

Turkey's Religious Diplomacy

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Since 2002, Turkish foreign policy has transformed on the intellectual, geographical, and practical levels, opening up to different parts of the world. In one of the most salient transformations, religious diplomacy began to play a key role in expanding Ankara's influence, from Latin America to Eurasia and Africa. This religious diplomacy has been implemented not only by state institutions but also through active contributions from civil society organizations. Today, Turkey's religious diplomacy is much more sophisticated and comprehensive than many imagine, mostly thanks to the experiences of the past decade. Institutions that implement and develop religious diplomacy in Turkey have been reshaping themselves, both structurally and in terms of content.

Keywords: Turkey, religious diplomacy, Diyanet, foreign policy, Islam

Depuis 2002, la politique étrangère turque a été transformée aux plans intellectuel, géographique et pratique, en s'ouvrant sur différentes parties du monde. L'une des transformations les plus saillantes a été celle de la diplomatie religieuse qui a joué un rôle-clé dans l'expansion de l'influence d'Ankara, s'étendant de l'Amérique latine à l'Eurasie et à l'Afrique. Cette diplomatie religieuse a été mise en œuvre non seulement par le biais des institutions de l'État, mais également par la contribution active d'organisations de la société civile. Aujourd'hui, la diplomatie religieuse de la Turquie est beaucoup plus sophistiquée et plus complète que beaucoup ne se l'imaginent, grâce surtout à l'expérience acquise pendant la dernière décennie. Les institutions qui la développent et la mettent en œuvre en Turquie ont été elles-mêmes remodelées, tant dans leurs structures que dans leurs contenus.

Mots-clés: Turquie, diplomatie religieuse, Diyanet, politique étrangère, islam

Introduction

One of the most salient dimensions of Turkish foreign policy in the last decade is its opening to different parts of the world. Until the early 2000s Turkey largely followed a one-dimensional foreign policy based on a Western orientation despite various pressures from society to open to different parts of the world, such as the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and the Balkans. In those years, the state elite mostly acted to satisfy the social pressure whenever a crisis emerged, such as war in Bosnia, but these shifts

were neither deep-rooted nor comprehensive but rather based on ad hoc policies. Since the election of the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, or AK Party) to office in 2002, one can talk about a “period of openings” in Turkish foreign policy to many areas which were neglected before. However, these openings have occurred not only in economics and politics but also in social and religious areas. This is a novel phenomenon in Turkey’s conventional or traditional approach to foreign and security policy, as Turkey is constitutionally a secular state.

The dimension of religious diplomacy has always been underestimated and under-studied among scholars of Turkish politics (Aydın 2008). Perhaps many considered it only as a natural repercussion and part of the soft-power approach (Beng 2008; Kalın 2011),¹ but the time has come for a comprehensive understanding and situating of religious diplomacy within the overall structure of Turkish foreign policy. Although until recently this religious diplomacy has not been used much in foreign policy discourse for a variety of reasons, its influence and significance for Turkey’s foreign relations in most of the last decade are worth considering. This article argues that religious diplomacy is becoming a key factor in Turkish foreign policy and is now almost impossible not to notice. Therefore, this piece tries to develop a comprehensive approach to the elements of religious diplomacy in Ankara’s new geopolitical discourse and foreign policy with regard to both the content and the institutions involved. After analyzing the changing nature of Turkish foreign policy thinking, it will proceed to locate religious diplomacy within this changing framework.

The Changing Nature of Diplomacy and Religion in Turkey

While it is not possible to separate religious diplomacy from the general tendencies of Turkey’s foreign policy, it is possible to evaluate the economic, political, and intellectual foundations of this necessity on three basic points. A correct analysis of the intellectual basis for the openings will answer the question of why Turkey has started to undertake these openings toward different regions of the world—not only in economic and political terms but also through religion—which were previously neglected in Turkish foreign policy.

Especially since the AK Party’s accession to power, the first foundation for change has been intellectual. The major intellectual transition in Turkish foreign policy has been the visible prominence of a geographical perception in its outlook toward the whole world. Turkey no longer construes the world as it was during the Cold War period but rather has adopted new balances of power while re-conceptualizing its understanding of international politics in a new framework. This intellectual

transition and transformation has emerged as a result of foreign political circumstances as much as of Turkey's own political dynamics.

Regardless of the reason, Turkey is today looking at its region and the world with a new and different perspective, and as a consequence there have been radical changes in its approach to Africa, Latin America, the Balkans, and Asia. According to this new perspective these regions are not regarded as distant and troubled regions but as possible partners with which political and economic relations ought to be established and developed and where unified action should be undertaken when necessary. For that reason, historical cultural ties and religious diplomacy have become key elements of Turkey's foreign policy normalization.

The second transformation, which constitutes the economic foundation of the openings, has been Turkey's efforts to reposition itself in a changing global economy. Although Turkey's increasing engagement with the global economy started after 1980 with the efforts of Turgut Özal (Ataman 2008)—Özal perceived the world as an area of opportunities rather than a land of perils and in particular had tried to realize these new global economic opportunities—the systematic framework of a growing economic engagement was established after 2002 during the AK Party era.

The struggle to redefine a world view which concentrates on economics has led the way and laid the foundations for the definition of a new “national role” and foreign policy orientation, which have manifested themselves even more during the AK Party era (Aras and Görener 2010). Yet even a brief comparison of the AK Party and Özal eras clearly reveals the basic differences between the two periods. Özal's approach displayed both a structuralist and an opportunist character and regarded the economy as the principal component. As a result, in this period Turkey embraced a pragmatic approach. However, during the AK Party era Turkey has been trying to develop a new regional and global perspective based especially on historical and cultural components. Ankara's proactive and dynamic openings toward different regions of the world have been systematic and important initiatives rather than being appendages to its relations with the West (Davutoğlu 2008). In this framework, Turkey's definition of itself as a “central country” rather than a “bridge” is an indicator of this new vision (Davutoğlu 2004). Turkey, viewed from this standpoint, both started to open up toward other regions with an institutionalized partnership and wanted to play a more active role in foreign politics (Altunışık 2009). Therefore, the AK Party era's foreign policy is more comprehensive and has more depth in both style and expression than that of the Özal era, and as a result it will probably have long-term effects.

Third, the political foundations of Turkey's openings, in parallel to the intellectual and economic aspects mentioned above, are to increase

Ankara's involvement in all regions, international organizations, and international relations and to increase Turkey's activity in contributing to regional and global peace. Today Turkey is not prone to crisis but instead is pursuing a foreign policy with a specific vision and perspective (Davutoğlu 2009). Within Turkey's political vision, its relations with Asia and Africa are an alternative to its relations with the West but at the same time do not pose a contradiction. In a world where the international system is no longer bipolar, Turkey wants to display an active presence in all international and regional organizations and has determined its foreign policy inclinations within this framework (Davutoğlu 2009). Turkey's observer status in the African Union, its partnership of dialogue in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), its active stance in the G-20, and its non-permanent member status in the UN Security Council in the 2008–10 term have to be evaluated within this framework. Similarly, Ankara's serious interest in the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC; now the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation) since 2003 indicates its decision to utilize religious diplomacy at the institutional level as well. Because of this, as the Turkish foreign minister at the time, Abdullah Gul, announced before the 31st meeting of the Islam Foreign Ministers Conference in May 2004, Turkey has placed special importance on its relations with the Islamic world, and it aims to get the OIC to take its deserved place in the international arena and to transform it into a more effective and dynamic structure. In this spirit, Turkey proposed Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu as its candidate for the OIC Secretary-General at the 2004 meeting. With the election of Ihsanoglu to that position, Turkey had upgraded its role in the OIC structure to the utmost degree (Ozkan 2007).

Deepening Turkey's Religious Diplomacy

Turkey's religious diplomacy has not been conducted exclusively at the state level. Many civil-society organizations, religious groups, and religious figures play an important role in this. However, to better explain the nature of religious diplomacy within Turkey's new approach to the world, the main focus here will be the official state institutions, but other types of involvement will be analyzed where necessary.

Turkey's Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) is the government body that—surprisingly for a state that identifies itself as secular—deals with all religious matters of the country's Sunni Muslim majority (Adanali 2008). Diyanet employs the imams, pays their salaries, organizes religious life, and acts as the highest religious authority in questions of doctrine and practice. Since its establishment, the role of Diyanet has always been debatable (Tarhanlı 1993). In 1966, when Diyanet's presi-

dent, İbrahim Elmalı, left the country for the first time to visit Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Syria to participate in the ceremonies commemorating the Prophet Muhammad's birthday, the press published fervent criticisms of the visit (*Milliyet*, 28 June 1966). The Turkish government recalled Elmalı from Tunisia and asked him not to go to the other countries (*Milliyet*, 29 June 1966). However, from the 2000s on, foreign delegations, both Islamic and non-Islamic, visit Diyanet frequently, and Diyanet often pays a return visit. Turkey, unlike Saudi Arabia and Iran, constitutionally is a laicist state, but Diyanet has expanded its foreign activities over the last 30 years and has become a key actor in Turkish foreign policy.

Particularly since the military coup of 1980, when the generals mandated a revision in state ideology and introduced the “Turkish-Islamic synthesis” (Rabasa and Larrabee 2008), Diyanet has embarked on several internal missions to bring citizens back into the fold of a patriarchal Turkish Islam, even if they were not Sunnis but followers of the heterodox Alevi traditions. With close to 100 000 employees and a budget larger than those of most ministries of the republic, Diyanet is probably the world's largest and most centralized Muslim religious organization, comparable in scope and capabilities only to the Vatican. Despite the veneer of a secular regime, Diyanet today stands very much in the tradition of the Office of the Şeyh-ül İslam and feels increasingly less inclined to disguise this legacy (Erdem 2008). Until the 1980s, Diyanet's remit had been limited to Turkey's Muslims. At that point, religion was not a significant resource in the construction of dominant forms of national identity. After the coup of 1980, however, Diyanet began to develop administrative capabilities that extended well beyond Turkey's national borders and expanded massively into countries with Turkish immigrant populations (Bardakoğlu 2008). If the 1980s marked the expansion of Turkish state Islam into the immigrant communities of western Europe, then the 1990s saw a gradual orientation toward Muslim communities in different part of the world. What follows are details on and an analysis of Diyanet's activities in different regions.

Latin America: Establishing Links

Until recently Turkish–Latin American relations have always been analyzed through the prism of sympathy with Che Guevara and romantic socialism. This, in reality, has produced nothing concrete to help develop relations between both sides. What it has produced is a romantic understanding of Latin America and a paradigm that sees developments on that continent as either black or white, namely, socialism or capitalism. The other understanding that has persisted in Turkey is to look at Latin

America in terms of popular culture, such as music, salsa, tango, and like. These perspectives are now beginning to change, at least on several fronts.

Turkey's Diyanet organized a Summit of Latin American Muslim Religious Leaders in Istanbul for the first time on 12–15 November 2014, with a total of 71 people from 40 countries in attendance. Not only have community leaders from key countries like Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, and Colombia joined in, but there have also been representatives from small countries like Belize and Barbados among the invitees. One of the main aims is, of course, to establish links and share experiences. Because of this, most of the topics discussed have been related to understanding and identifying the problems faced by Latin American Muslims. The main issues raised are the lack of sufficient religious leaders who speak Spanish and of religious books in Spanish. According to participants, one of the main ways of communicating, teaching, and learning for Latino Muslims is use of the Internet and various online sources. Subsequently, many participants have focused on credible online sources of Islam and their easy availability.

Diyanet's summit cannot be understood without contextualizing the political opening of Turkey to Latin America in the last decade. Since the announcement of 2006 as “the year of Latin America” in Turkey, Turkish foreign policy-makers have put a special emphasis on Latin America. Ankara opened new embassies in countries like Colombia and Peru, and mutual visits have intensified. Several Latin American countries opened embassies in Ankara, and the presidents of Colombia, Brazil, Argentina, and Ecuador, along with many foreign ministers from the continent, have visited Turkey (Levaggi 2013).

Despite the huge geographical distance, social relations are also on the increase. One can find many mixed Turkish–Latin American couples living either in Latin American countries or in Turkey. At the same time, many students from Latin America are studying in Turkey through the scholarships of the Presidency for Turks and Related Communities Abroad and the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK). There is also an increasing interest from the academic community to study and do research about the linkages of history, politics and culture between Turkey and Latin America.

Turkey's religious opening to Latin America goes beyond bilateral relations and is partly a natural extension of Ankara's Middle East policy with unexpected outcomes. Many Muslim organizations in Latin America are run by people of Arab descent, and most of their ancestors arrived on the continent with Ottoman passports in the late 19th and early 20th century. Indeed, many people think that these Arabs are Turks and call them *los Turcos* (Kalm 2015).

Although Latin America is less well known in Turkey, it is not an

exaggeration to say that Latin America is the continent where the Turkish passport has the most validity and acceptance. In order to connect the social aspects, there are Turks who not only represent the Middle East but also are integrated into Latin culture. Similarly, Islam is the fastest-growing religion in South America today, despite low levels of active proselytization; this ongoing phenomenon has been largely ignored in Latin America. Of course, when one considers the huge population of Latin America, the number and percentage of Muslims remain very low. It is estimated that there are about 6 million Muslims on the continent, about 1 % of the entire population. However, what the statistics show is open to debate for two reasons. First, there is no reliable census of the population of Muslims. The second and more important reason is that the number of Muslims is growing by the day.

There is very little research on this phenomenon. Converts to Islam in Latin America range from 17 to 27 years of age. This leads us to conclude that young Latinos are interested in Islam, a phenomenon that should be investigated. By connecting with this group, Turkey can further deepen the social base of possible cooperation and development of relations with Latin America. In fact, the social ties between the two regions are already developing with input from various actors from civil-society organizations. With the Dyanet's new opening, religion is becoming not only one of the most important elements of Turkey's soft power in Latin America but also an important aspect of Turkey's social connection with different regions.

Africa: Deepening Social Connections

Religion and historical relations are one of the subtlest but highly important elements in Turkey's relations with Africa, and religion may even be considered a key legitimizing force. This is valid at both the state and societal levels. As mentioned, until recently Diyanet in Turkey had no role vis-à-vis foreign policy. Its main focus was to serve the domestic religious needs of Muslims. With the changing of Turkish foreign policy toward a multidimensional approach, religion has served as one of the soft-power elements, especially in Africa (Ozkan and Akgun 2010).

Diyanet now brings African religious leaders together in Istanbul for interaction. The first Religious Leaders Meeting of African Continent Muslim Countries and Societies was held in Istanbul in November 2006; representatives from 21 countries participated (Deniz and Orakci 2006). Until recently Turkey had deliberately refrained from involvement in any Islamic/religious meeting, let alone organizing an official one in Turkey. However, this started to change after the AK Party assumed power in 2002. For example, Turkey began to actively participate in the activities

of the OIC, and a Turkish citizen was elected as its Secretary-General in 2004. Turkey's hosting of African religious leaders in Istanbul is directly related to the two paradigmatic shifts in Turkish foreign policy. First, Turkey softened its approach to religious-based organizations and meetings and saw these as opportunities to further Turkish national interests through soft-power instruments. Second, Turkey understood that an opening-up policy toward Africa would not be complete or sustained without a religious dimension, which is also directly linked to the Ottoman past in Africa. In confirmation of this, almost all of the religious leaders at the meeting emphasized the Ottoman legacy in their countries positively and wished to restore it (Presidency of Religious Affairs 2006).

Diyanet organized a second meeting in Istanbul and Ankara on 21–5 November 2011. At this meeting Muslim religious authorities from Africa called on Turkey to take a greater role in Islamic education in African communities. In a joint declaration, they urged that “educational institutions similar to the Imam-Hatip schools in Turkey should be used as an example for schools in Africa and backed with faculties providing higher religious education like [Turkey's] theology faculties” (qtd. in *Hurriyet* 2011).

At a broader level, Diyanet also hopes to contribute to the development of religious education and a quality environment for praying in Africa. Thus, mosques are being established. This makes religion the most distinctive mode of Turkey's involvement in the continent, in comparison to other emerging actors on the continent. Therefore, Turkey's policy toward Africa goes beyond focusing only on humanitarian and economic aspects (Ozkan 2012, 2013).

Many civil-society organizations also resort to religion to legitimize and motivate their activities on the continent. Traditional religious groups from Turkey are actively involved with projects in Africa. The Hüdayi Foundation and Suleymancılar are just two that can be mentioned. They are usually active in the area of education. Religious schools, high schools, and vocational schools are the most common.

The Hüdayi Foundation places particular importance on family, society, and educational issues. As part of their projects in many parts of the world, the Hüdayi Foundation has offices in nine African countries, mostly located in central and western Africa, and from these offices they operate in over 40 countries on the continent. They run Imam-Hatip schools, religious schools, and colleges; graduates of the latter can then work as teachers. Based on the author's personal observation on the continent and the limited information on their website, the schools in Africa seem to be modelled exactly on the Turkish version, albeit with minor differences, such as the language of instruction, which is French, and some other local elements.²

Suleymançılar, a religious group formed by students/followers of Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan (1888–1959), is also actively involved in Africa. They have been very active since the late 1990s in many African countries as part of their Islamic education. The details and the scope of this group in Africa are almost unknown; based on personal interaction and observation, however, one can say that their influence and their projects are broad, especially in the field of religious education, but take place out of the public eye.

With the maturation of democracy at home, Turkey's rise is focused predominantly on economic and political dimensions. As part of its active foreign policy, Turkey is now moving in a new direction to make its presence felt in other fields, such as education. Since the colonial period, the best educational system has been considered to be one similar to that of France or the United Kingdom. This was relatively easy for societies in which Christianity is dominant; however, in Muslim-majority countries, this has not yielded the expected results. Instead, it has forced families to find alternative educational facilities where their children can acquire Islamic knowledge. This has resulted in competing parallel educational systems. Imam-Hatip schools have been a particular model to bridge the gap between religious and scientific teachings (Ozgur 2012).

The fact that almost all Islamic groups are interested in opening Imam-Hatip schools, in Africa and elsewhere, should be contextualized and emphasized here for several reasons. First, it is an educational model that was developed in Turkey, where students can study both Islamic studies and modern sciences. In that sense, it is unique because it does not operate like *madrasas*, where only Islamic studies are taught. Second, it is widely accepted that these are the best educational institutions available in the Islamic world for creating a new generation that is more tolerant, interactive, and moderate in their readings of the world while continuing to live as pious Muslims.

Imam-Hatip schools are also likely to be the first instance of a modern educational system being exported from a non-Western country to other parts of the world. Of course, one needs time to see the future implications of this, but Turkey's social and religious depth in Africa is also connected to the success of these educational institutions.

The Balkans: Discovering the Past and Romanticism

Diyamet has played a major role in providing religious services to the Muslim communities of the Balkans on several levels. Its status as a directorate subordinate to the Prime Ministry and independent from the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs increased its ability to act outside the limitations of diplomatic conventions and to work with Islamic unions

and grassroots organizations rather than with often stolid state agencies. Since 1995 Diyanet has been organizing the Eurasian Islamic Council (EIC), of which the Balkan countries are members (Pikal 2013). At these meetings, issues of Islamic practice, from higher education to the accreditation of university degrees and the organization of the pilgrimage, are discussed and often resolved by extending Diyanet's religious services to the Islamic administrations of other countries. As a complementary forum to the EIC, Diyanet has also hosted an annual meeting of the leaders of the Balkans' Muslim communities since 2007.

In the Balkans Diyanet focuses on facilitating the spread of its assistance and services to Muslim communities, such as the organization of the hajj and the education of preachers and religious scholars, to mention just a few of Diyanet's activities. Such policies are usually realized through scholarships, the organization of educational programs for religious personnel, and the publication of books, as well as translations of the Qur'an into the languages of the region. The scholarships usually cover introductory Qur'an courses in Turkey for students and professional training for imams, studies in religious high schools, graduate courses at faculties of theology, and post-doctoral courses. More than 1 000 students from the Balkans with religious interests study in Turkey every year with full scholarships granted by Diyanet.

Besides these influences, Diyanet's most visible contribution in the Balkans has been its role as a facilitator of the construction and reconstruction of mosques. In the case of symbolic restoration projects, Diyanet collaborates mostly with the Turkish International Coordination Agency and the Turkish Ministry of Culture, which regards mosques of the Ottoman period as part of the Turkish-Islamic heritage. The construction of new mosques is also under way. For that purpose, Diyanet initiated the so-called sister cities project, which brings together the local mufti's office of a town in the Balkans and a mufti's office in Turkey. The mufti's office of Prizren, for instance, is now coupled with the office of Antalya. The mufti of Antalya started a collection for the construction of a new mosque in the sister community; now, the mosque is being built, and the people of Prizren call it the "Antalya mosque" (Öktem 2010, 34). There are several dozen twinning projects in the Balkans. Many of these projects create networks between congregations in Turkey and the Balkans. Diyanet's role in hosting the Eurasian and Balkan councils, in addition to the reconstruction and construction of mosques, is indicative of the role of Diyanet, and of Turkey in general, as a symbolic leader of the Muslim communities of the Balkans and Central Asia. This is a message that, as Öktem (2010, 35) argues, is generally well received, especially by the small and underfunded Islamic unions of the western Balkans and those of the former Soviet space.

Diyanet, for its part, is trying to shape Balkan Islam in the image of its own understanding of Islamic doctrine and practice, which is indeed the closest to local traditions, while using its external relations to legitimate itself as the heir of the Ottoman Meşihat. It does so as what is probably the world's largest and most centralized administration of Muslim religious affairs.

Eurasia: Reviving Religion

Diyanet's contacts with Muslim leaders in the Soviet Union date back to 1985, when a delegation headed by Tayyar Altıkulaç, president of Diyanet at the time, visited the muftis of the spiritual boards of Muslims in Moscow, Tashkent, Baku, and Mkhachkala. Altıkulaç met with the mufti of Central Asia, Kazakhstan, the South Caucasus, and the North Caucasus. Diyanet made its second visit in 1989 to attend the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Russia's acceptance of Islam and the 200th anniversary of the introduction of the Orenburg Spiritual Board of Muslims by Catherine II. A number of directors of Muslim spiritual boards and ministers of religious affairs from various Islamic countries participated in this meeting. The then president of Diyanet, Sait Yazıcıoğlu, and the delegation he led went to Ufa, Nizhnekamsk, Noberezhnye Chelny, and Kazan and exchanged ideas with supreme mufti of the Central Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Russian Federation. After 1990 cooperation among religious leaders in Eurasia increased, with the result that Diyanet introduced a section in charge of Eurasian countries in its Foreign Affairs Department in 1994. This directorate followed and researched religious situations in Eurasia, guided the construction and restoration of mosques in Eurasia in line with the Project for Protection of the Turkish Cultural Presence, and managed the religious education of Muslim students and leaders sent from Eurasian countries.³

Diyanet's most effective educational, religious, and cultural contribution to Eurasian co-believers is the periodic convocation of the EIC, begun in 1995 to promote cooperation among the spiritual boards of Muslims in Eurasia. The presidents of the religious administrations of Turkey, Albania, Western Thrace, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Romania, Croatia, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Kosovo, Serbia, Azerbaijan, Nakhchivan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Crimea, Lithuania, Dagestan, Chuvashiya, Omsk Oblast, Tatarstan, Slovenia, Belarus, Poland, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachai-Cherkessia, Bashkortostan, and Chechnya participate in the EIC. Academics, parliamentarians, diplomats, and even the prime minister of Turkey often attend EIC meetings. These meetings

have been the usual forum for consultation on various issues, and in 2010 they decided to have a headquarters in Istanbul to better manage the exchange of ideas. In that centre there is also a secretariat administered by a Secretary-General (Presidency of Religious Affairs, Republic of Turkey 2012).

Diyanet has contributed financially to the construction or restoration of mosques and Islamic schools in Eurasia since the 1990s. It has built 27 and restored 6 mosques and paid for the internal and external decoration of many others. The Baku Shehitlik Mosque, the Nakhchivan Kazim Karabekir Mosque, and the Kazakhstan Talgar Mosque were built with investments from Diyanet Waqf, which also restored the Tomb of Murat Hüdavendigâr in Priština, Kosovo. Diyanet also contributed to the restoration of Moscow Central Mosque, Belarus Mosque in Minsk, and many mosques in Bulgaria. Moreover, Diyanet plans to build mosques in Tbilisi and Batumi (Georgia), Vilnius (Lithuania), and Tirana (Albania). Moreover, Diyanet has built a number of secondary and higher Islamic schools in Eurasia. In the 1990s Diyanet contributed financially to opening a higher Islamic institute and three theological high schools in Bulgaria; an Islamic pedagogic high school in Romania; a theological faculty and Turkish high school in Baku, Azerbaijan; and a theological faculty in Osh, Kyrgyzstan. In the 2000s, however, authorities in Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan closed the theological faculties created with the help of Diyanet. Since 1990 Diyanet has provided stipends to students who come to Turkey from Eurasian countries for religious education. In 2008, 547 local imams, including 60 from Albania, 57 from Western Thrace, 20 from Romania, and 20 from the Russian Federation, visited Turkey for a few months for educational programs and training seminars; 819 students participated in Qur'an courses, including 80 students from Mongolia, 5 from Kosovo, 10 from the Crimea, and 139 from Georgia; and 147 students were registered at Imam-Hatip High School, including 5 students from Azerbaijan, 8 from Kyrgyzstan, 6 from Montenegro, and 7 from Serbia. In addition, Diyanet assigned 198 students to theological faculties in Turkey, including 2 students from Romania, 2 from Kabardino-Balkaria, 15 from Kazakhstan, 3 from Western Thrace, 10 from Albania, and 2 from the Crimea. Diyanet provided scholarships to 43 students, including 6 from Tatarstan, 1 from Dagestan, 3 from the Crimea, and 3 from Bulgaria (Korkut 2010, 132).

In the 1990s Diyanet also began sending imams to Muslim regions in Eurasia. But the number of imams sent decreased as religious education in these countries developed. For example, during the Ramadan month in 1996, Diyanet sent 20 imams to Azerbaijan, 10 to Uzbekistan, 8 to Kyrgyzstan, and 8 to Tatarstan. In contrast, in Ramadan of 2008, no imams were sent to these countries. Since 2008 Diyanet has sent 30 imams

to serve in Crimea, 1 to Nakhchivan, 4 to the Russian Federation, 3 to Mongolia, and 12 to Kyrgyzstan. In sum, nearly 100 imams have served abroad. These imams attended a six-month course and learned the language and culture of the country to which they were being sent. Moreover, Diyanet also gave financial help to several foreign spiritual boards that did not enjoy any financial support from their own states and had insufficient revenue.

To take developments in religious diplomacy further, EIC member states are now considering establishing a joint university called International Eurasian Islamic University, where religious scholars can teach Islam in the main languages spoken around the world, such as Turkish, English, Arabic, Russian, and Persian. Turkey supports this greatly and is interested in potentially hosting the university. They also plan to establish a Muslim Minorities Institute within the body of the university. Apparently, this institute, which will follow the needs, problems, and situations of Muslim minorities in all the countries of the world, is needed. It is expected that this institute will prepare a report about the situation of the Muslim minorities and share it with all Muslims.

Conclusion

The role of religion is no longer considered obsolete in foreign policy as it was during the Cold War. There are now calls for the possible inclusion of religions and religious diplomacy in peace processes, problem-solving, and other areas of foreign policy (Mandaville and Silvestri 2015). Turkey has already considered and followed this line and has included religious diplomacy as part and parcel of its foreign policy since the early 2000s. Today, with the change toward a multidimensional approach to foreign policy, religion has become one of Turkey's new tools in implementing its vision and policies.

Turkey's religious diplomacy today is much more sophisticated and comprehensive than one might expect, mostly thanks to the experiences of the last decade. Institutions that implement and develop religious diplomacy in Turkey must reshape themselves in both structure and content. For example, Diyanet is no longer a state body catering only to the religious needs of Turkish citizens; rather, it has become one of the flag carriers of Turkey abroad. Similar transformations can also be observed for religious civil-society organizations in Turkey. Perhaps more than a decade ago, Turkish people's education and needs were central to their existence, but today they are being challenged to reorganize themselves and internationalize. As Turkey's democratization, economic development, and internationalization have gone hand in hand since the 2000s, the civil-society organizations have been quick to adapt

to this situation as well. Eventually, as outlined in earlier sections, these developments resulted in a salient and influential implementation of religious diplomacy in Turkish foreign policy. In the coming years, it is highly likely that Turkey's religious diplomacy will continue to deepen and widen considering the drastic social changes and developments in its neighborhood.

Notes

- ¹ For the concept of soft power and its meaning for Turkey, see the special issue on soft power of *Insight Turkey*, vol. 10, no. 2 (April–June 2008).
- ² The travel notes of the chairman on Africa were accessed at <http://www.hudayivakfi.org/ayin-makalesi/183-afrika-seyahat-notlari.html> on 10 January 2013.
- ³ An excellent summary of Diyanet's activities in Eurasia can be found in Korkut 2010. This section of the current article is mostly based on Korkut's work.

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