

# İnternet ve bilişim alanında faaliyet gösteren sivil toplum kuruluşları üzerine bir inceleme: Sınırlar ve ihtimaller

## Özet

Türkiye’de medya alanında faaliyet gösteren ya da medya alanına dair çalışmaları olan çok sayıda sivil toplum kuruluşu (STK) bulunmaktadır. Medyanın basın, yayıncılık ya da sinema gibi çeşitli kollarıyla ilgili olarak örgütlenen söz konusu STK’lar, kuruluş amaçları doğrultusunda çeşitli faaliyetler, eylemler ortaya koymaktadır. Bu oldukça kalabalık ancak akademik çalışmalara yeterince konu olmamış alanda, Aydın Doğan Vakfı gibi doğrudan medya sahipleri eliyle kurulan yapıların yanı sıra özdenetim gayesiyle çalışan Basın Konseyi gibi kuruluşlar bulunmakta; ayrıca Hrant Dink Vakfı gibi izleme-takip yapan yapılar ya da doğrudan çalışanların haklarını gözetilen Sinema Emekçileri Sendikası gibi örgütlenme biçimleri bir arada yer almaktadır.

Bu çalışma, medyanın farklı alanlarında faaliyet gösteren STK’ların bir alt grubunu, İnternet ya da bilişim alanına odaklanan yapıları konu almaktadır. Bu kapsamda Türkiye’de İnternet kullanımının yaygınlaşmasına paralel bir şekilde sayıları artmakta olan Alternatif Bilişim Derneği, Linux Kullanıcıları Derneği, İnternet ve Hukuk Platformu, Telekomcular Derneği, Erişim Sağlayıcıları Birliği, İnternet Teknolojileri Derneği, Açık Kaynak Kod Platformu, Bilişim ve İletişim Çalışanları Dayanışma Ağı gibi farklı eğilimler sergileyen STK’ların kuruluş amaçları, eylem-faaliyet türleri, organizasyon biçimleri, ulusal ve uluslararası işbirlikleri incelenecektir. Bu amaçla, İnternet ya da bilişim alanına dair faaliyet gösteren STK’lar seçilecek ve seçilen kurumlar üzerine derinlemesine araştırma yapılacaktır. Araştırmada kullanılacak yöntemler arasında kurumlar tarafından üretilen belgelerin taranması, kurum temsilcileriyle yapılacak derinlemesine mülakatlar ve ikinci el kaynakların incelenmesi yer almaktadır.

Çalışmanın nihai amacı, bir yandan söz konusu alanda bulunan STK’lara dair detaylı bir tablo ortaya koymak suretiyle medya ve sivil toplum ilişkisinde gözlenen sorunları teşhis etmek, diğer yandan bu STK’ların İnternet ya da bilişim eksenindeki eksikliklerin giderilmesi konusundaki katkılarını saptamaktır. Araştırmadan edinilen bulgulardan hareketle, alandaki mevcut güçlüklerin giderilmesi yolunda sivil toplumun sınırları ve barındırdığı ihtimaller tartışılacaktır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** STK, internet, bilişim

## 1. Introduction

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Definition of key concepts

Due to its practical advantages as well as the fact that it has been tested for a considerable time the CSI’s minimal yet inclusive definition of civil society has been deployed in this research: “*the arena, outside of the family, the state, and the market where people associate to advance common interests*” (CIVICUS, 2003). In conceptualising civil society as an *arena*, the importance of civil society’s role in providing a public space where diverse societal values and interests interact, is emphasized. The term ‘arena’ is used to describe the particular realm or space in a society where people come together to debate, discuss,

associate, and seek to influence broader society while it should be highlighted that this 'arena' is distinctly different from other major arenas in society, that are the market, state or family.

Based on this research's practical interest in strengthening civil society following the CSI,<sup>1</sup> civil society is conceptualized as a *political* term rather than in *economistic* terms as a synonym to the "non-profit sector" for two reasons: First, since we are interested in collective public action in the broader context of governance and development and not primarily in the economic role of non-profit organisations in society. And secondly, such political perspective of civil society leads us to pay attention to issues of *power*, both within the civil society arena, as well as between civil society actors and the institutions of the state and the private sector.

Keane's public service model refuses to see civil society as a synonym for 'market competition'. It tries instead to adopt measures which protect civil society from the self-paralysing effects of market-based media. It implies the development of a publicly funded self-organizing and cosmopolitan civil society which is genuinely pluralist precisely because it is not dominated by commodity production and exchange. Public service media require a *post-capitalist* civil society guaranteed by democratic state institutions (Keane, 1991: 152).

The contemporary role of NGOs and their relative prominence in civil society is indicative not only of national political and economic changes but also of the rise of non-state actors and their relationship to global changes under neoliberalism (Fenton, 2010: 154). As the work of nation states moves and combines across national borders, the presence of non-state actors not accountable to electoral state-bound constituencies is beginning to 'reformat the political field' (Dean et al., 2006: xxviii).

***Boundaries and membership to Civil Society:*** While acknowledging theoretical boundaries between civil society, state, market and family, following the CSI conceptualization we acknowledge that in reality the boundaries between these spheres are "fuzzy". First, there can be and indeed there are some overlap between the different spheres. For example, co-operatives (that have both profit-based and value-based goals) might be seen to occupy the overlapping space of civil society and market. Secondly, similar to CSI with some differences, 'membership' in civil society is defined according to "function" (what activity or role an actor is undertaking) as well as the organisational "form" (While CSI gives the emphasize on the former one rather than the latter one). "Function-oriented membership definition" means that actors can move from one arena/sphere/space to another (or even inhabit more than one simultaneously), depending on the nature/function of their action – namely collective public action. For example, a private firm engaged in profit-making activities is clearly acting within the realm of the market. The same firm, however, undertaking philanthropy activities, can be said to be acting within civil society, yet with particular differences than the non-profit organizations operating in the civil society

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<sup>1</sup> The CSI is a participatory action-research project assessing the state of civil society in countries around the world. The project links this assessment with a reflection and action-planning process by civil society stakeholders, aiming to strengthen civil society in those areas where weaknesses or challenges are detected. By seeking to combine valid assessment, broad-based reflection and joint action, the CSI attempts to make a contribution to the perennial debate on how research can inform policy and practice. (...) The CSI is an international comparative project currently involving more than 54 countries from around the world (CSI Turkey Report, 2007, 21).

sphere. While "function-oriented definition of membership" places less emphasis on organisational forms and allows for a broader focus on the functions and roles of informal associations, movements and instances of collective citizen action; this definition makes the identification of who belongs to civil society and who doesn't probably more difficult than one which defines civil society by its organisational form. Yet, such an action-oriented definition can take account of the full range of civil society actors. Therefore both "function" (set of activities e.g. promoting tolerance, influencing public policy) and "organizational form" (e.g. non-profit, independent of state etc.) are used while deciding about which organisations are part of civil society and which are not.

**Associate:** By using the verb "to associate", the CSI indicates that civil society's most basic building block is the ability of people to bond and relate to one another, whether under the umbrella of an organisation or group or in the form of a spontaneous demonstration. "Where, by contrast, such bonds of affinity and cooperation are lacking, we speak of mass society, in which people stand alone, atomized and unconnected to each other" (Hadenius/Ugglä 1996: 1621).

**Advance common interests:** The term 'interests' should be interpreted very broadly, encompassing the promotion of values, needs, identities, norms and other aspirations. Rather than listing the different categories of interests, we opted for using the simplest and most-encompassing term<sup>2</sup>.

## **2.2 Contextualized theoretical framework: Turkish context of civil society**

It could be argued that civil society's history in Turkey is both a short and a long one, depending on how one approaches civil society conceptually. For instance, if civil society is seen solely as "an associational life outside of the state", it could be argued that civil society has a long history in Turkey: the importance of non-governmental organizations and associational life in Turkey's modernization and democratization history can be traced back to the late Ottoman Empire era (1850-1917). For example, foundations emerged in the Ottoman Empire as "philanthropic institutions", which created social solidarity outside political and economic spheres through charitable activities. Following the declaration of the independent Turkish republic as a modern nation-state, associations which operated outside, but in a close relation with the state, emerged. In other words, hand in hand with the state, the associational sphere acted as an integral and important component of modernization and parliamentary multi-party democratic life (Zurcher, 2004).

Yet, if we define civil society as something more than an associational life outside of the state and as a sphere that contributes to public participation and democratization on a voluntary basis, then civil society's history in Turkey would be a rather short one since such a civil society only gained importance after the 1980s. For this reason when discussing civil society in Turkey, one could talk about a paradox- one that indicates the simultaneous existence of a long history of civil society as an associational life and a new history of a civil society contributing to democratization in Turkey (Keyman, 2006). (CSI TURKEY, 2007, 35)

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<sup>2</sup> The issue that created the most debate was the use of the term 'common interest', which was viewed to have a more negative connotation in the Turkish language (implying some sort of self-interest). Thus the NAG eventually agreed to change only this term from 'interest' to 'benefit' (CIVICUS Turkey Report, 2007).

Both the concept and the reality of civil society vary greatly around the world. Given the Turkey-oriented nature of this research, the framework seeks to accommodate cultural variations in understandings of civil society and diverse forms and functions of civil society as observed in Turkish context. According to CIVICUS Turkey report published in 2007, in Turkey civil society “is perceived to play an important role in the creation of important values such as social stability, solidarity, trust, and social responsibility, in finding solutions to social problems, and as a network of communication” (Keyman and Icduygu, 2005) In detail, a two-dimensional conception of civil society is used in academic and public discourses in Turkey. In these debates, civil society is described as “an important arena and actor in the democratization and governance of state-society and state-individual relations”- and the problems embedded in the revival of civil society in Turkey are strongly emphasized. It must be noted that these problems have occurred mainly as a result of the use and abuse of civil society in Turkey (Ehrenberg, 1999) which refers to the fact that civil society was both used as a fundamental component of the democratization process and abused by different political actors (such as islamists, nationalists, conservatives and liberals) to maximize their own power and societal visions. This use and abuse of civil society has created a conceptual ambiguity and has attached both positive and negative connotations to our understanding of civil society.

The ambiguity surrounding the concept of civil society is further deepened by the existence of two similar yet, different definitions on the issue. First, in general terms, civil society is defined as the “arena of voluntary organizations which are autonomous from the state”. This definition conceptualises the civil society arena in Turkey as one which is formed free from state control and based on voluntary membership, but it does not necessarily embrace political or moral values such as democracy. The second definition defines civil society with reference to such democratic values, as “the common arena founded and populated by diverse voluntary organizations which participate actively in the process of finding efficient and long-term solutions to societal problems and seek to orient political actors to produce policies to implement these solutions”. Such an approach to civil society attributes importance to moral and political values which are thought essential to the process of establishing democratic social governance, but this feature is not perceived as the sole defining characteristic of civil society. Another defining characteristic of civil society is the existence of voluntary organizations, which by actively working in the arena of their choice, produce solutions to problems and operate autonomously from the state. In this sense, when defining civil society, instead of adopting a minimalist or maximalist approach on the level of moral and political values, it has become increasingly common to conceive civil society in terms of its impact and on the basis of its contribution to solving social problems. (SI TURKEY; 2007, 37)

### ***Typology of civil society in Turkey***

*CSOs (Civil Society Organizations and/or Non-Governmental Organizations):* Private, non-profit citizen organizations: Think tanks, cultural groups, organizations working mainly for public benefit (as opposed to member benefit). Tend to be foundations and associations (most common legal form).

*Business or Trade Associations:* Includes associations with restrictive corporate/business person membership and mainly act as pressure groups to advance interests of their own members and/or a particular sector. However some of these organizations (mainly TUSIAD,

Turkish Businessmen and Industrialists Association which is one of the largest) also commissions policy papers and makes public statements/pressure on the government regarding social and political reforms (e.g. education, etc.). They are legally organized as associations.

*Trade Unions:* Organized associations of the workers in an industry or profession working for the protection and furtherance of their rights and interests. Membership is voluntary but can be pressured in some environments. State employees have unions but are not allowed to strike. They have a separate law governing their organizational structure.

*Professional Associations:* Includes chambers and associations which require membership for the specific profession or sector (e.g. accountants, artisans, doctors, etc.). They are established by the government and have a separate law governing their organizational structure.

*Citizen Based Organizations (CBOs):* Grassroots based organizations such as mosque building and township associations (which are associations established in cities by migrants of a certain town to support one another and send remittances back home to communities).

### **3. Methodology**

IT-related NGOs in Turkey tend to cover different areas of interests and have different functions. They have various forms of establishment and differ in operational extent. However, they work on a specific area and usually sustain their activities within their defined borders. In some cases they share the same platform in civil society where they come together to find solutions to common problems. Therefore, IT-related civil society in Turkey has a broad context in which several initiatives work in an intertwined setting. The variety of these organizations and the multiplicity of media-related work in civil society oblige us to go through some steps.

In order to better understand the media-related civil environment, the first step would be to provide an outline of the IT industry in Turkey and to define the IT-related NGOs according to their field and functions. Telecommunication and IT can be listed as the subcategories of NGOs operating in the field of media since they are concerned with the media infrastructure. NGOs operating in this field generally deal with several issues and have complicated forms and functions. They demonstrate a wide spectrum of functions such as self regulation, monitoring, deliberation, networking, sponsorship, and advocacy.

After having defined the scope of IT-related NGOs in Turkey, the second step would be to depict their structural form and observe the outcomes of these specific models of organizations. In this phase of the research, the question “How do these NGOs operate?” is asked to find out the relationship between the forms of establishment and the context of the NGOs’ operations. In other words, the influence of the model of establishment on the operational routines are revealed. Structural form is basically comprised of the organizational processes, modes of mobilization, and financial models. Each of these aspects determine the efficacy of their operations, their decision making processes, and the kind of connections they have with the other NGOs.

Revealing the relationships of the NGOs is the third step of the analysis. Fundamentally, all NGOs have connections with several other units such as other NGOs, public, the state, media organizations, and universities. They get in touch with these units regarding their purposes and expectations. Therefore, their relationships and collaborative activities depend very much on why they reach other units. This phase of the research aims to find out how these relationships are built and sustained, moreover focuses on the outcomes of these contacts. This being the case, their relationships are analyzed at local, national and international levels. Briefly, this study seeks to find answers to the following questions:

- What are the occupations of those NGOs in Turkey?
- How do they operate?
- With whom do they ally or conflict?

In order to find out the answers to these question, this study in first place consults the secondary sources. Within that context, existing studies on the civil society in Turkey are reviewed and other NGO-specific materials are analyzed. That being the case, information obtained from the websites of the NGOs as well as from their publications and projects are investigated. Secondly, in-depth interviews with the NGO representatives from various organizations are conducted. A set of open-ended questions were asked to collect data from within the organizations. Since this research is a part of an ongoing research, a total of 4 (Alternatif Bilişim Derneği, Linux Kullanıcıları Derneği, Korsan Parti, İnternet Teknolojileri Derneği) representatives from distinctive fields were interviewed for the moment. Yet several representatives did not respond to our demand regarding individual interviews. So, this study should not be considered as a source to fully represent the civic mediascape in Turkey.

## **4. Topography of IT-related NGOs in Turkey**

### **4.1. Defining the field and functions**

#### ***4.1.1. IT landscape and operational extent of NGOs***

#### ***4.1.2. Functions***

- *Goals*
- *Actions*

#### **4.2. Workforce sources**

- *Structural form*
- *Financial sources*

### **4.3. Relational aspect**

#### ***4.3.1. Relations with the NGOs***

#### ***4.3.2. Relations at the international level***

#### ***4.3.3. Relations with the state***

#### ***4.3.4. Relations with the media***

## 5. Conclusion

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