



Telebriefing:
FOUNDATION SUPPORT TO CIVIL SOCIETY IN TURKEY:
THE JOYS AND THE OBSTACLES
April 9, 2013

Speakers:

- [James Logan](#), Programme Officer, International Human Rights, Oak Foundation
- [Dr. Ulrike Dufner](#), Director, Turkey Office, Heinrich Boell Foundation
- [Nurcan Kaya](#), Director, Strategic Fund for Turkey

Moderated by:

- Jo Andrews, Director, Ariadne - European Network of Human Rights Funders

This telebriefing examined the current state of Turkish civil society and explored how funders can effectively support human rights activists in Turkey. The speakers shared lessons learned and experiences working closely with civil society organizations in the country and explored the main challenges Turkish civil society organizations are tackling in 2013.

James Logan, Programme Officer, International Human Rights, Oak Foundation

Turkey is a significant addition to an international funding portfolio. The nation has:

- various human rights issues and related openings;
- a diverse, creative civil society;
- increasing influence: the Turkish model has been referenced for Middle Eastern countries in transition.

Turkey also has little private foundation funding for human rights and civil society (according to an IHRFG comparison, Turkey has received approximately \$4 million in funding over the past two years, a fraction of the funds received by other emerging powers). It often falls into the gap between Eastern Europe and the Middle East grantmaking programs. Domestic grants rarely go to human rights groups: funding comes mainly from the European Commission or foreign embassies. These foreign funds tend to be highly restricted; are project-oriented; have a low cost threshold; and are rarely multi-year, so organizations are unable to develop infrastructure. Foreign funding can also be perceived as political.

By investing in Turkey, private funders can fill an obvious gap and catalyze efforts to secure civil society organizations (CSOs).

Dr. Ulrike Dufner, Director, Turkey Office, Heinrich Boell Foundation

Turkish CSOs are tackling several issues, including:

- *Classic human rights challenges*: violations by the state, such as torture and inhuman treatment. CSOs document abuses and provide legal, medical, and psychological support.

- *Women's human rights:*
 - *Violence* by state and, increasingly, non-state actors (such as family and honor killings)
 - *Political participation:* CSOs try to attract female candidates for parliament and increase opportunities for women's participation in local elections
 - *Economic participation:* CSOs work with authorities and employers to reintegrate women into labor markets; establish quotas and training; and attract credit
 - *Sex workers*
- *LGBT rights:* LGBT CSOs were recently granted legal status as associations. They work with families of LGBTs and run media campaigns
- *Freedom of speech,* including social media and mainstream media observation
- *Minority rights,* including religious (Muslim and non-Muslim) and ethnic minorities (Kurds)
- *Religious rights:* CSOs are engaged in advocacy around head scarves and freedom in religious education
- *Education,* including alternative education; minorities and racism in history books; and mother tongue education, which is linked to the Kurdish issue
- *Refugee rights:* Turkey is a haven for non-European refugees (such as Iranians and Syrians), but does not accept the Geneva Convention. The issue ties into human trafficking, as women refugees have no legal status
- *Transitional justice:* CSOs encourage Kurdish and Armenian dialogues to cope with the past
- *Military service,* which is linked to the LGBT issue

Nurcan Kaya, Director, Strategic Fund for Turkey

Funders on the ground in Turkey enjoy several benefits. They can communicate directly with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), organizing events and encouraging work in key areas. Non-governmental funders are able to support crucial and otherwise-taboo subjects. With local staff who understand the language and landscape, funders are better equipped to engage grassroots groups, monitor NGOs and offer feedback.

Working on the ground poses challenges as well. Many local NGOs have limited capacity, so planning, monitoring, and reporting is difficult. As funders gain recognition, they receive more applications and require more human resources. Funders also struggle to maintain balance and distance in their relationships with NGOs. For re-granters, like the Strategic Fund for Turkey, donor flexibility is key, as political and social changes develop quickly and unexpectedly. Even at the local level, foundation work can be perceived as interference by foreign governments or sections of societies.

Question-and-Answer Period

Jo Andrews asked speakers and participants to highlight some of Turkey's most important issues. Issues ripe to be tackled include:

- *The Kurdish movement:* Ending the armed conflict and establishing peace would enable further democratization, accountability, and equality for other minorities

- *Personal freedoms* and the tension between *individual and collective priorities*. Military service and policing are good examples
- *Accountability* and *truth-seeking* related to past abuses
- *Violence against women*
- The status of *refugees*, especially Iranians and Syrians

Certain rights issues attract more pressure from Turkish authorities. The situation has improved since the 1990s, when NGOs were hit by assassination attempts and repeated prosecutions, but is still a cause for concern. Anti-terror law allows the government to detain activists working with Kurdish groups, and LGBT groups are the target of heightened scrutiny. It is possible, however, to establish organizations focused on a range of issues.

Engaging donors in human rights and social justice presents an ongoing challenge. Such work exceeds the capacity of many Turkish philanthropists, so donors often direct their grants to community service projects or specific disadvantaged groups. Donor collaboration could spur progress, but many funders hesitate to share information about grants and priorities.

Collaboration among NGOs is more common, and funders can play a role in facilitating. NGOs focused on separate rights issues have teamed up to pursue common goals: for example, LGBT and women's groups worked together on a campaign for hate crime legislation. Overlapping issues allow donors and grantees to consider discrimination as a broader issue, looking beyond their individual identities to advocate for rights collectively.

To listen to the full telebriefing:

Visit [IHRFG's website](#) (you will need to enter the password "humanrights").

Ariadne's portal will list known grantmakers in Turkey, to further mapping efforts. Email Lisa Hashemi at lisa.hashemi@ariadne-network.eu to join ARIADNE's MENA community.

Resources:

- [Turkish Policy Quarterly -- Gender Rights and Freedoms in Turkey and the Arab World: Spring or Winter?](#)
- Perspectives Journal, 3rd Issue "[The Turkish Question](#)", Heinrich Boell Foundation (This issue focuses on the Turkish/Kurdish question and its identity politics. For the journal's latest issue on the Turkish Green Movement, please [click here](#).)
- [Turkish Policy Quarterly – Gender Rights and Freedoms in Turkey and the Arab World – Spring or Winter?](#) and [Turkey: Trying to Impose an Abortion Ban?](#)
- [Turkey's New Draft Law on Asylum: What to Make of It?](#) and [Eyeing EU, Turkey adopts](#)
- [Migration and Asylum law](#)
- [Blog on Turkey](#) by Jenny White, Professor of Anthropology, Boston University