



## NEW TURKEY'S CIVIL SOCIETY

Now that there is talk of a new Turkey, we need to analyze what sort of society we are or will be. We can look at society's reactions in order to get the gist of whether Turkey is making any progress regarding rights and freedoms. In addition to political analysis, we can expect civil society representatives to make the most competent and objective comments on this matter.

The 2013-2014 Civil Society Monitoring Report issued by the Third Sector Foundation of Turkey (TÜSEV) indicates that the civil sphere is gradually shrinking. It is a good idea to quote certain conspicuous facts from this report. Around 13 percent of Turkey's population has membership in associations. Thus, there is one association for every 747 people in the country. A total of 1.5 percent of associations and 0.5 percent of foundations operate in the field of human rights and advocacy. Between 2008 and March 2014, access to approximately 40,000 Internet sites from Turkey was blocked, either by court decisions or the Telecommunications Directorate's (TİB) administrative measures.

There is not a single public institution responsible for improving and supervising the relationship between public institutions and civil society organizations (CSOs). Instead of promoting local and private resources to civil society through tax breaks, Turkey continues to complicate the financial management of CSOs through various accounting requirements. Progress can hardly be achieved in a country where the sphere of civil society is shrinking. If the new Turkey is a country with a better system and social climate, it must observe the prerequisites of such. CSOs constitute one of the most important platforms for a sound and reliable relationship between the society, individuals and the state.

It would be erroneous to identify civil society as the West's ideological subcontractors or secret faces of the West's fifth column. Such activities are already being conducted behind various veils and under different identities. What matters is to classify CSOs that perform their tasks seriously, to try to promote social matters and to lend an ear to them. To muffle civil society's voice is to close your eyes to the country's facts. The tendency to perceive civil society as a venue for violence and revolt is paving the way for new conflicts and gaps in communication.

The remarks by Basak Ersen, the secretary-general of TÜSEV, on the report indicate that you can find this tendency even in developed countries: "Nowhere around the world is the state happy with democracy. This applies to developed countries as well. The very purpose of the state is to protect the status quo. It is the civil sphere that will challenge this. That's why it is important that the sphere of the rights-driven struggle should be expanded. On the other hand, this struggle is wrongly associated with violence. No [this is not true]. What we do is part of the struggle. We are fighting to promote the rights of individuals. This is how the civil sphere has developed over time. The case of the countries that have failed to achieve this is obvious."

Turkey cannot maintain its development without securing freedom of expression. Economic development is impossible without democratic development. We must refrain from silencing academics, intellectuals and journalists, even if we don't like their ideas. Turkey was taking great strides toward democracy and setting a good example for the Middle East. But this success story has remained unfinished. It is the duty of the ruling party to crown its story with democracy once again. The new Turkey ideal will become meaningful if a balance can be struck between democracy and security through initiatives targeting civil society, the press and intellectuals.