Philosophy in Turkey: Current Situation

1. General Introduction

The Turkish Republic proclaimed on the 29th of October 1923 gave, in many respects, a new start to the nation. The founders of the Republic were profoundly eager to reform the education in general in Turkey and especially focusing on the construction of schools. Thus, the new attitude in the educational configuration had its result in the diversity of new schools and institutions. Efforts were also made on the transposition of ancestral non-written culture into a written world. They were accompanied with a well-scheduled teaching, which would make the plain «reading» subject into a «reading and writing» one.

After these most general characteristics, we may now put clearly the situation of philosophy in Turkey. This is a reformation of philosophy which began to be taught in high schools in 1910, under the Ottoman Empire. Sociology joined it from 1926 onwards. We also know that philosophy was taught for a long time only in literary final class of high schools while in the scientific final class only Sociology and Logic were taught. Due to the changes in curriculum, philosophy became an optional subject in high schools after 1980; but during 1998-1999 school year, under intensive pressure from intellectuals, it has returned as a compulsory one in the final class. The purpose of this change was to make the students acquire some critical as well as creative ways of thinking.

In secondary education, the centre of all important decision comes up on the Ministry of Education. For example, philosophers and their texts were largely examined and analysed in classes alongside cur-

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riculums officially prepared by the Ministry of Education. It must be remarked that, we never had any written curriculum neither under Ottoman rule nor during the first years of the Republic. From that time on, curriculums have been issued on and off, the current one having come into force in 1992.

As for the story of our higher education, philosophy had to be taught as a main subject since the second half of 19th century in the Faculty of Letters of Darülfünun. – «Darülfünun», this Persian-Arabic word that means ‘house of sciences’ was replaced by “university” in 1933. The faculty of Letters had four departments: «literature», «history», «geography» and «philosophy». In the philosophy department lectures on Psychology, Sociology and Pedagogy also took place. The «Institute of Education and Culture» was established in Istanbul by German scholars during the First World War for developing the Turkish educational system, being a means to get some foreign professors to come and give lectures. Among those guest lecturers, the name of Dr. Jacobi is still remembered. However, the very academic renovation of «Darülfünun» was realized in 1933.

In order to understand and evaluate better all these reforms, we have to consider the events preceding it. In fact, 1932 was, as regards the renovation of ancestral institutions, a very important year in our history. Considerable reforms had followed the proclamation of the Republic, especially in legal, social, political and economic fields. Time was reached now to change «Darülfünun» into a university on a worldwide scale as well as establish new institutions, where language, history and geography of the country would be studied with due care and application. For example, two Societies were established in 1932: «Turkish Language Studies Society» and «Turkish History Society» both aiming to evaluate the relationship between our past and future through scientific methods. In the same year, Prof. Malche was invited from Switzerland to prepare a preliminary draft concerning the Darülfünun reform plan.

Submitted in 1933, his report was so critical that the old Darülfünun closed on the 31st of July only to be opened again on the 1st of August of the same year as an institution based on contemporary criteria under the name of «Istanbul University». It is not our intention to go into details, but we can not go on without underlining the impact this change has had on our philosophical spheres. One of its spectacular effects was that philosophy was no more taught by eclectic methods by some professors (or «müderris» with the term employed that time)
who were considered as perfect teaching masters although they had no proper philosophical formation.

Since the Middle Ages, it is well known that any university is a totality of the professors and the students. As it is started from this determined point, it has been taken fundamental resolutions to choose teaching or researching staff in the new establishment. They are provided from three sources for the department of philosophy of Istanbul University, as well as the other sections: the first group was composed of some members of the «Darülfünum» teaching staff; the second contained several professors who came to escape the political pressure in Germany just before the Second World War. Finally, a third group not less important was constituted from young academics newly back home from European countries, where they had been sent with some government scholarship for master or doctorate thesis. Among those foreign teachers who came from abroad the first prominences were: Hans Reichenbach (arrived in 1933), Ernst von Aster (in 1936) and Walter Kranz (in 1942). Through this invitation action initiated by Atatürk and his close colleagues put forward an intellectual bridge between Germany and Turkey, which has been serving until now. So the new action officially vivified the forgoing German philosophical tradition in the department of philosophy in Istanbul University.

From 1933 to 2007, the ninety one universities were established in Turkey, the sixty six of them are state universities, the twenty five are foundation or private ones and there are twenty three departments of philosophy in these universities. These departments have been established until 2007: Adnan Menderes University ( Aydın), Ankara University (Ankara), Atatürk University (Erzurum), Bilkent University (Ankara, it is foundation/private university and the medium of instruction is English), Bosphorus University (Istanbul, the medium of instruction is English), Cumhuriyet University (Sivas), Dicle University (Diyarbakır), Ege University (İzmir), Fatih University (İstanbul, it is foundation/private university and the medium of instruction is English), Galatasaray University (İstanbul, the medium of instruction is French), Gazi University (Ankara), Hacettepe University (Ankara), Istanbul University (İstanbul), Kocaeli University (İzmit), Maltepe University (İstanbul, it is foundation/private university), Mersin University (Mersin), Middle East Technical University (Ankara, the medium of instruction is English), Uludağ University (Bursa), Muğla University (Muğla), Pamukkale University (Denizli), Sakarya University (Adapazari), Süleyman Demirel
University (Isparta), Yeditepe University (Istanbul, it is foundation/private university and the medium of instruction is also English),

The structure of philosophy departments that began to be organized in the thirties according to a modern conception suffered serious modifications under the impact of «Higher Education Committee», created in 1981. Before the adoption of the law foreseeing its establishment, our faculties were based on a «chair and certificate» system whereas since that date, we have «main science branches» instead of chairs.

Concerning general interest in philosophy is not limited to educational or researching programs in academic institutions such as universities; in addition to this well-known field, there are also some associations or societies, even independent thinkers who work on a voluntary basis. The first endeavours to establish professional society began in 1926, and the Turkish Society of Philosophy was established in 1928, the year when the Latin alphabet was adopted, followed by the Society of Philosophy in 1931, and Philosophical Association in 1949. None of them exists today. However, the continuous activities of the Philosophical Society of Turkey, established in Ankara in 1974, allow us to think that things on this way are well set up. This Society, that joined the International Federation of Philosophical Societies (F.I.S.P.) as an active member in 1979, is one of our important NGOs; and as such, it takes philosophy to the outside of academic institutions. Finally, we have to mention the name of the Turkish Association of Philosophy that was established in Ankara in 1987.

2. Current Situation in Philosophy

2.1. Philosophy in Primary and High Schools

As underlined previously, since the school year of 1998-1999, philosophy has taken place in the final class of high schools as a compulsory course two hours per a week. First time, in school year of 2006-2007, it has just started «Education of Thinking» in primary schools. The basis of this teaching is the official curriculum prepared by the Ministry of National Education. The last curriculum, that has been put into force since 1992, is a systematic one, and all students' books are based on it; moreover, all activities concerning this matter are inspected by the same Ministry.

There are approximately 1,000,000 students—only in the last class—in high schools which have been founded for various reasons. It is observed
that there is an increased interest in philosophy, especially, in Anatolian
(the adjective 'Anatolian' does not mean that the school is in Anatolia,
but it used for State high schools where great part of education is given
in English or French or German) High Schools and in private ones. In
the intensified activity concerning philosophy, there is a great deal of the
new approach according to which the knowledge should not remain in
the schools, on the contrary, it has to go beyond schools. Meanwhile, we
can not underestimate the role of "Philosophical Olympiads for Juniors"
periodically organized on the national scale by the Division of Philosophy
for Children of the Philosophical Society of Turkey. The students who
win the first and second degree, participate in the international olympiad
and these students are educated, generally, in the area of philosophy at
university. In addition to this, in high schools, the teachers and students
establish clubs of philosophy where they deal with the philosophical mat-
ters – for example discussions, congress, reading courses – are realized.
To give a concrete example, «The Istanbul High Schools Platform» which
is founded in the mentioned city, organized until now a lot of seminars
on different concepts like «freedom», «justice», «discrimination» etc.
This year, «International Philosophical Olympiads for Juniors» will be
realized in Turkey (Antalya) by Philosophical Society of Turkey.

As for the high school teachers: there are, approximately, 5400 teach-
ers working under the name of «the philosophy teacher» and «guidance
and counsellor» in Turkey, about twenty seven percent of whom are
the graduates of the department of philosophy of the universities; eight
percent of whom are from a faculty of education (i.e. Teachers' Train-
ing School For Social Sciences); but forty seven percent were graduates
of the department of sociology. As it is well seen, the great deal of the
philosophy teachers had studied sociology.

If a student of Philosophy, Sociology or Psychology Departments of a
Faculty of Letters takes, in addition to his/her own courses, eight hours
of logic plus sixteen hours of the main subject of one of these depart-
ments other than his/her own, he/she can have a teacher of philosophy
diploma. Moreover, there are three departments of teachers' training for
philosophy attached to the Faculty of Education in Turkey (in Adana,
Ankara and Erzurum).

Since 1994, the Higher Education Committee and the Ministry of Na-
tional Education have reorganized the departments of teachers' training
in the light of a new project supported by the WorlD Bank. According
to a recent decision taken by the Ministry, candidates to a philosophy
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teacher's post should have a masters' degree, but without being bound to submit a written thesis. So, from now on, the graduates of the faculty of science and letters will realize postgraduate studies for one and a half years, but the graduates of the faculty of education will make these studies for a year just to become a philosophy teacher in any high school.

2. 2. Philosophy in Higher Education

We have to consider this issue on the axis of the teaching and researching as well, at universities.

2.2.1. Philosophy as a Field of Teaching in Higher Education

Nowadays 4000 students are approximately educated in the twenty three departments of philosophy in the Turkish universities. In addition to these departments, teaching philosophy is done in the teachers' training departments, besides, in Faculties of Law (i.e. in the main science branch of the philosophy and sociology of law) and Faculties of Theology (i.e. in the main science branch of the philosophy and theological sciences). Postgraduate studies are realized only at the universities having qualified teaching staff in sufficient number. In our country, there are nineteen departments giving a master's degree and twelve departments having a program for a doctorate degree.

The Higher Education Committee prepared a framework to apply from the 1983-1984 academic year on; but as time passed, several modifications were made in this programme. In recent years, every department has prepared its own curriculum to apply. With general lines, the curriculums are prepared on a systematic and historic axis. In some departments things are taught that were realized in the Republic period. On the other hand, in recent years the subjects matters about human rights find the right place in various departments of philosophy from a philosophical point of view; it is frequently taken as a mastership course item or written thesis in some universities such as Hacettepe, in Ankara. Postgraduate studies are given also in two ways (systematic and historic) and are organized within seminars.

Turkey has made considerable efforts in order to become a knowledgable society since the proclamation of the Republic. Especially nowadays, the demands have increased to establish an open society based on knowledge. In a philosophical context, some scholars explain the results of their research studies or discuss the social subjects with their colleagues; consequently, the philosophical approach takes place

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in widespread scale. The number of this kind of works has much increased during the last five years. Those who devoted themselves to the elaboration of philosophical subjects concentrated their trainings in the foreground of the activities such as lectures, symposia, mass media discussions and round tables, etc.

Some of the professors and assistant professors teaching in the philosophical departments have had their master’s degree in foreign countries. As we said above, in the first years of the Republic, some young academics had been sent to European countries, like Germany and France, with some government scholarship for a doctorate thesis. But in recent years, young scholars have gone generally to the United States of America or United Kingdom by their own means. Some departments have the Bilateral Agreement with European universities on philosophy, for example, Maltepe University (in Istanbul) has eight Bilateral Agreements in the context of Erasmus Exchange Programme related students and teaching staff. Erasmus Exchange programmes are very significant for implementing the culture of philosophy on the universal values. Some universities regularly organize symposium or congress concerning philosophy. For example, Kocaeli University organizes every year «Kocaeli University International Philosophy Days», Muğla University holds also some seminars or symposia on either national or international level. Maltepe University organizes every year a symposium entitled «Human Sciences and Philosophy» for academic circle and «Philosophical Causeries» for people. The philosophical teaching and education have been taking an important place among the non-governmental organizations as well as the science, art associations, for the last ten years. These associations, from time to time, organize philosophy courses, some of which are destined for their own members, while some others are for the general public.

It is obvious that the training of the academic staff at universities will be reflected to their teaching form and content. The academics trained in foreign countries adopt some similar attitudes according to their scientific acquirement. Some philosophical writings dictated by the tension between the local character of the society and its universal one, and oriented to the comprehension of this tension show that the discussions about modernity, postmodernity or globalisation are reflected to the teaching of philosophy in Turkey.

In the past, teaching philosophy was realized through foreign texts or translated ones; but now some philosophical texts are written by
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Turkish philosophers or authors. The results of the postgraduate studies since 1942, have also taken place in the teaching of philosophy in our universities. Besides, nowadays, the approach concerning the history of philosophy is changed, some historical cross-sections are separately studied and taught thoroughly. To give a concrete example, for the last twenty years approximately, the philosophy of the European Middle Ages and Renaissance are taught as an independent subject matter in the departments of philosophy.

Some professors quest for different methods of teaching, so by this way they try to activate their students for world problems. We can give an example: the human rights problems are studied in the departments of philosophy as a world problem. In addition to those concerning ethics, philosophy of man or philosophical anthropology, philosophy of culture, history, social sciences take place meticulously in this education. Besides, these activities, classical languages like Greek and Latin are taught in some departments.

Right alongside all of these departments, in some universities philosophy teaching is compulsory and elective. While the philosophy teaching is attached only to the social sciences and literature in the first years of the Republic, in recent years in addition to them, it is attached also to engineering, medicine or natural sciences. Nowadays, there are many faculties which have organized philosophical courses in their programmes like «Introduction to Philosophy» or «What is Philosophy?». The main goal is to create a new generation that could elaborate all problems from the philosophical point of view. To give a concrete example for what has just been said, in Bosphorus University, since the days of Robert College (in its former name), philosophy has been taught in different departments. This application is becoming more widespread than in the other universities: in Middle East Technical University, Hacettepe University, Istanbul Technical University, Maltepe University etc.

The increase of the students’ activities is another fact observed in the universities in recent years. In this context, not only students of departments of philosophy, but also those of different departments are interested in philosophy. Generally, they found various associations such as «Philosophy Club», «Thinking Club», «Philosophical Association» or «Discussing Community». But almost all of the clubs organizing philosophical activities are in big cities such as Istanbul, Ankara etc. To give a concrete example, ten students’ congresses have been realized by different universities, until this year.
Usually, university staff members have creatively taken part in these students’ activities. In this way, working collaboratively, university, city and society were able to construct a common world thanks to philosophy. These recent developments show that Turkey is in advance to become an emancipated knowledge society.

2.2.2. Philosophy as a Field of Research in Higher Education

In addition to thesis of mastership and doctorate, university staff members work as researchers in these institutions. They present their studies in some seminars or congress and publish them in scientific journals or reviews. The research funds of the universities, Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey, founded in 1963 supports the philosophical research studies; and Turkish Academy of Sciences supports also the academic staff in social and philosophical sciences. There are many different research among them; for example, some of which are traditional; some others deal with contemporary subjects. It can be said that papers prepared, however, the studies which are realized in the universities, are from historical point of view, a great measure.

Even if we can not say that there are great philosophical movements in the universities, it is well known that problems concerning human beings are becoming the focus of attention. Especially, the studies realized in Istanbul University have proved it, since its reformation year, as we remarked it before. From these years on positive studies began to guide the intellectual life of Turkish society which made great progress in the fields of language, culture and history. So the everyday life of the Republic was imbued with a considerable new diversity of intellectual subject.

It was a necessity to realize some detailed studies on the subjects mentioned above; the main goal being the reformation of our present language into a philosophical one. For this purpose, newly founded institutions of the Republic cooperated on this way. So, some joint studies realized by the department of Philosophy of Istanbul University and the Turkish Language Association have given us a good example of this kind of cooperation. The Turkish philosophers knew very well that, in order to produce something reliable in the domain of philosophical research, the relationship between language and thinking ways had to be put in an obvious place. This interpretation is a result of the effects of their milieu where they were educated.

As we said above, in the first years, the majority of the founders were professors who had come from Germany; and the other part of them had
come back also from Germany and France after having achieved their thesis of doctorate. Obviously, the common cultural background on which they depended naturally provided some general ways of thinking and working to our two oldest universities, i.e. those of Istanbul and Ankara, the first newly reorganized, the second just about the foundation.

In Istanbul, Professor Hans Reichenbach lectured from 1933 to 1938 mainly on positivistic themes. Ernst von Aster’s subjects were about history of philosophy without leaving the positivistic ground. As for, Nicolai Hartmann, Heinz Heimsoeth and Joachim Ritter, their work was mainly oriented to form young assistant professors.

In order to mention people known by their research is very important to give a concrete example for what has just been said. Generally speaking, those who represent philosophy in Turkey are still the alumni of the Istanbul University. The first generation of philosophers, educated in istanbul by German refugee professors, taught the middle generation; and almost all of the current teaching staff is constituted by pupils of this latter.

Among the first generation, Nusret Hizir (1889-1980) influenced by Hans Reichenbach, considered the philosophical discourse as a scientific one. Hilmi Ziya Ülken (1901-1974), intrigued in a variety of philosophical disciplines, worked at first in the Istanbul University, then went to Ankara University. Macit Gökberk (1908-1993) is renowned for his studies concerning the history of philosophy and his modern and enlightening attitude. He associated his philosophical discourse with the linguistic, historic and cultural subjects. Takiyettin Mengüsoğlu (1908-1984) who founded his philosophical discourse on the natural sciences became the pioneer of the movement with his studies concerning philosophical anthropology in Turkey. Those who represent the philosophy in Turkey, nowadays, are generally pupils of these scholars. Bedia Akarsu (1921) studied language, culture, history and ethics. Hüseyin Batuhan (1921-2004) is well known for his studies concerning logic and the philosophy of science. Ismail Tunali (1922) is famous through his studies on aesthetics. Nermi Uygur (1925-2005) dealing with many disciplines covering human problems, never stopped recreating a new philosophical language, so he brought wealth to the Turkish language through his writings. Cemal Yıldırım (1925) is well known for his studies concerning history and philosophy of science and Teo Grünberg (1927) through his logical researches. Uluğ Nutku (1935), disciple of Takiyettin Mengüsoğlu, has worked with a particular interest in philosophy of man. Takiyettin
Mengüsoğlu’s another disciple, Ioanna Kuçuradi (1936) who prepared her thesis of doctorate with him, has studied intensively on the philosophy of man and especially, human rights on national and international level as well; at the same time she has worked hard to spread the philosophy out the walls of the universities in Turkey. Ioanna Kuçuradi, the president of the Philosophical Society of Turkey and International Philosophical Societies, has constructed her philosophical discourse on literary works as well as daily life. Önay Sözer (1936) is well renowned for his studies on the history of philosophy, especially Hegel, Heidegger and the contemporary philosophy. Aşar Timuçin (1939) has worked hard on the history of ideas and aesthetics. Doğan Özlem (1944) has realized important studies about hermeneutics. Ömer Naci Soykan (1945) has worked on the philosophy of art, language and contemporary philosophy. Arda Denkel (1949-2000) wrote a lot of books about the ontology and epistemology from an analytical point of view. Betül Çotuksöken (1950, F.I.S.P. member) who achieved her thesis of doctorate with Nermi Uygur; on one hand, has worked hard about medieval philosophy; on the other hand, she is interested in the essence or quiddity of the philosophical discourse and human being problems. Gürol Irzik (1955, F.I.S.P. member) is well known for his studies concerning the philosophy of science and the methodological problems of the social sciences in recent years. Sevgi iyi (1956) has worked hard for the metaphysics in our time and Harun Tepe (1956) is interested in ethics problems. The last two names were the pupils of Ioanna Kuçuradi at Hacettepe University.

Nowadays, one hundred eighty scholars are working in the philosophy departments of the Turkish universities. Their activity is not limited by an excathedra teaching, but a considerable amount of publication including papers, books, philosophical dictionaries and translations are owned by these scholars. They have also been presenting their studies with an international audience for the last fifty years, the Turkish language is recreated by these works and because of that, this language is becoming as a philosophical one.

2.3. Philosophical Associations, Philosophical Circles

The endeavours to establish the philosophical associations continued intermittently from 1926 until 1974. The Philosophical Society of Turkey was founded in 1974 in Ankara and it became a member of F.I.S.P. in 1979. Ioanna Kuçuradi, the president of this Society, took on the post of
the secretary general of FISP during the 1988-1998 period; and she was the president of this Federation between 1998-2003. The Philosophical Society of Turkey has organized a number of activities on national and international level; at the same time, it has been publishing Turkish and English books. This Society hosted the 21st World Congress of Philosophy in 2003 in Istanbul. As it is well known, the main theme of this Congress was «Philosophy Facing World Problems». Philosophical Society of Turkey will host for «Philosophy Day» in 2007, in Istanbul.

2.4. As for the Researchers out Academic Circles

Some of these authors who write books, essays, articles or translated various publications have had a philosophical formation in a proper academic institution, some of the other are self-taught as regards to philosophy since they are trained in another educational field. The best known among them are Vehbi Hackadiroğlu (1919-2007) and Arslan Kaynardağ (1923). The former was renowned for his books about the epistemological, anthropological and ethics problems, at the same time for the review entitled Felsefe Tartışmaları (Philosophical Discussions, it has published by Bosphorus University) has been published since 1987. He translated a lot of books. The latter is well known with his books entitled Felsefecele Söyleşiler (Causeries with Contemporary Turkish Philosophers, 1986), Kadın Felsefecilerimiz (Our Women Philosophers, 1999), which are very important to inform about the current situation of the philosophical discourse in Turkey.

3. Philosophy in Mass Media

It is evident that the philosophy has an enlarging place in the cultural life in Turkey. Many publishers, some newspapers or journals are interested in publishing philosophical books or articles, respectively in Istanbul and Ankara. Some philosophers carry out programs about philosophy for radio and/or television.

4. Conclusion

Turkey is a young country with 31 % of her sixty five million inhabitants being under 15. There are seventeen million students undergoing primary, secondary and higher education in Turkey. Since the 1997-1998 school year, the basic compulsory education has lasted eight years. The
main goal for the next time is to raise it to twelve years. According to recent research, thirty four percent (with the free teaching) of the young generation has got the possibility of education in the universities; without doubt this number has to increase, and most of them have to study in higher education institutions.

As it is the case in many fields in Turkey, in the area of philosophy also, the activities increased in the first quarter of twentieth century; with the reorganization of Istanbul University, done regularly and represented by the philosophers who were educated in the foreign countries or in this University. As it is clear to see that in most interest of these persons are turned to the intellectual life of Europe. So Turkish Republic as the heir of an old civilization is mature enough now to be a partner of the European Union. In this context, activating subjects matters of the philosophy on the world became the problems of Turkey, as the case of human rights education rightly underlight it, particularity and universality, interculturality, identity problems, cultural relativism etc. came so on the ground of Turkish philosophy.

But there are still a lot of unsolved problems in the secondary and higher education levels in Turkey. It is a necessity that the curriculum be revised and consequently, a new one destined to high schools has to be prepared reflecting the qualities of the philosophy as a thinking way. The systematic approach has to be realized within the dimensions of the history of philosophy. In addition to this, teachers of philosophy periodically have to attend refreshing courses in order to enlarge their philosophical culture concerning new problems and the latest publications.

On higher education level, teaching philosophy has frequently been considered in many respects; for instance, curriculum and application. It is important to discuss the main subjects regarding this topic. The most important problem is the number of the staff in the universities; in fact, this number is already far from being sufficient. Another problem is that religious trends are still tempting to penetrate various educational institutions in a philosophical context. Especially in recent years, the discussions, realized on cultural relativism and identity, are encouraging these kinds of tendencies.