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Gulsah Senol
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**THE EUROPEAN UNION ACCESSION PROCESS
AND ITS EFFECTS ON TURKISH CIVIL SOCIETY**

GULSAH SENOL

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Approved:

Signature

Department Committee
Professor Stephanie Golob

Signature

Department Committee
Professor Dov Waxman

Signature

Department Committee, Chairperson
Professor Gene Park

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Abstract

The European Union (EU) pre-accession process is greatly influential on developing civil society in Turkey. With the reforms initiated by the process, the sector has seen a substantial improvement in its status, capacity, resources and legitimacy in social, political and economic spheres. There is, however, an unexplored aspect to this seemingly all beneficial relationship between the EU and civil society. There seems to be little or no attention paid to the view that EU involvement has led to an adverse impact on developing only certain parts of the sector while ignoring the issue of creating a system of voluntary change from within the sector and within the organizations which interact with the EU. This study contends that the EU's role is shaping civil society and the social reforms in Turkey the way it wants, and Turkey is merely trying to please the former. Despite the favorable impact the EU has had on the development of civil society such as, increased credibility and funding for Turkish organizations, this paper contends that in fact Europeanization and the EU-accession process has caused the alienation of Turkish civil society organizations (CSOs) from the societal needs and identity of Turkey.

Introduction

The impact of European Union (EU) pre-accession aid on the development of civil society in Turkey is an interesting topic to consider because of the variety of opinions being expressed on this subject by academics, lawmakers, civil society leaders and the public. The EU defines civil society as “facilitators of a broad policy dialogue.”¹ The academia* on this subject is heavily saturated with the popular notion that the European Union was pivotal in developing modern day civil society in Turkey. There is little or no attention paid to the view that EU involvement has led to an adverse impact on the development of only certain parts of the sector while ignoring the issue of creating a system of voluntary change from within the sector and within the organizations which interact with the EU. This paper will explore both sides to this argument and will show what in fact is seen to be the case in present day civil society in Turkey. Despite the favorable impact the EU has had on the development of civil society such as increased credibility and funding for Turkish organizations, this paper contends that in fact Europeanization, which Marten Vink defines briefly as “domestic change caused by European Integration”, and the EU-accession process has caused the alienation of Turkish civil society organizations (CSOs) from the societal needs and identity of Turkey.²

In order to substantiate this argument, this paper will first look at EU-Turkey relations, starting from 1964, which was the initial promulgation of the idea of Turkey becoming a member of the former European Community until 1999, which is when Turkey was officially invited to become a candidate country. Next, this paper will discuss the EU-

* Muftuler-Bac (2006), Tocci (2005), Keyman and Icduygu (2003), Avci (2005)

accession process since 1999 and Turkey's progress in achieving the reforms set out by the EU. It will then consider the condition of civil society in Turkey before European involvement, specifically between 1980 and 1999. Then it will focus on the impact of Europeanization and how it has shaped present day civil society. This paper will examine how the EU approaches civil society in Turkey, specifically through aid and the Civil Society Dialogue, which is a program designed to increase communication between Turkish CSOs and European CSOs during the accession process.³ Following this discussion, this paper will outline the major favorable outcomes of EU involvement and then focus on the major negative issues that have arisen from the discourse between the EU and Turkish civil society. In conclusion, this study will suggest that though there are visible positive changes in the presence and structure of civil society in Turkey, there needs to be a greater balanced approach to the development encouraged by the EU. While trying to become "European", Turkish civil society has transgressed from addressing the actual needs and issues that plague Turkish society to focusing more on issues that the European Union advocates and funds.

Turkish-EU relations are highly debated and constantly on Turkey's as well as the EU's agenda; yet, there seems to be a lack of attention paid to the negative impacts which will be further discussed in this study. Turkish geo-politic strategic location makes it a focal point between Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Moreover, Turkey is the only country, which has been a candidate country for this long and has yet to join the EU. The result of this interaction, which has been going on for more than a decade, is unlike that of any other EU member country has experienced when joining the EU. What is more important is that countries that have similar backgrounds and political and social structures to Turkey such

as Croatia, look at Turkey-EU relations to assess where they stand in joining the union and take Turkey as an example. Hence, the case of Turkish accession to EU and factors which influence it, such as pre-accession aid, are important benchmarks for other neighboring countries aspiring to join the Union.

A Glance at the EU-Turkey Relations:1964-1995

Due to Turkey's strategic location connecting Europe and Asia, Europe has always had contact with Turkey through trade and treaties. In 1964, the Ankara Agreement paved the first initial path to Europe in Turkey. With this agreement, an official association between Turkey and the former European Economic Community (EEC) was established. This relationship was further strengthened in 1970, when the *Additional Protocol* establishing a time frame for a customs union was signed. The Customs Union Agreement was eventually established in 1995 to facilitate free trade between the two parties. In the meantime, in 1987 Turkey had officially petitioned to become a formal member to the European Community (EC) but was deferred due to the issues Turkey faced with the EC member state Greece over the control of Cyprus.

Until the late 1980's, Turkey's democracy and political structures were not very stable. The military, which viewed itself as the guardian of the constitution and the secular system of government put in place by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of Turkey, played an enormous role in politics. The National Security Council, which is the body responsible for domestic security policies, was dominated by the military and exercised great influence over domestic politics. There were several coups in Turkey staged by the

military in its attempt to intervene in politics and protect the constitution. Due to these military interventions, Turkey's relations with the European Union and the rest of the democratic world were strained. Also during this time, several attempts were made by the governments to apply for membership, but the EU postponed these applications because it did not consider Turkey's democracy equivalent to that of the member states.

In addition to these issues of political instability, there is also the issue of conflicting identities and reservations on both the Turkish and the European side about whether or not Turkey should be considered European due to its location, religion and cultural make up. This has also been an important factor in the postponement of the accession process for Turkey as a candidate country. These issues have made the general process quite controversial and multi-faceted yet this study will not address these issues of identities but will only consider the accession process from the perspective of the civil society.

Accession Negotiations and Their Importance

In 1999, at the Helsinki European Council Meeting, Turkey was officially recognized as a candidate country ready to begin accession negotiations, and in 2000 the EU issued the *Accession Partnership Document (APD)* for Turkey, outlining the long-term and short-term reforms Turkey would be required to make. Between 1999 and 2005, both parties were in communication and efforts were targeted towards the application and fulfillment of the Copenhagen Criteria established by the Union for aspiring members. In October 2005, after Turkey made notable progress toward the fulfillment of the criteria, the accession negotiations began, which consists of thirty-three different chapters or issue areas such as

financial services, industry, human rights, and consumer protection, which the EU recognizes as areas for Turkey to improve upon before becoming a full member. There is no official time frame set for Turkey to become an official member due to dissent among several European Union members. Full accession is being delayed as countries such as France, Germany and Austria express their dissatisfaction with Turkey's reforms and its obvious societal and structural differences that do not align with the general make up of the EU.

When Turkey was declared an official candidate for full membership at the Helsinki European Council Meeting, the reform process started in accordance with the democratic ideals stipulated by the Copenhagen Criteria. According to the European Union Website,

The Copenhagen Criteria, set out in 1993 by the European Council in Copenhagen, require a candidate country to have: stable institutions that guarantee democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities; a functioning market economy, as well as the ability to cope with the pressure of competition and the market forces at work inside the Union; the ability to assume the obligations of membership, in particular adherence to the objectives of political, economic and monetary union.⁴

These core criteria are the building blocks of democracy in the European Union and it is imperative that these criteria are met in order to become a member. Hence the goal of pre-accession aid is to fulfill the Copenhagen criteria, which places priority on democratization, human rights and strengthening of civil society and social institutions.

In response to the Copenhagen Criteria and the calls for reform by the European Union, the Turkish "government created the *National Programme (NPAA)*, which was designed to elevate the structure and quality of Turkish democracy to the level of European democracy."⁵ This was done largely by legal reforms and amendments to the constitution

to protect individual rights as well as ensuring the development of civil society in Turkey. The NPAA announced 89 new laws, and over 90 amendments to existing laws. Among these vast reforms several were key to the missions of CSOs or the actual function of the sector. Laws prohibiting insulting the government and military were reformed, freedom of speech and assembly were strengthened, the right to broadcast in Kurdish and teach Kurdish in public schools were granted to the minority Kurds and the Law on Associations was liberalized.⁶

Keyman and Icduygu argue that these reforms had a positive impact on democratization of the nation as well as strengthening of civil society.⁷ The concept of democratization is very strongly linked to the development of civil society because civil society is an indispensable component of any democracy and democratization efforts. Civil society can be an effective tool for advancing democracy in a country and likewise, democratization often has a direct impact on the advancement of civil society organizations. With democratization, civil society organizations gain greater independence from the influence of the government and become legitimate actors in the political and social arena. Democratization entails many different institutions and components such as human rights, judicial reform, and so on, but the civil society component is the main concern of this study primarily because of the lack of attention paid to the negative impacts of European democratization on Turkish civil society.

The Copenhagen Criteria outline basic democratic ideals that all countries should attain to be labeled a democracy, and there is no doubt that Turkey's adherence to these ideals will result in a favorable movement towards the consolidation of Turkish democracy.

Meltem Muftuler-Bac argues that this essential change would not have taken place without the EU accession process. Bac points out that the incentive of joining the EU was an indispensable, if not the most important factor in realizing those reforms and states that “the increased assimilation of rules and norms of liberal democracy in Turkey since 1999 is a direct result of Turkey’s institutional ties with the EU and its hopes for membership.”⁸ Gamze Avci also agrees with this point of view and claims that “overall, the EU accession process has been an important catalyst in Turkey’s human rights progress...”⁹ Both Bac and Avci believe that the EU’s involvement has commenced a state of Europeanization and democratization in Turkey, which has had mainly a favorable outcome of developing and strengthening Turkish institutions such as civil society. They do not, however, address any unfavorable results of this exchange between the EU and civil society in Turkey.

This analysis of pre-accession aid and its direct and indirect effects on Turkey’s civil society is important in several ways. First, the way in which civil society is shaping in Turkey is a direct result of EU involvement and aid. Second, the advancement of education, minority rights, and women’s rights are impacted from this interaction in an unbalanced way, which this paper will discuss in further detail in the following sections.

Civil Society in Turkey

According to the Centre for Civil Society at the London School of Economics, civil society is defined as,

The arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. Civil societies are often populated by organisations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organisations,

community groups, women's organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, trade unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy groups.¹⁰

In essence civil society refers to organizations independent of the government, united for a mission to address a social issue or a common cause. Goksel and Gunes describe it “as the space in which state and society interact”¹¹. This study contends that the civil society is a self-organizing sector, which attempts to balance the private and the public sector.

Since accession negotiations between Turkey and the European Union officially started in 1999, it is necessary to give some historical background on civil society before European involvement so as to be able to make a comparison between the pre and post EU involvement eras. In 1980, after a military coup, the Turkish social, political, and economic life was very unstable and there was a great need for civil society organizations to take the lead in organizing the people more efficiently. There were many societal issues and needs but the public was unorganized in getting their voice heard and helping to resolve issues such as the lack of freedoms people faced everyday including freedom of expression. Certain civil society organizations existed but they were either in need of resources or did not want to take the chance of standing up against the government. At the time, many organizations were dissolved by the government with little or no substantial evidence against them. Hence, CSOs were not seen in the frontlines of creating change in society.

The military was an unconventionally powerful institution in Turkey during this time. It was viewed as the guardian of the constitution and exercised its power over the government and society. Because of a lack of trust in the governments and the general discretion of the people, the military was greatly influential in all aspects of society and

government, which had a direct impact on civil society. Due to this unconventional presence of the military in the government and the lack of initiative taken by the organizations, the government was still the sole source of resources in society. Understandably, the public did not look to civil society organizations to provide the services or protection they needed because of the evident lack of resources. In reality, these organizations did not have the necessary resources or the capacity to carry out effective changes in society. There was little or no cooperation between the government and civil society because neither of the parties trusted each other or viewed each other as legitimate partners. As in the political sphere, the civil society was fragmented among the Kemalists, who are referred to by Simsek as “left-wing nationalists”, conservatives, Islamists, ultra-nationalists such as the Members of the Turkish Nationalist Movement Party and liberals.¹² There was little cooperation or trust even among civil society organizations.

This scene began to change in the 1990’s with the emergence of organizations such as *Turkiye Uuncu Sektor Vakfi- TUSEV* (Third Sector Foundation of Turkey) dedicated to the mission of organizing and strengthening civil society in Turkey. These organizations, as well as private foundations such as *Sabancı Foundation*, *Koc Foundation* and others became increasingly involved in improving the legitimacy and the resources of the sector. They attempted to build the capacity of civil society organizations and increase their legitimacy in the eyes of the public, the government, and other civil society organizations outside of Turkey. The attempts of these organizations to increase the credibility of the sector were reinforced by the economic reforms of Turgut Ozal, the Turkish president in the late 1980’s to early 1990’s. Ozal was an ardent supporter of Reagan and Thatcher economics. He sought to liberalize the economy and introduce privatization in Turkey. Along with these

economic reforms, he sought to liberalize society as a whole. Turkish civil society greatly benefited from this overall liberalization and began to expand, which would later be supplemented by the EU accession process.

The 1999 Marmara Earthquake was a turning point for civil society organizations in Turkey as these organizations were more effective than the government in mobilizing initial emergency response as well as recovery aid in the aftermath of the major earthquake. 1999 also marks the year when Turkey was officially invited to become a candidate country, receiving financial assistance as well directional aid from the European Union. Civil society was included in the EU's agenda and received funding and support along with other institutions.

After 1999, the role of civil society in Turkey is visibly stronger and more influential. In their study of globalization and civil society in Turkey, Fuat Keyman and Ahmet Icduygu observe, "civil society organizations have begun to play an important role in articulating and representing the various ideological interest and political demands voiced by different segments of society."¹³ In recent years, the size of civil society in Turkey grew considerably to 80,212 associations and 4,471 foundations. This was a drastic expansion for the sector considering the total number of civil society organizations (associations and foundations) in Turkey before the military coup of 1980 was 38, 354 and about 61,000 in 2004. Yet this surge in the number of CSOs in Turkey should not be taken to be only a positive development. As Simsek notes, the quality of the organizations and the degree to which they are successful in fulfilling the needs of society is much more important to recognize

than the quantity.¹⁴ The quality as well as the quantity of CSOs was directly affected by the accession process and Europeanization, which the next section will address.

Europeanization in Turkish Civil Society

From this point on, it is important to note the level of EU involvement in shaping Turkish civil society. Europeanization, which is a result of the European integration that Turkey is going through, can be seen to have certain effects on civil society, which can be positive or negative depending on how the country going through the process changes. Europeanization and an eventual EU membership are closely linked concepts. In order to be accepted into the Union and become a real part of Europe, candidate countries need to become European through the mandated reforms. In fact, EU membership is unlikely without complete Europeanization. Hence, Europeanization has substantial impacts on all reform areas. According to Diez et al., “EU membership candidacy has altered the characteristics of civil society in Turkey”.¹⁵ Diez and his colleagues define Europeanization through the EU accession process in three ways: Europeanization of policies, Europeanization of political processes and Europeanization of identities, which is a complex issue and is not the focus of this study.

The first term of Europeanization is explicit. With the accession process, candidate countries take up the *Acquis Communautaire* or the governing laws of the EU and create policies that are in line with these laws. Europeanization of political processes is much less explicit in its meaning. It refers to the way in which the EU integration process affects political structures already in place in the candidate nation. Diez and his colleagues point

out, “European integration does not reinforce national governments... but also empowers other domestic actors because it provides exit opportunities, veto points and informational advantages.”¹⁶ This process is specifically significant for the development of “other domestic actors” such as civil society, which is the primary concern of this study. With the Europeanization of political processes, civil society is looked upon to take up a greater role in the political decision-making process. It benefits from this kind of Europeanization because civil actors in Europe have an important role in society and politics. This form of Europeanization empowers the civil society in Turkey to take up a similar position in the Turkish societal and political spheres. Many civil society organizations such as TUSIAD use this process to their advantage by pushing their agendas and pressuring the government for reforms in the name of supporting the EU accession process. These organizations are ardent supporters of the EU because the reforms associated with the accession process give them a platform to push for their own reforms and resist government pressure. The next section will explore how these organizations leverage support from the EU for accession support.

Instrument for Pre-accession Aid and its Effect on Civil Society

Because civil society has the potential to influence democratization in any nation, the European Union views it as an important resource to tap into in the accession process. Hence the Union devotes considerable efforts in shaping the civil society of candidate countries. They do this in two specific ways: through aid -Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA)- and through inclusion in Community Programmes. According to the

Multi-Annual Indicative Planning Document (MIPD) released by the European Union Commission, the main purpose of the “Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA) Assistance is to help the beneficiary country face the challenges of European integration and implement the reforms needed to fulfill the Copenhagen criteria for EU membership.”¹⁷ IPA has an explicit influence on shaping civil society- the EU financially supports organizations with missions and activities that are similar to those of Europe and those that advance the ideals EU member nations should have. The stated goal of the aid is to strengthen the democratic institutions of the candidate nation, such as civil society. Although organizations which do not support the EU accession process are a part of civil society as well, they are not strengthened as a result of this aid clearly since they do not apply for EU aid. Hence, organizations with religious tendencies or those that have a nationalistic ideology and believe Turkey would be better off by not joining the EU, do not receive financial support from the European Union and they are not a part of the reform movement taking place in the sector.

According to the MPID, the main goal of Turkish inclusion in the Community Programmes is to increase communication between Turkish civil society organizations and European civil society organizations¹⁸. This is done through the participation of some Turkish organizations in European programs, discussions, and platforms, which benefits the Turkish organization. The organizations that take part in Community Programmes have clearly demonstrated support for the European accession process and promote the reforms the EU has demanded of Turkey. Turkish organizations take advantage of partnerships with European civil society organizations through joint ventures and direct EU financing for specific projects.

The IPA assistance consists of five different components for different issue areas the EU would like the candidate countries to address: IPA-I: Transition Assistance and Institution Building, IPA-II: Cross Border Cooperation, IPA-III: Regional Development, IPA-IV: Human Resources Development, and IPA-V: Rural Development.¹⁹ For the purpose of this study IPA-I: Transition Assistance and Institution Building is the most important component of aid to consider. Except under special conditions, IPA assistance is based on the progress of the country receiving the aid in the areas that need to be reformed. This paper focuses on IPA-I and the causal links between the aid and civil society.

The Transition and Institution Building assistance focuses on institutions that are directly influenced by the reform: judiciary, law enforcement services and civil society organizations with priority given to addressing issues of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The initial IPA assistance Turkey received from the European Union was in 2007 with a total budget of 497.2 million Euros. In 2008 Turkey received 538.7 million Euros and in 2009 it received 566.4 million Euros with almost 50% of the funding being allocated to Transition Assistance and Institution Building. The Commission on Enlargement projects to allocate 899.5 million Euros to Turkey as Instrumental Pre-accession Assistance in the year 2012²⁰. The Turkish Foreign Ministry publishes progress reports every year to give updates on the accession process and what chapters they have fulfilled. The most recent Progress Report published in October of 2009 addressed all the chapters of the reform process and mentioned some specific reforms and changes Turkey has been implementing with respect to each issue area stipulated by the EU. The 2009 Progress Report stated the increased awareness of civil society by the public but pointed out that there are still “difficulties with the consultation process [which] reflect the lack of trust

between State institutions and civil society organisations.”²¹ After the reform process, CSO’s have maintained a more powerful position in the government sphere and there has been a substantially greater interaction between the state institutions and the civil society. Yet the sides still approach each other with distrust as noted by the progress report. This distrust of both sides will continue to remain unless the government and the civil society cooperate on addressing the societal needs of Turkey together.

The EU-Turkey Civil Society Dialogue is a component of IPA, which aims to supplement the accession process by supporting civil society in Turkey to educate the public and bridge the differences between European and Turkish society. With the Civil Society Dialogue, the third sector (civil society) will increase its involvement in legislation making and fulfilling the political component of the Copenhagen Criteria. According to a communication from the Commission to governing bodies of the EU, “the main objective of the civil society dialogue to be developed with Turkey and Croatia is to better inform public opinions from the EU and candidate countries by addressing the opportunities as well as the challenges posed by future enlargement.”²² In its efforts to support the dialogue between the two sides, the EU Commission explicitly outlines its intentions of “developing contacts with social partners and civil society organizations involved in social fields in Turkey, in particular with a view to bringing them closer to EU standards.”²³ With this approach, the EU attempts to have favorable and strong relations with organizations independent of the government so as to have the civil society in Turkey promote and encourage EU reforms and membership in the country. With the civil society on their side, the Union has a voice as an internal as well as an external force.

The Civil Society Dialogue includes grants made to civil society organizations and nonprofit organizations. Financial support for programs is an indispensable resource for organizations receiving assistance since funding from government or other domestic resources are limited and are sought by many other organizations. In addition to the financial support, the Civil Society Dialogue promotes participation in EU Community Programmes, which allow Turkish civil society organizations to collaborate with civil society organizations in member countries and receive funding for programs as European CSOs would. The goal of this program is to establish greater connections with European organizations and to legitimize the role of Turkish organizations in society. Participation in this program is limited to organizations with interest and influence in Turkey's integration into the Union. Among the organizations that participate in this program are media, youth, academic institutions, local authorities, professional organizations, social partners and NGOs.

Institution building is an important component of IPA and that is why it receives the largest percentage of the actual funding. The aim of IPA with respect to institution building is to set the groundwork for structural changes to take place. It aims to build stronger democracies that are in line with European Union member countries and have similar institutions. Through institution building, the EU Commission attempts to strengthen democratic institutions in Turkey such as the judiciary, legislature, and civil society, which promotes higher standards of democracy and advances social and human rights development.

Since the accession process has started, Turkish governments have implemented

serious reforms from education to judicial processes many of which were supported by the civil society to heighten the level of democracy and openness in Turkey and promote higher standards in Turkish institutions overall. Many European politicians were skeptical about the intention of the Turkish governments that were implementing these reforms. According to some “democratization was more imposed from the outside than imbued with Turkish authorship, and it was more an instrumental adaptation to the demands of conditionality than a sincere change based upon acceptance and internalization of democratic norms.”²⁴ Because of this assessment, the Union was in favor of creating grassroots change that would build a stable infrastructure to build further reforms even with the change of government in office. This is why the Civil Society Dialogue and institution building are regarded with such high expectations from both the European Union and Turkish institutions that believe the EU has had a positive influence in the democratization process in Turkey. Since 2006, a total of 218,161,722 Euros have been allocated to Community Programmes and the Civil Society Dialogue, which is the component that has received the second most funding after economic and social cohesion under the IPA.²⁵ Though this study focuses on the unfavorable outcomes of Europeanization and accession on Turkish civil society, it is also important to note the positive changes this process has mobilized in Turkey and in the sector, which the next section will address.

The Benefits of Europeanization

EU’s involvement has not only increased the quantity of organizations but also the capacity and quality of some organizations. The influence of the EU in shaping the good

governance practices of Turkish Civil Society is noted as creating much more transparent and accountable organizations. Moreover, financial incentives have been key in achieving these favorable outcomes in the sector. Goksel and Gunes note, "The scope of the Copenhagen Criteria is wide and has empowered many NGO's to work on a multitude of issues with reference to EU accession."²⁶

The EU accession process has brought about much more legitimacy for the civil society organizations in the government sphere, giving them greater power to voice their opinions and demand greater support. This expansion of space given to civil society through the amendments and policy reforms is creating a greater expansion of programs and the number of civil society organizations in Turkey, which now have a collectively greater impact on policy and garnering public support. This development is mainly due to the EU accession process. Sefa Simsek notes that

The EU is a key component for the development of a pro-democratic civil society. NGO's such as the *Insan Haklari Dernegi* (Human Rights Association), Helsinki Citizens Assembly, *Iktisadi Kalkinma Vakfi* (Turkish History Foundation) and the like are improving their projects in close cooperation with relevant EU institutions.²⁷

When looking at Turkey's track record of reforms, one cannot help but be impressed. Though the EU Commission on Enlargement's progress reports outline the need for greater reforms and advancement in many key issue areas, Turkish governments to date have succeeded in passing unprecedented reforms often unimaginable by skeptics. With more than ninety constitutional amendments and almost as many new laws introduced, the Turkish governments have reformed laws pertaining to individual rights and freedoms, freedom of assembly, freedom of speech, particularly against the state, the

elimination of the death penalty, granting of Kurdish minorities education and national broadcasting in their language and a great many more reforms which have altered life in Turkey. In addition to lobbying the government for reforms and being an active voice in the reform process, civil society has also benefitted from these reforms. Hence they have been involved in the reform in a full circle method- promoting the reforms required by the EU and then being directly affected by these reforms. According to a study published by the Third Sector Foundation of Turkey (TUSEV), these reforms “were critical for enabling space for civil society in Turkey (granting freedom of association, assembly), which had been under significant restriction for a period of approximately 20 years.”²⁸

From the European standpoint, the abolition of the death penalty was a tremendous step for improving social and human rights in Turkey because it was one of few, if any, European modern democracies that still permitted the use of the death penalty. Though the death penalty was not used since the last military coup in 1980, it was still regarded by Europe as an undemocratic practice that should be addressed in order to become a part of Europe. From the Turkish societal standpoint, the reforms limiting the power of the military in Turkey strengthened Turkish democracy substantially. The reforms initiated to limit the role of the military in politics, specifically substantially decreasing military control of the National Security Council, brought about structural and institutional changes in Turkish politics, which affected all spheres of life in Turkey.²⁹ Hence, the civilianization of the National Security Council is viewed as one of the most important reforms implemented at the time of accession negotiations. Undeniably, the European Union’s preoccupation with democratization and reform and the appeal of joining the Union has led to drastic measures taken by Turkey.

Clearly, EU's pressure and influence on the development of civil society cannot be ignored as well. Due to the EU's stressing of human and minority rights, policy made by the government as well as by civil organizations have attempted to address the Kurdish issue, though not always successfully. Kurds, which are a minority group living in Turkey, faced limitations in their expression of culture and use of language due to some of their associations with the terrorist group PKK and fear of a secessionist movement by the government. The Turkish governments gave Kurds living in Turkey citizenship, granted that they would not claim rights to Turkish land to form their own nation. The Kurdish issue was one of the greatest problems EU pointed out in Turkey at the initial stage of negotiations. Hence, the EU gave considerable attention and funding to reforming this problem.

With the reforms in general, the political, legal and social conditions for civil society improved greatly. The openness and other freedoms that civil society organizations acquired directly combined with the reforms associated with other aspects of democracy brought about the favorable conditions for the development of civil society. When comparing civil society before and after the political, legal and social reforms were made, one can see the distinction between the roles CSO's took up in both eras. The position of CSO's before the reforms in the social and political arena was very weak and civil society in general was not looked upon as a credible source as noted previously. Although a reform process had been initiated in the 1980s and early 1990s before the EU accession process began, the reforms outlined by the EU accession negotiations had a substantial impact in altering civil society. After the reforms in civil society and other areas were implemented with the push of the EU, civil society has developed a much more prominent role in the

decision and policymaking process. Hence the structural conditions, which allow civil society to thrive, and the direct development of the sector itself are very closely linked.

Moreover, EU's financial incentives as well as recognition have given greater resources for civil society organizations to further improve and expand democratization, which started with the pre-accession process. The capacity as well as the reputation of civil society organizations has improved with EU legitimacy, yet the motives behind these reforms from the Turkish standpoint as well as the European standpoint are not simply to improve the quality of life in Turkey and to consolidate Turkish democracy. The next section will turn a more critical eye to these achievements to reveal the negative impact of Europeanization on Turkish civil society.

The Adverse Results of Europeanization

Over the many years that Turkey has been attempting to join the EU, Turkish public opinion of joining the union has gone from being supportive to being against the idea, mainly due to the constant demands of the EU and lack of certainty as to when Turkey will eventually join the Union. According to a poll conducted by the German Marshall Fund, in 2004, 73 percent of the public thought joining the EU is a good idea; in 2007 only 40 percent did.³⁰ Many Turks have also begun to view the EU as a "Christian Club" and do not believe Turkey should be a part of this exclusive club. The form of Europeanization, which seeks to shape the identity of Turkey to adhere to the norms and societal make up of Europe, creates a greater problem than just negative nationalist sentiment against the EU, however. As the ideal society EU seeks in Turkey shapes civil society organizations

supportive of European Union reforms, the organizations become alienated from the societal reality present in Turkey. This section will demonstrate that these organizations create programs and shape their missions according to the issues the European Union supports so as to receive further funding and recognition from the EU. This in turn leads to a lack of attention to other issues that concern Turkish society, which the EU ignores.

According to the Central Finance and Contracts Unit, the government agency created to monitor and carry out all budgeting decisions related to EU funding, “Non-governmental organisations could benefit from assistance with a view to supporting initiatives aimed at the consolidation and further development of democratic practices, the rule of law, human rights, equality for women and men and the protection of minorities.”³¹ The issues EU supports are clearly stated by the EU and the Turkish government agency responsible for the dispersing of EU funds. With this in mind, CSOs have begun creating initiatives addressing these issues with the purpose of receiving financial benefits. This is undeniably a good development for those issue areas that the EU supports because they receive EU funding and attention from many organizations in Turkey. The problem lies in the organizations that are excluded from this development.

More and more civil society organizations, which are “positively” shaped by the EU accession and integration process, are in fact producing the same kinds of programs to address the same issues. Specifically, business associations and minority and human rights organizations are getting the most funding from the EU. Business organizations show the greatest support for the EU because of the prospect of Turkey in the EU will mean greater business opportunities and resources for the sector. Human and minority rights

organizations receive enormous political and financial support because of the European opinion that Turkish governments do not do enough to address the Kurdish and other minority issues in Turkey. Meanwhile, education and sustainable poverty alleviation are not a top priority on the EU's agenda for Turkey and organizations that try to address these issues are still lagging behind others because of the lack of EU support, financially and politically. Although education, poverty eradication, business development, human and minority rights should be matters that governments address, the lack of financial resources and time devoted by the government calls for civil society action to complement or supplement the measures governments take. There are hundreds of civil society organizations dedicated to advancing access to education, alleviating poverty, addressing business related needs and advancing human and minority rights. Yet the EU does not pay the same amount of attention to each of these issues. Hence, while there is clear advancement and positive results in the development of civil society in Turkey with European support, there also arises a system that favors certain organizations and issues that agree with its ideals and ignores others that are not as pertinent or important in their view.

The selectivity of EU funding and its negative impact can be best seen in the field of education policy. The Education Reform Initiative, a research project initiated by the Istanbul Policy Center at Sabanci University outlines the status of educational reform in Turkey: "Turkish education system has witnessed major reforms in the last decade, including transition to eight-year compulsory education and reform of the primary and secondary education curricula. Nevertheless, equal access to quality education, through which all citizens can fulfill their potential and realize their right to education remains yet

to be achieved.”³² Furthermore, the Institute notes that the “resources set aside for public education in Turkey is well below the OECD average of 5.8 %. The ratio of resources to the GDP is a little over half of the 6 % recommended by UNESCO to developing countries.”³³

The main issues in education are access to education, especially for females in rural areas, educational content, teacher-student ratio and early childhood education before primary school. Turkey does not meet European standards on these areas according to a report published by the ERI in 2008. Although these issues are evident, government support for public education in Turkey is lacking as noted by ERI and the support for education from the EU is only a small percentage of the total aid given to Turkey. Since the pre-accession process has started, the EU has granted 2,198,360 Euros to associations related to educational reform, while the total amount granted all associations was 19,803,450 Euros. When comparing the total value of grants made to civil society organizations, education comprised only 11 percent, while business and industry related associations comprised 22.5 percent.³⁴

Similarly, EU funding targets groups that will benefit from the economic integration such as business associations, not necessarily those which need the funds. For example, rural development and poverty alleviation is an issue at the core of Turkish society which does not receive as much attention from the EU as it should. While Western Turkey has seen substantial developments and improvements in infrastructure and standard of living, Eastern Turkey is lagging behind other parts of Turkey. The Human Development Index (HDI) Report, administered by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which measures human development by incorporating measures such as literacy rate and life expectancy, is oftentimes used as a tool for measuring a country’s overall development.

According to the 2007 HDI Report, Turkey ranks at 79 out of 183 countries and is ranked substantially lower than OECD average for human development. According to the UNDP, “the Human Poverty Index (HPI-1), focuses on the proportion of people below certain threshold levels in each of the dimensions of the human development index - living a long and healthy life, having access to education, and a decent standard of living.” When looking at the Human Poverty Index (HPI), Turkey ranks 40th out of 135 countries included in the index.³⁵ Government programs to address the issue of poverty eradication have been more successful in the recent years, yet as the statistics show, there is still room for more improvement. There are a number of associations and foundations that have a mission of rural development and poverty eradication in specific regions in Turkey. To date, the EU has granted 1,503,079 Euros to such organizations, comprising 7.6 percent of the total amount given to associations.³⁶ Again, when compared to the support business and industry related associations received from the EU at more than 22 percent, this amount is only a small portion of overall aid.

The increased interaction between Turkey and the EU has led to even greater EU influence on Turkish civil society. Ziya Onis, notes that civil society organizations have increasingly become vocal for EU-related democratic reforms. Certain civil society organizations are becoming increasingly supportive of EU reforms and pressuring the government to take up these reforms. These organizations such as the Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen’s Association (TUSIAD) have strong ties with the Union and benefit from increased relations between Turkey and the EU. Onis notes, “TUSIAD’s commitment to the democratization agenda should not lead one to underestimate the fact that significant components of the business community embraced democratic reforms for

their intrinsic benefit.”³⁷ Hence, some of the organizations that lead a pro-EU and pro-reform campaign have an ulterior motive that is directly beneficial for their constituents. Organizations like TUSIAD benefit from stronger relations between Turkey and Europe since their constituents- businessmen- will directly benefit from Turkish involvement with EU. Not only will the organization receive support and funding for its programs but its constituents will benefit from increased trade between Turkey and EU facilitated through membership into the Union.

These political motives are encouraged further by EU’s selective funding process. As the EU provides accession aid and recognition for certain projects or certain organizations with missions that support the ideal democratic society EU would like to see in Turkey, those organizations, in turn, are publicly more supportive of EU reforms and there is a “mutually beneficial” relationship for both sides. Rana Birden Gunes and Diba Nigar Goksel recognized this as well. They noted that the groups that benefited the most were those that were closer to the EU, ideologically and in their support for EU reforms in Turkey. ³⁸

With these differences in mind, one must consider what the EU’s intentions are in trying to make Turkey and civil society adhere to these reforms. Are they supporting certain civil society organizations to gain favorable support for their democratization and Europeanization efforts in Turkey? Onis states that, “clearly, the EU can play an instrumental role by providing material support to broad-based civil initiatives and grass-roots initiatives, which are of critical importance of building mass support for EU membership in the Turkish context.”³⁹ Thus, for institutions and organizations, which

support EU reforms and the accession process, the incentives are financial support and legitimacy in the eyes of the Union.

Thus, selective and instrumental aid strategy has privileged certain civil society organizations over others, in effect distorting civil society development. To this extent, certain scholars dispute the process of Europeanization and its positive impact on Turkey. Paul Kubicek's study on grassroots change in Turkey reveals that in fact the reforms and extensive democratization taking place in Turkey in the past several years are due to the "political conditionality of the EU and the power of external agents of democratization."⁴⁰ Turkey wants to join the EU and they are assenting to the conditions set by the EU to reach this ultimate goal. Likewise, the motives of the civil society organizations are clear, the bottom line is getting increased support, credibility and exposure for their programs and mission.

Though this approach may help develop Turkish society, this kind of transformation can lead to alienation from the actual needs of society, such as the creation of programs that the EU supports so as to receive funding and ignoring other issues that plague Turkish society. The EU has a political agenda and motivation in selecting certain issues it would like Turkey to reform. The reforms for Kurdish minorities are some of such politically motivated demands. Kubicek notes "Turks appear to be so focused on satisfying Europe-as opposed to launching an independent reform course- [that] leads one to question, the depth of the commitment to reform."⁴¹ Hence, the motivations of Turkey in implementing these reforms may also be questioned.

The ideal situation for the involvement of the EU in Turkish civil society would be what Nathalie Tocci refers to as the EU acting as “an anchor” for reforms rather than “a trigger.”⁴² Tocci views European involvement not as the main condition or trigger for reform and development of civil society but rather as the anchor, or support, for the domestic actors such as civil society organizations to lead the movement of change. Her argument looks to the EU in a benign and supportive role, with its ultimate goal of improving democracy in Turkey but she does not ignore the role of Turkey in actually implementing the reforms supported by the EU. In fact she states that the EU supports an endogenous factor of social change already taking place in Turkey.

Kubicek examines the EU’s role as a force of democratization, considering whether or not the reforms implemented are due to the internalization of democratic norms beneficial for society or simply a political maneuver to gain support from the EU. He applies the concepts of the “logic of appropriateness” and the “logic of consequentiality” to the relationship between Turkey and the EU, noting,

the former would stress genuine change in values and beliefs, fostered by socialization, (re)education, learning and often thanks to involvement with international actors where as the latter reflects the demands of political conditionality: Do X to get Y.⁴³

The ideal is the first situation where the EU would only influence the domestic actors in Turkey to create grassroots change effective in Turkish society voluntarily. However, the latter situation of the logic of consequentiality is more apparent in Turkish-EU relations than the logic of appropriateness. The EU gives incentives to candidate countries, including Turkey, in forms of aid, trade benefits, prospective membership to the Union, etc which in turn act as “catalysts” of change. These incentives do not preclude voluntary change, but

they can alter the missions and programs of organizations, which benefit from them. When examining the impact of this attitude Turkey has been taking on civil society, Kubicek notes “political discipline provided by the EU-prospect has changed the social and political dynamic to the benefit of pro-reform civil society groups, whose agenda has enjoyed much more success since 1999.”⁴⁴ One such organization is TUSIAD, mentioned above. TUSIAD is successfully using the reform process associated with the accession process to increase their influence in Turkish policy-making and pushing forward their reforms via the EU agenda. It is possible that they would not have been as successful as they are now if they did not align with the EU agenda and openly support EU membership and reforms. This impact should not be ignored when assessing the result of EU-Turkey relations and the course of action certain civil society organizations take to get more funding from the EU.

One of the greatest weaknesses of Turkish Civil Society has been its lack of capacity to handle high volumes of constituents, services, or even funding. Through its involvement in the accession process, the EU attempts to address this issue of capacity building, specifically in regards to handling resources, mobilizing public support for programs, etc. Through training, the EU tries to give the candidate countries an opportunity to work with European Civil Society professionals to build the capacity of the organizations. This training, however, only helps a small percentage of organizations. The rest are still unorganized and use outdated methods in their approach and operation. This, combined with the lack of resources, puts Turkish organizations into a cycle of unsuccessful efforts to advance the organization. The EU’s unbalanced approach in supporting only certain organizations adds to this unhealthy cycle. Understandably, the EU cannot support every single organization in Turkey financially. Yet if their approach to the sector in general is

more balanced and gives equal support for programs and projects of all kinds, then the other organizations which aim to benefit from the EU but do not because of their choice of program will also have the same opportunity to develop.

In addition to the implicit impact of EU on the sector, some civil society organizations have noted some technical negative aspects of the EU accession process as well. Specifically they believe that there is not enough funding compared to other countries with similar needs. They have also complained about the burdensome application process, the bureaucracy that they have to maneuver around, and the lack of transparency in the selection and funding process. Hence, there should be a more cautious approach taken by the Turkish CSOs in this accession and reform process. This study does not claim that the European influence on Turkey and specifically on civil society is wholly negative, but there is a need for a more balanced approach so as to not counteract the afore mentioned positive progress incited by the EU clearly visible in the sector.

The initial positive attitude about the beneficial influence of the European Union on Turkish civil society has been seemingly dying down. What is emerging as the reality of the present time is that though there are many more organizations representing a variety of different causes and although nonprofits and nongovernmental organizations now have greater resources and power, certain essential needs of society are being ignored. There is not a great amount of change internally, where organizations are realizing the fact that they need to change some procedures or aspects of their organization to create much more efficient programs or missions with greater impacts. The few ones that do display this kind of internal change as opposed to a change imposed from external sources are often ones

that have achieved this state without the involvement of the EU. They have understood the need to adapt and build their capacity to address societal needs, not the demands of the EU. The ideal development of an organization would be one that results from internal assessments of weaknesses and strengths of the organization as opposed to an outside source, the EU, prescribing an efficient model for organizations, which they do not know much about. The other organizations which have been following the recommendations and prescriptions of the EU and what European civil society organizations are doing have had an initial track record which showed great success. In recent years, however, this initial record of success has been replaced with a fatigue and a slowing of development in the sector. The sudden increase in the size of the civil society as well as the programs implemented has recently hit a plateau.

Conclusion

This study has explored the impacts of European Union accession process on Turkish civil society and has argued that there needs be a greater balance of responsible development. While assessing the impact of European involvement in Turkish civil society, it should be noted that there are clear favorable outcomes as well as setbacks. When this fact is acknowledged, civil society can develop in a much more promising way while at the same time facilitating the EU accession process. This way, the issues that are ignored by Turkish civil society organizations when trying to get EU funding will be recognized and a proper response can be arranged so that all the necessary problems of Turkish society receive equal attention and support.

The intentions of the EU in providing aid or support to civil society organizations may be to develop the sector and strengthen CSOs yet the process which they choose to do so leads to an alienation of Turkish civil society from Turkish societal needs and a tendency to look to Europe for advice and funding. This study agrees with the general point of view that Europeanization and the EU accession process have created many beneficial opportunities for civil society and yet it also contends that this relationship was not always as positive as the discourse mentioned above stated. The mixed impact- both negative and positive- should be acknowledged and assessed so as to provide a more complete picture of the impact of EU aid on Turkey as opposed to the one-sided approach, which constantly depicts the results of the complex relationship between the two sides as positive and all beneficial.

Notes

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¹³ Keyman and Icduygu 221

¹⁴ Simsek 48

¹⁵ Thomas Diez, Apostolos Agnantopoulos, and Alper Kaliber, "File: Turkey, Europeanization and Civil Society," South European Society & Politics, 10.1 (2005): 3, SocINDEX with Full Text, EBSCO, 11 Jan 2010, <<http://search.ebscohost.com.remote.baruch.cuny.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=sih&AN=16967900&site=ehost-live>>.

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²³ Civil Society Dialogue between the EU and Candidate Countries 7

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²⁵ MIPD 7

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