



Interventions

EU DEMOCRACY PROMOTION AND GOVERNMENTALITY

TURKEY AND BEYOND

Hanna L. Muehlenhoff



EU Democracy Promotion and Governmentality

This book draws on a Foucauldian understanding of governmentality to explore how EU civil society funding policies depoliticise civil society organisations. It questions whether international civil society funding always depoliticises civil society organisations, as the literature on governmentality and international civil society policies argues.

The author examines how the liberal and neo-liberal rationalities of EU funding have both politicising and depoliticising effects on the human rights organisations funded, and demonstrates that whether the effects help or prevent the politicisation of human rights depends on how legitimate or contested the issue is domestically and how the civil society organisations act in this political context. These themes are explored through an in-depth analysis of the case of Turkey and EU funding of organisations working in the fields of women's, LGBT and Kurdish rights.

Unpacking liberal and neo-liberal governmentality in EU democracy promotion and civil society funding, this insightful contribution to the literature will be of interest to scholars of International Relations, Middle East Studies, European Studies and democracy promotion.

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Interventions

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**To my parents Elisabeth and Reimund, my godparents Heinrich
Jürgenbehring and Barbara Lorenzkowski, and Carl J. Mauzy.**

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Preface

I began this project in a historical and political context that was hopeful regarding Turkey's future in the European Union as a result of its democratisation process and the increasing pluralisation of Turkish society. Even so, ever since I started studying Turkey, classmates, colleagues, family and friends have asked me "Why Turkey"? They wondered what this had to do with me and how I was going to study Turkey without speaking Turkish. Unsurprisingly, learning Turkish has been a long and challenging path, but I found it obvious what Turkey had to do with me. I was very idealistic about the EU's enlargement and I wanted to study the EU's accession policies. In my view, Turkey had to become an EU member since it had such a long history of cooperation with the EU and would contribute to a pluralistic union. But in Germany, where I grew up and had studied, conservative politicians and sections of the public opposed Turkey's membership candidacy on the base of populist and xenophobic arguments. This apparently had to do with the fact that more than one million people with a Turkish migration background and more than three million Muslims live in Germany. The German debate revealed how little Germans knew about Turkey and how little they knew their German-Turkish neighbours. As in other European countries, Turkey's membership was also opposed on the grounds that Turkey supposedly did not belong to Europe, either geographically or religiously. I wanted to counter the xenophobic and exclusionary sentiments of this debate and get to know Turkey better myself. I probably would not have picked up the topic if I had not met people supporting my interest, such as Mechthild Rothe, former member and vice-president of the European Parliament, who was engaged in the solution of the Cyprus conflict. I was an intern at the Economic Development Foundation (İKV), which has strongly supported Turkey's EU accession, during my first longer stay in Turkey in 2009. There, I started to wonder how the EU supported civil society in Turkey. This is why I decided to study what kind of effects the EU's civil society funding has on civil society organisations (CSOs) in Turkey. During my research, I have learned a lot about Turkey's diverse civil society, and being in Turkey right after the Gezi protests was inspiring and exciting. Although I take a critical look at what Turkey's human rights organisations do, I have great respect for what they are trying to accomplish. Moreover, I am aware that my view even on the CSOs that I studied is still limited and always that of an outsider. I am still in favour of Turkey's EU

accession but I find it crucial that the marginalised groups in Turkey profit from this process. Moreover, I have become much more critical of the EU's external and internal policies, as the discussions in my book show. In my view, the EU (although a different one) is still the future, but I feel more ambiguous than ever about the EU's role in the world and its emancipatory potential.

But it is not only the EU that is currently in crisis; Turkey's democratisation project is, too. This book studies EU civil society funding in Turkey between 2002 and 2013. It comes to the conclusion that some depoliticisation helped CSOs to put their issues on the political agenda, and therefore politicise them. This was especially the case for organisations working on Kurdish and LGBT rights. However, it is exactly these groups that have been most affected by the oppressive climate since the Gezi protests in the spring and summer of 2013, the return of violent conflict to Turkey's Southeastern regions in 2015 and the failed coup attempt in July 2016. Moreover, journalists, activists and academics have been jailed and CSOs closed. The issue of Kurdish rights and the conflict with the Kurds have been securitised again. Talking about it, reporting on human rights abuses in this context and supporting a peaceful solution land people in prison. Therefore, you might wonder whether this analysis is still relevant and whether the arguments put forward still hold. In this book, I hope to show that they do. Although this book is mainly confined to the time period between 2002 and 2013, I have linked my findings to how the struggles continued up until 2018. For example, the Kurdish rights issue is most strongly affected by the changing political climate. However, the fact that it was possible to talk about the Kurdish issue during the third AKP term in government presented an extreme change in politics in Turkey. This had to do with the EU accession process but also with the governing party's willingness and strategy to address it. Despite this, CSOs working on Kurdish rights were still viewed with extreme scepticism from politicians but also from society; some were still jailed even during the time of political opening. My book shows that EU funds helped them to look more legitimate and to create networks with other parts of civil society. Although the discourse on Kurdish issues is more securitised again, and many people are tortured in Turkey's prisons, CSOs are still active; they publish their reports on their websites and social media, and these reports are picked up by the few remaining critical newspapers and by some (not enough) international media coverage. Civil society in Turkey changed between 2002 and 2013; it became more pluralistic, more active and visible, and also more professional and at times less political. These changes do not disappear overnight but they affect the struggles of today. Moreover, when I studied EU civil society funding in 2013, there were already signs that the AKP was becoming more authoritarian. The Gezi Park protests were a reaction to the increasingly less democratic government but also to the neo-liberal policies of the AKP. This all goes to show that it is extremely important to recognise and understand the complexities of the context and the political struggles in which EU funding intervenes. This is what this book aims to demonstrate.

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This book would not have been possible without my friends in Turkey who supported me whenever I was there and with whom I had so many inspiring and joyful conversations. I would like to especially thank Gökçe, İlge and Simge. Thanks to all my friends and colleagues with whom I attended great conferences and workshops in Turkey. I am further deeply grateful to my interview partners in Turkey who provided me with so much insight into their work and struggles.

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List of abbreviations

AKP	Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi)
BDP	Peace and Democracy Party (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi)
CFCU	Central Finance and Contracts Unit
ÇHD	Contemporary Lawyers Association (Çağdaş Hukukçular Derneği)
CHP	Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi)
CSF	Civil Society Facility
CSO	civil society organisation
DIB	Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Bakanlığı)
DISK	Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey (Türkiye Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu)
DTP	Democratic Society Party (Demokratik Toplum Partisi)
EIDHR	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights
EU	European Union
HDP	People's Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi)
HYD	Helsinki Citizens' Assembly (Helsinki Yurttaşlık Derneği)
İHD	Human Rights Association (İnsan Hakları Derneği)
İHOP	Human Rights Platform (İnsan Hakları Platformu)
İKGV	Human Resource Development Foundation (İnsan Kaynağını Geliştirme Vakfı)
İKV	Economic Development Foundation (İktisadi Kalkınma Vakfı)
Kader	Association for the Support and Training of Women Candidates (Kadın Adayları Derneği)
KAGED	Capacity Development Association (Kapasite Geliştirme Derneği)
Kamer	Women's Centre Foundation (Kadın Merkezi Vakfı)
Kaos GL	Chaos Gay and Lesbian Cultural Research Association (Kaos Gey ve Lezbiyen Araştırmalar Derneği)
KESK	Confederation of Public Workers' Unions (Kamu Emekçileri Sendikaları Konfederasyonu)
LGBT	lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual/transgender

Mazlumder	Association for Human Rights and Solidarity for the Oppressed (İnsan Hakları ve Mazlumlar İçin Dayanışma Derneği)
METU	Middle East Technical University Ankara
MHP	Nationalist Action Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi)
Mor Çatı	Purple Roof Women's Shelter Foundation (Mor Çatı Kadın Sığınağı Vakfı)
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OMC	Open Method of Coordination
PKK	Kurdistan Worker's Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê)
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SIPU	Swedish Institute for Public Administration
SODES	Social Support Program (Sosyal Destek Programı)
ŞÖNİM	Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centres (Şiddet Önleme ve İzleme Merkezi)
Spod	Social Policies, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Studies Association (Sosyal Politikalar Cinsiyet Kimliği ve Cinsel Yönelim Çalışmaları Derneği)
STGM	Civil Society Development Centre (Sivil Toplum Geliştirme Merkezi)
TASCO	Technical Assistance for Civil Society Organisations
TBM	Peace Assembly of Turkey (Türkiye Barış Meclisi)
TESEV	Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (Türkiye Ekonomik ve Sosyal Etüdler Vakfı)
TİHV	Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (Türkiye İnsan Hakları Vakfı)
TTB	Turkish Medical Association (Türk Tabipleri Birliği)
TÜSİAD	Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association (Türk Sanayicileri ve İşadamları Derneği)
UN	United Nations
UNDEF	United Nations Democracy Fund
YÖK	Higher Education Council of Turkey (Yükseköğretim Kurulu)

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1 Introduction

On EU democracy promotion, the question of depoliticisation, and the case of Turkey

During the last days of May 2013 thousands of people joined the protestors who had originally demonstrated against the plans of Turkey's governing Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) to destroy Gezi Park, a park in the middle of the European centre of Istanbul, for yet another shopping mall. They protested against the police's violent suppression of the first demonstration as well as against the governing party and its increasingly conservative and neo-liberal policies. The so-called Gezi Park protests became a symbol for Turkey's civil society. In the European Union (EU) politicians and societies alike praised the demonstrations as proof of a "vibrant civil society" (Yinanç 2013).

The EU, just like other international organisations, places a great deal of hope in civil society within the EU and in non-EU countries. Internally, the EU counts on civil society organisations (CSOs) – such as environmental groups or industrial lobby organisations – to provide knowledge and opinions on specific topics when drafting and implementing policies. Moreover, the EU assumes that civil society is a central element of democracy. Any state undergoing the process of democratic transformation needs to allow for civil society groups to exist and be active. Within democratic states, civil society is supposed to monitor the state, demand political change and/or take care of people in need by giving them social support. The EU regularly criticises third states for discriminating against CSOs and activists such as the sentencing of members of Pussy Riot in Russia (European Union 2012). In the eyes of the EU, any restriction on CSOs or activists is a violation of human rights. Civil society is imagined as the 'good' other (Chandhoke 2001). When we think of civil society, we usually think of civil society being different to the state; being better, more innovative, freer and more democratic. At the same time, citizens' trust in state institutions and politics in democracies is declining. Politicians are accused of following their self-interest and not being competent enough (Hay 2007). While "we hate politics" (Hay 2007), we love civil society (to overstate the matter). Civil society represents the opposite: altruism and solidarity, knowledge and expertise, transparency. As a consequence, democracies have transferred tasks that were originally the responsibility of the state to CSOs, such as providing social services and contributing

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to legislative processes. Governing increasingly takes place in the sphere of civil society (Foucault et al. 2008: 295).

Thus, civil society is generally assumed to be a *good* thing for democracies. Based on this premise, the EU provides financial funds to CSOs across the world. The EU's most important instrument for direct civil society support is the European Instrument for Democracy and Human rights (EIDHR), which provides funding for CSOs in all regions of the world and aims to contribute to democracy and human rights (European Commission 2015). Yet there are many different but overlapping forms of civil society. Civil society refers to social movements, charity and community groups as well as business organisations or environmental groups (Kaldor 2003a). The EIDHR has a narrow conception of civil society. It gives financial support to human rights organisations that it selects on the basis of project proposals. The criteria that the EU uses to select CSOs for funding are also common in other contexts. They require citizens to set their own goals and self-evaluate their work. For example, departments at universities are encouraged or obliged to evaluate their teaching and research output and make these results transparent in order to become 'better'. Anyone who has applied for research grants is familiar with project applications and funding procedures. Similarly, CSOs have to draft a project plan including goals and ways to achieve them and to measure them, and suggest a cost-efficient budget. Afterwards, they have to write a report that proves the effectiveness of the project and documents the costs. While many international organisations employ similar types of procedures, the EU is often said to have the highest demands for transparency and accountability, as I will discuss later. Borrowing from Michel Foucault (1991: 92; Foucault et al. 2008: 220–232), authors such as Milja Kurki (2011a), Katharyne Mitchell (2006), William Walters and Jens H. Haahr (2005) argue that these instruments and procedures of transparency, performance and accountability are an integral part of neo-liberal governmentality. In short, in neo-liberal governmentality economic rationalities dominate every part of life (Foucault et al. 2008: 226; Lemke 2001: 200); thus civil society is required to act like a company. Kurki (2011a) analyses the EIDHR program documents and finds underlying neo-liberal economic rationalities.

What does this mean for civil society, and more specifically for the CSOs applying for and receiving funds? Have CSOs always worked this way? Or has applying for EU funds changed the organisations? Many scholars assume that project-based work makes CSOs less grassroots, less honest and, to some extent, less 'good'. Kurki (2011b: 362) proposes that the EU "has arguably already shifted the practices of some NGO actors, such as political foundations, toward developing more depoliticised and non-ideological (lobby) positions". The EIDHR turns CSOs into entrepreneurs and service providers and ultimately depoliticises them (Kurki 2011a: 362). Political change and emancipation seems unlikely when EU funding depoliticises civil society. However, is this really the case? What does depoliticisation mean? And what does politicisation mean? Kurki and others (İşleyen 2015; Tagma et al. 2013)

analyse the EIDHR documents but do not assess the effects of the EIDHR on civil society on the ground. Yet the domestic context of the EU's policies influences their effects. This book provides an analysis of how the EU's governmentality actually depoliticises EIDHR-funded civil society organisations in Turkey. I suggest that the proposed depoliticising effects are shaped by their specific political context. Moreover, they are shaped by how *neo-liberal* the EU's rationalities really are. The literature on governmentality in the EU's external policies and its civil society funding blurs the difference between liberal and neo-liberal rationalities, although it argues that it is *neo-liberal* rationalities that have depoliticising effects (Kurki 2011b; Merlingen 2007; İşleyen 2015). The analysis of the EIDHR documents in Chapter 3 reveals that the EU transfers both neo-liberal *and* liberal rationalities to human rights CSOs in Turkey, and both have different effects in a specific context. This book builds on the specific argument that the EU's civil society funding depoliticises CSOs and their work as developed by Kurki (2011a) in her article on the governmentality of the EIDHR. Yet she is not the first to argue that governmentality depoliticises civil society (Amoore and Langley 2004; Ferguson 1990; Jaeger 2007).

The argument on EU civil society funding, governmentality and depoliticisation

Kurki's article on the EIDHR (2011a) was part of a larger research project (2013) on the democracy promotion practices of international organisations around the world. She analyses the different conceptions of democracy that underlie the policies of several funding bodies such as the United Nations (UN), national states and agencies. Her project includes various kinds of democracy promotion practices such as election assistance or civil society funding. Kurki looks at the EIDHR to investigate an instrument that gives direct support for civil society organisations and argues that the EIDHR is based on neo-liberal governmentality with which the "European Union has sought to depoliticise its democracy promotion" (Kurki 2011a: 351). Although the author describes this as one major contribution of her approach, she does not go into detail about how the EIDHR depoliticises civil society.

Analysing EIDHR documents, Kurki shows that the EIDHR is based on neo-liberal rationalities as part of neo-liberal governmentality in a Foucauldian sense. She identifies the economic market rationalities and the constitution of the individual as a self-entrepreneur (Kurki 2011a: 353–354) in the objectives and the calls for proposals of the EIDHR. She demonstrates that the governmentality perspective focuses on how economic rationalities shape individuals and every sphere of life. Individuals are made to use their freedom in a self-entrepreneurial way. These economic individuals can be managed within the sphere of civil society (Kurki 2011a: 353–354). In the EIDHR documents civil society is constituted as a sphere of freedom in which CSOs are expected to defend this freedom in the most effective way: "An ideal CSO, too, is seen as self-reliant, risk-taker, entrepreneur, and

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innovator, who has no need for dependency relations with funders or state support and who take[s] responsibility for finding and adapting themselves to the market opportunities” (Kurki 2011a: 357). The EU attempts to enable CSOs by increasing their capacities. One of Kurki’s main points is that the EIDHR’s governmentality constitutes CSOs as being in opposition to the state as the state is seen to be limiting its freedoms (Kurki 2011a: 357). Following this suspicion of the state, the EU encourages CSOs to defend their freedoms, support democratisation, independent from the state, be a check on the state, be project managers and providers of social services (Kurki 2011a: 357–358). Employing this strategy, Kurki argues, the EU “has arguably already shifted the practices of some CSO actors, such as political foundations, toward developing more depoliticized and non-ideological (lobby) positions” (Kurki 2011a: 362). Kurki suggests that the EIDHR influences CSOs in the way they work and in their political positions, ultimately depoliticising both.

When discussing EU democracy promotion, critical approaches such as Kurki’s are exceptional. While literature on development aid has investigated the effects of neo-liberal rationalities in CSO funding (Hulme and Edwards 1997; Paley 2002; Pearce and Eade 2000), the consequences of neo-liberal governmentality in democracy promotion policies for CSOs have largely been ignored. My book builds on Kurki’s argument regarding the EIDHR but suggests that it needs specification in two instances.

First, although Kurki’s book (2013) includes a wide range of comprehensive concepts of democracy and analyses how these concepts are present in democracy promotion across the world, her analysis of the EIDHR is reductionist. The EIDHR (Kurki 2011a) is clearly described as an instrument based on a neo-liberal idea of democracy and thus embedded in neo-liberal governmentality. Here, Kurki subsumes too much under the concept of neo-liberal governmentality and assumes its effect of depoliticisation too easily. An example of this is how Kurki links the argument of civil society as being responsible for controlling the state and for providing services usually provided for by the state. The notions of civil society as service providers and as opposition to government do not fit together easily. Within neo-liberal governmentality CSOs become a partner of the state and take over some of its functions such as providing social services to the marginalised while the state has retreated from these tasks. Both activities could be politicising in specific contexts, however. CSOs that control or check the government have been central to a *liberal* idea of state and civil society (Kurki 2013: 113) and monitoring governance practices is hardly apolitical. Especially in non-consolidated democracies, where the EIDHR promotes CSOs, monitoring is very political as it criticises governmental practices and increases the visibility of marginalised groups (cf. Shepherd and Sjöberg 2012). Moreover, even providing social services might be politicising when the state has never provided these services before and these services are for marginalised groups. It makes these communities visible (Shepherd and Sjöberg 2012; Butler and Athanasiou 2013). Not only Kurki but the governmentality literature more broadly