

How “social” is Turkey? Turkey’s social security system in a European context

Social security systems and welfare state are key institutions of Western post-war societies, absorbing 20-30% of GDP and shaping basic social structures like labour markets, socio-economic inequality, gender, and the relationship between state, markets and civil society (Castles et al. 2010; Leibfried/Mau 2008, Esping-Andersen 1990, T.H. Marshall 1950). Social policy is about fundamental normative understandings of society, constituting a social contract and underpinning social cohesion. Moreover, social policy may impact on a country’s international economic competitiveness. At the European level, the notion of a “social Europe” is seen by some as an essential element of Europeanization and the “European model” (Kaelble/Schmid 2004). Turkey’s situation in this context remains unclear. Standing between Europe and Asia, Turkey remains at the intersection of the developing world and advanced industrialized countries, and has not conventionally figured in comparative welfare state research.

This project brings together leading social policy researchers from Germany and Turkey in order to put Turkey on the map of comparative welfare state research, and to broaden the scope of Turkish studies in Germany. The project uses state-of-the-art theories and quantitative as well as qualitative research methods to pursue three main research goals: 1) It uses descriptive statistics and cluster analysis to locate Turkey’s experience in the field of social security within the broader world of welfare states. 2) It employs qualitative content analysis and semi-structured (topic-guide led) expert interviews to trace specific social policies and their political and ideational backgrounds in four key areas of social security (social assistance, health, pensions, and unemployment). 3) Finally, insights gained from this research will be used to depict the overall shape of the Turkish welfare state and explain its rise. Academically, the case of Turkey will also enrich existing data and refine conceptual tools of comparative welfare state analysis,

as well as add to the more recent global research on middle-income countries (for welfare statism beyond its European origins see Gough/Therborn 2010; Gough 2008). In particular, the project inquires as to whether Turkey is a welfare state in a strict sense.

Outside academia, the project aims to contribute to a better understanding of Turkey's society, economy, and politics in Germany. There is a dearth of knowledge on Turkey's social policy in German academia and among the public. Although the country declared itself a welfare state in the 1961 Constitution, and more than a third of all government expenditure is spent on social provisions, such as healthcare and pensions, popular imagination in Germany would not normally associate Turkey with welfare statism. But besides political and civil rights, the state of social rights in Turkey, too, is a crucial factor for the relationship between Turkey and Europe. Can Turkey relate to the European family of welfare states and to "social Europe"?