

The Problems and the Solution Projections of the Academics from Arab Countries who live in Turkey

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Preface

The workshop, organized by the Medipolis Mediterranean Studies Center in 28th May 2016 in İstanbul Medipol University's Haliç Campus discussed the problems and the viable concrete solution projections of the academics from Arab countries who live in Turkey.

The workshop, gathered so many academics and experts from Arab countries and Turkey, was designed as two main sessions, after the opening speech by İstanbul Medipol University Rector Prof. Sabahattin Aydın.

The first session, moderated by the Senior Advisor to the Prime Minister of Republic of Turkey Mr. Ömer Faruk Korkmaz and the Director of the Medipolis Mediterranean Studies Center Prof. Bekir Berat Özipek, focused on the problems of the academics from Arab countries who live in Turkey; while the second discussed on the concrete solution projections.

We kindly appreciate and thank to Mr. İbrahim Altan, Mr. Murtaza Yetiş, Mr. İbrahim Turgut, Mr. İbrahim Bouzidani, Mrs. Sena Melemez, Mr. Oktay Altın and Mr. Erol Kam for their valuable contributions throughout the organizational process and formation of this report.

We hope this study will contribute and support to the solution of the problems of our colleagues from Arab countries living in Turkey, who were forced to move from their own homeland, university and students in such a tragic breaking stage through the historical process.

Part I

The Problems of Being Away From the Country and the University

1. Residence permit problem: One of the issues emphasized by the participants is the lack of a permanent residence permit. It is stated that residence permit fees are being burden for academicians and thus, they are having difficulty to pay these fees; even they are able to pay for themselves, it is very difficult for them to pay for their families. Another aspect of the problem is the obligation to be employed in order to obtain a residence permit. Academicians are being obliged to work in ordinary jobs to obtain a residence permit.¹

2. Legal Status problem: Academicians who come from Arab countries do not have refugee status legally due to Turkey's disclaimer of refugee applications except from European countries. In this manner, some of the academicians have "Temporary Protection" status. This temporary status causes insecure situations and prevents academicians focusing on their academic studies.

3. Language barriers and language courses: One of the major problems of academicians who migrated to Turkey is the language barrier. The fact that an academician cannot speak Turkish is a source of distress for both finding a job and for the maintenance of everyday life. For this reason, it is a great difficulty to make transactions in public institutions; because, Arabic-Turkish translation services are not sufficient, even in the Directorate of Migration Management. Turkish language courses are considered as a solution to overcome this language barrier, but the fact that they are expensive is a burden for the academicians who already have serious financial difficulties. Besides, the people who give language courses usually do not have the expertise to give language education to foreigners.

4. Passport problem: In order to obtain a residence permit in Turkey, it is required to have a passport with one-year of validity. However, many academicians' passports are expired and there is no possibility for them to apply to Syrian authorities to extend their passport. For this reason, they cannot make application

¹ Syrian academicians who come to Turkey because of the war have "Temporary Protection" status. For this reason people who have this status do not have a problem such as residence permit fees etc. Residence permit is a problem for the people who come with their passports from Syria and other Arab countries. People who have passports are facing with residence fees and they cannot benefit from the services offered to the people with "Temporary Protection" status. (Currently, there is not any legal obstacle to switch to "Temporary Protection" status.)

to obtain a residence permit. Besides, the lack of a valid passport causes them not to attend academic meetings abroad and their academic studies hinder for this reason.

5. Travel Restrict: Academicians feel uncomfortable about some practices generally end with discriminations in the name of security measures while traveling within Turkey. When academicians need to travel within Turkey to participate academic activities, security forces may demand “invitation letters” from academicians in bus stations and airports. Besides the invitation letters, especially for the people who travel by airline, a “travel permit” is requested which should be obtained from the Directorate of Migration Management.

6. Academic titles and ascent problem: Participants repeatedly expressed the issue that they are not able to use their academic titles. In this context another problem is that academicians are being employed at lower positions than their status. Arabic-speaking academicians stated that ascent is a problem in their academic life in Turkey. Because, juries for associate professorship and professorship cannot evaluate the candidates in Arabic language. Likewise, the publication language of academic journals is usually Turkish and this is an obstacle for Arab academicians’ publications.

7. Employment out of profession: Academicians state that they are generally employed at faculties of theology and Arabic philology department by ignoring their different areas of profession. Academicians who are expert on technical fields such as chemistry, engineering etc. cannot work on their own specialization area. For this reason, most of academicians have migrated to West and the others are trying to find a way to migrate to West also.

8. Bureaucratic obstacle: Another problem which participants underlined is inert bureaucratic procedures in answerer institutions, especially in YÖK (Council of Higher Education). Slow rendering services on appeal about diploma equivalency process and non-recognition of some Syrian universities’ equivalency pose problems.

In addition to the absence of Arabic translation service at above mentioned public institutions, it can be seen also different problems in different institutions. For example, temporary residence permit is not known by some institutions because of its difference than ordinary residence permit and this situations causes incapability to put into process applications of people. Misspellings of the names and dates of births were also remarked as complaints by the participants. The

mistakes which are made especially by officers who cannot speak or understand Arabic are in the line of criticism. The misspelling and recording date of births in the form of “01.01” were mentioned by academics. It is said that this kind of negligence in these institutions cause feelings that they are not “wanted” in this country. Bureaucratic authorities utter that there is also no progress in the process of completion “some issues because of they cannot find or communicate country responsible of applicants.” On the other hand, it is impossible to find a state party in the example of Syria.

9. Arabic education in Turkey: Education of numerous children and youngsters were halted after they were forced to flee their countries and come to Turkey. These people aren’t able to pursue higher education due to absence of Turkish universities that provide education in Arabic. Moreover, students of Arabic origin who want to study in the existing universities are concerned about the amount of tuition fees which are much higher than those of Turkish students.

10. Education in Syria: There are students who are waiting for pursuance of their education in districts free of regime’s control (Liberated Districts). In a case of provision of necessary convenience, many scholars express that they are ready to return this areas with the intention of maintain the education. But, difficulties in the entrance and exit to these liberated areas are obstacles on a continuing education of these students.

11. Arab university problem: Arab Academicians Association has attempted to establish an Arab university in Turkey for Arab students and academicians but due to the bureaucratic issues and problems in YÖK, this attempt has failed.



Part Two

Focusing on the Solution: Debating Academic, Social, Legal, Political Steps

1. Permanent residency: Taking permanent residency for the academicians will ease their living conditions and enhance and facilitate their academic activities. Saving themselves from unsecured conditions will raise their productivity and enable them to concentrate fully on their studies. Additionally, giving permanent residency to their families should be a core and crucial necessity as well.

2. Financial support: The academician associations operative in Turkey can be financially supported. Hence, they can reach more academicians and enable to create more effective networks among themselves. Besides, a specific fund can be generated for jobless academicians to ease their life sustainability.

3. Language courses: Language courses as one of the main instruments in overcoming the language obstacle have always been so costly in Turkey. Solving this problem requires implementation of a broad and low-costly or even free language instruction activity. In addition to this, the voluntary support and contribution of the civil society can be referable at this task. The participants expressed the critical importance of learning Turkish for social adaptational process; and unless that's achieved, they always stay as visitors in this country. Thus, formation of a broad, efficient and low-costly or even free language course mechanism is so critical.

4. Profession: The necessity of employment of the academicians not just in technology and arabic language departments, but also in social or naturel sciences has been another important point emphasized within the discussions. It's required to support the people's studies of their own professions. Especially the studies within the exceptional fields, and the academicians who have scientific patents need to be supported and distinctively cared. In this way, qualified academicians tending towards the West can be captivated and hold within Turkey.

5. Academic title and ascent: During the employment decision process, the relevant academician's experience, past works and other talents should also be considered along with the diploma. Namely, the employment processes need to be more inclusive and careful. In order to guarantee the academic ascent pro-

cesses in a proper and fair context, the juris need to be designed also in Arabic language and contain academicians from Arab countries as well.

6. Arabic higher education and Arab universities: Considering the huge population of migration to Turkey and this population's academicians and students potential, Arabic departments within the Turkish universities has been an urgent need. For this task, the principles of YÖK which necessitates at least three Turkish citizen academician in opening a department and the must that number of foreign students can at most be half of the number of Turkish citizen students should be removed. Actually, these necessities do not based upon any legal regulations or law; rather, stemmed just from the practices and customal forms. In this context, the removal of this operational reservation would be sufficient. Besides, inside the universities, –just as in the US-, removal of the legal obstacles on an outcomer sponsored constitution of department, faculty, center and institute is another requirement to facilitate Arab universities and entities open academic units in Turkey. One of the most important suggestions in this context is establishing Arab universities. In this way, while there would be new opportunities for employment of academicians, the students would benefit as well and also these universities could be regional attraction centers which make serious contributions to the Turkey's image and economy. For this task, just as in the Turkish-German University model, a Turkish-Arab or Turkish-Syrian University shall be imaginable. Referring the Arabic program experience accomplished in Gaziantep University, this sample can also be implemented in other regions; especially in İstanbul, due to its huge potential and high demand for such a model. This vision of establishment of Arab universities and Arabic instructed departments within the existing universities will make Turkey an attraction center in the region as well.

7. Education in Syria: The feasibility of the educational process in the districts free of regime's control within Syria should be assessed. If this opportunity would be available, the academicians, in some determined periods (monthly or more frequent), would pass to Syria to pursue the educational process within Syria. In this regard, facilitation of entry-exits will be required for those persons.

8. Employment out of university: It has been suggested that the academicians can work, not only in universities, but also in other fields depending on their specializations and that they can be employed on those fields considering equal opportunity and competence. Various public organizations, chambers of commerce and industry and research centers are among those.

9. Statue of Visiting Member of Faculty: As a suggestion for practical solu-

tion, recruitment of academicians from Arab countries as visiting members of faculty has been expressed. Next to a comprehensive and permanent solution in long term, in short term application of visiting scholar and researcher can be serviceable. Moreover, they should be provided with satisfying salary.

10. Education in English: Many academicians have teaching efficiency in English. They can be recruited in departments in which the education is in English.

11. Education in Arabic: It is very apparent in Turkey that the level language teaching quality is very low. This is also valid for Arabic language teaching. These academicians are available for the schools that have Arabic in their curriculum. A simple change in regulations on this issue will bring a positive transformation in quality also in education in English.

12. Interacademicians Cooperation and Follow-up Committee: Launching an academic initiative for academicians from Arab country will make their cooperation with their colleagues in Turkey possible. This initiative for building up communication means and for driving common researches will provide many problems with easier solution on juristic, political and social level. These researches can be driven through platforms by civil societies and academic associations.²

13. Simplification of Bureaucratic Processes: The problems faced initially in YÖK (Higher Education Council) and in other public institutions must be found solutions. Firstly YÖK is expected to become facilitative for the accreditation of the universities. Then, through common cards that are inclusively in force these official operations will be possible to be driven at ease. Arabic-Turkish translation service will be worthwhile in public institutions that deal with refugees. During the solution processes of the problems of Arab academicians, public authorities should be free from asking to the related countries and due to some negativity, mass of people should keep away from suffering.

14. Employment in Existent Universities: In Turkey the existent universities can employ foreign members of faculty in 10% of their faculties. A huge quantity for employment can be provided as universities activate this quota.³

15. Suggestion for the Ministry of Emigration: Considering number of

² In the workshop, "Follow-up Commission, as a communication medium with this aim has been suggested by Dr. Mohadin Bananeh and the secretary of the commission has been undertaken by Assist. Prof. Can Ceylan from Istanbul Medipol University. The commission is open for participation through arabicacademics@googlegroups.com

³ The leading universities in this regard are Süleyman Demirel University and Gaziantep University. In the workshop, the participants from Süleyman Demirel University stated that they have successful studies at this task.

emigrants in millions in Turkey, establishment of a ministry for the emigrant has been suggested.

16. Scholarships: Post-doctorate scholarships for those who acquired PhD and PhD scholarships for those who finished their graduate education have been suggested.

17. Travel Document: Suggestion for a document to provide academics with easy domestic travel in Turkey has been expressed.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that problems of academics from Arab countries are varying, the solution steps are not difficult and so challenging. Simple legislative changes will be sufficient and effective in reducing the problem level; thus enabling to ease their lives. Indeed, the essential part of the necessary regulations does not offer significant costs and/or huge organizational capacities; rather, is related to the elimination of the legal and actual obstacles. The success in this course will depend on a rapid and effective decree and its sustainable prosecution. Particularly, against the risk of some delays in this task due to bureaucratic processes, a follow-up mechanism shall be implemented. The association of the civil society and academics both from Turkey and Arab countries by taking initiative to handle the issue will be crucial to get positive results and progression. Besides, in such processes, the mindful and sensitive societal parts' support and contributions are important. Hence, some probable counter-arguments, misinformations or objections from different groups within the society can be ceased by making informative explanations telling that the aimed steps to be taken will not mean any kind of an additional job loss or employment contraction; rather, will seek to stimulate the productivity and utilize the potentials. However beyond these all, the required steps should not be delayed at all in regard to some potential objections and resistances; yet, this is principally a moral commitment and liability for all of us above all different/varying considerations



Workshop Participant List

- *Dr. Moheddin Bananeh, Syria Oxford University*
- *Dr. Mohammed Waleed Al-Hayani, Syrian Academic Association*
- *Dr. Rasheed Shekho, Historian*
- *Dr. Zakria Zallam, Physicist*
- *Dr. Omar Al-Mohammad, Economist*
- *Dr. Tayseer Al-Zamil, Physicist*
- *Dr. Wissam Alokalah, Expert on International Law*
- *Dr. Mohamad Abdulhai, Economist*
- *Dr. Rim Khartash, Engineer*
- *Prof. Serry El Bialy, Arab Academicians Association*
- *Prof. Osama El Hamawy, Arab Academicians Association*
- *Dr. Tayseer Barmo, Arab Academicians Association*
- *Dr. Khalil El Hamadany, Arab Academicians Association*
- *Dr. Gamal Bakr, Arab Academicians Association*
- *Dr. Amal Sermadwo, Arab Academicians Association*
- *Dr. Maher El Hariri, Arab Academicians Association*
- *Zahi Suidan, Arab Academicians Association*
- *Prof. Mahmoud Al-Khalidi, İstanbul Sabahattin Zaim University*
- *Asst. Prof. Abdallah Marouf Omar, 29 Mayıs University*
- *Prof. Abdulrahman Hussian, Gaziantep University*
- *Ömer Faruk Korkmaz, Senior Advisor to Prime Ministry of Republic of Turkey*
- *Prof. Haluk Songur, Süleyman Demirel University*
- *Asst. Prof. Vahdettin Aydın, Süleyman Demirel University*
- *Prof. Sabahattin Aydın, Rector, İstanbul Medipol University*
- *Prof. Mehmet İpşirli, İstanbul Medipol University*
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- *Res. Asst. Yasin Kara, İstanbul Medipol University*
- *Res. Asst. Orkun Elmacıgil, İstanbul Medipol University*
- *Res. Asst. Asiye Yüksel Ağargün, İstanbul Medipol University*
- *Dr. Amir Faris, SCIRSR*
- *Halit Ali*
- *Hasan Mushtaha, MA student, İstanbul Ticaret University*

Workshop
Participant List



- *Mahmoud Al-Juhani, 29 Mayıs University*
- *Oktay Altın, Turkish Language Teacher*
- *Hüseyin Paça*
- *İbrahim Turgut*
- *Khirky Mohammed*
- *Nurhayat Kızıllan, Sociolog*
- *Rusdi Jabbas*
- *Frial Ramadhan*
- *Ongky Duta Pratama*
- *Büşra Akyüzlü*
- *Hatice Dilara Bilmez, Yeni Şafak newspaper*
- *Yasin İşleyen, Zaman newspaper*

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