Production of Activism under Authoritarianism
Insights from the Rights-Based Civil Society in Turkey

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Introduction

"Do I see hope in civil society? Actually, not much at the moment. I hope I am mistaken".[1] These are the words of one of my respondents, a civil society professional working with victims of torture in a Kurdish city in Turkey, when we discussed their prospects for democratization in the country. This pessimistic take on the potential of civil society activism is understandable given the extent of political repression in Turkey in the last few years, which has been harsher in Kurdish cities and in cases related to the Kurdish issue. This was also a response to the inefficacy of transnational human rights mechanisms in responding to the democratic backsliding in Turkey, which can be read as part of a broader trend affecting other peripheral countries under authoritarian regimes.

Following the general election in June 2015, in which the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party, AKP) lost its majority in Parliament for the first time, a political climate of fear dominated Turkey, starting with deadly attacks on members of the public who supported the opposition. Two devastating suicide bombings by ISIS took place in this period, one in Suruç on 20 July 2015 and the other in Ankara on 10 October 2015. In Suruç, a south-eastern town bordering Syria, 33 members of the youth section of a socialist organization were killed in an explosion, members who had been visiting to show solidarity with children living across the border under the threat of ISIS occupation. In Ankara, the capital of Turkey, two bombs killed 104 people at a mass political rally protesting the AKP government's decision to get involved in the war in Syria, organized by labour unions and supported by the left-wing pro-Kurdish Halkların Demokratik Partisi (Peoples' Democratic Party, HDP) and Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party, CHP), the main opposition party.

After the June 2015 election, no government could be formed and a general election was held again in November 2015, leading to a de facto coalition of the AKP

1 Interview, 5 November 2020.

with the ultra-nationalist Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Movement Party, MHP). As of early 2022, this coalition is still ruling the country, and is doing so with an intense discourse of securitization. In between the two elections, the peace negotiations between Turkey and the Kurdish movement came to an end, culminating in a counter-insurgency operation in several Kurdish cities that lasted until early 2016. Then in July 2016, there was a failed coup attempt against the AKP rule, after which the government declared a state of emergency, which lasted for two years. This endowed the government with extra-legal executive powers, enabling further repression of civil society and the criminalization of human rights activists and dissident political actors.

These events have led to pessimism among the opposition-aligned public and left-wing circles given the persistence of the AKP's authoritarian rule. The party has found ways to persevere despite its loss in the June 2015 election and the series of political and economic crises and corruption scandals in the last decade.[2] However, civil society activists in Turkey show dedication and commitment despite political repression shrinking the civic space and the discouraging factor of structural problems within the transnational civil society framework.

This article discusses the context within which civil society activism emerges and how civil society actors reflect on and navigate through the hardships they face. The focus is on rights-based and claim-making civil society organizations (CSOs). These are associations that focus on areas such as human rights, women's and LGBTQ rights, impunity, freedom of speech, equal access to justice, and minority rights. They aim to produce activism through advocacy, solidarity-building, lobbying, mobilizing public reaction, and the documentation and monitoring of rights violations. They are largely financed through external funding in the form of project grants since access to public funds is virtually impossible for them. The analysis will explore the transnational networks through which these organizations seek financial assistance and political support, mostly reliant on the human rights and democracy promotion mechanisms of the European Union.

2 The public investigation from 17 to 25 December 2013 disclosed massive corruption by high-ranking AKP politicians. Hayrettin Karaman, a pro-government Islamic columnist, issued a fatwa in response, declaring that "corruption is not a theft" (Yilmaz and Bashirov 2018, 1823). The manipulation of Islam has been a common strategy of the AKP to maintain support and prevent public reaction in such cases.

Authoritarian Neoliberalism in Turkey

Turkey has a seemingly unusual history with respect to the rise of authoritarianism in the last decade. The AKP government and its leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who came to power in 2002, were once praised and supported by the liberal international order and the EU as democratizing political forces during the 2000s (Başer and Öztürk 2017, 3). The country was declared a candidate for full membership of the EU in 1999, and the population's motivation to attain EU membership had provided substantial backing to the AKP. Along with the democratic reforms for the EU membership bid, the party pursued a neoliberal agenda from the outset. This entailed the increased privatization of public services and initiatives, the financialization of the economy, the flexibilization of the labour market, and the curtailment of labour rights.

The widespread perspective in the literature is that the AKP played a democratizing role in its first term until 2007 (or, according to some, during its first two terms until 2011) and then took a mostly conservative turn and went down an authoritarian path (McDonald 2011; Özbudun 2014). Cemal Burak Tansel problematizes this narrative of rupture between the early AKP on the one hand, which intended to implement democratic reforms and was committed to the EU membership agenda, and the later AKP on the other, which relied on coercion rather than consent. Accordingly, these two phases should be understood "not as diametrically opposed regimes with inherently contradicting modalities of rule, but as two interlinked nodes on the spectrum of a now-apparent authoritarian governance" (Tansel 2018, 198). That is, the authoritarian practices of the later period of the AKP can be traced back to its early years, if one considers the party's neoliberal restructuring of the economy and other spheres of life since its onset. Tansel analyses the development of the repressive regime in Turkey using the concept of authoritarian neoliberalism, which recognizes the inherent authoritarian dynamics in neoliberal regimes, and argues:

> AKP's recent "authoritarian turn" should be understood as the single facet of an authoritarian model of governance which was already shaped by executive centralisation – at the expense of political oversight and public participation – and sustained by the deployment of the full power of the state in the service of the party's interests. These interests have largely coalesced around neoliberal policies that have increased the scope and pace of commodification and restructured the state's regulatory and distributive roles. (Ibid., 209–10)

Even during its so-called democratic period, the AKP's statecraft relied on governmental decrees and omnibus bills that overrode parliamentary processes and democratic deliberation for changes spanning from accelerated privatization and the weakening of labour rights to increasing political control over the judiciary

(Erol 2018, 3). In this way, the neoliberal transformation led to the corruption of democracy and the erosion of check-and-balance mechanisms, paving the way for the entrenchment of the AKP's authoritarian rule in later years. Furthermore, the AKP's neoliberal policies prevented popular democratic empowerment, especially due to its anti-labour-rights policies and the weakening of labour unions as political actors. This happened through "the collective/institutional exclusion of labouring classes from policy-making processes and their 'disciplining by unmediated/individual incorporation' into AKP's political project as consumers, credit users and social assistance recipients" (Bozkurt-Güngen 2018, 220).

From Opening to Shrinking Civic Space

The government's undemocratic practices concerning economic affairs and labour rights were counterbalanced by the relaxation of state surveillance and controls over civil society during the 2000s as part of the EU harmonization reforms (Zihnioğlu 2020, 124). Moreover, the government and public institutions were open to dialogue and cooperation with claim-making CSOs on projects to improve human rights and the situation of minority groups (Babül 2020). The considerable opening of civic space generated optimism among the left-wing liberals and encouraged them to support the AKP during this period. The support of liberal intellectuals provided the party with ideological legitimization to pursue its neoliberal agenda for almost a decade and helped with discrediting the opposition as anti-democratic and anti-reformist (Ersoy and Üstüner 2016).

However, after the Gezi Protests in 2013, the AKP's stance towards CSOs—especially the rights-based ones that criticized the government's policies—took a negative turn. From that point on, several associations became victims of abuse and harassment in the form of extensive and additional auditing, fines, and even police raids (Yabanci 2019, 291). The closing of civic space intensified after the failed coup attempt in 2016. During the state of emergency rule, hundreds of CSOs and media outlets were shut down with statuary decrees, and many lawsuits were filed against activists, politicians, journalists, and academics under the accusation of supporting terrorism. This led to ongoing imprisonments such as that of Osman Kavala (Bia News Desk 2021), the leading promoter of civil society and human rights activism in Turkey, and Selahattin Demirtaş, the then-co-leader of the HDP.

In July 2017, the police raided a meeting in Büyükada in Istanbul, attended by several human rights CSOs including Amnesty International. 11 civil society activists were detained and put on trial, accused of supporting the coup attempt and terrorism. At the end of the trial in July 2020, four of them were found guilty and given prison sentences (Freedom House 2020). In late 2020, a legislative change was issued that increased control over CSOs, allowing the state to replace the lead-

ers of organizations who face terrorism charges and to seek restrictions on their activities in court (Freedom House 2021). The legislation also allows for annual government inspections of associations, specifically those with international ties. This legislation has been accompanied by an increase in criminalizing discourses by government officials and pro-government media, targeting the dissident CSOs that receive foreign funding and portraying them as enemies of the nation.

Stefan Toepler et al. (2020) define the trend of shrinking civic space which takes place in relation to the global rise of authoritarianism as "attempts by governments to disrupt international funding flows to local CSOs and further reduce their political voice through legal restrictions and other forms of repression" (ibid., 649). The authors discuss the coping strategies of claim-making CSOs, the section of civil society most adversely affected by authoritarianism due to their political activities (ibid., 654–55). Some of the strategies include foregoing foreign support and trying to mobilize domestic resources, reducing their public profile and de facto depoliticization, rebranding and refounding the organization, disbanding and working informally, or continuing activities abroad and/or largely online. For CSOs under authoritarianism it is more important to maintain interaction with and support from their communities, which requires creativity and institutional resilience as part of their strategic plans.

Crackdowns on civil society in the Global South are usually treated as isolated phenomena that are explained by the authoritarian and reactionary tendencies of domestic political forces. Instead, David Sogge (2020) argues for a transnational perspective to understand the worldwide shrinking of civic space and its domestic manifestations. This perspective considers the framework of foreign interests and global power relations, which includes factors such as the repression of organized labour in line with the measures imposed by international institutions like the IMF and the World Bank, and the increasing securitization and anti-terrorism policies that criminalize human rights activism.

Production of Civil Society Activism: Domestic and Transnational Frameworks

Civil society activism is not only an expression of political claims and struggle. I contend that it is also a product whose form, content, and influential capacities are affected by the domestic and transnational political-economic environment and power relations. Furthermore, it entails labour relations insofar as civil society activism becomes a professional activity and there are people who earn their living through this work. Hence, issues related to labour rights and workplace democracy also come into play in organizations that defend human rights and egalitarian values.

In the Turkish context, rights-based CSOs rely largely on foreign funding in the form of project grants, mainly obtained from EU sources enabled by Turkey's candidacy (Zihnioğlu 2020, 125). Especially for the claim-making CSOs, access to national public funds is virtually impossible and there are no tax exemptions. Membership fees are usually insufficient to sustain these associations' activities, as most rights-based CSOs in Turkey are not grassroots organizations and their membership base is quite limited, varying from several dozen to only a few members. Besides, the domestic legal framework is unfavourable, considering the difficulties in and vague eligibility criteria for getting the necessary permissions to collect donations, and the limitations over how donations can be used (TÜSEV 2020).

Under these circumstances, rights-based CSOs have to resort to project grants from foreign donors, mostly linked to the EU and other Global North sources, to secure their existence and realize their activities. "EU funding's short-term, activity-based, measurable outcome and visibility-oriented structure" contributes to some degree of depoliticization of Turkish civil society, even among those CSOs that have a primary focus on advocacy and empowerment, as they shift to service-based activities that better fit the funding framework (Zihnioğlu 2019, 513). In addition, CSOs may shift their mandates and goals to areas where funding is available, such as migration in recent years, which has come to the fore as an aftereffect of the civil war in Syria.

Thereby, dependency on external funding from the EU and other external donors turns out to be a critical problem regarding the transnational framework of civil society activism. Linked to this, the projectification of activism emerges as another significant issue whereby the donors' standard frame for activism is the project form, which serves their expectations regarding efficiency and accountability. The project form potentially causes alienation from grassroots politics and curtails the organic connection of CSOs with claim-making communities, as it requires a professionalized managerial system and a seemingly rationalized special mode of thinking (Buzogány 2011, 81).

The project form is an omnipresent trait guiding many aspects of contemporary human practice. It is characterized by the precedence of activity (as activity has the power to determine and format time, space, and relations), utilitarian networks instead of durable connections, and the treatment of society as isolated functions instead of a web of intertwined institutions (Jensen et al. 2016). Projectification in civil society presupposes the flexibility of operations, short-term time frames, and a fragmented approach to social relations in line with the neoliberal logic of production (Bayraktar 2017). This also refers to a neoliberal structuring of activism which involves the lack of job security for civil society workers and the acute problem of sustainability (that is, the ability of civil society initiatives to run by their own means), whereby short-term grants and time frames are the norm.

Furthermore, this neoliberal organization entails a geographical division of labour between the Global North donors and the Global South civil society actors. Therein, "activism production" is subcontracted by the northern donors which undertake the planning to the southern CSOs and activists who do the groundwork. Paralleling the global neoliberal production networks of goods and services, transnational civil society networks entail fragmentation and involve dynamics that can heighten power differences and exploitation. In this environment, problems such as the political risks that southern activists have to face, the non-democratic practices in CSOs, and the exploitation of voluntary labour are not adequately addressed.

Given the power inequality between northern and southern actors, agenda-setting and gatekeeping are identified as being important complications within the transnational civil society framework (Carpenter 2007). Northern donors have the upper hand because they have the financial resources and better access to political authorities with transnational power. As such, the preferences of large donor bodies such as major foundations and northern states define which needs are supported and in which ways they need to be framed by the southern CSOs seeking their support (Bob 2010, 144). In this environment, southern actors "are largely left out of the agenda-setting process by the more powerful gatekeepers and receive fewer resources and less international attention to alleviate human rights abuses" (Murdie and Polizzi 2017, 727).

Transnational advocacy network (TAN) is a much-referenced concept within civil society literature. It was first discussed by Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, examining cross-national solidarity for civil society activism. The authors describe TAN as a network of civil society actors across various countries which work internationally on a specific political, social, or environmental problem and advocate for change (Keck and Sikkink 1998). These actors are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and close exchanges of information and services. Ideally, the goal of TANs is to create a boomerang pattern in which the network mobilizes international organizations and powerful liberal states to push the repressive state into paying attention to the demands of domestic CSOs and social movements.

In Turkey, the boomerang pattern led to positive results in areas such as improving women's rights and fighting against torture and human rights violations in the 2000s, when the AKP government was willing to implement reforms for EU membership (Marshall 2009; Şahin and Yıldız 2010). Back then, CSOs in Turkey successfully mobilized EU mechanisms such as the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) to pressure the Turkish state to take action. This pattern is no longer functioning as the AKP government has practically dropped the EU membership agenda and is pursuing a pragmatic relationship with the EU by concentrating on trade and security. Correspondingly, the EU leadership has set aside the norm-

based approach and the agenda of promoting human rights in its relations with Turkey as it prioritizes border security in response to migration flows in the aftermath of the Arab Spring and the civil war in Syria (Thevenin 2021).

In recent years, human rights activists are voicing their disappointment with the EU's passivity regarding the human rights abuses in Turkey, most visibly in the ECHR's handling of the cases regarding the Turkish authorities' violations during the counter-insurgency operation in Kurdish cities in early 2016, and those during the state of emergency rule after the coup attempt (Negrón-Gonzales 2021). This passive stance is arguably linked to the EU's concern over not straining the relationship with the AKP government, which has been using the millions of migrants in Turkey as a bargaining chip. As such, there is a connection between the persistence of the AKP's authoritarian rule and the shrinking civic space in Turkey on the one hand, and the EU's border security agenda on the other.

Perspectives from the Field, Coping Strategies, and the Search for Alternatives

My field research with the rights-based civil society activists in Turkey revealed several key issues concerning not only the political repression that they face but also the civil society framework and transnational advocacy networks. Moreover, I inquired about the activists' strategies and their suggestions for how to maintain resilience under authoritarianism, and how to better use and transform the existing structures for advancing their activism. As expected, feelings of stress and sadness are commonly expressed given the political repression and the threat of persecution. Even if they are not themselves experiencing persecution, many activists bear the emotional toll of monitoring the regular rights abuses as part of their job, and of witnessing many fellow activists having to deal with lawsuits and prison sentences. The quote below, by the director of an association focusing on freedom of speech and founded in the last couple of years, exemplifies these sentiments:

> Fear is something that we discuss a lot [at our association]. I think we need regular therapy sessions. I thought about drafting a grant proposal for such a project [laughs]. A couple of years ago, when there was an intense period of trials against activists, I couldn't read or watch anything, I couldn't concentrate on anything. Everything made me sad. It is really toxic that we scan the news every day on human rights violations as part of our job.[3]

3 Interview, 3 September 2020.

In the last few years, this emotional toll has become part of the public conversation in the field of civil society, owing to the influence of feminist and queer interventions emphasizing the connectedness of private and political domains and the importance of emotions in collective action. Some CSOs organize collective therapy sessions and internal meetings for coping with the feelings of burnout and despair in the face of political repression and stressful work schedules.

Moreover, some activists recently addressed this situation with a project on political well-being that involved public workshops and exercises targeting the workers and volunteers in rights-based CSOs and other political organizations, whom they term "political labourers".[4] They start from a critique of the mainstream neoliberal wellness and personal growth industry, as they argue for a collective democratic conception of well-being which both acknowledges and encounters the multi-faceted inequalities dividing society. They adopt a queer feminist perspective proposing mutual care and revolutionary joy as strategies for continuing activism and maintaining resilience under authoritarianism (Equality Studies Association 2021).

At a broader level, criticism regarding the inefficiency of both the EU and international justice mechanisms is a prominent issue raised by civil society activists. This causes disappointment for some, whereas for others it exposes the interest-based realist approach of powerful liberal states that are inconsistent and dishonest. The global human rights regime rests upon the notion of the international liberal order (ILO), which was established after WWII and which reflected the hegemony of the USA, and the assumption that powerful liberal states implement norm-based politics and defend democracy. In the last decade, the rise of Russia and China and the worldwide surge of authoritarian and populist politics have caused a decline of this system, which was already flawed and deceptive, weakening the influence of human rights discourses (Van Lindert 2016).

In this context, international human rights treaties and justice mechanisms have lost their power to enforce democratic norms, contributing to the worldwide shrinking of civic space. A human rights activist who has been in the field for three decades and who has experience working in close contact with international organizations and EU actors expressed their concerns as follows:

> Human rights mechanisms are turning out to be inefficient at the global scale. Even England puts withdrawing from the ECHR on the agenda. International human rights mechanisms are collapsing. They cannot fight off the shrinking of resources, economic inequality, and the growth of racism and xenophobia. Today,

4 The project was initiated and conducted by Eşitlik Araştırmaları Derneği (Equality Studies Association) in 2021.

> the human rights issue is being bought off. What will happen to civil society at a global scale, that is the question.[5]

As part of the criticism towards the EU, an officer working at an international donor body operating in Turkey recounted that they viewed the EU's human rights donations as a strategy to whitewash its stance on the migration crisis, a strategy which they considered "completely hypocritical".[6] This interpretation was not uncommon among Turkish civil society activists. The EU's increased financial support for civil society and human rights activism in the aftermath of the coup attempt, which pushed authoritarianism in Turkey to the next level, is seen as an attempt to clear its conscience. That is, the EU has failed to effectively respond to the abundant human rights violations in Turkey since 2016 and has turned a blind eye to the suffering of migrants. This is because its primary concern is securing Turkey's cooperation for the containment of refugees from Syria and other war-stricken countries.

Despite the complaints, some activists think that it is still possible to activate the boomerang pattern, although this would likely not be as successful as in the 2000s. Accordingly, this can be achieved through raising well-framed demands and strategically lobbying EU government actors to influence the Turkish authorities to reverse some of the non-democratic practices:

> The civil society should be realistic in its relationship with the EU. There is no point in asking Germany to stop the weapons trade to Turkey or for the Netherlands to stop investing in hydroelectric dams in Turkey. We should recognize that for the European actors, the issue of human rights and liberties in Turkey is not a priority and their economic and security-related concerns are central. However, we can achieve positive results if we frame our demands precisely. For instance, we can press the EU to introduce the improvement of human rights as a condition for Turkey's long-term request of visa-free travel in the EU.[7]

Criticism towards the funding structure is a much-emphasized topic, pointing to an inadequate understanding of the local context by the EU and donor organizations. The introduction of sub-granting in recent years by the EU Delegation to Turkey—the largest funder of civil society in Turkey—has increased the responsibility of leading rights-based CSOs by burdening them with the heavy workload of reviewing applications, coordinating fund allocation, and monitoring the project cycles of sub-grantee organizations. Moreover, complaints are voiced regarding the short-term and activity-based project grants, which vary from six months to three

5 Interview, 4 April 2021.

6 Interview, 9 July 2020.

7 Interview with the director of a human rights association who has been active in the field for over three decades, 10 September 2020.

years at best, and do not allow the CSOs to sustain their capacities and institutional infrastructure.

The project form, and the constant search for funds to keep the CSOs alive, lead to neoliberal labour relations in the rights-based associations. These include short-term work contracts, a lack of job security, flexible work schedules, the giving up of basic labour rights such as severance pay, and exploitation of voluntary labour. It is not uncommon that CSO workers are expected to donate a part of their salary, since project grants are not sufficient to cover all the expenses of organizations. Furthermore, the grants are framed as donors' support for the activism that CSOs produce, with the assumption that these are self-sufficient organizations. The donors expect the CSOs to contribute to the project budget with their own resources. This usually means that workers have to realize some part of the tasks voluntarily without payment. The ethos of activism justifies such practices, wherein the workers are also activists, expected to make sacrifices in order to contribute to a political cause.

Eventually, this situation leads to hierarchical relations and top-down decision making, which ironically generates the conditions for authoritarian management within the CSOs that oppose political authoritarianism. In this regard, an activist who has been employed in different rights-based CSOs for more than a decade reported that:

> The associations [that advocate for human rights and democracy] tend to have a non-democratic self-organization. It is usually a group or a person making the decisions, so there are bosses. Sometimes they are like textile workshops and the workers are expected to give up on their rights. "This is not a job, this is activism" say the bosses and this justifies exploitation … The boss is the person who brings in the funds, which means the workers' salaries are paid because of them. This results in silence on the part of the workers who face exploitation and mistreatment. And so, demands for more democracy in the workplace are undermined.[8]

Recently, these undemocratic practices have become an issue in civil society circles in Turkey. Worker activists have begun to address exploitation, top-down decision making, and gender and age-based hierarchies in CSOs. There have been public debates about bullying allegations in certain reputable feminist organizations. While the younger activists accused the senior coordinators of overworking the staff and of bullying, the latter brought up the hardship of keeping small organizations alive for many years in the absence of continuous funding sources.

Another key problem regarding the CSOs' claim-making in Turkey is their limitations in reaching out to wider sections of society and raising support. One reason for that is the criminalization and defamation of such organizations by the government. However, another part of the problem relates to their shortcomings

8 Interview, 7 March 2021.

in building organic ties with society and engaging in grassroots politics. There is some degree of self-reflection whereby some civil society activists question their established activism perspectives, which include lobbying public authorities and focusing extensively on minority and cultural rights. The quote below, by an activist working for more than a decade in a human rights association focusing on reconciliation, shows how some actors in the field question their strategies and modes of activism:

> I think our association and many CSOs in the field [of human rights] are confused about whom they should address and whom they are trying to influence. Are we talking to the state? Well, there is no possibility of dialogue with the state now. In our association, little by little, we have been discussing ways to change our communication strategy. We are thinking about ways to build an accessible language and address the younger generation.[9]

In connection with the motivation for extending their social influence, some human rights associations have begun to focus more on labour rights, with the perspective that "workers' rights are human rights".[10] Addressing the labour rights abuses, which have evidently intensified under authoritarianism and the recent severe economic crisis prompting dozens of strikes only in the first two months of 2022, might be a way to establish stronger ties with society and gain grassroots support for a rights-based civil society (Osterlund 2022). In this regard, developing rapport with labour organizations and especially with the emergent smaller workers' collectives can be a meaningful strategy to make their struggles visible and to channel the European financial support and leverage to labour causes.

Finally, as an internal strategy for strengthening the stance against authoritarianism, rights-based CSOs seek to enhance dialogue, cooperation, and solidarity among themselves. The Solidarity Network for Human Rights Defenders – Turkey was launched in 2019 to bring together organizations specialized in different causes, such as human rights, media freedoms, access to justice, and women's and LGBTQ rights. Their motivation is to organize a stronger and more unified defence mechanism against the pressures on civil society, such as the detention and trial of activists and the introduction of new legislation that further restricts civic space.

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9 Interview, 29 July 2020.

10 A recent example is a research report on the workers' rights abuses and preventions of unionization during the state of emergency rule, convened by two important human rights CSOs, Hafıza Merkezi and Eşit Haklar İçin İzleme Derneği: https://hakikatadalethafiza.org/kaynak/ohal-rejiminde-iscilerin-kollektif-haklari-avrupa-kokenli-iliskili-isletmelerde-sendikal-orgutlenme-haklari/.

Conclusion

The rights-based civil society in Turkey is in trouble, being at the intersection of several factors stemming from the domestic context, the transnational civil society framework, and neoliberal work relations. These complications have been aggravated by the authoritarian crackdown on civil society in recent years. The analysis undertaken in this article delineates the main challenges that civil society workers/activists face, their counter-strategies, criticisms, and suggestions to overcome the problems.

To conclude, some key points can be highlighted as ways out of the structural problems and present-day impediments faced by rights-based CSOs in Turkey. These recommendations could also apply to improving the situation of other Global South civil society actors who are struggling against authoritarianism and who are seeking support from transnational networks and mechanisms.

- Developing compelling strategies to connect with broader sections of society and to incorporate the struggles for social and economic rights into human rights activism.
- Along with political authoritarianism, confronting the far-reaching effects of neoliberalism both in society and within CSOs, and improving ties with the labour movement and workers' rights initiatives.
- Addressing the hierarchical relations, undemocratic decision-making patterns, and exploitation within CSOs which amount to intra-organizational authoritarian practices.
- Improving dialogue, cooperation, and solidarity between CSOs working in diverse fields.
- Cultivating a realistic understanding of the EU-oriented transnational advocacy network at play and its contradictions, pragmatic lobbying of EU actors in order to activate the boomerang pattern, and holding the EU donor bodies and justice mechanisms accountable for making change.
- Improving ties with other Global South civil society actors—starting with CSOs in the MENA region that are also clients of European human rights and democracy promotion mechanisms—to put pressure on transnational human rights networks and mechanisms in order to implement effective policies to implement sanctions against authoritarian states.

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