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

Political Science and International Relations, Institute of Graduate Studies, Istanbul Aydin University, Kucukcekmece, Istanbul Turkey.

**Correspondence:** Blessing, Chinekwu Okeke, Political Science and International Relations, Institute of Graduate Studies, Istanbul Aydin University, Besyol, Inonu Cd. No 38, 34395, Kucukcekmece, Istanbul Turkey.

**E-mail:** blessingokeke@stu.aydin.edu.tr

**Abstract**

The aims of this research were 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.

1. **Introduction**

Gender is mostly considered as a concept that is socially created and a number of gender sociologists are of the school of thought that gender is a creation of the various social processes and not a biological process[[1]](#footnote-1). 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[[2]](#footnote-2). 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 over time 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 of female[[3]](#footnote-3). 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 with regard to the creation of gender, there exists unequal power relationship between men and women, with the existence of male domination and female subordination in predominantly most part of the world[[4]](#footnote-4).

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.[[5]](#footnote-5) However, in spite of this knowledge, the attainment of gender equality in most parts of the world has continued to pose as daunting and challenging tasks[[6]](#footnote-6). Meanwhile, even though there exists no general consensus with regards to a generally acceptable definition to 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, so as 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[[7]](#footnote-7). 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 their 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[[8]](#footnote-8).

In addition, 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 legislations of all of its member nations or nations that are seeking membership into the union[[9]](#footnote-9). 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 the 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.

1. **Statement of the Problem**

Turkey as a country is situated in two continents - Europe and the 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[[10]](#footnote-10). 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[[11]](#footnote-11).

In lieu 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. In addition, 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 the 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, in order 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.
5. **Literature Review**

Historically, particularly from the early 1980s, women’s roles have predominantly revolved around procreation and home making 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[[12]](#footnote-12). This evolution of gender roles is considered an improvement regarding women’s societal status.

Turkey for a long period of time attempted to officially become a member nation of the EU[[13]](#footnote-13) 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 low rate of female employment and the widespread suppression of women’s position in the country’ labour market had to be abolished, to create way for the labour policies determined by the EU[[14]](#footnote-14).

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 in – 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[[15]](#footnote-15). 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[[16]](#footnote-16).

In furtherance, before discussing gender equality in Turkey prior to the Helsinki Summit of 1999,[[17]](#footnote-17) 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 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 year 2011’s national elections, therefore confirming the party’s position within the Turkish political society[[18]](#footnote-18).

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 certain extent, shifted away from the recommendations of the EU, and has some how recreated the gendered division of labour, while also re-emphasizing women’s dominance in the home front and not in the labour sector[[19]](#footnote-19).

1. **Gender Equality in Turkey prior to 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, in spite of 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.[[20]](#footnote-20) 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[[21]](#footnote-21).

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[[22]](#footnote-22). Turkey’s gender related employment policies, prior to Turkey’s formal European Union candidacy, could be described as being patriarchal in nature and positioned men to be more at the top, while the women were basically considered as second fiddle. This was far away from the standard that existed and was propagated by the European Union.

**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 with all of the requirements. At this point, the Minister expressed indifference even if EU took away Turkey’s candidacy or membership of the EU.

In addition, during this period, Turkey began to utilize the term ‘gender justice’ rather than gender equality[[23]](#footnote-23). In this concept of ‘gender justice’, gender equality emphasized on 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 provision 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.

1. **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 of 10 Turkish citizens – 5 males and 5 females in order 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 4.1: Male Interviewees’ Names and Units in the Ministry**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Units** | **Name of Staff** | **Staff’s Gender** |
| Directorate General for Family and Community Services | Muhiddin | Male |
| Directorate General for Information Technologies | Mustafa | Male |
| Directorate General for Labour | Nurcan | Male |
| Directorate General for Foreign Relations | Oguz | Male |
| Department of Internal Audit | Yasar | Male |

**Table 4.2: Female Interviewees’ Names and Units in the Ministry**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Units** | **Name of Staff** | **Staff’s Gender** |
| Directorate of European Union and Financial Assistance | Sureyya | Female |
| Directorate General for Child Services | Zeliha | Female |
| Directorate General for International Labour Force | Sadettin | Female |
| Savings and Charity Fund of Eregli Coal Basin Workers Union | Mehmet | Female |
| Directorate of General Status of Women | Nesrin | Female |

1. **Discussion of Findings**

Based on the comments gathered from the respondents, it was discovered that with respect to **the EU being 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.

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.

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.

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 in spite of 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.

1. **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 own 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. In addition, 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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