



## Economic Perspectives of University Students in the South East Anatolia Region with regard to EU Membership of Turkey<sup>1</sup>

Mehmet Behzat Ekinci<sup>2</sup>

*Economics, FEAS, Mardin Artuklu University, Mardin-Turkey*

Mehmet Kara<sup>3</sup>

*Economics, FEAS, Mustafa Kemal University, Hatay-Turkey*

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### ABSTRACT

### ARTICLE INFO

This paper aims to reveal the economic perspectives of university students in the South East Anatolia Region of Turkey (SAR). In this context, data obtained through a survey conducted with university students in nine cities of the region (Mardin, Adıyaman, Antep, Batman, Diyarbakır, Kilis, Siirt, Şırnak, and Urfa) during April-June 2016 is analysed.

Most participants are knowledgeable about the EU and more than the half support membership for Turkey. However, while they perceive the Union as having a brilliant future, 39% believe that Turkey will never become an EU member. The percentage of those who think that EU membership would lead to an increase in the quality of goods/services is 58%. A significant percentage of participants expect positive outcomes in 'product quality' for the food, farming, and fishing sectors; 'technological progress and innovative capability' for industrial sector; and 'international competition' for the service sector.

57% of participants look forward to an improvement in the institutionalism of companies. Half the participants expect positive changes in wages and salaries. Conversely, the proportion of those who expect to see negative effects of companies on the environment is 43%. While half the participants believe that unemployment in Turkey will decrease, the percentage of those who believe that inflation will be lower is 35%. The participants who say that inequality in income distribution will be reduced is also around the same rate.

**Keywords:** South East Anatolia Region, University Students, European Union (EU), Economic Perspectives on EU, EU-Turkey Relations.

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<sup>2</sup> Assoc. Prof. Dr.

[mbekinci@akademiktisat.net](mailto:mbekinci@akademiktisat.net)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8720-844X>

<sup>3</sup> Corresponding Author: Mehmet Kara

Prof. Dr.

[kara70m@gmail.com](mailto:kara70m@gmail.com)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5572-2404>

## **Introduction**

The European Union (EU) to which Turkey has, for a long time, endeavoured to become a member, is an institutional structure that is discussed in Turkey in terms of its political, social, and economic aspects. However, economic issues are mainly taken into account. Prioritisation of the economic aspects of the EU by people during negotiations, or forming their expectations, is understandable in a country which lies far behind the Union in terms of average income level and standard of living.

Conversely, the issue of EU membership, particularly in the South East Anatolia Region of Turkey, is usually associated with political issues; the economic perspectives for its population with regard to the EU and its membership, are not necessarily being taken into account. Yet, the economic possibilities that would be provided by the EU are highly significant for the people of the South East Anatolia Region.

In general, although economic issues and related expectations are prioritised, studies on Turkey's people, particularly on their economic perspectives with regard to the EU, are insufficient. This study aims to close that gap, with particular stress on the opinions of the population in the South East Anatolia Region of Turkey, revealing their economic perspectives with regard to the EU. In this case, university students being identified as a target group. The basis of the study is formed by a survey conducted with the university students of nine cities in South East Anatolia Region (Mardin, Adıyaman, Antep, Batman, Diyarbakır, Kilis, Siirt, Şırnak, Urfa) during April-June 2016.

This paper aims, on the one hand, to determine the main understanding and interest level of students with regard to the EU and, on the other, to study the effects of possible EU membership of Turkey on 'consumer perceptions, sectors, and micro-macro economic life'. The analyses made through this field study are designed to be helpful for both the policy implementation of Turkey's membership of the EU and to determine the position of the South East Anatolia Region of Turkey in this process.

In this context, the targets of the paper are the following: determination of economic perceptions of university students in the region on the EU and outcomes of possible EU membership of Turkey, making some political inferences based on the data obtained, and making some proposals for training or raising awareness of people on the subject.

## **Literature Review**

Academic studies aimed at revealing and analysing the opinions of individuals with regard to the EU have been undertaken, mostly in the 1990's. Regional public polls have also been made, mostly in the 2000's; these were based on orientation theories rather than being for or against EU membership in the South East Anatolia Region of Turkey (Samur and Ekinci, 2018, 220). It should also be stated that in international literature there is an insufficiency of orientation based theories that study and analyse this subject in detail. Moreover, papers that study the economic aspects of the issues for the region are scarce.

Economic literature on Turkey's EU membership concentrates mainly on three areas: the general effects of EU membership on Turkey's economy, the general effects of a Customs Union on Turkey's economy and the sectoral effects of the Customs Union and EU membership.

An example of the first group is the study by Karakaya and Özgen (2002) which analyses the trade formation and diversion effects of Turkey's EU membership. An example of the second group is the study by Akkoyunlu-Wigley, Mihçı, and Arslan (2006). Here, they examine the effects of a Customs Union on the growth of Turkey's economy.

The paper by Bekmez (2002) falls into the last group. Bekmez studies the sectoral effects of EU membership on Turkey's economy. While the paper by Filiztekin (2003) analyses the effects of the Customs Union on Turkey's manufacturing sector, the paper by Akbostancı,

Tunç and Türüt-Aşık (2006) is a study of the environmental effects of the Customs Union on Turkey's economy; and the study by Ekinci (2006) is an analysis of the position of businesses in Turkey within EU membership. These are all also within the framework of the third group.

There are also various 'public opinion polls' examining Turkey's membership of the EU. The researches of Ceran et al. (2016) and Özsöz et al. (2015) analysing support level and perception of Turkey's public opinion and its level of the support with regard to EU membership; the survey by Ercan (2016) examining Turkey's public opinion towards the EU; the questionnaire by Samur and Oral (2007) determining the orientation of university seniors in Diyarbakır to the EU; the poll by Yazgan and Aktaş (2012) examining the role played by public opinion in the city of Çankırı with regard to relations between Turkey and the EU; and the survey of Karakuzu et al. (2015) studying the perception of Vocational Higher School students to the EU in the province of Uzunköprü-Edirne, could all be classified as being within the scope of this study.

As mentioned above, such studies do not, focus specifically on the economic aspect of the issue but are about the effects of membership on a sector and/or the perception of people of a city/province. Moreover, although existence of such studies is known, no published paper focusing mainly on the economic perspectives of public opinion in the South East Anatolia Region has been found so far. Therefore, it can be said that this paper shall make a contribution to close this gap.

### **Data and Method**

The main theme of the paper includes general opinions on the EU of students in the region and effects of possible EU membership of Turkey on 'consumer perceptions, sectors, and micro-macro economic life'.

Through the survey conducted in the cities of Mardin, Adıyaman, Antep, Batman, Diyarbakır, Kilis, Siirt, Şırnak, and Urfa, answers of the mentioned students were sought for the following questions:

- Are they knowledgeable about the economic advantages of the EU?
- What will happen in the agriculture, industry, and service sectors following EU membership of Turkey?
- What kinds of changes will occur in working conditions, institutionalisation of companies, competition, and the environment?
- How will unemployment, inflation, and income distribution change in the case of membership?

As it is handling an actual but a rare issue in the literature, the paper has an original value. The analyses made through this field study are expected to be helpful for both the policy implementation of Turkey's membership of the EU and the determination of the position of the South East Anatolia Region of Turkey in this process.

The paper includes a dual research method: firstly it is a desk study consisting of a literature review, preparation of a questionnaire, and analysis of the survey's data. Secondly there is a field study. In this context, a survey of 266 people was conducted using the methods of face-to-face interview with regularly selected persons, by visiting the said cities by filling in an online form, and via mail/e-mail communication.

The field study includes 26 questions classified under three main headings: personal information on the participants, their general knowledge and opinions on the EU plus their economic perspectives with regard to EU membership of Turkey. A 5-Point Likert Scale Method is applied in the survey. Here, when analysing and assessing the survey 'clustered cylinder and separated cake' graphs are used for the presentation of the answers.

### Analysis of the Survey's Data

#### Information on the Participants

The participants are mainly from the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences (FEAS). However, to enrich the research, students of the Faculties of Theology, Engineering, Architecture, and Vocational Higher Schools are also included.

The share of FEAS' students is 87% of the total. They are from the departments of Economics, Business, Political Sciences and Public Management, and International Relations. Information on the gender and age range of the participants is given below.

#### Q1) Gender of the participants

Male	57%
Female	43%

Although the majority of the participants are male, the number of females is not much lower. Thus, one can say that the representation level of the research is high in terms of gender.

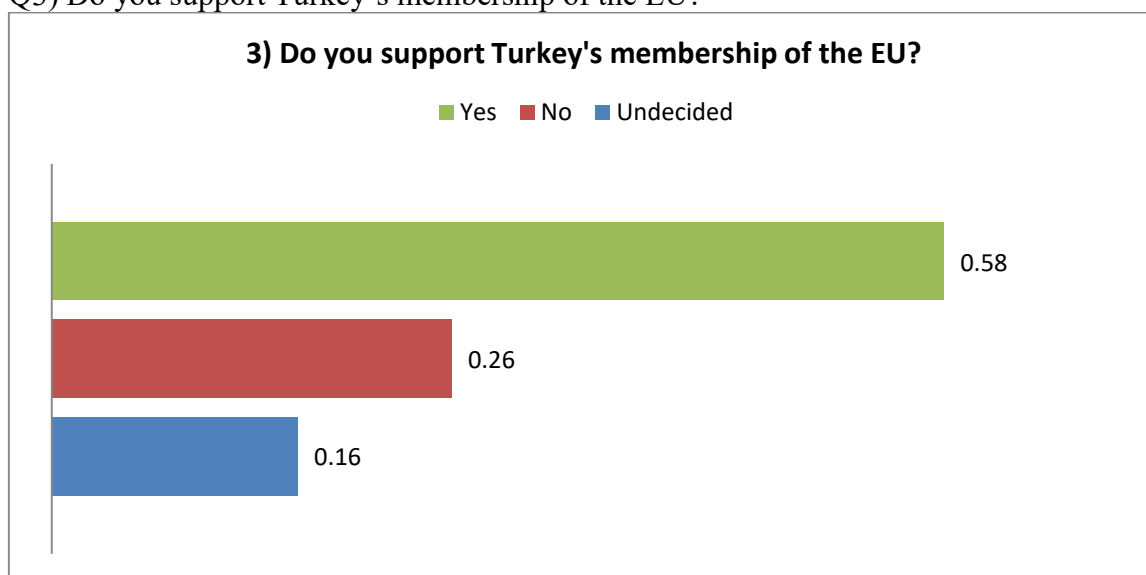
#### Q2) Age range of the participants

As they are university students, the age of the participants ranges from 17 to 28 years.

#### General Information on the EU

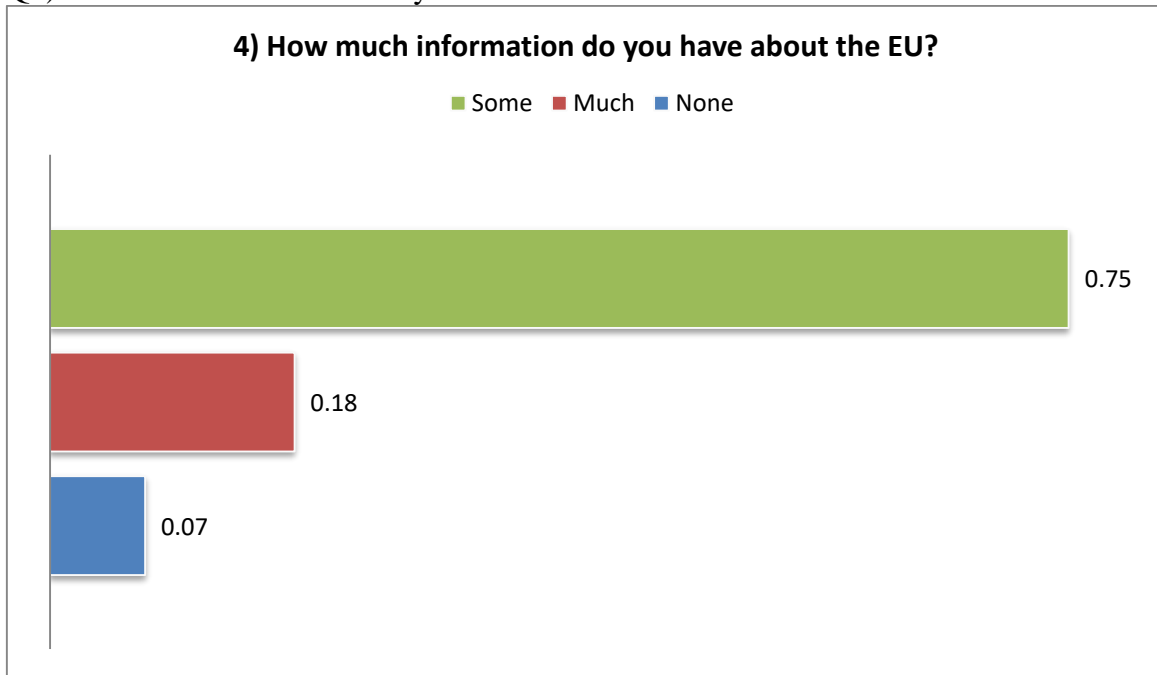
In this section of the survey, the main knowledge levels of the participants, their positive-negative approaches, and their assessments on the EU membership process of Turkey are revealed and related analyses are made.

#### Q3) Do you support Turkey's membership of the EU?



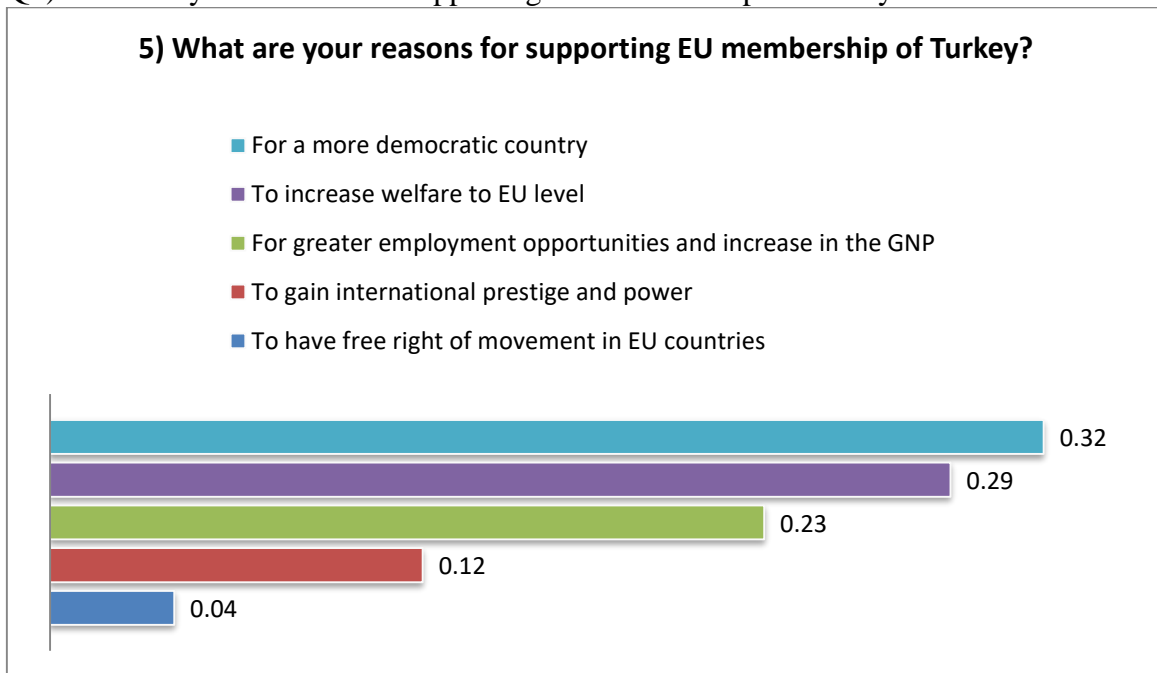
While more than half the participants supported Turkey's membership of the EU, the crisis of confidence with regard to several issues between Turkey and the EU, turned positive opinions to negative to a certain extent.

Q4) How much information do you have about the EU?



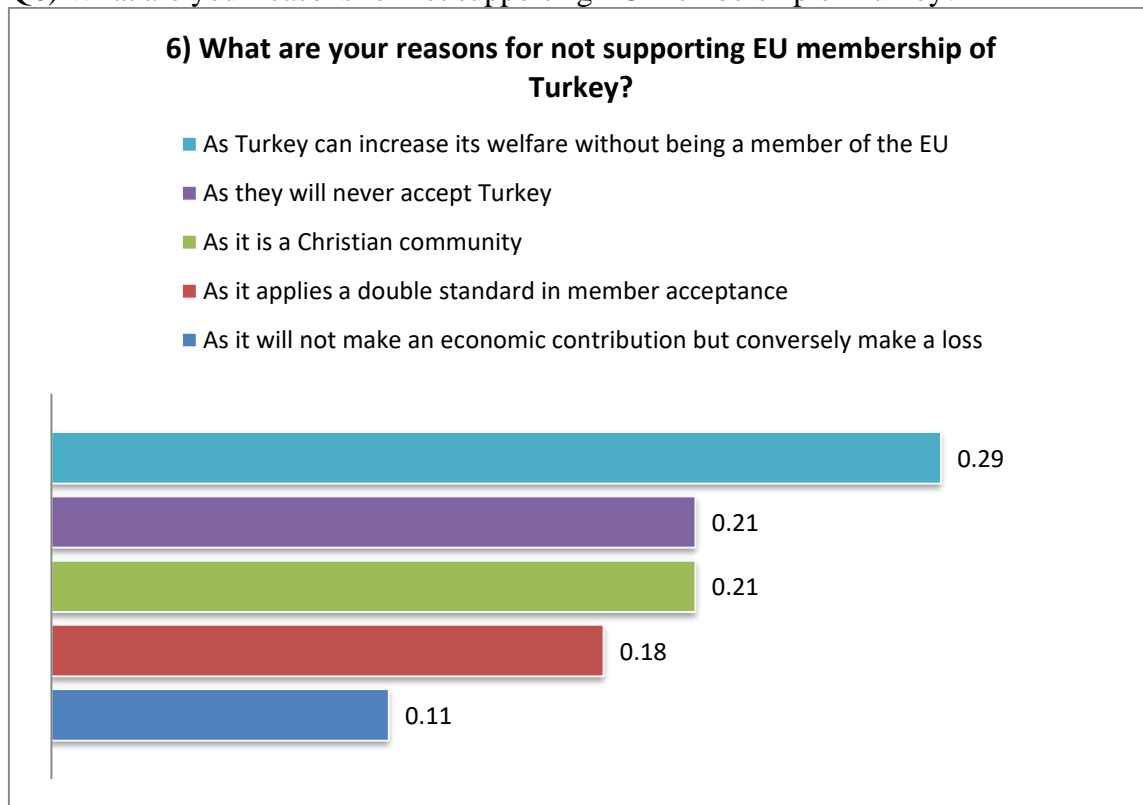
An important percentage of the participants have knowledge of the EU. However, the largest share (75%) belongs to participants who say 'some'.

Q5) What are your reasons for supporting EU membership of Turkey?



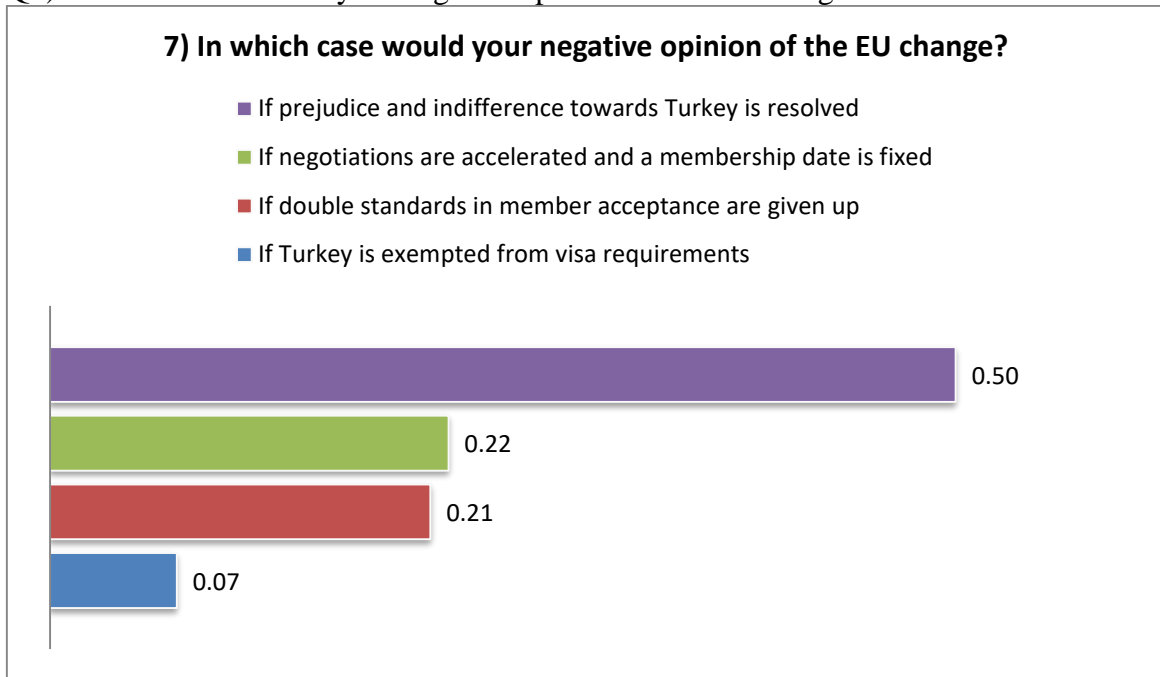
The main reasons stated for support of EU membership are 'political' and 'social' rather than 'economic'. This can be summarised as 'more democracy'. Economic reasons are then preferred. Among them the first is 'To increase welfare to EU level'.

Q6) What are your reasons for not supporting EU membership of Turkey?



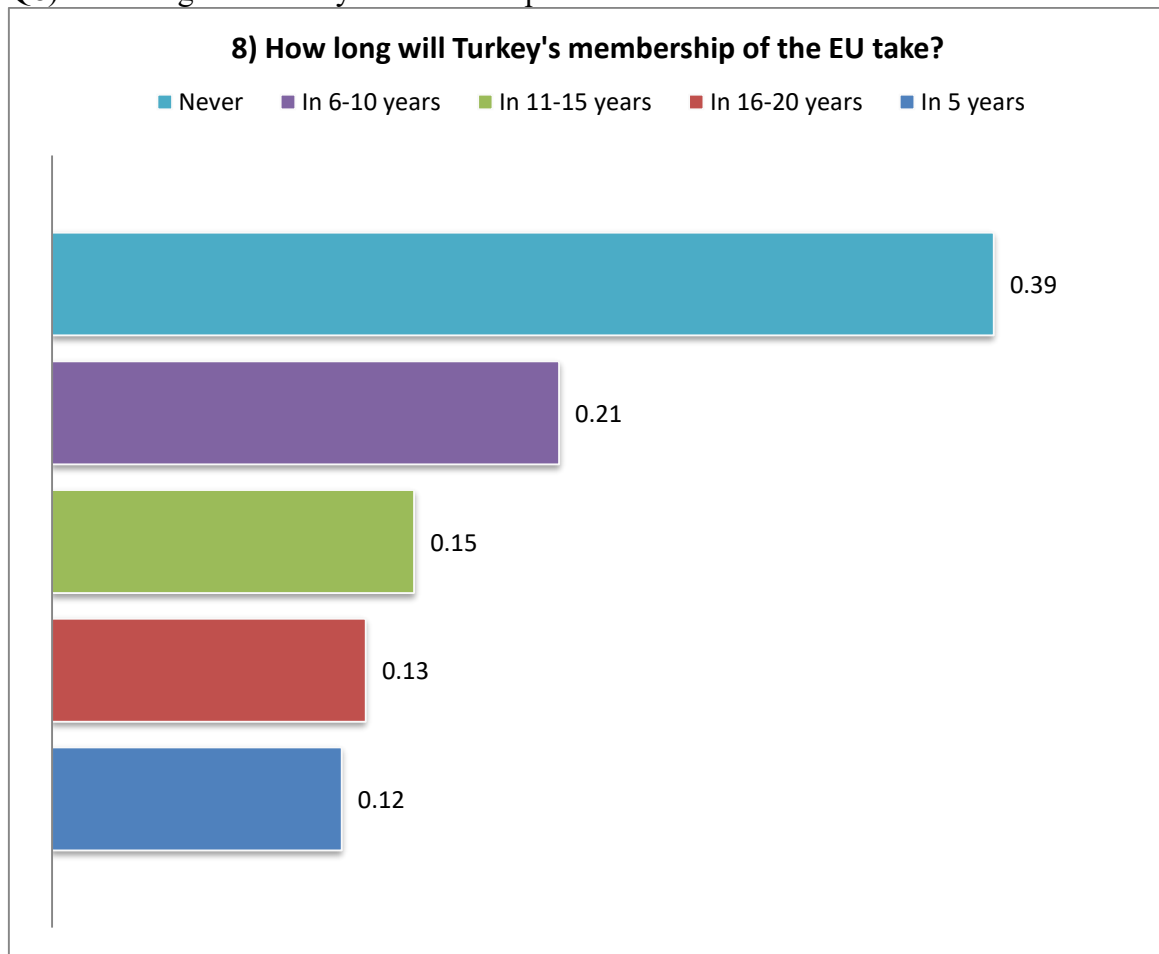
The main reason stated for not supporting EU membership is the belief that ‘Turkey can increase its welfare without being a member of the EU’. The two other main reasons declared are ‘As they will never accept Turkey’ and ‘As it is a Christian community’.

Q7) In which case would your negative opinion of the EU change?



Half the participants think that the EU is prejudiced against Turkey's membership. Therefore, they say that they will feel positive towards the EU 'If prejudice and indifference towards Turkey is resolved'. On the other hand, they emphasise the slowness of the negotiations and say that they will feel positive provided that the process is accelerated and a membership date is fixed.

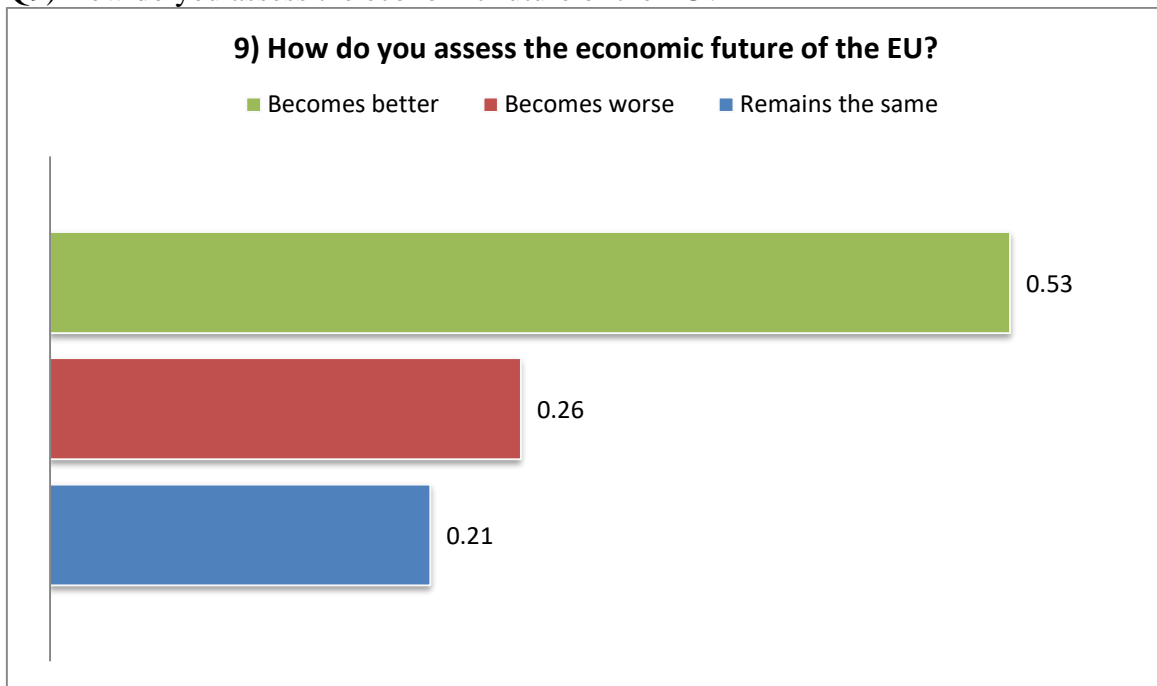
Q8) How long will Turkey's membership of the EU take?



39% of the participants believe that Turkey will never become an EU member. Those who say that Turkey will become a member within the 5 year period is 12%. This can be assessed as an indicator that the belief in EU membership for Turkey has weakened to some extent.

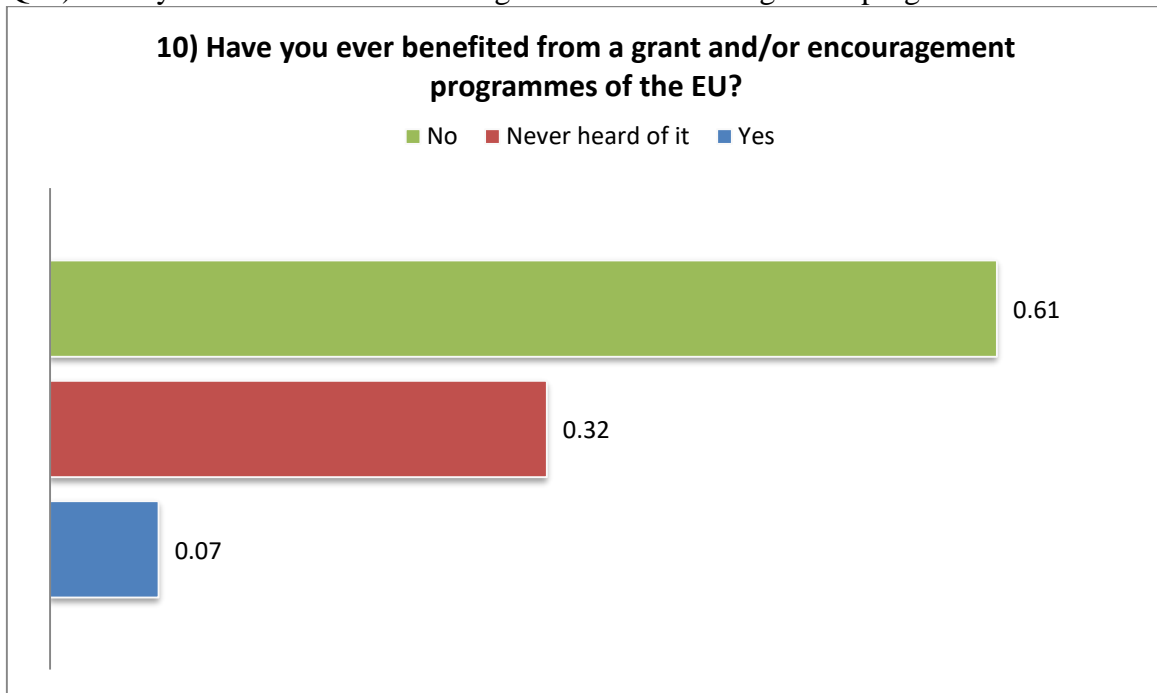


Q9) How do you assess the economic future of the EU?



In spite of some economic and political conflicts in the EU countries, more than half the participants (53%) expect a brilliant future for the Union. Those who think the reverse are 26%.

Q10) Have you ever benefited from a grant and/or encouragement programmes of the EU?



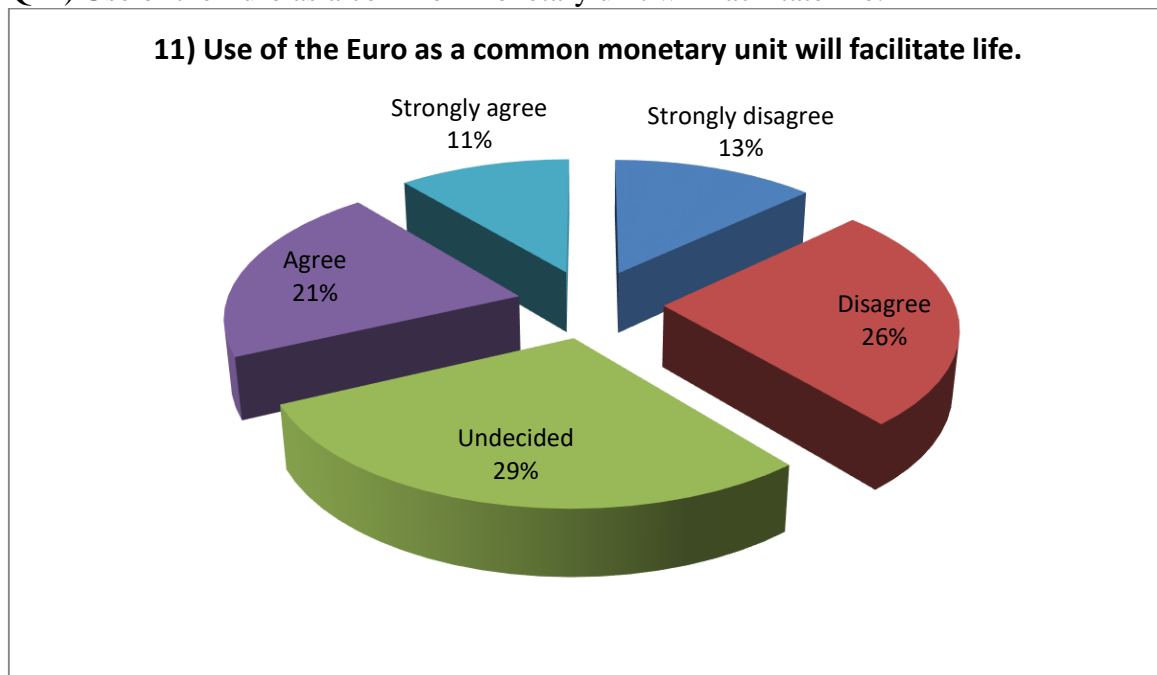
61% of the participants have never benefited from a grant and/or encouragement programmes of the EU. Moreover, 32% of the total have no information on such matters.

### Assessments for Turkey's Economy in case of Its Membership to the EU

In this section, the economic perspectives of the participants with regard to EU membership of Turkey are studied in detail. In this context, their assessments on the effects of possible EU membership of Turkey on 'consumer perceptions, sectors, and micro-macro economic life' are determined. Here, a 5-Point Likert Scale Method is applied in determining the preferences.

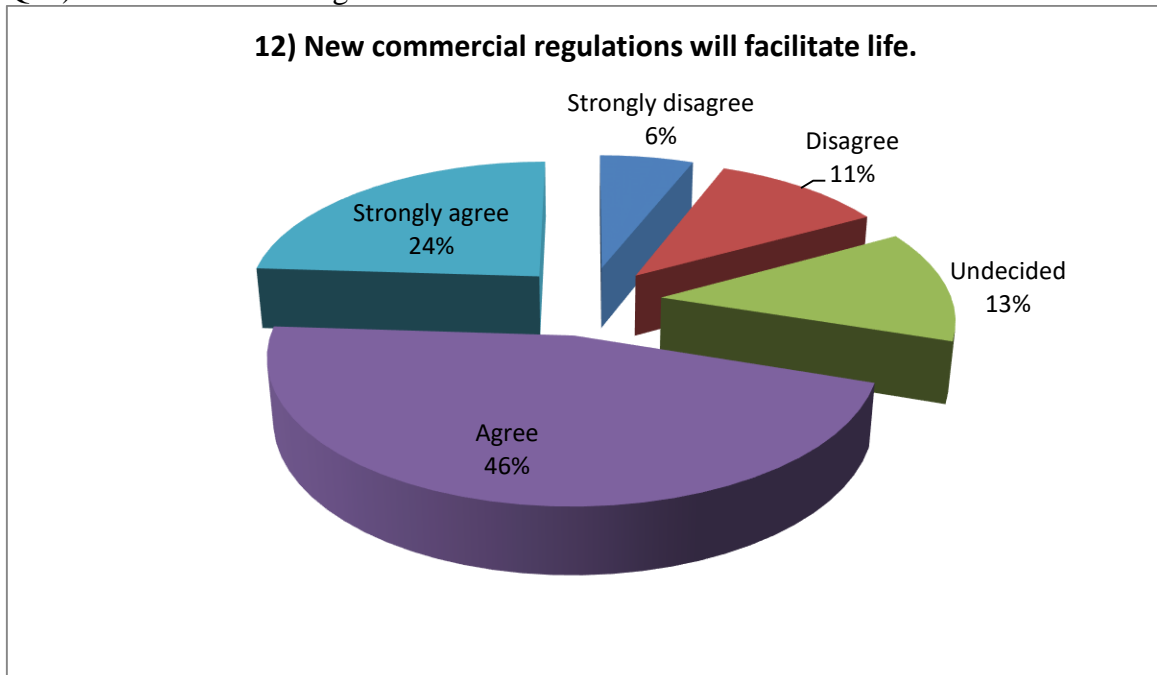
#### Assessments on Consumer Perceptions

Q11) Use of the Euro as a common monetary unit will facilitate life.



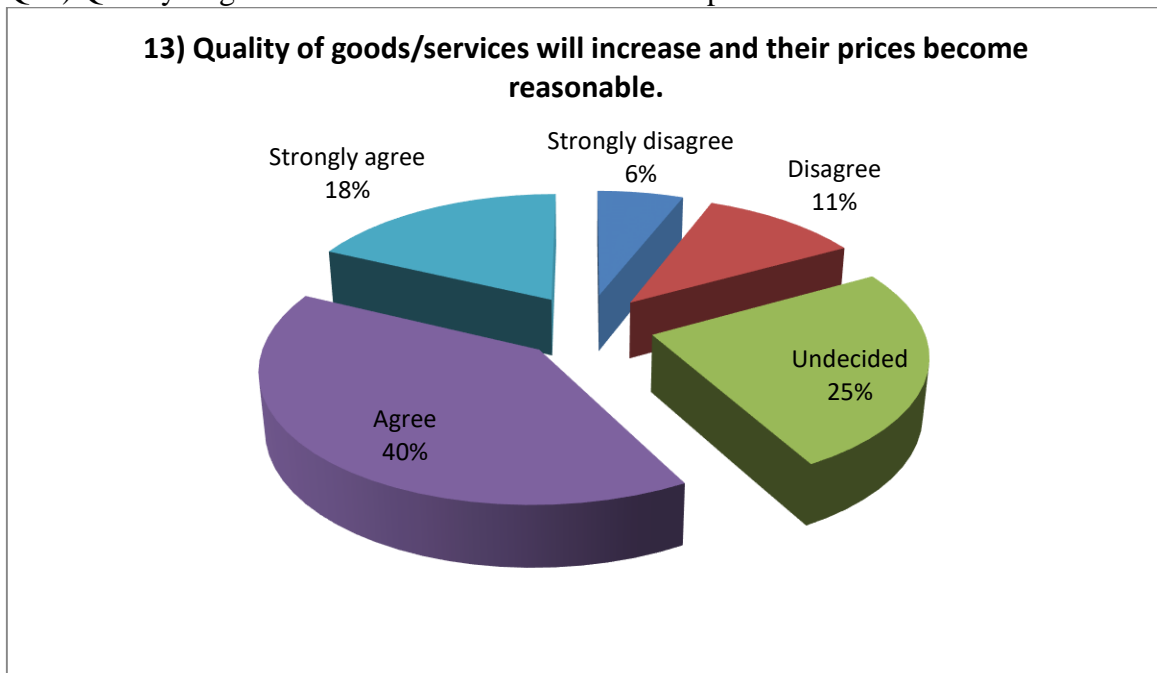
The belief level of the participants on 'Use of the Euro as a common monetary unit facilitates life' is low. Those who think positively on this matter are at the rate of 32%. It can be said that the reason for such a low rate is the economic crisis that occurs in some European countries, particularly in Greece.

Q12) New commercial regulations will facilitate life.



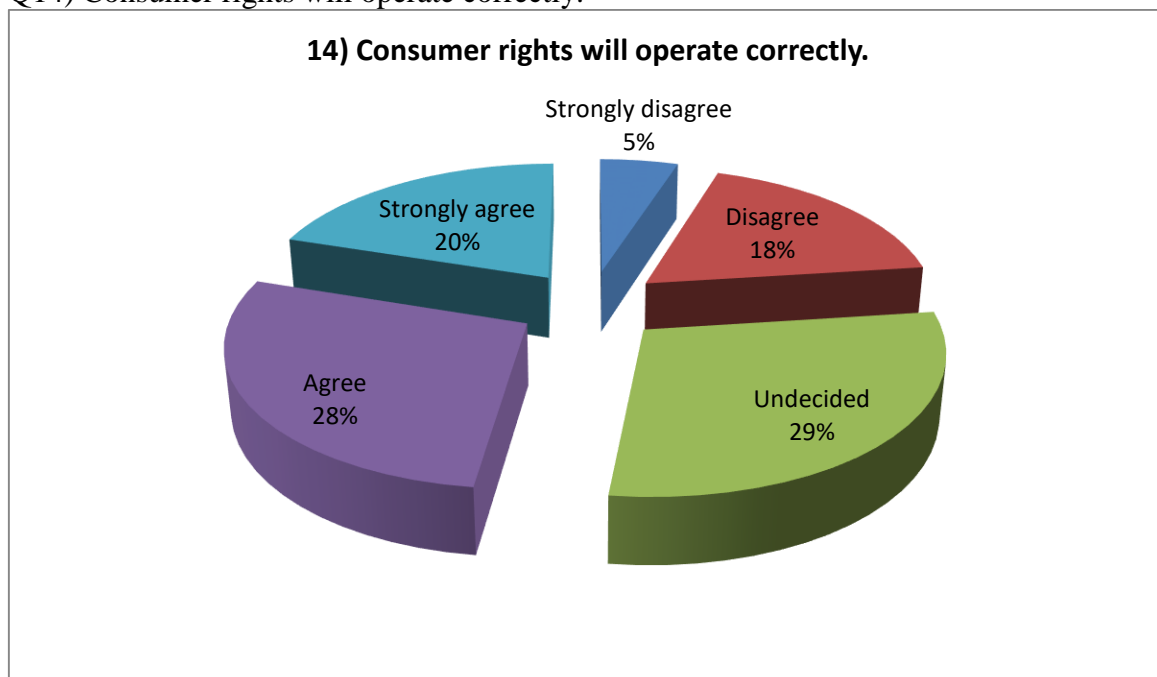
The percentage of those who think that the new commercial regulations through EU membership will facilitate life is 70%; a high rate.

Q13) Quality of goods/services will increase and their prices become reasonable.



The proportion of participants who think that the quality of goods/services will increase and their prices become reasonable through EU membership is 58%.

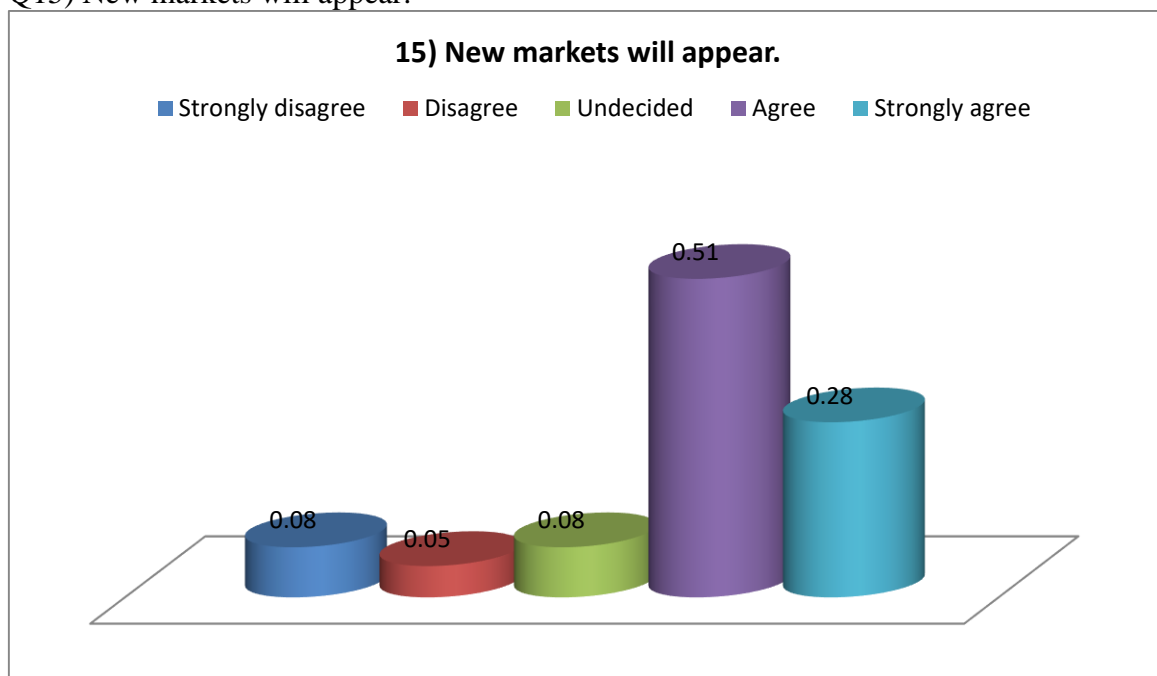
Q14) Consumer rights will operate correctly.



The belief level of the participants who think that consumer rights operate correctly through the EU membership is below half. Here, the preference of indecisive participants is remarkable with the rate of 29%.

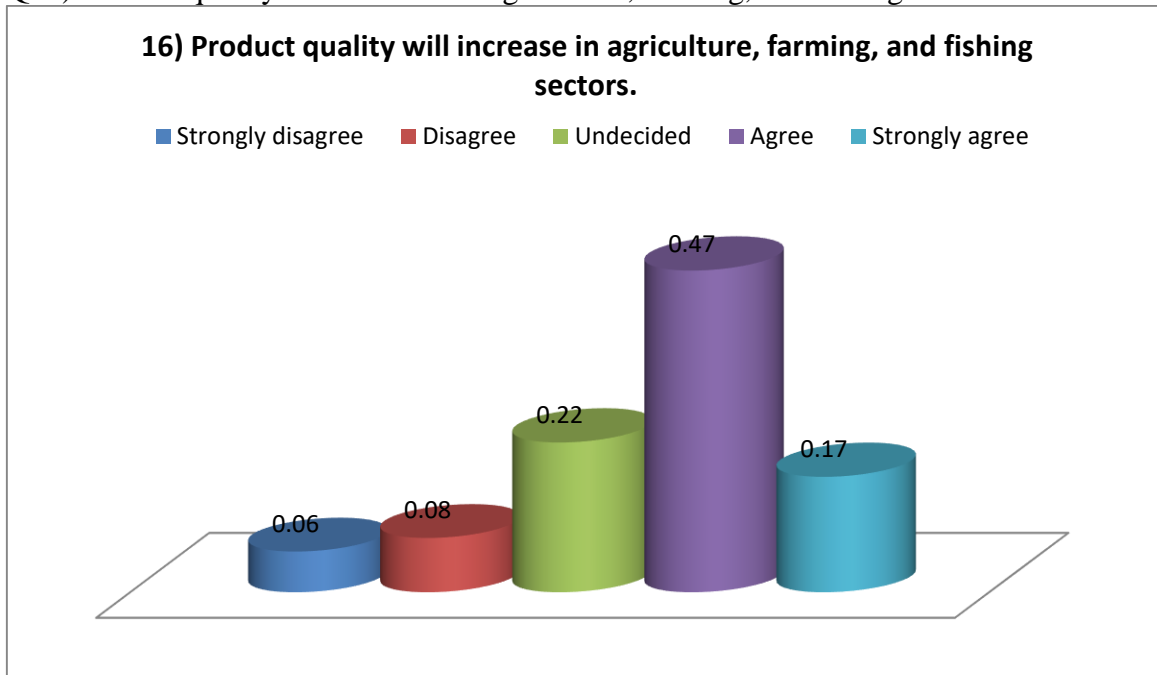
### Sectoral Assessments

Q15) New markets will appear.



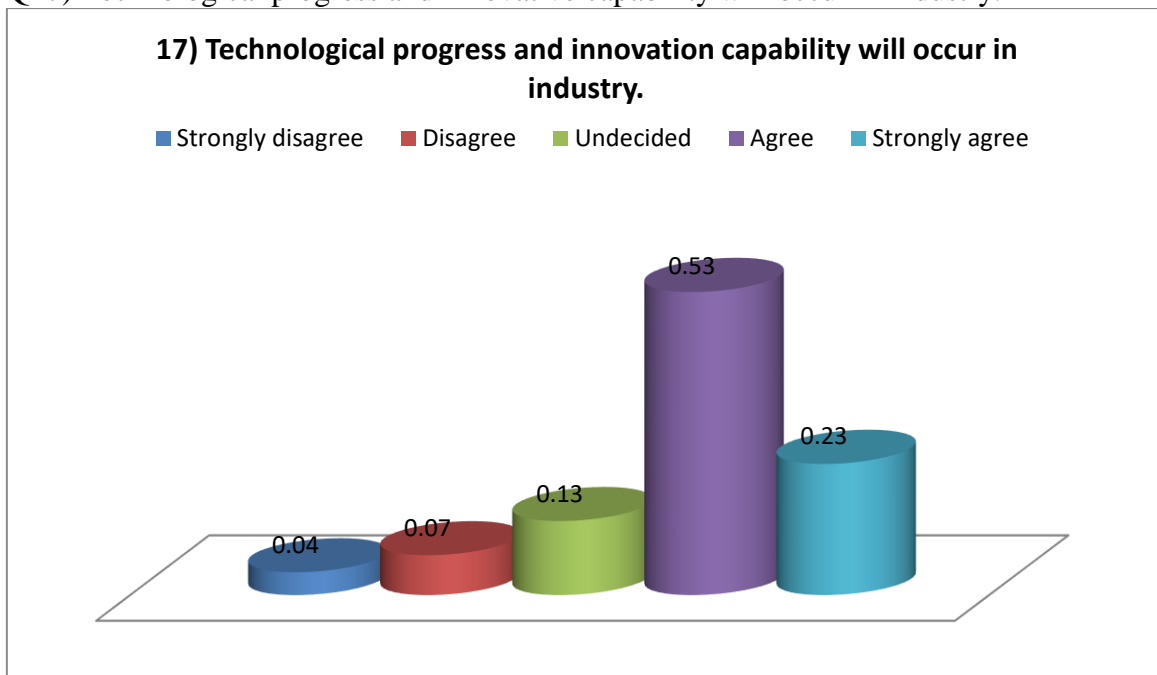
The participants have positive expectations with regard to new markets. The rate of those who believe that new markets will appear with EU membership is 79%.

Q16) Product quality will increase in agriculture, farming, and fishing sectors.



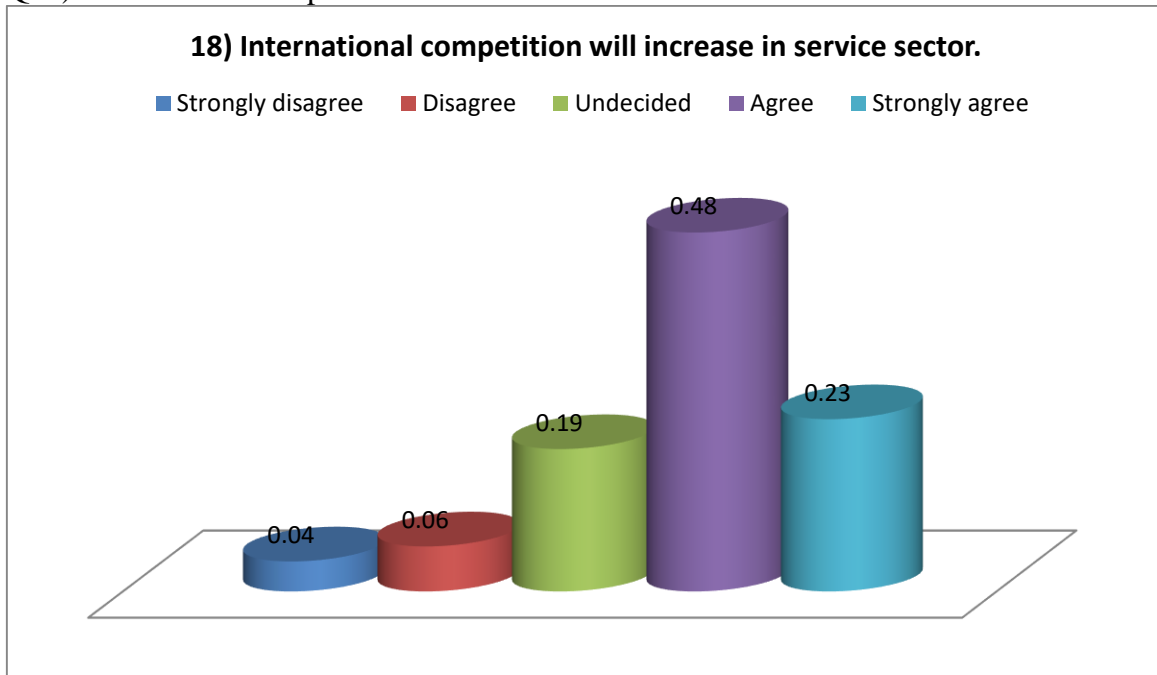
Opinions on the sub-sectoral economic development are positive. In this context, for instance, 64% of the total expect product quality increases in agriculture, farming, and fishing sectors with EU membership.

Q17) Technological progress and innovative capability will occur in industry.



76% of participants think that with Turkey’s EU membership, technological progress and innovative capability will occur in industry.

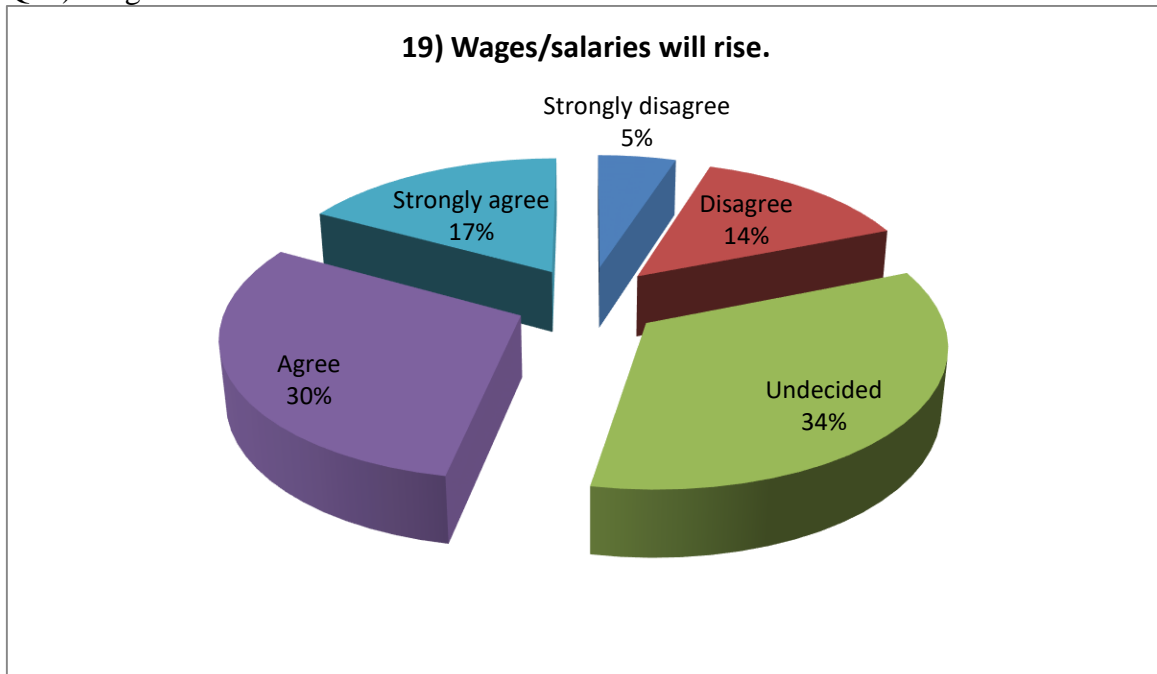
Q18) International competition will increase in service sector.



As in the other sectoral assessments, participants believe that with Turkey's EU membership international competition in the service sector will increase. The percentage of those who agree is 71%

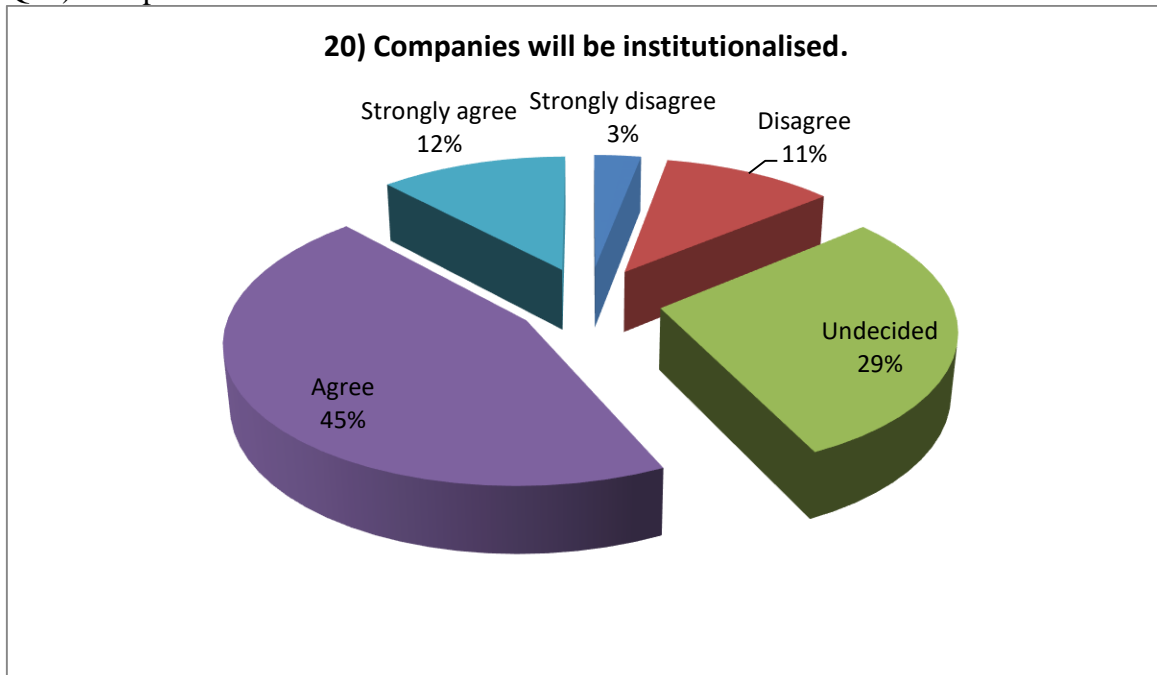
**Micro Economic Assessment**

Q19) Wages/salaries will rise.



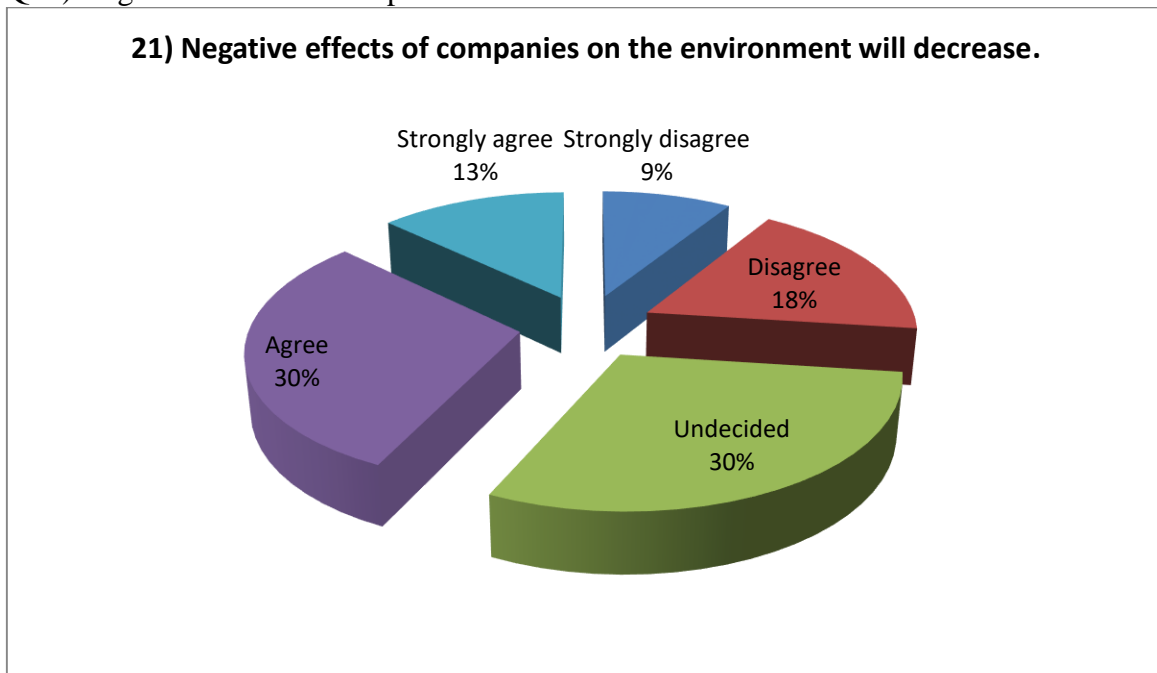
Nearly half the participants (47%) think that EU membership will have a positive effect on wages/salaries. However, the choice of those as yet undecided is remarkable. At 34% it comes top among all the answers.

Q20) Companies will be institutionalised.



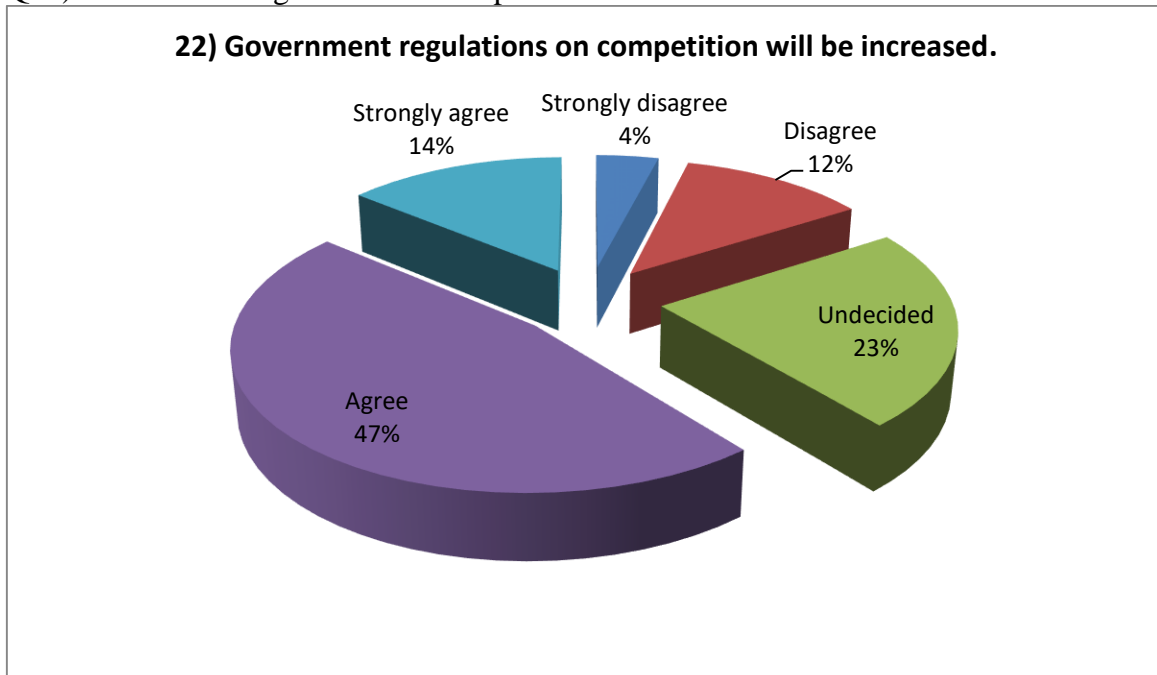
While the participants who expect an improvement in the institutionalisation level of companies is 57%, the rate of those who differ is 14%.

Q21) Negative effects of companies on the environment will decrease.



Following EU membership, the proportion of those who expect a decrease in the negative effects of companies on the environment is 43%. The proportion of those who think differently remains at 27%. However, the proportion of undecided students is 30%.

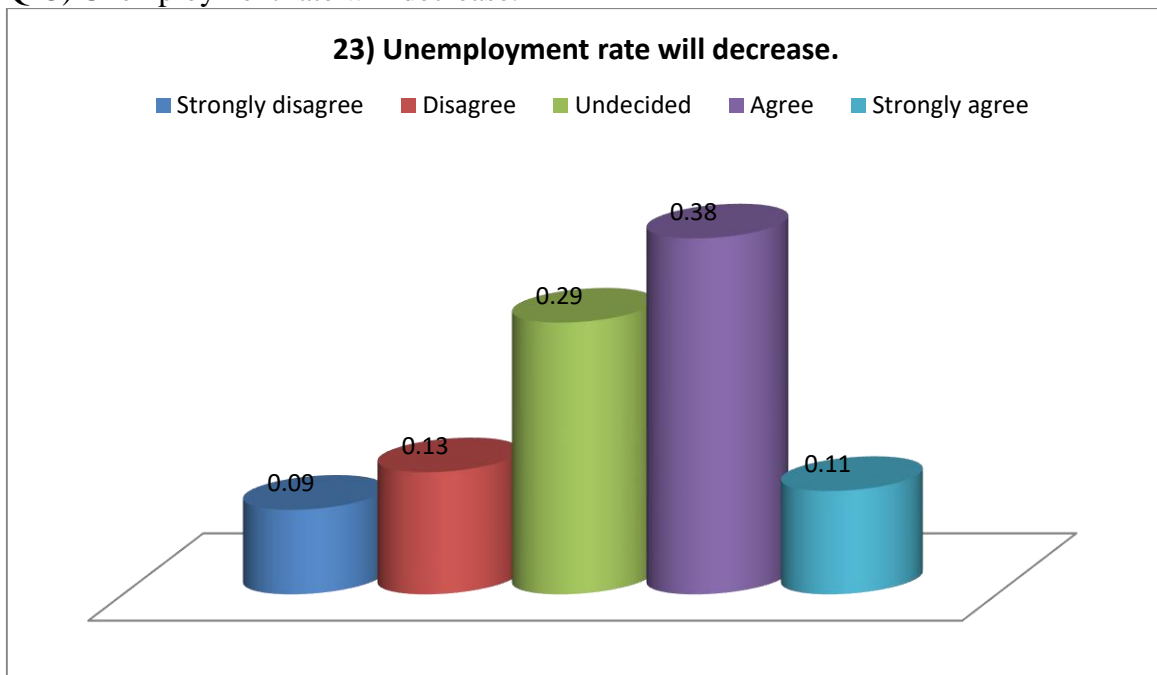
Q22) Government regulations on competition will be increased.



An important proportion of participants believe that government regulations on competition will be increased (61%). Only 16% disagree.

**Macro Economic Assessment**

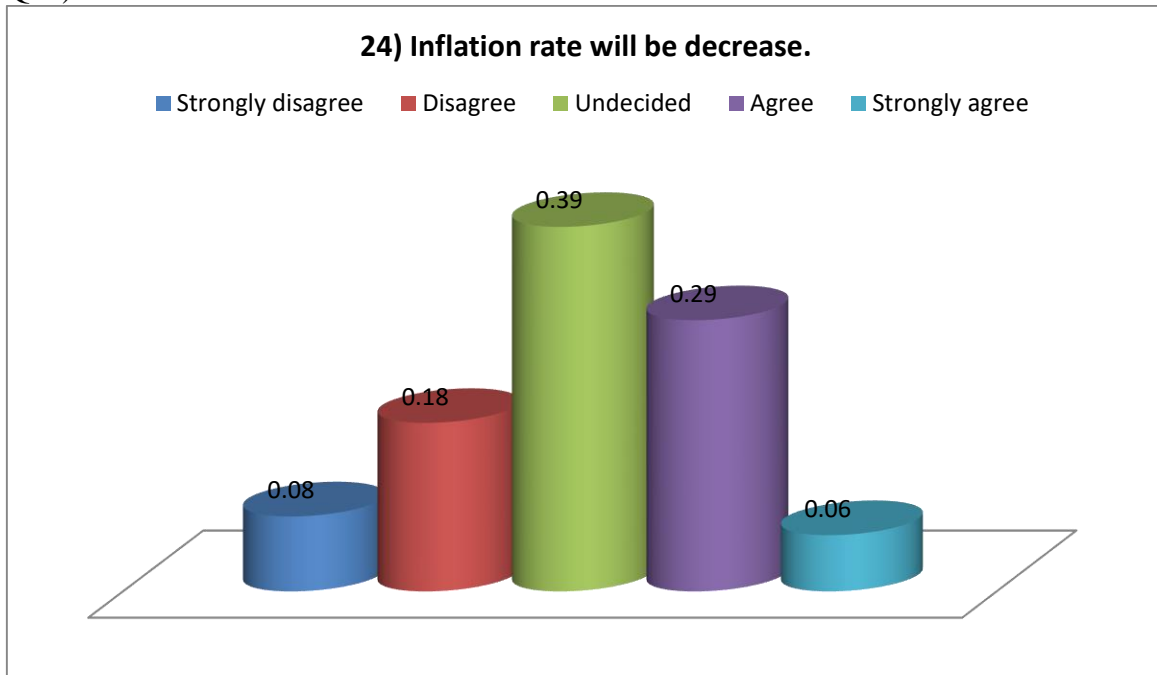
Q23) Unemployment rate will decrease.



Nearly half the students think that the unemployment rate will fall (49%). However, it seems that there is no clarity on this matter as 29% of the participants are undecided.

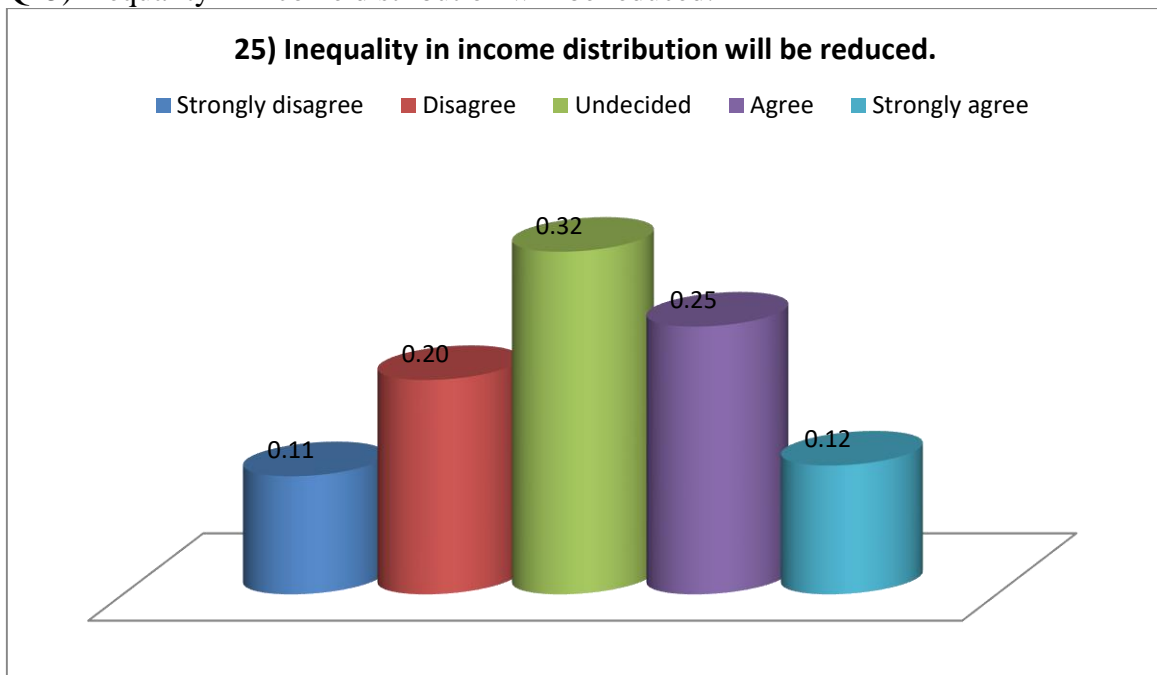


Q24) Inflation rate will decrease.



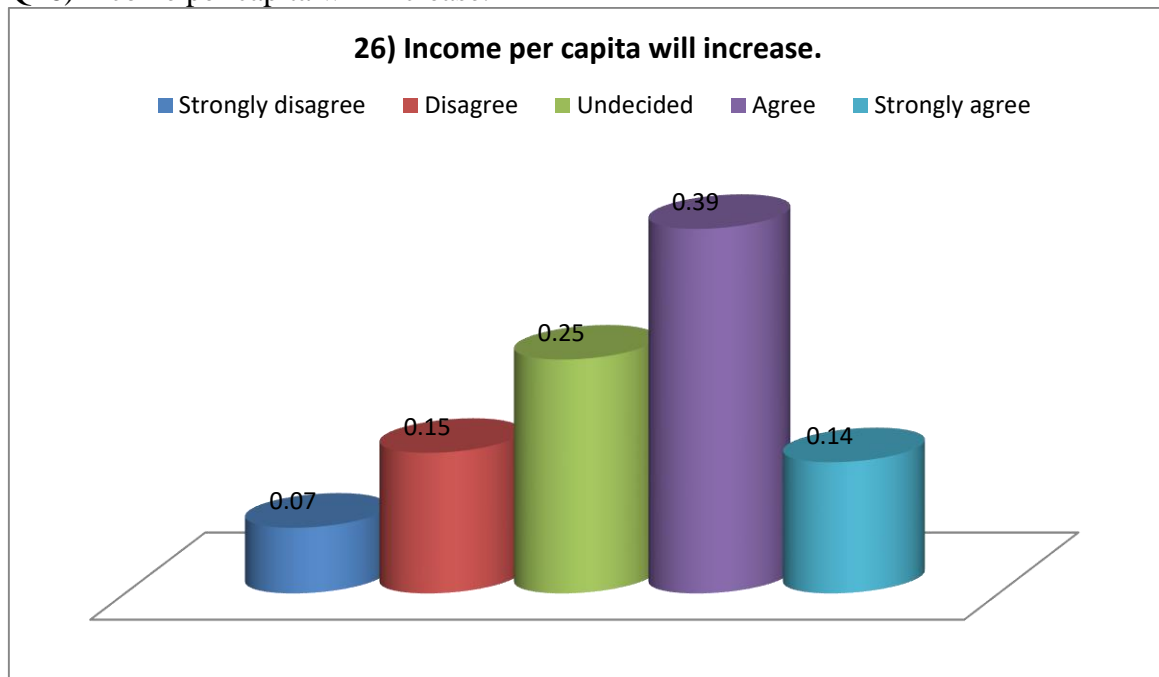
Those who believe that the rate of inflation will decrease following EU membership stands at 35% which is clearly a low rate. Moreover, the share of the undecided students is greater (39%).

Q25) Inequality in income distribution will be reduced.



Like the preferences of the participants for 'inflation', those who believe that inequality in income distribution will be reduced following Turkey's EU membership is low (37%). The share of those against this idea is 31% while the proportion of undecided students is 32%.

Q26) Income per capita will increase.



53% of participants think that income per capita will increase following EU membership of Turkey, while 22% believe that it will not be so.

## **Conclusion**

Turkey has endeavoured to become a member of the EU for a long time. This is discussed in Turkey in terms of several aspects; namely political, social, and economic. The economic aspects of the EU are either prioritised by the people during such negotiations or contribute to forming their expectations. Prioritisation of the economic possibilities of the EU is understandable, as Turkey is very behind the Union in terms of average income level and standard of living. However, although economic issues and related expectations are in general so prioritised, studies on the EU, particularly on the economic perspectives of Turkey's people, especially those in the South East Anatolia Region, are insufficient.

Based on a survey, this paper seeks to understand the various economic perspectives on EU membership of Turkey by the participants namely, 266 students from the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences (FEAS), and Faculties of Theology, Engineering, Architecture, and Vocational Higher Schools of the nine universities of the South East Anatolia Region. Related analyses and assessments were then made.

The main parameters obtained and analysed from this field study are as follows: supporting/not supporting Turkey's EU membership; knowledge level on the EU; benefits from EU financial support/incitement mechanisms; effects of EU membership on consumers' perceptions, economic sectors, business environment and enterprises; unemployment, inflation, and income distribution.

Most participants have knowledge of the EU and more than half support EU membership of Turkey. The main reason for this support is 'political' and 'social' more than 'economic' which can be inferred as 'more democracy'. Economic reasons come later.

Based on the belief that 'Turkey can increase its welfare provision without being a member to the EU', 1/3 of the participants do not support Turkey's EU membership. On the other hand, participants think that the EU has prejudices against Turkey's membership. Therefore, they say that until the EU resolves such prejudices and indifference, they will not change their opinion.

Nearly half the participants are pessimistic with regard to Turkey's membership. This can be interpreted as the preference for membership is not very high. However, although there are economic and political conflicts between EU countries, 53% of the participants expect a shining future for the Union.

More than half the participants have never benefited from an EU grant and/or incitement programmes. Worse, 1/3 of the total have no information on such financial possibilities. These answers give some clues to the thought processes of those people prioritising the economic aspects of the EU during their negotiations or forming their expectations. Clearly this approach is unbalanced. Those people who have economic expectations from the EU should also be made aware of its other benefits. In this context, 'not benefiting from the incitement and financial support of the EU' can be understood. It is, however, hard to understand why they are 'having no knowledge of such programmes'. This acknowledgement can be construed as the participants being very unclear about what they can expect from Turkey's EU membership.

In the section on the economic perspectives of participants with regard to EU membership of Turkey, 'consumer perceptions, sectors, and micro-macro economic life' are searched for. In this context, those who think that 'use of the Euro as a common monetary unit facilitates life' has a low rating. Only 1/3 of participants believe the reverse. The reason for such a low rate can be stated as being due to the economic crisis happening in some Euro area countries, particularly in Greece. On the other hand, 70% of participants think that the new commercial regulations that would come with EU membership would improve life. The rate of those who think that the quality of goods/services would rise and prices be reasonable is 58%. Moreover, 29% of the total believe that consumer rights would be in operation correctly in Turkey.

The first issue under 'sectoral assessments' is the participants' expectations of the new markets. 79% of them believe that new markets will appear with EU membership. Secondly, 64% of the total expect product quality increases in agriculture, farming, and fishing sectors. Thirdly, 3/4 of the participants think that technological progress and innovative capability will occur in industry. Lastly, the proportion of participants who believe that international competition will increase in the service sector is 71%.

In the context of micro economic assessments; 60% of participants believe that following Turkey's EU membership, government regulations on competition will increase. The proportion of participants who expect an improvement in the institutionalisation level of companies is similar to that above. Nearly half the students think that EU membership will have positive effects on wages/salaries. Their expectations with regard to the decrease of negative effects of companies on the environment is also positive. In fact, following EU membership, the proportion of participants who believe that such negative effects in Turkey will be lower is 43%.

In the context of macro economic assessments; nearly half the students think that the unemployment rate will be lower (49%). However, those who believe that the rate of inflation will decrease following EU membership is only 35%. The proportion of students who believe that inequality in income distribution will be reduced is almost the same as that given above. On the other hand, the participants who expect an increase in income per capita in Turkey following EU membership is more than half.

During the analyses, it was observed that while the preferences of participants in micro economic subjects are more prominent, this is not so with regard to macro economic issues. While preferences are generally positive with regard to micro economic life, the same does not apply to macro economic life. Thus, it is seen that there is no uniformity among the students' choices in terms of unemployment, inflation, income distribution, and income per capita.

For example, the participants show clear indecisiveness when stating their preferences with regard to the decrease of inflation and the reduction of inequality in income distribution. The proportional decrease in the number of those who are for 'lowering the inflation' is also shown in the preferences for 'reducing the inequality in income distribution'. However, they do behave in the same manner for the decrease in unemployment and increase in income per capita.

It should be stated that while the participants expect an increase in income per capita following Turkey's EU membership, they do not show the same tendency with regard to equality in income distribution. This can be interpreted as 'the inequality in income distribution' shall continue even if partial improvement is realised.

Although this paper includes a field study made during the period April-June 2016, one can say that it continues to have relevance as it reveals the perspectives of university students in the South East Anatolia Region of Turkey. However, a similar field study is planned for the near future using 'comparative static analysis' so that it shall be possible to make detailed analyses and assessments.

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**Enclosure: Q'naire Form**

**A) Information on the Participants**

- 1) Gender :  Female  Male  
 2) Age :

**B) General Information on the EU**

- 3) Do you support Turkey's membership of the EU?  Yes  No  Undecided  
 4) How much information do you have about the EU?  Much  Some  None  
 5) What are your reasons for supporting EU membership of Turkey? (Please go to the next question if you do not support)  
 For a more democratic country.  
 To increase welfare to EU level.  
 To have free right of movement in EU countries.  
 To gain international prestige and power.  
 For greater employment opportunities and increase in the GNP.  
 6) What are your reasons for not supporting EU membership of Turkey?  
 As it applies a double standard in member acceptance.  
 As it is a Christian community.  
 As Turkey can increase its welfare without being a member of the EU.  
 As they will never accept Turkey.  
 As it will not make an economic contribution but conversely make a loss.  
 7) In which case would your negative opinion of the EU change? (Please go to the next question if your opinion is positive)  
 If double standards in member acceptance are given up.  
 If prejudice and indifference towards Turkey is resolved.  
 If Turkey is exempted from visa requirements.  
 If negotiations are accelerated and a membership date is fixed.  
 8) How long will Turkey's membership of the EU take?  
 In 5 years  In 6-10 years  In 11-15 years  In 16-20 years  Never  
 9) How do you assess the economic future of the EU?  
 Becomes better  Becomes worse  Remains the same  
 10) Have you ever benefited from a grant and/or encouragement programmes of the EU?  
 Yes  No  Never heard of it

**C) ECONOMIC ASSESSMENTS**

Please mark the relevant box.		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
In case of Turkey's Membership of the EU;						
<b>C1) Assessments on Consumer Perceptions</b>						
11)	Use of the Euro as a common monetary unit will facilitate life.					
12)	New commercial regulations will facilitate life.					
13)	Quality of goods/services will increase and their prices become reasonable.					
14)	Consumer rights will operate correctly.					
<b>C2) Sectoral Assessments</b>						
15)	New markets will appear.					
16)	Product quality will increase in agriculture, farming, and fishing sectors.					
17)	Technological progress and innovative capability will occur in industry.					
18)	International competition will increase in service sector.					
<b>C3) Micro Economic Assessment</b>						
19)	Wages/salaries will rise.					
20)	Companies will be institutionalised.					
21)	Negative effects of companies on the environment will decrease.					
22)	Government regulations on competition will be increased.					
<b>C4) Macro Economic Assessment</b>						
23)	Unemployment rate will decrease.					
24)	Inflation rate will decrease.					
25)	Inequality in income distribution will be reduced.					
26)	Income per capita will increase.					

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