

Mediterranean Politics

ISSN: 1362-9395 (Print) 1743-9418 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/fmed20

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To cite this article: Hande Eslen-Ziya & Nazlı Kazanoğlu (2022) De-democratization under the *New Turkey*? Challenges for women's organizations, Mediterranean Politics, 27:1, 101-122, DOI: 10.1080/13629395.2020.1765524

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2020.1765524

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Published online: 25 May 2020.

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MEDITERRANEAN POLITICS
2022, VOL. 27, NO. 1, 101–122
https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2020.1765524

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De-democratization under the *New Turkey*? Challenges for women's organizations

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ABSTRACT

This article is an endeavour to explore the changing networking strategies of women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Turkey over the last decade. We delineate the shifts and changes during what we call the *de-democratization* process where secular women's organizations face significant constraints and difficulties while networking and lobbying the government. Under these constrained conditions, yet, secular women's organizations make an exceptional effort to sustaining their lobbying activities and changing their networking strategies as well as partners. Relying on the related literature and 26 semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted with activist members of these organizations with about a 15-year time difference, this paper contends that Turkish women's organizations under the *New Turkey* are forced to find alternative allies and adjust their velvet triangles of support. Though their strategies were similar in some ways, the type of partnerships formed and who these partners are changed from the first and second decade of the 2000s. Thus, the paper shows how the secular women's organizations adapt to new resources as they mobilize and how they shift away from employing the single target approach to double while changing their initial networking and collaboration partners.

KEYWORDS De-democratization; double-target approach; feminist movement; New Turkey; networking; women's organizations; velvet triangles

I. Introduction

Beginning of new millennium brought upon the concept of Europeanization (Börzel, 2002; Graziano & Vink, 2008; Olsen, 2002) where the candidate countries and their policies were influenced by and adopted with European policies, norms. According to Radaelli (2004) Europeanization is composed of dissemination and institutionalization of formal and informal rules of conduct, norms as well as policies. Especially in the case of Turkey, an important element of the European Union (EU) accession process has been the progress of adaptation of Turkish laws to the acquis communautaire[1] (Eslen-Ziya,

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2007), marking the period of democratization and rights-based reforms. Such years correspond with AKPs first term where conventionally identified by many scholars (like Erol, 2019; Keyman, 2010; Öniş, 2015) with democratization, reformism, and progressive economic policies.

Turkey has made amendments in its both internal and foreign policies to comply with the EU standards. During this process 'civil society played an active role in resolving the democratic deficits in governments and entities' (Eslen-Ziya, 2007, p. 82) and 'undertaking as a part of its accession negotiations' (Ketola, 2011, p. 787). Women's civic participation in Turkey worked to promote gender equality and gender equal legislation changes (Eslen-Ziya, 2007, 2012, 2013; Içduygu, 2011). They networked and lobbied to change clauses on gender discrimination in both Turkish Civil and Penal Codes (Eslen-Ziya, 2007, 2012; Eslen-Ziya & Korkut, 2010). However, since 2007, the ruling party, AKP's (*Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi*), hesitation to further continue the EU-membership project (Patton, 2007; Zihnioğlu, 2013) has been a 'breaking point for women's civil society' (Ketola, 2011, p. 797). This resulted in changing the dynamic process of Europeanization and caused disruption and even reversal (Szymański, 2017) – what we will call *de-democratization*.

We define *de-democratization* as the weakening of human rights as well as the EU influence on rights-based reforms and political system – but for the purpose of this paper – we define it, more specifically as the weakening of gender equality discourses in domestic settings and in national public debates. Such *de-democratization* is similar to what Szymański (2017, p. 190) refers as de-Europeanization. He argues that de-Europeanization and its negative impact can be observed in many countries across the world with changes in their regimes (from democratic to non-democratic), or loss of democratic quality. According to Copeland, de-Europeanization refers not only to the intentional loss of enthusiasm in Europeanizing the national legislation but also the intentional de-construction of the already Europeanized laws and policies as well as rules and regulations.

In the context of Turkey, this demise of EU-membership from the political agenda accompanied by AKP gaining almost 50 per cent of the votes in the 2011 general elections (Cindoglu & Unal, 2017; Gümüşçü, 2013) brought a number of severe attacks towards gender policies, asserting conservative gender norms by restricting women's choices. The gender-segregated discourses developed by AKP defined women as mothers and sisters, assigning them reproductive, homemaking, and nurturing duties. Moral and religious duties of citizens became the discursive tools used by the government to micro-manage society and push it to conform to conservative gender norms. This became more evident, when President Erdoğan, Prime Minister of the time, stated that every family should have at least three children:

> At this stage, the West is crying, but you shall never fall into that trap. If the same trend continues, in 2030 most of the Turkish population will also be above 60 years of age. My dear sisters, I am not talking as a Prime Minster, I am talking as your distressed brother. Never fall into this trap. We have to keep our young population as it is. The essence of economy is people. [. . .] What do they want to do? They want to put an end to the Turkish nation. If you do not want our population to cease, a family must have three children.[2] (President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, authors´ translation).

This quote marked the beginning of a new era, that AKP referred as the *New Turkey*. According to Eslen-Ziya & Korkut (2010, p. 109), *New Turkey* is the start of a 'conservative line and served as a break with the secularist tradition of the past … re-defined democracy along majoritarian principles. Rather than gender equality, it framed gender justice as the new currency for gender relations'. Notion of *fitrat* (nature) was used to define what it means to be a woman and/or man. For this, biological differences and their complementarity to one another were emphasized while refuting the possibilities for any form of equality between women and men.

This was followed with family-centred social policies, pro-marriage anti-abortion incentives as well as significant impediments to human rights and democracy with the surveillance and imprisonment of journalists and civil society activists and academics, and control over mainstream media. The milieu under *New Turkey* not only toughened secular women's organizations' networking and collaboration practices but also their very survival.

The focus in this paper then is to explore, with reference to the above mentioned emerging dynamics of Turkey, the changing strategies of women's organizations.[3] We argue that the shifting from democracy – referred as 'democracy decline' or a 'new transition' by political scientists like Plattner (2015) and Schmitter (2015) is observed under the *New Turkey*. *New Turkey* and its new set of norms and values (Korkut & Eslen-Ziya, 2016, p. 13) serves as a counter-conduct, a counter-narrative (Cebeci, 2016). We call these counter narratives, discursive governance (Korkut & Eslen-Ziya, 2017, 2016, 2011) through which AKP freely opposes the judiciary and fundamental rights, norms, and values, leading to a *de-democratization* process, and hampering gender equality and freedom narratives. Through such discursive governance, AKP influences the public agenda via active sense-making, a process in which the media and public discourse plays a critical disseminating and legitimating role, particularly in restrictive political settings (Burul & Eslen-Ziya, 2018). We argue that the identity and habitus in the ideology of *New Turkey* were projected via discursive governance, rendering formal policy change to affect behavioural shifts unnecessary.

Though there are a lot of literature on feminist movement during Turkey's Europeanization process since the Helsinki Summit (Aldıkaçtı, 2013; Eslen-Ziya, 2007, 2012, 2013; Içduygu, 2011), there is a salient gap regarding the

feminist movement during Turkey's *de-democratization* process under the *New Turkey* (with a few exceptions: Negrón-Gonzales, 2016; Güneş-Ayata & Doğangün, 2017). Seeking to fill this gap, this paper concentrates on the last twenty years of networking and collaboration (within the first and second decade of the 2000s) repertoire of Turkish women's organizations. The goal is to shed light on how civil society organizations adapt themselves to changing socio-political conditions of the day and maintain their causes and to understand how the dominant, conservative, and gendered public normative order of AKP effect women's organizations mobilizations. We ask, what are the lobbying and networking strategies used by women´s groups and whether or not there is a difference in such strategies in different time frames. In this paper, lobbying is defined as the planned strategies women´s organizations have to create an impact on political decision-making and governance, and networking is defined as the links collaborations and connections women´s organizations create during their campaigning. We will argue that during the *de-democratization* process (the second decade of the 2000s) secular women's organizations started facing significant constraints and difficulties in lobbying the government and/or forming allies with the government.

In an attempt to analyse the strategies used by women's groups in both periods and highlight the changing tactics during the *de-democratization*, the paper is organized into three sections. The first section presents our theoretical framework, within which the paper is situated by discussing the gender politics in Turkey in general and the role of women´s movement in this process in specific. The following section focuses on the ways in which women's organizations' collaboration and networking strategies evolved within the last decade and the major differences with that of the first decade. Finally, the paper concludes by summarizing the main findings and discussing the implications of our case study under this toughened condition. We will argue that such constrained and difficult conditions have become especially evident as the pro-government women´s groups started gaining power. In this respect, we will demonstrate how the secular women's organizations adapt new resources as they mobilize, and how they shift away from employing the single target approach to double and in doing so how they change their initial networking and collaboration partners.

The empirical data used in this paper draw on analysis of findings from semi-structured interviews conducted between 2001 and 2002 (first decade of the 2000s) and later between 2016 and 2017 (second decade of the 2000s). The first set of data was gathered through in-depth interviews with 10 activists from the women's movement who were journalists, members of women's NGOs and lawyers that work for women's rights in Istanbul and Ankara. In this case, a snowball sampling technique was used to locate feminists who were actively networking and lobbying to change the Turkish Civil and Penal Code. The interviewees occupied positions from the head of

a semi-governmental body, the Turkish Republic Prime Ministry Directorate General on the Status and the Problems of Women (KSSM), to activists from various women's groups such as the Association for Supporting Women Candidates (KA-DER) and the Flying Broom (Uçan Supurge). To supplement the interviews, primary and secondary documents (bulletins, newsletters, journals, magazines, and women's organizations' mission statements) related to women's activism were analysed.

For the analysis of activism under the *de-democratization* process of Turkey, a total of 16 interviews were conducted with activist members of secular women's organizations located in Ankara, Diyarbakır, and Istanbul such as Association to Support Women Entrepreneurs (KAGIDER), Foundation for the Support of Women's Work (KEDV) and Women for Women's Human Rights/New Ways (KIH/YC). Again, a snowball sampling technique was used to locate feminists who were actively resisting the anti-gender policies implemented by the AKP government. Our purpose was to understand their efforts of resistance in such gender policy (re)making process of the AKP government as well as to uncover their new networking and collaboration strategies, if there were any. Both data sets were analysed via the thematic analysis research method. It is important to note that in both time frames AKP has been the ruling party, but with major shifts in *democratization* process within second decade of the 2000s.

II. The gender politics in Turkey and its reflection on women's movement

In Turkey, between the founding of the Republic in 1923 until the end of the first coup in the 1960, women's groups worked to protect the new system and supported the education of women. Even among these groups the pro-natal and pro-nationalistic ideology that sees women's vocation as mothers breeding the children for the Turkish nation was endorsed. Though after the 1960 coup women became active in social movements, they yet did not question such gendered roles. It was in the 1980s that they started forming collective action and questioning women's role and status (Tekeli, 1995). While the space for diverse political groups was growing constantly, the women's activist groups during this period operated only as extensions of political parties. Hence, the issues they chose to advocate were connected to state ideologies.

1980s mark a key period in the development of civil society within the Turkish history. During the apolitical climate that was created by the 1980 military coup, different voices began to find a legitimate space within civil society. The autonomization of polices and civil society as Göle (1994) puts, started to take place especially, to maintain stability post military coup. It was within this milieu that secular women's groups become more organized (Arat,

2012; Aldıkaçtı, 2013; Davis & Lutz, 2000; Diner & Toktaş, 2010; Eslen-Ziya, 2013; Grünell & Voeten, 1997; Ketola, 2013; Tekeli, 1992) and mobilized in small groups revolving around certain themes, projects, or events (Al-Ali, 2002). As Sümer and Eslen-Ziya (2016, p. 6) put forward, a number of 'young, urban, middle class, well-educated, professional women' who identify themselves as secular[4] began to engage with a wide range of lobbying activities. Such lobbying was an effort to influence the decision of the government and policymaking (Interview with activists from 2001–2002 era). This was done, by not just focusing on women's suppressed positions within the public sphere, but also by putting an effort on alleviating gender inequalities within the private sphere (Threlfall, 1998). They were, in other words, concerned with issues including the domestic violence, women's disproportionate share of domestic work, which retain them from being politically or economically active (Aksu & Günal, 2002; Ketola, 2013).

Lobbying is one of the most effective strategy for policy change (Nyland, 1995), and our findings indicate that it requires strong collaboration and networking skills. Networking includes activities that support their work by enabling relationships with other organizations. To this end, secular Turkish women's organizations have acknowledged both the importance and power of coming together and forming networks at the national level. This helped them generate a bottom-up dynamic for women's liberation. They got together when necessary and formed what has been described as the '*velvet triangle*' (Woodward, 2004). Their velvet triangle included cooperation with national and international women organizations as well as with academics and female friendly parliament members (femocrats) (Interview with activists from 2001 to 2002 era). It was in the 2000s that they took new venues and developed new frameworks for their activism. We will refer to such period as the democratization period as it was both enabled by women's successful and determined advocacy efforts but also Turkey's official application to become a full member of the EU.

The EU accession process gave leverage to the movement (Ketola, 2013; Zihnioğlu, 2013) by acknowledging the importance of civil society actors' roles during the harmonization process of both the new member and the candidate states (Zihnioğlu, 2013). To this end, the EU has paid a salient attention to strengthening the civil society organizations in those new member and candidate states (Ketola, 2013) including Turkey. It provided both technical and financial support to these countries in order to contribute to their Europeanization and democratization processes (Zihnioğlu, 2013). Although a number of notable Europeanization scholars (Içduygu, 2011; Ketola, 2013; Zihnioğlu, 2013) saw the EU contribution to empowerment of Turkish civil society organizations as an ambivalent one in general, women's organizations have successfully facilitated from the opportunities that the accession process brought about (Eslen-Ziya, 2013).

Within this relatively freer climate, woman's organizations pressured the Turkish state to alleviate the gender discriminatory laws (Eslen-Ziya, 2013) and transfer the EU laws on gender equality into Turkish legislation. Especially during the processes of amending the Turkish Civil Code in 2001, the Turkish Penal Code as well as the Turkish Labour Code in 2003, woman activists were considerably active. They continuously lobbied and advocated the Turkish state (Aldıkaçtı, 2013). This required an intense collaboration and networking with various actors.

While exploring the networking and lobbying strategies of women's organizations during the EU accession process, Eslen-Ziya (2012) showed that the activist members of these organizations preferred to establish various networks with member state governments (i.e., Dutch, Swedish, and the United Kingdom) and the EU institutions on the grounds of funding opportunities. Collaborating with different women's organizations from different European countries found to be beneficial as it provided Turkish organizations with a constant learning opportunity (Interview with activists from 2001 to 2002 era). The European Women's Lobby[5] (EWL) also appeared as a much-preferred collaboration partner. This was mainly because first they saw it as a bridge between the Western feminism and Turkish feminism; second as a first step of Turkey's entry to the EU. In sum, within such milieu that was created in the wake of the Helsinki Summit in 1999, (Içduygu, 2011; Zihnioğlu, 2013), women's organizations successfully collaborated and networked with other agents nationally, internationally and transnationally. They did this in order to pressure Turkish government and make them acknowledge their causes.

In the course of the 2011 elections, however, the date chimes the start of the AKP's de-democratization process, where the secular women's organizations started to lose their ground for lobbying, and networking with the government officials become harder. In this period, KADEM (Women and Democracy Association) – a women's organization ran by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's daughter Sumeyye Erdogan, was established among many others. KADEM is a civil society organization with the aim to preserve traditional gender roles:

> Our goal is to engage in academic studies to develop a new discourse through going beyond the established social acceptances and the problematic areas of modern East-West frame of mind with respect to women studies. Engaging in lobbying activities at national and international level. Developing a social consciousness that the sharing of roles between men and women can only be realized by considering the balance between rights and responsibilities (KADEM mission statement, 2019[6]).

These government-funded and founded non-governmental organizations, been indeed an old project of conservative parties, dating back to mid-1980s. The *Refah Partisi* (RP), then ruling party, seeing the lack of organized Islamist

women to advocate for Islamist women's rights, chose a number of pious women, and trained them (Arat, 2012). Though RP was closed by the decision of the Constitutional Court in January 1998 on the grounds of threatening the secular character of Turkey it set the ground for the foundation of conservative women´s groups.

It was later in 2001 when AKP was formed, they took over the RP's determination to empower Islamist women's NGOs (Buğra & Savaşkan, 2014). This became openly visible after the establishment of KADEM in 2013. Once KADEM was founded it slowly blocked the communication between the government and secular women´s organizations. KADEM for instance took over the role from secular women´s groups in writing the Shadow Reports for CEDAW and worked with the government on Istanbul Convention. Hence, the Turkish government stopped consulting secular women´s organizations on matters related to gender issues. In such activities KADEM clearly aligns itself with the governments conservative position – situating women within the family (Akyüz and Sayan-Cengiz 2016) – silences cases of violence against women in Turkey. KADEM´s aim 'to conserve the essential values of women in Turkey' in return does nothing but contributing to side-lining secular women's NGOs where they lose their connections within the government.

In the second decade of the 2000s, within the Turkish civil society context, now, we observe a group of government-supported faith-based women's organizations bred up with the teachings of Islam coexisting with secular women's organizations. Although these two facets of Turkish Women's NGOs are not mutually exclusive, they have completely different causes, agendas as well as lobbying and networking repertoire. They also draw on to different donors to actualize their causes. While the secular women's NGOs follow the *democratization* legacy of the EU with emphasis on gender equality and gender equal legislation changes, the faith-based women's organizations, on the other hand, have the goal to disseminate the *de-democratization* discourses of the ruling party. The concept of 'gender justice' – emphasizing the natural complementary characteristics of men and women, wherein women are associated with private whereas men with public spheres (Gedik, 2015) – was one of them. Politics of family, attributing sacredness to the family institution while reinforcing gendered roles and duties then became a major discursive tool used by both the AKP government and its ally women's organizations. Debates on population politics involved contestations over women's bodies, sexualities, and their reproductive choices (Cindoglu & Unal, 2017; Korkut & Eslen-Ziya, 2011). During the second decade of the 2000s the 'state led ideology of egalitarianism is replaced by state support and protection of motherhood, which fits perfectly into its conservatism and neo-liberal policies as well as serving to appease its conservative

constituency' (Güneş-Ayata & Doğangün, 2017). Hence, for *New Turkey*, women existed only with reference to family and family life.

According to number of European studies scholars, such shift into a conservative-gender climate is referred as the *de-Europeanization* of Turkish Republic (Aybars et al., 2018; Kubicek, 2013; Patton, 2007; Yılmaz, 2016a, 2016b), and *de-democratization*. This in fact was what AKP officials referred as the *New Turkey* with a strong patriarchal gender order. Through such patriarchal gender order and the conservative discourses on women's bodies and sexualities under the *New Turkey*, women became the second citizens. Gender politics 'lost ground with respect to gender equality and women's position in society' (Cindoglu & Unal, 2017, p. 41). This according to Güneş-Ayata and Doğangün (2017, pp. 617–618) unfolds the intersection of religious, nationalist, and neo-liberal concerns in three areas where the *New Turkey* establishes its boundaries: First is the claim that AKP is the real representative of the national will (*milli irade)* and common values (and against the elites). Second, tendency to ignore the concerns of the civil society organizations, including the women's groups. The creation of KADEM has been the very attempt to silence, control, and limit women's activism. The third item that unfolds the intersection of religious, nationalist, and neo-liberal concerns according to Güneş-Ayata and Doğangün (2017) is the neo-liberal family-centred conservative politics implemented by AKP. Such conservative politics mainly relies on neoliberal-conservative regulation of reproduction, sexuality, and family (Cindoglu & Unal, 2017). Women's organizations, working for women's liberation and gender equality, on the other hand, have hardly given up on their causes. They rather come to be working even harder in order to overturn this backlash and re-gain at least what they already achieved in the previous decade. Under these toughened and relatively more constrained conditions, they were compelled to adopt new strategies and new resources for their networking and collaboration. It is these strategies and new ways that we will examine in the following section.

III. Overcoming challenges: Understanding the changing networking and collaboration strategies of women's organizations

In this section, we will look at the changing networking and collaboration strategies of women´s organizations. In order to demonstrate such shift this paper will draw on two conceptual approaches developed by Eslen-Ziya in terms of theoretical basis and presented in Figure 1 respectively: (a) *the single target approach* and (b) *the double target approach* (Eslen-Ziya, 2007). According to Eslen-Ziya (2007), lobbying is a highly flexible and multi-sited process, which requires dynamic networking and collaboration. In order to capture and analyse this dynamism, Eslen-Ziya developed the two

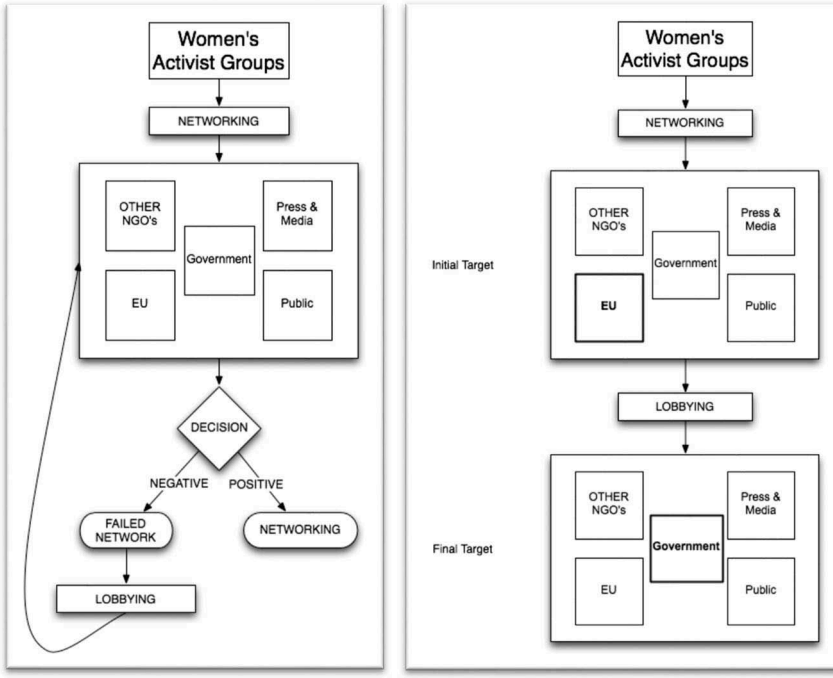


Figure 1. The single and double target approaches (Eslen-Ziya, 2007).

aforementioned approaches where the shared common interests of women's activists help foster informal ties. In this section, we will show how the double target approach is complimentary with what Woodward (2015, 2004, 2003) and Paternotte and Woodward (2017) defines as the velvet triangle.

The Velvet triangle is a theory that describes the interaction between policy-makers and politicians, feminist academics and experts, and the women's movement in EU policy-making (Woodward, 2015, p. 5). The velvet triangle then is created with these three sets of actors combining together to make each corner of the triangle. According to Woodward (2003) the personal ties, and networks, common histories as well as the representativeness of the social movement enable interaction between organized voices of women's movement and politicians (Vingelli, 2015, p. 16). Through such velvet triangles women's groups become able to challenge and influence policies and create new structures to implement gender mainstreaming for instance. Similarly (as shown in Figure 1), the single target approach was developed in order to delineate the situation wherein, the lobbyist group collaborates and networks with the 'target' directly. In order to influence the target in line with their own causes, the lobbyist groups lobby to and network with the target. Such strategy is expected to be used by the women's organizations under freer and less constrained political conditions, where they can reach the politicians directly in

order to pursue them for more gender-sensitive policymaking. In other words, similar to velvet triangles single target approach is employed in cases where the interaction between policymakers and politicians, feminist academics and experts, and the women's activists are smooth.

The lobbyist groups utilize the double target approach when they cannot lobby to or network with their final targets. In these cases, they first need to identify an initial target group, who has closer relations with the final target and network with them so that they can eventually influence their final target. Women's organizations are expected to apply the double target approach when the political opportunity structure appears not in their favour. In light of these two theoretical approaches, in the following section, we will look at the networking and collaboration strategies of secular women's organizations in Turkey in these periods under study.

A shift from the single target to double target approach

By taking advantage of the political structure opportunity in Turkey during the *democratization* process, secular women's organizations featured a successful and well-organized lobbying activity. While pressuring the Turkish government for more gender sensitive and women-friendly policy initiatives and laws, the direct approach to party members (MPs) has been mentioned by a number of secular women's organizations' representatives to be a much-preferred lobbying repertoire on the grounds that it would be quicker and more influential. In doing so, the activist members of those secular women's organizations formed their velvet triangles and arranged regular visits to MPs. Visiting MPs directly in order to lobby them strongly resonates with what Eslen-Ziya (2013) refers as the single target approach. As our participant depicts how they facilitated informal cooperation with the MPs:

> … In Turkey women's activist groups for many years worked carefully and demanded full equality between women and men under the law … went to the Parliament, presented their demands … waited at the Parliament corridors … usually the governments changed … and this postponed the process … and in 1999 Turkey became a candidate country in the Helsinki Summit and had many obligations … especially in terms of political criterion … (Interview with activists from 2001–2002 era).

Their will to create and maintain the velvet triangle of communication with the MPs depicts the lobbying process where the feminist ideas were travelling into the Parliament. Similarly, Selma Acuner, who worked as an adviser to the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues, emphasized their role in changing the agenda of the Turkish government in favour of women by keeping the velvet triangle intact:

> We [Selma Acuner and president of the KSSGM] literally dropped into the ministry meeting held at February 2000 where the 'prior objectives' were being determined … and we made some issues related to women as part of the prior objectives. (Interview with activists from 2001–2002 era).

These instances illustrate well how forming the velvet triangle via the single target approach was used when lobbying to the government:

> We were arranging meetings. And the government actually was listening to us, paying attention to our views … (Interview with activists from 2016–2017 era).

Hence, during the *democratization* process, they networked with the MPs directly in order to lobby them. This illustrates that the NGOs were not yet seen as an anti-governmental rebel organization but potential sources of information and trustworthy partners. Governments willingness to include civil society in decision-making was seen as a sign of profound and progressive changes in Turkish democracy (Negrón-Gonzales, 2016).

At the second decade of the 2000s, the *de-democratization* period accompanied with significant reluctance in terms of implementation and enforcement of the rights-based reforms required by the EU for the full membership (Pardo & Gordon, 2018; Patton, 2007). It was later complemented by AKP's relatively more open anti-EU and anti-gender discourse and policymaking (Aybars et al., 2018). The velvet triangle was broken in a way, and the MPs stopped working with them. This impacted their lobbying:

> … We really cannot do much lobbying lately as they have their own civil society organizations now … they are not even meeting with us anymore. It is now impossible to arrange those meetings with politicians. They do not even return to our emails. So, when we cannot reach the lobby target, how can we lobby them? (Interview with activists from 2016–2017 era).

Losing their close connections and powerful velvet triangles, they searched for new partners. This when progressive MPs of AKP as well as some former colleagues in the parliament became the most collaborative ones. It is plausible to argue that political parties are not homogeneous entities. Instead, they are constructed in a de-centralized fashion (Wiliarty, 2010). Meaning that MPs might have different even sometimes opposing ideas than their political parties. Similarly, some female members of the AKP and the Nationalist Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*-MHP) appeared to hold more modern and progressive ideas with respect to gender equality and women's rights compared to their other party members.

Similarly, while analysing the German MP's attitudes towards parental leave schemes, Leitner (2010) talked about two groups existing side by side, he defines them as '*moderate realos*' – with moderate views – and '*right-wing fundamentalists*' – with more conservative and traditional views. Similarly, our findings show that within the same party, members can have different views.

For instance, the former family minister and current Gaziantep[7] mayor Fatma Şahin and an MHP deputy Deniz Depboylu, who also is a current board member of the Committee on Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men, are mentioned by our interviewers in the second decade of 2000´s – as a *moderate realos*.[8] They were argued to be relatively more open to collaborating and networking with secular women's organizations. Therefore, secular women's organizations, who can no longer reach majority of the politicians directly in order to pursue their lobbying, network with moderate realos. One of our participants working as a project coordinator in a women's organization based in Istanbul argued:

> … well, obviously it is not easy to reach political parties especially today. But speaking on the experience, there are some MPs in every party even in the AKP are still responding us. For example, believe it or not, there is a very intelligent and very modern woman in the MHP who has very liberal views on gender equality and women's rights. She is for example, genuinely trying to collaborate with us. She is also involved in the Committee on Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men. So, we meet her, and we share our causes with her so that she can bring them on the table in the committee meetings … (Interview with activists from 2016–2017 era).

In compensating for the loss of direct contact with politicians, former colleagues became the second arbitrager between the organizations and the politicians that they are willing to reach. According to Eslen-Ziya (2013), once a previously used strategy is no longer effective and that they can 'no longer work or network with a particular target (because of a different point of view or because of their lack of understanding of the issue), they shift their strategy and begin to lobby targets in order to change their point of view and/or gain deeper comprehension of the issue' (Eslen-Ziya, 2013, p. 863). Despite the ideological cliff between these secular women's organizations and AKP, being a former cogent appeared as a synthesizer buffer. They did make exceptions and offered secular women's organizations off the record resources, even collaborated with them:

> … Well some people we know from the civil society organizations-circle are AKP-members. Of course, they have changed …, as we have their personal phone numbers, we can reach them … we remind them the times that we were working together, what we were fighting for and then we kindly ask them to bring these ideas to the party meetings … (Interview with activists from 2016–2017 era).

Networking first with the moderate realos and their former colleagues then with the MPs, strongly chimes with what Eslen-Ziya (2013) defines as the double target approach. The double target approach, 'refers to the situation wherein a lobbyist trying to influence a target group first has to lobby others – an initial target. The initial target in this case is defined as the target group that

has a closer contact and a good relationship with the final target and therefore it can help to lobby such a target more effectively' (Eslen-Ziya, 2013, p. 863).

Under the new conditions of the day, secular women's organizations, who previously could reach politicians directly, now are compelled to first lobby easier targets (i.e., moderate realos). Once such an initial target is approached and convinced, they lobbied the government. However, this did not automatically create success. Especially due to AKP's lack of collective decision-making in the second decade of the 2000s, in some cases, even the double target approach did not work. Some of our participants discussed the need for new networking tactics. In the following section, we will discuss what these new tactics are and how they allowed secular women's organizations to continue pursuing their strategy in spite of *de-democratization* and the conservative political climate in Turkey. We will show, while the ultimate aim has remained to pressure the Turkish government for more gender-sensitive legislation, or to put an end to the conservative discourses, the ways to reach this aim and therefore, the networking and collaboration strategies have considerably changed.

The role of the EU and the new partners in the double target approach

During the early 2000s, under the freer milieu, velvet triangles were being successfully formed. Secular women's organizations were networking and collaborating first with local NGOs, local governments, and international women's organizations in order to raise political awareness on gender issues. Over the last years, forming these partnerships becomes much harder. Therefore, secular women's organizations started searching new collaboration and networking alternatives in order to sustain their power in influencing policymaking. A number of our participants, involved in awareness raising campaigns, mentioned the changing enthusiasm of local governments in signing protocols with them as the upmost obstacle (Interview with activists from 2016–2017 era). Right leaning local governments remained highly reluctant in facilitating conversations on gender equality for instance when compared to social democratic or leftist local governments. While they expressed the easiness of signing protocols with HDP, People's Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*) and CHP, Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*) led local governments, they were more and more losing connection with AKP-led local governments. Given the majority of the municipalities are led by the AKP,[9] secular women's organizations needed to search for new collaboration partners.

In this search, forming partnerships with private companies appeared to be attractive. Private companies like Markafoni, Boyner, Doğan[10] in Turkey become more sensitive in social responsibility projects.[11] Secular women's organizations saw this as a great window of opportunity, verged them to

form partnerships (Interview with activists from 2016–2017 era). They saw such alliances as a font for resource acquisition or change of tactics (Negrón-Gonzales, 2016) in order to mobilize support. Their targets for networking shifted: from the EU in first decade of 2000s, to private companies in the second. These companies served as the potential co-operating units for reaching their final targets. These companies helped 'publishing flyers, handbooks and brochures as publishing those materials is an additional cost for the organizations especially if you are a small and local one' (Interview with activists from 2016–2017 era). Then, the neo-liberal market in Turkey compensated for the EU in terms of its financial support. Moreover, buildings collaborations with such companies appeared as an opportunity:

> … We lost the support of the AKP municipalities … Therefore, we are networking with private companies. They are supporting us and providing us what we need materially and so on. So, we still continue lobbying the government, there is no nuisance there (Interview with activists from 2016–2017 era).

Though they changed the actors that they initially networked with, they still maintained their lobbying activity by using the double target approach. As Woodward (2015, p. 15) argues, they transformed their tactics bearing their past experiences. In order to get the political attention on gender equality and women's rights, they continued running a series of awareness raising events. Yet, rather than collaborating and networking with the local governments or the EU (as they did with the single target approach), they started networking and collaborating with secular private companies as the initial target (switched to double target approach).

In addition to involving private sector into their lobbying at the national level, they changed their networking targets internationally. The EWL used to be, as a much-appreciated collaboration partner – even constituted a form of entry into the European Union, ahead of the Turkish state!

> … There is this beautiful remark of Selma Acuner; 'women became member of the EU before the Turkish State" (Interview with activists from 2001–2002 era).

However, our data shows that, as of the second decade of the 2000s, the EWL lost its reliability. This might be due to EWL's silence during recent impeachments on gender equalities and women's rights by the AKP government. Our data from the second decade of 2000s show that the members of the secular women's organizations were expecting support from the EWL to pressure the government: '… at the very least we expected an international awareness raising campaign initiated by the Lobby or a petition' (Interview with activists from 2016–2017 era). The lack of support and recognition gradually helped lose their trust and sympathy towards the Lobby. As illustrated in Figure 2 we modified Eslen-Ziya (2007) double target approach by including their decision-making process in choosing networking partners. The network decision-

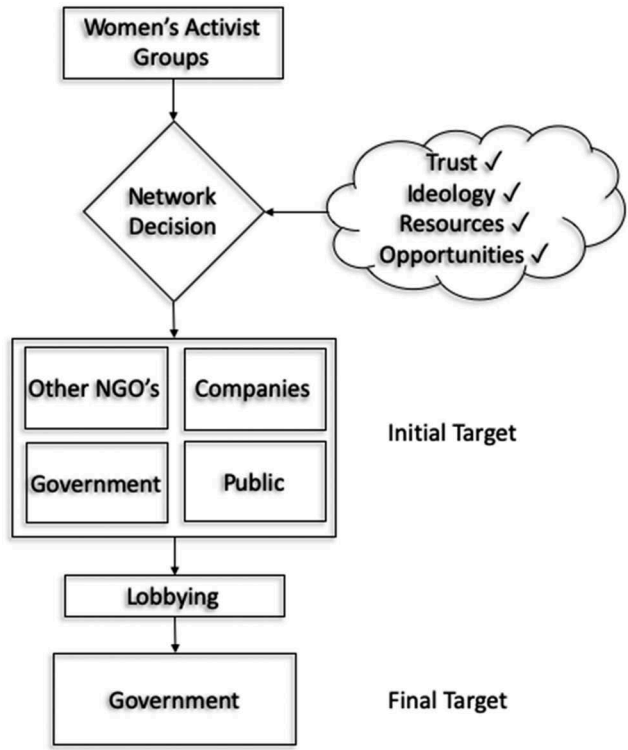


Figure 2. Network decision approach.

making approach presented in Figure 2 illustrates that secular women´s groups continue network with old partners if they trust them or continue to have similar ideologies or goals. Hence, every lobbying effort meant going over the networking partners and making a decision. Such decision-making involved looking at what these partners can offer and what opportunities they can provide as well as how supportive they have been so far. The EWL´s lack of support made them to change their networking partners:

> … well, we used to network a lot with the EWL in the past. But now, I have big doubts about the objectivity of the EWL, well actually I have huge doubts about the EWL at all. Like I mean, the EU is constantly telling us to reform some laws, well OK fair enough, but at the same time, the president of the country is making those overt gender discriminatory statements publicly, and neither the EU nor the EWL is saying a word. How come this is possible? And of course, we are not really willing to network with the EWL anymore … (Interview with activists from 2016–2017 era).

As the EWL and secular women's organizations drifted away, they had to find new collaborative partners. In this search, the EU states' governments as well as local women's NGOs in those countries appeared as promising ones:

> … We used to work with the EWL quite close, we did not receive any funding from them, but we used to find their partnership quite useful in terms of exchanging ideas and having backed up by a European-level organization. But not lately, nowadays we are more collaborating with NGOs in different countries. For example, there is a very big fund organization in Sweden … So, we were funded by one of those for a very long-time. They were paying the rent of our previous building … (Interview with activists from 2016–2017 era).

From our theoretical perspective these new networking strategies developed by secular women's organizations in the absence of the EWL strongly resonates with the double target approach: while the final target is still the government, the initial target has changed. This perhaps adds another layer of analysis (as presented in Figure 2) to discussion on women's movement as it exemplifies a situation wherein cognitive decision-making and emotions such as trust plays a vital role in terms of the decisions made on choosing networking and collaboration partners.

IV. Conclusion

This paper has sought to illustrate the changing collaboration and networking strategies of secular women's organizations throughout the *de-democratization* process in Turkey. We explored and explained how secular women's organizations lobbied the Turkish state for their causes over the last decade. We argued that while the presence of opportunities and their use are vital in understanding the social movement activities, the changing strategies used by the organizations when such resources are scares are also significant. In order to demonstrate such shift, we looked at the secular women's organizations networking and collaboration strategies during the peak of Turkey's *democratization* process and compared those strategies with their strategies during the creation of *New Turkey* by the AKP government.

The comparison of secular women's organizations networking and collaboration strategies during the first and the second decades of 2000s revealed a twofold argument. First, as their velvet triangles were broken, they adapted new resources as they mobilized, and shifted away from employing the single target approach to double. During the first decade of the 2000s, approaching politicians and lobbying them directly was far easier when compared to second decade of 2000s. Therefore, they networked and collaborated straightaway with the essential target, as in Woodwards's velvet triangle, forming alliances with policymakers and politicians.

Whereas in the second decade, as the EU influence on Turkish civil society begun to diminish and government-organized non-governmental organizations mushroomed, secular women's organizations lost their direct contacts with the politicians. To this end, they felt the need to search for mediating actors – new resources – who would be bridging between the secular

women's organizations and the government, which is what the double target approach suggests. In this search, women's organizations were aided by the relatively more progressive MPs – open to collaborations with the civil society – who now are members of different right-leaning political parties. Relying on this shift from the single target to double target approach, it is plausible to argue that secular women's organizations became marginalized in the eyes of the politicians. Second, secular women's organizations had to change their initial networking and collaboration partners in order to lobby the final target while organizing awareness raising events. In order to avoid any potential problem stemming from the growing reluctance of local governments in terms of networking and collaborating with women's organizations, they successfully formed partnerships with private companies. Though they maintained the double target approach, the initial target and resources were altered. Most strikingly, a much appreciated and networked actor, the EWL, lost its reliability. Instead, they worked together with international women's organizations that they trusted. This illustrates the role of cognitive decision-making in forming networks and powerful allies, a new component to Eslen-Ziya (2007) double target approach. Through the changing velvet triangles, and decisions in forming alliances, this paper contributes to the secular women's organizations literature in Turkey. It sheds light to the reasons behind the choices they make in forming their networking allies. Trusting the networking partner appeared as one of the important reasons for continuing or aborting working with a networking partner. Moreover, this paper contends that although *Europeanization* might open a salient window of opportunity for civil society movements, the socio-political conditions of the day intrinsic to national states well influence the trajectory of the movement.

Notes

1. The acquis communautaire is defined as the process of approximating the legal framework – jurisdiction, economy, and administration – to meet the Copenhagen Criteria.
2. http://yenisafak.com.tr/Politika/?i=104290, March 2008. Accessed; 20 December 2019.
3. In this paper, as we talk about our participants, we will interchangeably use secular women's organizations and women's organizations. When we are talking about the organizations supported and funded by the ruling party we will refer to them as government-funded and founded non-governmental organizations.
4. Since the foundation of Turkish Republic in early-1920, there has been a sharp division between secularists and conservatives. This conflict is also apparent in women's movement (Ketola, 2011) as much as it is in any other movements. Since mid-1980s onwards, the composition of women's movement in Turkey has been widening with the increasing voices of Kurdish and Islamist women,

identifying themselves as feminists. However, this widening in the Turkish context has appeared to be a rivalry one, in which secular and Islamist feminists have failed to put their political ideologies aside and work together (Ketola, 2012).

5. The European Women's Lobby (EWL) – founded in 1990 – is an umbrella organization of women's associations in the European Union working to promote women's rights and equality. EWL represents a total of more than 2000 organizations.
6. https://kadem.org.tr/en/about-us/about-kadem/ Accessed on 19 December 2019.
7. A city located in the western part of Turkey's South Eastern Anatolia Region.
8. In addition to these two key actors, there are also a number of moderate realos in the AKP and the MHP yet, their names were not given during the interviews.
9. Retrieved from: http://www.yenicaggazetesi.com.tr/hangi-parti-kac-belediye-kazandi-96235h.html. 08.05.2018.
10. Retrieved from: http://finans.mynet.com/haber/detay/foto-analiz/hangi-sirket-kime-yardim-ediyor/84226/#7082834. 22.02.2019.
11. Some of these projects include: The 10,000 Women project initiated by the international financial institution Goldman Sachs in 2008 (Retrieved from: http://www.sosyalsorumluluk.org/10000-kadin-girisimci/), Stop Domestic Violence project initiated by a Turkish mainstream newspaper Hürriyet (http://www.sosyalsorumluluk.org/aile-ici-siddete-son/).

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the anonymous reviews we received on this paper. Our sincere gratitude goes to our participants who shared their experiences and obstacles in achieving political attention on gender equality and women's rights. We dedicate this paper to them, with the hope to an egalitarian society in Turkey and across the globe!

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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