European Policies to Support “Civil Society”

Embodying a Form of Public Action

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This chapter seeks to analyse the effects that Turkey’s application to join the European Union has had on government practices in Turkey. In order to join the European Union a country must adopt the Community acquis, and the aim of the pre-accession policy is to help the country implement European standards by funding initiatives to this effect. In this sense it is explicitly a matter of international transfer, where this is understood as a process by which information and knowledge relating to the public policies specific to a past or present political system are exported and imported into another political system.¹

There are numerous studies analysing the international circulation of forms of public action. These policy transfer studies have developed a lot recently,² and studies of Europeanisation, which initially focused on the transfer of modes of public action between different levels of government and between European countries, have subsequently expanded their field of enquiry to include the way enlargement mechanisms function.³ These research streams explore a rich and varied set of issues, relating to different sorts of transfer, the conditions, the dissemination channels and actors involved, the transformations models undergo over the course of the process, the conditions for successful uptake, and the impact on public action in the importing country.

This analysis adopts the same perspective but will focus on two specific dimensions. Firstly it is important to take into account what we regard as a specific feature of the pre-accession policy, namely that it is at least as much a matter of exporting as it is of importing. Our study of the modes of transfer will therefore also examine the European policy to bring such transfer about. Secondly, many studies focus on the actual process of transfer (and particularly on the conditions for transfer) and take the ‘model’

³ Heater Grabbe, “Europeanization Goes East: Power and Uncertainty in the EU Accession Process,” in Kevin Featherstone and Claudio Radaelli (eds.), The Politics of Europeanization,
being transferred as some kind of given. It is reified as it were, considered as fixed and immobile, and the transfer mechanisms are conceived of as being top-down. The rules, procedures, and paradigms shaping modes of public action are thus apprehended as being fully fixed and consolidated prior to transfer. The impact of the transfer is then analysed by assessing the extent to which the form of public action differs from the original model. Equally, the usage by actors affected by the transfer are analysed in terms of the re-translation and appropriation of a model perceived as having a specific concrete reality prior to transfer. Lastly, the learning phenomena are studied in relation to this supposed reality. This chapter will show how on the contrary the transfer process itself plays a role in defining the forms of public action transferred.

We have decided to study a specific aspect of the pre-accession policy—the support provided to “civil society” in Turkey. The category of ‘civil society’—the explicit transfer object—like those associated with it (such as “governance” and “project”) are far from being clear and stabilised prior to transfer. As we shall see,

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4 As is the case in the now canonical definition of Europeanisation provided by Radaelli. Europeanisation consists of processes of (a) construction, (b) diffusion, and (c) institutionalisation of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, style, way of doing things and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, political structures and public policies Claudio Radaelli, “The Domestic Impact of European Union Public Policy: Notes on Concepts, Methods, and the Challenge of Empirical Research,” Politique européenne, vol. 1, no. 5, 2002, p. 108.

5 The aim here is not to define what “civil society” is or to discuss this notion. Though it is of course an ill-defined and polysemous notion, we deliberately use the term “civil society” (in scare quotes) as it is that used by EU bodies.