**Chapter 6**

**Continuity and Change in Turkish Civil Society**

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Throughout Turkey’s modern history, civil society simultaneously embodied and reflected continuity and change. On the one hand, political environment at home and abroad has changed. New actors and issues entered civil society, while some others drifted away. On the other hand, certain key features of Turkish civil society and associationalism has remained constant. The purpose of this chapter is to show and account for the changing outlook of Turkish civil society over the last three decades. To this end, this chapter shows how Turkish civic space diversified from the late 1980s with new issues and actors, discusses how EU accession process has affected civil society and examines how civic actors confront Turkey’s current challenging environment and closing civic space.

**Introduction**

Since the early 2000s, there has been much debate on the transformation of Turkish civil society. Starting from the late 1980s and in particular throughout the 1990s, new issues have attracted attention, which led to new groups of civil society actors. The improvement in legal framework eventually followed suit. Some of this change followed the international trends, while others were a result of domestic dynamics. More recently, Turkish civil society took another turn. The Gezi Park protests prompted new groups, while the ensuing changes in the political and legal environment affected many of the civil society actors. That said, some of the key features that characterize Turkish civil society remain unchanged. This chapter provides an overview of the recent trajectory of Turkish civil society and traces the continuity and change.

The received wisdom on state and society relations in the early decades of Turkish Republic is the presence of a strong and centralized state. During this period, “social engineering” (Popper, 1966: 22) has been a determinant feature of the Turkish bureaucrats in their identification of social and political problems as well as the ways generated to tackle them. The general approach of Turkish social engineering was to integrate from top down through imposing regulations that were initiated by the bureaucratic elite. This order prevented the internal dynamics that could sustain the structural transformation of the society (Heper 1976; Sarıbay 2000). This is not to suggest that there was no associational life at the time in Turkey. Certain civic organizations such as solidarity groups, and cultural initiatives were active as early as the 1950s. However, the bureaucratic elite was permissive for the development of associationalism only “within limits” (Kalaycıoğlu 2002: 268). This attitude of the state is considered to be the most crucial factor hindering the energy and progress obtained by the social groups, as social groups were allowed space to act only when they accommodated to the center (Mardin 2000: 98). This has begun to change in the 1960s with the growth of private industrial sector. Numerous trade unions and economic associations representing both the business and the workers mushroomed throughout the 1960s and the 1970s (Ahmad 2000: 132, 143; 2003: 120). On the eve of military takeover in 1980, though the rigid social engineering continued to limit civil society’s development, there were over 38.000 associations in Turkey (Şimşek 2004: 48).

 The remainder of this chapter is divided into three main sections. This chapter first explores new issues and actors that entered into Turkish civic space starting from the late 1980s into the 1990s. It then examines the enabling environment that Turkey’s accession process to the EU created for Turkish civil society and discusses its limits. Finally, this chapter analyzes the implications of the Gezi protests on Turkish civil society and looks into its changing dynamics.

**The Revival of Civil Society**

The military takeover in 1980 has crushed all civic assets, which the armed forces considered to have overgrown and become powerful. The new constitution that followed introduced restrictions to freedom of association and peaceful assembly. During the 1980s, activism was considered futile, if not dangerous. However, it was not long after that different groups began to re-organize themselves. Women’s organizations were among the first to re-organize in 1980s. They issued various periodicals, started consciousness raising meetings, and organized campaigns, mass protests and demonstrations. For instance, their mass demonstration against a domestic violence case in 1987 made an overwhelming impression.

Starting from the late 1980s, identity and religious politics played an important role on the transformation of civil society. On one hand, new Kurdish organizations were established. Some of them focused on language and culture, while others were occupied with civil rights and liberties. On the other hand, 1990s witnessed the rise of Islamist political actors. Islamic groups and civil society organizations became more active. Though Islamic charities and self-help groups had long existed in Turkey. Earlier Islamic civic actors widely engaged in charity work. Most of the Islamic charities worked in traditional religious communities that stem from a religious order or particular group. Their efforts often remained local. The new religiously motivated organizations established in the 1990s, such as the Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (*İnsani Yardım Vakfı*) and the *Deniz Feneri* Association, diverge from the earlier groups as major aid organizations with their wider outreach, both in Turkey and abroad. In addition, the ban on the veiled girls to enter classes and Turkish Council of Higher Education’s (*Yükseköğretim Kurulu*) regulation disadvantaging graduates of religiously oriented vocational high schools (*İmam Hatip*) mobilized religiously motivated organizations. [[1]](#footnote-1)

The post-coup 1990s saw a revival of civil society in Turkey. Many new organizations working on a wide array of issues were established and the number of civil society organizations began to increase steadily during this decade. Several external factors and internal dynamics contributed to this trend. Firstly, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) around the world boosted a growing global interest and activism on issues such as environment and human rights. This global trend encouraged the like-minded people in Turkey who pioneered establishment of similar initiatives at the national and local level. That Turkey hosted the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) in June 1996 was an important consequence of such a transformative trend. The Habitat II Conference served as a platform bringing together hundreds of Turkish and international NGOs. Not only did it draw attention to the increasing importance of civil society in Turkey, but more importantly it provided a rare opportunity for local NGOs to cooperate and share expertise with each other. Moreover, search, rescue and relief efforts following the Marmara Earthquake in 1999 played an important role on activating the civil society in Turkey. Various humanitarian groups and organizations were quickly mobilized, and they actively participated in philanthropic work. Some scholars approached this optimism regarding civil society’s mobilization with caution. They underlined that these organizations could not sustain their level of political mobilizations, and pointed that the early signs of solidarity soon returned to a state of disorganization and disconnection (Kubicek 2001).

The growing civic engagement of 1990s was coupled with only a limited change in state’s attitude to civil society. Indeed, Turkish state maintained a suspicious attitude towards “anti-establishment” organizations, meaning those making ethnic or religious claims (or demands) that challenged the state’s secular-republican tenets. The state often showed no tolerance to these groups, and restricted their activities, if not banned them altogether (Kaliber and Tocci 2010: 196-97).

**Europeanization of Turkish Civil Society and Its Limits**

Turkish civil society started enjoying a steady increase in numbers as early as the late 1980s and more visibility starting from the 1990s (Zihnioğlu 2013a: 75). The announcement of Turkey’s candidacy to the European Union (EU) in 1999 and the following accession process had a positive far-reaching influence on state and society relations in two respects.

Firstly, Turkey’s EU candidacy triggered a major democratic reform process in Turkey, with extensive improvements in freedom of association and freedom of peaceful assembly. Following the amendment of the relevant articles of the Constitution in 2001, a new Civil Code was drafted in 2002. This was followed by eight packages of legal amendments, commonly referred to as the ‘Harmonization Packages’ between February 2002 and July 2004. Harmonization Packages brought amendments to Associations Law, Foundations Law and Civil Code on a diverse set of issues including the civil society organizations’ establishment, membership, cooperation, international activities, and foreign funding. A new Associations Law entered into force in 2004 with a new regulation in 2005 that further improved the legal framework. In addition, a new Department of Associations was established in 2002 to be in charge of the associations – an authority which had previously been entrusted to the Directorate General for Security.

However, the reform process was not free of problems. Cumbersome procedures, especially in the areas of international cooperation, foreign funding and those relating to foreign organizations remained. Continuing pressures against human rights organizations (i.e. Mesopotamia Culture Centre, Human Rights Association) and judicial harassment to some LGBTI organizations (i.e. Kaos GL Gay, Lesbian Cultural Research and Solidarity Organisation and Lambda İstanbul Solidarity Association) on the basis of morality show that the drawbacks in practice still existed. Despite these ongoing problems and drawbacks, the reform process of the early 2000s led to a considerable opening of the civic space in Turkey.

Secondly, Turkey’s EU candidacy entailed new venues and an increasing amount of financial resources to civil society actors. EU funds have become one of the largest foreign funding Turkish civil society receives. Civil society organizations often apply to these funds in cooperation with other civic or public actors from Turkey and other European countries. While Turkish civil society had long benefited from the EU’s financial support, the EU has restructured its financial support mechanism to Turkey in the early 2000s. Under the new structure, financial support to civil society has increased dramatically. For instance, in 2002, civil society organizations started benefiting from the EU’s pre-accession assistance to Turkey. Though it is difficult to calculate the exact amount of funds Turkish civil society received due to collaborative nature of most EU programmes, between 2002 and 2019, associations and foundations completed 1,134 projects and received 109 million Euros from the pre-accession financial assistance (Central Finance and Contracts Unit, 2019).

In parallel with the direct and indirect benefits evoked by of the accession process, various sectors within Turkish civil society championed Turkey’s EU membership bid starting from the late 1990s. Frontrunners have mainly been the interest groups. For instance, Turkish Industry and Business Association (*Türk Sanayicileri ve İşinsanları Derneği*) (TÜSİAD) has been actively promoting Turkey’s EU membership at home and abroad even before the announcement of Turkey’s candidacy. [[2]](#footnote-2) In 1997, TÜSİAD published a report titled “Perspectives on Democratization in Turkey,” which raised sensitive political issues and elaborated reform proposals, and followed by seminars to foster public debates. Following the announcement of Turkey’s candidacy, TÜSİAD established the EU Harmonization Committee, commissions and working groups, and even opened a permanent representative office in Ankara to better monitor Turkey’s democratic reform process and lobby lawmakers in Turkey (Altınay 2005: 109; Atan 2004: 107). TÜSİAD also collaborated with European business organizations, Union of Industrial and Employers’ Confederation in Europe, now known as BusinessEurope, and lobbied for support in Brussels and across other EU capitals.

A non-governmental research organization, Economic Development Foundation (*İktisadi Kalkınma Vakfı*) (İKV) was another influential group, which also devoted substantial time and resources to promote Turkey’s membership bid.[[3]](#footnote-3) The İKV organized seminars and training programmes to different groups on Turkey’s EU accession process and studied the potential effects of implementation of the *acquis* (Economic Development Foundation, 2019). More importantly, the İKV led a collaborative civil society platform, known as the Turkey Platform,[[4]](#footnote-4) and carried out intense communication and lobbying activities through the Platform. For instance, soon after its establishment, it adopted a declaration called “*Türkiye’nin yeri Avrupa Birliği’dir, kaybedecek zaman yoktur*” [“Turkey’s place is in the European Union, there is no time to waste”]. Last but not least, for instance, the European Movement 2002 has become a well-known initiative during the early 2000s and it has lobbied for the adoption of democratic reforms, and also organized publicity campaigns such as “*Başka yarın yok”* [“There is no other tomorrow”].

Several similar other organizations and civic initiatives proactively focused on EU related issues, mobilized their members and contributed in different ways to communication, promotion, and lobbying activities at home and abroad. During 2000s as a result of these intensifying civic efforts, there was a renewed academic interest in civil society in Turkey. In parallel to the debates on other candidate countries, different civil society actors in Turkey, their potential, and how they interact with the accession process became widely debated topic in the academia. Earlier studies following the announcement of Turkey’s candidacy such as Göksel and Güneş (2005) and Yerasimos (2000) shared a more optimistic view on the emergence and the state of Turkish civil society vis-a-vis EU accession. They argued that Turkey’s accession process has contributed to a more and democratic pluralist civil society. Other scholars (Ergun 2010; Grigoriadis 2009) explored how the new political environment enabled these actors to enhance their capacity building and diversify their activities, and improved how they conduct their activities (Öner 2012). Others (Göksel and Güneş 2005; Tocci 2005) treated civil society as an agent of Turkey’s democratic transformation and discussed civil society’s participation in the accession process and the importance of the role it played in pressuring for EU related reforms.

On the other hand the skeptical strand of civil society as far as the impact of EU on civil society support criticized the scope of EU funds (Rumelili and Boşnak 2015), questioned what had been regarded as the positive impact of EU incentives (Ketola 2013) and the links to professionalization (Zihnioğlu 2018), and argued that EU funds contributed to depoliticization of Turkish civil society (Zihnioğlu 2019). Several scholars emphasized that the EU funds lead to a project culture, where the organizations lose their focus on their core activities (Kuzmanovic 2010), and the need to generate funds from their members. In return, this entails the risk of undermining the culture of volunteerism (Rumelili and Boşnak 2015: 135). Some studies found that the civil society actors lack the necessary organizational capacity to implement for EU-funded projects (Zihnioğlu 2013a: 117) and criticized that these projects created an ‘oligopolistic’ field in Turkish civil society privileging larger, better organized and more professionalized organizations (Altan-Olcay and İçduygu 2012: 16). For other organizations, implementing EU funded projects diverted staff energy away from member training (Paker et. al. 2013: 770-71). More recently, scholars discuss this issue in relation to Turkey’s de-Europeanisation, where European norms and values cease to inform public debates and how this affected those organizations vocal on the Kurdish problem (Kaliber 2016).

During the 2000s, civil society gained more visibility in Turkey for a number of reasons. The first important reason is media’s support for civil society organizations and initiatives enjoyed. The activities, campaigns and declarations of these organizations, particularly related to the EU accession process, have frequently appeared in mainstream media outlets, sometimes even free of charge (Altınay 2005: 111). Secondly, the AKP government itself promoted this visibility by being more open to the contribution of civil society actors in EU related matters. Leading business and civil society organizations such as The Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (*Türkiye Odalar ve Borsalar Birliği*), TÜSİAD and İKV acted together with a number of public institutions in the EU Communication Group, to inform the EU and Turkish citizens on the advantages of Turkey’s membership. Earlier meetings of Reform Monitoring Group in the early 2000s, where the negotiation process was monitored, were also open to civil society’s participation. Hundreds of organizations attended meetings with the Chief Negotiator - Turkey’s most senior official representative for the accession negotiations. At the same time some organizations were asked to submit a sample Negotiation Position Paper on the basis of the screening reports. It is important to note that civil society’s participation was limited and that these efforts do not necessarily add up to a genuine civic participation. That said, they contributed to civil society’s growing visibility in the country.

There are different forms of civic organizing in Turkey such associations, foundations, platforms, initiatives and networks. Of these different forms only associations and foundations are acknowledged by the law and associations are the most common form. Figure 1 shows the uptrend in the number of associations since the 1990s. More interestingly, the composition of civic actors has not changed much. From 1999 until 2006 the percentage of increase in all types of associations was more or less even; around 27 to 28 per cent. The only exception to this were those associations classified as working on international activities. Their numbers increased by 30 per cent during this period. This is probably due to the easing of the legislation on the international activities of the associations. Despite the growing emphasis on civic rights and democracy, organizations providing religious services, sports, development, and professional solidarity continued to dominate Turkish civil society. In 1999, there were 10,417 associations providing religious services, 10,025 sports associations, 6,609 working on development, and 5,657 on professional solidarity (Zihnioğlu 2013a: 136).[[5]](#footnote-5) The total of these four types of associations made up nearly 57 per cent of total associations in Turkey. By 2006, the numbers increased to 13,308, 12,807, 8,443, and 7,226 respectively and made up again nearly 57 per cent of total associations. In the meantime, the number of associations working on civic rights increased from 534 to 696, making up less than one per cent.

**Figure 1.** Number of active associations in Turkey (1990-2019)

*Source:* Zihnioğlu 2013a: 134-135; Directorate General of Civil Society Affairs, 2018

*Note:* Figures between 1990 and 1999 are compiled by the author from the Department of Associations (predecessor of the Directorate General of Civil Society Affairs) (Zihnioğlu 2013a). Figures from 2000 onwards are available at the Directorate General of Civil Society Affairs website. Figures that the author received from the Department of Associations for 2000-2012 were slightly different and the drop in 2004 was negligible. The earlier figures were 60,931 (2000), 64,379 (2001), 68,155 (2002), 71,832 (2003), 69,439 (2004), 71,287 (2005), 73,378 (2006), 77,849 (2007), 80,200 (2008), 83,954 (2009), 86,324 (2010), 89,495 (2011), 93,053 (2012).

 The intense reform process of the early 2000s came to a halt by the mid-decade. Despite the new Foundations Law (no. 5737), which entered into force in 2008 and amended in 2011, there were no new improvements in the field of freedom of association. This interruption in the reform process left some of the expected improvements for civil society half-finished or even untouched. For instance, cumbersome bureaucratic procedures on bookkeeping are still in place. Inspections are arbitrarily defined and inconsistently applied both in terms of frequency and scope through unequal treatment of rights-based organizations (Dereci and Ersen 2017: 20). Another such area where there is a problem is related with the collection of aids. The Law on Collection of Aid (no. 2860) is bureaucratic and restrictive. This law requires a permission for each fundraising activity of a civil society organization on public spaces (such as online fundraising, SMS campaigns and other public campaigns). For this, civil society organizations are requested to submit a comprehensive set of information, which are then evaluated for approval or disapproval by the local public authority.

Another equally problematic area relates to the fiscal benefits for civil society organizations. Except for those that have economic activities, civil society organizations in Turkey are exempt from corporate taxation. Grants and donations to organizations can be tax exempt if they have a tax-exempt status (for foundations) or public benefit status (for associations) (TÜSEV, 2018: 14). However, these vaguely defined statues are given only after a highly bureaucratic and what many organizations consider as a political decision-making process by the Council of Ministers. Yet, only a very limited number of organizations enjoy this status. As of November 2019, only 366 out of a total of 118,659 active associations in Turkey had “public benefit” status (Directorate General of Civil Society Affairs, 2019).

 All in all, what needs to be achieved is a comprehensive law on civil society to regulate various legal statutes, institutions, organizations, activities and relations with the public sector. Although this has been included in recent Government Programs, no draft law has been prepared so far. The institutional structure is equally divided with several public institutions involved in regulating and administrating the public space. In addition, the relevant legislation also lacks a clear definition of civil society or a civil society organization, which leads to problems in practice. Associations and foundations are the only acknowledged forms of civil society organization by the law and therefore can have a legal identity.[[6]](#footnote-6) Despite their widespread presence, unregistered or informal associational forms (i.e. initiatives, networks) are excluded from the legal framework and do not have access to similar rights (i.e. accessing public funds, opening bank accounts).

 On the other hand, the reforms failed to change the restrictive nature of the legislation on freedom of assembly. The right to hold peaceful assembly without prior authorization may be restricted on specified grounds stated in the Law on Meetings and Demonstrations (no. 2911), which include “preservation of national security, public order, prevention of crime, protection of public health and public moral or the rights and freedoms of others” (Article 19). The lack of clear definition of broad concepts such as ‘general morality’ or ‘public order’ lead to inconsistent, arbitrary, and often restrictive interpretations by various public institutions.

**The Gezi Protests and Beyond**

The Gezi protests in 2013 signify one of the most momentous points in contemporary Turkish history with important implications particularly on Turkish civil society and civic space. The protests started as a sit-in of a small number of activists at the Gezi Park in late May against the government’s urban development plans for the park. However, when the images of the forced eviction of protesters and the excessive use of police force hit social media, it rapidly evolved into a wave of mass demonstrations. The protests quickly spread across Turkey and around three million people took to the streets over a three-week period.

The Gezi protests were important not only for its sheer scale. Equally important, the protests brought together a diverse alliance of people who may not otherwise stand, act or protest side by side. This became a formative experience for many of the protesters. In addition, as the protests grew, many people joined the ranks also to protest the lack of societal input in policy and decision-making processes, the government’s intrusive practices, its lack of respect for diverse lifestyles and more broadly democratic rights and individual freedoms (İlhan Demiryol 2018). In short, protesters demanded a more inclusive approach to governance at the local and national levels.

The local forums (assemblies) in İstanbul reflected these expectations. These forums were first established towards the end of the protests by the protesters to discuss how to proceed with the post-protest period. Following the end of the protests, the forums scattered around the city and convened at neighborhood parks. While some participants pushed for political engagement especially in view of the upcoming local elections in 2014, most preferred to focus on local issues. With their internally horizontal, direct and equal relational structures, the forums featured elements of inclusive and participatory decision-making process. They showed us that the existing hierarchical and bureaucratized structure of established civil society organizations were not attractive models for young activists anymore. In a way, these people **were experiencing** non-traditional citizen participation mechanisms (Özçetin and Özer 2015: 9).

**A new group of civic activists** reinvigorated the civic sphere in Turkey after the Gezi protests as the **new generation seems to be taking its chances on new and alternative models of civic** and political engagement (Zihnioğlu 2020). These groups became more visible especially after the Gezi park protests. This new activism has become an evolving phenomenon in Turkey, and it is difficult understand its exact nature. It includes diverse groups with different demands. Still, a number of commonalities characterize new civic activists in Turkey.

Firstly, new civic activists often organize under *ad hoc* groups, and work in loose networks with flexible structures. This is partly because they regard hierarchical and bureaucratized structure of **NGOs as millstones**. In addition, organizing in this loose fashion helps especially the rights-based groups to circumvent the government’s ability to control their activities.

**Secondly, new activists extensively use social media. Advances made in information and communication technologies as well as widespread use of social media are certainly important aspects of this non-traditional form of activism. It may be ambitious to consider social media tools as an ignitor of activism. That said, social media and its widespread use serves as an engine helping civic activist groups to gain speed in communication and in organizing and gathering momentum for their activism. After all, at such a time when trust to mainstream media is all time low, social media appears as one of the few reliable sources of information.**

**Thirdly, these groups focus on specific and local issues, rather than generic ones. In parallel to this and in particular f**ollowing the Gezi protests, right to the city movement gained more prominence and a number of new groups and initiatives were formed. Not all the local forums survived long after the Protests. Some of them have become evolved into a larger initiative, the City Defenses, established in İstanbul in 2014 as a locally organized network to advocate the right to the city. İstanbul City Defense and its affiliated district level City Defenses work for bringing up local problems to the agenda. During their initial years, they actively organized several campaigns not only on urban renewal plans in their district but also other local issues such as unlicensed construction work on Beyoğlu Municipality’s historical building or protests against news on city police’s use of violence against peddlers and small business owners. Their numbers have often been limited to tens or hundreds, but they served to advocate these issues.

In parallel to this, ecological struggle also gained prominence. For instance, Northern Forests Defense was established soon after the Gezi protests to defend the ecological sustainability of the area north of İstanbul. Several other smaller and locally focused environmentalist initiatives followed suit. Some of these initiatives have been an offspring of the Gezi protests, while others have likely become byproducts of rising consciousness and civic activism following the protests.

During the immediate post-Gezi period, mass demonstrations erupted across the whole country. These tended to focus on a local, often, an environmental problem. However, the scale of protests usually went well beyond the local environment and spread to other places. For instance, thousands gathered to protest the expropriation plan of an olive grove to build a power plant in Yırca (2014), the Green Road project in the Black Sea (2015), gold-mining project in Fatsa (2015), and mining activities in Cerattepe (2015-2016). From the prism of the local issues, the protesters addressed to macro issues such as governance, and the right to the city. During this period, there were many other protests of smaller scale, as well.

The Gezi protests are considered a turning point as they led to a landscape for civil society in Turkey (Zihnioğlu 2020: 83-86). This is not only because of the reinvigorated and new forms of civic activism, but equally important and ironically are the changes in the environment for civil society. While the reform process of the early 2000s was about to lose its momentum by the mid-decade, legal and political environment for civil society immediately deteriorated soon after the Gezi protests. For instance, in 2013, the government re-introduced the ban on International Workers’ Day celebrations at Taksim square in İstanbul – a ban which had been lifted in 2010 and led to peaceful celebrations for three consecutive years. Some of the aforementioned post-Gezi protests continued to attract large crowds, although they often faced excessive police force. Soon after, the Turkish Grand National Assembly enacted the Law Amending the Law on Powers and Duties of the Police enacted in in March 2015.[[7]](#footnote-7) This new law, commonly referred to as the Internal Security Reform Package, was to strengthen the powers of the police during demonstrations, and to extend its authority to the detriment rights and freedoms. The putsch in July 2016 and the ensuing state of emergency measures became another dramatic turning point for Turkish civil society. It has been commonly believed that the state of emergency, which was imposed to investigate in a more efficient way those responsible for the putsch, served as a tool to silence various opposing views (The Guardian, 2016). In addition, the restrictions placed on public gatherings significantly narrowed civic space. In a way, what is politically permissible for civil society groups has changed.

**Conclusion**

Turkish civil society has been in transition since the mid-1980s. The civil society has soon shaken over the limits of the military takeover in 1980. While the state has remained distant and even unwelcoming to non-establishment groups, a wide range of civic actors was active starting from the late 1980s into the 1990s. An important dimension of this transition was that new issues came to forefront in civil society with new actors. The Habitat II Conference in İstanbul and the rescue and search operations following the Marmara Earthquake further boosted civil society in Turkey. Turkey’s EU candidacy and later the accession process that led way a more enabling environment for civil society actors. However, Turkey’s political transition did not spill over into civil society on the same plane. While the number and visibility of civil society organizations steadily increased during this period, the overall nature of Turkish civil society remained the same. Later, when the reform process slowed down and downturned, new forms of activism became more visible in Turkey especially after the Gezi protests. This chapter showed factors ranging from domestic political and legal structures to international actors and trends that exerted a certain level of influence the pathways available to civil society actors and eventually help shape the trajectory of Turkey’s civic space.

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1. Turkish Council of Higher Education passed a regulation providing advantage to students that enrolled to higher education programmes that coincide with their secondary school type. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. TÜSİAD is an interest group founded in 1971 to represent the Turkish business World. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The İKV is a non-governmental research organization established in 1965 with the initiative of İstanbul Chamber of Commerce and İstanbul Chamber of Industry to inform Turkish business and Turkish public on European integration and Turkey’s relations with the European Community/Union. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The Turkey Platform is a collaborative civil society initiative that brought together over 250 civil society organization following the invitation of the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey in 2002 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The categories are determined and the classifications are made by the Department of Associations. More recently, the Department of Associations changed the categorization of the associations. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The law recognizes also platforms, but they are not acknowledged as legal entities. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The law was enacted in response to widespread protests in 2014 against the government’s decision not to intervene in the self-proclaimed Islamic State’s siege of Kobane. Kobane is a pre-dominantly Kurdish populated Syrian city, near the border with Turkey. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)