

Roundtable Discussion
**“Young People in CSOs and Possible Collaborations between CSOs in the US
and Turkey”**
16 September 2011, 15.00-17.00
Istanbul

Program

15.00-15.15 Self-Introductions

15.15-15.25 Civil Society in Turkey, Derya Kaya-Third Sector Foundation of Turkey

15.25-16.45 Open Discussion moderated by Rana Birden Çorbacıoğlu

16.45-17.00 Closing Remarks&Recommendations

Common issues:

- The lack of information and frameworks that may enable cooperation is a barrier in developing relations. Organizations seeking to approach their counterparts have difficulties in establishing contacts. Organisations may randomly send emails or find local networks which will connect them to related organizations. The global networks that will enable cooperation between the US and Turkey are rather limited compared to European wide networks. ASHOKA, a social entrepreneur network, and CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation are some of the networks that may connect NGOs in Turkey and the US.
- The lack of information causes lack of understanding between NGOs in the US and Turkey. The terminology, the culture and the history of civil society are very different. As an example, while the sector is named as nonprofit sector in the US, it is called civil society sector in Turkey. NGOs have difficulties in finding concise and comprehensive information.

Problems to tackle in fostering dialogue and cooperation

In Turkish case some problems are as follows:

- Turkish NGOs tend to see their American counterparts as donor organizations rather than potential partners although the US funding is rather limited. According to the data of the Foundation Center, the total amount of donations received from the American grantmaking organizations is around 10 million dollars in the last 10 years. This is a rather small amount compared to the donations given to NGOs in developed and developing countries.
- As a result of increasing anti-Americanism and the effect of conspiracy theories, Turkish public opinion is sceptical about American funders and human rights organizations that fund or implement programs in Turkey. NGOs which received funds have had some negative reactions. It should be better communicated that actually “the projects come with strings attached, and there is not a hidden agenda with strings attached”.
- Language barrier is a major challenge to develop international relations of the Turkish NGOs which applies to the relations with American counterparts.

- The European Union (EU) funds that are allocated to NGOs are easier to reach, the processes are more transparent, and some funds are designed specifically for the context in Turkey. Information about American donors and their grantmaking procedures is harder to access compared to the EU funds.
- American NGOs tend to pursue a more ethnocentric approach towards collaborations; they want to transfer expertise and know-how rather than creating an equal partnership.

In the US case, the problems are as follows:

- Most Turkish NGOs are not transparent in the American terms. Turkish NGOs are reluctant to share their financial and administrative information openly. Furthermore, some NGOs are not able to provide basic statistics (such as number of beneficiaries) about the services they provide. Open and up-to-date information are among the priorities of the grantmaking American organizations.
- The legal context is very different between the US and Turkey which makes it harder to operate in Turkey.

Future Collaborations

What are the possibilities for future collaboration between US and Turkey?

- Citizen diplomacy is a good way to connect countries. It can be done through a partnering volunteer program between Turkish and American NGOs which will include exchange visits. Low level of volunteering is a major problem of the nonprofit sector in Turkey and it can be a potential area of collaboration.
- Local organizations in less developed cities of Turkey are in need of more resources yet these are the same organizations that find it most difficult to reach international contacts. Partnerships/projects should include NGOs all around Turkey.
- There is a need to increase the number of meetings and exchange programs to create an environment where Turkish and American NGOs get to know each other.
- There is almost no literature on the relationship between American and Turkish NGOs. Joint groups can be formed to produce research and information in this area.

Conclusion

Short term goals are designed as;

- Information-sharing through social networking
- Research

Long term goals are designed as;

- **Funding:** Although Turkish NGOs can't apply for many public funds in the US, they may partner with US-based organizations who will submit a proposal for government funds.
- **Capacity-building:** Training programs and travelling workshops for nonprofit leaders designed for nonprofit professionals would be beneficial for both parties.
- **Sharing good practices:** Defining international networks and frameworks for further dialogue would facilitate sharing good practices.