



EU–Turkey relations: civil society and depoliticization

by Özge Zihnioğlu, London and New York, Routledge, 2019, 155 pp., £115.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-81537-881-5

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BOOK REVIEWS

EU–Turkey relations: civil society and depoliticization, by Özge Zihnioğlu, London and New York, Routledge, 2019, 155 pp., £115.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-81537-881-5

Since the 1950s, the relationship between the European Union (EU) and Turkey has been quite volatile. More recently, this complex relationship has been further impacted by developments in Turkish politics. In the early 2000s, the willingness of the governing party, the AKP (Justice and Development Party), to start negotiations for Turkey's EU accession and its promising discourse and policies for democratization markedly improved EU–Turkey relations. However, with the deterioration of Turkish democracy in the 2010s, the situation has reversed, and EU–Turkey relations have suffered. Consequently, numerous books, journal articles, and research reports have been produced to examine the de-Europeanization process and/or the transactional features of EU–Turkey relations in certain areas.

Özge Zihnioğlu's new book ranks among these works. Rather uniquely, it approaches EU–Turkey relations from the perspective of 'the hidden but ever-present civil society dimension' (5). In this respect, this book presents an invaluable addition to previous work by focusing on a disappearing normative axis between the EU and Turkey. Zihnioğlu frames the book's main concern with a comprehensive analysis of how civil society has been influenced by this relationship's numerous facets. The book discusses it in three pillars. First, Zihnioğlu establishes the depoliticization of Turkish civil society, while the second pillar explains how and why Turkish civil society has depoliticized. In doing so, Zihnioğlu examines reasons for the depoliticization that stem from both Turkey and the EU. Lastly, Zihnioğlu discusses the implications of Turkish civil society's depoliticization in EU–Turkey relations.

The book consists of eight chapters; Chapter One (Introduction), begins with an inquiry into why a normative axis is so crucial to the sustainability of EU–Turkey relations. This chapter also draws on rationalist and sociological versions of New Institutionalism to grasp the impact and role of the EU's policies in Turkey and Turkish civil society.

The following two chapters deepen and broaden the readers' understanding of EU–Turkey relations in many aspects. In Chapter Two, Zihnioğlu provides a compact overview of longstanding Turkey–EU relations in order to shed light on their current status. The chapter accounts for how the relations started and examines the ties between the two sides in terms of economic, political and security concerns, and how the relations have become more complicated with the introduction of new dimensions and new actors. Chapter Three focuses on the current challenges and the key issues in EU–Turkey relations, including the migration crisis, the modernization of the Customs Union, the reduction of EU

funds, and energy cooperation. By considering civil society as an active participant in the process even when normative relations have diminished, Zihnioğlu offers than alternative side to the transactional nature of EU–Turkey relations.

The next four chapters elaborate on the book's main arguments and findings, examining the domain of civil society from within both Turkish and European domestic politics. In Chapter Four Zihnioğlu traces the changes in Turkish civil society since the 1980s and establishes its recent depoliticization. In so doing, she reveals that how traditional civic organizations, in particular right-based organizations, abstain from being political in their discourse and activities. On the other hand, Zihnioğlu shows the changing form of civil society in Turkey during the post-Gezi era and how they are dealing with Turkey's shrinking civic space.

Chapter Five accounts for the depoliticization of Turkish civil society through an analysis of Turkey's shrinking civic space and the domestic political affairs since the late 2000s. Zihnioğlu argues that the weakening of EU's normative touches, Turkey's deteriorating democracy, and the polarization of Turkish society are the main reasons for the shrinking of civic space in Turkey.

Chapter Six and Seven discuss the role played by EU funds in the depoliticization of Turkish civil society. Chapter Six introduces support from the EU's civil society as an element of Turkey's accession process to EU. Zihnioğlu shows how civil society is incorporated with the funding through an explanation of the EU funding mechanism and its process. Chapter Seven turns a critical eye to EU financial support to Turkish civil society and discusses how EU funding contributes to the depoliticization of civil society in Turkey. The core strength of this chapter is that it draws on a series of in-depth, and face-to face interviews (45 in total). It includes interviews with various civil society organizations, taking into account their working areas, sizes and geographical locations across Turkey (Ankara, Antalya, Iğdır, İstanbul, İzmir, Kayseri, Samsun and Van). In doing so, Zihnioğlu provides a comprehensive and comparative analysis of the impact of European civil society's support of Turkey. Zihnioğlu infers that EU's financial support reinforces the depoliticization of civil society due to the structure of the funding mechanism that is not amenable to rights-based activities.

Zihnioğlu concludes her book by discussing the implications of Turkey's depoliticization and EU relations. The author explains how diminishing rights-based activism will aggravate Turkey's already unstable democracy. She also argues that depoliticization will adversely affect the role of civil society organizations in transnational social learning and their positions as 'norm carriers' will begin to dwindle.

The book succeeds in addressing its main argument through well-structured analysis that brings new questions to debates in both Turkish domestic politics and EU–Turkey relations. However, the author might have paid more attention to the current challenges with the EU, stemming from new populist directions of some of its member states. Examining anti-institutional, anti-establishment, anti-elite and nativist characteristics of twenty-first century populism would account for both the future of the EU and its relations with candidate countries.

Thus, the populism now shared between EU's member states and Turkey might provide a new perspective to discussions of civil society and EU–Turkey relations.

In sum, this volume is a welcome addition to the literature on EU–Turkey relations, since it introduces a perennial issue by establishing a dialogue between Turkish domestic politics and EU regional level politics in the domain of civil society. This book will be of interest to researchers who would like to design a proper, authentic and supplementary research that combines theory and tangible outcomes. Its comprehensive coverage of Turkey and the EU sides makes it an important reference guide for researchers who have difficulty finding a critical source about the last decade of Turkish politics and the effects of the declining normative relationship between the EU and Turkey. Additionally, Zihnioglu's persistent approach to EU–Turkey relations from the normative pillar provides a different perspective on the literature and hints at a possible new growth in EU–Turkey relations.

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The Illicit Economy in Turkey: How Criminals, Terrorists, and the Syrian Conflict Fuel Underground Markets, by Mahmut Cengiz and Mitchel P. Roth, Lanham, MD, Lexington Books, 2019, 252 pp., \$95.00 (hardcover), ISBN: 978-1-4985-9504-9

Crime may be unavoidable, but it is seldom studied well. Situated in a theoretical borderland between political economy, security studies, and legal theory, few scholars produce quality research on crime as a never-ending empirical reality. Turkey's geographic position as the bridge between Europe, Central Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Russia create geopolitical challenges faced by few other countries. As a conduit of trade and political exchange between these geopolitical regions, the dynamics of Turkey's illicit economy can impact stability and business far from its borders. While few works engage in deep analysis of criminal affairs, Cengiz and Roth escort the reader through an empirically rich walk through of what could be dubbed the 'wild Middle East.'

Cengiz and Roth construct an empirically dense work of political economy on black markets and demonstrate how crime and corruption are embedded within Turkey's sociopolitical fabric. Drawing upon rich sources of data that includes field notes, official reports, interviews, government statistics, and network analysis, the authors' work culminates in a thorough and triangulated compendium of organized criminal enterprises in Turkey. While the book is a dry read, its deep