

# TENSION BETWEEN NEIGHBORS: THE SOCIETAL ADAPTATION PROBLEMS BETWEEN TURKS AND SYRIAN ASYLUM SEEKERS

Insamer and Syrian Dialogue Center



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Presently, Turkey has been hosting more than 4 million Syrian refugees since the beginning of the Syrian revolution that broke out in 2011. Following its open-door policy, Turkey has opened its arms to the Syrian refugees unconditionally until 2016.

Assuming that the crisis in Syria would be resolved in a short period of time and that the humanitarian problem would be temporary, Turkey provided access for asylum seekers into the country. Turkey's main goal at the time was simply to help and facilitate the lives of the Syrian people - who were suffering from a humanitarian crisis - until the time when the conditions in Syria would (was supposed to) improve. However, the involvement of international actors and other regional forces in the Syrian warzone and the changes in the dimension of military and political within the Syrian War caused the complexity of the situation evolved to the extreme. After all these

developments and having understood that the Syrian problem wouldn't be solved in a short term, the Turkish government decided to re-evaluate its policy about the refugees.

The Turkish people have also welcomed the Syrians with hospitality and sympathy when the war broke. However, aside from the lingering crisis, a serious environment of discontent about the existence of the Syrian slowly but surely began to emerge in Turkey due to some political and economic crises and some other factors that were affecting people's lives. Some communities started to point their finger to the Syrians in creating the problems that were affecting the Turkish people. As for the political parties that were eager to benefit from any internal politics that arises, they initiated the "campaigns of incitement against the Syrian". Gaining political momentum by exaggerating particular instances caused by some Syrian individuals was the goal of such groups. With this intention, the public



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opinion, which previously hadn't been disturbed by the existence of refugees in the country, was being redirected in the direction of opposing the immigrants. Moreover, to oppress the ruling party, the government's policy on Syria was deemed faulty by exaggerating any correctable point as far as possible.

This report is focused on the reasons regarding the "tension between the communities" which contribute to the social gap between both parties and disturbs both the Turkish and the Syrian people. This report includes some proposals of solutions with the hope that they could contribute to the attempts of creating harmony and positive interaction, by way of preventing problems between the two communities from solidifying.

The main goal of this report is to reduce the tension between the Turkish and the Syrian people with some practical recommendations as well as to encourage attempts to unify both parties. This report offer solutions which can either reduce or eradicate the negative effects caused by some cracks in various fields and which are preventing both parties from peacefully and co-exist harmoniously.

The research techniques used during the preparation of this report were monitoring and direct observation. This report includes data that were acquired by interviewing Syrian experts and academicians who were exposed to the aforementioned problems generally in Turkey and especially in Istanbul; on the other hand, commentaries of the Turkish people from different communities of the country.

In this report, problems of the Syrian people who only express their discomfort among themselves where they feel that the Turkish government and the Turkish people view them as ungrateful were also addressed. It should be mentioned that the reason for this procedure is to facilitate the process of recognizing the causes of the tension between these two communities.

The present work, which was jointly prepared by the Syrian Dialogue Centre and INSAMER, consists of three sections. The first section

describes the tension between the Turkish and the Syrian people. The second section focuses on the description of the reasons behind the tension. And the third section provides recommendations for the solution of the problem.

## **Incitement Campaigns and their Effects**

Serious incitement campaigns regarding the existence of Syrians in the country are carried out during all electoral periods in Turkey. Some repetitive cries for the deportation of refugees and fiery quarrels can be observed throughout social media platforms. Individual mistakes performed by Syrian individuals are instantly shared online, depicting those images<sup>1</sup> and negative instances are done by all Syrians.

For example, prior to the latest local elections, speeches of some parliamentarians from the opposition parties were spread online. A parliamentarian who wanted to draw attention to the transmission of rotavirus blamed<sup>2</sup> the Syrians for transmitting them and claimed that the instances increased especially after Syrians started to take refuge in Turkey.

Videos of Syrians who gather in Taksim Square to celebrate New Year were shared on various social platforms, especially on Twitter, with the hashtag #suriyelileristemiyoruz (We do not want Syrians). Young Syrian people that had fun in Taksim Square were reported on Turkish TV channels as people who have acted inappropriately, assaulted two girls and dispersed by police forces.

There has also been an increase of videos showing the discomfort about the existence of Syrian people in Turkey and the Turkish Government's policy regarding the refugees. Polls about the Turkish people's discontent with Syrians were created on some websites. Conferring citizenship to the Syrians was announced to be the leading subject about the discomfort with the Syrian.

A report titled "*Sınır Kentlerde Kabul, Uyum ve Mülteciler ile Yerel Vatandaşların İlişkisi Üzerine Çalışma*" (A Study on the Acceptance,

Harmony and Relationship between Locals and Refugees in Border Towns), was based on a poll that was applied to 300 Turkish citizens and 120 Syrian people. According to the result, 83% of Turkish citizens expressed that the security levels in their cities decreased after Syrians' arrivals in their cities. 71% of the Turkish people who reside in the Southern border regions, said that levels of uneasiness and concerns increased in their communities, the cultural structure of these cities was affected, and the percentage of unemployment rose following the arrival of the refugees. According to the poll, 43% of Turkish citizens do not want Syrian neighbors.<sup>3</sup>

In some regions, campaigns that were initiated to oppress and instigate both parties turned into fights where harmful weapons were used. These fights resulted in injuries and even deaths, which then paved the way to many other attacks on workplaces and on other Syrian people.<sup>4</sup>

## Reactions of Syrian People

The Syrians take the responsibility of most cases of tension that arise between both sides. They acknowledge the fact that these problems stem from cultural differences, language differences and, as a consequence, lack of communication. Social problems from the past also raise the level of tension.

Supporters of the Assad regime and supporters of extremist Kurdish groups organize violent campaigns against Syrian refugees on social media to elevate the disintegration level. The goals of these groups who translate and convey explanations and commentaries of both sides are to instigate people, share fake news and gossips, make the Syrians hate the Turkish government and people, make the Turkish people seem as exploiters, and encourage the Syrian people to riot against the Turkish people and government.<sup>5</sup>

These kinds of campaigns result in an increase of concerns and distrust in the Syrian people. Frequent arrests and deportations of many Syrian people who do not hold an official identification also play a role in the increase of such feelings. The idea that the Turkish police

won't care enough to solve their problems also made the Syrian people refrain from consulting to official authorities when they are being robbed, scammed, abused or exploited by their employers. The most dangerous outcome of this situation is that the Syrian people may take the law into their own hands by justifying themselves with their distrust with the Turkish police and with the notion that they are rightfully defending themselves.

On the other hand, some authorities and governmental foundations publish various statistics, from time to time, to decrease these misunderstandings about the Syrian.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, offensive speeches about the Syrian people and incitement campaigns that are shared on online social platforms are criticized and condemned by many Turkish people. Videos that are prepared by young Turkish people to show the real image of Syrian people and similar initiatives are highly appreciated by the Syrian people. Such initiatives have the effect of decreasing the tension and fear among communities and provide a positive effect on the process of accepting the Syrians.

## The Reasons for the Rise of Tension between the Peoples

There are many reasons that result in the escalation of tension between the two communities. Some of these are neither about the Turkish people nor the Syrians. Meanwhile there are common reasons caused by both sides.

### a) Reasons that increase the tension from the Turkish people's side

The factors which are caused or carried out by the Turkish and which increase the tension are as listed below.

#### 1. *The fact that political parties are using the issue of Syrians for their benefits.*

The incitement attempts against the Syrian people in Turkey mostly serve political benefits to some. These types of attempts are observed to happen mostly during electoral periods. The

goal behind these attempts is to benefit from some troubling situations caused by the Syrian refugees and gain political gains.<sup>7</sup>

It is also striking that these kinds of attempts are on the rise whenever Turkey plans a military operation in Northern Syria. To create hatred against the Turkish government, defamatory campaigns are being carried out by various accounts that belong to the PYD/PKK terror organization.<sup>8</sup>

Thanks to a wide-range operation, the Turkish police have arrested 2047 people who had claimed to be privileged and who had introduced themselves as Syrians through social media sites. These people and groups share fake information claiming that Syrians were allowed to get in universities without an exam, that the Syrian population in Turkey would reach 25 million in 10 years due to high birthrates, and that they are going to call for independence once it happens.

## ***2. The fact that some news agencies are focused on crimes or incidents perpetrated by Syrian individuals in order to blame the whole Syrian community.***

Integration process of the two communities is being negatively affected by factors such as; the fact that faulty actions of some Syrians are repeatedly reported on the media, that these actions are being reported with exaggeration (abuse of children, leaving children home alone, violence against women, etc.), and that positive attributes and success of Syrians are being ignored or reported incorrectly.

## ***3. The fact that the Turkish people have some rooted stereotypes against Syrians and that these stereotypes are being spread without any sort of control over them.***

News claiming that the Turkish government gives money to Syrian so much that they do not need to work, that it provides free residence for Syrians, that it pays for their electricity, water, and phone bills, that it exempts them from paying taxes, that it allows Syrians to get into universities without taking an exam; are all fake.<sup>9</sup>

Another subject that affects the society substantially is claims that the Turkish army fights for Syrians without their help and that the Syrian people are having fun while Turkish soldiers are dying for them on Syrian lands.<sup>10</sup> Whereas, in Operation Euphrates Shield and Operation Olive Branch, most of the fighters were from the Free Syrian Army and these facts weren't conveyed through media correctly.<sup>11</sup>

## ***4. The subject of granting citizenship to Syrians***

Some groups in Turkey use the subject of citizenship grants to Syrian refugees in exceptional cases to instigate people. These groups argue that it is not a good idea to grant citizenship to Syrians after the latest economic crisis emerged.

## ***5. The effect of the terms “Ansar and Muhajirun”***

No Syrian can deny the help, aid, and support done by the Turkish government and the Turkish people since the beginning of the Syrian Revolution (especially in the first years) until today. Syrians have never received help and support from any other country as much as they did from Turkey. However, at first, neither the Syrian nor the Turkish people expected the crisis to prolong for such a long time where everything became so complicated. This state of being a guest went on for years and the possibility for the refugees to return to their homes diminished day by day.

Speeches of some members of the government, which associated the Turkish to the Ansar and the Syrian to the Muhajir, gave a religious dimension to the current relationship of the two communities. Henceforth many people from both sides thought that this relationship would proceed similarly to the process when Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) migrated to Medina. This understanding relatively affected the relationship between the two communities. Many Turkish citizens who viewed the state this way had expected to welcome a community whose majority would consist of model



Muslims; however, naturally, there were some disappointments about this issue.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, Syrians who thought that the Turkish people's hospitality and generous help would never end and that their lives would gradually become easier were forced to accept the problems that emerged. The main problems faced by the Syrian among others are; the Turkish people's reluctance to rent their houses to Syrians, their high rent rates for the Syrians, unfair and abusive treatment in workplaces, being exposed to discrimination and even bullying by Turkish teachers and students in Turkish schools.

#### **6. *The fact that many Turkish people have biases against Syrians, which cannot be changed.***

According to most Turkish people, Syrians are fragile, tearful, always complain and beg for help. Turkish TV series played a role in the creation of such image.<sup>13</sup> Syrian people's normal lives, the time they spend in malls, the time they spend having fun and having celebrations, their luxurious lives, their own investments and their attempts at standing on their own feet might not have been accepted due to these reasons and coming across Syrians who do not fit in such an image may have made the Turkish people react negatively even more.

Some Syrians who work or have contact with Turkish people keep complaining about the fact they are seen untrustworthy or/and incompetent. The fact that the Syrian people do not do active tasks in most projects regarding the Syrian, the fact that they are not heard and that they are not seen as partners, and that their tasks do not go beyond translation tasks when they are accepted to work; can be shown as examples for this situation.<sup>14</sup>

#### **7. *Economic Crisis***

The economic crisis was the main reason for the growing public protests against the Syrians' existence in Turkey. Many Turkish people believe that the state funds are being used for Syrians instead of serving or investing the

Turkish people. There is a large amount of people who believe that the increased crime rates and the increasingly dangerous streets in the cities of Turkey stems from the rising unemployment rate caused by the economic crisis. A lot of people tend to blame Syrian young men who roam the streets without any job.

#### **8. *The fact that the Syrian people gather in certain neighborhoods and that they open businesses around there.***

It should be accepted that the Syrians who swarm to the neighborhoods have negatively affected the daily lives of the Turkish people. Moreover, the Turkish people started to think that this state would change the identity of their areas.<sup>15</sup> High demands in areas with many Syrians increased the average rent rates; and the fact that schools in those areas have more Syrian than Turkish students caused some problems among students and even teachers.<sup>16</sup>

#### **b) *Reasons that increase the tension from Syrian people's side***

In this section, perception and actions that increase the tension between the two communities from the Syrian people's side will be mentioned.

#### **1. *Racist attitudes towards the Syrian people***

Some researches indicate the existence of some types of racist attitudes against the Syrians. For instance, a young girl who participated in a poll about the Syrian people reported that she had witnessed a woman being assaulted with racist discourses. In another case, the demeanor of a Turkish person, who was criticizing the way a Syrian woman had worn hijab, attracted attention in a bus.

Another group of people who were interviewed conveyed an instance that they witnessed in the Ministry of Justice in Ankara where they were working as interns in 2015. When they received a petition in French, the person in charge asked who it was from and when they learned that it was from a Syrian child, they didn't even put the petition into the process.

Similar instances were reportedly met with harshness and double standards. For example, it was told that some municipality bus drivers accept cash from Turkish people who don't have enough credits in their transportation cards at the time; however, yet they don't grant this privilege to Syrian people or they would accept the cash complainingly.

Many people who share their feelings and concerns about these types of behaviors believe that negative effects of such actions will rise even more in the future; thus, racist behavior in the society will get stronger and this will have negative reflections on all aspects of the society.

## ***2. Reactions of the Turkish people to some life choices of the Syrian people***

The Turkish people criticize the high birthrates within the Syrian community. They criticize the fact that Syrian people are having many children in these conditions while the Turkish people themselves are being forced to be think twice about having children of their own. The reason behind this idea is sadly about the minor beggars who play on the street without any supervision. Moreover, the fact that some Syrian parents abuse their children or even use violence against them draws its own attention and lead to negative reactions.

The main subjects that Turkish people react negatively against the Syrians are: early marriages, polygamy and marriage contracts between Syrian women and Turkish men. Besides; the insensitivity of the Syrian people to the rules and laws in Turkish society, the fact that they resort to fights and violence to resolve problems between themselves, and their way of talking with swear words are highly criticized by the Turkish people too. Of course, these are subjects where the Syrians should be more sensitive about. However, it will be a more constructive approach for the Turkish people and government institutions to acknowledge the causes of these actions and contribute to the resolution to the ongoing problems.<sup>17</sup>

The Turkish people criticize the Syrians for being disrespectful to Turkish laws and being disorderly. However, these are the people who were ruled by the politics of the Assad Regime and Ba'ath Party and who recently started to resist law and order unavoidably.

There are some reasons that drive the Turkish people to think and criticize at how Syrian youth do not fight for their country enough. Yes, the Syrian youth do not want to do military service. Because young Syrians who carry out their military duties are routinely humiliated and forced to work under harsh conditions for many years. Thus, this resulted in a state of unwillingness to serve in the army. At present, there are additional reasons as to why young Syrians refrain from serving in the army. Dissociation of the fighter groups, lack of high quality weapons, lack of caregiver of the fighters' families, lack of support for veterans and the injured, the fact that the war has been going on for a long time, and most importantly the Syrian people's despair and distrust for the revolution can all be listed as a reason as to why young Syrian people do not want to participate in the war.

The Turkish people also criticize Syrian people who go to their countries for Ied holidays with questions such as "Why do Syrians still live in Turkey if they are able to go to their countries for Ied?" and "Why don't they go back to their countries and rebuild it?" However, it should be understood that people who think this way do not know about the current living, service and security standards of the country.

## ***3. The negativities caused by the war***

The unsettling effects of the crisis on Syrians along with the hardships and fear that resulted in striking social cases shouldn't be overlooked. Besides, politics that has been systematically carried out by the Assad Regime for a long time that involves sectarianism, regional nationalism, corruption, exploitation, social dissociation, and selfishness are all disturbances that loom in the Syrian people's minds and they all

resulted in serious problems such as a culture of complaining and disinterest in public issues.

The trauma of taking refuge in another country and its propagation to other communities caused complicated problems that are hard to understand and deal with. All these negativities caused intense psychological traumas that still affect a large number of Syrians.

Therefore, all of these complications and the growing restlessness are creating a serious state of oppression on Syrians. Syrians who think they are held responsible for others' mistakes feel the urge to make explanations or apologize at all times. Many Syrians who think they are an outcast or unwanted in society, believe that their existence in Turkey is always under threat.

#### ***4. Bureaucratic obstacles during official processes***

Syrians who resort to government institutions for the laws or legal decisions that are prepared for them are having a tough time, and many of them are not informed about the laws and regulations or when some laws are subject to change in a short period of time.

These types of instances cause serious complications for both sides, especially in crowded government offices.

From time to time, the Turkish government's request of stamped, legal or valid passport instead of temporary protection identification cards only complicates the existing problem.

### **Reasons that increase the tension from both sides**

It is not possible to say that the tension arose without any reason or by itself. There are some historical and cultural reasons as to why this tension occurs in this fashion.

#### ***1. Different cultural past of the two peoples and their rooted biases***

During the last period of the Ottoman Empire the region was exposed to an intellectual and cultural invasion aimed at strengthening

nationalistic ideas. The new power balances in the region which became dominant after the wars and the downfall of the Ottoman Empire provoked nationalistic feelings that severed the religious and historical bonds between the peoples and affect their ideas of one another.

The Turks concluded that the Arabs betrayed them by cooperating with the British during World War I; hence they describe the aforementioned period as "The Great Arab Betrayal". Until today this memory is reflected in the negative descriptions of Arabs in Turkish idioms. "If I understood what you just said, let me be an Arab", "Tangled like an Arab hair", "Filthy Arab" etc...

Some common judgments of the Turkish people regarding the Arabs are: Arabs do not help each other even though they are really rich, they turned their backs on issues about them (Especially the Palestinian issue), they didn't help Palestine, and instead helped Israel siege the country and cooperated with the enemy.

In contrast, there are some ideas among Arabs especially the Syrians that deem the Ottoman Empire and its successor, the Turkish Republic, as an intruder. So much so that, this subject was spread this way through school curriculums and even TV series eminently.

The negative issues in the Syrian minds regarding the Turkish people can be listed as follows: Gallows of Djemal Pasha, mobilization years, and Turkification politics that the Ottoman Empire used in Arab countries during its last days of power.

Besides, the Hatay issue had always been a serious conflict between Turkey and the Syrian Regime prior to 1998. In the Syrian textbooks that were prepared according to its curriculum, the Hatay province has been included as a Syrian territory in geographical maps.

All in all, it is an all too clear fact that all positive developments that took place in the Ottoman Empire's brightest years are being clearly and intentionally overlooked. As opposed to this, apart from the territorial claim made by any

administration in charge, the Arab people have always helped whomever in need of help. To sum up, it is a vital need for the two communities to distinguish the negativities produced by the political agendas of both sides' administrations.

The Damascus Center for Research and Studies, which is known for its close relationship with the Assad Regime, has published a research titled "National Identity in Syrian Curriculums: The Discussion of Dream and Reality". The research showed how the Syrian map used in geography and history textbooks include the Hatay province and the Israel-occupied Golan Heights as its territory. However, information about these locations wasn't provided. Therefore, this situation is evident how the politics of those who prepare the curriculum for decades is not clear. Maps showing Hatay and the Golan Height as Syria's inseparable lands were made to foreshadow the claim that these regions are under the control of other countries. Changes in the new curriculum and the fact that these regions are enclosed with the Syrian borders once again are noteworthy on the grounds that they represent the political culture of modern Syria. To sum up, it is evident that the Syrian Regime is refraining from resolving problems, which are non-existent according to them, by pretending as if there are no problems and by using a politics known as "ostrich policy".

These historical issues have been used to provoke Syrians against the Turks in recent years. Turkey's military operations such as Operation Olive Branch and Operation Euphrates Shield are being reflected by groups who have an interest in the region as an extension policy of the old exploitation politics. The closing of Syrian schools in Turkey is being reflected as an extension of deportation politics, which some groups claim to have been used previously. However, what the Syrians should not overlook is the fact that the host country has an education system of its own and that there are concerns about the use of foreign curriculum, which foresee that the long stay of refugees may have negative effects on the aforementioned system.

Besides, the two sides do not have sufficient knowledge about each other's culture and customs. Syrians know Turkey as a secular and liberal country from the TV series and programs they watch through the Turkish satellite channels since the beginning of the 2000s. As for the dubbed Turkish TV series, the Turkish people's basic values were overlooked.

The Turkish people are also far from the ability to describe the real social life of Arab countries, including Syria. The most common basic attributes of Arab people in the eyes of Turkish people are backwardness, extravagance, and extreme ignorance.

These types of solidified biases cause some intense friction between both parties. The fact that some Turkish people act on such biases leads to the response of the Syrian people who have already been through intense trauma on their way here.

## ***2. Syrian people's reluctance to be viewed as "refugees"***

The Syrian people pride themselves. For this reason, they refuse to be called as refugees and be treated this way. They are negatively affected by the pitying look on people's faces. For instance, the explanation made by the Turkish government about the number of funds used for the Syrians disturbs them on a great level. Of course, the aids provided by the Turkish Government to the Syrians are valuable. However, as opposed to what most people think, many Syrians live without receiving any support and pay their bills and rent on their own. They live on the investments that they had brought from their country to Turkey.

The Turkish Red Crescent supports people who live under harsh conditions with only 120 liras a month. This amount barely meets the needs of refugees, particularly Syrians. Hence they meet the rest of their needs (around 90%) on their own. And for this, they have to agree to work with low wages and unfair working conditions.

Furthermore, businesses of the Syrian people, who have better economic statuses compared



to others, do not receive enough interest due to Turkish people's concern and aversion. Overcoming the failed initiatives aimed at easing their business obstacles doesn't seem to be possible, as these kinds of problems are not seen as a priority.

### **3. Religious and denominational sensitivities**

Even though they are not seen as an obstacle to the harmony between both communities, this type of sensitivities includes some weak points that may increase problems between certain groups. It should be mentioned that most Islamic groups in Turkey happily welcome the Syrians to their country thanks to their religious point of view. However, in time, sensitivities that stemmed from ignorance and intolerance of the two sides emerged. For example, from time to time, the Turkish people reacted negatively to the fact that Syrian women carry out the Imam's duty on certain occasions. This practice, which is allowed by many Fiqh scholars, is a common practice in Arab countries. However, unfortunately, some Turkish groups warn people of not imitating these deviant practices of Syrian women on social media platforms.

In another instance, Turkish students at an Imam Hatip School bullied a Syrian student for rinsing his feet with his socks on during ablution. The Syrian student naturally defended himself by saying that it is an approvable practice allowed by his sect.

Fearing that this type of discussion may result in disagreements in the society, the Syrians generally refrain from getting into a religious, denominational or fiqh discussion with the Turkish people. Because, even with evidence and reasoning, the Turkish people do not accept any ideas or religious views that come from the Syrian people. They exhibit fanaticism for the views of their sheiks and, unfortunately, they think that the Syrian people lack religious knowledge.

On the other hand, having negative experiences with certain cults, Syrians try to stay away from the members of those cults. Many Syrians

are uneasy with the various denominations and ideological groups, namely the Nasiriyah community, known as Syrian Alawites. Therefore, they rarely have contact with Alawites.

## **HOW CAN SYRIANS AND TURKS ADDRESS THESE PROBLEMS?**

Viewing the tension between Turks and Syrians merely as a systematic instigation of the media will only serve to ignore the root of the problems. A possible resolution for these problems are as listed below:

### **a) Recommendation for the Turkish Government**

The Turkish government is the most active actor in this process. Considering the Syrian potential in Turkey, it is evident that making use of such a potential, which will contribute to Turkey in the future, is a grave need. However, there should be a series of conscious actions to achieve that. What Turkish Government should do first is to take precautions to decrease the tension between the two communities. The recommendations are:

- The present Turkish Labor Law forbids the Syrian people from working in cities other than the ones they are registered in with a temporary protection program. This resulted in accumulation of refugees in some regions. Encouraging Syrians to move to rural areas rather than crowded cities, providing them job opportunities and easing their moving process would be beneficial.
- Investment projects such as agricultural projects, construction projects, language-learning institutes, which can provide job opportunities for Syrians, can be initiated to help Syrians by initiating them in collaboration with corporations that donate funds for the Syrian people. These developmental projects will be beneficial for the Turkish economy, as well as the Syrian and the Turkish people as a whole.

- Managing overconcentration of Syrian businesses in certain areas and balancing their proportions may help the surrounding people psychologically. Obliging workers to have obligatory work permits by registering them in these businesses is an important precaution.
- Collaborating with the Syrian people under non-governmental programs to stop beggary, forgery, and child labor performed by both Turkish and Syrian people is also essential.
- Establishing the necessary mechanism to allow the review of some legal policies and laws on Syrians, evaluate their effects and efficiency for both sides, assess the reasons behind their inefficiencies, and optimize their implementations.
- Establishing an Arabic phone line, with which Syrian people can easily consult and report on issues like work opportunities and conditions, scamming cases, residence permits, and racism to help eliminate problems early on.
- Carrying out research projects in all universities, especially the ones with social and humanitarian subjects, regarding issues about both communities and to which Syrian and Turkish students can attend, will also be beneficial.
- Projects that encourage social integration shouldn't only be provided for the Syrian community, the same project should also be provided for the Turkish community.
- It is necessary to encourage experts to carry out researches and actions about the Syrian and Turkish people. Because it is important to analyze the social phenomena caused by the war and catastrophes in detail to be able to come up with solutions. Therefore, it will be possible for actors of humanitarian aid to be able to distribute their aid and support projects with a certain standard. A generalized approach, detailed rules, principles, and methods that will

psychologically and socially ease people's minds will contribute to the resolution of the problems.

- Equality of job opportunities between Turkish and Syrian workers and establishing programs that will secure both groups' rights will prevent the main reason that leads to tension between the two groups.
- Present bureaucratic procedures for the accreditation of Syrian diplomas and certifications can be improved and simplified. This is very important because the experience of Syrian scientists, academics, and people with jobs that require specialty will contribute to the development of both communities.
- Allowing Syrians with a degree who reside in bordering cities to go to Syria and come back to Turkey (as it is allowed for Syrian doctors) will decrease unemployment in Turkey and give an opportunity to these people to work in their own fields.

#### ***b) Recommendations for Syrian and Turkish non-government organizations***

- Joint projects for both Turks and the Syrians must be prepared.
- Initiating projects to encourage learning the Turkish language and culture, focusing on the development of dialogue between the two sides, and establishing organizations to familiarize the Syrian people with Turkish culture, manners, and traditions are all important.
- It is vital to encourage Turkish foundations to benefit from skilled Syrians. For example, Arab teachers that know the Turkish language can educate Turkish students while Arab academicians can lecture Turkish students that study in the Arabic language.
- Encouraging Syrian Organizations to perform projects regarding the Turkish people and reporting them on the media. For example events organized by Syrian people, such as visiting old people at nursing



homes, volunteering at gardening events or organizing courses about the Syrian cuisine, can help the normalization process of the relationship between the two peoples.

- Cooperation in teaching the Arabic language and Quran and employing Syrian teachers in this field can also be beneficial. To make it possible, Quran classes, mosques, public education centers, and private houses can be used. The Turkish people, who deeply respect these kinds of programs, can lead the way to overcome the state of distrust between the two communities.

- Syrian doctors and academicians that are specialized in their fields and who are living abroad can be invited to Turkey and be offered to volunteer in public hospitals and other places for free.

- A joint project with prominent Syrian NGOs that Arabs support can be carried out where both Syrian and Turkish youth can participate in. For instance, a mass wedding organization can be arranged.

- Projects about the youth, who pose as the most challenging group in societies, is critically important. Focusing on the Syrian youth who will have direct contact with the Turkish people is a vital step towards strengthening inter-communal communication.

- Contacting Turkish NGOs and professional associations to monitor and respond to hate speech on the media and carrying out joint actions against such negativities are necessary.

- Discussing social differences, detecting problematic issues, and coming up with solutions for them. it is necessary to carry out a comprehensive dialogue organization between Turks and Syrians, in which experts from both sides discuss the social problems between the peoples.

### c) *Recommendations for the media*

The Turkish and Syrian people are highly affected by the news and images reported in the media. Thus, it is clear that these tools should be used appropriately. Instead of instigation campaigns, biases, and clichés; the media should provide positivity on the issue. To serve positive campaigns, a series of issues below should be focused on:

- How Turkey successfully managed the waves of refugees, how it took the refugee guests in, and how it managed to convert them into functioning groups should be told.

- TV programs about the Turkish people's role in protecting Islam throughout history should be produced.

- Programs that objectively discuss historical events behind the problems between Turkey and Syria (The Arab Betrayal, Hatay Agreement, etc.) should be made to ease both communities.

- News or other programs that mention Arab people's role in subjects regarding the Ummah and not only about the corrupt Arab governments' actions should be publish.

- Programs that emphasize the positive impacts or potential positive impacts by the Syrian people to Turkey's economy should be organized.

- Necessary corrections must be made regarding the misconceptions on the Syrian people in Turkey (Free housing for Syrians, easy entrance to universities etc.).

- Programs to eliminate the belief that Syrians do not defend their country should be produced. In order to achieve this, it is required to mention what happened during the Syrian revolution, the peaceful movement that shocked the whole country and the violence that the regime resorted to.

- Mentioning the Free Syrian Army's role (i.e the number of fighters and martyrs) in Operation Euphrates Shield and Operation Olive Branch is also important.
- It should be clarified that the war proceeds in an unwanted direction not because of the lack of fighters, but because of the lack of high-quality weapons and international interventions.
- It is also necessary to create publications that promote common religious or humanitarian values such as compassion, hospitality, brotherhood, collaboration, and tolerance; values that remind both sides of their refugee-welcoming histories; and which reveal the abundant common words between the Turkish and Arabic languages.
- The use visual tool is necessary to increase the effect on public opinion. For that, the two methods provided below must be adopted.

### **1. Programs on the media (television and newspapers)**

- Syrian academicians can be invited to Turkish television channels (with simultaneous interpretation if necessary) to speak in different fields apart from politics.
- Popular TV series can be used to change the image of poverty and neediness associated with Syrians as well as to show their strength and pain.
- Some programs can be produced to correct the two communities' misconceptions about one another.
- A project of movie/TV series about the problems between the two communities, whose script will be jointly written by Syrians and Turkish scriptwriters, can be produced.
- TV programs (cuisines, history, religions, etc.) hosted by trained Syrian hosts can be produced.

- Distinguished Syrian and Arab personalities can be introduced to the Turkish people on Turkish TV channels.
- To eliminate social obstacles, Syrian people's individual developments can be supported on television channels.
- Producing TV programs on popular Turkish TV channels participated by Turkey's officials to clarify the misconceptions and misinformation about the Syrian people.
- To allow the Syrian people to be a part of Turkey's international newspapers.

### **2. Campaigns on social media**

- Social media platforms managed by the Syrian people in Turkish language speaking about popular Turkish public opinion can be created.
- Turkish celebrities can help by promoting positive initiatives of the Syrian people.
- To discuss the political and social problems that concern both sides, competitions can be arranged on social media sites used by the Syrian and Turkish people.
- A social media team consisting of Syrian and Turkish people who are specialized in the field can be created. The task of this team should be initiating social media campaigns in the Turkish language to eliminate the rooted clichés and misconceptions about one another, correcting misinformation, obviating negativities caused by some individual mistakes and publishing videos translated into Turkish.
- Stories of Turkish and Syrian people who are exemplary in successfully coexisting must be spread. Rather than focusing on their negativities, success stories of the Syrian people must be shared.



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> See some images shared on social media: . <https://twitter.com/taneryl/status/488470487178444800>, <https://twitter.com/Turkdfenceforum/status/1036715643364671488>, <https://twitter.com/maviii05/status/1098277769757245444>, <https://twitter.com/Arzucobanoglu2/status/902157798728978432>
- <sup>2</sup> “The Ministry of Health of Turkey disproves the claims regarding the rotavirus”, “Rotavirus has nothing to do with the Syrian” <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/rota-virusunun-suriyelilerle-iligisi-yoktur-41125697>
- <sup>3</sup> “Turkish citizens who live alongside the Syrian border do not want Syrians”, *A poll for Syrian and Turkish people in Turkey*, 31.01.2019, <https://www.yenicaggazetesi.com.tr/suriye-sinirindaki-kentlerde-yasayan-vatandaslar-suriyelileri-istemiyor-221906h.htm>
- <sup>4</sup> Some news titles: “Tension between Turkish and Syrian people in Bursa. A Syrian man attacked shop and households. The police brought the tension under control with difficulty”, 13.09.2018; “Tension between Syrian and Turkish people, a Syrian hospitalized, houses and cars damaged”, 10.08.2018; “Tension between Turkish and Syrian people in Gaziantep”, 25.12.2018; “Tension between Syrian refugees and Turkish people in Urfa! Governor gave security to Syrians”, 01.10.2018; “Fights between Syrians turned into an assault against themselves”, 06.09.2018.
- <sup>5</sup> Following the events that took place in Esenyurt in February 2019, anonymous accounts emerged on social media that called out to Syrian to go out in the streets to protest. These accounts also called out for a rally on the border with Greece and a passage to Europe under the name “a convoy hope from Turkey to Greece”. Approximately 12.000 accounts responded to these invitations. The organizer of the convoy claimed that they were promised support and aid for the refugees from some humanitarian aid foundations.
- <sup>6</sup> “YÖK’s explanation regarding the Syrian”, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/yokten-suriyeli-multeci-ogrenci-aciklamasi-41120553>
- <sup>7</sup> Some Turkish specialist claim that the hateful campaigns on social media platforms do not emerge on their own. They claim that these are campaigns funded and supported by some political parties. These parties use the Syrian existence in the country to imply that Ak Party is unsuccessful at its foreign relations. Their goals seem to be encouraging negative reactions towards Syrians and benefiting from these during especially electoral periods.
- <sup>8</sup> In 25th January 2019, Turkish authorities arrested 51 people on the grounds that they carried out social media campaigns against the Syrian who celebrated the new year in Taksim. Most of these people were members of Kurdish parties. According to an intel, the owner of an account with the name “Official Citizenship Bureau” who introduced himself to be a Syrian turned out to be a Turkish citizen living in İstanbul. These accounts share racist comments about Syrian and comment incitingly on their posts with other accounts on behalf of Syrians. Most of the arrested turned out to be members of the opposing parties and FETO. “The vile ally behind the Taksim incitement, they got upset when the Syrian laughed”, Yeni Safak.
- <sup>9</sup> “Misconceptions about Syrians”, Association for Refugees, 03.02.2019, <https://bit.ly/2SOAxZH>
- <sup>10</sup> Ahmet Hakan, “Why don’t the Syrian fight for their country?”, *Hürriyet*, 08.02.2018, <https://bit.ly/2nKjkE8>
- <sup>11</sup> “Erdogan: Free Syrian Army lost 302 warriors to war”, 25.03.2018, <https://bit.ly/2SRqDGX>
- <sup>12</sup> The way Syrian women put on a hijab, their skinny clothing, their exaggerated make-up, Syrian men’s consumption of shisha in cafés and their use of loud voice in public places are highly criticized by the Turkish.
- <sup>13</sup> The fact that the Turkish tv series depict Syrians as beggars in streets who wear dirty clothes played a role in the creation of a negative image about Syrians in Turkish society.
- <sup>14</sup> The fact that Syrian doctors who have the license to assist Turkish people with medical services are not allowed to work in Turkish medical foundations, the fact that Syrian people are banned from donating blood, and the fact that they are forced to find people who have Turkish citizenship even in the most urgent cases are examples to these negative applications.
- <sup>15</sup> Bu durum İstanbul’un Fatih ilçesinde oldukça yoğun yaşanmaktadır. Burada bazı sokaklar Suriye restoranlarıyla dolmuş haldedir. İnsanlar bir Arap bölgesi havasına bürünen ilçede dükkân kiralalarının ve dükkânların hava parasının çok artmasından şikâyetçidir. Ancak bu durumun dükkân sahiplerini fazlasıyla memnun ettiğini belirtmek gerekmektedir.  
  
This situation happens quite frequently in Fatih, a district of İstanbul. Some streets are filled with Syrian restaurants there. People complain about the rent rates of shops and the high amount of key money in the district which was tuned into an Arab region.
- <sup>16</sup> Suriyeli öğrencileri geçici okullardan belirli bir okula transfer etme kararı alınmasından sonra, Suriyeli öğrenciler aileleri tarafından sıkça tercih edilen İmam Hatip okullarında yoğunlaşmıştır. Yeni sisteme göre orta öğretime girişte LGS sınavı koşulu olmayan bazı okullar -özellikle Fatih, Esenyurt ve Başakşehir bölgelerinde- Arap, Suriyeli ve diğer yabancı öğrenciler tarafından tercih edilmektedir. Bazı okullardaki Suriyeli ve Arap öğrenci sayısı Türk öğrenci sayısıyla eşitlenmiş durumdadır.  
  
After the decision of transferring Syrian student from temporary schools to specified ones, Syrian students resorted to Imam-Khatib schools which are preferred by their families.
- <sup>17</sup> Applications of the Turkish Government weren’t effective at controlling marriages at early age between Syrians. Adversely, it intensified the problem and transformed it. Minor pregnant girls use identification cards that belong to one of their acquaintances who is over the age of 18 and the children are registered under other people’s names.