

## THE ROLE OF TURKISH CIVIL SOCIETY IN POLITICAL DECISION MAKING\*

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### Öz

For consolidation of democracies, political scientists recognize the normative ideal that civil society should be given an enhanced role in political decision-making. Analysis of such role is very central to the study of political science and especially for democratic theory. To assess such role, one needs to understand civil society organizations' interactions with the larger political system and its actors, their activeness in policy making processes and impact of all these over policy outcomes. This article first examines the content and methods of the literature on the impacts of the European Union (EU) process over the transformation of civil society realm in Turkey. The article points to lack of empirical research within this literature on the civil society organizations' characteristics of involvement to decision making processes. In this respect, the article reveals the convenience of the methodological approaches of the literature on interest group influence and demonstrates how the literature on Turkish civil society can benefit from these contributions. The article draws attention to the need for future studies to empirically assess the characteristics and transformation of Turkish civil society's participation to the decision-making processes.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Turkey, Civil society, European Union, Decision making process, Democratization

### *Türkiye'deki Sivil Toplumun Siyasi Karar Almadaki Rolü*

### Abstract

Sivil toplumun siyasi karar almadaki rolünün etkinleştirilmesi şeklindeki normatif ideal bugün siyaset bilimciler tarafından kabul görmektedir ve demokrasinin konsolidasyonu açısından kaçınılmazdır. Böyle bir rolün analizi, siyaset bilimi çalışmaları açısından ve özellikle de demokrasi teorisi için merkezi öneme sahiptir. Böyle bir rolün değerlendirilebilmesi için, sivil toplum örgütlerinin siyasi sistemle ve aktörleriyle etkileşiminin, siyasa yapım sürecindeki etkinliğinin ve tüm bunların siyasa çıktıları üzerindeki etkisinin incelenmesi gerekir. Bu makale, öncelikle Avrupa Birliği (AB) sürecinin Türkiye'deki sivil toplum alanının dönüşümü üzerindeki etkilerini tartışan literatürü içerik ve yöntem biçiminden inceleyecek, daha sonra ilgili literatürde sivil toplum örgütlerinin karar alma süreçlerine katılımı ile ilgili ampirik çalışmaların eksikliğine dikkat çekecektir. Makale, çıkar grubu etkisi ile ilgili literatürde yararlanılan metodolojik yaklaşımların uygunluğunu ortaya koyacak ve bu katkılardan Türk sivil toplumu ile ilgili literatürün nasıl yararlanabileceğini örneklerle açıklayacaktır. Makale, Türkiye'deki sivil toplumun niteliklerinin ve karar alma süreçleri ile olan ilişkisinin dönüşümünün ampirik olarak çalışılmasına yönelik ihtiyaca dikkat çekmektedir.

**Keywords:** Türkiye, Sivil toplum, Avrupa Birliği, Karar alma süreci, Demokratikleşme

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## **The Role of Turkish Civil Society in Political Decision Making\***

### **Introduction**

Civil society is a dynamic heterogeneous realm filled up with all kinds of organizations and groups which compete and collaborate in their pursuit of public or particularistic interests. Civil society is therefore a catch-all term for activists, interest groups, pressure groups, lobbyists, foundations, associations, advocacy groups, trade unions, business organizations, universities, think-tanks, and yet others. Civil society is always on the making with changes in its internal dynamics and in terms of its organizations' relations with the state. As a matter of fact, observing such a fluid and transforming realm represent the main analytical puzzle in civil society discussions in Turkey and around the world. This paper argues that any of the above group may seek access to decision making with their own alternative policy proposals or they may engage in other kinds of activities or utilize alternative channels for interest realization. Investigation into these activities is what makes civil society discussions critical for democratic theory. In this respect, it is essential to identify competing groups, assess opportunities and limits for their access to the political sphere, unearth each group's relations with the state and thus be able to argue about the level of deliberative democracy in a particular country.

The Turkish civil society had historically faced inherent limits in terms of access and participation to the sphere of politics. Before 2000s, civil society organizations (CSOs) were simply denied autonomy from the state and marginalized into a narrow sphere of activity (Mardin, 1973; Toprak, 1996; Heper, 2000). Yet, things have begun to change with Turkey's accelerating European Union (EU) process. Through a clear membership perspective, Turkey embarked upon a rapid process of political reforms and proceeded fast on its path toward democratic consolidation. Turkey became an EU candidate with the EU Helsinki Summit of 1999. The post-Helsinki Era transformations have generated

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a new scholarly debate about the multiple ways in which the EU contributed to the development of the Turkish civil society.

The EU-led reform process of Turkey helped eliminate certain structural limitations to the CSOs' autonomy from the state establishment. Especially entry into force of a new Associations Law in 2004 reduced the state interference in the activities of CSOs including their contacts with foreign counterparts and with domestic political organizations. On top of that, the EU pressured for reform of state-civil society relations, especially for the enhancement of civil society's role within political decision-making. A group of scholars have begun to observe the Turkish civil society under this initial period of Turkey's EU-led reform context and found support for the EU's role in civil society empowerment (Kubicek, 2005; Göksel and Güneş, 2005; Ergun 2010; Yılmaz, 2014: 307). Later, the EU impact turned controversial and scholars drew attention to the changing contextual characteristics of the civil society domain in Turkey (Zihnioğlu, 2013; Kaliber, 2016).

This paper first briefly reviews the achievements and limits of the hitherto research on state and civil society relations under Turkey's EU led reform process. The paper looks at how these studies observe civil society empowerment under Turkey's lengthy and undulant process of EU accession. The paper asserts that the related literature would pull forward with more empirical work on the relatively understudied topic of CSOs' decision making participation experiences. Such empirical work may harness and build upon the available methodological tools developed under the literature on interest group influence. This literature provides a few alternatives for measuring and testing influence of such groups over decision making, as well as assess the factors that would account for (lack of) influence. These factors can be summarized under the broad categories of institutional context, organizational characteristics of CSOs and the characteristics of issues concerning which the CSOs engage in lobbying. In this respect, the paper argues that the discussions on Turkish civil society empowerment should not overlook such potential factors other than the EU in understanding the current and future state of the relations between the state and civil society in Turkey. The paper concentrates on the impact of these alternative factors in explaining the decision making influence of the Turkish CSOs. It builds mainly on the experience of human rights groups –such as women's human rights organizations and minority rights organizations- which effectively utilized the window opportunities created by the EU accession of Turkey and lobbied the government for realizing their interests. The lobbying experience of these groups provides support to the interest group literature emphasizing the nature of lobbying coalitions and the conflictuality of policy issues as strong determinants of lobbying success or failure.

## 1. The Literature on the EU's Empowerment of Turkish Civil Society

Scholars, who observe Turkish civil society in the pre-EU processes, relate Turkish CSOs past weaknesses mainly to the Turkish State's interventionist nature and its distrust towards this realm (Kalaycıoğlu, 2002: 68). In such a restrictive environment, it was inept to talk about CSOs ability to pursue their collective interests (Toprak, 1994: 91). The commencement of Turkey's EU candidacy in the Helsinki Summit of 1999 had been a decisive turning point in the aftermath of which Turkey entered into an accelerated process of adaptation to the EU criteria through initiation of a set of political and economic reforms. Scholars acknowledge that during this initial period, the EU contributed to an enhanced legal and financial status of CSOs through its political conditionality and financial aid (Keyman and Öniş 2007; Grigoriadis, 2009; Ulusoy, 2009; Ergun 2010; Rumelili and Boşnak 2015).

Since 2005, the EU has launched several projects in different thematic fields under Civil Society Dialogue to support civil society. This external funding was preferable in the case of most CSOs, as it helped secure independence from reliance on the government's funding (Rumelili and Boşnak, 2015: 133). Additionally, the EU membership negotiations introduced certain channels through which the CSOs can interact and collaborate with the EU institutions to put pressure on the policies of the Turkish government. This relationship proved mutually beneficial. Through such a collaboration, the EU also elicited support for its agenda of democratization in Turkey. According to Chris Rumford (2005: 9), the EU's pressures on the candidate countries increase prospects of democratic reforms and thus mobilize a plethora of groups in civil society to enter into the political arena and struggle for recognition. Especially once the accession negotiations commenced on 3 October 2005, the EU increased its calls on the Turkish government to improve CSOs' access to political decision-making, and especially sought to engage them into Turkey's EU-led reform processes.

CSOs have begun to utilize the opportunity structures provided by the EU accession process and many groups became highly active in terms of voicing demands for participation and accordingly integrated into decision making processes that relate to their policy fields. For instance, business organizations and trade unions were included into decision making on social policies and employment (Karadağ and Usta 2011, 37). Prominent CSOs located in urban cities had been highly active with respect to Turkey's EU reform processes. Such groups were "very much preoccupied with interest-based, pragmatic approaches, such as involvement through capacity-building, fund demanding or providing, or pro-EU campaigning" (İçduygu, 2011: 392). Especially the organizations of big

business such as *Türk Sanayicileri ve İşadamları Derneği* [Turkish Industry and Business Association, TÜSİAD] and non-governmental think-tanks such as *İktisadi Kalkınma Vakfı* [Economic Development Foundation, IKV] have become staunch supporters of Turkey's EU accession, effectively engaged in pro-EU campaigning and worked to ensure active participation of business, as well as NGOS to the EU processes. The identity based grievances also became vocal during Turkey's EU accession process which pressured the Turkish government to seek better communication and consider consultation with different cultural and religious groups of Turkey. For instance, the government initiated a process called the *Alevi Açılımı* [Alevi Opening] in the Summer of 2007 and invited different Alevi groups to a series of workshops which took place between June 2009 and January 2010 on the issues that relate to the Alevi demands from the government. The EU process also pushed for reforms on several other human rights issues. Through utilizing this context, the human rights organizations became more visible and active in their search for access to decision making. One of the most successful groups during this process were women's human rights organizations. They lobbied the government through coalitions and established platforms such as Constitution Women Platform, European Women's Lobby Turkey Coordination, Women's Labor and Employment Initiative Platform, Women Platform Against Sexual Violence, Civil Code Women Platform, or Turkish Penal Code Women Platform. Some of these platforms are named after the legal documents the content of which the women organizations tried to revise according to their preferred policies. Collective lobbying helped these groups attain most of their policy objectives. Jessica L. Doyle (2017), for instance, evaluated the women's human rights organizations' ability to influence the state policies through her analysis of their perceptions and self-assessments about access to decision making. In a more recent study based on the same field work, Doyle (2018) differentiated between independent and government-supported organizations and reported about the former groups' complaints that they are increasingly becoming excluded from the legislative processes. Further research may concentrate on these arguments, testing the government's creation of alternative civil societies working in different issue areas and question the generalizeability of the related arguments.

Another factor jeopardizing the achievements of the earlier period is perhaps that since 2013 Turkey's EU reform process has lost its momentum and even came to a standstill. Observing such a context, scholars have begun to analyze how the Turkish civil society has adapted to these new circumstances and criticize the waning ability of the EU in terms of civil society empowerment. Alper Kaliber (2016: 70) observes a process of Turkey's estrangement from the EU path throughout the 2010s and discusses how the weakening of Turkey-EU relations have limited the capacity of CSOs to exert pressure on the Turkish

government. According to Kaliber, opening of new chapters especially the loaded ones such as the rule of law chapters and “progress on these issues would certainly change the political opportunity structure in favor of politically mobilized civil society in Turkey” (Kaliber, 2016: 71). Amanda Paul and Murat Seyrek (2017) similarly argues that the EU could and should do more than criticizing the state-civil society relations in Turkey and create more opportunities and alternative channels for civil society empowerment. With respect to the ongoing discussion about freezing and redirecting of the EU funds provided under the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA), the authors urge that more money should be provided to civil society in a more structured manner (Paul and Seyrek, 2017: 1). In a Special Report, the European Court of Auditors (2018) also recommends that starting from 2018 the EU should better target IPA funds to “areas where reforms are overdue and necessary for credible progress towards EU accession.” The European Commission (2018) similarly underlines the democratic backsliding in Turkey, recommends significant cuts to funds provided under IPA for the 2018-2020 period, and proposes reorientation of these funds to civil society. According to Büke Boşnak (2016: 85) certain areas such as the rule of law had been subject to reversals, yet on certain other issues such as the environment, the EU continues to fund projects and assist civil society. Such groups may continue to utilize the EU as a context to promote their policy proposals.

Scholars also point to a decline in the transforming ability of the EU (Öner, 2014). A group of scholars observe that several CSOs are becoming more skeptical about the EU’s civil society policies and thus they raise concern over a loss of EU fervor among these groups (see for instance: Kaliber, 2016; Boşnak, 2016). Marcus Ketola (2011, 793) criticizes the EU funding for its gravitation towards groups which are located in urban cities, ideologically compatible with the EU’s mission and professional enough to become entitled to the EU’s project based funds. In this respect, by its exclusionist nature, the EU’s funding policies may unintentionally result in further fragmentation of the Turkish civil society and may also fuel the existing ideological differences (Ketola, 2011). In light of these arguments, future studies may investigate the availability of EU funds to projects concerning the awaiting reform areas and inquire into how the CSOs are engaging with these projects.

Since the start of Turkey’s EU accession process in March 2005, empirical studies on the interactions between the EU, the Turkish state and civil society have multiplied, yet these studies concentrated on different aspects of this triangular relationship and also differ in terms of their focus on different type of CSOs. Empirical choices critically impact the variation in arguments about the EU’s interactions with civil society actors and its relative impact over state-civil

society relations in Turkey. In the literature, there are empirical accounts which investigate organizations that are most vocal with respect to the EU process (İçduygu, 2011; Emini, 2013; Öner 2014). Scholars also concentrate on particular type of CSOs -i.e. the environmentalist groups (Boşnak 2016), Kurdish CSOs (Kaliber, 2016), women's human rights organizations (Doyle, 2017 and 2018), and trade unions (Karadağ and Usta, 2011). Yet, there are still others who tried to account for diversity among CSOs in terms of capacity, issue area, as well as, ideology (Zihnioğlu 2013). Recent studies on civil society concentrate rather on the new forms of civic and political participation since the Gezi Protests in June 2013 such as the *occupygezi* movement and emphasize how such new forms of civic participation differentiate from the earlier traditional forms of organized civil society (see for instance: Kaya, 2017; Bee and Chrona, 2017; Bee and Kaya 2017; Zihnioğlu, 2018). There is still room for the existing literature on Turkish civil society to further flourish with more empirical work through comparative case selection and research on some active CSOs which seek decision making participation. For that purpose, it would be convenient to start with issue sampling, that is one can first identify the policy issues and reforms that are on the agenda of the Turkish government. Scholars may conduct interviews with organizations which are most visible with respect to their lobbying on different issue areas. Alternatively, CSOs which had prepared EU projects and received EU endowments may also be interviewed about their experiences of lobbying and interest realization. In its 2018 Report, the European Commission notes involvement of approximately 900 Turkish CSOs under the past EU-Turkey civil society dialogue programs (European Commission, 2018: 16). Such research would better account for the success of the EU's programs directed towards civil society empowerment.

## **2. Conceptualization and Measurement of Civil Society's Influence Over Decision Making**

Today in both established democracies and in democratizing countries, CSOs are growingly engaged in the business of having a say in political decision-making. This has made the issue of influence a highly relevant study item for those who work and theorize about civil society and democratization. Contrary to the importance of this subject, methodological impediments associated with measurement and testing of influence continue to keep most scholars away from its empirical investigation (Mahoney, 2007; Dür and de Bievre, 2007a; Michalowitz, 2007; Baumgartner et al., 2009). Still, a group of interest group scholars come up with novel ways to conceptualize and operationalize influence, as well as measure it either qualitatively or quantitatively (Furlong, 1997).

What accounts for differences in CSOs ability to exert influence during enactment of different policy proposals that concern their interests? To study this question, the primary task is to settle on a workable definition of influence. Dür and de Bievre (2007a: 3) define influence as control over political outcomes. Such a definition necessitates in depth investigation of the match between policy preferences of CSOs and political outcomes, as well as an analysis of the details of interactions and negotiations between CSOs and decision making authorities. Along the lines of this definition, an organization can be considered influential over decision making if it is 'its lobbying' that breeds political outcomes in line with (part of) its policy preferences.

Decision making has several stages including agenda setting, formulation of the content of reforms, legal outcomes and their implementation (Dür 2008a: 48). Scholars should carefully differentiate between these stages when making inferences about the level of CSOs' influence. For instance, attainment of the preferred legal outcomes suggests medium level of influence, if a CSO is also highly concerned with their implementation. Conversely, without any lobbying to shape the content of a reform, a CSO may simply consider itself as influential; if its sole lobbying concern is towards the agenda setting stage that is bringing a policy proposal or a reform to the agenda of the decision makers. In his study on the contributions of civil society to democratic consolidation in Turkey, Emre Toros (2007) made differentiation between the CSOs overall contribution and their contributions at the stage of agenda setting. Toros (2007: 412) observes that although the overall performance of CSOs had been unsatisfactory, these actors were able act as agenda setters, share experience on issues pertaining to their areas of expertise and press the government for putting the problems of human rights on its political agenda.

Consider a human rights organization which is critical of the then existing Associations Law and accordingly which engages in activities to pressure the government for its replacement with a new law that would ensure further freedoms for the associations in Turkey. However, the same organization may be unable to play a significant role in determination of the content of the new law, due to its relative organizational weaknesses in terms of staff and resources. Therefore, when making inferences about CSOs decision making influence, scholars should be attentive to such issues of CSOs' competences, lobbying and role played at different stages of the decision making processes.

It would be interesting to note at this point that in a country like Turkey, which has been undergoing ups and downs in its democratic process, it is also critical for CSOs to retain their past achievements. Under two years of emergency rule, Turkey had received several criticisms from the EU circles that it is backsliding in its record of human rights and democracy. In this respect, further



research may be oriented towards analyzing how the CSOs have been impacted by Turkey's new political context, how did they react to it, and if they have managed to prevent losing their past achievements. According to Mahoney (2007: 37) we may know the group's objectives and the policy outcomes, yet still fail to correctly code the level of influence. As a result of its lobbying, a CSO may have at least avoided the unfavorable outcomes or achieved partial realization of its interests, or prevent backsliding from the past achievements.

Based on the above discussions, the level of government's impartiality towards the civil society realm appears to remain a critical topic to consider. With the government's (financial) support to and resultant proliferation of the like-minded organizations, the civil society may transform in a way as to lead to misinterpretations. Decision making access and influence of certain groups may be in full flow, yet careful research should especially be able to depict their level of ideological, organizational and financial independence from the decision makers. Besides, a CSO may have done little to affect the decision-making process, yet the outcome regarding a particular reform issue may reflect its preferences simply due to preference concurrence with the government. For instance, the EU has been highly critical of the Turkish Armed Forces ability to exercise control over the political sphere and it increased its calls for measures to strengthen the civilian control of the army especially during Turkey's process of EU candidacy. Since such measures were deemed instrumental for expanding the government's sphere of autonomy, the government was naturally predisposed to carry out the related reforms. On that note, it would be very difficult to determine the source of the related policy changes. Consider now another reform issue about which there is little or no congruence between the positions of the government and a particular CSO. For instance, several CSOs voice their concerns about the issue of limits over the press-freedom in Turkey. Especially, they claim total abolishment of the Anti-Terror Law; since the framework of this law and its individual articles have been used to restrict freedom of expression through making the arrest of dozens of journalists possible, thus keeping the Turkish press under pressure. The same concerns were raised in the European Commission reports about Turkey's progress towards accession, since freedom of expression ranks high among the EU criteria for membership. In that case, pertaining to the reform of that issue, the critical question is how much influence are we going to attribute to the lobbying organizations and how much to the EU.

The interest group literature offers a few techniques for the measurement of influence. These are mainly the process-tracing, the attributed influence method and assessing the degree of preference attainment (Dür 2008a). The process-tracing strategy is mainly applied by Small-N studies (for such studies see, for instance: Pedler, 2002; Dür and De Bièvre, 2007b; Michalowitz, 2007).

It looks for causal mechanisms and intervening variables through which the final policy about a particular issue is produced and to this end it “examines processes within single cases in considerable detail” (George and Bennett, 2005: 149). This technique can be employed to study in detail Turkish CSOs in terms of their policy proposals, techniques of lobbying according to these preferences and contributions to legislative debates, and ability to attain the preferred policy outcomes (for details of this strategy see: Dür 2008a). In the Turkish case, application of process tracing methodology has some advantages over others. For instance, looking at the transformations in CSOs’ relations with the EU structures, future studies may trace the ways in which the EU continue to help CSOs attain their interests.

The attributed influence method alternatively draws on surveys and interest groups are asked about their self and peer-assessments of influence (Dür and de Bièvre, 2007b). According to Polsby (1960), the results reached through application of this strategy will be about perceptions of influence rather than actual influence. Thus, a considerable level of bias is likely to occur; since the interviewed groups may have quite a few reasons to conceal their real assessments of self-influence over political outcomes (Dür, 2008a: 54). To avoid such a bias in measurement of the stated goals of a CSO, one should also look at the distance between the policy proposals of a CSO and the final outcome of the decision making process (Schneider and Baltz 2004; Mahoney, 2007; Dür, 2008b). Depending on the scope of a study, these alternative methodologies may also be applied simultaneously.

Overall, political decision making is a complex multi-stage process. To be able to fully grasp the relations among its actors, one has to account for interactions under these multiple stages. The fact also remains that some policy issues are many-sided and involve several details. Take for instance the issues of the right to protection of women from violence on which the women’s human rights groups actively lobby. The issue has many aspects and requires a holistic approach. Legal measures for the realization of this objective could be both preventive and protective, including the establishment of the relevant institutions, agreement on an appropriate definition of violence, as well as imposition of some proportional punishments. The government may take certain measures to protect women from violence, yet fail to meet the demands of women’s human rights organizations lobbying for further diversification of such protective and preventive measures. In such a situation, one can only talk about partial lobbying success of women organizations.

In order to achieve profound understanding of the Turkish CSOs’ participation to the political sphere, future studies should also concentrate on the reasons for variation in decision making access and lobbying success of different

CSOs. Such a variation can be attributed to different factors. Among these, the EU impact had been widely discussed, yet it is still necessary to explore how the utilization of the EU instruments in tandem with other domestic dynamics motivate or discourage successful decision making participation of the CSOs in Turkey. In this respect, future studies still face the daunting task of contextualizing the CSOs' lobbying in an ever changing context of civil society-state relations in Turkey.

### **3. Explaining the Decision Making Influence of the Turkish Civil Society**

Several alternative explanatory factors would account for differences in the CSOs' ability to exert political influence. In the interest group literature, these factors were classified under the broad categories of institutional context, organizational characteristics and issue characteristics. The institutional context mainly involves the rules surrounding the policymaking process and the degree of democratic accountability of a political system (Mahoney, 2007). These factors are generally deemed as constant in single country studies. However, in ever-shifting domestic political contexts like that of Turkey, the institutional context may undergo sudden changes to alter the responsiveness of the government. Also, different governments by different political parties may replace one another and in such instances one cannot expect responsiveness to remain constant.

Between July 2016 and July 2018, Turkey had been ruled under state of emergency which simply excluded not only the CSOs, but also the Turkish Parliament from effectively taking part in the decision making processes. The emergency rule represented a blow, both quantitatively and qualitatively, undermining civil societal activity. According to the European Commission's Report (2018: 16), more than 1400 CSOs were closed under the emergency rule and the remaining groups had to operate under more restrictive circumstances. Nevertheless, 358 of these organizations including several of those working in the field of human rights were reported to reopen (European Commission 2018: 16). It would be interesting for future studies to investigate the lobbying experiences of this specific group during the state of emergency period in Turkey unpacking the reasons for their closure and reopening, as well as the impact of their individual efforts and the EU connection for getting back to ordinary. In a referendum held in April 2017, Turkey adopted presidentialism as its new system of government. At the general elections held in June 2018, this systemic change took effect which points to a major transformation of the whole political

institutional context with implications over the modus operandi of state-civil society relations in Turkey.

Organizational characteristics of the CSOs may also account for their influence over political decision making. These could be the resources spend on lobbying (Dür, 2005; Woll, 2007) and the nature of the lobbying coalitions (Baumgartner et al., 2009; Klüver, 2010) –i.e. the level of competition among different advocates and their relative strength. CSOs may choose to commit their resources to establishing contacts with decision-makers or alternatively devote their resources to the mobilization of the general public through media campaigns, press conferences, press releases and dissemination of research, as well as boycotts and demonstrations. The amount of resources employed in the service of these different strategies may impact an organization's chances of influencing the policy outcomes. Taking into account the staff and budget dedicated to lobbying, there are studies which demonstrated the weakness of financial resources in predicting success of the interest group influence (Furlong, 1997: 327; Leech et. al., 2007). Using similar methodologies, future studies on the Turkish civil society may examine the degree to which the EU's financial empowerment had been instrumental for the CSOs participation and engagement to decision making.

With respect to their lobbying on some policy issues, the CSOs are supported or opposed by other policy advocates who have vested interests on the same issue. Organizations with similar preferences tend to rally around these preferences –that is, they form lobbying coalitions- and engage in collective efforts to pull the content of the final policy towards their ideal points. For instance, a plethora of Turkish CSOs assembled and established platforms to influence the possible contents of a new constitution which was once high on the political agenda of the ruling *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* [Justice and Development Party, AKP] of Turkey. These include, for instance, *Anayasa Platformu Girişimi* [Constitution Platform Initiative], *Anayasa Kadın Platformu* [Constitution Women's Platform], *Yeni Anayasa Platformu* [New Constitution Platform], *Özgürlükçü Anayasa Platformu* [Libertarian Constitution Platform], *Muhafazakar Demokratlar Platformu* [Conservative Democrats Platform], *Genç Anayasa Hareketi* [Young Constitution Movement]. Through these platforms several organizations had tried to generate a public debate, write reports and organized conferences to convey their demands and proposals about the contents of a new constitution. CSOs preferred to work through these ad hoc issue coalitions given the reasonable conviction that compared to individual efforts, coalitions would have more potential in terms of influencing decision-making. Other two prominent examples are *Avrupa Hareketi* [European Movement] which was formed in 2002 and *Türkiye Platformu* [Turkey Platform] which was

formed in 2004. Under these coalition structures several CSOs came together and pressured the government to carry out the expected reforms.

It is critical to consider and test the size of such lobbying coalitions as one of the key variables in determining lobbying success (Baumgartner et al., 2009). However, intensity of collective lobbying efforts may also account for the ability to influence decision-making about a reform issue. The strength of a lobbying coalition may not only depend on the size of its membership relative to the counter lobbying coalition, but also on the magnitude of collective efforts directed towards the policy-making process. In a recent study, Zihnioğlu (2018) emphasizes the importance of alliances among the traditional Turkish CSOs (such as non-governmental organizations, trade unions or associations) and new civic actors which has looser structures and join in ad hoc campaigns. Zihnioğlu shows how these alliances create opportunity structures that would facilitate interest realization. In a similar vein, Bee and Kaya (2017) underline how some critical macro events of Turkey have led to emergence of new alliances of solidarity such as *occupygezi* movement in June 2013 and *Oy ve Ötesi* [Vote and Beyond] Initiative starting from 2014 local elections, both emerged as spontaneous bottom-up mobilization processes embracing all kinds of groups in society. Such alliances represent unconventional structures of collective civic engagement, able to motivate a plethora of organized groups within civil society, young activists, environmentalists and yet others. Bee and Kaya suggest that these bottom-up mobilization processes “gain importance only at key moments, when windows of opportunities to initiate processes of social change open up and put into question the legitimacy of the political system to act in matters of public concern” (2017: 318). Nevertheless, it is critical to observe how, for instance, following its initiation first during 2014 local election process the Vote and Beyond Initiative continues to represent a strong watchdog against electoral fraud in Turkey as it fosters and organizes active participation of civil society and voluntary individuals to take charge of confirming the polling reports collected during the last five elections in Turkey. Overall, such new platforms of collective civic engagement appear to have established themselves as the new powerful actors of the Turkish civil society.

The number of powerful actors within a coalition may also account for its level of influence. For instance, the AKP government organized a series of workshops between June 2009 and January 2010 inviting several Alevi associations and foundations to partake in this deliberative decision making process. This was the first time that the Alevi groups were conferred about reform content. The workshop process provided a platform for deliberation with more than 300 stakeholders. Representatives of diverse interests within the Alevi Community, academicians, representatives from *Diyanet* [the Directorate of

Religious Affairs] and a plethora human rights organizations were all present in the workshop process. Questions about the Alevi identity, the relevance of endowment of a minority status to Alevis, the legal status of the Alevis' religious places were among issues that were debated in the Alevi workshops. During the workshop process, the Alevi organizations failed to speak with one voice due to different approaches concerning the underlying problems of their community. Leading Alevi umbrella organizations such as the Alevi Bektashi Federation, the Alevi Foundations Federation, the Alevi Associations Federation and the World Ahlul Bayt Foundation all participated in the workshop process. Unlike the lobbying on gender mainstreaming, these organizations were unable to present a united front with respect to the details of their lobbying positions. They had been in disagreement about proper representation by an umbrella platform structure and the workshop process exacerbated the fragmented nature of the Alevi lobbying. Alevi organizations' solidarity was also challenged as representatives from *Diyanet* and academics from the university departments of religious studies represented Sunni interests and provided a successful counter lobbying. Besides, the interests of this Sunni lobbying groups corresponded to the policy interests of the ruling AKP. In this respect, there were several impediments to the Alevis' ability to realize their interests as an outcome of the Alevi Opening process. Nevertheless, with the workshop process, it was the first time that the Alevi groups found a chance to express their alternative demands and bargain among themselves, with other stakeholders, as well as with the government.

During the EU candidacy and accession processes of Turkey, collective lobbying strategy was effectively utilized by women's human rights organizations which constructed unified policy positions with respect to specific reform issues –i.e. women's labor force participation- and then lobbied the government via their ad hoc coalitions and platforms –i.e. Women's Labor and Employment Initiative Platform. In another instance in 2011, 233 women organizations participated in the formulation of a draft law on the elimination of all kinds of violence against women which was formulated as an alternative to a draft law prepared by the AKP government. The women organizations specialized on the issue of violence against women –such as *Mor Çati* [Purple Roof]- laid the groundwork for the draft law and represented other women organizations through such a coalition structure. This collective lobbying should have contributed to women organizations' ability to achieve a legal framework at least covering their most emphasized expectations.

Interest group scholars also address issue characteristics as additional factors that would account for the level of lobbying success. Those proposed in the literature are the scope, the salience, the conflictuality and complexity of policy issues, or the occurrence of a focusing event (see Dür and de Bievre,

2007b; Mahoney, 2007; Dür, 2008a; Baumgartner et al., 2009). In the Turkish case, the issue of minority rights emerges as a major source of polarization. During the Alevi opening process, the interested Alevi groups could not agree among themselves about the content of reforms that would address the Alevis' grievances and they were also countered by a powerful Sunni lobbying. Such a polarization among alternative lobbying groups points to a high level of conflictuality of the Alevi Opening process which was utilized as a pretext for the government's indisposition to adopt the requested reforms. In essence, despite differences in nuance, Alevi organizations issued common concerns. Yet, they were unable to effectively emphasize this commonality. For instance, the CEM Foundation and the Alevi Foundations Federation and the World Ahlul Bayt Federation preferred to follow a policy of reconciliation with the government hoping to produce negotiable policies that would not contravene the policy contours of the Sunni interests. Others such as the Alevi Bektashi Federation and the Pir Sultan Abdal Culture Association considered these concessions as betrayal, distanced themselves from the government and concentrated on outside lobbying in the form of public protests. One of the major grievance of the Alevi community concerns the legal status of their places of worship (Cem Houses). Since Alevism has been considered as a sect under Islam, Alevis were denied from religious places other than mosques, whereas their religious rituals are radically unusual to those of the Sunnis. Alevi organizations had been united about their demand for an official status to Cem Houses which continues to represent a strong pressure for the AKP government to carry out the necessary reforms. Moreover, on 26 April 2016 the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled in favor of the Alevi organizations that the Cem Houses should be granted legal status and Alevi religious leaders should be employed by the state. The government officials occasionally and in different election manifestos and through democratization packages announced that they will soon grant such status. Yet, the Alevi community still awaits the demanded changes. Another concern of the Alevi community is the compulsory religious education in Turkey and its implications over the right to religious conviction of non-Sunni believers like Alevis. There are also different policy positions on this reform issue. Whereas the Alevi Bektashi Foundation demands complete removal of such an education, the CEM Foundation offered revisions to the content of the school curricula. Moreover, Sunni groups favor continuation of this education which prevents ability of the Alevi groups to provide a strong lobbying block in favor of termination of the compulsory religious instruction in Turkey. 2007 ECHR ruling pushed for revision to the content of the state provided religious education, yet excessive emphasis on the Sunni faith of Islam is still preserved in the school curricula.

The removal of the headscarf ban in higher education was yet another conflictual religious reform issue, which was subject to lobbying of competing groups located on different ideological ends and thus adopted alternative policy positions. Some civil society advocates like Freedom of Thought and Educational Rights Association (ÖZGÜR-DER), the Association for Human Rights and Solidarity for the Oppressed (MAZLUM-DER) and Women's Rights against Discrimination Association (AK-DER) have launched active campaigns for the removal of the ban. The AKP government also framed the issue within a human rights discourse and made a few attempts to lift the ban. For instance, in 2008 the AKP government had sought the support of *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* [Nationalist Action Party, MHP] in order to loosen the restrictions on wearing headscarf at the public universities. Yet, on paper, the ban remained in effect until 2013 given the 2007 and 2008 judgments of the Turkish Constitutional Court which used to act as an effective institutional veto player. Besides, the EU member states followed different policies concerning the headscarf ban. In this respect, the EU simply refrained from commenting on the issue and preferred not to take sides with respect to the related dispute in Turkey. Finally, the ECHR also ruled against the claim that the ban violates right to religious freedom and education.<sup>1</sup> Overall, the issue of the headscarf ban demonstrated that a lobbying organization may become unable to exert any influence over issues about which there are clear demarcations in society and accordingly about which there is no accord of viewpoints among the powerful actors of the decision-making process. The above examples, overall, indicates how the level of conflict over an issue may negatively impact an organization's chances of wielding influence on the final decision, irrespective of its ideological compatibility with the government.

If a research focuses on decision-making participation of civil society in an EU negotiating country, it additionally has to consider the potential of this extra channel of influence. As discussed above, many scholars of Turkish civil society already sought to analyze this connection and observed the transforming impact of EU over civil society empowerment in Turkey. This study asserts that future studies on Turkish civil society should be more attentive to the interplay between the EU impact and a set of domestic dynamics in giving shape to the realm of the Turkish civil society.

Overall, future research should consider the specific legal issues and CSOs' policy positions and their proposals, their level of resource commitment, coalition-building and EU-level lobbying with respect to reform of each policy issue. In the past, some groups within civil society managed to establish umbrella

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1 The European Court of Human Rights, Case of Leyla Şahin v. Turkey (Application No. 44774/98) Judgment, Strasbourg, November 10, 2005, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/48abd56ed.pdf>.



organizations on issues of common concern cooperating with the like-minded organizations. Yet, there are plenty of CSOs which work for similar causes although they do not come together in formal coalitions. As Mahoney puts it “these advocates need not be allied in an official ad hoc coalition, they may not even be communicating, but if all are pushing in the same direction, it should make a difference in whether they attain their goals in the final outcome” (Mahoney, 2007: 54). Coalition size is the number of active groups in civil society which holds the same position with an organization working on a specific reform issue. If this number is high, that organization should have more chances of attaining its lobbying goals. Future studies may also inquire about the extent to which the EU institutions convey the preferences of civil society to domestic decision-makers and whether their intermediation helps CSOs realize their reform related preferences.

## Conclusions

Interactions between the actors of civil society and the actors of political sphere, as well as the CSOs activities that aim at supporting or questioning decisional outcomes necessitate us to inquire on the value of CSOs’ participation to politics. If CSOs’ role in decision making continues to increase or decrease, then it has implications for political science research. The issue of civil society’s role under Turkey’s EU process has become a highly debated issue; but this review emphasizes that these discussions need to build on more reliable empirical evidence since there had been major transformations in the EU process itself and the institutional context under which the state and CSOs interact in Turkey. Although empirical investigation of civil society’s influence over decision making is a tricky task, the issue of influence is too important to be neglected. Utilizing the previous empirical literature on the interest group influence; this review points to a need for investigation of different set of factors that may determine such influence in the Turkish case which has also undergone some major systemic transformations from parliamentarism to state of emergency and lately to presidentialism. Future studies should be able to account for the alternative ways in which such systemic transformations may account for the CSOs decision making participation.

Especially under Turkey’s EU candidacy and early stages of EU accession, several Turkish CSOs had become active participants of the decision making processes, however their influence over policy outcomes varied considerably due to potential factors discussed in this paper. The weight of two independent factors loom large in the interest group literature. These are the nature of lobbying coalitions and the conflict over policy issues. For making inferences about civil

society's current patterns of access and participation to the policy processes, scholars may trace the unfolding of these dynamics together with the impact of the EU's support in the Turkish case. With respect to certain policy issues, the EU's preferences and proposals for reform may not always (sufficiently) correspond to those advocated by certain CSOs, or the EU may abstain from presenting a particular policy position. Concerning such instances, scholars should further dig into the alternative strategies utilized by the CSOs for gaining advantage over a policy debate. Furthermore, the contextual characteristics of participation may not be the same for each and every group within civil society. For instance, the establishment of Women Men Equal Opportunities Commission as a specialized commission under the Turkish Parliament in March, 2009 fundamentally effected the women's human rights organizations' ability to communicate their policy preferences to the political level. Also institutions such as the Directorate General for the Status and Problems of Women served a prominent role in the formulation of laws and policies to enhance women's human rights in Turkey. The relative impact of such alternative access structures should be taken into account when evaluating the efficacy of different CSOs' lobbying and interest realization.

In the Turkish context, especially the competitive discourses developed around the main dividing lines such as secularism versus religious conservatism, as well as Turkish versus Kurdish national identities lead to alternative conceptions of necessary democratic reforms. These conflicts will continue to dominate the Turkish political scene and have the potential to lead to further polarizations within the sphere of civil society. Sharpening of such polarizations may serve the government which at certain instances had been disinclined to follow policies that would remediate the related human rights grievances. On that note, CSOs may strategically seek cooperative connections which need not be permanent and which could instead be issue-based and formed to promote a common policy position.

All in all, lobbying success cannot be explained as a consequence of a single specific factor. Turkey's transforming political context necessitates CSOs to reconsider their channels for interactions both with the political level as well as among themselves. Whereas some groups gained plenty of experience with respect to these processes, others are still new in the game and try to puzzle out the best strategies for attaining their interests. Future studies first need to identify the overall aims of the CSOs and then their intent for political decision making participation, monitor transformations in the post-state of emergency era, as well as observe the legal rearrangements through Turkey's switch to presidentialism. Additionally, changes in the level of ideological fragmentations within civil society, as well as the evolution of the Turkey-EU negotiations all point to a

highly dynamic context. All these dynamics interact to determine a future role for the Turkish civil society and adjust its potential for constituting a drive towards normalization and re-democratization in Turkey.

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