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Exchanging Ideas on Europe: Civil Society and EU Enlargement

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Lost in translation: Turkish NGOs and the uncertain outcomes of EU civil society policy

Abstract

This paper delves into the processes of social and political change that underlie Turkey's pre-accession negotiations for EU membership, an area where Turkish NGOs have featured as one of many instruments to exact such change. These change processes – collectively referred to here as “Europeanization” – are uncertain in their outcomes. The paper contends that the conceptual lens of sociological institutionalism offers useful insights to understanding how the actions of local actors contribute to unexpected outcomes. Sociological institutionalism emphasises the informal rules and norms that influence decision-making. The institutional influence of the EU is therefore contingent on more than mere threats or conditionality; the recipient actors must also internalise the responsibilities placed on them. Drawing on the case of EU funding for Turkish NGOs, the paper identifies a gap between the liberal democratic ideals that inform EU policy and the reality of how Turkish civil society operates in practice. Moreover, this lack of congruence generates space for local actors to negotiate such gaps in locally meaningful ways. It is here that the conceptual lens of sociological institutionalism offers a useful way of understanding those dynamics of the accession process that may be best explained in sociocultural rather than rational, procedural terms.

Introduction

The EU accession negotiations, by their very nature, crystallise around processes of change. It should therefore come as no surprise that local nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), particularly those working on issues of political advocacy, feature highly on the list of potential partners in the local context. Indeed, the EU has a track record of treating civil society funding policy as a support mechanism for the social and political changes required by the accession process. The purpose of this

paper is to challenge the utility of this approach. Is it realistic, in the case of Turkey, for the EU to frame the outcomes of civil society funding in terms of ‘strengthened’ civil society and ‘democratization?’ The logic of the EU approach to funding is rooted in distinctly normative, liberal democratic ideals and rational-technical approaches to policy making and conception of projects. This logic tends to regard NGOs as neutral instruments that can facilitate Turkey’s accession process in particular, pre-defined ways. Yet in practice every system, including that of EU funding to Turkish NGOs, needs to be internalised before it garners meaning and relevance in the local context. If we are to understand the impact of the external funding on the NGOs and the way Europeanization is likely to unfold in the Turkish context, it is important to delve deeper into the sociocultural processes that underpin the changes that are taking place.

The paper argues that this gap between the policy process and NGO responses on the ground can also be explained by employing aspects of the framework of ‘new institutionalism’. It is argued that the approach embraced by the EU resonates with rational choice institutionalism, whilst the behaviour of NGOs on the ground, particularly their varied responses to EU funding, can be best explained by sociological institutionalism because of its emphasis on the importance of the informal rules and norms that are contextually defined. Thus, the paper suggests that a process that on the surface appears linear and top-down unfolds in a more multifaceted way in practice, and the NGOs involved exhibit a great deal of agency in their responses to EU funding. Therefore, in the case of Turkish NGOs, the outcomes of EU policy aiming at Europeanization remain unpredictable and uncertain. Whilst the vision that motivates the funding agenda agrees with a certain perspective on Europeanization promoted by EU policy, in reality a gap is created between what EU policymakers feel ought to take place, and how NGOs experience the policy process for themselves.

The paper is formed of three sections. The first offers a broad entry point to the debates on Europeanization, with a view on highlighting issues of relevance to this paper. In particular, the relevant dimensions of new institutionalism – rational choice institutionalism and sociological institutionalism – are accounted for. The second section interrogates in more detail the policy processes that surround EU funding for NGOs. It is argued that EU policy towards civil society reveals a bundle of normative assumptions that echo the rational choice model of new institutionalism. This is illustrated by outlining a particular policy, entitled “civil society dialogue” and by analysing the way civil society funding has been operationalised in practice by looking at the role of the Central Finance and Contracts Unit (CFCU) in NGO fund management.

The third and final section explores the multifaceted responses that NGOs exhibit in relation to EU civil society policy. The analysis here draws on sociological institutionalism, focusing on the agency of the NGO actors to respond in a variety of ways. These responses are informed by the contextually defined informal rules and norms. The paper goes on to suggest four roles that characterise NGO behaviour in the EU funding context; translators, brokers, navigators and resisters.

1 Shades of Europeanization

Europeanization is best described as a process that requires explanation, rather than as a theory in its own right (Graziano and Vink 2008; Radaelli 2004). At its broadest, Europeanization alludes to the relationship between the norms, policies, rules and regulations that exist at the European level, and those that are present at the national level. It may refer to a top-down process where EU directives and policies are being

adopted by nation states. Alternatively, Europeanization can be seen as a bottom-up process where domestic pressures feed into the decisions of national actors, which in turn guide the forms of governance at the European level. These two sources of influence are likely to interact, working as a two-way process that determines the final form Europeanization takes (Kazamias and Featherstone 2001 p. 6).¹ Europeanization can also be understood as a purely domestic process, where local actors, local problems and local discourses engage with “European variables”, and where the outcomes feed directly back into the domestic environment (Radaelli 2004).

When discussing Europeanization and civil society in the Turkish context, the following conceptual map that disaggregates the different meanings attached to the concept is a useful starting point. Diez, Agnantopoulos and Kaliber break Europeanization down to its policy, political, societal and discursive elements (2005). Policy Europeanization refers to the impact of European integration on policy making, focusing primarily on the “goodness of fit” between what is required by the next step of integration and what already exists within the country in question, followed by domestic adjustments where appropriate (Risse et al. 2001). Political Europeanization focuses on the impact of European integration on political institutions and on their ability to deliver the reforms requested. In addition, this field of study concerns itself with the impact European integration on a variety of political actors, such as political parties and interest groups. Different political agents are affected in different ways, as each agent may be hindered or empowered by certain consequences of the integration process. Societal Europeanization, on the other hand, focuses on questions of how social norms and identity formation may be pegged onto perceptions of European integration. Finally, discursive Europeanization pertains to the study of how public discourses reference the EU – whether, and to what extent the language of “Europe” enters the domestic public discourse. It is relatively easy to conceive how EU NGO funding can lead to policy and even political Europeanization, but societal and discursive Europeanization are much more contingent processes, dependent on local uptake rather than imposition from above.

“New institutionalism” offers a useful framework conceptualising the processes of domestic adaptation in view of Europeanization (Kazamias and Featherstone 2001; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2006; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2008). Rational choice institutionalism supposes that actors’ behaviour is driven by a “strategic calculus”, that actors have fixed preferences and always employ strategies that aim to maximise self-interest (Hall and Taylor 1996). It emphasises the role of major EU institutions, such as the European Commission and European Parliament, as the structuring agents between other actors and is a framework often favoured by scholars of European integration (Kazamias and Featherstone 2001). With a focus on formal institutions and the actions of member states, this strand of thinking suggests that actors form their preferences through a rational calculation. Another angle examines agenda-setting power as a source of influence (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2006 p. 195). This type of approach resonates more with the areas of political and policy Europeanization.

Sociological institutionalist (or constructivist institutionalist) approaches, on the other hand, emphasise the importance of the informal rules and norms that

¹ Although the literature most often deals with Europeanization within the EU borders, the dynamics in the enlargement context are principally the same and the same literature has generally been adopted (see, for example: Bulmer 2008; Radaelli 2000).

influence actors' decision making². When an institution influences the behaviour of actors, this is not simply down to a threat of sanctions or conditionalities that may have been imposed. These actors. It is also a question of "socialization", whereby actors must internalize the responsibilities, rules and norms placed upon them by the institution. This in turn affects how they see their interests (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2006: 395). In similar fashion, Diez describes Europeanization as concept that energizes actors to act by creating certain conditions, but it does not prescribe a certain way of behaving. It remains an enabling concept, but not as something that causes things directly (1999). It is the decisions made by the actors involved that ultimately determine the outcome of Europeanization. The structures of European integration and of Europeanization are not rigid but vague, and link up with the societal and discursive elements of Europeanization.

What is common to all these conceptual tools and explains their relevance in the enlargement context, is the underlying focus on change. EU policy in general, and NGO funding in particular, is anchored to the Copenhagen Criteria which sets out the political, economic and policy reforms for all new member states and form the backbone of the programme for change. This paper argues that the way in which EU policy is formulated through a top-down, technical and depoliticised process grounded in liberal democratic normative ideals stands at odds with the experiences of Turkish NGOs on the ground. The reactions of domestic actors are not purely strategic reactions to European influences explained by rational decision making in response to project funding; these reactions are in fact moulded by the local experiences and influenced by local socio-political debates therefore uncertain and unpredictable.

2 The processes of policy Europeanization

EU civil society policy has a strong normative character, rooted in a liberal democratic understanding of the role NGOs play in society. Furthermore, this policy is operationalised in a very technical manner, through projects within which NGOs are expected to play a neutral, instrumental and depoliticised role. This approach to policy and projects resonates with the rational choice institutionalist model of explaining how policy Europeanization unfolds. Two examples serve to illustrate this: an evaluation of the normative assumptions underlying the EU policy documents for a programme entitled "Civil Society Dialogue", and an assessment of the technical role played by the Central Finance and Contracts Unit (CFCU) in monitoring NGO projects.

The policy process is often approached as rational and objective process, where policy is regarded as an instrument to be employed in pursuit of a predefined end result. Such policy is generally paired with an assumption that it is based on an objective criteria that has an air of universality and is seen as a technical, controlled exercise (Dryzek 1990). Even where policy makers recognize the shortcomings of a rational approach, it is not easy to depart from it in favour of alternatives. The expected role of NGOs is informed by two salient assumptions about what the societal role of NGOs ought to be. First, NGOs are expected to challenge the autonomy of the state and in doing so check state power (Mercer 2002). Such understanding is largely

² Historical institutionalism considers the short-term and long-term impact of institutions. It agrees on the initial premise of rational choice institutionalism – that institutions and actors are bound in a strategic game of interest bargaining – but foresees the development of path dependencies in the long term.

informed by NGO experiences in Eastern Europe and Latin America, and supports the neo-liberal view of state-civil society relations. Civil society and state are placed in an antagonistic relationship, or a zero-sum game for autonomy and legitimacy (Trägårdh 2007). A civil society autonomous from the state is seen as a prerequisite of democracy, making NGOs central to processes of democratization. The second assumption suggests that advocacy NGOs are inherently “good”. The focus tends to have been on the positive, countervailing force NGOs collectively present to the state, without problematizing the nature of civil society itself (Howell and Pearce 2001). By being part of civil society, NGOs are part of the democratic process and together form a bulwark against the state. In this way there is a degree of assumed homogeneity across NGOs, in that they are all meant to share this democratising characteristic (Chandhoke 2007). These normative assumptions at the base of EU civil society policy are in turn translated into practical initiatives through the medium of projects.

Nature of projects

Projects are rarely regarded as particularly good tools for altering human behaviour. In development studies projects are criticised for imposing a linear and technical way of thinking, drawing a straight line between a problem and the policy designed to address it (Ferguson 1990; Fowler 1997; Mosse 2004). Yet projects have remained the dominant force in engaging NGOs in donor funded programmes (Tvedt 1998). Projects encapsulate a rational method for finding a way to implement a given policy agenda while keeping the chains of causality short. The logical sequence of activities – setting the policy agenda, identifying the problem on the bases of this agenda, designing a policy intervention that is aimed at dealing with the problem, implementing the policy, and evaluating its success – surrounding the project has its advantages as far as fund-disbursing mechanisms go (Long 2001).

The advantage of the project is the ease with which accountability measures can be embedded in the funding programs. Projects have pre-defined objectives that NGOs promise to fulfil; time constraints NGOs promise to abide by; and budget frames that detail how the grant money can be spent together with quantifiable outcomes against which success is measured. In this way projects remain attractive because they simplify the complex process of social change into bite-sized chunks that are easily managed (Fowler 1997). For the NGOs, these requirements offer a concrete way to demonstrate success and make donor expectations transparent. For donors, this perceived simplicity makes projects an attractive option to fund. It would be unrealistic to expect these conditions not to exist.

Yet, it is also important not to lose sight of policy as an inherently political activity. Various interests are constantly entering the process, and policy outcomes are the results of a constantly evolving bargaining process (Gordon et al. 1977). Instead, I argue, we should see the project embedded in on-going social processes where success cannot accrue without consideration for the broader context in which the actors operate. Although policy as a rational, technical process depoliticizes a naturally political process (Ferguson 1990), placing the emphasis on the institutions instead of the individual actors involved (Long 2001), such approaches remain largely favoured among policy makers.

Civil Society Dialogue

The aim of civil society dialogue is to make sure that both Turkish and EU citizens are sufficiently informed about the other prior to accession. The more efforts there are

at exchanging ideas across the EU-Turkey borders, the more ideological cleavages can be bridged, and differences of opinion ironed out. NGOs are seen as key agents within this process of dialogue, asked to facilitate the accession process by way of establishing a channel of communication between the two sides in the negotiations.

The broad contours of this policy are spelled in a communication titled “Civil Society Dialogue between the EU and Candidate Countries” The document claims to draw on the lessons learnt from previous rounds of enlargement and, as the timeline suggests, was allegedly written with Turkey’s accession negotiations specifically in mind.³ The emergence of civil society dialogue represents an important policy shift that further centralises the role of civil society in the accession process. For example, the communication earmarks as much as eight to ten per cent of Turkey’s total annual accession financial assistance to civil society related activities (European Commission 2005). This dialogue brings a broader set of benefits along with it. By way of increasing the participation of civil society in political, cultural and economic development the dialogue also supports:

[...] a lively and vibrant civil society in candidate countries, which is key to the consolidation of human rights and democracy, in line with the political criteria for accession (European Commission 2005).

The most extensive and comprehensive commitment to increased civil society dialogue has come in the form a new grants programme, which also illustrates how exactly the policy becomes operationalized through projects. A look at on illustrates how “Promotion of the Civil Society Dialogue between Turkey and the European Union” ran from 2006 to December 2009 and committed to awarding grants amounting to €19,3 million in total (Civil Society Dialogue Project 2009). The programme aims to strengthen contacts and the exchange of experiences between civil society in the EU and Turkey, and to ensure better understanding on both sides of the history, culture and values of the other (European Commission 2006b p. 1). The development of civil society dialogue with Turkey is underlined by an expectation that this will contribute to a better informed public opinion, to a sharing of experiences across the EU-Turkey border. These outcomes are expected to increase civil society participation in the political, cultural and economic development of Turkey, and to aid in the “development of a lively and vibrant civil society, which is key to the consolidation of democracy” (European Commission 2006b pp. 4-5). There seems to an instrumental undertone to these projects, seeing NGOs as vehicles that aim to deliver rather specific outcomes, attached to the broader aims of the accession process. This example illustrates the universal and instrumental characteristics of EU policy approach and its alignment with a rational institutionalist understanding of processes of Europeanization and offers a strong indication that the focus of EU policy is clearly on political and policy Europeanization.

The Central Finance and Contracts Unit

How these policies translate into projects is largely dependent on the management structures that oversee the project cycle. Since 2004, the EU pre-accession process has introduced a new layer of management in the NGO enterprise, the Central Finance and Contracts Unit (CFCU). It was set up as part of the EU pre-accession process to oversee all of EU financial support towards Turkey’s accession process and remains

³ Interview with a senior civil servant, EU delegation to Turkey, Ankara, 03 April 2008.

the organisation that is at the heart of project funding, tasked with tendering, evaluating, contracting, accounting, payments and reporting (CFCU 2009). Given its role as a middleman, it is important to pay attention to the apparent disconnect that exists between the technical and bureaucratic role of the CFCU and how NGOs operate in practice.

Possibly the most important concern for the CFCU is over accountability.⁴ It is essentially a Turkish organisation with responsibility over money invested by the EU, and for this reason CFCU takes its role as an accountant very seriously. My interviews with CFCU staff also highlighted the rigorous guidelines that govern what CFCU can and cannot do. These guidelines require, for example, that all projects tendered with a value of €10,000 or more are accompanied by logical framework and concept note documents. The budgets that come with project proposals have specific rules about how the grant money should be allocated under the different areas of the project, such as human resource costs and administrative costs. During on-going projects, CFCU holds frequent meetings with the NGOs involved, to ensure that accounts are kept in good order and release funding for the next phase of the project only once the accounts have been checked and approved. CFCU is also preoccupied with upward accountability, as it is required to report biannually to the European Commission on its activities. It is these accountability processes that take centre stage in the role CFCU assumes in its relationship with NGOs and dominate the daily project management. As long as the project unfolds as the project proposal anticipated, in accordance with the proposed logical framework and the financial spending plan, it is expected to make a positive contribution and regarded as a success.

NGOs make up only a small part of CFCU's mandate. In fact, majority of CFCU work involves overseeing the financial contracts of EU funding to ministries and other public bodies. The formal procedures rarely allow flexibility for the fact that many NGOs are often run on volunteer bases, with staff working part-time and lack the capacity to deal effectively with the accounting aspect of project management. The NGOs find it therefore very demanding to comply with the requirements, and feel that the way in which the CFCU operates lacks an understanding of the way in which civil society organisation carry their work, and as a result hinder rather than help NGOs.

3 NGO response to Europeanization

The aforementioned bureaucratic, technical-rational demands solicit a broad range of reactions from Turkish NGOs, as these organisations embrace, appropriate or reject the project mentality that EU funding introduces. These reactions arise from the fact that there is a disconnect between EU projects and the everyday practices of NGOs anchored in local socio-political realities. Out of this disconnect, however, arise opportunities for local actors to generate new ways of conducting their work, new ways of bridging the discrepancies that exist between the EU policy logic and their own experiences. It is a perspective that extends beyond the linear relationship between inputs and outputs of a project to an appreciation of a much broader range of outcomes that need to be considered. It also leads to questions over the appropriateness of project-based support as a means of bringing about change. NGOs are not mere passive recipients of project funding but react to projects in locally

⁴ This section is based on interviews conducted with representatives of the CFCU in Ankara, June 26 and 27 2008.

relevant ways, and find ways to “massage” the funding process in ways that delivers a more favourable (and unanticipated) result.

Consequently, I identify four roles that surface from the efforts by NGOs to reconcile their own interests with the reality of the project culture. Two of these roles originate from the work of David Lewis and David Mosse, who describe NGOs as “brokers” and “translators” (Lewis and Mosse 2006). In addition, in the Turkish context I have conceptualised two additional roles, “navigators” and “antagonists”. By employing this fourfold framework, it is possible to begin to conceptualise the colourful array of ways that NGOs in Turkey generate new, positive outcomes for themselves. Moreover, these observations relate in particular to the societal and discursive elements of Europeanization.

This framework draws heavily on the actor-oriented approach within development studies, which developed as a critique of the linear and normative nature of policy processes. The approach moves away from emphasising structural and rational strategies, instead considering the relationship between policy and practice as “a messy free-for-all in which processes are often uncontrollable and results uncertain” (Lewis and Mosse 2006 p. 9). The approach endeavours to develop a conceptual framework that is more attentive to the contextual nuances and offers a useful starting point for considering the uncertainty of outcomes. Social life is heterogeneous in that it comprises a wide diversity of social forms and cultural repertoires, even under seemingly homogeneous circumstances. For this reason, it is necessary to study how such differences are produced, reproduced, consolidated and transformed, and to identify the social processes involved, not merely the structural outcomes (Long 2001). “Social interface” is a key concept within the actor-oriented approach, looking at the points of linkage where external factors become internalised by local actors. In the case at hand, EU-funded projects to support the work of NGOs can be considered to be such interfaces. A key part of the analysis is to understand the interaction between the various actors, to show how the interest groups, through negotiation, interpret the processes surrounding a planned intervention differently (Long 2001 p. 72). This style of inquiry puts us on a track that asks us to pay attention to the diversity, discrepancies and uncertainty that are present in development interventions.

The actor-oriented approach has made an important contribution by communicating a persuasive critique of the structural-rational approach to development, and is therefore an invaluable stepping-stone. Yet, as Lewis and Mosse insightfully observe, there are strategies and methods of acting that are not explained by what takes place in the social interface, where it is necessary to look at the broader issues of power and structure; “it is the appearance of congruence between problems and interventions, the coherence of policy logic, and the authority of expertise that is really surprising and requires explanation” (2006).

It is in this vein that Lewis and Mosse introduce the ideas of “brokerage” and “translation” as concepts that complement the work initiated by the actor-oriented methods. This is aimed to push the analysis further, to consider both the agency of the actors involved as well as the influence of existing power structures on these actors. It is therefore not merely a case of looking at how external factors are internalised, but also how this works the other way around; how internal factors may become externalised. The remainder of the paper addresses exactly this by looking at the roles NGOs assume as translators and brokers, as per the framework offered by Lewis and Mosse, and expand this framework by suggesting the two additional roles of antagonists and navigators.

NGOs as translators

The characteristics of a translator are crystallised in the operations of the Civil Society Development Centre (CSDC), given that one of its key roles has been quite literally to translate the EU-driven ideas about civil society funding to suit Turkish reality. The original motivation in setting up the CSDC was to build a halfway house between local NGOs and the European Union funding programmes. To this end the centre has run its own project application programme and been responsible for selecting which projects it wishes to fund. Staffed by Turkish civil society activists with long experience of working in the field, the CSDC offers advice and support on project management, and in so doing opens the door for less capable NGOs to access funding. Through its operations the CSDC works towards a locally relevant vision of the EU funding agenda. The centre has embraced the way in which EU operationalises its civil society funding, whilst at the same time working to reinterpret the purpose of its activities and role so that it fits in better with local needs. It is a prime example of a local actor as translator, an organisation that has taken up the ideas and actions introduced by EU funding, and then renegotiating these further in an effort to reshape their meaning in a way that is more contextually relevant.

The outcomes of the first two CSDC Advisory Board meetings, held in September 2005 and April 2006 offer an insight to how such reinterpretation takes place. The meetings were organised with a view to solicit opinions about the “course” that CSDC was following. Over 80 NGOs participated in both meetings, and two documents outlining the outcomes have been published on the CSDC website (CSDC 2005, 2006).⁵ In the first meeting, the agenda focused on the theme of “problems for NGOs in Turkey”. The second meeting focused on the activities the centre engages in (for example training and other NGO support activities, such as grants) and how these could be improved. In terms of civil society development, these notes reveal a desire for civil society to find a more united, collective voice. The participants lament the fragmented relationships and communication that exist between NGOs, and the subsequent lack of common objectives and inability to speak with one voice. This is seen as a necessary development in order for civil society to become a more capable and influential voice in society. In brainstorming how CSDC could contribute to resolving these issues the following suggestions were made: branching of CSDC; organising workshops that allow NGOs to come together; organise meetings around common agendas (such as EU related issues); help NGOs to establish a communication strategy; publish a book on best practices for NGOs as well as a director/leader handbook; provide training on internal communications and lobbying; to help NGOs participate in relevant EU platforms.

The notes from the two meetings describe ways in which local actors are interpreting local needs in ways that can realistically be addressed through the framework offered by EU civil society funding. The meetings were an exercise in matching the concerns of the local civil society actors with possible solutions from within the EU funding framework. This is evident from the style of approach, where the solutions that are proposed – expansion of CSDC, organising meetings/training sessions and development of publications – are all practices that are usually introduced by donor policy (there are today four regional branches of the CSDC). The meetings can therefore be described as translation exercises where local interests were reinterpreted to suit the EU-led agenda for civil society development.

⁵ The analysis here is based on the written minutes of the of the two meetings

How the Advisory Board conceptualised the problems and needs of Turkish civil society offers further evidence of translation. The problems were identified on the bases of a particular idea of what civil society means, an idea which resonates strongly with the European concept of civil society. For example, identifying the lack of a collective voice as a problem, and aspiring for civil society to gain greater influence by developing a united voice closely correlates with the liberal view of civil society promoted by EU (and discussed in more detail in the chapters Two and Three). Lack of volunteerism and local participation as well as competition between NGOs were among the other problems that also resonate with the Western ideas about civil society.

CSDC thus plays a translating role as a middle man between EU efforts to fund civil society, and the NGOs on the ground that undertake the work through projects. It offers examples of how the policy design – training, workshops, publications and above all projects – through which donors operationalise their vision for civil society, is translated to better suit a local context. The actions here show that EU policy and reality of Turkish civil society do resonate with each other, and the processes of Europeanising Turkish civil society is also driven by an internal motivation. Given this role, the practices in which CSDC engages as an organisation CSDC characterises the trend towards Europeanization of Turkish civil society. This also speaks to the way NGOs internalise/socialise EU policy, making these concepts locally meaningful.

NGOs as brokers

In their engagement with project funding, Turkish NGOs have displayed an ability to create new roles for themselves and not simply follow the normative guidelines that the EU rules for civil society funding prescribe. These brokering roles are produced by the new situation in which NGOs find themselves as they respond to the changing circumstances and pursue to bridge the gap that exists between the NGO and access to EU funding. Such point of view allows us to see the entrepreneurial character of NGOs, and adds to the variety of ways in which NGOs can shape the outcomes of EU involvement. This section outlines one of the unexpected ways in which NGOs have reacted to the increasing availability of project funding. In so doing, it suggests that the impact of EU funding is more wide-reaching and complex than anticipated, leading to uncertain and uncontrollable results.

In response to the rise of project funding, an industry of consultancies, acting as brokers, has also emerged. Some regard these as simply a support network that less capable NGOs can rely on, levelling the playing field.⁶ For others the existence of these organisations is an undesirable side effect of the funding framework.⁷ At any case these consultancies have had a significant impact on the way in which EU funding has unfolded in Turkey. The CSDC had an encounter with a consultancy that is worth recalling here. CSDC received a phone call enquiring about upcoming grant programs for NGOs. As the caller was working for a consultancy, the director explained that only NGOs were eligible to apply. The caller said he knew this, and their role was to design projects for NGOs – they had so far created 48 projects, four of which had been sent to the CSDC:

⁶ Interview with a government official, Department of Associations, 08 August 2007, Ankara.

⁷ Interview with EU civil servant EU Delegation in Turkey, 03 April 2007, Ankara.

I checked our database, and saw that proposals they submitted before had been accepted. Twice. I looked in the computer, and saw the logical frameworks in these proposals were the same, they only changed the cover page! When I went to visit one of these NGOs, I asked “So you will soon start a project. What kind of preparations have you made?”. He said “oh, I don’t actually yet know what kind of project we are going to make. The consultancy made the application; we just said that we will cooperate with them.”⁸

The NGO had simply agreed to pay the consultancy a fee of ten per cent of the value of the award. The project budget has no such allocation available, yet the NGO thought they could find a way to spend the money in this way. Here we can observe two separate acts of mediation. One is the role of played by the consultancy as a broker. It identifies the gap between the EU project culture and the local NGO culture and offers its services as a way to bridge this gap. The second is by the NGO that recognizes its own lack of capacity to apply for EU funding, yet is able to identify a path that will gain it access to EU funds.

NGOs as navigators

By the term “navigator” I am referring to the ability of NGOs to identify opportunities to access donor funds, utilising the funding process to their own ends and finding ways to make the funding framework work for them. Navigator NGOs display the same entrepreneurial spirit as broker NGOs, but aim at different outcomes. Whilst brokers act as the go-betweens that work bridge the donor reality with local reality, navigators use entrepreneurial skills to take advantage of the opportunities donor funding generates, and do so for their own ends. In this sense their actions are opportunistic – the NGOs find ways navigate through the differences that exist between their current state of affairs and access funds. The observations made in this regard by a member of the CSDC resonate strongly with this interpretation:

The NGOs see the amount of the grant, and become fixated on this. They first put together a list of activities, then realise they have to create more activities to reach the amount of the grant. Then they discover a mission that fits these activities, and an appropriate main goal. So they approach this process the wrong way around.⁹

This behaviour offers an example of how NGOs navigate the gap that exists between their operations and what is required by EU funding.

An Istanbul-based human rights organisation I encountered during my fieldwork demonstrates further how NGOs can make EU funding work for them. They have set up a separate association, used for “official work”, such as applying for donor funding.¹⁰ A friend of the director working for the EU delegation in Ankara suggested they should apply for a grant. The application proposed to create a new Human Rights Centre, and given that the application was successful, €66,000 was spent on this project by the EU in a subsequent 12-month period. In their publication the EU delegation to Turkey referred to the project as an example of a successful

⁸ Interview with a member of CSDC, 07 August 2007, Ankara.

⁹ Interview with a member of CSDC, 07 August 2007, Ankara.

¹⁰ Interview with the director a human rights NGO, 24 June 2008, Istanbul.

project. The way in which the director of the NGO described the effect of this project on the organisation was interesting, for he said there was no change in their daily operations. In order to convince the EU delegation to grant the funding, they had to describe the purpose of the funds as creating a new centre for human rights. This way the project had a concrete end result, which appealed to the funders. However, as far as the daily work of the NGO was concerned, nothing changed. The NGO had found a way to package their work so that it granted access to EU funding without compromising its own interests. Additionally, the director of the NGO cited a long list of other foreign donors from whom they had received money. Some years ago the director had visited United States in order to receive an award from the Human Rights Watch. This trip had been most useful, he said, because it opened new avenues for fundraising for them. The actions exemplify how NGOs find ways to navigate a path towards a situation where it is able to benefit from NGO funding, even where its initial circumstances may not have been favourable for such an outcome, and identify new opportunities for funding. The daily activities of the NGO did not change but were rather re-packaged in the form of a new centre, demonstrating skills at reinterpreting their own work in ways that make it relevant to the funding agenda of donors.

NGOs as antagonists

When faced with the possibility of applying for EU project funding, some NGOs pursue an entirely different type of strategy. So far, the discussion has focused on ways in which NGOs engage in the processes that EU has in place, either by translating, by brokering or by navigating the system so that it makes sense in the local context. In addition, it is also worth exploring the resistance that NGOs display towards the EU. This, I argue, is a form of extreme brokering that is distinct from the forms discussed above in that the strategies are premised on disengagement with the EU.

Take for example one women's NGO that I interviewed in Ankara, taking a firm stance against EU funding.¹¹ It does this on the bases that external funding poses a challenge to the independence of civil society. Institutions such as EU have a particular agenda that they wish to implement in Turkey, and NGOs are being asked to help with the implementation. The funding is therefore viewed as not being neutral; there is deemed to be an agenda behind it that goes beyond merely funding and spills over into attempts to control NGO behaviour. Politically the NGO can be described as conservatively secular, at least to the extent that it opposes the proposals to allow the wearing of the headscarf in universities and other public spaces, and the NGO participated actively in the public demonstrations in the spring of 2007 expressing such sentiments. This is not to say that they are not progressive, for the NGO was also at the forefront of a group of women's NGOs the pushing through ground-breaking legal reforms on gender equality in 2001 and 2004. Whilst the director of the NGO assures that they respect all work done by NGOs that do receive foreign funding, and they can see the positive results, they themselves refuse foreign funding on the grounds that it comes with a hidden agenda. This attitude reinforces a broader set of issues that relate to scepticism and weariness towards the EU accession process. The refusal to accept EU funding contributes to the organisational identity of this NGO. The act of antagonism is therefore a generative act; it produces a positive outcome for

¹¹ Interview with the director of a women's NGO, 03 April, 2008, Ankara.

the NGO. The resistance to EU funding is viewed as a source of integrity, as an outwardly sign of keeping true to the values they uphold as an organisation.

The antagonistic responses to EU funding can be found across a wide spectrum of NGOs. In various areas of civil society the antagonistic attitudes towards EU-funded projects surface in several different degrees of intensity. In each case the antagonistic reaction offers something positive to the NGO. It can be a way of establishing a clearer sense of organisational purpose and objectives and help to bolster organisational identity by defining what the NGO is not. In this sense this behaviour can be understood as protecting the independence of the NGO. For some this antagonistic behaviour forms part of a broader suspicion and weariness towards the Europeanization project in Turkey. For others it is a way of reaffirming the reasons for the NGOs' existence; it is focused on particular issues, and the lure of project funding must not direct away from these issues.

Conclusion

In Turkey's current case, Europeanization refers largely to the change processes that are brought about by the EU membership negotiations. EU membership is contingent on the fulfilment of a long list of reforms, and the procedures for bringing about these changes are inevitably unidirectional and top-down in nature. The paper does not argue that EU policy is necessarily erroneous in expecting actors to behave in particular way, or imposing a particular, external agenda for change. This, after all, is something Turkey has signed up for when applying for EU membership.

However, the paper has argued that the expectations behind this policy approach remain at odds with the way in which social actors – such as NGOs – react to policy in practice. The paper further contends that a useful way to reflect on this tension is to view EU policy conforming to a rational institutionalist approach to designing and delivering policy, whilst NGO behaviour in practice is better explained by the sociological institutionalist model. Whilst the formal funding procedures are unidirectional (EU determines project aims and decides on monitoring criteria), there exist numerous opportunities for civil society actors to internalise and mediate the system of funding in order to make it meaningful in the local context. It is in this way that the actor-oriented perspective offers interesting insights to the role played by civil society. Moreover, it goes to show that the impact of EU funding is not limited to those NGOs that receive funding. It also has an effect on the behaviour of civil society actors that are unable, or refuse to apply for funding. Given the existence of such conditioning factors, the funding operation ultimately has uncertain outcomes. Out of these dynamics arises a complex web of interactions and responses that pull in various directions, making the outcomes of Europeanization policies varied and unpredictable.

Has the EU either adopted “wrong” aims, or “wrong” policies to achieve the said aims? Processes of Europeanization or democratisation are not simple behavioural traits that can be adopted overnight. They are long-term processes that evolve incrementally and will inevitably look different in each country context. In order to ensure that the NGOs are fully involved and share the policy aims, they should be included in the decision-making processes that form a part of the annual review of policy priorities. The practice of participating in the decision-making process may in fact be as Europeanising or democratising as the projects that follow.

If the EU continues to present itself as a benevolent but inflexible bureaucratic behemoth, in the eyes of the NGOs it may not differ so much from the state which

traditions it is trying to change. It may therefore be more prudent to focus on processes, rather than short-term outcomes. Whether a given project lives up to the stated aims word by word may be less important than ensuring the aims are arrived at through a participatory process in the first place. By including NGOs at all stages of the decision-making, they are likely gain a much stronger sense of ownership over the policies and projects that they are asked to act upon. This may mean that the EU will have to compromise on some of its aims in order to facilitate a genuine dialogue, but given the current state to uncertainty in terms of policy outcomes, this would almost certainly not be a regressive step in terms of actual (as opposed to stated) outcomes.

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