

## Notes from the TASSA Townhall Meeting

Date: February 26, 2011

Time: 10am-1pm

Location: College Park, MD

The first informal TASSA Transition Team (TT) town-hall meeting was held on February 26, 2011 in Van Munching Hall Room #1330 at the University of Maryland Robert M. Smith School of Business, with around 30 participants from various professional and academic institutions in Washington DC and neighboring areas. Among the participants were: six TASSA TT members (one joining via phone from CA), four TASSA founding members, and a number of former and current TASSA members. Participants also included people who have not heard about TASSA before they received the meeting invitation. Post-docs and doctoral students were also represented in the meeting.

Participants introduced themselves and their contact information including names, email addresses, and phone numbers were collected.

Haluk Unal, chair of the Transition Team in charge of re-vitalization of the organization, made a presentation starting with TASSA's history, past objectives and activities. He emphasized that the flagship activity of TASSA was the annual conference which was held very successfully between 2005 and 2008. He then summarized the difficult situation TASSA fell into as evidenced by failing to hold the flagship activity in 2009 and 2010. The 2009 TASSA Peer Review Panel described the situation as "State of Paralysis" and recommended revitalization of TASSA through a TT. In 2010, TASSA held a Special General Assembly where the power was completely transferred to a TT. The TT was charged to carry out reform activities and hold a General Assembly to approve the reform package and elect the next TASSA officials. The General Assembly also appointed Murat Tarimcilar of Georgetown University to organize the next TASSA conference. Haluk Unal outlined the TT activities and the work plan. He then opened the following issues to discussion.

- TASSA objectives: Are the current objectives overambitious?
  - Discussions and comments pointed that there should be a mission statement which should be short and easily understandable. It should be like a slogan. Current TASSA bylaws do not have such a mission statement; it has a detailed and long statement of purpose.
  - Two lines of thought were discussed on how to develop the objectives: (1) have objectives that are concrete, focused, realistic, and measurable. This approach allows the organization to avoid being spread thin and has the advantage of facilitating accountability and tractability (2) keep the objectives general enough so as not to limit work that TASSA members may want to pursue. Current TASSA objectives fit in this category as they are ambitious, generic, and cover many areas. The audience agreed that this issue needs to be discussed further.
  - TASSA founders noted that the TASSA bylaws were taken from the bylaws of a Korean Scientists and Scholars Association and thus there could be some rigidity in the bylaws.

- It was noted that there was not a strong and connected TASSA community yet. Despite the TT's strong efforts, the turnout rate for this meeting is only around 5%. Having a community is a prerequisite for a successful organization. That is why there is urgency in getting a grassroots movement started. It was strongly suggested that before TASSA tries to "promote the scientific and scholarly contributions of Turks residing in the US," it should first form the prerequisite TASSA community.
- Another point was that TT should separate short-term objectives from long-term objectives where the short-term, urgent, objective is to develop and cultivate the "TASSA community." To this end, organizing social events were suggested.
- The attendees also noted that TASSA's current web site platform can be used for communication and coordination among members.
- The attendees also agreed that TASSA's visibility has been very low despite successful and reputational precedent events and activities. To this end, the audience has agreed on working on a meaningful contact database creation, the use of popular tools such as Facebook, Twitter to be considered in short and medium terms. These targets are to create a TASSA community network to exchange information and inputs.
- TASSA membership: Who should be the members of TASSA?
  - The membership has dwindled in the last few years. A question that was raised was "What is in it for me? How is TASSA going to help me advance my career?" Former TASSA members indicated that some young people found jobs through TASSA (at the conferences, for example).
- TASSA activities: What are the attractive and doable activities?
  - Participants stated what kind of activities would excite them. These activities included linking up scholars or students from Turkey to various opportunities in the US and have them come and spend time in the US furthering their careers.
- TASSA organizational structure and management
  - Should TASSA be organized centrally or in chapters? It was stated that the Turks were not connected well even in their own organizations, so TASSA's priority should be to organize locally in the DC area first. Once the TASSA "community" is well established in this area, TASSA may get organized in other areas such as Boston, North Carolina, and California.
- TASSA Financial Structure
  - Haluk Unal presented a plan to raise \$2 million endowment for TASSA. Such endowment can enable the organization to undertake meaningful activities and move toward a professional organizational structure. The plan involves saving individual and institutional membership fees for five years, organizing annual conferences to be financial self-sufficient. Once these efforts accumulate meaningful sums then TASSA can ask Turkish-American philanthropists to sponsor specific activities.
  - Haluk Unal argued that we need to have 100 committed individuals to run such a capital campaign. These individuals can lead the efforts and identify additional people who can commit to be TASSA members.
  - Given legal aspects on domestic association status, TASSA is limited with its corporate identity in the US. However, this shouldn't be a constraint with enlarged corporation and relationship with Turkish

universities, science institutions and authorities but maintaining its institutional and financial independence vis-à-vis politics and groups of interest. The audience has agreed on the principle of having a neutral position and being open to all academic and scientific communities.

- Review of 2011 TASSA Conference program proposed by Murat Tarimcilar
  - The annual meeting, of which draft proposal was briefly presented by Murat Tarimcilar, looks to be a good opportunity to share the message that “TASSA is alive” and to transfer Transition Team’s duties to newly elected management. In this term, the audience has agreed on clarifying the concept and targets of such event to be openly discussed further and decided soon.
  - Murat Tarimcilar cautioned that if TASSA decides to adopt narrower objectives, his proposed conference may not have the right format and TASSA may want a more academic format. The audience seemed to think that his conference proposal would serve TASSA well regardless of the approach that will be taken in defining the objectives.

#### Next Steps:

- ✓ Transition Team to communicate the notes from the meeting
- ✓ TT will deliberate based on the input received from this meeting and will reach out to the participants to request for written feedback since not all participants may have had the chance to share all of their ideas.
- ✓ TT to organize other town-hall meetings in other parts of the US;
- ✓ February 26 Meeting’s Audience to spread TASSA’s re-energizing activity messages to their social and professional contacts, and to convince other interested people to attend the next meeting.