Kinship and Diasporas in Turkish Foreign Policy:
Examples from Europe, the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean

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CONTENTS

CONTRIBUTORS .................................................................................................................................................... V

CHAPTER 1
Kinship and Diasporas in Turkish Foreign Policy – An Introduction ........................................................ 1
Zenonas Tziarras

PART I - Examples from Europe

CHAPTER 2
The Ambivalent Nature of the Relations between Bulgaria and Turkey in the New Millennium ....................... 11
Ahmet Erdi Öztürk

CHAPTER 3
Turkey’s Diaspora Governance Policies and Diasporas from Turkey in Germany: A Critical Reading of the Changing Dynamics ............................................................................................ 29
Bahar Baser and Ahmet Erdi Ozturk

CHAPTER 4
Bosnia and Herzegovina in the orbit of Turkish Foreign Policy ............................................................................. 47
David Henig

PARTII - Examples from the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean

CHAPTER 5
Turkey’s Justice and Development Government vis-à-vis The Muslim Minority in Greece ............................. 59
Nikos Christofis

CHAPTER 6
From ‘National Cause’ to ‘National Burden’:
Turkish Cypriots within Turkey’s Kinship and Diaspora Politics and Perceptions ............................................ 73
Mete Hatay and Rebecca Bryant

CHAPTER 7
Turkey’s Identity and Foreign Policy in Transition since 2002:
The case of relations with Palestine ..................................................................................................................... 89
Nur Köprüülü

CHAPTER 8
Conclusions: Turkey’s new diaspora and kin foreign policy – Looking ahead ................................................. 105
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CHAPTER 1:

KINSHIP AND DIASPORAS IN TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY - AN INTRODUCTION

Zenonas Tziarras

Introduction

From the moment it came to power in 2002, Turkey’s Justice and Development Party (AKP) began to change the direction of Turkish foreign policy (TFP), making it more dynamic and multileveled and giving it a wider geographical scope and a more focused ideological drive. Partially rooted in Ahmet Davutoğlu’s vision of regional soft power, the Turkish state began successfully to emphasize its historical and cultural links to countries or minorities throughout Europe, Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Middle East. As Turkey’s regional influence grew, so did its economic strength, built in part on regional investments. Although Turkey’s soft power and the idea of Turkey as a ‘model’ for Muslim democracy have lost much of their glamour in the 2010s, Ankara has not stopped exerting ideological power and influence abroad.

One of the main ways in which the country achieves this influence is by courting its diaspora and playing ‘big brother’ to ethnic or religious groups that it perceives as kin communities. In one of his speeches in 2016, Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, speaking about the campaign to recapture Mosul in northern Iraq from ISIS, stated: “We cannot draw boundaries to our heart, nor do we allow it,” and went on to add that “Turkey cannot disregard its kinsmen in Western Thrace, Cyprus, Crimea and anywhere else” (TCCB 2016). From this perspective, it seems that akıra topluluklar, namely the communities that are perceived to have a shared history and culture with Turkey (a type of kinship) continue to play an important role in Turkey’s foreign policy agenda.

Against this background, the papers in this collective volume will investigate the dynamics of perceived kinship in Turkish foreign policy (TFP). We wish to examine: the roots of this
foreign policy approach and its particularities under the AKP; the ways in which Turkey demonstrates and builds power for akraba topuluqlar; the extent to and ways in which this policy regarding diaspora and perceived kin communities increases Turkey’s influence; the effects that the policy has on the politics, economy and social life of the diaspora communities and their relationship with host countries; and the kind of fractures or divisions that are created within the communities due to Turkey’s attempts to maximise its presence and influence over them.

Diasporas and Kin Politics

Two of the main concepts in this report are those of diaspora and kin-politics. Before moving on to the multileveled relations and dynamics between the homeland/kin-state and the diaspora/kin-communities, we first provide working definitions for these otherwise contested concepts. Initially referring to the identity that bound together Jews that were scattered all over the world, the concept of diaspora has undergone multiple transformations (Baumann 2013). According to a broad enough definition by Vertovec (2013: 63), diaspora is “an imagined community living away from a professed place of origin.” A more elaborate definition and perhaps more useful in the context of this report comes from Shain and Barth (2003: 452) who define diaspora as:

a people with a common origin who reside, more or less on a permanent basis, outside the borders of their ethnic or religious homeland—whether that homeland is real or symbolic, independent or under foreign control. Diaspora members identify themselves, or are identified by others—inside and outside their homeland—as part of the homeland’s national community, and as such are often called upon to participate, or are entangled, in homeland-related affairs.

Although not the same, the concepts of diaspora and kinship often overlap and, depending on their definitions, are sometimes intertwined within the framework of globalisation and the transformation of the nation-state itself. A distinction sometimes made between diaspora and kin communities divides the groups into homeland citizens living abroad and ethnic-cultural/religious (non-citizen) kin living abroad, respectively (Adamson 2019: 225). However, this distinction is not often clear-cut. Much like Shain and Barth’s reference to a diaspora’s ethnic/religious homeland, Tátrai, Erőss and Kovály (2017: 203) note that nation-states have increasingly faced the need to deal with “the effects of losing ethnic-kin citizens due to emigration or demographic decline, while at the same time new, non-ethnic immigrants settled in their territories.”

To be sure, kinship studies have come a long way since their emergence in the 1800s (Peletz 1995). The end of the Cold War and the newly emergent world order brought about an enhanced interest in and attention to identity politics, culture, religion and ethnicity (Dickstein 1993; Duvold 2015; Maynard 2015). Samuel Huntington’s (1996) well-known work,
The Clash of Civilizations, became central to this body of literature and debate. Huntington (1996) made the case that the future of world politics would be dominated by conflicts between civilizations more than by anything else. He divided the world into eight major civilizations on the basis of culture and religion. And even though he never really explicitly defined kinship (Nossal 2018: 63-65), he saw countries, communities or peoples that shared the same civilization as kin among which there is often solidarity in times of conflict (Huntington 1996: 272-273).

Turkey’s Kin Politics
In the same work, Huntington lists Turkey among the countries he terms ‘torn’, namely, those countries that have “a single predominant culture which places it in one civilization but its leaders want to shift it to another civilization” (Huntington 1996: 138). This is a rather accurate description of what has taken place in Turkey at least since the establishment of the republic in 1923 and Mustafa Kemal’s top-down social engineering project of modernization and westernization. His reforms constituted a deep (civilizational) break from Turkey’s Ottoman and Islamic heritage. The new state of affairs brought about by Kemal created a lasting identity crisis between the two main currents (and their various manifestations) of secularism-republicanism and conservatism-ottomanism that have been in tension for most of Turkey’s history.

The election of the AKP to government and the consolidation of its power gave rise to the flip side of that crisis with the comeback of the conservative-ottomanist paradigm. Whereas under Kemal Turkish national identity acquired a racial-ethnic content, it eventually became more religion-tinged under the AKP. The AKP and president Erdoğan tried to re-connect the Turkish nation to its old roots while creating a national identity synthesis in which the Islamic component predominated over the ethnic (i.e., an Islamic-Turkish synthesis). And thus, at least in the narrative of the AKP and Erdoğan, the concept of the Turkish nation came to be closely associated with the Muslim nation (i.e., ummah, the global community of Muslims) (Tanir 2019).

To be sure, the country remains ‘torn’ in the sense that there are still domestic political and social forces that oppose Turkey’s new reality. However, the AKP’s new approach demonstrates an attempt to transform Turkey from a torn country into what Huntington calls a core country, not only in terms of the socio-political fabric but also with regard to its role in the international system (see also, Kalin 2011; Yurtnaç 2012): a state that “can perform its ordering function because member states perceive it as a cultural kin. A civilization is an extended family and, like older members of a family, core states provide their relatives with both support and discipline” (Huntington 1996: 156). This effort is not new and yet it has never been expressed in this degree and in the terms seen under the AKP.

The Turkish interest in the Muslim or Turkic people dates back to the Ottoman Empire or even to the emergence of Islam if we are referring to pan-Islamism as the notion of solidarity among Muslims (Baskan 2019: 97-98). Pan-Islamism returned as a political ideology during the late years of the Ottoman Empire along with Pan-Turkism: a movement that strove “for
some sort of union – cultural or physical, or both – among all peoples of proven Turkic origins, whether living both within and without the frontiers of the Ottoman Empire” (Landau 1995: 1). Pan-Turkism became a popular irredentist ideology that complemented Turkish nationalism during the years of the Turkish republic and especially in the 1960s and 1970s (Landau 1995: 4). In the context of pan-Turkism, ‘outside Turks’ (Diş Türkler) were central, consisting of “a wide range of groups comprising people of Turkic origins” mainly located in Russia (or the Soviet Union), such as the Tatars, Kazakhs, Turkmens, Uzbeks, etc. (Landau 1995: 7). In the 1990s Turkey tried to capitalise on these kin ties to increase its influence over the post-Soviet republics of Caucasus and Central Asia (Mango 1993; Fidan 2010).

Apart from these so-called outside Turks, it took the Turkish state a while to recognize labour-migrant Turks as diaspora; for the authorities they were “solely Turks abroad, or, as used in the daily vernacular, expatriates” (Ünver 2013: 183). However, with time, the permanence of Turkish citizens abroad came to be accepted and in the 1980s the Turkish state started developing policies and legislation in order to preserve the ties between the Turkish diaspora and the homeland as well as their culture and identity (Ünver 2013: 184). This political, institutional and legislative evolution is covered extensively in this report. Up until the 2000s, Turkey’s public diplomacy abroad, if limited, was for the most part directed at these two groups – the outside Turks and the Turkish diaspora. Under the AKP this changed radically. Not only did the new government accelerate “the state’s engagement policies towards citizens living overseas” (Akcapar and Aksel 2017: 141) but it also gradually widened the scope of social/identity groups of interest abroad.

One of the institutions that the AKP government established was the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Kin Communities (YTB), an agency that aims “to establish a reliable and reputable Turkish diaspora with common reflexes with the ability to determine [participation] in socio-economic, cultural, and political fields in the host countries and on the global level to build an institutional infrastructure” (Ünver 2013: 186). As the first Chairman of YTB, Kemal Yurtnaç (2012: 7-8) explained:

Aware of the responsibilities that come with inheriting a rich history and a distinguished civilization, Turkey constantly interacts with those communities with whom it shares a common cultural heritage and sentiment across the globe. The Presidency coordinates services provided to kin and related communities, while ensuring the efficiency and productivity of those services... The Presidency ascribes utmost importance to improving the economic, social and cultural standing of kin and related communities living in different parts of the world... In recent years Turkey’s ties with kin and related communities in the Balkans, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Middle East, and Africa have acquired new dimensions.

This approach was consistent with Turkey’s new foreign policy under the AKP and its ideological underpinnings. The AKP, its leaders and ideologues, like Erdoğan and Ahmet Davutoğlu, went beyond a mere diaspora policy or even pan-Turkism, adopting a version of pan-Islamism in
their foreign policy akin to that of the 19th-century Ottoman Empire (Baskan 2019: Ozkan 2014). In a highly controversial speech, Erdoğan stated the following (TCCB 2016):

Our physical boundaries are different from the boundaries of our heart. We should differentiate between them. We of course show respect for physical boundaries; but we cannot draw boundaries to our heart, nor do we allow it. Some ask us, “why do you care about Iraq, why do you care about Syria.” They are asking, “why do you care about Georgia, Ukraine, Crimea, Azerbaijan, Karabakh, the Balkans, North Africa”[…] None of the places for which they ask us ‘what business do you have here,’ are foreign to us. I am asking you Rize my dear bothers. Is it possible to separate Rize from Batumi? Or is it possible to think [of] Edirne apart from Thessaloniki or Kardzhali? How come you can regard Gaziantep and Aleppo, Mardin and al-Hasakah, or Siirt and Mosul as places that have nothing to do with each other? You see something from us in any Middle Eastern and North African country you stop by between Hatay and Morocco. You definitely come across a trace of our ancestors at every step you take along the geography extending from Thrace to Eastern Europe.

In another speech, two years later, Erdoğan made a similar statement:

From this magnificent place I personally want to congratulate my brothers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Albania, Macedonia, Serbia, Western Thrace, Crimea, Bulgaria and Romania. We send our greetings to all the victims and oppressed brothers of ours in Sarajevo, Skopje, Xanthi, Komotini, Kardzhali and Mostar. We share our cordiality with these brothers whose souls and eyes are turned to Turkey, for those who pray for the success of Turkey. Every time I say it – these cities are physically located in the borders of other countries, but they are part of our spiritual boundaries. The meaning of Turkey does not fit within 780,000 kilometers. One half of our hearts are in Istanbul, Diyarbakir, Trabzon, Antalya, Izmir, and the other half is in Aleppo, Kirkuk, Jerusalem, Sandzak and Bukhara (cited in Gotev 2018).

From this perspective, it is evident that Turkey’s new kinsmen and brothers (akraba topluluklar) include not only Turkish citizens or Turkic peoples/ethnic Turks abroad but also Muslims generally speaking, and not least those who live in the post-Ottoman space. As Wigner (2018: 121) argues:

Turkish politicians [under the AKP] use metaphorical kinship – and kinship metaphors – to legitimize Turkey’s foreign policy. A key aspect of this is how the actors attempt to unmake ethnic boundaries between different Turkic-speakers and tying former Ottoman Muslims to Turkey by claims of brotherhood.

Within the same framework, the Diyanet (Turkey’s Directory of Religious Affairs) has been transformed from an ideological state apparatus that started “as a protector of the Turkish
state’s understanding of Islam and secularism” under Kemal, “into a promoter, with the task of spreading Turkish nationalism and Islamic moral values both inside and outside of Turkish borders” under the AKP (Öztürk 2016: 633-634). As such, the AKP’s new approach regarding diasporas and kin communities demonstrates a significant transformation in Turkish foreign policy and its objectives, the ideological framework of the Turkish government, and Turkish identity itself, issues that are further explored in the chapters of this report.

‘Homeland’ Interactions with Diaspora and Kin Communities
Regardless of pursued state policies or established notions, the dynamics of interaction between the homeland and the diaspora or kin communities abroad are complex; they vary and manifest in different policies and attitudes. These can be categorised respectively into the homeland and diaspora/kin community policies and/or attitudes.

Diasporas and kin communities are important to Turkey for a number of reasons: first because of their national or cultural affinities; second because of the instrumental role that they can have in its own policies abroad. For example, Shain and Barth (2003: 449) argue that “diasporas [and kin communities, we might add] may become the pretext for state-sponsored irredentism—the effort by a homeland government to ‘recover’ territory populated by ethnic kin in a nearby state.” In the same vein, Ho, Boyle and Yeoh (2015: 206-207) define diaspora strategies as “proactive efforts… to birth, incubate, fortify and better leverage the transfer of resources from diaspora communities to their homelands,” while adding that these relationships are usually instrumental and may not have the best interest of the diaspora at heart.

Furthermore, in the context of diaspora or kin diplomacy, such communities abroad “are being sought out and engaged as potential diplomatic actors to fulfil diplomacy’s core functions of communication, representation and negotiation” for the homeland (Ho and McConnell 2019: 235). In short, homelands or migrant-sending states often pursue policies with the aim of mobilizing diasporas and kin communities for ‘national agendas,’ which may include influencing the domestic or foreign policies of host countries for the homeland’s benefit (Ho and McConnell 2019: 239; see also, Shain and Barth 2003: 450).

Beyond being utilized and instrumentalised by their homelands, diasporas and kin communities have their own perceptions, attitudes and policies. They themselves are able to become active in the politics of the host country as identity groups and instrumentalise the support of their homeland to achieve their own political ends. They can function as bridges in the relationship between their homeland and host country, as well as “exert influence on homelands when the latter are ‘weak’” for their own benefit (Shain and Barth 2003: 450-451). In this sense, diaspora and kin communities can have a partner relationship, a utilitarian relationship or even a hostile relationship with the homeland (Lee and Ayhan 2015: 62-63; Baser and Swain 2009). What is more, these communities are not monolithic and therefore different ideological and political currents can be found within them, often reflecting the politics of their homelands.
The chapters in this report take under consideration these complex aspects of diaspora and kin politics with respect to the case of Turkey and its diaspora-kin policy, with examples from Europe, the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean.

**The Structure of the Report**

The report is organized in two parts: one on Europe and one on the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean region - although there is some overlap between these areas. The first part includes three case studies from Europe: Bulgaria, Germany and Bosnia. In Chapter 2, Ahmet Erdi Öztürk looks at Turkey’s relations with Bulgaria from a historical and contemporary perspective and through the lens of Bulgaria’s Muslims and their role in or attitudes towards Turkish foreign policy. He argues that Turkish foreign policy under the AKP has been more actively instrumentalizing religion, an approach that creates a certain polarisation among Bulgarian Muslims. Therefore, according to Öztürk, Turkey’s soft power projection abroad—and not least among diaspora or kin communities—has not been particularly successful.

In Chapter 3, Bahar Baser and Ahmet Erdi Öztürk scrutinize the case of Turkey’s policy vis-à-vis its diaspora in Germany and suggest that Ankara’s “diaspora governance policy is a clear example of how diaspora engagement policies can bump into an invisible red line in host countries,” thus creating a number of problems. Baser and Öztürk explain how the synthesis of the Turkish diaspora in Germany has been undergoing changes over the past years and has been affected by political developments – and particularly the authoritarian turn – in Turkey. Furthermore, based on the Germany case, they argue that beyond certain benefits, diaspora engagement policies can “favour certain segments in the diaspora while disfavouring others.” As such, homeland policies vis-à-vis diaspora communities can have a great impact on the latter’s everyday life.

The next chapter, written by David Henig, documents how Turkey’s kin community foreign policy unfolds in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), and suggests that the dynamics of the BiH-Turkey relations need to be approached as an ongoing self/othering relationship. Henig offers a bottom-up perspective to trace how the local actors and communities articulate, respond and negotiate Turkey’s presence; to this end he examines the domains of economy, cultural heritage and education. The author argues that Turkey’s activities in these domains create frictions, foster critical reception and open a new field of opportunities, all of which allow the local actors to pursue their own goals beyond the realm of kin community policies and Turkey’s orbit of influence.

In Chapter 5, the first chapter of Part II, Nikos Christofis examines the case of Greece’s Muslim minority, and particularly the community in Western Thrace. Christofis provides a historical background to the Muslim minority in Greece since the early 20th century and then focuses on the 2000s and the AKP governance period. Through Turkish policies and statements by Turkish officials he demonstrates the AKP’s increased interest in and engagement with the Muslim minority in Greece, often at the expense of its relations with the Greek government.
However, Christofis suggests, Turkey seems to care enough about good (economic) relations with Greece and its Muslim minority that it might not be willing to compromise them for a more controlling relationship with that particular kin community.

Mete Hatay and Rebecca Bryant’s chapter focuses on Turkey’s kin politics vis-à-vis the Turkish-Cypriot community. More specifically, the authors provide a broad outline of the ways in which Turkish state attitudes towards Cyprus and Turkish Cypriots have changed over time, and the policy implications of such attitude changes. As Hatay and Bryant argue, for Turkey Cyprus has always stood somewhere between the ‘domestic’ and the ‘foreign,’ having influence in both realms of policy. With the AKP coming to power this narrative began to break down without, however, being fully replaced. What this change did create were increasing tensions between Turkish-Cypriots and Turkey as well as between Turkish Cypriots and Turkish nationals.

Chapter 7 concludes the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East case studies with Nur Köprülü’s take on Turkey’s diaspora/kin policy with regard to Palestine, which highlights the ‘new’ ideological and Islamist discourse in Turkey’s ‘new’ national identity and foreign policy-making. Köprülü argues that the AKP government perceives the Palestinians as a kin community – as a part of the global Muslim community – and sees them as central in rebuilding Turkey’s new diaspora and kin-community policy overseas. Furthermore, she demonstrates that the Palestinians and Palestine more broadly are key to Ankara’s regional foreign policy.

The volume ends with Chapter 8, namely the editors’ conclusions that attempt to summarize Turkey’s diaspora and kin politics taking into account the various case studies and the transformation of Turkish foreign policy more generally. Lastly, the authors comment on the future prospects of Turkey’s influence abroad through kin communities in light of the new political-ideological shifts within Turkey and within the diaspora and kin communities respectively.

References


CHAPTER 2:

THE AMBIVALENT NATURE
OF THE RELATIONS BETWEEN BULGARIA
AND TURKEY IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

Ahmet Erdi Öztürk

Introduction

Since the beginning of the new millennium, Turkey’s Presidency of Religious Affairs (the Diyanet) has been sending imams and appointing religious attachés (in Sofia and Burgas) to Bulgaria for two main reasons. The first is that since the very late 1990s the Diyanet has been financially supporting the Muslim community in the Republic of Bulgaria (Grand Mufti’s Office or the Bulgarian Chief Muftiate), the Muslim Denomination/Community and more than 1,000 mosques all over the country, and these imams and attachés have been coordinating these supportive activities. Secondly, according to Bulgaria’s 2011 population census, Muslims account for over 7 percent of the total population and most self-identify as ethnically Turkish or Pomak. Turkey has historically demonstrated a vested interest in promoting Turkish and Islamic identity and has traditionally overseen these Muslim minorities. Moreover, the appointed religious leaders also function as representatives of Turkey—as much as the Turkish diplomats (Öztürk and Sözeri 2018: 634-636). And while these imams and attachés have long been active in various regions and cities of Bulgaria, since roughly the beginning of 2016 their activities have begun to alarm the Bulgarian authorities who claim that such activities are inappropriate (i.e., to their religious and diplomatic status). As a result of these claims, Ugur Emiroğlu, the Diyanet attaché in Burgas, was deported in 2017, accused of


1 In 1924, the Diyanet was established as part of the state structure; its mandate is to implement all provisions that relate to the Islamic faith and worship in modern Turkey. It has undergone various changes according to political forces, beginning in the late 1940s when the Diyanet gradually took control over the Quran courses and endowments favored by political actors. After the re-establishment of the democratic order annihilated by the 1960 coup, the Diyanet gained prominence because the state employed it in its struggle against communism. Since the 1970s, the Diyanet has played an important role both in Turkey and abroad.
meddling in the domestic politics of Bulgaria.\textsuperscript{2} Indeed, this was a telling sign of the loss of confidence between two neighbouring countries.

Even though Diyanet representatives have engaged in some questionable activities—which has for some time been a subject of dispute between the two countries—Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov have been “thick as thieves” since 2009. They have met frequently and discussed a number of important issues, including: how the two neighboring countries can deepen bilateral cooperation in the fields of economy, energy and tourism; and how they can work together on the problems of terrorism and the new mass immigration.\textsuperscript{3} Prime Minister Borissov supported the Turkish government against the bloody coup attempt in Turkey of 15 July 2016. This was an army-led coup against Erdoğan and his party, the AKP (Justice and Development Party, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi), which was successfully squelched, although not before 256 people died and 2,797 were wounded. Erdoğan, backed by other major political actors and media outlets, accused the Gülen Movement\textsuperscript{4} of being behind the coup attempt, and the following morning the Bulgarian government was one of the first countries to publicly condemn the uprising. Moreover, in August 2016 the Bulgarian government discreetly extradited to Turkey Abdullah Büyük, a Gülenist Turkish businessman who had sought political asylum in Bulgaria. And while most Bulgarian NGOs and many political groups were outraged at this decision, Borissov underlined his support to Erdoğan in many ways.\textsuperscript{5}

Besides these Bulgaria-Turkey centric issues, Turkey’s Balkan policy under the AKP period is itself a subject of some dispute. On the one hand, some argue that Turkey’s new pro-active foreign policy towards the Balkans satisfies the cultural, financial and religious needs of the region’s people. Furthermore, these studies emphasize Erdoğan’s protective leadership vis-à-


\textsuperscript{4} The Gülen Movement, which was founded by Fethullah Gülen, has defined itself as an advocate of interfaith dialogue through civil society activities at a global level since the second half of 1990s. However, it is popularly believed to have a political face dedicated to expansion of its political and bureaucratic power and through obtaining and maintaining important positions within the state. Although in 1980 the Movement started to place its members in public institutions, their presence reached its peak during the Justice and Development Party (AKP) period when the Movement became the unofficial coalition partner of AKP governments. Furthermore, the Movement has expanded its activities abroad and worked in line with the AKP. Yet, through the political crises, such as the 17-25 December 2013 corruption scandal and the 15 July 2016 coup attempt, this unofficial coalition was dispersed. As a result, the government labeled the Gülen Movement as Fethullah Gülen Terror Organization (FETÖ). Therefore, in the aftermath of the coup attempt, the AKP government shut down all the civilian institutions of the Movement and tried to expand this abroad via its transnational institutions. Since then, southeast Europe has been a core battlefield between the two and this battle has been negatively affecting Turkey’s image in the region. Therefore, the study gives a special attention to the subject of the Gülen Movement. For details see: Watmough and Öztürk, 2018a.

The Ambivalent Nature of the Relations between Bulgaria and Turkey in the New Millennium

vis the Turks and Muslims of the Balkans (Aras 2009; Kalın 2011). On the other hand, there are those who argue that Turkey’s rapid illiberal turn (Baser and Öztürk 2017), and its pushing the boundaries via aggressive use of soft power tools and religion (Demirtas 2017) have been negatively affecting Turkey’s relationships with the Balkan countries and, indeed, with Bulgaria. Beyond these polarised ideas, some of the realpolitik claims are actually very controversial. For instance, one such complaint has been voiced by the former national security adviser to the US president Donald Trump, Herbert Raymond McMaster, who declared that ‘we’re seeing great involvement by Turkey […] everywhere from western Africa to Southeast Asia […] particularly the Balkans is an area of grave concern now’.6 Despite McMaster’s very controversial remarks, Turkey also has revealed its diplomatic involvement via religious tools. For instance, in early 2018, Erdoğan, together with Muslim and Orthodox religious leaders of Turkey and Bulgaria, reopened the centuries-old Bulgarian Orthodox Iron Church (Demir Kilise), also known as St. Stephen’s, in the historic Balat neighbourhood of Istanbul after a seven-year restoration project, and during the opening ceremony he noted his belief that different religions and cultures can peacefully coexist.7

This divergence of ideas (and even facts) regarding the relations between Turkey and Bulgaria indicates that these are both complicated and multi-dimensional; there are perforce many intrinsic variables based on Turkey’s ever-transforming domestic and foreign policies and the Bulgarian authorities’ subsequent reactions. In this regard, I prefer to define the relations between Turkey and Bulgaria as an ambivalent one with an ambiguous nature. This ambiguity is based on several dependent variables such as Turkey’s kin policy, how this policy is perceived by Bulgaria, and a number of other mutual realpolitik dynamics. Indeed, none of these variables are independent of the two countries’ historical relationship and Turkey’s Balkan policy.

Therefore, to examine the ambiguous nature of the relations, this article8 will first scrutinise Turkey’s presence and role in the Balkans (Bechev 2012) and Bulgaria from the beginning of the AKP period. Secondly, it will briefly clarify the historical and ideological forces behind the AKP’s Balkan and Bulgaria policies. Finally, it will elucidate the three key issues of the last two decades: a) increasing the Turkish investment as a service to the umma in Bulgaria; b) exportation of the domestic conflict; c) involving the Bulgarian political arena for the purpose of enlarging Turkey’s sphere of influence.

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8 This article is largely based on author’s fieldwork dating to 2017 and 2018 in Bulgaria. The fieldwork comprised 30 interviews with political actors, diplomats, scholars and journalists, as well as religious community leaders/representatives, and imams; the interviews were targeted to the general arguments of this study. This fieldwork, my observations and interviews, which included Muslim and non-Muslim, Turkish and non-Turkish interviewees, provide a rich body of information on the complex relations between Turkey and Bulgaria.
The Balkans and Bulgaria in the heart of Turkey

Halil İnalcık, a prominent historian of the Ottoman era, argues that what made the Ottoman state into an Empire was its expansion into the Balkans, as it fought for its ethnic and religious causes (İnalcık 2013: 3). İlber Ortaylı, another historian of the same era and a student of İnalcık, claims that the Ottomans were so heavily influenced by the Balkans that, in essence, the Ottoman state was a Balkan state (Ortaylı 2008). While both perspectives can be regarded as biased in favour of the Empire (Akgonul and Ozturk 2018), the importance of the Balkans and particularly Bulgaria, in both the rise (Wittek 2013) and the fall (Quataert 2005: 83-84) of the Ottomans cannot be ignored. Thus, the region played a central role in the Ottoman era and in the foundation of the Turkish Republic as well. In other words, both the rise of the colonialist and expansionist Ottomans (Todorova 1994: 454-455) and their fall through loss of territories (Yavuz and Blumi 2013) may be seen through the lens of the Balkans – and so, accordingly, can the foundation of the Republic, since most of its founding elite were from the former Ottoman territories. The perspective of the remaining Muslim population in the region on the Ottomans and on Turkey (Akgönül, 2008) further connects Turkey and the region and complicates relations between the two.

The loss of the Balkans, and further disconnection with the region via the establishment of a separate nation state, created trauma for the founding elites of Turkey and the socio-political groups that were ethnically and culturally affiliated with the region. This trauma then facilitated the formation of longing for the region among these people. Against this backdrop, Turkey’s presence in the region cannot be taken as a recent rise of activism; and as Bechev (2012) argues, Turkey has always been a presence in the region to varying degrees and according to the changes in its domestic political balance and the choices in its overall foreign policy. For instance, immediately subsequent to Bulgaria’s establishment as a state, Turkey tried to develop good relations with the country, while it also prioritized its border security against a possible coalition between Greece-Bulgaria and Italy. Furthermore, in the early Republican period, joining the Western world was a priority (Müftüler-Bac 1996: 53); thus, a pragmatic commitment to a stable international order, strict adherence to the law, and an a la Turca secularism (in Turkish: laiklik) (Öztürk 2016) were determining factors of the country’s foreign policy (Yavuz 1997: 23).

In these years, the first problem that beset Bulgaria and Turkey was the forced population exchange. The establishment of a Communist regime in Bulgaria in 1944 created a new situation for the Turks and other Muslims in the country. The new regime in Bulgaria began to implement policies aimed at transforming the multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious structure. And although the Ankara governments declared their concerns in diplomatic ways, the Bulgarian government did nothing to improve the rights and living conditions of Turks and Muslims. These minority groups started to hold mass protests against the Bulgarian government. The Bulgarian government could not control the street protests and demanded that the Turkish government accept a total of 250,000 ethnic Turks. Because of its economic and structural problems Turkey only welcomed around 150,000 Bulgarian Turks who had
been forced to migrate. Despite the emergence of problems with Bulgaria arising from this forced population exchange in the 1940s (Kirişçi 1995: 65), from the 1950s to the mid-1980s Turkey’s approach remained grounded in security and balance of power.

Turgut Özal (1983–1989 Prime Minister, 1989–1993 President), who came to power following the military coup of 1980, implemented many political changes and sought to establish a new approach based on the concept of neo-Ottomanism, referring to Turkey’s Ottoman–Islamic–Turkic past and its aspiration to regional domination (Yavuz 1998: 23). Indeed, this approach manifested itself in the Balkans especially in the aftermath of the Cold War, and Turkey started systematically viewing the region as an area of interest and involvement. At the tail end of the Özal period, in the 1990s, three Balkan countries—Bulgaria, Macedonia and Albania—invited Turkey and the Diyanet into their states, outside official diplomatic lines. It was the Diyanet that was key, according to some senior staff in Bulgarian Grand Mufti Office, since during the late 1980s and early 1990s Özal himself had directly and indirectly supported Muslims and Turks against the repressive Bulgarian regime.

Although there were some legal protections in place for religious and national identities during the Communist period (1946-1990), Bulgarian Muslims suffered due to the prohibition of mother-tongue education, Turkish names and Islamic practices. The harsh policies of the Bulgarian Communist regime coerced and punished the Turkish and Pomak Muslims of Bulgaria, who reiterated with small-scale rebellions against the government. Thereupon, in late 1989, Thodor Zhivkov, president of Bulgaria, called on the Turkish government to open its doors to Bulgarian Muslims. Turkey complied with the request and committed to taking 250,000 Bulgarian Turks from Edirne and Kıklareli. However, before too long, Özal put an end to this mass migration—as Ivanov argues—because Zhivkov’s officials replaced Turkish Bulgarians with thousands of gypsies, some of whom were criminals. But Özal did not stop there. He encouraged the Gülenists to change the situation, not only in Bulgaria, but also throughout rest of the Balkans.

It is important here to explain the Gülen Movement’s position in the 1980s and 1990s, as this knowledge is essential to understand the current situation. Despite Turkey’s catastrophic domestic politics in these two decades, the Gülen Movement was not negatively influenced by the instability in Turkey, and the Movement began to play an active role with the support of the Özal administration. In this regard, with the support of Özal, the Gülen Movement’s Bulgarian Association signed an official sponsorship agreement with the Grand Mufti’s Office and started to support the institution with money and human resources. They also tried to supply teachers for the Momchilgrad, Shumen and Ruse Imam Hatip high schools. Lastly, in the late 1990s they established the Bulgar-Turk Demokrasi Vakfi (Bulgarian-Turkish Democracy Foundation). At this point one might argue that the military intervention of 28 February 1997 aimed to curb the influence of the Movement in the region. It had a limited effect, however, and subsequent AKP governments (in the 2000s) made use of the ground that had been prepared by the Gülen Movement in the region (Öztürk and Sözeri 2018; Öztürk and Gözaydın 2018).
The New Turkey and Its New Foreign Policy

The AKP period has witnessed an unprecedented wave of change in Turkey. Coming to power in 2002 as a single-party government against the pressures of the Turkish Armed Forces and bureaucratic tutelage, the AKP has changed both itself and the country at critical junctures. Studies examining the AKP, however, diverge radically in their assessments of the party. While some argue that under AKP rule, at least initially, Turkey was exemplary in reconciling Islam with democracy (Dagi 2008), other studies, specifically after 2011, observed repressive tendencies (Taş 2015). Therefore, framing Turkey's influence in the Balkans and particularly Bulgaria requires a comprehensive and holistic study, one that can assess the changes in the country's domestic and foreign policies using an integrated approach, and one that is able to evaluate the AKP in light of both the ruptures and continuity that the party experienced in different periods.

First, it must be acknowledged that the AKP's ascent is the cumulative result of the march to power of Islamic and conservative groups since the Young Ottomans of the late Ottoman era (Öztürk 2019). In order to achieve power with an effective leadership, support of the lower-middle class and a pro-European Union discourse, the AKP followed non-confrontational policies to avoid problems with the Kemalist-secularist guardianship mechanism, i.e., the well-established bureaucratic tutelage of Turkey (Akkoyunlu 2014). Fighting the indirect interventions of the military (i.e., the e-memorandum of 2007) and the secularist mass protests (the Republican protests), the AKP formed an unofficial coalition with various anti-tutelage groups. One of their largest unofficial but visible coalition partners was the Gülen Movement, and together they began to implement a more pro-active foreign policy in southeast Europe and the rest of the world. This coalition then shifted its attention to domestic politics, and with the support of the liberal intelligentsia began publicly fighting the hostile bureaucratic structures with the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer cases. However, the AKP–Gülen coalition became more assertive over time, applying more nationalist policies vis-à-vis the Kurdish issue.

When Ahmet Davutoğlu, an ambitious yet less-than-realistic scholar of international politics, was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs, Turkey followed bolder and more confident policies—first in the Balkans and then in Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia and the West. At this point, it is important to note that even though the Gülen Movement and the AKP emerged from different traditions and had different worldviews and organisational and political styles as well as completely different historical roots and theological traditions, their agendas coalesced along common interests in terms of foreign policy. The Balkan region represents an important area for both the AKP and the Gülen Movement because of its significant Muslim and Turkish-speaking demographics and its potential for multilateral investment in areas such as trade and education. Indeed, one focal point of this unofficial coalition was Bulgaria because of its Ottoman background and Turkish-speaking Muslim minority. In this regard, both in Bulgaria and in the rest of the Balkans the organisational capacity of the Gülen Movement acted in tandem with the transnational apparatuses of the AKP government in a manifestation of soft power. Moreover, the political power and influence
of the AKP helped the Gülen Movement open some key doors in host countries’ corridors of bureaucracy (Wathmough and Ozturk 2018b). Indeed, to define all the policy implementations of that period within the category of soft power would misrepresent what soft power entails, since most of the policies were geared to the self-interest of the Gülen Movement and the AKP, rather than to create a Turkish soft power per se.

To understand the foreign policy mentality of the AKP, it is important now to explain Davutoğlu’s ideas. In his 2001 book, Stratejik Derinlik (Strategic Depth), he clarifies his central claims about the Balkan region: he believes that Turkey— because of its Ottoman past and its shared cultural identity and religion with both old Ottoman territories and the Islamic world— should utilise its geostrategic location to enhance its standing in the world. In this way, Turkey has the potential to be a pivotal state in global affairs. This represents a rebuttal of the secular and Western-oriented characteristics of classic Turkish foreign policy. Davutoğlu also offers an alternative worldview and definition of the Turkish state identity by instrumentalising religion. He focuses on the ontological difference between Islam and all other civilisations, particularly the West, and asserts that the differences between Western and Muslim paradigms create an obstacle for the study of contemporary Islam as a subject of the social sciences, especially international politics. Davutoğlu believes that governments in the Islamic world cannot derive their legitimacy from the same sources as Western states (such as elections and representative institutions), but instead must have a religious basis. He also notes that Turkey is a key part of Islamic civilisation and can resume its rightful place on the world stage only if it embraces leadership of the Islamic world, as it did when the Caliphate was based in Istanbul. He repeatedly drives forward the importance of nationalist ideas supported by glorification of the Ottoman period (Davutoğlu 2001).

The Balkan countries appear to be a suitable context in which to implement these foreign policy aims, since they are located within Turkey’s geographical, cultural and economic realm of influence (Öztürk 2018). Furthermore, he suggests (Davutoğlu 2008) that the Balkans is entering a new era, undergoing a period of restoration, cooperation and construction: restoration in the sense of restoring shared cultural, economic and political ties; cooperation in developing a new spirit of joint action; and construction as a way to both overcome the legacy of past decades and respond to the challenges of the new decades to come. At this point, suffice it to say that Davutoğlu’s ideas were welcomed primarily by the Muslims of the region; they were not accepted unilaterally.

Yet, it is hard to claim that Davutoğlu’s ideas are not widely accepted throughout the entire region. In my fieldwork, I realised that while most local experts and the elite were critical of Davutoğlu and his ethno-religious desires for the Balkans, the Turkish officials did not discuss these. On the contrary, most Turkish diplomats in Bulgaria noted that Davutoğlu’s ideas were in fact accepted by most “rational” Bulgarian scholars and political elites, and the Turkish Embassy in Sofia took the initiative of publishing a translation of the book—an interesting as well as a controversial decision. However, it is also important to note that it is almost impossible to find the book in any Bulgarian bookshop, since Bulgarians find Davutoğlu’s ideas hegemonic, Islamist and colonialist.
Apart from the “Davutoğlu effect,” which is also uncertain, Turkey’s foreign policy in the Balkans has also become rather ambiguous due to its domestic political transformations. At this point, we might suggest that Turkish-Balkan and Turkish-Bulgarian relations can be very easily understood through a constructivist perspective, i.e., the viewpoint that domestic political changes directly affect a country’s foreign policy (Klotz and Lynch 2007). Yet, in fact, Turkey has historically departed from this norm—while some domestic changes have been reflected in Turkey’s foreign policy, this has not always been the case (Bozdağlıoğlu 2008). We might argue that, after roughly 2013, the open and outward-reaching policy-line started to deteriorate; this was due to a sluggish Turkish economy, rising authoritarianism in line with global developments, and the Arab uprisings that frightened the AKP leadership and explains the party’s harsh reaction to the Gezi protests in the summer of 2013. This process of de-democratisation was manifested through increasing authoritarianism in domestic politics and significant changes in foreign policy, especially in relation to the EU. While this process had a number of critical junctures, it may be fair to claim that the “war” between the Gülen Movement and the AKP has affected it the most. After 2013, the unofficial coalition between the AKP and Gülenists that had been based on power-sharing turned into an all-out war, which altered AKP domestic and foreign policy. The crises that the AKP government faced, such as the 17–25 December corruption investigations and finally the July 15 coup attempt, led Erdoğan to centralise power in his person. The regime change that came in 2017 and the necessity of obtaining more than 50% of the votes made Erdoğan lean towards nationalism and ally with the MHP (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, Nationalist Action Party). This new coalition has become the core ideological backbone of Turkey: ethno-nationalist, repressive and Sunni Islamist. The emergence of what Erdoğan labels the New Turkey has changed Turkey’s policies and its image in Bulgaria.

**Three Outcomes of the AKP Rule in Bulgaria**

As I noted at the beginning of this article, Turkey’s transformation under AKP rule has produced three different consequences: a) increasing Turkish investment as a service to the *umma* in Bulgaria: b) exportation of the domestic conflict; c) involving the Bulgarian political arena for the purpose of enlarging Turkey’s sphere of influence.
Bulgaria’s Grand Mufti, Mustafa Hadji, in the course of my 2017 interview with him, noted that Turkey’s material and non-material support has been gradually increasing since the very beginning of 2006. Even though it is not quite enough, Turkey has been sending around two million Bulgarian levs every year in compliance with an official agreement with the Grand Mufti Office in Sofia. According to Hadji, they can also ask for additional material support from the Diyanet and the Turkish Diyanet Foundation. For example, during Eid periods, Turkey sends sacrificial lambs to Bulgarian Muslims. Even though at first glance this financial support would not seem a huge burden on Turkey’s Treasury, Turkey is a country where economic crises are fundamental determinants of the political situation, and thus even that kind of support could affect the country negatively. After a decade of economic failures and coalition governments, the AKP was perceived as a new hope with its promises of change (Öniş 2009: 409-432). The party initiated its economic policies on the basis of the established economic plan devised by the previous government and the IMF, which had two main aims: increasing the GDP and establishing a monetary policy with a target of price stability. The AKP governments, particularly between 2002 and 2008, addressed a number of the country’s chronic economic problems and created new and alternative sources for the Treasury.

Under a strict program, the Turkish economy overcame to a degree some entrenched difficulties, but the global economic turbulence of 2008 affected the Turkish economy negatively. The significant and consecutive political upheavals— the Gezi Protests, the 17–25 December Corruption Investigation Process, the struggle between the Gülen Movement and the AKP, the failed coup attempt and the long-lasting state of emergency— affected the economy negatively. In other words, the Turkish economy has not really improved since 2009, when the GDP per capita had reached around $10, 500. Even though, according to 2017 economic indicators, Turkey’s GDP has grown more than 5 percent, the Turkish lira has been steadily plummeting since 2018 (Yeldan and Ünüvar 2016: 12) Therefore, under conditions of a backsliding of democracy and political tensions, the economy remains an issue of major debate in Turkish politics. Beyond that, the exchange rate has depreciated steadily since mid-2017. Intensified market pressures in August 2018 led to a further depreciation of around 30%, followed by a partial recovery thereafter.

Despite this economic background, and apart from the Diyanet under the AKP rule, Turkey has been investing a lot, particularly to Muslims of the Balkans, via transnational state apparatuses such as the TİKA and Yunus Emre Institutes, but the situation in Bulgaria is quite

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9 TİKA was established in 1992, as a statutory technical aid organization under the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Its remit was to provide assistance to the Turkic (Turkish speaking) Republics of Central Asia as they transitioned after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Especially since 2002, TİKA has increased its activity and visibility through projects of external development assistance that have reflected Turkey’s increasing commitment to an expansive foreign-policy orientation under the AKP.

10 The Yunus Emre Institute is a public body established in 2007 to encourage friendly knowledge and understanding between the people of Turkey and the wider world by promoting the Turkish language, history, and culture abroad. In this sense it is akin to the UK’s British Council and Germany’s worldwide network of Goethe Institutes. It provides a range of cultural relations programs and services, including the promotion of cultural exchange and partnership and the internationalization of education in Turkish language, culture, history, and art.
different. Even though, after the African countries, the Balkan Peninsula is the second most important target region for TİKA, and the Yunus Emre Institute is quite active in the region, Turkey has not succeeded in opening branch offices of TİKA and Yunus Emre in Bulgaria. However, TİKA has been supporting some renovation works in Bulgaria, e.g., it undertook the renovation of Banyabaşı Mosque (Баня баши джамия) between 2013 and 2014. TİKA’s limited scope of activities and the absence of a branch office in Bulgaria, where there are hundreds of Ottoman monuments, was one of the questions put to Süleyman Gökçe, the Turkish ambassador to Sofia. In response, in 2017, he explained that even though Turkey has been insisting on opening a TİKA office in Sofia, the Bulgarian administration thinks that because Bulgaria is an EU country, EU funds would be sufficient to support a number of renovation projects. Ambassador Gökçe also noted that the Bulgarian state is afraid that Bulgarians will react negatively to Turkish institutions, since most Bulgarian citizens think that Turkey’s institutions are political and detrimental to their interests.

In Bulgaria, apart from the Diyanet’s undersecretary, no Turkish state apparatus has an official presence, although upon demand and/or request by local actors, the Turkish government and municipalities might become involved in aid activities. In this way Turkey can be active in some areas even though the Bulgarian authorities do not allow any sort of official Turkish presence its state apparatuses. A senior official who worked at the Foreign Ministry of Bulgaria was asked about this situation in the first quarter of 2017:

We [the Bulgarian state] have two answers: one of them is very official while the other is less so, but both of them are correct. First of all, we do not need Turkey’s support directly, because we are a member of the European Union and get support from them if we need. Secondly, since 2007 or 2008 we realised that these Turkish institutions are highly political and they categorise people according to their religion and ethnicity. We do not want any more division in Bulgaria… but let me tell you that Davutoğlu wanted to open TİKA and Yunus Emre offices here [in Sofia] but we did not give an affirmative response to him, since we have some problems with Turkey’s agents here and these institutions might open new cases for us.

From this it may be inferred that the Bulgarian state does not perceive the activities of TİKA and Turkey’s other soft power instruments as structures that respect the boundaries of their official job descriptions. We might well ask then, why did the Bulgarian state accept the Diyanet’s activities in the late 1990s, but did not allow those of TİKA and the others in 2000? Mihail Ivano, a chief advisor to Zhelyu Zhelev, the first post-communist president of Bulgaria between 1990 and 1997, was one of the political actors who established the first protocol between the Diyanet and the Bulgarian Grand Mufti’s office. He told me that around twenty-five years ago they were comfortable with the Diyanet in Bulgaria, but now he saw that it was a mistake—the Diyanet is not a Turkish institution, it is Erdoğan’s political instrument; as a result the present political actors and bureaucrats do not make the mistake of inviting other pro-Erdoğanist political instruments to Bulgaria.
As noted previously, Bulgaria’s demographic structure makes it a different case from the other countries in the Balkans. The Bulgarian Muslims who are ethnically Turkish or Pomak or Roma constitute approximately 7% of the overall population and Turkey considers them in terms of kinship (soydas), which is relatively different and even stronger than religious brotherhood. While around four hundred thousand Bulgarian citizens live in Turkey, six hundred thousand Bulgarian citizens have Turkish passports and the right to vote in general elections. Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks (and Roma) who have migrated to Turkey and clustered in big groups in Istanbul and neighboring cities (especially Bursa) are becoming an issue that unites domestic politics with foreign policy.

Turkey plays the role of motherland for most Bulgarian Muslims, and some argue that ‘We [the Bulgarian Muslims] know that the motherland [Turkey] is just over there, even if we never go.’ This makes better sense when considered in the light of the fact that in terms of its population the Bulgarian Turks constitute the largest extra-territorial ethno-linguistic Turkish minority, as an Ottoman residue. Therefore, while Turkey considers Bulgarian Muslims in terms of kinship, most Bulgarian Muslims see Turkey through the lens of motherland. All this considered it was not the Turkish state that initiated activities in Bulgaria first: it was the Gülen Movement first, and now it is the exportation of domestic conflicts focused on the AKP’s fight with the Gülen Movement. The AKP is trying to win the hearts and minds of the Bulgarian Muslims against the presence and established status of the Movement.

The representative of the Gülen Movement stated that in 1993, after the collapse of the Communist regime, they began their activities through the education institutions, signing sponsorship agreements with the Grand Mufti’s Office during the Grand Mufti Nedim Gencev times. The Movement then undertook the financial support of the Grand Mufti’s Office and took partial control of the Momchilgrad, Shumen, and Ruse Imam Hatip high schools. Alongside these supportive activities, they began to publish a weekly newspaper (Zaman) in both Turkish and Bulgarian, as well as a religious journal (Ümit); until 1998 they also operated the Bulgarian-Turkish Democracy Foundation. In 1998, in the aftermath of the 28 February 1997 post-modern military coup in Turkey, the activities of the Gülen Movement were stopped and/or frozen by the Bulgarian authorities in compliance with Turkish demands. The Diyanet took over the Movement’s supportive role in the Grand Mufti’s Office and the Imam Hatip high schools. Yet, the relatively weak Turkish economy prohibited sustainable support and, de facto, the Gülen Movement reclaimed its former role. In this regard, the current Grand Mufti noted that: ‘The Turkish Diyanet was incapable of supplying our demands until 2002, so we received the support of the Movement.’

After the “frozen period” of 1998—2002, the Gülen Movement initiated activities in various areas as the AKP came to power. They started running activities with the Grand Mufti’s Office and in 2010 a secretary general who had close ties to the Gülen Movement was appointed to the office. Additionally, between 2008 and 2013, members of the Movement were appointed to most of the critical positions in the Office of the Grand Mufti, although no official (in the
Office) could provide a satisfactory answer to how these appointments were made. In fact, it was the “unconventional and unofficial coalition” between the Movement and the AKP that provided these opportunities.

Beyond these activities, in 2011 the Gülen Movement managed to open two secondary and high school complexes under the name of *Drujba* (*dostluk* in Turkish, friendship in English). The larger of these two schools was established in the periphery of Sofia and had a 500-plus student capacity. The other school, located in Plovdiv where the majority of the population is comprised of Turkish and Pomak Muslims, was built as a boarding school with a capacity of 120 students. According to Mihaglev, even though the AKP government did not directly support the Gülen Movement in its activities in Bulgaria, the period between 2008 and 2013 can justly be called “the golden age” of the movement. The support of the Turkish Embassy played an important problem-solving role. The golden age however, ended right after the corruption investigations, which were publicly believed to have been carried out by members of the Gülen movement members into the state bureaucracy.

In my 2017 dated interview with Süleyman Gökçe, the Turkish Ambassador to Sofia, highlighted; ‘… our friends in Bulgaria have realised the danger quite late. There are still many activities of this dangerous Movement in many areas. Yet, the Bulgarian state has not understood the danger, in contravention to our suggestions…’ However, according the representative of the Gülen Movement, the *Diyanet* threatened the Grand Mufti’s Office via the embassy to cut off financial support if it maintained relations with the Movement. As a result, all the pro-Gülen staff were dismissed from the Grand Mufti’s Office and from the Momchilgrad, Shumen, and Ruse Imam Hatip high schools. All the staff of the Grand Mufti’s Office withdrew their children from the schools run by the Movement. This was a crucial point in terms of the exportation of domestic conflicts via state apparatuses and the instrumentalisation of religion.

It is clear that, until the 15 July 2016 coup attempt in Turkey, the issue of the exportation of domestic conflicts was limited to the representatives of the Gülen Movement, Turkey’s Sofia Embassy, the *Diyanet* and the Muslim communities of Bulgaria. The cooperation of the Embassy and the *Diyanet* removed the Movement from religion-based management areas, indicating that Turkey preferred not to use the official diplomatic channels to reach its aim, but to instrumentalise the *Diyanet*.

However, the failed coup attempt and the subsequent Turkish measures led the Bulgarian authorities to change their ideas on the issue. Turkey’s Sofia Embassy, as an official representative of the country, has come to the fore and asked the Bulgarian state to take the initiative regarding the dangers posed by the Gülen Movement, which would be good for both Turkey and Bulgaria. On the night of the coup, Ambassador Gökçe took an open position against the coup attempt and the Bulgarian government held an emergency meeting regarding this issue on the day following the coup attempt. After the meeting with Gökçe, Bulgarian Prime Minister Boiko Borissov noted that; ‘We always supported observing the laws and constitution of any country. There is a way to topple governments and that is
through elections. Peace cannot be achieved through war and death. Under these circumstances, the Bulgarian government repatriated more than 70 Gülenists to Turkey, only two of whom had Bulgarian residence, the rest being individuals who had tried to escape from Turkey as illegal migrants. The Bulgarian state then began to actively repress the Gülen Movement, using its regulative role: e.g., as the representative of the Gülen Movement in Bulgaria noted, inspectors visited the Drujba School in late July on orders from the Bulgarian government, although they could find no basis for cancelling the school’s license.

Bulgaria’s political elites are finally convinced that the Turkish state has been involving itself in the Balkan region’s internal affairs, by supporting new political parties and dividing the existing parties, using their financial power, and promoting religious oriented ideals onto the transnational apparatuses. Süleyman Gökçe, the former Turkish ambassador in Sophia, focused on Turkey’s mediator role, arguing for Turkey’s normative duty towards Bulgarian Muslims and Turks. He believes that Bulgarian Turks, Bulgarian Muslims and the people of Turkey are “as close as two coats of paint”. Yet, he also confessed that the Bulgarian Muslims suffered before the establishment of democracy in Bulgaria and in those days, Turkey was not very forthcoming in its protection of the Muslims of Bulgaria. He further believes that Turkey is now much more willing to work for the needs of Muslims and Turkish Bulgarians. All these pressures and restrictions led the Muslim and Turkish Bulgarians to resist the Communist regime, but the Bulgarian state managed to reduce tensions by establishing the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (Движение за права и свободи, Hàk ve Özgürlükler Hareketi, НОХ), under the leadership of Ahmet Dogan (Ахмед Демир Доган) in 1990.

Although the НОХ was officially established in 1990, it is commonly believed that Ahmet Dogan had started to organize the party in the early 1980s. In 2007, the Bulgarian state revealed the list of secret service staff and paid agents during the Communist period; Dogan was listed among the paid agents of the Bulgarian State Committee for Security between 1974 and 1988. Dogan is also a social scientist whose PhD dissertation is entitled; ‘Philosophical Analysis of the Principle of Symmetry’, which was also the core ideological background of the НОХ.

While from the very outset of the НОХ, certain Muslim and Turkish luminaries, such as the former Grand Mufti, Nedim Gencev, tried to divide and create new political structures for Muslims and Bulgarian Turks, they were less than successful. Because the HOH represented all Bulgarian Muslims, the party managed to acquire a reasonable number of seats in the Bulgarian Parliament, as early as the first democratic elections. Between 2001 and 2009, the Party was not only part of the coalition governments, but it also controlled some ministries, including the Ministry of Agriculture. In 2009 the Bulgarian state gave voting rights to all its citizens in the diaspora, the majority of whom live in Turkey; the НОХ became the first party on the ballot outside Bulgaria. Moreover, since 2009 the Party has won a small number of seats in the European Parliament.

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Despite the fact that the HÖH has a relatively successful election record, as well as a respectable acceptance rate among both Bulgarian Muslims and some non-Muslim Bulgarians, since 2010 some former party members and members of the parliament have aimed to establish a new political structure to counter the HÖH. Among them, the People’s Party for Freedom and Dignity (Narodna Partiya Svoboda i Dostoynstvo) was founded in 2011 by Korman Ismailov, a former HOH member of parliament, but did not exceed the required 4% election threshold in 2013. During the establishment period of the People’s Party for Freedom and Dignity, some news agencies claimed that the Party received direct financial support from Turkey and argued that Erdoğan’s October 2010 visit was evidence for this argument. In October 2010, Erdoğan paid a diplomatic visit to Sofia and met Korman Ismailov and other leading figures of the party but refused to meet Ahmet Doğan. Furthermore, in 2010, Boyko Borissov openly warned Erdoğan with these words: ‘No party intermediaries are necessary between Bulgaria and Turkey. I insist that our Turkish colleagues review their relations with certain circles in Bulgaria who present themselves as actors expressing the will of the Turkish state in Bulgaria.’

Although the People’s Party for Freedom and Dignity was never actually operative, it was the first sign of the division between the pro-Turkish HÖH and Turkey’s direct and indirect intervention in the Bulgarian domestic political arena. A number of leading figures within the HÖH began to argue that it had become Ahmet Dogan’s personal party and was losing its inclusionary vision. Thus, while Dogan was not happy about stepping down as party chair, because of the intense opposition he turned it over to Lütfi Mestan, in January 2013. Dogan then created a new position for himself: honorary president. Under Mestan’s chairmanship, a new discussion started within the party ranks: Turkey’s direct support to the HÖH under Mestan’s rule. A close political colleague of Lüfti Mestan felt that Dogan was responsible for these claims since he wanted to reclaim the chair. Therefore, such claims were related to internal party politics, not the country’s overall political stance. But other colleagues of Mestan argue that prior to his chairing the HÖH, the party had become an anti-AKP party. They also faulted this stance, since the HOH was a political party that claimed to support the rights of the Bulgarian Turks.

Despite the fact that Mestan managed to ride out these claims and much intimidation, in 2015 he was removed from his post by the central council and expelled from the party for what it considered an excessively pro-Turkish government stance following the downing of a Russian bomber jet by the Turkish Air force. In response he founded another pro-Turkish

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12 Bulgaria PM to Erdogan: No Ethnic Parties Needed as Mediators
https://www.novinite.com/articles/112559/Bulgaria+PM+to+Erdogan%3A+No+Ethnic+Parties+Needed+as+Mediators
last accessed 26 September 2019.

13 On 24 November 2015, a Turkish Air Force F-16 fighter jet shot down a Russian military aircraft near the Syria-Turkey border. According to the Turkish authorities the Russian aircraft was in Turkish airspace without permission, but the Russian Defence Ministry denied this claim and insisted that the aircraft was in Syrian airspace. Right after the issue Erdoğan pointed out that Turkey had the right to defend its airspace and Russian President Putin insisted that his country’s general claim was true. This issue created a diplomatic crisis between Russia and Turkey more than a year.
political party, Democrats for Responsibility, Solidarity and Tolerance (Демократи за отговорност, свобода и толерантност, DOST), and the claims about the direct influence of the Turkish AKP reached their peak point. A key reason for this perception was that in one of DOST’s propaganda films, the former Turkish ambassador, Süleyman Gökçe, appeared in a scene and spoke in favour of the DOST. Gökçe denied these claims in the interview conducted for this book, but the senior party official with whom another interview was conducted was quite sure about it. There are other claims regarding Turkey’s support to DOST; in fact, prior to the 2017 elections more serious claims emerged, asserting the instrumentalisation of the Diyanet and Diyanet imams as DOST was being established. And while DOST took only 2.9% of the votes in the 2017 general parliamentary elections (therefore won no seats because of 4% election threshold), the discussions and diplomatic crises that it created were much greater than its vote share.

On 21 February 2016, the Bulgarian press reported that Uğur Emiroğlu and three other Diyanet imams in Bulgaria had been declared ‘persona non grata’. According to the official declaration, Emiroğlu and the other imams’ activities were ‘incompatible with their diplomatic status’. According to the allegations, these Diyanet officials had been putting pressure on Bulgarian Muslims to support DOST. Furthermore, according to vogue in the Muslim houses of worship, Diyanet imams were asking for support for DOST. Even though Turkey’s role and the functions the Diyanet carried out during the establishment and promotion of DOST are uncertain, one issue is almost certain: the foundation of DOST led to new discussions on Turkey and religion by the two pro-Turkish Bulgarian parties. For instance, during the April 2017 Turkish constitutional referendum, the HÖH openly supported the AKP’s opponent, proclaiming their support on its website. On the other hand, DOST supported the AKP stance throughout the referendum process. Regarding this issue, Hafizoglu openly declared that although as a political party they were not openly linked to the election campaign for Turkey’s referendum, it was no secret that they supported Erdoğan’s stance and believed that the new constitution would be an opportunity for a big and powerful Turkey which would be an achievement for them as well.

Conclusion and policy recommendations

It is clear that Turkey has been undergoing another period of domestic transformation and has been developing new policies that are preferential to Bulgaria. Moreover, Turkey has been more heavily instrumentalising religion via its transnational apparatuses. This new religion-based and aggressive policy, it seems, cannot simply be regarded as an element of soft power. But it has different repercussions for different actors in Bulgaria: some groups (mostly Muslims) are rather happy with Turkey’s religiously fuelled approach, while others are seriously concerned. This is one reason that I prefer to define Turkey as an ambivalent actor who has not been instrumentalising her soft power resources efficiently. Even though one might argue that Turkey’s new religion-based policy and new activities could be understood within the concept of public diplomacy and/or soft power, this policy preference is multi-
faceted and has many problematic points, such as exportation of domestic conflicts, which are too complex to be defined as any kind of positive policy methodology such as soft power.

A comprehensive analysis of Turkey’s policies vis-à-vis southeast Europe indicates that the new elite in Ankara tends to believe that their southeast Europe imaginary is shared by the relevant countries and groups at the local level. This imaginary and the resultant strategies are not unrelated to Turkey’s recent transformation, i.e., Turkey is building its new approach on the Ottoman legacy in a selective manner and sees some Muslims in the region as “more Ottoman” than others and thus considers them its natural and historical interlocutors. For this reason, Turkey does not hesitate to intervene in domestic politics, creating a permanent influence through the elements of culture, language, religion and economics. To claim that Turkey’s new policies are totally ineffective would contradict the findings of my personal fieldwork and readings. However, the effect is polarized. Overall, Turkey works with a southeast Europe imaginary rather than with a well-calculated and internally consistent Balkan policy. This imaginary magnifies policymakers’ perceptions of Turkey’s influence in the region; they believe that most Muslims in the region see Turkey as a guardian. The much-opposed concept of “clash of civilizations” put forward by Ahmet Davutoğlu and other minor architects of Turkish foreign policy seems to be internalized in an extreme paradox. It has yet to be seen whether this is an historical illusion, or a hidden potential. Another shortcoming of this imaginary is that it downgrades the other actors in the region, including Austria, Russia and Germany, as well as the United States.

Yet, Turkey can still increase its capacity. To this end, it must acknowledge that it cannot be a true alternative for the countries of the region that aspire to be members of the EU. Turkey needs to increase its democratic credentials and strengthen the constitutional institutions; this will help it come more in line with EU policies. It must not use its religious influence to provide guardianship for Muslims in a hegemonic way; on the contrary, it must promote religious freedom and peaceful coexistence both domestically and in the region. Supporting a specific religious group would harm a region that has suffered greatly from religious divisions and conflicts. Bringing its secular culture to the fore would differentiate Turkey from Wahhabi and Salafist powers that are also trying to exercise influence on the region. Turkey should also be careful in its emphasis on the common Ottoman heritage with the countries of the region, because this does not necessarily imply the peaceful and harmonious past that the AKP elite depicts. Lastly, as noted previously, Turkey must not view the Balkans as a single entity and implement wholesale policies in the region. Rather, it must tailor specific policies for each country considering the sensitivity of historical, cultural, sociological and political dynamics in each context.
The Ambivalent Nature of the Relations between Bulgaria and Turkey in the New Millennium

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CHAPTER 3:

TURKEY’S DIASPORA GOVERNANCE POLICIES AND DIASPORAS FROM TURKEY IN GERMANY: A CRITICAL READING OF THE CHANGING DYNAMICS

Bahar Baser and Ahmet Erdi Ozturk

Introduction

Last year over 10,000 Turkish citizens applied for asylum in Germany;\(^1\) the year before it was approximately 8000.\(^2\) Normally only one-third of these applications are approved by the German authorities. These numbers show that since the authoritarian turn in Turkey, which gained momentum after the Gezi protests in 2013 and reached its peak after the coup attempt in 2016, Turkish citizens are leaving the country despite the somewhat harsh asylum conditions that they face in Europe. Approximately 50% of those who leave seek asylum in Germany\(^3\), but there are also thousands who leave the country via golden visas or work permits. Newspapers have published alarming statistics that indicate a significant brain drain from Turkey,\(^4\) and those leaving the country constitute a heterogeneous crowd: there are former Turkish diplomats,\(^5\) academics who signed a petition calling for peace in southeastern

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2 Türkiye'den Almanya'ya iltica başvurularında artış sürüyor, Deutsche Welle, 14 November 2018. Accessed 30 August 2019. https://www.dw.com/tr/t%C3%8Ctkiyeseden-almanyaya-iltica-ba%C5%9Fvular%C4%B1nda-art%C4%B1%C5%9F-s%C3%8Ct%C3%8Cyor/a-46299568
Turkey, students, highly skilled migrants, political activists (Kurdish and leftist) and members of the Gulen Movement, which is accused of preparing the coup attempt against the elected government. The numbers leaving Turkey clearly indicate a significant wave of migration from Turkey, the largest since the 1990s when displaced and activist Kurds left the country in record numbers.\(^6\)

According to the Turkish Foreign Ministry more than five million Turkish citizens— including second-generation Turks and those of Kurdish, Assyrian or Armenian origin who hold or used to hold Turkish passports—live in western Europe.\(^7\) The lion’s share (more than 3 million) live in Germany (Baser 2015). Migration from Turkey to Germany dates back to the bilateral agreements for guest workers in the early 1960s. The first migrations were economically motivated; however with each political turbulence in Turkey—mainly due to military coups—immigrations have occurred one after another. Most visible migrations took place in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s because of increased repression of leftist and Kurdish nationalist groups due to the escalating conflict between the Turkish state and the PKK. In fact, migration from Turkey to Germany was fairly constant for over 50 years, making Germany a hub for Turkish transnational interactions.

A diasporic landscape has been created in Germany: throughout the country Turkey’s political movements have satellite branches where Turkish state actors execute diaspora governance policies for a population that is by now also German, obliging the German state to constantly mitigate between their own demands and those of the Turkish state. Germany is a space of contestation, settlement and struggle; it is a diasporic space where both dissenters and loyalists of the current Turkish regime transport their agendas from the homeland.

In the 1960s Turkey’s engagement with its diaspora was sporadic and consisted primarily of the bureaucratic means required to facilitate remittance flows back to the country and build communication channels for guest workers and their families.

Beginning in the 1980s the diasporic space started to become politicized and Turkish state officials began to pay more attention to migrant organizations with political aims, including leftists, Kurdish nationalists as well as Islamist groups that campaigned against the secular structure of Turkey. However, it was when the AKP came to power that Turkish diasporic policy took a major turn. Following current neo-liberal trends, Turkey formulated a ‘diaspora management policy’, which targeted not only Turkish citizens abroad (and their descendants) but also their kin communities—mainly in the Balkans (Ozturk and Gozaydin 2018) and in Central Asia, among others (Sahin-Mencutek and Baser 2017). The AKP government also

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\(^6\) Turkey brain drain: Crackdown pushes intellectuals out, BBC News, 28 December 2017. Accessed 30 August 2019
https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-42433668

\(^7\) Turkish Citizens Living Abroad, Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Accessed 30 August 2019
Turkey’s Diaspora Governance Policies and Diasporas from Turkey in Germany

introduced external voting rights to the diaspora members and this eventually led to the transnationalization of election campaigns, with both positive and negative consequences (Mugge et al. 2019; Sevi et al. 2019). Things became especially tense during the referendum whereby Turkey changed its government regime from parliamentary to presidential (Bilgin and Erdogan 2018).

However, the latest migration flow dates to early the 2010s when secular Turks, leftists and Kurdish activists began to leave the country due to an escalation of violence and a reduced freedom of speech after the Gezi protests (Yanasmayan and Kasli 2019). These new migration flows not only changed the demographics of Turkish migration to Germany, but also the balance of power in the diasporic landscapes. Turkey’s diasporic communities were already heterogeneous and divided; this most recent wave created a new impetus with regard to activism and changing the balance of power among various groups in the diaspora. The societal and political polarizations in Turkey are also reflected in their transnational networks, while migrants in Germany are now forming new alliances, which has led to new disputes/debates.

Turkey’s domestic tensions and their diffusion to the transnational space have also affected its diplomatic relations with Europe. A central dynamic here is the interaction between diasporas and their host countries, such that the debate on dual loyalties has resurfaced and Turkish migrants’ allegiance to ‘Western values’ has been fiercely questioned, although many journalists and politicians interpret diaspora support for the AKP as the result of insufficient (on the part of host countries) integration policies. Moreover, even during the campaign period, there were clashes with European leaders regarding the AKP’s ‘YES rallies’ that were organized for Turks living in Europe and attended by Turkish politicians brandishing incendiary rhetoric. The referendum results and Turkey’s worsening human rights record exacerbated tensions between Turkey and the West and saw Turkey drift further from EU membership. This will surely have long-term consequences for Turkey’s diasporas and their relations with the countries that they live in.

A Closer Look at Turkey’s Diaspora Governance Policy

Turkey’s policy towards its citizens living abroad has evolved over time. Turkey has shown a growing interest in diaspora governance decade by decade, however the most significant policy change occurred under the AKP: the party not only established the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) and the Public Diplomacy Coordinator under

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9 The YTB was founded in March 2010. For the law that regulates the scope of its activities see the [Official Gazette 27544, 5/49.](https://www.ytb.gov.tr/uploads/resimler/mevzuat-pdf/5978.pdf)
the Prime Ministry,\textsuperscript{10} but it also founded the Yunus Emre Institutes\textsuperscript{11} to enhance cultural activities abroad. Turkey is not the first country to reform its emigration policies and transform them into a systematic and strategic engagement with its citizens abroad. From Armenia to Bosnia, from China to India, many countries are trying to formulate diasporic policies to benefit their homeland’s interests, especially by engaging with them via certain political processes such as lobbying or external voting. They often create new institutions such as diaspora ministries or sub-committees that operate under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Şahin-Mencütek and Baser 2017). Turkey has always been, in one way or another, engaged in its citizens’ transnational landscapes abroad; what changed under the AKP was the systematic engagement with certain segments while simultaneously isolating dissidents of the regime under the same diaspora policy.

The major break from earlier policies is the distinct change in mentality. The policies formulated by successive AKP governments have used diaspora policy as a nation-branding strategy; in contrast, the political parties previously in power opted for a nation-hiding practice.\textsuperscript{12} What do we mean by this? In the past, mainstream political parties in Turkey treated Turkish migrants as a liability. Especially during the time when Turkey’s EU bid was at its peak, immigrants were constantly blamed for Turkey’s poor image in Europe (Ramm 2009). Therefore, government efforts aimed at a positive branding of the Turkish nation in the international arena mostly ignored Turkish migrants—the migrant Turk, who left Turkey for a better future, did not speak well for the country’s image. This has drastically changed during the AKP era.

The AKP did not formulate a diaspora governance mechanism from scratch (Yaldiz 2013). On the contrary, it built on and reformed existing policies and institutions, and worked to transform the popular perception of Turkish citizens abroad as a liability to the idea that they were an asset (Sahin-Mencutek and Baser 2017). Every speech made by a politician or YTB bureaucrat has underlined this fact. In line with the current neo-liberal trend of engaging with diasporas and using them as bridges between home and host countries, Turkish authorities have re-embraced their kin and invested significant capital and effort to strengthen ties, not only with those born in Turkey but also with the descendants of first-generation migrants.

Why did the AKP do this? What are the long and short-term repercussions/benefits of these policies for diasporic landscapes? Initially the AKP made efforts to mobilize the diaspora with a holistic approach that simultaneously included social, economic and political agendas. Yet the real transformative motivation came from the AKP’s own vision and future

\begin{itemize}
  \item For more information on Turkey’s Public Diplomacy Coordinator see: \url{https://kdk.gov.tr/}.
  \item For more information on the Yunus Emre Institutes see: \url{http://www.yee.org.tr/en}.
  \item We thank Mete Hatay for underlining the nation-branding/nation-hiding dichotomy.
\end{itemize}
Turkey’s Diaspora Governance Policies and Diasporas from Turkey in Germany

aim for the ‘New Turkey’ that they wanted to create—a vision that included both domestic and foreign policy dimensions. Indeed, in an article published in 2011, Ibrahim Kalin, the President’s spokesperson, said the following:

This [a new geographic imagination emerging in the 21st century] new idea of time and place makes it possible for Turkey to produce its own concepts and build a new vocabulary. From a semiotic perspective, even the new vocabulary and concepts of Turkish politics and foreign policy should be noted as indicators of a profound mental transformation. (Kalin 2011: 6)

The strategy underlying the creation of diaspora management programs was public diplomacy, which also entails soft power and cultural diplomacy elements.13 By adapting to the needs of the time, but at the same time embracing the nation’s roots and customs, the diaspora could be reunited with the homeland. This would clearly show Turkey as a powerful country that could take care of its citizens anytime and anywhere in the world, while reassuring the diaspora that the homeland was always ready to embrace them in whatever way they want to stay connected. They are neither ‘remittance machines’ nor the ‘unemployed masses’ that the state sent away in despair; instead, they are part of the Turkish nation—an inseparable component of the very psyche of the Turkish national identity. The AKP’s major success in getting mass support in Turkey and beyond was actually this very inclusive discourse, which condemned, and was a huge change from, the previous party discourses they perceived as elitist. In the AKP’s vision, re-embracing kin and diaspora would not only make Turkey stronger but would also bring the country prestige in the international arena.

In other words, Kalin claimed, “public diplomacy entails the comprehensive commu-
nication of the new ‘Turkish story’ effectively to the world” (2011: 18). However, apart from the social, political and economic benefits that are confined within the borders of public diplomacy, the new corridors connecting the diaspora and the homeland would also serve another purpose. The ‘new Turkish story’ had to be communicated to the international audience as well as to the diaspora Turks. The regime change in Turkey, which happened slowly but surely, needed a narrative that could be appreciated by the domestic population as well as by Turks living abroad. This was/is important for its survival and its ability to counter dissent. For the survival of the new regime in Turkey, nation-branding, therefore, becomes a practice that also, unavoidably, addresses the loyal citizens, who can then become the carriers of that nation’s image to broader audiences in a much more complex, legitimate and widespread way. In other words, the new brand needs ‘brand ambassadors’ and they need to be created before other strategies are put in play. Aronczyk explains this strategy in the following way:

13 Turkey aims to strengthen cultural diplomacy, AA, 03 February 2019. Accessed 30 August 2019
[...] the primary responsibility for the success of the nation brand lies with individuals: the nation’s citizens, members of the diaspora, or even non-citizens in distant locations who may find cause to engage with the nation and therefore wish to have a stake in its success. For national citizens in particular, the key function is to ‘live the brand’—that is, to perform attitudes and behaviors that are compatible with the brand strategy. By ‘immers[ing]’ themselves in the brand identity, citizens carry ‘the microbes of the brand’ and ‘infect’ those with whom they come into contact. This role is described variously as a ‘brand ambassador,’ ‘brand champion,’ ‘brand exemplar,’ or ‘brand carrier.’ (Aronczyk 2008:54)

However, in this day and age where boundaries are blurring and where ideologies and identities can become transnationalised in a matter of seconds, the diasporans are also expected to ‘live the brand.’ The audience for nation-branding strategies is just getting wider and wider. Take the YTB for instance. It focuses on four main areas: a) Overseas citizens, b) Kin and related communities, c) International Students, and d) Non-governmental Organizations. The scope of its activities is much broader than other diaspora ministries that deal with citizens abroad, but it has elements that underline Islam and Turkishness, adopting a broad definition of kin and relative communities. Therefore, the diaspora governance policy became highly lucrative for winning the hearts and minds of a variety of Turkey-related groups who are not necessarily citizens of Turkey.

The vagueness of the term gave Turkish authorities an incredible space to maneuver and tailor policies under the title of diaspora diplomacy, public diplomacy and soft power—and in ways that go far beyond the classical definitions of ‘diaspora’ in the academic literature. The AKP’s commitment to reviving historical ties with former Ottoman territories as well as to strengthening relationships with Muslim communities abroad shaped the diaspora governance policy. The neo-Ottoman ideology that the political party pursued affected how they defined the ‘citizen’ who lives abroad and the individuals who are ‘kin’ to ethnic Turks. Countries included in this category range from Bosnia to Mauritania, from Kyrgyzstan to Tunisia.

It should also be noted that there was a bottom-up demand for the Turkish state’s belated interest in such issues. Many diasporans feel that it was even too late when Turkey began to formulate such policies and believe that it should have stepped in long ago (Sahin-Mencutek and Baser 2017). Diasporans were resentful, and they felt abandoned by the homeland—a sentiment the AKP clearly understood. The YTB’s discourses and activities, especially during the initial stages of the implementation of such policies, clearly show that it has understood the diaspora mentality and has paid close attention to the bottom-up demands.

Because the AKP had done their homework carefully, many diasporans welcomed their policies despite not feeling one hundred percent in line with their ideological stance. Initially, the reforms in transnational state activities—including basic operations at Turkish consulates, voting rights, pensions, facilitating military duty-related bureaucratic matters, social security
and health matters, online appointment system for consulates, etc.— benefited the whole Turkish diaspora, regardless of individuals' religious, ethnic and ideological affiliation. For instance, before the foundation of the YTB, Turkish citizens living abroad could only vote at ballot boxes set up at customs; they could not vote in their host country. The law changed in 2012 and in 2014 diasporans cast their vote for the first time in their host countries, for the Presidential elections. The extension of democratic rights abroad created a highly positive atmosphere in the Turkish diaspora and perpetuated the AKP's positive image abroad.

The YTB also prepares regular reports on the situation of Turkish citizens in various European countries and maps the needs of diasporans by focusing on specific pertinent issues such as Islamophobia and xenophobia. The YTB undertook, in Europe as well as in the MENA, the Caucasus and Central Asia, the foundation of various NGOs that aim at promoting Turkish interests, lobbying host country governments and keeping diasporic ties intact. For instance, the Diyanet branch in Germany, *Diyanet Isleri Turk Islam Birliği (DITIB)*, is considered an umbrella NGO, and is reputed to have 896 organizations under its auspices.

One might argue that the diaspora also has an economic value for the AKP governments. However, research shows that the remittances that Turkey receives have actually been declining for the last two decades (See Içduygu 2006; Mugge 2013: 6-7). Rather than relying on remittances, the new policy aims to create transnational business networks among diaspora entrepreneurs and local business owners, with the aim of increasing Turkey's economic capacity abroad. For instance, at the World Turkish Entrepreneurs Congress, TOBB and DEIK President Rifat Hisarcıklıoğlu said the following:

*This force will make us Turbo-Turkey! The time has come for Turkey and the Turkish Diaspora to come together around shared global goals. We have always approached such concepts as lobbying and Diaspora with doubt. We have identified these things as foreign powers acting against us in our country. We weren't aware of our own Diaspora. Now, as the Turkish Diaspora, we declare "We are here!" We want our successes to herald change, to shape change. Our goal is to be one of the top 10! The top 10 is the world's 10 largest country economies. They direct the world. The key to it is a strong economy and the key to that is a strong Diaspora! We will enter the top 10 with our Diaspora! We have set our course. We will design the future together.*

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14 For more information on Turkey’s external voting experience see Şahin-Mencütek and Erdogan (2016).
15 For other examples on diaspora integration policies see: https://www.ytb.gov.tr/yurtdisi-vatandas-rehberi.
16 As Ozturk (2016) argued, the Diyanet is one of the most pliable state apparatuses that Turkey uses to establish hegemony over Muslims from Turkey and beyond.
18 Ibid.
These economic ambitions also translate into the establishment of Turkish businessmen associations in countries where sizeable Turkish-origin populations live. These organizations not only strengthen ties with local Turkish businessmen, but they also build bridges between host country entrepreneurs and Turkey. Besides economic interests, it is clear that the YTB acts with political motivations: it has agendas that promote state interests and it reflects the mentality of the ruling elite. The main activities of the YTB in this regard include bringing diaspora representatives together with state officials and creating platforms for otherwise scattered communities to create leverage. While the whole institution is structured in a way to acknowledge Turkey’s diaspora and address their needs, at the same time the idea is to tap their capacities to advance the Turkish state’s interests.

**Diffusion of Turkey’s Domestic Politics in Germany: From Public Diplomacy to Extraterritorial Security Measures?**

Turkey’s domestic tensions diffuse to the transnational space in three ways: a) extraterritorial authoritarian measures; b) transnational election campaigns and the conflicts they create; c) accelerating intra-group rivalries, widening already existing cleavages and creating new alliances.

Turkey’s diaspora governance policies reveal who the state deems ‘acceptable citizens’ because it is they who are included in the diaspora narrative as part of the nation. The YTB’s diaspora activities clearly indicate who is to be mobilized and who is to be demobilized in the transnational space. Their activities are very much the mirror image of the AKP and its mentality; and the AKP definitions of ‘enemies of the state’ and ‘friends of the nation’ are diffused to the diaspora discourse. This is not an entirely new jargon. Turkey has always...
created such dichotomies and has always cast a shadow over the transnational space when it involves dissident activities. However, during the AKP period, and with increasing undemocratic measures, these tactics became more visible and more frequent, especially after the coup attempt.

Turkey’s domestic politics spread to the transnational space with the first migration flows. Ethnic, sectarian and ideological struggles in Turkey found audiences among diaspora members, and Turkish political movements have established satellite organizations all around Europe to expand their hegemony abroad (Baser 2015). Germany, due to the size of its Turkish migrant communities, became a hub for Turkey’s domestic tensions. Especially during the 1990s, the Turkish–Kurdish conflict was highly visible in the German public sphere due to the discursive and physical contention among these diaspora groups on German soil (Baser 2017). Kurdish transnational activism caused diplomatic tensions between Germany and Turkey when Turkey accused Germany of harbouring terrorists. These simmering tensions between the two countries spiked after the 15 July coup attempt in Turkey because of another politicized movement in the diaspora: the Gulen Movement, which was/is accused of orchestrating the coup.19 Because there is an active purge of Gulenists in Turkey the movement cannot survive within Turkey—it must survive in exile (Watmough and Ozturk 2018). However, this will not be easy. The YTB and the Diyanet have targeted Gulenists abroad via social media as well as actions on the ground, as a clear demonstration of extension of state’s national security concerns abroad (Ozturk and Sozeri 2018).

It is not only the Gulenists who seek shelter in Germany. As Turkey has become increasingly authoritarian and the purge against the Gulenists and other opposition groups has deepened, Germany has emerged as a primary safe haven for many seeking asylum. Many have prolonged their stay illegally to avoid returning to Turkey where they risk an uncertain future. Academics, who are persecuted in Turkey, have sought out Germany as a friendly environment for freedom of speech and thought,20 and intellectuals who feel obliged to flee Turkey also usually choose Germany as a primary destination.21 It is therefore difficult to imagine Germany, a country with more than three million Turkish immigrants, being able to remain untouched by Turkey’s domestic disputes for any prolonged period.

Monitoring and surveillance of dissidents has taken another form under the current conditions: the state has actively subcontracted surveillance and monitoring activities to loyal diaspora members as well as to employees of state-linked institutions such as imams. For instance, the scandalous news about imams spying on oppositional diaspora members (especially the Gulenists) made headlines not only in Germany but in other European

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19 For a detailed analysis on the diasporization of the Gulen movement see Watmough and Ozturk (2018).
20 https://academicsforpeace-germany.org/
countries as well (Winter 2017), many of whom (including Germany) immediately launched investigations into these allegations.\(^\text{22}\) Claims that a foreign country has been brazenly spying on dual-nationality citizens within their borders has created nothing but headaches for European governments attempting to manage anti-immigrant sentiment and extreme right-wing populist opposition.

Turkey’s international prestige has accordingly come in for a beating, which in the long run will hamper any diaspora organization’s activity—as suspicions will prevail and distrust among different diaspora groups will increase. Additionally, while Germany and other countries have reacted harshly to these spying allegations, many oppositional diaspora members feel unsafe even though they are at a great distance from Turkey.\(^\text{23}\) Many have concerns about surveillance of their activities by Turkish authorities, having their passports cancelled or being deported to Turkey. This is not an irrational fear: many Turkish citizens who live in the diaspora have been arrested or taken into custody at the airport as soon as they have landed in Turkey—usually for their social media posts. Also, the president of the Alevite associations in Europe was charged with terrorism and had his passport confiscated and a travel ban imposed.\(^\text{24}\) Many others have had their passports annulled after emergency decrees. Overall it can be seen that in the diaspora governance mechanisms are also used as a *transnational state apparatus* to punish those who oppose the ruling party’s and President Erdogan’s hegemony and reward those who are loyal to them. Thus, they can also serve as an extra-territorial authoritarian state apparatus to control and contain anti-regime protests and activities (Glasius 2018).

Besides extra-territorial authoritarian measures, the current reforms in diaspora policy have also led to undesired consequences in the European political sphere. Although the AKP aimed to use these strategies as public diplomacy and soft power, they triggered negative feelings among the European public. The consensus is that the policy backfired, but how did this happen? A key dimension of the diaspora engagement strategy of instrumentalizing Turkish citizens abroad as a tool of state policy has been to grant extra-territorial voting rights. Since 2012, the once highly limited voting rights have been extended significantly. Whereas once Turkish citizens abroad who wished to vote had to return home or be bussed to voting booths at border checkpoints, now Turks abroad can vote in their host countries, giving them real, if numerically marginal, electoral clout in Turkish elections (Sahin-Mencutek and Erdogan 2016).


The growing importance of the diaspora vote has attracted the attention of political parties in Turkey, and they have transnationalised their electoral campaigns accordingly: European countries are now important stops in election campaign tours. However, transnational support for the ‘YES’ campaign for regime change in Turkey (April 2017) created a degree of tension in Europe due to the anti-European rhetoric in propaganda speeches by visiting politicians. For example, both President Erdogan and AKP politicians used the discourse of ‘crusaders’ to frame the debate, accused European politicians of being Nazi remnants and constantly highlighted Islamophobia in Europe. Moreover, when the AKP’s referendum campaign gatherings were banned on security grounds, diplomatic tensions erupted between the Netherlands and Turkey.

These tensions actually benefited non-democratic discourses in both Turkey and Europe and hindered minority struggles in both contexts. The AKP had two choices: It could either adapt an anti-European, populist and nationalist rhetoric to mobilize voters or it could downplay tensions for the sake of the safety and well-being of its citizens abroad. It chose the former option. In a referendum where each side needed just a small margin to win, the diaspora vote became all the more important and the diaspora’s long-term interactions with the host society were sacrificed for the greater gains of the AKP.

However, this does not mean that AKP policies do not have a strong support base in the diaspora. On the contrary, even these agitations with European politicians were appreciated by many diasporans, who had felt undermined in their host countries for many years. The AKP was seen as the saviour and protector of Turkish citizens and their descendants who were often unfairly treated in their host countries, and who suffered discrimination and Islamophobia despite their hard work and economic contributions. Their support for the AKP and the Erdogan was also used as a legitimization strategy in Europe for the AKP’s vision. Popular media outlets such as The Economist have described diaspora support for Erdogan as if these people are “seduced” by his speeches. However, these kinds of approaches, in their focus on the present, actually undermine the root cause of this massive support, and ignore the fact that diaspora members also have agency in their decisions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>Number of Registered Voters</th>
<th>Participation Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>63.07%</td>
<td>36.93%</td>
<td>1,429,492</td>
<td>46.22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

25 For instance, in the Netherlands Turkey’s diaspora engagement policy caused parliamentary discussions on the limits of home country intervention in diaspora affairs. See: http://gocvakfi.org/hollandadaturkiyediaspora/.

That almost 50% of diasporans who voted were in favour of the presidential system and increasing Erdogan’s powers confused the European public, paving the way for old debates on the failure of Turkish migrants’ integration and the problem of ‘dual loyalties’ to surface (Smith 2007). For many Europeans, the results were taken to mean that more or less half of Turkish migrants on their territory supported an undemocratic regime back home and actually approved limitations on freedom of speech and assembly as well as arbitrary arrests and ill-treatment. These issues unpacked a whole new discussion on ‘undemocratic remittances’ from a European diaspora that was supposed to have internalized ‘European values’ after so many years. Yet in countries such as Germany or Austria the mantra of ‘integration failure’ surfaced again as senior politicians discussed revoking dual citizenship rights. Extreme right-wingers even suggested deporting Turks who voted for the AKP.

In this regard, the German national team footballer Mesut Ozil’s case is an interesting one: a photo taken with President Erdogan received such a huge negative backlash that he was forced to resign from the German national team, underlining that he is still not accepted into German society. Similar examples are found in other European countries. In Sweden for instance, Green Party member, Mehmet Kaplan, had to resign from his political role as Housing Minister after the Swedish media discovered that he was too close to Turkish nationalist diaspora organizations. Moreover, when Turkey’s ‘soft power’ strategy became somewhat ‘blurry’, European media organizations began to follow Turkish state diaspora interventions more closely. The events of 2017, especially, proved that host countries have limits when it comes to absorbing the home-country diaspora governance policies. There seems to be an invisible red line and it seems that Turkey had crossed it. Germany also banned a Turkish diaspora gang called ‘Osmanen Germania’ which was allegedly very close to the AKP, and acted as a strong arm against those opposed to the AKP regime and/or President Erdogan. The DITIB’s activities and Turkish politicians’ visits to open mosques in Germany also caused great tension and German politicians asked organizations such as DITIB to put a clear distance between politics and religion in their affairs.

Scholars have already been pointing to German discontent with publicly pro-Erdogan German-Turks. Wasmer, for instance, stated as far back as 2013 that: ‘Many ordinary Germans watching television coverage of crowds of over 10,000 people waving Turkish flags and applauding Erdogan’s speeches saw this as proof that Turkish immigrants and their

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descendants lacked a feeling of belonging to Germany and showed no willingness to integrate in the host society’ (Wasmer 2013: 175). These debates are therefore neither new nor unique to the circumstances surrounding the recent transnational election campaigns. Rather they are signs of a growing hostility in Europe towards the ruling elite in Turkey due to the AKP and President Erdogan’s quite open and explicit anti-democratic stance vis-à-vis the Turkish opposition. Diaspora support for Turkey and its government is thus naturally interpreted to indicate these immigrants’ strong anti-democratic mentality.

Lastly, the diffusion of Turkey’s domestic tensions to Germany is evidenced in intra-group rivalries. Previous tensions between different ethnic, religious and ideological groups in Germany have already been widely studied (Baser 2015; Argun 2003; Massicard 2012; Ostergaard-Nielsen 2003; Eccarius-Kelly 2002; Bruinessen 1998). The authoritarian turn, however, led to a very visible divide between pro-AKP and anti-AKP groups in Germany. The latter is much more fragmented and spontaneous compared to the loyalist groups, which receive money and support from the homeland towards their mobilization. Incidents pointing to spying, informing, and protests/counter-protests have reduced trust between two communities. The current diaspora governance policy benefits loyalist groups to the detriment of others. Turkey is also constantly putting pressure on Germany to limit the non-loyalist groups’ freedom of association and speech (for instance for Kurds and leftist groups). These are actions that reveal how cleavages that originated in Turkey are reflected in the diaspora.

The newest migration outflows also serve to alter the existing dynamics, creating new spaces of contention and collaboration. Recent studies show that ‘Turkish refugees experience solidarity and sympathy from/with some people with a Turkey-related migrant background and their organisations while others are hostile towards them in everyday life’ (Roing 2019). For example, we have observed that the Gulenists who are now in exile are not offered the solidarity that they desire from other dissident groups such as Academics for Peace, leftists, anti-fascist NGOs, Kurds or other opposition party supporters. This is primarily because the above-mentioned groups consider Gulenists as accomplices in the authoritarian turn in Turkey.

The days when Gulenist newspapers, TV channels and civil society organizations all worked to criminalize Kurdish activities and condemned academics’ engagement with peace processes is not such a distant memory. Moreover, German policy-makers and civil society also promote a different discourse, hoping to persuade migrant groups to their way of thinking. Furthermore, we can observe that some diaspora groups are aligning over their discontent with AKP policies. It is too early to tell whether these alliances will hold in the long term; in the past, other such initiatives, e.g., the Democratic United Forces, dissolved after a few disputes among the member community organizations.31 We can also discern a silent clash between the newcomers and the established diaspora members in terms of domination of the transnational spaces.

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Conclusion

Turkey’s diaspora governance policy is a clear example of how diaspora engagement policies can come up against an invisible red line in host countries. Although born of intentions to expand Turkey’s public diplomacy and soft power through diaspora diplomacy, in fact, the strategy for engagement with Turkish citizens and their descendants abroad has put Turkey in European headlines for the wrong reasons. Any google search on a combination of keywords such as Turkey, elections and diaspora will produce results that contain keywords such as tension, spill-over, divided and conflict, among others. Turkey’s diaspora policy also reveals that although normatively diaspora engagement policies expand democratic rights to wider populations, such policies can also be instrumentalized to favor certain segments in the diaspora while disfavoring the others. Disfavoring, in this case however, not only means disadvantaging but also means control, monitoring and surveillance. One thing is clear, during the last ten years, the diaspora governance related actions, despite their top-down nature, have had significant impacts on diasporans' everyday lives one way or another.

In addition to what has already been happening in the diasporic space, new migration flows keep coming from Turkey to Germany and other European countries due to the democratic decline and economic uncertainties in Turkey. The new migration flows bring new dynamics and it is too early to predict how they will change Turkey’s diasporic landscapes in the long term. More research is needed in terms of understanding the real impact of the authoritarian turn on diasporans’ everyday lives, the relationships between the established diaspora and the newcomers as well as the host country responses to these drastic changes.

Acknowledgements

This report builds on Dr. Bahar Baser’s previous work on Turkish Diaspora Governance Policy (Baser, Bahar. “Governing the Diaspora (s) and the Limits of Diaspora Diplomacy.” In The Routledge Handbook of Turkish Politics. Routledge, 2019; Baser, Bahar. “Turkey’s domestic politics spill over to Europe: Old debates in new frames,” ORIENT III, 2017) and also on Dr. Ahmet Erdi Ozturk’s research projects: “Religion Based Foreign Policy Initiatives on Muslim Minorities: The Case of Turkey’s Diyanet in Sweden and Germany” (2018); “Religion, Identity and Ideology in Turkey’s Diaspora Governance Policy: Transnational Reflections from Sweden, Germany and France” (2019-2020), funded by the Swedish Institute Turkey-Sweden Programme. The authors would like to thank Zenonas Tzirrass, Mete Hatay and the participants of the PRIO Cyprus Centre workshop for their constructive feedback on an earlier draft. The authors are also grateful to Bahar Yigitel for her editorial assistance.
References


CHAPTER 4:

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA
IN THE ORBIT OF TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY

David Henig

Introduction

On 2 September 2006, about 200 Bosnian Muslims gathered in the newly rebuilt Šudžaudinova mosque in the town of Rogatica located in the Republika Srpska. The mosque was built in 1576, destroyed in 1992 during the Bosnian war, and rebuilt thanks to the help of the city of Istanbul. During the opening ceremony the then grand mufti of the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mustafa Cerić, addressed the audience in which a member of the Turkish government, the minister Ismet Yıldırım, was also present. The grand mufti emphasised that Rogatica was one of the most important towns in the history of Bosnian-Turkish relations, as it was the greatest recruiting centre to the ranks of the Ottoman Empire. He then added, “I propose we all call ourselves Turks. And we are Turks — by our historical memory, by our historical disposition, by the identity of Islam that Turks brought to us. However, we are also Bosniaks.”

Two years later, in 2008, during the visit to Sarajevo of the then prime minister of the leading AKP Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the grand mufti sparked a controversy when he said, “Please convey to your people the following: Turkey is our mother; it has been so and it will remain so.”

In 2018, after being banned from campaigning in EU countries, the now President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and the AKP organised a large electoral rally in Sarajevo for the diasporic AKP supporters from across Europe. Thousands of AKP supporters flocked to the city. One of the participants in the rally, a Macedonian student of Turkish descent, for example, expressed his enthusiasm, saying, “Turkey is our mother nation,” and added, “We came to Sarajevo just for one day to support our saviour Erdogan.”

1 Bakir Izetbegović, the

Henig, David (2019) “Bosnia and Herzegovina in the orbit of Turkish Foreign Policy” in Mete Hatay and Tziarras Zenonas (eds), Kinship and Diasporas in Turkish Foreign Policy: Examples from Europe, the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean, PCC Report, 10. Nicosia: PRIO Cyprus Centre, 47-58.

1 https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/turks-flock-bosnia-see-erdogan-election-rally
Bosniak (Muslim) chairman of the tripartite presidency at the time, encouraged all Turkish citizens living in Bosnia and Herzegovina (henceforth BiH) to vote for Erdogan, pleading that “the Turkish nation has a person sent by God. He is Recep Tayyip Erdogan”\(^2\). In response to the rally, the now emeritus grand mufti Mustafa Cerić commented around the same time “Erdogan can’t be our sultan; our sultan is seated in Brussels,” lamenting that the AKP-led Turkish parliament has never passed any sort of resolution about the Srebrenica genocide— unlike the European parliament.\(^3\) When I subsequently interviewed Bosnian Muslims of different walks of life about their perception of the rally, I received several characteristic responses. My interlocutors either commented, “it wasn’t as bad as the media reported,” or they expressed their outrage about what they described as “Erdoganisation” of Bosnian politics. Several other interlocutors suggested that, “it was more pragmatic than many people would be willing to acknowledge,” and added, “Erdogan just wanted to find a place as close to Vienna as possible. Nothing more, nothing less.” And finally, I interviewed several small hotel owners in Sarajevo, who welcomed the rally as it was a good business opportunity for the city. One of them put it clearly: “imagine more than 10,000 Turks from the EU with money. They need to sleep somewhere. They need to eat something. Even if they all ate just one portion of ćevapi, imagine, 10,000 times 7KM, that’s a good business.” What can be learned from these encounters?

Much attention has been paid in recent years to Turkey’s assertive geopolitical involvement across southeast Europe, and its diasporas in the EU (Öztürk and Sözeri 2018). It has been documented how the discourse on kin communities and shared Ottoman history is used as a legitimising framework for the expansive AKP-led foreign endeavours and the exercise of Turkey’s influence in the host countries (Wigen 2018). While Turkey’s activities in southeast Europe have been scrutinised, less attention has been paid to understanding the everyday diplomacy and geopolitics of such encounters (Jansen 2009; Marsden, Ibanez-Tirado and Henig 2016). This perspective focuses on how local actors and communities affected by such geopolitical processes articulate, respond to and negotiate them. Put differently, we need to ask what living in the orbit of Turkey’s policy entails for people of BiH.

As the above-mentioned examples indicate, Turkey’s involvement in BiH is primarily aimed at only one segment of the country, namely, the Bosniaks (Muslims) as one of the perceived kin communities (Akraba Topluluklar). In the Bosniak public discourse, the relationship with Turkey has often been understood through kinship terms as well. It was described variously as our mother, mother-orphan, older brother, family and family relations, or Islamic kinship, to name just a few (Merdjanova 2013: 80; Karčić 2010: 527; Henig 2012).


\(^3\) [https://www.slobodna-bosna.ba/vijest/81824/mustafa_ef_ceric_poznaje_0_godina_i_on_ne_moze_biti_nas_sultan_nas_sultan_je_u_briselu.html](https://www.slobodna-bosna.ba/vijest/81824/mustafa_ef_ceric_poznaje_0_godina_i_on_ne_moze_biti_nas_sultan_nas_sultan_je_u_briselu.html)
The framing of BiH-Turkey relations in such a variety of kinship terms illustrates both the dynamic and simultaneously ambivalent character of BiH-Turkey relations, and of Turkish foreign policy in one of its so-called kin communities. More importantly, this ambivalence points to the ways in which the very same kin community — Bosnian Muslims in this case — responds. By tracing the local responses to and negotiations of such encounters, this chapter suggests that Turkey’s discourse on kin communities and shared Ottoman history also brings into sharp relief a history of entanglements and frictions between BiH and Turkey. In so doing, it exposes not only its ambivalence but also its limitations. This chapter aims to understand the nature of these ambivalent relations and their arrangements between Turkey and BiH, while paying attention to Bosnian Muslims’ feelings and perceptions about Turkey’s foreign policies.

A central argument of this chapter contends that BiH responses to Turkey’s foreign policy discourse centred on its historical kin communities need to be understood not as a top-down Turkey-BiH relationship, but rather as an on-going self/othering one. Drawing on Edin Hajdarpasic’s (2015) ground-breaking work on the genealogies of national movements in Bosnia and the debates and contestations over ‘Bosnian Muslim identity’, I consider the relationship between BiH and Turkey as of two (br)others. As Hajdarpasic writes, Bosnian Muslims became perceived as co-nationals (of Serbs and Croats), but simultaneously not quite so. They were signifying “at the same time the potential of being both ‘brother’ and ‘Other,’ containing the fantasy of both complete assimilation and ominous, insurmountable difference” (2015: 16). The reference to (br)others, Hajdarpasic further argued, implies “a sense of shared ancestry, intimacy, and fellowship” among the members of the kin group. It is a kind of relationship that is somewhat self-evident and yet ambivalent. The figure of (br)other works in Hajdarpasic’s writing as an analytical and interpretative device that enables him “to simultaneously hold two terms that usually have opposite meanings” (2015: 17). Although Hajdarpasic developed his analytical device for the context of imagined communities among the co-nationals in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, its analytical purchase for the quasi-kin groupings with shared historical and cultural intimacies is obvious here, when the relations between BiH and Turkey are considered. Drawing on more than a decade of ethnographic fieldwork in BiH, this chapter will look at this (br)othering self/other dynamic from the Bosniak kin community’s grassroots perspective, which is missing in much of the scholarship on this topic. It focuses on three key contentious areas of Turkey’s foreign policy activities in BiH: economy, cultural heritage, and education.

**Entering Turkey’s orbit**

Turkey’s renewed geopolitical presence in southeast Europe was long in the making, having begun at the end of the Cold War (Anastasakis 2009). The violent disintegration of Yugoslavia and the ensuing war in BiH (1992-1995) further rekindled many of these interests. During the 1990s numerous actors from the Gulf countries were more active among the local Muslim communities on both humanitarian as well as religious grounds (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003; Blumi 2002; Li 2019; Öktem 2010). Turkey did not take an active role until the
first decade of the 21st century when the AKP came to power and redefined Turkey’s foreign policy and its role in southeast Europe (Öktem 2012). This coincided with the post 9/11 years during which the US-led pressure on BiH and other countries in the region to restrict the activities and money flows from the Gulf countries opened a new window of opportunities for Turkey, now represented by the pro-Islamic AKP as a relevant geopolitical force “protecting” its kin communities in southeast Europe (Merdjanova 2013: 77).

Since then, Turkey has exercised an increasingly assertive geopolitical role in the region. Yet, unlike in other countries in the region with kin communities, the scope of Turkey’s influence in BiH has been limited, exercised mainly in the three areas that will be discussed in this chapter: economic investments, cultural heritage and education. As has been pointed out by many observers, Turkish foreign policy relies nowadays on rather “non-conventional foreign policy actors” (Öktem 2009; 2012: 32), namely, the Turkish Development Agency (TIKA), and the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet). The latter has played a major role since the 1990s “in providing religious services to the Muslim communities of the Balkans” (Öktem 2012: 42). As Özturk and Gözaydin (2018) recently observed, in countries like Bulgaria, this includes training as well as sending imams, or running religious teaching and educational programmes locally, and even interfering in the appointments of muftis. The Diyanet is very active in the countries of the region such as Albania or Bulgaria, which experienced severe ruptures in religious organizations and practice during the communist era. However, this is not the case in BiH where Muslim religious affairs have been firmly under the control of the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina for more than a century (Karčić, F. 2015). The Muslim community of BiH does not recognise the Diyanet as its supreme religious authority unlike in other countries across southeast Europe (Öktem 2009; Özturk and Gözaydin 2018).

Economic diplomacy or the power of love?

One of the central components of Turkey’s expanding influence over its kin communities abroad is through trade, investment and infrastructural development (Bryant and Hatay 2013). According to official statistics, Turkey’s trade in the western Balkans alone rose from $435 million in 2002 to $3 billion in 2016. The kin affinity, however, does not always take precedent in Turkey’s foreign trade activities. The majority of Turkey’s trading relations in southeast Europe are carried out with the EU countries (Bulgaria and Croatia), and with Serbia. In the kin countries such as BiH it is often more the rhetoric than the deeds that unfolds on the ground. One of the main successes of Turkey’s economic diplomacy in BiH is how effectively it managed to cultivate the perception of care, influence and aid. When the Deputy Secretary General of the AKP gave a speech in BiH in January 2018, and announced the AKP’s plans in the country, he described BiH as “the future Anatolia of Europe” (Feyerabend 2018: 16).

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4 [https://www.politico.eu/article/turkey-western-balkans-comeback-european-union-recep-tayyip-erdogan/]
The success of such rhetoric was documented recently in a survey, according to which more than one in three Bosniaks considers Turkey to be the largest investor in BiH. In fact, Turkey spends more money in neighbouring Serbia than among its (br)others in BiH. In 2017, the trade between Serbia and Turkey totaled $1 billion with Erdogan’s publicly announced aim to increase it to $2 billion, while between BiH and Turkey it was only $623 mil. The gap between the words and the deeds widens even more if we look at the breakdown of trade exchange. BiH’s export to Turkey was significantly lower than the other way round ($243 mil / $368 mil respectively). As one former Bosnian diplomat expressed this trading gap, “Turkey gives Bosnia love, and Serbia investments.”

With protracted economic precarity in the country, and ever-increasing outmigration of young people primarily to the EU countries, this sentiment is increasingly felt in BiH. It articulates the othering rather than the affine relationships between the two countries. The ambivalence of the (br)otherhood was captured by one of my Bosnian interlocutors who described such a relationship with Turkey as, “they are brothers to us, but we are not brothers to them.” Indeed, a number of online publications and newspaper articles appeared in the last year that critically discuss Turkey’s underinvestment in BiH. In the period between 1994-2016, the total investment in BiH was €199.1 million, meaning that Turkey is only the 11th largest investor in BiH. The main investors remain EU countries. In 2017, Turkey’s investment was even negative (-€6.6 mil). However, in May 2018 during his visit to Sarajevo, Erdogan pledged to invest €3.5 billion to build the ‘Motorway of Peace’ between Sarajevo and Belgrade. Erdogan further added that once the project is finalised, the entire region will benefit from it. In early June 2019, Erdogan invited Bakir Izetbegović to further talks about the motorway to Ankara. It remains to be seen whether this pledge will materialise given the deep economic recession in Turkey.

Several interlocutors suggested that the increasing media reporting on the lack of Turkey’s investments in BiH, exposing the gap between the words and the deeds, is one way to intensify pressure on Turkey. The recent public debates in BiH suggested that while Turkey’s foreign policy discourse towards BiH portrays it as the most important country in the Balkans, the only support it gives is political. Turkey supports territorial sovereignty and indivisibility of the post-Dayton BiH, and in particular strong ties between Turkey’s AKP and pro-Bosniak SDA. But these ties are also a source of concern because they are seen within the intra-Bosniak political landscape as buttressing the authoritarian and socially conservative tendencies of SDA. If we zoom in and look at Turkey’s economic activities, the kinship logic plays its role here as well. There is clearly a preference to invest in the Muslim-majority parts of the country, that is, in the Federation rather than in the Republika Srpska (Feyerabend 2018: 16).

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5 https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/06/22/erdogan-is-making-the-ottoman-empire-great-again/
6 https://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/erdogan-autoput-beograd-sarajevo-bice-put-mira/n41bzm;
The question increasingly asked by various actors across BiH is: how do BiH citizens benefit from Turkey’s interests in the country? It is worth noting that the rising tide of critical reflections on Turkey’s economic role also emerges from Bosniak circles, and cuts across all strata. For example, in response to Erdogan’s visit to Sarajevo in 2018, the emeritus grand mufti Mustafa Cerić critically commented: “We have two direct flights between Istanbul-Sarajevo daily, but these are run by Turkish companies. And our airline company went bust. Why couldn’t Turkey lease two ‘Boeings’, train our pilots and let BiH run this line?”. A similar critique is often heard among the wider public about Turkey’s employing only Turkish workers on BiH construction projects, and even importing building material made in Turkey rather than allowing the local actors to partake, which could create jobs and profit locally. As one interlocutor commented to me, “Imagine if all the concrete that has been used for building mosques was used for building roads or factories.”

It is important to note that the ‘mosque versus factories’ argument is not entirely new. The argument can be traced back to the socialist era, during which the Yugoslav state prioritised investments in industrial over religious infrastructure. The comment, however, points to the fact that it is not only the quantity but also the quality of these investments, and how this affects the local actors. While direct economic investment does not always materialise immediately, other forms of investment and aid have more visible and immediate effects, and contribute again to the rhetoric of Turkey being the major economic player in the country. These are various ‘spectacular investments’ aimed at infrastructural development (e.g., motorways, airports as in the case of Kosovo), and even more so on cultural heritage infrastructure from the Ottoman era, which again strengthens its public visibility and the kin rhetoric.

Reviving or saving cultural heritage?
One of the central tools of Turkey’s foreign policy targeted at kin communities in southeast Europe is the revival of the Ottoman cultural heritage (Walton 2016). The Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA) is the major actor in such efforts. As Luke (2013:351) observed, “[o]ver the last decade, municipalities throughout the Balkans and Turkey have made concentrated efforts to revitalize historic sectors of villages, towns, and cities. The hope, for development agencies and government sectors funding the work, is that rehabilitated areas become spaces for contemporary, civic events.” These attempts have been welcome as much as they have fostered discontent in the kin communities. A recent article in the Guardian, for example, describes the tensions that have arisen over Turkey’s ‘diplomatic gift’ - building a new mosque in Pristina, Kosovo. Although the range of TIKA’s activities is diverse, restoration of the Ottoman cultural heritage became the prime site of engagement in BiH, whereby the kin ties are being revitalised.

7 https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/jan/02/turkey-is-kosovo-controversy-over-balkan-states-new-central-mosque
To date approximately 850 TIKA projects have been realised since the Bosnian war (1992-1995). Education, health and farming are important areas of engagement, but the projects aimed at reviving the Ottoman cultural heritage dominate. In 2017, over 60 projects were realised and, once again, those targeted at cultural heritage dominated. Although TIKA employs the rhetoric of help to all the communities of BiH regardless of their religion and ethnic identification, it prioritises restoration of the Ottoman cultural-historical monuments. The material traces of the Ottoman past, however, were the prime targets of anti-Muslim attacks and destruction during the Bosnian war. Furthermore, whitewashing the Ottoman-cum-Islamic past has also been part of the ethno-national narratives across the region. This complicates the story of TIKA's inclusivity of all BiH communities because not all communities share the same vision of the past. Indeed, in a recent interview, the TIKA coordinator for BiH, Ömer Faruk Alimci, gave as an example of TIKA’s activities the project of restoration of the Careva mosque in Foča that was set alight and its minaret detonated by the Serbian powers in April 1992.  

Along with restoration projects of the Ottoman heritage, the Turkish directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) has since the end of the Bosnian war invested in building four mosques in BiH. These are the Kajserija mosque in Goražde, a mosque in Tešanj, the Ferhadija mosque in Banja Luka, and the now-under-construction Ahi Evran-i Veli Kirsehir mosque in Olovo (co-financed with the city of Kirsehir). As in the case of Olovo, there are many other individual projects aimed at shared cultural heritage that have been realised over the past two decades through the partnership between Turkish and Bosnian cities. Although these projects have been undertaken throughout the entire country, here again we can find a clear preference for targeting the local kin community (i.e., Bosniaks).

As much as the examples illustrate Turkey’s use of soft power in its foreign policy, it is important to disentangle how these encounters unfold in regard to their cultural, religious, historical as well as political textures, and how local communities caught in such geopolitical processes articulate, respond to and negotiate them. In the previous section, we encountered an opinion that Turkey should invest in building factories and roads rather than mosques. During my interviews, I raised this opinion with numerous individuals of different walks of life and generations. My interlocutors agreed that it would, of course, be good to have more roads and factories. Yet they often immediately added, “but who would repair our mosques, all these buildings that need to be renovated? No one here would pay for it. There is no money.” Comments such as this open another perspective on Turkey’s activities in its kin communities: what is considered as exercising ‘soft power’ from Turkey’s foreign policy point of view can become also an opportunity for the targeted community to exercise their own agency and turn these activities into their own opportunities. In BiH during the Yugoslav era, the Ottoman-era cultural heritage, including mosques, was neglected at best.

During the ensuing Bosnian war (1992-1995), the same heritage as well as the mosques that were built in the post-Ottoman era were the prime target of destruction. The numbers make it plain: there were 1,144 mosques on the territory of BiH before the Bosnian war; more than 80% were damaged during the war. Furthermore, 614 mosques, 218 masjids, 69 mektebs, 4 tekijjas, 37 turbes, and 405 other waqf properties were destroyed. Hence, with the living legacies of conflict and targeted assault, such a (br)otherly embrace is a welcome opportunity for revitalisation of one’s own community. This sentiment was echoed for example among the members of one cultural heritage association from central Bosnia who I interviewed on several occasions. While reflecting on the restoration activities of TIKA, one of their members told me: “it’s the Ottoman heritage, but it’s also Bosnian heritage. So one can be against Turks, one can even easily distinguish oneself [Bosniak] from the Ottomans and Turks, and yet it can’t be taken away from Bosniaks, exactly because it’s what represents Islam in this place.” Thus, not only are the TIKA activities perceived as a tool for exercising Turkey’s soft power (for a similar observation see Öktem 2012: 39). They also create a space for local actors to strengthen and articulate one’s own interests, agendas and identities.

Education
Another equally important pillar of Turkey’s cultural diplomacy and exercising soft power among its kin communities is education and cultural exchange. This dynamic unfolds in BiH along two major vectors: building educational infrastructure locally in the kin communities, and bringing its kin subjects to Turkey. Let us examine these vectors in turn.

There are currently several educational institutions in BiH entangled in Turkey’s orbit of interests. The probably most well-known is the International University of Sarajevo (established in 2004). Although the International University of Sarajevo wasn’t established directly by the Turkish government, the links are obvious. Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Ahmet Davutoglu have visited it on several occasions. The University also caused public outcry in May 2018, when it was reported that several foreign academics employed there had been made redundant after expressing their critical views on breaching human rights in Turkey, and for not showing up at the (mandatory) ceremony during which the university awarded an honorary doctorate to President Erdogan.9

There is also the International Burch University that was established in 2008 as part of Bosna Sema educational institutions, close to Fethullah Gülen’s networks. Welcome at first, the activities of Bosna Sema came under considerable pressure after the failed coup d’état in 2016 in Turkey. The pressure from Turkey on local politicians and judicial institutions to shut down any Gülen-related educational institutions was widely discussed in the press. Numerous Bosniak politicians, in particular from SDA, but also intellectuals and representatives of the Islamic Community of BiH, publicly condemned Gülen networks after the failed coup, though

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9 https://www.dw.com/bs/turske-igre-u-bih/a-44710578
many had earlier welcomed their activities. In both cases, the foreign countries, such as BiH, became a battleground for Turkey’s domestic struggles. Yet the effects these frictions create are wider.

Indeed, Turkey’s attack on the activities of Gülen-related networks in Turkey and abroad also created a space for critique and for articulating domestic tensions over religious authority in BiH. For example, it enabled the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina to place Gülen’s teaching activities among the “new interpretations of Islam,” which have proliferated in the country (Duranović and Ljevaković-Subašić 2018). This euphemism is increasingly deployed by the local religious establishment to lump together various and rather diverse actors (Li 2019), foreign and local, who represent and proselytize different interpretations of Islam and organization of Muslim lives, and who do not recognize the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina as their religious authority. However, when Turkey’s government repeatedly requested extradition of seven Turkish citizens from BiH and accused them of being ‘Gülen sympathisers’ and assisting in the 2016 coup, a number of Bosnian intellectuals publicly protested, and reminded the Turkish government that BiH is no longer anyone’s imperial province (pashalik).

The development aid aimed at the local educational infrastructure is another important aspect of Turkey’s involvement in BiH, and TIKA again plays the major role. In recent years, for example, TIKA renovated and fully equipped the library of the Faculty of Architecture in Sarajevo. But numerous elementary and high schools were also renovated with TIKA’s help. One of the school headmasters from a central Bosnian municipality showed me that he was able to renovate the roof and the heating system and to get a new IT lab through donations from TIKA as well as from one of the Istanbul boroughs with a significant number of the Bosniak refugee descendants (muhaçir). All these renovations, the headmaster suggested, would have hardly happened if the school relied on the state and cantonal help.

Another important group of educational activities is linked to the Yunus Emre Institute. Locally, the Institute runs numerous courses promoting Turkish culture (e.g., Turkish language, calligraphy), and cultural activities (lectures, exhibitions). But it also offers stipends to study in Turkey. This is quite an attractive opportunity for younger generations in the context of protracted economic precarity and the massive outmigration of the youth. Here, the kinship discourse is explicit. The scholarship programme runs under the auspices of the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (Yurtlidi Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar). The target group are those students and regions that the Turkish state sees as being ‘Turkish’.

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12 Most recently: https://www.dw.com/bs/zemlja-staraca-i-sirotinje/a-48606027?fbclid=IwAR3-xyNxtwzu0vooMhyS2YASBheh-vr9thjoDBnsZZI MLwuKicXC7OIEo [last accessed 6 May, 2019]
This also determines the shape and composition of the trans-regional networks that are formed through these stipend-driven initiatives. One of my interlocutors listed among their dorm-mates young Bosniaks, along with Albanians, Macedonians, Pomaks, Kyrgyzs and Tatars. Although it would be easy to see these activities purely as a tool of soft power, the recipients of the stipends I interviewed also talked about receiving hope and being able to believe in their aspirations because of this opportunity to study abroad in a range of subjects, including social sciences, history, languages and engineering. But this does not mean that these activities wouldn’t be perceived ambiguously.

The main issue raised by many of my interlocutors — now graduates of the universities in Turkey — was how difficult, or rather impossible, it has been to find a job in Turkey since graduation. Yet the lack of job opportunities in BiH was often mentioned as the main reason for going to Turkey. This was a cause for much frustration and disillusionment. Others, however, admitted that these stipends offered other forms of hope. Namely, since many universities in Turkey offer exchange programmes with universities in the EU, some of my interlocutors admitted that getting a stipend to study in Turkey is a way into the EU. Several of my interlocutors also considered the study option as an opportunity to revitalise their diasporic family networks in Turkey. They were referring to muhaçir—relatives who left decades ago and with whom their families in BiH maintained contact during the Cold War and post-Cold War years. The stipend thus enabled them not only to pursue their studies but also to spend more time with their relatives, mainly in Bursa and Istanbul. However, although the scholarships are perceived as an opportunity, the underlying kinship discourse is also perceived as very problematic and ‘othering’. One of the recurring themes in the interviews was that my interlocutors felt rather uncomfortable about the Akraba Topluluklar categorisation. It reminded them of the war and the anti-Muslim rhetoric employed against Bosnian Muslims, when they were categorised as being Turks and not of Slavic background, and thus foreign to the Bosnian lands.

Conclusion
This chapter has documented the ways in which Turkey’s foreign policy aimed at its perceived kin communities unfolds in BiH. It suggested that the dynamics of the BiH-Turkey relations need to be attended to as an ongoing self/othering relationship in order to understand the effects of such foreign policies on the targeted kin community. The existing debates have focused primarily on Turkey’s foreign policy endeavours, how these provide a lens on the reconfiguration of domestic policies and society and on the politics of identity in Turkey. The aim of this chapter has been to reorient the perspective, and trace instead how the local actors and communities articulate, respond to and negotiate Turkey’s presence in various

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13 Turkey did not figure in the interviews as a preferred choice for pursuing Islamic studies, unlike Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia or Malaysia.
domains of their lives. The chapter examined the dynamics of the BiH-Turkey relationships in three domains in particular: economy, cultural heritage, and education. While these are Turkey's strategic areas for exercising soft power abroad, the bottom-up findings presented here show how these activities also create frictions, foster critical reception, and often open a new field of opportunities that allow the local actors to pursue their own goals beyond the realm of kin community policies and Turkey’s orbit of influence.

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CHAPTER 5:

TURKEY’S JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT GOVERNMENT VIS-À-VIS THE MUSLIM MINORITY IN GREECE

Nikos Christofis

Introduction

As across the world, the end of the Cold War created new conditions that would shape the Turkish political agenda — and foreign policy in particular — in distinct ways. These conditions profoundly influenced the foreign policy vision adopted by the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) after 2002. A significant characteristic of the AKP’s foreign policy has been the decisive reconsideration of Turkey’s relations with the Balkans, including Greece, which is the focus of this paper. Thus, we find it useful to consider how this policy shift has affected Turkey’s policy toward the Muslim Turks in Greece, the latter being considered a kin-minority.

Greek–Turkish relations have always been fraught, and thus any shift in Turkish foreign policy tends to trigger any number of different potential flashpoints between the two countries. Significantly, the shift in the AKP’s policy toward Muslim Turks in Greece is relatively recent, having begun in the last decade — a period in which Turkish domestic politics has become increasingly unstable and turbulent. Indeed, relations between the countries have deteriorated, especially after the July 2016 putsch attempt when several Gülenist army officers implicated in the failed coup fled to Greece seeking asylum. Against this backdrop, the fate of the Muslim minority in Greece (and, for that matter, the Orthodox minority in Turkey) —a “bone of contention” ever since the formation of the nation-states in the Balkan region in the nineteenth century when both minorities found themselves overwhelmed by Ottoman and Greek nation-building agendas (Özkırımlı and Sofos 2008) — has returned to the forefront.

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With its guiding assumption that societies are (or at least ought to be) inclusionary—respecting and protecting religious and cultural differences and countering discrimination, among other things—international law has gradually sought to address the question of the status of the two minorities, although to limited effect. This tends to be the case, ‘especially when minorities’ legal status stems from an international treaty concluded with the group’s kin-state’ (Tsitselikis 2012, 2). Politicization of minority protection—and, indeed, minorities *per se*—appears almost inevitably under such conditions. Minorities thus find themselves in a precarious position under the jurisdiction of the state of habitation, while at the same time they are often deployed as part of the foreign policy agenda of the kin-state. The Turkish-Muslim minority of Greece, also mirroring the situation faced by the Romioi–Greeks of Turkey, is a case in point. As one commentator has put it:

Political relations between Greece and Turkey seem to be an essential factor in these [minority] problems. […] Each State is apparently in part responsible for the unsatisfactory status of the Muslims in Thrace, with Turkey considering them more as a political pawn and Greece not paying sufficient heed to the views of this community that has clearly been living marginally and has been the butt of long-standing intolerance (quoted in Tsitselikis 2012, 3).

**The Muslim Minority of Greece in Historical Context**

The Muslim community of Western Thrace was positioned in the geopolitical landscape primarily through the terms of the Treaty of Lausanne that ended the Greco–Turkish war of 1919–1922. Seen at the time — and to some extent even today — as a “successful” precedent for the resolution of cross-territorial minority issues (Hirschon 2003, xiv), the Treaty of Lausanne nevertheless set in motion a set of conditions that have plagued communities up to the very present. The equation of religion with national identity as laid out in the relevant documents proved far too simplistic a dichotomy given the complex local circumstances obtaining in post-1922 Greece and Turkey.

As a consequence, the Muslims of Greece acquired a distinct legal identity — the only national minority recognized by the Greek government. Greece’s Muslims thus became “minoritized”: outside the ideological construction of “Hellenism” that structures the Greek national identity, identified by a binding international treaty, but subject to a domestic legal framework that set them apart and left them to endure much marginalization (Christopoulos and Tsitselikis 2003). It is fair to argue that the Greece’s non-inclusive national identity structure and ‘the local actions of the Greek state’—including stationing Greek army units in Greek–Muslim villages and diffuse discrimination toward the Muslim population—‘sustained an identity of separation [among Greek Muslims], wary of its identification with the new Turkey’ (Featherstone et al. 2011, 36). At the same time, the Treaty itself shaped how much of the subsequent local, bilateral and international discourse on Western Thracian Muslims was constructed.
In bilateral terms, the principle of reciprocity enshrined in Lausanne placed the Muslims of Western Thrace, and the Orthodox Christians of Istanbul, within the strategic frame of Greek-Turkish relations — and made them hostages to their vagaries (Featherstone et al. 2011; Tsitselikis 2008). Throughout the twentieth century, Greek–Turkish relations, implicitly or explicitly, affected both populations. For example, during the 1920s—but especially following the Friendship Pact (Treaty of Ankara) between Greece and Turkey of October 1930, which marked a period of rapprochement between the two countries—the fate of the Muslim minority disappeared from the international agenda, and Ankara stepped back from promoting the rights of its kin in Western Thrace (Featherstone et al. 2011, 40; Tsitselikis 2012). This shows, according to Oran (2008, 36), that ‘reciprocity had an inherent weakness: It returned ill for ill as well as good for good’. Evidently, treatment of both minorities has tended to reflect the ups and downs of bilateral relations (Kamouzis 2008, 49–67).

The “heyday” of the minorities ended with the Cold War, and in particular due to the Cyprus Question. Both countries had no problem using the respective minorities as leverage during periods of strained relations, as the 6-7 September 1955 pogrom against the non-Muslim population of Istanbul shows. As Dayıoğlu and Aslım (2015, 42) argue, Greece also applied the principle of reciprocity in retaliation, such as when Turkish citizens residing in the Dodecanese Islands were deported during the dictatorship of the Colonels (1967–1974). The latter continued a general policy of repression and expropriated minority land, while minority villages came under military siege after each eruption of crisis in Cyprus (Fırat 2009, 716–748).

Thus, it was minorities who paid the price each time Greek–Turkish relations came under strain. When Greece returned to democratic stability after the fall of the junta and the country reoriented to Europe, a new era opened between the two countries. Although longstanding grievances, like the Aegean issue, persisted, the end of the 1980s saw a clear trend of rapprochement and a willingness to advance relations. The rights of the Muslim minority in Western Thrace began to receive sustained international attention from the early 1980s since Greece’s membership in the European Community in 1981 meant it was bound by European standards. At the same time, the Muslim population had come out of isolation, with many migrating to the larger industrial cities of the Federal Republic of Germany as workers where they came into contact with a dynamic international environment.

In the 1990s, the sustained mobilization of the Muslim minority—as well as international attention on the issue and the Republic of Cyprus’s European Union (EU) accession process—saw the Greek government decide to ease its policy toward the Muslim minority. In line with the general thaw in relations through the 1990s mentioned above, Giorgos Papandreou and İsmail Cem—then Greek and Turkish foreign ministers, respectively—actively sought closer relations in the domains of low politics and Track-II diplomacy, a process that accelerated with the so-called earthquake diplomacy after August 1999. Successive earthquakes allowed political elites in both countries to claim support and legitimacy for their policy transformation (Dayıoğlu and Aslım 2015, 44).
Turkish Foreign Policy and the Muslim Minority in Greece

Turkey’s EU accession process, which began in 1999, launched a democratization process that saw the once marginal movement of political Islam assert itself in Turkish politics. A struggle over foreign policy-making between the Kemalists and Islamists followed (Göksel 2016, 50). In 2002, the AKP—a progressive splinter from the older Islamist Welfare Party that participated in a coalition government in 1995-1996—won a stunning electoral victory. The new party presented a more democratic, pro-western political agenda, respecting human rights and declared its intention to fulfill Turkey’s European vocation and solve some of the most heated national issues of the country, such as the Kurdish and the Cyprus Questions (Christofis 2019; Baser and Öztürk 2017). Yet after fifteen years in power, the party turned to full-scale “authoritarian neoliberalism” (see, e.g. Christofis 2020) expressed best through the vision of a ‘New Turkey’ that, ironically enough, mimics in large part the old-fashioned Kemalist recipe of social engineering (Christofis 2018; Polat 2016).

Turkey's foreign policy drastically shifted under the AKP. Passing through various stages that roughly correspond to the party's successive terms in office, Turkish foreign policy under the AKP has also been affected by global developments in the Middle East and elsewhere, including Europe (Christofis 2019; Turan 2015). What is more, the new foreign policy orientation ‘is a constitutive component of a new nationalist project, constructed and carried out by the AKP over the last decade, and intricately related to the party's quest to build a new kind of nationalism and a new conception of the nation’ (Saraçoğlu and Demirkol 2015, 301). Foreign policy discourses are generally considered an extension of the state’s official ideology in a given period but cannot be dissociated from domestic developments. In the Turkish case, as Saraçoğlu and Demirkol (2015, 302) argue, the relationship between the AKP’s domestic, nationalist project and its so-called neo-Ottomanist foreign policy at the international level is threefold:

First of all, the AKP’s nationalist position has functioned as the major ideational framework and ideological justification for its new foreign policy orientation. Secondly, this new foreign policy orientation and the concomitant foreign policy discourse play a vital role in the formation and solidification of the AKP’s nationalist-hegemonic project at home. Thirdly, and as a logical consequence of these first two points, the “future” of neo-Ottomanism at the international level is not only contingent upon the course of inter-state relations and balances of power in global politics but is also highly reliant on the success or failure of the nationalist project at the domestic level.

The AKP has continued the Turkish tradition of a strong commitment to the transatlantic community (i.e., NATO and the EU) and the conciliatory approach of governments in the 1990s to the Muslim minority in Greece. Concerning Greek–Turkish relations, the EU seems to have played a central factor, at least in the early years of AKP rule. A speech given by the Turkish Prime Minister at Oxford University in 2004 is instructive here: ‘If Turco-Greek rapprochement is possible today, it is because we have a common ground through which
mutual perceptions are most accurate. That common ground is the EU’ (Erdoğan 2004). A few
days later, Erdoğan visited Greece—the first Turkish prime minister to do since 1952—as a
sign of ‘the upgrading and the liberalization of the status of both minorities under modern
political and legal standards in light of Turkey’s candidacy for membership to the European
Union’ (Tsitselikis 2012, 174). Western Thrace was, understandably, a key stop in his visit. One
of the main aspects of Turkish policy in the post-Lausanne years was to reinforce a uniquely
Turkish national identity within the minority. Indeed, the visit of Erdoğan can be seen as a
show of concern by Turkey toward the Turkish–Muslim minority. However, given the sensi-
tivities, he limited himself, sending at the same time a clear message of support to the
minority: ‘No one told you to abandon your Turkish identity, but do not forget that you are
Greek citizens and citizens of the European Union. A strong Greece will provide you with
greater benefits’ (Chousein 2005, 178; Kathimerini 2004).

The issue of the Mufti of Western Thrace —the religious leader of the Turkish–Muslim
minority of Greece —came up during Erdoğan’s visit to Greece.1 The status of the mufti has
been hostage to Greek–Turkish political antagonism over control of minority institutions for
decades. The question of the mufti’s status is not just a religious and political issue; solving
the problem requires a fundamental shift in the conception of the minorities—from millet-
like remnants of the Ottoman past to integrated parts of a broader society governed by the
same fundamental values (Tsitselikis 2008).

During his visit, Erdoğan refused to meet with the muftis appointed by the Greek state,
choosing instead to meet the elected muftis, Ibrahim Serif and Mehmet Emin Ağa. So as not
to create friction with the Greek government, Erdoğan sent Mehmet Aydın, the Minister for
Religious Affairs, to meet with the appointed muftis at a dinner organized in honor of the
Turkish president. In so doing, Erdoğan deftly navigated the thorny issue of the elected and
appointed muftis that would otherwise have overshadowed the visit (Chousein 2005, 140). To
date, Greek courts have opted to safeguard the muftis’ jurisdiction as mandatory for Muslim
litigants in breach of the Greek Constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights
(ECHR). A case pending before the Court of Strasbourg seems to have overturned this situation.

Under international pressure, the Greek government amended the law (Act 4511/2018) in
such a way that the muftis’ jurisdiction is now optional. However, the question of whether
Sharia law (certain legal norms on family and inheritance disputes), even applied optionally,
can be legally tolerated, remains unanswered (Özgüneş and Tsitselikis 2019).

Things, however, started to change after the AKP was re-elected for the second time in
2010. Turkey’s EU accession process was halted indefinitely, while the internal reform
process—especially in the fields of civil-military relations, national security and economic

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1 The mufti issue attracted public attention only in the 1980s, when the prelates of the minority claimed the right to elect
their own religious leaders against the practice of state appointment. The Greek government refused that right, also
pointing at the judicial duties, which the mufti office combined with its strictly religious duties and allegedly rendered
a popular election impossible.
liberalization—also fed into shifts in Turkey’s foreign policy. In particular, a new “geographical imagination” emerged (Christofis 2018; Tziarras and Moudouros 2016; Aras and Polat 2007) that casts Turkey as a regional hegemonic power and challenger to the current global distribution of power and the global system of governance (Turan 2015, 139).

The “geographical imagination” of the AKP derives in large part from the book Strategic Depth (Stratejik Derinlik), written by Ahmet Davutoğlu, an advisor to Erdoğan (2003–2009), then Foreign Minister (2009-2014), and, finally, Prime Minister and leader of the AKP (2014–2016). Although the book was published a year before the AKP came to power, the ideas it propagated were a significant reference point in the construction of the AKP foreign policy discourse, including in the Balkans (and Greece in particular). Strategic Depth provided AKP officials, including Erdoğan himself, with a ready set of ideas and metaphors that could be deployed in everyday domestic political language as well. Davutoğlu’s books and statements, in other words, have functioned as one of the chief ideological reservoirs that AKP officials have drawn on to bolster their nationalist discourse in domestic political struggles (Saraçoğlu and Demirkol 2015, 303).

In the AKP discourse on its nationalist project, geography plays a central role. This is not surprising, given ‘the persuasiveness of nationalism as a structure of feeling that transforms space into homeplace and interpolates individual and collective subjects as embodiments of national character (viewed as shared bio-genetic and psychic substance) [that] hinges on tropes of kinship, gender and sexuality’ (Alonso 1994, 386). As Saraçoğlu and Demirkol stress, the notion of homeland itself—as the integral geographical component of any nation-building process—is also a subject of ideological and political struggles and susceptible to change depending on the course of these struggles, and as such geography constitutes an integral element of the AKP’s concept of ‘nation’ (2015, 310).

Thus, as Davutoğlu argued in his book, ‘the remaining Muslim populations from the Ottoman era constitute the foundation of Turkey’s policy in the Balkans’. Moreover, he noted: ‘While these communities were previously regarded as burdens for our [i.e., Turkish] foreign policy, the erroneous policy of the evacuation of the Balkans through migration [to Turkey] has been exposed in a clear way. Today the Ottoman legacy in the Balkans secures Turkey important possibilities’ (Davutoğlu 2001, 122-123). The possibilities that Davutoğlu refers to here include the opportunity to exploit the Ottoman legacy in the Balkans and the Middle East economically and politically. Turkish trade and investment growth in these regions during the 2000s bore this out, with Turkey expanding its sphere of influence, not only in the Balkans, but also in the Middle East, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. Ambitiously, the new Turkish foreign policy also reached out to areas traditionally neglected until recently, such as Africa and South America (Moutsis 2016, 169).

In order to mobilize the Muslim population, in Turkey but also abroad, the use of Islamic values and extensive references to religion reverberate in ‘echoes of empire’ (Onar 2015, 149). At the same time, explicit Islamic codes, such as Erdogan’s use of fatih, the first chapter of the Koran, in one of his speeches in 2014, signifying the beginning of a new era in Turkish history
Turkey’s Justice and Development Government vis-à-vis The Muslim Minority in Greece

– a kind of official founding signifier of a nation reborn – are all instrumentalized as components of the people living inside the national borders of the country. This forms the backbone of the AKP’s political discourse concerning its domestic nationalist project (Christofis 2018; Saraçoğlu and Demirkol 2015). The “Islamic world” thus becomes the “historic mission” of the nation, that is, acting as the kin-state and even, the leader, of former Ottoman territories as, according to Davutoğlu (2004), Turkey should seek its place as a central country on the global chessboard.

The artificiality of the nation-state structure and the national borders created by European colonialism described in Strategic Depth (2001, 65-73) allow the AKP to appropriate and legitimize its policies regarding Muslim kin populations. It was this artificiality, imposition, and even betrayal and conspiracy by domestic and foreign powers (Christofis et al. 2019; Danforth 2014), that constituted the main obstacle to developing “intimate” relations with the rest of the Muslim populations that share the same religious values and some cultural traits as well as a common Ottoman past. In that sense, the AKP attempts to ‘make territorial borders de facto meaningless’, allowing the Turkish ruling party to increase the political effect of Turkey itself in the region by occasionally stressing the ‘boundless tolerance culture of this country’ (Erdoğan 2007), or the ‘cohabitation between the Christians and Muslims’ (Erdoğan 2004).

Reframing a discourse of the nation and national identity that invokes those beyond the border can provide a unique source of legitimacy for new political actors, which the AKP was in the early 2000s. This coincides with Brubaker’s (1996) contention that new actors can present themselves as “nationalizing elites” or saviors of the nation ready to finally “right the wrongs” of the past. Gagnon’s (2004) study of Serbia and Croatia and Waterbury’s (2010) work on Hungary have shown that nationalist invocations of this type can be a powerful tool in demobilizing opposition and stoking fear during turbulent periods of political transition. Elites thus use alleged threats to the trans-border nation to focus attention outward and make citizens feel that their security and well-being is intimately connected to the protection of the nation as a whole (Gagnon 2004).

By 2007, the AKP was facing one of its first intense crises with the Turkish military planning to overthrow the ruling party and stop Abdullah Gül’s candidacy for the presidency. The AKP’s policy regarding the Muslims in Greece shifted significantly against this background. Ali Babacan—Turkey’s Minister for Foreign Affairs at the time—was quite revealing in that respect. In a visit to Thrace in early December 2007, he advised the members of the minority to ‘defend their Turkish identity’ (Tsitselikis 2012, 174). Visiting the offices of the banned Turkish Youth Association of Komotini, he delivered a speech to minority members, recom-

2 Nevertheless, AKP officials and intellectuals organically linked to this party have so far never proposed such a radical project as collapsing these borders and ensuring the full political unification of these societies. Rather, they presented the presupposed contradiction between so-called geo-cultural integrity/historico-cultural affinities and legal international borders as an advantage for Turkey in its involvement in neighboring regions (Saraçoğlu and Demirkol 2015: 311).
mending his audience to adopt the term Turk to describe themselves and advising they pursue legal means channels in defense of their rights (Grigoriadis 2009, 168). Babacan’s statement and recommendations worked, transferring the AKP’s kin-state ideology, as a rationale for its regional influence as the bond between a kin-state and its co-ethnics becomes stronger when the minority is closer to the mother-state (Bloed and van Dijk 1999, 25-27). The AKP tried to present the kin-state ideology as a unifying and inclusive phenomenon by reaching out beyond the country’s borders to engage with co-ethnics living abroad, thus maintaining historic “national” ties, and fostering connections and contacts (Liebich 2017).

These gestures caused a nationalist backlash in the Greek media and a strongly worded statement from the Greek Foreign Ministry spokesman Georgios Koumoutsakos:

Fully respecting international treaties and the Treaty of Lausanne in particular, Greece implements a policy of full equality before the law and equal rights for the Greek Muslim citizens in Thrace. Greek Muslims have no need of advocates. This policy is being deepened constantly with new measures. In fact, it is an example and model for emulation for a country that wants to make progress on its EU accession course. This is the reality of the situation in Thrace, and everyone in Turkey should understand this. (as quoted in Grigoriadis 2009, 168)

The new measures Koumoutsakos referred to became apparent after a few years, when Papandreou sent a letter to Erdoğan on 25 January 2010 announcing a suite of measures to ease conditions for the Muslim–Turkish minority. Greece put minority issues under the control of the Ministry of Interior to show that minorities were not perceived as foreigners but as citizens. Without expecting any reciprocity from Turkey, Greece united some schools and published textbooks in Turkish for the minorities. In the aftermath of the Arab uprisings, and with the heat transferred to the Middle East, Ahmet Davutoğlu as Minister for Foreign Affairs paid a visit to Thrace in March 2011. Although he repeated Babacan’s statement, he did so in a more elegant way, calling on the minority ‘to conserve their religion, language and identity [and] to participate in the political and economical life of Greece’ as well as ‘to open their horizons in Greece and Europe’ (Tsitselikis 2012, 174).

The increasingly authoritarian character of the AKP rule under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan took a sharper turn after the Gezi protests of 2013 and the rapidly escalating friction with its erstwhile ally Fethullah Gülen. The end of the longstanding AKP–Gülen Concordat (Watmough 2019) had significant foreign policy implications, given that Gülenists were until then key actors in the Balkan region through the Turkish consulates and the minority schools they established and ran. The AKP thus sought new channels to exercise responsibility for the

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3 Liebich warns however, on the ‘boomerang effect’ of the kin-state policies, as kin-state activism may also be dangerous and conflictual, when a kin-state’s trans-border projects anger neighboring governments, leading to the securitization of kin minorities and the destabilizing of inter-ethnic and regional relations.
Turkey’s Justice and Development Government vis-à-vis The Muslim Minority in Greece

Muslim population in the region. The June 2015 elections, and particularly the attempted coup of 15 July 2016, signified new conditions and frictions in Greek–Turkish relations. In particular, the eight military officers who sought asylum in Greece because of their involvement in the coup attempt started a bargaining process between the two countries over whether Greece should extradite them to Turkey. The refusal by Greece to deport the military personnel angered the Turkish government. This contributed to other crises, such as the Kardak issue and the revision of the Treaty of Lausanne (Christofis et al. 2019), through the circulation of a series of imprecise—even crudely drawn—maps of Turkey with new and expanded borders through pro-government media, encompassing in these new borders kin-minorities as well (Danforth 2016).

What is noticeable concerning Greece and Western Thrace is the escalation of the AKP’s rhetoric. For example, on 15 October 2016 during a speech delivered at the university bearing his name, President Erdoğan announced his intention to reconquer the territories that Turkey had lost following defeat in World War I. Such a move would fully implement the National Pact (Misak-ı Milli) of the last Ottoman Parliament, adopted on 12 February 1920, which specifically mentions Western Thrace and the Dodecanese archipelago (VoltaireNet 2018). On several occasions in late 2017, Erdoğan expressed similar sentiments, stating in one speech that ‘the borders of our heart are extended until Vienna’. Some days later, he added that ‘the Ottoman Empire had an area of more than 2,000,000 sq. km while nowadays Turkey has only 783,000 sq. km,’ creating cracks in the stability of the wider region (Hellenic News 2018).

In December 2017, Erdoğan willingly accepted the Greek invitation to visit the country—a gesture that was warmly viewed by the Turkish media, which made extensive references to the positive climate that was being created between the two countries. Erdoğan met with his counterpart, Prokopis Pavlopoulos, and the Greek Prime Minister, Alexis Tsipras, to discuss “updating” the Treaty of Lausanne, among other things. Erdoğan chastised the Greeks for failing to look after Ottoman sites and to provide proper places of worship for Greek Muslims. Afterwards, Erdoğan visited Thrace, where he gave a statement that recalled nothing of his pronouncements of thirteen years before. In this 2017 speech to the Muslim population, he referred to the audience as Turks, adding that ‘We (Turks) have four members in the Hellenic Parliament who have to do many things’, and greeted them in the symbolic Muslim way with four fingers and a closed thumb (rabia) (Hellenic News 2018).

What is of further importance was Erdoğan’s request that the Athens government not demand that ethnic Turks assimilate. In particular, he stated to an audience of Greek Turks in Komotini that ‘We [Turks] never wanted [to assimilate] a different ethnic element. This would be a great injustice’. Finally, the Turkish president referred to the Muslim minority as the ‘descendants of Ottomans who controlled Greece from the fifteenth until the nineteenth century [Turkish] War of Independence now numbering in tens of thousands, [who] should be able to elect their own chief Islamic cleric’. This was a comment already made during his meeting with Tsipras in Athens, where he criticized Athens’s appointment of a mufti for the Turks in Western Thrace, which he said violated the Lausanne Treaty (Kurdistan24 2017).
Conclusion

Historically, and in many cases to the present, the central players in the AKP’s policies toward the Balkans have been Turkey’s Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), the Turkish Development Agency (TİKA), and Islamic grassroots organizations, such as the Gülen movement. Apart from the latter’s role in the Muslim minority affairs, which shows some activity, both the Diyanet and TİKA seem not to have any significant activity in Greece. For example, Öktem mentions ‘the Gülen colleges are successful primary and secondary schools that operate in all countries of the region with the exception of Greece and Bulgaria’ (2012: 33, n. 17), while, in contrast, TİKA limits its role to the Western Balkans (Öktem 2012, 37-38). Finally, Kirişci (2012) has provided important examples showing how Turkey’s foreign policy has been steadily transnationalizing in recent years through the increasing role of non-state elements—including municipalities, business communities, non-governmental organizations, and even soap operas (see, e.g., Constantinou and Tziarras 2018)—as well as individuals. Turkish foreign policy as it pertains to the Muslim minority in Greece is no exception here.

Although more research is needed to provide concrete findings, it could be suggested that Turkey would not be willing to sacrifice its economic relations with the Muslims in Greece, and with Greece itself, for a tighter control over the kin minority. The three large projects in the works—a border bridge, ferry connections and a high-speed train connection—as well as the statement by Tevfik Bilgen, the chairman of the Foreign Economic Relations Board of the Turkey–Greece Business Council, that trade relations between the two countries, are on the same path seem to support this argument.

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CHAPTER 6:
FROM ‘NATIONAL CAUSE’ TO ‘NATIONAL BURDEN’: TURKISH CYPRIO Ts WITHIN TURKEY’S KINSHIP AND DIASPORA POLITICS AND PERCEPTIONS

Mete Hatay and Rebecca Bryant

In the past nothing could be said about Cyprus apart from the official position. The Annan Plan marked a new era. It’s no longer on the political agenda. The government looks at it from a more geopolitical perspective. It comes on the agenda when we talk about the EU or energy. But for the society, it’s gradually begun to occupy a smaller place in their minds. No one’s interested in Cyprus. In the past, whenever you said “babyland” everyone would get excited. But the subject has now been normalized. Turkey has much bigger problems to deal with… the Kurdish problem, Syria.

— Head of a Turkish NGO

Introduction
The above remark summarizes the Turkish government’s current disinterest in their ‘kin’ in Cyprus. While there are numerous factors that may lead to Turkey’s increased interest in the island—e.g., gas reserves recently discovered off the coast of the island (Tzimitras and Gürel 2018)—our concern in this paper is with Turkish perceptions of Cyprus and Turkish Cypriots, as well as how these perceptions play into Turkey’s foreign and domestic policies.

In this regard, it is important to emphasize that Turkey is now politically and socially divided in a way that, arguably, it has not been since the establishment of the Republic. While class, gender, ethnic and political differences have always existed in the country, there now exists a rift between those who oppose the AKP government and a majority that support the
AKP/Erdoğan agenda. That agenda includes increasingly autocratic powers for the presidency, given impetus by the 15 July 2016 coup attempt and threat to Erdoğan’s life. Public dissent has been stifled in the country, as many opposition and dissident voices have been swept up and silenced in the vast purges that have ‘cleansed’ the state’s military-bureaucratic complex.

In this chapter we will provide a broad outline of the ways in which Turkish state attitudes towards Cyprus and Turkish Cypriots have changed over time, and we will also discuss the resulting policy implications. For instance, as other studies have noted, the idea of Cyprus as a ‘national cause’ was so hegemonic until the early 2000s that to question it was equated with treason (Kaliber 2005). Moreover, as we explain below, this was because Cyprus has always stood somewhere between the domestic and the foreign, with influence in both realms of policy. It was only with the AKP’s sidelining of the military and bureaucracy—what Metin Heper (1992) calls the ‘state elites’—that this narrative began to break down. As we will explain, that narrative has yet to be fully replaced, although its breakdown has been accompanied by increasing tensions between north Cyprus and Turkey, and indeed between Turkish Cypriots and Turkish nationals.

**Historical Background: Becoming a ‘National Cause’**

During the establishment of the Turkish Republic, Turkish speakers living in Cyprus fell outside the boundaries of the National Pact that defined the limits of the Turkish state; as a result they were cast as ‘outside Turks’ (*dış Türkler*). The National Pact also defined the limits of non-intervention, the idea being that protecting one’s own sovereignty—something that Turkish citizens clearly desired after so many decades of war at the end of empire—meant respecting the sovereignty of others. As a result, despite growing Greek Cypriot agitation for enosis, or union of the island with Greece—intensifying in the first half of the twentieth century—Turkish governments kept a political and military distance from an island that was, at the time, a British colony.

Turning the Cyprus problem into a national cause was possible in part because of the many Turkish Cypriots living in Turkey who, in the late 1940s, started to form associations and join forces with ultra-nationalists in Turkey. Many of these nationalists were sympathetic to Turanism, i.e., the idea of the unification of all Turkish-speaking peoples in one homeland; in fact, they often fell afoul of the official Kemalist ideology because of their support for their ‘kin’ who were not covered in the National Pact.

By the early 1950s, the plight of the Turkish Cypriots, aka the Turks who ‘remained’ in Cyprus, had penetrated Turkish popular culture, while demonstrations kept the matter constantly in the news. The decade was also a time of martial pride in Turkey, when the Turkish military showed its mettle in Korea, Turkey’s first involvement in a foreign war. In the same period, however, regional interests required the Turkish government to take a position against intervention on the island, expressed by then Foreign Minister Fuat Köprülü in 1950 when he remarked: “for us there is no problem called the Cyprus Problem.” Retired Turkish ambassador Tugay Uluçevik notes that in the context of the early Cold War period, Turkey watched Cyprus
From ‘National Cause’ to ‘National Burden’

from the sidelines, partly because it did not want to ruin the good relations it had with Greece at that time (Uluçevik 2016).

It was not until the late 1950s and the start of a Greek Cypriot anticolonial struggle aimed at enosis that the Turkish public began to be more aware of the Cyprus issue. Organizations of Turkish Cypriots in Turkey joined with associations of nationalist students to hold large-scale protests around the issue of Cyprus (Armaoğlu 1963: 441, 557-559). Indeed, such associations used the media and mass rallies to whip up popular opinion in a way that would ultimately change foreign policy (see Bryant and Hatay 2015).

By the end of that decade, the rhetoric of a ‘national cause’ (*milli dava*) had become common in Turkish public discourse on Cyprus. Moreover, the excitement around their island kin, this group of ‘outside Turks,’ continued as violence in Cyprus escalated in the 1960s. Following the 1974 Turkish military intervention/invasion in the island, Cyprus also became a subject of national pride. In this regard, former ambassador Uluçevik remarked:

Starting from the mid-1950s and continuing until the beginning of 2003, in Turkey, despite occasionally being faced with very difficult internal and external conditions, there was a “national excitement” that covered all of the state institutions, the parliament, and all of the people young and old and was reflected without exception in our press. What made this excitement possible was the idea of the “national cause.” This idea came about because of becoming aware of the importance and value for Turkey of the island of Cyprus. Adopting this “national cause” entailed demonstrating an unwavering “national stance.” There was no thought, in either the government or the press, of taking a step back or making a concession on the question of Cyprus in order to achieve some other foreign policy goal. (Uluçevik 2016)

As Uluçevik describes it, then, ‘national excitement’ easily turned into a ‘national stance’ (*milli durus*)—in other words, a policy principle. Within the context of that national stance, he asserts, it was impossible either to question that principle or to think of sacrificing it for other interests.

**Securitization of the Cyprus Problem**

The transformation of the Cyprus Problem into a Turkish national cause also blurred the lines between domestic and foreign policy in Turkey; as the Cyprus question became increasingly ‘securitized,’ it made what would otherwise appear to be foreign policy a matter of domestic concern. An emerging literature on securitization reveals the ways in which particular events or subjects are transformed into issues of national security through the intervention of state actors and/or the media. Securitizing an issue in turn enables state actors to take extreme or otherwise unacceptable steps to counter the subject that has been securitized. An example would be the United States immediately after 11 September 2001, when the government explained U.S. security needs as the reason: to open Guantanamo, to justify the torture of suspected terrorists, and to institute large-scale surveillance of its own population. More recently, the 2015 flood of refugees into Europe elicited a similar securitizing response, one that implied that the only way to stem the tide of migrants was by policing borders and erecting border fences.
While for the first three decades after the establishment of the Turkish Republic that country’s stance on Cyprus had been a distant one, the intense mobilization by Turkish and Turkish Cypriot elites and youth, as well as Turkish media, ultimately convinced a large portion of the Turkish public that Turkish Cypriots were ‘blood brothers’ under threat, and moreover, that geographically the island was actually part of Anatolia. The sense of threat to a national cause that had also become part of Turkey’s national interest carried into the post-1974 period, primarily through the collusion of Rauf Denktaş and other Turkish Cypriot nationalist politicians with the military-bureaucratic establishment in Turkey (Kızılyürek 2003: 118-119).

Historian Behlül Özkan notes: “Cyprus was used to construct a national consensus as well as an authoritarian system which silenced opposition” (Özkan 2015: 544). In an important article, political scientist Alper Kaliber (2005) argued that the process by which the “national stance” became unquestionable and opposition silenced was through the bureaucratic normalization of the issue. Returning to the USA response to 9/11, we can see how various forms of anti-terror legislation can lead to—even justify—an increased surveillance of populations; surveillance also becomes bureaucratized and normalized. As an issue becomes bureaucratized, it becomes harder to question, and it may even serve to increase the power of the bureaucracy. In the case of the Turkish securitization of Cyprus, Kaliber notes:

> It has forced the government as the political authority to pursue predetermined policies by remaining loyal to the “red lines” drawn up by the “foreign” policy and security establishment. Second, the consistent efforts of the bureaucratic elite to hold the Cyprus question within the sphere of “the existential” and “the imminent” thwarted the occurrence of widespread social debate within an autonomous public sphere, and thus led to the depoliticization and fixation of the issue as an area of bureaucratic specialty and competence. (Kaliber 2005: 320)

In other words, once Cyprus became a national cause and a matter of national pride, it was no longer debatable. As Kaliber remarks: “The conventional state rhetoric on the Cyprus question substantially contributed to the institutionalization of a regime fetishizing such concepts as security, stability and ‘national sensitivities’ in Turkey.” So while the securitization of the Cyprus Problem served to bolster the state elites in Turkey through ‘fetishization’ of national security, often against political elites, it simultaneously bolstered the position of nationalist politicians in Cyprus, especially Rauf Denktaş, who was greatly admired by the Turkish public (ibid. 2005: 321).

**Marching on to more Pragmatic Games**

It was not until the early 2000s— when Turkey was in the process of EU-oriented changes intended to lead it closer to the European Union— that Turkey’s position on Cyprus began to change. Then EU Coordinator Egemen Bağış called Turkey’s new position on Cyprus a ‘win-win’ (kazan-kazan) strategy, echoing the rhetoric of conflict resolution experts who had sought to intervene in the conflict. As a result of this so-called win-win strategy, Turkey
actively participated in the negotiations of the Annan Plan V, the version that would ultimately be put to twin referenda on both sides of Cyprus in April 2004. While there were vociferous voices decrying the state’s ‘selling out’ of Cyprus, these were soon drowned by the AKP’s EU-oriented agenda and sidelining of the military. It was only in the de-securitizing of the Cyprus Problem, then, that a new Turkish policy towards the island could be born.

Even after Greek Cypriots defeated that plan at referendum, the AKP-led Turkish government insisted on a policy towards Cyprus in which they would be ‘one step ahead.’ This meant a departure from Rauf Denktaş’s previous insistence on certain ‘red lines,’ especially the idea that the unrecognized TRNC would first have to be recognized “if only for a minute,” as the former Turkish Cypriot president used to say. This had given Denktaş, and perforce the Turkish Cypriot side, the reputation of intransigence. Instead, the new ‘one step ahead’ policy was built on Turkish Cypriot support for the Annan Plan in a bid to ‘show the world’ that, actually, the intransient side was the island’s south.

In addition, the defeat of the Annan Plan at referendum led to a new Turkish policy of ‘developing’ north Cyprus through both state and private investment. This included, for instance, the development of large hotel complexes in the Kyrenia and Bafra regions of the island, building new roads, and most recently, the construction of a massive water pipeline bringing fresh water undersea to Cyprus from the south Turkish coast. All this infrastructural and economic investment aimed to develop the north has been called by some Turkish diplomats a ‘Plan B’ — i.e., a plan for north Cyprus’s future in the event that there never will be a settlement. However, as we will show below, that development has also created further rifts, as many Turkish Cypriots interpret it as a use of Cypriot resources without direct benefit for Cypriots. Because many of the projects employ workers from Turkey and funnel profits back to Turkey, Turkish Cypriot unions have objected that this is a form of exploitation and colonization. Indeed, in the post-Annan period, even as incomes have risen in Cyprus’s north, the discourse of Turkish colonization has also gained considerable ground.

Rebecca Bryant and Christalla Yakinthou (2016) observed that the current relationship between north Cyprus and Turkey might be described as a paternal protectorate, a type of protectorate that is justified and explained by both Turkish Cypriots and Turkish nationals in the idiom of kinship. The authors remarked: “This perceived kinship relationship, then, makes it ‘natural’ that Turkey would protect Turkish Cypriots and intervene in their affairs.” However, it is also the familial nature of this relationship that “creates ambiguity in this particular relation of domination and authority,” as that familiarity “often slides between the paternal and the paternalistic.” Paternalism, or interference against someone’s will in the interests of their own good, was also a feature of European colonialism in the 19th and 20th centuries, especially the belief in a European “civilizing mission.” They also observed: “And so like a good father, Turkey has for so long ‘taken care of’ north Cyprus, protecting it, advising it, giving its allowance, and intervening to chastise. Like other parent-child relationships, Turkish Cypriots must struggle to have their autonomy recognized, and there is therefore often resentment that the child is never allowed to ‘grow up’” (Bryant and Yakinthou 2012: 16-19).
Gradually in the post-Annan period, the Turkish state’s protectorate relationship with its client in Cyprus’s north moved from the paternal to the paternalistic, including not only north Cyprus’s development but also the imposition of austerity measures associated with Turkish aid packages. As we will see, the response of the Turkish public to Turkish Cypriot protests of an increasingly colonizing relationship has increased tensions and led to periods of stand-off between Turkish leaders and their counterparts on the island.

**From Victimized ‘Brotherhood’ to ‘Ungrateful Parasites’**

In early 2011, the streets of north Nicosia filled with, by some estimates, upwards of 20,000 angry Turkish Cypriots who gathered to protest Turkey’s demands that the island’s north go on an economic diet. Since the 1960s, Turkey has sent millions of dollars each year to support a community whose economy has been hampered, and at times crippled, by various forms of isolation. The current figure is around $650 million. A large part of that money goes to pay the salaries of civil servants, and Turkey had demanded the imposition of austerity measures, including downsizing the bloated bureaucracy, increasing working hours, and eliminating privileges such as the thirteenth salary, a remnant of British rule on the island. The trade union and civil society leaders who organized the protest proclaimed that it was part of a *Toplumsal Varoluş Mücadelesi* (Struggle for Communal Existence). In Turkey, however, the protests tended to be interpreted as ingratitude and as asking for handouts with no strings attached.

In the post-Annan period, even as Turkey used diplomacy and soft power to improve relations with its neighbours and renew its influence in the region, relations with Turkish Cypriots grew worse from day to day. Around the time of the Arab Spring, in early 2011, Turkish Cypriot relations with Turkey also entered a new period, following the protests described above and as a response to the paternalistic and even bullying reaction of then Prime Minister Erdoğan, who remarked in a press conference:

> Lately there have been provocative protests in North Cyprus. They’re organizing these with the South. . . . They tell us “get out.” . . . They have no right to engage in protests like this against Turkey. The very lowest civil servant salary is close to 10,000 TL. . . . The gentleman gets 10,000 lira and shamelessly holds such a protest. . . . They say “Turkey should get out of here.” Who are you to say something like that? (*sen kimsin be adam*). I have martyrs, I have wounded veterans, I have strategic interests. Whatever business Greece has in Cyprus, Turkey also has the same business for strategic reasons. . . . It’s quite significant for those who are being fed by our country to take this route (*Ülkemizden beslenenlerin bu yola girmesi manidardır*).¹

Erdoğan then claimed that he would order the prime minister of the TRNC to appear in Ankara and ‘call him to account’ (çağırıp kendisiley konuşacağız, soracağız).

The language used was inflammatory: Turkish Cypriots interpreted Erdoğan’s description that they are ‘being fed’ (besleniyorlar) by the Turkish state to be a way of calling them besleme, a word used to describe the traditional practice of taking poor children into one’s home and raising them as a type of servant. The tone with which Erdogan claimed that he would call the TRNC prime minister to his office suggested, again, a master calling his servant, or a father calling his son to account. The immediate reaction in the Turkish Cypriot media was shock and indignation, with the editor of one newspaper ironically commenting, “Erdoğan . . . has begun to talk like a colonizer. We have no need of a president in a puppet government. This state that we call the TRNC should be abolished and joined to Turkey. A governor should be sent to Cyprus so that it can be a modern colony.”

All of this was a long way from the close cooperation of seven years earlier, when the AKP had recently come to power and strongly supported a U.N. plan to reunite the island. In 2011, there were numerous Turkish commentators, especially those of a more pragmatic nature, who warned that Erdoğan’s rhetoric, rooted as it was in the idea of Cyprus as a national cause and Turkish Cypriots as persons who had been saved, would ultimately result in north Cyprus appearing to be a colony of Turkey, if Turkish Cypriots’ identity and wishes were not respected:

What are you going to do if you don’t support [feed] the TRNC? If you have the strength, let’s see you solve the problem by annexing the TRNC. It’s only then that you’ll have the right to treat the President of the TRNC like the “governor of the 82nd province.” . . . However, you can’t annex the TRNC, because you rightfully don’t want to put yourself in the position of accepting a solution that’s a step behind the Annan Plan. So in that case you’ll show respect for the law created by the reality of your state recognizing the TRNC as an independent state; you’ll play the game by those rules. Even if for you the TRNC’s independence is a lie, you’ll behave as though it’s not one [authors’ italics].

The final sentence is especially telling, as it acknowledges that for many people in Turkey and for Turkish politicians, Cyprus is like another Turkish province, even if it is called by another name. Indeed, one sees this in many aspects of everyday relations between Turkey and north Cyprus, including the right to enter the country using only an identity card, and the way that Turkish travel agents describe Cyprus as a destination somewhere between domestic and foreign tourism.

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Indeed, as early as 1995, Tanıl Bora, a leftist intellectual writing in the magazine *Birikim*, described what he saw as the difficulties created by persons from Turkey equating Turkish Cypriot identity with Turkish identity:

Turkish Cypriot (*kıbrıslıtürk*) identity has been equated with the Turkishness of Turkey. While ethnic kin such as Turks from the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Balkans are not deemed “worthy” of this same degree of identification, it is approved by official Turkish Cypriot nationalism: Denktaş, in a speech before the Turkish parliament in May 1993, used the phrase, “the Great Turkish Nation of which I am proud to be a member.” . . . Turkish Cypriots, in both meaning and rhetoric, are positioned as a branch of Turkey’s Turkishness (Bora 1995).⁴

It was the lack of identity or sameness that particularly came to the fore during the *besleme* row. It was at this point that certain writers reminded the Turkish public that north Cyprus was not simply a branch of Turkishness in Cyprus:

Some time ago I wrote in this column, “Cyprus belongs to the Cypriots.” I don’t want to repeat the same thing again, but briefly I want to make clear that Cyprus is not Turkey’s colony. At least that’s not how Cypriots see it. And this problematic perspective is going to create even bigger problems in the future. The day may come when those Turkish Cypriots seeking to be free of Turkey may even establish secessionist groups. Before any solution we need to be clear on the perception of Cyprus in the heads of politicians from all parties in Turkey. Positioning ourselves as “saviors” from 1974 won’t solve the Cyprus Problem and could complicate it even more. The Northern Cypriots, like the Kurds, support an honorable solution. They want their identity to be protected and respected.⁵

In this period, Turkish Cypriot insistence on their distinctiveness, as well as the increasingly antagonistic relationship created by others’ insistence on their Turkishness, or seeing north Cyprus as a branch of Turkishness in the island, as well as by Turkish Cypriot reactions against large numbers of Turkish nationals arriving on the island as temporary or seasonal labour, led to a general perception amongst the Turkish public that “Cypriots don’t love Turks from Turkey,” or even that “Cypriots don’t love Turkey.” This was and continues to be widely expressed and discussed on social media, where in some cases the question is framed as “Why do Northern Cypriots (*kuzey kıbrıslılar*) not love Turkey and/or Turks from Turkey?”

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It was mainly in the 1990s that Turkish Cypriots began to express increasing anxiety that they were being outnumbered by Turkish immigrants from Turkey. Because north Cyprus’s only door to the world at that time was through Turkey, this also meant that economic migrants arrived via Turkey and that most were Turkish citizens. Despite the opening of checkpoints in 2003, Turkey and points east remain the main source of cheap labour in the island’s north.\(^6\)

**How Do We Save Them from Degeneration?**

In addition to perceptions of ungrateful Cypriot ‘brothers,’ however, is another growing perception of Cyprus as a centre for gambling and prostitution, in other words, for so-called decadent tourism. One senior researcher at a well-known Turkish research institute commented in an interview with us that even the rhetoric of Cypriots not loving them has begun to be replaced by one that views the island as a place to engage in activities that are illegal in Turkey, such as casinos and night clubs that are actually brothels.\(^7\)

The current picture of the island, then, is one where activities that are illegal in Turkey take place openly, where higher education is nothing more than an economic sector, and where locals ‘dislike Turks.’ For nationalists and religious conservatives in Turkey, this is further accompanied by an impression that the island’s universities shelter Kurdish separatists and that Turkish Cypriots are losing their Turkish and Muslim identities. For instance, there are frequent clashes at north Cyprus universities between Kurdish students and members of the Turkish nationalist ultra-right. Although both groups are from Turkey and bring their disagreements from Turkey to the island, the refusal of the north Cyprus government to stamp out Kurdish nationalism has led members of Turkish ultra-right organizations and parties to call Cyprus a ‘traitor land’:

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\(^6\) Beside the economic migrants who started arriving in Cyprus in the late 1980’s, there was also another kind of migration was already taking place. After the division of the island in 1974, approximately 30,000 Turkish nationals were settled in the island’s north as part of a facilitated migration (1975-1979) intended to increase the Turkish population on the island. This act of demographic engineering was planned by the Turkish Cypriot leadership in collaboration with the Turkish state and primarily involved moving to the north of Cyprus persons who had been displaced as a result of dams or other state projects. Soldiers who had participated in the military intervention/invasion were also encouraged to settle on the island. Upon their arrival, all settlers were given Greek Cypriot houses and citizenship in Turkish Cypriots’ new breakaway state, and they became an important element in building an economy out of Greek Cypriot land and enterprises. Many were used as agricultural labour, and they were usually settled in remote areas where Turkish Cypriots did not wish to live, such as the Karpassia Peninsula. Many others married Turkish Cypriots and were incorporated into the community, while their children and grandchildren speak the Turkish Cypriot dialect and often are indistinguishable from Turkish Cypriots. However, this facilitated migration ended in 1979, and so these ‘settlers’ should be distinguished from persons who later arrived in the island as labour migrants. The latter group comes to the island of its own volition, seeking a better life. This population began to increase in the 1980s and 1990s first with the growth of tourism and later because of the construction in the island’s north, as both these industries are dependent on cheap labour. However, the numbers of these migrants, as well as a perception of a rise in crime, has caused Turkish Cypriots to perceive this influx as a ‘population problem,’ and popular discourse often accuses Turkey of ‘sending these people to the island’ (For more further reading see: Hatay 2005, 2007, 2008).

\(^7\) “Kumarhane Cenneti KKTC,” Birgün, 8 October 2009, https://www.birgun.net/haber/kumarhane-cenneti-kktc-48685
While the blessed island is being run with a mentality that gives credence to traitors and makes it seem not like a Turkish land but like a traitor land, what are our Ambassador and our military commander doing there if they’re not raising an objection? . . . This island for which we sacrificed thousands of martyrs and Turkey’s future cannot become an island of treason, prostitution, and gambling, this should not be allowed!8

Moreover, in the AKP period, what had in the past been simply a need to prove their Turkishness became entwined with that party’s mingling of nationalism and religiosity. Today, in other words, Turkish Cypriots often find both their Turkishness and their Muslimness questioned. One political scientist explained in an interview the current perceptions of religious conservatives in Turkey from a historical perspective:

For the more conservative elements, it seems more like a military area. It’s the place where all the Kemalist fantasies have been realized. What Kemalism wanted to accomplish, it accomplished it there. For instance, education is completely secular. . . In other words, there’s an unadulterated Kemalism there, with all its faults. Overly Western.

This interviewee, then, argues that for conservative Turks, an ‘unadulterated Kemalism’ is responsible for the lack of religiosity amongst Turkish Cypriots that today calls their identity into doubt. Not only have party officials often noted Turkish Cypriots’ loss of religious identity and the need to revive it, but ordinary authors and intellectuals who affiliate themselves with the party have also remarked upon the lack of religious identity they find in Cyprus’s north. For instance, only a few months after the besleme crisis, one religious author who had visited Cyprus briefly spoke rather definitively on its religious lack:

This weekend, as I was walking around the cities and streets of the TRNC, where I had gone for a conference, and conversing with people, and talking to officials—especially religious officials—for some reason the last gasp of Andalucia appeared before my eyes. My brain was making connections with the Andalucia of Leo Africanus that I had read about years ago. . . . I don’t want to paint a negative picture, but the TRNC has become a country in limbo. Neither religious nor without religion . . neither Muslim nor Christian. There’s an incredible indifference to religious and national values. . . . I assure you, the Cypriot community is melting like snow. Turkey keeps thousands of troops there, it sends billions, but the community is quickly melting. If a plebiscite were to happen now, the percentage of those wanting to join with the South Greek Republic would be at least fifty percent.9

From ‘National Cause’ to ‘National Burden’

What this writer expresses as a ‘melting away’ (erimek) of identity often finds expression as a fear that Turkish Cypriots will be assimilated into a non-Turkish majority and thereby lose their identity. The interviewee above, for instance, continued:

The state has an assimilation fear, in other words they fear that the people there will lose their identity. Whether it’s the Kemalists or the religious people, they don’t want the people there being assimilated in the long run. Before they would do this [counter this] by feeding them Kemalist nationalism. Now it’s with conservative ideas. But there’s certainly a fear that their own symbols will be reconstructed. In other words, that a new identity will be created. There’s a fear that “they shouldn’t be assimilated in the majority” or “in the EU.”

As we see from the quotes above, there is a logical association at work that equates secularism with loss of faith, loss of faith with loss of Turkishness, and loss of Turkishness with loss of values. Moreover, that loss of values, for some, appears to imply a willingness to do anything for profit, including joining with Greek Cypriots. This has become a theme in Islamist writings about the island:

People who have lost their Islamic consciousness and sensitivity have also weakened their awareness of being Turkish. Because throughout history the Muslim religion and Turkishness have been intertwined. Those Turks who have lost their Muslimness have, after a period of time, also lost their Turkish identity. Those who remained attached to Islam, on the other hand, retained their Turkish identity. There are very strong bonds between Muslim identity and Turkish identity. . . . In North Cyprus, because of anti-religious secular policies, the Cypriot Turk has begun to lose his Islamic consciousness and Muslim identity. Distancing from religion has brought with it a loss of identity. Those persons whose spiritual side has been damaged have also weakened their ties with Turkish culture and identity. Instead of faith and culture, material interests and profit relations have begun to take precedence. A public has emerged that for the sake of its own interests is not disturbed by collaborating with the Greek side and behaving against Turkey, that instead of a unity of faith is more interested in an association of profit.10

As a result, a newly articulated conflict has emerged between adherents of the AKP who seem to think bringing Turkish Cypriots back to the faith is their duty, and Turkish Cypriots who resent having their faith questioned. One leftist commentator remarked ironically on this perspective:

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While Davutoğlu’s “strategic perspective” gives little importance to the presence of Turkish Cypriots, the culture men of the religious segment declare Turkish Cypriots “without religion” and practically count North Cyprus as “Darül Harp” [the “place of war,” a phrase used to refer to non-Muslim territories where Islam cannot survive].

The ‘war’ declared here is a fight against the secularism of Turkish Cypriots, and an insistence on drawing them back into the faith. The AKP has sought to accomplish this on the island through religious education, including building an imam-hatip school; through financing the building of mosques; and most recently through a ‘coordination committee’ intended to control funding for youth housing and activities.

**Building a Trojan Horse**

Since 2004, the AKP has also shown its political economic face to Cypriots in the form of neoliberalism. As explained above, the Turkish government has attached conditions to its aid packages, e.g. privatization of public works, and has encouraged Turkish investors to pour large amounts of money into the sorts of building projects that have fuelled the Turkish economy (Buğra and Savaşkan 2014). These have included large resort complexes, universities, housing developments, and even an airport. The Turkish government has also invested in infrastructure, such as new roads and a water delivery project, primarily using Turkish contractors. And most controversially for Turkish Cypriots, the Turkish government has invested in the construction of mosques and religious schools.

All these projects have brought new and powerful Turkish business interests to the island for the first time. These business interests, furthermore, have inserted themselves into the island’s nepotistic system, which had previously been the exclusive terrain of local interests. These Turkish individuals/companies have invested large sums of money to support parties that would give them favours, e.g., prime locations to build hotels or overlooking zoning restrictions, etc. Although many of these interests are not directly affiliated with the AKP, there is still the perception among many Turkish Cypriots that their own assets and resources are secondary to Turkey and its economic interests.

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11 Between 1974 and 2000, only nine new mosques were built in the north. In contrast, between 2000 and 2018, 45 new mosques were built, most of these in the post-2001 AKP period. Of course, it is also important to explain that the actual number of mosques has not increased: all these new mosques were built in the ‘former’ Greek Cypriot or mixed villages where Muslims had converted the Christian churches into mosques. Once the new, purpose-built mosques have been built, Turkish Cypriot authorities evacuate the churches and move all the carpets and other furniture to the new mosques, while also keeping the former mosque/church locked (High level clergy from TRNC Religious Affairs Office, phone interview, 5.9. 2018).

12 As an example, businessman Besim Tibuk, the owner of the Merit International Hotels Group, first came to the island in 2000. Today, he owns 12% of the bed capacity in the north, spread among seven resorts. He is the owner of six of the 17 five-star hotels in the north, while five of these five-star hotels were built in the past decade. The same businessman owns a newspaper, a television station a and radio station in north Cyprus.
In addition to these changes, there is also the AKP’s new diaspora politics in Cyprus, which is no longer targeted to their Turkish Cypriot kin but is now aimed at the Turkish immigrants who settled/were settled on the island post 1974. This new policy resembles AKP transnational politics elsewhere and has the potential to disturb the peace on the island. Since 2014, political parties led by diaspora Turks who support the AKP have begun to emerge in countries with Turkish immigrant and minority populations (Sahin Mencutek and Baser 2018). In Germany, the Netherlands, Bulgaria and elsewhere, the AKP has established political parties that are in some cases rivals to established diaspora parties. These new rival parties are intended to have an influence on domestic politics in the countries where they operate, but they also are used to mobilize absentee votes for the AKP in Turkish elections.\(^{13}\) In north Cyprus, on the other hand, these policies have created new problems both because of the island’s geographical proximity to Turkey and because of its dependence on it.

In Cyprus today, Turkish nationals, or persons of Turkish origin, have access to new networks and new forms of political connection that have been emerging on the island since the late 1990s. There are now often direct connections between important members of the diaspora in Cyprus and businesspeople/politicians in Turkey, particularly when they are from the same region in Turkey.\(^{14}\) This is precisely the sort of grassroots mobilisation that the AKP has encouraged, providing both the means and the networks to address local-level grievances that were often overlooked in the past.\(^{15}\) In the last decade, for instance, there has been a proliferation of associations based on place of origin in Turkey (hemşehri associations). According to one Turkish immigrant association, at present there are over 35 different diaspora organisations in north Cyprus, with four only for people from the Hatay region (Hatayıllar Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği, Hatayıllar Derneği, Ak Hatayıllar Derneği, and Öz Hatayıllar Derneği).

A founder of one Turkish settler civil society organization complained that in the past, “Whenever a deputation came from Turkey, it was necessary to gain a place in the official representation. If you weren’t a civil society organization or political party, you couldn’t meet with the delegation” (quoted in Özekmekçi 2012). However, as explained above, today Turkish nationals on the island have many options for accessing the Turkish government and political networks in Turkey. Indeed, in some instances it is easier for them to access Turkish government officials than to access local government officials in any effective way. Building on the AKP’s encouragement of what Jenny White (2002) calls ‘vernacular politics’ has provided a vehicle for new political agents to emerge, ones who achieve their goals through the AKP and other Turkish political networks, even as they ‘defend’ Turkey.


14 For instance, YDP General Secretary Bertan Zaroğlu belongs to an important Hatay family that includes an uncle who is the head of the Reyhanlı Chamber of Commerce and Industry and a cousin, Hüseyin Zaroğlu, who is an important name in the Hatay branch of the National Action Party (MHP) http://www.kibrispostasi.com/index.php/cat/35/news/31508.

15 On the grassroots mobilization of the AKP, see Doğan 2016, and White 2002.
In the past many Turkish Cypriots viewed Turkish nationals and their descendants as a sort of ‘Trojan Horse,’ a rather passive vehicle; they did not appear to be active agents for Turkey’s politics in north Cyprus. Today, however, there is an increasing fear amongst many Turkish Cypriots that the arterial networks that are the vehicle for vernacular politics are enabling new forms of political agency that directly link persons living in Cyprus to Turkish politics and the Turkish state. This impression is reinforced in instances where there is tension between Turkey and north Cyprus, or between the Turkish government and Turkish Cypriots, and when some of the immigrant associations unquestionably defend Turkey and the Turkish government whether they agree with them or not. Such instances only reinforce the idea that they are Turkey’s agents on the island, and the feeling that they are in Cyprus to produce new forms of polarization that had not existed in the past.

This polarization was only to increase in the autumn of 2017, when a newly formed settler party began to gain ground in parliamentary election campaigning in Cyprus’s north. In response, the main faces of the party affiliated with ultra-right nationalist parties in Turkey—rather than the AKP and their supporters—immediately began to defend the Turkish government in any tensions with Turkish Cypriots or their own administration. The party had been formed only a year earlier, when it quickly attracted a solid base of Turkish-origin ‘TRNC’ citizens who believed that they had been excluded by the system in the island’s north. That system is one in which persons who were born in Turkey or whose parents were born in Turkey complain that they have difficulty finding jobs in the civil service and find themselves excluded from nepotistic networks. They also perceive that any tension between Turkish and Turkish Cypriot political leaders, or between north Cyprus and Turkey, reflects on them.

**Conclusion**

In this article we have shown chronologically how Turkish policies with regard to Cyprus have changed, and more particularly Turkish policies related to Turkish Cypriots. As explained above, the events of the 1950s led Cyprus to become a national cause in Turkey’s view, and in time the Turkish public discourse about Cyprus became securitized, rendering the national cause rhetoric indisputable. This is the reason why, for decades, the Turkish government, no matter the party or ideological leaning, endorsed the sole discourse of a national cause and manipulated it for domestic political purposes.

However, with the AKP’s rise to power and the start of EU negotiations, Turkish Cypriots gradually began to be cast not as a national cause but rather as an impediment, a negotiating strategy, or more recently as a burden from which Turkey needs to be rescued. Ironically, it was in this same AKP period that Turkey’s investments in Cyprus increased. The AKP’s policy towards Cyprus became one of constructing a strong state that could be a partner in a federal Cyprus. In this period, the subject of Turkish policies became the north Cyprus state, while Turkish Cypriots were cast as ungrateful, spoiled brothers.
When Ahmet Davutoğlu became Turkish Foreign Minister in 2009, the effects of his new foreign policy strategy began to be felt in Cyprus, too. In this period, capital investments in Cyprus increased, but even more importantly, a politics slowly began to be put in place that cast Turkish Cypriots as not only spoiled but also degenerate and alienated from their Muslim roots, and therefore persons who needed to be disciplined as Turks and as Muslims. When Turkish Cypriots showed determined resistance to such policies, the AKP effectively lost hope of reforming them and instead turned its attention to the ‘other’ Turks in Cyprus. For this reason, even as the Turkish government continued the rhetoric of Cyprus as kin or a ‘brother country’ (kardeş ülke), it simultaneously began to implement the same diaspora politics that it had used in other countries with regard to Turkish citizens who had been settled in Cyprus after 1974. The intention appears to have been to create a type of loyal ‘Trojan horse’ within this kin state. It was in this period that the number of North Cyprus civil society organizations based on place of origin in Turkey multiplied; later, many of these same organizations gathered under the political umbrella of the Rebirth Party.

The current rise of a ‘settler’ party tells us much about both political polarization in the island’s north and also the changing landscape of relations between north Cyprus and Turkey. Moreover, the current political conjuncture is more complex than in the past, particularly because the extreme political polarization of Turkey is also being reflected in Cyprus. A polarization has emerged that had not existed in the past: one between Turkish Cypriots, along with their allies in the Turkish immigrant community, and certain groups of Turkish immigrants who align themselves more closely with the Turkish state. Riffs, then, are emerging not only between Turkish Cypriots and the Turkish government and its supporters in Turkey, but also between Turkish Cypriots and the Turkish government’s supporters on the island, some of whom allow themselves to be used as instruments of Turkish government policy. This rift not only impedes the integration of Turkish migrants to Cyprus but also has sent many Turkish Cypriots in search of a new politics that can lessen Turkey’s influence in the island.

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CHAPTER 7:

TURKEY’S IDENTITY AND FOREIGN POLICY IN TRANSITION SINCE 2002:
THE CASE OF RELATIONS WITH PALESTINE

Nur Köprülü

Introduction

Diaspora policy has long been a contested area in a country’s foreign policy. Turkey has many expatriate communities abroad, as well as numerous ethnic connections to states like Azerbaijan and the Turkic republics of Central Asia. Since its establishment in 1923, the Republic of Turkey has pursued a diaspora policy towards Turkey-related communities abroad. This traditional approach has shifted significantly since 2002 towards pursuit of a more proactive engagement with its geographical neighbours, a policy shift that is principally linked to the ascendancy to government in 2002 of the Justice and Development Party – Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP). The implementation of Turkey’s diaspora policy was brought under the newly established office of the Presidency of Turks Abroad and Related Communities (Yurtdışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı – YTB) in April 2010 under the auspices of the Prime Ministry. To understand this shift, it is imperative to scrutinize how particular diasporas emerge, how they shape policy-making and the ways in which Turkey demonstrates and builds ‘soft’ power among its akraba topluluklar (kin/related communities), as well as the extent and ways in which this policy regarding diaspora and perceived kin communities has increased Turkey’s influence worldwide. For instance, in time for the 2015 elections, 2,867,858 Turkish citizens living abroad were eligible to vote, and to that end, polling stations were set up at 33 different customs gates and 112 foreign representative offices in 54 countries (Adamson 2019; Turkish Office of the Prime Minister 2019).

Originally rooted in former Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu’s vision of being a regional ‘soft’ power, Turkey began effectively to emphasize its historical and cultural links to neighbouring countries and countries with Turkish minorities across Europe, Central Asia,
the Caucasus and the Middle East. As Turkey’s regional influence grew, so did its economic strength, built in part on regional investments. As Chief Advisor to the Turkish Prime Ministry, Davutoğlu was the key architect of the AKP’s foreign policy doctrine, and he described the key pillars of Turkey’s foreign policy towards the Middle East in his book *Strategic Depth*, published in 2001. Although Turkey’s soft power, or the idea of Turkey as a ‘model’ of Muslim democracy, has lost much of its attraction during the second decade of the 2000s, Ankara has remained determined to exert ideological and Islamist influence abroad (Altunışık 2008).

Kerem Öktem views Turkey’s present diaspora policy as ‘selective’, a policy that “continues to treat communities differentially and makes available funds only to preferred groups would have exactly the opposite effect” (2014, 24). Thus, he describes Turkey’s present conception of its diaspora as an “exclusive and post-nationalist, but also a post-sectarian ‘global-nation’ [which] is certainly not yet a reality [and] possesses considerable risks and potential of competition between citizens and non-citizens” (Öktem 2014, 25).

This chapter aims to address Turkey’s diaspora policy through a specific case study of Palestine. The main objective is to explore the ideational motivation underlying the re-conceptualization and rejuvenation of Turkey’s identity and the policies relating to its diaspora, as well as Turkish foreign policy since 2002, i.e., under the AKP government. In other words, this work will highlight Turkey’s ‘new’ ideological— i.e., Islamist— discourse as the country seems to be adopting a ‘new’ identity—i.e., religious as opposed to secular— as well as Turkey’s foreign policy in light of its strategies towards a specific *akraba topluluk*, or more specifically, a Muslim community, i.e., with Palestine and Palestinians.

**Aspects of re/making Turkish foreign policy**

Telhami and Barnett argue that, when deciding foreign policy, states take notice of other states’ identities before setting their agendas (2002, 8). To understand whether there has been a change in Turkey’s identity, or whether its foreign policy has become more heavily influenced by an Islamist vision, Turkey’s identity must not be taken as pre-given; instead, the ideational definition and demarcation of its diaspora should be examined. Thus, diaspora politics necessitates a focus on identities, beliefs and ideas that inform actors and their behaviours in the international system, as well as the mutual and shared understandings that guide relations. This view, therefore, rejects the primary realist assumption that actors’ interests are an a priori fact. Alexander Wendt claims that it is interactions with others that “create and instantiate one structure of identities and interests rather than another, [and that] structure has no existence or causal powers apart from process” (Wendt 1992, 394). Likewise, Martha Finnemore believes that: “The fact that we live in an international society means that what we want and, in some ways, who we are, are shaped by the social norms, rules, understandings, and relationships we have with others” (1996, 128).

Most scholars of constructivist thinking have examined the impact of a politics of identity in shaping the foreign policies of states. Constructivism seems to be relevant in understanding
the role of identities and preferences in states' behaviours because they perceive the international system as a catalyst for prompting debates over national identity. This reveals that state and national identities are not always coterminous. The reason behind this stems from deeply rooted sub-state or supra-state loyalties and identities. For example, due to the existence of multiple affiliations in the post-Ottoman lands – namely Islamic, tribal, and parochial, as well as Pan-Arabist – the project of nation-building has not been completed in most of these territories. These unconsolidated loyalties have been gradually replaced either by ‘supra-state’ (e.g., Islamist) or ‘sub-state’ (e.g., tribal) affiliations since World War I. In this regard, the shift in the understanding of ‘nation’ from ummah (global Muslim community) to watani (territorial) identities has become central to understanding states' foreign policy-making in this region. The debates over the politics of identity thus highlight why different foreign policy discourses, practices, and behaviours occur.

It has been widely argued that the AKP began to change the direction of Turkish foreign policy in 2002, making it more dynamic and multi-levelled, and giving it a wider geographical scope and a more focused ideological drive than in the previous Republican-Kemalist approach. In other words, foreign policy-making under the AKP government has undergone a drastic structural change that has run parallel with a shift in Turkey's identity-building processes. This ‘new’ identity formation is primarily associated with the AKP's Islamist orientation and credentials, and the shift in Turkey's proactive foreign policy towards its eastern neighbourhood is to a large degree intertwined with the National Vision Movement (Milli Görüş Hareketi) and the ideology of neo-Ottomanism (Ataç 2018).

The roots of Turkey's new identity and diaspora politics under the AKP

There is a growing literature on Turkey's identity and foreign relations that explores the question of whether or not it has undergone a 'shift of axis' or a drastic departure from the West and its allies (Yeşilyurt and Akdevelioğlu 2009, 40; Kardaş 2011). These works either support or refute the argument that the primary determinants and principles of Turkey's foreign policy have been undergoing structural transformation since the AKP's victory in 2002.

When the AKP first came to power, the party described itself as a Conservative Democrat Party (Çınar 2018, 8), but its ideology was in fact taken from Turkey's Milli Görüş school. The tradition of Milli Görüş rested on a political rhetoric disassociating Westernization from modernization, with a specific reference to and advocacy of Islamism. The origins of Milli Görüş and Islamist activism in Turkey can be traced to the early years of the Turkish Republic. The founding Kemalist principles and ideology had been historically located at the core of Turkey's political model and state-formation; the policy excluded Islamists from the political scene with the aim of fortifying the secular character of the new republic. The ascendancy of the AKP in 2002, therefore, marks the beginning of a new era that can be labelled as 'post-Kemalist', and a restoration of Turkey's previous ideological discourses and courses of action (Daği 2012).
Kinship and Diasporas in Turkish Foreign Policy

In this regard, analysing the transition in Turkey’s identity is central to analyzing the great changes in its foreign policy strategy, a process closely linked to the AKP’s growing ties with Turkey’s neighbours and related communities abroad. In this regard, an in-depth analysis is necessary to understand the rise of the Islamist movement in Turkish history. Since the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, nation and state formation were primarily guided by Kemalist principles and reforms (Esen 2014). Berk Esen defines Kemalism as an ideology of national development: “Kemalism remains as the guardian of a modern, secular Turkey, though a ‘neo-Kemalist’ variant that emerged in the 1990s has shifted its focus from the official discourse to the popular level to enlist mass support” (Esen 2014, 603). On the one hand, the secular character of Kemalist ideology precluded Islamist actors from mobilizing religion in the public sphere, while on the other, Kemalism posited Islam exclusively in the private sphere.

The roots of political Islam in Turkey are most often seen as linked to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the abolition of the caliphate by the Turkish Republic in 1924. In this context, the Millî Görüş Hareketi occupies a central place in analysing the roots of Islamism, Islamist activism and the politicization of Islam in Turkey. Its ideology is mainly shaped by the 19th-century Islamism that grew out of the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the colonization of former Ottoman lands.

Necmettin Erbakan defined the Refah Partisi (Welfare Party) as “the political expression of the Turkish part of the ummah” (Yıldız 2003, 187). Yılmaz considers the Millî Görüş as an Islamist movement in Turkey, as its main discourses and practices are framed through an antagonism between ‘the West and Islam’.

In line with this argument, it is also crucial to indicate that Islamists in Turkey – as well as the AKP today– have sought to falsify Orientalism in building their agenda. In other words, they have rejected the notion that political Islam emerged in Turkey as a result of a clash of civilizations, as with the origins of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and other branches around the Arab world.

It is also imperative to state at this point that the changeover in Turkey’s identity and its subsequent impact on Turkey’s foreign policy occurred in two stages, the second initiated upon the second victory of AKP in parliamentary elections, thus primarily post-2009-2010. The AKP first exhibited a departure from the long tradition of the Kemalist era and backed the UN-sponsored Annan Plan to solve the intractable Cyprus Problem during 2003/2004. Meanwhile, Turkey pursued a more European approach when the US intervened in Iraq in 2003, which also led to the emergence of new debates on the ‘Europeanization’ of Turkish Foreign Policy (Özcan 2008). Moreover, Turkey’s new foreign policy options embraced building close ties with the European Union (EU) as well as reinforcing the inauguration of accession negotiations with the EU for full membership. Thus, while perhaps small, the AKP’s steps towards implementing a new approach marked the beginning of an era of Europeanization in Turkey’s foreign policy. However, this stance of the AKP government did not last long. The failure of the Annan Plan and the subsequent deterioration of EU-Turkish relations regarding
the accession negotiations led to a drastic change in the Western/ liberal view of the AKP and encouraged them to incorporate more ideological foreign policy tools. Thus, we see a shift from “Muslim Democrat to Political Islam” (Çolakoğlu 2019).

New Turkey’s New Middle East

Despite a shared past and long-standing cultural-historical connections with the Arab Middle East, Turkey could not build strong commercial and political-cultural ties with its eastern neighbours who had also been part of the Ottoman Empire. With the end of the Cold War, however, Turkey began to manifest its regional power status via engaging in the Gulf War of 1990-1991 after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, although it remained detached from the Middle East region and its politics. This detachment is, in fact, twofold: a product of Cold War politics and its ramifications and derivative reflections across the entire region; and the result of an historical mutual suspicion and conflicting perceptions rooted in the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. These factors discouraged both sides from working to build close ties. With the ascendancy of the Justice and Development Party in 2002, a new political elite arose to contest the established Republican-secular elite, and the AKP transformed Turkey’s guarded position towards rapprochement with this conflict-ridden region. As part of this identity transition, Turkey began to proactively pursue a new regional policy in 2009 under the banner ‘zero-problems with neighbours’ (Tocci 2011). However, this new foreign policy strategy faced some complications with the onset of the Arab protests in late 2010 and early 2011. On the one hand, the Arab uprisings prompted Turkey to expand and diversify its priorities and preferences towards the region, for example, by showing support to the Arab protests in general and to the Ikhwan of Egypt in particular. Turkey also engaged in a more complex pattern of behaviour with its old strategic Western allies— specifically the USA.

Turkey has also displayed a pro-Palestinian stance since 2006, with the parliamentary victory of Hamas in Gaza—a drastic move that led to a rapid deterioration of Turkish-Israeli relations. In this regard, the spill-over effects of the new problems of the Middle East can be said to have prolonged the Arab-Israeli conflict, as well as US President Trump’s Jerusalem and Golan Heights decisions; these have put Turkey in an uneasy position vis-à-vis the US.

Turkey initiated relations Israel in 1948 with the proclamation of the state, when it became the first country with a majority Muslim population to recognize the state of Israel. Turkey’s relations with Israel primarily derived from Turkey’s relations with the West, as a pillar of its NATO and US partnership. Relations between the two countries took a turn during the 1990s; this rapprochement was established in the military and economic realms, and was later characterized by ups and downs precisely due to divergent views of both sides regarding the Palestine-Israeli conflict. Both countries, from the beginning, were particularly sensitive to developments related to the Arab-Israeli conflict (Altunışık 2009), but Palestine / the Palestinians were not the primary force shaping threat perceptions.

However, since the 2009 crisis at the Davos Summit (between Erdoğan and Peres) and the Mavi Marmara Incident in 2010 (The Guardian 2010), Turkey has downgraded its diplomatic
relations with Israel three times, most in 2011. In May 2018, Turkey again expelled the Israeli ambassador after Israel Defence Forces killed dozens of Palestinians during violent clashes in the Gaza Strip; Israel followed suit and expelled the Turkish consul in Jerusalem (Al Monitor 2019). While Turkey and Israel normalized relations in 2016, and share significant economic and geostrategic interests, developments since 2009 have been marked by deep divisions between the two countries on central issues, most notably the status of Palestine and Palestinians.

**Turkey’s relations with Palestine and Palestinians as a perceived kin community**

Turkey established official relations with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1975, and was one of the first countries to recognize the Palestinian State established on 15 November 1988. The establishment of relations was in fact an integral part of Turkey’s relations with the Arab world, as well as in Turkey’s policy towards the Arab-Israeli Conflict. During the Cold War years, Turkey’s ties with the Arab Middle East were partially based on resentments tracing back to World War I and the Arab revolt led by the Sherif of Mecca (Emir Hussein) against the Ottoman Empire. This threat perception has shaped Turkey’s relations with the Arab world since 1923.

Although Turkey opted to establish cordial relations with the Arab world, including the Palestinians, ‘Islam’, or the goal of cultivating a ‘Muslim community’, was not a pillar of these relationships. These rapprochement efforts have been explained by Turkey’s need of Arab support on the Cyprus Problem during the 1970s (and also due to OPEC’s quadrupling of oil prices) (Doğan 2016). This motivated Turkey to exhibit a pro-Palestinian stance on the Arab-Israeli conflict, with the aim of gaining the endorsement of the Arab countries vis-à-vis Greece at the international level. However, in 2002 the AKP governments began to pursue a pro-Palestinian stance regarding the Arab-Israeli dispute—a shift first prominently displayed in 2006, when the AKP government hosted Hamas and its leader, Khaled Mashal, in Ankara just before Hamas’s parliamentary victory in Gaza. Later, in January 2009, Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan stormed out of the World Economic Forum at Davos over a harsh argument with Israeli President Shimon Peres about the Gaza crisis. Later, however, he explained in a press conference that his reaction was to the moderator and not Peres, and Israeli officials stated that relations would not be damaged (Yeşilyurt and Akdevelioğlu 2009, 55).

To contextualize and understand the significance of Palestine in Turkish foreign policy, it is crucial to refer to statements by Turkey’s former Foreign Minister Davutoğlu. For instance, in 2010 he stated: “One day they will pray in al-Aqsa Mosque”, later adding: “We will one day pray in East Jerusalem” (Milliyet Gazetesi 2010). Davutoğlu was also moved to tears during a visit to the Gaza Strip, and embraced former Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to the thunderous applause of UN delegates in 2012 (Al Monitor 2019), which also illustrates Turkey’s sensitivity to the Palestinian cause. In that regard, in 2011 Davutoğlu defined Turkey’s new diaspora as the following: “Every individual who originated from Anatolia belongs to the Turkish diaspora … regardless of religion and ethnicity … we will talk about our glorious shared past” (Aydın 2014, 14).
Turkey’s active relations with Palestine cover various areas, from trade to cultural heritage. Going back primarily to 2013, the two countries established a founding protocol for a bilateral economic cooperation council, a customs agreement, and a Friendship Agreement among municipalities in Palestine and Turkey. Palestinian Minister of the National Economy Abir Avde and Turkish Minister of Trade Ruhsar Pekcan in September 2018 signed an agreement that aims to foster cooperation in areas such as education, trade, protection of cultural heritage in Palestine, customs, free trade, transportation, investment, the service sector, commercial affairs and energy. In addition, in February 2018, Turkey provided 10 million US dollars of aid to the Palestinian Authority (Amer 2018). Meanwhile, a cooperation agreement was also established between TİKA and the Palestine International Cooperation Agency.

The bilateral trade volume between the two parties exceeded 400 million US dollars in 2016 (Amer 2018). Moreover, both countries also reinforced cooperation regarding education and scientific activities, which led to an agreement between the Palestinian Higher Council for Innovation and Excellence and the Turkish TÜBİTAK.

On 21 September 2018, the first Palestinian school – Jasmine International School – was opened in Turkey by the Minister of Palestinian Higher Education, Sabri Sidem, who described its opening as a symbol of the strong historical ties and friendship between Palestine and Turkey (Amer 2018). According to Oraib al-Rantawi, a Jordanian-Palestinian analyst and director of the Amman-based Quds Center for Political Studies: “despite its difficult economic status and its uneasy relationship with the Donald Trump administration, Turkey has been a staunch supporter of Palestine … Turkey is one of the strongest supporters of Palestine. They coordinate at the highest level with both the PLO and Hamas” (Al Monitor 2019). Professor Nasir Abdul Kerim of the Arab Cenin University also evaluated Turkey-Palestine relations as not only an endorsement of economic cooperation, but a relationship that goes beyond technical cooperation and connotes a political meaning (Al Monitor 2018).

Deputy Prime Minister Hakan Çavuşoğlu stated: “This year [2019], Turkey’s Directorate General of Foundations delivered 10,000 tons of humanitarian aid and food to Gaza. The handover of 320 houses built in Gaza was also completed last week”. Meanwhile, Turkey has carried out 71 projects in East Jerusalem and the West Bank since 2005 – primarily organized by the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA, Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı) – including the restoration of the Dome of the Rock (also known as Qubbat al-Sakhrah) that is inside the Al-Aqsa Mosque complex, building the Al-Quds University 400-student female dormitory, as well as restarting the Nabi Musa celebrations (Hürriyet Daily News 2019).

While Turkey is ideologically perceived to have good ties with the Hamas – which is the Ikhwan’s branch in Palestine— Turkey wants to retain cordial ties with Palestinians living in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip without risking ties with one at the expense of the other. According to Adnan Abu Amer, “Hamas hasn’t benefited from the Turkish financial aid offered to the Gaza Strip, as the assistance is provided directly to targeted poor Palestinians, those in need and people with disabilities, without using an intermediary” (Amer 2018). He also argues:
… the Turks don’t seem anxious to provide Hamas with other financial assistance out of fear that the United States and Israel will accuse it of supporting terrorism. Turkey’s further rapprochement with the PA and, to a lesser degree, Hamas, affirms that Ankara does not want to overlook either party in the Palestinian arena, although said approach is unsatisfactory to both Hamas and the PA’s Fatah movement: Each wants Ankara standing exclusively by its side. (Amer 2018)

**Why Palestine matters in Turkey’s new foreign policy strategy: The issue of Jerusalem**

Turkey’s policy towards Palestine and Palestinians has been primarily a derivate of the religious magnitude of Jerusalem and the AKP’s attachment to the Muslim community worldwide. Due to this fact, Turkey is a strong supporter of a two-state solution for solving the Palestine-Israeli conflict, and also calls on the parties to the dispute to commit to going back to 1967 borders. Since the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, which is also known as the 6-Day War, the Palestinian territories –West Bank and Gaza Strip –are under Israeli control and there is an ever-greater number of Jewish settlements in the West Bank territories. Another paramount issue in this regard is the contestable status of Jerusalem, which for Turkey and Palestinians is not a matter of debate, who believe that East Jerusalem must be given to Palestinians. According to Avi Shlaim; the Declaration of Principles (DOP) reached at Oslo Accords “is completely silent on vital issues such as the right of return, borders, settlements and Jerusalem" (1994, 34). Nevertheless, it was also envisaged in the 1993 Oslo Accords that the Gaza Strip and the West Bank constitute Palestinian territories, while the current situation is far from respecting this provision. In addition, the Kingdom of Jordan is also one of the strongest defenders and guardians of the two-state solution, given that the Hashemite Kingdom still retains its custody over the religious areas in East Jerusalem, the Al Aqsa Mosque and Harem al-Sharif (Telegraph 2014). Accordingly, King Abdullah II of Jordan lately has told US President Donald Trump’s senior adviser Jared Kushner that “a lasting Middle East peace can only come with the creation of a Palestinian state on land captured by Israel in a 1967 war” (Al Jazeera 2019). In addition, the King stressed the need for settling the Palestinian issue through a “comprehensive and lasting peace based on a two-state solution … with East Jerusalem as its capital” (Al Jazeera 2019).

The question over Jerusalem has been triggered in the wake of the US President Donald Trump’s recognition of the city of Jerusalem, and as the corollary of this policy, moving the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. This drastic repositioning of US foreign policy regarding the Palestine-Israeli conflict has alarmed the international community as well as Turkey, and led Turkish President Erdoğan to immediately and urgently invite all members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to hold an extraordinary session on this particular issue on 13 December 2017. The Summit meeting ended with issuing the İstanbul Declaration, which stated that all the participant states declare that they recognize the Palestinian state with its capital city East Jerusalem (TRT Haber 2017). In this session of the Islamic Summit Conference, which was held in İstanbul, the OIC stressed the following points:
Reaffirming once again the vital importance of preserving the sanctity and historical status of Al Quds and Haram al-Sharif for the whole Muslim Ummah (MFA 2017);

Reiterating their solutions adopted by the United Nations on Palestine and Al Quds, in particular the Security Council Resolution 478, adopted in 1980 (MFA 2017);

Saluting the exceptionally peaceful resistance that the entire Palestinian people, especially the residents of Al Quds, sustained and accomplished through many sacrifices against the reckless violations at Al-Haram al-Sharif in July, 2017 (MFA 2017).

**Relations at the grassroots level: Turkey’s soft power**

One of the key instruments of Turkish diaspora policy towards the Arab world has recently revolved around the manifestation of Turkey’s soft power. Turkey’s attractiveness in the Middle East and North Africa has been galvanized with the perceived political and economic transformation of Turkish foreign policy as well as its growing cultural impact through TV programs and cultural associations launched in various countries across the region.

In a survey conducted from 5 August-27 September 2010 by TESEV in eight different countries in the region— Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iraq and Iran— Turkey’s image was estimated at 80 percent positive. The positive perception behind this public opinion in the region is rooted in the economic and political transformation of Turkey (Altunışık 2009, 1-2). More precisely, Turkey opted to pursue a policy of representing a democratic country having a large Muslim population where the significance of religion and belonging to the Muslim community (umma) mark the ideology for building ties with primarily the Arab people.

**Yunus Emre Institute**

In implementing this policy, in 2014 Turkey established in Jerusalem the Yunus Emre Enstitüsü (YEE) Kudüs Türk Merkezi (Jerusalem Turkish Centre of Yunus Emre Institute). Annually, YEE teaches hundreds of Palestinians the Turkish language, and the first-degree students (20) are sent to Turkey for summer school. According to the Director of YEE in Jerusalem, İbrahim Furkan Özdemir, there 150 students studying the Turkish language in Jerusalem, and there are also students learning Turkish in Ramallah, the West Bank and Gaza (TRT Haber 2018). As of 2018, more than 5000 Palestinian students have graduated from these language courses (TRT Haber 2018).

In addition to the YEE and its activities, the Association of Turkish Graduates (Filistin Türkiye Mezunları Derneği) also plays an important role in building ties with Palestinians in both the West Bank and Gaza. The Association organized iftars in Ramallah this year in June, which the head of the Association Mahmood Matar explained as a way to keep up relations between Palestinian graduates and Turkey (Anadolu Ajansı 2019). In addition, the President of Turks Abroad and Relative Communities has supported a total of 89,000 Palestinians studying in Turkey (Hürriyet Daily News 2019).
In 2005 TİKA (Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı) also launched an office in Palestine, with the aim of empowering education, women's rights, public health, emergency aid, the water supply and production sector in both the West Bank and Gaza. Today, TİKA continues its activities with projects carried out in every field in Palestine. The Sultan Abdulhamid Water Dispenser was opened after the completion of its restoration in 2014. In 2012, the water treatment system that TİKA created for seven schools in Gaza will began to provide clean water to the schools via the water pipeline, which is adjacent to one of the schools (TDBB 2014).

To understand the close ties between Palestine and Turkey, a discussion of the role of TİKA is paramount. For instance, Palestinian Ambassador to Ankara Faed Mustafa once thanked TİKA's President Serdar Çam saying “we will not forget what you have done in our country and for the Palestinian people” (Sabah 2016). In 2016, Ambassador Mustafa presented Çam with the Medal of Excellence and Merit of the Palestinian State at a ceremony held at the embassy in Ankara. As of 2018, TİKA had implemented a total of nearly 553 projects (Time Türk 2019). Among these projects, 332 were launched in the West Bank, 130 in Gaza and around 80 in East Jerusalem. TİKA has recently undertaken several new projects, including building a modern 180-bed hospital, and last year completed a 320-flat public housing project in Gaza (Anadolu Ajansı 2018).

Bülent Korkmaz, the former Coordinator of TİKA in Palestine, who is extremely well-regarded in Palestine, stressed the role of TİKA in building ties with the 170 different countries worldwide that have a TİKA agency headquarters and he specifically pointed out the special status of Palestine in the eyes of Turkey, saying: “Undoubtedly, every country and geography we are in is very special for us, but Palestine and Jerusalem have a different position” (Anadolu Ajansı 2018). Turkey’s special attachment to Palestine can also been seen in various TİKA-led projects, such as the thousands of Palestinians being educated in six TİKA–sponsored schools in different cities of Palestine. Moreover, the Al-Halil Turkish School is the most modern school of the city – with a current capacity of 550 students (Anadolu Ajansı 2018).

TİKA, which initiated the school project with the motto ‘A School for Every City of Palestine’, now has 18 classrooms, 2 computer laboratories, 3 executive rooms and a warehouse built on an area of 2000 square meters in Nablus in the West Bank, the second largest city of Palestine, as well as the Nuri Pakdil Girls School. In addition to the six new schools it has built in Palestine, TİKA has also undertaken the renovation and restoration of nine schools, provided hardware support to 20 educational institutions and established computer laboratories for 13 educational institutions. TİKA also supports many universities in Palestine with computer labs and similar projects, and it aims to complete in two years the 400-bed female dormitory project of the University of Jerusalem, which was initiated in June 2018 (Anadolu Ajansı 2018; Haber Türk 2018).

TİKA has recently taken part in giving iftar (breaking of Ramadan fast) during the last Ramadan in Palestine (Time Türk 2019). In a written statement made by the Vice President of
TİKA, Birol Çetin, Ramadan packages were distributed to 500 families in need in East Jerusalem, and 500 people were also given iftar in Haseki Sultan Tekkesi, which was built by Hürrem Sultan, the wife of Ottoman Emperor Kanuni Sultan Süleyman during his visit to Jerusalem in 1552. Ramadan packages were also distributed in Ramallah, Al-Halil and Eriha cities in the occupied West Bank, as well as to 2,500 Palestinian refugees in camps in the same region (Time Türk 2019). Moreover, the Palestinian Bedouins in the village of Han al-Ahmer and the Bedouins of Jehhalin in the rural areas of East Jerusalem (which Israel decided to demolish) were also given aid during the period of Ramadan. As stated by the TİKA Coordination Office, 5000 orphans participated in the iftar programs organized in the city (Time Türk 2019).

The Ambassador of Palestine to Turkey, Faed Mustafa, and the former Coordinator of TİKA in Palestine, Korkmaz, on behalf of the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, presented TİKA a medal of achievement at a ceremony held at the embassy in Ankara with the participation of Turkey’s Consul General in Jerusalem, Ambassador Gürcan Türkoğlu, Serkan Kaya, Vice President of TİKA, and the ambassadors of various Arab countries. Ambassador Mustafa, speaking at the ceremony, emphasized that TİKA is one of the pioneer agencies working in Palestine, and acknowledged that Turkey has a strong political will to support the Palestinian issue. Regarding TİKA’s scope of work in Palestine Mustafa stated: “TİKA, Turkey’s humanitarian arm, initiated many signature projects in Palestine and has helped to ease the burden of the Palestinian people” (Time Türk 2019).

In presenting the Mahmood Abbas medal to TİKA and Turkey, Faed Mustafa stressed that he was “proud to present this medal to Korkmaz, and also wanted to thank Turkey and the President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan”. Mustafa also underlined the meaning of this symbolic medal and said: “The owner of this award is the Turkish people and President of the country Erdoğan” (Time Türk 2019). In light of the weakened relations between Turkey and Israel, Israel has been alarmed by the many facilities and activities that TIKA has offered to Palestine. Last year, Israel opted to restrict TİKA’s activities in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza. Former Ambassador of Turkey, Uluç Özlük, has recently evaluated Tel Aviv’s move as “selectively taken steps towards Turkey” (Sputnik 2018).

**Regional ‘spill-over’ effects of Turkey’s Palestine policy: Where to go?**

Today Turkey is caught between a prolonged war in Syria, which includes a huge influx of Syrian refugees across its southern border, and a complex geopolitical environment in the aftermath of the 2011 Arab uprisings (which led to the overthrow of President Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt as well as developments in Saudi Arabia, Libya and Iraq). The fluctuation in the distribution of power and the changing nature of building partnerships/alliances in the Middle East in the post-2011 era have resulted in Turkey’s relative isolation, particularly in the East Mediterranean. In other words, Turkey’s reduced political and diplomatic relations with Egypt and Israel have galvanized an anti-Turkey camp in the region, with the successive gas explorations in the Eastern Mediterranean. Within this framework, Turkey’s
policy towards Syria refugees was revolved around non-refoulment and hosts a considerable number of refugees crossing Turkey’s southern border. According to UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR) records, Turkey is currently hosting nearly 3.5 million Syrian refugees–in fact, the unofficial records provide higher estimations (UNCHR 2019).

The aforementioned geopolitical atmosphere highlights the need for Turkey to develop pragmatic foreign policy strategies that could repair and normalize its ties with the incumbent regimes in Egypt, Israel, and Syria (despite its questionable legitimacy). To this end, Turkey has begun to strengthen its relations with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, particularly with the extraordinary session of the OIC Summit held in Istanbul in 2017 over Trump’s controversial decision on Jerusalem’s status. Turkey’s assertive policy backing Palestinians and calling for a two-state solution has resonated with Jordan’s King Abdullah II. One main issue for Jordan’s pro-Palestinian stance, in this regard, is closely tied to the aforementioned religious custody over the holy places in East Jerusalem and also to the perceived threat in the contentious rhetoric of ‘Jordan is Palestine’. Historically, Jordan has been home to a huge number of Palestinian refugees and the Kingdom is the only Arab country that grants Palestinians citizenship. And, in fact, this has motivated the Israeli Likud Party to describe Jordan as ‘an alternative homeland’(al-watan al-badil) for Palestinians in the diaspora. This rhetoric appears to ignore Jordan’s more than 30-year-long policy of ‘Jordan is Jordan’ and ‘Palestine is Palestine’ announced by King Hussein (Abu Odeh 1999; Köprülü 2012). Thus, the stars are aligned over the ultimate status of Jerusalem in re/making and reinforcing an ideological partnership between Turkey and Jordan.

Nevertheless, Turkey insists on its pro-Palestinian stance, and accordingly President Erdoğan recently stated: “Turkey, will never turn its back on the Palestinian cause and the Palestinian people. We will continue to share all opportunities with our brothers” (CNN Türk 2019). But, in fact, Turkey necessities multileveled policy towards Israel and Palestine reinforcing complex-interdependency that may strengthen its role and potential for being a partner in the region. In addition, because of Turkey’s support for the İkhwan both before and after the overthrown of Mohammad Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood in 2013, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and the US view Turkey as against their interests– not to mention the AKP’s Islamist credentials, which heighten this reading.

Palestine occupies a central place in Turkey’s re/making of its foreign policy after 2002. Prior to the AKP’s ascent to government, Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East, as well as in the Palestine-Israeli dispute, rested on a ‘balancing’ of the two side and was not constructed on a pro-Palestinian and Islamist basis. However, with the AKP government, it can be clearly seen that Palestine and Palestinians as a part of global Muslim community are central in rebuilding Turkey’s new diaspora and kin-community policy overseas. The lingering Palestinian-Israeli conflict, as well as the changing geopolitical dynamics in the Eastern Mediterranean region, highlight the inevitability of reinvigorating a more complex and more interdependent approach in Turkey’s foreign policy through normalizing its ties with its former partners –Egypt and Israel in particular.
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Turkey’s Identity and Foreign Policy in Transition since 2002: The case of relations with Palestine


CHAPTER 8:

CONCLUSIONS:
TURKEY’S NEW DIASPORA AND KIN FOREIGN POLICY - LOOKING AHEAD

Mete Hatay and Zenonas Tziarras

With the aim of understanding Turkey/AKP politics vis-à-vis its diaspora and ‘kin’ communities, especially during the 2010s, the authors of the present report have examined historically the development and role of outside Turks in Turkish foreign policy. It is clear that despite Turkey’s almost simultaneous implementation of its new diaspora politics in all relevant countries, that policy has been altered, with resultant differing multiplier effects, for and within each country. In particular, Turkey has attempted to turn its diaspora and kin communities in various countries, especially those in the EU, into civil society organizations that can lobby on its behalf and so increase its ‘soft power’; these actions are both troubling to host states and occasionally have become a source of division amongst the diaspora and kin communities themselves.

Such divisions have been keenly felt in some countries, e.g., Bulgaria, where we examined the ways in which Turkey’s intervention in local politics not only undermined but also divided the secular Turkish party that for years had maintained a position in a coalition government while also maintaining the loyalty of other minority groups, such as Pomaks and Roma. Looking at the example of Bosnia, we learned that because of the former Yugoslavia’s membership in the Non-Aligned Movement, the Islamic institutions in that country have associated themselves with a more Egypt-centered (and Al Azhar-centered) Islam, such that Turkish Islamic institutions are not accorded the same power or respect from the Bosnian religious elite. Indeed, compared to other countries, the Diyanet is today considerably less influential in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Nevertheless, Bosnians feel a close relationship to Turkey because of their ‘historical kinship.’

Research in this report has also revealed the noteworthy factor that the amount of Turkey’s financial assistance to Bosnia is often exaggerated.
Like Bulgarian Turks, Turkish Cypriots have historically struggled with Turkey’s inconsistent and ever-changing policies; they are likewise struggling now to adapt to the latest changes in Turkish foreign policy. It is particularly interesting that the AKP has been unable to formulate a coherent policy re its Turkish migrants (a ‘diaspora’ in official Turkish discourse) who live in a country that is both ‘foreign’ and ‘kin.’ As a result of this ‘dual status’ of Turkish migrants, Turkish policy has wavered, sometimes appearing to move forward and at other times backward. With the 2009 changes in foreign policy, Turkey embraced the migrant associations, either by approaching them or opening its arms to any such associations that approached them. In this way, the number of migrant associations on the island exploded, and after a short time a migrant party was founded, which in its first election won a seat in parliament. The establishment of a migrant party, whose Turkish candidates claimed that they would fight for migrant rights, brought tensions to a head between Turkish Cypriots and mainland Turks. The fact that 30 percent of the citizen population in Cyprus’s north and 60 percent of the de jure population (including students, workers, and their families) is from Turkey has been for years at the top of Turkish Cypriots’ list of grievances.

While the results of Turkish foreign diaspora policy have varied by country, Turkish parties have also been established in numerous other European countries. For example, we see that in the Netherlands, while the Turkish DENK party had previously won two seats in parliament, it recently lost those seats when another party was formed with AKP support, causing the Turkish vote to become divided amongst the Turkish candidates. We have also seen that in Turkey’s new foreign policy the concept of kin community has been expanded to incorporate Sunnis and Muslims in Arab countries as well, particularly in Palestine. Turkey’s cultivation of relations with groups attached to the Muslim Brotherhood has backfired in countries such as Egypt, where relations since the last regime changes are almost at a standstill. Despite this, we see that Turkey’s simultaneous cultivation of Sunni collaborators and distancing from former sympathizers such as Israel have increased the country’s influence in Sunni regions.

Based on the various studies in this report one could conclude that there are two major elements marking the AKP’s diaspora and kin foreign policy: the political-Islamic element and the increasing authoritarianism that characterises the AKP government (Baser and Öztürk 2017). From this perspective, the AKP’s diaspora and kin policy has been consistent within the framework of its broader foreign policy that pursued more influence and control abroad – including through ideational means – to the end of rendering Turkey a hegemon regionally as well as beyond. At the same time, both the AKP’s religiosity and authoritarian tendencies have created frictions within diaspora and kin communities—a strong reminder that these communities cannot be seen monolithically and that their individual complexities must be understood and considered.

Looking ahead, as Turkey’s socio-political and economic circumstances remain uncertain and unstable—due to domestic polarisation, an economic crisis, foreign policy adventures, and fluid politico-ideological dynamics—the AKP’s diaspora and kin policy will also face
challenges. Given that diaspora and kin communities are sometimes like small-scale reflections of Turkish politics, Turkey’s domestic turmoil is often exported to them. Further, it seems that the more authoritarian Turkey becomes and the more the AKP government loses legitimacy domestically and internationally, ‘the more difficult it is for Ankara to effectively export hegemonic narratives and exert hegemonic power’ abroad (Constantinou and Tziarras 2018: 33), including among diaspora and kin communities. Thus, if there is no significant political change for the better in Turkey it is likely that polarisation will grow deeper among these communities and the AKP will have a harder time manipulating or instrumentalising them.

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From the moment it came to power in 2002, Turkey’s Justice and Development Party (AKP) began to change the direction of Turkish foreign policy (TFP), making it more dynamic and multileveled and giving it a wider geographical scope and a more focused ideological drive. As the country’s regional influence grew, the Turkish state began successfully to emphasize its historical and cultural links to countries or minorities throughout Europe, Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Middle East. One of the main ways in which the country achieves this influence is by courting its diaspora and playing ‘big brother’ to ethnic or religious groups that it perceives as kin communities – i.e. akraba topluluklar. Against this background, the papers of this collective report investigate the dynamics of perceived kinship in TFP. The authors examine: the roots of this foreign policy approach and its particularities under the AKP; the ways in which Turkey demonstrates and builds power for akraba topluluklar; the extent to and ways in which this policy regarding diaspora and perceived kin communities increases Turkey’s influence; the effects that the policy has on the politics, economy and social life of the diaspora communities and their relationship with host countries; and the kind of fractures or divisions that are created within the communities due to Turkey’s attempts to maximize its presence and influence over them.