



Which NGOs will get 3 billion euros?

The EU will distribute the money it has earmarked for Syrian refugees via NGOs, but there is little transparency.

Gila Benmayor on page 11



GILA
BENMAYOR

gila.benmayer@hurriyet.com.tr

Which NGOs will distribute 3 bln euros to Syrian refugees?

The Third Sector Foundation of Turkey (**TÜSEV**) was founded 23 years ago by more than two dozen non-governmental organizations and some of Turkey's prominent foundations like Sabancı, Vehbi Koç and the Turkish Foundation for Combatting Soil Erosion, for Reforestation and the Protection of Natural Habitats (TEMA).

The aim was to develop civil society's legal, financial and functional infrastructure.

In short, **TÜSEV** is working for a strong civil society in Turkey.

TÜSEV has been preparing a report overviewing the situation of Turkey's civil society since 2011. I had the chance to talk **TÜSEV** Secretary General Tevfik Başak Ersen about the third and most recent report, which was made public in the last days of 2015.

First, let's see the situation from the perspective of the numbers:

According to the report, which covered 2013-2014, there were 104,066 associations and 4,893 foundations in Turkey.

When you look to the areas of activity, only 1.5 percent of associations and 0.5 percent of foundations were working on the issue of human rights.

Education, sustainable development, culture and art were among other areas of activity.

Let's not underestimate the foundations' and associations' contribution to our lives, despite the insufficiency of their financial resources.

For example, life in Istanbul would be colorless if not for the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (IKSV), which organizes music and film festivals, among other events, in the city.

Getting back to the numbers, 13 percent of Turkey's population was a member of an association; 5 percent of association members were women and 70 percent were between the ages of 30-50.

According to the view of the **TÜSEV** team that prepared the report, Turkey's youth does not believe associations can serve or respond to their demands, which is why they do not look positively on associations.

The most important finding of this report according to Ersen is that the space for civil society was growing narrower.

The days when we had the wind of EU membership negotiations have stayed well behind.

The last report has revealed problems which were not in accordance to international standards as far as the rights to organize, assemble and freedom of expression were concerned, according to Ersen.

He recalled that the 2015 report on the State of Civil Society prepared by Civicus also revealed that civil space was narrowing in Turkey.

TÜSEV also found the resources earmarked for civil society were not enough. In 2013, donations to foundations and associations totaled 7.1 billion Turkish Liras.

I was not surprised by this finding, since according to the World Donations Index the rate of donation to a civil society organization in Turkey remained at 12 percent in 2014.

According to the index, Turkey ranked 128th among 135 countries for the amount of time spent on voluntary work.

I'd like to further underline two issues which came up during my conversation with Ersen.

The government's 2016 action plan includes the endorsement of a law on civil society.

"We are demanding that NGOs participate in the preparatory process," said Ersen. I don't know to what degree this demand will be taken into account, since the IKSV's report on culture policies, which was prepared with the participation of several foundations working on art and culture, was not given any attention.

The second issue is how the European Union will distribute the 3 billion euros it earmarked for Syrian refugees via NGOs.

Which civil society organizations will get this money? How will it be distributed?

How will the state ensure the transparency of this process?

That will be an important issue throughout 2016.