

Religion as Soft Power in the International Relations of Turkey

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Last quarter of the twentieth century witnessed the return of religion to the mainstream of political life in an array of settings around the world. Last decade have been a period that religion got brought into international relations. Publication of several books on the topic within this period¹ signifies the phenomenon. Almost in all of the related publications, it is mentioned that there exists a global resurgence/return of religion (Banchoff 2008: 9-13; Falk 2001: 2; Fox and Sandler 2004: 12-14; Haynes 2007: 19; Johnston 2003: 3; Petito and Hatzopoulos 2003: 1; Shani, 2009: 311; Thomas 2005: 26-42)². Upon discussions on Westphalian legacy (Banchoff 2008: 52-54; Falk 2001: 6-8; Fox and Sandler 2004: 22, 54; Hanson 2006: 17; Haynes 2007: 31-34; Petito and Hatzopoulos 2003: 2; Shani, 2009: 308-309; Thomas 2005: 25-26; Wessels 2009: 324, 328), changing paradigms of international relations and the rise of faith-based diplomacy more or less get to be the common denominator of all mentioned material (Banchoff 2008; Falk 2001; Fox and Sandler 2004; Fox 2009; Hanson 2006; Haynes 2007; Haynes 2009; Petito and Hatzopoulos 2003; Shani, 2009; Thomas 2005; Wessels 2009). Religion is understood in this context, “as encompassing both the teachings and beliefs of organized religion and all spiritual outlooks that interpret the meaning of life by reference to faith in and commitment to that which cannot be explained by empirical science or sensory observation and is usually associated with an acceptance of the reality of the divine, the sacred, the transcendent, the mysterious, the ultimate (Falk 2001: 30).

Soft power is another concept used in regards to the role of religion in international relations; referring to “the capability of an entity, usually but not necessarily a state, to influence what others do through attraction and persuasion” (Haynes 2009: 296). It is quite recent that religious soft power gets considered in regards to foreign policy³ (Haynes 2007: 44-55; Haynes 2009: 296-304; Thomas 2005: 12, 69, 109-110, 214-216) Joseph Nye, who coined the term two decades ago (Nye 1990), perceives religion in international relations as a

¹ For some examples see, Richard Falk, *Religion and Humane Global Governance*, palgrave, New York, 2001; Douglas Johnston (ed.), *Faith-Based Diplomacy: Trumping Realpolitik*, Oxford University Press, Oxford-New York 2003; Fabio Petito and Pavlos Hatzopoulos (ed.), *Religion in International Relations: The Return from Exile*, palgrave, New York 2003; Jonathan Fox and Shmuel Sandler, *Bringing Religion into International Affairs*, palgrave macmillan, New York 2004; Scott M. Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations*, palgrave macmillan, New York 2005; Eric O. Hanson, *Religion and politics in the International System Today*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2006; Jeffrey Haynes, *An Introduction to International Relations and Religion*, Pearson Longman, Essex 2007; Thomas Banchoff (ed.), *Religious Pluralism, Globalization, and World Politics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford-New York 2008, 3-121. Recent books on religion and politics have also sections on religion and international relations; see, Jeffrey Haynes (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Politics*, Routledge, London and New York 2009, pp.271-339 (includes four articles: Jonathan Fox, “Integrating religion into international relations theory”; Jeffrey Haynes, “Religion and foreign policy”; Giorgio Shani, “Transnational religious actors and international relations”; David Wessels, “Religion and globalization”)

² Thomas defines the global resurgence of religion, as the concept is used in this context, as follows: “the global resurgence of religion is the growing saliency and persuasiveness of religion, i.e. the increasing importance of religious beliefs, practices, and discourses in personal and public life, and the growing role of religious or religiously-related individuals, non-state groups, political parties, and communities, and organizations in domestic politics, and this is occurring in ways that have significant implications for international politics.” (Thomas 2005: 26)

³ John O. Voll uses the term in a “negative” context reminding the readers, a religious impetus in U.S foreign policy that was reinforced by Bush administration had resulted in an increase in the soft power of Osama Bin Laden and other radicals. (Voll 2008: 262-268)

persuasive power reserved for same-faith parties mentioning that “religion is a double-edged sword as an American soft-power resource, and how it cuts depends on who is wielding it” (Nye 2004: 59); and focusing on Wahhabism, which he calls a “sorcerer’s apprentice that has come back to bedevil its original creator”, the Saudi Government (Nye 2004: 96). The concept of soft power is similar in substance but not identical to a combination of the second dimension (agenda setting) and the third dimensions (or the radical dimension) of power as expounded by Steven Lukes in *Power: a Radical View* (Lukes 2005: 20-29).⁴

Turkey is not at all an exception to these developments in the international relations. In this paper I want to map Turkey’s existing and potential use of religious soft power in foreign affairs by focusing not only on state agencies including Presidency of Religious Affairs (hereinafter *Diyanet*)⁵, but also on some NGO’s and faith-based organizations affiliated to Turkey. In terms of corresponding parties, I will focus on some regions as Europe, Balkans, Caucasia, Central Asia, and Middle East.

EUROPE

Turkey is the home country of an estimated population of more than 4 million scattered all over Europe. The presence of “diaspora” in Europe originated from Turkey dates back to the arrival of workers in West European countries in the late 1950’s and early 1960’s. The initial wave of labour migration from Turkey was mainly directed to West Germany, however several other West European countries such as France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, and Britain also received labour migrants from Turkey. Following figures indicate mostly an on-going increase both in terms of population and in recipient countries over the years (Küçükcan 2008: 203)⁶.

	1973	1984	1995	2003
Austria	30,527	75,000	150,000	134,229
Belgium	14,029	63,587	90,425	70,701
Britain	2,011	28,480	65,000	79,000
Bulgaria	-	-	-	750,000
Denmark	6,250	17,240	34,700	35,232
Finland	-	-	-	3,325
France	33,892	144,790	254,000	311,356
Germany	615,827	1,552,328	1,965,577	2,653,600
Greece	-	-	-	150,000
Italy	-	-	-	10,000
Netherlands	30,091	154,201	252,450	299,909
Norway	-	3,086	5,577	10,000
Romania	-	-	-	35,000
Spain	-	-	-	1,000

⁴ For critical views on the concept of soft power see articles of Steven Lukes’ and Janice Bially Mattern’s in Berenskoetter and Williams.

⁵ *Diyanet* is a secular administrative unit in the Republic of Turkey established in 1924 to execute services regarding Islamic faith and practices. It was designed to enlighten society on the topic of religion as well as to carry out the management of places of prayer. For further information see Gözaydın 2008a; Gözaydın 2008b; Gözaydın 2009a.

⁶ Küçükcan indicates the sources as, “SOPEMI (1995), Beaufragte der Bundesregierung für die Belange der Ausländer (1995), Annual Report, Turkish Ministry of Employment and Social Security, (1984, 1992, 1993), 2003 Statistics on Turkish Migrant: Online report of the Turkish Ministry of Employment and Social Security, TUSIAD Report on Turks in the European Union, compiled from Eurostat and German Federal Office of Statistics figures (the latter two are available at <http://www.calisma.gov.tr>, and <http://www.tusiad.org/haberler/basin/ab/9.pdf> respectively)

Sweden	5,061	20,900	36,001	38,844
Switzerland	19,710	48,485	76,662	79,476
TOTAL	757,398	2,108,097	2,930,392	4,661,672

An important means and platform for immigrants' activities have been immigrant organizations, and religion in this context plays a decisive role (Levitt 2003). The general landscape of Turkish immigrant organizations in Europe has been mapped out in depth (Avcı 2006: 61). *Diyanet* mostly gets based in various European countries on different immigrant organizations like Turkish Islamic Cultural Federation. However the administration also gets represented in as the councilors of religious services connected to the Turkish Embassies, and as the attachés of religious services connected to the Consulates General. In Europe the counsellors of religious services are found in Germany, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the Russian Federation, Macedonia, and Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Attachships are found in Germany (Berlin, Düsseldorf, Essen, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Hanover, Cologne, Karlsruhe, Munich, Nuremberg, Stuttgart, Münster, Mainz), the Netherlands (Deventer), France (Lyon), and Romania (Constanta). In European context the aim of *Diyanet*'s activities appear to support mosque associations and spread its own interpretation of Islamic knowledge rivalling with some other Turkish affiliated religious groups like *Süleymanlılar*⁷.

Another aspect of Turkish foreign affairs in Europe is obviously the country's relationship in regards to European Union (EU) membership. Differences of religion and culture between Europe and Turkey appear to be main obstacles for some opponents of a full accession for Turkey to the EU.⁸ However there also exist others to debate several views to reveal an enriching outcome (Jung and Raudvere 2008). Besides policies carried by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs⁹ and *Diyanet*¹⁰, several lobbying groups work in Europe on behalf of Turkey to use religion not as a dividing but as a persuasive power. Especially Fethullah Gülen, the spiritual leader of a large community of religious activists, is a prominent religious figure who advocates Turkey's accession to EU.¹¹ One of the activities of his movement known as the Gülen movement is to advance transnational interfaith. In Gülen's opinion, interfaith dialogues have five main reasons: saving modern humans from

⁷ *Süleymanlık* (path of *Süleyman*) is a religious group formed by students/followers of Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan (1888-1959). For further information about the group and also rivalry between *Diyanet* and *Süleymanlılar* see Çakır 1990: 125-139).

⁸ For a brief evaluation of these views, see Haynes 2007: 286-293.

⁹ According to Abdullah Gül, Turkey's Foreign Minister at the time and the President now, Turkey's Muslim identity would neither be a handicap nor 'political time bomb'. Instead, "positive EU-Turkey relations will show that shared democratic values and political unity prevail, sending the message that a 'culture of reconciliation' within Europe is at hand" (Gul 2004).

¹⁰ On English version of *Diyanet* website under the heading of "preceding" in regards to international relations it is stated that, "The presidency also has been running various projects to help establish a firm and lasting peace between muslims and other religious groups, based on common values and principles. So the presidency cherishes a firm belief in the natural prospect of the alliance of civilizations and human beings on the grounds of those common values and ideals. Being aware of the cultural and historical differences, it also sees the continuing process of turkey's entry into eu as a tremendous opportunity for a mutual learning and understanding, which should be considered as a win/win process for both parties." <http://www.diyenet.gov.tr/english/default.asp> In this context, among many others, on 5-7 September 2004 Prof. Ali Bardakoğlu, the President of the Presidency of Religious Affairs, alongwith a committee joined a meeting titled "Freedom of Religion in Christianity and Islam" organized by Catholic Academy Berlin and Protestant Academy Berlin in Berlin, presenting a paper titled "Achieving Freedom through Religion: Turkish Experience".

¹¹ See Fethullah Gülen's website; especially an article by Paul Weller at <http://en.fgulen.com/conference-papers/the-fethullah-gulen-movement-iii/3475-fethullah-gulen-turkey-and-the-european-union.html> (accessed March 9, 2010)

materialism; all religions have the same sources and natures; the Koran's call to interfaith dialogue; religious tolerance as a purpose of human life; and love as the essence of being requests tolerance. He repeatedly rejects fundamentalist, violent, and exclusivist interpretations of religion.¹² Instead, Gülen emphasizes the importance of pragmatist reasoning to serve what he sees as the common goal of all religions: to fight materialism and to revive the existence of God in people's lives. In other words, he appears to be seriously concerned not only with religion per se, but also with the question of how to improve the religious life of contemporary humans so as to increase both tolerance and interfaith dialogues. He prefers as a method of dialogue to forget the divisive arguments of the past and to concentrate on common points that religions share (Gözaydın 2009b: 1225). In the context of the Intercultural Dialogue Platform, Gülen has held talks with many religious leaders and institutions, such as Pope John Paul II (1998), Greek Eucumenical Patriarch Bartholomeos (1996),¹³ Sepharadic Chief Rabbi of Israel Eliyahu Bakshi Doron (1999).

Turkey's Presidency of Religious Affairs has also made 'dialogue' a part of its agenda from 1998. However recently it has become a concept that has been expressed more and more by the authorities: "I believe that one of the most effective steps to solve such problems is to establish ways for strong dialogue among religions as well as cultures. Such a dialogue will not only help to wipe out the prejudices of the followers of different faiths, but also contribute to solve the above-mentioned problems. I believe that lack of sincere dialogue causes the discourse of the clash of civilizations to gain ground."¹⁴

Popes Paul VI and John Paul II visited Turkey in 1967 and 1979, respectively. Pope Benedict XVI visited Turkey in November 2006, as his first visit to a majority Muslim country to "reiterate the solidarity between the cultures." In a 2004 *Le Figaro* interview, as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger he had said that Turkey should seek its future in an association of Muslim nations rather than the European Union, which he has stated has Christian roots. Ratzinger claimed then that Turkey had always been "in permanent contrast to Europe" and that linking it to Europe would be a mistake.¹⁵ At his visit to the country, it was reported that he made a counter-statement backing Turkey's bid to join the EU. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, after meeting the pope upon his arrival in Ankara, the pope's first visit to a majority Muslim country, said that the pope told him that while the Vatican seeks to stay out of politics it desires Turkey's membership in the EU.¹⁶ However, the Common Declaration of Pope Benedict XVI and Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople implied that support for Turkey's membership in the European Union would be contingent on the establishment of

¹² See, Y. Alp Aslandogan and Bekir Cınar, 'A Sunni Muslim Scholar's Humanitarian and Religious Rejection of Violence Against Civilians', a paper presented at the 'Muslim World in Transition: Contributions of the Gülen Movement', conference that was held on October 25–27, 2007, at the House of Lords in London organized by SOAS, the London School of Economics and the Leeds Metropolitan University, online at <http://en.fgulen.com/content/view/2463/53/>. (accessed March 9, 2010)

¹³ For 'Repercussions from Gulen-Bartholomeos Meeting' see, <http://en.fgulen.com/content/category/148/252/11/>

¹⁴ "Peace and Tolerance", a speech made by Ali Bardakoğlu, the President of Religious Affairs in the Conference on Peace and Tolerance II, co-sponsored by Appeal of Conscience Foundation and Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Istanbul, November 7–9, 2005).

¹⁵ Jim Bencivenga, "Navigating a clash of civilizations: Examining the new pope's old comments on Turkey's entry into the European Union," *Christian Science Monitor*. 22 April 2005.

¹⁶ Flavia Krause-Jackson and Mark Bentley, "Pope Benedict Backs Turkey's European Union Bid, Erdogan Says", <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601085&sid=a0hofLY1v5.U&refer=europe> Accessed March 10, 2010; BBC News, "Pope calls for religious exchange". <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6192770.stm> Accessed March 10, 2010

religious freedom in Turkey. “In every step towards unification, minorities must be protected, with their cultural traditions and the distinguishing features of their religion.”¹⁷

BALKANS

The presence of Turkish people in Europe can be traced back in Europe long before the arrival of Turkish workers. Halil İncalcık argues that the advent of the Anatolian Turks in the Balkans dates back to the 1260s (İncalcık 1993: 10). “Most scholars, including the Greek authors of the earliest study from the area, used the much commoner term ‘European Turkey’, and references to ‘the Balkans’ remained scarce long into the nineteenth century.” (Mazower 2001: 2) “Had the Ottoman’s wished to, they could have in six centuries forcibly assimilated the Christian populations of the Balkans. This legacy of tolerance, ironically, has rarely been enjoyed by Balkan Muslim populations threatened with extinction from the turn of the (XXth.) century to today in places like Bosnia, Sanjđak, Kosovo, Bulgaria and Western Thrace” (Khan 1996) “The Ottoman legacy¹⁸ and Muslim population appears to be a drive for Turkey’s interest in the Balkans; thus, Greece, Bulgaria¹⁹ and Bosnia-Herzegovina are three countries that Turkey seems to be focused on most in terms of international relations.

In recent years relations between Greece and Turkey have improved, mainly due to Greece's supportive attitude towards Turkey's efforts to join the EU, although various issues have never been fully resolved and remain constant sources of potential conflict. Relations between Greece and Turkey improved after successive earthquakes hit both countries in the summer of 1999. The so called "earthquake diplomacy" generated an outpouring of sympathy and generous assistance provided by ordinary Greeks and Turks in both cases. Problematic issues between Turkey and Greece in regards to religion include mutual religious minority rights, acknowledgement of the Orthodox Church of Constantinople and the role of the Ecumenical Patriarch.

The Bulgarian communist Regime's coercive assimilation campaign towards the Muslim Pomaks in the 1970's and the Muslim Turks between 1984-1989 resulted in forced expulsion of the Turkish origin people to Turkey, an estimated number of 900,000 and comprising approximately 10 percent of Bulgaria's total population. In spite of intermittent rapprochement, Turkey was hostile to Bulgaria through most of the 1980s because of Zhivkov's mistreatment of Bulgarian Turks and the economic hardship caused in Turkey by mass immigration of Turks from Bulgaria in 1989. The last rapprochement, a protocol of friendship in early 1988, was signed by Bulgaria to defuse international criticism of its ethnic policy. That agreement dissolved rapidly in 1988, when Turkey saw no change in Bulgarian ethnic assimilation; by 1989 Turkey was vowing to defend the Turkish minority, while Bulgaria claimed that its "Turks" were all Bulgarians converted to Islam under the Ottoman Empire. Efforts by Bulgaria's ethnic Turks to protest government policies requiring them to change their Turkish and Muslim names to Bulgarian and Christian ones, end all Islamic teaching and practices, and stop speaking Turkish in public had led to increasingly severe repression. This repression culminated in the summer of 1989 with a mass exodus of an estimated 320,000 Turkish Bulgarians, who fled across the border into Turkey during a seven-week period in July and August. The exodus overwhelmed Turkey's refugee facilities and

¹⁷ William Donohue, “Pope did not change stance on Turkey and EU”, *Spero News*, 30 November 2006 <http://www.speroforum.com/site/article.asp?idcategory=34&idSub=160&idArticle=6852>

¹⁸ For an analysis of the Ottoman legacy in the Balkans, see Maria Todorova, “The Ottoman Legacy in the Balkans” in Carl C. Brown (ed.), *Imperial Legacy: The Ottoman Imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East*, Columbia University Press, New York, 45-77.

¹⁹ For an analysis of relationships between Turkey -Bulgaria and Turkey-Greece with a special focus on identity issues, see Küçükcan 1999.

provoked an international crisis as well as an internal crisis within Bulgaria that contributed to the fall of the communist government.²⁰

The ouster of Zhivkov and subsequent Bulgarian commitment to repatriate deported Turks and grant them full human rights brought a marked change in Turkish policy. Despite delays and complaints from the Bulgarian Turks, Turkey remained patient and positive toward all signs of progress. The former dissident Zhelev, long a vocal critic of assimilation, became president and met with Turkish President Turgut Özal in September 1990. That meeting began a series of high-level economic talks in 1990-91 that yielded Turkish loans and technical assistance to Bulgaria and promised to bolster bilateral trade, which had shrunk by 80 to 90 percent in the mid-1980s. A new treaty of friendship and cooperation was prepared in the summer of 1991.

Despite the thaw, obstacles remained in Bulgarian-Turkish rapprochement. The ill will caused by Zhivkov's shrill anti-Turkish propaganda remained fresh in the early 1990s. Strident anti-Muslim and anti-Turkish statements in the media by Bulgarian nationalist factions kept tension high, and minor border incidents continued in 1991. And Bulgarian friendship with Greece created a precarious balancing act that required caution toward such moves as the Bulgarian-Turkish nonaggression pact proposed by Turkey in late 1990.

Relations between Turkey and Bulgaria have experienced a comprehensive development during the last two decades as the new regime has abandoned the old leadership's coercive policy towards the Turkish people in Bulgaria. During this period, mutual visits at every level increased in number, some of the long-lasting bilateral problems have been overcome. In addition to these, legal framework for the development of trade and economic relations has been completed so that improvement has been achieved in these areas of bilateral relations. Turkey has given its support to the integration of Bulgaria with the Euro-Atlantic structures. Bulgaria's membership in NATO in 2004 and in the EU in 2007 have been welcomed by Turkey. Bulgaria declares its support for Turkey's membership in the EU. Improvement of relations between Turkey and Bulgaria after the 1990s owe a lot to diplomatic relations constructed by religious authorities from both sides.

Diplomatic relationship between Turkey and Bosnia-Herzegovina has been a difficult one. Especially statements of Dr. Mustafa Efendi Cerić, the reis-ul-ulema (grand mufti) of Bosnia and Herzegovina stirred up the relations. Speaking at a reconstructed mosque in Rogatica on September 2, 2006, Cerić has said: "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." The grand mufti of Bosnia also told Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan during his visit to Sarajevo on March 25, 2008, "Please convey to your people the following: Turkey is our mother; it has been so and it will remain so."²¹ Problems existed before these statements as well. The plight of the Muslim population of Bosnia and Herzegovina during the civil war that followed Bosnia's 1992 declaration of independence aroused popular sympathy in Turkey and support for interventionist policies to help the Bosnian Muslims. Although the government supported the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping force in Bosnia and an auxiliary NATO military role, Ankara criticized these efforts as inadequate. In the mid-1990s, Turkey favored firmer measures against Bosnian Serbs and the government of Serbia, which Turkey, like other countries, had accused of providing military aid and other assistance to the Bosnian Serbs. However, as of early 1995, Turkey was not prepared to take unilateral steps in Bosnia that

²⁰ See, <http://countrystudies.us/turkey/87.htm>

²¹ For a briefing over reactions to these statements, see Hajrudin Somun, "Is Turkey Bosnia's mother?", *Today's Zaman*, November 11, 2008. <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=158350> Accessed March 11, 2010. Hajrudin Somun is the former ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina to Turkey and a lecturer on the history of diplomacy at the Philip Noel-Baker International University in Sarajevo.

might antagonize its NATO partners. However speaking at a joint news conference with Prime Minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Nikola Spiric on December 15, 2009 in Ankara, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan described political relations between the two countries as “excellent”.²²

In the Balkans *Diyanet* has been organized as a counsellor of religious services in Macedonia, and an attacheship exists in Romania (Constanta).

CAUCASIA

Following the demise of the Soviet Union, local and external powers sometimes competed for influence in the South Caucasus, and since then three South Caucasus republics—Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan—gained their independence. TIKA (the Turkish Co-operation and Development Agency), established in 1992,²³ appears to be the most important body in Turkey that furthers economic relations with the newly independent states of the Caucasus and Central Asia. Some of TIKA’s ongoing programmes include educational scholarships and student exchanges in co-operation with the Turkish ministry of education. Currently, about ten thousand students from the Caucasus and Central Asia attend various Turkish educational institutions, at the Turkish government’s expense. TIKA has arranged for the exchange of specialists in various fields, and teachers of all levels are being trained in Turkey. Turkey has opened eighteen high schools and two universities in the Caucasus under the direct control of its education ministry. Ankara has also promoted the use of the Turkish language in Azerbaijan and has beamed Turkish-language radio and television programmes via satellite to the region through its Avrasya (Eurasia) channel since April 1992.

Diyanet, and its Foundation of Religious Affairs (TDV), “aim not only to promote Turkey’s position in the new republics but also to prevent the penetration and dissemination of Iranian and Wahhabi types of Islamic understanding.” (Aras 2005) *Diyanet* supports the education of Islamic preachers, and increase aid for Muslim–Turkic peoples to restore and build mosques. TDV has opened three religious high schools and five divinity faculties in various countries of the region. *Diyanet* also has a counsellor of religious services in Azerbaijan, and an attacheship in Nahjevan. There also exists a temporary official of religion in Georgia where there are no consulships and attaché units.

Turkish economic activity in the Caucasus and wider region exists on two levels: state agencies, especially TIKA, provide technical and financial assistance, and Turkish businessmen invest. By the end of the 1990s, 2,500 Turkish companies were operating in numerous projects in the Central Asian and Caucasian republics, their investments amounting to \$8.4 billion and involving \$4 billion in construction services. Trade volume climbed from a meagre \$145 million in 1992 to over \$5.6 billion in 1999. However, Turkey’s trade relations with the Caucasian republics leave room for improvement. For example, export statistics for the first four months of 2001 show that Azerbaijan had just a 0.7 per cent share of Turkey’s total exports and Georgia just 0.4 per cent. (Aras 2005)

Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs state that, “In order to alleviate the suffering of the internally displaced persons in Georgia as a result of the Abkhazian conflict, Turkey has supplied humanitarian assistance to both Georgians and Abkhazians. Since its outset, Turkey has participated in and provided support to the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG). Turkey supports the South Ossetia Peace Plan proposed by the Georgian government in 2005. Turkey also continues to provide assistance to the projects initiated by

²² <http://www.topix.com/world/turkey/2009/12/relations-between-turkey-bosnia-and-herzegovina-are-excellent-erdogan>

²³ For history, roles and responsibilities of TIKA, see <http://www.tika.gov.tr/EN/Icerik.ASP?ID=345>

the OSCE, geared towards the improvement of the socio-economic infrastructure of South Ossetia region.”²⁴

CENTRAL ASIA

In the 1770s Catherine the Great took the surprisingly modern view that Russia's hold on the Steppes would be strengthened if she positively encouraged rather than undermined local Islamic institutions. To that end she sent Tatar Muslim preachers to the region. The plan backfired: instead of playing their allotted part, the Tatars fuelled anti-Russian sentiments. Whatever the imperial policy, it is always mediated by local implementation. General Konstantine Von Kaufman, who was the Russian governor general of Turkistan from 1866 to 1882, did not mind Islam, but he feared competing sources of authority. So he banned Orthodox preachers and permitted Muslims to worship unhindered, but he deliberately undermined the standing of Muslim clerics. (Bruce 2002/2005: 16)

Some two hundred years later, in the case of Turkey in Central Asia, religion as a soft power in diplomatic affairs emerge. Until the early 1990s, Turkey's historical, ethnic, cultural and linguistic similarities with these states did not imply anything for Turkish policy-makers. Central Asia began to play a central role in the making of Turkish foreign policy when the Turkish population claimed a kinship with Central Asian communities. In order to read Turkey's focus in Central Asia, it is interesting to look where *Diyanet* has been organized in the region. There exist counsellors of religious services in Kazakhstan, Kirghizia, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. There is also a temporary official of religion in Mongolia where there are no consulships and attaché units.

Since the beginning of the 1990s Central Asia has been the area where Gülen movement has mainly been focusing its strategy of development as a transnational network.²⁵ Because of its strong presence in Central Asia, Gülen's movement is an element in the development of Ankara's policies in the Turkic republics there. Their presence in Central Asia is everywhere: in economic life, in the media and in the educational network. In just two years, 1991–93, hundreds of companies and dozens of schools were opened in Central Asia, as well as the *cemaat* newspaper *Zaman*, which was published in the capital of each republic. Most of the Turkish companies in Central Asia belong to the Nurcu movement. Most of them, except *Ülker* and *Barakat* (import-export) are small-sized companies involved with a range of activities like baking, running restaurants, the construction industry and textile manufacture.

Through TİKA, Turkey has provided technical assistance to Central Asian countries since the gaining of their independence, and TİKA's role has grown even further under the auspices of Turkey's new foreign policy vision. Its substantial development aid and diverse activities in various fields are important in terms of demonstrating Turkey's vision of sharing its gains with its sister states and communities. Sixty per cent of Turkey's US\$702 million in development aid in 2007 was allocated to Central Asia and the Caucasus. These funds sponsored projects in economic and industrial infrastructure development, the health and education sectors, academic cooperation between Turkish and Eurasian universities, internship programmes in Turkey for Central Asian and Caucasian university students, Turkish language programmes, and the promotion of business and trade. (Fidan 2010: 118)

MIDDLE EAST

During Erdoğan's visit to Syria in December 2006, President Bashar Assad expressed the Syrian leadership's positive perception of the new Turkish attitude, stressing the fact that, “Turkey and Syria have common views on regional issues and [that] his country appreciates

²⁴ http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-political-relations-with-georgia.en.mfa

²⁵ For a study based on field research on Gülen movement carried out between November 1996 and May 2002 in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan see Balcı 2003.

Turkey's efforts to restore peace in the Middle East." The increasing levels of trust on both sides have made Turkey a potential mediator in the decades-long Syrian–Israeli conflict. Turkey pursues a multi-dimensional policy line, in part, to foster just such a role in the region, and has already enjoyed some degree of success. Turkey's mediating role was strengthened when Turkey moved ahead to bring Syria and Israel together. The level of engagement, at the outset, was limited to conveying messages from each side and the process was extremely difficult. Prime Minister Erdoğan, after a visit to Damascus in April 2008, confirmed Turkey's mediating role in the initiation of negotiations between Syria and Israel for a peaceful resolution of the dispute about the strategic Golan Heights. He further stated that he would attempt to restart direct talks between Syria and Israel. Foreign Minister of the time Ali Babacan evaluated the situation from a more realistic standpoint and stressed that the resolution of this chronic dispute would require 'strong political determination' from both sides. He also added that 'we are still at the very beginning of the process'.²⁰ As an initial success of Turkish mediation attempts, Israeli and Syrian authorities declared on 21 May 2008 that they started indirect talks under the supervision of Turkish diplomats in Ankara.

The Turkish government adopted a different policy approach toward Iraq in the aftermath of the US invasion. The March 2003 motion that forbade US troops from using Turkish territory in the war against Iraq was a historical turning point for Turkey, as Ankara made it clear that it will follow the principle of democratic legitimacy in its regional and international policies. The Turkish parliament prevented the USA from opening a northern front against Iraq on the basis that the international community considered the war illegitimate. Turkey's decision prolonged the process of the Iraqi invasion, forced the USA to search for greater legitimacy and drew more attention to the Palestinian question. The parliamentary motion that prohibited the use of Turkish territory by American troops saved Ankara from much of the negative impact of the Iraq crisis in regional terms. The new policy was shaped within the democratization process and the emergence of a new regional policy in Turkey. This process contributed to the emergence of a new regional profile which has created more room for manoeuvring in terms of Ankara's Iraq policy. Turkey's new orientation seems more flexible and adaptive to the challenges in Iraq. It aims to develop initiatives regarding the emergence of an Iraqi state while also planning to provide security for Kurds and Turcomans in Northern Iraq.(Çetinsaya 2006)

Possible areas of cooperation between Turkey and Iran were mentioned during Turkey's Foreign Minister Ahmed Davutoğlu's recent visit to Iran on September 12-13, 2009. Following his meeting with Iranian Foreign Minister Manoucher Mottaki, Davutoğlu noted that the two countries shared deep-rooted historical ties and "outlined many areas where they explored boosting bilateral relations, ranging from economic cooperation to security. Referring to this multi-dimensional partnership, Mottaki described Turkish-Iranian relations as "strategic"." During this visit, Davutoğlu also reiterated Turkey's position that the resolution of the nuclear problem should be based on mutual respect. He also conveyed to the Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council and Iran's chief nuclear negotiator, Saeed Jalili, that Turkey is ready to host negotiations between Iran and Western countries.(Serdar 2009: 12)

In spite of Turkey's constructive relations with Israel, diplomacy between Turkey and the Palestinian National Authority has been relatively strong and helpful. Since the historic breakthrough in Israeli-Palestinian relations, Turkey has been a strong supporter of the Middle East peace process not only as an important step toward regional stability but in the belief that the peace process will increase regional economic cooperation and provide new opportunities for trade and investment (Sayarı 1997: 50). Some faith-based transnational actors affiliated

with Turkey like The Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (IHH)²⁶ also work intensively for Palestine.

CONCLUSION

Turkey's diplomatic affairs with above mentioned countries reveal overwhelmingly that same-faith relations somewhat prevail; however as Scott Thomas argues (Thomas 2003) MacIntyrean virtue-ethics can help us develop a deeper pluralism among different communities and states in international society as well. Contemporary religious thought provides new ways of thinking about the socio-political implications of the multiple systems of belief present in the world. (Lynch 2003). Actually activities of ngo's like The Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (IHH)²⁷, and Gülen movement that also work in places like South America, Africa and Southern Asia where Muslims are extremely or relatively scarce indicate that religion as soft power gets used by some faith-based transnational actors affiliated with Turkey.

Changes in Turkish foreign policies that have already started in 1990s but intensified by the ruling AKP government appear to be a substantial drive for Turkey's relatively new claim for a more prominent role in world affairs. There seems to be three factors that support such a claim. Firstly, Turkey's modernization, social and cultural achievements, economic development, political and economic stability, and democratization seem to make it an attractive civil-economic power especially to the countries of the region. As an example, Turkish TV series gained considerable popularity in the Arab countries. The rising interest in Turkey in the Middle East prompts more visits to Turkey by citizens of the regional countries. Secondly, Turkey's recent enthusiasm to pursue an active foreign policy, which pays attention to international legitimacy and regional concerns, with the aim of resolving the region's serious problems increases the country's prestige in world affairs. Thirdly, Turkey pursues its diplomacy carefully and modestly. Turkish policy aims to include all related actors, forming a broad coalition to solve problems and develop initiatives. Turkish policy-makers keep an equal distance from all actors and avoid taking part in any regional alliances or groupings. Turkey's all-inclusive policy and equal-distance policy satisfy the concerns of international actors and assure them of the constructive nature of Turkish policies.

²⁶ See <http://www.ihh.org.tr>

²⁷ See figure 1 for venues where IHH work.



Figure 1

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