



Diary of an Intern: Harikrishnan Sasikumar

The three months I spent as an intern at DPI gave me a good perspective on the Middle East and on human rights debate in particular the Kurdish Question. More importantly, the placement helped me reflect critically on the theoretical frameworks that were discussed on other academic modules in my classes at Kings College London. I applied to the Democratic Progress Institute in November 2014, after Eleanor Johnson (Director of Programmes at DPI) gave a presentation about the organisation in a talk arranged by Kings College London Careers Department. The DPI focuses on policy-related research on democratic peace-building and post-conflict societies, as well as on issue of human rights and transnational justice within the context of conflict resolution.

Having carried out research previously on Iraq, I had an interest in learning more about the region in general. The Kurdish Question has always been of specific interest to me, and from Eleanor Johnson's presentation, I understood that DPI focuses on the Kurdish Question in Turkey and Syria, among other projects addressing conflict resolution. I considered an internship at DPI to be a good opportunity to see and learn closely about the issues and theories I had learnt in class from a more practical perspective. I emailed DPI soon after the presentation, expressing my interest in interning with the organisation. After applying for a programme's internship and being accepted for an interview in late November, I started my three month long internship at DPI on 2 December 2014.

During the course of my internship, I had the opportunity to work on various assignments that helped me understand the current Kurdish conflict in Turkey, and place it within the larger political economy framework of Turkey and the Middle-East region as a whole. During my internship I helped with an assessment report on the political developments in Turkey since the presidential elections in 2014. This involved assessing the conflict dynamics, timeline (of conflict), positions of stakeholders, and resilience measures. This was my first assignment directly dealing with the events of Turkey, which helped me to understand the trajectory of the Kurdish Question. I was introduced to the politics of identity of the Kurds – something that I continued to research even after this particular assignment and beyond my internship.

Using my understanding of the political economy of the Kurdish Conflict in Turkey, I worked on a research paper which explored the identity formation of the Kurdish communities in Turkey, in comparison with the identity conflicts in Northeast India, a region I was relatively more familiar with. DPI focuses on a comparative learning approach and explores examples and case studies of conflict resolution and democratic transition processes around the world, and my knowledge of the subject in Northeast India allowed me to contribute to the Institute's research on comparative cases of conflict resolution globally.

Academically, I believe that this internship helped me understand better, the theories of political economy. Specifically, I felt that theories on Realism, Two-Level Game Approach, and Game theory were very relevant in the context of my research at DPI. I enjoyed researching aspects relating to the European Union, Russia and the Kurdish communities within the country. I especially enjoyed discussing with the DPI team of staff and interns regarding Turkey's resolution process and the general elections of 2015 which were also a constant topic of focus.

I extended the research I began during my internship at DPI, and presented a paper entitled 'Nationalism and Violence: A case of Assimilation in North-East India' at the *Nations, History and Comparison: conference on historical sociology and the study of nationalism*, organised by the University of Edinburgh and British Sociological Association. While working on the Kurdish Question in Turkey, I became very interested in understanding how identity and nationalism were built, especially among stateless populations. For my MA dissertation at Kings College London, I will be exploring the way in which everyday consumption perpetuates nationalism in stateless nations. Undoubtedly, my internship at the DPI has influenced my academic interest.

Professionally, I believe that my internship at DPI helped me to get acquainted with the working environment of an internationally facing think tank. Being part of a small team of 11 has had its benefits, since I was assigned with some important work not just by my supervisor, but within the legal, finance and administrative teams too. I was also responsible for making edits to the website (which led me to learn the basics of WordPress!), and for carrying out regular press sweeps.

I feel that I have learnt much from everyday conversations and discussions with the team at DPI. Working with a team of very young, passionate interns from all across the world has also been very educating. Having a cross-cultural dialogue helps immensely, since it brings experiences from difference countries and conflicts. Some of the good friends I made included students, journalists and human rights activists from Turkey, Armenia and Israel.

Something which also added to my overall experience, is the fact that I was selected as a runner-up for the annual Internship Programme Achievement Awards 2015 at King's College London, based on my DPI internship, which reinstates my belief that my internship experience was fruitful and educative both academically and personally. Although it was challenging to manage my time between academic work at King's College London and the internship at DPI, I feel that it was definitely worth the effort.