its reason of existence. Today, like all other political systems, EU needs people's understanding, acceptance and support of the system as well as the rules in order to sustain its existence (Yalçın, 2014). Information strategies are even more relevant today, as the increasing drop in the turn-out rates of European Parliament (EP) elections show that citizens are not convinced to participate and to be adequately represented in the European democracy. It may well be argued that in addition to the fact that the elections of the EP are considered as secondary elections, a lack of information and knowledge about the EU is also behind this decreasing participation.

In this regard, tackling with the information deficit on EU is significant in the sense that citizens' participation in European Union has never featured more prominently. Within this framework, as mentioned by Brüggemann, "the EU does not necessarily lack support, but first and foremost awareness among its citizens" (Brüggemann, 2005, p. 59).

Within this framework, European institutions started to have communication strategies and information policies during 1970s and 1990s. Taking the approval and support of the well-informed European society has been one of the central priorities of the EU outline, particularly following the collapse of the Communist alliance. For this commitment, the notion and principles of European citizenship have been further improved with the Maastricht Treaty (1992) and Lisbon Treaty (2009). Moreover, with the measures taken in the above-mentioned treaties, the transparency of the EU decision-making procedures and its institutions have been further promoted. Especially the negative referendum in France and the Netherlands in 2005 brought a period of reflection about the future, institutions and activities of the EU as well as a great attention to improve communication between citizens and the EU. In this sense, the Vice President of the Commission Margot Wallström asserts that;

The French and Dutch "no" votes in 2005 reminded us very forcefully that the European integration project cannot go ahead without wide public support. It must be a project which the citizens of Europe understand and in which they are actively involved. The people need to take if there is real communication between the people and the policy makers (Nesti, 2010, p. 1).

In this regard, the Commission was now focusing on the concept of active citizenship especially with the Treaty of Lisbon. The Commission was trying to generate an informed debate on EU matters specifically by providing European citizens an access to information (Michailidou, 2008). However, despite all these attempts, public opinion surveys demonstrate that a large part of the European citizens are unable to hold even some basic knowledge about the EU. For instance, it is proved by the public opinion surveys that citizens have a low level of awareness on European Commission and associated institutional measures and capabilities. It is even surprising to see that

a considerable percentage of the European citizens are not able to mention the name of the EU institutions (Kurpas, Meyer, & Gialoglou, 2004).

In that respect, the thesis focuses on the lack of information about the EU, the way it works, its institutions as well as the policy areas regulated by the Union and the implications of this deficit in terms of the legitimacy of the EU and the future of the European integration. The object of this thesis is to understand the theoretical explanations behind the information deficit and to offer genuine and feasible alternatives to deal with this deficit. In this regard, this study suggests that in addition to the information campaigns and other sort of strategies, the Erasmus Program-student mobility program organized by the European Commission can be considered as another mean to increase the participants' knowledge on the EU and an end to deal with information deficit as well as to increase backing for European integration. Although the EU does not aim to eradicate the information deficit with the help of the Erasmus program, it unintentionally contributes to this problem. It is highly important to offer such programs especially for young Europeans, because as it will be discussed in the latter parts, the results of the referendum for Constitutional Treaty and the Reform Treaty in the Netherlands, France and Ireland as well as Eurobarometer surveys show alarming results for young voters. As the future of the European integration, it is highly important to consolidate the trust and support of younger citizens for EU institutions and policies. In this context, this study will claim that practical and lively experiences like student mobility programs may be influential in terms of the promotion of information on EU thereby the backing for European integration among young generations. As they become a part of the Program administered by the European Commission itself and interact with individuals coming from other European countries and who are subjects or direct beneficiaries of the regulatory powers of the Union such as free movement, single currency or mutual recognition of diplomas, it may be assumed that taking part in the program will positively affect students' awareness of the EU and even before generating a European identity, or quite independent of it. In order to assess as if the Erasmus experience has had an affirmative effect on participants' knowledge of the EU and its policy areas, a longitudinal survey was organized within the framework of this study. To be able to measure the impact of the

program, the same questionnaire was distributed electronically to Erasmus students at the beginning (ex-ante) and the end (ex post) of the exchange period. The questionnaire was distributed in four of the most well-known universities in Ankara; Ankara University, Bilkent University, Hacettepe University and Middle East Technical University (METU). In order to understand whether the hypothesis of this study is validated or not, the results of the survey will be analyzed in the last part of the thesis.

The thesis is structured as follows. After the opening chapter, the second part of the study will provide introductory insights about the information deficit on the EU as well as the origins of the deficit. The chapter will also focus on the historical overview of the EU's attempts to address information deficit like the information campaigns, communication strategies and other sort of attempts. The chapter will also present the results of selected Eurobarometer surveys. As the only tool to measure the public opinion and analyze how much European citizens know about the EU regularly, Eurobarometer surveys clearly show that almost half of the Europeans do not know how the EU works and they lack the basic knowledge about the EU institutions, rights and the policy areas regulated by the EU. The second chapter will also analyze the recent membership referendum of the United Kingdom (UK) (2016) which resulted in 51 percent of voters voting in favor of leaving the EU. It is considered that the referendum may provide substantial consequences for the challenge of information deficit and the future of the Union and European integration, because it is well-known that British citizens have been one of the least knowledgeable public on the EU among the member states.

The third chapter will include a compact literature review. It should be noted that the literature largely focuses on the democratic legitimization arguments, the role of the media as well as the European public sphere and there are only a limited number of studies on information deficit that experimentally assess the knowledge of the Europeans on the EU. Even though the notions of democratic deficit and information deficit refer to two different processes in terms of the EU level, it is clear that they go hand in hand. In order to reduce the gap between the Union and European citizens and achieve the increased transparency, openness of the EU decision-making processes and the improved democratic governance, increased flow of information about the EU

actions is highly required. In that respect, the chapter will analyze the discussions about the democratic deficit of the EU with specific focus the different aspects (“institutional” and “the socio-psychological” or “popular”). The chapter will also analyze the impact of the Eurozone crisis on the democratic legitimization of the EU, because it is obvious that the financial crisis made it more challenging to defend the benefits of the EU membership and put the legitimacy of the European integration under much more pressure. Moreover, the discussions about the communication deficit and the role of the media will be also analyzed in this chapter, as the communication deficit is a phenomenon closely related with the information deficit. Because the media is the primary source of information on EU activities, the literature essentially focuses on the national media systems and their agenda-setting role for the EU-related news. Besides, the third chapter will examine the discussions on the European public sphere in which Europeans can discuss common concerns, which is closely related with the communication deficit. Lastly, the chapter will analyze the notion of public opinion in the mainstream EU-integration theories with a specific focus on neo-functionalism and intergovernmentalism.

After the analysis of literature and theoretical discussions, the fourth chapter will analyze the basics of the Erasmus Program. The chapter will provide facts and figures about the program’s background, the number of participants and its growing budget. This part of the study will also analyze the legal framework in order to capture the Union’s capability and the powers in higher education area. The chapter will emphasize that despite the increasing impact and strategies of the EU, the role and competence of the EU in the field of higher education is an unsettled issue, because it has a supportive competence rather than offering legally binding acts. The fourth chapter will also analyze the growing literature on the Erasmus program, as there are increasing number of studies measuring the impact of the program. The chapter will argue that the literature mainly focuses on the impact of the Program in terms of European identity as well as the personal/professional skills and employability of the participants. The chapter will examine the controversial scholarly views about the expectation that mobile studies will become more pro-European and develop a collective and supranational European identity. Moreover, the chapter will provide the

discussions about the effect of the program on personal competences, employability and professional career.

As explained above, an online survey was organized in order to understand as if the experience of Erasmus period has had a positive impact on participants' knowledge of the EU or not. In that respect, the fifth chapter of the study will explain the structure of the questionnaire, the number and demographic aspects of the participants, the limitations of the study as well as the ethical considerations. After the introduction of the methodological framework, the results and findings of the survey will be analyzed in the sixth chapter.

The main sources of this thesis include various books, articles, reports, Eurobarometer surveys and the rest of the EU literature as well as the EU *acquis communautaire*. In order to support the hypothesis of the study, the results of the author's own survey are also used as one of the sources of this thesis.

The importance of this study is twofold. First of all, as it will be seen in the later parts, the discussion of information deficit on EU has been essentially studied in reference to the discussions of democratic deficit as well as the role of the media. It should be noted that these discussions pay little attention to the nature and role of the information itself. Other than Eurobarometer surveys, there have been no empirical studies that analyze the knowledge of the Europeans about the EU affairs. However, as the EU has enlarged its competences especially after 1990s, it is now more essential to take the approval of the largely informed European public for the sake of Union's legitimacy and the future of the European integration. For this reason, it is highly required to have a comprehensive analysis of the knowledge of European publics about the EU, the basic facts about the way it works, its institutions, the policy areas regulated by the Union, the rights enabled by the Union for the European citizens and so on. In that sense, the literature has the theoretical and empirical deficiency about the knowledge and awareness of the Europeans on the EU and the significance of the largely informed citizens. This study is expected to offer contribution to the literature in that respect.

Secondly, there is a growing literature about the effect of Erasmus program. However, most of these studies analyze the impact of the Program in terms of the European

identity as well as the increasing competency of the individuals (e.g. personal development, language skills, employability etc.). There are numerous studies which discuss whether the Program has a positive effect on the participants' identity or not. However, these studies offer limited information about the extent to which participation in the program affect students' knowledge and awareness of the EU. This study suggests that participating an Erasmus Program can be considered as a means to increase the participants' knowledge and awareness on the EU, even before generating a European identity. In this respect, the study is expected to contribute to the Erasmus literature by offering an alternative point of view.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **INFORMATION DEFICIT ON THE EUROPEAN UNION**

#### **2.1. Historical Overview of EU's Attempts to Address Information Deficit**

It can be argued that the information deficit on EU has been a challenge since the foundation of the Customs Union and the Common Market which was mainly considered too technical and technocratic for many Europeans. Right after the World War II, European integration began in order to end confrontation between European states. The basic idea behind the European integration was to maintain peace, prosperity and stability in the European continent by controlling the European states through supranational bodies and common policy areas (Birben, 2005). European integration basically meant economic and political project to minimize the potential for warfare. As it primarily focused on economic and technical policy areas, European integration was originally confined to non-controversial and not so visible and salient fields. Moreover, during the first years of the European Coal and Steel Community, Communist threat was an adequate justification for the establishment of the Union, because it was bringing European states together against a common enemy. In that respect, it may well be concluded that the EU did not evolve from a project strongly advocating European citizens, rather it was established by a minor group of politicians and elites and developed exclusively from the top (European Parliament, 2014). In this regard, to offer an economic and political measure to the outgoing conflict among European states, European people were somehow neglected in the beginning of this process. Elitist nature of the integration process and technocrats developing and conducting the means of integration were effective upon this manner (Birben, 2005). Within this framework, in the early years of European cooperation, the EU has rather been promoted by political actors like national and European politicians. Rather than

informing general public, the communication campaigns of the European Economic Commission in 1950s were principally meant to inform a selected audience-political, economic and academic elite about its main activities and achievements. It was believed by national and supra-national political elites that a real EU would be achieved through increasing integration of economic and technical areas with the help of their policies (Nesti, 2010). This selected audience, the so-called “multipliers” of the European idea were people with power and communication skills to affect the social groups and to expend European message to broader public with their symbolic influence. From this perspective, there is tendency in the literature considering the initial process of European construction as something fundamentally technocratic and elitist (Terra, 2010).

Traditionally, communication was mainly organized by elite and opinion leaders who acted as carriers of information and journalists were preferably kept distant from the Union. Especially before the Maastricht Treaty, European Commission’s attitude towards public communication was mostly depended upon half-hearted report attempts as well as political neglect and outright hostility. In that respect, the founder of Agence Europe, Emmanuelle Gazzo mentions that Monnet himself warned him to end covering about the European Coal and Steel Community (Meyer, 1999). Moreover, the sentences of President Delors’ Chef de Cabinet-Pascale Lamy also affirms this attitude; “the people weren’t ready to agree to integration, so you had to get on without telling them too much about what was happening” (Meyer, 1999, p. 624). Such a tendency made EU citizens feel that decisions were generally taken by political elite and their wishes and needs were not involved in the decision-making process. Moreover, the rapid enlargement and integration process without any public discussion also led to a serious damage for confidence and trust in the EU (European Parliament, 2014).

During 1970s and 1980s, European institutions started to have more specific communication strategies with ad hoc staff and resources. With 1970s, as the policy areas and competences of the EU extended, the first information campaigns were launched. As the influence of European Economic Community started to increase in 1970s and 1980s, political decision-makers opted for the further parliamentarization

of the European level. In order to consolidate democratic input, direct elections to the EP were introduced in 1979 and the Parliament gained certain degree of power in the legislative and budgetary process. Electoral participation for the first direct elections of EP members was quite high (63 percent). This was a historic and revolutionary event in the sense that it marked a great stride in the democratic legitimacy and integration of the European Community. As the single European institution directly elected by the public, the EP gained a role as the democratic basis of the European Community as well as the voice of citizens and the expression of their political will. With the first direct elections of the EP held in 1979, the EP together with the Commission started to launch information programs in order to increase public awareness and interest in voting (European Parliament, 2014). However, the power of the EP was still limited in the sense that the Commission was appointed by the Council among the candidates offered by the member states. In that respect, the vote and opinion of the European citizens started to be represented in the EP, but the structure of the Commission was not inevitably affected by this representation (Smismans, 2016). Within this framework, in addition to the 1979 Parliament elections, the main topics of the communication strategies of 1970s was about the transparency, dialogue between citizens and institutions as well as the decentralization of information activities in the member states. With 1980s, both the number and content of the issues enlarged mostly because of the inclusion of the idea of European identity in the discourse (Nesti, 2010).

In 1990s, especially with the impact of the Treaty of Maastricht, communication policies of the Union were revised and the urgency of investment in communication was clearly realized. Maastricht Treaty was a turning point, as it marked the expansion of policy integration into areas of core state powers, such as money as well as external and internal security. These were the areas subject to domestic politicizations, where there were more visible sovereignty and autonomy costs for elites and publics. Also, post- Maastricht period saw a widening gap between elites and publics' support for European integration. These broader developments made public support and information deficit on EU increasingly important for the EU. In that respect, a number of reports generated by EP suggested different proposals for simple and attractive

promotion of EU to different target groups having particular interests. After the Maastricht Treaty, the first Commissioner for information and communication at the direction of DGX (Information Communication Culture and Audiovisual Media)-Joao de Pinheiro was appointed in 1994.

In addition, the refusal of the referendums in France and the Netherlands triggered a new period by 2000s that the Commission itself adopted a comprehensive information and communication strategy. Moreover, after the rejection of the Treaty on the European Union by Danish referendum, the Union made progress in its communication policies through significant political and financial commitments (Meyer, 1999). The declined referendums revealed that the interactions with citizens should be further improved and for the first-time, communication policy became one of institutional priorities (European Parliament, 2014). This was especially revealed in the Flash Eurobarometer survey organized by the European Commission after the Dutch referendum on the European Constitution in which 62 percent voted no. According to Eurobarometer survey held in 2005, 51 percent of Dutch citizens who did not use vote in the referendum believed that they were not necessarily informed on the Constitution. Also, 56 percent of the respondents who voted in the elections indicated that before voting in the referendum, they did not have the necessary information. Moreover, 31 percent of the respondents who voted “no” mentioned lack of information as at least one of their reasons for rejection. In this regard, it may be presumed that even though the reasons for the no vote are very diverse, the level of information played a significant role in the outcome of the Dutch referendum as well (European Commission, 2005).

Moreover, the decline of the Constitutional Treaty in 2005 demonstrated that European integration is not unidirectional. Of course, there were several factors behind the failure of the referendums in France and Netherlands including purely domestic ones. However, this failure also revealed that European constitutional patriotism did not speak to people and further integration was neither inevitable nor limitless (Scicluna, 2012). So, renewed communication strategy debates are also closely related with the EU’s democratic legitimacy crisis. For this reason, communication campaigns should be aimed at reducing the democratic disconnect of the Union and the EU must seize

the opportunity to better communicate and inform European citizens in order to pursue further integration. By then, EU institutions with their specifically designated services and communication instruments began to work in order to inform and promote the work of the EU, related policies and European values and to develop a sense of European citizenship. In that respect, under the authority of the Commission's Directorate-General for Communication, the EU has initiated a number of programs to promote European citizenship such as "Your Voice Europe (2001), "the Citizens' Initiative and the Citizenship Program 2007-2013, "Europe for Citizens." In this regard, some other additional programs like the Culture and Media Program and Lifelong Learning Program (now Erasmus+) were also initiated in order to develop European citizenship through financing student and staff mobility across Europe (European Parliament, 2014). In the current structure, three main EU decision-making bodies, the European Commission, the EP and Council of the European Union have their own subunits and communication apparatuses. However, because of its impact on the integration process, legislative proposals, operation of EU laws and policies as well as representation of shared interests, the European Commission acts as the main actor in terms of European communication strategy. Through the means of their respective DG COMM (Directorate-General for Communication) and different information services like Spokespersons, Service European Commission, EP Press Service, TV channels (Europe by Satellite and Euronews), website (EUROPA, press Europe) and so on, the European Commission and the EP communicate with the citizens as well as the media and stakeholders about the EU policies and actions (European Parliament, 2014).

In the early days of EU communication activities, the Commission was largely focusing on the openness and quantity of information on EU and it was working in a cooperation with national governments, national media as well as the civil society actors. With time, it became important to create a European public sphere where citizens not only debate EU topics but also participate in an open dialogue with EU policy makers and officials. As a result, there has been a shift from top down information-oriented policy with interactive communication thanks to the internet-enabled developments (Michailidou, 2008). In that respect, establishment of "Your

Voice in Europe” or “Citizens’ Initiative” was meant not only to inform people about the EU policies, but also to promote a dialogue on EU matters and a sense of involvement (European Parliament, 2014).

Moreover, until recently, the Commission and the Council did not have public meetings, rather they have conducted almost all of their gatherings behind closed doors which paved way for governments to distort the policies organized at the European level. After 2006, some sessions of the Council, especially those about the voting of the government representatives and those under the co-decision regime with the EP became public which suggests that the citizens can follow those meetings. However, there are still a plenty of meetings like those without legislative decisions or which are not under the co-decision regime that are not open to public. In addition, the public has not granted a right to access EU documents until 2001. At the end, with the EU Regulation 1049/2001, all residents of the EU were granted a general right of access to documents (Brüggemann, 2010). Moreover, with the European Citizens’ Initiative, accepted by the EP and the Council of the EU in 2011, European citizens were granted a right to affect the EU legislative. In the current situation, one million EU citizens coming from at least 7 out of 28 member states may invite the European Commission to propose a legislation. However, according to Flash Eurobarometer survey published in 2016, “the right to participate in a citizens’ initiative” is the least known right (66 percent) among European citizens after the right to free movement, the right to complaint the right to non-discrimination, the right to consular protection (European Commission, 2016). Currently, it is a basic and legally accepted right for European public to access documents and obtain information on the EU.<sup>1</sup> Yet, even though the right to access documents on the EU is legally recognized by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, the European Ombudsman still collects complains mostly about the access to the documents and/or information, (European Ombudsman, 2012).

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<sup>1</sup> For detailed information please see Article 10, Treaty on the European Union (1992); Article 15, Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (2007).

## **2.2. General Perceptions of the EU: Eurobarometer Surveys**

As the only tool to measure the public opinion regularly, Eurobarometer surveys organized by the EU since spring 1973 are the only source that empirically analyzes how much European citizens know about the EU. It is proved by numerous Eurobarometer surveys that European citizens would like to access to the updated information about the EU. However, despite their willingness, the Eurobarometer survey 66 reveals that most of the EU citizens (84 percent) are not aware of the right to demand access to non-published documents on the EU (European Commission, 2007). Moreover, even European citizens can access to the updated information on the EU regulations, this information is not truly understood by the average citizens; rather mainly understood by a limited number of citizens who have a high level of knowledge about the EU. This is mostly because of the fact that the EU decision making process is a complex structure composed of ever-changing bulk of rules and procedures (Clark, 2014).

It is also revealed by the Eurobarometer surveys that majority of the European citizens regard the EU as a single body, because they are not well aware the differences between the EP or the Commission (European Parliament, 2014). For instance, in Eurobarometer survey conducted in Spring 2005, participants were requested to rate their knowledge level about the EU, its policies and institutions and the majority of the participants rated their level of knowledge between 3 and 5 (out of 10) which is fairly limited (European Commission, 2005). Likewise, once the level of knowledge about the EU was assessed by “true or false” questions, Eurobarometer survey conducted in 2004 shows that only 25 percent of EU citizens know that the EU has its own anthem and just 22 percent of the respondents are aware that the headquarters of the European Commission are not in Strasbourg (European Commission, 2004). Similarly, according to Eurobarometer survey conducted in Spring 2009, almost half of the Europeans (48 percent) declared that they did not know how the EU works (European Commission, 2009). The same survey also reveals that 63 percent of the respondents had not heard anywhere about the Presidency of the Czech Republic for the Council of the EU (European Commission, 2009). In the same manner, Eurobarometer survey conducted in Spring 2010 indicates that 47 percent of the Europeans said that they

tended not to understand how the EU works (European Commission, 2010). The same survey also confirms that like in previous surveys, the EP is the best-known institution, while a majority of Europeans have still not heard of the European Ombudsman, the Committee of the Regions of the EU and the European Economic and Social Committee (European Commission, 2010). Moreover, a more recent Eurobarometer survey conducted in 2016 reveals that only around 4 in 10 respondents (42 percent) indicate that they feel informed about their rights as citizens of the EU, while it was only 36 percent of the respondents in 2012 survey (European Commission, 2016). Similarly, according to Flash Eurobarometer conducted in 2015, even though it became legally binding in 2009, only 14 percent of respondents know what the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union is (European Commission, 2015). In addition, Flash Eurobarometer survey conducted in 2013 reveals that 2/3 of respondents (64 percent) have not heard about any EU co-financed projects (European Commission, 2013).

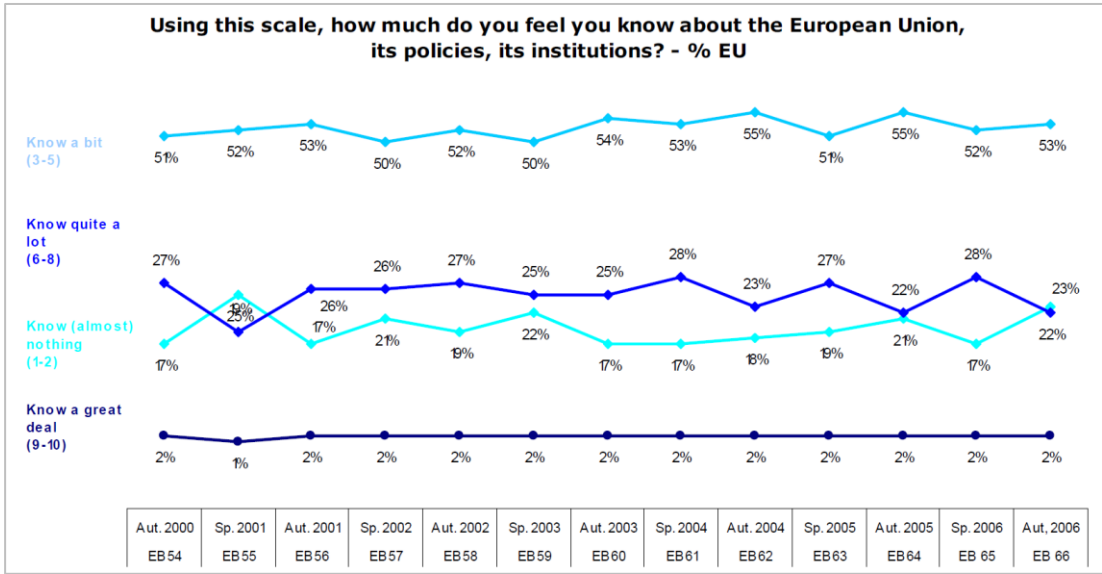


Figure 1. Answers to the Eurobarometer Survey Questioning, “Using This Scale, How Much Do You Feel You Know About the European Union, Its Institutions?”, Source: Standard Eurobarometer 66 (2007).

It should also be highlighted that the above results are not only specific to aforementioned years. On the contrary, Eurobarometer surveys are also useful



indicators for the recurrent trends on the awareness and knowledge of EU over time. For instance, the Eurobarometer 66, published in 2007 reveals that once EU citizens have been asked to assess their level of knowledge regarding the EU, its policies and institutions, between 2000 and 2006, majority of respondents have positioned themselves as “know a bit” (European Commission, 2007). Moreover, it is striking to see that only 2 percent of the respondents believe that they know a great deal about the EU and this percentage has been same throughout 6 years. (Figure 1).

Similarly, the Eurobarometer survey 81, conducted in 2014 shows that despite the ups and downs in certain periods, in general for around 10 years, almost half of the respondents have specified that that they did not understand how the EU works (European Commission, 2014) (Figure 2).

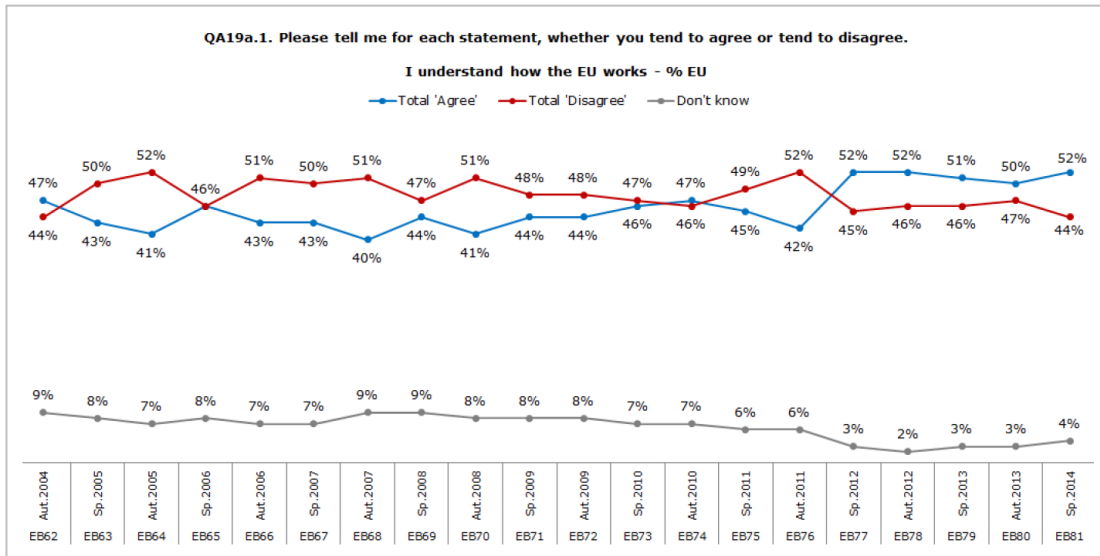


Figure 2. Answers to the Eurobarometer Survey Questioning, “Please Tell Me to What Extent You Agree or Disagree with Each of the Following Statements”, Source: Standard Eurobarometer 81 (2014).

In the same manner, Eurobarometer surveys also reveal the persistent trends on the awareness of EU institutions. For instance, one of the most recent surveys, the Eurobarometer survey 85 conducted in 2016 suggests that for around 10 years, the EP has remained the most well-known EU institution (around 90 percent) among

European citizens after the European Commission and the European Central Bank (European Commission, 2016) (Figure 3).

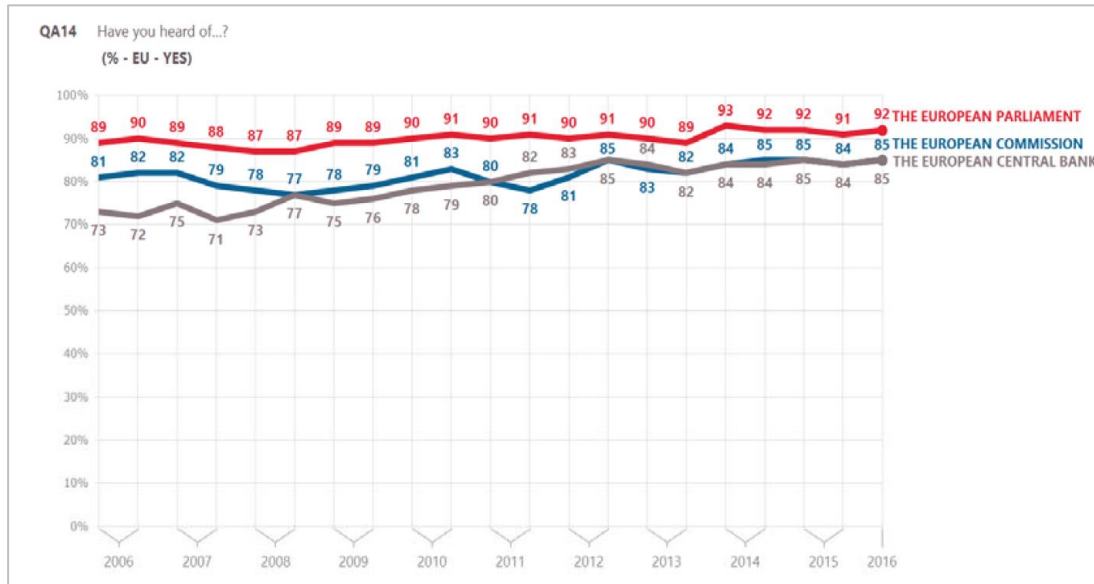


Figure 3. Answers to the Eurobarometer Survey Questioning, “Have You Heard of...”, Source: Standard Eurobarometer 85 (2016).

However, basing on this data, we cannot assume that there is a single and uniform information deficit common to all EU members. Rather, Eurobarometer surveys suggest that there is a difference among Europeans in different EU member countries in terms of the EU-related information. For instance, according to Eurobarometer survey conducted in Spring 2009, while Poland, Cyprus, Estonia, Slovenia and Netherlands are the countries which have the largest number of participants confirming that they know how the EU works, Italy and the UK citizens are the least knowledgeable followed by Ireland, Spain, Hungary and Portugal (European Commission, 2009). Similarly, Eurobarometer survey conducted in Spring 2010 reveals that once European citizens were requested to indicate whether the 4 EU-related statements were true or false, participants in Slovenia, Luxembourg, Slovakia, Denmark, Austria and Finland showed the highest results in terms of the objective knowledge on the EU. On the other hand, the results of the respondents the UK, Romania, Spain and Latvia were significantly below the European average (European

Commission, 2010). Moreover, where more than half of the respondents in Sweden, Denmark, Malta, Luxemburg and Ireland said that they felt informed about their rights as a citizen of the EU, respondents in Croatia, France, Austria, the Netherlands and Latvia were least likely to mention that they felt informed about their rights (European Commission, 2015). In that respect, it is also possible to see that the citizens of a country may be well informed in a specific area, while they may be almost least knowledgeable about the other one. For instance, the Eurobarometer survey 83 held in 2015 shows that while the respondents in France are the least knowledgeable (45 percent) about the direct election of the members of the EP by the citizens of each Member State, they are well informed about the fact that Switzerland is not the member of the EU (79 percent). The same survey also reveals that while the respondents in Austria are one of the least informed groups regarding the direct election of the EP's members (50 percent), they are the most knowledgeable group in terms of the number of EU member states (85 percent). Consequently, it may well be claimed that there is a varying degree of information deficit in EU among different member states and hence there should be country-specific information campaigns.

Eurobarometer surveys also show that as the citizens of a candidate state, Turkish people are among least knowledgeable in terms of the EU institutions. According to Eurobarometer survey 68, while the average of EU citizens who have heard the European Commission is 79 percent, this is only the case for 60 percent of Turkish people. Similarly, only 42 percent of Turkish people have heard of the Court of Justice of the EU, while 64 percent of EU citizens are aware of the regarding institution (European Commission, 2008). In this regard, it may well be claimed that majority of the EU citizens as well as the candidate countries do not have the basic knowledge on the capabilities of the EU and its institutions as well as Union's history, background, member states and so on.

Within the framework of Eurobarometer results, the status of young generation in terms of EU information and support, which is the focus of this study, deserves a special attention as well. The support and trust of young people for EU institutions has become one of the forefront issues for the last 20 years. Especially the results of referendum for Constitutional Treaty and the Lisbon Treaty in the Netherlands, France

and Ireland showed the worrying position, since most of the young people have voted no (Huyst, 2009). Young voters (age 18-24) have voted largely no in the Dutch referendum (74 percent) on the Constitutional Treaty and in the Irish referendum (65 percent) on the Lisbon Treaty (Huyst, 2009). Moreover, Eurobarometer results (2005) demonstrate that while 69 percent of young citizens (age 18-24) do not even know when the elections are, only one third of them participated in the EP elections of 2004 and the main reason not to vote was indicated as “not knowing enough about the role of the EP (64 percent)” (Huyst, 2009). This discussion shows how important is to strengthen the trust and support of younger citizens for EU institutions and policies. In this regard, this study will claim that practical and lively experiences like student mobility programs may be influential in terms of the promotion of information on EU thereby the support for European integration among young generations.

### **2.3. United Kingdom and Membership Referendum**

The referendum is a key feature of the EU integration and since the 1970s, there have been around 60 referendums on EU-related topics. As an instrument of direct democracy, referendums started to play a crucial role at the political and constitutional future of the EU especially with 1990s and 2000s (European Parliament, 2017). However, Eurobarometer results discussed in the previous part suggest that EU citizens are generally ill-informed about the EU policies which could be clearly seen in the low turnout of EP elections and referendums as well as the result of the UK's membership referendum called as “Brexit” (Yalçın, 2014). Actually, growing practice of referendums in the EU context with 1990s seems paradoxical with the declining support and increasing information deficit about the EU. In that respect, especially the recent membership referendum of the UK (23 June 2016) as a result of which the 51 percent of the British public voted to leave the Union, may offer significant suggestions for the unintended results of the information deficit on the EU. European surveys on the UK demonstrate that British public has not been truly persuaded for the EU membership and they have remained highly skeptic (McGowan & O'Connor, 2004). For example, the standard Eurobarometer survey organized in May 2015 approves that UK citizens have less knowledge on the EU compared to other member

states. The above-mentioned survey showed that once British participants were provided 3 EU-related questions by the European Commission, only 27 percent of them could answer all of these 3 questions (Hix, 2015). Once we analyze the Eurobarometer surveys it is revealed that compared to the other member states, the UK is a unique country which shows the lowest results for each year steadily.

The result of the UK referendum may be explained with numerous factors like the Eurozone crisis, economic policies, rapid increase in the number of immigrants, unemployment and so on (Dennison & Carl, 2016). In addition to these most frequently cited factors, the lack of knowledge may also be taken as another factor for the leave votes. This thesis does not suggest that the lack of knowledge is the only and the most decisive factor, because there is not any empirical data which proves a direct correlation between the result of the Brexit and the British citizens' level of knowledge on the EU and the results referendum. Nonetheless, it is worth to underline that before the referendum, a quite number of columnists questioned the knowledge level of British public to make such a vital choice and they shared the results of some public surveys to show that the UK citizens were not sufficiently informed (Berry, 2016). Several columnists and researchers suggested that the UK citizens would be voting for the future of the country with a low degree of knowledge and some of them even called the government to launch a proper information campaign (Huggins, 2016).

The Google reports announced after the referendum was also an indicator for the fact that British society was not sufficiently aware what they were actually voting for (Fung, 2016). The Google reports showed that one of the questions most frequently asked by the British citizens during the referendum was "what happens if we leave the EU?" which once again confirms that people were not aware of the results of the referendum (O'Hare, 2016). For the analysis of Google reports, it is surprising to see that British public asked these questions not before the voting, but after the end of the referendum. It is also surprising to see that they also searched for some basic facts about the EU. Even some simple questions like "What is the EU?" or "which countries are in the EU?" were in the list of the top questions asked by the UK citizens during the referendum (Fung, 2016). By looking at the above discussion it can be suggested

that public information deficit on the EU combined with referendums might have negative or even disintegrative consequences for the EU unintendedly.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The role of public opinion for European integration has been increasing specifically since the 1990s. Especially in the current period, the public opinion is considered as one of the crucial aspects of the European integration both in theoretical and practical terms. Yet, the literature review conducted for this thesis shows us that the studies have mainly concentrated on the European integration and did not truly analyze the level of the knowledge that European citizens have regarding the EU. Most of the studies focusing on the knowledge of the EU do not truly describe the fundamentals of the EU knowledge, rather they largely concentrate to its effects on the public opinion and the voting attitude (Clark, 2014). In that respect, it should be indicated that except Eurobarometer surveys, there have been no empirical analyses that try to understand to what extent European citizens are aware of the EU, its institutions, policies and so on (Clark, 2014). In its place, the literature highly focuses on the discussions of the democratic legitimization, the European public sphere and the role of the media.

#### **3.1. Deficit in the Democratic Legitimation of the EU**

##### **3.1.1. Conceptualization**

Democratic deficit in general indicates the problems faced in the application of democracy in political systems; absence of transparency, accountability and adequate level of participation by the public as well as the deficiency of European demos that would signify a collective identity and a common will. As the democratic deficit is an inherent part of the democratic rule in one way or another, most of the countries ruled by democracy encounter this deficit. This is mostly the case because today we mainly

experience a representative or indirect type of democracy in which people can only realize their political wills in an indirect way of representation (Birben, 2005).

Within the framework of EU scheme, the notion of democratic deficit refers to the absence of democracy for the organs and decision-making procedures of the Union, as a result of which the average citizens find the system quite complex and inaccessible. (EUR-Lex, n.d.). Democratic norms and values were not that much concerned at the beginning of the European integration, mostly because of the focus on the integration idea as well as securing peace and prosperity. The democratic deficit problem started to manifest itself especially in 1990s as a result of further deepening in the integration movement (i.e. single currency). As the policy areas began to enlarge, European citizens started to query the responsibilities and rights of the EU more and more (Birben, 2005). As discussed in the previous sections, the initial solution for the European democratic deficit was to Parliamentarize the European public sphere through directly elected EP and by enlarging its powers. The introduction of the European citizenship was also another way of framing democracy in the European level. With the Maastricht Treaty, it was underlined that the EU ensures a group of rights and duties to its citizens as the members of the same community (Smismans, 2016).

On the other hand, legitimacy may be defined “as a generalized degree of trust that the governed have towards the political system” (Smismans, 2016, p. 340). Even though they do not refer to the exact same thing, in the official documents about the EP or the Commission, the concepts of democracy and legitimacy are used interchangeably. It may well be suggested that non-democratic systems may not maintain their legitimacy, but it is possible to see democratic but illegitimate structures. Discussions regarding the EU legitimacy have been largely focused on two types of legitimacy; *output legitimacy* which refers to the ability of EU institutions to effectively govern and *input legitimacy* which points to the participation of the public and the representation of the citizens (Schmidt, 2010). In that sense, people may regard a political system legitimate either because they are adequately represented in the decision-making procedures (*input legitimacy*) or because they are pleased about the policy outcomes (*output legitimacy*). In general, it is argued that the EU has initially been built on output



legitimacy. However, because of the expanding competences and policy areas, it has become increasingly difficult for the EU to base its legitimacy on policy outcomes alone (Smismans, 2016). In addition to general classifications, Vivien Schmidt offers a third perspective to the definition of the legitimacy in the EU context which she calls as “throughput legitimacy”. According to her, this type of legitimacy includes not only internal practices and processes of EU governance but also consultation with the people. In addition to their efficiency, throughput legitimacy focuses on the accountability and transparency of the EU governance which means that policy actors are responsible for output decisions and the citizens have access to the information (Schmidt, 2010). On the other hand, for Weiler, we can define the legitimacy in two ways; *formal/legal* or *social legitimacy*. According to his conceptualization, the formal legitimacy is about the institutions and requirements of the law. In order to possess formal legitimacy, the existing structures should rest on the law (in the case of the EU the founding Treaties) and the formal approval of the democratically elected parliaments. On the other hand, social legitimacy is about the societal acceptance of the system (Weiler, 1991). The legitimacy of an existing structure requires not only structural, but also social component. According to Weiler, who makes a distinction between formal and social legitimacy, in order to maintain legitimacy, there should be “societal acceptance of the system” as well (Birben, 2005).

The discussion of democratic legitimation is important in the sense that political units are required to acquire approval and recognition of the public and to increase citizens’ awareness about the rules and the system in general to justify and maintain their presence (Yalcin, 2014). However, it is also a well-known fact that the change of effective participation decreases for citizens as the scope of the polity expands. Within this framework, the change of meaningful participation declines especially in large political systems such as the EU in which the delegation is a more evident aspect (Jensen T. , 2009). In this regard, it can be indicated that the EU is like other international organizations which are fundamentally not able to conduct the decision making in a democratic way. But even among the scholars that define the EU as democratically deficient, there are disagreements about the causes, meaning and consequences of the democratic deficit problem in the scholarly literature. Roughly

speaking, we can talk about two different perspectives, in terms of the relation between the EU and the democracy. On the one hand, there is this understanding of an intergovernmental EU (i.e. Moravcsik 2002, Schapf 1999) which suggests that the main carriers of European democracy are the member states. According to this perspective, EU may only enjoy an indirect legitimacy, because the main source of its legitimacy is the sovereign democratic member states delegating their powers to the EU-level. It is also suggested that since the European elections are generally secondary compared with the national elections, public communication will be fragmented throughout national borders (Liebert, 2012). One of the well-known proponents of this perspective-Andrew Moravcsik argues that criticizing the EU in a way that it lacks the democratic legitimation is unjustified. This is mostly because according to him, EU's democratic credentials are in general compatible with the advanced democracies because of the "constitutional and material restrictions on its mandate, inter-institutional checks and balances, indirect control by the national governments and increasing powers of the European Parliament" (Moravcsik, 2004, p. 338). On the other hand, there are proponents of supra-national European democracy (i.e. Duff 2011, Verhofstadt 2006) who argue that "the EU should evolve into a federal democratic state" (Gaus, 2014, p. 3). This is closely related with the sui generis nature of the EU which is far from a classical international organization because of its supranational institutions like the EP, the European Commission and the Council of EU as well as the EU flag, common currency, anthem and EU citizenship.

Moreover, in terms of the causes of democratic legitimation argument within the context of the EU, there are two different but interrelated dimensions as well. The first dimension is about the "institutional" structure which is usually discussed within the framework of the EP. It may well be suggested that the institution equivalent to national parliaments is the EP, but it neither acts as a full legislative body nor has power to control other institutions as in the case of national parliaments. Within this framework, the discussion of the democratic deficit is mainly about the structure and the authority of the EP and the Commission. Compared to the Commission composed of unelected members, the EP has moderately less power despite the fact that its members are selected by the European citizens. The introduction of direct elections to

the EP in 1979 was considered as the most vital step to eliminate the democratic encounters of the integration process. However, even though European citizens directly vote for EP members, it is not the sole legislative institution in the EU. Rather than the EP, the Commission generally defines the policy areas for discussion and the Council of the Ministers largely makes the final decisions.

With the co-decision procedure introduced in by the Maastricht Treaty, the authority and the impact of the EP on the decision-making process has been largely increased. Yet, this did not end the discussion of democratic deficit. This is also partly related with the fact that the elections of the EP are not regarded as significant as the national elections. Rather, for some scholars like Hix, political parties in the EU initially try to win national elections or so called “first-order contests”. As a result, this “second-order perception” inevitably leads to low turn-out rates in the EP elections (Hix, 1999). Consequently, it may well be suggested that there was lack of accountability of European institutions as well as inherent institutional imbalance and comparative weakness of the EP which constitutes the institutional feature of the democratic deficit.

The second dimension is called as “the socio-psychological” or “popular” dimension of the democratic deficit which is about the absence of public participation and support in the decision-making process together with the lack of common identity and interest (Birben, 2005). According to this perspective, rather than institutional structure, the democratic deficit mainly comes from the social, historical and cultural conditions of the EU. The socio-psychological dimension perceives the inadequate participation of the European residents as the main difficulty of the Union’s democracy. In that respect, the report of EP suggests that big number of citizens are dissatisfied with the democracy in the EU level and one of its reasons is that according to citizens, the EU was and still is an entity created by the technocrats and political elite that do not truly describe its motivations and purposes. Moreover, because of the complex multi-level governance structures, the EU seems conceptually remote in the minds of citizens, who are generally confused about who represents the EP or the Commission (European Parliament, 2014). In this regard, the EU is largely criticized in a way that it implements policies which are not backed by the most parts of the EU citizens, it lacks the democratic legitimacy as well as the transparency and it is considered distant from

the European public. Such an argument implies that European elites take decisions on the EU level without popular support and they do not truly take the public needs into consideration (Dursun Ozkanca, 2014). In this regard, it is now even more essential for the EU to have closer contacts with the citizens and eliminate the democratic gap in order to legitimize the system in the eyes of the European public. As the EU legislation takes precedence of national legislations, a model of governance with that much power needs to be more accountable to the European communities to be able to keep its legitimacy and its future. It is inevitable for public to lose its belief and support for the European integration, as if the decision-making is conducted with nontransparent means and the related information is not easily accessible and understandable (Birben, 2005).

Moreover, within the perspective of “socio-psychological” or “popular dimension, it is believed that the construction of a European identity or “we feeling” may help European citizens to be more interested and supportive of EU decision-making (Birben, 2005). In that sense, in the literature it is usually suggested that the EU cannot enjoy a full-fledged democracy due to the absence of a well-established political community or the so-called “European demos” (Liebert, 2012). A demos is defined as “a group of people, the majority of whom feel sufficiently connected to each other to voluntarily commit to a demos discourse and to a related decision making process (Innerarity, 2014, p. 1).” In this regard, the argument is that as a sui generis political system, the EU is not the type of organization that may generate European demos and public sphere which is called as “no-demos thesis” in the literature. According to one of the well-known proponents of popular dimension-Weiler, if there is no demos, then there can be no democracy (Weiler, 1999). In line with this perspective, it can be discussed that because of its deficiency in shared symbols such as culture, common language and religion, it even more essential for the EU to communicate with European public as much as possible (European Citizen Action Service, 2006). By contrast to “no-demos thesis”, one recent argument suggested by the proponents of “demoi-crats” (Cheneval 2011, 2013; Nicolaidis 2013) is that we need to rethink the concept of EU democracy in the sense that rather than as a unified European demos in a shared federal state, we should consider a demoi-craic community built on the mutual

responsibility and democratic consciousness of each national demos (Gaus, 2014). This perspective relies on the democracies of each of the member states which is achieved at the level of executives in the Council of the EU to a certain extent. However, it is clear that this perspective underestimates the problems generated by the national and linguistic fragmentation of the European demos (Van Parijs, 2014).

### **3.1.2. The Impact of the Eurozone Crisis on the Democratic Legitimation of the EU**

According to the study of Sara B. Hobolt and Christopher Wratil, after the Eurozone-crisis, in contrast to expectations, public support has not been negatively affected for the states in the Euro area. Nevertheless, they indicate that for the member states outside of the Euro zone, there has been a considerable decline in terms of the public support (Hobolt & Wratil, 2015). However, although there is not much empirical evidence to claim that it increased the democratic deficit on EU, it is clear that the financial crisis and the following Eurozone crisis of 2009 (also referred as European sovereign debt crisis) put the Union in a more challenging situation in terms of justifying the benefits of the EU membership and the legitimacy of the European integration. For instance, while the Spanish citizens had believed the benefits of the EU membership before the crisis, they began to approach the EU with suspicion, distrust and insecurity after the crisis. The EU integration project has been increasingly questioned by Spanish citizens, considering the EU actions and the budgetary reductions and as a result, Spain's support for economic integration decreased from 59 percent in 2009 to 34 percent in 2013 (European Parliament, 2014). In that respect, it is suggested that with the impact of the Eurozone crisis the sense of nationalism and anti-EU sentiments have increased. Moreover, the crisis widened the already existing democratic deficit, because it increased the welfare gap among Northern and Southern members and deteriorated the European solidarity. Especially in those countries that had been more severely affected by the crisis like Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal, there has been a significant shift of the electorate to more radical left wing or right wing extreme parties. Particularly in those countries, there was a perception that their political elites were no longer in the control their own country's future, rather they

were mainly run by the unelected technocrats of the Brussels (Matthijs, 2013). On the other hand, in the prosperous European countries like Germany, Austria and Nordic countries, public discourse was generated along national lines as well. Within this discourse, it was suggested that as the citizens of prosperous economies they should not be held responsible for the crisis. In that respect, according to Eurobarometer surveys, people who define themselves exclusively with national identities exceed the number of citizens defining themselves with the European identity for the first time since 1990s, which supports the idea that financial crisis negatively affected the sense of identifying with Europe. Moreover, in EP elections in May 2014, anti-EU parties got a significant amount of support and they hold almost one third of the Parliament seats (Polyakova & Fligstein, 2016). Even though it is hard to claim that Eurozone crisis is the only determinant, it is also clear that there is a decrease in terms of the trust in the EU as well as the public image of the EU after 2008. While the trust in the EU was 57 percent in the Spring 2007, it declined to 33 percent in the Fall of 2012. Similarly, while the ratio of positive perception of the EU was 52 percent in the Fall of 2007, it dropped to 30 percent in the Fall 2012 (Matthijs, 2013). In the same manner, the Eurobarometer survey conducted in Spring 2015 suggests that support for Euro fell continuously between Spring 2007 and Spring 2013 from 63 percent to 51 percent (European Commission, 2015). Consequently, by looking at these data it may be suggested that crises deepen EU's existing democracy and legitimacy deficits and make publics more skeptical about the EU and its policies during those times.

### **3.1.3. Relationship between Democratic Legitimation and Information Deficit in the EU Context**

Although there are different definitions for the processes of democratic deficit and information deficit in the EU level, the democratic deficit is closely related with the lack of knowledge. In order to bring the European citizens closer, the EU needs to overcome the problem of information deficit as one of its primary challenges (The Robert Schuman Foundation, The Research and Studies Centre on Europe, 2014). Increased transparency and openness of the EU decision-making processes as well as the improved democratic governance are directly related with an increased flow of

information about EU actions (Michailidou, 2008). Because of the recent referendums declined by the European public, it is obvious that the public opinion is quite effective in the European integration and close contacts between the EU and the European citizens are more essential now (McGowan & O'Connor, 2004). It is clear that if the EU does not take the confirmation and support of the sufficiently informed European public, it will be very difficult for the Union to become democratically legitimate in the eyes of the European citizens (Clark, 2014). If the EU is not be able to take the approval of the European public, the Union may be seen as an abstract and distant organization imposing its own rules and regulations on the European residents (Sinnott, 1997).

As an additional explanation for the connection between the lack of knowledge and the democratic deficit in the EU level, it should be also indicated that European citizens may have negative considerations on the way of democracy, if they do not have adequate level of knowledge on EU affairs. If the citizens are not adequately informed about the decision-making procedures of the Union, this may negatively affect their active participation on the policy processes regarding the EU politics (The Robert Schuman Foundation, The Research and Studies Centre on Europe, 2014). It is also discussed by the literature on the democratic deficit that in case of lacking the sufficient level of information, the European residents may evaluate the EU affairs by looking at their domestic politics. As a result of this, if the citizens are not pleased with the domestic politics in general, this may negatively affect their satisfaction level for the European politics as well (Anderson, 1998). This discussion is also supported by the results European referendums in which the European citizens mainly decide about their preferences in line with the national governments and their popularity (Guerra & McLaren, 2016).

As in line with the discussion above, it can also be underlined that the citizens with high level of knowledge may have positive considerations for the membership of their states and the European integration in general. On the contrary, they may have negative opinions on the EU, in case the European public is not adequately informed. In other words, public information deficit on the EU can be one of the causes behind today's Euro-skepticism. Within this framework, it is confirmed by Eurobarometer surveys

that 2/3 of well-informed European residents have a positive image of the Union. Additionally, it is also revealed by the Eurobarometer surveys that according to 62 percent of European citizens largely informed about the EU matters, being an EU member is an advantageous position (Europedia, 2011). Moreover, according to a recent study conducted by M. Elenbaas in 2013 on two-wave panel data, as the citizens got more information on the EU, they started to understand its utilities and became more supportive. His study also demonstrates that the well-informed residents take their previous evaluations on the EU performance into consideration, when there is a major event that the citizens need to decide (e.g. referendums) (Elenbaas M. , 2013).

Furthermore, it should be also indicated that their level of knowledge is also effective for European citizens' participations in the EU politics with their votes in the EP elections (European Citizen Action Service, 2006). The relation between the referendums and the public information is stated by Belgium's former foreign minister, Erik Derycke as follows; "I am glad that we have no referendums. How for God's sake are you going to explain a complicated thing like the Euro in a yes-and-no question to voters?" (Hobolt S. B., 2007, p. 154). The Eurobarometer survey conducted in 2004 also reveals a direct relation between the knowledge level and the participation rates for the elections of the EP (European Citizen Action Service, 2006). Since the first year of the EP elections (1979), the participation rates for the voting have been decreasing progressively; while the turn out rate was 63 percent in 1979, it was 43,1 percent in 2014 elections. It is not possible to claim that the information deficit is the only reason behind the declining participation rates. But it can be still discussed that the low level of knowledge on the EU may have a negative impact on the turn outs for EP elections (European Citizen Action Service, 2006). The data obtained from the referendum results of the Constitutional Treaty reveals that around 1/3 of participants in the Netherlands and a quarter of the voters in Spain indicated that the lack of knowledge was one the reasons behind their negative votes (Hobolt S. B., 2007). This data suggests that even though the voters do not have a high level of knowledge on political affairs in general, they are even less aware of the European level-political matters. This is even become more complicated in the case of referendums where the



citizens need to have adequate level of political knowledge to make specific preferences.

Moreover, as most of the citizens are not adequately informed on European integration, it is also possible for them to make their decisions by looking at national heuristics and cues. Within this framework, an elite-driven top down approach argues that, political elites and the information coming from them may be effective in terms of determining citizens' attitudes towards the European integration. In this sense, Sara Binzer Hobolt underlines that recent studies (Lupia 1994, Bowler and Donovan 1998, Lau and Redlavusk 2001) show that in case of having insufficient knowledge, the citizens make decide about complex preferences by using informational shortcuts such as elite cues. In her study, Hobolt analyzes the political parties and the heuristics delivered by them during the referendum campaigns. The result of her analysis reveals that these cues and partisan authorizations can affect the voting behavior of the citizens as long as they are sufficiently informed about the party's views for European integration (Hobolt S. B., 2007). Similarly, earlier researches (i.e. Slater, 1982) reveal that negative attitudes in countries like UK, Norway and Denmark come after the negative discourse of the political elites in those countries regarding the EU (Guerra & McLaren, 2016). Also, an additional study which analyzes the media reports during the referendum campaign for the accession of the Norway argues that the referendum process was like a competition among political parties, because most of the news (3/4 of the news) were talking about the political parties and their actors rather than the content of the referendum itself. The party endorsements may be a problem for certain situations because they have a potential to misinform the public (Hobolt S. B., 2007). Consequently, it may be suggested that besides other intervening variable, parties and party leaders (i.e. Euro-skeptical parties) framing of EU issues may be a source of public information deficit or distorted image.

## **3.2. Communication Deficit: Role of the Media and European Public Sphere**

### **3.2.1. Role of the Media in the EU Context**

In addition to the democratic deficit, the literature on the EU is largely focusing on the media and its effects on the public behavior, because the media serves as the primary source of information. Communication deficit suggesting an insufficient and ineffective provision of information about EU institutions and policies is a phenomenon closely related with the information deficit (Thiel, 2008). Communication studies show that especially in the national level, sphere of the media is increasingly politicized, while sphere of politics is increasingly mediatized, as the political systems are obliged to adopt to mediated and televised communication in order to gather support and acceptance (Meyer, 1999). Due to the lack of a pan-European media system in the EU, the communication on Europe is overwhelmingly organized along national media, even though this has been increasingly changing due to the increase of internet usage exceeding traditional media boundaries (European Parliament, 2014). In this line, the EU literature generally concentrates on the role of the national mass media in terms of its agenda setting effect on the public attitudes.

A wide range of Eurobarometer surveys demonstrate that European citizens predominantly use the mass media to obtain information regarding the EU. It is confirmed by these studies that rather than analyzing the party documents or following campaign meetings, most of the citizens get the information through national media as the main source of information. Such a mediated information diffused by the media matters even more considering that the European integration is a highly complex and abstract process for most of the European citizens (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006). In that sense, the mass media in general is a key factor in terms of formation of opinion and political debate in the national public spheres. Considering its potential influence on citizens' attitudes and their support for the efforts on European integration, it may well be claimed that news coverage of EU affairs has great importance. Within this framework, mass media has the power to construct the reality and shape the opinions, because it can leave the certain things out and present the other details as the most relevant aspects (Adam, 2009). For instance, the results of a study conducted by de

Vreese and Boomgaarden with a content analysis of TV news and newspapers as well as two-wave panel surveys show that media coverage of EU affairs affects public opinion about EU enlargement (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006). Similarly, according to study of Sean Carey and Jonathan Burton in which they analyze 10 national newspapers in Britain and their Euro-sceptic nature, in addition to the political parties, the media has a power to affect the public attitude on the discussions for the single currency and the EU affairs in general (Carey, Sean & Burton, 2004).

Within this framework, studies on the representation of the EU in the media shows that EU news are predominantly reported within a national point of view and in a negative tone. Moreover, these studies also suggest that the media coverage varies from country to country which means that EU public has a different level of information regarding the Union (European Parliament, 2014). In addition, it may well be said that the domestic media coverage of European affairs is generally rare comparing with national politics (Elenbaas M. , 2013). In that respect, most of the studies analyzed how EU affairs are covered by newspapers and TV news in different European countries and it has been proven that the news on the EU constitute only a minor part of the media coverage except important EU events like EU Council Summits or European elections or internal and external crises. For instance, De Vreese (2001) in his study comparing news coverage around the introduction of the Euro, the 1999 EP elections and the Nice Summit in 2000 finds that the visibility of the EU in news coverage picked around these events, but almost non-existent before and after of those. Similarly, Norris (2000) analyzing press coverage between 1995 and 1997 finds that the EU was only marginally covered and that coverage peaked around EU summits (Boomgaarden, Vliegenthart, de Vreese, & Schuck, 2010). Also, it is well documented that although the number of legislative acts of the Union has grown by 72 percent from 1998 to 2008, the number of articles regarding the EU in prominent Danish newspapers has fallen by 18 percent for the same period of time (Bonde, 2011).

In that sense, even though it is the main source of information, almost a quarter of the European citizens feel that the mass media allocates only minor part for EU affairs. This is mostly because of the fact that as a profit-orientation entity, the national media considers that the EU politics is not attractive for the audience (Kurpas, Meyer, &

Gialoglou, 2004). In that respect, the foreign editor of the leading Danish newspaper Berlingske Tidende-Kristian Mouritzen affirms this situation by saying that “the word EU is a stop factor”. In addition, journalist and European correspondent Martin Aagaard says that “the EU in the title does not sell”, while news director at Jyllands Posten-Pierre Collignon says that “most readers want to be entertained and they simply skip the EU stories” (Bonde, 2011, p. 156). Moreover, while the media is the main source of information for EU matters, citizens have much more direct relation with national politics and institutions and as a result, they are less reliant on media reports. Readers are generally more interested with national politics in which they have clearer-cut information, know the actors better and perceive the bigger impact on their own lives. (European Parliament, 2014).

On the other hand, once we look at the media side, journalists also complain that important passages are not stated in the policy documents of the Union or written in a highly technocratic jargon and with little explanation. Moreover, even for journalists it is hard to grasp the relevance and role of the European institutions and committees and only few of them can understand the whole process (Meyer, 1999). In general, national journalists do not have adequate education about how the EU works (European Parliament, 2014). In addition, it is also difficult for journalists to explain the EU-related information in a couple of pages that would normally require too much space (Meyer, 1999).

### **3.2.2. European Public Sphere**

The notion of European public sphere is closely associated with the role of the media, because according to perspective of EU elites, especially no votes of referendum in France and the Netherlands in 2005 were primarily result of a communication deficit and the key to eliminate this deficit was to strengthen European public sphere, a transnational communication area in which Europeans can discuss common concerns (Brüggemann, 2010).

There are different approaches with regard to the formation of European public spheres. On the one hand, there are a number of scholars who consider that a pan-

European public sphere already exists in an extensive mode. As widely known, Habermas suggests the existence of an ideal-typical pan-European national public sphere (Thiel, 2008). From the perspective of Habermas, public sphere as an open field of communication exchange and the diffusion of inter-subjective meaning and understanding is indispensable requirement of democratically constituted Europe and European citizenship. An active public sphere should be composed of active and participating citizens interacting with each other and expressing their demands for political institutions and authorities (Hennen, 2016). In that respect, according to Habermas, public sphere, structured as a network of political communication is a place of social interaction. Public sphere, integral part of democracy serves as an arena for exchange of ideas, opinions and arguments.

Unlike the Habermasian vision, those scholars like Eriksen, Koopmans, Risse and Trenz are pessimistic about the European public sphere. According to Eriksen:

The lack of a collective identity renders the prospect for a viable European public sphere rather bleak. There is no agreement on common interests, different languages and disparate national cultures make opinion formation and common action unlikely....A common public debate-which enables the citizens to take a stand on the same issues, at the same time and under the same premises-is thus, not achievable (Lauristin, 2007, p. 399).

Similarly, according to Risse, “we can speak of a European public sphere, if and when people speak about the same issues at the same time using the same criteria of relevance and are mutually aware of each other’s viewpoints” (Lauristin, 2007, p. 404). There is a close relation between the public sphere and awareness on EU, because the Europeanization is mainly limited by the lack of interest among ordinary people in EU information and the domination nationalistic behavior. According to Eriksen, the general public start to engage with European issues, only when they have national interest in it. Other than that, European debate is mainly followed by narrow groups of elites (Lauristin, 2007).

Moreover, many authors also argue that since politicians’ need to appeal public in their home county and they generally use Brussels to legitimize unpopular decisions,

transnational public sphere is limited (Thiel, 2008). By claiming that a unified European public sphere with transnational communication channels does not yet exist, this perspective also suggests that a pan-European public sphere is primarily filtered through national preferences as well as market-oriented structure of the media systems. Except for a few ones targeting a small groups of international elite (i.e. the Financial Times or the International Herald Tribune), media products are mainly produced for national, local and regional markets. In addition, European national newspapers are mainly produced in their own format and language and the multiple language and formats also prevent the formation of a highly integrated transnational public sphere (Thiel, 2008). Moreover, according to Brüggemann (2005), because of a lack of common language and media as well as a shared identity, a European public space cannot be constituted. Brüggemann also underlines that European public space suggests a communication in various countries about the same subject with same references and in the same time. He suggests that because there is not a transnational European media system covering European issues and rather nationally focused policy debates, there are separate national public spheres which are only weakly related to each other (Hennen, 2016). In that respect, depending on the suggestion that the European public sphere can exist to the extent that national spheres open up for the transnational communication flows, it is primarily considered as nationally segmented and fragile (Brüggemann, 2010). In the White Paper on a European Communication Strategy, the European Commission also confirms the nationally segmented European public sphere with the following quotation;

The 'public sphere' within which political life takes place in Europe is largely a national sphere. To the extent that European issues appear on the agenda at all, they are seen by most citizens from a national perspective. The media remain largely national, partly due to language barriers; there are few meeting places where Europeans from different Member States can get to know each other and address issues of common interest (Commission of the European Communities, 2006, p. 4).

### **3.2.3. Public Opinion in the Mainstream EU-Integration Theories**

For years, neo-functionalism and intergovernmentalism have been dominant paradigms to explain European integration. However, it may be suggested that main theories of European integration have not focused on the role of public opinion adequately; rather it has been mainly disregarded from the integration process especially until 1990s (Hobolt & Wratil, 2015).

Neo-functionalism has begun to be effective in the 1950s particularly with the publication of Ernst Haas's prominent work, *The Uniting of Europe*. He was trying to develop a theory that would explain why the integration was inevitable after the initial commitment (Moravcsik, 2005). As an answer to that question, the concept of "spillover" was the basis of neo-functionalist theory. It was based on assumption that cooperation in one policy area would eventually generate pressures in other policy areas which ultimately lead to further integration. Moreover, neo-functionalist theory puts a specific emphasis on the interdependence of member states which will be provided by the removal of trade barriers, investment and human mobility as well as the establishment of common market. The theory assumes that publics will support the transnational organization and the expansion of its competence, because the regional interdependence will be beneficial for the economy as well as the population (Schmitter & Lefkofridi, 2016).

According to Haas, as the key actors of the integration, interest groups and political parties would push for further integration. This is because despite their different ideological positions, these groups would see regional integration as in their interest. However, neofunctionalism is often cited as a rather elitist perspective. Even though groups are assigned a significant role in European integration, for neo-functionalism this process would be mainly driven by functional and technocratic needs. Neo-functionalism rather "tends to assume a permissive consensus which experts and executives rely when pushing for further European integration" (Jensen C. S., 2016, p. 54). There is an extensive focus on political and administrative elites because of the assumption that the populations would follow, once the elites started to cooperate. However, the no votes in referendums in the EU context suggest that voters do not

have to follow political elites. In that respect, neo-functionalism is usually criticized for missing the need of the EU to establish legitimacy among European citizens (Jensen C. S., 2016).

From the mid-1960s onwards, intergovernmentalism has been another yet useful paradigm to understand European integration process. The classical version of the theory was initially developed by the works of Stanley Hoffman mostly as a reaction to the assumptions of neo-functionalist theory. It has begun to offer useful explanations particularly in the period of increasing intergovernmentalist concerns because of the impact of French President General Charles de Gaulle, the “Empty Chair Crisis” and the following “Luxembourg Compromise” in the middle of 1960s. It has been affected by classical international relations theories, most notably from realist and neo-realist assumptions. As a state-centric theory, intergovernmentalism privileges the role of states in the process of European integration (Cini, 2016). The key concept of the intergovernmentalist theory is the sovereignty. In that respect, the theory suggests that EU member states engage in European integration but they do not give their sovereignty up for a supranational entity. Hence the control of the integration process remains in the hands of the nation states. In the eyes of the intergovernmentalism, supranational actors are not independent institutions but rather servants of the member states. The cooperation in intergovernmentalist theory is not considered as related with ideology or idealism. Rather, it is related with the rational conduct of governments seeking to deal with policy issues (Cini, 2016). Moreover, intergovernmentalist theory rejects the idea of “spill over” by claiming that European integration is not inevitable. According to intergovernmentalist theory, neo-functionalism missed the significance of differences among states in terms of state-interests and culture. Lastly, Hoffmann makes a difference among high politics and low politics. For him, it may be possible to cooperate in less controversial areas like the economic sphere, while the integration would be resisted by states in the areas of high politics like political sphere (Cini, 2016).

After the early 1990s, Andrew Moravcsik started to re-structure intergovernmentalist theory which was then called as “liberal intergovernmentalism”. According to Moravcsik emphasizing the inter-state negotiations, the decisions taken by the EU are



at the end the result of bargaining among member states. In that respect, in order to appreciate the European integration properly, it is important to analyze the states' will for cooperation and the inter-state negotiations (Cini, 2016). Moreover, Moravcsik also suggests that dominant economic groups are important in the formation of national policy preferences.

According to Hobolt and Wratil, public opinion could be potentially relevant in both theories. This is mostly because liberal intergovernmentalism emphasizes the significance of national interests in terms of influencing the preferences of national government (Hobolt & Wratil, 2015). However, it is clear that rather than national electorates, Moravcsik's main focus is the governmental and economic elites. Moreover, the following quotation clearly shows how Haas defended his elite perspective;

The emphasis on elites in the study of integration derives its justification from the bureaucratized nature of European organizations of long standing, in which basic decisions are made by the leadership, sometimes over the opposition and usually over the indifference of the general membership (Hooghle & Marks, 2008, p. 6).

Hence, it would not be so wrong to suggest that grand theories have only paid limited attention to public opinion. Within this perspective, rather than the ordinary citizens, major interest groups, particularly the economic elites and politicians determine their support or opposition to the new policies (Moravcsik, 2005).

In addition to the grand theories, especially since 1990s, with the increasing importance of public opinion in the European integration process, more ambitious theories like post-functionalist theory have begun to provide useful assumptions incorporating the role of public opinion into the regional integration (Hobolt & Wratil, 2015). Within the framework of the post-functionalist theory, Hooghe and Marks argue that for the first three decades of European integration, which they call as the years of "permissive consensus" for most of the people, implication of the integration was restricted and not transparent, thereby the public opinion was quiescent. On the other hand, they call the period from 1990s as one of "constraining dissensus", because

of the fact that now authorities must look at the publics' support when negotiating European issues (Hooghle & Marks, 2008). Moreover, for the latter period, in terms of the public opinion and support for the European integration, we can also talk about an ongoing debate between two competing perspectives; utilitarian and identity-based approaches. Utilitarian approach assumes that the public support for European integration is mainly determined by a rational cost-benefit calculation. According to this perspective, those who benefit from the integration in economic sense as well as the individuals highly involved in the international trade are much more supportive for the integration process than the others (Hobolt & Wratil, 2015). On the other hand, identity-based approach suggests that rather than economic self-interest, attachment to the national identity can be a powerful predictor for the negative attitudes for European integration. In that respect, for instance individuals who consider that the EU undermines their national sovereignty may be vote against the adoption of the Euro (Hobolt & Wratil, 2015).

To conclude, by looking at the above discussions it may well be suggested that public opinion have been neglected by the grand theories of European integration and the information deficit has been mostly analyzed in reference to the other arguments like the democratic legitimacy and the role of the mass media. The analysis of the literature reveals that there has not been adequate level of focus on the role of the information itself. Except Eurobarometer surveys, there have been no empirical studies that analyze the knowledge of the European citizens on the EU matters, which also confirms that there is some sort of a deficiency in the literature both in theoretical and empirical sense.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **ERASMUS PROGRAM**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

The name Erasmus refers to the name of the famous philosopher, the renaissance humanist Desiderius Erasmus and it is also the acronym of the “European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students”. As one of the largest and the most prominent programs of the EU, Erasmus Program has been accepted as the flagship of all the educational programs managed by the Union (Papatsiba, 2005). The program provides the students monthly grant to visit higher education institutions in another member state for one or two semesters without paying a tuition fee. The program is overseen by the European Commission as the responsible organization and the national agencies in participating countries with their delegated authorities. It is open to any kind of discipline and academic levels in institutions holding Erasmus University Charter. Erasmus program is composed of 33 Erasmus+ Program countries that are the 28 EU member states as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey. After it has signed the Instrument for Pre-Accession agreement in February 2002, Turkey became the part of the Erasmus projects in 2003-2004 academic year with pilot projects and it has remained among the top sending countries. Turkey’s experience of Erasmus became such effective that, according to Yılmaz it has been a model for its own mobility program called as Mevlana (Yılmaz, 2018).

As a program cooperating with around 90 percent of higher education institutions in Europe, the Erasmus program has a widespread scope. As it can be seen in the figure below (Figure 4), in the first year of the Program, 3244 students from 11 countries became part of the program and studied in another member state. Since its beginning,

more than 3 million European students have studied abroad within the framework of Erasmus program (European Commission, 2015).

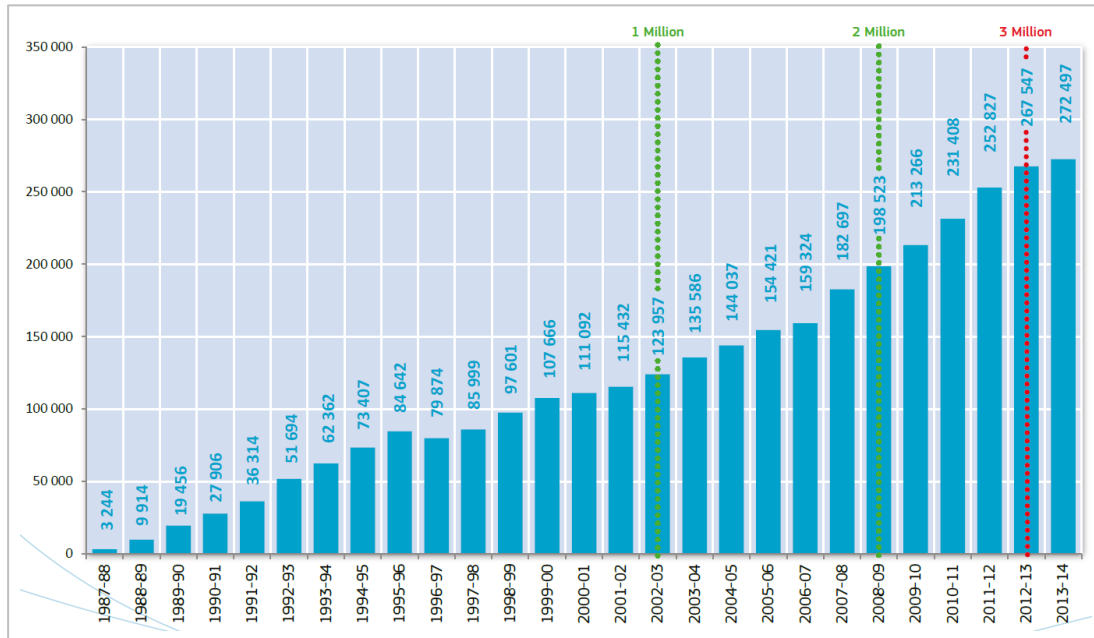
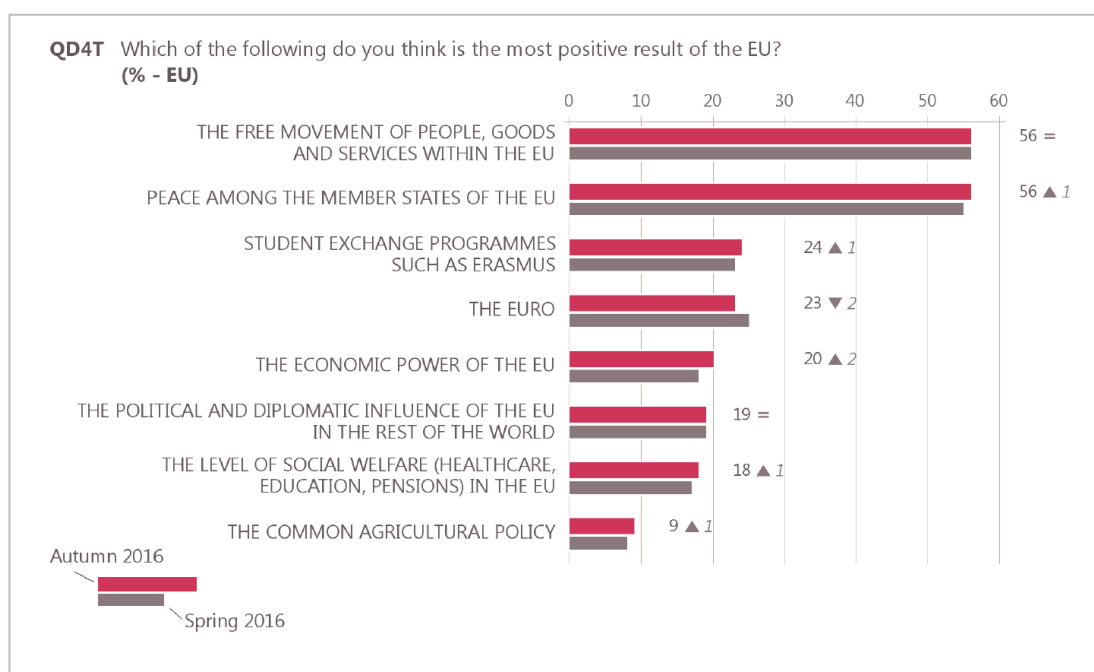


Figure 4. “Growth in Student Mobility Since the Start of the Erasmus Program”, Source: Erasmus Facts, Figures and Trends (2015).

Like the number of participants, the total budget of the Program has increased over years as well. For instance, Erasmus+ budget increased by 7.5 percent to 2.27 billion Euro in 2016 call in which 725.000 individuals went abroad with the program funding (European Commission, 2017). Additionally, for the 2014-2020 period, 14.7 billion Euro were provided for Erasmus projects.

As one of the most widespread programs of the EU, Erasmus Program is widely known by the European citizens. As shown in the Eurobarometer survey results conducted in Autumn 2016, more than half of the Europeans (53 percent) say that they have heard of the Erasmus program. The same Eurobarometer survey also shows that according to EU citizens, “student exchange programs such as Erasmus” is among the most positive outcomes of the EU (Figure 5) (European Commission, 2016).



*Figure 5.* Answers to the Eurobarometer Survey Questioning “Which of the Following Do You Think Is the Most Positive Result of the EU?”, Source: Standard Eurobarometer 86 (2016).

In the official statement-87/327/EEC: Council Decision of 15 June 1987 adopting the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (Erasmus), the objectives of the Erasmus program are defined as follows:

- (i) to achieve a significant increase in the number of students from universities as defined in Article 1 (2) spending an integrated period of study in another Member State, in order that the Community may draw upon an adequate pool of manpower with first-hand experience of economic and social aspects of other Member States, while ensuring equality of opportunity for male and female students as regards participation in such mobility;
- (ii) to promote broad and intensive cooperation between universities in all Member States;
- (iii) to harness the full intellectual potential of the universities in the Community by means of increased mobility of teaching staff, thereby improving the quality of the education and training provided by the universities with a view to securing the competitiveness of the Community in the world market;

- (iv) to strengthen the interaction between citizens in different Member States with a view to consolidating the concept of a People's Europe;
- (v) to ensure the development of a pool of graduates with direct experience of intra-Community cooperation, thereby creating the basis upon which intensified cooperation in the economic and social sectors can develop at Community level (European Council, 1987).

As it will be discussed in the later parts, in addition to the declaration of the aims of the program in official statements, there is a growing literature about the objectives and the impact of the Erasmus program. However, according to Wilson, it is difficult to evaluate the program because its declared objectives have transformed steadily over the years (Wilson, 2011). Since its establishment, the Erasmus Program has been presented as a means to achieve various aims varying from promoting European identity to creating opportunities for personal development and future career as well transferring skills and technology among member states (Psychogiou, 2015). For instance, in his article, Papatsiba has presented Erasmus program with four fundamental objectives. For him, the Program is identified as a tool to support European perception, European labor force, international capabilities and the transfer of technology and skills (Papatsiba, 2005, p. 174). On the other hand, according to the recent studies, Erasmus program is mainly supported to generate pro-European graduates. According to this point of view, in addition to the educational goals of the Program, European institutions started to emphasize secondary and cultural consequences of the Erasmus project, which identifies the program as a civic experience (Ieracitano, 2014).

## **4.2. Background**

The discussion of education and student mobility which is one of the main themes of today's EU had not been brought to the EU agenda at the very time. Since the Union was originally composed of economic purposes in its essence, the field of education, just like the social or cultural areas came to the EU agenda afterwards. For this reason, there was not any direct reference to the field of education in the founding treaties. The only relevant article was the Article 128 of the Rome Treaty which was referring to a

shared vocational training strategy in line with the purpose of a common market. This reference may be well regarded as the reflection of the purpose of common market and employability, rather than as a direct reference to a common education policy.

Even though there were discussions regarding the inclusion of social and educational policies in the Community's competency in the 1960s, there was not any significant progress because of the intergovernmental concerns. 1960s were quite important in terms of showing two different types of European integration; supranationalism and intergovernmentalism. Especially, with the event known as Empty Chair Crisis (1965), the role of intergovernmentalist type of understanding started to rise. In 1965, Charles de Gaulle-the president of France boycotted European institutions against Commission's attempt to shift towards supranationalism and extension to majority voting in the field of Common Agricultural Policy. The crisis was solved with the Luxembourg Compromise in 1966 which provided a de facto veto power to member states on topics which were quite important for domestic interests. When we came to the 1970s and 1980s, the field of education got much more emphasis, especially with the impact of concerns to create a European Single Market. During these years, it was clearly understood that education is one of the major dynamics for economic growth and competitiveness, political stability and social equality (Dakowska & Serrano-Velarde, 2018). In 1971, the Ministers for Education of the member states came together and had their first meeting. In 1974, Ministers for Education adopted a resolution which defined the outline of the future collaboration in the field of education (European Commission, 1974). In the 1980s, particularly in the second half of the century, several programs in the field of education and training were initiated such as Erasmus, Comett, "Youth for Europe", Lingua and so on. With the launch of these programs, the cooperation in the field of education developed to a further level, as those projects enabled member states to harmonize the implementation of their national education policies to a certain degree.

The Program was initially launched in 1987 with the aim of encouraging collaboration among higher education institutions and developing a labor force having economic and social experience in other member states in parallel to the achievement of the single European market project as well. Despite the initiation of certain programs in the field

of education, the lack of legal basis in the initial agreements of the Community for this policy field has continued to cause problems of implementation especially in terms of national harmonization. Education finally gained a legal status, as the Maastricht Treaty (formally the Treaty on European Union, 1992) came into force. With the Article 126 of the Maastricht Treaty, the competence of the Union in the field of education was identified clearly. Within the framework of Article 126, the Union would encourage the cooperation among the member states and support the improvement of quality in the field of education. However, while doing this, it would respect the authority of member states to organize their own educational systems. In this regard, the competency of the Union defined in the Maastricht Treaty was a kind of supporting competence, rather than an exclusive or shared one.

Between 1995 and 1999, Erasmus became a part of the Socrates I Program. Socrates Program was targeting to develop the quality of education and creating a European area for collaboration in higher education. After the end of Socrates I, the Socrates II program was carried out between the years of 2000 and 2006. During this period, some new activities (e.g. traineeship programs) were introduced to the Program. On 15 November 2006, the EP and the Council of the EU adopted a decision to establish Lifelong Learning Program (LLP) for the period from 2007 to 2013. After its introduction, the LLP became an umbrella program including various initiatives and sub-programs such as Comenius for schools, Erasmus for higher education, Leonardo da Vinci for vocational education and Grundtvig for adult education. During the period of LLP, the EU's commitment to the Bologna process in terms of establishing a European Area of higher education was explicitly mentioned (Klemencic & Flander, 2013). After the end of LLP period, for the 2014-2020 period, a new single program called as "Erasmus+" was introduced by the European Commission. Moreover, when we came to the 2000s, the three-pillar-structure established with the Maastricht Treaty was legislated away and the distribution of competencies among the Union and the member states was reorganized within the framework of the Lisbon Treaty (2009). In accordance with this redistribution, the field of education was recognized as one of the fields in which the Union shall have supportive competency. According to Article 2E of the Lisbon Treaty;



The Union shall have competence to carry out actions to support, coordinate or supplement the actions of the Member States. The areas of such action shall, at European level, be:

- a) protection and improvement of human health;
- b) industry;
- c) culture;
- d) tourism;
- e) education, vocational training, youth and sport;
- f) civil protection;
- g) administrative cooperation (European Union, 2007).

In addition to the developments explained above, the Bologna process has been also quite effective in the restructuring of European and global higher education institutions and to promote cooperation among them. The Bologna Declaration was signed in 1999 by the national ministers responsible for higher education coming from 29 European countries. The Bologna process was aiming to form a European Higher Education Area by setting equivalent degrees with compatible and comparable systems of education. It is a well-known fact that especially with the impact of the Bologna Process and the Erasmus program, European countries have revised their degree structures and existing teaching and quality approaches towards a common qualifications framework (Tamtik, 2017). The structural harmonization of the European higher education systems through the Bologna process has also aimed at increasing the competitiveness of Europe in accordance with the Lisbon and later Europe 2020 Strategy (Garben, 2012). Moreover, the Union's role in higher education has become even more prominent especially with the Lisbon Strategy and later Europe 2020 Strategy which aims to turn Europe into the most competitive and active knowledge-based economy in international arena (Garben, 2012). In its official website, the European Commission clearly indicates that "the aim of Erasmus+ is to contribute to the Europe 2020 strategy for growth, jobs, social equity and inclusion (European Commission, 2018)."

#### **4.3. The Legal Framework**

Despite the growing impact of the EU in the field of higher education as well as the growing emphasis of higher education in the current strategies to increase Europe's competitiveness, the Union's role in the regarding field is an unsettled issue. Today,

the Union's competence in the field of education is identified clearly within the framework of Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). Just like the Lisbon Treaty, the related articles of the TFEU confirm the EU's supportive competence in the field of education and Article 6 of the Treaty repeats the Article 2E of the Lisbon Treaty.

Article 165 of TFEU is one of the key articles for encouraging and promoting cooperation between member states, cooperation and mobility of students as well as youth exchange programs. According to the second item of Article 165;

Union action shall be aimed at:

- developing the European dimension in education, particularly through the teaching and dissemination of the languages of the Member States,
- encouraging mobility of students and teachers, by encouraging inter alia, the academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study,
- promoting cooperation between educational establishments,
- developing exchanges of information and experience on issues common to the education systems of the Member States,
- encouraging the development of youth exchanges and of exchanges of socio-educational instructors, and encouraging the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe,
- encouraging the development of distance education.
- developing the European dimension in sport, by promoting fairness and openness in sporting competitions and cooperation between bodies responsible for sports, and by protecting the physical and moral integrity of sportsmen and sportswomen, especially the youngest sportsmen and sportswomen (European Union, 2012).

However, it should be noted that, despite the supportive and supplementing role of the Union, the final decisions in the field of education shall be made by the member states. Even though the EU promotes cooperation among member states in that field, education and training policies are determined largely at the domestic level. This is explicitly defined in the first item of Article 165 of the TFEU that the Union will

respect the responsibility of the member states to organize their own education schemes;

The Union shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity (European Union, 2012).

Like some other fields such as culture, tourism and sport, education has still remained a field of supportive competence for the EU which means that it can only interfere for supporting or complementing the action of the member states, rather than offering legally binding acts. This is mostly because of the fact that these policy fields like education and culture represent the national sovereignty and they are also a means to construct a national identity. In that regards, even though member states need to comply with the European legal order-EU acquis and transfer a portion of their sovereignty to a supranational level, they would like to protect their national authority to decide upon their own educational system and regulations. Moreover, such legal basis also represents EU's policy to protect for cultural and linguistic diversity (in unity) of its member states which is clearly stated in the Treaty on European Union that "it shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity and ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced" (European Union, 2012).

Still, it must be noted that, although the educational policies are essentially decided and implemented by the individual member states, there are several advantages in working together, since the problems experienced in the field of education are similar across the EU even in an enlarged and heterogeneous Union. Despite the higher education is primarily a national competence, this does not take away from the possibility of harmonization tools like the Erasmus Program and the European Qualifications Framework. Despite the fact that it is voluntary act to have a European-level collaboration, it is obvious that education policies of member countries are being more and more Europeanized and Europe 2020 Strategy as well as the Bologna Program steadily adds to that process (Garben, 2012). Even though the EU lacks clear

competence to enforce rules in the field of higher education, EU member countries show commitment to follow European policy guidelines in their national system (e.g. through the Bologna process). The Europeanization of the higher education firstly refers to the harmonization of education systems throughout the continent. However, it is also related with the aim of neoliberal agenda in the sense that the equivalent systems across countries would make it easier to form a European Higher Education Area and to increase the competitiveness of the continent by adjusting the curricula in line with business needs and knowledge economy. Creating a European Higher Education system would also increase the number of graduates having competences and skills required by the European labor market as well as the knowledge-intensive economy. In this respect, the Europeanization of higher education does not only mean the adoption of European Union directives, regulations and politics to the national level, but it also refers to the Europeanization of curricula to increase competitiveness of European Higher Education Area and to equip graduates with necessary skills for European labor market.

#### **4.4. Literature Review**

There is a growing literature about the impact of the Erasmus program and there are controversial scholarly views. In the current period, numerous authors have analyzed the Erasmus program as a civic exercise to enhance European identity. In this perspective, there is this expectation that students will be more pro-European as they become more mobilized. It is claimed that by living together with other European citizens, Erasmus students would develop mutual trust and a feeling of collective and supranational European identity (Psychogiou, 2015). The Erasmus experience will transform into a process of attitudinal Europeanization especially with the help of socialization and direct contact with other European students. There is a comprehensive literature about social identities, but in general it is discussed that collective identities are socially constructed and individuals may adopt certain values and norms by being exposed to these values as well as symbols, narratives and commonalities encouraged by the European elites (Kuhn, 2012). The channels of direct contact with other European students is expected to reduce past hostilities and

encourage the notion of a “People’s Europe” (Sigalas, 2010). It is generally assumed that the “Erasmus generation” who are highly mobile and aware the practical benefits of European integration will encourage European integration more compared to their families or grandparents (Wilson, 2011). The theoretical background of these discussions comes from Karl Deutsch’s theory of Transactionalism which suggests that political and cultural integration would emerge in case of high international transactions and cross-border interactions such as capital flows, labor migration, student mobility and so on. According to Deutsch’s perspective, the increased transactions or different sorts of exchanges like economic, political, technological, material and so on are expected to generate a learning process in which individuals will understand each other’s perceptions and norms (Kuhn, 2012). For Deutsch, if we increase transactions, there will be more sense of community because the interaction and increasing communication would lead to emergence of security communities and promote feelings of trust between the parties. In addition to emotional and psychological explanations, Erasmus students may generate a more rational expectation that European integration provides an easier and better life, as the existence of the EU gives them an opportunity to study in another member state and offers them a program grant. These benefits of integration may also enhance pro-European sentiments of the students (Wilson, 2011).

Considering the discussion above, a number of studies have shown that those students who have been part of the Erasmus program are inclined to be more European than non-mobile students. For instance, the study of Mitchel (2012) which includes more than 2000 students from 25 EU countries demonstrates that Erasmus experience generates an attitudinal change about Europe. The data analyzed by Mitchel shows that participating in Erasmus program makes students more interested in Europe and feel more European (Mitchell, 2012). Similarly, according to the results of the analysis made by King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003) with 425 students, Erasmus students were more prone to European feeling of belonging compared with the students who did not participate in the program (Psychogiou, 2015). Additionally, the master thesis written by Nina Kind suggests that European identity and citizenship is shaped with the help of certain symbols like flag, anthem, currency etc. and these symbols shared by

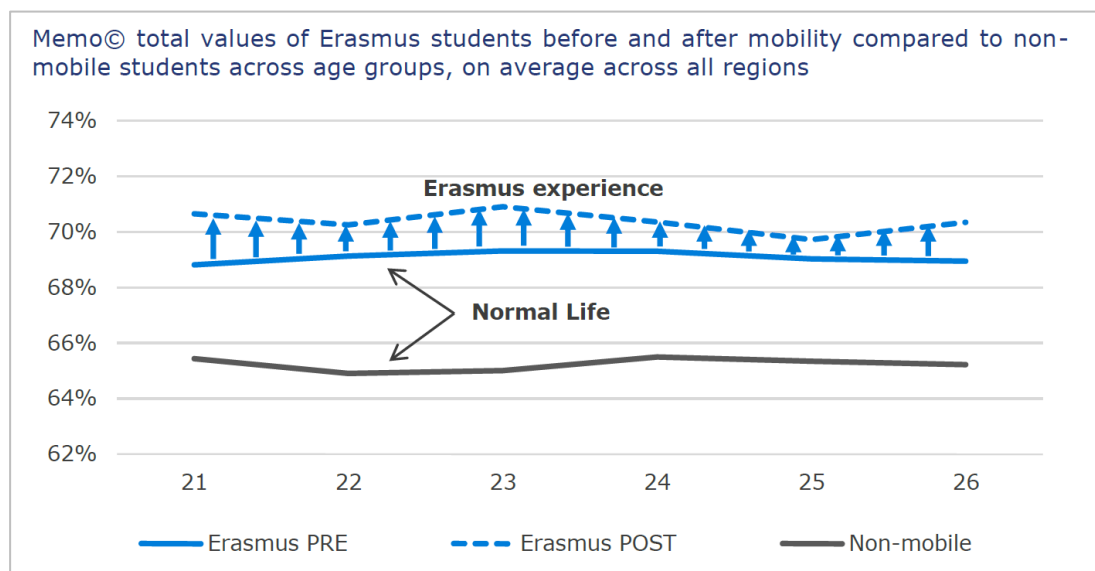
European citizens make people feel more attached to Europe. According to author, Erasmus program can also be considered as one of these symbols on which a European feeling can be constructed. In other words, she identifies Erasmus student mobility program as a means of EU discourse on higher education to promote European identity (Kind, 2013). At this stage, it should be noted that even though Erasmus+ project offers programs for non-European program countries as well, this study is basically focusing on the intra-European mobility program which is open to the 28 EU member states as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey. In that case, the participants of the program are mostly coming from EU states and candidate countries. For most them, their participation in the program is a right-based conduction which is a consequence of being an EU citizen.

However, many recent studies also show that the Erasmus program does not necessarily have any effect on the students in terms of their identity and the sense of belonging. The studies of Sigalas and Wilson are crucial in that respect. The longitudinal survey conducted by Sigalas show that even though the Erasmus program increases interaction among European students, this does not automatically generate a strengthened sense of European identity. On the contrary, the Erasmus experience may even deteriorate the European identity of some students (Sigalas, 2010). According to the results of Sigalas' study, Erasmus students have a limited interaction with the students of the host country. Rather they have an extensive interaction with other European Erasmus students as well as the students of the same nationality. Moreover, it is also critical to underline that Sigalas analyzed students coming to the UK which is one of the most Eurosceptic states of the EU. This also proves us that the effect of the Program on the European identity is not uniform and there may be different results throughout Europe. His longitudinal survey in another study also demonstrates that mobile students feel more European, but this is not because of the mobility experience itself, because there are no substantial fluctuations over time in any of his samples (Sigalas, 2009). In parallel with this point of view, Sigalas suggests that the pre-existing orientations of the students are important in the sense of European identity. For instance, students who have the experience of travelling abroad or who belong to a multicultural family may already have a stronger sense of European identity (Sigalas,

2010). Similarly, the panel study conducted by Wilson suggests that Erasmus experience do not make students more pro-European. According to the results of his study, those students who take part of the Erasmus program are already more pro-European than non-mobile students (Wilson, 2011). In parallel with the discussions of Sigalas and Wilson, the study of Kuhn (2012) also suggests that the proponents of the idea of European identity miss the point that the Erasmus program addresses the higher education students who are already expected to feel European. For her, compared to low educated individuals, university students are already European minded and their interaction with other European students will hardly make a difference (Kuhn, 2012). Lastly, the longitudinal study conducted by Weele (2014) similarly offers that the Erasmus program has no or very little influence on student's identification with Europe. The results of his analysis do not verify the initial expectations of the program's effect for a European identity. On the contrary, European identity seems more effective on the decision to apply for the program than the other way (Weele, 2014).

In addition to the impact of the program on European identity and sense of belonging, the literature on Erasmus program also focuses on its effects on personal competences, employability and professional career. As in line with the aim of making the EU the most competitive knowledge-based economy, the program is expected to develop a highly-educated European workforce having necessary skills to adapt to international dimensions of job market (Weele, 2014). It is often assumed that mobility contributes to students' personal and professional development, because they improve their foreign language abilities, intercultural awareness and soft skills like being tolerant or adapting to new situations. It is believed that the Program helps students to be equipped with transferable skills which are appreciated by the employers (European Commission, 2015). For instance, the Erasmus Impact Study (EIS) organized by the European Union with over 71.000 responses demonstrates that, comparing with non-mobile students, Erasmus students have higher standards for personality attributes (tolerance, curiosity, self-confidence, serenity, determination and vigor). The study affirms that these values are higher for Erasmus students even before going abroad, but the mobility experience also contributes to an improvement. As it can be

understood in the figure below, the study even claims that the positive change in terms of the personality traits would normally occur over 4 years without Erasmus experience (European Commission, 2016).



*Figure 6.* “Total Values of Erasmus Students Before and After Mobility Compared to Non-Mobile Students Across Age Groups, on Average Across All Regions”, Source: the Erasmus Impact Study Regional Analysis (2016).

It is also claimed by the EIS that the Erasmus program also affects employment rates positively. According to the EIS, with the help of the program, the risk of long run unemployment was eliminated by 83 percent for the students in Eastern Europe (European Commission, 2016). Similarly, the study conducted by University of Kassel, International Centre for Higher Education Research with over 4500 former Erasmus students shows that according to these students, their international experience has been helpful in the recruitment process. Comparing with non-mobile students, former Erasmus students assessed their academic knowledge and skills higher than others and considered themselves as being better equipped for employment (Bracht, et al., 2006). Additionally, the same study provides the results of the surveys organized with 67 experts in the field of mobility, Erasmus Program and labor market. The data of these surveys show that almost all of these experts think that compared to non-mobile students, the competences of mobile students improve after their return to home



institution (Bracht, et al., 2006). Nevertheless, it is also critical to underline that employment related benefits of the Erasmus program are not shared equally across the EU and there are major differences among the regions. For instance, according to the EIS, while the ratio of Erasmus students who found a job as soon as they graduate is 78 percent in Northern Europe, it is 66 percent of Erasmus alumni in Southern Europe (European Commission, 2016). Similarly, when we compare the Erasmus alumni with non-mobile students, it is significantly high in those countries like Hungary (8.6 percent) and Portugal (6 percent). These countries also show the highest levels of long-term unemployment, which is interpreted by the EU in a way that “Erasmus brings highest benefits in regions where mostly needed (European Commission, 2016).”

In a similar manner, the study of Nina Kind suggests that for the EU such mobility programs are seen as a tool to improve certain personalities of the citizens in line with the demands of the European labor market. For instance, the job market forces employees to be flexible and to adopt to varying circumstances. Erasmus experience can be considered as a tool which becomes a life lesson for flexibility, as students are required to adapt to the conditions of another country. Through certain publications, quotations and success stories, the Erasmus experience symbolizes an increasing personal capacity to survive in a new environment. Similarly, speaking a foreign language is one of the central features of a European identity, it is required for finding a job and it is also important to make Europe more competitive. In that respect, the Erasmus program could foster an exceptional chance to develop language skills (Kind, 2013).

Therefore, as it can be seen in the discussions above, the literature mainly focuses on the impact of the Program in terms of European identity as well as the personal/professional skills and employability of the participants. However, the offered literature on Erasmus program provides inadequate information about the extent to which participation in the program affect students’ knowledge and awareness of the EU. As they become a part of the Program administered by the European Commission itself (even the documents used during the process are signed with the logo of European Commission), it may be assumed that taking part in the program will positively affect students’ awareness of the EU and even before generating a European

identity, or quite independent of it. Students who interact with individuals coming from other European countries and who are subjects or direct beneficiaries of the regulatory powers of the Union such as free movement, single currency or mutual recognition of diplomas may become more aware of the policy areas governed by the Union and increase their basic knowledge about the EU which may help to overcome the problem of information deficit about the Union and to a certain degree the legitimacy deficit of the EU as described in the theoretical part of the study. Consequently, this study suggests that the Erasmus Program can be considered as a means to increase the participants' knowledge on the EU and an end to deal with information deficit as well as to increase support for European integration. As it can be understood from the officially-declared purposes of the Erasmus program, the EU does not intend to overcome the lack of information with the help of this program, rather it has different priorities. Yet, the program also generates unintended consequences with regard to the information deficit. The thesis is expected to contribute to the literature in that respect.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **5.1. Research Setting**

Especially in recent years, the use of self-reports surveys has emerged as one of the most common methods for obtaining data. In line with this statement, in order to analyze as if the Erasmus experience has had a positive impact on participants' knowledge of the EU and its policy areas, a longitudinal survey was conducted within the framework of this study. In general, surveys can be described as "a means of gathering information usually through self-report questionnaires or interviews" (Hutchinson, 2004, p. 285). However, it should be also noted that there is not a short and clear definition of the survey nor is a solution which will work for all kind of surveys, as each survey is unique (Bell, 2005). The longitudinal survey was chosen and designed, because rather than cross-sectional surveys which collect information at one point of time, longitudinal surveys are organized at different points of time to observe the changes over the same group. In line with the objective of longitudinal survey and to be able to measure the impact of the program, the same questionnaire was distributed to Erasmus students at the beginning (ex-ante) and the end (ex post) of the exchange period and the fluctuation between the pre-test and post-test results was determined through online tools.

In order to have a well-defined and delimited focus, this study did not analyze traineeship, teaching and training activities (staff mobility), which are the other parts of the Erasmus program; rather it solely focused on students participating in the student mobility program. In recent years, with these new projects like "Erasmus+ KA107 International Credit Mobility Project", Erasmus program has expanded to several countries other than Europe. However, this study merely focused on student mobility

activities organized by those EU member states and program countries (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Turkey).

The questionnaire was distributed in four of the most well-known universities in Ankara; Ankara University, Bilkent University, Hacettepe University and Middle East Technical University (METU). As it is not possible to have the opportunity of face-to-face communicating with each of the student, the questionnaire was disseminated electronically via e-mail. The Erasmus Offices of the abovementioned universities were kindly asked to send the online link of the questionnaire to e-mail addresses of the Erasmus students. The questionnaire was conducted in Fall and Spring semesters of 2016-2017 academic year. It was distributed to Fall semester students on September (upon their departure) and January (upon their arrival); while the questionnaire was conducted to Spring semester students on January and July.

The questionnaire was composed of closed-end questions based on scale charts enumerated from 1 to 10 as well as “yes” and “no” questions. The questionnaire was 4 pages in total and included 5 different parts; “EU as an Institution” (15 sub-item), “EU as a Source of Citizens’ Rights” (2 yes/no questions and 6 sub-item), “EU as a Policy Regime” (16 sub-item), “Impact of Erasmus Program” (14 sub-item) and “Demographic Data”. As it was conducted to Erasmus students coming from European universities as well, the questionnaire was prepared in English language.

While preparing the questionnaire, similar questions asked in Eurobarometer surveys were taken as a reference. Eurobarometer surveys organized by the EU since 1973 are the only tool to measure how much of European public have knowledge about the EU. In order to analyze the knowledge of the European publics on the EU, Eurobarometer surveys authorized by the European Commission frequently asks questions about the number of member states, the rotating presidency in the Council of the EU, the Euro area, the institutions of the EU, the elections of the EP and so on<sup>2</sup>. It is also possible to see special volumes of Eurobarometer surveys which were specifically focusing on the awareness for the rights of the European citizens as well as EU’s regional policies and

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<sup>2</sup> Please see the following examples of Eurobarometer surveys; Standard Eurobarometer 73 (May 2010); Standard Eurobarometer 78 (November 2012); Standard Eurobarometer 83 (May 2015); Standard Eurobarometer 85 (May 2016).

these were a reference point for the second and third parts of the questionnaire<sup>3</sup>. The fourth part of the questionnaire- “The Impact of the Erasmus Program” was constituted in accordance with the professional observations that the author of this study has experienced during her professional career in the METU International Cooperation Office (ICO) since 2014.

The data collected by the questionnaire and frequencies of the responses were analyzed with the help of IBM SPSS Statistics. In addition to the analysis of the frequencies, a paired sample t-test was applied to see as if there was a substantial change between the pre-test and post-test. As in the majority of analyses, the P-value less than 0,05 ( $p < 0,05$ ) was accepted as a meaningful difference.

## **5.2. Participants**

The focus of the survey was on short term student mobility program carried out in the Ankara University, Bilkent University, Hacettepe University and METU, respectively. The survey was intended to target two group of students; incoming and outgoing students composed of university students (above 18 years old) with different academic backgrounds and different levels (bachelor, master and PhD). To be able to analyze the results in an objective way, the incoming group would be composed of students coming from different European countries; while the outgoing group would constitute the students going to the different European countries within the help of the Erasmus program.

The initial test (pre-test) was filled by 159 participants in the above-mentioned universities. 50 of these participants filled the post-test as well. 59,8 percent of the larger group was female, while 40,2 percent of them was male. Their ages ranged between 19 and 36. There were also students above 30 years old, because it is also possible for even PhD students to benefit from the Erasmus program. 73,5 percent of the participants were undergraduate students, while 26,6 percent of them were

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<sup>3</sup> Please see the following examples of Eurobarometer surveys; Flash Eurobarometer 365, European Union Citizenship (November 2012); Citizens’ Awareness and Perceptions of EU Regional Policy (September 2013); Flash Eurobarometer 416, The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (February 2015); Flash Eurobarometer 430, European Union Citizenship (October 2015)

graduate-level students (20,5 percent Master and 6,1 percent PhD students). The cumulative age of the participant group was 23 and the students who are 22 years old (20,5 percent) and 21 years old (19,7 percent) constituted the largest groups.

In addition to outgoing Turkish students, the survey was sent to incoming Erasmus students coming to Turkey from different European countries. However, because of the limitations explained below, there were only a few incoming students and as a result, Turkish students represented the largest group (92,1 percent) in terms of nationality. The distribution of participations' nationalities could be seen Table 1.

Table 1

*Distribution of Participants' Nationalities, Source: Questionnaire of the Author*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Cyprus	1	,6	,8	,8
	France	1	,6	,8	1,6
	Germany	5	3,1	4,0	5,6
	Iceland	1	,6	,8	6,3
	Latvia	2	1,3	1,6	7,9
	Turkey	116	73,0	92,1	100,0
	Total	126	79,2	100,0	
Missing	System	33	20,8		
Total		159	100,0		

Because of this limitation, this study does not claim to be representing the entire target population. As it was not possible to cover all relevant types of students, the study could not be truly representative. Yet, the results of the survey are still important as they provided informative outputs.

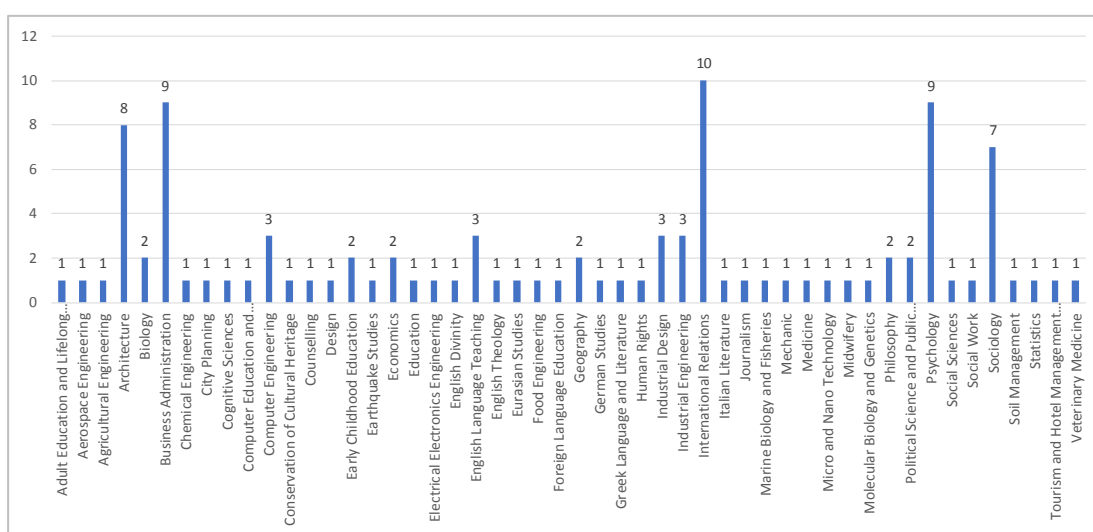
The distribution of the countries that the participants studied during their Erasmus period can be also seen in the Table 2.

Table 2

*Distribution of the Host Countries, Source: Questionnaire of the Author*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Austria	2	1,3	1,5	1,5
	Belgium	5	3,1	3,8	5,3
	Czech Republic	4	2,5	3,0	8,3
	Denmark	1	,6	,8	9,1
	France	3	1,9	2,3	11,4
	Finland	2	1,3	1,5	12,9
	Germany	38	23,9	28,8	41,7
	Greece	8	5,0	6,1	47,7
	Hungary	1	,6	,8	48,5
	Italy	11	6,9	8,3	56,8
	Latvia	2	1,3	1,5	58,3
	Lithuania	1	,6	,8	59,1
	Luxembourg	1	,6	,8	59,8
	Netherlands	10	6,3	7,6	67,4
	Poland	4	2,5	3,0	70,5
	Portugal	7	4,4	5,3	75,8
	Slovenia	1	,6	,8	76,5
	Spain	6	3,8	4,5	81,1
	Sweden	3	1,9	2,3	83,3
	Turkey	9	5,7	6,8	90,2
	United Kingdom	13	8,2	9,8	100,0
	Total	132	83,0	100,0	
Missing	System	27	17,0		
Total		159	100,0		

Among 159 participants, 102 of them indicated their academic programs, while the rest 57 participants preferred not to mention their departments. The distribution of their academic programs can be seen in the figure above. Even though there were also students coming from the Natural and Applied Sciences and some other departments, most of the students were studying at the departments of International Relations, Business Administration, Psychology, Architecture and Sociology, which may also suggest that the students of Social Sciences are more prone to study abroad.

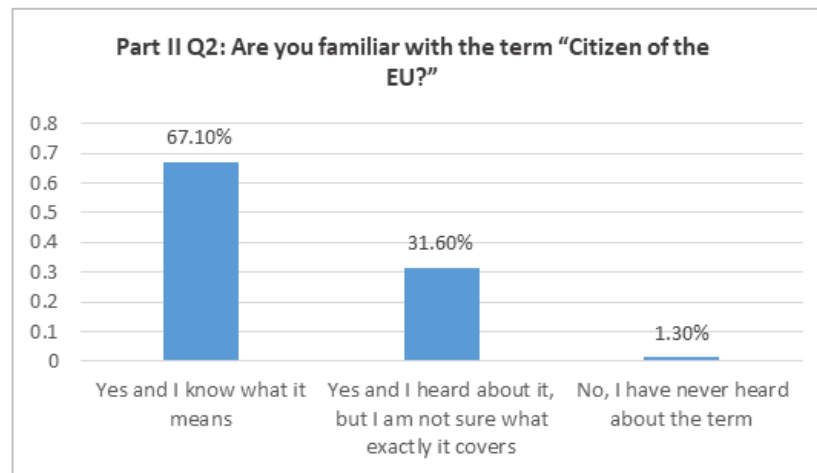


*Figure 7.* Answers to Author’s Questionnaire Asking the Question “Please Indicate Your Academic Program?”, Source: Questionnaire of the Author.

In addition to their demographic information, it must be stated that 58,5 percent of the participants indicated that they have been in another EU country other than their home/host countries, which may confirm the claim that the students participating in EU mobility programs are already familiar with other EU states and European culture.

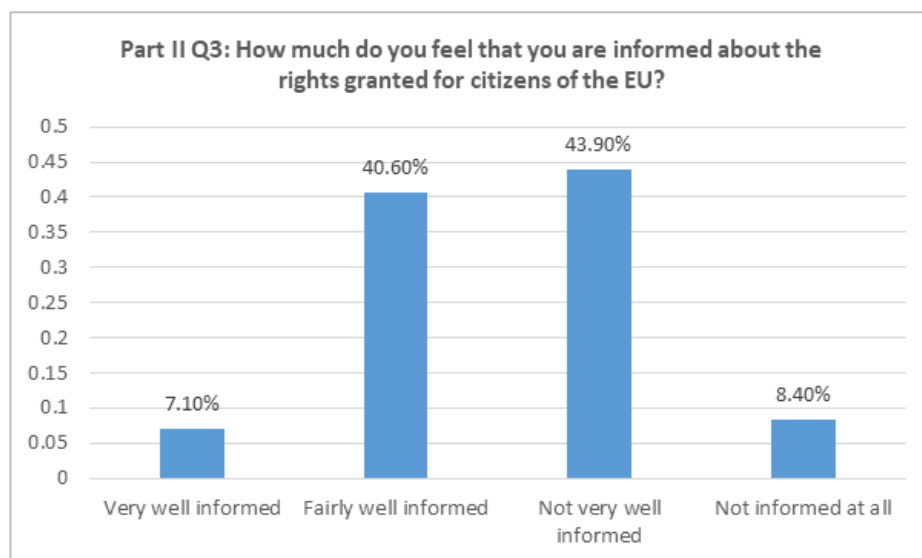
Moreover, participants were asked whether they were familiar with the term “Citizen of the EU?” (Figure 8). Most of the participants (67,1 percent) indicated that they knew what it meant in the Question 2 (Part II).





*Figure 8.* Answers to Author’s Questionnaire Asking the Question “Are You Familiar with the Term Citizen of the EU?”, Source: Questionnaire of the Author.

On the other hand, in Question 3 (Part II), 43,9 percent of the students stated that they were not very well informed about the rights granted for the citizens of the EU (Figure 9). Additionally, in order to assess their background in terms of academic information, participants were also asked whether they have ever taken any course related to the EU and 81,8 percent of the students answered as “no”.



*Figure 9.* Answers to Author’s Questionnaire Asking the Question “How Much Do You Feel That You Are Informed About the Rights Granted For Citizens of the EU?”, Source: Questionnaire of the Author.

### **5.3. Limitations**

This study was intended to deliver the questionnaire to both incoming and outgoing Erasmus students. However, because of the political developments experienced in Turkey (e.g. constant bombings and terrorist attacks, 15 July coup d'état attempt etc.), the number of students coming from European countries has dropped significantly in recent years. For instance, according to the records of its international office, at METU, there were 134 students coming from countries in Europe in 2014-2015 academic year. Similarly, the number of students coming from the countries in Europe was 106 in 2015-2016 academic year. Unfortunately, this number has dropped to 28 in 2016-2017 academic year and to 21 in 2017-2018 academic year. Even though the questionnaire was distributed in four different universities in Ankara, the number of European students who have filled the survey was rare and they have not filled the post-test either. Because of this limitation, the survey turned into a study which mainly measures the impact of the program on outgoing students (from Turkey). As Turkey is not a member state yet, it is likely that the knowledge of Turkish students on the EU may be already at a lower degree than the students living in other European countries. Consequently, it should be beard in mind that the result could be bigger for Turkish students. If we had chance to analyze the answers of incoming European students, we would have an opportunity to compare the results for both Turkish and other European students and this would have provided us with a more accurate picture.

In addition to the political developments experienced in the country, the number of participants remained limited, because in general it is very difficult to find respondents who could fulfill surveys on a voluntary basis without any incentive. This is a general restriction for all survey studies and many researchers are also well aware of and complain about the fact that response rates have been decreasing over the past few decades. As a result of this decline, researchers have come to rely on various incentives (e.g. pre-payment, post-payment, credit or grade for questionnaires conducted within the framework of specific courses etc.) in order to attract the interest of respondents and to increase the response rates (Cole, Sarraf, & Wang, 2015). Considering this limitation, it is even more difficult to find respondents for questionnaires which require

both pre-test and post-test questions; and as a result, the number of participants for post-test has remained even smaller than the initial respondents.

Lastly, as the surveys depend upon self-reporting, there is no way to be sure that respondents answer the questions truthfully and accurately. It is not possible to know whether the respondents have really concentrated on the question or read it fully before answering.

#### **5.4. Ethical Considerations**

Just like any other type of research including human subjects, conducting a questionnaire requires obedience to certain ethical principles. The most important part of this principles is that in order to conduct this type of research under the auspices of the University in question, it is required to receive an approval of research with human subjects prior to conducting the study (Hutchinson, 2004). In order to comply with these ethical and academic norms and principles, a written approval (appendix) was received from the Ethical Commissions of the four universities where the questionnaire was distributed.

Moreover, the data indicated in this study was kept confidential as the answers given by participants have been evaluated only by the researcher and the thesis advisor. The analyzed data would be used in scientific publications in line with the principle of confidentiality. The participants were also informed about the confidentiality of their data. Personal information like the name or address of respondents was not asked within the questionnaire. However, e-mail information of the participants was asked in order to distribute the same questionnaire to those individuals who have already filled the pre-test at the beginning of the mobility period. The e-mail addresses of the participants was not shared with third parties and this was stated in the questionnaire as well. As filling the questionnaire was based on a volunteer basis, those students who do not want to indicate their e-mail addresses did not participate in the study either.

The aim and the description of the survey was indicated in the consent form that was also shared with those participants at the first page of the questionnaire. Moreover, the purpose and the brief description of the study was also stated in the invitation message.

Both the consent form and the invitation message also stated that the questionnaire depends on a volunteer basis and participants can withdraw from the study at any time.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The first part of the questionnaire is dedicated to the EU's peculiarities as an institution. This part of the study was aiming to assess whether there was a significant increase in the participants' awareness and knowledge in terms of the EU's institutional features. For instance, as the students have increasingly become part of an EU program organized by one of the EU's principal bodies-the European Commission, it was expected that there would be an increase in participants' awareness of the name and key functions of the EU organs. Moreover, it is required for institutions to use the logo of the European Commission and the EU flag on the documents that have been used during the exchange period. For this reason, students were expected to increase their awareness of the logo and flag of the EU at least. Similarly, it is also possible for students to have an experience on the elections to the EP or on the celebrations of the Europe Day and hear the anthem of Europe during their study abroad.

The outcomes of the paired sample t-test show that according to the comparison of the means (the average of the answers in a scale chart enumerated from 1 to 10), there has been an increase in the knowledge of the Erasmus participants in each sub item of "Part I: The EU as an Institution". The percentage of increases in means can be seen in the table below. However, according to statistical rules, only the results for which the P-value is less than 0,05 is accepted to make a significant difference. In that sense, results demonstrate that there has been a significant increase in the knowledge of Erasmus participants in terms of the "Anthem of Europe", "Name of the EU Organs", "Functions of the EU Organs", "Decision-Making Style of the EU Organs", "The Method by which the Members of the EP are Elected", "Date of the Next EP Elections and Rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU". As can be seen in the table below,

for other items, there has been slight increases as well, but according to statistical rules, they are not accepted as substantial changes. This being said, the average of initial answers shows that, compared to other objects, participants are already familiar with the “EU Flag” together with the “Number and Name of the EU Member States”. Moreover, the average of initial answers show that the students have already had high level of knowledge about “Turkey’s Accession Process” at the beginning. Due to the limitations explained in the previous parts, the largest group of participants were Turkish students who were already familiar with Turkey’s accession process.

Table 3

*Results of the Author’s Questionnaire-Part I: EU as an Institution,  
Source: Questionnaire of the Author (\*  $p < 0,05$ )*

<b>PART I: EU AS AN INSTITUTION</b>				
	<b>Mean Before</b>	<b>Mean After</b>	<b>Difference (Increase) in Mean (%)</b>	<b>P Value</b>
EU Flag	8,02	8,18	2,00%	0,590
The Cities that the EU headquarters are Located	6,02	6,66	10,63%	0,080
Europe Day	3,18	3,84	20,75%	0,068
Anthem of Europe	3,38	4,24	25,44%	<b>0,013*</b>
The Period that the EU was Established	5,08	5,58	9,84%	0,062
Number of EU Member States	6,40	6,64	3,75%	0,472
Name of the EU Member States	7,08	7,52	6,21%	0,132
Candidate States for EU Membership	5,86	6,20	5,80%	0,307
Turkey’s Accession Process	6,90	7,18	4,06%	0,346
Name of the EU Organs	4,72	5,22	10,59%	<b>0,037*</b>
Functions of the EU Organs	4,58	5,22	13,97%	<b>0,022*</b>
Decision-Making Systems of the EU Organs	4,26	5,08	19,25%	<b>0,001*</b>
The Method by which the Members of European Parliament are Elected	3,90	4,72	21,03%	<b>0,004*</b>
Date of the Next European Parliament Elections	2,50	3,22	28,80%	<b>0,033*</b>
Rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU	3,04	3,68	21,05%	<b>0,029*</b>

The second part of the study sought to analyze if there has been any increase in participants' knowledge about the EU as a source of citizens' rights. Since exchange students could have personally experienced the benefits of certain legal rights of EU citizenship such as the right of free movement across member states or the right to reside and study in another member country, it was expected that there would be an increase in students' knowledge about those rights granted for EU citizens only. Similarly, if there was any practical difficulty about their exchange period, students could have realized that they have the right to make a complaint or to send a petition to the European Commission which is the main responsible institution for the Erasmus program.

The comparison of the means according to the outcomes of the paired sample t-test demonstrate that there has been an increase in the knowledge of the Erasmus participants in each sub item of "Part II: EU as A Source of Citizens' Rights". The percentage of increases can be seen in the table below. However, as mentioned above, only the results for which the P value is less than 0,05 is accepted as a substantial difference. As a result, it is acknowledged that there has been a substantial increase in the knowledge of Erasmus students in terms of "Free Movement Across Member States", "Reside and Study Across Member States", "Right to Make Complaint to the European Commission, EP or European Ombudsman", "Right to Participate in a Citizens' Initiative". For other items, there has been slight increases as well, but according to statistical rules, they are not accepted as significant changes. Although there was not a meaningful increase, the averages of the initial answers demonstrate that compared to other objects, participants already had high level of knowledge about "Free Movement Across Member States" and "Reside and Study Across Member States" at the beginning of their exchange period.

Table 4

*Results of the Author's Questionnaire-Part II: EU as a Source of Citizens' Rights, Source: Questionnaire of the Author (\*  $p < 0,05$ )*

<b>PART II: EU AS A SOURCE OF CITIZENS' RIGHTS</b>				
	<b>Mean Before</b>	<b>Mean After</b>	<b>Difference (Increase) in Mean (%)</b>	<b>P Value</b>
Free Movement Across Member States	8,14	8,94	9,83%	<b>0,014*</b>
Reside and Study Across Member States	7,24	7,92	9,39%	<b>0,035*</b>
Right to Petition to Key EU institutions	5,36	6,22	16,04%	0,058
Right to Make Complaint to the European Commission, European Parliament or European Ombudsman	5,04	5,84	15,87%	<b>0,049*</b>
Right to Ask for Help at Embassies of Other EU Member States if Citizen's Country does not Have an Embassy There	4,84	5,68	17,36%	0,098
Right to Participate in a Citizens' Initiative	4,62	5,42	17,32%	<b>0,037*</b>

The third part of the questionnaire was designed to assess whether there has been an increase in the participants' knowledge of the EU as a policy regime that has authority to regulate certain common policy areas. For instance, participants coming from the other EU countries could realize that their European Health Insurance Card would be valid in all EU member states. Similarly, they would see that the Euro is a common currency in many EU members and they would experience that there are similar type of EU regulations in certain policy areas like public housing, transportation, taxation or environment etc. Students' usage of public transportation systems (e.g. train, bus etc.) when travelling around Europe may give them an idea about the transportation networks linking most of the European countries. Additionally, it is highly possible for students to be exposed to EU legal rules and regulations (foreign affairs, crime, terrorism etc.) through TV news, newspapers, demonstrations or public debates in the host country. Moreover, during their exchange period, it is also possible for students



to take courses related with the EU at the host institution which may also help them to increase their knowledge about the EU's internal policies and foreign relations.

As for the "Part III: EU as A Policy Regime", the P value rule ( $p < 0,05$ ) demonstrates that there have been meaningful increases in the Erasmus participants' knowledge on "Fighting Crime", "Fighting Terrorism", "Fighting Unemployment", "Foreign Affairs", "Health Care System", "Housing", "Immigration" and "Public Transport." When we compare the initial and subsequent means according to the results of the paired sample t-test, there have been slight increases in the other objects as well. However, only the results less than 0,05 is acknowledged as a substantial increase. Even though there were not significant increases, the averages of the initial answers also show that compared to other objects, participants already had high level of knowledge about the EU's policy regimes in the fields of "Environment", "Human Rights" and "Financial Markets" at the beginning of their Erasmus period.

Table 5

*Results of the Author's Questionnaire-Part III: EU as a Policy Regime,  
Source: Questionnaire of the Author (\* $p < 0,05$ )*

<b>PART III: EU AS A POLICY REGIME</b>				
	<b>Mean Before</b>	<b>Mean After</b>	<b>Difference (Increase) in Mean (%)</b>	<b>P Value</b>
Defense	<b>4,92</b>	<b>5,48</b>	11,38%	0,148
Fighting Crime	4,68	5,42	15,81%	<b>0,050*</b>
Fighting Terrorism	5,04	5,98	18,65%	<b>0,019*</b>
Fighting Unemployment	5,02	5,76	14,74%	<b>0,029*</b>
Foreign Affairs	5,44	6,44	18,38%	<b>0,007*</b>
Health Care System (e.g. health insurance)	5,66	6,60	16,61%	<b>0,010*</b>
Housing	4,88	6,26	28,28%	<b>0,002*</b>
Immigration	5,68	6,70	17,96%	<b>0,027*</b>
Pensions	4,76	5,60	17,65%	0,059
Public Transport	5,68	6,64	16,90%	<b>0,049</b>
Protecting the Environment	6,42	6,64	3,43%	0,557
Protection of Human Rights	6,68	7,06	5,69%	0,266
Regulating Economic Governance	5,72	6,10	6,64%	0,411
Regulating Financial Markets (e.g. Euro as a common currency)	6,12	6,44	5,23%	0,476
Taxation	4,82	5,30	9,96%	0,269

As it can be understood from the results above, in a number of items, there were meaningful increases. Even though there was not significant increase in each of the objects (according to P value), the comparison of the initial and subsequent means shows that there have been slight increases. These results suggest that participating in Erasmus program has a positive influence on the knowledge of the participants about the EU.

As explained previously, especially since the 1990s, gaining the consent of well-informed European societies has become quite important for the legitimacy of the EU. Compared to the pre-Maastricht phase of the EU, public attitudes have now become more important so that it is not possible for the EU to maintain its legitimacy without European peoples' recognition, acceptance and understanding of the benefits of the EU scheme. Because of this, the EU has been working on a number of communication strategies and information campaigns. The results of this study show that participation in the Erasmus program may also be an effective tool to increase the awareness and knowledge of young Europeans about the EU as an institution, as a source of citizens' rights and as a policy regime. As one way of experimental learning, this process may be even more effective than a textual reading about the lengthy and complicated information about the EU. As a result, this study suggests that the Erasmus Program can be considered as a means to increase the participants' knowledge on the EU and an effective tool for tackling the Union's information deficit as well as to increase public support for European integration.

The results of the initial survey (pre-test) filled by 159 students show that the participants were also well aware the impact of the Erasmus program in terms of increasing their awareness about the EU. In Part IV, the participants were provided with a list of objects which are considered to be the most important aspects of the Program that might be helpful for participants in increasing their knowledge about the EU. For example, it was expected that the participants would increase their awareness about the Schengen regulations because of the visa procedures that they experienced before and during their study abroad. Moreover, it was assumed that the students would also learn the policies and regulations in other EU states from each other (interaction) and from the mass media organs and news in the host country. It was also

believed that because of the daily life experiences in the host country, students would understand the EU regulations in certain policy areas like monetary domain, transportation, environment etc.

The answers given by the participants demonstrate that, for each of the items, majority of students rated above 5 (out of 10). For instance, for 43,4 percent of the participants, the visa procedures are quite effective, because they rated the relevant question as 10 out of 10. Participants who chose 10 in each object constitute the biggest groups: for each item, more than 64 percent of the participants rated as 8 or more. Especially items of “Interaction with Other Erasmus Students” and “Daily Life Experiences in the Host Country” are worth mentioning because more than half of the participants rated these items as 10 which also suggests that for the participants, these two aspects of the program are the most effective ones. The highest results for “Interaction with other Erasmus Students” and “Daily Life Experiences in the Host Country” enable us to assume that participating in the Erasmus program is an experimental and lively practice which may be much more effective compared to EU official information campaigns or providing thousands of scholarly articles about the EU. It is also critical to underline that for more than 42 percent of the students who ranked 10 on “Higher Education Policies in the Host Country”, participating in the Erasmus program is also an effective way to acquire more knowledge about the regulations of the EU in that field. It is expected that with the assistance of higher education exchange and mobility practices, students would know more about the European Higher Education Area, the European Credit Transfer System as well as other relevant EU regulations.

Under the part of “Other”, participants have mentioned the following subtitles; accommodation, expenses and consumption in EU countries, human rights, immigration policies of the host country, language, living conditions and standards, religion and tradition.

Table 6

*Results of the Author's Questionnaire-Part IV: The Impact of Erasmus Program, Source: Questionnaire of the Author*

<b>PART IV: THE IMPACT OF ERASMUS PROGRAM</b>										
	<b>Answers (%)</b>									
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>
Visa Procedures	1,5	2,9	2,9	2,9	5,1	6,6	13,2	11,0	10,3	43,4
Documents required within the framework of Erasmus Program (e.g. learning agreement, grant agreement)	2,9	2,2	2,2	5,1	5,1	9,5	8,0	12,4	12,4	40,1
Procedures required by EU institutions (e.g. EU survey sent by European Commission report system at the end of the mobility)	2,9	0,7	2,9	6,6	2,9	8,0	10,9	13,1	18,2	33,6
Interaction with other Erasmus students	2,2	1,5	0	2,2	2,2	2,9	8,0	16,8	12,4	<b>51,8</b>
Daily life experiences in the host country (e.g. market, transportation, environment)	2,2	0	0,7	2,2	1,5	4,4	4,4	7,3	13,9	<b>63,5</b>
Higher education practices in the host university (e.g. ECTS, transfer of credits)	1,5	2,9	2,9	4,4	3,7	6,6	6,6	9,6	19,1	42,6
EU-related courses taken in host universities	3,6	2,2	2,9	0,7	5,8	7,3	10,2	11,7	18,2	37,2
EU-related political developments in the host country (e.g. Brexit)	2,9	2,2	2,9	0,7	3,6	5,8	13,1	19,0	16,8	32,8
Mass media organs and EU related news in the host country	0,7	2,9	2,9	2,9	8,0	7,3	10,9	20,4	20,4	23,4
Other (please indicate)	34,0	3,8	1,9	0	11,3	5,7	3,8	7,5	9,4	22,6

When we compare the three parts in general, according to participants, the Program is especially effective in increasing their knowledge of the EU with regard to the rights granted for the EU citizens. Once we add up the percentages of students who rated 7 and above, it is clear that for more than 64 percent of the participants, joining the program is quite effective in increasing their awareness about the EU citizenship rights. For more than 56 percent of the participants who rated 7 and above, the Program is fairly efficient in increasing their knowledge about the role of the EU in Common Policy Areas. According to the results of the paired sample t-test analyzed previously, there have been significant increases in the participants' knowledge of the institutional features of the EU as well. However, according to the percentage of the participants who rated 7 and above, the program is the least effective in terms of the institutional aspects of the EU, compared to other two parts. This suggests that participation in the Erasmus program increased participants' awareness of the EU as a source of citizens' rights mostly to be followed by an awareness of the EU as a policy regime and lastly as an institution. The more one's own direct personal experience with the EU programmes, the higher the awareness about the tangible impacts of the EU. Stated differently, this study confirms the conceptualization of the EU as an experimental union.

Table 7

*Results of the Author's Questionnaire-Part IV: The Impact of Erasmus Program 2, Source: Questionnaire of the Author*

<b>PART IV: THE IMPACT OF ERASMUS PROGRAM 2</b>										
	<b>Answers (%)</b>									
<b>ITEMS</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>
Institutional Features of EU	6,6	8,8	5,1	5,8	12,4	14,6	19,0	10,2	8,8	8,8
The Rights Granted for EU Citizens	2,9	0,7	2,9	4,4	8,8	16,1	11,7	19,7	14,6	18,2
The Role of EU in Common Policy Areas	3,6	2,2	8,0	6,6	8,8	13,9	16,1	18,2	8,0	14,6

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **CONCLUSION**

Even though the EU's policies are directly affecting European citizens' daily lives and most of the EU laws and regulations are binding for EU citizens, they are not always aware of those policies and the functioning of the EU organs which may keep the citizens distant from the Union and refrain the public from understanding the benefits of the EU membership. If we expect European citizens to understand the benefits of the EU and support the European integration process, it is quite important to rely on largely-informed citizens. Specifically, taking the approval and support of the young generations are essential for the future of the Union and the European integration. In this regard, this thesis focused on the lack of information and awareness on the EU, its institutions, the way it works, the policy areas regulated by the Union as well as the rights granted by the Union for its citizens. The main aim of this thesis was to analyze the empirical and theoretical explanations behind the lack of information and understand the implications of this deficit for the legitimacy of the EU and the future of the European integration and offer an alternative mechanism to deal with this deficit. In that sense, this study argues that in addition to the information campaigns and communication strategies, the Erasmus student mobility program currently run by the European Commission can be considered as another means to increase the participants' awareness and knowledge about the EU. Although the EU does not intend to overcome the problem of information deficit through Erasmus program, this study shows us that the program unintendedly creates outcomes in that respect.

Since 1957 Treaty of Rome, the competencies of the EU have gone far beyond the original economic objectives. Moreover, as the Communist threat which kept the Western block together has been erased, the EU now needs further steps to maintain

its legitimacy and *raison d'être* and to receive the approval of the well-informed people's Europe. In that sense, the EU needs to take further measures to have acceptance, recognition and understanding of the peoples of Europe. Decreasing participation rates for EP's elections and the recent referendums denied in France and Netherlands in 2005 can also be seen as the signs of this alarming situation. It should be indicated that most of the young voters (18-24) have voted "no" in the Dutch referendum (74 percent) and in the Irish referendum (65 percent). Moreover, the recent membership referendum of the UK (2016) which resulted in 51 percent of votes to leave the Union is also highly essential. As the Eurobarometer surveys also prove, British public has been one of the least knowledgeable citizens on the EU. Before the referendum, there were numerous columns which were criticizing that the UK citizens did not have adequate level of information for such a vital decision which can be seen as a supplementary reason for the outcome of the referendum. Within this framework, the Brexit referendum may also offer important consequences for the challenge of information deficit and the upcoming of the EU.

As the EU's policy competencies, general influence and domestic influence have expanded over years, the Union has initiated communication strategies and information campaigns from the 1970s onwards. With the first elections of the EP, the Parliament and the Commission started to launch information campaigns to increase the public awareness and interest for voting. Especially with the Treaties of Maastricht and Lisbon, the gap between the public and Union tried to be minimized and the notion of citizenship has been introduced and promoted. In 1994, the first Commissioner for information and communication was appointed. The Commission's Directorate General for Communication has initiated a number of programs like "Your Voice Europe", "Europe for Citizens" etc. Some sessions of the Council became public and the citizens were granted a right of access to documents. As a result of all these developments, it is now a legally recognized right for citizens to acquire information and access documents on the EU. However, the Eurobarometer surveys show that most of the EU citizens are not aware of this right to request access on the non-published documents of EU institutions. Besides, the information on the websites of EU institutions are only understood by few persons with sophisticated knowledge of the

Union. Eurobarometer surveys also demonstrate that most citizens tend not to understand how the EU actually works. Eurobarometer surveys also show that European citizens are confused about who represents which European institution. It is also understood from the surveys that European citizens have limited information about the rights granted for them, the headquarters and anthem of the EU, rotating Presidency of the Council and some less visible organs of the Union such as European Ombudsman, the Committee of the Regions of the EU and the European Economic and Social Committee as well as the EU co-financed projects. Considering these deficits revealed by the Eurobarometer surveys as well, this study suggests that mechanisms such as the Erasmus program can be seen as a one of the effective tools to engage with the EU information deficit and to increase the public awareness about the EU, its institutions and policies.

Erasmus, a flagship program run by the European Commission is a student (and staff) mobility program which enables students to study at a university in another program country for one or two semesters with monthly grant. Since the beginning of the program in 1987, over 3 million students have become part of the program. Just like the number of participants, the total budget of the Program has increased over the years which also shows that it has acquired a widespread geographical scope. Even though the EU is given supportive authority in the field of education (according to TFEU) and educational policies are essentially decided by the individual member states, the education policies of the member states are being more and more Europeanized with the help of harmonization measures such as the Erasmus program or the Bologna process.

Moreover, it should be indicated that the literature on the Erasmus program highly concentrates on the impact of the program on the sense of European identity as well as the advancement of personal skills such as foreign language, employability etc. For a growing number of studies, Erasmus students are expected to develop a feeling of collective European identity and mutual trust as a result of their interaction with other European students. In other respects, there are also numerous analyses which suggest that such an interaction does not automatically generate a sense of European self-identity. Moreover, there also some studies which argue that students taking part in the



Erasmus program are already more pro-European than non-mobile students and Erasmus experience does not make students more pro-European. Additionally, the Erasmus literature also focuses on the contribution of the program in personal and professional development. It is believed that the Program helps students to improve their foreign language skills, intercultural awareness and soft skills like being tolerant which also increase their chances of employability. However, these studies provide partial information about the extent to which participation in the program affect students' knowledge and awareness of the EU.

In order to understand whether participating in the Erasmus program has a positive effect on participants' awareness and knowledge or not, a longitudinal survey was organized among the Erasmus students in four Universities of Ankara. To be able to measure the impact of the Program, the survey was distributed twice; at the beginning and at the end of the exchange periods and the fluctuations between the two terms have been analyzed with SPSS program. The questionnaire was composed of closed-end questions based on scale charts enumerated from 1 to 10 as well as "yes" and "no" questions. In formulating the questionnaire, the Eurobarometer surveys and the professional observations of the author were taken as reference. The initial test was filled by 159 participants and 50 of them filled the post-test as well. The ages of the initial participants ranged between 19 and 36; while the cumulative age of the participant group was 23. The countries of those participants who studied in those universities during their exchange period varied from Austria to Denmark and from Italy to Netherlands, which were 21 different program countries in total. Participants were coming from various disciplines, but the largest part of the students were studying in the departments of Social Sciences, which also suggest that the students of Social Sciences are more prone to study abroad.

The first three parts of the study were designed to measure and assess whether there has been an increase in the participants' knowledge and awareness of the EU as an institution, as a source of citizens' rights and as a policy regime. At the beginning of the study, it was expected that there would be an increase in the students' awareness and knowledge, simply because they would be willing to be part of a Program run by the European Commission itself. Possible experience of EP elections and celebrations

of the Europe Day and benefiting from common legal rights (e.g. free movement or right to send a petition to European Commission) may lead an increase in the participants' awareness and knowledge. It was also anticipated that experiencing similar type of regulations in certain policy areas like transportation, public housing, environment etc. and being exposed to EU rules and regulations about foreign affairs, terrorism etc. though TV news, newspapers or public debates in the host county may contribute to this increase. The terminology and the documents (with EU logos) used during the mobility period are also expected to contribute to this expected increase.

When we compare the average of the answers in a scale chart enumerated from 1 to 10 with the help of the paired sample t-test, we understand that there has been increases in the knowledge of the participants for each of the sub-items. For instance, the average of the answers for the item of "EU Flag" was 8,02 (out of 10) at the beginning of the Program, while this average increased to 8,18 at the end of the mobility. Similarly, the average of the answers for the item of "Right to Petition to Key EU Institutions" was 5,36 (out of 10) at the beginning of the mobility period, while it was 6,22 at the end. The comparisons of average answers show us that even though some of them are slight changes, there have been a certain degree of increase for the each element provided in the survey. However, according to the statistical rules, only the results for which the P value was less than 0,05 ( $p < 0,05$ ) could be accepted as a significant difference. In that sense, it is concluded that in the first part of the survey ("Part I: EU as An Institution") there have been significant increases in the knowledge of Erasmus participants in terms of the "Anthem of Europe", "Name of the EU Organs", "Functions of the EU Organs", "Decision-Making Style of the EU Organs", "The Method by which the Members of the EP are Elected", "Date of the Next EP Elections and Rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU". Similarly, the analysis of the results of the second part ("Part II: EU as A Source of Citizens' Rights) demonstrate that there have been meaningful increases in awareness of Erasmus students in terms of "Free Movement Across Member States", "Reside and Study Across Member States", "Right to Make Complaint to the European Commission, EP or European Ombudsman", "Right to Participate in a Citizens' Initiative". Finally, the outcomes of the third part of the survey ("Part III: EU as A Policy Regime") reveal that there have

been substantial increases in the Erasmus participants' knowledge on "Fighting Crime", "Fighting Terrorism", "Fighting Unemployment", "Foreign Affairs", "Health Care System", "Housing", "Immigration" and "Public Transport." All these results validate the suggestion that although the overall impact is not equally distributed across the items, participating in Erasmus Program may have a positive effect on the knowledge and awareness of the participants regarding the EU in general.

Lastly, it should be indicated that the study was intended to analyze the responds of not only outgoing Turkish students but also students coming to Turkey from European countries. However, because of the limitations explained in the thesis (e.g. the decreasing number of incoming students because of the recent political developments), there were only a few incoming students and Turkish students represented the largest group of participants. As a result, the survey was turned into a study which mainly measures the impact of the program on outgoing students (from Turkey). As Turkey is not a member state yet, it is likely that the knowledge of Turkish students on the EU are at a lower degree than the students living in other European countries. Hence, we should bear in mind that compared to other citizens, the results could be bigger for Turkish students and this data only demonstrates that there was an increase in the knowledge of citizens of a non-EU country. In that respect, the questionnaire conducted for this thesis does not claim to be representative, but its results provide informative suggestions. If we had chance to analyze the answers of incoming European students as well, we would have an opportunity to compare the results for both Turkish and other European students and this would have provided us with a more accurate picture. In this regard, for further research, a sample group with a more precise distribution of nationalities is suggested.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **APPENDIX A: VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION FORM**

This master thesis is being prepared by Burcu Akpınar, a master student in METU European Studies Program under the supervision of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sevilay Kahraman, faculty member in METU International Relations department. This dissertation focuses on the impact of Erasmus Program (EU-funded student mobility program) on the participants' knowledge and awareness of EU and aims to explore to what extent the Program has an impact on participating students' knowledge and awareness on institutions, concepts, regulations and policies of EU. Please note that the delivery of the survey prepared within the framework of the below-mentioned master thesis has been approved by the Ethics Commissions of the Universities that this study will be conducted.

In order to measure the impact of the Erasmus Program, the same questionnaire will be conducted twice at the beginning and end of the mobility period. For this reason, the questionnaire will be sent at the end of the mobility period once again to those participants who have already filled the same questionnaire at the beginning of the mobility. Please note that filling this questionnaire depends on a volunteer basis. If you agree on participating in this study, we expect you to answer a range of closed-end questions. It takes around 10 minutes to answer all the questions indicated in the questionnaire.

The answers given by the participants will be evaluated only by the researcher and the thesis advisor. The answers will be kept confidential and after the evaluation of data, the answers will not be recorded. The analyzed data will be used in scientific publications in accordance with the principle of confidentiality. The attached questionnaire does not intend to provide any personal discomfort. Please note that you



may withdraw from the study anytime or leave the questionnaire undone, if you feel disturbed. You may also skip those questions that you do not want to answer.

Thanks for your participation.

If you would like to ask a question or take further information about the study, you may have a contact with Burch Akpınar through below contact information.

Burcu AKPINAR, METU International Cooperations Office

Tel: xxxx xxxxxxxx– xxxx xxxxxxxx / e-mail: xxxxx@metu.edu.tr

***I participate in this study on a volunteer basis and I am well aware that I may withdraw from the study anytime. I agree that you may use the answers that I have given in the questionnaire in scientific publications.***

Name Surname

Date

Signature

## APPENDIX B: SURVEY QUESTIONS

### PART I: EU AS AN INSTITUTION

**1-How would you assess your knowledge of the EU (as an institution) with regards to the below items? Please answer the question in accordance with the below scale and choose the appropriate number for each item (1=know nothing at all; 10= know a great deal).**

	Know nothing at all									Know a great deal
<b>ITEMS</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>
EU Flag										
The Cities that the EU headquarters are Located										
Europe Day										
Anthem of Europe										
The Period that the EU was Established										
Number of EU Member States										
Name of the EU Member States										
Candidate States for EU Membership										
Turkey's Accession Process										
Name of the EU Organs										
Functions of the EU Organs										
Decision-Making Systems of the EU Organs										
The Method by which the Members of European Parliament are Elected										
Date of the Next European Parliament Elections										
Rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU										

## PART II: EU AS A SOURCE OF CITIZENS' RIGHTS

### 2-Are you familiar with the term "Citizen of the EU?"

- ☐ Yes and I know what it means
- ☐ Yes and I heard about it, but I am not sure what exactly it covers
- ☐ No, I have never heard about the term

### 3-How much do you feel that you are informed about the rights granted for citizens of the EU?

- ☐ Very well informed
- ☐ Fairly well informed
- ☐ Not very well informed
- ☐ Not informed at all

### 4-How would you rate your knowledge on the below-mentioned rights granted for EU citizens? Please answer the question in accordance with the below scale and choose the appropriate number for each item (1=know nothing at all; 10= know a great deal).

	Know nothing at all									Know a great deal
ITEMS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Free Movement Across Member States										
Reside and Study Across Member States										
Right to Petition to Key EU institutions										
Right to Make Complaint to the European Commission, European Parliament or European Ombudsman										
Right to Ask for Help at Embassies of Other EU Member States if Citizen's Country does not Have an Embassy There										
Right to Participate in a Citizens' Initiative										

### PART III: EU AS A POLICY REGIME

**5-How would you assess your knowledge of EU with regards to its roles in the below-mentioned common policy areas? Please answer the question in accordance with the below scale and choose the appropriate number for each item (1=know nothing at all; 10= know a great deal).**

	Know nothing at all									Know a great deal
ITEMS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Defense										
Fighting Crime										
Fighting Terrorism										
Fighting Unemployment										
Foreign Affairs										
Health Care System (e.g. health insurance)										
Housing										
Immigration										
Pensions										
Public Transport										
Protecting the Environment										
Protection of Human Rights										
Regulating Economic Governance										
Regulating Financial Markets (e.g. Euro as a common currency)										
Taxation										
The Educational System (e.g. European Higher Education Area)										

### PART IV: THE IMPACT OF ERASMUS PROGRAM

**6- How much do you feel that Erasmus Program may be effective on participants' knowledge of EU with regards to the below-mentioned aspects? Please answer the question in accordance with the below scale and choose the appropriate number for each item. (1=not effective at all; 10= strongly effective)**

	Not effective at all									Strongly effective
ITEMS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Institutional Features of EU										

**(Part IV / 6 cont'd)**

The Rights Granted for EU Citizens										
The Role of EU in Common Policy Areas										

**7-How much do you feel that below-mentioned aspects of Erasmus Program may be effective on participants' knowledge of EU? Please answer the question in accordance with the below scale and choose the appropriate number for each item. . (1=not effective at all; 10= strongly effective)**

	Not effective at all									Strongly effective
ITEMS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Visa Procedures										
Documents required within the framework of Erasmus Program (e.g. learning agreement, grant agreement)										
Procedures required by EU institutions (e.g. EU survey sent by European Commission report system at the end of the mobility)										
Interaction with other Erasmus students										
Daily life experiences in the host country (e.g. market, transportation, environment)										
Higher education practices in the host university (e.g. ECTS, transfer of credits)										
EU-related courses taken in host universities										
EU-related political developments in the host country (e.g. Brexit)										
Mass media organs and EU related news in the host country										
Other (please indicate)										

## PART V: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

*Please note that this questionnaire will be distributed at the end of the mobility period as well. I only need e-mail information in order to distribute the same questionnaire to those individuals who have already filled the pre-test at the beginning of the mobility period. E-mail information will not be shared with the third parties and this data will not be stored after the end of the study.*

**8- E-mail:** .....

**9-Gender:**

- ☐ Male  
☐ Female

**10-Age:**.....

**11-Please indicate your nationality:**

	Austria		Estonia		Ireland		Malta		Slovenia
	Belgium		France		Italy		Netherlands		Spain
	Bulgaria		Finland		Latvia		Norway		Sweden
	Croatia		Germany		Liechtenstein		Poland		Turkey
	Cyprus		Greece		Lithuania		Portugal		United Kingdom
	Czech Republic		Hungary		Luxembourg		Romania		
	Denmark		Iceland		Macedonia		Slovakia		

*\* Member states of the EU and non-EU Programme countries*

**12-Please indicate the name of the host country that you will study during the Erasmus program:**

	Austria		Estonia		Ireland		Malta		Slovenia
	Belgium		France		Italy		Netherlands		Spain
	Bulgaria		Finland		Latvia		Norway		Sweden
	Croatia		Germany		Liechtenstein		Poland		Turkey
	Cyprus		Greece		Lithuania		Portugal		United Kingdom
	Czech Republic		Hungary		Luxembourg		Romania		
	Denmark		Iceland		Macedonia		Slovakia		

*\* Member states of the EU and non-EU Programme countries*

**13-Please indicate your academic program:** .....

**14-Please indicate your level of study:**

- ☐ Undergraduate  
☐ Master

☐ PhD

**15- Have you ever taken any course related to EU? (e.g. “Institutions and Laws of the EU”, “Development of European Identity and the European Union”)**

☐ Yes

☐ No

**16- Have you ever been in another EU country other than your home country and the host country that you study during the Erasmus program?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

**17- If you would like to make an additional comment regarding the questionnaire, please use the below part**

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**Thanks for your participation!**

## APPENDIX C: ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVALS / ETİK KURUL ONAYLARI

UYGULAMALI ETİK ARAŞTIRMA MERKEZİ  
APPLIED ETHICS RESEARCH CENTER



ORTA DOĞU TEKNİK ÜNİVERSİTESİ  
MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

DUMLUPINAR BULVARI 06800  
ÇANKAYA ANKARA/TURKEY  
T: +90 312 210 22 91  
F: +90 312 210 79 59  
ueam@metu.edu.tr  
www.ueam.metu.edu.tr  
Sayı: 28620816 / 261

29 AĞUSTOS 2016

Konu: Değerlendirme Sonucu

Gönderilen: Doç.Dr. Sevilay KAHRAMAN

Uluslararası İlişkiler

Gönderen: ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (İAEK)

İlgi: İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başvurusu

Sayın : Doç.Dr. Sevilay KAHRAMAN

Danışmanlığını yaptığınız yüksek lisans öğrencisi Burcu AKPINAR'ın "Erasmus Programı'nın Katılımcıların AB'ye Yönelik Bilgi Düzeyi Üzerindeki Etkisi " başlıklı araştırması İnsan Araştırmaları Kurulu tarafından uygun görülerek gerekli onay **2016-SOS-137** protokol numarası **05.09.2016-31.07.2017** tarihleri arasında geçerli olmak üzere verilmiştir.

Bilgilerinize saygılarımızla sunarız.

Prof. Dr. Canan SÜMER

İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başkanı

Prof. Dr. Meliha ALTUNİŞİK

İAEK Üyesi

Prof. Dr. Mehmet UTKU

İAEK Üyesi

Yrd. Doç. Dr. Pınar KAYGAN

İAEK Üyesi

Prof. Dr. Ayhan SOL

İAEK Üyesi

Prof. Dr. Ayhan Gürbüz DEMİR

İAEK Üyesi

Yrd. Doç. Dr. Emre SELÇUK

İAEK Üyesi





## Bilkent Üniversitesi

Akademik İşler Rektör Yardımcılığı

**Tarih:** 24 Ağustos 2016

**Gönderilen:** Burcu Akpınar

**Gönderen:** Hitay Özbay  
Provost Yardımcısı

**Konu:** "The Impact of..." çalışması etik kurul onayı

Üniversitemiz İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu, 24 Ağustos 2016 tarihli görüşme sonucu, "The Impact of Erasmus Program on EU Knowledge of Participants" isimli çalışmanız kapsamında yapmayı önerdiğiniz etkinlik için etik onay vermiş bulunmaktadır. Onay, ekte verilmiş olan çalışma önerisi, çalışma yürütücüleri, ve bilgilendirme formu için geçerlidir.

Bu onay, yapmayı önerdiğiniz çalışmanın genel bilim etiği açısından bir değerlendirmesine karşı gelmektedir. Çalışmanızda, kurulumuzun değerlendirmesi dışında kalabilen özel etik ve yasal sınırlamalara uymakla ayrıca yükümlüsünüz.

Etik Kurul Üyeleri:

Ünvan / İsim	Bölüm / Uzmanlık	İmza
1. Prof. Dr. Hitay Özbay	Elektrik ve Elektronik Müh.	
2. Doç.Dr. Fatma Taşkın	İktisat	- izinli -
3. Prof.Dr. Haldun Özaktaş	Elektrik ve Elektronik Müh.	
4. Prof.Dr. Tayfun Özçelik	Moleküler Biyoloji ve Genetik	
5. Prof.Dr. Erdal Onar	Hukuk	
Yd.1. Yrd.Doç.Dr. Ali Osmay Güre	Moleküler Biyoloji ve Genetik	- izinli -
Yd.2. Prof.Dr. Cemal Yalabık	Fizik	

Kurul karar/toplantı No: 2016\_08\_24\_03



T.C.  
**HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ**  
Rektörlük

Sayı : 35853172/ 242 - 2850

26 Eylül 2016

**ORTA DOĞU TEKNİK ÜNİVERSİTESİ REKTÖRLÜĞÜNE**

Üniversiteniz İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi öğretim üyelerinden **Doç. Dr. Sevilay KAHRAMAN** sorumluluğunda yüksek lisans programı öğrencisi **Burcu AKPINAR** tarafından yürütülen **“Erasmus Programının Katılımcıların AB’ye Yönelik Bilgi Düzeyi Üzerindeki Etkisi (The Impact of Erasmus Program EU Knowledge of EU)”** başlıklı tez çalışması, Üniversitemiz Senatosu Etik Komisyonunun **20 Eylül 2016** tarihinde yapmış olduğu toplantıda incelenmiş olup, etik açıdan uygun bulunmuştur.

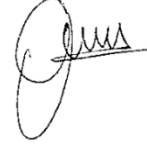
Bilgilerinize arz ederim.

Prof. Dr. Rahime M. NOHUTCU  
Rektör a.  
Rektör Yardımcısı

ANKARA ÜNİVERSİTESİ  
SİYASAL BİLGİLER FAKÜLTESİ DEKANLIĞINA

Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Avrupa Çalışmaları programı yüksek lisans öğrencisiyim. İlgili yüksek lisans programında Doç. Dr. Sevilay Kahraman danışmanlığında "Erasmus Programı'nın Katılımcıların AB'ye Yönelik Bilgi Düzeyi Üzerindeki Etkisi" başlıklı bir tez hazırlamaktayım. Bu tez kapsamında, Erasmus değişim programı aracılığıyla fakültenize gelen ve yine bu program kapsamında yurtdışına giden fakülte öğrencilerinize yönelik bir anket çalışması yapmayı talep etmekteyim. İlgili anket çalışmasının Ankara genelinde yapılması planlandığı için Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi, Hacettepe Üniversitesi ve Bilkent Üniversitelerinden de onay alınmış olup ilgili onaylar ekteki başvuru belgeleri ile birlikte onayınıza sunulmaktadır. Başvurumun değerlendirilmesini ve ilgili tez çalışmasını fakültenizde gerçekleştirebilmem için gerekli onayların alınmasını saygılarımla arz ederim.

Burcu Akpınar



uygundur.  
Kf  
28.10.2016

ANKARA ÜNİVERSİTESİ	
SİYASAL BİLGİLER FAKÜLTESİ	
Kayıt Tarihi:	28.10.2016
Kayıt No:	2240
Dosya No:	

## APPENDIX D: TURKISH SUMMARY / TRKE ZET

Avrupa Birlięi tartiřmalarında sıka bahsi geen demokrasi aıęına ek olarak ‘‘Avrupa vatandařlarının AB politikalarının nedenleri, amaları, yasa ve dzenlemeleri hakkında yeterli bilgiye sahip olamaması’’ olarak tanımlanabilecek ‘‘bilgi aıęı (information deficit)’’ da Birlięin sorunlarından bir dięerini temsil etmektedir. AB politikalarının, ye lkeler iin baęlayıcı olması ve Avrupa vatandařlarının hayatlarına byk oranda etki etmesine raęmen, yapılan arařtırmalar, Avrupa vatandařlarının AB kurumlarının iřleyiři ve Avrupa dzeyinde regle edilen politika alanlarını anlayamadıęını gstermektedir. Bu durum vatandařların yabancılařmıř hissetmelerine, AB’yi uzak ve karmařık bir yapı olarak grerek uzaklařmalarına ve aktif rol almamalarına neden olmaktadır. Ortalama vatandařın; ok sayıda politik aktrn, yasama, yrtme ve yargı srelerinin ve kurumların, ye lke hkmetlerinin ve siyasi partilerin dahil olduęu ve sadece ye devletlerin sayısı ile deęil yetkinlik alanı olarak da srekli geniřleyen bu sistemi anlaması bir hayli zordur.

Kuruluř yılları ile karřılařtırdıęımızda 1957 Roma Anlařması’ndan beri AB’nin yetkilerinin orijinal ekonomik hedeflerin ok daha tesine geniřledięi grlmektedir. Birlięin yetkilerinin dięer politika alanlarına da tařması ve Batı bloęunu bir arada tutan Komnist Rusya tehdidin ortadan kalkması ile birlikte AB’ye ynelik bilgi aıęı daha da nemli hale gelmiřtir. Dięer sistemler gibi Avrupa Birlięi de meřruiyetini korumak ve varlıęını devam ettirmek iin ye lkelerin ve vatandařlarının onayına ihtiya duymakta ve bu sebeple Avrupa halkının bilgi ve farkındalık dzeyini arttırmak iin daha ileri nlemler almak durumundadır. Avrupa Parlamento seimlerindeki dřen katılım oranı ve Fransa ve Hollanda’da 2005’te dzenlenen olumsuz referandum sonuları da bilgi ve iletiřim stratejilerinin ne kadar nemli olduęunu ve vatandařlar ile Birlik arasındaki iletiřimin arttırılması gerektięini bir kez daha gstermektedir. Bu sebeple AB kurumları 19701’erden itibaren eřitli iletiřim stratejileri ve bilgi kampanyaları dzenlemeye bařlamıř, Maastricht ve Lizbon anlařmalarıyla da Avrupa vatandařlıęı nosyonunu geliřtirerek vatandařlara bilgiye eriřim hakkı sunmaya

çalışmıştır. Fakat tüm bunlara rağmen kamuoyu araştırmaları Avrupa vatandaşlarının Birliğe yönelik temel bilgilerden bile yoksun olduğunu göstermektedir. Vatandaşların Avrupa Komisyonu ve diğer kurumsal prosedür ve yetkinliklere yönelik farkındalıklarının çok düşük olduğu bilinmekte, önemli bir kısmının Birliğin kurumlarının isimlerini dahi söyleyemediği belirtilmektedir. Eurobarometer raporlarının da gösterdiği üzere İngiltere vatandaşları, AB hakkında en az bilgi sahibi olan ülke vatandaşlarından birisi olmuştur. Bu bakımdan 2016'da İngiltere'de gerçekleşen referandum sonuçları da (yüzde 51 oranında Birlik'ten ayrılma oyu) bilgi açığı problemi ve Birliğin geleceğine ilişkin önemli çıkarımlar sunmaktadır.

Temelde bilgi açığı probleminin Birliğin ilk günlerinden beri devam eden bir sorun olduğu söylenebilir. İkinci Dünya Savaşı'nın ardından Avrupa ülkeleri arasında ekonomik entegrasyon sağlayarak barışı temin etmek amacıyla kurulan Avrupa Birliği öncelikle tartışmalı olmayan ekonomik ve teknik politika alanlarında ortak politikalar üretmeyi hedeflemekteydi. Ayrıca o günkü adıyla Avrupa Kömür ve Çelik Topluluğu'nun ilk yıllarında Avrupa ülkelerini ortak bir düşmana karşı bir arada tutan bir Komünist tehdit bulunmaktaydı. Bu kapsamda AB'nin Avrupa vatandaşları tarafından desteklenen bir proje olarak ortaya çıkmadığı, daha ziyade bir grup politikacı ve teknokrat tarafından oluşturulduğu söylenebilir. Bu sebeple 1950'lerdeki bilgi kampanyaları kamuoyunu bilgilendirmekten ziyade seçilmiş siyasi, ekonomik ve akademik bir elit grubu, Birliğin faaliyet ve başarıları hakkında bilgilendirmeyi amaçlamıştır. Birliğin ilk yıllarındaki bu teknokrat tavır, vatandaşların kararların siyasi elit tarafından alındığı ve kendi istek ve ihtiyaçlarının karar aşamasında dikkate alınmadığını düşünmelerine yol açmış, bu durum ciddi güven kaybına neden olmuştur. 1970 ve 1980'lerde Avrupa kurumları daha spesifik iletişim stratejileri oluşturmaya başlamış ve kamuoyu desteğini sağlayabilmek için 1979 yılında Avrupa Parlamento üyelerinin Avrupa vatandaşları tarafından seçilmesi sürecine başlanarak, Parlamento'ya yasal ve bütçesel yetkiler tanınmıştır. İlk parlamento seçimlerinde yüzde 63 oranında katılım sağlanmış, Avrupa Parlamentosu ve Komisyon tarafından halkın seçimlere yönelik farkındalık ve ilgisini artırmak amacıyla çeşitli bilgi kampanyaları düzenlenmiştir. 1990'larda özellikle Maastricht Anlaşması ile birlikte Birliğin iletişim

politikaları gözden geçirilmiş, 1994 yılında bilgi ve iletişimden sorumlu ilk delege olarak Joao de Pinheiro atanmıştır.

Fransa (2005), Hollanda (2005) ve İrlanda'daki (2008) referandumların ardından 2000'lerde daha geniş kapsamlı stratejiler oluşturulmaya başlanmıştır. 2005'de hazırlanan Eurobarometer anketine göre referanduma katılmayan Hollanda vatandaşlarının yüzde 51'i oylamaya sunulan anayasa hakkında yeterli oranda bilgilendirilmediklerini belirtmiştir. Ek olarak oy kullananların yüzde 56'sı da oylama öncesinde yeterli bilgiye sahip olmadıklarını kabul etmiştir. Ayrıca genç seçmenlere (18-24) bakıldığında Hollanda'daki referandumda yüzde 74'ünün ve İrlanda'da ise yüzde 65'nin hayır oyu kullandığı görülmektedir. Bu bakımdan oylama sonuçlarının pek çok ayrı nedeni olsa da bilgi düzeyinin de referandum sonuçları üzerinde önemli bir etkisinin olduğu söylenebilir. Kabul görmeyen referandumların ardından vatandaşlarla diyalog ve etkileşimin artırılması gerektiği bir kez daha ortaya çıkmış ve ilk defa iletişim politikası kurumsal önceliklerden birisi haline gelmiştir. Bu sebeple AB kurumları AB'nin işleyişi, politikaları, değerleri ve Avrupa vatandaşlığı hakkında bilgi sağlamak ve teşvik etmek için özel olarak tasarlanan servisleri ve iletişim araçları ile çalışmaya başlamıştır. Ayrıca Komisyon'un İletişim Genel Müdürlüğü altında "Your Voice Europe (2001)", "Citizens Initiative and the Citizenship Program (2007-2013)", "Europe for Citizens" gibi programlar oluşturulmaya başlamış, yukarıdan aşağı iletişim politikaları, etkileşimli, diyalogu teşvik eden ve vatandaş odaklı iletişim politikalarına doğru evrilmiştir. 2001'de AB vatandaşlarına belgelere ulaşma hakkı tanınmış, 2006'dan sonra Konsey'in bazı oturumları vatandaşlara açılmıştır. Bugün itibarıyla bilgi edinmek ve AB'ye yönelik belgelere ulaşmak Birliğin resmi anlaşmaları tarafından da tanınan temel haklardan birisidir. Fakat tüm bu çabalara rağmen Eurobarometer anketlerinde katılımcılar AB'ye yönelik bilgi düzeylerini 10 üzerinden 3-5 arası olarak derecelendirmekte ve yarısından çoğu AB'nin nasıl çalıştığını anlamadığını belirtmektedir. Ayrıca bu anketler kapsamındaki diğer sorular Avrupa vatandaşlarının, Birlik tarafından sağlanan vatandaşlık hakları, AB'nin kurumları, genel merkezleri ve marşı, Konsey'in dönem başkanlığı, AB tarafından finans sağlanan projeler gibi konularda yeterli düzeyde bilgi sahibi olmadığını ortaya çıkarmaktadır.

Avrupa alıřmaları literatüründe bilgi aığı probleminin “demokrasi aığı”, meřruiyet, iletişim aığı, medyanın rolü ve kamusal alan tartışmaları ile bir arada analiz edildiğı görölmektedir. Bu sebeple bu tartışmalara da teorik olarak atıfta bulunmak önemlidir. AB özelinde demokrasi aığı, Birliğın kurumlarının ve karar alma süreçlerinin demokratik mekanizmalardan uzak olduėunu ve ortalama vatandaşlar için kompleks ve ulařılmaz bir sistem olarak algılandığını ifade etmektedir. Ayrıca demokrasi aığı kavramı, Avrupa kamuoyunun yeterli katılımının sağlanmaması, AB’nin řeffaflık ve hesap verilebilirlik ilkelerinden yoksun oluşu ve Avrupa genelinde ortak irade ve kimliğın bulunmamasına da işaret eder. Demokrasi aığı, meřruiyet tartışmaları ile de yakından bağlantılıdır ve demokratik meřruiyet yoksunluğu “kurumsal” ve “sosyo-psikolojik (veya popüler)” faktörler olmak üzere iki bağlamda açıklanmaktadır. Kurumsal bağlama göre ulusal parlamentoların karşılığı olarak görölen Avrupa Parlamentosu tam bir yasama organı olarak işlev görememekte veya diğerkurumları kontrol edecek düzeyde gücü bulunmamaktadır. Avrupa Parlamentosu üyeleri kamuoyu tarafından seçilmesine rağmen, seçim yapılmadan oluşan Komisyon’a göre daha az yetkiye sahiptir. Parlamento’nun karar alma süreçlerindeki rolü yıllar içinde arttıysa da bu durum demokrasi aığı tartışmalarına son vermemiş ve Parlamento tek başına yasama gücünü elinde bulunduran bir kurum olamamıştır. Sosyo-psikolojik boyut ise Avrupa Birliğı’nin ortak kimlik, ortak çıkar ile kamu katılımı ve desteğinden yoksun oluşuna işaret eder. Ayrıca 2008-2009 yıllarında başlayan finansal kriz ve ardından gelen Euro bölgesi bor krizi de AB üyeliğinin faydalarını anlama sürecine negatif etkide bulunmuş ve Avrupa entegrasyonunun meřruiyetini daha da baskı altına almıştır. Kuzey ve Güney ölkeleri arasındaki refah farkının artmasına da neden olan bu süreç, Avrupa dayanışmasına zarar vermiştir. Bu süreçte milliyetilik ve AB-karşıtı düşüncelerin artması, zaten var olan demokrasi aığı problemini daha da arttırmıştır. Özellikle krizden etkilenen Yunanistan, İtalya, İspanya ve Portekiz gibi ölkelerde radikal partilere doğru bir kayma olduğı gözlenmiş, 2014 Parlamento seçimlerinde AB karşıtı partiler önemli oranda oy almıştır. Eurobarometer anketleri de bor krizinin etkisiyle AB’ye yönelik güvenin azaldığı ve kamu imajının zarar gördüğünü göstermektedir.

Demokrasi açığı tartışması, bilgi açığı problem ile de yakından ilgilidir. AB hakkında yeterli düzeyde bilgi sahibi olmayan vatandaşlar demokrasinin iyi işlemediğine ilişkin düşüncelere kapılabilmektedir. Eurobarometer anketleri de AB hakkında yeterli bilgiye sahip vatandaşların AB'ye ve ülkelerinin Birlik üyeliğine yönelik daha pozitif bir imaja sahip olduklarını göstermektedir. Ayrıca bilgi eksikliği, Avrupa Parlamentosu seçimlerine katılımı da negatif etkileyen bir durum olarak görülmektedir. Eurobarometer anketleri, düşük bilgi düzeyi ile Parlamento seçimlerine yönelik düşük katılım oranları arasında bir korelasyon olduğunu göstermektedir. 1979'dan beri Parlamento seçimlerine yönelik katılımın sürekli olarak düştüğü düşünüldüğünde, bu durum daha da önemli hale gelmektedir. Bilgi açığı tartışması, iletişim açığı tartışmalarını da beraberinde getirmektedir. Avrupa genelinde ortak bir medya sistemi olmaması sebebiyle Avrupa'daki iletişim büyük oranda yerel ve ulusal medya aracılığıyla sağlanmaktadır. Bu kapsamda literatür, ulusal medyanın etkili, gündem oluşturan rolüne ve vatandaşların düşünce ve tutumları üzerinde nasıl etkili olabildiğine odaklanmaktadır. Avrupa vatandaşlarının pek çoğu Avrupa entegrasyon sürecini kompleks ve soyut bir süreç olarak algıladıklarından, medya aracılığıyla sağlanan bilgi kamuoyunun şekillenmesinde önemli bir araç olmaktadır. İletişim açığı problemiyle mücadele etmenin en önemli yolu Avrupa vatandaşlarının fikir ve görüş alışverişinde bulunabileceği, aktif katılım sağlayabileceği ve etkileşim içinde olabilecekleri bir kamusal alanın yaratılmasıdır. Bazı yazarlar ortak kimlik ve ortak çıkar yoksunluğunun bu tür bir kamusal alan önündeki en büyük engellerden birisi olduğunu belirtse de vatandaşların AB'ye yönelik farkındalık ve bilgilerini arttırmak, bu tür bir kamusal alanın oluşturulması için bir başlangıç noktası olarak görülebilir.

Bu kapsamda bu tez AB'nin kurumları, işleyişi, Birlik tarafından düzenlenen politika alanları gibi konulardaki bilgi açığını ve bu bilgi açığının AB'nin meşruiyeti ve Avrupa entegrasyonunun geleceğine yönelik implikasyonları üzerinde durmaktadır. Çalışma kapsamında bilgi açığının ampirik ve teorik arka planı anlaşılmaya ve bilgi açığı ile mücadele için alternatif bir mekanizma sunulmaya çalışılmıştır. Bu kapsamda bilgi kampanyaları ve iletişim stratejilerine ek olarak, Avrupa Komisyonu tarafından yürütülen Erasmus öğrenci değişim programının da özellikle genç Avrupa vatandaşlarının AB'ye yönelik farkındalık ve bilgi düzeylerinin arttırılmasında bir araç



olabileceği savunulmuştur. AB'nin ve Avrupa entegrasyonunun geleceği için özellikle genç Avrupa vatandaşlarının desteği ve güvenini kazanmak büyük önem arz etmektedir. Bu kapsamda Erasmus programı gibi pratik ve deneyimsel süreçlerin, bilgi promosyonu sürecinde AB'ye yönelik sayfalarca bilgi okumaktan çok daha etkili bir araç olabileceği düşünülmektedir. Avrupa Birliği, Erasmus Programı'nın yardımıyla bilgi açığı ile mücadele etmeyi amaçlamasa da Erasmus deneyiminin bu doğrultuda bir amaçlanmamış sonuç (unintended consequence) yarattığı gözlemlenmektedir. Bizzat Avrupa Komisyonu tarafından yürütülen bir programın parçası olan ve diğer Avrupa ülkelerinden gelen yararlanıcılarla bir araya gelen katılımcıların AB'ye yönelik farkındalıkları üzerinde olumlu bir etkinin oluşması beklenmektedir. Erasmus programına katılan öğrencileri AB'nin serbest dolaşım, ortak para birimi, ortak yükseköğretim sistemleri (AKTS vs.) gibi alanlarda Birliğin düzenleyici gücünün direk yararlanıcısı olacaklardır.

Avrupa Komisyonu tarafından yürütülen Erasmus Programı, yükseköğretim öğrencilerinin diğer program ülkelerindeki yükseköğretim kurumlarında bir veya iki dönem okumalarına olanak veren ve aylık hibe sağlayan bir öğrenci değişim programıdır. Program kapsamında personel hareketliliğinin de gerçekleştirilmesi mümkün olmakla birlikte personel kalemi bu çalışmanın kapsamının dışında bırakılmıştır. İlgili program, 28 AB üyesi ülke ve İzlanda, Lihtenştayn, Norveç, Makedonya ve Türkiye olmak üzere toplam 33 program ülkesinde yürürlüktedir. Türkiye, 1987 yılında başlayan programa 2003-2004 akademik yılından itibaren dahil olmuştur. Avrupa genelindeki yükseköğretim kurumlarının yüzde 90'ının dahil olduğu program kapsamında şimdiye kadar 3 milyondan fazla öğrenciye yurtdışında okuma olanağı tanınmıştır. Günden güne artan katılımcı sayıları ve bütçeler programın ne kadar geniş bir etkisinin olduğunu göstermektedir. Avrupa Birliği eğitim alanında yalnızca destekleyici bir yetkiye sahip olsa da ve eğitim politikaları temelde üye ülkeler tarafından kararlaştırılsa da üye ülkelerin eğitim politikalarının Erasmus programı veya Bologna süreci gibi uyum araçlarıyla günden günde Avrupalılaştığı (Europeanization) söylenebilir.

Erasmus programının yararlanıcıların AB'ye yönelik farkındalık ve bilgi düzeyi üzerinde pozitif bir etkisinin olup olmadığını anlamak için bu çalışma kapsamında bir

anket çalışması düzenlenmiştir. İlgili anket çalışması Ankara'nın 4 üniversitesindeki (Ankara Üniversitesi, Bilkent Üniversitesi, Hacettepe Üniversitesi ve Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi/ODTÜ) öğrencilere elektronik olarak gönderilmiştir. Programın katılımcılar üzerindeki etkisini ölçmek için anket çalışması hareketlilik döneminin başında ve sonunda olmak üzere iki kere uygulanmış ve aradaki artış/azalış oranları SPSS programı aracılığıyla ölçülmüştür. İlgili anket çalışması 1'den 10'a kadar numaralandırılmış kapalı uçlu sorular ile evet/hayır sorularından oluşmaktadır. İlgili anket sorularının oluşturulması sırasında Eurobarometer anketlerinden ve çalışma sahibinin ODTÜ Uluslararası İşbirliği Ofisi'nde devam eden mesleği sebebiyle edindiği profesyonel gözlemlerinden faydalanılmıştır. İlk anket 159 kişi tarafından doldurulmuş, bu katılımcıların 50 tanesi ikinci anketi de doldurarak çalışmaya katkı sağlamıştır. Katılımcıların yaşları 19-36 aralığında değişmekte ve grubun ortalama yaşı 23 olarak hesaplanmaktadır. Katılımcıların Erasmus programları sırasında eğitim aldıkları ülkeler Avusturya'dan Danimarka'ya ve İtalya'dan Hollanda'ya çeşitlilik göstermekte ve toplam 21 farklı ülke bulunmaktadır. Katılımcılar farklı disiplinlerden gelmekle birlikte çoğunluğunun Uluslararası İlişkiler, Psikoloji, İşletme ve Mimarlık gibi bölümlerde okuduğu görülmekte, bu durum Sosyal Bilimler öğrencilerinin yurt dışında okumaya daha meyilli olduğu iddialarını da güçlendirmektedir.

Bu çalışma kapsamında sadece Türkiye'den giden öğrencilerin değil, diğer Avrupa ülkelerinden Türkiye'ye gelen yabancı öğrencilerin verilerinin de analiz edilmesi planlanmış, fakat çalışmada bahsi geçen kısıtlar sebebiyle (örn. Türkiye'de son yıllarda yaşanan politik gelişmeler sebebiyle Avrupa'dan gelen öğrenci sayısındaki ani ve büyük düşüş gibi) Türk öğrenciler katılımcıların büyük çoğunluğunu oluşturmuştur. Ayrıca tüm anket çalışmalarında olduğu gibi gönüllü katılımcılar bulmanın ve bahsi geçen üniversitelerdeki tüm öğrencilere ulaşmanın zorluğu gibi sebeplerle katılımcı profilinin hedeflenen tüm katılımcı türlerini kapsayamadığı anlaşılmıştır. Bu sebeple yapılan anket çalışması tüm popülasyonu temsil etme iddiasında bulunmamakta, fakat sonuçları itibarıyla bilgi verici öneriler sunmaktadır. Ek olarak Türkiye'nin AB üyesi olmayan bir ülke olduğu düşünüldüğünde Türk öğrencilerin AB ile ilgili bilgi düzeylerindeki artışının Avrupalı öğrencilere göre daha yüksek olacağı da göz önünde bulundurulmalıdır. Bu kapsamda daha sonraki araştırmalara ışık tutması açısından

temsil değeri daha yüksek olan ve katılımcıların ülke dağılımlarının daha dengeli olduğu bir çalışma yapılması önerilmektedir.

Anket çalışmasının ilk kısmı (“Bölüm I: Bir Kurum Olarak AB”) katılımcıların AB’nin kurumsal özelliklerine yönelik bilgi ve farkındalık düzeylerinde bir artış olup olmadığını ölçmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bizzat Avrupa Komisyonu tarafından yürütülen bir programa katılan, program kapsamında AB terminolojisini sıkça duyan ve AB logosu ve bayrağının bulunduğu belgeleri kullanan öğrencilerin AB’nin temel kurumlarının adı veya kilit fonksiyonları hakkındaki farkındalıklarının artması beklenmektedir. Ayrıca öğrencilerin Erasmus programları sırasında Avrupa Parlamentosu seçimlerini veya Avrupa günü kutlamalarını görme veya Avrupa marşını dinleme ihtimalleri bulunmaktadır. Eşleştirilmiş örneklem t testi sonuçları incelendiğinde, katılımcıların hareketlilik döneminin başında ve sonunda verdikleri yanıtların ortalamalarında her bir alt başlık için (farklı değerlerde de olsa) bir artış olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Örneğin “AB Bayrağı”na yönelik ortalama puan hareketlilik döneminin başında 10 üzerinden 8,02 iken, bu değer hareketlilik dönemi sonunda 8,18’e çıktığı görülmektedir. Aynı şekilde “AB Üyesi Ülkelerin İsimleri” maddesine yönelik ortalama puan hareketlilik başında 7,08 iken bu değer hareketlilik dönemi sonunda 7,52’ye çıktığı anlaşılmaktadır. Fakat istatistiki kurallara göre yalnızca P değeri 0,05’in altında kalan sonuçları “anlamli farklılıklar” olarak kabul edebildiğimizden, katılımcıların bilgi ve farkındalık düzeylerinde yalnızca şu başlıklar için anlamli artışlar olduğu görülmüştür; “Avrupa Marşı”, “AB Organlarının İsmi”, “AB Organlarının Fonksiyonları”, “AB Organlarının Karar Verme Mekanizmaları”, “Avrupa Parlamentosu Üyelerinin Seçim Yöntemi”, “Bir Sonraki Parlamento Seçimlerinin Tarihi”, “Konsey Dönem Başkanlığı”.

Anket çalışmasının ikinci kısmı (“Bölüm II: Vatandaşlık Haklarının Kaynağı Olarak AB”) katılımcıların AB vatandaşlarına sağlanan haklar konusundaki bilgi ve farkındalık düzeyinde bir artış olup olmadığını analiz etmektedir. Erasmus öğrencileri, AB vatandaşlığından doğan yasal hakların bir kısmını (serbest dolaşım, başka bir üye ülkede yaşama ve çalışma hakkı gibi) hareketlilik dönemlerinde deneyimleyebilecek, bu dönemde herhangi bir problem yaşamaları durumunda Avrupa Komisyonu’na dilekçe gönderme ve şikâyetle bulunma hakkı gibi çeşitli hakları hakkında farkındalık

geliştirebileceklerdir. Bir önceki bölümde olduğu gibi bu bölümdeki alt başlıklara verilen yanıtların ortalamalarını karşılaştırdığımızda yine her bir alt başlıkta çeşitli oranlarda artış olduğu görülmektedir. Fakat, P değeri kuralına göre katılımcıların yalnızca şu başlıklardaki bilgi ve farkındalık düzeyinde anlamlı artışlar olduğu saptanmıştır; “Üye Ülkeler Arasında Serbest Dolaşım Hakkı”, “Üye Ülkeler Arasında Yaşama ve Çalışma Hakkı”, “Avrupa Komisyonu, Avrupa Parlamentosu veya Avrupa Ombudsmanına Şikâyetle Bulunma Hakkı”.

Çalışmanın üçüncü kısmı (“Bölüm III: Bölgesel Bir Politika Rejimi Olarak AB”) katılımcıların belli ortak politika alanlarını düzenleme yetkisine sahip AB’nin politika rejimlerine yönelik bilgi ve farkındalık düzeyinde bir artış olup olmadığını saptamayı amaçlamıştır. Diğer üye devletlerden gelen katılımcılar Avrupa Sağlık Sigortası Kartlarının tüm Avrupa genelinde geçerli olduğunu görecektir, Euro’nun diğer Avrupa ülkelerinde de kullanılan ortak bir para birimi olduğunu deneyimleyecek ve kendi ülkeleri ve diğer katılımcıların ülkeleri ile de karşılaştırarak kamu konutları, ulaşım, vergi, çevre gibi pek çok politika alanında ortak AB düzenlemeleri olduğunu anlayacaklardır. Önceki iki bölümde olduğu gibi bu bölümdeki alt başlıklara verilen yanıtların ortalamalarını karşılaştırdığımızda her birinde çeşitli oranlarda artış olduğu görülmektedir. Fakat, P değeri kuralına göre katılımcıların yalnızca şu başlıklardaki bilgi ve farkındalık düzeyinde anlamlı artışlar olduğu saptanmıştır; “Suçla Mücadele”, “Terör ile Mücadele”, “İşsizlikle Mücadele”, “Dış İlişkiler”, “Sağlık Sistemi”, “Konut”, “Göç”, “Toplu Taşıma.” İlk üç bölümde elde edilen veriler, her bir alt başlık için aynı oranda bir etki yaratmasa da Erasmus programına katılmanın katılımcıların AB’ye yönelik bilgi ve farkındalık düzeyleri üzerinde olumlu bir etkisinin olduğu iddiasını doğrulamaktadır.

Çalışmanın Erasmus programı ile ilgili bölümünde ise katılımcılara programın hangi yönlerinin AB’ye yönelik farkındalık ve bilgi düzeyi üzerinde etkili olabildiği sorulmuş ve bu kapsamda şu 10 maddeden oluşan bir liste sunulmuştur; “Vize Prosedürleri”, “Erasmus Programı Kapsamındaki Belgeler”, “Erasmus Programı Kapsamında Avrupa Kurumları Tarafından İstenen Prosedürler”, “Diğer Erasmus Öğrencileriyle Etkileşim”, “Misafir Olunan Ülkedeki Günlük Yaşam Deneyimi”, “Misafir Olunan Yükseköğretim Kurumundaki Pratikler”, “Misafir Olunan

Yükseköğretim Kurumunda Alınan AB Odaklı Dersler”, “Misafir Olunan Ülkede Yaşanan AB Odaklı Politik Gelişmeler”, “Misafir Olunan Ülkedeki Medya Organları ve AB Odaklı Haberler”. İncelenen sonuçlara göre her bir maddede 10 üzerinden 5 ve üzeri puan verilen yanıtların çoğunluğu oluşturduğu ve her maddede 10 puan grubunun en büyük grubu temsil ettiği görülmüştür. Her bir madde için katılımcıların en az yüzde 64’ünün 8 ve üzerinde puan verdiği tespit edilmiştir. En yüksek oy oranını “Diğer Erasmus Öğrencileriyle Etkileşim” ve “Misafir Olunan Ülkedeki Günlük Yaşam Denetimi” maddelerinin aldığı görülmüş, bu durum Erasmus Programı’nın pratik ve deneyimsel bir alternatif sunduğunu bir kez daha teyit etmiştir. Bu kısımda verilen yanıtlar, katılımcıların Erasmus programının AB’ye yönelik bilgi ve farkındalık düzeyinin artmasında önemli oranda etkili olabildiğini düşündüğünü göstermektedir.

Bu çalışma literatüre iki yönüyle katkı sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. AB’ye yönelik bilgi açığı kavramı, daha çok demokrasi açığı ve Avrupa kamuoyunu şekillendiren bir bilgi aracı olarak medyanın rolü tartışmaları kapsamında incelenmiş, bu tartışmalar bilginin doğası ve rolüne çok az yer ayırmışlardır. Avrupa Komisyonu tarafından organize edilen Eurobarometer anketleri dışında Avrupa vatandaşlarının AB’yi ne kadar tanıdıkları ve bildiklerine ilişkin ampirik bir çalışma neredeyse bulunmamaktadır. Bu kapsamda literatürde Avrupa vatandaşlarının Birliği ne kadar tanıdıklarına ve bilgi ve farkındalık sahibi vatandaşların önemine ilişkin teorik ve amprk bir eksiklik bulunduğu söylenebilir. Bu çalışmanın bahsi geçen eksikliğe katkı sunması beklenmektedir. Ayrıca Erasmus programının etkilerine ilişkin günden güne büyüyen bir literatür oluşmaktadır. Fakat bu çalışmaların pek çoğu Program’ın Avrupa kimliği ve katılımcıların istihdam edilebilirlik, yabancı dil yeterliliği gibi yetkinlikleri üzerindeki etkisine odaklanmaktadır. Özellikle programın Avrupa kimliği üzerindeki etkisini analiz eden sayısız çalışma bulunmaktadır. Bu çalışmalar Erasmus öğrencilerinin diğer Avrupa vatandaşlarıyla bir arada yaşaması sonucunda kolektif ve ulus üstü Avrupa kimliğini ve karşılıklı güven duygusunu kazanacağını iddia etmektedir. Diğer taraftan Erasmus programının Avrupalı öğrenciler arasındaki etkileşimi arttırdığını, fakat bunun otomatik olarak bir Avrupa kimliği duygusuna dönüşmediğini savunan çalışmalar da bulunmaktadır. Yine bir diğer açıdan, Erasmus Programı’na katılan öğrencilerin daha hareketlilik döneminin başında bile

hareketliliğe katılmayan öğrencilere göre Avrupa kimliğine ve Avrupalı olma duygusuna daha yatkın olduğunu belirten çalışmalar bulunmaktadır. Fakat bu çalışmalar programın, katılımcıların AB'ye yönelik farkındalık ve bilgi düzeyi üzerindeki etkisine yönelik çok kısıtlı veri sunmaktadır. Bu kapsamda bu çalışmanın alternatif bir bakış açısı sunarak Erasmus literatürüne katkı sunması beklenmektedir.

## APPENDIX E: TEZ İZİN FORMU / THESIS PERMISSION FORM

### TEZ İZİN FORMU / THESIS PERMISSION FORM

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#### YAZARIN / AUTHOR

Soyadı / Surname : AKPINAR  
Adı / Name : BURCU  
Bölümü / Department : AVRUPA ÇALIŞMALARI

TEZİN ADI / TITLE OF THE THESIS (İngilizce / English) : THE IMPACT OF EU-FUNDED STUDENT EXCHANGE PROGRAMMES ON THE EU INFORMATION DEFICIT

TEZİN TÜRÜ / DEGREE: Yüksek Lisans / Master ☒ Doktora / PhD ☐

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