Student Dispatch: 
Fall in Boğaziçi

After the hot summer days of the intensive language summer program, I came back to Istanbul to embark on a full academic year linguistic immersion program in Boğaziçi University on a Boren Fellowship. Apparently there are approximately 600 exchange and Erasmus students currently studying in this prestigious Turkish university with one of the most beautiful campuses in the world. As opposed to the Summer program where nearly 90% of my fellow students were from the US, in the first days of pre-registration for Fall 2012 I met new friends from France, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Bosnia, Croatia, Great Britain, Spain and even Australia, China, and Japan. Student life is accordingly more intense than during the summer months with a lot of events, club activities, and social life.

Boğaziçi has a rather original registration system where all students are let to log in the system at the same time on a Monday morning which results in the fact that the interface program often blocks. It may take a considerable amount of time to be let in the system and try to grab the classes you need. However, after some valuable help from my Boğaziçi advisor, Professor Ceyda Arslan Kechriotis, as well as some diplomatic efforts on my part in order to convince a Political Science professor that Turkish Language and Literature (the department I was placed in) is not my only field of study in terms of my major in East European Studies, I was able to get in all the classes I had planned on taking. Out of five classes, four are taught in Turkish and only one in English, namely Issues in Turkish Foreign Policy, taught by Professor Gün Kut. Professor Kut is a Foreign Policy analyst and current Member of the Interim Management Board of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency. The Ottoman course taught in Turkish is an introduction to one of the most important languages in terms of Balkan history, the language of the empire of Osman that ruled over the entire Peninsula for centuries and left a deep mark on the cultures, languages, and historic memories of the peoples who live in the region. Being able to read and understand Ottoman allows access to a sea of historical sources that are often only partially studied (for instance, the Ottoman archive in the Bulgarian National Library in Sofia).

As language studying is on top of the priorities list in terms of my fellowship, getting into the classes I am in is more than a satisfactory result. Nevertheless, mastering a language like Turkish remains a challenge. While its grammar may indeed seem straightforward most of the time, literary Turkish, as well as the language of the press are rather rich in thousands of terms and synonyms, a sea of words arranged in a manner which does not bear resemblance with any European language. A Turkish sentence may go on for a solid paragraph and still leave you desperately looking for its core or main thought. Nevertheless, such difficulties can be overcome with practice and exposure to the language and I am grateful for the unique opportunity of complete immersion in Turkish linguistic environment. I am happy to notice that I now understand most of the news stories I hear on Turkish TV, as well as articles on different matters in the local press.

Istanbul has a different but again charming face in this season. It is now experiencing the softest fall in a hundred year period with a lot of sunny
days and temperatures in the mid and high 60s. Add the beautiful sight of the Bosphorus and one can safely say that this is arguably one of the most beautiful places to study in the world.

Taking a course on Turkish foreign politics from a senior foreign policy analyst like Professor Kut is a unique chance to get an insight into the dynamics of foreign relations of Turkey and the topic of my thesis, Turkey's new role in Balkan politics and its historical background.

While US students may be but a small minority in the pool of exchange students, I still have a few friends from America with whom I am proud because we were able to organize a true Thanksgiving feast with roasted turkey and other wonderful traditional American food. Some of our Turkish and Greek friends experienced Thanksgiving for the first time in their lives.

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