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Title: Common Action Project: Culture Workshop, Anna Lindh Foundation Turkey

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Cornelis Hulsman: We are unfortunately not able to offer our interns any payment but we help interns with interesting connections and information and will make recommendations for participation in projects if an opportunity presents itself. This is what happened to Diana Serodio when the Anna Lindh Foundation informed us about a workshop for youth in Turkey, March 27 – April 1, 2013. Of course we asked Diana Serodio to report about her experiences.

In an attempt to bring youngsters from around the Mediterranean closer together and have them work collectively towards common goals of development and cultural awareness, Anna Lindh Foundation's branch in Turkey put forth the "Common Action Project". Through a recommendation of the board of Arab-West Foundation, member of the Anna Lindh Foundation network and publisher of Arab-West report, I, Diana Serôdio, an ex-intern at the Center for Arab-West Understanding, was given the opportunity to participate in this project.

During the three days the participants were hosted at a beautiful Military Camp for flying sports (skydiving, glider planes, etc) located by a very nice city called Eskisehir. Eskisehir is known for being a students' city due to the vast number of Universities it has, which amount up to half of the city's population.

This Ana Lindh Foundation's project had a duration of approximately three days and consisted of workshops with three main focuses: Environmental Awareness, Social Responsibility and Cultural Understanding. The participants were divided into these three groups. While the first two groups were exclusively constituted by Turkish students as they were given in Turkish, the third group, although it still had a vast majority of Turkish students, counted on a few international youngsters as well, including myself.



The participants arrived on the evening of Saturday, the 27th of April. The program and schedules were presented, room keys were delivered and those enrolled had the opportunity to chat and get to know each other for a few hours. Then we all went to our dorms early in order to be up and ready at 8am next morning.

In the morning of the 28th of April we were directed in groups to three different rooms. The culture group had around 15 participants with different nationalities: a (vast) majority of Turks, one Lebanese, one Polish, one Slovenian, one Italian and one Portuguese – me. We started out by presenting ourselves and the organizations that we were representing individually. I had thus the chance of both introducing the work we had been developing at Arab West Report and of expanding mine and the organization’s network.

As a first activity we were asked to write down on a piece of paper the three first words that would come to mind when we thought of the concept “Culture”. The words were all collected and our group’s facilitator (Ismail Keskin, MA in History) would ask us why we chose those specific words as he read each paper. At times, some of the words chose would give way to discussions, but in the end we came up with a pretty good and largely agreed-upon definition of culture.

After conceptualizing “culture”, we spent the next three sessions discussing related topics: circles of culture (ex: nuclear family, extended family, colleagues,



friends, society...) and their impact on a person’s sense of culture and identity; we debated “culture” as something personal and/or something collective; the impact of globalization and the complexity of cultural interactions and juxtapositions that came with it; and, at last, we argued over the extent to which cultures should be preserved in order to respect

diversity without leading communities into isolation which would work against inter-cultural understanding.

The one day and a half-long workshop was disappointing for me given the lack of more practical approaches to concrete issues and a certain lack of guidance and structure during the sessions. Nonetheless, being able to attend such an event was a great privilege. I was given the opportunity to interact with people from different backgrounds and go into controversial and complex topics which helped me understand



how the sense of identity and cultural integration is seen and understood by all.

Once the workshop sessions were finished, Anna Lindh Foundation in Turkey prepared several activities for the attendees. We had the chance to visit a municipal center for arts and crafts for people of all ages and backgrounds to gain and/or perfect their artistic abilities; we joined an initiative from the Erasmus committee in Eskisehir to clean up the main street of the city; we were invited to attend the inauguration of the Municipal Cultural Center; and, finally, we had the chance to visit the city's main museums and parks. In addition to all these initiatives and events, the attendees shared and exchanged ideas during meal times and bus rides and we danced, sang and walked together for three days giving way for friendship ties to be formed between all the participants.

On the last day, we all sat together at the Municipal Assembly Hall where those responsible for this “Common Action Project” to come into being made their speeches and representatives from the three workshop groups came forth to present their conclusions after the workshop sessions. It was a shame most of these speeches were made in Turkish, for, despite the “live” translation made by some generous friends, those of us who were not Turkish felt a bit sidelined. After lunch we were given permission to explore the city freely and, at dinner time, we all gathered at the pub street for a nice meal and a bit of dancing after we all parted our ways.



Despite the disappointment I felt where it came to the workshop on culture, which I felt it lack in-depth discussions and more pragmatic approaches, the “Common Action Project” by Anna Lindh Foundation in Turkey is an initiative which I applaud and hope will be repeated. Even though there are improvements to be made, the project's idea of bringing youth from different cultures together to discuss topics which are central to enhance mutual understanding and peace is incredibly valuable. I am grateful for the opportunity and I will be looking forward to participate in similar initiatives in the future.

