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Civil society's role in times of social polarization and shrinking civil space

A deductive content analysis of Swedish aid policies with focus on civil society in Turkey

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Abstract

This bachelor thesis investigates how civil society's role in democratization processes is expressed in Swedish aid policies with specific focus on Turkey. The empirical material selected consists of two more general policies and one with a regional focus. My theoretical framework is based on previous research about the subject which have inspired a categorization matrix consisting of five different categories: civil society as a third sector, civil society as an actor for the promotion and enhancement of human rights, civil society as a promoter of pluralism in views, voices and interests, civil society as a disseminator of information and a forum for dialogue and finally civil society as an inherently positive phenomenon. Through a content analysis with a deductive approach I code my material for correspondence with the categories in order to explore and discuss civil society's different functions in the Turkish context. The study reveals that the empirical material investigated contains elements which fit into all five categories but also that some context-specific characteristics must be taken into account and problematized.

Key words: civil society, democratization, polarization, aid policies, Sweden, Turkey, deductive content analysis.

Abstrakt

Swedish title: det civila samhällets roll i en tid av social polarisering och krympande utrymme för det civila samhället. En deduktiv innehållsanalys av svenska biståndspolicyer med fokus på det turkiska civilsamhället.

I denna kandidatuppsats undersöks hur det civila samhällets roll i demokratiseringsprocesser uttrycks i svenska biståndsstrategier med särskilt fokus på Turkiet. Det empiriska materialet som valts består av två mer generella policyer och ett med regionalt fokus. Mitt teoretiska ramverk bygger på tidigare forskning om ämnet som har inspirerat en kategoriseringsmatris bestående av fem olika kategorier: civilsamhället som den tredje sektorn, civilsamhället som en aktör för främjande och stärkande av de mänskliga rättigheterna, civilsamhället som en aktör för främjandet av mångfald i åsikter, röster och intressen, civilsamhället som informationsspridare och forum för dialog och slutligen civilsamhället som ett positivt fenomen. Dessa kategorier hjälper mig att systematisera och analysera mitt empiriska material. Genom en innehållsanalys med deduktivt ansats kodar jag mitt material för att överensstämja med kategorierna för att sedan analysera och diskutera civilsamhällets olika funktioner i den turkiska kontexten. Studien visar att det undersökta empiriska materialet innehåller element som passar in i alla fem kategorier men även att vissa kontextspecifika situationer måste beaktas och problematiseras.

Nyckelord: civilsamhälle, demokratisering, social polarisering, bistånd, Sverige, Turkiet, deduktiv innehållsanalys.

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Abbreviations

SIDA = Swedish International Development Agency

CSO = Civil Society Organization

NGO = Non-governmental Organization

EU= European Union

EIDHR = European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights

EBA= The Expert Group for Aid Studies (Expertgruppen för biståndsanalys)

GONGO= Government non-governmental organization

1 Introduction

The size, scale and capacity of civil society has increased dramatically over the past twenty years largely through the globalization process, and its role in democratic processes has received increasing attention.¹ The concept of civil society itself has captured the imagination and hopes of a global community which dreams of active citizen involvement for better and more democratic societies. Others worry about the proliferation of nongovernmental organizations² and the “dominant normative consensus on the political role of NGOs”³. In fact, civil society is often assumed to be a catalyst for democratic change. Empowering citizens is said to help them give voice to or defend their interests, counter-balance the state power and generally contribute to democratic functions of their country improving governance.⁴ At the same time, civil society faces unprecedented levels of restriction and challenging the power has become increasingly dangerous. Patterns of attacks on civil society organizations (henceforth CSOs) and human rights activists are consistent and civic space is being constrained in 106 countries.⁵

From a human rights perspective, civil society is considered to be one of the arenas with the biggest potential for the promotion, protection and advancement of human rights. In fact, a pluralistic and independent civil society is said to have the potential to contribute to the monitoring of democracies or work for the democratization of authoritarian governments.⁶

In the world of development cooperation, donor countries channel government funding through CSOs in developing countries as key actors to help promote democracy

¹ Billing, Annika. 2011. Support to Civil Society Within Swedish Development Cooperation, *Perspectives no. 20*, School of Global Studies-University of Gothenburg, p.4.

² Ottaway, Marina and Carothers, Thomas. 2000. *Funding Virtue: Civil Society Aid and Democracy Promotion*. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, p.Vii.

³ Mercer, Claire. 2002. NGOs, civil society and democratization: a critical review of the literature. *Progress in Development Studies* 2, no.1, p.6.

⁴ Diamond, Larry. 1994. Toward democratic consolidation. *Journal of Democracy* 5, no. 3, p.8.

⁵ CIVICUS, State of Civil society report 2017, p.7 (retrieved 03/05/2018)

⁶ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) website, *Civil society* (retrieved 28/04/2018)

and the rule of law. Strengthening civil society is often part of a more general strategy to increase transparency and accountability of the institutions in the target country and is expected to be a natural transition to a strengthened and renewed democracy.⁷

Sweden is no exception, having made commitment to support civil society as a central actor for democratization. The Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) considers civil society actors as key players in reducing poverty, contributing to democratic development and enhancing respect for human rights.⁸ The underlying assumption is that a strong civil society in the so-called developing countries is a prerequisite for developing democracy and that CSOs in donor countries can help to strengthen civil society in developing countries through cooperation. This assumption has today a strong positive connotation which is increasingly analyzed and questioned.

Sweden gives bilateral aid to Turkey within a regional strategy for reform cooperation with Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans and Turkey.⁹ The policies containing the guidelines for its allocation are interesting examples to examine how the role of civil society in democratization processes is expressed. After having understood the role of civil society and its connection to development cooperation, the Turkish context constitutes an engaging case to contextualize it.

1.1 Thesis statement, purpose and research questions

As explained, a significant part of Sweden's development assistance is carried out in cooperation with CSOs in partner countries. In regard to civil society, the Turkish case is interesting. The country is said in most of national and international NGOs reports to be suffering from shrinking space for civil society and strong social polarization, which is part of a global trend¹⁰ but particularly engaging to examine in Turkey because of the historical and cultural context.

⁷ Billing, 2011, p.4.

⁸ Utrikesdepartementet, UD2016/10135/IU, 02/06/02, *Strategi för stöd genom svenska organisationer i det civila samhället för perioden 2016-2022*, unpagged.

⁹ Utrikesdepartementet, UD 14:013, 13/03/2014, *Results strategy for Sweden's reform cooperation with Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans and Turkey for the period 2014-2020*.

¹⁰ See Amnesty, Turkey report 2018 *Weathering the storm*, 28/04/2018 (retrieved 29/04/2018) & Center for American Progress, Istanbul Policy Center, and Istituto Affari Internazionali, July 2017, *Trends in Turkish Civil Society* (retrieved 27/03/2018) & CIVICUS, State of Civil society report 2017, p.7 (retrieved 03/05/2018).

The overall purpose of this thesis is to investigate, at a more theoretical level, the role of civil society in democratization processes according to Sida, analyzing it in relation to already existing research. More specifically, I intend to analyze and discuss Swedish aid policies with focus on civil society and Turkey and look at how civil society's role is expressed in Swedish development strategies. In doing so, some of civil society's underlying assumptions will be made visible. The guiding question is thus the following:

- How is civil society's role in democratization processes expressed in Swedish aid guidelines with specific focus on Turkey?

1.2 Material and delimitations

My aim in the following section is to introduce the material I will investigate, reflect on my choices and share some thoughts with the reader.

1.2.1 Primary material

My primary material consists of three documents. Two of them apply generally to Sida's operations and one has a specific regional focus:

- Support material for the strategy to support civil society in developing countries, CSO-strategy, 2016-2019 (*Underlag för strategi för stödet till civila samhället i utvecklingsländer, CSO-strategin*)
- Strategy for support via Swedish organization in the civil society, 2016-2022 (*Strategi för stöd genom svenska organisationer i det civila samhället*)
- *Results strategy for Sweden's reform cooperation with Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans and Turkey for the period 2014-2020*

The support material for the strategy to support civil society in developing countries (2016-2019) is a twenty-five pages long working document, namely the result of a consultation process with inputs from relevant external actors, affected CSOs and different sections within Sida. It is an interesting support document because it clarifies Sida's understandings, standpoints and objectives when it comes to civil society support and democracy promotion in aid recipient countries. In fact, as pointed out in the document's introduction, the Swedish government requested further clarifications from

Sida on different issues and aspects regarding the operationalization of the strategy. These questions are therefore taken into account and analyzed in this documentation and preliminary proposals are given. However, it should be emphasized that this is not the final operationalization of the strategy, which is the second document I am analyzing. In the support material, Sida clarifies the expected results and the actors involved in the strategy. It also divides the action into three areas: the first one aims to strengthen the capacity of civil society actors in developing countries in order for them to be able to work with a rights-based approach.¹¹

The second area focuses on the promotion of a favorable atmosphere within civil society which allows civil society actors to work as independent forces and at the same time promote cooperation between civil society and other actors for a more sustainable democratic development.

The third and final area addressed supports civil society's involvement and participation in decision making processes which touch upon civic, political, social, economic and cultural rights for people who live in poverty. Besides the results, the support document for the policy also addresses logistical aspects of aid and development operations and various methodological concerns.

The Strategy for support via Swedish organization in the civil society, 2016-2022 also referred to as the CSO strategy, is a shortened and more coherent version of the support material. It is seven pages long and aims to establish a coherent approach within the framework of development cooperation and procedures for the implementation of the policy. The ultimate goal is a pluralistic civil society in developing countries that contributes to poverty reduction in all its dimensions with a rights-based perspective, to increased respect for human rights and to a global sustainable development. The strategy is expected to increase and strengthen civil society actors' capacity and contribute to a more favorable atmosphere for civil society organizations to work in. The strategy also emphasizes civil society as a key actor for poverty reduction and as an actor having a

¹¹ Important to note that poverty is perceived by Sida as a multi-dimensional concept and therefore includes a wide range of aspects. Poverty has many different expressions and deprives people of freedom to decide on their own lives. The poor do not live in freedom, since their living conditions are at stake and they lack the power to make choices. The core of poverty is the lack of material assets and lack of power and choice. Sida sees development as a viable process where people's prosperity, freedom and dignity increase within the framework of an equal and secure society which is why poverty reduction is an integral part of development. Sida, Perspektiv på fattigdom, June 2004, p. 7 (retrieved 05/04/2018).

particular relevance and potential to contribute to democratic development and increased respect for human rights in developing countries.

The Results strategy for Sweden's reform cooperation with Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans and Turkey for the period 2014-2020 is an eighteen pages document with a geographical focus on the mentioned areas. This strategy does not specifically target civil society as the other documents, but the term is mentioned numerous times. The section related to Turkey claims that the efforts and aid allocations will help to accelerate Turkey's membership in the EU. Operations in Turkey are expected to contribute to results within the area: strengthened democracy, increased respect for human rights and strengthened rule of law. This is done by focusing on strengthened public administration and justice. Another focus is increased respect for human rights while strengthening opportunities to exercise democratic influence.

These documents also contain parts with more technical and logistic details such as result measurements which are not of interest for my analysis. Therefore, those parts will be left out.

As explained, my primary material consists of documents issued by a governmental institution, Sida. This has an impact on the kind of text that is produced, which in this case might appear very polished, but I believe these documents can provide interesting and valuable insights into Sida's understanding of civil society as a concept and as a democratic actor in the Turkish context. Finally, in order to avoid repetition, I would like to state that the translations of the Swedish documents, which do not have an English version, are my own.

1.2.2 Secondary Material

I have included different kinds of sources as secondary material. For instance, I have decided to use the *Strategy Report for Turkey implementing the Results Strategy for Sweden's Reform Cooperation with Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans and Turkey 2014-2020* from 2017. It contains recent and valuable updates about the development towards the strategy objectives which I find useful to contextualize my primary material, which is prevalently abstract.

The insights provided by the report are negative and highlight the challenges of the Turkish context. The situation during the reporting period is said to have deteriorated, particularly when it comes to democratic principles, human rights and freedom of

expression. The state of emergence instated after the failed coup attempt on July 2016 is still effective, conservatism has increased, and gender equality is increasingly politicized. Moreover, government NGOs (henceforth GONGOs) constitute the dominant voice in policy discussions.¹²

The burden on civil society is heavy, particularly in the Kurdish region due to the conflict in the South East. The pressure on civil spaces has increased overall and this has made it almost impossible for organizations to secure funding from domestic sources due to the fear to be associated with these which can have consequences. At the same time, funding from international actors can also be seen as part of a conspiracy by the government of Turkey.¹³

In addition, I have decided to also include two very recent reports for some valuable and updated background information. One is *Trends in Turkish civil society* published in July 2017 by the Center for American Progress, Istanbul Policy Center, and Istituto Affari Internazionali, which contains useful information in regard to the polarization aspect and to the prospects of funding for CSOs. Moreover, on 26th of April 2018 Amnesty released its annual report about Turkey *Weathering the Storm*, which will also be used for some updated background information.

1.2.3 Delimitations

My intent is to examine Sida's policies focusing specifically on civil society and Turkey and that explains the selection of the documents mentioned above. I have chosen not to include the Changed strategy for special democratic support through Swedish party-linked organizations 2016-2020 (*Ändrad strategi för särskilt demokratistöd genom svenska partianknutna organisationer 2016-2020*), since my focus is not on the support for democratic multi-party systems abroad, but more generally on civil society support. Even though I recognize this as a relevant component for the understanding of the full picture of Swedish civil society support in Turkey, including it would add too many layers to the analysis with the risk of losing clarity. It could rather be interesting for a larger future study.

¹² Sida, 18/000531, *Strategy Report for Turkey implementing the Results Strategy for Sweden's Reform Cooperation with Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans and Turkey 2014-2020*, p.2.

¹³ Ibid.

One could argue that Sida's general guideline on democracy and human rights in development cooperation¹⁴ could also be useful to look at, but after reading it I thought it either had a slightly different focus that did not really fit my purposes or was repeating very similar concepts as the policies targeting civil society.

Finally, I have been looking at policies and strategies which are currently in use, since most of the policies have a specific duration and afterwards are not valid anymore. For instance, *Pluralism. Policy for support to civil society in developing countries within Swedish development cooperation (Policy för stöd till det civila samhället i utvecklingsländer inom svenskt utvecklingssamarbete)*¹⁵ is one of those; it clearly states Sida's guidelines in regard to civil society, but many of them are also part of the current CSO-strategy. In fact, the majority of the new policies builds on the previous ones.

¹⁴ Utrikesdepartementet, 20/12/2017, *Strategi för Sveriges utvecklingssamarbete avseende arbetet med de mänskliga rättigheterna, demokrati och rättsstatens principer 2018–2022*.

¹⁵ Utrikesdepartementet, UD09.061, 10/09/2009. *Pluralism. Policy för stöd till det civila samhället i utvecklingsländer inom svenskt utvecklingssamarbete*.

2 Literature review and previous research

My research overview has shown a broad and nuanced research field, where, due to the high quality, the biggest challenge has been to identify materials which better relate to my purpose and which I consider relevant when looking at civil society today. I have selected material that is related to three main themes:

- General political theories about civil society and democratization
- Civil society support in development cooperation
- Possibilities for democratization in Turkey

Not much has been written before on how Sida understands civil society's role in Turkey since the Swedish aid structure and its policies are continuously subjected to renovation and improvement.

In my section about possibilities for democratization in Turkey I have included some research about the impacts and challenges of the EU's civil society policies since they do have many similarities with Swedish support to civil society and since EU accession is the ultimate goal of Swedish bilateral aid too.

2.1 General political theories about civil society and democratization

Larry Diamond is one of the most cited sources within the academic debate focusing on civil society and democracy, since despite writing in the 1990s his thoughts are still very relevant. He conceives civil society 'as the realm of organized social life that is voluntary, self-generating, (largely) self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules'.¹⁶ The rediscovery of civil society is commonly traced back to the situation in Poland in the late 1970s, when the intellectual fathers of Solidarity

¹⁶ Diamond, 1994. p. 5.

(*Solidarność*) used the term to describe their efforts to organize people in a broad social movement which was independent of the totalitarian state.¹⁷ A vigorous debate over the role of civil society after transition was then inaugurated, with the ambition of reflecting upon the nature and limits of civil society and its contribution to democracy.

Where to situate civil society has been and still is a central topic within the academic debate. According to Diamond, civil society is distinct from society in general and defined as an *intermediary entity* between the private sphere and the state.¹⁸ This idea is also expressed by Markus Ketola, important contributor to the study of EU Turkey relations, who discusses how the term *third sector*¹⁹ referred to civil society is used to describe the space outside of the state and the market. He also discusses its intermediary role between the political interests of the public sector and the economic interests of the private sector.²⁰

Neera Chandhoke, one of the contributors to the book *Civil society and Democracy* edited by Carolyn M. Elliott also reflects critically on questions such as:

Can we assume that civil society possesses a distinct logic of its own, which is in sharp contrast to that of the state or the market? Can we correspondently assume that it is quite as autonomous of other spheres as much as we would like it to be?²¹

According to her, these questions are important to ask if we want to think about civil society as a political project. In fact, she argues that we should learn to problematize this sphere, but on the other hand we cannot allow political passions and normative concerns to influence our understanding of it.²² The idea of civil society as an autonomous third sphere filled with solidarity and self-organization is attractive since it would help us assume that impersonal societies can be emancipated from the alienation that besets them but thinking like this is deeply problematic.²³

¹⁷ Plattner, Marc F. and Diamond, Larry Jay, 1994. Rethinking Civil Society, *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 5, no. 3, p. 3.

¹⁸ Diamond, 1994, p.5.

¹⁹ Others, like Cohen and Arato refer to a *third realm*, distinct from the economy and the state. Cohen, Jean and Arato, Andrew, 1992. *Political Theory and Civil Society*. Cambridge: MIT Press, p.18.

²⁰ Ketola, Markus. 2013. *Europeanization and civil society. Turkish NGOs as instruments of change*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p.19.

²¹ Chandhoke, Neera in Elliott, Carolyn M. 2003. *Civil society and democracy: a reader*. New Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.239.

²² Ibid. p.240.

²³ Ibid.

Part of the same debate is also civil society's relationship to political society. As we have seen, a majority argues that civil society is separated from the political society. Nevertheless, Diamond sees the possibility of alliances between civil society networks and political parties, but they cannot be *captured* by parties or *hegemonic* with them without losing their ability to perform mediating and democracy-building functions.²⁴

This is an issue which provokes disagreement in scholarly debates, since like the two leading scholars Thomas Carothers and Marina Ottaway point out there are political groups that play the pro-democratic role which civil society is also assumed to have.²⁵ They also explain how donors have chosen to see the two realms as separate because 'doing so helps defend the claim that is it possible to support democracy without becoming involved in partisan politics or otherwise interfering unduly in the domestic politics of another country'.²⁶

Looking at civil society as an agent and therefore at its social and political contributions – which is also called functionalist approach²⁷- there is another distinction worth mentioning. Timm Beichelt et alia explain that conceptualizing civil society as a complementary and integrative power of the state is characteristic of the republican view of civil society. Differently, conceptualizing it as a counterpart to the state defending the free civic sphere is typical of liberal views.²⁸ As Gideon Baker, another important name within political philosophy puts it, the republican view sees civil society as a democratic end in itself, 'as a space for the realization of that elusive promise of democracy-self-government'.²⁹

The function of civil society as an opposing or delimitating force to state power, is seen by Diamond as central. However, he warns for an exaggeration of this role which revives the eighteenth-century idea of civil society in opposition to the state.³⁰

Another one of civil society's roles Diamond emphasizes is its support to political participation as a stimulator. A rich associational life increases the democratic

²⁴ Diamond, 1994, p.7.

²⁵ Ottaway & Carothers, 2000, p.10.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Beichelt, Timm, et al. 2014. *Civil society and democracy promotion*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p.17.

²⁸ Ibid. p.18.

²⁹ Baker, Gideon. 2002. *Civil society and democratic theory: alternative voices*. London: Routledge, p.148.

³⁰ Diamond, 1994, p.7.

skills of citizens while promoting rights and duties of democratic citizenship. It also enhances the development of democratic values such as tolerance, moderation, respect for differing opinions.³¹ Furthermore, Diamond argues that civil society creates alternative channels to voice interests, giving access to power to groups that have traditionally been excluded from it.³² A wide range of CSOs is said by Mercer to pluralize the institutional arena, generating a diversification of interests and preventing polarization within a society.

More civic actors mean more opportunities for a wider range of interest groups to have a voice, more autonomous organizations to act in a ‘watchdog’ role vis-à-vis the state, and more opportunities for networking and creating alliances of civic actors to place pressure on the state.³³

Moreover, according to Diamond, issue-oriented movements have the potential to draw together groups of people cutting across longstanding religious, partisan or ethnic distinctions, generating “a modern type of citizenship that transcends historic divisions”.³⁴

Caroline Boussard from the Department of Political Science at Lund University is a prominent Swedish name in the debate and has produced a report on the role of aid in the development of civil society in the global South commissioned by Sida. She argues that through the dissemination of information, the democratic process can become more inclusive and support citizens in defending their interests or values.³⁵ Diamond agrees that being well-informed is a pre-requisite for successful defense of interest of contestation of government policies.³⁶ Information sharing is also considered an important strategy for the consolidation of political institutions. Boussard argues that civil society can spread knowledge about how the democratic process works and build trust for democratic states functioning in this way.³⁷ This role goes also hand in hand with the

³¹ Diamond, 1994, p.8.

³² Ibid.

³³ Mercer, 2002, p.8.

³⁴ Diamond, 1994, p.9.

³⁵ Boussard, Caroline. 2001. *En studie över biståndets roll i framväxten av civila samhällen i syd: kriterier för urval av ramorganisationer*. Stockholm: Sida, Avdelningen för samverkan med enskilda organisationer och humanitärt bistånd. p.14.

³⁶ Diamond, 1994, p.11.

³⁷ Boussard, 2001, p.14.

promotion of human rights since civil society can also spread knowledge about what rights and obligations both institutions and citizens have in a democracy.

2.2 Civil society support in development cooperation

Civil society support and development cooperation have gone hand in hand for some time. As Annika Billing explains in the publication *Perspectives* issued by the University of Gothenburg, the vast majority of CSOs which are involved in development work “share a common view about development and their role in helping to promote it”. This view is shared by the governments and donors who fund their development activities.³⁸

In her nuanced and comprehensive picture of civil society support within Swedish development cooperation, she discusses how both historically and today, development work has been about support or implementation of projects and programs for specific target groups, often poor and/or marginalized communities, encompassing service delivery activities and efforts aimed at enhancing the livelihoods of these communities.³⁹

When trying to address the causes of poverty, Billing also discussed the importance of other funded activities such as advocacy, lobbying, awareness-raising and campaigning activities. These have often powerful interest groups as targets to influence.⁴⁰ The different roles abovementioned have received an expanding support and civil society’s role in development is increasingly emphasized.⁴¹

Donor governments see CSOs in North and South as key players in helping to advance democracy and the rule of law, and in enhancing the transparency and accountability of institutions as part of a more general strategy of ‘strengthening civil society’.⁴²

³⁸ Billing, 2011, p.8.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid. p.9.

Further, Billing reflects on the fact that aid agencies from different countries have different ideas about development shaped by their culture and historical experiences.⁴³

Boussard contributes with some interesting critical perspectives. For example, she looks into the reasons why civil society support ended up on the donor community's agenda. She mentions, among other reasons, that the end of the Cold War brought changes in the international arena in the sense that there was no longer need for aid programs with the aim of turning other states into friends.⁴⁴ Moreover, the 1980s structural adjustment programs had reduced the state's scope to the extent that it was no longer able to provide services to its citizens. Also, ideas such as accountability, legitimacy, rule of law, human rights, transparency and good governance became words of honor. From this, the idea soon emerged that the development of civil society was a central part of democracy development.⁴⁵

Boussard also discusses if and how civil society support can be a problem for democratization and argues that, in order to understand the support's effect, it is important to take into account the relationship between the state and civil society, between the donor community and civil society and between civil society and grassroots.⁴⁶ Without discussing too many details which are only marginally relevant to my thesis, one of her most important lessons is that a civil society does not exist in a vacuum and is highly dependent on the structures it surrounds as well as the political culture.⁴⁷

The last aspect worth mentioning is the fact that behind civil society funding within development cooperation, there is the assumption of civil society's positive impact, as Ketola discusses. 'The underlying tendency is to view civil society as always making a positive contribution; the more groups there are the better.'⁴⁸ Moreover, he means that this approach ignores the fact that CSOs can represent different political ideologies and struggle against each other or against the state. The donor approach will, in his line of reasoning, create winners and losers among the local CSOs and bring up new sources of contention and competition.⁴⁹ This aspect will further be discussed in the following section with focus on the Turkish context.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Boussard, 2001, p.15.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid. p.17

⁴⁷ Ibid. p.24.

⁴⁸ Ketola, 2013, p.20.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

2.3 Turkish civil society and possibilities for democratization

As stated earlier, I believe the Turkish case is an interesting example when looking at civil society because of its cultural and historical specificities. Moreover, in the last fifteen years Turkey has undergone a rapid change from a political, social and economic perspective. Explaining the origins and nature of these changes and its impacts on civil society has been the ambition of many scholars.

Fuat Keyman and Ahmet Icduygu, Turkish professors in International Relations, argue that Turkish civil society is the arena where these changes can be felt the most. It has been growing since the 1980s and is increasingly gaining importance for making Turkey more democratic and liberal. Today Turkey has numerous CSOs working with many different issues such as human rights, democratization, environment and ‘even meta-societal visions such as Westernization, Atatürkism, nationalism, and Islamization.’⁵⁰ They therefore represent a wide range of ideological interests from different groups of the Turkish society. Yet, Keyman and Icduygu are very clear in pointing out that this should not be uncritically taken as a positive development. In fact, the emergence or strengthening of civil society does not only involve the possibility of democratization but also risks

...insofar as it constitutes a ‘discursive space’ both for democratic forces and for religious and the ethnonationalist political strategies to voice their essentialist and anti-democratic identity claims.⁵¹

This aspect is what they call the *boundary problem*, since civil society in Turkey functions both as a necessary condition for democratization and a strategic arena for non-democratic forces to voice their essentialist identity claims.⁵²

Sefa Şimşek is another valuable voice in the debate. Building on many already mentioned critiques such as the oversimplification of the relation between state and civil

⁵⁰ E. Fuat Keyman & Ahmet Icduygu. 2003. Globalization, Civil Society and Citizenship in Turkey: Actors, Boundaries and Discourses, *Citizenship Studies* 7, no.2, p.221.

⁵¹ Ibid. p.222.

⁵² Ibid. p.219.

society as belonging to two opposite spheres⁵³ and the importance of not neglecting the internal contradictions and the authoritarian tendencies of civil society⁵⁴ he problematizes the Turkish context from different aspects to explain ‘the relative weakness of Turkish civil society’⁵⁵. Like Keyman and Icduygu, Şimşek sees a problem in the stifling official ideology, which envisions a homogenous nation-state that rejects different identities and subcultures. The result is that citizenship appears as a function of the state, as a number of imperatives and duties and is not a social contract.⁵⁶

The nation is thus a monolithic entity belonging to the state and not the other way around. Thus, all the problems faced by civil society in Turkey derive from either the lack of autonomy from state power or deep political fragmentation and hostility. If these two problems could be solved, Turkish civil society could then become a pro-democratization factor.⁵⁷

Hanna Mühlenhoff also provides valuable insights into understanding the specificity of Turkish civil society, with focus on EU support policies and funds. She also warns for the positive normative assumptions which comes with civil society funding and argues that an evaluation of these policies must take into account the domestic contexts of third countries, and in the Turkish case, the competing ideological narratives before mentioned. Among the different aspects of her criticism, she mentions the fact that nowadays NGOs are equated with civil society, which is a term ‘...that previously referred to social movements struggling for democratic rights in authoritarian regimes. When social movements ceased to exist, the industrialized countries found a new form of civil society that could coexist with the capitalist structures.’⁵⁸ Therefore, NGOs can work in a neo-liberal system where they are conceived as a *third sector* which exists in addition to the state and the market, but where they actually function like the market and exercise

⁵³ Şimşek, Sefa. 2004. The Transformation of Civil Society in Turkey: From Quantity to Quality. *Turkish Studies*, vol. 5, no. 3, p.46.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p.47.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p.69.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Mühlenhoff, Hanna. 2014. Funding Democracy, Funding Social Services? The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights in the Context of Competing Narratives in Turkey. *Journal of Balkan & Near Eastern Studies* 16, no. 1, p.104.

functions which are characteristic of the state, since the state's responsibilities have to be reduced and privatized.⁵⁹

Mühlenhoff means that these are the guiding principles of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), through which the EU transfers the responsibility for democratization to the domestic civil society by capacity building, implying that Turkish society should 'help itself' and provide what is missing in the democratization process. Moreover, she explains that civil society and the NGOs in it are taken into account and empowered '...as economic actors that have to act according to market principles'⁶⁰, like being efficient in terms of costs, self-responsible and accountable. Summarizing, according to Mühlenhoff the EU approach deals with NGOs not as political actors but as simple providers of administrative, social and legal services. This liberal depoliticized NGO narrative is unlikely to challenge the Turkish struggle between a kemalist/secular and a pro-Islam narrative, which is one of the biggest causes of social polarization in Turkey.

Other scholars looking at EU civil society policies obstacles in the Turkish context bring up other critical aspects, such as Özge Zihnioğlu. She analyses critically the neo-Tocquevillian premise that considers civil society as opposed to state since this clear separation is absent in Turkish state-society relations. She argues this has its origins in the subsequent military interventions in 1961, 1970, 1980, 1997 as well as in the restricted political and legal environment which hindered the bottom-up dynamics for the strengthening of civil society in Turkey. This has resulted in the fact that Turkish CSOs has a low level of organizational capacity which affects CSOs' ability to make the best of EU's financial and technical instruments.

Zihnioğlu second criticism reflects the *third sector* argument made by Mühlenhoff. Because of the neo-Toquevillian inspiration, EU civil society policy regards civil society as 'a neutral field composed of rather homogenous set of actors'⁶¹, which can be noted in the use of technical, financial and political instruments which are pre-modelled universally. Civil society is rather a sphere of political contestation and struggle and CSOs are autonomous actors but with ideological preferences and political

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid. p.107.

⁶¹ Zihnioğlu, Özge. 2013. The 'civil society policy' of the European Union for promoting democracy in Turkey: golden goose or dead duck? *Journal of Southeast European & Black Sea Studies* 13, no.3, p.395.

connections. In the Turkish context Zihnioğlu puts special emphasis on the fragmentation of civil society through the main dividing line between secularists and conservatives.

This overview shows the breadth of perspectives from which the issue can be approached. While the first part discusses the different functions of civil society, the second part looks at civil society's relevance for donor countries. The third and final part illustrates the challenges and the opportunities of the Turkish context. I situate my own contribution in a merging point between more abstract political theories about civil society and context specific considerations about Turkey.

3 Theory and method

In the following section I am going to discuss my theoretical and methodological approach. While the methodological approach follows the tradition of qualitative content analysis with a deductive approach, the theoretical framework is developed by myself based on previous scholars' work on the subject. Since the choice of methodology and theory are closely connected, I will first explain the method with the different steps associated to it and afterwards present my theoretical framework.

3.1 Method

The thesis' methodological approach is based on a qualitative text analysis, which is described by Peter Esaiasson to be about 'extracting the essential content by carefully reading the parts of the text, the whole and the context in which it is included'.⁶² More specifically, in order to use a method that can adequately support the analysis of my empirical material which consists of guidelines and strategies by Sida, I found content analysis with deductive approach very fitting.

Content analysis as a method was first used in the end of the twentieth century to analyze hymns, newspapers, advertisements and political speeches. Today it is used within nursing, communication, journalism, sociology, psychology and business and it is also known as a method to analyze documents.⁶³ Satu Elo and Helvi Kyngäs which discusses the method in relation to nursing, argue that 'content analysis allows the researcher to test theoretical issues to enhance understanding of the data.'⁶⁴ This is precisely my intention with applying this methodological approach to the empirical material.

⁶² Esaiasson, Peter, et al. 2017. *Metodpraktikan: konsten att studera samhälle, individ och marknad*. Stockholm: Wolters Kluwer, p.237 (my own translation).

⁶³ Elo, Satu & Kyngäs, Helvi. 2008. The qualitative content analysis process, *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 62, no.1, p.108.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Once I chose content analysis I realized that previous research had a great impact on my understanding and interpretation of the material, which is why I opted for a deductive approach. As Elo and Kyngäs describe it:

Deductive content analysis is used when the structure of analysis is operationalized on the basis of previous knowledge and the purpose of the study is theory testing.⁶⁵

They also explain that the analysis moves from the general to the specific.⁶⁶ As Göran Ahrne and Peter Svensson argue, theory can be a great help in the analysis, ordering, sorting and comprehension of material.⁶⁷ More in depth, he argues that theories in social science research can be relevant in at least three ways: to create a new theory, develop or question an existing theory or use theories to analyze the empirical material.⁶⁸ In my case, I use theories as tools for my analysis.

When it comes to the operationalization of the method I want to argue that even though qualitative content analysis is often used in different fields, not much has been written about how to apply the method. The reason behind this might be the fact that it is considered to be a very flexible methodological approach. Accordingly, Elo and Kyngäs discuss in their article the fact that it does not proceed in a linear fashion since there are no simple or standardized guidelines. It is described to be a flexible method, where the researcher's judgement determines which variations are most appropriate depending on the particular research question.⁶⁹

After making this clear, I have decided to follow the steps indicated by Elo and Kyngäs. According to their description both inductive and deductive analysis processes are represented as three main phases: preparation, organizing and reporting. The central objective is that the many words of the text are classified into much smaller content categories.⁷⁰

The preparation phase starts with selecting the unit of analysis, which can be a letter, word, sentence, portion of pages.⁷¹ I have previously explained and discussed my

⁶⁵ Ibid. p.109.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ahrne, Göran, & Svensson, Peter. 2011. *Handbok i kvalitativa metoder*, Malmö: Liber, p.182.

⁶⁸ Ibid. p.188.

⁶⁹ Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, p.113.

⁷⁰ Ibid. p.109.

⁷¹ Ibid.

selection in section 1.2. Next in the analytic process, the researcher strives to make sense of the data and obtain a sense of whole through an immersion in the data. To achieve this, the written material is read through several times.⁷² This step has been for me, besides reading my empirical material numerous times also about underlying relevant sentences and taking notes. After making sense of the data, analysis is conducted using the deductive approach. The following step identified by Elo and Kyngäs is to develop a categorization matrix which I present and explain in Section 3.2. After that, it is suggested to code the data for correspondence with or exemplification of the categories which have been developed.⁷³

To conclude, I also want to mention that another method that I have considered is idea analysis, which Ludvig Beckman describes as a collective name for various possible combinations of purposes, research questions and analysis techniques that can be used in the study of political messages.⁷⁴ Since I am interested in how civil society is portrayed and how its role in democratization processes is expressed, I think this kind of method could have shed light on underlying political ideologies. My final decision to use deductive content analysis is mainly dictated by the fact that it allows me to do conduct a more complete analysis, while focus on political ideologies would have directed my analysis to much smaller parts of text.

3.2 Theoretical framework

As section 2 containing the previous research overview emphasizes, there are different definitions and understandings of the concept of civil society to be taken into account. These- at least the ones I have assessed as central- will constitute a theoretical framework for my thesis. The reason behind this choice is dictated by the complexity of the concept, which left me unsatisfied with trying to understand civil society from a single theoretical perspective. Taking aspects from various scholars and traditions allows me to do a deeper analysis of the idea of civil society in my empirical material. Still, despite striving for a

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid. p.111.

⁷⁴ Beckman, Ludvig. 2005. *Grundbok i idéanalys: det kritiska studiet av politiska texter och idéer*. Stockholm: Santérus Förlag, p.11.

broad picture, this is not meant in any way to be an exhaustive account of the idea of civil society but rather a tool to theoretically systematize and analyze my empirical material.

With this purpose in mind, I will hereby summarize the key aspects of the concept of civil society that can help me explain the conceptualization of the term in the material I am investigating, followed by a short summary linking the concept to the previous research:

1. Civil society as a *third sector*.
2. Civil society as an actor for the promotion and enhancement of *human rights*.
3. Civil society as a promoter of *pluralism* in views, voices and interests.
4. Civil society as a *disseminator of information* and a *forum for dialogue*.
5. The emergence of civil society as an inherently *positive phenomenon*- or not?

My literature review has shown these five aspects to be the central ones when analysing civil society as a concept. As discussed in Section 2, civil society is often referred to as a separate sphere, an intermediary entity between the state and the private, either completely disconnected from the political realm of the state or in alliance with it but not having the political society as primary venue of activity.⁷⁵ The idea of the third sector is described to derive from the modern need of civil society to function and coexist with capitalist structures in a neo-liberal system. Within this third sector CSOs function like the market and exercise certain functions which are characteristic of the state.⁷⁶ Ketola describes it as the space outside of the state and the market. He also discusses its intermediary role between the political interests of the public sector and the economic interests of the private sectors.⁷⁷ In short, the separation from politics is, for many, the very essence of the idea of civil society.

From a human rights perspective, civil society is considered to be one of the arenas with the biggest potential for the promotion, protection and advancement of human rights. The human rights perspective has been central in understanding civil society and seeing it as a mechanism for the social empowerment of those groups who have

⁷⁵ Diamond, 1994, p.17.

⁷⁶ Mühlenhoff, 2014, p.104.

⁷⁷ Ketola, 2013, p.19.

traditionally been excluded or marginalized, such as the poor, women, certain ethnic groups and so on.⁷⁸

This aspect is closely connected to the assumption that a pluralistic and independent civil society is said to have the potential to contribute to the monitoring of democracies or work for the democratization of authoritarian governments. The pluralism of views, interests and experiences is seen as pre-requisite for democracy. Also, civil society is considered to be a school when it comes to democratic skills, since citizens learn and exercise values such as tolerance, diversity and respect for differing opinions.⁷⁹

Part of this idea of civil society as a ‘school’ is its role as a disseminator of information and a forum for dialogue. Sharing information about rights, duties and democratic processes is said to increase the interest and involvement of citizens, which in turn will engage positively with the state and be able to voice their interests and concerns.⁸⁰ Also, the emergence or the strengthening of civil society is prevalently portrayed as a strongly positive phenomenon, while previous scholars do warn for normative assumptions.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Billing, 2011, p.7.

⁷⁹ Diamond, 1994, p.8.

⁸⁰ Boussard, 2001, p.14 and Diamond, 1994, p.11.

⁸¹ Boussard, 2001. p.1. & Ketola, 2013, p.20.

4 Civil society in different times and contexts

As previously explained, the only consensus among scholars in regard to civil society is the ambiguity of the concept. That is why, before entering the matter, I am going to shortly introduce the idea of civil society with a brief historical and geographical background. Civil society as the concept we know today begins in the eighteenth century. With Adam Ferguson in the second half of 1700s civil society and the state were seen as two separate entities, an idea later consolidated by Hegel. With Alexis de Tocqueville in the 1800s another function of civil society was emphasized, namely its capacity to check the excesses of state power and in so doing constitute a counterbalancing force to the state.⁸² The Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci saw the separation between the state and civil society as blurrier and focused on civil society as subjected to hegemonic dynamics and to intricate relations between civil society and the state. Therefore, he also considered civil society as an important tool in the struggle for power.⁸³

After Gramsci, the concept fell into misuse until the 1980s, when East European political activists revitalized it in their counterhegemonic political discourse which was joined by Western intellectuals and brought the concept to the popular spot where it is today, at the center of a still contested debate.⁸⁴ As Ketola argues:

it has been the liberal democratic model of civil society, which emphasizes the separation of civil society from the state and the links between civil society and democratization that dominates the political, policy and academic discourses on the subject.⁸⁵

The criticism instead comes from a wave building on Gramsci's legacy, which sees civil society as an arena for struggle and different hegemonic discourses.⁸⁶

⁸² Ketola, 2013, p.14.

⁸³ Ibid. p.16.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

In the aid and development context, as Boussard explains, democratic participation and civil engagement were considered to be the key actors to democratic consolidation and assistance to CSOs was perceived as an effective method of achieving the democratic objective, following the liberal democratic model. Civil society was also a term that was received positively by most political orientations, albeit for various reasons, which further contributed to its major impact within the donor community.⁸⁷ However, from the romanticized slogan of the 1990s, increasingly critical voices⁸⁸ are heard since the term has been subjected to significant changes of meaning or different interpretations. For instance, according to Boussard it is problematic that the term is used both as a neutral analysis category, as a normative ideal and as a political slogan, because the different uses can be interwoven. She sees a risk in using the term as an analytical category while it is based on implicit normative assumptions about civil society's positive effects.⁸⁹

The difference between CSOs and NGOs is also blurry. I will use Boussard's reflections to explain it. She argues that NGO is an overly narrow definition. To avoid excluding other groups, it is more appropriate to speak generally about CSOs where NGOs constitute only a group. In fact, in addition to these, there are membership-based organizations, social movements, cooperative movements and networks.⁹⁰ Thus, it should be avoided to see NGOs and civil society as equivalent, since CSOs include a wider variety of groups.

4.1 The Muslim civil society

Since I am going to look at the Turkish context, a short introductory background on the Muslim civil society is also needed. We should be aware of the fact that as Ketola puts it, 'civil society remains essentially a Western concept'. He means that our understanding of civil society is greatly influenced by the historical path of civil society in Western Europe and North America.⁹¹ Similarly, Elliott argues that this idea arises from the

⁸⁷ Boussard, 2001, p.5.

⁸⁸ See Mercer, 2002 & Zihnioğlu, 2013.

⁸⁹ Boussard, 2001. p.1.

⁹⁰ Ibid. p.9.

⁹¹ Ketola, 2013, p.10.

assumption that civil society is defined by its historical sociology and that differing histories make the development of civil society unlikely.⁹² Islam and its religious principles often guide or at least influence both the civil and the political, so other aspects have to be taken into account in a Muslim civil society. For instance, Ketola, inspired by Ernest Gellner, argues that this aspect of Islam leaves no room for individuality to flourish, while Christianity, particularly since the Reformation, has contributed to the emergence of a secular state because of the separation between religion and politics, which he means is not possible in Islam.⁹³ The *umma*, the Muslim community, prevails over the individual with the consequence that the focus remains on group rights, not on individual rights.⁹⁴

Ketola also mentions Şerif Mardin, a Turkish scholar, who argues that Muslim countries are inherently different and this difference makes the emergence of civil society unlikely. He has described civil society as a ‘Western dream, a historical aspiration’.⁹⁵ Ketola continues:

While the notion of civility – the ethical (how individuals should behave) and moral (notions of right and wrong) tenets – translates into Islamic terms, civil society with its inferences to individualism, agency and freedom does not.⁹⁶

Moreover, according to Ketola, having moral and virtue as guiding aspect of the government makes it unable to accommodate democracy. In fact, it would be impossible for a liberal democratic government to impose moral principles on its citizens without infringing on their individual rights.⁹⁷ A critic of the liberal democratic society comes from this communitarian viewpoint which challenges the impact that the liberal individualism, which lacks moral and values, has had on solidarity and active citizenship.⁹⁸ Viewing individuals as separate entities instead of imbedded in group identities, is said to miss individuals’ broader embedment in society.

⁹² Elliott, 2003, p.28.

⁹³ Ketola, 2013, p. 21.

⁹⁴ Kazemi, Farhad. 2002. *Perspectives on Islam and civil society*, in Nancy L. Rosenblum and Robert C. Post, eds. *Civil society and government*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press in Ketola, 2013, p.21.

⁹⁵ Mardin, Şerif. 1995. *Civil society and Islam*, in John A. Hall, ed. *Civil society: Theory, history, comparison*. Cambridge: Polity Press in Ketola, 2013, p. 22.

⁹⁶ Ketola, 2013, p.22.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* p.23.

Thus, there are also scholars which sees the Muslim world as operating the same way as the West, slowly adapting to modern socio-economic formations.⁹⁹ Summarizing, there is no clear or easy answers to the question of whether civil society can exist and flourish in a Muslim context, but it is important to be aware of the often-close link between state and religion.

4.2 The Turkish case

The case of Turkey finds itself outside of the ideal types as a secular country with a Muslim population. In particular, Ketola finds the Turkish context a relevant example to understand the idea of civil society- particularly from the donor viewpoint- and the surrounding secularization debate that looks at the role of religion in Turkish society.¹⁰⁰

The report *Trends in Turkish civil society* released in July 2017 by the Center for American progress, Istanbul Policy Center and Istituto Affari Internazionali argues that Turkish civil society has always struggled to escape the weight of strong central government. Still, the Ottoman Empire gave more space to civil society than did the early republic letting Sufi brotherhoods and other religious foundations carry out economic and social functions.¹⁰¹ After the foundation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, the country's western aspirations where clear. Ketola mentions that questions of how to synthesize Western and Eastern values in the Ottoman/Turkish melting pot had already arisen and this kind of enquiries have left their imprint on the character of Turkish civil society today.¹⁰²

As the processes of state-building that preceded this did not resolve the underlying and competing private needs, the reforms merely brushed away a fire that, out of sight, continued to smoulder. As such, the adoption of Western values was selective and limited, and for decades civil society was smothered by the republican assimilationist ideas of Turkishness, allowed only to flourish in support of the state.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Ibid. p.24.

¹⁰⁰ Ketola, 2013, p.26.

¹⁰¹ Center for American Progress, Istanbul Policy Center and Istituto Affari Internazionali, 2017, p.7.

¹⁰² Ketola, 2013, p.27.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Different scholars agree on the fact that the 1980s were a turning point for the emergence of new actors within Turkish society, with a renovated interest in Islamic organizations, particularly after the military coup.¹⁰⁴ The emergence of new actors and mentalities and a new language of modernization made culture an important factor to take into account for the understanding of the Turkish political arena.¹⁰⁵

On a general level, the Turkish case ‘reminds us to push for a multidimensional understanding’.¹⁰⁶ It reminds us to analyze the existence of civil society in non-Western contexts as the result of both domestic and external influences - such as the EU accession process. At the same time, it makes us reflect on the universal notion of civil society as it is exported by donors and the way in which the idea of civil society is translated in different cultural, political and historical contexts.

4.3 Sida’s definition of civil society

Since my focus is on Sida’s guidelines I think it is important to mention and keep in mind the agency’s own definition of civil society:

For Sida, civil society is an arena, separate from the state, the market and the individual household, in which people organise themselves and act together to promote their common interests. Sida cooperates with eg people's movements, social communities, women's movements, environmental movements, religious associations, cooperatives, neighbourhood committees and trade unions.¹⁰⁷

This means that Sida agrees to the third sector argument, considering civil society as a separate sphere where people organize themselves in different groups in order to defend and promote their interests. I will go back to this definition in my discussion, trying to look at it in relation to my findings.

¹⁰⁴ See Keyman & Icdyugu, 2003, p.223 & Ketola, 2013, p. 27.

¹⁰⁵ Keyman & Icdyugu, 2003, p.223.

¹⁰⁶ Ketola, 2013, p.29.

¹⁰⁷ Sida, *About cooperation with civil society*, 23/05/2014 (retrieved 20/04/2018).

5 Analysis

In this part I will look closely at my empirical material with the help of my methodological approach, which builds on the theoretical framework. I will analyze, in the following order, the *Support material for the strategy to support civil society in developing countries 2016-2019* (henceforth the support material), the actual *Strategy for support via Swedish organization in the civil society, 2016-2022* (henceforth the CSO strategy) and finally the regional *Results strategy for Sweden's reform cooperation with Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans and Turkey for the period 2014-2020* (henceforth the regional results strategy). In accordance with the method chosen, the analysis part is further divided into the categories I developed from previous research on the topic. The text will be examined and, through the deductive approach, inserted in the different categories.

The support material is, as previously mentioned, a clear statement when it comes to Sida's understanding of civil society in developing countries. The CSO strategy is a shorter and more concise version where similar concepts are repeated. Therefore, the analysis will mostly report quotes from the support document with some references to the actual strategy. When looking at the regional results strategy I will only analyze the parts which are specifically referred to Turkey. As already mentioned in section 1.2.1, all the translations of the strategies missing an English version are my own.

5.1 Civil society as a *third sector*

As discussed in Section 2, where to situate civil society at an abstract level is a central issue within the scholarly debate. The literature review has shown that a majority does agree with the idea of civil society as a third sector, namely a sphere which is separated from the state and the market. By reading the Swedish documents we can note that civil society is in fact represented as an independent and separate sphere. For instance, when looking at the support material within the second result area targeting a *favorable social atmosphere*, increased cooperation between civil society and governments is encouraged

‘as long as it takes place with respect for civil society’s independence’.¹⁰⁸ This tells us that politics and institutions should not compromise civil society’s independence.

In regard to relations with the political sphere, the state is often mentioned. The introduction of the support material states that even though civil society’s role for a sustainable and including development is today recognized globally, space and resources for civil society have shrunk in recent years. The text points at the fact that it is often states themselves adopting legislation, rules and practices limiting the ability of civil society to act.¹⁰⁹ We can here notice that even though civil society is supposed to be a separate sphere, its space of action can still be limited by an authoritarian state. This idea can be identified in Mercer’s discussion too, where she argues that liberal democratic theory sees ‘a strong state and a strong civil society as separate from, yet essential complements to, one another’.¹¹⁰ Moreover, she argues that in this vision, civil society exists only in its relationship to the state.¹¹¹ This aspect will further be discussed in Section 5.2.

On a similar line, CSOs are expected to offer community services when the state fails to do so.¹¹² In this we can see a function that could be defined as complementary or eventually supportive of the state.

Furthermore, we can also understand that civil society is expected to be able to continuously have a dialogue with governments, since in the result area focusing on *capacity*, the support document states that developing CSOs thematic and organizational capacity will strengthen their ability to conduct advocacy work and hold evidence-based dialogues with governments about existing challenges.¹¹³

The CSO strategy, in the same fashion, addresses civil society as a third sector and emphasizes functions such as providing suggestions and options, monitoring the situation and claim accountability.¹¹⁴ Even though it is not openly expressed, the underlying message is that these functions are related to the state. Moreover, when addressing the issue of CSOs’ capacity building, the objectives of this contribution are,

¹⁰⁸ Sida, 15/000809, 30/09/2015. *Underlag för strategi för stödet till civila samhället i utvecklingsländer, CSO-strategin, 2016-2019*, p.7.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. p.1.

¹¹⁰ Mercer, 2002, p.7.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Sida, 2015, p.1.

¹¹³ Ibid. p.4.

¹¹⁴ Utrikesdepartementet, 2016, unpagged.

among others, the capacity to carry on advocacy work, influence and ask for accountability in decision processes. This includes the capacity to conduct a qualified dialogue with governments, political parties and other relevant actors.¹¹⁵ It is clear that even though CSOs are supposed to dialogue with the state and with political actors such as parties, they are still considered as separate entities. This takes us back to Diamond's reflections on the possibility of alliances between civil society networks and political actors such as parties. His opinion is that civic organizations and social movements that try to change the nature of the state may still be considered as parts of civil society but only if they are acting for the common good and not for the desire to occupy a hegemonic position with the group they are representing or acting on behalf of. Otherwise, they lose the ability to perform mediating and democracy-building functions.¹¹⁶

The regional reform strategy is also aligned with the idea of civil society as a third sector:

Swedish support should target initiatives to increase the capacity and sustainability of civil society, media and other actors for change, so that they will be able to work for democracy and human rights and demand greater accountability of those in political power, for example by working for increased freedom of expression.¹¹⁷

Civil society is here portrayed as in opposition with those who hold political power and as an arena to claim accountability from those who hold power. Larry Diamond, strong advocate of civil society as a distinct and independent arena, sees power control and limitation as the first and most basic democratic function of civil society. The function encompasses both the monitoring and restraining of power exercise as well as the democratization of authoritarian states. 'This is the function, performed so dramatically in so many democratic transitions over the past two decades, that has catapulted civil society to the forefront of thinking about democracy.'¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, he warns for this eighteenth-century revival of the idea of civil society as in opposition to the state, which he sees as dangerous if taken too far.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Diamond, 1994, p.6.

¹¹⁷ Utrikesdepartementet, 2014, p.17.

¹¹⁸ Diamond, 1994, p.7.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

Finally, as discussed by Mühlenhoff, it might be worth reflecting on the fact that many donors assume that civil society opposes the state. But as the scholar argues, there has been evidence that third sector organizations and the state instead might be mutual supporters. She means that civil society will not oppose the state if it the support is given to a neo-liberal form of civil society, since in that case civil society is a neutral and depoliticized mediator. Mühlenhoff argues that civil society and the state are not two separate spheres but are internally divided by ideological cleavages which cannot be ignored.¹²⁰

Concluding, civil society is mainly identified as a third sector in the empirical material investigated. Nevertheless, some functions of civil society are integrative and complementary to the state and the two spheres are supposed to be in dialogue.

5.2 Civil society as an actor for the promotion and enhancement of *human rights*

As I stated in the introduction, civil society is considered to be one of the arenas with the biggest potential for the promotion, protection and advancement of human rights. Civil society's relations and potential contribution to human rights are mentioned several times throughout the empirical material I am analyzing.

In the support material, three roles can be identified in relation to human rights: the first one is touching upon the awareness-raising function, the second one is related to the capacity building function for citizens to demand their rights and the third one refers to the potential to contribute to the actual realization of human rights. Accordingly, the introduction of the support document states that civil society has a key role in poverty reduction and a specific relevance and potential to contribute to democratic development and increased respect for human rights in developing countries. CSOs are said to be able to increase awareness about individual human rights, mobilize people and strengthen their capacity to claim their rights, but also themselves offering community services when the state fails to do so.¹²¹ There is a clear link to the idea of civil society seen as a mechanism

¹²⁰ Mühlenhoff, 2014, p.105.

¹²¹ Sida, 2015, p.1.

for the social empowerment of certain marginalized group which leads to the realization of human rights, as described by Billing.¹²² Also Diamond sees human rights organizations as having a vital role in the pursuit of judicial and legal reform and greater institutionalized respect for individual liberties and minority rights.¹²³

Furthermore, the support material emphasizes a rights-based approach as the central feature of all activities carried out by civil society.¹²⁴ The overall purpose of civil society support tells us a lot about the civil society's role from a rights-perspective and is expressed as follows:

The purpose of the support for civil society organizations is the achievement of a viable and pluralistic civil society in developing countries, working with a rights-based approach towards improved living conditions for people living in poverty and a greater respect for human rights.¹²⁵

The overall purpose has been formulated based on the theory of change (*förändringsteori* in Swedish). It states that civil society, when pluralistic and working with a rights-based approach, has a specific potential to contribute to democratic development as well as respect for and promotion of human rights. The support material clarifies that the starting point for these claims is that civil society has an important role to play in creating the conditions for sustainable improvement of living conditions for people living in poverty.¹²⁶ The result area targeting *capacity* is relevant for the human rights perspective:

Strengthening the capacity of civil society actors in developing countries so that they can work in their respective roles with a rights-based approach and represent and act with legitimacy in relation to people living in poverty.¹²⁷

Strengthening CSOs is seen as an important step since there are several organizations in developing countries which lack internal democracy and ability to include target groups with a rights-based approach. In order for civil society to give voice to the people, many organizations and different voices must be heard. Moreover, Sida mentions how many groups and organizations which have the potential to contribute to democratic

¹²² Billing, 2011, p.7.

¹²³ Diamond, 1994, p.10.

¹²⁴ Sida, 2015, p.1 & p.3,

¹²⁵ Ibid. p.2

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid. p.3.

development have weak thematic, organizational and financial capacity and therefore cannot achieve these results.¹²⁸ Therefore, lack of capacity is here framed as a relevant obstacle to the realization of human rights, and as confirmed by the strategy report form 2017, low capacity is still a central problem for CSO support.¹²⁹

Consequently, the first result is expected to target the thematic, organizational and financial capacity of CSOs. The first aspect is related to relevant thematic knowledge and capacity to develop and share that knowledge, both internally and externally. It also refers to the ability to conduct advocacy work and demand accountability in decision making. This includes being able to conduct an evidence-based dialogue with governments and other relevant actors, participating actively in existing networks and building new ones when needed, as well as having a functioning communication system that utilizes modern information technology. Thematic capacity also refers to knowledge the human rights perspective and the international system's mechanisms. The organizational capacity refers to internal democratic structures and practices. CSO are in fact, supposed to function as schools in democracy and act with legitimacy and representativeness.¹³⁰

Finally, even though I have been able to find numerous and clear relations between civil society and human rights is important to note that Sida claims the importance of holding CSOs accountable only for the results that are under their control. This means that the ultimate responsibility for the realization of human rights lies with the state, which is why CSOs cannot be expected to show results when it comes to a country's fulfillment of human rights' standards.¹³¹ This reminds of Diamonds discussion about what he calls the civic civil society, which seeks in nonpartisan fashion to improve the political system and make it more democratic through human rights monitoring, voter education and mobilization, anticorruption efforts and so on.¹³² In this way, civil society is contributing to human rights realization but is not responsible for it.

So human rights at a national level is seen as the state's domain, while civil society should have a role in providing different kinds of social services when the state fails to do so. In fact, the CSOs' target people are said to be in many cases unaware of

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Sida, 2018, p.10.

¹³⁰ Sida, 2015, p.4.

¹³¹ Ibid. p.2

¹³² Diamond, 1994, p.6.

their human rights or sometimes lack basic social services such as access to schools and health care. In order to be able to actively participate in society and affect their living situation, the support material states that people need access to basic social services and knowledge about their rights.¹³³

The CSO strategy also emphasizes the importance of the rights-perspective, together with poor people's perspective on development, permeating CSOs' activities. In fact, every action should be based on the rights-perspective and strengthen the rights holders' capacity to claim their rights, while not implying that the state should fail to fulfill its obligations vis-à-vis its citizens. The activities carried out by the CSOs should also be permeated by the four principles of participation, non-discrimination, accountability and transparency.¹³⁴

The regional reform strategy tries to address the challenges Turkey faces before it can achieve the human rights standard required for EU membership, and civil society is considered to play an important role in this process here as well.

Civil society is a catalyst for continued development and has the potential to act as a force for change and demand accountability. Swedish support should target initiatives to increase the capacity and sustainability of civil society, media and other actors for change, so that they will be able to work for democracy and human rights and demand greater accountability of those in political power, for example by working for increased freedom of expression.¹³⁵

The regional reform strategy is also interesting to look at when it comes to 'responsibility' in regard to human rights fulfillment. From the text it appears to be a combined responsibility since it mentions an efficient public administration with administrative capacity to implement reforms for closer relations with the EU, with emphasis on fundamental rights, as well as an efficient judicial system which better guarantees the right to a fair trial in accordance with European standards, but also a civil society which provides greater opportunities to exercise democratic influence with focus on increased enjoyment of rights.¹³⁶ This could therefore be interpreted as a shared responsibility.

¹³³ Sida, 2015, p.3.

¹³⁴ Utrikesdepartementet, 2016, unpagged.

¹³⁵ Utrikesdepartementet, 2014, p.17.

¹³⁶ Ibid. p.5.

As Chandhoke discusses, the relationship between state and civil society does not need to be only one of opposition, since CSOs need the state for different purposes.¹³⁷ Particularly when it comes to human rights claims, civil society is heavily dependent on the state for state protection, institutions, resources and management. This is why she claims that the state frames the limits of civil society as well as social initiatives in civil society.¹³⁸ This statement becomes extremely relevant in the Turkish context where, as explained in the Strategy report from 2017, the state of emergency instated after the coup attempt in 2016 severely limits civil society's arena.¹³⁹

Concluding, in the material investigated civil society is expected to play a central role in the promotion and enhancement of human rights. In fact, civil society is targeted as an essential actor for capacity development in order to further contribute to raising awareness about human rights, mobilize citizens to demand their rights and generally implement a human rights-based approach throughout its activity. Despite its central role, the responsibility for the realization of human rights lies within the state.

5.3 Civil society as a promoter of *pluralism* in views, voices and interests

Pluralism and diversity, which are synonyms, are recurrent words throughout the support document. It is relevant to note that the very objective of civil society support is expressed as follows: 'the purpose of the support for civil society organizations is the achievement of a viable and pluralistic civil society in developing countries'.¹⁴⁰

As already mentioned in Section 5.2, the *capacity* area specifically sees the strengthening of CSOs as an important step in the democratization process since there are several organizations in developing countries which lack internal democracy and ability to include target groups with a rights-based approach. In order for civil society to give voice to the people, many organizations and different voices must be heard.¹⁴¹ As we note, this section addresses the problem of representation and the lack of capacity which

¹³⁷ Chandhoke, 2013, p.245.

¹³⁸ Ibid. p.246.

¹³⁹ Sida, 2018, p.2.

¹⁴⁰ Sida, 2015 p.2.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. p.3.

can affect marginalized communities excluding them from conducting a successful work in representing their group as part of civil society. This can also be related to the need to provide a different story from the official one; as Diamond argues, by contradicting it, CSOs make it more difficult to cover up repression and abuses of power.¹⁴² As Section 2.3 emphasizes, the problem of competing ideological narratives is particularly relevant in Turkey where, as both Mühlenhoff and Zihnioğlu explain, there is an ongoing ideological struggle between a Kemalist/secular and a pro-Islam narrative.¹⁴³ Therefore, the need to provide different alternatives to hegemonic narratives becomes urgent.

The forth result under the *capacity* area targets an increased diversity within civil society in developing countries. This is achieved by providing support to a multitude of Swedish organizations, which in turn collaborates with a multitude of organizations in developing countries.¹⁴⁴ This means that plurality is achieved starting from the Swedish actors. Diversity is seen as an objective also when it comes to the issues addressed by the CSOs. In fact, CSOs targeted by strategy are said to have a wide thematic focus, which is why the strategy results have been formulated in broad and general terms. For the same reason, Sida considers that it is not possible to measure expected results in quantitative terms, but qualitative instead.

The second area targeted by the support document is a *favorable social atmosphere* and touches upon, among others, the importance of civil society's diversity:

Promoting a favorable social climate, incl. legislation, for civil society organizations to act as independent and self-sufficient actors, as well as promoting cooperation between civil society and other actors for a sustainable democratic development.¹⁴⁵

According to Sida's definition, a favorable social atmosphere means that there is a legal framework that enables civil society to operate freely, to influence decision making and that donors' support for civil society is effective. In the fourth result of this area, increased diversity within civil society in developing countries is directly addressed.

The expected result is achieved by providing support to a multitude of Swedish organizations within

¹⁴² Diamond, 1994, p.10.

¹⁴³ Mühlenhoff, 2014, p.110. & Zihnioğlu, 2013, p.383.

¹⁴⁴ Sida, 2015, p.5.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. p.6.

the framework system, which in turn collaborates with a multitude of organizations in developing countries. Since it is neither reasonable nor desirable for the framework organizations to work against diversity, it is the strategy as a whole that needs to achieve this goal by collectively contributing to the diversity of civil society within the framework of the budget. Framework organizations should, however, analyze how they contribute, or not contribute to a pluralistic civil society in the countries they work in.¹⁴⁶

As we note, diversity is also included as an indicator for the work evaluation. This approach also characterizes the CSO strategy, which aims to promote the participation of a diversity and breadth of organizations, in relation to its thematic competence, identity and issues.¹⁴⁷

An increased pluralism is among the objectives of the regional results strategy too: 'A more pluralistic civil society with strengthened popular support, which promotes democratic accountability'.¹⁴⁸ Also, the reform strategy claims the importance of including those groups who have been excluded or marginalized. It states the following:

It is also important to strengthen the rights of vulnerable and marginalized groups and to increase recognition of and respect for such groups. Initiatives to increase awareness of and combat discrimination and intolerance are important.¹⁴⁹

Inclusion is a strategy to make all voices heard, particularly important when taking into account Turkish civil society's diversity. As we notice, the importance and relevance of pluralism within civil society is very much celebrated throughout the empirical material, in accordance with previous research. According to Diamond:

...the more pluralistic civil society can become without fragmenting, the more democracy will benefit. Some degree of pluralism is necessary by definition for civil society. Pluralism helps groups in civil society survive and encourages them to learn to cooperate and negotiate with one another.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. p.5

¹⁴⁷ Utrikesdepartementet, 2016, unpaget.

¹⁴⁸ Utrikesdepartementet, 2014, p.5.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. p.17.

¹⁵⁰ Diamond, 1994, p.12.

He also argues that pluralism within a given sector such as labor or human rights makes that sector makes it less vulnerable.¹⁵¹ Mercer agrees that pluralizing the institutional arena helps more voices and interests to be heard and prevents polarization within society,¹⁵² something which Turkey is specifically suffering from.¹⁵³ Moreover, Diamond sees a wide thematic perspective within civil society as a possibility to associate people in ‘a modern type of citizenship that transcends historic divisions’,¹⁵⁴ setting aside religious or ethnic distinctions. This is also a reflection which is very relevant in the Turkish context, since as the Strategy report from 2017 highlights, the political polarization in the country along several lines such as political, religious and ethnic strongly affects civil society. In particular the report argues that ‘the emergence of several so-called GONGOs in Turkish civil society in the past years is another factor that is affecting the landscape’.¹⁵⁵

Summarizing, pluralism and diversity are mentioned as central objectives to be achieved by civil society organizations in the material investigated. Pluralism is expected to counter-balance social polarization and give voices to the social, ethnic and religious groups who traditionally have been marginalized.

5.4 Civil society as a disseminator of information and a forum for dialogue

In the support material within the result area targeting *capacity*, we can see that civil society is considered as a crucial actor for the spread of information, both regarding human rights, the international system and democratic processes. Therefore, it is considered an important target for capacity building, since it will, in turn, increase the capacity and knowledge of their activities’ targets.

Diamond is well aware of this function and argues that civil society encompasses the ‘ideological marketplace’ as well as the flow of information. He refers to, among others, independent mass media, think tanks, publishing houses, theaters and artistic

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Mercer, 2002, p.8.

¹⁵³ Center for American Progress, Istanbul Policy Center, and Istituto Affari Internazionali, 2017, p.22.

¹⁵⁴ Diamond, 1994, p.9.

¹⁵⁵ Sida, 2018, p.10.

networks.¹⁵⁶ He also argues that ‘a vigorous civil society widely disseminates information, thus aiding citizens in the collective pursuit and defense of their interests and values’.¹⁵⁷ Without being well-informed civil society cannot be effective in contesting government policies or defending interests.

In accordance, the support document’s second result within the capacity area refers to the people targeted by the CSOs and sees CSOs as important actors in contributing to the fact that people living in poverty have increased awareness, commitment and knowledge to work with democracy and human rights. By increasing their knowledge, the goal is to increase their involvement and provoke changes about their willingness to actively participate in democratic processes and influencing decision makers.¹⁵⁸ The fifth and final result within the *capacity* area focus on increased understanding and commitment to global development and sustainability issues affecting people living in poverty and strengthened advocacy work for this towards decision makers.¹⁵⁹

Civil society as a forum for dialogue is also a central idea throughout the documents, and partnerships within civil society but also with other actors are considered as one of the necessary conditions for a sustainable democratic development.¹⁶⁰ This is closely connected to the spread of information since dialogue is described by Ketola to be ‘a two-way dissemination of information’.¹⁶¹

In regard to partnerships, Sida argues that there is a need for increased cooperation both within civil society and between civil society and other actors. As pointed out in a recent study commissioned by EBA, civil society is not uncommonly dominated by actors who rather contribute to anti-democratic development by fighting conflicts, both in civil society and between civil society and the state. In those cases, support is also needed for bridge builders.¹⁶² The CSO strategy also recommends that more focus should be placed on creating arenas and processes for dialogue between civil society organizations in partner countries to strengthen civil society in itself rather than

¹⁵⁶ Diamond, 1994, p.6.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. p.10.

¹⁵⁸ Sida, 2015, p.5.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. p.6.

¹⁶¹ Ketola, 2013, p.55.

¹⁶² Sida, 2015, p.6.

individual organizations.¹⁶³ Through increased collaboration internally, civil society can strengthen its knowledge and membership base and improve its prerequisites for impact work. This also applies to civil society cooperation with other actors.¹⁶⁴

The regional results strategy mentions specifically the importance of civil society as a forum for dialogue, debate and communication.¹⁶⁵

5.5 The emergence of civil society as an inherently *positive phenomenon* - or not?

Civil society is, throughout the texts here examined, mentioned as a positive phenomenon, or at least as a phenomenon with a *particular potential* (särskild potential) to contribute positively to democratization processes.¹⁶⁶ The very beginning of the support material states that civil society has a key role in poverty reduction and an important role when it comes to influence the public as well as decision makers and give voice to the people.¹⁶⁷ The following paragraph continues on a positive note, claiming civil society's importance and recognition within a global framework. Sida states that civil society's importance for a sustainable and inclusive development is formally recognized at all levels; national, regional and global through, among other things, the Accra Agenda for Action and Busan Partnership Agreement.¹⁶⁸

This way of addressing civil society is discussed by Boussard, who sees it as problematic when the term is used as one analytical category while based on implicit normative performances about the good qualities and positive effects of civil society.¹⁶⁹ In a similar fashion, Mercer turns her focus specifically on NGOs, but I have argued before that NGOs are a subset of civil society or for some a narrower definition of civil society. She argues that

¹⁶³ Utrikesdepartementet, 2016, unpaget.

¹⁶⁴ Sida, 2015, p.7.

¹⁶⁵ Utrikesdepartementet, 2014, p.9.

¹⁶⁶ Sida, 2015, p.2.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. p.1.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Boussard, 2001, p.1.

much work on NGOs weaves a normative narrative, imagining future scenarios for the potential contribution of NGOs to democratic development given more favourable conditions (or donor funding), which usually involves decrying the forces of neoliberalism that have pushed NGOs towards becoming public service contractors.¹⁷⁰

Mercer further discusses how this normative ideal is a liberal democratic one and that civil society should be conceptualized as more problematic idea of competing interests and voices.¹⁷¹

Although a generally positive approach towards civil society, the support material does shed light on the possibility of an undemocratic development. In the section 2.1.2, Sida states the importance of increased cooperation both within civil society and between civil society and other actors. The reason is that, as pointed out in a recent study commissioned by EBA, civil society is often dominated by actors who rather contribute to anti-democratic development by creating and taking part in conflicts, both in civil society and between civil society and the state. In those cases, support is also needed for bridge builders.¹⁷²

This risk seems to be particularly topical in Turkey. As mentioned in my research overview, Turkish specificity is excellently explained by Keyman and Icduygu through what they call the *boundary problem*. Civil society in Turkey is characterized by numerous CSOs working with many different issues such as human rights, democratization, environment and broader societal visions such as Westernization, Atatürkism, nationalism, and Islamization. For this reason, it functions both as a necessary condition for democratization and a strategic arena for non-democratic forces to voice their essentialist identity claims, being a discursive space.¹⁷³ According to Keyman and Icduygu, the source of the boundary problem is historical in the sense that is it based on the Kemalist civic-republican understanding of the notion of citizenship in Turkey, where the citizen put national identity and public good before difference and individual interest.¹⁷⁴ Therefore, they argue that Turkey is an illuminating case study since the crisis of the old notion of citizenship has given rise to the elevation of civil society. Attributing only positivity to this rise is though problematic. All the previously

¹⁷⁰ Mercer, 2002, p.10.

¹⁷¹ Ibid. p.11.

¹⁷² Sida, 2015, p.6.

¹⁷³ Keyman & Icduygu, 2003, p.221.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. p.231.

excluded identities have started to challenge the idea of monolithic citizenship in Turkey, leading to the social polarization which characterizes the country today.

The CSO strategy is coherent with the positive attitude towards civil society, and argues that:

The shrinking space for civil society in many parts of the world makes it particularly important to stand up for the need for a strong civil society and contribute to its capacity development.¹⁷⁵

As it can be noticed, this sentence argues that civil society support is particularly important due to the global trend in shrinking space for civil society. The regional reform strategy continues on the same line of positivity towards the role civil society can play in the process towards EU membership. The exact words reported in the document are: ‘Civil society is a catalyst for continued development and has the potential to act as a force for change and demand accountability.’¹⁷⁶

Summarizing, the emergence and strengthening of civil society is mainly perceived as a positive phenomenon in the empirical material investigated. Nevertheless, the possibility that this can also imply the strengthening of undemocratic forces is also acknowledged.

5.6 Summary and result

The analysis shows that the three examined Sida-documents clearly show elements which fit into all five categories, which were developed out of previous research in order to understand how civil society’s role is expressed in my empirical material. Sida addresses civil society as a third sphere which is separate from the state and the market, but which is still supposed to exercise functions which are supportive or integrative of the state. Moreover, civil society is framed as key partner in the process towards human rights fulfillment. Despite this, the responsibility for it lies within the state according to Sida.

Thirdly, civil society, in order to contribute positively to the democratic process, is supposed to give voice to a plurality of groups, issues and interests. Diversifying civil

¹⁷⁵ Utrikesdepartementet, 2016, unpaget.

¹⁷⁶ Utrikesdepartementet, 2014, p.17.

society and including groups which traditionally have been marginalized is seen as essential.

Furthermore, civil society has an important function as a disseminator of information, which is why a specific area of the CSO strategy is targeting CSOs' capacity. The expectation is that CSOs, in turn, will develop and strengthen the capacity of their target groups. Civil society's role as a forum for dialogue is mentioned in all three documents; specifically, the importance of bridge builders within civil society is acknowledged. Finally, the emergence and strengthening of civil society is portrayed as an inherently positive phenomenon, even though the possibility of anti-democratic developments is also recognized in the support document, something which we have seen is particularly relevant in the Turkish context.

6 Discussion

My aim with this thesis has been to investigate civil society's role looking at Sida's documents addressing civil society in general and the Turkish case in particular. My guiding question was how civil society's role in democratization processes is expressed in Swedish aid guidelines with specific focus on Turkey. Through the theoretical framework I developed, I was able to identify and systematize five different functions which showed to be central in the material investigated. I am now going to take a step back and reflect upon the working process making some self- reflections.

I would like to start by looking at my categorization matrix from a critical perspective. It was inspired by what can be defined as the 'mainstream research' within the field, which is why I believe it deserves some reflections. First of all, it is important to note that my categorization matrix is a tool to systematize and analyze the material in the clearest way possible. This said, the different categories and its content can sometimes overlap, since aspects such as the promotion of human rights are closely linked to, for instance, a pluralistic civil society or to civil society as a forum for dialogue. I am therefore aware of the fact that some parts of the analysis could fit into two or more categories.

Furthermore, as I have already shortly mentioned, the idea of civil society as a third sector is not completely unproblematic. As we have seen in the analysis chapter, Sida seems to expect that CSOs offer community services when the state fails to do so, and this is a function hardly criticized by Mercer. According to her, the forces of neoliberalism are guilty for pushing CSOs to become public service contractors.¹⁷⁷ Mühlenhoff also occupies a similar position, arguing that the third sector functions like the market but has also tasks formerly intrinsic to the state. She also links this tendency to the underlying neo-liberal ideology where the concept of a third sector is based on the assumption that the responsibilities of the state need to be reduced and privatized.¹⁷⁸ This implies increased responsibility for CSOs.

¹⁷⁷ Mercer, 2002, p.11.

¹⁷⁸ Mühlenhoff, 2014, p.104.

Also, civil society's separation from party politics is another aspect worth reflecting on. Voices like those of Ottaway and Carothers talk about 'the mirage of apolitical engagement', arguing that donors assume that by fostering nonpartisan civic advocacy they can affect the political development of recipient countries without intervening in politics.¹⁷⁹ Because of the aforementioned competing ideological narratives within Turkish civil society, this critic deserves serious evaluation.

Civil society seen as a disseminator of information is also criticized. As we have observed in the analysis of the empirical material, capacity building is framed as a central objective of civil society support. Mühlehoff sees capacity building as a transfer of responsibility for democratization to the domestic civil society. Furthermore, she argues that capacity building aims also to transform civil society actors into economic actors which have to be efficient in terms of costs, self-responsible and accountable, which goes back to the critique of neoliberal democracies mentioned before.¹⁸⁰ Despite these critical voices, my categories still reflect civil society's key functions and are in line with the empirical material.

Among the different expectations I had for my work, there was a desire to engage with and gain a deeper understanding of the local context. The truth is that aid policies and development strategies are not the best way to do that, since they are always formulated in a very generalizing fashion. This said, I am not disappointed. Analysing the documents which contain the guidelines for Sida's operations offered me the possibility to understand the difficulties and the contradictions between civil society support's ambitions and the actual restraints. These can be found both in the reality of the local context and the difficulties related to governmental aid which is, for obvious reasons, very demanding when it comes to financial reporting and aid effectiveness.

During the preparation phase as well as during the writing process I constantly got reminded of how broad, complex and context-specific this issue of civil society is and from how many different angles it can be framed and analysed. I mentioned earlier in my method chapter that using idea analysis as methodological approach would have also been interesting since the focus would have shifted towards the underlying political ideas in Sweden's aid policies. The literature review already showed a trend towards criticizing

¹⁷⁹ Carothers & Ottaway, 2000, p.296.

¹⁸⁰ Mühlehoff, 2014, p.107.

the many neo-liberal assumptions that characterize aid policies which push for EU accession.

Furthermore, I already explained that not including the Changed strategy for special democratic support through Swedish party-linked organizations 2016-2020 (*Ändrad strategi för särskilt demokratistöd genom svenska partianknutna organisationer 2016-2020*) was a conscious choice I made in accordance with my purpose not to focus on the support for democratic multi-party systems abroad, but more generally on civil society. Nevertheless, as previously discussed, I consider this to be a relevant component for the understanding of the full picture of Swedish civil society support in Turkey and definitely an interesting starting point for either another study or a supplement to this one.

Another idea for further research on the issue, which was constantly present in my mind during my work, is based on the necessity to talk with Turkish civil society representatives currently benefitting from Swedish aid, since I am sure that would add interesting perspectives to the discussion. Explore and problematize policies at a more abstract level is important but look at how civil society support works in practice is even more crucial.

Reflecting upon my contribution to the research, my hope is to have contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of Sida's ideas about civil society and its various roles and at the same time to a contextualized understanding of the concept through the Turkish civil society as a case. Looking back at Sida's own definition of civil society in Section 4.3, we could say that it reflects the image of civil society which I have explored in my empirical material. Moreover, my analysis has helped me to question and problematize the mainstream ideas about civil society in a way that I did not expect when I first started reading my empirical material. This in turn gave rise to questions about civil society support *per se* and its effectivity.

The current negative development in Turkey which is confirmed by the strategy report from 2017, makes it necessary to evaluate and discuss civil society support continuously due to the fast-changing situation. Understanding it theoretically and framing it within previous research, as well as comparing the Turkish case to other geographical experiences might be a step in this direction. We could also start reflecting on which kind of sustainable and democratic development can be achieved by targeting civil society and not dialoguing with the state. However, the current political situation in Turkey poses challenges which are not to underestimate, where alleviating civil society's

burden in times of shrinking civil space could be seen as a short-term objective in a much broader and long-term strategy.¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹ I would like to thank my supervisor Lina Sturfelt for her patient and insightful guidance.

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