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Published online: 11 Sep 2013.

To cite this article: Hande Paker, Fikret Adaman, Zeynep Kadirbeyoğlu & Begüm Özkaynak (2013) Environmental organisations in Turkey: engaging the state and capital, Environmental Politics, 22:5, 760-778, DOI: 10.1080/09644016.2013.825138

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2013.825138

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Environmental organisations in Turkey: engaging the state and capital

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Throughout the world, unfettered capitalism and the obsession with economic growth have led to the destruction of many ecologically important sites, and generated sharp conflicts between the state and civil society actors concerned to protect the environment. Some optimists about the role of civil society actors gloss over the power dynamics in which they are embedded, and their economic and political contexts. The roles civil society organisations (CSOs) can play are contingent on such relationships and contexts, which in turn are affected and transformed by the dynamics of neoliberal globalisation. Our study of environmental CSOs in Turkey, focusing on their institutional context, identifies two crucial dimensions that shape their contribution: their interactions with the state and with financial donors.

Keywords: environmental organisations; civil society; Turkey

Introduction

Civil society actors increasingly participate in policymaking processes, providing services, engaging in activism, and seeking to raise awareness (Wapner 1995, Keck and Sikkink 1998, Tamiotti and Finger 2001, Friedman et al. 2005, Edwards 2009, Joachim and Locher 2009). Neoliberal governance discourse expects civil society to assume the service delivery role of the state, and left-leaning democratisation anticipates civil society transforming social and economic relations. These prevalent views gloss over the power relations in which civil society actors are embedded, and the economic and political spheres in which they operate. Civil society organisations (CSOs) are able only partially to fulfil their potential in cases where they lack autonomy and legitimacy while pursuing their own agenda or when the state disregards the divergent voices of civil society. We take the case of Turkey, a country with high population and economic growth and rapid urbanisation, undergoing a democratisation that has

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intensified in the past two decades, that has witnessed the emergence of civic mobilisation in relation to women’s, human, and environmental rights, and Islamic and Kurdish movements, and where tensions between state and civil society are particularly evident in environmental issues.

Turkey is home to numerous biodiversity hotspots and natural reserves of global significance. Due to increasingly aggressive modernisation and industrialisation, these areas and the species they sustain are under imminent threat of degradation and extinction. The pressure on the environment has reached such a point that even conservation of natural parks, usually uncontentious in the global North, became a key area of contention and has dominated Turkey’s environmental agenda since the 1980s.

The two critical dimensions that constitute the power nexus are CSOs’ interactions with the state and with financial donors. These arise from the Turkish context, as already signalled by studies on state and civil society (Kalaycıoğlu 2002, Keyman 2005), as well as emerging practices of donors and CSOs. Unpacking them will help unveil the obstacles CSOs encounter in realising their potential for transition to sustainability, however defined by the CSOs themselves.

We start by mapping civil society in its varied manifestations in local and global environmental spheres. Next, the case of Turkey is presented to help assess the capability of CSOs in the context of a modernist state prone to rent seeking and patronage, followed by in-depth analysis of four prominent CSOs, all with extensive donor networks and actively engaged with the state. Subsequent sections analyse the nature of CSO–state interaction, and the impact of various types of financial resources, before evaluating the implications of these two axes for CSOs’ capacity and effectiveness. The final section situates the case of Turkey in the broader context of CSOs in a globalising neoliberal era.

Civil society and the environment in a neoliberal era

Civil society can broadly be defined as a public sphere between the state, the market, and households, where people associate to advance common interests by organising resistance to authority and/or provide alternative and complementary services to those provided by the market and the state (Edwards 2009, Ehrenberg 2011). Civil society has enjoyed particular prominence in neoliberal discourse. As a potential vehicle for liberal governance, civil society was enthusiastically assigned the role of replacing state responsibilities, such as providing services, social care, and protecting the environment, a role constructed on a promise of freedom, as a way of subverting authoritarian regimes. The left, too, disillusioned with the paternalistic governance of the 1960s and 1970s, sees in civil society a transformative capacity to empower people to defend themselves against the economic, cultural and political imperatives of the ‘omnipotent’ state or the ‘seductive’ market.¹

CSOs have certainly opened new channels to address issues in a globalising context. Recently, however, perceptions of civil society as a panacea have been questioned on the grounds that both the autonomy and the capacity of civil
society are constrained politically and economically (Fine et al. 2001, Harvey 2005, Klein 2008). Increased recognition that CSOs at times enter into antagonistic confrontation with the state, and look desperately for external funds that may compromise their independence, leads us to analyse them at the intersection of the relations of political and economic power.

Extractive and destructive industrial practices by transnational corporations and global capital, fuelled by short-term profit motives and governmental policies that support unsustainable practices, have presented challenges for CSOs (Skair 2002, Martinez-Alier 2003). Neoliberal practices, juxtaposed with the growth-oriented agendas of governments, coincide with a worsening ecological crisis and increased awareness of the global nature of most ecological problems. Despite political and economic constraints, CSOs continue to contend with modernist agendas of nation states and, above all, the varying manifestations of global neoliberalism, by forming and joining international environmental networks (Bandy and Smith 2005, Doherty and Doyle 2006, Rootes 2006).

The spread of global capitalism affects different parts of the world and their ecologies differently: neoliberalism not only has diverse impacts on various landscapes, but responses to similar impacts vary from one place to another. In some cases, transnational links and increased funding opportunities from supranational organisations, such as the United Nations Development Program Global Environmental Fund (UNDP-GEF), the Regional Environmental Center (REC), and the European Commission (EC), lead to institutionalisation and bureaucratisation of CSOs, but also enable local struggles to establish ties to the global justice movement, as in Hungary (Kerényi and Szabo 2006). Elsewhere, transnational links and funding generate ‘governance states’, which partner CSOs that have limited autonomy and uncritical positions (Duffy 2006). Given this diversity, categorising environmental movements and CSOs is a challenging exercise.

That said, the common trends and affinities observed in environmental civil society have been classified broadly in terms of north and south, with the north interested in ‘the rights of “other nature”, which are implicit in conservation, threatened species and wilderness campaigns’, while for the south the issues are those of survival (Doherty and Doyle 2006, p. 706). The majority of environmental organisations in the north are preoccupied with non-anthropocentric concerns of nature conservation, deliver services, support ecological modernisation, and largely remain apolitical (Mol 2001, Brulle and Jenkins 2006). In the two European countries with the densest CSO networks – the Netherlands and the UK – recent growth has been in nature protection organisations rather than advocacy (van der Heijden 2002, Rootes 2009). It is not surprising, therefore, that many CSOs in the north either remain silent or at best pay lip service to issues such as ecological debt and natural resource extraction. In contrast, for many in the south, the key issues underpinning environmental degradation are either unequal and unjust distribution of natural assets or threats to natural resources that help sustain the poor but are exploited by transnational companies or their national affiliates. In short, the environmental justice demands of the
south render their claims political and antagonistic (Martinez-Alier 2003, Routledge et al. 2006).

This north–south dichotomy is often limited, since environmental actors can adopt a social movement framework or an institutionalised organisational structure, the dynamics of which generate multiple environmentalisms, as both can exist in different national contexts or within a single organisation. In Turkey, CSOs have engaged with both types of environmentalism – some concerned with nature conservation, others seeking to defend natural resources. Meanwhile, the modernising state mostly takes a confrontational position, opposing not only what are deemed ‘radical’ environmental demands, but also rather mild calls to conserve nature.

State, civil society, and the environment in Turkey

Economic development in Turkey has had a severely unfavourable impact on the environment. Unable and/or unwilling to deal properly with pressures posed by the energy, industry, agriculture, transportation, and tourism sectors, as well as urbanisation, Turkey is overwhelmed by environmental challenges (Adaman and Arsel 2005, 2010, 2012, Baykan 2008, OECD 2008, Adaman et al. 2009, European Commission 2011); in the 2012 Environmental Performance Index, Turkey ranks 109th out of 132 countries.3

Yet Turkey established a Ministry of Environment and its organisational network in 1991, and has passed a large body of environmental laws and regulations. This seeming paradox has been explained by the state’s unwillingness to implement environmental legislation effectively and its inability to enforce it properly (Adaman and Arsel 2010, 2012). Unwillingness transpires where the state favours growth over the environment. Although EU membership has long been Turkey’s aspiration – which largely explains the state’s eagerness to align its environmental legislation with that of Europe – so has modernisation. Governments in Turkey, irrespective of their political position, have readily supported projects that would add value and create jobs at the expense of high environmental costs. Inability stems from patronage-based corruption that sacrifices environmental quality to particularistic interests. Both processes frustrate existing legislation (Sunar 1996, Heper and Keyman 1998, Kıray 1999, Çoban 2004, Keyman and İçduygü 2005).

Since in Turkey, unlike Western capitalist countries, modernism was not promoted by any social actor, and partly due to the heritage of the Ottoman Empire, the state acted in a top-down manner. Patron–client networks may be situated at this junction as one specific type of representation. When the traditional elite began to lose power in the 1950s, the tendency to settle contesting voices through patronage was set in motion, serving as a link between state and society and acting as a mechanism to acquire consent. The Turkish state should not, however, be seen as monolithic; its legislative, judicial, and executive components may and do clash with one another, as the state machinery is

Before the 1980s, Turkey had a vibrant civil society, which nevertheless lacked any substantial transformative power. Paradoxically, the 1980 military coup, which severely curtailed democratic rights, produced a decline in traditional mechanisms of political participation (through political parties) and an increase in civic mobilisation around a wide range of issues, including gender, human rights, identity, and the environment. Civil society’s growing prominence has been reinforced by the EU accession process and increased integration into the global economy.

Environmental organisations grew in number and activities in the 1990s, and have been brought into the process of policymaking at local and national levels (Adem 2005, Keyman 2005). As environmental degradation intensified, ecological issues became an important part of the political agenda from the late 1990s. Moreover, given growing doubts about state capacity and willingness to address environmental problems, different actors at local and national levels, with different ideological and environmental agendas, have begun to emphasise the need for a new division of labour between the state, the private sector, and civil society. These developments have clearly influenced the democratisation process in Turkey, although the magnitude of their impact is subject to debate (Kalaycioğlu 2002, Keyman 2005).

Environmental organisations in Turkey

While there are environmental CSOs in Turkey that participate in policy processes, they are not necessarily effective. Our research, focused on CSOs’ relationship with the state and financial donors in the past decade, considers four CSOs: Doğa Association (DD), Greenpeace Mediterranean (GP-Med), the Turkish Foundation for Combating Soil Erosion, for Reforestation and the Protection of Natural Habitats (TEMA), and World Wildlife Fund-Turkey (WWF-Turkey). These have been the most important environmental CSOs in Turkey in terms of size, area of impact, visibility, national coverage, access to international networks, and funding. Our study focused solely on environmental organisations, and did not examine other civil society actors, such as national environmental platforms (e.g. the anti-nuclear platform), local environmental resistance movements (e.g. the Bergama movement against gold extraction), local voluntary environmental bodies (e.g. the Turkey Water Assembly), or Green political parties – the analysis of which is necessary for a comprehensive understanding of environmental activism in Turkey. Our limited objective was to produce a deep analysis of the selected environmental CSOs (see Table 1).

The research was conducted in two main stages: first, a desktop study reviewing official documents, activity reports and websites of environmental organisations, and newspaper and journal articles; second, semi-structured in-depth interviews with CSO directors and staff, relevant state bureaucrats and
Table 1. Features of CSOs discussed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>DD</th>
<th>Greenpeace-Med</th>
<th>TEMA</th>
<th>WWF-Turkey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year founded</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offices</td>
<td>Ankara, Istanbul, Hasankeyf, Burdur, Birecik, Beypazar</td>
<td>Istanbul</td>
<td>Istanbul and 77 provincial representatives</td>
<td>Istanbul, Ankara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priority areas</td>
<td>Biodiversity conservation, climate change</td>
<td>Climate change and energy, conservation of the Mediterranean, a future without nuclear energy</td>
<td>Erosion, rural development, climate change, forests</td>
<td>Nature conservation, biodiversity, climate change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular dues-paying members/supporters</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>27,000</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>2100*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>147,000**</td>
<td>600***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transnational networks</td>
<td>Birdlife International, IUCN</td>
<td>Greenpeace International</td>
<td>IUCN, Drynet, EEB, Mio-ECSDE, Climate Action Network</td>
<td>WWF International, IUCN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial sources in 2009</td>
<td>1% Membership fees; 8% Donations; 91% International donors</td>
<td>87.4% Individual supporters; 12.4% Greenpeace International; 0.01% Merchandising; 0.15% Interest receivable</td>
<td>80.4% Conditional donations; 6.6% Donations; 7.6% Interest receivables; 5.3% Other income and previous year’s profit</td>
<td>50.9% Conditional donations (projects); 19.7% Individual income; 18.7% Corporate donations; 10.7% Other income</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *WWF-Turkey has 12,000 one-time donors and 2100 regular dues-paying members.
**This is the estimated number of active volunteers defined as people who made a one-time payment of 5 TRY and are below 25 years of age, or 20 TRY and over the age of 25. Some may be paying regular sums in the form of donations, but the number of these people is not available.
***This number excludes those who volunteer on various projects.
parliamentarians, funders, international organisations (UNDP GEF-Small Grants Program [SGP], REC, and EC), and other experts. Forty-five interviews were carried out mainly in Istanbul and Ankara between October 2008 and November 2009. A workshop was organised with respondents to present initial findings of the study and solicit their comments. Thirteen participants provided information and feedback that both confirmed and enriched our findings. In the following two sections, the nature of the interaction between environmental organisations and the state, and the effects of the types of financial resources on organisational capacity and effectiveness, are analysed, followed by a discussion of the implications of these two axes for the self-realisation of CSOs.

Engaging the state

CSOs have been participating in decision-making processes on an institutional basis by becoming commission members, preparing reports and presenting opinions/positions solicited by relevant ministries, and participating in passing legislation. Consulting and including CSOs in these processes, especially the biggest and most prestigious such as TEMA, DD, and GP-Med (interviews 1, 8, 9, 15), is becoming more common. Their participation in commissions has certainly allowed them to carry out advocacy work and exchange information on a first-hand basis: ‘We were presenting reports, and sometimes decisions were taken in line with our recommendations since they knew about our capacity to make a fuss’ (interview 1); ‘They invited us to the Energy Commission meeting. We pressed hard for the signing of Kyoto’ (interview 9).

Furthermore, CSOs implemented several pilot projects that were backed by scientific research and carried out with/supported by the state (interviews 1, 4). CSOs deem it important to work with the state, to intervene in investment decisions and intercede in policy processes; however, when cooperation fails to achieve the aims of ‘exchanging information, pointing in the right direction of common environmental and societal interests, and designing policies to that effect’ (interview 9), CSOs turn to alternative channels such as legal action, protest, and activism (interviews 4, 6, 12, 13, 14, 22, 27). Campaigns have helped bring issues to the table; thus, when DD volunteers spelled out HELP across the dried part of Lake Tuz with their bodies to protest and underline the urgency of its demise, it became front-page news the following day. As one CSO representative succinctly summarised, ‘We both work and clash with [the state]’ (interview 4).

However, while the state subscribes to a participatory and inclusive discourse in its affairs with civil society actors, in practice it adopts an arbitrary/inconsistent stand towards them. CSOs have found that the state is accessible and easy to cooperate with on some cases, provided they do not contradict the modernist priorities of the state, but is particularly territorial with regard to issues such as water regimes, nuclear energy, mining, and international waters (interviews 7, 8, 18), rendering CSOs ‘ineffective’ (interview 2).
Generally, participation is ‘participation on paper’. In such cases, CSOs’ scientific reports and policy suggestions are not taken into account in earnest, and as a result, their input is often not reflected in the final decisions, regulations, and laws (interviews 1, 2, 5, 8, 9, 21, 25, 29, 30, 33). CSOs, for instance, criticise the fact that the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey alone represents civil society in the Climate Change Commission (interview 15), or that CSOs were consulted about the 2B legislation on forestry only after it was ratified in parliament (interview 1). In short, inclusion seems to occur on the state’s terms (interviews 8, 9, 24): ‘CSOs try to influence state projects in their areas of expertise. The relationship with the state is very difficult as the state listens to them but barely … as its plans for the next 50 years have already been made’ (interview 25). The one-day meeting organised by Turkey’s Chief Negotiator to the EU is another excellent case in point – 500 CSOs were invited (interviews 29, 37). As one CSO representative rightly pointed out, ‘This is not real participation. We are not involved in decision-making processes. But were we there? Yes, we were’ (interview 29). CSOs believe that this illustrates the state’s insincere commitment to include them, and that it cooperates with them merely to fulfil the criterion of working with civil society (especially relevant for the EU process). The tendency of the state to consult CSOs after the fact is regarded by one as ‘a lack of deepening of democracy’, since democratic conduct requires ‘the text to be co-written’ (interview 29).

The state also works with some CSOs, some of the time. As CSO representatives and directors repeatedly underlined (interviews 7, 8, 25, 33), being invited to collaborate on one issue does not guarantee future invitations: ‘Simply choosing the wrong wording in addressing state institutions, or claiming in a press release that the ministry has its hands tied, has closed the doors to some CSOs in the past’ (interview 24). The desultory acceptance of civil society participation is evidenced not only by the fact that participation remains partial and ineffectual in conveying the environmental and social concerns of CSOs into actual policy, but also by the state’s tendency to co-opt and choose to work with accommodating organisations. Although increased state–CSO partnership indicates a mode of interaction based on cooperation, mutual empowerment, or synergy (Evans 1995, Wang 1999, Migdal 2004), the inclination of the state to establish particularistic ties with CSOs signifies a co-optative thread within the web of state–CSO interaction. This co-optative mode of interaction works with both carrots and sticks. Being in the good graces of the state enables CSOs to ‘get things done’ (interviews 7, 25, 27). By contrast, CSOs critical of state policies face frequent inspections, obstacles to funding, and exclusion (interviews 7, 22, 24, 30). Even the EU process, which has generally been perceived as strengthening the position of CSOs vis-à-vis the state, has unintentionally given the state leverage, such as the requirement for a letter of endorsement to determine whether issues designated for funding have priority (interview 18). Finally, hierarchy and the state’s perception of CSOs as insincere and
incompetent troublemakers characterise state–civil society relations (interviews 3, 5, 7, 18, 23, 25, 30, 33, 44).

Intimidation, co-optation, and selective inclusion raise challenges for CSOs, but this does not imply that all environmental organisations are co-opted and controlled by the state. The fact that some can develop strategies to resist and preserve critical positions suggests yet another mode of interaction based on conflictual relations. Thus GP-Med, which works with state organisations, making policy suggestions and contributing scientific knowledge, also runs campaigns on controversial issues such as stopping the construction of nuclear power plants. Similarly, DD is represented on state commissions on various environmental problems, but is simultaneously involved in one of the most contentious issues in Turkey’s environmental history – the construction of the Ilısu dam in a biologically and culturally irreplaceable site in south-eastern Turkey – and has locked horns with the Ministry of Environment and Forestry.7 This controversy has been so fierce that the minister sued the president of DD (for calling him ‘a serial killer of nature’). Even TEMA, founded by the industrial elite and traditionally with close ties to the state, found that criticising the state – as it did in relation to the 2B legislation – comes at a cost (interview 24): ‘Whenever TEMA says something [critical], the [state] inspector shows up. If you are an unwanted CSO, this means you are inspected more often. This is discouraging’ (interview 22). Clearly, state–CSO interaction cannot be reduced to any single dimension of cooperation, co-optation, or conflict, but must be analysed as a complex set of contingent dynamics that play out simultaneously.

One inconsistency, arising when an environmental organisation works with the state on the same commission on one issue but is involved in a heated controversy, even a lawsuit, on another, may be explained by the fragmented nature of the state. The state is institutionally differentiated: there are two general directorates in the Ministry of Environment and Forestry: Nature Protection, and National Parks and Forestry. ‘[Nature Protection] may say yes to a suggestion by a CSO but then it turns out to be a no. So it is very difficult to work with them. In contrast, the Directorate of Forestry has a different institutional culture. Once a CSO understands this culture and can work within it, everything runs like clockwork. They tell you who to talk to, and the work gets done when you do’ (interview 25).

This differentiated nature of the state is complicated by problems of coordination and jurisdiction. Different departments can take each other to court, as in the case of State Hydraulic Works and the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (when they were separate entities), or some politicians may advocate measures to mitigate climate change while others stick adamantly to unsustainable notions of development and modernisation (interviews 1, 3, 4, 8, 26, 27, 30, 37). There is a hierarchy among institutions: ‘The Ministry of Industry is superior to the Ministry of Agriculture. A person from the Commission of the Environment had stated that the Minister of Energy “beats everyone else”’ (interview 27). This fragmentation renders the state porous, making it possible to work easily with some parts of it, while being shut out of others. In other words, it partly enhances
the capacity of CSOs to participate in decision-making processes and ultimately protect the environment.

The state’s unwillingness to abandon ineffectual, outmoded, and ecologically detrimental modernisation policies or patronage networks results in implementation failures. The state’s lack of commitment to the environment makes it a constant battleground for civil society actors. CSOs have repeatedly emphasised that legal measures were meddled with and overturned by political actors, and environmental impact assessments were treated as mere formalities, resulting in failure to implement environmental regulations, laws, and court decisions (interviews 12, 21, 25, 29, 32): ‘Construction on sand dunes is an important problem. The Chamber of Architects filed charges against plans for development on the dunes at Lara Perakende [Antalya] for the 13th time. Ankara changes the law all the time, but thanks to alert local actors who bring the constructors to court and win the case, construction is prevented’ (interview 21). These implementation failures are closely related to rent-seeking opportunities. Frequently, areas and ecological dynamics that environmental organisations are working to preserve conflict with economic interests. A good example is Belek, on Turkey’s Mediterranean coast, ecologically vital because of its sand dunes where sea turtles (Caretta caretta) reproduce, as well as a high-profile tourism area. Initially, DHKD (the national association that then merged with WWF) and the then ruling administration agreed on a zoning arrangement where the coast was divided into adjacent lots and respectively allotted as space for hotels or uninhabited areas. Yet these uninhabited areas were later opened to construction (interview 34). Rent seeking is identified by one CSO director: ‘The minister is being pressured. If need be, [those who are influential] will intervene. This is where we have the biggest difficulty. You advocate an area of conservation based on completely scientific data, but the very institutions which are obliged to provide protection become instrumental in making the area a source of rent and hence lead to its demise’ (interview 34).

Engaging capital

CSOs can function self-sufficiently to the extent that they can consistently raise the funds their activities and staff require. Each funding source – membership-based income and independent resources, international donors, corporations, and sponsors – has advantages and disadvantages. Concerns related to funding sources include failure to secure funds and work in certain fields or projects; inability to express opposition to environmentally threatening activities that the funder is engaged in; and diversion of focus and energy from activities that are not attractive to donors.

Membership-based income and independent resources

Membership fees and donations strengthen the autonomy of CSOs. Most CSOs in Turkey have low membership. DD has approximately 270 members and 650
volunteers. TEMA considers 147,000 volunteers as active, but data on the number of donors who make regular payments is lacking. WWF-Turkey has 2100 regular fee-paying members. Of the four CSOs examined, only GP-Med can sustain its activities from supporter donations. With approximately 27,000 supporters, GP-Med maintains its autonomy by refusing funds from corporations or states and accepting funds only from individuals or individual foundations, but Greenpeace International funds 10% of the Istanbul office expenses. DD representatives were especially enthusiastic about membership campaigns and increasing the share of independent sources in their budget: ‘We need money to protect species, we need people to sign our signature campaigns, and we need people to participate in demonstrations’ (interview 3). Many referred to the UK’s Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, with its one million members. Membership not only gives CSOs financial autonomy, but also boosts their legitimacy, and is a means to command public support against environmentally harmful projects. In the absence of a large paying membership/supporter base, CSOs depend on funds from international donors or corporate sponsors.

**International donors**

In countries with a small middle-class and low levels of CSO membership, donor support can make it possible for autonomous CSOs to thrive and challenge existing economic elites and the state (Parks 2008), but can also have a detrimental impact on CSOs’ accountability (Edwards and Hulme 1996, Clark 2003). CSOs in Turkey are typically funded by the EC, GEF-SGP, REC, and various embassies. Furthermore, CSOs are also affiliated with international networks: DD with BirdLife International, TEMA and WWF-Turkey with IUCN, WWF-Turkey with WWF International, and GP-Med with Greenpeace International. These international organisations can be vital in providing funding.

The positive impact of the EU process has been the expansion of funds throughout the candidacy period, and the encouragement of formation of alliances among CSOs. However, grants by donors reduce the necessity for organisations to raise funds from supporters and enlarge their membership base (interview 4). This can have a negative impact, as donor funding may not be as sustainable as funds generated from members or independent resources. Another negative aspect of international donor dependency is the possibility of state interference: ‘Big donors such as the EU have entered the picture but created problems regarding independence. The EU asks for a letter of endorsement from the state in order to determine whether the project topic has priority so that funds are not wasted on unimportant issues. This means that CSOs have to run around corridors after bureaucrats to get these letters. This gives bargaining power to the state, and creates pressure on CSOs’ (interview 18).

Although funding from international donors is crucial, it may render CSOs ‘project-seeking’. This may have a detrimental effect by diverting energy: ‘Individuals concentrate on a project and we do not have the energy or the
human resources to work on member training, conferences, or conserving an endemic plant. We end up doing things that the project requires and pulling out of areas that are not generally funded’ (CSO manager, interview 4). Overall, CSO staff agree that there are no strict criteria determining grant recipients. Grants are awarded to project proposals depending on the priorities of the funding agency. As one CSO manager stated, grants from international agencies prioritise project sustainability (interview 37) – potentially achievable if the project infrastructure and facilities remain intact when the funding is over. Projects necessitate reports at every level and divert staff energy, since a new project has to be written every two or three years to provide funds for salaries (interviews 4, 25). This is a general problem for CSOs in relation to both international donors and corporate sponsorships (Igoe 2003, Wang 2006, Parks 2008).

**Corporations**

With increasing emphasis on social responsibility, corporations throughout the world have raised their funding of CSOs. Although sponsorship of art and education was common, in the 1990s, the growing severity of global climate change and deforestation translated into an increased share of funding for environmental organisations. However, dependence on sponsors is not sustainable, as the areas considered attractive to demonstrate social responsibility tend to shift over time (interviews 2, 37): ‘Previously “sexy” animals used to lure sponsors into projects, and environmental issues used to get funds easily. Now the emphasis [in Turkey] is on issues such as female school enrolment and poverty’ (interview 18). Fluctuations in areas of interest of corporations and international donors jeopardise the sustainability of CSO activities and are a major problem for CSOs that depend predominantly on a single revenue source (Wang 2006, Parks 2008).

Interviewees (1, 3, 4, 5, 24, 25, 36, 37) claimed that the predominant aim of corporations that fund environmental CSOs is to attain visibility: ‘I do not think they are genuinely interested in the environment. They allocate funds to these issues to improve their image’ (interview 2). An environmental expert stated that corporations compare the cost of advertising and sponsorship, and decide to fund CSOs (interview 25). These public relations attempts can even reach the level of ‘greenwashing’, where corporations feign concern for the environment and fund environmental organisations, while simultaneously engaging in economic activities that have serious ecological consequences. ‘Corporations select the projects they fund based on their public relations impact. They prefer to fund projects that provide environmental training to their employees or send their employees on nature expeditions. But corporations should equally have natural resource policies. In Turkey they do not’ (interview 4).

Just as CSOs may work with the state on some issues while being shut out of others, such topical fragmentation emerges again in funding: ‘We determine our portfolio but the sponsor chooses the sexiest projects. But of course, a sponsor will
never fund the Ilısu campaign because they do not want to clash with the state. Neither the state nor corporations will fund you if you try to raise funds for a campaign against nuclear energy’ (interview 24). There was consensus among CSO staff that sponsors did not interfere with the projects. However, there are constraints: ‘The sponsor does not tell you what you can and cannot say. But you know that if you say something controversial you will never receive any more funding from them, and what you currently have may also be in jeopardy’ (interview 24). Not only are there instances of self-censoring because of sponsors, but CSO representatives may also find themselves working on projects that are against their principles (interview 2) or face open censorship of their ideas: ‘Once I participated in a TV shoot with a CSO. When I examined the broadcast later, I realised that they removed some of the things I had said. The CSO representative told me that their sponsor had found them “radical”’ (interview 27).

Some CSOs, especially TEMA and WWF-Turkey, have influential businesspeople on their boards of trustees, and this facilitates their access to corporate funds and donations. The TEMA administrator claimed that they fund most of their projects through partnerships with corporations, which provide funding mostly to rural development projects. Among the CSOs examined, GP-Med, which refuses funding from corporations, stands in stark contrast to WWF-Turkey, which has received a significant portion of its budget from its institutional sponsor, Garanti Bank. Although institutional sponsorship provides sustainable base money for CSOs, it reduces their autonomy and hinders their ability to criticise environment-threatening projects implemented or funded by sponsors: ‘If there is an institutional sponsor, there is dependence … TEMA claims they are opposed to the Ilısu dam “in principle”. WWF swept it under the rug. They cannot act’ (interview 6). ‘Even though WWF International confronts dam builders, WWF-Turkey has not been able to say anything against dams in Turkey’ (interview 24). While WWF-Turkey claims to have the protection of endangered species as one of its goals, it fails to act in relation to the Ilısu dam, which will endanger some species in the region, because Garanti Bank is a major funder. The importance of multiple sources of funding was frequently emphasised by CSO representatives (interviews 5, 6, 15). It was suggested that a basket approach to funding will prevent CSOs from losing their independence and render them capable of working even if a donor withdraws funds for any reason. A CSO leader highlighted the importance of financial autonomy: ‘We do not work with donors that provide lump-sum amounts. Not that anyone offers us these types of funds. But we would not accept such funding because it would hamper our independence’ (interview 4). Although elsewhere there are cases where the CSO–business relationship is built on a more egalitarian basis – e.g. WWF-UK claims it can dissuade its business partners from investing in certain ecologically sensitive areas (Rootes 2006) – this does not seem to be the case in Turkey.
Conclusion

We have argued that civil society’s efforts to fulfil its potential are contingent on the relations in which CSOs are embedded, which in turn are affected and transformed by neoliberal globalisation. This was illustrated by our analysis of how environmental organisations engage with the state and financial donors in Turkey. Our results strongly indicate that CSOs enjoy an increasing opportunity to influence decision making, for they have access to governmental bodies. Improved funding opportunities for environmental issues have also strengthened the capacity of CSOs. However, our findings also reveal that increased participation in policymaking processes has not translated into effective environmental protection and conservation. The first reason for this is the arbitrary and inconsistent stand the state has adopted towards the role that environmental organisations aspire to play in environmental politics, which manifests across a spectrum of cooperation, co-optation, and coercion, and more often than not results in granting access to CSOs only in appearance and discourse, rather than ensuring their genuine participation. Second, donor funding raises concerns for environmental organisations, as manifested in diversion of focus and energy from activities that are unattractive to donors, failure to work in certain fields due to lack of sponsorship, and inability to oppose certain environmentally threatening investments because of donor interests. Third, environmental organisations themselves have to contend with their limitations, given low levels of membership and the corresponding deficiency in legitimacy. Turkey’s (currently dormant) relationship with the EU might in future bring additional challenges to CSOs, mainly regarding funds and networks.

In short, comprehensive changes based on Green policies jointly decided by state and civil society actors have yet to produce a participatory framework. There is a non-linear process in which dynamics of cooperation, conflict, and co-optation concurrently affect interactions between environmental organisations and a modernising, incoherent and often arbitrary state. CSOs have made some progress in confronting environmental degradation mainly through building expertise and international links, pressuring lawmakers for the conservation of wetlands, protecting species and habitats, and raising awareness. They have also been instrumental in supporting local resistance movements that emerged in opposition to large and small dams and large-scale mining projects in ecologically important areas. Yet, this does not ward off environmental threats (potential or actual), as the state still passes legislation, for instance, that allows mining activities in national parks, and plans dams, hydroelectric and nuclear power plants, and mega-highway projects in ecologically and culturally unique sites; civil society seems unable to resist effectively given the political and economic constraints.

Given that the state in Turkey often becomes an obstacle to efforts to preserve and sustain the environment, it is perhaps inevitable that civil society actors are locked in antagonistic relations with state and economic actors. Even
conservation, which is perceived as a relatively conflict-free environmental undertaking in the global North, may easily become a controversial political struggle for survival and livelihood in Turkey. The less contentious nature of conservation in western Europe largely results from deindustrialisation and cost-shifting to the global South. Analysis of the Turkish case reveals that differences between environmental movements, north and south, are more apparent than real. Turkey illustrates well how all environmental issues are necessarily political conflicts as environmentalists confront a modernist state with an insatiable appetite for growth within a neoliberal framework. More importantly, the political and economic relations of CSOs imply that their efforts with limited leverage cannot ultimately alter the course of unsustainable societies. The case of Turkey, where environmental struggles are explicitly antagonistic, helps crystallise the economic and political constraints on the global environmental movement. Such constraints are the reason why political ecologists argued long ago that in capitalist liberal democracies the prospects of Green policies are severely limited (Dryzek 1995).

Civil society will continue to be a major actor which can potentially slow environmental degradation and assume a transformative role in changing economic and societal relations towards a more human and sustainable structure, but more needs to be done to politicise the environment and strengthen public support, enhance public participation, and fortify cooperation and coordination among different parts of civil society.

Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of TUBITAK 1002 (Scientific and Technical Research Council of Turkey), project 108K383. We also thank all the participants who generously contributed their time and expertise, and Barış Gençer Baykan for his invaluable assistance throughout the research process. We are equally grateful to the editor, as well as the three anonymous reviewers whose comments much improved the text.

Notes

1. The title of Powell’s (2007) book is revealing: both sides of the political spectrum assign important roles to civil society as a way of replacing old-style welfarism.
2. ‘Governance state’ refers to a mode of governance in which the nation state, CSOs, donors, international finance institutions, and corporations are conjoined in making policies along neoliberal premises and based on post-conditionality (Duffy 2006).
4. 2B legislation refers to lands that have lost their forest attributes as a result of human action. It allows the state to sell them to private owners. Settlers on these lands are involved in unlicensed construction and await full ownership of the plots they invaded following the legislation.
5. In a telling incident, a group of CSOs withdrew from a joint capacity enhancement project because the state refused to allow CSOs to publicise the event. However, this
did not stop the state from engaging a different group of CSOs and using the funding for the project to comply with the donor’s requirement of CSO participation (interview 24).

6. Co-optation has received less attention in the analysis of state–civil society relations than cooperative or conflictual engagements. But see Friedman et al. (2005).

7. The Ministry of Environment and Forestry was split into two ministries from July 2011: the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization, and the Ministry of Forestry and Water Works.

8. Low membership levels in environmental CSOs are not peculiar to Turkey; most southern European CSOs suffer from a similar problem. Even in Europe, where reliance on membership is relatively high, the largest funding source of the non-profit sector is often government subsidies and grants (Wang 2006).

9. GEF comprises the UN Development Fund, the UN Environmental Program, and the World Bank, and provides grants to CSOs and local organisations on biodiversity conservation and climate change. See http://www.gefsgp.net.

10. REC Turkey supports CSOs and corporations on environmental policies, biodiversity and climate change, renewable energy, and waste management since 2004. See http://www.rec.org.tr.

References


Appendix. List of interviews
1. CSO director, 30 June 2009, Ankara
3. CSO representative, 7 August 2009, İzmir
4. CSO director, 21 January 2009, Istanbul
5. Expert, August 2009, Ankara
7. CSO representative, 3 February 2009, Istanbul
8. CSO representative, 10 February 2009, Istanbul
9. CSO director, 28 January 2009, Istanbul
10. CSO director, 25 August 2009, Artvin
11. Member of the Ministry of Environment, 13 January 2009, Ankara
12. CSO lawyer, 11 May 2009, Istanbul
13. CSO representative, 11 May 2009, Istanbul
14. CSO director, 20 March 2009, Istanbul
15. CSO representative, 7 July 2009, Istanbul
16. CSO representative, 27 August 2009, Giresun
17. Expert, 30 September 2009, Istanbul
20. Expert, 11 August 2009, Bafra
23. Member of Parliament, 30 June 2009, Ankara
25. Expert, 8 January 2009, Istanbul
27. Expert, 14 April 2009, Istanbul
29. Member of the Ministry of Environment, 17 September 2009, Ankara
32. CSO lawyer, 30 July 2009, Istanbul
33. CSO director, 17 July 2009, Istanbul
34. CSO director, 7 July 2009, Istanbul
35. Financial donor, 18 August 2009, Istanbul
36. Expert, 6 December 2009, Istanbul
37. CSO director, 1 December 2009, Istanbul
41. Expert, 2 November 2009, Istanbul
42. CSO representative, 15 November 2009, Istanbul
43. CSO representative, 15 November 2009, Istanbul
44. CSO representative, 27 February 2009, Istanbul
45. Expert, 26 January 2009, Istanbul