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Islam in Central Asia and Southeastern Europe

Guest Editor:
Sandra King Savić



Iftar in downtown Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina
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Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), religious practices are ostensibly on the rise. On the Balkan Peninsula, for instance, one often hears the term *re-tradicionalizacija* (re-traditionalization) – an expression that concerns the active propagation of religious values in the social sphere. The authors of our current *Euxeinos* issue examine the way in which religion returned to the public sphere by way of governmental institutions and non-state actors that influence Islam, and illustrate how underlying cultural traditions and the state shape an individual's relationship to god, and thus one's practice of the faith. The authors in the following issue illustrate each of these aspects with specific examples from Central Asia and the Balkan Peninsula.

As an all-encompassing faith, Islam permeates everyday experiences of practicing Muslims. Islam is, as is the case with Judaism, guided by orthopraxy – correct action – that transcends mundane activities as exemplified by, for instance, the *salat* (worship). Practicing Muslims initially declare their submission and testify their faith by way of reciting the *shahada*, and pray five times per day toward the direction of the *qibla* – the Ka'ba located in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Besides the testimony and daily prayers, practicing Muslims pay *zakat* – almsgiving – observe *sawm* – also known as the fast during Ramadan – and perform the *hajj* – or pilgrimage to Mecca – so long as one is able to do so. Practicing Muslims perform these religious duties that are known as the five pillars in their observance of the faith. Given this emphasis on correct behavior, one might perceive Islam as static and

unchanging, but this is not the case.

The Balkan Peninsula illustrates the multifaceted character of the faith. Ever since the Ottoman arrival on the Peninsula, the most common school of Islam practiced in Southeastern Europe has been the Hanafi *madhhab* (school of thought, jurisprudence), which is considered the most liberal and flexible among the four schools of Sunni jurisprudence.¹ Sufi orders were widespread and added a layer of mysticism to local Islamic practices. Sufis, for instance, constructed shrines and tombs so as to mourn their dead, while believing that visiting these graves substitutes for *hajj* – pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia – one among the above elucidated pillars of the faith.² In addition, Sufis practice Islam by focusing on their personal relationship to Allah that leads conservative schools, such as the Hanbali, to discredit Sufiism.³ Islam, in other words, is practiced with a bewildering heterogeneity, and meshes exceptionally well with already existing characteristics that are dominant in local cultures and preceding religious practices, as previously stated by Leila Ahmed in *Women and Gender in Islam*

(B)y definition, contributions from other religious traditions brought in by converts and the descendants of converts were discrete in that they were either unconscious or traceless, by deliberate

1 Denny Mathewson Frederick. *An Introduction to Islam*. Pearson Prentice Hall: New Jersey. 195.

2 Sorenson S. David. *An Introduction To The Modern Middle East*. Westview Press: Boulder, Colorado (2008). 52.

3 Williams Alden *The Word of Islam*. University of Texas Press: Austin, Texas (2009). 109.
King-Savić „History and Identity in the Sandžak Region“, <http://fms.leavenworth.army.mil/Collaboration/universities/Sandzak-King-Savic.pdf>

*intention, to any tradition other than the Islamic. Similarities between prior customs and Islamic ones attest to the fact of Islam's having absorbed such traditions.*⁴

As such, Islam acquired and/or shaped existing cultural practices. Drinking alcohol, though frowned upon by ascetic followers of the faith, is common in Central Asia,⁵ as was eating pork in the Balkans.

Cultural influences are often layered with, supplanted by, and/or channeled through governmental institutions, as was the case in the Soviet Union and the former SFRY. With the creation of the Soviet Union and the former Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia respectively, Islam faded into the background in both regions. And yet, Islam never vanished wholly, and remained central to the Balkan and Central Asian social fabric even though the Soviet and Yugoslav modernist projects variously restricted the learning of and controlled Islamic teachings, forced unsanctioned religious practices underground or else into the privacy of one's home.⁶ In places where Islamic practices remained in the public sphere, they were labeled as cultural traditions and national identity markers.

In both Central Asia and the Balkans, Muslims are considered as such by way of parental confessional identity. One is, in other words, born a Muslim, never mind

the nature of one's observance of the faith. Mariya Y. Omelicheva illustrates this feature in the present issue with her example on the *Instrumentalization of Islam in Central Asia*, and states that Central Asians consider an individual a Muslim by "virtue of their birth" into a Muslim family. A similar conflation of ethnic and religious identity defined Muslims in the Balkans. Government officials of the Socialist Yugoslav Republic did not consider Bosniaks a titular nation, but as 'Yugoslavs of undeclared nationality'. In the 1961 census, Muslims were able to declare as '*Muslimani u smislu naordnosti*' (Muslims in terms of national character, ethnicity), and as national *Muslimani* (Muslims) in the 1971 census. However, Bosniaks were not considered a *narod* – a separate national entity - until 1993⁷ when Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Sandžak area declared themselves as Bosniaks.

And yet, the collapse of the Soviet Union and SFRY did not herald an end to governmental intrusion in religious affairs, as illustrated by all authors in the present *Euxeinos* issue. Politicians still seek to influence and shape the faith to fit the current 'security discourse', or to legitimize governmental institutions as demonstrated by Alisher Khamidov and Omelicheva. Considering the present governmental intrusion in religious affairs, one might discern a continuity in how governments seek to influence religious affairs in Central Asia and the Balkans. Yet, there are not only domestic, but also foreign actors who influence and shape Muslim practices.

Turkish institutions play a vital role in the lives of Muslim communities in both Central Asia and the Balkans. Among the most

4 Ahmed, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam*. Yale University Press: New Heaven and London (1992). 86.

5 David W. Montgomery and John Heathershaw, „Islam, secularism and danger: a reconsideration of the link between religiosity, radicalism, and rebellion in Central Asia“, *RELIGION, STATE & SOCIETY*, 2016 VOL. 44, NO. 3, 19.

6 David W. Montgomery and John Heathershaw, „Islam, secularism and danger: a reconsideration of the link between religiosity, radicalism, and rebellion in Central Asia“, *RELIGION, STATE & SOCIETY*, 2016 VOL. 44, NO. 3, p. 203

7 Tone Brंगा, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way – Identity and Community in a Central Bosnian Village*, Princeton University Press (1995): 24 – 28.

prominent of them are the TIKA (the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency), the *Diyamet* (Presidency of Religious Affairs), and the Gülen movement.

As a governmental organization, the TIKA supports infrastructural, social, and cultural projects in the Balkans and Central Asia, but also in the Maghreb area, and the larger Middle East. The mission statement of the TIKA organization goes hand in hand with Ankara's 'strategic depth' policy, thus illustrating Turkish regional aspirations that are based on, in part, a common linguistic and religious identity. Dino Mujadžević and Xhabir Hamiti give us greater insight into Turkish practices in Bosnia & Herzegovina and Kosovo, especially as they relate to the Ottoman heritage, and how Muslims contend with and navigate the above-illustrated mixed messages from foreign and local actors.

The *Diyamet* is another officially sanctioned governmental institution of Turkey with a presence in the Balkans and Central Asia, as well as in Western European states. *Diyamet* representatives were variously

accused of spying on the activities of Muslim communities, especially their suspected following of 'Gülenists' as documented by Ahmet Erdi Öztürk in the present *Euxeinos* issue. Öztürk demonstrates how Turkish authorities utilize religion at once as a regulatory tool and legitimizing instrument for domestic and internationally oriented purposes.

Islam is a rich and multifaceted religion that evolves in tandem with political and cultural traditions. The authors of the present *Euxeinos* issue offer valuable insight into how internal and external influences, cultural aspects, and governmental institutions shape Muslim communities, and how individuals navigate these forces in their observance of the faith in Central Asia and the Balkans.

Our present issue developed in cooperation with the G2W magazine, and previously appeared in German.⁸

Sandra King-Savić

8 RGOW 2/2017: „Islam in Zentralasien und Südosteuropa“, *Ökumenisches Forum für Glauben, Religion und Gesellschaft in Ost und West G2W*, available at <https://www.g2w.edu/zeitschrift/aktuelle-ausgabe1362-rgow-2-2017-islam-in-zentralasien-und-suedosteuropa>

Instrumentalization of Islam in Central Asia: Using Religion for Legitimizing the Governing Regimes

by Mariya Y. Omelicheva

Abstract

Governments in Central Asia recognize a „traditional“ or „official“ version of the Islamic faith to strengthen the national identity, but also to legitimize local authoritarian regimes. Officials justify structural and political grievances by referencing a ‘security discourse’ of „Islamic danger“. However, governmental repressions against „unofficial“ Islamic practices could have counterproductive effects.

Key words: Islam, Central Asia, Instrumentalization, Repression

The authoritarian governments of Central Asian states have relied on multiple means to sustain their power grip and maintain legitimacy. With some variation across the region, these regimes have derived their legitimacy from their ability to deliver on socio-economic promises, ensure state security and unity of the nation, and establish formal representative institutions covering these countries’ democratic deficit. Islam, too, has been co-opted by these governments in a process that I term the instrumentalization of religion. The latter refers to the discursive representation of Islam around certain themes for accomplishing specific political goals.¹

Any religion as a system of beliefs can lend itself to instrumentalization. Islamic tradition, which lacks a central organizational hierarchy and recognizes no authoritative source of doctrinal interpretation, is particularly open to divergent readings of religious texts and the deliberate manipulation of religious meanings. The relative freedom of interpretation of what counts as “Islamic” and what is “un-Islamic” and impious presents stakeholders, including the secular regimes, with an opportunity to assert their authority over religious practices

1 Mariya Y. Omelicheva (2016) “Islam and Power Legitimation: Instrumentalisation of Religion in Central Asian States,” *Contemporary Politics*, 122(2): 144-163.

and knowledge. In the remainder of this article, I review common themes and interpretations of Islam developed in the official discourses of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, and illustrate how these representations have assisted the governing regimes in legitimizing their rule and policies.

The Discourse of “Traditional” Islam and Its Uses in Nation-Building and Nation-Branding

One of the defining features of Islam in Central Asia is its connection to ethnicity. For the majority of Kazakhs, Tajiks, and Uzbeks, ethnic identity is a Muslim one: “To be Kazakh means to be Muslim;” “There can be no *O‘zbekchilik* without *Musulmonchilik*.”² This correspondence of ethnic and religious identification has deep historical roots. Prior to the Russian conquest, large segments of the Central Asian population identified themselves as

2 See, for example, Chris Hann and Mathijs Pelkmans (2009) “Realigning Religion and Power in Central Asia: Islam, Nation-State and (Post)Socialism.” *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 9 (2009): 1524. Muslims in Kyrgyzstan tend to emphasize relationships with their own kin, rather than all other Kyrgyz Muslims (Aurélie Biard (2010) “The Religious Factor in the Reification of “Neo-Ethnic” Identities in Kyrgyzstan,” *Nationalities Papers* 38, 3, 323-35).

Muslims, but derived this identity from communal practices and traditions rather than the mastery of Quran. The Soviet-era nationality politics strengthened this religious and national identification, and it has been reinforced in the post-independence period. Today, as centuries ago, Muslimness is viewed as intrinsic to the Central Asian peoples. Many Central Asian Muslims do not regard the strict observance of Islamic prohibitions as the exclusive marker of Muslim identity. Instead, their Muslimness is defined by virtue of birth into a family of Muslims and through the lineage in the communities where Islam constituted a central component of life.³

The official discourses of “traditional” Islam are best understood in this context. The Central Asian governments have creatively deployed references to the region’s rich Islamic heritage for accomplishing distinctive nation-building aims. Islam Karimov, the late president of Uzbekistan, anchored his legitimacy in Uzbek nationalism built on celebrating the cultural and Islamic heritage of Uzbekistan. The late president portrayed the “cultural” and “traditional” Islam of Uzbeks as a moral fabric for their national character and a depository of ancestral spiritual values transferred from one generation to another. Karimov drew discursive links between his own views and those of representatives of the Uzbek Islamic heritage, in this way defending his Islamic reputation, and conferring legitimacy on his policies.

Until recently, the nation-building efforts of Tajikistan’s President Emomali Rahmon excluded all references to Islam. Instead, his government has drawn on the pre-Islamic and Persian heritage as a source of an official collective memory. Islam, however,

has been imperious to the stern anti-religious policies of the Rahmon administration. An increasing number of young Tajiks publically express signs of religious piety. There is a growing interest in Islamic knowledge and renewed debates about the essence of “genuine” Islam. Facing this Islamic resurgence, the Tajik government has begun embracing Islam by including selective references to the Islamic heritage as part of its nation-building agenda. In 2009, Tajikistan commemorated “Imami Azam”, the founder of the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence, and in 2010 Dushanbe was named the “Capital of Islamic Culture.”⁴ In 2016, in a striking change of his aversion to Islamic rituals, Rahmon has travelled to Saudi Arabia accompanied by his relatives and senior officials to go on a pilgrimage to Mecca. All other Central Asian leaders have publically performed the Hajj.

Kazakhstan’s president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, has also expressed his reverence for the national Islamic tradition, but deployed all references to Islam in the context of building Kazakhstan’s image as a peaceful and stable poly-confessional and multi-ethnic state. The idea of national unity has become a source of legitimacy for the Nazarbayev government, credited for intelligent policies responsible for inter-ethnic and religious accord. This model of peaceful religious co-existence in a modern and economically developed state has become Kazakhstan’s national brand flaunted to other Muslim nations.

³ Ro'i, Y. & Wainer, A. (2009) ‘Muslim Identity and Islamic Practice in Post-Soviet Central Asia’, *Central Asian Survey* 28, 3, pp. 303-22.

⁴ Tim Epkenhans (2011) “Defining Normative Islam: Some Remarks on Contemporary Islamic Thought in Tajikistan – Hoji Akbar Turajonzoda’s Sharia and Society,” *Central Asian Survey* 30(1): 81-96.

The Discourse of “Official” Islam: Legitimizing Control over Religion

Central Asian republics are constitutionally secular but predominantly Muslim states. By different estimates, Muslims constitute 52-65% of all believers in Kazakhstan, and 90-93% in Turkmenistan. In Kyrgyzstan, 75-86% of the population identifies with Islam, and around 88-90% of Uzbeks and 90-98% of Tajiks are Muslims. The majority of Central Asian Muslims are Sunnis of Hanafi madhab, but there are also Sufi, Shia, and Salafi minorities across Central Asia.⁵

The constitutions of Central Asian states declare the separation of state and religion and enshrine religious freedoms. In reality, the regimes have exercised extensive control over religious practices through the mandatory registration of religious associations, determination of qualifications for clergy, censorship of religious literature and information, and even surveillance of mosques with security cameras. In 2016, Dushanbe banned Central Asia’s only legally operating Islamic political force - the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan. Other Central Asian states outlawed the formation of religious parties immediately following their independence.

The regimes’ grip on the practice of Islam has strengthened in recent years. Tajikistan, for example, passed regulations of private celebrations, funeral services, and weddings in Tajikistan, banned female students from wearing hijabs and prohibited minors from participating in public religious rituals. Reports of forced beard-shaving and

new constraints on the travel to Mecca on the Hajj transpired in 2016. Kazakhstan, too, has tightened its restrictions on religious activities by summoning home Kazakh nationals who were studying at religious institutions abroad. In 2016, it created a new Kazakh Ministry of Religious Issues and Civil Society that barred women from wearing headscarves in educational institutions and announced its plans to ban Salafism.

The instrumentalization of Islam through the creation of a category of “official” religion has provided the governments with the necessary context for legitimizing state control of religious affairs. The vague category of “official” Islam has been linked to the corpus of texts, practices, institutions, and individuals sanctioned by the new religious administrations. Nominally independent, the new Central Asian Muftiates, which exercise monopoly over religious instruction and the organization of contacts with the rest of the Muslim world, act as organs of state. Furthermore, various agencies for religious affairs established in the structure of Central Asian governments have been responsible for overseeing the implementation of religious laws.

Islamic groups and movements practicing their faith outside the state-sponsored religious institutions have been regarded as pseudo-Muslim by the Muftiates and criminalized and prosecuted by the states. As succinctly stated by the late Uzbek president, “the wrong kind of Islam [must] be kept in check, by merciless means if necessary.”⁶ The “official” Hanafi Islam has been discursively linked to the region’s Islamic tradition and embedded with positive subjective evalua-

5 Mariya Y. Omelicheva (2016). “The Multiple Faces of Islamic Rebirth in Central Asia,” in *New Approaches to Area Studies in the Global Era: Community, Place, Identity*, edited by Edith Clowes and Shelly Bromberg. Northern Illinois University Press, pp. 143-158.

6 As quoted by Human Rights Watch (1998), “Crackdown in the Farghona Valley: Arbitrary Arrests and Religious Discrimination,” available from: <http://www.hrw.org/hrw/reports98/uzbekistan>.

tions, such as “enlightened,” “spiritual,” “authentic,” “moderate,” “tolerant,” and “sensible.” The unofficial Islamic practices have been portrayed as “alien,” “backward,” “fanatic,” “obscurantist,” and “dangerous.” Muslims practicing the “wrong” kind of faith have been labelled “barbarians” and “uneducated people” who seek to increase their power under the pretext of pseudo-Islamic beliefs.

**The Discourse on the Islamist threat:
Justifying Political Repression, Diverting
Public Attention from Socio-
Economic Concerns**

The discourse on the Islamist threat is neither new nor unique to the region. In Central Asia, it has been fueled by the emergence of a number of homegrown and foreign Islamist groups, including those propagating jihad, and a series of terrorist attacks blamed on Islamists.⁸ Overall, however, the fundamentalist expressions of Islam have been inimical to the majority of Central Asian Muslims, who view their religion as part of their ethnic identity, heritage and culture. Nonetheless, the Uzbek and Tajik leaders challenged by religious opposition at the dawn of their states’ independence have repeatedly warned about the existence of an imminent security threat from Islam and called for security policies on religion.

Although the Islamist groups operating in Central Asian exhibit considerable di-

versity in their religious beliefs, political goals, and strategies, the official discourse on the Islamist threat homogenizes them and renders them synonyms with “fundamentalism” and “Wahhabism”. The vagueness of these terms has allowed the government to employ them selectively to crack down on any dissent, including political, civil, and religious dissent. The emergence of dangerous variations of Islam has been blamed on external influences, even though the majority of analysts agree that the Islamic revival in Central Asia has been driven by local developments, rather than by foreign intellectual thought and proselytizing. Central Asia has not been immune to the influences that contributed to the appearance of radical Islamic groups. Still, it is the internal processes, including state repression that facilitated the emergence of radical Islamic groups.

All Central Asian governments have tried to externalize the structural and institutional failures produced by deficiencies in their rule onto the Islamist threat. The Islamist threat has been blamed for redirecting states’ efforts away from public and social programs and obstructing the governments in carrying out political and social reforms. To put it differently, by presenting Islamism as the source of national evils, the Central Asian leadership deflected their own responsibility for enduring socio-economic and political problems. The rhetorical hype about the governments’ efforts at protecting their citizens from the Islamist danger has been used to enhance the legitimacy of the governing regimes. In Uzbekistan, the late president Islam Karimov portrayed his country as the last bastion against the Islamist insurgency. The Tajik President has presented Tajikistan as a state on the frontlines in the fight against ISIS. The Kazakh government has emphasized its role in the

⁷ See, for example, Kazakhstan’s President Nursultan Nazarbayev’s speech on Islam, Orthodoxy and Protestantism delivered at the XVI Congress of Kazakhstan’s Nur Otan party in Astana on March 11, 2015, available from <https://en.tengrinews.kz/religion/Nursultan-Nazarbayev-speaks-about-Islam-Orthodoxy-and-259371/>

⁸ For further discussion see Omelicheva, “The Multiple Faces of Islamic Rebirth in Central Asia.”

global war against terrorism.

Conclusion

Islam in Central Asia is immensely diverse. It manifests itself in a variety of local practices and beliefs that have become intertwined with canonical Islam during the century-long history of Islamicization of the region. This richness and diversity of the Central Asian Islamic tradition cannot be reduced to simplistic presentations of Islam as “traditional,” “official,” or “radical.” Overall, Islam in Central is very moderate due to the prevalence of the indigenous forms of Hanafi madhab and strong association between religious and ethnic/national identity.

The Central Asian governments, however, have employed these categories as a tool for power legitimation. The rhetoric of “traditional” Islam has become a legitimizing instrument in the hands of the ruling elites in need of popular support. The leadership of Central Asian states has celebrated Islam as a national heritage and a moral compass, and employed their states’ Islamic identity for building productive relations with other Muslim states. The Central Asian governments have claimed the right, even a responsibility, to defend and protect the “traditional” and “official” Islam from the dangerous foreign influences detrimental to their countries’ progress. These characteri-

zations of Islam have been used to justify the homogenization of Islamic practices, imposing restrictions on religious expressions, and repression in the name of combatting violent Islamism. All in all, the instrumentalization of Islam has provided the Central Asian governments with an opportunity to clamp down on religious and secular dissent and to cover up the lingering deficiencies in their governance. The instrumentalization of Islam, although beneficial to the rulers in the short run, bears long-term repercussions. Seeking to control religion through restrictive policies and discourse, the governments inadvertently contribute to the emergence of social forces ready to embrace alternative expressions of Islam, which may be destined to transform themselves into radical forms. Rather than deterring Central Asian Muslims from turning to “unofficial” brands of Islam, state repression could have an opposite effect – strengthening the resolve of the most determined individuals and pushing the moderates onto a dangerous path.

About the Author

Mariya Y. Omelicheva is an Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science at the University of Kansas.

E-mail: omeliche@ku.edu

Islam in Kyrgyzstan since 1991

by Alisher Khamidov

Abstract

Kyrgyzstan's religious liberalism of the early 1990s gave way to a rather repressive control since the political unrest in 2010. As a result of the political exclusion, Islamic radicalization is discernable among the Uzbek ethnic minority in southern Kyrgyzstan. The newly sanctified state-religion is to counter the radicalization.

Key words: Islam, Kyrgyzstan, Religious Politics, Radicalism, Uzbek Minority

Country background

Kyrgyzstan, a mountainous and predominantly Muslim country,¹ gained independence in 1991. After two tumultuous decades in the post-Soviet period, the country experienced dramatic political unrest in 2010 that culminated a violent overthrow of government in April and interethnic violence in June. Six years after the political upheaval, the country has made remarkable progress. In the political domain, the parliamentary system, adopted in June 2010, has grown in strength as coalition parties have exhibited the capacity to compromise with each other and resolve disputes relying on the current constitutional arrangements. In the security realm, the central government strengthened the ability of law enforcement agencies to maintain law and order, which prevented the recurrence of violence. In the economic sphere, fuelled by remittances from labour migrants in Russia, the country's economy grew between 2010 and 2014. In the international arena, Kyrgyzstan has deepened security and economic ties with its Central Asian neighbors as well as with Russia and China.

1 Kyrgyz Muslims are Sunni Muslims of Hanafi mazhab (school of Islamic jurisprudence).

Liberal approach toward religion in the early 1990s

After Kyrgyzstan gained independence in 1991, its citizens witnessed significant changes in the domain of religious practices. As the country's leadership pursued a liberal approach to religion, the number of mosques, *madrassahs*, and seminaries quadrupled in the early years of independence and various kinds of religious missionaries established a presence throughout the country.² Taking advantage of new political freedoms, various religious clerics became vocal and officially recognized voices in their communities, presiding over local efforts to reinstate the pre-Soviet role of religion in public life.³

Hardening of religious controls in the late 1990s

A series of events in the late 1990s and the ear-

2 According to statistics from the Kyrgyz State Agency for Religious Affairs, there were only 39 mosques in Kyrgyzstan in 1991. By the year 2015, their number reached 2,500. The number of unregistered mosques and associations is several times higher than official figures, according to estimates by independent scholars.

3 Interviews by author with Uzbek and Kyrgyz historians of Islam in Central Asia, Bishkek and Tashkent, 1999.

ly 2000s – the infiltration of South Kyrgyzstan by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) in 1999 and 2000, and a rise in the public visibility of Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT) – prompted the government to backtrack on religious liberalization and ushered in a tougher approach to dealing with religious radicalism. The hardening of government policy toward religion continued after the March 2005 Tulip Revolution. Kyrgyz security forces engaged in hundreds of search-and-seizure operations, arresting alleged HT members. In connection with the crackdown, the security forces carried out several controversial shootings of suspected Islamic militants, including a popular imam from South Kyrgyzstan. In 2009, the Kyrgyz Parliament passed a new law, imposing stricter rules on the registration of mosques and seminaries.⁴

The repressive state policies toward religious dissent had a number of effects. First, despite the government's strict controls, membership in banned groups continued to rise throughout the 2000s and early 2010s, prompting many experts to link the growing appeal of radical groups to weak governance, deep economic recession, and the spread of various social vices (including HIV).⁵ Second, faced with increasing state repression, many groups went underground and began using more secretive methods of recruitment, making it difficult for authorities to monitor them. Third, internal splits within underground groups emerged, leading to the formation of more extremist

4 In keeping with the law, registering a new mosque requires the signatures of 200 people, whereas the previous legislation required only 10. Clerics must also go through periodic exams to establish their theological/ideological reliability. The law also prohibited private religious tutoring, the unsanctioned distribution of religious materials and proselytizing. In addition, it banned mosques from admitting children.

5 International Crisis Group, "Women and Radicalisation in Kyrgyzstan," Report No. 1763 (September 2009).

and violent groups, some of which reportedly planned terrorist attacks.⁶

The nexus between political exclusion and religious radicalism

Political exclusion of ethnic minorities has been inter-linked with religious radicalism. Ethnic Uzbeks from South Kyrgyzstan reportedly predominate in banned religious groups such as HT, prompting some analysts to suggest that the rise in religious radicalism among Uzbeks is a response to political exclusion and ethnic discrimination. Throughout the 2000s, Uzbek leaders called for the expansion of political and civic rights for ethnic minorities. Political mobilization by Uzbek leaders was one of the catalysts of the June 2010 violence in South Kyrgyzstan.

Following the June 2010 inter-ethnic clashes in South Kyrgyzstan in which more than 400 people died, two trends have created a more permissive environment for religious radicalization among Uzbeks and other ethnic minority groups. The first trend is the continuing harassment of ethnic Uzbeks by ill-trained law enforcement agencies.

After the June 2010 interethnic violence, law enforcement agencies (staffed predominantly by ethnic Kyrgyz) raided Uzbek neighborhoods, arrested many residents for their alleged role in the unrest, and frequently extorted money for their release. Police actions not only alienated many Uzbeks from the state, but also affected commercial ties among ethnic groups and deprived a large number of residents of their economic livelihood.⁷ The

6 Naumkin, Vitaly, *Radical Islam in Central Asia: between Pen and Rifle*.

7 Human Rights Watch, "Where is Justice? Interethnic Violence in Southern Kyrgyzstan and its Aftermath",

second trend was a rise in ethnic nationalism as demonstrated by an increase in inflammatory nationalistic rhetoric in Kyrgyz-language press and in the number of chauvinistic vigilante groups targeting ethnic minorities. Disillusioned by brewing ethnic nationalism and the lack of state efforts to tame it, many residents, primarily ethnic Uzbeks, have reportedly turned to conservative Islamic values to find an escape and purpose in life.⁸

Recent trend: the rising ideological appeal of global radical groups

Recent studies indicate that a growing number of practicing Muslims in Kyrgyzstan believe that they are part of an *Umma*, or global Muslim community. This change in people's consciousness is believed to have been caused by two developments. First, over the past two decades, Kyrgyz citizens have come into frequent contact with representatives of many foreign religious charities that fund the construction of mosques and Islamic learning centers in different corners of the country. While a majority of these charities have a legal status, many others rely on informal means of channeling resources and proselytizing. Second, thousands of Kyrgyz citizens have forged connections with their co-religionists in Middle Eastern and South Asian countries during their travels abroad as religious pilgrims and proselytizers.⁹

The political turmoil in the Middle East in 2011 and the formation of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has attracted im-

mense attention from Kyrgyz Muslims in recent years. Utilizing sophisticated digital platforms and employing an extensive network of recruiters, the ISIS and other rebel groups in the Middle East have been making appeals to the global identity of Kyrgyz Muslims and reaching out to socially marginalized and disenfranchised groups in Kyrgyzstan. These recruitment campaigns are designed to persuade Kyrgyz Muslims that they must not be indifferent to injustices against Muslims in other parts of the world, including in Syria.

State response to rising religious radicalism

By 2016, the Kyrgyz government officially banned 20 religious organizations, 14 of which are considered terrorist or extremist in nature. The number of registered extremist offenses such as the distribution of banned publications and plotting terrorist attacks increased threefold between 2010 and 2015.¹⁰ Approximately 500 Kyrgyz citizens, primarily from the southern regions, have reportedly joined rebel groups in Syria. Religious radicalism is present not just in the south, but also in other parts of the country. According to government data, various *salafi* and *takfirist* groups, which openly reject the secular order, have established a presence in the northern provinces, engaging in extensive proselytizing among various layers of society, including Russian-

August 16, 2010.

⁸ International Crisis Group, "Kyrgyzstan: Widening Ethnic Divisions in the South," March 29, 2012.

⁹ Approximately 4 thousand Kyrgyz citizens make annual Hajj pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia.

¹⁰ Presentation by Emil Jenebekov, Head of Department on the Analysis of Religious Situation, 10th Directorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, at the OSCE/ODIHR National Roundtable on Freedom of Religion, Bishkek, 3 February, 2015. A late September 2016 attack against the Chinese Embassy in Bishkek, which was allegedly carried out by terrorists with ties to rebel groups in Syria, underscored the potential for violent extremism.

speaking communities.¹¹

Alarmed by an increase in the number of Kyrgyz nationals departing for Syria, Kyrgyz authorities have taken a series of measures to counter radicalization. Recognizing the link between flawed law enforcement and radicalization, the authorities are working to reform the judiciary and law enforcement agencies. Responding to the exclusion of ethnic minorities, the State Agency for Local Government and Ethnic Relations coordinates state policy to include ethnic minority groups more fully into governance structures. In 2014, Kyrgyz authorities also adopted a blueprint on state policy in the religious sphere that outlined a series of measures to reduce religious radicalization through community outreach and

support of state-sanctioned religious education. The 2013-2017 National Strategy for Sustainable Development also attaches special importance to the religious affairs. The State Commission on Religious Affairs and its newly established Centre for Religious Studies are expected to take an active role in this area.

About the Author

Alisher Khamidov, Ph.D., is a Newton International Fellow at the University of New Castle in Great Britain, and an international consultant for the World Bank, and for EurasiaNet.

E-mail: akhamido@hotmail.com

11 In November 2015, Kadyr Malikov, a prominent theologian and a staunch critic of the ISIS and other radical groups, was attacked by two young men who were later identified as ISIS followers by Kyrgyz law enforcement agencies. "ISIS followers who attacked religious expert Kadyr Malikov detained in Turkey: police," AkiPress, November 11, 2015, <http://akipress.com/news:569212/>.

Delectation or Hegemony: Turkey's Religious Actors in South Eastern Europe and Central Asia

by Ahmet Erdi Öztürk

Abstract

Under the AKP Government, Turkey sought to increase its influence in South Eastern Europe and Central Asia by emphasizing historic, religious, and kinship ties. The Diyanet, the Turkish Presidency for Religious Affairs, is a key player in this process. There are Muslims in South-Eastern Europe and Central Asia who welcome the support of the Diyanet. Others, however, resist the strong interference of Turkish religious actors.

Key words: Diyanet, Turkey, AKP, Gülen Movement, Islam.

In the last month of 2016, Turkey's highly contradictory state apparatus, the *Diyanet* (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı* – Presidency of Religious Affairs) improved its standing among some European countries by refusing to work as an intelligence service of Turkey. The December 8th issue of the daily newspaper *Cumhuriyet* revealed that the *Diyanet* has gathered intelligence from imams from 38 countries on the activities of suspected followers of the U.S.-based Islamic preacher Fethullah Gülen¹, especially after July 15th, 2016. This constitutes one of the biggest milestones of contemporary Turkish history, but has not been sufficiently discussed in all its aspects.

Without exaggeration, the night of July 15th, 2016 was one of the most remarkable moments in contemporary Turkish political life. To best public knowledge, a medium-sized group of flag officers of Turkey's army attempted a coup d'état primarily against the President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the ruling AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* – Justice and Development Party) government, but it was prevented by efforts of the government and Turkish citizens.² Indeed, it was a trau-

matic attempt for a country which had suffered periods of military tutelage and a number of different types of military regimes. It also must be noted that approximately 300 people lost their lives. Notwithstanding, many things are still ambiguous regarding the coup attempt and most of the statements of the coup plotters are discordant. President Erdoğan and thus almost all the other political actors and a vast majority of Turkish society prematurely came to an agreement about its instigator: Fethullah Gülen and his Gülen movement.³ Even though a special investigation commission was established under the umbrella of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, it dispersed without giving any clue regarding the political, financial and social support of the coup organizers.

The Gülen Movement is not a new issue for Turkey and globally. The Gülen Movement is a network organised around the ideas

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2016/07/turkey-coup-attempt-happened-night-160721132018415.html> (last accessed on 18 December 2016).

³ Gülen Movement, Gülen Community, Voluntary Movement and the Hizmet are among different names given to this group in various settings. Although the movement itself prefers to call itself the Hizmet Movement and Turkey calls them FETÖ (Fethullah Gülenist Terrorist Organisation); in this study I prefer to use the term "the Gülen Movement" to respect academic principles and to protect individual objectivity.

¹ Diyanet MİT gibi [The Diyanet is like an intelligence service of Turkey] http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/641909/Diyanet_MiT_gibi.html (last accessed on 9 December 2016).

² Turkey coup attempt: What happened that night?

of the preacher Fethullah Gülen, who is the indisputable moral and ideational vanguard of the movement. On the one hand, the Gülen Movement has a contemporary Islamic core with transnational activity mechanisms on education, inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue and philanthropy. On the other hand, it is very well-known that the Gülen Movement is a sort of para-political network organisation which has been gradually ganging up on the Turkish state apparatus since 1970s. It has been wrongly assumed that the AKP and the Gülen Movement established a political alliance from the beginning of the AKP's political journey since late 2013. However, this is a misperception, as these structures had entirely different political origins and orientations. These two different structures have not cooperated with each other, with the exception of a five-year period during the first term (2002-2007) of the AKP. However, while securing its power the AKP identified some mutual interests and used the movement's qualified and educated human capital. Gülen infiltrated the state, especially the structural apparatuses such as intelligence, police and jurisdiction, without needing to be directly involved in politics. In other words, the Gülen Movement supported the AKP by using its intellectual platforms, the media, and public figures. Meanwhile, through the AKP government, members of the Gülen Movement have managed to reach top positions in the state bureaucracy.

Although this coherent coalition seemed to last for a long time, the relationship worsened after 2010. The biggest tension began with the 17 December and 25 December 2013 corruption investigations that involved Erdoğan and some ministers in the cabinet. According to Erdoğan, the Gülen Movement was actually trying to carry out a civil *coup*

d'état through these judicial investigations. It is known that many Gülen Movement volunteers had been holding important positions in the state bureaucracy. After the corruption investigations Erdoğan claimed that the Gülen Movement was not a civil society organization, but an illegal one that was working against the elected government and the state. Thus, Erdoğan started to establish judicial policies against both Fethullah Gülen and the movement's voluntary activities, including schools, intellectual platforms and charity organisations. Print and social media characterized the government's actions as a witch-hunt against the Gülen Movement. Yet after the coup attempt Erdoğan signed the Movement's 'death warrant' and during this period the *Diyanet* started to play an important role as an ideological state apparatus, both inside and outside Turkey.

Regarding the coup attempt, the *Diyanet* stated that it gathered intelligence and prepared reports on Gülenists in many countries including Albania, Austria (two reports from Salzburg and Vienna), Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Kosovo, Macedonia, Romania, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. Photos of individuals allegedly linked to the Gülen Movement were also included in some of the *Diyanet's* files. Gülen-linked schools, businesses, foundations, associations and media outlets were also included in the 50 reports prepared from the intelligence gathered from mosque officials, religious coordinators and religious services counsellors.⁴ Furthermore, concerning with the *Diyanet's* 'intelligence' ac-

4 *Diyanet* gathers intelligence on suspected Gülenists via imams in 38 countries, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/diyanet-gathers-intelligence-on-suspected-gulenists-via-imams-in-38-countries.aspx?pageID=517&nID=107028&NewsCatID=341> (last accessed on 18 December 2016).

tivities, authorities in Belgium⁵, Holland⁶ and Germany⁷ have been planning take legal and political action since the coup attempt.

Under these circumstances, it is very clear that Turkey's legal religious state apparatus, the *Diyanet* and other Turkey originated transnational faith based communities have been scrutinizing in academic areas with different perspectives. Furthermore, issues related to South Eastern Europe and Central Asia involve additional dimensions and concepts such as foreign policy, kin, hegemony and power and their intertwinement with religion. Yet to understand Turkey's activities to instrumentalise religion in South Eastern Europe and Central Asia since the beginning of 2000's, its esoteric approach to religion and its dependent variables should be scrutinized.

In this regard, this relatively short article proceeds as follows. It begins with a brief discussion of Turkey's understanding of secularism and the *Diyanet*. It then describes Turkish foreign policy and the role of Islam, the *Diyanet* and other religious actors under AKP rule. Finally, it will explain Turkey's influence, with all its religious actors, in South Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

5 See for related news <http://gazetekuzey.be/diyanetin-feto-mektubu-belcikayi-karistirdi/> (last accessed on 18 December 2016).

6 See for related news <https://tr.sputniknews.com/avrupa/201612141026311489-hollanda-turk-ankara-feto/> (last accessed on 18 December 2016).

7 In the case of Germany, the issue is related to subsidiary organ of the *Diyanet*; Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Türk İslam Birliği-DİTİB*), <http://t24.com.tr/haber/diyanet-isleri-turk-islam-birligine-alman-yesillerden-suc-duyurusu,377559> (last accessed on 17 December 2016).

Turkey's choice of '*laiklik*': The management of religion through imposition by the *Diyanet*

Turkey's historical journey has been idiosyncratic, and the impact of that historical development remains salient today in almost every dimension of social and political life. This is especially true of religion, which has remained a highly ideologically-charged and vexed issue and for which a broad consensus within society has failed to materialise. Turkey has officially been a secular (*laik*) state since 1937. *Laiklik* was the concept selected by Turkey's Republican elite in all statutes and other legal regulations which shape its core today. *Laiklik* itself has never had one single, unambiguous interpretation in Turkey, but in general it is widely understood that it reflects a perception that the state should not be totally blind to religious issues, but also should never favour one particular religion over another. At first sight, this would lead us to assume the existence of a distinct separation of religion and state since this time. Nevertheless, it is clear that in reality the situation is much less clear cut. In fact, the particular structure and function of the *Diyanet* as a legally secular administrative structure within the Turkish state responsible for religious affairs is instructive.⁸ The incorporation of the *Diyanet* within the Turkish state does not indicate a *separation* of religion and state, but an attempt at *hegemonic management* of religion by the state for the purpose of not only limiting its influence and pertinence within the public sphere, but for pacifying it more generally.

The *Diyanet* was thus established in the new Republic as a multi-functional poli-

8 Gözaydın, İstar: . *Diyanet*. [the *Diyanet*]. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları 2009.

tical instrument and apparatus aimed at instrumentalising religion through state action. It was established in March 1924 in the wake of the abolition of the Ottoman caliphate and its associated institutions, including the *Şer'iye Vekaleti* (Ministry of Religious Affairs) and the Evkaf (Pious Foundations). The new Republican elite established the *Diyanet* in a deliberate fashion, so as to resolutely signal ideological commitments. First, the new administrative unit's legal status was grounded in the authority of the state, signalling that religion was now *de jure* subordinate to the sovereign secular Turkish state. Secondly, administratively speaking the new arrangements were a clear bureaucratic downgrade (from the ministerial level) in religious administration, while at the same time the *Diyanet* was the only such unit placed directly under the control of the prime minister.

Regarding the *Diyanet* and Turkey's 'religion policy', several alterations became apparent in the course of time. The first significant shift came in the 1960s. Under the provisions of the 1961 constitution, Turkey was mandated to provide special legislation to recast the ideological work of the *Diyanet*, particularly in terms of a new mission to 'enlighten' society about the proper conduct of religion and the moral aspects of the Islam within a fundamentally rationalist-modern framework. Secondly, its position did not change, but its authority and duties were expanded in the 1982 constitution, which came into force after the 1980 coup d'état. The constitution gave the *Diyanet* the duty to carry out its mission within the framework of the principles of the Turkish understanding of secularism, but also added achieving national solidarity and integrity to the institution's remit. This development reflected the view of the 1980-1983

military junta that religion and nationalism should be merged (the so-called Turkish-Islamic Synthesis) in Turkey in order to prevent the emergence of radical discourses, particularly of the left, which had caused tremendous violence in Turkey in the 1960s and 1970s. The *Diyanet's* role was expanded to propagate the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis. Additionally, in the new order, the *Diyanet's* mission was expanded to include the promotion of Turkish Islam abroad, especially in countries with high Turkish immigrant populations such as South Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The last and the biggest shift of the *Diyanet's* position come into existence during the AKP period. Over the last decade its structure and activity have become increasingly synchronized with the policies of both Erdoğan and the AKP. Indeed, to an unprecedented extent, the *Diyanet* now contributes actively to the public discussion in Turkey on all manner of political and social affairs, but does so largely as a 'mouthpiece' of the ruling party. Furthermore, the *Diyanet* has been used as a foreign policy actor, mostly in South Eastern Europe and Central Asia which are focus areas of AKP's foreign policy.⁹

Turkish foreign policy during AKP rule: neo-realist, constructivist or sui generis?

The AKP established itself as the dominant electoral force in Turkey, becoming the first party in Turkey since 1957 to win more than three successive general elections and this aplomb has affected every single policy area. Nowhere is this truer than in the domain of

⁹ For a comprehensive study about *Diyanet* activities and discussions see; Öztürk, Ahmet Erdi: Turkey's *Diyanet* under AKP rule: from protector to imposer of state ideology?. In: *Southeast and Black Sea Studies* 4 (2016), 619-635.

Turkish foreign policy. Turkey's foreign policy has traditionally hued to a realist orientation centred on three enduring principles – westernization, a commitment to a stable international order, and strict adherence to law. The instrumentalisation of Turkish history, culture, and religion under the influence of Ahmet Davutoğlu¹⁰ and his foreign-policy doctrine of strategic depth have been the motive behind this shift. The novelty of Davutoğlu's perspective is the definition of Turkey as a state neither at the periphery of Europe nor at the periphery of the Middle East.

Instead Turkey sits (as it did in Ottoman times) prominently at the crossroads of the two continents, and is thus a pivotal centre mainly due to its unique geographical, historical, and cultural links with both regions. During the AKP period Turkey has shifted its foreign-policy identity by describing itself as the inheritor of a long-standing Ottoman cultural tradition and attempting to influence former Ottoman territories more actively. Moreover, many have observed a distinct soft power emphasis in this approach as Turkey has reached out culturally and economically in its relations with non-western states from Africa to Central Asia. Scholars working from the constructivist perspective in international relations theory attribute these changes in Turkish policy to a reformulation and a transformation of how the Turkish state defines its own identity internally and externally. Furthermore, it is possible to define this policy shift with a neo-realist approach and its 'national interest' under the normative capability.

In terms of religion and politics, one may argue that the influence of religion in do-

mestic and foreign politics is neither singular nor monolithic. Religion is a multifaceted phenomenon that has cross-cutting influences on all levels of politics and society including both domestic and foreign policies.¹¹ In this regard, Seul for example argues that almost none of the other repositories of cultural meaning have historically offered so much in response to the human need to develop and cultivate group identity.¹² In this regard, examples of the influence of religion on politics and international relations are numerous and thus, first of all, even if a political actors' and policy makers' worldviews are not completely religious, religion can still influence their decision-making. Secondly, religion influences the extent to which governments are authoritarian and democratic. Thirdly, there are many studies in the field of politics and international relations, which show that religion may be defined as a legitimacy structure of politics. More precisely, religion is one of the most powerful potential sources of legitimacy and also one of the oldest sources of it.

Religion-oriented structures occupy important an important position in political science, international relations and sociology. In this regard, the first component is related to states. A number of states clearly embrace religion as their national ideology or at least as an element of it. For instance, in a study of 177 states' religion policies between 1990 and 2008 Fox demonstrates that official support for a single religion is common practice. Forty-one states have official religions and an additional 44, while not declaring an official religion, support one religion more than others.¹³ Thus,

11 Sandal, Nukhet and Jonathan Fox. *Religion in International Theory*. Oxfordshire: Routledge, 12-30.

12 Seul, Jeffrey R. Ours is the way of god': Religion, identity, and intergroup conflict. In: *Journal of peace research* 36, no. 5 (1999), 553-569.

13 Fox, Jonathan. *An introduction to religion and politics*:

10 Ahmet Davutoğlu is a Turkish academic, politician, and former diplomat who served as Prime Minister of Turkey and leader of the AKP from August 2014 to May 2016.

nearly half of the world's states consider a single religion sufficiently important to single it out in official policy, at least on the domestic level. In this regard, one may claim that the relationship between state and religion is also state ideology in one way or another, which also has significant implications for international relations. It is possible to argue that, even if the country is secular or not, single and majoritarian religious identity and legitimacy would certainly be a more defining factor in political discourses, including those with regard to foreign policy.

At the risk of oversimplifying a complex and diverse theoretical tradition, it is true to say that realism generally perceives the world as a harsh and a dangerous place. Realist theory asserts that the condition of anarchy among states conditions them to pursue their individual interests competitively. Although realism has traditionally been the dominant paradigm in IR, since the end of the Cold War it has been the subject of intensifying critique from scholars working within the emerging constructivist paradigm. Constructivism, as a word, was employed by Nicholas Onuf and furthered as a theory by scholars like Alexander Wendt, Friedrich Kratochwil and Ted Hopf. The structural theory outlined in Kenneth Waltz's famous study, *Theory of International Politics*, has been a particular target of constructivist critique. Waltz argues that every single political and social system is composed of its own structure and interacting units. Waltz's theory is understood as 'structural' in the sense that it centers on the effects of the structure of the international system when it seeks to explain outcomes in international politics.¹⁴ Although states were arguably the

main agents in the early years of mainstream constructivism, the literature has since embraced a wide range of actors including non-state entities and transnational organisations. What distinguishes constructivism from other theoretical approaches to international relations is its emphasis on the construction of identities and interests of actors, rather than taking them as given. Furthermore, constructivists see international structure as shaped by norms, rules and law, in addition to material factors. In other words, stable meanings form structures and institutions.

Constructivist scholars challenge the capacity of realist precepts to explain the condition of the changing international system, especially after the Cold War. According to them, structural realism misses the point that intersubjectively shared ideas shape behaviour by constituting the identities and interests of international actors. Among different criticisms, Alexander Wendt has provided one of the most important. In his study, *Social Theory of International Relations*, he clarifies the central claims of the constructivist approach, presenting both a structural and an idealist framework that contrasts with the individualism and materialism that underpin much mainstream international relations theory. He builds a cultural theory of international politics that holds that the tendency of states to take on the social role of 'enemy', 'rival', or 'friend' under differing conditions of anarchy is central. Wendt emphasizes that the varying cultures of anarchy – Hobbesian, Lockean, and Kantian – will shape social role adoption in important ways. For Wendt, a Hobbesian culture of anarchy is the 'law of the jungle' and conditions states to adopt the social role of enemy in a war of all against all. Lockean anarchic culture, in contrast, promotes the ad-

Theory and practice. Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2013.

¹⁴ Waltz, Kenneth N. *Theory of international politics*. Waveland Press, 2010.

option of social roles of competitive rivalry. Finally, Wendt's concept of a Kantian culture of anarchy draws on Immanuel Kant's thesis of perpetual peace. Here, states are conditioned to see one another in a context of non-violent cooperation and mutual aid.¹⁵ In sum, these cultures of anarchy constitute intersubjective ideational structures for states that condition their interests and capabilities, and generate tendencies in the international system.

Theoretically speaking, this shift has drawn particular attention from constructivist scholars, who have observed that Turkish policy has increasingly come to reflect significant changes in how the Turkish state defines its own identity internally and externally. While some scholars have understood cultural and identity impacts in very broad terms, others have a more narrow focus, highlighting shifts in the way Turkish national security is defined and perceived. Bahar Rumelili analyses the identity dimensions of EU-Turkey relations from a constructivist perspective by focusing on how processes of reconstruction and negotiation have brought about change in Turkish politics and society.¹⁶ Some of the others read the AKP period in constructivist terms by referring to the socializing impact of increasing economic and cultural relations with Western countries. Therefore, it is very much possible to examine the transformation of Turkish foreign policy in the AKP era through the lens of a constructivist Kantian culture of anarchy in international society, focusing on Davutoğlu's doctrine of strategic depth as a central pillar.

On the one hand, Davutoğlu's foreign

policy approach seems to have a coherent and systematic theoretical background. On the other hand, it can be conceived to be problematic for the countries of the region. Turkey has been trying to be a pro-active actor in the countries of the region via soft power by using and instrumentalising its state apparatuses and some civil society organisations in order to have an impact on these countries. This new methodology where Turkey has been trying to be an active player may easily annoy countries in terms of hegemony and sphere of influence. The crux of this matter is that the host country may find one outside actor between itself and its citizens as a source of problematic situations. In this respect, Turkey has been supporting many projects such as the renovation of the Ottoman buildings, the cataloguing of Turkish manuscripts in libraries and conducting public courses on Islamic teachings under the image of a protector of the Muslim communities in different regions. Yet it is fair to say that Davutoğlu's and therefore the AKP's foreign policy approach has both a neo-realist and constructivist dimension that makes it *sui generis*. This *sui generis* structure comes from its instrumentalisation of history, culture, kin and especially religion to establish overarching and hegemonic influence in some territories such as South Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

Turkey's outreach to South Eastern Europe and Central Asia

According to Davutoğlu, Islamic and Western paradigms are incompatible because they are based on an opposite relationship between God and humans. Islamic culture and religion are based on an ontological hierarchy, where-

¹⁵ Wendt, Alexander. „Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics“. In: *International organization* 46, no. 02 (1992), 391-425.

¹⁶ Rumelili, Bahar. Liminality and perpetuation of conflicts: Turkish-Greek relations in the context of community-building by the EU. In *European Journal of International Relations* 9, no. 2 (2003), 213-248.

as Western culture is based on ontological proximity. This means that the conflicts and contrasts between Islamic and Western political thought originate mainly from philosophical, historical and methodological differences. Moreover, he defines Turkey as a central country with multiple regional identities that cannot be reduced to one unified category. According to him, in terms of Turkey's sphere of economic, historical, cultural and religious influence, it is a Middle Eastern, Balkan, Caucasian, Central Asian, Caspian, Mediterranean, Gulf and Black Sea country all at the same time.¹⁷ In this regard, with the impact of Davutoğlu's foreign policy approach, Turkey's relations with South Eastern Europe and Central Asian countries exhibit not only Turkey's approach to strategic, economic and socio-cultural issues, but also the effects of its on-going political, economic and social transformation on foreign policy. Moreover, Davutoğlu complained that Turkey's previous governments' secularist sensitivities and fears have prevented Turkey from engaging in a stronger relationship with the Muslims in South Eastern Europe and Central Asia and hence from utilising a significant socio-cultural resource. These comments and policies show that religion and religious actors have taken a prominent position in Turkey's foreign affairs since Davutoğlu became an important decision-maker.

In this regard, Turkey's religious state apparatus the *Diyanet* has been playing a multidimensional and active role in both South Eastern Europe and Central Asia. For instance, according to Yıldırım Kaplan, Head of the Department of Publications in Foreign Languages and Dialects at the Presidency of Religious Affairs, one of the more prominent

functions of the *Diyanet* is to provide true and healthy Islamic sources to their Muslim brothers, including publishing not only the Quran, but also other relevant resources. According to Kaplan, the near loss of religious awareness among South Eastern European and Central Asian Muslims' during the Yugoslav and the Soviet periods is one of the fundamental reasons why Turkey as a Muslim brother sees its duty in enhancing the religious knowledge of South Eastern European and Asian Muslims.¹⁸

However, some of the Turkish officials especially in South Eastern Europe reveal quite different perspectives regarding to the *Diyanet's* activities in the region. According to them, Turkey has been trying to teach religion to them and this conduct has attracted various reactions from the regional representatives. First of all, the authorities of South Eastern European countries perceive the activities of the *Diyanet* as an intervention of Turkey's by instrumentalising religion and thus they see the *Diyanet* as a Trojan horse. Secondly, according to a Turkish Foreign Ministry representative in South Eastern Europe, some of South Eastern European Muslim community leaders have become restive due to the *Diyanet's* wise-acre moves towards them.¹⁹ Likewise, Hasan Makiç, Bilhaç Müfti, declared that although it is perfectly acceptable that the Turkish *Diyanet* provides support to their religious brothers in some issues, they should also be aware that South Eastern European Muslims are totally independent and only Islam and no other agency should be obeyed.²⁰ Furthermore, the

17 Davutoğlu, Ahmet: Turkey's foreign policy vision: An assessment of 2007. In: *Insight Turkey* 10 (2008), 77-96.

18 Information based on an interview with Yıldırım Kaplan. Interview was conducted by the author on January 26, 2016.

19 Information based on an interview with two anonymous Turkish Foreign Ministry officials. Interview was conducted by the author on May 5, 2016.

20 Information based on an interview with Hasan Makiç, Bilhaç Müfti in Sarajevo. The interview was conducted

situation in Central Asia is almost the same. In this regard, Turkey has been trying to implement a sanctimonious foreign policy by instrumentalising the *Diyanet* and a religion-based historical kin policy. Although according to Ankara similar policies have had the same 'positive' results, this is very much open for a discussion. It should be noted that the *Diyanet* constructed and renovated many mosques in Azerbaijan, Kirgizstan and Kazakhstan.²¹ At this point, it should also be mentioned that Turkey and its *Diyanet* are mostly active in Turkic countries of Central Asia because they could not establish a comprehensive policy in other countries due to the lack of kin and common religion.

Additionally, in order for the *Diyanet* to provide any services in South Eastern Europe and Central Asia, legal procedures initially require the official and registered Muslim entities, communities and groups or/and Turkish citizens thereof to send an official registration statement which should explain the demand clearly. Thus only then may the *Diyanet* take action via its representatives and other institutions such as the *Diyanet* Foundation (TDV).²² Nevertheless, if the *Diyanet* determines that it is being deprived of certain activities, it may suggest conducting only some activities, but this procedure is very exceptional. In any case, it appears that as soon as the *Diyanet* enters a country in South Eastern Europe and Central Asia in one way or the other, the officials of the *Diyanet* start to establish relations with both Muslim entities and other groups by

using Turkey's main foreign policy strategies. In this respect, they use a language which refers to the Ottoman past, kin policies and the common ground of Islam. In this regard, since 1995 and intensively since 2007, the *Diyanet* has been organizing meetings of the Eurasian Islam Council (Avrasya İslam Şurası) in order to bring different Muslim entities together and establish communications among them. At these meetings, discussions on Islamic practices, educational activities, regional problems of religion are carried out on the *Diyanet's* invitation. Cooperation among the groups and countries, new perspectives and Islamophobia are among the most frequently discussed issues at these annual meetings. Finally, one group other than the *Diyanet* is also very much involved and active in South Eastern Europe and Central Asia: the Gülen Movement with education, dialogue and religion based institutions. Despite the Gülen Movement and the AKP government, all state apparatuses including the *Diyanet* worked together. Since the severe tensions began in the end of 2013 it has been a huge question mark how they may affect each other's activities.

Concluding Remarks

As noted before, Turkey's religion, kin and history-based foreign policy during the AKP period was reflected in Davutoğlu's determination and cooperation between the Gülen Movement and the AKP government. However, the circumstances have been changing since late 2013. First of all, the 'frustrated divorce' with the Gülen Movement, secondly the AKP and Davutoğlu's resignation from the Prime Ministry and the bloody coup attempt in 2016 significantly changed many things

ted by the author on May 7, 2015.

21 Gümüş, Burak: *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı'nın Orta Asya'daki Faaliyetleri* [Activities of the Diyanet in Central Asia]. In: *Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Dergisi* 2 (2010), 1-11.

22 For a comprehensive study about the activities of the Diyanet and related institutions especially in South Eastern Europe see; Öktem, Kerem: *Global Diyanet and multiple networks: Turkey's new presence in the Balkans*.

in Turkey's political atmosphere. On the one hand, it is obvious that these situations could change most of the dynamic of Turkey's foreign policy towards South Eastern Europe and Central Asia. On the other hand, it is possible to argue that Turkey will continue to put Islam on the table while establishing relations with these two important regions.

At this point, it is important to pay attention to Ayşe Sözen Usluer, the head of the Presidency's Foreign Relations Department, to estimate the future policy. According to Usluer, Turkey has become more operational since the failed coup attempt by applying both hard-power and soft-power approaches. In the new era, AK Party's foreign policies are more rational and operational, particularly with regard to its relations with individual states. This signals a shift toward neo-realism, which proposes hardliner policies in terms of security

and interests, thus taking value-based policies out of the game. Yet, Turkey's neo-realist policies do not entirely downplay the importance of values in international relations; rather, Turkey attempts to provide equilibrium to international order by playing the realist card.²³ Thus, one can only take a simple "wait and see" approach at this point whether Islam is a value or a realistic tool for the AKP's Turkey in South Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

About the Author

Ahmet Erdi Öztürk is a research assistant at the department for political science at the University of Strasbourg, and a correspondent for the EUREL-Project (EUrope-RELigion).

E-mai: aerdiozturk@gmail.com

²³ For a comprehensive study about the activities of the Diyanet and related institutions especially in South Eastern Europe see; Öktem, Kerem: *Global Diyanet and multiple networks: Turkey's new presence in the Balkans*.

Turkey's role in Bosnia and Herzegovina

by Dino Mujadžević

Abstract

The legacy of the Ottoman Empire is still evident in Bosnia-Herzegovina and all through the Balkans, and continues to play an important role in Muslim societies. Under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the AKP instrumentalizes the Ottoman legacy to strengthen its foreign policy, as is evident in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Economic means and developmental aid are, however, secondary, compared to the cultural and educational influence Turkey exerts in the region. The schisms between the Gülen movement and the AKP are also felt in the region.

Key words: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkey, Southeastern Europe, Contemporary History, Foreign Policy

Contemporary Turco-Bosnian relations have been fundamentally shaped by the Ottoman rule in Bosnia of the mid-15th century until 1878. This influenced the country's character in various ways, most visibly by establishing an enduring large Muslim demographic presence. After the Ottoman withdrawal, including during the socialist period, references to Ottoman history have officially and unofficially remained an important cornerstone of the ethno-political ideologies to which Bosnian Muslims adhered while elements of Ottoman culture have continued to impact their language and daily life. Bosnian Islamic religious praxis and thought have continued to function within the coordinates of the Ottoman version of Islam. This has contributed largely to the fact that the contemporary advocacy of Turkish foreign policy and Turkey itself in Bosnia largely functions on the basis of the exploitation of references to the Ottoman historical period or the surviving Ottoman heritage in that country or Turkey. This nurtures a widespread sense of connection with contemporary Turkey, especially those forces in Turkish politics that seek legitimation and inspiration in the Ottoman era.

The fall of the socialist regime in Yu-

goslavia around 1990 not only enabled the sudden revival of Islamic religious life in Bosnia, but also facilitated comprehensive changes in attitudes among Bosnian Muslims towards its past. Most prominently, ties with the Ottoman past started to be re-discovered in this context by political, academic and religious actors for the purpose of building the post-communist ethno-cultural identity of Bosnian Muslims. Approximately at the same time the gradual relaxation of the Kemalist grip over society during the 1990s and 2000s led, from the Turkish perspective, to a similar process, that of the large-scale discovery of the very same Ottoman heritage in Bosnia and other parts of the Balkans. The Bosnian war during the period 1992-1995 provided an opportunity for the actors from Bosnia and Turkey, mostly belonging to conservative Islamic socio-cultural spectrum; the various actors promoting Turco-Bosnian relations in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2000-10s were united by a special kind of affective bond, a common discourse consisting of attitudes towards conservative Islam in general, Ottoman history and Turco-Bosnian relations. The Turkish conservative scene in particular profited from the situation by creating and using the narrative of an endangered ex-

Ottoman Muslim population in Bosnia, threatened with extinction, for the plight of which Kemalist Turkey had no concern. Its only true supporters were supposedly the conservative Turks, who insisted on providing assistance to the endangered Muslim communities related to Turkey on the basis of Islamic and Ottoman cultural solidarity. By the end of the 20th century, the Turkish conservative scene came to encompass a large, possibly the largest, part of Turkish society and it came to dominate Turkey politically after the AKP came to power in 2002. Under AKP rule, the topic of Bosnia – as well as the Balkans in general – emerged as an important topic for those Turkish discourses on foreign policy that championed the use of the Ottoman heritage as a foreign policy tool and stirred the interest of the Turkish public.

In Bosnia, the result of these renewed ties, especially since 2002, is the emergence of a loose policy network that includes persons and organizations from Turkey present in Bosnia and Herzegovina and domestic Bosnian Muslim pro-Turkish activists, mostly belonging to the Bosnian Muslim conservative scene. Conservative Muslims represent a significant societal group in Bosnia. A population with Muslim roots currently represents around 50% of the entire Bosnian population and approximately one third of them can be described as conservatives. According to the 2012 Pew Research report, 30% of Muslims from Bosnia attend mosque once per week (compared to 44% in Turkey) and 36% claim religion is very important in their life (compared to 67% in Turkey).

The so-called Neo-Ottomanism has been a very influential conceptualization of Turkish foreign policy introduced at the end of 2000s. Although the term Neo-Ottomanism has been in occasional use since the mid-1970s

and more commonly since the 1990s, it became widespread in 2009-10. The Turkish government does not endorse the use of this term. It indeed officially objects to its use as an allegedly anti-Turkish propaganda tool and has continued to insist that its foreign policy has been based upon liberal-democratic values, multiculturalism economic and national interests. According to proponents of the term, it describes in a sufficiently precise manner the content and origins of the discourse which is used to justify and support the new Turkish foreign policy orientation under the AKP, especially since 2009-10. Such authors define the trends associated with the concept of Neo-Ottomanism as a major shift from the previous Kemalist Turkish foreign and cultural policies in the Republic of Turkey. It is suggested that this new version of TFPD is based on the view of Ottoman history as developed by Turkish conservative intellectual elites. Although Turkey remained pro-Western in its overall foreign policy orientation and although it established very good relations and a strong economic presence in the predominantly Christian neighbouring countries of the Balkans, a parallel focus of its foreign policy has been on the Muslim communities in the Balkans - notably on the largely Muslim parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the ethnically related Muslim minorities in Serbia and Montenegro, as well as among Muslim Albanians in Albania, Macedonia and Kosovo. It also aims to establish Turkish presence in the Middle East, prominently by sponsoring the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and developing strong relations with countries like Qatar. All definitions that proposed the use of the concept of Neo-Ottomanism more or less agree that this discourse has pragmatic aims – to serve the goals of the Turkish government

and Turkish non-governmental actors as a means of legitimation and mobilization with the purpose of influencing the power relations in the former Ottoman territories where Turkish foreign policy is active. This includes establishing close alliances particularly with culturally related communities – in addition to the already existing strongholds in the ethnic Turkish and Turkmen communities and among Turkic peoples – as possible strongholds of Turkish influence. It is usually suggested that Neo-Ottomanism discursively justifies the increased presence and influence of Turkish governmental and non-governmental entities, that it aims at creating a friendly environment for them and that these entities are even its main actors. For example, the Turco-American political scientist Ömer Taşpınar defines Neo-Ottomanism as the predominant concept in the foreign policy circles in the Republic of Turkey under the AKP and as having the following characteristics: the embrace of the Muslim and the Ottoman heritage in Turkey and abroad, and using both to increase “soft” Turkish influence in formerly Ottoman territories; the simultaneous acceptance of “liberal secularism” and “multiculturalism”; openness to and cooperation with both Western and Islamic countries. Taşpınar sees this “flexible mind set” as a sign of political self-confidence, ambition and willingness to re-invent Turkey as a “pivotal state” or even as a “regional superpower” with “a very active diplomatic, political and economic role” in the wide region of which it is the “centre”. On the other hand, the American scholar Nicholas Danforth, while being very sceptical about Neo-Ottomanism insists that ... *the metaphor makes no sense ... misrepresents history in order to misunderstand the present ... [because it] implicitly links political Islam and Ottoman nostalgia to some vaguely de-*

finied anti-American, anti-European, pro-Muslim, or generally Middle East-oriented foreign policy.

Alternative conceptualizations of Turkish foreign policy since 2008-09, often coming from authors supportive of Turkey, include terms like “multilateralism” and “activism”.

The Turkish foreign affairs minister Ahmet Davutoğlu (2009-2014) has been seen by some as the most prominent ideologue of Neo-Ottomanism in foreign policy and is unanimously held to be the foremost champion of the use of the Ottoman heritage as a Turkish foreign policy tool. The coming years showed however that, considering the majority population of the Balkans is of Christian heritage, the ambitious vision of Turkish leadership in the Balkans proclaimed in Sarajevo had some lasting resonance only in the conservative parts of Muslim communities of that region.

Turkish state actors should be considered the main players in creating a discourse promoting Turkish foreign policy goals in the Bosnian public due to their financial capabilities. The main venue for their activity is the cultural and humanitarian field as well as their careful media framing and dissemination. Turkish state actors constitute the pillar of what is usually described as Turkish “soft power” in Bosnia and elsewhere. After the war in Bosnia ended in 1995, the Turkish government assisted the efforts to reconstruct Bosnia’s war-torn society and economy through diplomatic, military, humanitarian and developmental aid. Nevertheless, the direct Turkish financial assistance to Bosnia was relatively small. According to some estimates, around 20 million US Dollars in assistance were made available for various projects in Bosnia during the 1995-2002 period, most prominently one million for the reconstruction of the Mostar Old Bridge. The Turkish offer to make loans

to Bosnia was also refused by Bosnian government during this period. The period since the AKP came to power in 2002 has seen a dramatic surge of interest in Bosnia among Turkish state actors, which was reflected primarily in their increased spending and media presence. The support for a relatively large number of Bosnian students at Turkish universities since early 1990s through scholarships and dormitory placements is also one of the important aspects of the Turkish state's support for Bosnia. However, it is often not taken into account and there are few relevant data available.

Since 2002, the Bosnian branch of the Turkish Agency for Cooperation and Coordination (*Türk İşbirliği ve Kalkınma İdaresi Başkanlığı*, TİKA) has become the most visible Turkish governmental actor in Bosnia. This governmental agency with the aim of providing Turkish assistance internationally – during the 1990s usually in Central Asia – was founded in 1992 and since 1999 has been directly under charge of the Turkish PM. TİKA was active in Bosnia in delivering donations by Turkish companies as aid to the devastated country. According to the law of 2011, its duties are “to improve economic, commercial, technical, social, cultural and educational cooperation with developing countries by conducting projects ... to implement projects to eliminate prejudices about Turkey and to strengthen inter-communal dialogue among civilisations.” After the AKP came to power in Turkey in 2002, TİKA's activities focused on cultural projects and economic development in Bosnia visibly increased. For example, in 2012 alone Turkey allocated to Bosnia approx. 16 million Euros in official developmental aid through TİKA, which is a 5-fold increase of the assistance given in 1998. The Bosnian branch of TİKA had the third largest budget

of all TİKA branches worldwide. In the same year, the USA granted a mere 29 million euros, a 6-fold decrease since 1998! According to TİKA officials, in 2012 around 50-70% of its budget went to the renovation of the Ottoman architectural heritage, while the rest went mostly to smaller entrepreneurial and smaller infrastructure projects. From the very beginning the AKP government started developing official cultural ties in with Bosnia. A bilateral agreement on cultural cooperation, which provided for the opening of cultural centres, Bosnian centres in Turkey and Turkish centres in Bosnia, was signed by presidents Demirel and Alija Izetbegović in December 1999, but due to the stall in the bilateral relations it was realized only after the AKP came to power. The Turkish Cultural Centre (*Turski kulturni centar*) which was organisationally an arm of the Turkish Embassy but was housed in a separate building was opened finally in April 2003. This institution presented Turkish culture to the Bosnian public focusing on contemporary literature, painting, music, theatre and cinematography with more cosmopolitan features. Turkish cultural diplomacy in Bosnia and elsewhere took a conservative turn after PM Erdoğan in May 2007 established the government-funded and directed Yunus Emre Foundation (*Yunus Emre Vakfı*). Since 2009, this foundation has been the founder of Yunus Emre Institutes (*Yunus Emre Enstitüleri*) in foreign capitals and taken over the role of Turkish Cultural Centres active within diplomacy. The new institutes aim to ensure “that societies around the world will become better acquainted with Turkey from more accurate sources” through promotion of Turkish culture and Turkish language instruction. The Turkish Cultural Institute - Yunus Emre Institute (*Yunus Emre Institut – Turski kulturni cen-*

tar) in Sarajevo was opened in November 2009 by foreign affairs minister Davutoğlu and was the first outpost of the institute outside Turkey, which strengthened the impression that Bosnia was discursively extremely important for the Turkish AKP government.

The economic relations of Turkey with Bosnia seem to be of small importance for the Turkish economy and of moderate importance for the Bosnian economy. However, their development, especially with respect to Turkish investment, seems to be very high on the list of Turkish foreign policy priorities as well as an extremely important discursive line for its promoters and supporters, regardless whether Turkish or local in Bosnia, a country that suffered an economic cataclysm during the war and has continued to suffer from chronic and systemic economic problems in the 2000s and 2010s. The media and diplomatic attention, as noted by analysts, seems to distort the real proportions of these relations. For example, an analyst from the think-tank *Populari*, Alida Vračić, sums the perception of the Turkish investment in Bosnia as follows:

... as there is a long-lasting misconception regarding what they really are and what is the amount/significance of these investments. Economically, for Turkey, the western Balkans are insignificant. Within the region, high-profile investments in certain roads and airports give the impression of a huge amount of Turkish investment. In fact, with the exception of Albania and Kosovo, there has been much talk but far less cash. In spite of lots of sentimental rhetoric between the countries in the region, especially Bosnia and Turkey, Turkey doesn't rank in the top 10 countries when it comes to investment. The link that exists is totally unexploited. I am afraid that Bosniaks think it is enough to "share" Muslim brotherhood and the cash will

flow into the country, having no serious offers on the table, while Turks invest in other places.

Major investment projects in Bosnia by the economic actors from the Republic of Turkey include companies like *Natron Hayat Ltd. Maglaj*, *Şişecam Soda Lukavac*, and *Turkish Ziraat Bank Bosnia Sarajevo d.d.* with more than 8 thousand employed persons in 2013.

Bosnian Muslim conservative (and ethno-nationalist) politics is dominated by *Stranka demokratske akcije* (the Party of Democratic Action; SDA), which is without a doubt one of the most important supporters of the pro-Turkish activism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Other smaller groups and personalities also belong to the Bosnian conservative political scene but their impact is rather limited. This party has generally stressed the Bosnian perspective, interests and experience in the rapprochement between the countries, in contrast to actors financed directly from Turkey, who are entirely discursively dependent on the Turkish perspective.

The ICBH, with its array of activities and institutions (mosques, masjids, pious foundations, schools, faculties, research institutes, halal certification centres, news agency and so on) is one of the most important players in the contemporary rapprochement between Bosnia and Herzegovina – i.e. its Muslim part – and the AKP-ruled Turkey. The ICBH's historical roots in Ottoman state-controlled Islam and the Ottoman-mediated cultural and spiritual heritage of Bosnian Muslims are the main reason for this tendency, which have contributed to the ease of communication among the various actors within the ICBH and the conservative scene in Turkey. Today its main Turkish partners in building firm relations are TİKA with its investment in Ottoman architec-

ture, which prominently includes the religious infrastructure, and the Turkish state directorate for religious affairs, DİB, with which the ICBH has initiated cooperation, mostly in the area of education. The new AKP government, elected in 2002, committed itself very soon to establishing relations with the ICBH. On July 6th 2004 the DİB president Ali Bardakoglu and *reisul-ulema* Cerić signed in Ankara the memorandum of understanding between the DİB and the ICBH which declared that both organisations “would closely collaborate on questions of the interpretation of Islam on the basis of the common experience and tradition”. After 2009, the cordial relations between the Cerić-led ICBH and the Turkish authorities deteriorated, although never completely. The Bosnian side resented the attempts by the DİB and Turkish foreign policy to gain control in internal questions of Muslim communities in Serbia and Montenegro and even Bosnia, which was, according to some analysts, part of the AKP government’s wish to coordinate Muslim communities in the Balkans. Under Husein Kavazović, the new *reisul-ulema* elected in 2012, the ICBH leadership visibly improved relationships with the Turkish government.

The Fethullah Gülen movement, also known as the *Hizmet* (service) movement, appeared in Bosnia during the 1992-95 war as a part of its humanitarian and educational activities, which also aimed to build the public profile of the movement within the Turkish conservative scene. During the 1990s Gülen’s representatives from Turkey managed to set up a nucleus of an informal network of Bosnian activists, financiers and supporters who accepted Gülen’s writings as inspiration and followed the same organisational principles. While several foundations and NGOs were es-

tablished as a public platform of activities, the flexible network has been, as in Turkey, the basis for all the activities of the movement which does not exist as a distinctive legal entity. The educational activities of the *Hizmet* in Bosnia - publicly the most visible activity that can be associated with the movement - are financed and co-ordinated by the private foundation *Bosna Sema Obrazovne Institucije* (Bosna Sema Educational Institutions; BSEI), which was founded in 1998 with the aim of “assisting the educational system of Bosnia and Herzegovina” and “safeguarding the historical and cultural heritage” in that country. In 2015, the foundation operated 4 private kindergartens, 5 private primary schools and 7 private secondary schools, as well as the *Burç* (Constellation) University in Sarajevo, which was founded in 2008. The rift between the AKP and the Gülen movement at the end of 2013 led to a deterioration of relations between the ICBH and SDA, by that time strongly influenced by AKP foreign policy, and the Bosnian *Hizmet* which is seen by AKP-associated pro-Turkish activists as a branch of the centrally commanded Gülen organisation (in AKP parlance labelled “the parallel State”). Many personal contacts have been broken (e.g. the children of many ICBH personalities left *Hizmet* schools) and the movement became increasingly isolated in the Islamic scene in Bosnia.

The Turkish private educational institutions – the International University of Sarajevo (IUS) and *Burç* University as well as 13 primary and secondary schools established by the private foundations BSEI and SEDEF - represent the backbone of Turkish influence and pro-Turkish activism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to the *Novo vrijeme* newspaper, Turkish investors have invested “millions of euros” in opening Turkish uni-

versities and schools in the Bosnian capital Sarajevo and other towns and several thousands of students and teaching staff from Turkey and other countries also have also provided support for the sustaining and the development of Bosnian economy due to the long-term stays of foreign newcomers, the employment of local teaching and other staff as well as through the transfer of skills and experiences to the local population.

Ilidža near Sarajevo alone there are cur-

over 3,000 enrolled students from Turkey and Bosnia, as well as from other Balkan countries. At the two Turkish universities situated at the Middle East, Africa and Asia.

About the Author

Dino Mujadžević is a researcher in the humanities at the University of Lancaster.

E-mail: Dino.Mujadzevic@ruhr-uni-bochum.de

Serbia's Sandžak: Caught Between Two Islamic Communities

by Sandra King Savić

Abstract

At present, two Islamic communities compete for legitimacy in Serbia. The resulting difficulties are particularly evident on the Serbian side of the *Sandžak* region – home to a majority of the Muslim population of Serbia where religious and political leaders instrumentalize religious divisions to garner political support. A great majority of the population, meanwhile, seeks economic progress in the neglected region.

Key words: Islam, Serbia, Instrumentalization, Sandžak

Political Borders and the Creation of Regions

The *Sandžak* is a region that stretches from southwestern Serbia into northeastern Montenegro and a colloquially used term that symbolizes a common foundation among local Bosniaks. The region is, in other words, not a legal entity, but rather a mind-map that reflects the common history of local Bosniaks. As such, many locals identify as *Sandžaklije* even though Montenegro and Serbia split in 2006. Within the context of the institutional split that characterizes the Islamic community in Serbia, the mind-map and non-legal entity known as *Sandžak* illustrates the political, religious, and social consequences locals face as a result of the recurring territorial re-, and division. The existence of two Islamic Communities in Serbia must thus be understood from two perspectives. The first relates to the shifting borders, and the way in which the subsequent state destruction and reconstruction affected local Muslim communities. The second, and related factor is the question of trust regarding the legitimate representation of the Islamic community in Serbia.

Shifting Borders

With the occupation of Bosnia in 1878, the *Sandžak* also came under the auspices of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In 1908, Vienna returned *Sandžak* to the Sublime Porte, until Serbia and Montenegro recaptured and divided the *Sandžak* during the Balkan Wars of 1912/13. Between 1918 and 1929, the Serbian, Croatian, and Slovenian monarchy (KSHS) subsumed the *Sandžak* into the „province of Southern Serbia“. In 1941, the Axis powers attacked Yugoslavia and rewarded the southern region of *Sandžak* to the Kingdom of Albania – a satellite state of Italy. The *Sandžak's* legal character was since on the backburner so long as SFRY, and the subsequent Federation of Yugoslavia (FRY), existed.

The collapse of the Ottoman Empire not only heralded repeated modifications of regional borders, but also dictated that local Islamic communities reform accordingly. With the onset of the royal dictatorship in 1930, for instance, the Austro-Hungarian decree for religious autonomy stipulated a reorganization of the Islamic community. Within this structure, the KSHS leadership transferred the seat of the *reis-ul-ulema*¹ from Sarajevo to Belgrade, while

1 Supreme religious leader.

keeping both the *vakuf*² and *medžlis*³ in Skopje and Sarajevo. A new organizational structure was introduced following the formation of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), which, to a certain extent, reflected the federal structure of the newly created state. The seat of the Islamic community was now re-transferred to Sarajevo. With the onset of the Yugoslav Succession Wars, the organizational structure of the Islamic community disintegrated in tandem with the destruction of SFRY. Henceforth, Islamic Communities represented the Muslim *ummah*⁴ according to the newly established Yugoslav successor states. The question of legitimate representation in Serbia, however, was contentious from the outset.

Two Competing Islamic Communities in Serbia

Muslims on the Serbian side of the *Sandžak* region identify as Bosniaks, and as constituent members of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). Founded in 1993, the *mešihat* of the Islamic community in *Sandžak* represents this attitude with its institutional orientation toward the *rijaset* in Sarajevo, the highest religious and administrative body of the Islamic community of BiH. In 1994, mufti Hamdija Jusufspahić of Belgrade founded a new Islamic community to illustrate Serbia's institutional split from Sarajevo. Belgrade thus supported the

Islamic community of Serbia (Islamska zajednica Srbije, IZS) in view of territorial integrity. Three constituent *mešihats*⁵ represent the IZS, including the *mešihat* in Serbia, Preševo, and Novi Pazar. The *mešihat* of Novi Pazar is further affiliated with the madrassa in Prijepolje (Bakije-hanume), and Novi Pazar (Sinan Beg). In 2007, Adem Zilkić, a native of Tutin on the Serbian side of the *Sandžak* region, succeeded Jusufspahić as Reis-ul-ulema of the IZS. Zilkić, however, repeatedly faced accusations of being a fraud, and an alleged lackey of state security services until his final release from office in 2016. Sead Nasufović from Novi Pazar serves as the current Reis-ul-ulema of the IZS. In 1993, Mufti Muamar Zurković headed the *mešihat* in Novi Pazar with political backing from Sulejman Ugljanin, leader of the Democratic Action Party, SDA. In 2006, the *Mešihat* adopted a new constitution under its new name, the Islamic Community in Serbia (*Islamska zajednica u Srbiji*, IZuS) because of Belgrade's adoption of a law that recognized only "traditional" Islamic communities hereafter. Zurković was elected to lead the IZuS in the presence of Mustafa Cerić, then head of the Islamic Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The IZuS is subdivided into four muftiates, including Belgrade, Novi Sad, Preševo, and Novi Pazar. The muftiate in Novi Pazar is further connected to the International University of Novi Pazar.

Like Zilkić of the IZS, Zukorlić continually faced various accusations, including his alleged protection of local *vehabije* (wahabites), corruption and self-aggrandizement. In his position as mufti, Zukorlić repeatedly used his religious tenure for political purposes, which led to widespread antipathy against his person in Novi Pazar and beyond. Zukorlić

2 *Vakuf* is a modified word from the Arabic word *al-waqf*. The *waqf* (*khairi*) is a charitable trust that belongs to Allah. As such, it cannot be sold or used in a different capacity, except for the development of the Muslim community.

3 *Medžlis* is a modified word from the Arabic word *majlis*. Within this context, the word *medžlis* stands for Ulema council.

4 *Ummah* is an Arabic word, and means community.

5 Territorial, organizational units.

abdicated his office in 2014, and was succeeded by Mevlud Dudić. Dudić previously served as the dean of the International University of Novi Pazar that was founded by Zukorlić.

Fusing Political and Spiritual Interests: On the Heels of the Yugoslav Succession Wars

In light of the prewar barrage of propaganda and full-blown violence in BiH during the 1990s, a group of political actors strove for political and territorial autonomy for the *Sandžak* region. Though disparate in their views, they united behind Sulejman Ugljanin within the Stranka Demokratske Akcije (SDA) – an offshoot of Alija Izetbegović's party in Bosnia. Among Ugljanin's recurring rallying points was the creation of a special status for a common *Sandžak* – the unification of the Montenegrin and Serbian sides of the territory. In 1991, Ugljanin finally launched a referendum for autonomy within the umbrella organization of the Bosniak National Council of *Sandžak* (BNVS).⁶ A total of 70.2 percent of all 264,156 eligible voters turned out in support of autonomy, especially residents of Novi Pazar, Tutin and Sjenica.⁷ Belgrade meanwhile denied the validity of the memorandum and charged Ugljanin with violating the constitutional order of Serbia and terrorism. As a consequence, Ugljanin fled and found political asylum in Turkey.

An elder resident of Novi Pazar appreciated Ugljanin's political activism as a

necessary tool to ensure regional continuity: *We were sitting ducks here in Serbia. We thought it was our turn after Bosnia. We knew people were killed and harassed in BiH; just because they were Muslims. We saw what was happening over there. People fled Bosnia and came to Novi Pazar, and we took them in. But we were afraid of the authorities. So, in response to the extreme nationalism of Milošević, Drašković, Šešelj, and all those people, we created our own political platform to protect ourselves – because we thought they wanted our physical annihilation.*⁸ At the time, Ugljanin was recognized as a strong leader for the political movement of the Bosniak population in Sandžak. Ugljanin was not only a vociferous advocate for the rights of Sandžak Bosniaks, he also supported the creation of a separate Islamic Community that recognized the rijaset of Sarajevo as its spiritual center. Muamer Zukorlić became the first mufti of this new Islamic Community in 1993.

Locals understood the implications of the above move, though some considered the establishment of the second Islamic Community as a political strategy. A young interlocutor considered Ugljanin's support of the Islamic Community in Novi Pazar as a ploy. *Ugljanin supported the creation of this new Islamic Community because he had his own political interests. Those were not the interests of Muslim believers. It was a political decision because the other Islamic Community stood in unison against Sulejman Ugljanin. So, he literally created his own Islamic Community, and in turn this split amongst believers. But the Muslims are not divided in their beliefs. At least I don't think so. We believe in one god. I have only one gamija (mosque), I don't need a middleman. As a believer, I do not need a mufti to represent my needs before god. We don't have a pope or some patriarch we are supposed to rely on*

⁶ The assembly was registered as the Bosniak National Council of Sandžak (BNVS). Since 2003, the council is known as the Bosniak National Council.

⁷ For more information on the council, see: "Bošnjačko nacionalno vijeće Sandžaka 1991-2011". Sandzak News.com, 24. 12. 2011. <http://www.sandzaknews.com/kolumna/73-bosnjacko-nacionalno-vijece-sandzaka-1991-2011.html>

⁸ Interview held in Sandžak in June 2012

*for communication with god. No. This Community was set up with political goals in mind. But I must say the split is bad. We need a united Islamic Community. Just one.*⁹

In 1996, Ugljanin returned from Turkey a compromised politician. Once seen as a vocal advocate, he now seemed subdued compared to his former self. He no longer supported autonomy, let alone independence or unification with Bosnia. A number of locals considered him suspicious, based on his alleged collusion with Belgrade to split the local vote. Others, however, still perceive him as their legitimate political leader. At any rate, Rasim Ljajić, another politician from the SDA ranks, filled the political void during Ugljanin's absence. Disagreeing with Ugljanin's politics and course of action, Ljajić established the *Socijaldemokratska Partija Srbije* (SDP). Ljajić subsequently pursued a conciliatory course with Belgrade due to his conviction that cooperation would improve the standard of living in the *Sandžak* region. While some in the region disagree with Ljajić, others support his cooperation with Belgrade. *There is no other way out but collaboration with Belgrade. Both politicians, Sulejman Ugljanin and Rasim Ljajic realized they needed to cooperate with Belgrade if they wanted to improve the standard of living, the political, and the religious situation here in Sandžak. Both ministers tried to improve life here as best as they could.* Though their political and spiritual platforms and positions transformed over time, Ugljanin (SDA) and Ljajić (SDP), as well as the (now) former mufti Zukorlić remained high profile actors in the *Sandžak* region.

⁹ Interview held in Sandžak in June 2012.

The Montenegro-Serbia Split: Another Border is Drawn

Bosniaks in Montenegro were less suspicious of and looked toward Podgorica for political leadership. Besides breaking with the Milošević regime openly in the late 1990s, Milo Đukanović also included Bosniaks into the political fold.¹⁰ In 2006, a substantial majority of Bosniaks supported Podgorica's move for independence. Pro-independence sentiments were especially strong in Rožaje and Plav, though less so in Bjelo Polje. Berane and Pljevlja rejected Montenegrin independence by a small margin.

Both Ljajić and Ugljanin opposed the referendum at the time, though neither of them held substantial sway over the Montenegrin Bosniak population. The dream of a unified *Sandžak* was now over, a reality that sunk in quickly at the local level. *I think the idea of an autonomous Sandžak lost its support among the Bosniak population. Sandžak is already divided between Montenegro and Serbia, and I don't think that Bosniaks of Montenegro are even interested in merging with us to create an autonomous region. All that is left are five, maybe six municipalities... we would be very weak, economically speaking. Not to mention our infrastructure... Novi Pazar can only prosper within a larger community – even Serbia is too small. We are waiting to be part of the European Union. We need open borders, fewer borders, and not more of them.*¹¹ Many Bosniaks share his point of view and look to a future in which Serbia becomes a member of the European Union.

¹⁰ "Serbia's Sandžak: Still Forgotten". Europe Report No 162. International Crisis Group, April 8, 2005. 14.

¹¹ Interview held in Sandžak in June 2012.

United in Division

Both Islamic communities claim to represent all Muslims of Serbia, and disagreements reached a high point in 2007 when Zilkić demanded that Zukorlić relinquish his position as mufti. Believers who showed up in support of either Zukorlić or Zilkić, respectively, shot in the air and threw rocks and bricks at each other during the subsequent clashes.¹² Since this incident, the Bosniak population has become internally divided. And yet, local Bosniaks and/or Muslims abhorred these clashes and considered the growing fusion of religion and politics an obstacle to a constructive social, and political progress. *The rift between the two Islamic communities has influenced the political process negatively and had harmful consequences for the town. People have simply stopped talking to each other in a normal manner. The community is divided, even though they are all Bosniaks. It is bizarre, but I think this is perhaps the first time in history that Bosniaks and Serbs get along better than Bosniaks amongst one another.*¹³

Mufti Zukorlić has, much like Ugljanin, as many supporters as opponents. Supporters agree with the former Mufti's arguments regarding a lack of prospects in the region, higher unemployment among Bosniaks when compared to unemployment numbers of Serbs, the generally high unemployment in *Sandžak*, the violations of human rights, and Belgrade's failure to care for historic Islamic landmarks.¹⁴

12 "Sukob Ispred Džamije Altun-Alem". B92. November 16, 2012. http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2007&mm=11&dd=16&nav_category=11&nav_id=272509

13 Interview held in Novi Pazar June 2012.

14 "Zukorlić i vlast u Srbiji: Zidanjekrize". Radio Slobodna Evropa. February 17, 2013. http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/content/srbija_sandzak_zukorlic/2312758.html See also "Zukorlić: Autonomija Sandžaka nužna". Radio Slobodna Evropa. March 3, 2012. <http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/archive/news/20120320/500/500.html?id=24522257>

A recurring argument in support of the former mufti relates to local attitudes toward Belgrade. *Why has the government created a situation in which I feel like a second-class citizen? Why did the government allow for this mess to happen around here?*¹⁵ And yet, even those who agree with the former mufti's objections in general disagree with his attempted stranglehold on power. One interviewee explained that *Zukorlić was right about everything he said. But he went too far. He wanted to control everything, how we deal with the international community, the Novi Pazar rijaset, and now he wants to run for political office. He is like a dragon with four heads...it just does not work like that.*¹⁶

Religious and political opinion makers – including Zilkić, Zukorlić, and Ugljanin – still assume that all Bosniaks, too, are practicing Muslims, and vice versa. Former mufti Zukorlić, for instance, used to fly the Bosniak flag over his Islamic community despite there being Muslims of Roma and Albanian background in Southern Serbia. Yet it appears that Bosniak appointees internalized and further perpetuated the concept that Bosniaks approve of all legislation if promoted by and for Bosniak-Muslims. This explains the overtly religious overtones in the political process of the *Sandžak* area and indicates that local politicians and religious leaders emphasize the local Muslim identity to garner votes. The above quote, however, illustrates that religious and political leaders cannot assume that Bosniaks favor all proposals simply because they are couched in religious terms. Bosniaks of *Sandžak*, in other words, look for more sophisticated, and long-term solutions to the very specific shortcomings summarized above.

When you ask average citizens here about

<http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/archive/news/20120320/500/500.html?id=24522257>

15 Interview held in Novi Pazar June 2012.

16 Interview held in Novi Pazar June 2012.

the challenges they face in their daily lives, explained one lady in her late sixties, you will conclude their problems are tied to structural deficiencies, and only secondarily to their demands for minority rights. Her sentiments were echoed by a middle-aged man who argued for a re-evaluation of the negative narrative that defined the Sandžak since the Yugoslav Succession Wars. The entire Serbian media announces whatever Zukorlić comes up with. As if he is that important! But the government, the media, and the politicians all need him. This is some sort of continuance, an unofficial-official policy, and something that all governments have done since Milošević. And this is how it works; the government has one particular region where they can create controlled incidents. And, in Serbia, this is tied to the message that minorities create problems. As if the minorities are the problem. And I think of all minorities here, including the Hungarians, the Albanians, and us (Bosniaks). I mean, what is an average Serbian to think about Serbia's minorities when all he sees in the media are problems created by an allegedly problematic minority. The message then is this; if there were no minorities, there would be no problems. This is a continuous message that is sent via the media from the government to Serbia's citizens. Here we see again that citizens distrust the government in Belgrade. As such, the legitimate representation is very much tied to the governing body in Belgrade – a body that is yet viewed with great distrust among locals.

A young man in his late twenties stressed his desire for political and religious leaders to create some sort of order. I want the government to come down here to work on the infrastructure. I wish the media presented our problems in a different manner. That is what I really wish for. If the situation calmed down... if the Islamic community unified, to kind of... simply to

create some sort of order here. I wish for the election of neutral politicians.

Conclusion

The existence of two Islamic Communities in Serbia must be understood from the perspective of fluctuating border regimes and the way in which altering borders affect local communities. Questions of legitimacy and trust in the government are at the core of the divided Muslim community in Serbia. Both the IZS and IZuS purport to represent the entire Islamic community in Serbia and thus claim Islamic properties. The political leadership in Belgrade, in particular, supports the IZS with regard to Serbia's territorial integrity. The IZuS, by contrast, is oriented towards Sarajevo.

At the local level, disputes that surround the representation of the Islamic community in Serbia serve as a prism through which we understand that locals do not simply endorse decrees because they are couched in religious terms and/or in anti-Belgrade rhetoric. To the contrary, locals oppose the conflation of politics and religion, and seek European Union membership to escape the straightjacket of national boundaries and partisan policy makers.

About the Author

Sandra King-Savić is a research assistant at the University of St. Gallen, and executive director for the Center for Governance and Culture at the University of St. Gallen.

E-mail: sandra.king-savic@unisg.ch

Islam in Kosovo - the Current State of Affairs and the Way Ahead

by Xhabir Hamiti

Abstract

The traditionally moderate and tolerant interpretation of Islam dates back to the Ottoman Empire. Though extremist propaganda messages infiltrated Kosovo over the past 20 years, there are only isolated cases of radicalization in Kosovo.

Key words: Islam, Kosovo, Education, Religus Life, Propaganda

Islam is a monotheistic religion of global proportions, similar to Judaism and Christianity. The main monotheistic religions, originating from the lands of the East, grew and then spread worldwide. Kosovo Albanians, like other Balkans nations, became acquainted with Islam in the early 15th century, coinciding with the time the Ottoman Empire invaded the Balkan region which it ruled over until the early 20th century.

During the nearly 500- year Turkish-Ottoman presence, a large part of the Balkan nations converted to Islam. The Albanians, Bosniaks and the Pomaks in Bulgaria and Greece were some of the nations in modern-day Southeastern Europe, who widely embraced Islam as their spiritual religion. Even as we speak, traces of the rich historical heritage of the Ottoman Empire are present in many Balkan countries.

Prior to the their first contact with Islam, Albanians generally adhered to Christianity based on either Eastern Orthodox or Roman Catholic rites, while some nostalgically retained their ancient pagan Illyrian beliefs. By the end of 17th century, percentage of Albanians adhering to Islam became the majority, while the rest remained devoted to Christianity and split between the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Church. It is worth noting that, despite the religious divide

or multi-confessionalism, there is no record of a religion-based conflict amongst Albanians. The struggle for survival as well as the fear of annihilation from the common foe, both in the past and the present, has united the Albanians without distinction, putting their national affiliation before the religious affiliation. Gjergj Fishta, a great Albanian national poet and a Roman Catholic cleric (1871-1940), delivered to his believers and all Albanians in general his famous message: "Truly we observe both Easter and Bajram (the main Muslim feast), but together we share Albanianism¹".

The Muslim theologian and patriot, Idriz Gjilani, was quoted saying: "Indeed we are a nation with three religions, but we share same blood, language and homeland²".

The Composition of Kosovo Muslims

Albanian Muslims comprise the largest religious community in Kosovo. The vast majority of them adhere to the Sunni branch of Islam, built upon a religious school of Islamic jurisprudence established by the scholar Abu Hanifa in the 17th century. This religious school

1 <https://www.slideshare.net/marjandodaj/vrtet-nekemi-bajram-e-pashk-por-shqiptarin-e-kemi-bashk-at-gjergj-fishta>

2 <http://orashqiptare.blogspot.com/2015/01/jemi-veller-kemi-tri-fe-por-vetem-nje.html>

of jurisprudence is currently predominant throughout the Islamic world, because it follows a 'middle course' in interpreting Islam. It recognizes the institution of analogy in the elaboration of legal religious provisions and allows the use of logic in the argumentation of religious matters by taking into account the 'time and place' perspective.

Another significant part Kosovo Muslims amounting to approximately 15 % adhere to the Sufi Dervish orders, representing religious mystic groups operating under their denominations such as: *Khalwati*, *Qadiri*, *Malamatis*, *Meolevi*, *Naqshbandi*, *Shadhili*, *Rifai*, *Bektashi*, *Sinani*, etc. Their particular rites, as well as the glorification of Ali, the fourth Muslim caliph who died in the year 661, represent the line of division between them and the rest of the Sunni Muslim majority in Kosovo. Instead of mosques, Dervishes perform their rites in their special shrines called "tekke". Although divided in rites, the Dervish orders, until 2013, were under the umbrella of the Islamic Community of Kosovo (ICK). Under the new draft law regulating the legal status of religious communities in Kosovo, mystic groups are defined as an independent religious community. ICK remains the largest religious institution in Kosovo.³ Prior to the collapse of the communist system and the breakdown of the former Yugoslavia, this community the ICK was registered with the legal authorities of Serbia in Belgrade. From that time up to the present day, all the religious communities in Kosovo, including ICK, continue to operate without a new legal status in the country's democratic setup. The draft law regulating the status of all religious communities in Kosovo has been passed by the Government, but has yet to receive the final approval of the Parliament.

³ <http://bislame.net/>

Besides Albanians, Kosovo Muslim community also includes Turkish, Gorani and Torbesh (who speak a mix of Slavic languages) groups, as well as Roma and Ashkali minorities.

Organizing Islamic religious life in Kosovo

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, religion is clearly separated from the state: (Article 8: The Republic of Kosovo is a secular state and is neutral in matters of religious beliefs)⁴. Due to this legal constitutional norm, Kosovo Muslims and other religious communities carry out their religious activities through independent private institutions. Mosques are the main places of gatherings, where Muslim believers perform their daily and weekly religious prayers. Currently, Kosovo has a total of 810 mosques (most of them inherited from the Ottoman Empire). Following the war, over 218 mosques have been rebuilt on the foundations of old mosques destroyed by Serbian forces, while an additional 300 new mosques were built. Meanwhile, Muslim Dervish Orders⁵ have around 72 small tekke's throughout Kosovo, concentrated mainly in the towns of Prizren, Gjakova and Rahovec. Islamic religious communities in Kosovo continue to be funded on a voluntary basis by their believers and followers. None of the religious communities is funded by the state.

Islamic educational institutions in Kosovo

The Islamic religious staff in Kosovo is trai-

⁴ <http://www.kushtetutakosoves.info/repository/docs/Constitution.of.the.Republic.of.Kosovo.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.btkonline.net/>

ned by two major educational institutions, the Secondary Madrasa "Alauddin"⁶, founded in 1951 and thus one of the oldest Islamic religious schools in the country, and the Faculty of Islamic Studies⁷ as a private institution under the ICK supervision. The Islamic religious school "Alauddin" is funded by the Ministry of Education of Kosovo, based on a decision taken dating back to when Kosovo was administered by UNMIK (United Nations Mission Interim in Kosovo) between 1999 and 2008. The "Alauddin" Madrasa was largely active during the partly monist system in the former Yugoslavia, where its teachings attracted students from all Albanian inhabited lands of the former Yugoslavia as well as other nationalities.

The "Alauddin" Madrasa has two separate subsidiaries in the towns of Prizren and Gjilan and counts around 600 students, both male and female. Students who graduate from this school cherish the right to pursue studies in different university-level courses, both at home and abroad. The "Alauddin" Madrasa in Pristina ranks second, behind the well-known Sarajevo-based "GaziHusrevbeg" Madrasa, and thus has a large influence in Southeastern Europe in terms of training the Albanian-speaking imams and religious teachers. The duration of studies in this school until 1984 was five years, and four years from 1984 to 2013, but was reduced to three years since 2013.

Apart from the religious secondary education, the ICK (Islamic Community of Kosovo) also embodies a higher education institution, the Faculty of Islamic Studies founded in 1992. Unlike the "Alauddin" Madrasa, the Faculty of Islamic Studies provides its educational activities on the basis of financial sup-

port secured directly from the ICK, which is also its founder. Due to the failure to determine the legal status of the ICK within the country's new institutional framework after independence in 2008, this higher education institution has not yet been registered nor licensed with country's judicial authorities. It is worth mentioning that the Faculty of Islamic Studies has been awarded accreditation for both educational levels, Bachelor and Master. In 2012, the Senate of the University of Pristina ruled in favor of inclusion of this Faculty at the University of Pristina. However, the Kosovo Ministry of Education has not taken any step to forward the procedure to legitimize and formalize this decision.

Upon completion of studies, students in this educational institution are awarded a professional degree to serve as imams in mosques or teachers at Islamic religious secondary schools in the country. The Faculty is open to both genders. After graduation, many students pursue their Master studies in universities, both at home and abroad. The Faculty curriculum is mainly based on the curriculum of the Faculty of Islamic Sciences in Sarajevo.

Branches of Islam in Kosovo

Kosovo Muslims are followers of the Sunni-Hanafi religious school of jurisprudence that has taken roots among Balkan Muslims and beyond, largely due to the influence of the Ottoman Empire in organizing religious life. The way of interpreting Islam among Muslims in Kosovo and Southeastern Europe for centuries has been and still remains, the middle course- inclusive rather than exclusive. In addition, the mystical groups represented by

⁶ <http://medreseja.com/>

⁷ <http://www.fsi92.net/>

Dervish orders, supported this approach and interpretation of Islam in Kosovo. Muslims of our country, up to the end of 20th and early 21st century, never knew nor heard of extreme and radical approaches to Islam. Radicalism and extremism were unfamiliar terms amongst Kosovo Muslims and Albanians in general. Muslim believers in Kosovo had no problem sharing a roof with or living in a family with different religious beliefs of its members. The tolerance and mutual reverence of individual religious beliefs among Albanians has always been an example to follow, both inside and outside their lands.

As an indigenous nation of Southeastern Europe, the Kosovo Muslims, regardless of their religious adherence, have shown their ability to preserve and respect customary good neighborly traditions, while sharing the common good and bad. Even presently, the traditional soft Islamic course reflecting an inclusive rather than exclusive approach to the religion, continues to prevail in Kosovo, regardless of a slight variation caused by foreign religious doctrines reaching Kosovo and the region following the collapse of the communist system in the Balkans. Over the past two decades and particularly following the war of 1999, non-domestic Islamic religious schools and doctrines have fought and competed for domination in Kosovo. The countries of the Arabian Peninsula, a majority of which follow a course of strict interpretation of Islam, have sponsored local conservative ideologists, who succeeded in establishing small cells and groups of their members in Kosovo. Fortunately, they were unable to widely expand their influence. By contrast, Turkey, which considers its religious heritage in Kosovo and the Balkan region to be part of its historical past, has tried to be very active in the region. Due to the absence of any

large group of Shiite community in Kosovo, Iran has chosen to extend its influence through the establishment of associations and scientific journals in the spirit of Shiite ideology. There is only a symbolic number of Shiite believers in Kosovo, who are concentrated mainly in the multiethnic and multicultural town of Prizren. Differentiations in terms of Islamic religious interpretations in Kosovo could only be observed over the past two decades and fortunately are not widespread.

The impact of the global propaganda on violent religious extremism in Kosovo

Kosovo Muslims are indigenous citizens of Europe, and therefore they see and feel their present and future within the European Union. Kosovo Muslims do not consider their religious affiliation as an obstacle to European integration. Even Western European nations who have opened their doors to Kosovo Albanian immigrants, declare that regardless of religion, Albanians are one of the immigrant social groups whose integration into their living environment was the easiest.

External influences of Islamic religious ideology of global proportions have failed to find fruitful soil in Kosovo. Nevertheless, and similarly to other countries, it could not entirely prevent foreign propaganda coming from the war hotspots in Iraq and Syria from penetrating into the country mainly through the uncontrolled distribution of religious literature as well as the influence of various online websites. This sort of propaganda, proclaimed in the name of Islam, inspired a number of citizens of Kosovo to join the fronts of extremist and terrorist groups in Iraq and Syria. However, owing to the measu-

res undertaken by the Government of Kosovo, particularly in the course of the last two years, Kosovo has not registered any case of one of its citizens joining ISIS.

With all the powers available and in cooperation with state institutions, the ICK has recently been working intensively to prevent violent forms of interpretation of Islam in Kosovo. With every passing day, citizens of our country are realizing that violent religious extremism leading to terrorism, should not and cannot be part of our society in any form.

The extreme approach to religion, which is embraced nowadays in the countries of East, is seen by Kosovo Muslims as a religiously and politically deviating agenda that has nothing to do with Islam as a religion in the first place, nor with their regional and European future.

The future of Islam in Kosovo

Islam in Kosovo will continue to be developed and nourished in the spirit of tolerance and respect for all the country's religious communities. Muslim believers of Kosovo, regardless

of ethnicity, both now and in the future will aspire and work towards Euro-Atlantic integration. They are aware that Brussels is their political center today. The interpretation of Islam will remain a domestic one, taking into account the context of culture and tradition as well as the local, regional and European perspective, and shall restrict itself from imitating foreign ideologies and serving politically driven religious purposes.

However, Western Europe must work harder to speed up Kosovo's integration into the European Union. The isolation of Kosovo from the western world, which has taken place so far, by impeding the free movement of its people, will allow foreign groups to take advantage of its harsh economic and political situation.

About the Author

Xhabir Hamiti, Dr., is a Professor at the faculty for Islamic Studies in Pristina in Kosovo.

E-mail: xhabirhamiti@gmail.com

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Contact

Center for Governance and Culture in Europe (GCE-HSG)
University of St.Gallen
Müller-Friedberg-Str. 8
CH-9000 St.Gallen
Switzerland
Phone: +41 (0) 71 224 21 26

e-mail: euxeinos@unisg.ch

URL: www.euxeinos.ch, www.euxeinos.info

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