

TURKISH FILMS CO-PRODUCED WITHIN EUROPE: THE STORY AFTER TWENTY YEARS' EXPERIENCE IN *EURIMAGES*

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Abstract

Out of four new sources of financial support for Turkish cinema that emerged in the post-1990 period, *Eurimages*, the cinema support fund of Council of Europe, is the only non-domestic one where decisions are taken with the agreement of the national representatives of the member states. Considering the experience of twenty years left behind in Turkey's membership to *Eurimages*, this article examines the influences/contributions of a supranational cinema support fund – which demands a series of criteria to be met - on a national cinema. The focus is particularly on the nationalness and/or Europeaness of *Eurimages*-backed Turkish initiative films in terms of both style and content; co-producer country preferences of Turkish producers; and the contributions of *Eurimages* support to filmmaking practices in Turkey. As written materials on this quite new phenomenon are limited in number, the analyses are primarily attained through a study of the films, interviews with the professionals (those made by the author and some cited from the media as well) who have first hand experience of the process, and official documents of *Eurimages*. Following the definition and objectives of the Fund, various conclusions out of the lived experience and criticisms are put forth.

Keywords: *Eurimages*, Council of Europe, Turkish, film, cinema, co-production, support, national, fund, Turkey.

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Avrupa ile Ortak-Yapım Türkiye Filmleri: *Eurimages* ve Yirmi Yılın Hikayesi

Öz

1990 sonrası dönemde Türk sinemasına parasal destek sağlayan dört yeni kaynak ortaya çıkmıştır. Bunlar içinde Avrupa Konseyi sinema fonu *Eurimages*, destek kararlarının üye ülke temsilcileri tarafından alındığı, ulusal olmayan tek oluşumdur. Bu makale, yirmi yıllık üyeliğin ardından, ancak bir dizi kriteri karşılayan projelere destek veren uluslararası bu fonun ulusal bir sinemaya etkilerini/katkılarını Türkiye sineması özelinde ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Özellikle *Eurimages* destekli Türkiye filmlerinin ulusallığı veya Avrupalılığı tartışması, Türk yapımcıların ortak yapımcı seçiminde öncelik verdikleri ülkeler ve bunun arkasında yatan nedenler ile *Eurimages* yapım desteğinin Türkiye'deki sinemasal üretime katkıları ele alınmaktadır. Bu makalede, üzerine yazılanların çok sınırlı olduğu bu yeni olguya ilişkin analizler üç kaynağa dayanmaktadır. Bunlar, bugüne kadar *Eurimages* tarafından desteklenmiş olan Türk filmleri; sürecin gözlemcisi veya tarafı olmuş yapımcı-sinemaclar, geçmişteki ve mevcut *Eurimages* yetkilileri ile Türkiye'nin fondaki temsilcileri gibi profesyonellerle gerek yazar tarafından yapılan gerekse de dergilerde yayınlanmış röportajlar ve resmi *Eurimages* dokümanlarıdır. Önce fonun tanımı ve amaçları, ardından deneyimlenen sürecin sonuçları fon tarafından desteklenmiş Türk filmleri özelinde ortaya konmakta ve eleştirilere yer verilmektedir.

Ahahtar Sözcükler: *Eurimages*, Avrupa Konseyi, Türk sineması, ortak yapım, destek, ulusal, fon, Türkiye.

One of the novel occurrences that Turkish cinema met in the 1990s was the introduction of new sources of financing for films. As the video device lost its popularity, and accordingly the reason to produce for this market disappeared, filmmaking became more than ever a high risk business in an environment which produced fairly low numbers in terms of films, audience sizes, number of movie theaters etc.¹ For the producers, it had come to a point in which to make films dependent on their own capital and/or loans was nearly impossible. A solution to save Turkish cinema was necessary and came into effect: four new financial sources emerged which could support filmmakers. These were TV channels, the Ministry of Culture (national support), sponsorship of business companies, and Eurimages. Since then, films have usually been able to receive support from one or more of them.

Out of those four new sources of support, Eurimages is the only non-domestic one where decisions are taken with the agreement of the national representatives of the member states. As a European funding scheme which demands a series of criteria to be met satisfactorily, Eurimages has on several occasions been the subject of debate in Turkish cinema. Its role and influence on ‘national’ films have been questioned but these arguments in general lacked a comprehensive approach and/or extrapolated their conclusions from single examples (films). With an experience of twenty years of membership, Turkey’s case, I contend, is worthwhile to be put forth as an example of the influences or contribution of a European fund on a national cinema tradition. As written material on this quite new phenomenon is limited in number (Karakaya, 2002; Özcan, 2005; Soydan, 2008), I will attain my conclusions through a study of

¹ In the system of “regional operators” which had emerged by the end of the 1950s, before starting a film, regional operators (local distributors) would lend producers a certain amount of the total cost in advance. Those were funds accumulated by exhibitors through ticket sales of earlier film(s). Thanks to this financial support, the producer was able to pay the cast and crew, and meet some other costs as well. In exchange, the operators were given the distribution rights for the film in their region for a certain period or were granted a percentage of the film’s box-office revenue so as to collect their loan. This mechanism greatly contributed to the growth of the film industry. It also provided filmmakers with very significant information about audience preferences insofar as the producers in Istanbul became aware of the reactions, demands, and tastes of audiences via regional operators. By the beginning of the 1980s, video operators replaced the regional operators. Similar to regional operators, the video operators supported producers financially and had temporary rights to the distribution of films. Thanks to these two successive mechanisms of financial support, a relatively high number of films could be produced throughout 1960-1990 period.

Turkish initiative films that have been supported by Eurimages.² I will also be using data collected from interviews with the professionals (those made by myself and some cited from the media as well) who have first hand experience of the process. First I will outline the definition and objectives of Eurimages in brief, then present various results of the actual experience on the basis of Turkish initiative co-productions, and finally put forth the criticisms of the Fund and its contribution to Turkish cinema.

Eurimages: A Brief Introduction

Considering the continual rising market share of Hollywood in Europe, the Council of Europe decided to establish a cinema support fund on 26 October 1988, and they named it *Eurimages*. The headquarters were to be in Strasbourg, France - where the Council of Europe is - and the Fund started in operation by the beginning of 1989. 22 new members have joined in the past 21 years in addition to the 12 founding states to make the total number 34 today. The Fund has two main missions: (1) culturally it is an organization which “endeavors to support works which reflect the multiple facets of a European society whose common roots are evidence of a single culture”; and (2) financially it invests “in an industry which, while concerned with commercial success, is interested in demonstrating that cinema is one of the arts and should be treated as such” (Eurimages, Mission and Objectives). The sources of the Fund are mainly comprised from the annual fees paid by the member states. The Board of Management is the decisive body and is composed of one national representative from each member state. There are four types of support designed for *co-production*, *exhibition*, *distribution*, and *digitization* of films. The focus of this article will be on the co-production support as the bulk of the funding is mainly devoted to this type which is directly related to the creation of films as cultural products.

Animations, documentaries and feature films with a runtime of 70 minutes or more, which are intended for cinema release, are included in the scope of co-production support. Any film containing any pornographic nature, or advocating violence or inciting against human rights is considered to be ineligible for support. The Board of Management takes a “support” decision on two grounds: one of the criteria concerns the quality of the work (the script); the other takes the co-production set-up into account. Roberto Olla, the current executive director of Eurimages, stated that there is no censorship for the scripts in so far as what European culture is and what it is not (personal interview, June 19, 2009). In a similar vein, the location of the story is not important. It may be anywhere on the earth or space. A story developed by a European filmmaker (a national of one of the member states) is welcome provided that it is appreciated from the dramaturgical point of view. Olla also clarified:

² The term “Turkish initiative film” refers to a Eurimages-backed co-production in which a filmmaker of Turkish nationality is the majority co-producer and thus has more impact on the form and content of the film. Besides, a co-production in which a filmmaker of Turkish nationality is not the majority co-producer might/should be considered within the term “Turkish initiative” provided that the director and theme are Turkish and the landscapes are predominantly those of Turkey, as I will exemplify in the following pages.

What the Board of Management clearly does not like is those films that are very national. They become co-productions only because they need money to accomplish their financing. There is no real will to co-produce and so the Board of Management refuses those films (2009).

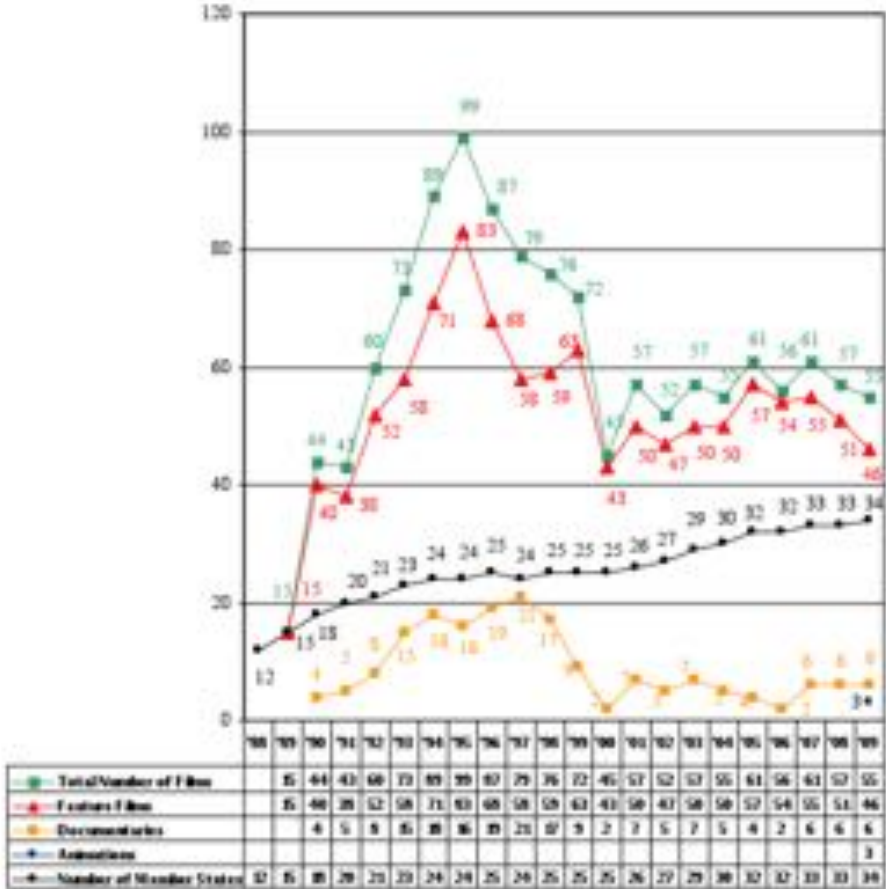


Figure 1: Number of Supported Films and Member States in Years (Eurimages, Co-production Funding History)

The rationale is that projects which aim only at a domestic audience should be able to find the financing in their homeland or can rely on box-office revenues. Furthermore, there is no motive for a minority co-producer to activate the national support mechanisms for a film which will not address the audience in his or her country. At least two independent co-producers from different member states should be involved in a project.³ One of the co-producers takes the initiative –titled the “majority co-producer”- and usually has more impact on the form and the content of the film.

The Fund has contributed to the co-production of 1,293 films hitherto

³ At least three independent co-producers were required in a project until 1998.

(until the end of 2009), 1,108 (85.7%) of which are features. The allocated amount accumulated to a total of 388 million Euros, feature films getting the lion's share with a 96.1% proportion of the funding. The number of supported films varied from 15 to 99 and the allocated amount for the co-productions has been between 6.2 and 24.4 million Euros annually. The number of member states and supported films in years are on the Figure 1. Average co-production support awarded per feature film has been 336,798 and per documentary has been 75,259 Euros. Faruk Günaltay, who served as the first national representative of Turkey in Eurimages between 1990 and 2005, stated that member states who contributed larger amounts rather focused on big-budget projects which had the potential of commercial success whereas countries that had smaller film industries demanded support in the name of cultural diversity (personal interview, November 14, 2009).

Turkey: The Past 20 Years

Turkey, a member of the Council of Europe since 1949, acceded to Eurimages on 28 February 1990 as the 18th participant. 60 Turkish initiative co-productions have been supported by 12.8 million Euros by the end of 2009. Although Turkish co-producers have been the minority party in *Mavi Sürgün* (*The Blue Exile*, Erden Kiral, 1993), *Harem Suaré* (Ferzan Özpetek, 1999) and *Yara* (*Wound*, Yılmaz Arslan, 2000) and even a Turkish producer does not exist in the co-production setup of *Bulutları Beklerken* (*Waiting for the Clouds*, Yeşim Ustaoglu, 2005), they should be considered (and indeed they are in this article) as Turkish initiatives - the directors and themes are Turkish and the landscapes are predominantly those of Turkey. Twenty-seven projects in which Turkish filmmakers are the minority co-producers (2nd or 3rd) have received a total of 5.9 million Euros as co-production support. Regarding the Turkish initiative projects, those 60 films have been shot by 39 different directors. The average number of Turkish initiative projects to get Eurimages co-production support is three per year. Fifty-eight of those films are features and two are creative documentaries.

Through those 87 (60 as initiative taker and 27 as minority party) projects, Turkish producers collaborated with colleagues from 22 different countries. The details of the preferred countries for co-production are on Figure 2.

As is discernable, producers from France, Greece and Hungary are the most preferred colleagues as far as the producers from Turkey are concerned in terms of co-operation. There are a couple of possible explanatory reasons behind this fact. In the first place, the producers prefer to work with colleagues either that they already know or are in contact with, or with any eligible company they can find. In the case of acquaintance, what co-producers inhabit certain countries is of more importance than arbitrary country preference. In terms of co-operating with any eligible company, two facts seem to be of importance. Firstly, the producers from the countries with bigger film industries were not eager to co-operate with Turkish colleagues at that time and hence collaboration with the producers from smaller countries was indispensable, as Günaltay explained (2009). He also added that he channeled some of the Turkish

filmmakers (who were in search of co-producers to collaborate with) to those countries. Secondly, the legal environments of those co-producing countries come into prominence rather than the co-producers: “Because it is very difficult to make co-productions in some countries due to their laws and regulations”, Ahmet Boyacıoğlu, who served as national representative of Turkey in Eurimages between 2005 and 2007, pointed out (personal interview, April 8, 2009). Beyond or outside these reasons, different motives might emerge for different co-producing country choices and it is worthwhile to try and detect them.

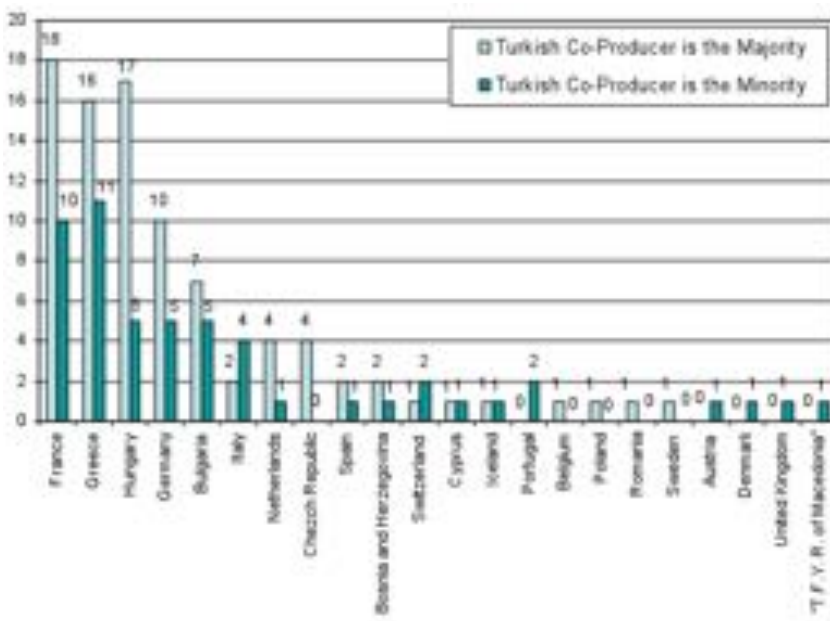


Figure 2: Turkey Co-production Partners
(Eurimages, Co-production Funding History)

In the case of France, it strikes one at once that the head office of Eurimages is in Strasbourg and to co-operate with a French producer might be helpful for accessing the funds. My interviews reveal that this is not the rationale. On the contrary, as Mehmet Demirhan, the current national representative of Turkey in Eurimages, noted, to collaborate with a producer from one of the big contributor states (France, Germany and Italy) might be disadvantageous because there exist about 8-10 applicant projects on the agenda of the national representatives of those countries for each meeting in which their citizens are the majority co-producers and they have to deal with such a high number of projects (personal interview, April 7, 2009). This does not increase the potential for getting support for a certain film. Moreover, the national representatives do not always act in the same way nor do they necessarily vote for similar projects. Rather, focusing on France’s impetus and leading role in the European film industry explains the phenomenon with greater validity. Following a strong co-production tradition, France makes bilateral conventions

with many countries and there is a notable number of French producers sustaining and promoting different genres or types of films in their portfolio to distribute all over the world. Hence they undertake co-productions not only with Turkish colleagues but with many others as well.

A high number of co-productions with Greek filmmakers can be explained with reference to the cost advantage of accessing post-production facilities and also in terms of the geographical proximity and cultural familiarity of the two nations. Although Turkey has attained enough by way of advanced studios and post-production utilities in the last two decades, certain technical operations like processing sound recorded films are much cheaper in Greece - sometimes it costs about one quarter of a film's budget in Turkey. The qualifications of the technical crew, rather than the technology used, have a significant influence upon the artistic quality of the work and make it more apparent. While the qualifications do not vary too much between the two countries, the cost advantage gives the position of priority to Greece. On the cultural and geographical side, the transnational stories which spread to both lands like *Kayıkçı* (*The Boatman*, Biket İlhan, 1999) and *Sevgilim İstanbul* (*My Darling Istanbul*, Seçkin Yasar, 2007) required a Greek co-producer, actors and crew. The convenience of transportation between the two countries, on the other hand, also makes things easier. In addition to this, understanding each other comes into prominence in a co-production. The style of filmmaking is common in these two countries, compared to Western or Northern Europe, as Ömer Uğur stated:

In Turkey, we develop a story in a short period of time and want to shoot it immediately. We have neither a tradition nor a state of mind for long-term planning. We want things to go on fast, actualize now and here... We can communicate to Greeks and we understand each other easily. They think like us; we come to an agreement immediately and make it. It takes longer, by as much as one year, with the French, German or Swedish producers (personal interview, April 1, 2009).

However Derviş Zaim, agreeing with the advantages of co-operating with producers from the Balkan countries, stresses how the others add to the value of a project: "Nevertheless the co-producers who serve the purpose and boost a project tend rather to come from Western and Northern European countries" (Erdine, 2003, p. 70).

The rationale for co-operating with Hungarian producers is the high quality of post-production facilities which reside in that country at low cost. Co-productions with the remaining countries are established on account of acquaintanceship, story requirements, coincidences or simply the obligations set by Eurimages. The filmmakers did not complain about a serious problem stemming from co-producing in a bi- or multi-national environment. In general the problems were of the kind of minor nature that any filmmaker might face while executing any given project. On the contrary Seçkin Yasar, as a director, experienced a serious conflict with her *Turkish* producer which ended in court and *Sevgilim İstanbul* was released an immense eight years after its shooting.

Eurimages co-production support contributed to Turkish filmmakers in a number of ways. Although the first co-production in Turkish film history was materialized by Muhsin Ertuğrul through *İstanbul Sokaklarında* (*In the Streets of Istanbul*) with Greek and Egyptian filmmakers as early as in 1931, and

various co-productions have been made since then, it has not turned into a common practice for Turkish filmmakers and co-productions have not reserved an important place in the Turkish cinema tradition. The Eurimages scheme first of all brought in a familiarity with film production in multinational environments which prompts the artists and crews to become closer and to share their experiences. Having partaken once in a multi-national project, it is easier then to take on subsequent projects, as Seçkin Yasar expressed: “I can easily proceed in the future to co-operate with foreign producers thanks to my co-production experience” (personal interview, April 26, 2009). Semih Kaplanoğlu verified the positive results of co-productions: “The filmmakers are gradually learning how to co-produce. We see them in foreign markets which was not the case in the past” (personal interview, March 30, 2009). Secondly, Eurimages experience has helped with the technical aspects of filmmaking, especially sound recording and processing, to advance to hitherto unachieved limits. From the ‘40s until the beginning of the ‘90s, films were shot silently and dubbed later in Turkey and there were almost no sound recording specialists to be found in the region. Technical co-operation with other countries introduced the requisite knowledge and practice to improve this. Thirdly, besides assisting the majority co-producer through undertaking some of the technical work, the minority co-producers considerably contributed to the marketing affairs of Turkish initiative projects as well. In addition to screening a Eurimages-backed film in the co-producer’s country automatically, the distribution becomes easier to exercise in cinemas and amongst the TV channels of all European countries and even non-European ones, depending on the co-producer’s international relations. To be at the level of the international arena is highly important for a national cinema’s recognition all over the world. Finally, a vital benefit of co-production support has been the advantage of being able to shoot with a greater budget. Zeki Demirkubuz confirmed this from his own experience through the making of *Kader (Destiny, 2006)*:

It is the first time I caught a chance to shoot with a high budget. This was the absolute benefit. My concern or attitude did not change but I could shoot the film in three seasons and thus spare more time for certain pertinent things and be able to enhance the formal quality of the work (personal interview, March 30, 2009).

Moreover, some other directors expressed that they would not have been able to shoot those films if they had not received Eurimages support.

The national representative’s role is of importance, for possessing the role of helping to guide the filmmakers throughout the application process. The national representative does not make a pre-election of the applicant projects. Expressing that he is ethically against pre-election as it would imply a kind of censorship and also because it is against the philosophy and spirit of Eurimages, Günaltay added:

I thought of supporting every project applying from Turkey in an indifferent manner, provided that they are not racist, pornographic, fanatic or against democratic and humanistic values. Therefore I essentially supported all projects from Turkey, even if I was not convinced that they were the best projects on the agenda of Eurimages or they had a critical dimension (2009).

The subsequent representatives of Turkey confirmed that they also never made pre-elections with regard to applicants and that is the case for the

representatives of all the other member states as well. What they in fact do is to direct the filmmakers to appropriate paths throughout the formal process. Demirhan stressed two points which exemplify exceptional cases (2009): The first case is if the number of applicant Turkish initiative projects outweighs the possible funding. For instance, when there are four projects on the agenda of comparable artistic quality and it is apparent that only two of them can get the support, he mentioned he would look at which director(s) need(s) it more; he would place the priority of his efforts on the project(s) coming from younger director(s) rather than for the project(s) from acclaimed director(s) whose film(s) were supported by the Fund before. By conducting himself in this manner, he said, there might therein be a contribution to the emergence of new talents: “I can explain it to the parties and my rationale will not be arbitrary for sure” (2009).

The second exceptional case is that wherein the national representative’s intervention in the process might be needed as a blockage for those projects which aim just to make propaganda, not art, Demirhan expressed (2009). He added that a film can surely be critical over social and political issues but what comes first is its aesthetic quality. His approach is understandable - that the priority of formal aesthetics is over and above content is in the nature of art. Furthermore, the main financial source of the Fund is the annual fees paid by the member states and no authority wishes to be subverted by an opportunity offered by itself. Günaltay, on the other hand, expressed that he did not take the dominant taboos in the country into consideration as a cinema representative in Eurimages, since art cannot be something done under restrictions and it is rather insubordinate by its very nature (2009). He attached importance to the artistic culture of self-criticism - projects questioning or criticizing Turkey should come from Turkey, not from outside. For instance, he was criticized in some of the media over the issue of Eurimages support for *Güneşe Yolculuk* (*Journey to the Sun*, Yeşim Ustaoglu, 2000) –which is critical of the predominant nationalist ideology in Turkey about the Kurdish question– and *İstanbul Kanatlarının Altında* (*Istanbul beneath My Wings*, Mustafa Altıoklar, 1996) –which exhibits the religious conservatism in the Ottoman state. “That is a democratic attitude. We composed an image in the eyes of other European countries that Turkey does not block support for a project which criticizes the state. I am pleased and proud of that” (Günaltay, 2009). In any case, a considerable number of films questioning the dominant taboos in the country have been produced with the contribution of Eurimages support in the past twenty years⁴ and approximately

⁴ Especially the narratives which question and/or represent the problematic facets of national identities [*Sen de Gitme* (*Please Don't Go*, Tunç Başaran, 1998), *Güneşe Yolculuk*, *Kaçıklık Diploması* (*Graduate of Insanity*, Tunç Başaran, 1998), *Sevgilim İstanbul*, *Kayıklı*, *Büyük Adam Küçük Aşk* (*Big Man Little Love*, Handan İpekçi, 2001), *Yazı Tura* (*Toss Up*, Uğur Yücel, 2004), *Çamur* (*Mud*, Derviş Zaim, 2003), *Bulutları Beklerken*], religious identities [*İstanbul Kanatlarının Altında*, *O da Beni Seviyor* (*Summer Love*, Barış Pirhasan, 2001), *Takva* (*Takva: A Man's Fear of God*, Özer Kızıltan, 2006), *Eve Giden Yol 1914* (*The Road Home*, Semir Aslanyürek, 2006)] and gender identities [*Çıplak* (*Nude*, Ali Özgentürk, 1994), *Robert's Movie* (*Robert'in Filmi*, Canan Gerede, 1991), *Aşk Ölümden Soğuktur* (*Bergen or Love is Colder than Death*, Canan Gerede, 1995), *Hamam* (*Steam: the Turkish Bath*, Ferzan Özpetek, 1997), *Meleğin Düşüşü* (*Angel's Fall*, Semih Kaplanoğlu, 2005), *Mutluluk* (*Bliss*, Abdullah Oğuz, 2007)] in Turkey are worthy of note..

half of those 60 Turkish initiative films, for example, speak politically or touch upon politics and political issues.

There are practically speaking two types of co-productions. One is the type where the co-producing parties entirely get involved in the project, i.e. artistically and technically. The other type is mainly financial in that the necessary fund for the film is raised in different countries but the film is national in terms of its content - a national film of the majority co-producing country. A striking majority of Turkish initiative films fall into this category. According to Olla, two reasons behind this fact might be: (1) the lack of co-production experience which Turkish filmmakers have had, and (2) the unprivileged position of the Turkish language in Europe (2009). Countries like France, Germany and Italy have a long history of co-productions and this experience creates good conditions for a cross-fertilization of cultures in the stories and in general they have a more mixed content contributed by both or all co-producing countries. On the language side, languages like English, French and German maintain the advantageous position of being spoken by more than one nation and thus the films in those languages have more chance of distribution outside the co-producing countries and are more open to transnational contexts. Conversely Turkish is not the official language of any state in the Council of Europe except Turkey and Azerbaijan and it is of course spoken in a few countries like Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, France, Sweden, Norway, Bulgaria and Greece but by a small number of immigrants and minorities. Therefore the Turkish initiative films inevitably narrate stories that aim at the audience in Turkey in the first place.

Nevertheless, this does not necessarily refute the notion that they are universal. The filmmakers care about being perceived by worldwide audiences as they themselves intend to be; this is in the nature of filmmaking. Hence there exists self-control to some extent in terms of being understandable and accessible universally. The filmmakers also consult their projects with their colleagues or with some people with different ethnic and national profiles from both inland and in foreign countries at the scriptwriting stage. Some of the filmmakers stressed that their films narrate the stories of Turkey as co-productions but they belong to the common culture of humanity after their release. They observed that different audiences all over the world appreciated them at the various international festivals. Ersin Pertan, referring to this issue, defined his work, *Kuşatma Altında Aşk* (*Love under Siege*, 1997), as a European film but added:

We are not European; we cannot be. Even if we want to be, Europeans do not accept us. We are not Eastern; we are not close to Eastern or Arabic culture. We are people of a culture which is peculiar to us. A journey to our roots reveals that the Byzantines influenced the Ottomans more than the Sumer, Hittite or Urartu cultures (Uzer, 1997, p. 97).

Barış Pirhasan pointed out in an interview in 2005 that particularly the Turkish films of the early 2000s should be located in European cinema:

The recent Turkish cinema is for sure a European cinema: look at the sources, look at what the filmmakers - including myself - have been influenced by. This is a new breath in European cinema which will be named sooner or later.

Though Turkey seems as a very different cultural region, Turkish cinema can be grasped in European cinema context. The crucial point is, we should not expect every individual's work to reflect his or her typical culture. The recent Turkish cinema, for instance, embraces international themes or dimensions with a peculiar point of view while focusing on the topics which are so-called "European" (Özcan, 2005, p. 189).

Some directors, on the other hand, do not assess their films in terms of national cinemas or as a part of European cinema. Semir Aslanyürek, for instance, expressed the fact that: "None of the films I made belong to a specific nation; they are all *human* stories" (personal interview, April 4, 2009). Özer Kızıltan noted that:

For film, for visual art, there is no such thing as being Turkish or German. It is universal and it *should* be that way. There may be local differences but the basic rules and language of cinema are universal. The story of *Takva: A Man's Fear of God* concerns Turkey but it might as well be a narrative of a Buddhist temple or of a fundamentalist Jewish environment as well (personal interview, March 31, 2009).

A close look at the films, however, reveals that the majority of them are profoundly national in that the stories, the images, the signs, the characters and the context clearly belong to Turkey, including the ones in which the shooting locations are indefinable (i.e. wherein a spectator does not know Turkey and cannot discern which country it is). A very traditional style of narration is followed, which was set in the 1950s and has been described by Halit Refiğ as "a language that is plain, less pretentious, and which seeks to reach its goals via shortcuts" (1971, p. 22). It was shaped under the influence of Hollywood – just like the other national cinemas - by the audience's taste and the economical and technical constraints of the film industry. The film language also occasionally displays the ornamental attractions thanks to the possibilities provided by the improvement in cinema technology. Speaking in Deleuzian terms, the majority of the films fall into the category of movement-image: "So-called classical narration derives directly from the organic composition of movement-images [*montage*], or from their specification as perception-images, affection-images and action-images, according to the laws of a sensory-motor schema" (Deleuze, 2003, p.26).

As Eurimages has been a good place to apply for funding for difficult projects (contextually and formally) which do not have much of a chance to succeed commercially, some of those films deviate from the narrative tradition that has been defined by market rules. *Akrebin Yolculuğu* (*Clock Tower*, Ömer Kavur, 1997), *İklimler* (*Climates*, Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 2006), *Meleğin Düşüşü*, *Yumurta* (*The Egg*, Semih Kaplıanoğlu, 2007), *Üç Maymun* (*Three Monkeys*, Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 2008), and *Bal* (*Honey*, Semih Kaplıanoğlu, 2010) for instance, display the particularities of what Deleuze introduced as *time-image* in which "time is no longer subordinated to movement, but movement to time":

We no longer have an indirect image of time which derives from movement, but a direct time-image from which movement derives. We no longer have a chronological time which can be overturned by movements which are contingently abnormal; we have a chronic non-chronological time which

produces movements necessarily “abnormal”, essentially “false”. (2003, p. 129)

As Patricia Pisters (2006, p. 176) encapsulated from Deleuze, in action cinema of movement-image (first cinema: “Hollywood genre cinema”) the action is followed through one or two central characters who are confronted with a challenge that is overcome in the course of the actions whereas modern cinema of time-image (second cinema: “auteur cinema”) is often an idiosyncratic reworking of class genres (sometimes with non-professional actors) and pays more attention to the socially less fortunate. The stories are deeply universal, talking about the human condition in general.



Figure 3: *Meleğin Düşüşü* (*Angel's Fall*, Semih Kaplanoğlu, 2005)

The films mentioned above display one or more of several false continuities, banalities of everyday life, re-collection images or crystal time which are particular to time-image. Directors of those films expressed that they were influenced by or at least have an appreciation for one or more of the masters whom Deleuze (2003) referred to in order to disclose time-image: namely Ozu, Bresson, Antonioni and Tarkovsky. Such films would have hardly had a chance of being made (and would have had little chance of screening even if they were) a few decades ago when the film industry was dependent solely on the market rules, since they are not well-appreciated by the mass audience.⁵ Although the landscape is Turkey in those films, they not only differ from the majority of the indigenous films in terms of their narrative style, but also the feelings and sentiments they invoke are dissimilar to those invoked in main stream films and they are thus nicknamed as ‘festival films’. However, the prestige that a national cinema needs is ensured thanks to the international awards won by its films, which in turn bring

⁵ A few directors who attempted different narrative forms or ‘difficult’ themes in the 60s and 70s experienced box-office crashes and some of them could not have a second chance to make a film. The others had to engage in commercial projects afterwards to survive the film market. Metin Erksan is the outstanding figure among those who made works outside the mainstream.

recognition and more interest to the films from Turkey (in this case) and it has served to nourish the national film industry.

Statistical data for the box-office returns of Eurimages-backed Turkish initiative films in Turkey show a heterogeneous distribution. While some of those like *Eşkîya* (*The Bandit*, Yavuz Turgul, 1996) and *Güle Güle* (*Goodbye*, Zeki Ökten, 2000) –which attracted more than one million spectators to movie theatres- have been appreciated by the audience, the majority reached a number of spectators less than 100,000. *Çıplak, Sen de Gitme, Parçalanma* (*Split*, Canan Gerede, 2000), *Yara, Sevgilim İstanbul, Karşılaşma* (*Encounter*, Ömer Kavur, 2003), *İnat Hikayeleri* (*Tales of Intransigence*, Reis Çelik, 2004), *Meleğin Düşüşü, Yolda* (*On the Way*, Erden Kıral, 2005) and *Hayat Var* (*My Only Sunshine*, Reha Erdem, 2009) have been seen by less than 10,000 people, which is too low a number for cinematographic productions. As a matter of fact, the average admission per indigenous film has been 244,187 during the 1990-2009 period and Eurimages-backed Turkish initiative films have an average of 187,581 whereas the films which did not get that co-production support have achieved 252,814.⁶ Especially those films which received support from Eurimages in the first five years of Turkey's membership (1990-1994) have an average admission as low as 30,130 per film. The average of indigenous films during the corresponding period is not as high as the general average of the last twenty years but nonetheless it is approximately two times that figure: 61,090.⁷ Ryclef Rienstra, who served as the first executive director of Eurimages between 1989 and 1993, explained that the Board of Management paid little attention to the box-office potential of the projects in the initial years of the Fund and this seems to have changed in recent years:

This could be one reason I could think of; there was too much criticism of the Fund on the grounds that the films supported by Eurimages didn't find an audience. So it is very much possible that the Board chose to opt for more audience-friendly films during recent years because they wanted these films to be seen and recognized by a larger audience. That is very much possible. At that time the Board didn't care about audience results. At the beginning it was just not a major consideration (personal interview, November 3, 2009).

Eşkîya in particular has a special place in Turkish film history in that it is the first indigenous film to come into contact with a large number of spectators after the fall of Turkish cinema in the end of the 1970s. Released in 1996, the success of 2.5 million admissions gave the hope to the filmmakers which was needed: an indigenous film should not necessarily be a box-office crash.⁸ *Eşkîya* was like an oasis in the desert for the audience who had been stuck between

⁶ The data are derived from: 1) Yurdatap and Yavuz 2004: p. 25; 2) *Antrakt Sinema Gazetesi*; 3) *Sinematurk 2.0*: Sinepedia. The higher audience number is taken into account, in case the figures in different sources for a given film contradict. The admissions for *Saint Ayşe, Büyük Çaresizliğimiz* (*Our Grand Despair*, Seyfi Teoman) and *Bir Zamanlar Anadolu'da* (*Once upon a Time in Anatolia*, Nuri Bilge Ceylan) are not included in the figures for Eurimages-backed films, as they have not been released yet (by the time of this article).

⁷ Since the years of the support decision by Eurimages and the release of the film differ, the figures of 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995 and 1997 are taken into account which correspond to the release years of the films that were supported during 1990-1994 period.

⁸ The admissions for a total number of nine indigenous films were approximately three million that year.

Hollywood productions and highly personal, symbolic and ‘boring’ indigenous auteur works. Yavuz Turgul, director of *Eşkiya*, had stated two years ago, in the midst of a barren film industry: “To me, Turkish cinema signed its own death warrant the day it lost its commercial character” (Tankuter, 1994, p. 29). Years after its disappearance, this film made use of the classical structure of the *Yeşilçam* narrative style – to which the mass audience had been used to - within the context of a modern love story and with strong characters. The other few films which reached relatively high levels of audience numbers – *Ağır Roman* (*Cholera Street*, Mustafa Altıoklar, 1997), *Güle Güle, Eğreti Gelin* (*Borrowed Bride*, Atif Yılmaz, 2005) and *Mutluluk* – are the ones which followed the classical narrative tradition as well.



Figure 4: *Eşkiya* (*The Bandit*, Yavuz Turgul, 1996)

The films which experienced box-office crashes, on the other hand, either made use of experimental/symbolic narration [*Ateş Üstünde Yürümek* (*To Walk on Fire*, Yavuz Özkan, 1991), *Çıplak, Seni Seviyorum Rosa* (*Rosa I Love You*, Işıl Özgentürk, 1992), *Akrebın Yolculuğu, Çamur*] or difficult themes [*Kaçıklık Diplomasi, Hiçbir yerde* (*In Nowhere Land*, Tayfun Pirselimoglu, 2002), *Sır Çocukları* (*Children of Secret*, Aydın Sayman & Ümit Cin Güven, 2002), *Bulutları Beklerken, Meleğin Düşüşü, Sevgilim İstanbul*] or the characters and the language were simply unfamiliar to a typical Turkish audience [*Robert’s Movie* (*Robert’in Filmi*, Canan Gerede, 1991)] – it was beyond a matter of being good or bad films. Three of the five leading roles are performed by non-Turkish actors and the characters speak mostly in the English language in *Robert’s Movie*. It is more like a foreign film shot in Turkey rather than being national in character. Director Canan Gerede, referring to *Cahiers du Cinema*, admitted it was not, indeed, a Turkish film: “Speaking of style, *Cahiers du Cinema* for instance, defined it as ‘the best sample of new American cinema’ from the film language point of view” (Peker, 1992, p. 67). Similarly *Mavi Sürgün, Hamam, Yara* and *Harem Suaré* were criticized for narrating Turkish society through the

eyes of a foreigner.

As the majority co-producer takes the initiative and has more influence on the content of the film, the scriptwriters of all the films are from Turkey except the co-writers of *Mavi Sürgün* and *Harem Suaré*. The location in most of the films is set in various parts of Turkey, mostly Istanbul. In some films, even though we know that the landscape is Turkey (since they are Turkish stories shot on locations in the country), there is no clear sign, image or dialogue affirming the country nor its identity. Thus such films as *Ateş Üstünde Yürümek*, *Seni Seviyorum Rosa*, *Akrebin Yolculuğu*, *Avcı (The Hunter)*, Erden Kıral, 1998) and *Meleğin Düşüşü* can be classified in the ‘indefinable locations’ category. As co-productions between two or more countries, some films, on the other hand, narrate transnational stories spanning in relevance to at least one country outside Turkey: *Hamam* (Italy), *Parçalanma* (Iceland), *Kayıkcı* (Greece), *Harem Suaré* (Italy), *Balalayka (Balalaika)*, Ali Özgentürk, 2000, Russia and Georgia), *Yara* (Germany), *Bulutları Beklerken* (Greece), *Sevgilim İstanbul* (Greece) and *Romantik (Romantic)*, Sinan Çetin, 2007, Bulgaria) are in this category. *Çamur* is an exception in the sense that the whole story is narrated in Cyprus; there is no part from Turkey. Co-operation between countries is observable also in the critical technical crew duties like those of the cinematographer and those of the editor: 24 of the cinematographers and 16 of the editors are non-Turkish nationals.

Criticisms and Conclusion

The approved projects tend to get an amount of support less than that which is demanded. Common belief is that the amount a Turkish initiative project can get is not more than 350,000 Euros; this is verified by the statistical data. The co-production support that Turkish initiative projects have received actually varied in amounts between 42,145 (*Aziz Ayşe / Saint Ayşe*, Elfe Uluç, 2005) and 330,000 (*Bir Zamanlar Anadolu’da*) Euros, excluding *Bulutları Beklerken*, *Mavi Sürgün* and *Harem Suaré* which got 350,000, 457,347 and 487,837 respectively; as mentioned before, there exists no Turkish producer or the Turkish producer was the minority party in those three projects. Taking into consideration the contribution Turkey has made to the Fund, the amount that the supported projects get is perceived as fair by the filmmakers. The projects in which Turkish co-producers are the minority party, on the other hand, have received support amounting to between 39,637 and 578,500 Euros. A comparison of the paid annual fees and the support given to the Turkish film industry - filmmakers, movie theatres and distributors – reveals that Turkey has very much benefited from Eurimages funding in the past twenty years (see Figure 5.1 and 5.2).⁹

As is discernable on the graphs, Turkey paid 47.50 million French Francs between 1990 and 2000 and received a support amounted to 73.25 million. After the currency turned into Euro in 2001, the paid amount and received support hitherto have been 8.09 and 10.82 million respectively. An annual support which

⁹ The source of the data is Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

is slightly higher than 1 million Euros is not a big amount for the film industry as a whole but it is helpful for the professionals who depend on such support.

A common criticism of the Fund is that the application process is highly bureaucratic and necessitates too much paper work. However, what is demanded

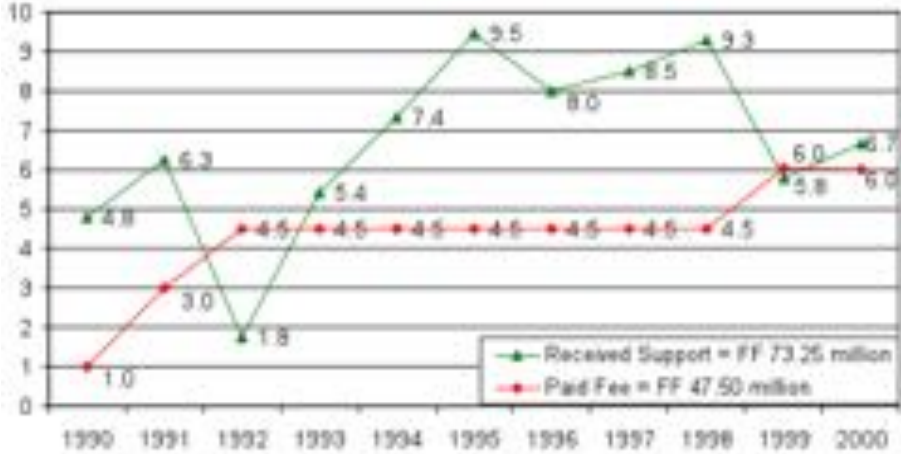


Figure 5.1: The Amount of Fee Turkey Paid to Eurimages and the Support Received (FF)

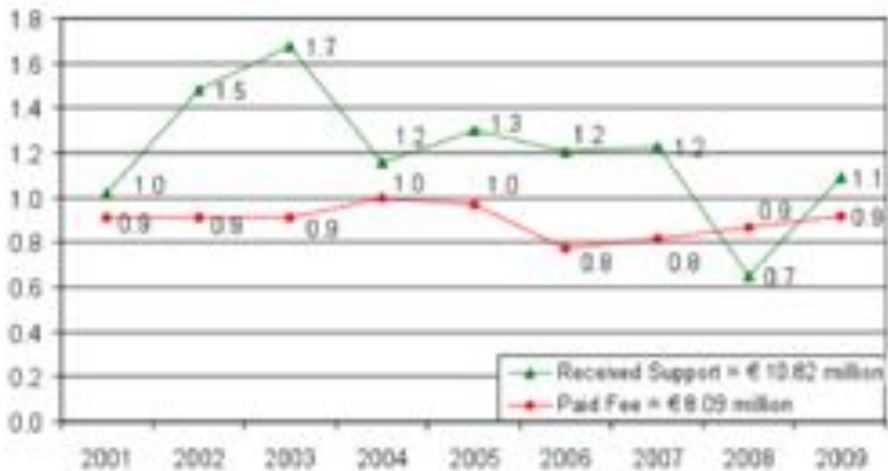


Figure 5.2: The Amount of Fee Turkey Paid to Eurimages and the Support Received (€)

by the Fund are documents which are already supposed to be prepared by the producers indeed. The complaints about bureaucracy and paper work are not particular to Turkish producers on the other hand; such complaints come from almost all countries. What they have to add to those already supposed to be prepared is the English or French translation of the documents. Olla stated that:

We do not ask anything that they shouldn't already have if they are good producers: for instance the co-production agreement, or for instance a budget, or for instance a financial plan or a schedule. Those producers who are complaining of administrative burdens usually indicate two things: if they don't have those materials it means either they are not good producers or they are not ready to come to us. Or the second possible reason - if they don't have it, what they would declare is false (2009).

Rienstra agreed with these criticisms but stressed the inevitability of the bureaucracy:

I think they are absolutely right but the point is that this was a fund which was set up within the framework of the Council of Europe and the Council of Europe is a very bureaucratic organization. One should understand that we are dealing with member states' money and we are held accountable for all of our expenses and support amounts by our member states. And another fact is that on the national level, when I was the director of the Dutch Film Fund, I knew the filmmakers, I knew the producers. I knew which one was reliable, and which one was not. And for which one I had to be careful and for the other one to say "I can trust you". But on the international level we don't know and we are entirely dependent on the judgment of the national representatives, who are not always all that objective. We have always asked - because we discussed this very often - for them to submit a project in one fold, just one copy, and we copied it for the Board. And if the file was incomplete it was our fault. So we only said, Ok we have 15 member states; you bring 15 copies of the file. It is your responsibility. Maybe it is bureaucratic, yes, but I think this is unavoidable... I have seen procedures in France and Germany and I can faithfully say that we are not all that bureaucratic (2009).

Even though the bureaucratic process aims at achieving a tight control on the budgets in such a monetary affair, these criticisms point out that there has been a considerable number of inflated budgets through the applications or false submissions for the payments due to the system, which pays a certain percentage of the estimated budget and thus encourages the producers to exploit the Fund. These criticisms are common to producers from almost all member states. Barrie Ellis-Jones, who served as the executive director of Eurimages between 1993 and 1995, stated that Eurimages was more sensitive and cautious about certain projects: "There are tight budgets, which have little realistic room for manoeuvre, fair budgets and loose budgets, and it's the loose ones that we are most keen to re-examine with care" (Finney, 1996, p. 110).

There is a common held belief that Eurimages will not support a director who is shooting his or her first feature, which is partly true. Rienstra explained this:

In general I think Eurimages has not very often supported first films in the past because usually they have wanted projects with filmmakers who have a good reputation and very often it was difficult for first time directors to get a film in co-production with two other countries. How can you convince other producers? This is not easy (2009).

Nevertheless, Tayfun Pirseliimoğlu (director of *Hiçbir yerde*) and Bahadır Karataş (director of *Usta / The Master*, 2009) got support for their first feature film projects.

A problem which stemmed from the governments of member states in the past was the temporary delays in the payment of the annual fees. Many members

delayed their annual fees from time to time but this is not the case anymore. In any case, 18.5 million Euros is generated annually by the Fund on average for the production of 62 films and there existed 34 member states in 2009. This hardly corresponds to the budget of a cheap American production; that is to say, Eurimages support remains at a symbolic level compared to the financing available in Hollywood.

The experience of twenty years shows that the Eurimages-backed Turkish initiative films can be classified in the category of *national* films to a large extent. Nevertheless, an important number of films question the dominant taboos and/or the established values related to national, religious and gender identities in the country. Those films, thus, simply affirm the Eurimages criteria which do not allow pornography, nor violence, nor the infringement of human rights, and which encourage the filmmakers to reflect and promote the contribution of diverse national components to Europe's cultural identity. The majority follow the traditional narrative style of Turkish cinema, but films which fall outside the mainstream exist as well. Turkish producers preferred to collaborate with colleagues from France, Greece and Hungary the most due to a series of aforementioned reasons. Regarding the filmmaking practice, Eurimages experience – as one of the four new sources of support in the post-1990 period – has contributed to Turkish cinema particularly in terms of familiarity with co-productions, technical aspects, marketing affairs and extended budgets.

APPENDIX

CO-PRODUCTION SUPPORT AMOUNTS FOR TURKISH INITIATIVE PROJECTS AND AUDIENCE FIGURES OF THOSE FILMS

Film	Turkish Title	Director	Year of Support	Year of Release	Support Amount (Euro)*	Admission**
Nude	Çıplak	Ali Özgentürk	1990	1994	304,898	9,847
Robert's Movie	Robert'in Filmi	Canan Gerede	1990	1991	228,674	24,198
To Walk on Fire	Ateş Üstünde Yürümek	Yavuz Özkan	1990	1991	198,184	12,200
Rosa, I Love You	Seni Sevdiğim Rosa	İşıl Özgentürk	1991	1992	228,674	17,678
The Blue Exile	Mavi Sürgün	Erdem Kural	1991	1993	457,347	28,325
Shamran	Şamran	Zülfü Livaneli	1992	1994	213,429	39,444
Bergen or Love is Colder than Death	Aşk Ölümden Soğuktur	Canan Gerede	1993	1995	304,898	21,445
Letter	Mektup	Ali Özgentürk	1994	1997	152,449	87,899
Istanbul beneath My Wings	Istanbul Kanatlarımın Altında	Mustafa Altıoklar	1995	1996	182,939	474,571
Love under Siege	Kuşatma Altında Aşk	Ersin Peritan	1995	1997	182,939	20,022
Please Don't Go	Sen de Gitme	Tunç Başaran	1995	1998	213,429	2,105
Steam: the Turkish Bath	Hamam	Ferzan Özpetek	1995	1997	123,484	200,440
Cholera Street	Ağır Roman	Mustafa Altıoklar	1996	1997	213,429	872,172

* The data are derived from official website of Eurimages: http://www.coe.int/t/044/eurimages/History/Coproductio/default_en.asp

** The data are derived from: 1) K. Yurdutap and D. Yavuz, 25; 2) Show TV; 3) www.sinematurk.com. The higher audience number is taken into account, in case the figures in different resources for a given film contradict.

Clock Tower	Akrebın Yolculuğu	Ömer Kavur	1996	1997	167,694	1,307
Miracle ma non Troppo	Nihavend Muscize	Atıf Yılmaz	1996	1997	152,449	80,041
The Bandit	Eşkya	Yavuz Turgul	1996	1996	137,204	2,572,287
The Hunter	Avcı	Erden Kıral	1996	1998	137,204	34,921
Goodbye Tomorrow	Hosçakal Yaran	Reis Çelik	1997	1998	239,040	260,471
Journey to the Sun	Güneşe Yolculuk	Yeşim Ustaoglu	1997	2000	167,694	73,324
The Split	Parçalanma	Canan Gerede	1997	2000	259,163	988
Wound	Yara	Yılmaz Arslan	1997	2000	106,714	6,282
Graduate of Insanity	Kaçıklık Diploması	Tunç Başaran	1998	1998	182,939	10,697
Harem Suaré	Harem Suare	Ferzan Özpetek	1998	1999	487,837	223,429
My Darling Istanbul	Sevgilim İstanbul	Seçkin Yasar	1998	2007	167,694	5,224
Romantic	Romantik	Sinan Çetin	1998	2007	182,939	162,028
The Boatman	Kayıcı	Biket İlhan	1998	1999	167,694	14,105
Balalaika	Balalayka	Ali Özgentürk	1999	2000	67,078	427,580
Goodbye	Güle Güle	Zeki Ökten	1999	2000	243,918	1,275,967
House of Angels	Melekler Evi	Ömer Kavur	1999	2000	138,729	22,910
Big Man, Little Love	Büyük Adam Küçük Aşk	Hansdan İpekçi	2000	2001	304,000	139,450
Children of Secret	Sar Çocukları	Aydın Sayman & Ümit Cin Güven	2001	2002	200,000	30,038
In Nowhereland	Hiçbir yerde	Tayfun Pirselimoğlu	2001	2002	275,000	45,055
Summer Love	O da Beni Seviyor	Barış Pirhasan	2001	2001	280,000	102,101
Encounter	Karşılaşma	Ömer Kavur	2002	2003	250,000	6,875
Toss Up	Yazın Tura	Uğur Yücel	2002	2004	320,000	271,988
Letters Unsent	Gönderilmemiş Mektuplar	Yusuf Kurçenli	2002	2003	190,000	371,641
Mud	Çamur	Derviş Zaım	2002	2003	250,000	17,101
Waiting for the Clouds	Bulutları Beklerken	Yeşim Ustaoglu	2002	2005	350,000	20,761
Angel's Fall	Meleğin Düşüşü	Semih Kaplanoğlu	2003	2005	275,000	5,736
On the Way	Yolda	Erden Kıral	2003	2005	238,370	9,870

Tales of Intransigence	Inat Hikayeleri	Reis Çelik	2003	2004	75,000	7,439
The Time of the Heart	Kalbin Zamanı	Ali Özgentürk	2003	2004	266,000	79,598
Borrowed Bride	Eğreti Gelin	Anf Yılmaz	2004	2005	210,000	638,444
Climates	İklimler	Nuri Bilge Ceylan	2004	2006	200,000	35,345
Destiny	Kader	Zeki Demirkubuz	2005	2006	200,000	21,747
Saint Ayşe***	Aziz Ayşe	Elfe Uluç	2005	-	42,145	
Takva: A Man's Fear of God	Takva	Özer Kızıltan	2005	2006	210,000	349,530
Waiting for Heaven	Cenneti Beklerken	Derviş Zaim	2005	2006	220,000	59,281
Bliss	Mutluluk	Abdullah Ögüz	2006	2007	230,000	590,106
Egg	Yumurta	Semih Kaplanoğlu	2006	2007	150,000	33,585
Home Coming	Eve Dönüş	Ömer Uğur	2006	2006	200,000	231,784
The Road Home	Eve Giden Yol: 1914	Semir Aslanyürek	2006	2006	200,000	345,817
Justice	Yengeç Oyunu	Ali Özgentürk	2007	2009	150,000	11,286
My Only Sunshine	Hayat Var	Reha Erdem	2007	2009	200,000	9,586
Pandora's Box	Pandora'nın Kutusu	Yeşim Ustaoğlu	2007	2009	200,000	26,939
Three Monkeys	Üç Maymun	Nuri Bilge Ceylan	2007	2008	235,000	127,668
The Master	Usta	Bahadır Karataş	2008	2009	250,000	80,550
Honey	Bal	Semih Kaplanoğlu	2009	2010	180,000	31,910
Once upon a Time in Anatolia***	Bir Zamanlar Anadolu'da	Nuri Bilge Ceylan	2009	-	330,000	-
Our Grand Despair***	Bizim Büyük Çaresizliğimiz	Seyfi Teoman	2009	-	150,000	

*** Has not been released yet (by the time of this article)

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