

Chapter 16

Regional Innovation Strategies: Europe and Turkey

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ABSTRACT

Regional innovation strategies which emerged during the mid 90s and were implemented especially in the developing regions of the world are significant for the transformation of both the knowledge produced in the regional scale and the added value it created into competitive power in the national and global scale. These strategies which have successfully been implemented in different parts of the world are a great opportunity for a country like Turkey which has a large young population and stands out among the other developing countries with her strategic location and potentials for human resources, agriculture and commerce. Focusing on these strategies and exploring national and regional innovation systems, this chapter both investigates the leader implementations in Europe and examines the first implementations of regional innovation strategies in Turkey. This chapter suggests that by transforming her regional innovation skills into products and services that have added value, Turkey will have a potential to achieve rapid social and economic development and therefore increase her significance for the national and international innovative investors.

INTRODUCTION

Having become the major driving force of post-industry society, innovation processes emerge in all steps of production from production techniques to marketing. In the formation of an international industry zone, the combination of technology and

innovation processes have formed the basis of competition superiority for the producers. Leaving behind collective consumption, individual preferences gained significance during the 1970s and this led to the development of flexible production systems to replace collective production. When the move away from Keynesian policies directed towards spending were combined with this process, it was inevitable for the producers to make constant

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technological innovations in the production systems and processes. The atmosphere of constant technological innovation have made the process of what Schumpeter (1942) called “*creative destruction*” more visible. Production systems that were renovated in every ten or fifteen years in the past are undergoing a transformation today challenging the time. The implications of this for the producer is on the one hand the rapid decrease of profitability and on the other the requirement of following and developing technological innovations to be able to survive economically in the prevalent competitive environment.

The creation of technological innovation within the production process itself is only possible with a qualified labor force not to mention the state policies supporting the development of such labor force. “National Innovation Systems” taking its frame of reference from List’s (1841) teachings depend on governments’ systematic implementation of long-term policies from education to economic incentives decisively.

With the onset of the competition among different countries in terms of technological innovation, the existing National Innovation Systems alone are not sufficient in addressing the needs. In order to catch up with the technological innovations faster and to spread the new production knowledge to the base, it has become a must for SMEs to be included in the innovation processes. As the global monopolies do not share the new production techniques and “knowledge goods” they produce under the intellectual and industrial property laws, SMEs have become weaker in the global competition. Even if SMEs, which have been highly affected by the global competition, increased their R&D activities individually, it would not help them in this competition process. That is why Regional Innovation Systems and Strategies which were developed as part of the National Innovation Systems are gaining importance. Thanks to the Regional Innovation Strategies, technological innovations and the potential to make innovations are diffused in the region.

First implementations of the development of Regional Innovation Strategies, which was set as an important target in the techno-economy policies of the European Union (EU), have also started in certain regions of Turkey. Since becoming an “associate member” of European Union, Turkey has been undergoing a process of harmonizing its national legislation with the EU *acquis communautaire*. Against this background, this study explores the development of Regional Innovation Strategies in Turkey in relation to the relevant EU policies.

In the first part of the study, Regional Innovation Systems and the Regional Innovation Strategy are investigated with respect to their primary characteristics. The second part of the study examines the emergence of Regional Innovation Strategies in Europe and the dynamics of development. In the third part, implementations in Turkey and the dynamics of development are inquired.

THE CONCEPT OF REGIONAL INNOVATION STRATEGIES

Since the awareness into the significance of knowledge¹ on the economic activities increases day by day, knowledge-based production factors are coming to the forefront getting ahead of the traditional factors. As the source of the innovation, knowledge is being produced by the firm and it diffuses from the firm to the industry, from the industry to the sector and from the sector to the national economy. The theoretical basis of the Innovation System approach (Freeman, 1987 and 1988; Lundvall, 1988 and 1992; Nelson, 1988 and 1993; Nelson 1993 and Rosenberg, 1993), the total of systematic efforts during the use and diffusion of this produced knowledge, lies back to Friedrich List (1841). In fact, the proposal of List for the development of Germany called “the national research development system” formed the basis of National Innovation System. While laying the foundations of national innovation system, List

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