

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.

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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*.