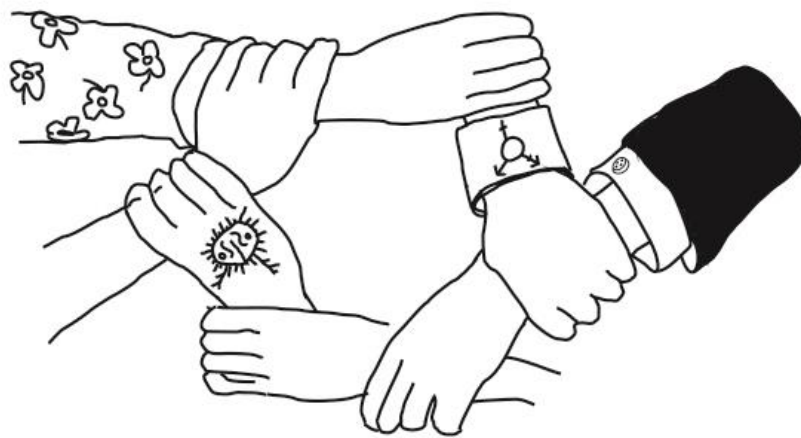


## Research Project Report “Comparing women’s movements in different cities in Turkey”

### III.3.B. Examples of women’s coalitions taken from research fields

Charlotte Binder

September 2017



### III.3.B. Examples of women’s coalitions taken from research fields

To date, hardly any theoretical or empirical research has been conducted in the German-speaking area on the concepts of “coalition” or “coalition policies” or on coalition practices (Leidinger, 2011: 283–284). In an article, Leidinger summarises the approaches to defining the concept of coalition taken from Raschke (1985), Levi and Murphy (2006) and Hildebrandt (2007) and emphasises in particular the “processuality of coalitions” (Leidinger, 2011: 287). While Raschke (cited by Leidinger, 2011: 285) describes coalitions as a “coordinated cooperation of independent but converging political forces”, Levi and Murphy cite “cooperation, variety, potentiality, resource allocation/connection, belongingness and change as well as [...] conflict solving” and common interests as crucial criteria for achieving “cooperative arrangements” (Leidinger, 2011: 286).

Acar and Altunok (2009) made the following remarks by referring to the intersectionality concept, which was developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the research field in Turkey:

Interactions between social movements can take place in different forms, ranging from hostility to coalition. While alliances and coalitions do not require ideological agreements, and rely on mutual interests, they are expected to be more successful in achieving policy goals.

As a result of the analysis of the thematically relevant literature, such as the dissertation by Charlotte Binder “Coalition Politics in the Frame of International Women's Day in Berlin and Istanbul”, the following criteria for platforms were identified:<sup>1</sup>

- Joint activity planning
- Formulation of shared interests
- Assembly of actors who pursue different identity policies with regard to

---

<sup>1</sup> Certain structures such as “women’s assemblies” (*kadın meclisi*) (e.g. the Socialist Women’s Assemblies) and “women’s initiatives” (*kadın girişimi*) (e.g. the Women’s Initiative for Peace) are not defined as platforms in the light of these criteria.

heterogeneous categories of differences and political-ideological orientations

- Autonomy of the coalition partners
- Ability to self-identify and self-understanding as a coalition

On this basis, 12 women’s platforms<sup>2</sup> were identified in the four research regions during the research period, which have been characterised below based on the empirical material collected in each region regarding the platform’s executive responsibility, their history and origins, organisational structure and means of communication, topics and activities, as well as their self-image, goals, the discussions they engage in and the capacity to collaborate. These 12 platforms are described and compared to each other below.<sup>3</sup> This highlighted the importance of the region as an analysis category in the research of women’s coalitions.

### 1.1 Women’s platforms in Ankara

In the light of 20 expert interviews conducted in the city in 2014, three women’s platforms were identified:

#### *Ankara Women’s Platform (Ankara Kadın Platformu)*

At the time of the research, Ankara Women’s Platform consisted of union members, socialists, politicians, Kurdish individuals, students, feminists and LGBTI activists. In her interview, İlknur Üstün of the Ankara Women’s Platform explained that the platform mostly consisted of women’s organisations and feminist formations, during its years of foundation in mid-2000s. By 2014, however, the platform was influenced by women involved in different

---

<sup>2</sup> Platforms were identified at national level that dealt with, among other things, the topics of violence (such as the Women’s Platform Against Sexual Violence (*Cinsel Şiddete Karşı Kadın Platformu*), Stop the Violence Platform (*Şiddete Son Platformu*), Fight against Violence Platform (*Şiddetle Mücadele Platformu*) and We will Stop Femicides (*Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platformu*)), body politics (Abortion is Woman’s Right and Decision Platform (*Kürtaj Haktır Karar Kadınların Platformu*)) and work (Women’s Labour Platform (*Kadın Emeği Platformu*)).

<sup>3</sup> The range in the quality and quantity of empirical material for each platform resulted in differences in their descriptions, which were complemented with internet research where necessary. Within these descriptions, research gaps are also visible, which should be examined in follow-up studies. For more information on the categorisation of women’s platforms in each research region, see the description of the research fields in Text II.

political parties and mixed-gender organisations, such as the Confederation of Public Workers' Unions (KESK) (Üstün, 2014: 34; Conversation with AFK activists, 2014). For instance, one interviewee (Kalkan, 2014: 48) mentioned that Aylin Nazlıaka participated in the platform, who was a serving deputy of the Republican People’s Party (CHP) at the time of the research. Under the common slogan “We don’t bow down to male domination, the State, the capital — we resist!”, more than 40 organisations participated in the demonstration on 8 March 2014. Even women from the outskirts of Ankara who did not have an academic background were mobilised for this demonstration (Binder, 2014). The manifesto was read both in Turkish and Kurdish in this demonstration. This is the evidence of both the participation of Kurdish activists in the coalition and the recognition of Turkey’s ethnic diversity by the participants.<sup>4</sup>

Hatice Kapusuz Kütküt (2014: 33) of the Association for Supporting Women Candidates (KA.DER) describes the Women’s Platform in Ankara as a structure to which almost all women’s organisations in Ankara belong, regardless of their political or ideological orientation. For Gülsen Ülker (2014: 26) of the Women’s Solidarity Foundation (KDV), this platform is a place where women carry out activities not only as members of an organisation but also as individuals. In addition to the platform’s annual march on International Women’s Day (8 March) and on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (25 November), the platform also provided support in the legal processes at the time of the research. By developing specific campaigns, the platform can react to current political events, such as the debate on the abortion law, femicides or the consequences of the war that women in Syria and Iraq suffer. These activities are planned at irregular meetings and coordinated via a group e-mail list (Hocaoğulları, 2014: 43). As the platform’s activities are reported in the media, Pelin Kalkan (2014: 48) estimated the external impact of the platform, which also acts as a media contact, to be high.

Kalkan (2014: 19, 25, 48), who is active both in Ankara Feminist Collective and the Women’s Platform, highlighted the level of cooperation between these two coalitions, as well as the

---

<sup>4</sup>Text III.3.A. focuses on the how controversial is “ethnicity” among the actors of women’s movements in Turkey.

controversies. While feminist-oriented activists criticise, among other things, the politics of representation of activists engaged in mixed-gender organisations, those persons in turn describe the feminists as “bourgeois” as they refused to allow cis men to participate in the march. Üstün (2014: 34) stresses that, in this context, the language used and the results achieved differ depending on how much influence feminist activists exert on a given platform. Despite the numerical majority of the women from mixed-gender organisations within the platform, the feminist influence is, nevertheless, still clear. For example, the slogans for the 8 March demonstrations in 2014 were developed by feminists, who also led the demonstration, together with LGBTI activists (Conversation with AFK activists, 2014).

While Seçin Tuncel (2014: 56) of KAOS GL emphasised how meaningful even the symbolic participation of an LGBTI in 8 March demonstration was, she also criticised the dominant attitudes towards the language that was used while expressing LGBTI-related demands in the meeting of Feminist Collective that took place on 22 March 2014 (Meeting of AFK, 22 March 2014). However, the feminists also criticised the fact that the LGBTI activists did not accept their critique, but rather accused the feminists of representing a conservative opinion with regard to gender.<sup>5</sup>

According to Kalkan (2014: 48), the platform is internally “controversial” and “disputed” (*tartışmalı [...] kavgalı*) owing to the heterogeneous nature of its management. This diversity also provides an opportunity, however, to learn about political agency in cooperation with a variety of activists.

Despite the controversies within the platform, such as on questions of organisational structure and gender, Sevinç Hocaogulları (2014: 41) from the women’s section of the mixed-gender organisation Halkevci Women expressed the view that the Ankara Women’s Coalition possessed a greater continuity of contact and mobilisation potential in comparison with similar coalitions in the other provinces of Turkey: “If a call is made, there is no reason for women’s organisations not to come together.” Furthermore, activists engaged in the Ankara

---

<sup>5</sup> For an analysis of the diverse ways in which women’s and gender political activists in Turkey view gender, see Text III.1.A.

Feminist Collective consider the Ankara Women’s Platform to be more stable than, for example, the 8 March Women’s Platform in Istanbul (Conversation with AFK activists, 2014).<sup>6</sup> Even the description of the coalition as the “Women’s Platform” shows to the importance of women and/ or gender category as a common ground and a for its creation.

### ***Ankara Feminist Collective (Ankara Feminist Kolektif)***

During the research period, the members of the Ankara Feminist Collective consisted of feminists from the Socialist Feminist Collective and of independent feminists. Activists described the collective as a shared space for women from diverse backgrounds, which explicitly included trans women. According to the activists from the group, although Kurdish activists contributed to the collective, there were hardly any participants from mixed-gender organisations (Conversation with AFK activists, 2014).

The collective was founded in 2012 by “active and political persons with a feminist statement” (*hareketli, politik, feminist söyleme sahip kişiler*) (Özkazaç, 2014: 44). The Socialist Feminist Collective called the first meeting in order to found a structure in Ankara comparable to the Feminist Collective Istanbul, which 80 to 100 women attended (Conversation with AFK activists, 2014). Pelin Kalkan (2014: 3) described the reasoning for creating the collective:

As feminists, we experience a fragmentation in Ankara. [...] an organised attitude is necessary, yes, there are women’s structures, [...] there are coalitions and such, however something is missing; if there is no structure that enables us to carry out joint activities, [...] we need to form a structure [whose aspects are] listed by all of us after long discussions; if I had to define it [...] right now, [only] by [reflecting] on our past experiences and lessons (2014: 3).

---

<sup>6</sup> For an analytical description of the 8 March Women’s Platform and the Feminist Collective in Istanbul, see Binder (2016).

Kalkan refers in her statement to feminist structures<sup>7</sup> that have existed in Ankara since the 1980s, the historical development of which she reflected upon critically. In the 2000s, feminist-oriented formations such as Feminists from Ankara (*Ankaralı Feministler*) and FeministBiz came into existence, which can be described as the predecessors of the Ankara Feminist Collective.

Following the call to found the collective, discussions regarding a suitable organisational structure for the Ankara Feminist Collective were held for a year. Meanwhile, financial independence/ autonomy was agreed upon. The monthly meetings which, at the time of the research, were attended by only 20 to 30 women were held in the office of Women’s Solidarity Foundation (KDV) or in various alternative cafés. Activists referred, however, to the collective’s broad e-mailing list, which enabled it to reach more women, in addition to the use of social media, such as internet blogs, Facebook and Twitter. The feminist potential in Ankara was also made visible through the active participation of feminist-oriented women in the Gezi protests held in 2013 in Ankara (Kalkan, 2014: 3; Conversation with AFK activists, 2014).

Besides condemning violence against women, in particular (sexual) abuse and rape, the Feminist Collective also criticises sexism, homophobia and transphobia, in addition to the women’s and gender policies of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). Besides the groups working on feminist agendas, literature and the archive, the collective also conducts workshops in cooperation with women from the USA and Europe about web design, English and Wen-Do.<sup>8</sup> The yearly organisation of the Feminist 8 March Night March (*8 Mart Feminist Gece Eylemi*) on International Women’s Day, as well as the monthly organisation of sit-ins against male violence and femicides at the centrally-located Güvenpark, were the focus of the collective’s activities in 2014.<sup>9</sup> These activities, during which activists read out the names

<sup>7</sup> The feminist-oriented organisations in Ankara referred to during the interviews are the Women’s Solidarity Foundation (KDV), the Ankara Socialist Feminist Collective, the feminist Ayizi Publications and the feminist magazine ‘*Amargi*’. The main organisations to represent queer-feminist oriented feminism are the LGBTI organisation KAOS GL and the Women’s Studies Center at Ankara University. Here the fragmentation and the academic character of the feminist movement in Ankara becomes visible, which, in addition to Istanbul, has played a leading role since the 1980s.

<sup>8</sup> Wen-Do, a form of self-defence and self-assertion for women and girls, emerged in the 1970s in Canada.

<sup>9</sup> Kalkan (2014: 9) also describes the booklet regarding violence against women which was distributed as a part

of murdered women and issue press statements, are inspired by the activities of the so-called Saturday Mothers<sup>10</sup>, who have organised a sit-in every Saturday in Istanbul since 1995 in order to commemorate their missing relatives and to demand an official explanation from the government.

During the discussion, an AFK activist stated that the collective must be understood as a feminist network and not as an organisation. The collective provided a base for exchange between women and for the development of feminist politics. She also stressed that women, as feminists, participated individually in the collective and, therefore, rejected the policy of representation used by collectives such as the Ankara Women’s Platform. Owing to the individualistic approach adopted by the collective and diverse living realities experienced by women, the activists in the collective also did not have a uniform understanding of feminism. However, according to the activist, there were common feminist practices that were considered at the collective’s meetings in order to avoid the emergence of hierarchies based on one’s age/generation, among other things (Conversation with AFK activists, 2014).<sup>11</sup>

An activist (Anonymous, 2014: 41) from the Socialist Feminist Collective cited communication and the organisation of shared activities as the central functions of the Feminist Collective: “a platform in which all feminists — despite their individual differences — can express themselves and carry out shared actions”. The collective aims to strengthen the feminist orientation of women who are active both independently and in mixed-gender organisations (Meeting of the AFK, 22 March 2014). Although Kalkan also aspires to achieve the dissemination of feminist ideology in mixed gender organisations, at the same time she warned of the possible loss of radicalism of the feminist movement if women mix their political or ideological orientations, for instance, in an 8 March activity organised by the collective. For Kalkan (2014: 9), the platform should contribute to feminist politics, strengthen the feminist discourse in Ankara and organise activities in order to transform

---

of 25 November activities, especially in Adana province.

<sup>10</sup> The ‘Saturday Mothers’ were, in turn, inspired by the Mothers of *Plaza de Mayo* in Buenos Aires. This also reflects the transnational dimension of social protest.

<sup>11</sup> The activist provided examples of feminist practices such as allowing each other to speak during discussions, conducting regular feedback sessions and making all women’s and gender political activities optional rather than obligatory.



social mentality as a whole.

The unwanted participation of men in the 8 March activities organised by the Feminist Collective was also discussed at the meeting of the Ankara Feminist Collective held on 22 March 2014. Both left- and queer-oriented men and LGBTI activists levelled accusations (of sexism) against feminists who ensured that no cis men participated in the Women’s Platform march or the night march held on 8 March. Feminist-oriented activists agreed that, given the confrontation on the issue, the feminist and LGBTI movements should resume their dialogue on the subject of gender. Their feminism can develop only if they succeed in integrating trans-feminism — or rather trans-feminists — into the Feminist Collective (Meeting of AFK, 22 March 2014). In order to ensure that participants continued to attend meetings and activities and to strengthen the stability of the alliance, participants at the meeting agreed to introduce regular “feminist conversations” (*feminist sohbet*). In this way students and young women could also be reached and the relationship between the academy and the feminists could be reinforced.

The financially precarious state of the collective, and the resulting failure to provide a common space for meetings and for storing records of the collective’s activities, was raised by several AFK activists (Kalkan, 2014: 9; Conversation with AFK activists, 2014). Furthermore, owing to the individualist approach of feminism, some individual activists bore too much responsibility for the collective. In addition to placing too great a burden on certain individuals, this could also lead to the formation of hierarchical structures. In order to solve this problem, a periodical “shift in the division of labour (rotation) for action and activities” was adopted at the meeting of Ankara Feminist Collective held on 22 March 2014. This constructive method of handling the organisation of the collective, in addition to the participants’ readiness to further develop the central concepts of political agency, may explain the stability of Ankara’s feminist structures.

#### *(Ankara) Women’s Coalition ((Ankara) Kadın Koalisyonu)*

At the time of research, the (Ankara) Women’s Coalition consisted of around 70 women and

LGBTI organisations (Kapusuz Kütküt, 2014: 3).<sup>12</sup>

İlknur Üstün (2014: 18), the coordinator of the Women’s Coalition, describes it as “an organisation platform” (*örgütlenme platformu*) for independent women’s organisations. During the 2002 elections, Üstün (2014: 18), who was head of the Association for Supporting Women Candidates, (KA.DER) Ankara at the time, called for the foundation of the coalition: “the process of founding the Women’s Coalition started with a call I sent out to women’s organisations and to women working on this subject [...] whom we trusted to work alongside us”.

Taking into account the horizontal organisational method and the prohibition on discrimination, common topics such as legislation, the water supply and international aspects are discussed alongside the topic of women’s political participation at the annual evaluation meeting and in the jointly developed annual plan (Üstün, 2014: 12).<sup>13</sup>

The Women’s Coalition, which meets at the office of the feminist magazine *Amargi* in Ankara, was operating at both regional and national level at the time of research. The Women’s Coalition works with human rights activists in each region in order to implement a “gender equality perspective” (*toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği perspektifi*) within those groups (Üstün, 2014: 12). The coalition therefore works in close cooperation with the Human Rights Joint Platform (*İnsan Hakları Ortak Platformu*).

The Women’s Coalition was named as a coalition partner in all four research regions in this study. For instance, an interviewee in the Aegean region reported that the Women’s Coalition carried out activities in the province of Muğla (Erozan & Karslı, 2015: 41). Nilüfer Akgün, who is active in the Black Sea Women’s Solidarity Association (KARKADDER) in Trabzon, also mentioned that the Women’s Coalition was a coalition partner (Akgün, 2015: Questionnaire). Kurdish activists Zin and Emek (2015: 48) from Diyarbakır described

<sup>12</sup> A magazine reports, conversely, that the coalition consisted of around 110 member-organisations ([http://kazete.com.tr/haber/kadin-koalisyonu-cumartesi-toplaniyor\\_42359](http://kazete.com.tr/haber/kadin-koalisyonu-cumartesi-toplaniyor_42359)). For an overview of the member organisations, principles and goals of the Women’s Coalition, see its official website: <http://kadinkoalisyonu.org>.

<sup>13</sup> <http://ozgur-gundem.com/haber/147792/kadin-koalisyonu-ankarada-toplandi>

themselves as members: “women from all over Turkey are in the Women’s Coalition, we collaborate -because we are all a part of it-, [and we do so] not [merely] partially.”

According to Üstün (2014: 12), given that the goal of equal political participation for women cannot be achieved by one organisation or women’s group alone, a “union of forces” (*güç birliği*) must be established, in particular at the political level, between Kurdish, religious–conservative, Kemalist and feminist-oriented women, as well as LGBTI individuals. Üstün points out that not all member organisations of the Women’s Coalition would describe themselves as feminist. Therefore, feminist practices such as the rejection of hierarchy and supremacy, as well as the spirited culture of discussion among the participants are crucial (Üstün, 2014: 12). These practices are also referred to as the “working principles of the coalition” (*koalisyonun çalışma ilkeleri*) on the coalition’s website, alongside a reference to its independence from all political structures and its recognition of different identities.

Despite their diverse orientations and different areas of work, since 2002 the women’s organisations involved in the coalition have pursued the common goal of ensuring female political and social participation. Self-reflection is of central importance to the Women’s Coalition (Üstün, 2014: 12): “Until now, [the coalition] has shaped itself, too, by self-questioning, discussing and tackling the current political issues in the country. Moreover, it has also tried to intervene in the existing political structure.”

According to Hatice Kapusuz Kütküt (2014: 3) from Association for Supporting Women Candidates (KA.DER) from Ankara, the Women’s Coalition follows a fundamental women’s agenda and tries to increase solidarity between various women’s organisations by bringing them together. The Women’s Coalition thereby aims, according to the description on its website, to increase female participation in all social, economic and political spheres and to combat the trend of contemporary politics based on power and violence and nourished by discrimination, with the aim of replacing it with egalitarian, fair political practices. The Women’s Coalition sees itself as “a transformation movement” (*bir dönüşüm hareketi*) for social and political institutions such as the family, the economy, civil society, political parties

and the State.<sup>14</sup>

Although the internal discussions of the Women’s Coalition could not be observed, it could be said to be stable based on the information available concerning how long it has existed for and how many of its members it has retained. The relative stability of the platform may lie in the fact that, among other things, it uses an NGO-based organisational method with defined working principles and goals and a paid coordinator’s position.

## 1.2 Women’s coalitions in Diyarbakır

In Diyarbakır, where nine expert interviews were conducted in 2015, one women’s coalition could be identified.<sup>15</sup>

### *Free Women Congress (Kongreya Jinên Azad)*

Free Women Congress (KJA) was founded in 2015 (Aktaş, 2015: 2). According to Sara Aktaş, the first independent women’s organisations emerged in the 1990s, such as the *Dicle* Women’s Cultural Centre and the Free Woman Association. In 2003, the Democratic Free Women’s Movement (DÖKH) was established as an “umbrella organisation” (*çatı örgütü*) for activists of the Kurdish Women’s Movement. According to Aktaş, the dynamism of DÖKH was made evident in particular at its annual conferences, in the preparation of annual plans and the use of common decision-making mechanisms and discussion practices. Moreover, this alliance succeeded, from the perspective of Kurdish women, “in transforming itself into an identity whose strength and representativeness [...] were recognised both internationally and [...] among women’s organisations in Turkey” (Aktaş, 2015: 2).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> <http://kadinkoalisyonu.org/biz-kimiz-2/>.

<sup>15</sup> The Women’s Platform Diyarbakır/Amed (*Diyarbakır/Amed Kadın Platformu*), consisting of activists from the Kurdish women’s movement, LGBTI activists and representatives of mixed-gender parties and organisations, held their women’s demonstration in Diyarbakır on 8 March 2014 (Polatdemir, 2014). As these groups united only for this demonstration, the platform did not meet the criteria of an alliance and has therefore not been described here.

<sup>16</sup> As noted in Text III.2.A., this view of the Kurdish Women’s Movement is shared by several women’s and gender political activists in Turkey.

A “congress model” (*kongre modeli*) was developed over a year-long discussion process in order to develop an organisational structure in which various women would be able to express themselves, as well as to promote institutionalisation. The congress, formed of a delegation, an assembly, an executive board and a ten-person coordinating body, ensures the equal participation of representatives from all segments of society, all religions, all peoples, all cultures, all world views and all parties (Aktaş, 2015: 2). Quotas were introduced to ensure adequate representation of women from specific city districts (10%) and from women’s organisations (5%) (Alataş, 2015: 42). Aktaş stressed that the congress was organised across “Kurdistan” and therefore no independent women’s movement existed in Diyarbakır, which she described as the centre of the congress (Aktaş, 2015: 23–25).

In addition to women’s committees from mixed-gender organisations such as the Democratic Peoples’ Party (HDP), most women’s organisations in Diyarbakır take part in the Free Woman Congress. Aras (Aras, 2015: 2) described her Women’s Academy Association as “a component of the women’s movement which became a congress” (*kongreleşen kadın hareketinin bir bileşeni*), noting that it was close to the “Kurdish freedom movement”. According to Alataş (2015: 23), the perspectives and activities of each women’s organisation are integrated into the alliance, in which the representatives also hold responsibilities, such as in the form of administrative functions within the congress. Alataş (2015: 44–46) nonetheless also emphasised the independence of the women’s organisations from the coalition:

We are in the KJA as women’s centre; if we want to give out a press statement, we don’t need permission from the KJA [...] We are there in order to represent ourselves too, but the KJA doesn’t tell us what to do from above. [...] However, when we do give out a statement, we say: “a KJA Women’s Institutions member”.

Aktaş cited violence against women, femicide, female political participation, peace and the transnational events held on 8 March and 25 November as the central topics of the KJA, which are consistent among south-eastern provinces of Turkey. For instance, petitions such as “No to Slaughtering Women!” (*kadın kırımına hayır!*) or “Our Honour is our Freedom!” (*namusumuz özgürlüğümüzdür!*) have been organised in response to these issues, which are

communicated via text messages and e-mail as well as through each organisation’s representatives in the KJA (Alataş, 2015: 42; Aktaş, 2015: 2). Joint efforts to establish women’s centres and promote the independent organisation of women are also important to achieving the political goals of the KJA (Aktaş, 2015: 2, 17).

Aktaş described the establishment of the co-chair system<sup>17</sup> and the introduction of a 40% quota in political and administrative area as two successes achieved by the Kurdish Women’s Movement. She also emphasised the considerable influence of the Democratic Free Women’s Movement (DÖKH) on the political decision-making process. The establishment of women’s academies and the development of the “women’s science” *jineoloji* are central to the development of academic awareness in Kurdish territories. (Aktaş, 2015: 2).

Aktaş (2015: 2) expressed the view that “the organisation of women [has] now reached a qualitative peak in Kurdistan [...] not only from the perspective of the Kurdish women, [but rather] from the perspective of all the peoples, cultures, faiths, world views [and] social groups living in Turkey and Kurdistan.” According to Aktaş (2015: 23), no separate women’s organisation or movement therefore exists outside the alliance in Diyarbakır. During the interview, Mukaddes Alataş (2015: 25) from Kardelen Women’s Centre described the Free Women Congress as a structure in relation to which all other women’s and gender political organisations exist, including her own women’s centre.<sup>18</sup>

Dilan Çiçek (Çiçek & Gülen, 2015: 5, 14) from the KESKESOR LGBT Formation described DÖKH — the forerunner of the KJA — as dominant and representative of the Kurdish movement. The LGBTI activist criticised the fact that its activists were more concerned with achieving ethnic self-determination than fighting for women’s and gender policies.<sup>19</sup> However, Alataş (2015: 13), a female Kurdish activist, expressed the view that she was unable to carry out any

<sup>17</sup> This term describes the joint occupation of important offices in a political party by a woman and a man, in this case in the Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP).

<sup>18</sup> Conversely, the KA-MER Foundation, founded by Nebahat Akkoç in 1997 in Diyarbakır, views itself as an autonomous feminist organisation operating in southeast Turkey — i.e. independent both from both men and mixed-gender organisations — and is not a member of the KJA (<http://www.boell.de/de/2014/12/09/anne-klein-frauenpreis-2015-geht-nebahat-akkoc-aus-der-tuerkei>).

<sup>19</sup> On the controversy around “ethnicity” among women’s and gender political activists in Turkey, see Text III.3.A.

activities focusing on women’s and gender policies without being involved in “Kurdish fight for freedom” at the same time.<sup>20</sup> According to Al-Rebholz (2013: 262), the concept of feminism includes “for Kurdish feminists not only gender-specific women’s politics” but considers “ethnic, class and race-specific differences among women along other lines of oppression”. The Kurdish Women’s Movement always criticises racist and Turkish nationalist trends in the government and in society, in addition to the ethnocentric tendencies of “Turkish feminism”.

Both Aktaş (2015: 2) and Alataş (2015: 5, 42) are convinced that the establishment of an “authentic and autonomous organisation” (*özgün ve özerk bir örgütlenme*) with common decision-making processes within the newly founded congress is essential to the success of women’s struggle: “We should unite our forces, we should organise around this perspective”.

The implementation of a suitable organisational method may play a role in ensuring the stability of the collaboration. As noted by Çiçek, the KJA can also be seen as an umbrella organisation for the Kurdish Women’s Movement that relates particularly to one ethnic identity, which therefore calls into question its existence as an alliance with autonomous partners with diverse political and ideological orientations.

### 1.3 Women’s coalitions in the Aegean Region

In Denizli and Muğla, in which a total of 20 expert interviews were carried out in 2015, three local women’s coalitions and one regionally active women’s coalition were identified, which will be presented below.

#### *Denizli Women’s Solidarity Platform (Denizli Kadın Dayanışma Platformu)*

The platform was founded by activists in 2007 for the purpose of “making the voices and demands of women in Denizli heard” (*Denizli’de kadınların sözlerinin ve taleplerinin duyurulması*) and establishing a sense of unity in the women’s movement, in particular on the

<sup>20</sup> For additional descriptions of the Kurdish Women’s Movement by both external and internal commentators, see Text III.2.A.

topics of violence and exploitation.<sup>21</sup> According to an activist who wished to remain anonymous (Anonymous, 2015: 6–10), the platform became livelier with the rise of the country-wide women’s movement over the past decade. The platform follows the women’s movements in Turkey and worldwide, as well as current social and political developments, and has given the women’s movement in Denizli their own sense of drive and direction in recent years. Contrary to when it first started out, at the time of research the platform consisted of a minority of independent women and a majority of women who were active in mixed-gender, left-oriented organisations such as the Freedom and Solidarity Party (ÖDP) or the Communist Party of Turkey (TKP).

According to the activist (ibid: 15), who was engaged both in the platform and in the mixed-gender Socialist Democracy Party (SDP), “we act together ‘just like a family’, [...] our minds all work in the same direction”, despite the fact that the activists are women involved in mixed-gender groups.

She (ibid: 16) stressed in the interview that the activists from the independent Denizli Women’s Solidarity Platform set aside the political identity of their respective organisations and adopted the values of the women’s movement and the feminist movement. Women’s and gender political activities — referred to by the activist as “anonymous actions” (*isimsiz eylemlilikler*) — had therefore been successfully organised in recent years without naming or revealing the names or symbols of the organisations involved (ibid: 150). The interviewee (ibid: 6–8) described the autonomy of the activists from men as the fundamental principle of the platform: “the women’s struggle or our actions on the street [are carried out] with women, only with women” ([...] *sokakta kadın mücadelesini ya da eylemlerimizi kadınlarla, sadece kadınlarla [...]*). Furthermore, the conviction that “women’s testimony is fundamental” (*kadının beyanı esastır*), which was first represented by the feminist women’s movement, is essential to the platform’s self-understanding (ibid: 9–10).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> For a self-description of the platform, see its Facebook page: [https://www.facebook.com/Denizli-Kad%C4%B1n-Dayan%C4%B1%C5%-Platformu-218465884891191/about/?ref=page\\_interna](https://www.facebook.com/Denizli-Kad%C4%B1n-Dayan%C4%B1%C5%-Platformu-218465884891191/about/?ref=page_interna).

<sup>22</sup> Feminists argue that the victim’s statement must carry the most weight in cases of sexual violence.



The activist cited violence against women — such as the sexual femicide of the university student Özgecan Aslan in 2015 or the media representation of sexual violence, such as in the television series “What’s Fatmagül’s Fault?”, which ran from 2010 to 2012 — religious marriage and the transnational events of 8 March and 25 November as topics addressed by the platform. Ayşe Balkanay (2015: 12) from the Supporting Entrepreneur Women Association (GİKAD) also reported during the interview that activists from the platform had organised a human rights course. On the platform’s Facebook page, it also lists lobbying for law reform and promoting peace as central topics.

The platform organises a yearly Feminist Night March on 8 March with the aim of strengthening dialogue, exchange and solidarity among women, in addition to occasional “women’s solidarity nights” (*kadın dayanışma gecesi*) (Anonymous, 2015: 122). The platform also promotes awareness about discrimination and the oppression of women — regardless of ideology, race, language or religion — and promotes the adoption of feminist perspectives at the same time (ibid: 19).<sup>23</sup>

### *Denizli Women’s Platform (Denizli Kadın Platformu)*

Twenty-two women’s associations participate in the Denizli Women’s Platform, which was founded in the mid-2000s by Gülizar Biçer from the Denizli Bar Association/ Women’s Rights Commission.<sup>24</sup> According to activists in the Denizli Women’s Solidarity Platform (Anonymous, 2015: 19), the women who are active in the Denizli Women’s Platform belong to the Workers’ Party (İP), the Atatürkist (Kemalist) Thought Association (ADD) and the Republican People’s Party (CHP), among others, which are primarily Kemalist-oriented. This orientation expresses itself symbolically, such as laying wreaths on the main statue of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founder of the Republic of Turkey, and playing the national anthem during the platform’s activities to celebrate 8 March in Denizli.

<sup>23</sup> Owing to a lack of literature and of empirical material, no statements can be made about the discussions held within the platform or about its stability. This both to the the Denizli Women’s Platform and the Aegean Women’s Gathering.

<sup>24</sup> <http://bianet.org/bianet/kadin/30719-kapali-da-olsalar-kapilari-zorlamaliyiz>.

According to Biçer, the platform works mainly in rural and socio-economically weak areas and is supported by the Turkish Ministry of Education. In 2005, the 1st Women’s Film Festival in Denizli was organised in cooperation with the governor in office.<sup>25</sup> The proximity of the platform to the local administration is also apparent in its cooperation with the Denizli Metropolitan Municipality City Council Women’s Assembly. It also carries out activities in areas such as promoting women’s rights and combating violence in cooperation with Pamukkale University.<sup>26</sup>

These activities are organised at monthly meetings of the member organisations and through changing platform speakers, such as Nurten Karakiş from the Association of Women’s Rights Protection and Gülnur Oymak from the Women’s Board of the City Council. Cennet Kasapoğlu, who, at the time of research, was acting simultaneously as the platform speaker and the head of the Republican Women’s Association (CKD), described her understanding of being-woman during a speech at a demonstration: “Woman is mother, labour, love, affection. Woman is respect, devotion, citizen. Behind every beauty, the shining face of woman can be seen.” This statement references the glorification and idealisation of women, which helps create a sense of identity within the platform.<sup>27</sup>

### *Muğla Women’s (Solidarity) Platform (Muğla Kadın (Dayanışma) Platformu)*

The Muğla Women’s (Solidarity) Platform was founded between 2003 and 2004. At the start, it consisted of activists from politically and ideologically diverse orientations, such as the feminist-oriented Muğla Women’s Solidarity Group, the Kemalist-oriented Association for the Support of Modern Living (ÇYDD), the religious–conservative oriented Rainbow Women and Family Association, members of Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University and the Women’s Board of the City Council (Kılıçoğlu, 2004: 53). A list of the participants in the 25 November demonstration that took place in 2014 proves diverse support the platform receives.<sup>28</sup> While, at time of research, women from mixed-gender and left-oriented unions and parties, such as

<sup>25</sup> <http://bianet.org/kadin/kultur/71908-kadinlar-filmlerde-kendini-buldu>.

<sup>26</sup> <http://denizli.bel.tr/Default.aspx?k=haber-detay&id=15633>.

<sup>27</sup> For diverse ideas of the participants regarding the concept being woman, see the section III.1.A.

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.muhaletet.org/haber-muglada-kadinlar-gericilige-meydan-okudu-0-12827.aspx>.

Confederation of Public Workers' Unions (KESK) and Freedom and Solidarity Party (ÖDP), and from environmental political groups continued to participate in demonstrations organised by the platform, the religious–conservative oriented Rainbow Women and Family Association was no longer a member.

Gaye Cön (2015: 2) from the KA-MER Foundation stated that the Muğla Women’s Platform developed from within the Muğla Women’s Solidarity Group. Cön helped to found the platform in 1989, which was the first feminist group in Muğla Province and which renamed itself the Women’s Solidarity Platform in the mid-2000s (Kılıçoğlu, 2004: 43). During her research of women’s organisations in Muğla, Kılıçoğlu (2004: 54) also referred to the central role played by feminist academicians Ayşe Durakbaşa and Nurgün Oktik, who were teaching at Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University at the time of the platforms foundation.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to the issues of violence and environment, the platform also works in particular to improve female political participation. As early as 2004, the platform adopted the activity format developed by the Women’s Solidarity Group in the 1990s during the local election campaign in which the group presented a list of women’s demands to the candidates. Additionally, Cön (2015: 8) describes how the communally-financed Muğla Women’s Solidarity House, which also hosts the platform’s meetings, was established in the district of Sekibaşı as a result of the success of the platform’s activities and its cooperation with the local administration. Besides basic literacy and handicraft courses to promote female financial independence, “awareness activities” (*farkındalık çalışmaları*) to help women form their own identities is also held at the House.

At the time of research, the platform organised regular demonstrations on 8 March, 1 May and 25 November and, in 2015, it took responsibility for coordinating the World March of Women for the province of Muğla with a regional focus on “ecological struggle” (*ekolojik mücadele*).

<sup>29</sup> In relation to the population of the city, at the time of research Muğla appeared to have a significantly large feminist structure, including the *Karya* Women’s Association, the Vegan Feminists and a feminist working group.

In a press release dated 19 February 2004, the platform set out its central goals, namely improving communications and solidarity between different platform organisations in Muğla and women’s organisations in Turkey and carrying out joint projects and lobbying (Kılıçoğlu, 2004: 53). Many experts who were interviewed in Muğla were active in the platform or participated in its activities. This empirical finding reflects the stability of the platform, which has existed for more than 15 years.

### *The Aegean Women’s Gathering (Ege Kadın Buluşması)*

The first Aegean Women’s Gathering took place in 2004 in Muğla with the financial support of the Heinrich Böll Foundation, which is known to be close with the Alliance 90/The Greens (*BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN*). Gaye Cön described how she organised the meeting in cooperation with important female political activists in Turkey, such as Nazik Işık, Güler Dost and Nebahat Akkoç, in response to the demands expressed by women from Denizli and Aydın who were impressed by the foundation of the Women’s (Solidarity) Platform in Muğla. According to Cön (2015: 30–32), the goal of this first gathering was to help women’s and gender political organisations in the Aegean region to get to know one another, create ties and exchange ideas.

In 2015, Nurten Karakış from the Association of Women’s Rights Protection and a member of the Republican People’s Party (CHP) in Denizli served as the coordinator of the 9th Women’s Gathering. Associations that work for the Aegean women’s movement(s) in the seven provinces of the region (Uşak, Aydın, Denizli, Kütahya, İzmir, Muğla and Manisa) come together at these meetings with academics (Balkanay, 2015: 46; Karakış, 2015: 37). Each on their own, these organisations have less influence at a national level, so, during these regional gatherings, Ayşe Balkanay (2015: 46) attempts to pursue her women’s and gender political agenda, such as improving female labour conditions and employment and increasing female political participation (2015: 46).

While, at the start, the gathering was initially influenced by feminist-oriented activists, none of these activists were part of the secretariat of the 9th gathering. Cön was not invited to the

8th Aegean Women’s Gathering, organised by the Muğla Women’s Council in 2008; she (2015: 34) explained why she chose to reject the gathering: “the nationalists marked [the gathering], I said ‘I am out of here’ [...] The ruling forces want to wipe us out. It doesn’t disturb me; the important thing is that we started something”.

The crux of Cön’s criticism lies in the influence of the “nationalists” (*ulusalcılar*) whom she does not see as suitable coalition partners, owing to their relationship to the State — made evident, in her view, by the fact that they play the national anthem at coalition activities and invited the governor of Manisa to a Women’s Gathering — in addition to their establishment of internal hierarchies and the manner in which they have distanced themselves from women who wear the hijab as well as Kurdish women.

At the time of research, the Aegean Women’s Gathering could be described as a regional network, a loose collective or context comprised of mostly Kemalist-oriented activists.

#### 1.4 Women’s coalitions in the Black Sea Region

While there are, according to Nurber Gürdal (2015: 32), some 20 women’s organisations in the large city of Trabzon, the existence of an independent women’s movement in the small towns of Artvin and Hopa was denied by several experts (e.g. Arıcı & Anonymous, 2015: 57). However, this study found evidence of the development of women’s and gender political structures in those areas at the time of research in 2015. In Trabzon, Artvin and Hopa, in which 20 expert interviews were conducted in 2015, four local women’s coalitions were identified, which are presented below.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Similar to the Aegean Women’s Gathering, information on the Trabzon Foundation of the Black Sea Provinces Women’s Platform (KİKAP) as a regional coalition is available on the Internet (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Karadeniz-İlleri-Kad%C4%B1n-Platformu-Trabzon-Derne%C4%9Fi-K%C4%B0KAP-Trabzon/412965378833477>). However, as no reference was made to this coalition during the interviews and as it is barely relevant to women’s and gender politics in the region, it has not been discussed here.

### *Trabzon Women’s Platform (Trabzon Kadın Platformu)*

Trabzon Women’s Platform was founded in the end of the 2000s by some 13 associations (Bostan, 2015: 57; Şirin, 2015: 27). An online article from the independent communication network BIANET (bianet.org) named the Kemalist-oriented Turkish Women’s Union (TKB) and the Turkish Mothers’ Association and the feminist-oriented Black Sea Women’s Solidarity Association (KARKADDER) as partners in the platform (Bianet, 2009). Additionally, Bahar Bostan (2015: 59–64) from the Trabzon Bar Association/ Women’s Rights Commission listed female members of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) as active platform members.

According to Nurber Gürdal (2015: 32) from Trabzon Life Women’s Centre Association, the platform was founded in order to advance Trabzon along on the basis of “a focus on woman” (*kadın paydasında*). For example, the platform ran a campaign entitled “40 neighbourhoods, 40 female neighbourhood representatives” (*40 Mahalle 40 Kadın Muhtar*) to promote women’s political participation.<sup>31</sup> The platform is also highly involved in the “Women Friendly Cities” (*kadın dostu kentler*) programme initiated by the United Nations so that the collaborations with actors such as government institutes and international organisations can be improved.<sup>32</sup>

During the interview, Nilüfer Akgün from the Black Sea Women’s Solidarity Association emphasised the number of coalition possibilities among women’s and gender political activists: “You can find a common ground with anyone in the women’s movement.” Akgün (2015: 18) criticised, however, the lack of a “women’s perspective” (*kadın bakış açısı*) among several platform partners, which, in her view, must include the rejection of discrimination based on ethnicity, culture or sexual orientation. Similarly, Pelin Şirin (2015: 35), who is active in the Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP), criticised the national or nationalist orientation of several women’s associations represented in the platform, which view Kurdish women and

<sup>31</sup> <http://bianet.org/kurdi/toplumsal-cinsiyet/113105-trabzon-kadin-platformu-yla-12-kadin-muhtar-adayi-secime-hazirlaniyor>

<sup>32</sup> [http://www.unfpa.org.tr/rapyay/kadin\\_dostu\\_kentler\\_2010.pdf](http://www.unfpa.org.tr/rapyay/kadin_dostu_kentler_2010.pdf)

similar groups with a different ideological world view as “others”. From her perspective, it is therefore not a functioning platform, but rather a loose network of women’s associations that actually work individually. Firat Varatyan (2015: 66), an activist from the LGBTI organisation Purple Fish (*Mor Balık*) from Trabzon, complained about the lack of a stronger women’s and gender political orientation in the platform, describing it instead as a sort of “coffee party”.

### *Trabzon Democratic Women’s Platform (Trabzon Demokratik Kadın Platformu)*

While activists from all political and ideological orientations were represented in the Women’s Platform described above, according to Bahar Bostan (2015: 57, 85) the Democratic Women’s Platform was founded instead by primarily socialist or social democratic women: “They are like a women’s branch of common politics”. Seda Kenanoğlu (2015: 35) from the University Women’s Collective in Trabzon confirmed that the platform was open to everyone, despite noting that most women’s organisations were left- and democratic-oriented: “You don’t need to be a member of a group to participate in the meetings. You can also participate simply as a woman.” However, during the interview Kenanoğlu stressed that women from the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and National Movement Party (MHP) did not take part in the platform.

In addition to the importance of common decision-making processes, which were partly prepared within each organisation, the financial autonomy of the platform was also of central importance (Bostan, 2015: 65): “Nothing is done using donations [...] the women’s struggle must come from the street.” Bostan (2015: 81, 83) also referred to the principle of autonomy, in accordance with which the platform has rejected opportunities to cooperate with the Women’s Board of the City Council because “this is a structure which establishes zero ties with the system”.

According to Kenanoğlu (2015: 35, 43), the platform organises activities in particular during the weeks of 8 March and 25 November, such as demonstrations against violence, femicides or abortion legislation. It had also attempted to mobilise merchants at the women’s market

in Trabzon, in an attempt to extend women’s and gender political activities to women who represent the traditional contribution of women to the public economic life of the city but who have not yet established a women’s organisation of their own. When discussing the media coverage of Trabzon Democratic Women’s Platform, Kenanoğlu (2015: 45) also referenced the concerts performed by the Democratic Women’s Choir and the demonstrations held following the sexual murder of Özgecan Aslan, in which participation was drummed up via flyers, e-mails and social media. However, according to Bahar Bostan (2015: 36, 73), the Democratic Women’s Platform conducts few political activities apart from its 8 March activities, in which especially the women from the Halkevci Women participate.

During the interview, Şahinde Yavuz, a scientist who is active in the Black Sea Women’s Solidarity Association (KARKADDER), described the exchange between women’s organisations as the reason for which the platform was established. The relationship and the communication between women’s organisations in Trabzon should therefore be continued and they should be made aware of each other’s activities. Furthermore, by acting together on politic issues, more influence can be applied on the city council or the governor’s office (Yavuz, 2015: 5): “If we are together, they take us seriously. If we are lone individuals, sometimes they like us and sometimes they don’t, but they have no choice but to like a platform.”

#### *Artvin Women’s (Solidarity) Platform (Artvin Kadın (Dayanışma) Platformu)*

Özge Zeynep Arıcı (Arici & Anonymous, 2015: 75), secretary of the Education and Science Workers' Union, described the establishment of the Women’s (Solidarity) Platform in Artvin with reference to the date 8 March 2015: “We said [...] ‘Let’s call everyone, all associations, [...] all unions, NGOs’; we said, ‘Let’s do something together’”. Some 10 organisations, all of which shared a left-leaning world view, participated in the first meeting. However, in February 2015, immediately after news broke of the sexual murder of Özgecan Aslan, Kemalist-oriented organisations such as Eğitim-İş Union and the Republican People’s Party (CHP), as well as the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), joined the platform, which organised a demonstration against violence against women and sent out a press release



(ibid). The unofficial spokesperson for the platform, Nurcan Ay Katırcı (2015: 4), who is also active in Education and Science Workers' Union, also described the “Özgecan case” (*Özgecan olayı*) as the starting point for the women’s movement in Artvin.

Filiz Karakuş (2015: 61) from Eğitim-İş Union also described herself as a founding member of the platform and emphasised its publicity: “Every woman in Artvin knows that there is a platform”. According to Karakuş (ibid: 59), everyone — including men — is invited to join the platform.<sup>33</sup> In addition to the central subject of violence against women, Karakuş (2015: 49, 55, 81) believes that the platform should also address topics such as disability, family and the environment: <sup>34</sup> “If a social problem exists, this should always be the focus of attention”. During the interview, Karakuş also criticised the forms of action used thus far by the platform, such as the organisation of petitions and panel discussions, owing to its one-sided focus on urban forms of communication. She (2015: 21–23) suggested that, as city inhabitants, they should reach women in the villages and support them. Similarly, Ay Katırcı (2015: 12) also described the mobilisation of women in Artvin who did not express themselves and were unable to make their voices heard as a goal of the platform and expressed the view that the platform should also become the voice of these women.<sup>35</sup>

The platform had not yet developed any clear lines of action, as executive responsibility for the platform was shared among various activists (Ay Katırcı, 2015: 12). The left-oriented trade unionist Ay Katırcı (2015: 4, 54) discussed the idea of transforming the platform into an association without an overriding identity in which women with very different ideas could come together. To that end, the office of the Education and Science Workers' Union, where meetings of the platform are held, should be replaced by a “neutral space” (Arıcı & Anonymous, 2015: 81). Özge Zeynep Arıcı (Arıcı & Anonymous, 2015: 75) also believed that political views should not be expressed within the platform, which should instead focus on uniting women.

<sup>33</sup> The topic of whether to allow men to participate in the platform is a source of controversy among the platform’s partners, cf. the statement by Arıcı & Anonymous (2015: 55–57).

<sup>34</sup> The close connection between the platform’s activists and the environmental movement was made evident by the fact that several interviewees were members of the political environmental association Green Artvin.

<sup>35</sup> This study was unable to determine the extent to which this desire is translated into real action or to which rural women identified as the target group of such actions are actively incorporated.

A feminist-oriented scientist working at Artvin Çoruh University (Arıcı & Anonymous, 2015: 57) expressed the view that the partners in the platform did not share a feminist awareness, as proven by the failure to use terminology commonly used in feminist circles or the continued use of terms that are criticised in Turkish-speaking feminism, such as “Ms. / lady” (*hanım*) instead of “woman” (*kadın*).<sup>36</sup>

Arıcı (Arıcı & Anonymous, 2015: 77, 84) described the biggest problem faced by the platform as the low level of motivation among women in Artvin to engage in women’s and gender politics, in particular as these women themselves are rarely subject to violence and therefore lack the necessary motivation. Given that the platform is supported primarily by teachers, scientists and students who are not from Artvin and given the lack of support from women in the region, Arıcı (Arıcı & Anonymous, 2015: 79) evaluated the future stability of the platform as weak. Republican People’s Party (CHP) members Sevda Ersöz and Arzu Sevim, and National Movement Party (MHP) member Pervin Arslan expressed the same view; they too described the platform as an “imported” social movement that was not suitable for Artvin (Sevda Ersöz et al, 2015: 91).

### *Hopa Women’s Platform (Hopa Kadın Platformu)*

Hopa Women’s Platform consists of activists from left-oriented trade unions such as Education and Science Workers' Union and Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey (DİSK), as well as political parties such as the Freedom and Solidarity Party (ÖDP), Republican People’s Party (CHP) and the Socialist Women’s Assemblies (SKM), and was first launched mostly by Halkevci Women. The first demonstration regarding the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women took place on 25 November 2014 in Hopa thanks to the platform’s initiative and efforts.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> In Turkish, while the word “girl/daughter” (*kız*) emphasises the virginity and unmarried status of the woman, “woman” (*kadın*) describes the subject as married and sexually active. Due to the “sexual” connotations of the term “woman”, the term “Ms. /lady” (*bayan; hanım*) is used among religious–conservative and Kemalist milieus in Turkey when addressing or describing someone. Feminists have, however, appropriated the term “*kadın*”, which they also use to describe unmarried women and ascribe sexuality to women outside of marriage.

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.etha.com.tr/Haber/2014/11/25/kadin/hopada-ilk-25-kasim-eylemi/>.

Even though the Women’s Platform was no longer active at time of research, according to the interviews conducted with Melike Arduç (Arduç et al, 2015: 40–43, 47–49) of the Halkevci Women, joint demonstrations on the occasions of 8 March and 25 November against violence, prostitution, exploitation, racism, war and environmental degradation were still carried out. The platform’s website was also still accessible in 2015. Nurcan Vayıç Aksu (2015: 5, 7) from the Socialist Party of the Oppressed (ESP) intentionally did not take the website offline because it was used to contact independent women who had participated in the platform. It also helped to ensure the visibility of women and women’s movement(s) in the left-leaning small town of Hopa. Vayıç Aksu (2015: 7), a left-oriented activist, expressed the view that women’s branches within political parties should work independently on their activities regarding gender policies, but should also come together through the platform to organise joint activities. In her opinion (ibid), a united force can be formed only by forming a coalition. To that end, a women’s organisation is necessary which, among other things, also applies to housewives in the small town (ibid: 11).

### **1.5 Conclusion: Comparison of women’s coalitions in the four research regions**

In the regions in which the research was conducted, a sum of 12 local and regional women’s coalitions were identified during the research period (2014–2016), which united completely heterogeneous movements that targeted discrete or overlapping target groups.

While three women’s coalitions were identified for the large city of Ankara, only one women’s alliance could be identified for the large city of Diyarbakır, namely the Free Women Congress (KJA). In Denizli and Trabzon, both comparably large cities with several hundred thousand inhabitants, two women’s coalitions were identified in each city. In the small towns of Muğla in the Aegean region and Artvin in the Black Sea region, at the time of research only one women’s coalition was identified in each city, which were described by some activists as women’s solidarity platforms. The Aegean Women’s Gathering was established as a regional coalition and attempts were made to establish a local women’s coalition in the small town of

Hopa.

From the outset, the diverse self-descriptions used for each grouping, such as “platform” (*platform*), “collective” (*kolektif*), “coalition” (*koalisyon*), “congress” (*kongre*) and “gathering” (*buluşma*), offer the first evidence in analysing the self-image and stability of each platform.

The executive responsibility for each coalition was shared among activists from women’s organisations, women from mixed-gender organisations and independent activists, in different proportions for each coalition. The comparison of the distribution of executive responsibility shows that, in rural areas such as Muğla and Artvin, women’s and gender political organisations are able to work together beyond their political and ideological borders to a greater extent than in the large urban cities of Ankara, Diyarbakır, Trabzon and Denizli. The closer cooperation between activists charged with executive responsibility for these platforms despite their political and ideological diversity is explained by the lower number of women’s and gender political activists in those areas. As stated by Lahn (2007: 54) when discussing the situation in Germany, “women’s movements on the periphery tend to work together and integrate at organisational level”. Only by forming broad coalitions can women’s and gender political activists attract public attention to their discussions and demands at provincial level; the activists are aware of this, as confirmed by the interview excerpts presented in this text.

Over time and as the result of internal political upheaval, the composition of these coalitions changes and their fragility becomes apparent. For example, although religious–conservative oriented activists took part in the Women’s (Solidarity) Platform in Muğla in the mid-2000s, none of them were active participants at the time of research. This empirical finding reflects what appears to be a growing gap between religious–conservative oriented activists and other women’s movements.<sup>38</sup> The connections discussed here cannot be described as coalitions between all women in Turkey.

---

<sup>38</sup> For more information on the divisions between the women’s movements over “religion/conservatism”, see Text III.3.A. Cooperation between women’s movements and activists from the Kurdish women’s movement is also discussed with regard to the alliances. Cf. also Text III.2.B. and Text III.3.A.

The question of what makes a suitable coalition partner — such as whether the platform should cooperate with men, opposition movements or the LGBTI movement — shapes the discussion within several of the coalitions identified. Cooperation with the State or even the local administration was also a point of divide between several coalitions. For example, although the Trabzon Women’s Platform cooperates with State institutions, the left-oriented Women’s Solidarity Platform in Trabzon refuses point blank to cooperate with such institutions. The points of divide between women’s movements discussed in Text III.3.A. could therefore also be examined when analysing women’s coalitions. In particular, feminist ideology and practices, such as the rejection of hierarchies, is of varying importance to each platform. For example, although the Kemalist/nationalist-oriented women’s platforms in Denizli and Trabzon have an official platform spokesperson, activists from the Ankara Feminist Collective, among others, criticise this policy of representation. As feminist-oriented activists place the focus of self-definition on the individual, they require their coalitions to be independent of both men and mixed-gender organisations, such as political parties or trade unions.

The reasons given for establishing a platform included transnational events such as 8 March and general resistance against the women’s and gender policies of the ruling AKP Government, in particular as regards its abortion legislation and the political participation of women; violence against women was cited as the most common reason. For example, the Women’s (Solidarity) Platform in Artvin was founded in 2015 as a reaction to the sexual murder of the student Özgecan Aslan. The platforms were formed with the goal of, in particular, promoting exchange, networking and solidarity between activists from politically and ideologically diverse orientations, with the aim of encouraging cooperation to ensure that their demands regarding women’s and gender political issues in the local area were met. A variety of coalitions were identified in all four research regions; the platforms in Muğla and Artvin place particular emphasis on environmental issues. In most platforms, digital media was used to communicate with and mobilise women’s and gender political activists.

The comparison of the history of each platform showed that feminist-oriented activists in

particular were involved in establishing the platforms in Ankara and Muğla, as well as the Women’s Solidarity Platform in Denizli. Over time, however, several feminist activists withdrew from the coalitions, such as the Aegean Women’s Gathering, which was dominated at the time of research by activists from political parties and organisations. This empirical finding reflects the flexibility in transferring executive responsibility for a coalition.

In Ankara and Diyarbakır, coalition traditions dating back to the 1990s or 2000s were identified, such as the Ankara Feminist Collective and the Free Women Congress. The establishment of the Women’s Solidarity Platform in Muğla in 2004 reflected the fact that women’s platforms also emerged early on in several rural regions of Turkey. In contrast, as regards to the Black Sea region, the platforms in Trabzon were founded only in the late 2000s and those in Artvin province were established only in the mid-2010s, primarily by left-oriented activists. Most women’s and gender political experts described these platforms in the northeast of Turkey as unstable. A decisive factor in the stability of a platform appears to be its organisational structure. For example, the KJA, which was seen as very stable, used an organisational method that was developed over the course of a year-long discussion process.

However, the existence of women’s coalitions in the four research regions in Turkey alone shows that the topic of gender, which is decentred and deconstructed in the context of (post)structuralist, postcolonial and queer–feminist critique in activist and scientific discourse, can act — at least on some occasions — as a crystallisation point for social movements in Turkey.

## References

- Acar, Feride; Altunok, Gülbanu (2009): Paths, Borders and Bridges. Impact of Ethnicity and Religion on Women’s Movement in Turkey. Available online at [http://www.quing.eu/files/WHY/acar\\_altunok.pdf](http://www.quing.eu/files/WHY/acar_altunok.pdf), accessed on 11 August 2014.
- Al-Rebholz, Anil (2013): Das Ringen um die Zivilgesellschaft in der Türkei. Intellektuelle Diskurse, oppositionelle Gruppen und Soziale Bewegungen seit 1980. Bielefeld: Transcript.
- Binder, Charlotte (2016): Der Internationale Frauentag nach der Dekonstruktion von Geschlecht. Eine empirisch-qualitative Vergleichsstudie zu Bündnispolitiken im Rahmen des 8. März in Berlin und in Istanbul. Dissertationsschrift. Universität Bremen, Bremen.
- Hildebrandt, Cornelia (2007): Bündnispolitik. In: Ulrich Brand, Bettina Lösch und Stefan Thimmel (ed.): ABC der Alternativen. Von “Ästhetik des Widerstands” bis “Ziviler Ungehorsam”. Hamburg: VSA, pp. 36–37.
- Kılıçoğlu, Özlem (2004): Muğla’da kadın örgütlenmeleri. Lisans Tezi. Muğla Üniversitesi, Muğla.
- Lahn, Ulrike (2007): Flog die Tomate auch in der Provinz? Die Anfänge der Zweiten Frauenbewegung in der Provinz und ihre Bewegungsstrategien. In: *Ariadne. Forum für Frauen- und Geschlechtergeschichte* (51), pp. 54–59.
- Leidinger, Christiane (2011): Kontroverse Koalitionen im politischen Laboratorium Camp. antimilitaristisch-feministische Bündnisse und Bündnisarbeit als kontingente, soziale Prozesse. In: *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft* 40 (3), pp. 283–300.
- Levi, Margaret; Murphy, Gillian H. (2006): Coalitions of Contention. The Case of the WTO Protests in Seattle. In: *Political Studies* 54 (4), pp. 651–670.
- Raschke, Joachim (ed.) (1985): Soziale Bewegungen. Ein historisch-systematischer Grundriss. Frankfurt/M.: Campus.