

Autocratic or Democratic? A Critical Approach to Civil Society Movements in Turkey*

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Abstract. Civil society, which corresponds to a significant social/historical phase in the social progress of Western European societies, is a concept that has grown in parallel with political, economic and social transformations of Western civilization. This concept has emerged as an “analytical” tool to better understand Western European society. With respect to the collapse of socialistic regimes in Central and Eastern Europe and the USSR, and the recent domination of Western democratic models, after the military intervention of 1980, Turkish society entered a new era of the depoliticisation process. For this reason, the concept of civil society began to be viewed in Turkey as a tool for eradicating statist totalitarianism and a magic formula for democratization.

In this period, many civil society organizations were established in Turkey either to provide protection from authoritarian statism or to eliminate statist pressures coming from the top echelons of society. Although there are already more than sixty-thousand civil society organizations and all political bodies are “democratic” and in favour of “civil society” in Turkey, the country still faces the problems in terms of democratization. While Turkey has struggled with “democratization” it has become apparent that civil society organizations fall short in regards to “pluralism”, “participation in the public sphere”, “individuality” and “impact on law reform” both within themselves and toward each other.

* I wish to thank Ass. Prof. Dr. Mehmet Dikkaya and Assistant Fatih Ertugay for their helpful comments and suggestions.

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Using a theoretical perspective, this study aims to make a general analysis of four civil society organizations: the IHD (Human Rights Association); MAZLUMDER (Organization for Human Rights and Solidarity for Oppressed People); the LDT (Association for Liberal Thinking); and the ADD (Atatürk Thought Association). These organizations address significant social segments in Turkey through their discourses, actions and activity reports. The organizations reflect respectively liberalist, Islamist, leftist and Kemalist points of view. This paper examines to what degree they are able to tolerate different opinions, different identities and ideas, alternative thinking and types of activities in the public discussion environment compared within each other and more importantly with other civil society organizations (CSOs).

JEL Classification Codes: D71, D79.

Keywords: Civil society, democratization, IHD, MAZLUMDER, LDT, ADD, Turkey.

1. Introduction

Civil society, which corresponds to a significant social/historical phase in the social progress of Western European societies, is a concept that has grown in parallel with political, economic and social transformations of Western civilization. The concept of “Civil Society” originates with Aristotle’s *koinonia politike* and dates back to Ancient Greek *polis*. This idea evolved through Cicero’s *societas civilis* and in modern positive law has been conceptualized variously as political society, by social contract thinkers, as economic society, by classic political economists and Hegel, and as bourgeois society, by Marxists by liberal and socialist thinkers who discuss the transformation process of the western European societies (Keane, 2004:47-90). With the collapse of socialist regimes in the Eastern European countries and the Soviet bloc and with the recent pre-eminence of Western democratic models, this concept has emerged as an “analytical” tool to understand society in Western Europe (Sarıbay, 1998: 89). It has even been interpreted as a magic formula providing immunity from authoritarianism or totalitarianism.

Whereas the concept of civil society was developed and used as an “analytical” tool for understanding social and political life in the West, in post-1980 Turkey the concept was unfortunately used by leftists and Islamists as a “tactic”, in concord with their own world views, to erode the despotic state tradition (Çaha, 2000: 69-70). Throughout Turkey’s history, the state-society relation has been formulated upon the framework of a

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strong state (centre) and weak society (periphery) (Mardin, 1992: 34-76; Heper, 1980: 3-35). In the relationship of the Governing to the Governed, the “centre” has always been dominant over the periphery and any encounter between them has been one-dimensional and resulted in a clash rather than a compromise (Çaylak, 1998). Because of this historical-social practice social segments of Turkish society have not been able to initiate an autonomous sphere for themselves free of the state. Those segments which came into being concurrently with the rise of neo-liberal trends throughout the world, and exempt from the social and historical reality that civil society means, have started to develop an understanding of “civil society” that is positioned against state power (Sarıbay, 1995: 120). Such a political approach emerging solely from an anti-state position shared by various groups which suffered deeply after the 1980 military coup d'état, is dependant upon the naïve idea that civil society is the only way of moving towards a more democratic state-society relationship (Mardin, 1992: 9-10).

Although there are already more than sixty-thousand civil society organizations¹ and all the political bodies are “democratic” and in favour of “civil society” in Turkey, the fact that Turkey struggles with “democratization” has made it apparent that civil society organizations fall short in regards to “pluralism”, in terms of their self-administration; “participation in the public sphere”, which is related to their responsibilities; “individuality”, or their lack of distinctness; and their “impact on law reform”, their inability to cooperate or find a common framework with which to effectively generate legal change (Sarıbay, 1998: 108). In addition to these requirements, being democratic also requires a toleration of diversity and the eradication of gender inequality.

Using a theoretical perspective, this study aims to make a general analysis of some CSOs such as the IHD (Human Rights Association); Mazlumder (Organization for Human Rights and Solidarity for Oppressed

¹ Akşit addresses the error of using the term “civil society association” (CSA) as a synonym for NGOs (Non-Government Organizations) as understood in western literature. According to Akşit, while the term NGO denotes structures totally independent from state/government, it is nearly impossible to think of Turkish CSAs functioning so independently from the state. Akşit feels that the best term is CSO as used in the literatures of former USSR and some third world countries (Akşit et al, 2002: 408-409); Çaha expresses that the term CSO is better than CSA, emphasizing that the term CSO considers civil society only as structures organized under a corporate roof and registered officially, ignoring the social dynamism excluded from any kind of corporate structure like social actions, protest groups and friendship groups (Çaha, 2004: 181-182). So, this article prefers the term CSO.

People); the LDT (Association for Liberal Thinking); and the ADD (Atatürk Thought Association). These organizations address significant social segments in Turkey through their discourses, actions and activity reports. The abovementioned organizations are thought to reflect respectively liberalist, Islamist, leftist and Kemalist points of view in which the degree they are able to tolerate different opinions, different identities and ideas, alternative thinking and styles of activities in the public discussion environment compared within each other and more importantly with other civil society organizations (CSOs). These four CSOs were founded independent of the state and were expected to develop alternative programmes and discourses against the state, and so they are here analysed to see whether they, in terms of pluralism, heterogeneity, legality, and public participation, contributed more to democracy or autocracy.

2. Civil Society with Respect to Autocracy or Democracy

Despite the lack of a direct correlation between the progress and commonisation of civil society with democratization in Turkey, civil society is nevertheless viewed as guarantor of democratization. Quoting Norton's *Civil Society in the Middle East*, Kadioğlu notes that "No societies can become more democratic the next morning only by taking two civil society pills before they go to bed" (Kadioğlu, 2005: 23). There is no compulsory relationship between civil society and democratization. Besides this, civil societies may even become "the battle field of despotism" through authoritarian implementation of their discourses and types of activities (Sarıbay, 1995: 17). In other words, if only the democratic image that is perceived, the inner organizational contradictions and authoritarian tendencies of civil societies can be neglected. If not held in balance and arranged elaborately, civil societies may turn into oppressive dictatorships (Şimşek, 2004: 47).

In countries such as Turkey, where civil society is perceived as *having a position against the state*, it is important to determine whether CSOs serve autocracy or democracy. Sartori, who responds, "What democracy is not?" to the question "What is democracy?" reminds us that democracy is not "autocracy". Autocracy means "an unconditional claim to the right to rule" of any bodies or groups exclusive of all others. *Demos* (people) gives to democracy its meaning and the equivalent of *demos* is *populus* in Latin. However, this term has been misunderstood in Turkey as well as in other countries. Sartori explains that *populus* has been taken for an organic whole, a single mass which can be interpreted as "a social unbreakable will"; but what has been ignored is that *populus* also means "a

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mass which consists of individual detachable units” (Sartori, 1996: 23). Although rightists, leftists, Islamists or liberalists in Turkey distinguish themselves by their emphasis upon “the individual”, all social segments that form the (civil) society are based upon an organic whole which considers a general consensus (i.e.; nation, state, the people and so forth). In light of the historical-social background, this is apparent in the relations CSOs establish both within and toward “others” and this situation may prevent CSOs, which have vital significance in establishing democracy, from becoming organized in an environment of individualism, pluralism and haccceity. On the other hand, it is clear that the way to prevent the civil society and CSOs from being the background of autocracy and despotism is to let them have a more active role in the consolidation of democracy. This entails creating pluralist public spheres that will enable various different classes, cultures, religions, ethnicities, genders and sociological identities to live together in peace without neglecting individualism. In this sense, it should be remembered that a civil society is at the same time a public society that includes various identities (Pateman, 2004: 120). In his famous work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas discussed the structural dimension of social-political transformation that began with industrialization in the 17th century. He suggested that the public sphere is an area in which, apart from family members or close friends, all individuals or groups who have been exposed to a structural transformation regarding social-political factors can discuss their opinions or differences freely (a negotiative democracy) (Habermas, 1997: 31, 43, 52). The public sphere is the heart of a pluralistic, diverse civil society and it is identical to the public sphere (Köker, 2004: 99).

The greatest concern is how those civil societies which are founded upon an autonomous sphere free from state involvement can be prevented from turning their diversities into “privileges” or abusing their own micro-governing in an autocratic and despotic way (Sarıbay, 1998: 107). How will it be possible to prevent those CSOs, which are supposed to be civilian, democratic and pluralist public spheres, from being ideological public spheres (Çaha, 2004: 93) As Sarıbay suggests, the only protection available lies in discarding single or dominant ideologies and through ensuring that political bodies do not attempt to become autocratic rulers. When it is recognized that civil society is a dialectic whole that contains contrasting elements as opposed to a monolithic reality that impairs different “publicisms” from oppressing one another, then civil society becomes the *sine quo non* of a democratic and pluralist public sphere. (Sarıbay, 1995: 16).

On the other hand, all cultural, ideological, political or religious social segments and movements need a frame through which they can express themselves freely. This not only connects postmodernist ideas (in which each person has the right to turn his/her lifestyle into a culture) with civil society but also creates a structure that takes pluralism as a necessary base (Sarıbay, 1995: 11). Yet, this means nothing on its own. The important point is to be able to preserve their pluralism, diversity and haecceities both within themselves, towards “others” and towards the political society and at the same time internalize respect for others’ haecceities in order to instil democratic culture in the hearts of all social segments. Popper sees “abstract society” in open societies and may emerge as a problem because some members may have a tendency toward social-alleviation or allowing themselves to be replaced by other members (1989: 168). Thus it is possible that civil society may despotically oppress others through use of the wide range of freedom and this may create a paradoxical democracy (Magee, 1982: 71).

Organizations forming the civil society should not try to eliminate each or oppress other organizations but should recognize each other without conflict. This can only be realized if those CSOs that address different social identities adopt a practices which do not attempt to eliminate other CSOs despite the fact that they are in opposition with one another. They should understand that there is no a single way to wisdom. Instead of using slogans such as “*The Only Way is Revolution*”, “*The Only Way is Islam*”, “*The Only Way is Nationalism*” or “*The Only Way is Liberalism*”, it would contribute to the liberation of civil society and solve the representation crisis in the public sphere to shift to an appreciations of “multi-dimensional ways” (Akşit, 03.07.2006).

Furthermore, Sarıbay suggests that civil society is “an ethical sphere of solidarity” and is at the core of not only private life but also public and political life. If solidarity and Aristotelian “civic friendship” is missing, conflicts of interest among social groups will result and “the wild alternatives” of the civil society will emerge causing a degeneration of public life (2003: 15-16). The only way to realize ethics and solidarity in the public sphere comes from perceiving “the civil solidarity form” not as a means but rather as an objective (Sarıbay, 2003: 17-19). The way to rescue civil society from becoming a battlefield of different identities to make society absolutely “civilized” and at the same time de-emphasize the self-worship of nationalist or religious bodies. Different identities should not be silenced on the basis of a desire for or belief in “individual-citizen”

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homogeneity, but rather the different groups of society should compromise with their “others” in a new democratic perspective (Keyman, 1998: 48-50).

Although it cannot be denied that to form the base of a democratic civil society nationalist or religious collectivity which incorporates democratic and liberal cultural values cannot be excluded (Çaha, 2001: 44), there is still an increasing necessity to re-establish a public sphere that includes various identities and values within society in order to be consistent with democracy’s pluralist structure. Especially considering the present political context of increasing globalism, some identity rights (such as ethnic, gender, sociological or religious rights) may be abused by civil society organizations. The solution to this “limit” and the lack of politically equal participation will require a more critical, multi-dimensional and multi-spherical approach (Keyman, 2003: 220-221).

There are two approaches for constructing a democratic and pluralist civil society: the ‘liberal’ and the ‘radical democrat’. Şimşek (2004: 50-53) calls the former a “critical” approach and states that it depends upon the structure and characteristics of civil society if that civil society aspires to liberalization or democratization.

Approaching the issue from this point of view, it is clear that there is a direct correlation between civil societies that are founded autonomously from the state and have a democratic character and those that lack a democratic political culture in their historical/cultural tradition. In countries such as Turkey, where there is a strong state tradition, paternalistic political culture and religious community structure, civil society will inevitably remain weak (Kalaycıoğlu, 1998: 132-133). Even when they are founded autonomously of the state, if civil societies or CSOs are not able to institutionalize pluralist or democratic methods within their power structure, it is clear that they will be more inclined to make others conform to their own “rightness” rather than accept the diversities of other groups. If the necessary arrangements are not made, CSOs that gather together people with the same complaint may become a destructive factor for civil society. Subsequently, autocracy and despotism will be perpetuated in civil society by the CSOs themselves. Thus, the existence of CSOs in a society does not necessarily mean that the society is “democratic” or “civil”. Two examples from Turkey are illustrative here: The group that started the campaign of “Blackball DEP (a Pro-Kurdish, Democratic Society Party) from the Parliament” after the 1991 elections; and the group that had an active role in deposing RP (a Pro-Islamic, Welfare Party) by military force during the February 28 crisis. These were “civil initiative” groups from various labour

unions, businessmen, and professional organizations that formed the “Fivefold Initiative” for “civil society.”

The existence of CSOs does not necessarily guarantee a democratic civil structure or active participation. This was proven in a survey that was conducted by a team directed by Bahattin Akşit. The survey was conducted in 10 provinces of Turkey. One hundred thirty-five administrators of 78 CSOs and 896 members of 39 CSOs were interviewed. According to this case study case, 71% of the people rated civil society on a par with the CSO structure or at least identified the former as the latter’s prerequisite (Akşit, 2002: 407-408).

That is why it is necessary that CSOs in a civil society should establish the democratic structure that they want from the state within themselves and accept the other organizations or diversities as having equal legality as themselves. For instance, according to a survey conducted on 1,804 CSOs in Turkey, the term period of administrative boards is approximately 4.4 years, and of directors 6.4 years (in professional organizations 10.1, in unions 8.6 years). From this it can be seen that there is a structure of organization based upon “one man” rather than a democratic and pluralist approach (Tosun, 2001: 391). CSOs usually complain about state pressure upon them, yet the way they treat opposing elements within their own organizations is entirely contradictory.

3. Analysis of the Case

Before analysing CSOs in Turkey, we must recognize, as Akşit pointed out, CSOs in Turkey do not have clearly defined types but fall into three basic types that need to be evaluated differently. The first group is those CSOs that are part of the state. They usually operate as “the civil society of the state”. The second group consists of organizations with a liberal and pluralist structure. They are organizations similar to Think-Tanks that support the individualistic philosophy generally accepted by the society and are in favour of limiting the state. The last group consists of organizations that are prominent for responding to state pressure, seeing the state as an obstacle to the expression of different identities in the public sphere. They are organizations that have willingly or unwillingly internalized a struggle on the issues of democracy or human rights (Akşit, 03.07.2006). Keeping this distinction in mind, some of the CSOs, which are supposed to address

“leftist”, “Kemalist”, “Islamist” or “Liberal” public segments, shall be analysed within this framework.²

The IHD

The IHD was founded in 1986 by the relatives of some leftist prisoners and intelligentsia after the 1980 coup and it is the seventh association with the same name³ (Türkmen, 2002: 91). The IHD, with its 98 founding members, is not an organization of professionals nor the people but rather is a combination of mothers in search of their sons/daughters who went missing during military rule after the coup, relatives of prisoner or supporters, and intellectuals who protest in front of prisons or courts (Türkmen, 2002: 92). The IHD currently has 34 branches. (IHD, 17.09.2006).

The foundation of the IHD began during constant house-visits in Ankara. At first it was an association which promoted solidarity with prisoners and their relatives, but eventually grew into the IHD, Human Rights Association⁴ (Helvacı, 2006: 49). Thus, the initial primary objective of the IHD was to minimize the pressure of the state upon the prisoners and intelligentsia and to deal with the injustices they were exposed to rather than the formation of a democratic structure. Yusuf Alataş, the director of the IHD at present, states that the IHD did not defend the rights of all social segments in the beginning. Their struggle was mainly against the “injustice” they were exposed to. It can be said that practice paved the way to theory in case of the IHD (Alataş, 10.08.2006). As the IHD was founded to protect the rights of leftist prisoners, their relatives and intellectuals, it did not attempt to deal with human rights “second generation” or “third generation” categories. For instance, they were not interested in the rights of the disabled or children (Bora, 2006: 115). However, the IHD did strive to get legal capital punishment abolished and to get individual application right to the European Human Rights Court accepted (Birdal, 2006: 54).

Apart from this, the IHD failed to attract wide public participation and suffered a period of regression. In 1989 many socialist prisoners in Turkey were released on probation and then they contacted the association.

² This analysis has been performed following the chronological order of founding of the relevant CSOs.

³ First of these Human Rights Associations, was founded by eminent Turkish politicians on October 17, 1946, with Fevzi Çakmak as first president. The second was founded after World War II under the leadership of Ali Fuat Başgil (Goloğlu, 1982; Anar, 1996).

⁴ Writers such as Aziz Nesin and Yaşar Kemal often attended those meetings.

This kept the relatives of the prisoners and founders, who were mainly from cities, away from the active movement (Türkmen, 2006: 130). Through 1986 to 1990, the IHD's struggle for freedom and rights was not separated from the dominant paradigms of the Turkish left (Kantar, 2006: 142). In 1990, Vedat Aydın made his speech in Kurdish in the general congress and it was a turning point for the IHD. Most of the delegates, those members of the general management organs and the intelligentsia of the IHD who were Turkish in origin, left the congress hall. During the same period, a considerable part of the intelligentsia and the urban members moved away from the IHD.⁵

In our interview with Alataş, who emphasizes that the IHD is not a homogenous leftist organization, stated that two different cliques in the left emerged (Alataş, 10.08.2006):

“The first clique in the IHD started with the nationalist left. This was a result of a change in the type of injustice occurring. The 1980s saw great injustices directed at leftists rather than “Kurdishness”. In the course of time, Kurdish armed groups started to fight against the state and the Kurds became exposed to injustice and so the IHD began to stand up for the rights of Kurds. This situation disturbed the Turkish nationalist leftists in the IHD. A separation was inevitable when the nationalist left's ideology encountered official state ideology. The second separation was between the radical left (socialists) and the liberal left. The mainstream belonged to the liberal left. They argued that the torturer also had his human rights, whereas the minority faction, the radical leftists, argued that it was only the oppressed who were entitled to human rights. The radicals moved away from the IHD in course of time, and the liberal left prevailed

⁵ Such separations continue to happen, recently one of the founders, Adalet Ağaoğlu, left the association. When leaving Ağaoğlu said that the IHD's incompetence at defining a clear stance on Hikmet Fidan's (Ex-General Manager's Deputy of HADEP, a pro-Kurdish party) execution by PKK played a major role. Ağaoğlu stated that “motherhood cannot be Kurdish or Turkish. Both Kurdish and Turkish mothers are crying in this country.” She feels the IHD did not protest loudly enough about the increasingly frequent terrorist attacks, asking how it was that there could be a human rights association which shows no reaction to PKK terror? She stated in public that the IHD's single-sided, ethnic-group-based beliefs have not changed and she resigned (Zaman, 31.07.2005).

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(Alataş, 10.08.2006). As for now, many different identities such as liberals with a Turkish origin or intellectuals are represented in the IHD; however, there are no longer many ultra-conservative rightists in the IHD. As time passed, Kurdish people with rightist, religious or conservative opinions also emerged.”

On the other hand, the IHD gradually opened branches, principally in eastern regions which were under “extra-ordinary conditions” before the first separation. During this period, the IHD received more and more pressure from the branches in the region and this started to influence the central management of the IHD. Consequently, during that period the IHD moved away from the struggle for human rights as a whole (Türkmen, 2002: 94). The IHD, which used to discuss issues such as the right to live, freedom of speech, personal freedom and security or freedom of assembly after 1990, mainly focused on the Kurdish problem and problems of the south-eastern region of Turkey. Although it is not so fair to claim that the IHD reduced the human rights issue to the Kurdish problem completely, the way the IHD handled the issue or the significance they gave to it created the impression that it was their reason for existence. (Beşikçi, 2006: 122; Dicle, 2006: 125).

It is also necessary to mention other deviations in the IHD’s understanding of human rights as a whole. Until recent times, it is notable that there were important distinctions made in the IHD on the issues of freedom of belief and freedom of thought. For instance, whereas they objected to the 141st and 142nd articles in the former Turkish Criminal Law, they preferred to remain silent about the 163rd article. Whereas they principally objected to military coups, they made a discriminative analysis about the May 27th coup and perceived it positively. Whereas they principally objected to capital punishment, they remained silent about capital punishment in countries with a socialist political system. Considering all these examples, it is not incorrect to say that the IHD was also similar to other organizations that addressed only some specific social segments and bent to the latest winds of change. Without generalizing, it can be said that the IHD has at times almost become an association for training qualified personnel for some political parties. It is a fact that some branch directors of the IHD, especially in the south-eastern region, became provincial directors of various political parties in the region later on. And in the following elections they were elected members of the Parliament.⁶ Likewise, except

⁶ Dicle began as local manager of an IHD branch, later on he was elected as HEP Diyarbakır Director and then MP from Diyarbakır in the next general elections.

for the branches in some metropolises, the IHD implemented policies consistent with the SHP (Social Democrat People's Party) and the SBB (Socialistic Union Party) between 1986 and 1992. In the 1995 elections, the IHD mainly followed the line of the HEP's (People's Labour Party) policies (Kantar, 2006: 143). Consequently, this partial and limited approach in the IHD, which acts for human rights issues, affected the way they are perceived by the public sphere and also restricted their activities as a form of democratic civil organization that is supposed to embrace all social segments.

Similarly, there remains a big question in the minds of many as to whether the IHD has completed its stated mission against those bodies who breached rights or used terror and violence as part of their policies or took the most essential right, the right to life, away from people. For instance, the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) threatened those who opposed it with execution and even executed some of them (such as Hikmet Fidan) in 2000 and 2001. The IHD has remained silent about these concerns. Adalet Ağaoglu's claim in footnote 5 supports this view. Although some branches of the IHD objected to those executions from time to time, the central management of the IHD could not take a firm and clear stance against the executions (Kantar, 2006: 145). However, the IHD kept the state's breaches of rights in the south-eastern region on the agenda, actively and justifiably. Although Kurdish people that did not support the PKK and rangers that fought against the PKK were also subject to executions, attacks or breaches of rights, the IHD has never mentioned these at any time.

Lately, however, the IHD has started to move away from the understanding which sees human rights issues only for some specific people. The IHD president recently said, "the struggle for human rights should be general" (Alataş, 10.08.2006). Thus they move closer to an ethical stance towards a more international and comprehensive human rights struggle. Moreover, it weakened its attitude towards the perception of the public sphere based upon "a single truth" while more strongly emphasizing "the ethics of democracy". In the course of time, the IHD faced itself and even started to defend the rights of people that did not share its opinion of world. The IHD stood forth as a protector of the breached rights of the Islamists during the 1997 February 28 crisis. For instance, the IHD made a poster criticizing the crimes committed at those times and also defended Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who was imprisoned because of a poem he had recited. Alataş emphasized that among the secularists only the IHD defended the "headscarf" from the perspectives of belief, thought, discrimination against women and immunity of private life. According to Alataş, even the social

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acceptance of Mazlumder, the human rights organization of Islamists who took the headscarf matter as a focus, gained support from the attitude adopted by the IHD. Alataş claims that Islamists have conflicts within themselves and the hypocrisy of some Islamists appeared as another problem during the period of 28 February. However, there has been a positive transformation in the Islamists under the instigation of Mazlumder. On the other hand, Alataş stated in our interview that the IHD cooperates and coexists with other CSOs that are sensitive to different issues in the democracy platform and they were of one mind concerning Lebanon and Palestine. However, the IHD could never cooperate or act together with the nationalist Turkish left and any group holding racist opinions (Alataş, 10.08.2006).

The ADD

The ADD was founded on 30 December 1989 by a board of fifty founding members including M. Aksoy, H.V. Dedeoğlu, L. Duran, M.B. Aksoy, B. Üçok, A. Çeçen, F. Sağlam and Ö. Ozankaya. F. Yavuz, B. Savcı and M. Kapani were also among the honorary founders (ADD, 08.09.2006). The ADD now has more than 500 branches and over 100,000 members (Ercan, 14.08.2006).

The ADD, which sometimes defines itself as a CSO, obtained the status of “an association that works to the benefit of the public” in 1993 by the decision of the Board of Ministers. The reasons for its foundation are encapsulated by Tozluyurt: “The ADD is a Kemalist civil society organization which aims at analysing and defending Atatürk’s principles and revolutions and making a fight of thought against the ideas or policies which are against Atatürk’s principles and revolutions” (Tozluyurt, 2003: 40). In our interview with the deputy of the ADD, he stated that the ADD is equivalent to an NGO (non-governmental organization) in the sense that it is a democratic organization for the people, and claimed that the ADD is the only CSO that utters “the sole truth” (Ercan, 14.08.2006). Similarly, in an interview with Derya Sazak, retired general and new president of the ADD, Şener Eryugur, defined the ADD as a CSO (Sazak, 24.07.2006).

It has earlier been emphasized that civil society is a pluralist, self-organizing and an autonomous sphere free from the state. However, the ADD has an objection to this. As Mustafa Tozluyurt notes (Tozluyurt, 2003: 38):

“Even if this opinion is right in western democracies, it is not valid in ‘developing’ democracies... In this sense, the state and the civil society may cooperate and that cooperation is not against this definition as long as the main objective is to create a modern society.”

The cooperation between civil society and state is strongest in certain specific areas, such as relations with the European Union. However, this is not to say that civil society is an appendage of the state under the disguise of cooperation. Although civil society functions to broaden the rights and freedoms of society and to internalizing democracy, its objective is not to create a “civilized society” that is modified subjectively, dictated from above or reflects a monist understanding. Above all, cooperation between civil society and the state is unimaginable. Civil society should not become ‘a slave’ of the state.

It has been observed that the ADD’s understanding, which is not inconsistent with the philosophy of civil society, has also been put into practice. In 2000, the ADD established ‘positive relations’ with the Ministry of National Education and, by means of a circular letter by the Ministry, the ADD has been allowed to hold conferences or give lectures, with the permission of the directorates of the ministry, in provinces or towns (ADD, Activity Report, 2002: 8). Similarly, managers of the ADD have visited some departments of the state as though ‘blessing’ each other or reminding each other of their mutual duties. They have, from time to time, visited the Presidency, the General Staff and certain Ministries (ADD periodical, 2002: 17). ADD managers have made statements that supported this claim. The deputy of the general director stated that “*The President said the ADD is a very significant organization, and many other retired bureaucrats, army members, and civilians have agreed to that*” (Ercan, 14.08.2006). Strangely, the ADD website states that “*there has been an increase in the support and relations of the Presidency to social political parties*” (ADD, 08.09.2006). The ADD tried to gain social legality or acceptance from state departments that were close to its own ideology. They also claimed that the AKP (Justice and Development Party) government was not legal and should immediately be overthrown. The deputy of the ADD said that there are not even five Kemalists among the high-ranking bureaucrats in the government or among the management of state affairs. As their deputy asserts, depending on the situation, the ADD perceives that being autonomous to the state is identical to being autonomous from the government (Ercan, 14.08.2006):

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“It is known that organizations that work for the benefit of the public used to be given money by the state, but this money was cut off when the AKP started to govern, which means that we have no common ground with the AKP government. So, if the AKP government represents the state at present, then we have not the slightest connection with the state.”

On the other hand, the February 28 coup was an intervention that virtually turned the civil public sphere into an “ideological public sphere.” The Armed Forces substituted themselves for politicians and attempted to take power from certain institutions (such as the press, unions, etc.) by putting democracy under their guardianship. The formality of this “militarized democracy” limited the political arena while broadening the autonomous military sphere (Bayramoğlu, 28.02.2006). Yet, the ADD views the perpetrators of the February 28 coup as “*the enlightened powers that created February 28*” (ADD periodical, 2002a: 48) and warned those powers as follows: “*Although it has been three and a half years since February 28 decisions, there is still a danger of political tricks or resistance to implementing those decision and we warn you again*” (ADD periodical, 2002b: 14).

Aside from the ADD’s theory of an ideological public sphere, the ADD has an understanding of a militarist civil society. It is significant that the new president of the ADD, Şener Eruygur, was the General Commander of the Gendarmerie from 2003 to 2005. He was the leading actor of two unsuccessful attempts, codenamed “Sarıköz” and “Ayıışığı”, to overthrow the AKP government in 2004. Özden Örnek, Head Commander of Navy Forces at the time, kept a diary, parts of which were published in a periodical called *Nokta*. According to *Nokta*, Şener Eruygur was the leading actor in the Sarıköz attempt to overthrow the AKP government, which he considered was working against republicanism and secularism. This first coup attempt was planned to coincide with the Cyprus referendum and was planned outside of the regular armed forces chain of command. In the diary, Eruygur was referred to as “the hawk”, “the prominent”, and it is stated that he played “a provocative role” in the failed operation. The common sense of Hilmi Özkök, head of the General Staff, and a lack of proper planning caused the attempt to fail. The second coup attempt was prepared in detail by Şener Eruygur himself and named “Ayıışığı.” It failed due to the negative attitude of the head of the General Staff and the other commanders of the Army Forces (*Nokta*, 2007: 10-37). During the mass demonstrations carried out against the AKP government in Ankara in 2004, the ADD carried banners

with the message “*Army, Do Your Duty*”. This is a clear sign that when governments do not match their own ideological understanding the ADD acts like a “military society”, the very opposite of civil society.

The deviation of the ADD from the civil society perspective is not limited to this. Recognition of new social identities, equality, freedom and pluralism are determining properties of the civil society. However, the ADD does not tolerate different opinions either within or outside itself. The media revealed that Şener Eruygur criticized the Isparta branch manager, Mahmut Özyürek, for making declarations without consulting him first (Zaman, 24.07.2006). Moreover, Mahmut Özyürek was brought up before the disciplinary council. In another dispute related to the election of president, those who raised critical voices were sent to the disciplinary council the same way (www.yeniaktuel.com.tr, 13.09.2006). Following these incidents, president Şener Eruygur published a declaration on 18 July 2006, expressing that any future activity, proclamation or statement of the ADD would be authorized by him (Zaman, 24.07.2006). That the ADD has an authoritarian point of view regarding the existence and representation of different identities in the public sphere can be inferred from the following statements of Ali Ercan, the deputy of the president of the association (Ercan, 14.08.2006):

“We are not for social differentiation, we are for social integration. We are for solidarity, integration and resemblance... I see no use in underlining differences... Then we stand away from these concepts which are not anything different than traps of neo-capitalism and globalisation like social differentiation and individualism...”

Clearly the ADD envisages an ideological public sphere that does not tolerate individualism,⁷ class differences, cultural, religious, ethnic, and sexual differences.⁸

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⁷ “We do not take even the smallest step for the individual.” (Ercan, 14.08.2006).

⁸ The ADD is motivated by a concept of an “official-ideological public sphere.” In my interview with the ADD deputy director, he said, “The official ideology of Turkey is Kemalism. It is obvious and undeniable. In this context, Kemalism is an unrejectable authority which speaks the only truth. The ADD adopts Kemalism, the official ideology of Turkey, as its own official ideology.”

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Mazlumder was founded on 28 January 1991 by a group of 54 people consisting of lawyers, journalists, writers, publishers and businessmen mostly having an Islamic sensitivity. They were inspired by the belief that there needed to be a human rights organization for those people who felt that the IHD was too focused on injustice against the left and disregarded the problems faced by conservatives (such as women being discriminated against for wearing the headscarf). However, as Ayhan Bilgen, president of the association, stated, in 1991 the founders of the association were also, at least theoretically, sensitive to the violation of the rights of the leftists, Alevis (an Islamic sect) and Kurds on the basis of universal human rights. The discussion of the problem emerged on the practical side (Bilgen, 14.08.2006). The Mazlumder association's motto was "*Against whoever is cruel; for the oppressed,*" and later, as identity rights came to the forefront: "*You cannot ask the cruel for your identity.*" These mottos declare that Mazlumder is not the voice of any single philosophical or political view; it defends the right to be able to express and organize any political views and ideas and it is an organization functioning on the premise of the universal ethics of human rights (www.mazlumder.org, 28.08.2006).

In fact, if we take the term civil society as understood in the Western context, Mazlumder was not originally founded as a CSO. Istanbul branch manager Mustafa Ercan stated that, "*Yes, Mazlumder did not hit the road with a discourse of civil society. . . . Mazlumder's reference was the *Hilfu-l Fudul* institution in which The Prophet Mohammed participated before the Prophecy period. The members of this institution were volunteers and voluntarism was preferred instead of civil society*" (Ercan, 15.04.2005). Thus we can see that Mazlumder does not reject the civil aspect of the association.

The IHD played a significant role in the foundation of Mazlumder. At the time of foundation, women suffering from the headscarf prohibition in public institutions or universities and others whose Islamic beliefs were exposed to human rights violations were making efforts to found their own human rights organizations, rather than applying to an IHD which was primarily sensitive to rights violations against social segments with leftist tendencies or of Kurdish origin. Hence, the headscarf problem gave as much social acceptance to the founding of Mazlumder as the violations of human rights of the Islamic social segments (Kadioğlu, 2005: 34).

In time Mazlumder experienced several separations, as happened within the IHD. Between the first founders, the first general manager, Islamic writer Mehmet Pamak, who held radical Islamic views, and the

current management, “serious” and “deep” discrepancies over issues related to all Islamic segments (such as secularism, democratization, identity rights, European Union, Kurds, homosexuality) emerged. Today Mehmet Pamak blames the current directors of the association for allowing the original identity of the association to fade. He considers it has lost its Islamic sensitivity and has become a Western organization. A further claim is that under its new management Mazlumder, like the IHD, has assumed a Kurdish identity. What is interesting is that this claim belongs to the Islamic writer Süleyman Aslantaş, one of the first founders of the association (Aslantaş, 23.07.2006). The current president of the association, Ayhan Bilgen, replies to these claims as follows (Bilgen, 14.08.2006):

“What does the statement ‘Mazlumder was formed an Islamic organization and became a pro-western institution’ mean? First of all, what is Islam? Does an organization have a religion? Moreover, if you founded an association based on Islam, why is not it written in its regulation? As a result, we cannot compromise on the Mazlumder dispute. We cannot reach a consensus on the term civil society. In this context, we have never had the need to ask each other (Turks, Kurds, and Zazas) about our identities. When it came to human rights as a perspective, we focused on where it stood.”

Mazlumder has become to be seen as a Kurdish association in the public eye for a number of reasons. First, all the directors of the association are Kurdish (Mehmet Pamak, İhsan Arslan, Yılmaz Ensaroğlu and Ayhan Bilgen); second, the new chairman, who abstains from the strong Islamist tendencies of the previous chairmen and who brings a more “liberal” and “pluralist” structure to the core of the association, writes a weekly column in a newspaper known to have pro-Kurdish/PKK and Leftist opinions, and was an independent candidate in Konya for the DEP (Democratic Society Party) in the 2007 general elections; third, there has been an increase in joint activities between Mazlumder and the IHD. These activities are based on the closeness between Mazlumder and IHD in terms of valuing universal human rights. Chairman Ayhan Bilgen stresses that Mazlumder will participate in any formation, regardless of its identity, in order to enlarge the sphere of Universal Human Rights and to stand against violations, without discriminating between Turks, Kurds, Lazs, or Alevis. He believes that the discriminationist assumption has been developed on purpose by some domestic and foreign figures who refuse to embrace the universality of

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human rights. He also emphasizes that it is impossible to observe such a tendency inside the organization (Bilgen, 14.08.2006).

From Bilgen's statements in an interview with Neşe Düzel in the *Radikal* newspaper, "*If only Turks could also assume that a Kurd can also establish peace in the country,*" it is clear that Bilgen and also Mazlumder have a pro-Kurdish tendency (Bilgen, 26.06.2006). At the same time, it is clear that the organization, known for its Islamist character, is struggling to establish peace and abrogate the chilly stance between different identities in Turkey. Bilgen states (Bilgen, 26.06.2006):

"The Kurds think that a Turkish leader who can develop empathy with them can solve the problems more easily... If only Turks could share this assumption as well. If only they could feel that a Kurd can establish unity, integrity and peace in Turkey. In fact nationalist Turks and the Turks in Central and Western Anatolia will not tolerate a Turkish leader who is supported by Kurds for they think that he favours the Kurds and separatist activities."

It could be understood that in acknowledging the differences and internalizing democracy, he ambiguously discriminates against Turks and Kurds who come from the same historical tradition. That is, when the individualistic and liberalizing impacts of urbanization and industrialization are taken into account, it will be an artificial point of view to assume that the Turks who live in the western part of Turkey, as a more urbanized and individual population, will not tolerate a Kurdish leader yet the Kurds who came from the same historical roots will tolerate a Turkish leader. What should be highlighted here is that Bilgen's ambiguous words reveal a potential tendency to emphasize Kurdish identity. Neither Turks nor Kurds have superiority over each other in terms of accepting each other and establishing a common life.

From Bilgen's answer to Neşe Düzel's question, "*Is the PKK struggling for separatist nationalism?*", one may understand that Mazlumder is against any "exclusion" and "othering" in public spheres (Bilgen, 26.06.2006):

"What causes separatist nationalism is the excluding and separating nationalism of the mainstream. It is the excluding and separating nationalism of the mainstream when a senior commander told a woman who did not

know Turkish and asked for help, ‘If they need help, they should first learn Turkish’.”

Gellner expressed an opinion that religion has lost most of its authority over people and that the public is now secularized. Yet due to Islam’s inner dynamics, it is a religion unsuitable for secularization. Gellner’s stance assumes Islam is an enemy of civil society (Gellner, 1994: 15). Sarıbay implies that though cultural Islam has become more common as a component of post-modernism, Islam may threaten pluralist civil society as the beliefs of *tevhid* (unification) and *ümmet* (the group of people who believe in the one prophet) work to incorporate differences inside Islam. He argues that there are various Islamic conceptions that do not accept a holistic understanding but that what is important is that approaches which tolerate plurality do not threaten civil society (Sarıbay, 1995, 12–15). This issue was discussed by Bilgen in an interview on the same date with Neşe Düzel in the *Radikal* newspaper, in which he offers a pluralist civil society conception of Islam to the annoyance of many Islamist circles:

“In Islamist circles, there is an understanding that it is no point in talking about ‘Turks’ and ‘Kurds’, the Islam identity will be enough for all of us. The presentation of the Islamist identity as an understanding which denies differences brings out a fascist religious conception... In Turkey there is a critical Muslim identity that favours the integration of the state with Islam and the repression of other identities.”

Mazlumder has a human rights watch dimension with a very wide scope, ranging from the headscarf debate to discrimination against Armenians, non-Muslims and, especially, Kurds; from issues about discrimination, the rights and freedom of women, to the issue of suspiciously missing people, unknown assailants and prisoners’ rights. Mazlumder also claims itself as the only organization that defends the rights of a liberal academician who was punished after he insulted the Republic and the Turkish Army. The chairman of Mazlumder states that people who are subject to violations of human rights have no dignity while defending themselves and further argues (Kadioğlu, 2005: 34-35):

“If the rights of gypsies were violated, we would also have cooperation with them. We support the *mazlum* (oppressed ones) against the cruel. We do not care about

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the identities of the oppressed people we defend... The only legal criteria we look for is that it is based on international human rights.”

Mazlumder has a determined stance regarding women. Bilgen emphasizes that they do not just defend women's rights regarding the headscarf issue but also develop perspectives and activities that will overcome the discrimination in every field of society. The organization plays a key role in every field of society to abrogate discrimination against women, to cooperate with *Cumartesi Anneleri* (Saturday Mothers), to stop “honour” killings, to assist women who are subject to pressure stemming from traditions or those who are exploited and made to work for very low salaries. In addition to previous chairman Yılmaz Ensaroğlu's statement that they do not care about the religious, ethnic, cultural or gender aspects of the oppressed, the new chairman says that where homosexuals are concerned, although they will not approve of homosexual behaviour, they might support homosexuals when their rights are violated or they are subject to pressure (Ensaroğlu, 1997: 333). The members and founders of the organization view homosexuality as a pathological condition and they do not want to defend or glorify homosexual behaviour (Bilgen, 14.08.2006). According to Ayşe Kadioğlu this situation stems from moralism and “value theory” and may constitute an impediment to a clear stance towards a civil society or a human rights watch organization (Kadioğlu, 2005: 35-36). Yet there is a wide discussion platform in the organization about subjects such as homosexuality. For example, there is a consensus that homosexuals should not be tortured. On the other hand there are different views on their freedom of expression and association. Some members think that this is against *fitrat* (a habit present in a person by nature or since birth) yet others say that their freedom of expression and association should also be supported (Bilgen, 14.08.2006).

A hierarchical and status quo attitude is not dominant in the organization. The chairman of the organization Ayhan Bilgen expressed his views on this subject (Bilgen, 14. 08. 2006):

“The branches also have the right to take decisions in addition to the decisions taken by the headquarters. Yet there are some situations that require decisions to be taken unanimously. For instance we have a principle about EU funds. Unless all the branches agree to these principles, we will not utilize these funds.”

Additionally, a variation can be observed in member profiles, yet these are all different tones of a particular ideology. As the chairman explained (Bilgen, 14.08.2006):

“To make an evaluation about the practices in the organization, Mazlumder can be said to welcome different Islamic views within itself. More liberal, more conservative, partially more radical and more traditional – various Islamic conceptions are present in the organization. Yet groups outside the boundaries of these conceptions cannot be represented in the organization.”

Another significant point is the close relationship between Mazlumder and the IHD. As supporters of human rights, these two organizations act jointly in their discourses and activities. “The International Peace Forum, Susurluk, the Rule of Law, the Association for the Freedom of Expression” are joint activities of this kind. The relationship of the two organizations is well represented in the media. However, since the IHD is accused of focusing on the Kurdish issue, and Mazlumder of focusing on religious matters such as the infamous headscarf controversy (İnsel, 02.07.2006), only time will tell whether if the relationship between the organisations is merely tactical or more substantial.

We must not forget that Mazlumder, while narrowing the rule of the state, is not attached to any political party. The organization did not even support the AKP, even though it displayed a similar ideology during the 2002 general elections. Mazlumder is quite sensitive to human rights violations though the general perception is that Mazlumder holds views similar to those of the 59th government. Mazlumder has announced its civil character by means of reports claiming that the Turkish Penal Code has an oppressive character (Yeni Asya, 28.04.2004), and, that there has been an observable increase in violations of the right to live (especially in 2004) (Gündem, 05.08.2004). The CSO’s civil character is also revealed in its statements about human rights violations (Evrensel, 05.11.2004) and ex-director Cevat Özkaya’s interview titled “The bans are the big lacks in AKP” (Vakit, 06.08.2005).

The LDT

The LDT was founded by 9 liberal intellectuals in Ankara at the end of 1992. The association, which kept its informal structure through books and published articles in various newspapers and magazines till 1994, began to

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formalize its functions its the same year, acknowledging the need to have a formal structure. After the regulations and documents of the founders were completed, the LDT was officially founded on April 1, 1994 (Yayla, 2003: 17-18).

“Thought movements are much more important than political movements. There are thoughts which succeed or fail in the long term. The world is based on thoughts” (Yayla, 05.06.2006). Utilising this point of view, the LDT functions as a think-tank which attempts to introduce liberal thought and find solutions to the problems of the country within liberal principles (Yayla, 2003: 22). In addition to these general goals, it also bears responsibilities such as translating Liberalist classics into Turkish, preparing a platform to convert people to liberalism, promoting a common educational activity and nurturing young liberals (Yayla, 2003: 19).

In fact, the LDT has taken the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), founded by Fisher and Hayek in 1956, as a model. The IEA is an independent research institute which tries to affect public policies in line with liberal policies and to train politicians, bureaucrats, intellectuals and journalists who are not actively interested in politics and who do not take any financial support from the government (Yayla, 2003: 15). Yet the interests and activities of the association, such as translating liberalist classics into Turkish and the nurture of young liberals, are much wider than the IEA's.

Although it is a civil society organization, the LDT, which aims to make liberal values more common in society (Yayla, 11.08.2006), faces the problem of being conceived of as a movement of intellectuals and elites who wish to make a high transformation, as opposed to a movement of individuals who aims to internalize democracy and pluralism in Turkish society. It is equated with other thought movements, such as Socialism, Islamism, Pan-Turkism and Westernisation, which unfortunately are not developed by individuals or by society. In other words, the LDT is thought of as elitist and unique in the history of Turkish modernism because it aims to shape minds with liberal principles and to deal with the politics of public matters. Referring to recent discussions of practical policies and on advice related to this subject, Mustafa Erdoğan said, *“Yet as an intellectual organization which has been running over 10 years, we need to begin to develop concrete projects that will become a guide to public matters”* (Erdoğan, 2006: 141). From these words, it can be adduced that despite all denial of the idea, the LDT reminds us of social engineering and the restrictive ways of thinking mentioned above.

On the other hand, the fact that the LDT does not have aim to have a wide-ranging effect on the masses or to give messages to every group and person in society, as political parties do, preserves it from involvement in the delicate and often treacherous endeavours surrounding the formation of a democratic and libertarian civil society (Yayla, 2003: 22). This does not mean that the members of the organization have no political ideology. The LDT, aside from introducing political parties to liberal principles, acts quite independently from the political parties (Yayla, 2003: 22). The fact that it abstains from politicization by avoiding daily politics or taking sides on political issues highlights its character as a civil organization.

The LDT, is not a traditional civil society organization and does not have the hierarchical structure (organisational positions such as chairman and the board of directors do not have a hierarchical structure), yet it has become an association due to official and practical necessities. Nevertheless, the institutional nature of the organization is very low (Yayla, 11.08.2006). It is in fact a platform for people with common ideas rather than a CSO. The LDT does not make decisions that are binding to all members, does not make press statements or announcements or talk on behalf of a common identity, and does not organize meetings or marches. Participation in activities is voluntary and there is no compulsory economic obligation on its members (Yayla, 2003: 23). As stated by Yayla, all liberal ideas with all their numerous variations (such as, communitarianism, welfare state, social justice) are encompassed in the LDT. However, the LDT only welcomes liberal ideas and non-liberal ideas cannot be published in its academic periodical, *The Journal of Liberal Thought*.⁹ Therefore the LDT separates itself from “others” in opposition to and hostile to liberalism, an attitude that is not entirely compatible with the LDT’s pluralist character and its focus on the importance of individual differences.

The LDT claims that it does not attached itself to particular groups or identities or take sides between opposing groups such as Sunni/Alevi, Turk/Kurd, employer/employee, intellectuals/non-intellectuals, urban/rural

⁹ To the question, “Would you allow an article which criticizes liberalism in your publications?” Yayla answered: “Excepting articles which criticize liberalism through cliché, I would allow an article to be published if it criticized liberalism seriously and philosophically.” He ironically added, “I think we need to make a good criticism of liberalism ourselves.” (Yayla, 11.08.2006). This can be seen as a rejection of thoughts other than liberalism (perhaps not sociologically, but ideologically, “othering”) and as the exclusion of thoughts and groups that stand against the LDT’s values. This may be an obstacle to a pluralist civil society.

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and religious/secular. The LDT specifies that it is the supporter of liberty, justice and peace (Yayla, 2003: 108) and acts in accordance with these principles. During the February 28 period and with the Kurdish issue, the LDT supported the rights of the oppressed not as specific rights but as fundamental rights and did not make use of “buts” and discrimination in its statements. The LDT persistently maintains that humans come first and that political regimes, ideologies and religions are servants, not the masters of humans (Yayla, 2003: 109). However, the LDT believes that sociological, gender, cultural, ideological, religious and ethnic identity rights, based as they are on difference/identity relationship, increase collectivism and tend to erode individualism. Therefore, the LDT is not involved in the struggle for the liberty and rights of a particular identity but rather defines and supports these rights as individual human rights. It should also be acknowledged that the LDT’s historical, local and express “individualistic” identity concept is so general and all-encompassing that it carries the risk of destroying differences in class, religious, ethnic, gender and cultural identity which act as individual identity concepts in modern times (Keyman, 28.05.2006). In this respect, redefinition of “individualization” through rights (identity, religious or ethnic rights) will enhance the social and political representation of the LDT’s liberal democratic ideas. This may also make the civil public sphere more democratic on an “associative identity” basis.

In the formation of a civil and democratic public sphere, the LDT constantly emphasizes the presence of “individualism” and “liberty”, concepts which are based solely on the “individual” and which are independent of “group” or “identity” rights and liberties. The LDT tries to adapt these concepts to Turkey, which is the remnant of an Empire and which has not experienced the same historical processes as the West. This may create problems in the public sphere as the state struggles to protect the unitary structure. For some groups in Turkey, where people have not experienced the economic, social and cultural transformations of the West, and where the state maintains a powerful, paternalistic, political culture, and there is a powerful state tradition and people have not been able to internalize “freedom” and “individualism,” freedom may become a social and political movement. This has been observed in recent Turkish political history. In 1946, Başar criticized the Democrat Party’s idea of liberty, and declared that groups should come together around a simple idea: “*We want freedom, down with despotism*” (Başar 10.08.1946) as a basis of a democratic, pluralist, civil and political society. Only dictators make use of this kind of simplistic idea wherein economical and social principles do not exist (Başar, 1960: 28-31). In Turkey the idea of liberty has traditionally had a collectivist character in order to maintain a functional society rather than a

social credo that protects “individual rights” as in the West (Mardin, 1991: 121).

4. Revision and Conclusion

Even though there are many CSOs active in various fields in Turkey, they are in no position to create the political participation needed to engender radical democratization in Turkey, and thus it is apparent that civil society is a slogan rather than a reality in Turkey. Despite the fact that CSOs in Turkey were formed to respond to or defend a particular situation, some CSOs in recent years have the intention—even if inefficiently realized—to democratise the public sphere, to expand civil and political rights, to engender a civil citizenship perspective and to represent differences equally in the public sphere. These can be counted as sound steps in Turkey’s future. The CSOs can only become a reality if they are equipped with the above-mentioned principles and if individuals and the whole society become equipped with civil character and ethics under the assumption that one person’s presence is as legal and respected as another’s. Within this perspective, and based on the general evaluations about the abovementioned CSOs, these points should be emphasize:

The IHD can be said to fulfil (not completely though) the expected duties of a civil society organization in restricting the authority of the State (because of its activities towards a particular group of rights and a particular part of society). But it cannot be claimed to be an active agent against other kinds of violations (freedom of religion and conscience) in the same category of rights and in the same category of society.

On the other hand, if one excludes recent developments, the IHD is observed to act on an “unjust treatment” assumption and thus bears the character of a civil society organization. From originally perceiving democratization and justice in a particular framework, exhibiting a quite limited human rights perspective, and addressing only a very restricted group of people, the IHD has renewed itself over time. Now the IHD tends to carry a more pluralist character and tolerates the differences inside and outside the association. The association also maintains a more cooperative relationship with the other civil society organizations.

Thus IHD can be said to have the required level of tolerance for pluralism and alternative thoughts. Thus there are members from Turkish, Kurdish, leftist and liberal groups. Yet there are no members from conservative, right-wing groups (Alataş, 10.08.2006). This plurality of views

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is more obvious in the relationships between headquarters and branches. Each branch can express thoughts different from headquarters and other branches; there is no overriding homogenous character to the organisation. The only common feature amongst members is that they have leftist ideologies of various kinds. Apart from this, there are a variety of views regarding various issues from the “human rights” concept to the “Kurdish issue.” Some hold that human rights should be defended everywhere and at all times for everyone as an ethical principle; others view human rights from an “instrumental” perspective (Alataş, 10.08.2006). Others perceive human rights in the framework of the Kurdish issue. The IHD is more “inclined” towards the Kurdish issue, which is especially obvious when the recent resignations are taken into account. Yet it should be acknowledged that the IHD acts out an explicit pluralism while defending and promoting the rights and differences of diverse groups.¹⁰ The association has established its discourse on an “identity” basis (the rights of Kurds, the disabled and gypsies), and the struggle for rights within an individual framework has taken a back seat.

It cannot be claimed that the IHD makes an “integral” struggle for human rights. Instead, a defensive attitude of daily requests and tendencies has been employed. This is primarily because the leaders of the IHD perceive human rights as a tool for ideological and ethical struggle relating to specific causes, rather than a universal struggle for free individuals and free society. In the struggle with the state for rights and liberties, it has not attached much importance to the internalization of these liberties and rights nor to the adoption of a democratic common life and formation of a civil society. It has acted on the assumption that “these are our rights; we requested these rights from the state and we got them.” In other words it has existed as a mediator between the state and the public in attaining certain rights and liberties. The difficulties experienced, the struggles and the losses have been continuously expressed in the public sphere by the IHD. This can be seen as a struggle to change the differences into priorities and carries the risk of becoming a means of pressure and domination in a public sphere where the plurality of views should be dominant. However, I believe that the IHD has the dream of a public sphere where individuals and groups can discuss issues in a free atmosphere that values difference.

The ADD has a semi-official and reactionary structure and maintains the image of a civil society organization of the state. The ADD emerged with

¹⁰ For instance, missionary activities are claimed to be a part of freedom of expression and should not be prevented (Alataş, 10.08.2006).

the support of some departments of the state when popular values in 1980's distorted the foundations of the official ideology in Turkey. The main goal of the association is a struggle against civil formations operating around religious, ethnical and liberal values as defined by the deputy chairman (Ercan, 14.08.2006).¹¹ The members of the association, who see Kemalism as the general structure of the left, think that behind democratization requests lie sinister intentions. The ADD wants to deny these apparently progressive requests. Thus the ADD can be viewed as representing the state in civil society (Çaha, 2004: 190).

The ADD presupposes a policy and a society in which differences and plurality of views do not exist. The association declares one dominant truth and is not open to criticism or questioning. According to the ADD, this one truth (Kemalism) should be dominant in all segments of the society and it should be the official ideology of the society; the state should be organized in accordance with Kemalism. In this respect, it can be claimed that it struggles for an "ideological and autocratic public sphere" which integrates with the existing authority rather than criticising or exceeding it. This ideology favours similarity and unity while denying differences and requests for difference. The ADD ignores individualism and the "othering" of distinct social segments.

If the ADD realized that its current behaviour constitutes an obstacle to the integration of Turkish people with the modern values of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, if it became aware of its strategic faults, Atatürk and his philosophy could be interpreted and recreated more powerfully in the public sphere in the light of recent developments (globalization, civil society, democratization, identity rights and human rights). It is possible that the philosophy of Atatürk could become a more powerful agent in Turkey's future political and social image through a transformation from "ceremonial Atatürkism," as defined by Sina Akşin (Akşin, 1997: 11-17), to a Kemalist philosophy which does not disregard modern values and which can be debated in the public. The discussions about Atatürk will not come to an end unless official "Atatürkism" or "Kemalism" turns into a philosophical "Atatürkism" or "Kemalism" of the society.

¹¹ Another word for civil societies is FONGO (Foreign Operated Non-Government Organization). Ercan believes FONGOs are Trojan horses which get outside support (Ercan, 14.08.2006). Others have called for fights in the streets against these (German, 24.08.2006).

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The fact that the ADD has experienced factional infighting since its foundation can be understood from the following statements of the current deputy chairman, Ali Ercan: *“Previously they wanted to turn the ADD into a puppet of the IP (Labour Party) and the CHP (Republican People’s Party)... We will not let different Kemalist ideas exist inside the ADD. The ADD does not have any connection with any political party”*. These statements are clear signs of serious discussions and discrepancies about Kemalism or about the vision and understanding of the association.

The ADD can be viewed as the state’s civil society. Only when there is a separation from the State, can it become a true civil society. However, if the ADD works on behalf of the State, in places where the State cannot reach, this integration precludes any notion that it is a civil society (Çaha, 2004: 191).

In its early years Mazlumder as a CSO fought for human rights on the basis of solely “individual” and “group” rights. But in recent years the rights of ethnic minorities have become more dominant in the organization’s agenda. Since Kurds have been subject to the violations of ethnic rights in recent years, the organization, which struggles against such violations, has acquired an image of being closely connected with Kurdish identity.

Mazlumder has not established an internally consistent attitude towards different ideas and alternative lifestyles. Manifold evidence of this is seen in the dimension of the conflicts between the different Islamist views inside the organization; the organization’s ambiguous attitude towards homosexuals; discrepancies among the branches, members, activists and sympathizers with Islam (based on an identity/difference relationship); the Turkish/Kurdish identity problem; the debate about whether the *tevhid* (unification) and *ümmet* (the group of people who believe the same prophet) dimensions of Islam should be handled with a prototypical or pluralist point of view; and their inability to accommodate the differences and lifestyles of minorities within a libertarian civil society. Mazlumder, under the chairmanship of Bilgen, is becoming a democratic and pluralist CSO, displaying an Islamic character which regards different identities as legal as their own. Whether the perspective of Bilgen will be accepted by the administrators, activists, members, branches and by the other Muslim groups with which Mazlumder works, is still ambiguous. From the perspective and attitude of the chairman, it is possible to say that Mazlumder is acting with an agnostic democracy while constructing a civil, plural and democratic public sphere and defending the rights of different identities.

With its discourse and image, Mazlumder differs from other Islamist civil society organizations like The Women's Movement Against Discrimination (AK-DER) and The Association of Free Thinking and Educational Rights (OZGUR-DER). Those groups are composed of people with Islamic tendencies. It is clear that Mazlumder stands against the violations of human rights rather than merely concerning itself with the headscarf issue. By remaining independent in a political society, tolerating differences, internalizing multiculturalism, protecting human rights of all identity groups, rather than just remaining in an Islamist framework and struggling to transform the political society, Mazlumder has become a more democratic and pluralist civil society organization (Kadioğlu, 2005: 37–38).

The LDT refrains from defining itself a typical CSO and does not hold value conceptions of group and identity rights which emphasize collectivity. There are a number of reasons why the LDT does not favour civil society. First is the concern that civil society may increase collective feelings and may become an obstacle to individual enterprises (Yayla, 11.08.2006). Second, civil society is regarded as a tool to reach a Hegelian transcendental state. Third, civil society movements against the State have traditionally been conducted by leftist activists, environmentalists, feminists and communal radical groups which have defended collective values since the 1960's (Çaha, 2001: 36).

The notion that privileges the individual's rights over social rights disregards the connections with history, place, discourse and other identities as mentioned above. This is problematic from political, historical and democratic perspectives (Keyman, 28.05.2006). The LDT see the concept of the "individual" as a tool for freeing oneself from the psychological and physiological pressures of religious bodies and other communal structures that diminish liberties. However, this is not enough. Individualism is the basis of rights, yet the individual-citizen emphasis, based on common values and principles, ignores the relationship of individual with gender, cultural or sociological identity and the religious and ethnic rights of late postmodern times; it also ignores the organization of the "associative identity" of the above mentioned differences. Therefore liberal democracy, besides its emphasis on the individual, needs to be re-democratised within a radical perspective which will foster the active participation of different identities in order to overcome the problem of representation. This will only be possible by the conceptualization of the "individual" with rights and assuring relationships between the individual and other identities have legal equality and social justice (Keyman, 28.05.2006). The public sphere can be claimed to be a sphere of freedoms only when the relations between ethnic rights

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such as the freedom of speech and education in the mother tongue and religious rights which function as identity rights can be organized on the basis of “associational identity” and identity/difference relationships rather than these rights being defined on an “individual” basis. Otherwise civil society will turn into a battlefield of different identities which function as cognitive and cultural codes, leading to a Gordian knot democracy in which ideological public understandings in conflict with each other will be dominant in the civil society.

Finally, underlining the common features and differences in the CSOs in Turkey necessitates a re-evaluation of the understanding of civil society, an all-important process in the democratization of Turkey.

Civil society in the four CSOs examined, and in Turkey in general, is unfortunately not perceived as “intentional” but rather as a tool in an ethical field. This means that the IHD, ADD, Mazlumder and LDT use civil society as a tool to construct or defend their leftist, Kemalist, Islamist or liberal goals.

Further, since civil society is used as a tool to realize their goals, CSOs in Turkey paradoxically maintain the *universitas* principle (harmonizing of differences) inside themselves and *societas* principles (maintaining the differences) against the state. There are also CSOs, such as the ADD, that have no *societas* character. In civil societies which have a *societas* character, individuals and groups will not only regard the civil society as a tool for their goals, they will also be responsible and respectful to each other (Sarıbay, 2003: 17-19).

When the foundations of the four CSOs are examined, it becomes clear that the CSOs in Turkey exercise a policy of response and defence as they attempt to eliminate complaints and injustices. The common feature in the foundation of these four CSOs is the meeting of needs. This requirement is sometimes a reaction against unjust treatment (as with the foundation of the IHD and Mazlumder), sometimes a thought war against the enemies of Kemalist view (the ADD) and sometimes, though ironically, provision of liberal values to individuals and the state administration (the LDT). In other words, a CSO understanding and practice which is “from the bottom”, “natural” and compatible with evolutionary development has begun to mature. The CSOs which dedicate themselves to meeting “needs” will finally mould civil society into an instrument. The reason is the simple understanding of freedom in Turkey. This understanding, which lacks

individual and social grounds and overlaps with the slogan, “Down with despotism; long live freedom,” may soon cause political despotism.

All other CSOs have experienced, and are still experiencing, “serious” and “deep” internal clashes and discrepancies, excluding the LDT. They have not been able to sustain internal divisions. Although it is generally viewed as a positive for a CSO to bear different understandings, this is not the case for these CSOs. The conflicting and clashing parties have nothing in common except for continual internal strife. That is, “previous” and “incumbent” figures in the organizations both claim that they are the only ones telling the truth, and claims that organization has deviated from its initial goals are rife.

The four CSOs studied in this paper do not cooperate in activities which promote the democratization of civil society or liberties in public life. In recent years the IHD and Mazlumder have combined to help enlarge the sphere of human rights. Yet, time will show whether these activities are a part of a tactical relationship to realize their own ideals or a real “free”, “plural” and “democratic” institutionalization.

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