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GRADUATE STUDENT EU RESEARCH GRANT

Interview with grantee Dilara Hekimci



Dilara Hekimci is a Ph.D. Candidate in Political Science at the Department of Politics & International Relations, Steven J. Green School of International & Public Affairs, Florida International University. This year, she received the Miami-Florida Jean Monnet Center of

Excellence Graduate Student EU Research grant for her research "The Opposition Strategies towards Populism in Turkey and Hungary."

She sat down with Christine I. Caly-Sanchez, Associate Director of the Miami-Florida Jean Monnet Center of Excellence, to answer a few questions about her research and her trip to Istanbul and Budapest this summer.

MFJMCE: Can you tell us a little bit about yourself and what studies you pursued at FIU?

My name is Dilara Hekimci, and I am currently a Ph.D. candidate in Political Science at the Department of Politics and International Relations. Regarding my degree, my major is comparative politics, with a minor in American politics. I have also taught comparative politics and American government classes at FIU.

MFJMCE: Can you tell us in a few words what the focus of your EU research project is?

I am writing my dissertation on the opposition strategies against incumbent populists in Turkey and Hungary, where they lead their respective countries toward more authoritarian regimes. In this regard, I am analyzing the European Union's role regarding these two countries, Turkey as a non-EU and Hungary as an EU country.

MFJMCE: What are your plans for the research you are conducting?

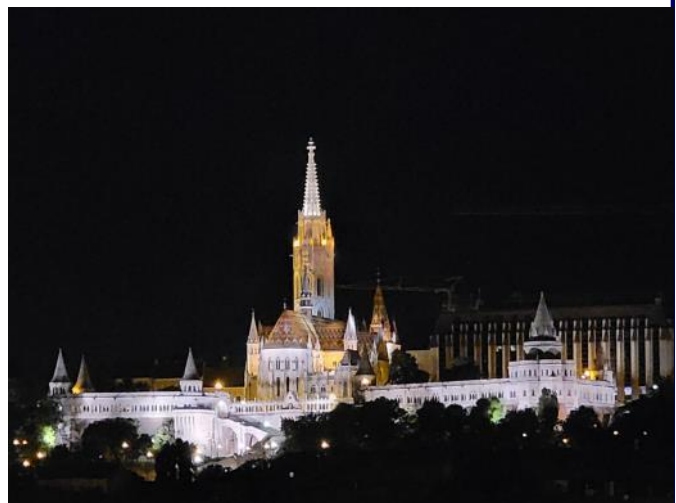
First, I will complete my dissertation. Then I plan to expand my research by including different countries to increase the analytical leverage and publish it as a book.

MFJMCE: Could you tell us about your trip in Europe, and how it has helped you for your research?

On this trip, I went to Istanbul and Budapest for my research. In Budapest, I presented a paper titled: "Opposition Strategies towards Populism in Hungary: Social Media as an Alternative?" at a conference named "The End of 'Freedom' in Central and Eastern Europe? Addressing the Challenges of an Illiberal Turn", hosted by Andr ssy University. At the conference, I was chosen to moderate a public debate with three journalists about the freedom of media in Eastern and Central Europe. On this trip, I also interviewed party officials from the United opposition in Hungary and academics about the latest election results.

In Istanbul, I had a chance to attend a workshop on a project called TurkuazLab, which had been researched for over two years in various cities in Turkey to understand how to overcome polarization. In that workshop, we had focus groups, including civil society leaders, academics, and journalists, to develop policy proposals for the depolarization of politics.

Additionally, I interviewed experts from different schools and the newly appointed Ambassador of Turkey in Budapest before her term started. The Budapest conference helped me understand the country better because it was my first time visiting and gave me a better perspective while writing my dissertation. But I also created a network that helps me further my future research. Although Istanbul is my hometown, living away from it makes things harder to



Budapest, Hungary

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Istanbul, Turkey

understand. Talking with the experts related to my study and observing people more closely gave me a better understanding of the current situation before the election next year.

MFJMCE: How do you hope your research will contribute to the field of International Relations/ Political Science?

Previous scholarship on populism has focused on the causes and consequences of populist leadership and the spread of populist attitudes. However, this study aims to fill a gap in the literature by examining the opposition's roles against populism. Furthermore, Turkey and Hungary have been studied as either single-case studies or as part of large datasets. However, there is no in-depth comparative study analyzing how these different countries with past legacies, institutional designs, and cultures came to have populist leaders with similar authoritarian tactics.

MFJMCE: Why do you think this research is essential to conduct at the present time? Once completed, this project "will help foster..."

To understand current strategies the opposition aims to adopt to respond to the challenges imposed by the populist in power.

MFJMCE: Do you have any last thoughts to share?

We have been experiencing democratic backsliding worldwide, and one of the key reasons is the emergence of populism. Therefore, how to overcome populism and re-democratize countries has become an essential question. I hope that my research will shed light on this issue.

By Christine I. Caly-Sanchez



Dr. Tugce Ercetin, Assistant Professor in International Relations Dept., Bilgi university, and Dilara Hemkici - Istanbul, Turkey



TurkuazLab Workshop—Bilgi University, Istanbul, Turkey



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Dilara Hekimci presenting her paper "Opposition Strategies Toward Populism in Hungary" at Andrassy University, Budapest



Andrassy University, Budapest



Interview with Tugba Goktas, Academic Planning Coordinator Bahcesehir University Graduate School, Istanbul, Turkey



Dilara Hekimci with Ihsan Alpargin, General Coordinator, ULMER and School of Government and Leadership at Bahcesehir University Graduate School, Istanbul, Turkey



Dilara Hekimci with Ambassador of Turkey Gulsen Karanis