

The role of Non-Governmental Organizations in Turkey in the accession process to the European Union

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Abstract: Civil Society and the EU membership are one of the subjects discussed by political and intellectual groups in Turkey. In today's Turkey, where significant steps are being taken in the process of accession to the European Union, the importance of the effects of non-governmental organizations on Turkey's democratization is enormous. European Union attributes great significance to civic society and non-governmental organizations in the development of participatory democracy in Turkey. It is known that European Union demonstrates its enthusiasm in this regard through funding or other support mechanisms. In this study, Turkey's experiments in the process of democratization and the roles the non-governmental organizations have played in this process will be investigated. On the other hand, what roles non-governmental organizations have assumed in order to establish participatory democracy, the projects such institutions have implemented and the support the European Union has given in this regard will be studied.

Key words: Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), European Union, Turkey

1. Introduction

The priorities of the EU in the fields of foreign policy, security and cooperation in development include development and strengthening of democracy in collaborating countries, rule of law, respect for human rights and protection of fundamental rights and freedoms. The European Union is in a regular dialogue with Non-Governmental Organizations and also funding them in order to achieve these goals. In the European Union, the NGOs are not only considered as institutions to reduce the burden on governments but also as substantial actors of establishing development policies (Bedük et al., 2006). According to the EU, unions and associations, local associations and cooperatives, trade unions, employer organizations, professional associations, service and production associations, organizations established by local governments, political interest groups, religious interest groups, and student unions are all regarded as NGOs (Paul, 2000).

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Since the 1990s, the European Commission has become an important source for funding the NGOs in the European Union member states and candidate countries. The Commission pays direct grants to beneficiaries in a wide range, from universities to NGOs, to pursue the EU policies. The grants include social affairs, research and development, education, environment, consumer protection and external policies. The Commission's grants for gender equality are comprised in the area of Human Rights. The dialogue with the civil society is today exceptionally significant for the European Union's objective to create its own European constituencies. Its institutions such as the European Commission and the European Parliament have become intermediaries with the civil society organization through formal and informal ways. The extent of the European Commission's funds to the civil society in member and candidate countries shows its commitment. The dialogue has also become a subject of conditionality for the setting out of policy frameworks in the candidate countries. The European Commission claims that Turkey has to implement civil society friendly policies, most importantly when it comes to some key areas such as children, human rights, youth, environment, the handicapped, culture, arts and gender equality. As a result, the women's NGOs develop into being a part of the Turkish pre-accession process (Aksel, 2009).

With the civil society dialogue between the EU and Turkey, various NGOs in Turkey are struggling to accelerate membership process by influencing the decision making mechanisms of the EU while the EU is trying to prepare Turkey and Turkish citizens socially for the EU membership.

In this study, it is aimed to determine the responsibility established by the NGOs in Turkey in the scope of civil society and rising expectations, how much contribution is made to democratic culture and to what extent civil society dialogue is developed by civil society initiatives in Turkey, the EU-candidate country, and problems and expectations created by the 'European Union' concept in Turkey. From this point of view, historical development of the NGOs and their roles in the process of the EU membership will be examined in Turkey that newly met the concept of civil society dialogue. Started in 1999, the EU candidacy process will be evaluated, developments contributing to democratization in Turkey, problems and expectations in the field of civil society will be investigated, and contributions of civil society to the EU membership and the EU membership to civil society will be emphasized.

2. Roles of the NGOs in Turkey in membership process

Civil society is a new phenomenon for Turkey. This concept started to be discussed with the influence of globalization in 1980s and parallel to international developments. Development of the NGOs was almost halted after military coup in 1980, but it has accelerated after 1985 (Kalaycıoğlu et al., 2000). In particular, organizations have started in the field of human rights, democracy, and environment. However the existence and particularly the influence of the NGOs became visible in the process of Turkey's membership to the EU.

Turkey's history with the project of European integration goes back to the Ankara Association Agreement signed with the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1963. The agreement projected the progressive establishment of customs union. In 1970 an Additional Proto-

col was signed in Brussels. Turkey's application for full EEC membership took place in 1987 and in 1995 a customs union was created after the agreement between Turkey and the European Union Association Council. The Customs Union covers trade in manufactured products between Turkey and the EU, as well as alignment to the EU policies such as technical regulation products, competition and Intellectual Property Law. The candidacy to the EU membership was accepted after the Helsinki European Council of December 1999. This event widened the relations between Turkey and the EU, covering social policies as well as economic ones. In March 2001, European Council adopted the Accession Partnership for Turkey and defined the conditions to open accession negotiations at the end of 2004 (Aksel, 2009).

Accession negotiations started in 2005 with 35 chapters. The Commission also adopted a Communication on the civil-society dialogue between the EU and candidate countries, in order to arrange a general framework 'on how to create and reinforce links between civil society in the EU and candidate countries.' The communication included the bilateral activities between Turkey and the EU, and forecasted the development of long term partnerships with non-governmental bodies, including the objectives for 'strengthening the position and participation of women in all aspects of Turkish society' (COM [2005] 290).

Civil society has a substantial place in the construction of social Europe and integration of the continent. The NGOs, according to the EU's understanding, are effective in social and economic development of organized citizens and their countries, and have great importance in terms of establishing and sustaining participatory democracy by contributing directly to the rule of civil society (Güder, 2004). Also in candidate countries, within the framework of compliance with the Copenhagen Criteria that constitute a prerequisite for the EU membership, great emphasis is given to development of civil society, because the diversity and dynamism of civil society is considered as an indicator of healthy pluralistic democracy.

In Turkey, along with the acceleration of the EU membership, the studies of human rights, and fundamental rights and freedoms began to gain importance. For example the 1982 constitution was significantly amended in 2001 and 2004 with a view to lifting the restrictions on political rights and civil liberties. The constitutional amendments were followed by harmonization packages that revised related laws in line with the constitutional amendments (Nas, 2005). The most important changes introduced by the 2001 and 2004 constitutional amendments and the ensuing harmonization packages led to an extensive liberalization entailing many reforms such as the lifting of restrictions on human rights and fundamental freedoms both in the constitution and in related laws, the abolishing of the death penalty including acts of terror and in times of war, the redefinition of the role of the National Security Council as a purely advisory body with more civilian than military members, cultural rights including the right to learn and broadcast in languages other than Turkish used by Turkish citizens in their daily lives, and the abolishing of state security courts (Nas, 2005). In this process, in the field of laws about NGOs, a significant portion of regulations to reduce the effectiveness of the government and to increase freedoms are organized by harmonization laws. For this reason, the NGOs gain strength to play important roles in the EU membership process. On the other hand, the EU supported civil society organizations in Turkey through different budgets in the late 1980s. The European Commission, especially since 1993, began to provide financial assistance for the NGOs in Turkey for the subject of democratization and develop-

ment of civil society. An allocation system was managed during the period of 1996–2002 for countries in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership/ Barcelona Process, including Turkey, so that the NGOs obtained financial assistance for their projects (Aksel, 2009). Projects included to MEDA programme,¹ except for those concerning the promotion of democracy, human rights and civil society were stopped after European Parliament's resolution in 1996 on human rights violations in Turkey. Financial support increased especially with the nomination process. After this period, the European Commission started to work with the NGOs on the subjects concerned, rather than funding line ministries (Güneş, 2005). The means that the EU uses for financial support in candidate countries is called the pre-accession funding. The pre-accession funding can be traced down to the 'Accession Partnerships' that the European Commission set up when Turkey was given the candidacy status in 1999. Accession Partnerships included areas that Turkey had to establish in order to achieve the EU criteria. Through these funds, the EC aimed for the Turkish NGOs to develop their capacity in project design and implementation, fundraising, communication, public relations and employment in order to construct a more balanced relationship between state and non-statist actors. The ultimate goal was presented as the maturation of Turkish democracy in practice (Güneş, 2005). Turkey receives pre-accession funds since the 2004, and the financial support has increased since then (from 250 million euros in 2004 to 654 million euros in 2010) (Şen, 2004). The funds can be obtained by the projects carried out by state institutions or non-governmental organizations. The designing and the implementation of the projects are organized by the institutions receiving the funds and the areas range from health and education to infrastructure and rural development (Delegation of the European Commission to Turkey, 2008). The Accession Negotiations for Turkey have been launched in 2005, with the adoption of the Negotiation Framework. Since then an 'Instrument for Preaccession' (IPA) has been launched. This assistance programme for candidate and potential candidate countries (Croatia, Turkey, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia, Montenegro and Serbia, including Kosovo) includes various policies that are aimed to be harmonized with the European Union standards. In order to accomplish this, the assistance intends 'strengthening the

¹ The MEDA Programme provides Community assistance in the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership as set out in the Association Agreements signed between the EU and the partner countries and in the Barcelona Declaration signed on 27 November 1995. The MEDA is an abbreviation derived from the original French title of the programme: 'Mesures d'accompagnement financier et technique à la réforme des structures économiques et sociales dans le cadre du partenariat euro-méditerranéen'. In the English language the abbreviation is sometimes used for Mediterranean development assistance (Mid-term Evaluation of the MEDA II Programme Final Report: 19). The establishment of MEDA Programme provided a comprehensive, cohesive, national as well as regional framework of cooperation based on bilateral and regional cooperation programmes. In the Barcelona Declaration the partners established the three main overall pillars of the partnership:

- To establish a common Euro-Mediterranean area of peace and stability based on fundamental principles including respect for human rights and democracy (political and security partnership);
- To create an area of shared prosperity through the progressive establishment of a free-trade area between the EU and its Partners and among the Mediterranean Partners (economic and financial partnership);
- To develop human resources, promote understanding between cultures and rapprochement of the peoples in the Euro-Mediterranean region as well as develop free and flourishing civil societies (social, cultural partnership).

democratic institutions, as well as the rule of law, including its enforcement; the promotion and the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms and enhanced respect for minority rights, the promotion of gender equality and non-discrimination; public administration reform, including the establishment of a system enabling decentralization of assistance management to the beneficiary country; economic reform; the development of civil society; social inclusion; reconciliation, confidence-building measures and reconstruction; regional and cross-border cooperation' (Council Regulation [EC] no. 1085/2006). The EU-funded activities for the development of civil society, social dialogue, employment and social affairs and other activities that would diminish the lack of common knowledge on the European Union in Turkey were also implemented in order to increase the foregone dialogue (Aksel, 2009).

The European Commission's communication of the 2005 for enhancing civil dialogue with the candidate countries (COM [2005] 290) highlighted that the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights and the pre-accession financial assistance programme aimed the development of civil society in Turkey. In order to establish a long-term partnership between organizations, the EU demanded from Turkey bilateral exchange projects that would include Turkish and the EU organizations. In the EC's communication, gender equality, business relations, cooperation between local communities, youth, university and professional exchanges and culture, and the media are defined as areas of significance. The gender equality is represented as an area that should be enhanced, and accordingly it was indicated that 'the EU aims to strengthen the position of women in Turkish society and to tackle other issues such as domestic violence. The Commission will seek to include gender equality and the equal opportunity dimension in all its activities' (Aksel, 2009).

The European Union members aim to build a structure of a civil union, such as the one the member states and candidate countries already have. The NGOs have variety of tasks in the accession process of the EU. Firstly, NGOs have to inform the public about negotiation and accession process. In addition to this, NGOs who support the EU membership have to raise public awareness among the people against membership. On the other hand, they work with the financial support for the unemployment, discrimination, poverty and xenophobia struggle, environment, trade, development, social welfare and human rights to develop the welfare level and democracy. Next section will provide more details examples about the NGO's roles.

3. The NGO's roles in the EU in the process of membership

In the process of the EU, Turkish people are in need to learn about the EU implementations and to adapt this to their lives. But the EU citizens need to learn more about the Turks, too. This mutual recognition process cannot only be carried out by the hands of governments. Therefore, it is so important that the NGOs raise awareness of the both sides. In addition, it will help for the membership provided the trade unions and employers' unions cooperate and transfer the works done for this membership to the addressee. In this process, the NGOs roles are not just limited in the country. When Turkey's membership is on the table, the EU public opinion will be highly effective. Thus, the NGOs that work for the EU areas also take the roles such as lobbying, to create joint projects. In the EU–Turkey integration, they work for

the civil society organizations to get integrated. The purpose of civil society organizations is not only to determine the subjects and to inform the public. It is also so important to set up a network between different NGOs and to keep them active, to provide the cooperation between international ones and to build partnerships. The Turkish NGOs are also support and show so much effort for the public diplomacy in the eyes of the EU public. For example, TUSIAD, one of the Turkish NGOs, helped Turkey to gain the member status by lobbying during the 1999 Helsinki Summit (Keyman, 2005). Also, with the ongoing lobbying activities, TUSIAD created Turkey's expansion file on the website called 'www.euractive.com'. TUSIAD builds relationships with European Commission, European Parliament and other EU institutions, also uses newspapers, television and radio to reach the EU public. Another NGO that works for the EU public diplomacy is Economic Development Foundation that was established in 1965 and since then carries out organizations to strengthen the relationship between Turkey and the EU sector.

The importance of civil society organizations come to the forefront in field of lobbying, which is one of the most important ways for political communication. Lobbying can be defined as an influence and guiding decision strategy for the process of decision making. Lobbying gained great importance in the process of the EU accession in particular.

Since 2000, TUSIAD increased the lobbying activities especially in Brussels. It arranged multiple visits to all the EU countries for more than one between 2000 and 2002, got in contact with the NGOs and officials. By organizing Turkish SIAD Platform in Brussels before Copenhagen, it aimed to increase the belief in business life and show its support to Europe.

Also IKV directed itself to inform the public about the subjects in the Turkey–EU relationship and to provide the participation of the business life and civil society organizations.

4. Conclusions

The most important role of the NGOs is to remark the social and economic problems of the country and to use its effort for these problems solutions with different ideas, to deepen the relations with international and supranational institutions, to promote the country and to contribute the positive image of the country. In this context, the NGOs have been found helpful in many operations to support Turkey to get the membership of the EU. In the EU and Turkey relations they transferred the efforts of Turkey to have the EU membership by having close contact with the institutions. They also visited the EU countries and lobbied. Furthermore, it can be said that they worked to fulfill the function of informing people. On the other hand, to ensure the compliance with the Copenhagen criteria, the NGOs have shortened the nomination process for Turkey by working for fundamental rights and freedoms, education and environmental issues. By taking such important roles in the process of democratization, they showed an effort that can be named 'floor to ceiling'.

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Rola organizacji pozarządowych w Turcji w procesie akcesji do Unii Europejskiej

Abstrakt: Społeczeństwo obywatelskie i członkostwo w Unii Europejskiej są obecnie tematami często dyskutowanymi w tureckich kręgach politycznych i intelektualnych. W dzisiejszej Turcji, w której podejmowane są znaczące kroki na drodze akcesji do Unii Europejskiej, niezwykle ważny jest wpływ organizacji pozarządowych na rozwój demokracji. Także Unia Europejska przypisuje duże znaczenie społeczeństwu obywatelskiemu i organizacjom pozarządowym w rozwoju de-

mokracji uczestniczącej w Turcji. Demonstrowane jest to poprzez środki pomocowe i inne mechanizmy wspierające. W artykule przedstawiono tureckie doświadczenia związane z procesem demokratyzacji oraz rolę, jaką odgrywają w nim organizacje pozarządowe. Zbadano postawę, jaką te organizacje przyjęły w celu ustanowienia w Turcji demokracji uczestniczącej, pokazano wdrożone projekty przygotowane przy wsparciu Unii Europejskiej.

Słowa kluczowe: organizacje pozarządowe, Unia Europejska, Turcja