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4.2 Women's NGOs as Sites and Agents of Enactment

In this section we propose an overview of various acts of European citizenship brought about by women activists in Turkey. We take the example of women's NGOs in Turkey working on the political participation, entrepreneurship of women, violence against women and discrimination. We will focus here specifically on the Association for Supporting and Training Women Candidates (*Kadın Adayları destekleme ve Eğitim Derneği*, KADER), Women Entrepreneurs Association (*Türkiye Kadın Girişimciler Derneği*, KAGİDER), Women's Center (*Kadın Merkezi*, KAMER), and Capital City Women's Platform (*Başkent Kadın Platformu*). These associations either used European norms and ideals as reference points, or they developed strategies and mechanisms to become a part of the European lobbies and networks, and/or worked through EU institutions. These active agents of the women's movement in Turkey, though they have not been affiliated officially with the EU citizenship, enacted themselves as European citizens through these networking or lobbying activities, through their attempts to use European platforms and the EU institutions in favour of bringing the necessary changes in the field of gender, and/or through the criticisms they brought to the European institutions and countries with respect to gender issues. [...]

Since the Helsinki Summit in 1999, the EU's rules, procedure, paradigms, styles, ways of doing and shared beliefs and norms had a role in the development of civil society associations' action capacities in Turkey; and the struggles for extending citizenship rights embodied acts referencing Europe. Both KADER and KAGİDER used the European norms and standards as reference points for realizing changes in gender related issues, and enhancing women's rights. [...] The associations we have focused in this report have used different strategies to achieve efficient lobbying in Europe and especially in Brussels, at the heart of Europe. Lobbying, in particular, has become an effective tool for the members of women's NGOs in Turkey who enact claims of European citizenship, even though they formally do not possess a European identity. Through such acts women referenced Europe for achieving full citizenship rights that are in line with European norm and standards. [...]

Women's associations use informal lobbying as a strategy to endorse formal lobbying in the EU and participating in the European institutions' reports and recommendations. Openings, seminars and breakfast meetings are such activities where women activists create new fields for lobbying. On the day of March 4th 2008, State Minister Responsible of Women and Family Affairs Nimet Çubukçu, women academicians, writers and NGO activists from Turkey as well as women actors from the EU institutions were invited to the launching of KAGİDER Brussels office. In its communication on the launching of the Brussels office, it was stated that KAGİDER believed in the necessity to integrate with the EU values for the establishment of gender equality in Turkey and EU values represented democratic rights such as "the superiority of law" and "gender equality". In the communication KAGİDER affirmed that it "[has] acquired the target. To have strong and independent women in Turkey, the only way it is the EU" (KAGİDER 2009). [...]

KAMER also tries to actively affect the EU policies on Turkey, particularly with regard to progress reports. The organization communicates with the formal EU bodies mainly through MEP's like Emine Bozkurt. It also takes appointments from the key figures of the EU institutional structure, such as the heads of countries carrying EU presidency and/or from the European Parliament rapporteurs on Turkey, and tries to communicate and influence policies through these contacts.

The Capital City Women's Platform, though unlike other women's organizations it was formed by the women practicing Islamic way of life, also works through formal and informal regional and global networks. Despite the fact that they particularly refrain from taking the EU funds, they try to affect policies through their communications and contacts with the diplomatic committees coming to Turkey from various European countries and from the institutions of the EU. The platform is a part of the European Women's Lobby, and CEDAW executive committee's Ankara branch, and formally uses these channels (and others such as working with ILO under the coordination of TÜRKİŞ, or actively participating in the demonstrations of Amnesty International) to effect and become a part of the policy-making processes (Özkan, 2006).

Nonetheless through these acts of referencing Europe, women activists demand the same citizenship rights with men, the primary citizens of the Republic, and also ask for the enlargement of these rights in line with European citizenship; thus enact themselves as European citizens. All of these women activists tried to use the accession process and the progress reports as tools in the realization of the changes that the women's movement in Turkey, in general, and their organization in specific have been struggling for. İlknur Üstün, the former chairwoman of KADER's Ankara branch²¹ stated in a conference held at Bilgi University in 2005 that as the Turkish government has decided "to make the European Union a state policy"; it became obliged to implement gender equality. As discussed above, the women actors try to affect policy in Turkey in line with their decades old demands of women's citizenship rights and women's human rights through referencing the EU, using the EU networks, funds, and formal processes of accession. While referencing Europe for transforming gender issues in Turkey, women actors indeed criticize Europe, and/or try to influence gender politics in Europe as well, with the idea that Europe does not stand as the final target and resides in itself gender gaps.

Although for KAGİDER, Europe stands as the main target that has to be achieved as a whole by becoming a member, Özgül Erdemli Mutlu, Director of Women Entrepreneurship and Leadership Center of KAGİDER, affirmed in our interview that Europe is "a tool for democratization" but should not be taken as the ultimate example. Aysun Sayın, the former General Secretary of KADER indicated that the standards in the *acquis communautaire* were important because they had to be reached. But on the other hand, "the *acquis* on gender equality [was] not enough" because the Union was interested mostly on equality in employment but not on women's participation in politics or the problem of domestic violence. For Sayın, KADER's aim was not only to influence gender politics in Turkey, but to transform it also in the European Union (Interview with Aysun Sayın). As a feminist organization particularly focusing on violence, KAMER criticizes Europe particularly with respect to the problem of gender-based violence. It argues that European countries do not pay enough attention to the issue of domestic violence in their home countries, and act as if it is an Eastern phenomenon. In order to counter this Orientalist stance, as Akkoç

states, the members of KAMER study each country in detail especially before meeting with the officials from the European countries or EU institutions [...]

In the overall, it can be argued that all these organizations, KADER, KAGİDER, KAMER and Capital City Women's Platform have deconstructed the European conceptual and ideological packages. In doing so, they have enacted upon a model of citizenship which includes cosmopolitan, egalitarian and democratic values and rights in general; and ideal gender equality, policies empowering women, freedom from discrimination, violence, and the bonds of the patriarchal system, in particular. These active agents of the women's movement in Turkey have enacted themselves as European citizens through their attempts to use European platforms and the EU institutions in favour of bringing the necessary changes in the field of gender, and/or through the criticisms they brought to the European institutions and countries with respect to gender issues. They not only tried to change gender policies in their home countries, but envisioned at least a regional change (e.g. empowerment of women and enhancement of gender equality, betterment of women's rights), if not worldwide. Women activists in Turkey in fact did shape the EU agenda on women of Turkey. As citizens of Turkey, they influenced the policy of a polity that they are not a member of. [...] Yet the EWL coordination in Turkey, and its member women's organization did not act only with the aim of affecting the EU policy on Turkey, but they acted with a much broader vision which can be summarized as "We have not founded the EU, but we can actualize its transformation with respect to equality" ("AB raporu'nda Türkiye kadın haklarında hala sorunlu ülke"). Thus, this coordinated act of influencing the policy of the EU should not be treated only as an act of transforming the policies of Europe with respect to the citizens of Republic of Turkey, but also as an act of transforming/enhancing the norms and standards of Europe for all its citizens.

References:

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