European Union Funds and the Assumed Professionalization of Turkish Civil Society Organizations

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**Funding**

This work was supported by the The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey under Grant 114K774.

**Disclosure**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author

**Note on Contributor**

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Professionalization effect of foreign funding is one of the prominent issues in the critical literature on donor and recipient relations. Despite growing attention on this topic, the link between European Union (EU) funding to Turkish civil society organizations (CSOs) and their professionalization remain understudied. This article fills this gap. Drawing on an original set of interviews with leaders of 45 CSOs in Turkey, this article finds that EU-funded projects have not led to the professionalization of Turkish CSOs. This article suggests several reasons for this and also discusses the broader impact of EU funds in relation to CSO’s professionalization.

Keywords: professionalization; NGO-ization; civil society; foreign funding; European Union; Turkey

# Introduction

Supporting civil society as part of development assistance and democracy promotion has long been a common practice. Especially since the “associational revolution”[[1]](#endnote-1) of the early 1990s, support from the West[[2]](#endnote-2) to civil society in developing countries has become increasingly more and diverse. Initially, the literature was dominated by development policy-making community informed by (neo) liberal theory and the practitioners with their bottom-up development model.[[3]](#endnote-3) This changed in the mid-1990s. Since then, a critical literature emerged both from within the civil society community[[4]](#endnote-4) and from independent academic researchers[[5]](#endnote-5) who found donor and recipient relations to be far more complex. This article explores the impact of the European Union’s (EU) support to Turkish civil society organizations (CSOs)[[6]](#endnote-6). More specifically, this article examines whether the EU funds have led to their professionalization.

There is no commonly accepted definition of professionalization in the literature. For some, professionalization refers to a process bringing CSOs closer to the workings of the state.[[7]](#endnote-7) This understanding often sees professionalization as an enhancement of CSOs’ managerial capabilities and their functioning as government’s technical agencies.[[8]](#endnote-8) The critical literature takes such managerialism pejoratively and defines professionalism in relation to its impact on members, base and activities. Accordingly, professionalization is typically characterized as having functionally specialized, paid, professional staff and, sometimes, a limited set of volunteers, receiving funding from international agencies and private foundations, and engaging in pragmatic, strategic planning to develop reports or projects aimed at influencing public policies and/or providing advice.[[9]](#endnote-9) This erodes the participatory approaches and weakens the organizations’ local ties.[[10]](#endnote-10) This article approaches the topic from within the critical literature and defines professionalization as the gradual replacement of volunteers with paid (professional) staff in designing and implementing activities and projects of the organization.

This is an important case first because the professionalization may have broader implications and shape CSOs in certain ways (e.g., relations with members or grassroots if any). Second, the EU has been providing a substantial amount of financial and organizational resources to CSOs in a vast array of countries.[[11]](#endnote-11) However, the overall impact of EU funding in the context of professionalization is understudied with only a few cases looking at central and eastern European countries. These studies either focus more broadly on NGO-ization[[12]](#endnote-12) or the EU funds’ link to the depoliticization of CSOs.[[13]](#endnote-13) Third, the EU has been supporting Turkish CSOs for a long time. Especially since the EU’s acceptance of Turkey’s candidacy in 1999, EU funds make up one of the largest financial support Turkish civil society receives. A number of studies developed a more critical approach to EU support to Turkish civil society. These studies criticized the scope of EU funds,[[14]](#endnote-14) questioned the impact of EU incentives[[15]](#endnote-15) and more recently discussed this issue in relation to Turkey’s de-Europeanization[[16]](#endnote-16) and depoliticization.[[17]](#endnote-17) The professionalization effect of EU funds has been raised only as part of broader analyses on the impact of EU funds over Turkish civil society.[[18]](#endnote-18)

The professionalization of Turkish CSOs and what, if any, links there are to EU funding is yet to be explored. This article does just that. In addition, this article examines professionalization within the context of CSOs’ broader relations with their members, their links to grassroots and society. By doing so, this article provides insights not only on the impact of EU funding to Turkish CSOs but also into the literature on Turkish civil society. In contrast with the literature, this article argues that EU funds do not lead to the professionalization of Turkish CSOs. This article draws from my original interviews with the leaders of 45 CSOs in Turkey and works within insights offered in civil society literature and Resource Dependency Theory.

**Resource Dependency Theory**

The conceptual framework in this article draws on Resource Dependency Theory (RDT). RDT, initially formulated by Pfeffer and Salancik,[[19]](#endnote-19) explains how organizations respond to pressures from external environment and therefore provides a useful framework to understand EU funds’ impact on Turkish CSOs.

RDT has two main tenets. First, RDT sees an organization as part of its environment. Explaining an organization’s behavior requires a broader to understanding of the “ecology of the organization.”[[20]](#endnote-20) In this environment, organizations are constrained by and depend on other organizations that control resources. An organization’s survival therefore depends on its ability to acquire and maintain these relevant resources.[[21]](#endnote-21) Despite the emphasis on environmental conditions, managerial decisions to adopt these conditions are equally important in RDT. Accordingly, the second tenet is that the organizations take action to manage their dependency on external institutions and increase their autonomy. RDT describes an array of actions and tactics that organization have recourse to minimize their dependency and uncertainty. However, such actions inevitably produce new dependencies.

In RDT terms, resource refers to things that the organization is dependent. For CSOs, funding is an obvious resource, one that is likely to create dependence on external institutions providing funds. Pfeffer and Salancik[[22]](#endnote-22) state that charitable organizations “may willingly exchange their autonomy for the promise of some funding rather than face drastically reduced resources.” To respond to the funding dependency and to overcome funding uncertainty, CSOs may resort to professional staff. This may create a new dependency – on professional staff – and result gradually in the organizations’ professionalization.

However, for CSOs, resource may not necessarily be defined in terms of funding only. Other things, such as legitimacy is also an important resource.[[23]](#endnote-23) In addition, one can argue intra-organizational resources such as members and volunteers. In that sense, an organization’s dependency on its environment is not a single dependency, but it is rather “a complex set of dependencies that exist between an organization and the specific elements of its environment found in the inter-organizational network”.[[24]](#endnote-24) In addition, dependency is not absolute, but its degree is determined by the importance and concentration of resources.[[25]](#endnote-25) Therefore, important as it is, an organization may not only and primarily seek funding, but may be guided by other resources that could balance their existing or potential funding dependency.

# Professionalization of CSOs: Defining and Operationalizing the Concept

The literature on the Western civil society support was initially dominated by development policy-making community informed by (neo) liberal theory and the practitioners with their bottom-up development model.[[26]](#endnote-26) This changed in the mid-1990s. Since then, a critical literature emerged both from within the civil society community[[27]](#endnote-27) and from independent academic researchers[[28]](#endnote-28) who found donor and recipient relations to be far more complex. Various cases focusing on feminist groups in Latin America,[[29]](#endnote-29) in Palestine[[30]](#endnote-30) and in India,[[31]](#endnote-31) LGBT[[32]](#endnote-32) groups,[[33]](#endnote-33) anti-mining movements in India,[[34]](#endnote-34) Democratic Left in South Africa[[35]](#endnote-35) found Western support to civil society to be problematical and argued how civil society became an agent for stabilizing status quo than bring change.[[36]](#endnote-36) Others suggest that funding dependency,[[37]](#endnote-37) weak links to grassroots and rising technocracy obstruct NGOs’ long-term transformative goals.[[38]](#endnote-38) These studies argue that with Western support, grass-roots organizations[[39]](#endnote-39) that confront the state are being replaced by professional and institutional CSOs that run projects to help implement state policies. In a nutshell, we see NGO-ization of civil society.[[40]](#endnote-40)

What underlies the NGO-ization literature is a critique of how neoliberal policies relate to civil society. As the state stepped down its traditional role, CSOs stepped in to *deliver*, and not only *demand*, development.[[41]](#endnote-41) The Western institutions began funding CSOs because the CSOs could meet the immediate needs of those hurt by the withdrawal of the state from service provision.[[42]](#endnote-42) As such, CSOs have become a strategic tool to ease in neoliberal changes.[[43]](#endnote-43) The NGO-ization literature explores how foreign funding affects the structure, agenda, discourse and accountability of CSOs. It criticizes foreign funding on the basis of its link to demobilization, depoliticization, funding dependency and professionalization of CSOs.[[44]](#endnote-44) This article focuses only on the professionalization of CSOs. No doubt several factors, –inter alia institutionalization, political position, relations with state and transnational actors– may be relevant to understanding CSOs’ organizational choices. However, factoring them all in would be beyond the scope of one article. Without overlooking this point, this article focuses on one understudied dimension of foreign funding, namely professionalization.

Running foreign-funded projects may be a challenging endeavor for CSOs. To meet funders’ demands, CSOs often have to overcome different challenges such as multiple task management in tight timelines and resource management in limited budgets. Equally challenging is to access these funds. Better organized CSOs with knowledge and expertise in funding seem to be better at tracing foreign funds even if they have weak links to the people they claim to represent.[[45]](#endnote-45) Many CSOs that can barely overcome the complicated application procedures and competitive evaluations are intimidated by the bureaucratic hurdles and strict monitoring of foreign funding.[[46]](#endnote-46) This may create a new line of work within CSOs that requires people who not only has the expertise in but also the ample time for project development and management. Ultimately, this may result in the professionalization of CSOs.

In a way, professionalization connotes an estrangement of the organization from its volunteers. While the paid staff may personally support the cause of the organizations s/he works for, his/her status is different than a member or volunteer. The paid staff usually consists of people who have received professional training that is largely technical, including organizational development and strategic planning. Depending on the size of the organization, there may be only one or several paid staff to run the activities. This article does not take into consideration the number of paid staff but focuses on whether it is the paid staff or the members/volunteers responsible for implementing the organization’s activities. This is because professionalization is a qualitative change in the workings of the organization where paid staff replaces members/volunteers for implementing the organization’s activities. The number of paid staff replacing the volunteers is not determinative over whether there is professionalization or not. In smaller organizations one staff may be enough to shoulder the workload, while larger organizations may need several staff. In other words, this number depends on the size and accordingly the income of the organization. While paid staff’s training may bring more efficiency to the organizations, such managerialism carries the risk “that emphasizes organizational governance over radical politics and support for mobilization and social movements”.[[47]](#endnote-47)

Roy[[48]](#endnote-48) argues that such professionalization transforms social movements into reasonable and nine am to six pm paid jobs that employ local people who could otherwise have mobilized for the same cause. Representativeness, while still an important criterion, is not always a priority for foreign funders. Despite the funders’ emphasis on the development of civil society, their funding criteria rarely prioritize how representative these CSOs are.[[49]](#endnote-49) Banks et. al.[[50]](#endnote-50) argue that increasing professionalization of CSOs have eroded participatory approaches and weakened local ties as these organizations are not independent actors but implement donor policy. In a way, as Hearn suggests, professionalized CSOs have become the new “compradors” in civil society in a number of countries.[[51]](#endnote-51)

Studies analyzing the Turkish context argue that EU funds risk undermining the culture of volunteerism and reduce the necessity for generating funds from members. [[52]](#endnote-52) In addition, EU funds are criticized for diverting the staff energy to the EU-funded projects only with little or no human resources left for member training.[[53]](#endnote-53) Other critiques of EU funding underline that EU funds professionalize these organizations in such a way that they lose their focus on their core activities.[[54]](#endnote-54) On the positive side, some scholars note how EU funds and the ensuing professionalization help CSOs to enhance their capacity. This article questions this link between EU funds to Turkish CSOs and the professionalization of these organizations.

# Methods and Sampling

The primary data relies on my original interviews with the leaders of 45 CSOs in Turkey. I resorted to the grants database at Turkey’s Central Finance and Contracts Unit (CFCU) [[55]](#endnote-55) for the list of CSOs benefited from the EU’s pre-accession assistance to Turkish civil society. I selected CSOs with purposive sampling and according to certain criteria detailed below. While non-random sampling can introduce a selection bias, random sampling in small-n samples may entail more serious irregularities. In such cases, it may be better to justify the purposive sampling. As interviews progressed, it became very difficult to adhere to the initial list of preselected CSOs. This is because many CSOs still do not have an active website, the contact information on their website is outdated or they cannot afford an office. In such cases, I used snowball sampling to reach the most relevant CSO for the sample. Relevancy is determined by the sampling criteria below. Snowball sampling became necessary especially in small towns to overcome some of the CSOs’ reluctance to participate in this research. The potential impact of this on the research results is negligible as I continued sampling until a point of saturation where no new data was emerging.

Sampling satisfies certain criteria. First, to reflect the composition of Turkish civil society, the sample shows variety in terms of the organizations’ working area, size and geographical location (See Annex 1). The sample includes organizations working in areas prioritized by the EU and also those others that are less related to EU funding priorities but are widespread in Turkey. 33 of the interviewed organizations are local, 3 of them work locally as a branch of a nationwide organization, while the work of 9 organizations is nationwide. I interviewed organizations from eight cities in Turkey: Ankara, Antalya, Iğdır, İstanbul, İzmir, Kayseri, Samsun and Van. The geographical distribution reflects Turkey’s different regions and variation in the concentration of CSOs and in the use of EU funds. The sample also included a control group of organizations that have not received EU funding. In the control group, the factor (EU funds) thought to be causing an effect (professionalization) is removed. Finally, I interviewed organizations established both before and after 1999 to better understand the broader implications of EU funding for Turkish civil society.

Most of the interviewees are members of their organizations’ executive board. In few cases, where the board members meet only to oversee management issues and therefore do not have in-depth knowledge of their activities or in cases when they were not available, I held an interview with the most relevant staff or member. Interviews were half-structured and included several questions on whether or not they employ paid staff, what type of staff they employ, who they employ and how they feel they are impacted by EU funding. The interviews were in Turkish, lasted on average one and a half hour. I also reviewed the organizations’ websites and publications to collect any background information possible. Finally, I studied official data from Turkey’s Department of Associations and the EU, and other relevant studies to contextualize the transformation of Turkish civil society.

All interviews were recorded and were supplemented by my notes taken during the interviews. To analyze the data, I first identified professionalized and partially professionalized CSOs among those that received EU funds. Given that only less than a third of those that received EU funds were professionalized or partially professionalized, I checked to find other commonalities than having used EU funds to explain professionalization. I cross-checked these commonalities with the control group. To establish why EU funds did not professionalize the beneficiary CSOs, I analyzed answers to questions regarding employed staff. Finally, I determined certain themes (e.g., structure of EU funds) that may relate to broader impact of professional staff or EU funds on Turkish civil society. In light of these subjects, I thematically analyzed the interviews and supplemented them with earlier research.

# EU Funds to Turkish Civil Society

The EU’s financial support to Turkish civil society predates Turkey’s candidacy. However, under the new financial support mechanisms in place since 1999, EU funding to Turkish civil society has increased dramatically. Since then, Turkish CSOs can benefit from pre-accession financial assistance and EU programmes. These funds make up an unprecedented amount of foreign funding that Turkish civil society receives. Due to EU programmes’ multifaceted structure, this article focuses on the funds Turkish CSOs received under Pre-Accession Financial Assistance. In addition, grants under Pre-Accession Financial Assistance are better known among CSOs and therefore many CSOs associate “the idea of EU funds” with those that come through this Assistance.

Turkey started receiving funds from Pre-Accession Financial Assistance in 2002. During the first period that lasted until 2006 Turkey received 1.3 billion Euros and in the following phase between 2007 and 2013[[56]](#endnote-56) the amount reached 4.8 billion Euros. The EU allocated 4.5 billion Euros for Turkey under the new phase that will run through 2020. The overall aim of pre-accession assistance is to support efforts and projects relating to Turkey’s harmonization to the EU as well as its economic and social development.[[57]](#endnote-57) Civil society support under the pre-accession assistance complements these broader objectives. In addition, with this support, the EU aims to improve mutual knowledge and understanding between member states and Turkish society[[58]](#endnote-58) and more broadly support the development and capacity building of CSOs.[[59]](#endnote-59)

The EU adopts a broad definition of civil society that includes all non-state, not-for-profit, non-partisan and non-violent structures, through which people organize to pursue their shared objectives and ideals as CSOs.[[60]](#endnote-60) Accordingly, programmes under Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance[[61]](#endnote-61) (IPA) are open to various actors including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), unions, cooperatives, universities, municipalities and small- and medium-size enterprises (SMEs). This article focuses on the support given to associations and foundations because they are usually considered as the two main actors of Turkish civil society. From 2002 until the end of 2014, associations and foundations have carried out 972 projects and received 89.230.432,56 Euros of grants under above-mentioned pre-accession financial assistance.[[62]](#endnote-62) With the new phase of IPA II discussed below, as of July 2018, the total number of completed projects supported under subsequent pre-accession financial assistance increased to 1018. The total amount of grants awarded to these projects is 92.525.329,10 Euros.[[63]](#endnote-63)

Understanding EU funds’ potential link to the professionalization of CSOs requires looking at these funds in more detail. The first issue is the amount of distributed grants. Depending on the program and the proposed project, the amount of grant received by a CSO ranges from anything just below ten thousand Euros to a few hundred thousand Euros. The second issue is the duration of the projects. Most projects last around ten to 18 months, although some could be a little shorter. All in all, under most programs, it is not uncommon for a civil society organization to receive tens of thousands of Euros for a period that rarely exceeds 18 months. Third, EU funds are activity-oriented, meaning that the principal aim of the grants is to implement a set of predetermined activities. Coupled with these programmes’ expectation for visibility and output, CSOs end up running several activities during the project’s relatively short life span.

Implementing EU-funded projects may become a challenge for CSOs in Turkey. Most CSOs have relatively small budgets and accordingly limited operational capacity. Most interviewed organizations that carried out EU-funded projects acknowledged that the budget of EU-funded projects is above their standard budget or the budget they are used to managing. In addition, EU-funded projects come with a workload and intensity of activities usually not experienced by that organization. Interviewed CSOs also complain about the overwhelming red tape in terms of reporting requirements. The EU, probably in anticipation of this, funds project-related staff’s employment (including managerial positions such as project coordinator) as part of these grants. Being able to have this item in the budget seems to work both ways. On the one hand, the EU can rightfully expect an effective project implementation since it is funding staff explicitly for that purpose. On the other hand, CSOs can successfully implement their project without putting so much burden on the members’ shoulders. However, the caveat here is the danger of taking the activities and therefore the organization away from its members and leaving it to the hands of the professionals. In other words, EU funds bear the risk of professionalizing the CSOs.

# Discussions – Evidence from Field Work

The official figures from the Department of Associations on paid-staff are illustrative. The sharp increase in the number of full-time paid staff in associations in the early years of EU funding and its steady increase since then suggest a relation between EU funds and the professionalization of CSOs in Turkey (see Figure 1). The figures are also in line with the literature’s assumption that foreign funding leads to the professionalization of civil society. However, discussions on the field work and careful analysis of the interviews show that this may not necessarily be so.

Figure 1: Number of paid-staff in associations in Turkey (2004-2017)

Source: Department of Associations, 2018

## Employment of New Staff

The first question is whether EU funds have led to the professionalization in its narrow sense, meaning whether there is a replacement of volunteers with outsider professionals in designing and implementing activities and projects. Of the 45 interviewed CSOs, 33 of them benefited from EU funds. Of these 33, only eight (24.2 percent) appear as professionalized, meaning their activities are consistently designed and implemented by paid staff and not their members. Of these eight, seven are established as professional organizations from the start. These organizations are established in consideration of financial resources for paid staff, which, as will be discussed later, appears as a major issue delinking professionalization and EU-funded projects. Interestingly, all seven are sectorial or interest groups. The remaining organization, Culture Routes Society is established with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism’s recommendation to determine the cultural routes in Turkey. This organization relies heavily on the efforts of a single person (founder and chair) who actively tries to institutionalize the organization to make it sustainable. Although they have about 40 members, the employed staff acknowledged that they do not need the members for their activities or projects.[[64]](#endnote-64) The organization employs paid staff to plan and implement the activities and they plan to gradually transfer the relevant workload. At the time of the interview, the staff was employed through an EU-funded project and the organization was seeking other financial resources (e.g., social entrepreneurship) to keep their staff. The rationale behind this organization’s professionalization is not EU funds. In short, there is no apparent causal relation between use of EU funds and transferring the workload to professional staff.

The control group reveals a similar result. Two of the interviewed CSOs are professionalized and have not benefited from EU funds. As in the above seven cases, both were established with financial resources and institutional structure from early on.

Two other interviewed organizations, working on gender issues, are partially professionalized. One is Women Entrepreneurs Association of Turkey. This organization runs several projects with different financial resources. Some of these projects are refinanced over the years by the funders. The number of paid staff (project experts or coordinators) has been increasing over the years. The other is Leader Creative Participants Association established relatively more recently in 2010. This association, too, runs several projects, although their projects are based more on its own resources. In both organizations, the members continue assuming responsibility for some of the activities and projects.

“Those who speak to the institutions [about the new projects] are usually professionals. We meet, identify the demand. Accordingly, there are strategy groups here in KAGİDER [Women Entrepreneurs Association of Turkey] … we send our notes from the meeting to those strategy groups. At the head of each strategy group there is a board member. Therefore, we get together with the board member afterwards for this project proposals and say which members we can call, get support from. … From our members we invite people who know the job, in this way, we include them. After this, of course we write that project.”

This leaves us with 23 out of 33 (69.7 percent) of the interviewed organizations that have carried out EU-funded projects, but not professionalized.

## The Employed Staff

The interesting question is why then the EU funds have not led to professionalization. There are two reasons for that.

First, in the majority of the cases, the managerial positions of EU-funded projects are filled up by existing members or volunteers. Of the 33 CSOs that benefited from EU funds, 22 employed their existing member or volunteer (66.6 percent). These people are board members, active members or volunteers, who tend to have prepared the application, too. In a way, the funds became a financial incentive for those who have actively and voluntarily been contributing to the organization’s work. These people continue their voluntary work once the project ends. These organizations (with one exception) are not professionalized. Indeed, employment of volunteers and members for EU-funded projects are usually not considered as “employment” per se. Several interviewees who said they never have had any paid staff in their organization, later acknowledged having their members or themselves employed during their EU-funded project. In a way, “employment” connotes the working of an outsider. “We did not employ anyone in the project with insurance.[[65]](#endnote-65) Of course there is the project coordination. We carried that out officially.”[[66]](#endnote-66) Furthermore, it came natural to many interviewees that those who drafted the project proposal should also be responsible for managing it. This is first because “there is already a handful of people actively working. They get employed.”[[67]](#endnote-67) Second, these people are considered to know the project better than anyone else. It becomes part of their task in the organization. One interviewee who ran several EU-funded projects in a CSO said she was the project coordinator “because I had that skill. To run the project, to report it, in other words to master in the project, to know your subject well. … I was doing it because I had that skill. Otherwise, there are a lot of members in the association. They did not assume that task because they lacked that skill.”[[68]](#endnote-68) Therefore, while people who are otherwise volunteers or members become employed by the CSO, this does not necessarily affect volunteerism as suggested by the literature.[[69]](#endnote-69)

Second, one CSO employed one of their staff and the rest of the CSOs employed outsider professionals to run their EU-funded projects. These professionals in the latter group broke their connection soon after their project ended. This is because it is nearly impossible for most organizations to maintain the generous financial means the EU funds provide. Several interviewees underlined that it is not possible to keep a staff without the financial means of a project. In addition, “because s/he improved herself/himself here and because s/he carried out this project better, they become a staff in demand. … they can go to somewhere else before they leave you.”[[70]](#endnote-70)

There are two exceptions here: Women Entrepreneurs Association of Turkey and Cultural Routes Society. While the former found the means to move the staff to another project, the latter, at the time of the interview was seeking financial resources for the project staff to stay. In two other cases, the projects were implemented with the professional assistance of a consultancy company. This, too, terminated with the completion of the project.

It is also important to note that a number of non-degree and graduate programmes on CSO management confirm the interest in working for CSOs. However, a career in this sector requires working selflessly usually with low salary and without job security. “If you do not have a very strong bond to that issue, it is not possible to sustain it for a long time. Therefore, [the professionals] must have already had a political bond with that issue and therefore they must have come from such a street movement.”[[71]](#endnote-71) Therefore, while professionals may become permanent in some CSOs, it is not accurate to see them as complete outsiders to that organization’s cause or their position in conflict with the organization’s members or volunteers.

## Broader Impact of EU-Funded Projects

A final important question is about the broader impact of professionalization and the related discussions on the impact of EU funds on Turkish CSOs.

First, the CSOs that employed outsider professionals do not perceive any effect of that staff over the organization apart from the better management of the project. There are several reasons behind this. Under IPA, the EU provides activity-oriented funding, rather than operational funding. In other words, the EU provides funds for CSOs to carry out certain activities and not for their institutional development. While the budget for EU-funded projects may cover the employment costs of paid staff, the rationale for such staff is to help better implement the planned activities. The second reason is the limited duration of the EU-funded projects. Most projects last around ten to 18 months, although they may be a lot shorter. Considering that the EU does not refund the same project, winning a new grant is challenging and some CSOs do not even desire to apply for a new grant due to its bureaucratic overload, the time that professional staff can have an impact on the respective CSO is very limited. A project’s lifetime is not long enough to professionalize a CSO. Finally, as discussed above, the projects come with a demanding timetable. Running a project “financially, activity wise, implementation, with methodology is a difficulty thing… Goes so fast. In fact, you can face various unpredicted situations”.[[72]](#endnote-72) Therefore, throughout the project’s lifetime, the professional and depending on the size of the organization, the members focus on the project’s activities only. Efforts for retaining the professional staff remain exceptional. So, when the outsider professionals are employed, they may bring some “managerialism” as suggested by Choudry and Kapoor. But this is unlikely to have lasting impact on the organizational structure and choices.

Second, Turkey is characterized by low interpersonal trust[[73]](#endnote-73) leading to very low levels of volunteerism and philanthropy.[[74]](#endnote-74) Volunteering for CSOs becomes a “professional” job put on the shoulders of a few, ultimately creating quasi-professionals for the civil society sector. This may lead to a hierarchical and elitist structure in most organizations where one person has a strong hold over the organization. However it also prevents professional staff to take over and estrange the CSO from its member and volunteer base. In return, the undermining volunteerism or participatory approaches, as the literature suggests, does not come to forefront as a big risk for EU-funded projects in Turkey.

The field work yields several points on the broader impact of EU funds in relation to professionalization. First, visibility is an important aspect of EU-funded projects. CSOs have to outline how they will enhance the project’s visibility in their proposal. In addition, EU-funded projects are activity-oriented, which in turn increase the project’s and the CSOs’ visibility. In the words of one volunteer, the EU “wants to stay at a level that is rather activity-oriented, short-term, smooth, both very high visibility and easy to follow the work for the two sides”.[[75]](#endnote-75)

The pressure for higher visibility is also coupled with the EU’s emphasis on measurable outputs. To better meet this criteria the CSOs try to reach as many beneficiaries (especially for their trainings, conferences, meetings) as possible. In return, with EU-funded projects, CSOs may achieve better access to groups they claim to represent. Some of the examples prove this. With their EU-funded projects, Van Women’s Association and Association for Raising Consumer Awareness gave seminars to thousands in their respective areas, while Handicapped People’s Association of Turkey provided vocational education to hundreds.

Second, interviewees noted that EU-funded projects yielded higher recognition. “This association can now do any work, it has the capacity, it goes with a plan and project and has education support, has staff … [EU-funded project] had a great effect.”[[76]](#endnote-76) Higher recognition is also likely to be an indirect consequence of the higher visibility and intense activities.

Third, in line with the concerns raised by the literature,[[77]](#endnote-77) reaching out to more people makes CSOs better intermediaries and not more representative. However, reaching out to more people may have an indirect consequence of expanding CSOs’ membership or volunteer base. For instance, in some cases, “during the project, we had volunteers … a new group of volunteers emerged with experience in this area”.[[78]](#endnote-78) The impact need not be limited with the project’s lifetime. “When a new member goes to [the CSO] or when [the CSO] wants to recruit a new member, when it says ‘I ran this project, I understand from this job, I have an office, I have a computer, I have conference halls, I do seminars’ people are influenced.”[[79]](#endnote-79)

Fourth, the interviewees’ statements are in line with the critique[[80]](#endnote-80) that EU funds divert their energy to EU-funded projects. Then again, several interviewees[[81]](#endnote-81) underlined that EU-funded projects improved their capacity for problem description, generating solutions and guided them for systematizing their work. Especially those CSOs that employed their member explained how “EU projects disciplined”[[82]](#endnote-82) them or how they “at least learn to act more orderly, namely to learn to set goals. At least, plan how to reach these goals”.[[83]](#endnote-83) While this may lead to a certain level of institutionalization, this does not amount to professionalization as defined in this article where volunteers are replaced with professional staff in designing and implementing activities and projects of the organization. Even after the project is completed, most CSOs continue similar work, albeit in a smaller scale. “The work is the same, we do not reflect it… We continue, meaning we take care of ourselves”.[[84]](#endnote-84)

# Conclusions

Running EU-funded projects under IPA is a challenging endeavor for many of the CSOs in Turkey. These organizations have to manage a budget and intensity of activities they usually have not experienced, in a tight timeline and under an overwhelming bureaucracy. Earlier studies exploring different cases argue that both the appeal of foreign funding and the immense workload it creates lead to the professionalization of CSOs at the expense of their members or volunteers.

Official data in Turkey indicates an increasing number of paid staff in Turkish CSOs over the past decade. The figures coincide with an ever-increasing EU funding to Turkish civil society. However, the findings of this study suggest that the link between EU funds and the professionalization of Turkish CSOs to be weak. So, in contrast with the findings of the earlier research, why has the EU funding not led to professionalization of Turkish CSOs?

Professionalization argument is based on the assumption that CSOs are dependent on external funding. From this it follows that accessing and managing external funding require professional staff and sustaining it entails professionalization. Needless to say that external funding is a key resource for CSOs and in Turkey, EU funding makes up an important part of this. However, as suggested by RDT, organizations take different actions to manage their dependency. In this case, the research shows that some of the CSOs transformed EU funding into other resources, such as increased legitimacy or new members. In some cases, external funding is used as an incentive for existing members and volunteers. Therefore, professionalization of Turkish CSOs is not a necessary outcome of EU funding thanks to their decisions in managing their funding dependency.

Second, professionalization argument also considers professional staff as a key resource. However, as RDT rightly underlines, resource refers to things that the organization is dependent, which is not the case for professional staff employed by CSOs in Turkey under EU-funded projects. The research suggests that these CSOs resort to professional staff mainly to ensure the project’s successful implementation and do not perceive any effect of that staff over their organization apart from this. The staff is seen as necessary for the project, but are not expected to bring a long-term input for the CSO. In this sense, professional staff is not a resource, but rather an interim facilitator. Therefore the incentive to keep the professional staff, and as such prospects for dependency and professionalization remain low.

In short, Turkish case does not validate the widely accepted argument in the literature that links professionalization effect with external funding. It is true that CSOs in Turkey are constrained by funding dependency, but managerial decisions to adopt these conditions have proven equally important. In Turkey, it is these decisions and actions taken as a result that impeded professionalization of CSOs.

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Interviews:

Interview, Hale Akay, August 18, 2016

Interview, Sevgi Kunt Açan, January, 5, 2017

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| Annex 1: List of Interviewed CSOs |
|  | **Location** | **Founding Year** | **Working Are** | **EU-Funded Project** | **Scope of Work** |
| CSO1 | İzmir | 1999 | disabled groups | Yes | Local |
| CSO2 | İzmir | 2010 | women’s rights | Yes | Local |
| CSO3 | İstanbul | 2006 | culture | Yes | Local |
| CSO4 | İzmir | 2009 | LGBT | Yes | Local |
| CSO5 | İstanbul | 1994 | culture/environment | Yes | Local |
| CSO6 | İstanbul | 2009 | youth | Yes | Local |
| CSO7 | Ankara | 2004 | youth | Yes | Local |
| CSO8 | İzmir | 1988 | youth | Yes | National |
| CSO9 | İstanbul | 1986 | human rights | No | Local |
| CSO10 | İstanbul | 2002 | women’s rights | Yes | National |
| CSO11 | Samsun | 2010 | disadvantaged groups | Yes | Local |
| CSO12 | Samsun | 2007 | education | Yes | Local |
| CSO13 | Samsun | 1989 | professional/sectorial | Yes | Local |
| CSO14 | Samsun | 2005 | education/solidarity | Yes | Local |
| CSO15 | Samsun | 1987 | disabled groups | Yes | Local |
| CSO16 | İstanbul | 2002 | professional/sectorial | Yes | National |
| CSO17 | İstanbul | 1997 | consumer rights | Yes | Local |
| CSO18 | İstanbul | 1960 | disabled groups | Yes | National |
| CSO19 | İstanbul | 1990 | consumer rights | Yes | National |
| CSO20 | İstanbul | 1992 | professional/sectorial | Yes | National |
| CSO21 | İstanbul | 1999 | professional/sectorial | Yes | Local |
| CSO22 | Kayseri | 1991 | disabled groups | Yes | National |
| CSO23 | Kayseri | 2005 | education | Yes | Local |
| CSO24 | Kayseri | 2005 | culture | Yes | Local |
| CSO25 | Kayseri | 1964 | minority rights/solidarity | Yes | Local |
| CSO26 | İstanbul | 1992 | professional/sectorial | No | Local |
| CSO27 | Iğdır | 2007 | culture | No | Local |
| CSO28 | Iğdır | 1924 | women’s rights | No | Local (branch) |
| CSO29 | Iğdır | 2012 | professional/solidarity | No | Local |
| CSO30 | Iğdır | 2002 | foreign policy | No | Local |
| CSO31 | Iğdır | 2010 | culture | No | Local |
| CSO32 | İstanbul | 1963 | professional/sectorial | No | Local |
| CSO33 | İstanbul | 1994 | professional/sectorial | Yes | Local (branch) |
| CSO34 | Van | 2002 | culture/sports | Yes | Local |
| CSO35 | Van | 2004 | women’s rights | Yes | Local |
| CSO36 | Van | 2005 | disabled groups | No | Local |
| CSO37 | Van | 2005 | professional/sectorial | Yes | Local |
| CSO38 | Antalya | 2008 | professional/sectorial | Yes | Local |
| CSO39 | Antalya | 2014 | women’s rights, worker’s rights | Yes | Local (branch) |
| CSO 40 | Antalya | 2012 | disabled groups | Yes | Local |
| CSO41 | Antalya | 2012 | culture | Yes | Local |
| CSO42 | Ankara | 2008 | youth | Yes | Local |
| CSO43 | Ankara | 2001 | women’s rights, youth | Yes | Local |
| CSO44 | Ankara | 1997 | women’s rights | No | National |
| CSO45 | Ankara | 1989 | disabled groups | No | National |

# Notes

1. Salamon, “The Rise of the Nonprofit Sector.” [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The terms “West” and “Western” in this article denote major Western donor countries, organizations and private institutions. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Hearn, “African NGOs,” 1096. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Edwards and Hulme, “Too Close for Comfort.” [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Choudry and Kapoor, *Learning from the Ground Up*; Henderson, “Selling Civil Society”; Alvarez, “Advocating Feminism”; Howell and Pearce, *Civil Society and Development*; Lang, “The NGOization of Feminism”; Mercer, “NGOs, Civil Society and Democratization”; Prakash and Gugerty, *Advocacy Organizations and Collective Action.* [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. In this article, CSO is used as an overarching term to denote a non-profit and voluntary organization of people outside of market, state and family working for a common purpose. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Cumming, “French NGOs in the Global Era,” p. 89; Fowler, “The virtuous spiral,” p. 105. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Korten, “The role of non-governmental organizations in development,” p. 36. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Alvarez, “Advocating Feminism,” p. 185 [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Banks et al, “NGOs, States, and Donors Revisited.” [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Youngs, *The European Union and the Promotion of Democracy;* Youngs, “What Has Europe Been Doing?” [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Jacobsson and Saxonberg, *Beyond NGO-ization.* [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Kurki, “Governmentality and EU Democracy Promotion”; Kurki, “Democracy through Technocracy”; Kurki, *Democratic Futures;* Mühlenhoff, “Funding Democracy?” [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Rumelili and Boşnak, “Taking Stock of Europeanization of Civil Society in Turkey.” [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Kubicek, “Political Conditionality and European Union’s Cultivation of Democracy in Turkey”; İçduygu, “Interacting Actors”; Ketola, “*Europeanization and Civil Society*; Zihnioğlu,”The ‘Civil Society Policy’ of the European Union for Promoting Democracy in Turkey.” [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Kaliber, “De-Europeanisation of Civil Society and Public Debates in Turkey”; Boşnak, “Europeanisation and De-Europeanisation Dynamics in Turkey.” [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Mühlenhoff, “Funding Democracy?” [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Kuzmanovic, “Project Culture and Turkish Civil Society”; Ergun, “Civil Society in Turkey and Local Dimensions of Europeanization.” [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. “The External Control of Organizations.” [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Pfeffer and Salancik, “The External Control of Organizations.” [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Falkner, “International Strategic Alliances,” p. 16. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. “The External Control of Organizations,” p. 177. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Yanacopulos, “The Strategies That Bind”, p. 97 [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Hatch, “Organization Theory,” p. 78. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Froelich, “Diversification of Revenue Strategies.” [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Hearn, “African NGOs,” 1096. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Edwards and Hulme, “Too Close for Comfort.” [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Choudry and Kapoor, *Learning from the Ground Up*; Henderson, “Selling Civil Society”; Alvarez, “Advocating Feminism”; Howell and Pearce, *Civil Society and Development*; Lang, “The NGOization of Feminism”; Mercer, “NGOs, Civil Society and Democratization”; Prakash and Gugerty, *Advocacy Organizations and Collective Action.* [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Alvarez, “Advocating Feminism.” [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Jad, “NGOs.” [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Roy, “The NGO-ization of Resistance.” [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Paternotte, “The NGOization of LGBT Activism.” [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Kapoor, “Social Action and NGOization in Context of Development Dispossession in Rural India.” [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Sinwell, “From Radical Movement to Conservative NGO and Back Again?” [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Hearn, “The ‘Uses and Abuses’ of Civil Society in Africa.” [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Hulme and Edwards, “Too Close for Comfort.” [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Banks et al, “NGOs, States, and Donors Revisited.” [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Grassroots organizations are self-organized group of local people working voluntarily to find solution to problems in their community. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Alvarez, “Advocating Feminism.” [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Gupta, “From Demanding to Delivering Development”; Roy, “The Indian Women’s Movement,” 102; Roy, “The NGO-ization of Resistance.” [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Biekart, *The Politics of Civil Society Building..* [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Howell and Pearce, *Civil Society and Development*; Kihika, “Development or Underdevelopment” ; Mercer, “NGOs, Civil Society and Democratization.” [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Alvarez, “Advocating Feminism”; Armstrong and Prashad, “Exiles from a Future Land”; Jad, “The NGO-isation of Arab Women’s Movement”; Choudry, “Global Justice”; Kamat, “The Privatization of Public Interest.” [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. De Schutter, “Europe in Search of Its Civil Society,” 206. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. Zihnioğlu *European Union Civil Society Policy and Turkey*, 52-53. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. Choudry and Kapoor, “Introduction,” 14. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. Roy, “The NGO-ization of Resistance.” [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. Hulme and Edwards, “NGOs, States and Donors,” 6. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Banks et al, “NGOs, States, and Deonors Revisited,” 710. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Hearn “African NGOs.” [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. Ergun “Civil Society in Turkey and Local Dimensions of Europeanization,” 514; Rumelili and Boşnak, “Taking Stock of Europeanization of Civil Society in Turkey,” 135. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. Paker et.al., “Environmental Organisations in Turkey,” 770-771. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. Kuzmanovic, “Project Culture and Turkish Civil Society,” 436. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. CFCU is responsible for the procedural operations for distributing nearly all EU funds under IPA in Turkey. Exception to this are the small number of programmes run by the Human Resources Development Programme Authority established 2012 and EU Delegation in Ankara. The impact of their non-inclusion into sampling is minimal since CFCU’s database provides a sufficiently comprehensive list of CSOs benefited from EU funds. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. Together with its 2007-2013 budget, the EU’s financial assistance mechanism for the candidate and potential candidate countries were consolidated under a single framework called Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA). [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. Ministry for EU Affairs, “Turkey-EU Financial Cooperation.” [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. European Commission, *Civil Society Dialogue.* [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. European Council, *Regulation No 1085/2006,* Title I, Article 2; European Commission, *The Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges*, Sections 3.2 and 3.5; European Commission, *Civil Society Dialogue*, 2.2.3.1. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. European Commission *The Roots of Democracy and Sustainable Development,* 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. The EU’s pre-accession financial assistance instrument providing financial and technical support to Turkey’s political and economic reforms during the accession process. [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
62. Ministry for EU Affairs, 53. [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
63. Central Finance and Contracts Unit, “Grants Database.” See Youngs and Küçükkeleş, *New Directions for European Assistance in Turkey* for a detailed summary of recent EU support programmes to CSOs and other civic actors in Turkey. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
64. Interview, CSO 41 [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
65. The interviewee refers to social security and means officially employed. [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
66. Interview, CSO 23 [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
67. Interview, CSO 38 [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
68. Interview, CSO 34 [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
69. See Roy, “The NGO-ization of Resistance;” Ergun “Civil Society in Turkey and Local Dimensions of Europeanization,” 514; Rumelili and Boşnak, “Taking Stock of Europeanization of Civil Society in Turkey,” 135. [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
70. Interview, CSO 18 [↑](#endnote-ref-70)
71. Interview, Hale Akay. [↑](#endnote-ref-71)
72. Interview, CSO 4 [↑](#endnote-ref-72)
73. See for instance World Values Survey, European Social Survey and International Social Survey Programme of OECD; World Map of Interpersonal Trust. [↑](#endnote-ref-73)
74. Third Sector Foundation, “*Sivil Toplum İzleme Raporu 2013-2014*”;Charities Aid Foundation, “*World Giving Index.*” [↑](#endnote-ref-74)
75. Interview, CSO 4. [↑](#endnote-ref-75)
76. Interview, CSO 22. [↑](#endnote-ref-76)
77. Hulme and Edwards, “NGOs, States and Donors.” [↑](#endnote-ref-77)
78. Interview, CSO 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-78)
79. Interview, Sevgi Kunt Açan [↑](#endnote-ref-79)
80. Paker et.al., “Environmental Organisations in Turkey,” 770-771. [↑](#endnote-ref-80)
81. For example interviews CSO 14, CSO 23, CSO 43. [↑](#endnote-ref-81)
82. Interview, CSO 43. [↑](#endnote-ref-82)
83. Interview, CSO 34. [↑](#endnote-ref-83)
84. Interview, CSO 35 [↑](#endnote-ref-84)