

THE IMPACT OF EUROPEAN UNION ON TURKEY’S GENDER RELATED EMPLOYMENT POLICY FROM THE 1999 HELSINKI SUMMIT

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Abstract:

This research aimed to determine if the European Union served as a driving force in the determination of Turkey’s employment policy decisions; measure Turkey’s current progress report in terms of the adoption of the EU’s gender employment policy; discover the greatest challenges or problems caused by Turkey’s gender employment policy. Apart from these aims, other aims that this research set out to achieve were measuring the extent of Turkey’s compliance with the European Union’s standards in the area of gender equality; discovering the impact of the European Union’s Gender Equality Regime in Turkey’s employment patterns, especially in practice and lastly, measuring the EU’s effectiveness in ensuring the achievement of gender equality among member nations. This research employed the qualitative research method, utilizing face-to-face interviews conducted on 10 carefully selected Turkish citizens to collect information relevant to answering this study’s research questions. These interviewees comprised of 5 men and 5 women, all of whom were senior staff members of the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services, particularly called ‘*Aile, Calisma ve Sosyal Hizmetler Bakanligi*’, which has its headquarters office located in Ankara, Turkey. Data were analyzed utilizing text transcription of interviewees’ comments and also excerpts to answer the relevant research questions.

The study’s findings revealed that in the past, the European Union constituted a significant driving force in determining labour and employment policies, however, currently, the Union has ceased to be a driving force for determining employment policy decisions in Turkey. The study also revealed the following: Turkey is in charge of determining her employment laws and policies and is not dependent neither is the country abiding by the stipulations contained in the EU’s Gender Employment Regime and in terms of her adherence to the EU’s Gender Employment Regime it was really low. In the same vein, tradition and culture; a patriarchal society; religion and tradition; and Turkey’s adoption of the Middle Eastern cultures and beliefs were pointed as the causes of gender inequality in Turkey’s labour force. Lastly, despite the existence of the European Union’s Gender Employment Regime, its recommendations did not create any significant impact in Turkey’s employment landscape, policies or employment patterns and also the EU’s Gender Employment Regime was no longer effective in facilitating gender equality among all of EU’s member nations, as the union lacked a mechanism of enforcing compliance among her member nations.

Keywords —Impact, Gender, Gender Employment Regime, European Union.

I. INTRODUCTION

Gender is mostly considered as a concept that is socially created and several gender sociologists are of the school of thought that gender is a creation of the various social processes and not a biological process. According to these sociologists, gender could be considered as a specified pattern of behaviours, actions or identities, which are rewarded and created by parents, instructors or other figures of authority within a specified environment or place. In the same vein, another school of thought describes gender as a concept, which underlines socially created roles ascribed to men and women, and is learned, and evolves and is also different based on cultures. This description of gender is based on the premise that gender is the social organization of assumed sexual variations that dictates the roles and identities connected with being a male or female. According to Ertürk, gender identities are determined within a social-cultural context, and also with an economic and political environment, with various roles and responsibilities connected with being a woman or man. Ertürk further reveals that concerning the creation of gender, there exists an unequal power relationship between men and women, with the existence of male domination and female subordination in predominantly most of the world.

Having provided a brief description of the concept of gender, it is important to mention at this juncture that achieving equality between men and women is considered necessary for the development and growth of societies, especially in a democratic setting. However, despite this knowledge, the attainment of gender equality in most parts of the world has continued to pose a daunting and challenging task. Meanwhile, even though there exists no consensus with regards to a generally accepted definition of the concept of gender equality, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that was promulgated by the United Nations General Assembly in France in 1948 offers a perfect example of the definition for the concept of gender equality. Therefore, according to the Article 1, which stipulates that every human is born free and equal in dignity and rights and also Article 2

that stipulates that all humans are entitled to all the rights and freedoms as stipulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – the summary of these two Articles as provided in this Declaration is that every human being, irrespective of whether being a man or a woman is equal, devoid of all sorts of gender-oriented differences.

Shifting attention back to an important variable in this thesis, which is the European Union, it is important to note that this Union has continually acted and funded missions aimed at the promotion and facilitation of gender equality, to ascertain that men and women are considered equal in the eyes of the law. This promotion of gender equality dates back to the year 1957, during which, the principle of similar pay for equal work was included in the Treaty of Rome. From this treaty, the European Union has made successful giant strides and progress in this issue of gender equality. The three identified predominant measures that the European Union employ in them strive to ensure gender equality include: legislation for equal treatment, gender mainstreaming and other specific measures aimed at the advancement of well-being for women.

Also, the European Union in a bid to ensure proper maintenance of gender equality among its member nations created 35 Chapters of policy areas that require harmonization into the national laws, policies, practices and legislation of all of its member nations or nations that are seeking membership into the union. However, out of all of the 35 Chapters of policies, Chapter 19 of the Social Policy and Employment, in particular, is the one that especially focuses on gender equality as it affects employment for women in particular.

Therefore, it is based on the stipulations of Chapter 19 of this Social Policy and Employment that this research attempts to examine the degree to which Turkey's European Union (EU) processes of accession has impacted or influenced Turkey's gender-related employment policies from the 1999 Helsinki Summit.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Turkey as a country is situated on two continents - Europe and Middle East Asia. Meanwhile, while the country's earlier strides of development shared

more similarities with the Middle Eastern nations, the interference or influence of the European Union (EU), coupled with recent reforms in her social policy tilted more in the direction of the Southern European nations. Moving further, Turkey's historical and cultural precedents gave women the predominant duties as mothers and homemakers. This consequently undermined women's roles in the field of labour or employment. Hence, women in Turkey encounter immense challenges both in the processes of recruitment and social rights.

Instead of this, the author deemed it appropriate to examine Turkey's current situation with regards to gender equality, while also examining the legislations and policies and other structural transformation processes associated with the role of gender in the labour market. Also, from the researcher's perspective, Turkey functions as a patriarchal society, which relegates women's opinions to become subservient to men's opinions, a situation that contradicts the stipulations of Chapter 19 of the Social Policy and Employment Declaration, which attempts to create an environment in which everyone, irrespective of gender or sex is considered and treated as equal in the sight of the law.

Therefore, based on the foregoing, the goal of this thesis is to examine the impact of Turkey's European Union accession process on its gender-related employment policy from the completion of the 1999 Helsinki Summit. This suggests examining the degree to which the European Union's gender equality regime or stipulations have influenced the attainment of gender equality in Turkey. Therefore, to achieve some of the goals set above, below are some of the hypotheses that set the foundation for this research:

1. The unequal power relations between men and women in a patriarchal socio-political and economic setting cause gender inequality in Turkey.
2. Turkey does not comply with the European Union's standards for gender equality.
3. There are several impacts of the European Union's Gender Equality Regime on Turkey's employment patterns and practice.

4. There is no effectiveness in the European Union's Gender Equality Regime to achieve gender equality in member nations.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Historically, particularly from the early 1980s, women's roles have predominantly revolved around procreation and homemaking as their lifetime employment. However, recently their involvement in the Turkish labour force has been increasing and they have gradually become more capable of contributing to the family budget. This evolution of gender roles is considered an improvement regarding women's societal status.

Turkey for a long period attempted to officially become a member nation of the EU and consequently after her acceptance into the EU, she became bound by the considerably stronger requirements for integration and adaptation created by the Union. This meant that her conventional and traditional societal policies and structures that allowed for the existence of a low rate of female employment and the widespread suppression of women's position in the country's labour market had to be abolished, to create a way for the labour policies determined by the EU.

Moving further, from this opinion of Turkey's economy and labour force, it can be assumed that Turkey is still very far behind in terms of fully adapting to the policies advised and recommended by the EU. This opinion is proven by the very conservative societal order in which Turkey's labour force has historically functioned— a system that conditions women to merely consider themselves as mothers and home keepers, while males are made to believe that they should be the engine room or the driving force of the labour market. This opinion does not mean that the influence of Turkey's membership in the EU has not been felt in any way in Turkey's labour market. One of these influences is that the government of Turkey has introduced, with various degrees of success, different policies, laws and bylaws about gender equality, as it affects employment in the nation's labour market.

In furtherance, before discussing gender equality in Turkey before the Helsinki Summit of 1999, it is

necessary to discuss the relatively recent political situation in Turkey and its influence on gender equality in Turkey's labour sector. Recently, a political party is known as the "Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi, AKP)" gained a higher percentage of the country's votes, rising from 34.26% to 46.58% in the year 2007, then to 49.9% in the year 2011's national elections, therefore confirming the party's position within the Turkish political society.

With this development of a new government controlled by the Justice and Development Party, coupled with the party's strong Islamic origins, it became increasingly obvious that the party began to foist its Islamic beliefs into the general public. This became even more obvious during the party's second tenure in government when Turkey's foreign policy experienced a drastic turn and tilted more in the direction of the East than the direction of the West, where the EU is a strong front liner. To some extent, there is a wide belief that the Justice and Development Party to a certain extent, shifted away from the recommendations of the EU, and has somehow recreated the gendered division of labour, while also re-emphasizing women's dominance in the home front and not in the labour sector.

IV. GENDER EQUALITY IN TURKEY BEFORE THE HELSINKI SUMMIT OF 1999

There is no doubt that Turkey's EU candidacy has registered significant influence on the nation's approach to gender equality in the labour force, especially in the aspects of getting more women involved in the country's economic activities. However, despite this, it is necessary to discuss the nation's gender policy with regards to the employment of women before the country's EU candidacy. This discussion is important as it casts a spotlight on the changes that have occurred as a result of the EU's influence.

Generally, women were employed as staff in either the service industry or as civil servants in the public sector. However, in reality, women were predominantly employed as either low or mid-tier staff and rarely employed at the top management positions. This suggested that women were largely absent from becoming top-ranking officials in

either the public or private sectors. Additionally, women were also employed in the industrial sector of the labour force, but as is the case in both the service and public sectors, women were employed in the least lucrative jobs, especially in the textile industries.

In summary, Turkish's labour force policies that existed before the Helsinki Summit predominantly maximized the roles and responsibilities of women in the homes and on the domestic scene. Turkey's gender-related employment policies, before Turkey's formal European Union candidacy, could be described as being patriarchal and positioned men to be more at the top, while the women were considered as second fiddle. This was far away from the standard that existed and was propagated by the European Union.

A. Gender Equality in Turkey from 2011 till date

This era encountered top government functionaries from Turkey expressing their long-held anger and frustration with the so-called double standards in which the European Union deals with Turkey. In the course of the expression of their frustrations, they also expressed their indifference or in some instance, their desire to abandoning their candidacy or membership of the EU. One of these instances is erstwhile Justice Minister Sadullah Ergin who expressed the possibility of the EU declining Turkey's membership even in instances where Turkey had met all of the requirements. At this point, the Minister expressed indifference even if the EU took away Turkey's candidacy or membership of the EU.

Also, during this period, Turkey began to utilize the term 'gender justice' rather than gender equality. In this concept of 'gender justice', gender equality emphasized the equality between two sexes, while on the other hand, gender justice cast its focus on 'various features of males and females that are naturally determined. In this scenario, based on the political discourse being propagated by the Turkish government, women and men were described as possessing natural differences that naturally dictate their various roles and responsibilities – which is provided for the family by the men and caring for the children and then for the homes for women. The

implication for this is that the government of Turkey normalized the ‘natural division of responsibilities dictated via the biological differences that directly negates the tenets of gender equality. This ideology of differences between males and females and their responsibilities sparked the reason that Turkey began to shift from the European Union’s principles and tenets of gender equality.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research methodology was deployed for this research, which also entailed using the primary means of data gathering through in-depth face-to-face interviews on interviewees purposively chosen for this study. This study’s interviewees comprised 10 Turkish citizens – 5 males and 5 females to ensure gender equity. All of the 10 interviewees were also workers at the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services, also known as ‘Aile, Calisma ve Sosyal Hizmetler Bakanligi’, which has its headquarters in Ankara. The reason for the selection of this set of interviewees was due to their knowledge of the study’s subject matter, and also due to their positions at the Ministry, which is in charge of family and women affairs. The tables below depict tabular representations of the 10 interviewees consulted for this paper.

TABLE I
 MALE INTERVIEWEES’ NAMES AND UNITS IN THE MINISTRY

Unit	Name of staff	Staff gender
Directorate-General for Family and Community Services	Muhiddin	Male
Directorate-General for Information	Mustafa	Male
Directorate-General for Labour	Nurcan	Male
Directorate-General for Foreign Relations	Oguz	Male
Department of Internal Audit	Yasar	Male

TABLE II
 FEMALE INTERVIEWEES’ NAMES AND UNITS IN THE MINISTRY

Unit	Name of staff	Staff gender
Directorate of	Sureyya	Female

European Union and Financial Assistance		
Directorate-General for Child Services	Zeliha	Female
Directorate-General for International Labour Force	Sadetti	Female
Savings and Charity Fund of Eregli Coal Basin Workers Union	Mehmet	Female
Directorate of General Status of Women	Nesrin	Female

VI. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Based on the comments gathered from the respondents, it was discovered that concerning the EU is a driving force in the determination of Turkey’s employment policy decision, the EU was not a driving force in determining Turkey’s gender employment and labour policy decision, but rather, the Turkish government was solely responsible for this. For instances, in the comment made by one of the interviewees to support this claim:

“Women were to a large extent more involved in Turkey’s politics and economic activities when the EU carefully maintained strict adherence to the Gender Equality Regime. However, towards the year 2005, the EU’s energy towards ensuring strict compliance to the Gender Equality Regime declined and consequently led to Turkey’s government creating policies that began to relegate women to the position of home caretakers and mothers”.

This statement implies that from 2005 till date, Turkey began to become more independent of the EU and started to create labour employment policies that were against the stipulations of the EU. This development, therefore, answers the question and indicates that the EU for almost two decades has ceased to be a driving force in the determination of Turkey’s employment policy decision.

Moving further, with regards to measuring the progress report of Turkey’s gender employment policy by the EU and to also the extent to which Turkey complies with the European Union’s standards in the area of gender equality, the findings reveal that Turkey was in charge of

determining her employment laws and policies and was not dependent neither was the country abiding by the stipulations contained in the EU's Gender Employment Regime. It was also discovered that there existed no degree of compliance by Turkey to the EU Gender Employment Regime. To buttress this discovery, one of the interviewees for this research revealed that:

“Presently, to measure Turkey's current adherence to the EU's gender employment policy, I would say that it currently stands at zero percentage adherence in my opinion. This deviation from the EU's gender employment policy became solidified when in the year 2011, Turkey's government abolished the Ministry for Women and Family Affairs and replaced it with the Ministry for Family and Social Policies. This singular action in my opinion suggested that Turkey's government did not see the importance of having a ministry that sought to take care of the affairs of women, rather it created another ministry that pushed issues affecting women to the background”.

This suggests that there existed a time in the past when Turkey largely adhered to the stipulations of the EU regarding gender equality in labour employment actions and policies. However, currently, there existed no form of adherence to the EU's Gender Employment Regime by Turkey.

In the area of the biggest problems of Turkey's gender employment policy, this study discovered that some of the major factors that caused gender imbalance in Turkey's labour force include: Turkey's tradition and culture; a patriarchal society; religion and tradition; Turkey's adoption of the Middle Eastern cultures and beliefs. An excerpt from one of the respondents also buttresses this when he opined that, ‘Due to the result of the historical and traditional synergy of religion and politics in Turkey, the situation of gender inequality and imbalance had even become more rampant in the country. According to another interviewee, ‘The factors that cause the imbalance in Turkey's employment policies, especially as it is against women are majorly our religion and customs, which the current government have now employed to further deepen the imbalance in the nation's labour force.

The responses above reveal that culture and tradition, without leaving out Turkey being a patriarchal society were one of the major problems that caused gender inequality in Turkey employment and labour force.

In conclusion, in the area of measuring the impact of the European Union's Gender Equality Regime in Turkey's employment patterns, especially in practice and also measuring the effectiveness of the European Union's Gender Equality Regime in achieving gender equality among member nations, this paper discovered that despite the existence of the European Union's Gender Employment Regime, its recommendations did not create any significance or impact in Turkey's employment landscape, policies or employment patterns. While simultaneously also discovering that the EU's Gender Employment Regime was no longer effective in facilitating gender equality among all of her member nations, as the union did not possess a mechanism that could enforce compliance to the recommendations of the regime. To add more credence to the claims above, excerpts from one of the interviewees are referenced. According to one of the interviews:

“There are no impacts that the EU's Gender Employment Regime has had on the current employment policies adopted by Turkey's government and labour ministry. Any impact would have only been possible if Turkey adopted the EU's Gender Employment Regime, however, the opposite is the case as Turkey is self-determined in that regard.

Also, concerning the effectiveness of the European Union's Gender Equality Regime in achieving gender equality among member nations, the interviewee revealed that:

“I believe that there is no practical or hands-on way that the EU can ensure gender equality among her member nations, except through imploring them or probably sanctioning erring member nations and through diplomatic relations. This alone creates a limitation to the influence of the EU. This situation is even made worse for especially Turkey, whose membership and adherence to the stipulations of the EU remains under question. Therefore, I truly believe that the EU's Gender Employment Regime

is not effective in entrenching gender equality among member nations”.

From the excerpts above, it buttresses the point that the EU’s Gender Employment Regime lost its effectiveness in attaining gender equality among EU member nations when the union lost her capacity to enforce compliance to the recommendations of the regime in member nations.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

In line with the objectives of this paper, this study reached the conclusions below:

1. That since the EU’s loss of drive for promotion of gender equality issues, it ceased to be a driving force for determining employment policy decisions in Turkey, which took advantage of this situation and proceeded to commence the independent determination of her employment policies and rules.

2. That Turkey is in charge of determining her employment laws and policies and is not dependent neither is the country abiding by the stipulations contained in the EU’s Gender Employment Regime. Also, since the JDP took over Turkey’s government, it has continued to create employment laws and policies that further increased women’s roles as mothers and enforcers of family and home values. And that Turkey’s progress report in terms of her adherence to the EU’s Gender Employment Regime is really low, as Turkey is self-reliant in the determination of her employment laws, policies and regime and to no degree practice the EU’s Gender Employment Regime.

3. That some of the factors that caused gender imbalance in Turkey’s labour force include: Turkey’s tradition and culture; a patriarchal society; religion and tradition; and Turkey’s adoption of the Middle Eastern cultures and beliefs.

4. That despite the existence of the European Union’s Gender Employment Regime, its recommendations did not create any significance or impact in Turkey’s employment landscape, policies or employment patterns and also that the EU’s Gender Employment Regime was no longer effective in facilitating gender equality among all of her member nations, as the union did not possess a

mechanism that could enforce compliance to the recommendations of the regime.

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