

Narrative Report

Graduate Travel-Research Fellowship on the European Union,
European Integration, EU-Canada Relations

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Thanks to the Graduate Travel-Research Fellowship on the European Union, I had a chance to do part of my Ph.D. research in Brussels in April 2009. I spent six days in Brussels and had an opportunity to conduct interviews and research on the recent publications of the EU Commission. The focus of my thesis is to examine the role of the EU and other international organizations on the recent labor market and social policies in Turkey. As part of the thesis, my focus of research in Brussels was to discover to what extent the EU was influential on the recent labor market and social policy reforms.

To answer this question, I conducted interviews with key bureaucrats from the Turkey Team in the European Commission, and officials from the European Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. These interviewees were very helpful in clarifying current issues relating to the informal sector, gender inequality, collective rights, and social inclusion of disadvantaged and marginalized groups. The EU Commission officials pointed out to the large informal sector which leads to more social exclusion in terms of benefiting from the social security; they emphasized the low rate of women participation in labor markets; they stated that having a threshold for establishing a trade union is considered to be an infringement of political rights by the EU; and underlined that Turkey needs to take more action for social inclusion. To overcome some of these difficulties, Turkey and the EU work on the preparation of the Joint Inclusion Memorandum; yet, there is an impasse between Turkey and the EU on the issue of minorities. My interview results show that the EU has started to become influential after Turkey's acceptance to candidacy for EU membership. All these results can also shed light on my future research on the relations between the EU and Turkey.

In that regard, the interviews gave me an important opportunity to increase my knowledge about the role of the European Commission on the social policy agenda of Turkey. The trip also deepened my knowledge about the social and employment policies of the European Union. This initial research enabled me to understand the relationship between a candidate country and the European Union in the accession process. Moreover, with the help of my interviews I was informed about the relevant contacts in Turkey for furthering my Ph.D. research.

I would like to express my thanks to the Centre for European Studies for providing me such a great opportunity to do my research in Brussels.