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Research Article

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# Turkey's Kin State Policy in the Balkans: The Muslim Community from Dobruja

Adriana Cupcea\*

This article is focused on empirical research of Turkey's kin state policy in the Muslim community in Dobruja post 1990. It investigates how Turkey has managed to accumulate influence and soft power potential by using its mother-state position to strengthen the community of Muslim Turks and Tatars in Dobruja. The study explains the factors in the community which determined the manifestation of Islamic fundamentalist actors in this period, and the context in which Turkey stepped in and countered them through its own actors. The main goal of the study is to identify the areas in which the Turkish state acted, through cultural and religious funds and through development assistance. It profiles the Turkish state actors in each of these areas. The study is an overview of the presence, purposes and activities of these actors at the local level, while also providing an evaluation of the impact their action strategies have in the local Muslim community.

**Keywords:** Turkey, kin state, *soft-power*, Balkan Muslims, Dobruja, Romania

## Introduction

In this study, following the trajectory of Turkey's kin state policy in the case of the Turkish and Tatar Muslims in Dobruja,<sup>1</sup> I show that the policy is interdependent with Turkish foreign policy in the post-1990 period, which developed around the concept of *soft power*,<sup>2</sup> especially after the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002. I trace how Turkey has

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<sup>1</sup> Dobruja Turks and Tatars are two ethnic Sunni Muslim communities concentrated in two counties, Constanța and Tulcea, which constitute the region of Dobruja, situated in the south-eastern part of Romania. Their presence in the region is a demographic heritage of the region's Ottoman period, between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries. The most recent Romanian census, that of 2011, indicates a total of 27 698 Turks and 20 282 Tatars. See: [National Institute of Statistic, Romanian Census, Population by ethnicity, 1930-2011](#) (accessed: 12. June 2020). Their presence dates back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century and was consolidated during the Ottoman period. Anatolian Turks came mainly from Asia Minor, while Tatars came from the territories of Central Asia and Crimea.

<sup>2</sup> The concept of *soft power* was first used by Joseph Nye in the 1980s and is rooted in the idea that alternative power structures exist in the framework of international relations alongside economic and military powers. The concept was defined by Nye as the ability of a state to attract, co-opt, and shape others' preferences without resorting to force or material stimuli as a means of persuasion. Nye believes that this is possible due to a state's capability to convince another party by reasoning and rational policies. To be more precise, credibility and power of persuasion are the main elements of soft power. See Nye, Joseph S. 2004. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs.

accumulated this influence and soft power potential by using its kin-state position to strengthen the community of Muslim Turks and Tatars in Dobruja.

It must be stated from the beginning that the Turkish state distinguishes between Turkish citizens who have emigrated to the Western Europe, Australia and the U.S.A., which are new minorities in these states, and the related communities (kin-groups). This latter category includes those with which Turkey shares a common history and a common cultural heritage,<sup>3</sup> meaning Sunni Hanafi<sup>4</sup> Muslims from the Balkans, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.

This distinction between Turks who have emigrated to other states for various reasons and the related communities is reflected in the existence of the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (*Yurt Dışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı*-YTB), which functions under the Republic of Turkey's Ministry of Culture and Tourism and which aims to formulate economic and cultural policies in order to meet the needs of emigrated Turks and related communities.<sup>5</sup> YTB therefore collaborates with various Turkish institutions that are targeting the two groups, such as the Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*), the Turkish Coordination and Cooperation Agency (TIKA) or the Turkish Cultural Institute *Yunus Emre*. Last but not least, Article 8 of the Law on the Establishment of the YTB mentions that one of the goals of the institution is to promote a positive image of Turkey internationally and to provide an effective lobby abroad.<sup>6</sup>

Considering the Islamic religion as one of the main items of common identification between Turkey and the Muslim local community, I approached this area starting from the definition of religion the way Joseph Nye perceives its potential within a soft power framework: as a persuasive power reserved for parties who share the same faith.<sup>7</sup> After AKP came to power in 2002, Turkey utilised Islam as a power-element of foreign policy by making Sunni Islam more visible and, therefore, made *Diyanet* (the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs) a major tool in foreign policy ideology. Following the *modus operandi* of Turkish state actors which operate in Dobruja, *Diyanet*, TIKA and the *Yunus*

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<sup>3</sup> Yurtnaç, Kemal. 2012. *Turkey's New Horizon: Turks Abroad and Related Communities*. SAM Papers no. 3. Ankara: Center for Strategic Research, Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 7.

<sup>4</sup> For the sultans of the Ottoman Empire, beginning in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Abbasid Caliphate served as a model for good government, as it had been the last strong, centralised Sunni Muslim state. The Ottomans chose the Hanafi school when officially interpreting Islamic law, a school favoured by the Abbasid state. The name of the school derives from its founder, Abu Hanifa (8<sup>th</sup> century A.D.); this school belongs to the Ottoman-Turkish cultural area and is characterised by a strong role for the centralised government, the institutionalisation of the ulema in a hierarchic structure, the domination of Hanafi teaching, the influence of the Turkish language and culture, the demarcation of the urban lifestyle, art, architecture and daily routines. Most Balkan Muslims follow this school, which is currently associated with the Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey. See: Agoston, Gabor and Bruce Masters. 2009. *The Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*. New York: Facts on File, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Yurtnaç, *Presidency for Turks Abroad*, 6-8.

<sup>6</sup> Özgür Baklacioğlu, Nurcan. 2015. Between neo-Ottomanist Kin Policy in the Balkans and Transnational Kin Economics in the EU. *Journal of Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* 3, 63.

<sup>7</sup> Nye, Joseph S. 1990. *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*. New York: Basic Books.

*Emre* Cultural Centre, I argue in this paper that Islam is one of the main fields of interaction between the Turkish state and the local community and one of the main sources of Turkey's soft power. I also argue that Turkey, through its state actors, contributes decisively to the preservation of Islamic religious identity in Dobruja.

It must be mentioned that the Muftiate, the representative institution of the Muslim community in Romania, is the only authority recognised and supported by the Romanian state and "has managed to ensure a free practice of Islamic religion in the context of a non-negotiable observance of the laws and provisions of a democratic, secular regime".<sup>8</sup> The form of Sunni Hanafi Islam in Dobruja is the only such variety supported by the Muftiate as moderate, adapted to local specificities, a position affirmed in several public statements by the Mufti. According to its statute, the Muftiate is the representative institution of the Muslim community in Romania; it is autonomous, unsubsidiarized to any institution or organisation in the country or abroad, and acts in respect with the Constitution's provisions and the laws of the Romanian state.<sup>9</sup>

My approach also draws on Brubaker's triangular relationship of the national minority, the nation state in which the minority lives, and the homeland to which the ethnic group belongs.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, considering the post 9/11 context, when Turkey assumed the role of the moderate Islamic power in the region,<sup>11</sup> I added a fourth element of a relationship to the previous three: transnational Islam. John R. Bowen<sup>12</sup> defines this as a public, global space for reference and

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<sup>8</sup> Isac Alak, Alina. 2015. *Vechiul și noul islam în România: provocări ale construcției identitare a musulmanilor autohtoni [New and Old Islam in Romania: Challenges to the Identity Construction of the Autochthonous Muslims]*, in *Turcii și tătarii din Dobrogea. [Turks and Tatars in Dobruja]*, edited by Cupcea, Adriana. Cluj Napoca: ISPMN Publishing House, 324.

<sup>9</sup> The Status of the Islamic religion in Romania. Chapter I. General Disposals. Available at <https://lege5.ro/Gratuit/gezdamrrgq/statutul-cultului-musulman-din-11062008> (accessed 19 February 2020).

<sup>10</sup> Roger Brubaker does not consider the actual homeland of the minority to necessarily be a place where they or their ancestors once lived. Brubaker defines the mother-state especially as a political category and not an ethnographic one, constructed and not given. He considers that a state becomes an external national homeland for its ethnic diaspora when political or cultural elites define ethnonational kin in other states as members of one and the same nation, claim that they belong, in some sense, to the state, and assert that their condition must be monitored and their interests protected and promoted by the state; and when the state actually does take action in the name of monitoring, promoting, or protecting the interests of its ethnonational kin abroad. Homeland politics takes a variety of forms, ranging from immigration and citizenship privileges for returning members of the ethnic diaspora, through various attempts to influence other states' policies towards its co-ethnics, to irredentist claims on the territory of other states. See: Brubaker, Rogers. 1996. *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and Nationalism in the New Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 4-6.

<sup>11</sup> Kerem Öktem notes that Turkey's new role as a transnational Muslim power was welcomed by some, if not by all, governments. In the eyes of the international community and states such as Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina and North Macedonia, Turkey was viewed as a country capable of promoting "moderate Islam" in the region, seen especially by the US administration under George W. Bush as the antidote to more virulent strands of Islam. Öktem outlines that this was a challenge that the AKP took on in the new geostrategic context, or the windfall effect of 9/11, which significantly facilitated Turkey's new role in the region as "moderate Islamic actor", rather than as "secular Muslim country". See Öktem, Kerem. 2012. Global Diyanet and Multiple Networks: Turkey's New Presence in the Balkans. *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 1(1), 32.

<sup>12</sup> Bowen, John R. 2004. Beyond Migration, Islam as a Transnational Public Space. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 30(5), 879-94.

normative debate, where the norms and practices of Islam are negotiated and redefined beyond national borders.<sup>13</sup>

Maintaining the framework proposed by Brubaker, I approached the local community as an “accidental diaspora”.<sup>14</sup> The community was formed after Dobruja, an Ottoman territory for five centuries, became part of the Romanian state following the Russian-Ottoman War of 1877-1878 and in the wider context of the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Methodologically, the research is based on documentary analysis, empirical research, and information collected through qualitative methods, like semi-structured interviews (with Turkish officials, religious elites, members of the community), participative observation, and informal conversations, in the rural and urban Muslim communities in Dobruja.

In the first part of the study I explain the factors that favoured the fundamentalist Islamic presences in Dobruja after 1990. I followed the context in which Turkey began to counteract these influences through its state actors, who have acted and continue to act in the local Muslim community in accordance with the goals of Turkish foreign policy and Turkish kin-state policy. In the following sections I analyse the areas of Turkish presence in Dobruja since 1990 (cultural, religious and development assistance funds) and I sketched the profile of the state actors which correspond to each of these areas. I discuss the impact of Turkish kin state and soft power policies at the local level in order to see how they influence and shape the local Muslim community, religious practice, the religious personnel and religious education.

### **Islamic religion in Dobruja after 1990: between local context and transnational Islam.**

Immediately after the fall of the Romanian communist regime, the religion of Islam in Dobruja became the focus of a reconnection between the local community and Muslim communities abroad. At the same time, it became a point of confrontation between traditional Islam – an Islam rooted in the unique, local condition of the Muslim community's past – and the growing foreign presence of what has been called orthodox Islam.<sup>15</sup> This refers specifically to forms of Islam

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<sup>13</sup> John R. Bowen and Ina Merdjanova also argue that transnational Islam cannot be reduced to a single dimension, and in fact involves a multitude of speeches, ideologies, individuals and collective actors, networks, connections, migratory dynamics, pilgrimage, cultural and educational links. See Bowen, *Beyond Migration*; Merdjanova, Ina. 2013. *Rediscovering the Umma: Muslims in the Balkans between Nationalism and Transnationalism*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>14</sup> Brubaker makes the distinction between accidental diasporas and labour diasporas. He states that labour migrant diasporas are constituted by the movement of people across borders, accidental diasporas by the movements of borders across peoples. He believes that migrant diasporas form gradually through countless individual migration trajectories, while accidental diasporas crystallise suddenly following a dramatic – and often traumatic – reconfiguration of political space. Brubaker Rogers. 2000. *Accidental Diasporas and External Homelands in Central and Eastern Europe: Past and Present*. Vienna: Institute for Advanced Studies, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Following the example of Kristen Ghodsee, I use the terminology proposed by Talal Asad, with some reservation. Khodsee points out that the problem with this term, although it works well in an analytical opposition to traditional Islam, is that it implies a judgement that one form of Islam is more ‘correct’ than others, and that there is some supranational authority that makes this claim. In fact, Islam is very diverse, and it is precisely this diversity that orthodox reformers want to eliminate by claiming that their interpretation is the only correct one. See: Ghodsee, Kristen. 2010. Minarets after Marx: Islam, Communist Nostalgia, and the Common Good in Postsocialist Bulgaria. *East European Politics and Societies*, 24(4), 521.

that claim to be a purer version of the religion, based exclusively on sacred, original texts and supposedly not on culturally specific interpretation of those texts.<sup>16</sup>

Orthodox Islam was particularly represented in Dobruja by Islamic non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – a generic name covering charitable organisations that were not necessarily non-governmental – originating in the Gulf Arab countries. The identity of those present in Dobruja immediately after 1990 is extremely hard to establish. Based on interviews and the press, we can identify in the local area international organisations like the Muslim World League (al Rabita),<sup>17</sup> based in Saudi Arabia, along with *bahai*<sup>18</sup> missionaries, followers of the Bahá'í Faith with their central location in Israel.

Parallel to these Islamic orthodox presences which tried to impose themselves in reconfiguring local Islam, Turkey started counteracting their influences in order to maintain the character of the *traditional* Sunni Hanafi Islam. Turkey relied mostly on the *Diyanet*, which initiated its first projects in the early 1990s. These were focused mainly on mosque refurbishments in this early stage. This way of approaching the community took the form of a close cooperation with the Muftiate of the Muslim Community, which became the main local actor empowered by the religious presence of Turkey in Dobruja. The deep-rooted links between the Muslims in Dobruja and the Turkish state favoured the approach to the religious leadership and the empathic attitude of the members of the community towards Turkey. These links were based on a five-century-long shared history, language, culture and religion. Like the overwhelming majority of the Muslims in the Balkans, the Muslims in Dobruja belong to the Ottoman-Turkish cultural zone,<sup>19</sup> characterised by the influence of the Turkish language, and they are followers of the Hanafi madhab school of law, which is part of the Ottoman legacy as it was the official madhab in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>20</sup> This long-standing Ottoman cultural tradition became an important part of Turkish foreign policy discourse, accompanying the more and more active presence of Turkey in the former Ottoman territories after 1990. In this period Turkey's moderate Islam also became an important soft power tool in Turkish foreign

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<sup>16</sup> Ghodsee, *Minarets after Marx*.

<sup>17</sup> In the centre of the globalisation device of Saudi Salafi is the World Islamic League, created on the 15 December 1962, in the middle of the Arab Cold War, at the initiative of the Saudi heir of that time. While Egypt and Saudi Arabia fought to impose their moral and political authority across the entire Muslim world, the newly created League was tasked with countering the influence of Nasser's regime, whose propaganda was mostly targeted against Saudi Arabia. While its staff comes from various Muslim countries, its leadership is mostly under Saudi control. Its official status is that of an NGO, but it can be practically considered a Saudi trans-statal structure. See Amghar, Samir. 2011. *Le salafisme d'aujourd'hui. Mouvements sectaires en Occident*. Paris: Michalon.

<sup>18</sup> Baháism is a monotheist religion with Shiite roots, created in Iran in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Mirza Hoseyn Ali Nuri (1817-1892), known as Bahá'u'lláh. It is characterised by religious syncretism, believing that the founders of the great religions are the envoys of the same God for different epochs. According to those practicing Baháism, Bahá'u'lláh is the most recent in a line of divine messengers, which includes Abraham, Moses, Buddha, Krishna, Zoroaster, Christ and Mohamed.

<sup>19</sup> Karčić, Fikret. 2012. *Challenges Facing the Balkan Muslims at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century*. in *Balkans and Islam: Encounter, Transformation, Discontinuity, Continuity*, edited by Zişan Furat, Ayşe and Hamit Er. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 109.

<sup>20</sup> Merdjanova, *Rediscovering the Umma*, 6.

policy, providing an advantage over other actors like the Islamic NGOs in Dobruja, which were seen as exponents of radical Islamist ideas.<sup>21</sup>

The confrontation between the Turkish actors and the Islamic NGOs was favoured by the post-communist situation of Muslims from Dobruja, which was characterised by insufficient human and material resources for the reconstruction of the community. This motivated external interaction for the members of the community as well as for the religious elite. To be precise, the lack of possibilities for Islamic theological local training, along with a lack of organisational capabilities for making the pilgrimage to Mecca (one of the most important religious obligations for Muslims), represented opportunities for interaction among the local community and the Islamic transnational actors.

All these actors have approached the local community by trying first to fulfil material needs, but also trying to fill the void created by the communist period concerning Islamic religious practice. Thus, the foundations started conducting activities to spread Islamic teaching through sermons, religion classes or book publishing.<sup>22</sup>

Another method for approaching the community was the creation of boarding schools aimed especially for children coming from poor families. This practice was conducted through financial support coming exclusively from Islamic NGOs. Another was through offers to send young men to study theology abroad.<sup>23</sup> Immediately after 1990, the religious and ethnic representative institutions, the Muftiate of the Muslim Community and the Turkish and Tatar unions,<sup>24</sup> considered this solution to be the most accessible one. The theological scholarships offered through international NGOs in Turkey, but also in states in the Middle East like Jordan, Syria and Egypt, were seen as a possible solution to the pressing need of the Muslim community to train new imams. At the same time, they represented a means of reconnecting with the Muslim world. According to Osman Negeat, the Mufti from that period, the following number of pupils studied in seminaries abroad in 1991: in Sudan, five pupils from Constanța; four in Turkey; nine in Bosnia and Herzegovina (in Sarajevo); three

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<sup>21</sup> The 1980 *coup d'état* in Turkey marked the expansion of Turkish state Islam to the immigrant communities of Western Europe, and the 1990s later saw a gradual orientation towards the Muslim communities of Central Asia and the Balkans. See: Öktem, *Global Diyanet and Multiple Networks*, 41-42.

<sup>22</sup> Isac Alak, *Vechiul și noul islam în România [New and Old Islam in Romania]*, 324.

<sup>23</sup> Field observations 2014-2016.

<sup>24</sup> After the fall of communism in Romania, in 1989, the revitalisation of spiritual life was accompanied by an institutional revitalisation. Thus, the Turkish Muslim Democratic Union of Romania was created in the last days of December 1989. Following some divergences within the community, the organisation split in two: the Ethnic Turkish Minority Union of Romania, which later adopted the name Turkish Democratic Union of Romania, and the Democratic Union of Turkish-Muslim Tatars of Romania. Both were secular organisations, financed by the state budget. Their main declared objective is conserving and perpetuating the cultural and traditional values of the ethnic Turks, respectively Tatars. See: Gemil, Tahsin. 2012. *Înființarea Uniunii Democratice a Tătarilor Turco-Musulmani din România (Documente) [Establishment of the Democratic Union of the Turkish-Muslim Tatars of Romania (Documents)]*, in *Moștenirea istorică a tătarilor [Cultural heritage of the Tatars]* 2, edited by Gemil, Tahsin and Nagy Pienaru. Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române [Romanian Academy Publishing House], 351-414.

in Egypt (in Cairo); and four in Syria,<sup>25</sup> all based on partnerships in the education field between these states and Romania.

Gradually, the influx of foundations, each competing for influence and for imposing their own version of Islam, led to dissatisfaction in the local community. Contradictions arose between the Islamic NGOs, active especially in the community of Muslim immigrants, and the local Hanafi Islam, of historical Ottoman origin, officially represented by the Muftiate of the Muslim Community and the Muslim Turkish Tatar community. Meanwhile, the imams who were trained in Arab countries during the 1990s became representatives or leaders of different Islamic NGOs. Some of them have existed since the 1990s, while others are more recent. There was a constant and sinuous separation between them and the Muftiate over the course of the past 20 years, marked by mutual accusations. On one hand, the representatives of the NGOs accused the Muftiate and the local imams of lacking knowledge about the 'pure' Islamic religion, perpetuating novelties/*bid'ah* and traditions, local heretic customs, tolerance and a lack of proselytism in relation to the non-Muslims.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, the Muftiate launched accusations referring to the spread of fundamentalist Islamic teachings through sermons and religious publications, and mentioned the danger of infusing the local Islam with radical ideas.<sup>27</sup>

In this environment, in the 1990s and 2000s, Turkey assumed the role of an Islamic moderate actor in the area. The main instrument used in this sense was *Diyanet*, which allowed the Turkish state to play a prominent role in the religious competition 'market' created in former communist territories.

### **The religious field: *Diyanet* (Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs).**

After the abolition of the Caliphate, the Ministry of Sharia (Islamic Faith) and the Pious Foundations in March 1924, the *Diyanet* was founded as a government agency. It is subordinated to the prime minister and its main responsibilities concern administration of religious problems connected with the faith, practice and moral principles, informing society with regards to the Islamic religion, and the administration of places of worship.<sup>28</sup> Its activities are focused on two main areas: the administrative coordination of religious personnel (the imams) and the organisation of religious life, turning into the highest authority as far as doctrine and religious practice issues are concerned. Currently it has a budget greater than that of many ministries and it is probably the largest, most

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<sup>25</sup> Cuget liber [Free Thought]. 1991. Fiecare om are dreptul la credința sa. Interviu cu domnul Osman Negeat – muftiu, reprezentantul cultului musulman din România. [Each person has a right to freedom of faith. Interview with Osman Negeat, Mufti, the representative of Muslim Community in Romania], 4 April 1991.

<sup>26</sup> Isac Alak, *Vechiul și noul islam în România [New and Old Islam in Romania]*, 327.

<sup>27</sup> The Muftiate also pointed to the danger of radicalisation within the Muslim immigrant communities that had arrived in the 70s to study or in the 90s for business reasons, and also within the ranks of those converted. See Isac Alak, *Vechiul și noul islam în România [New and Old Islam in Romania]*, 327. One of the problems constantly pointed out by the Muftiate was its inability to regulate the activity of the mosques working outside the Office's authority in improvised locations (apartments, gyms), especially in the capital. Such mosques are considered clandestine.

<sup>28</sup> Sunier, Thijs / Landman, Nico / van der Linden, Heleen / Bilgili, Nazli and Alper Bilgili. 2011. *Diyanet, The Turkish Directorate for Religious Affairs in a changing environment*. Utrecht: Utrecht University, 32.



centralised Muslim religious organisation in the world,<sup>29</sup> and thus a significant religious global actor.

Until the 1980s, *Diyanet*'s actions were territorially limited with regards to its target, focusing on the Muslims from Turkey. This was because, according to Kemalist ideology religion was not a significant resource for national identity, but also because of the principle imposed by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in foreign policy – that of non-interference in the internal problems of other states. After the *coup d'état* from 1980, following the ideology put forwards by the movement known as the Turkish-Islamic synthesis, the army accredited the introduction of Islam as the state ideology, followed by a process of diffusion at the level of the society, particularly through the use of education.<sup>30</sup> This change has determined an extension beyond the national borders to those countries with Turkish immigrants. In the 1980s it extended towards Western Europe, aimed at the large communities of Turkish immigrants from states like Germany, Austria and the Netherlands, but the fall of the communist bloc in the 1990s has led to a gradual reorientation towards the Muslim communities from Central Asia and the Balkans.<sup>31</sup>

The approach towards the Muslim communities from the Balkans started during Turgüt Özal's mandates as president and prime minister (1983 – 1993) and reached its peak after AKP took power in 2002. This is related to the paradigm shift in foreign policy that occurred in this period. Following the strategic depth doctrine of Ahmet Davutoğlu,<sup>32</sup> one of the main principles in Turkish foreign policy was the focus on developing relations with neighbouring countries (the Balkans, the Middle East, and the Caucasus) by operationalising historical and cultural ties. In this context, religion and religious actors have come to a prominent position in Turkey's foreign policy,<sup>33</sup> and as many scholars have noted, the *Diyanet* crucially became one of the most important actors in the Balkans.<sup>34</sup> The *Diyanet* is present in the Balkan states with Muslim communities through its counsellors and attachés focused on religious affairs, functioning in the embassies and consulates.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Öktem, Kerem, 2010. *New Islamic Actors after Wahhabi intermezzo: Turkey's Return to the Muslim Balkans*, European Studies Centre. Oxford: University of Oxford, 31.

<sup>30</sup> The lessons in religion and religious ethics have become once more mandatory.

<sup>31</sup> Korkut, Şenol. 2010. The Diyanet of Turkey and its Activities in Eurasia after the Cold War. *Acta Slavica Iaponica* 28, 121.

<sup>32</sup> Following the creation of the AKP government in 2002, Ahmet Davutoğlu, a professor of Political Science, served as the Turkish prime minister's main counsellor for foreign policy. From 2009 he was Minister for Foreign Affairs, and from 2009 until 2016 he was Turkey's prime minister.

In 2001 he published the book *Strategic Depth*, in which he describes the central elements of the foreign policy doctrine of the same name, arguing that a nation's value in world politics is predicated on its geostrategic location and historical depth. Following the logic of Davutoglu's theory, Turkey is uniquely endowed both because of its location in geopolitical areas of influence, particularly its control of the Bosphorus, and its historical legacy as the heir of the Ottoman Empire. It is generally accepted that strategic depth has been the main doctrine informing Turkish foreign policy throughout the AKP period. See: Öztürk, Ahmet Erdi and İftar Gözaydın. 2018. A Frame for Turkey's Foreign Policy via the Diyanet in the Balkans. *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 7, 334, 339.

<sup>33</sup> Öztürk and Gözaydın, *A Frame for Turkey's Foreign Policy via the Diyanet*, 339, 344.

<sup>34</sup> Öktem, *Global Diyanet and Multiple Networks*, 27-58.

<sup>35</sup> Korkut, *The Diyanet of Turkey and its Activities*, 124.

The role of the *Diyanet* may be defined as relating to supplying various types of necessities, such as financial support for the construction and restoration of mosques, providing copies of the Qur'an and other books to be used for religious education, and training the religious officials of mostly Muslim communities in the Balkans.<sup>36</sup> It periodically organises the Eurasian Islamic Council (EIC), which has promoted cooperation among the spiritual boards of Muslims in Central Asia and the Balkans since 1995.<sup>37</sup>

### ***Diyanet* in Dobruja**

The presence of the *Diyanet* in Dobruja became official starting in 2001, when the attaché for religious affairs was appointed to the Turkish General Consulate in Constanța following a local request. The request was approved by the Romanian authorities, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The attaché's role is to offer assistance and religious services to the Dobruja Muslim community.

One of the first initiatives was **the project to refurbish mosques**, as they have a symbolic value and are considered part of the Turkish-Islamic cultural heritage. A collaboration protocol was signed in 2006 between the Muftiate and the *Diyanet*, whereby one of the main articles concerns financial assistance in the refurbishment of Muslim religious buildings.<sup>38</sup> Generally these projects, whether they were meant to renovate or construct, involved collaboration between *Diyanet* and the local administration of various municipalities with Muslim populations, the State Secretariat for Religious Cults, implicitly the Muftiate of the Muslim Community, and the Association of Turkish Businessmen from Dobruja.

Regarding **formal religious education**, from the start Turkey supported the reintroduction of studying Islam in state schools by supplying auxiliary teaching materials printed in Turkey. The curriculum was and is almost identical to that in Turkey. One of the most important contributions in the post-1990 period was the re-opening of the Medgidia Muslim Seminar, the only institution in Romania training imams for the Muslim faith. In this manner, Muslim religious instruction became the field for the first interaction of the Turkish state through the *Diyanet* and the Dobruja community. The Turkish state provided financial support, intermediated by the Turkish Ministry of Education and the *Diyanet*,<sup>39</sup> for lodging, food, clothing and school supplies.

The protocol of 2006 stipulates, along with the renovation of Muslim religious buildings, support through **editing religious literature**, books and brochures. This is in fact one of the initiatives started by the *Diyanet* to influence the religious training of the post-1990 generations. At the same time, it has reformulated religious practice and knowledge, learned orally from the older generations, for the generation formed under the communist regime. The religious literature offered by the *Diyanet* consists of brochures for

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<sup>36</sup> Öktem, Kerem, 2011. Between emigration, de-Islamization and the nation-state: Muslim communities in the Balkans today, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 11(2), 155-71.

<sup>37</sup> Öztürk and Gözaydın, *A Frame for Turkey's Foreign Policy via the Diyanet*, 346.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Y.M., Mufti of the Muslim Community, Constanța, Constanța County, 22 May 2014.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Özgür Kıvanç, deputy director of the National College *Kemal Atatürk*, Medgidia, 18 September 2013.

understanding the Qur'an, prayer books, compilations of the *hadith*, and books of Islamic history. It tries to fill the gaps created during communism and sets norms for religious knowledge and practice according to the Hanafi official version, which is specific for Turkey and the Balkan area. A great number of these books are in fact Romanian translations of the *Diyanet* publications that circulate in Turkey and other Balkan states with Muslim communities.

Another level where the support provided by the *Diyanet* is substantial, both symbolic and financial, is the **cult personnel**. Based on the 2006 protocol, the support consists of training exchanges for the cult personnel from Dobruja and assistance through the dispatch of such already trained personnel from Turkey to serve in the Dobruja mosques alongside local imams. Currently, there are 9 imams from Turkey who serve in Dobruja, in the mosques and historical monuments from the Ottoman period, like those in Constanța, Mangalia, Medgidia, Babadag, Tulcea, and Hârșova.<sup>40</sup> Their activity is coordinated by the attaché for religious affairs from the Consulate. Last but not least, given the small salaries offered by the state, the *Diyanet* offers the Muslim personnel financial support amounting to almost 100 USD, in addition to their basic wage. In the same registry fall the university and pre-university scholarships, offering the youth access to theological learning institutions from Turkey.

The *Diyanet* also conducts numerous activities in the field of **informal religious education**: it had the initiative of organising Qur'an reading courses for women. In Constanța, the courses organised in the Muftiate are held by a trainer appointed by the *Diyanet*. In the past years, the trainer was the wife of the Turkish imam serving in one of Constanța's historical mosques, but starting from 2015 the courses are held by a member of the local community, a woman who graduated Islamic theology in Turkey. In the other localities where larger Muslim communities exist, such as Valu lui Traian, Castelu or Medgidia, the Qur'an courses are organised at the mosque and are taught by imams. The initiative started with imams who arrived from Turkey, but the practice was gradually adopted by local imams; currently, the courses are organised in certain communities from Dobruja at beginner and advanced levels.<sup>41</sup>

Some of the *Diyanet* practices that have become common in the past 10 years fall in the Islamic tradition of **charity**. Some examples include sacrificing animals, sheep or cattle, with the occasion of the *Kurban Bayram* (Eid-al-Adha/Sacrifice Feast) and offering bundles for *Ramazan Bayram* (Eid-al-Fitr). Thus, poor members of the community are supported, as in the cases of Tăturu, Fântâna Mare, Mihail Kogălniceanu or Hagieni,<sup>42</sup> while the culture of charity, *Zakat*, one of the five pillars of Islam, is promoted in the community.

The presence of the *Diyanet* saw the rebirth of religious holidays celebrations, which were no longer followed in the local community during the communist period, such as *Kandil Geceleri* (the Holy Nights). These celebrations are unique to the Hanafi Islam from the former Ottoman territories. At the same time, the

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<sup>40</sup> Interview with Y. M., Mufti of the Muslim Community, Constanța, Constanța County, 22 May 2014.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with A. S., imam Valu lui Traian, Constanța, Constanța County, 16 October 2013.

<sup>42</sup> Field observations 2014-2016.

*Diyanet* organises a series of seminars and events focused on topics like *Kutlu Doğum Haftası* (Mohammed's Birth) or the month of Ramadan; the significance of these events is explained to the community during the celebrations. Last but not least, in order to maintain the **inter-confessional dimension**, generally promoted by the *Diyanet*, the attaché for religious affairs takes part in different meetings with representatives of other religious affiliations from Dobruja, trying to establish a dialogue and a moderate and open image, while at the same time relying on the Dobruja regional identity built around the idea of interethnic and religious cohabitation.<sup>43</sup>

**Development: TIKA (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency).**

Although it is certain that the activity conducted by the *Diyanet* has a strong impact in the communities, its presence is not very visible. This is partly because of its preferred low-profile approach when compared to other government agencies of the Turkish state, such as the Turkish Development and Cooperation Agency. This agency's profile is not a religious one and it does not overlap with the *Diyanet* activity, but it can be said that the two institutions converge in certain areas of activity, such as the conservation of cultural heritage, meaning the restoration of Muslim places of worship dating from the Ottoman period, where the TIKA projects have a much more visible impact on the Balkan Muslim communities.

TIKA was created in 1992 as an agency for development and support, under the coordination of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the initial role of focusing only on the states from Central Asia that emerged after the fall of USSR in 1993. Its initial purpose was to promote the Turkish experience relating to the building of democracy and the market economy model, trying to approach these states and to establish regional relations, legitimising themselves in the political discourse through historical experience and language and culture shared with these states.<sup>44</sup>

Over time, TIKA followed Turkey's foreign policy objectives, extending its presence in the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America, and in 1999 it was placed under the coordination of Turkey's prime minister, transforming it into a much more flexible agency from the bureaucratic point of view; after the Justice and Development Party acquired power in 2002 it became an instrument of Turkey's foreign policy,<sup>45</sup> with an important role in acquiring potential *soft power*. According to its statute, TIKA offers support to countries that share historic, geographic social and cultural bonds with Turkey, no matter their level of development.<sup>46</sup> Currently, TIKA has 62 offices for coordinating programmes in the Balkans, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, the

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<sup>43</sup> Interview with A. B., General Consul of Turkey at Constanța, Constanța County, 22 May 2014.

<sup>44</sup> Özkan, Güner and Mustafa Turgut Demirtepe. 2012. Transformation of a Development Aid Agency: TIKA in a Changing Domestic and International Setting. *Turkish Studies* 13(4), 648.

<sup>45</sup> Özkan and Demirtepe, *Transformation of a Development Aid Agency*, 655.

<sup>46</sup> Statutory Decree on the Organization and Duties of the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency Directorate (accessed: 22 June 2020).

Middle East, Africa and Latin America. 11 of them are in the Balkans and Eastern Europe.<sup>47</sup>

With regards to the Balkan states, TIKKA has generally succeeded in establishing connections with the local Muslim organisations in terms of symbolic projects, such as restoring the vast majority of Ottoman mosques, and of course in non-religious projects in areas such as education, health and agriculture.<sup>48</sup> TIKKA projects were and still are focused mostly on restoring monuments from the Ottoman period, whether they be mosques, bridges or caravanserais; education projects consisting of building or renovating schools and universities; opening Turkish Studies departments and centres for Balkan studies; health projects consisting of renovating hospitals and providing them with medical equipment; in the agricultural field, consisting of investments in organic agriculture; in civilian infrastructure and administration, consisting of renovating and equipping public institutions with equipment; and also in projects aimed at human resources, such as the training of employees in public administration.<sup>49</sup>

The total assistance to the Balkans and Eastern Europe in 2014 was 39.4 million dollars, making up 21.25% of total TIKKA assistance.<sup>50</sup> In general, in the last 15-20 years, TIKKA invested on average 20-30% of its total budget in the Balkans;<sup>51</sup> this is reflected with regards to the general prestige that Turkey enjoys in the area, establishing itself more and more as a regional power and as a 'big brother' for the Muslim communities from the area.

#### **TIKKA in Romania and Dobruja**

In Romania, TIKKA's actions began even before the official establishment of a branch, focusing on communities in Dobruja through collaborations with the local ethnic and religious organisations, the two political unions (Turkish and Tatar) and the Muftiate, intermediated by the Turkish Consulate in Constanța. The most important of these was the logistics for a community radio station (Radio T), broadcasting in Turkish and Tatar.<sup>52</sup>

Although it has been declaring its intentions to open a Dobruja branch since 2007, TIKKA's activities in the last decade have focused mostly on the Western Balkans, which were affected by the wars in former Yugoslavia, where significant Muslim communities live. The branch in Bucharest was inaugurated only in 2015, and since then it has developed over 100 projects. One of the features of TIKKA comes from its practice of establishing its priorities in developing projects based on the analysis of local particularities, infrastructure, sector statistics, geographic conditions and local culture. Moreover, TIKKA operates in partnership with institutions of the host state and selects projects in

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<sup>47</sup> Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Albania, Montenegro, Macedonia, Romania, Hungary, Serbia, Croatia, Moldova, Ukraine. Available at: <http://www.tikka.gov.tr/en> (accessed: 22 June 2020).

<sup>48</sup> Öktem, *New Islamic Actors after Wahhabi intermezzo*, 29.

<sup>49</sup> TIKKA. 2017. (accessed: 22 June 2020).

<sup>50</sup> TIKKA. 2014. *Annual Report 2014* (accessed: 22 June 2020).

<sup>51</sup> Nuroğlu, Elif. 2013. *TIKKA and its Political and Socio-Economic Role in the Balkans*, in *Turkish-Balkans Relations: The Future Prospects of Cultural, Political and Economic Transformations and Relations*, edited by Mulalic, Muhidin/ Korkut, Hasan and Elif Nuroğlu. Istanbul: TASAM, 291.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with E. I., general secretary of the Turkish Democratic Union in Romania (*Uniunea Democrată Turcă din România*, UDTR), director Radio T Constanța, 10 June 2014.

conformity with local administrative needs, in an attempt to create a bilateral cooperation with the Romanian authorities through its financial donations.

TIKA deliberately finances projects stemming from proposals by local partners, such as local or central authorities, NGOs, and universities. Turkey is thus attempting to gather soft power capital by granting assistance in alignment with its foreign policy purposes. TIKA is therefore the most important state tool in this regard, an executive of Turkish foreign policy in the field of soft power. Two major criteria for granting projects are serving the interests of both state parties (the host and Turkey) and focusing on regions and activities that are priorities for the Turkish authorities.<sup>53</sup>

Consequently, the first TIKA grants in Romania, directed towards the Muslim Turkish and Tatar communities in Dobruja, were focused on education, the primary goal being the sustainability of Turkish-language school education in Dobruja, in accordance with the agency's policy on the conservation of Turkish language use. In October 2015, TIKA has equipped the Department of Turkish Language, Culture and Civilisation *Mehmet Akif Ersoy*, at the Philological Faculty of *Ovidius* University, with school equipment and books. The project called "A Turkish class in each school" has equipped Turkish special classrooms in schools in Dobruja, such as in Constanța, Mangalia, Medgidia, and in villages like Cobadin, Castelu și Făurei. The project's targets were the schools of the largest Turkish and Tatar communities, where students learn Turkish as mother tongue. Moreover, TIKA's education projects provided equipment for the bilingual kindergarten *Zübeyde Hanım* in Constanța and rehabilitated a similar one in Medgidia, a structure of the National College *Kemal Atatürk*, where most of the teachers and students/children are of Turkish or Tatar ethnicity.<sup>54</sup>

Although Ahmet Daştan, the coordinator of TIKA, argues that the Turks and Tatars of Dobruja are a priority,<sup>55</sup> the collaboration and establishment of a durable relationship with the state authorities are also part of the agency's strategy and main objectives. Throughout the first year in Romania, TIKA developed projects together with the Ministry of Youth and Sports, Public Health, National Education and several state universities: mainly *Ovidius* University of Constanta, but also the Academy of Economics of Bucharest, the University of Bucharest and Babeş-Bolyai of Cluj Napoca, in areas such as sports, health, education and research.

TIKA's future projects are still focused on education and health, which are considered priority domains, both in general terms and particularly in regard to the Muslim community of Dobruja. One of these future projects is focused on the Ottoman cultural heritage. It concerns the restoration of several mosques in Dobruja built in the Ottoman period, and it is a collaboration with the Muftiate that manages them. In detail, TIKA decides on the prioritisation, but takes the major needs highlighted by the Muftiate into consideration, as the integration of local needs is one of the basic principles of action for both TIKA and *Diyanet*.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Nuroğlu, *TIKA and its Political and Socio-Economic Role in the Balkans*, 9.

<sup>54</sup> Agenția de Știri Crimeeană [Crimean Agency Press]. 2016. [Proiectele TIKa în România. \[TIKA Projects in Romania\]](#), 7 July 2016. Available at accessed: 17 February 2020).

<sup>55</sup> Nine O'Clock.2017. [Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency \(TIKA\). Program Coordination Office in Bucharest](#), 30 October 2017 (accessed: 17 February 2020).

<sup>56</sup> Interview with A. B., General Consul of Turkey at Constanța, Constanța County, 22 May 2014.

Therefore, the Mufti Yusuf Murat argues that the first objectives of the restoration project will be the Azizie mosque of Isaccea, which is in an advanced state of disrepair, the mosque of Tulcea, and Hunkiari mosque of Constanța, all monuments of Ottoman age, but also the Carol Mosque, built in 1910 by the Romanian King Carol for the Muslim community of Constanța.

### **Cultural Diplomacy: the Turkish Cultural Institute *Yunus Emre***

Another source of Turkish soft power, and one of its most successful cultural diplomatic tools, are the Cultural Centres *Yunus Emre*, developed on the model of Western institutes for the promotion of national cultural values such as the Goethe or Cervantes institutes, the British Council or the Romanian Cultural Institute.<sup>57</sup> *Yunus Emre*, with its headquarters in Ankara, was established in 2007, most of its branches being inaugurated initially in the Balkans and the Middle East. Its mission is strictly connected to the strategic dimension of Turkish foreign policy: to promote the Turkish language, to protect cultural heritage, and disseminate Turkish culture,<sup>58</sup> attempting, at the same time, to ensure collaborations with local actors and create bilateral cultural relations.

The discourses of the *Yunus Emre* officials underline the idea of the Turkish language as the communication language for all the territories that share a common history or culture with Turkey; such areas include the Balkans and Central Asia, where there exist important communities that follow the Islamic religion. Practically speaking, the scope of the institutes is to transform the Turkish language in these territories into a communication language, a *lingua franca*, and the Turkish culture into a sort of *cultura franca*. Practically, they try to achieve this by organising courses on language and literature, on Turkish culture and civilisation, and by supporting scientific studies by cooperating with universities and local research institutions, and informing the public by publishing the results of said activities. They also contribute to training researchers who focus on the Turkish language, history, culture, art and music. An important aspect is that it offers a component for testing the proficiency in the Turkish language (*Türkçe Yeterlilik Sınav Sistemi*).<sup>59</sup> This test anticipates the creation of a standardised form for testing the knowledge of the Turkish language, and is an obvious step towards promoting the Turkish language and recognising it as a common language in the states and regions where Turkish communities live.

The Institute *Yunus Emre* has founded 58 institutes in 46 different countries since its activity began in 2009.<sup>60</sup> The greatest concentration of institutes is in the Balkan area (14), with the rest located in the Middle East, Africa, Western Europe and Central Asia.

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<sup>57</sup> Öktem, *New Islamic Actors after Wahhabi intermezzo*, 28.

<sup>58</sup> Kaya, Ayhan and Ayşe Tecmen. 2011. *The Role of Common Cultural Heritage in External Promotion of Modern Turkey: Yunus Emre Cultural Center*. Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University, European Institute, 11.

<sup>59</sup> See the official website of the *Yunus Emre Institute* <http://www.yee.org.tr>

<sup>60</sup> Bocai, Adina. 2011. Centrul Cultural Yunus Emre, o poartă deschisă românilor către cultura turcă. Interviu cu Enes Bayrakli, director fondator al Institutelor Culturale Yunus Emre, filialele București și Constanța, în Interetnica [Yunus Emre Cultural Centre. An Open Gate for the Romanians to the Turkish Culture. Interview with Enes Bayrakli, Founder Director of the Cultural Institutes Yunus Emre, Bucharest and Constanta]. *Interetnica*, 4 October 2011 (accessed: 19 February 2020).

### ***Yunus Emre in Romania and Dobruja***

Romania is one of the few countries in the world where two branches of the institute opened, both in 2011, with the other countries being Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania, North Macedonia and Kosovo.<sup>61</sup> Their placement in Bucharest and Constanța adapts to the target audience for the promotion of Turkish language and culture. On the one hand, the audience includes ethnic Romanian and the society of the host country, and on the other it covers the Turkish and Tatar communities in Dobruja. The young generation of Turks and Tatars represents a specific target of the Cultural Centres in the attempt to counteract the trend of abandoning Turkish-language knowledge and education that dominates this segment of the community.<sup>62</sup> The inauguration of such a branch in the country's capital, where, a significant number of Turkish citizens are living and working, focuses on the recently created Turkish diaspora and their connection to the culture of their homeland. Moreover, these branches try to respond to the Turkish business community's demand for qualified personnel with knowledge of the Turkish language and culture, which has been especially expressed in Bucharest and Dobruja during the last two decades, which has implicitly increased the visibility of Turkish culture locally.

Beyond promoting Turkish language and culture, the location of the institutes, especially the one in Constanța, reveal the focus on the Ottoman heritage in current Turkish foreign policy. T. B., the director of the *Yunus Emre* branch in Bucharest, a descendent of a family originating from the now flooded Danube island that migrated to Turkey, claims the importance of the branches in Romania, arguing: "Ada Kaleh was the last Ottoman land, and then, Dobruja, here we have a population of 60-70,000 Muslims, Turks, Tatars, and also many mosques, technically a tradition, a culture in Romania, we have roots here."

The activities of the two branches focus on Turkish language courses, but their offer also includes Ottoman art courses in *ebru* (water painting), violin and artistic photography classes. They also project Turkish films, open exhibitions concerning Turkish folklore, literature and cuisine, the shared Ottoman history of Dobruja and the two communities, or the general Turkish-Romanian relations.

The language and art classes are held by teachers that come from Turkey, graduates in their homeland who are residents in Romania for the time of their activity in the Centre. In 2012, the classes had an attendance of 51 students, 40% of which were Romanians.<sup>63</sup> By 2014, they were followed by 100 new students, and in 2015 the attendance doubled. In the university year 2015/2016, a total of 270 attendants followed the Turkish courses, and 75 the art ones. Generally, both the arts and language classes that are held in the Constanța

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<sup>61</sup> Bocai, *Centrul Cultural Yunus Emre*.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with T. B., director of the Yunus Emre Cultural Center in Bucharest, Bucharest Branch, Bucharest, 1 April 2014.

<sup>63</sup> Bocai, Adina. 2012. Etnicii turci din România sunt norocoși în comparație cu cei din alte țări. Interviu cu Haşim Koç, director al Centrului Cultural Turc Yunus Emre Constanța. [Turks in Romania are lucky in comparison to those from other countries. Interview with Haşim Koç, the director of the Turkish Cultural Centre Yunus Emre Constanța]. *Interetnica*, 29 March 2012 (accessed: 19 February 2020).



branch have a larger ratio of Turkish/Tatar students than Romanian, while in the Bucharest branch, the Romanian ratio is predominant.

The Turkish language classes have a 55% Turkish and Tatar attendance ratio, 37% Romanians and 8% from other nationalities. Of the total number, 150 are Turks and Tatars, 100 Romanians and 20 other nationalities. By comparing the ratio of Romanian students from this year with past years, we can observe a 4% increase.<sup>64</sup>

The average age of the students is 30 years, 80% of them being university graduates that speak at least one foreign language. In terms of profile, they are school and university students, doctors, journalists, lawyers, teachers, businessmen, pharmacists, dentists, tourist agents, public servants, accountants, directors, managers, policemen and military.<sup>65</sup> Their motives are the need to improve language knowledge acquired in the past in the family, in the case of Turkish and Tatar ethnics, or a general interest in Turkish culture and history, stimulated by the contact with this country through travel or TV shows, or professional interests from the business environment.

### **The impact of Turkish actors on the local Muslim community**

*Diyanet* was the first institution of the Turkish state which mediated relations with local, ethnic and religious community organisations while being able to engage in direct dialogue with the local religious leadership, the Muftiate of the Muslim Community, and to meet local exigencies on major issues such as the scholarships in Islamic theology at universities in Turkey, the opening of a Muslim seminar to prepare imams, or the translation of religious literature.

The scholarships represent an important point for the community, as they give a certain educational background for the religious personnel serving as the local clergy; this can later influence the daily Islam practice in Dobruja. The local form of Islam belongs to the *Hanafi* School, but is filled with local habits of ethno-cultural character; in time, they have gained religious value but also represent a religious syncretism, a result of coexisting with the majority's Christian religion.

The imams directly appointed by the *Diyanet* who serve in the historical mosques from Dobruja consider that certain local customs, such as commemorating the dead after 7, 40, 100 days, and one year respectively, and sacrificing a male sheep on the eve of *Kurban Bayram*, are local cultural elements without any base in the Islamic official, religious sources (the Qur'an and the Prophet's traditions).<sup>66</sup> Although the same customs are contested by the representatives of Arab NGOs, there is a difference between them and the representatives of the official Turkish Islam. The difference is in fact that between the *Hanafis* and the *Salafis* regarding the compatibility of certain customs, either dating from before Islam or new ones, with the basic principles of the Islamic faith. To be more precise, the *Hanafis* believe that the local customs that do not contradict the basic

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<sup>64</sup> Information offered by Yunus Emre Cultural Center in Constanța, September 2016.

<sup>65</sup> Information offered by Yunus Emre Cultural Center in Constanța, September 2016.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with S., imam in Medgidia, Constanța County, 24 October 2015.

tenants of Islam can be included and practically tolerated. The *Salafis* totally reject all forms of local customs and emphasise the purity of religious practice.<sup>67</sup>

These customs of the community are part of a code of conduct handed down for generations. The religious elite has varied points of view, highlighting the age difference between them: older imams, trained at the start of the communist period, and younger generations, particularly imams who have continued their religious training in universities from Turkey. These customs are typical for Dobruja Islam, deriving from centuries-old local tradition, with its norms established by the Dobruja imams at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>68</sup> At the same time, the opinions of younger imams trained in Turkey overlap with the attitude of imams appointed by the *Diyanet*. They consider that the practice of Islam is informed by local customs. This is a result of the manner in which the local religious elite from the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries has explained the Prophet's traditions and customs to the community.<sup>69</sup> In time, their interpretation has become a cultural practice with religious value. Today, these practices are part of a behavioural code for the Dobruja Muslims; it is a code transmitted down through the generations, defining the view of what it means to be a good Muslim. Imams from the younger generations have taken the role of explaining to the community the vernacular character of the customs, but often their youth is perceived as lack of experience in relating with the elders of the community. The effect on the young generation is hard to measure, because the first imams trained in Turkey entered service 10-15 years ago. Their influence on the new generations coming to the mosques, now standing at a crossroads between the two tendencies – practices coming from the family and practices coming from imams trained in Turkey – is debatable.

The production of religious literature represents an initiative of the *Diyanet* to influence the religious training of the post-1990 generations. In this manner, the young generations learn of religious knowledge through accessing written religious sources.<sup>70</sup> It is therefore possible for those who trained during communism, who either learned orally or by imitating religious practices of older generations, to revisit religious knowledge. In spite of this, the *Diyanet* represents a small percentage on the market of Islamic literature, which is mostly dominated by Romanian translations of publications from the Arab NGOs. The publications of the Arab NGOs, particularly the translations of the Qur'an, circulate in the community, even among those who do not frequent these foundations.<sup>71</sup> The possibility to read them online eases young people's access to this literature, which, as opposed to the publications of the *Diyanet*, is only partially accessible on their official Turkish site. The publications of the *Diyanet* are also mostly in Turkish, although there are some Romanian translations, while the literature proposed by the Arab NGOs is mostly in Romanian, representing a new advantage for the young generations. The young generation may have Turkish as their mother tongue or as a second language, in the case of

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<sup>67</sup> Viktor-Mach, Dobroslawa. 2017. *Religious Revival and Secularism in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017, 126.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with O. A., imam of Bucharest, 4 April 2014.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with A. S., imam in Valu lui Traian, Constanța County, 16 October 2013.

<sup>70</sup> Quran, *Hadith*.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with S. M., Medgidia, Constanța County, 24 October 2015.

the Tatars, but it is much easier to read in Romanian or in another foreign language.<sup>72</sup>

Qur'an courses for women represent another segment diminishing the informal understanding of Islamic religion. Access to these courses, and to translations of the Qur'an in Turkish and Romanian, helps to understand the text read mechanically in Arabic. This gives new meaning to the religious knowledge specific to the communist generations, when access to religious literature was practically non-existent.<sup>73</sup> The Muftiate of the Muslim Community, supported by the *Diyanet*, competes on this segment against the Arab NGOs. The Centre for Islamic Culture and Education within the Muftiate of the Muslim Community organises courses of Qur'an-reading for women, taught by a teacher from the local community, who graduated from a theology faculty in Turkey and is recommended by the *Diyanet*.

Most of the women attending the courses organised both by the Muftiate of the Muslim Community and Islamic NGOs are between the ages of 50 and 70. The challenge is to attract the young generation of Muslim women again, since the participation of older ones does not necessarily guarantee the transmission of information to the young generations. The creation of these courses in the Muftiate of the Muslim Community came as a reaction to the Arab NGOs organising the same ones. The priority was thus to create a counter-offer on this segment of Islamic religious teaching; the Muftiate of the Muslim Community recently noticed the generational problem and considers it a result of focusing on completion and losing sight of the real needs and problems of the community. The Muftiate registers an advantage on this sector, namely its appeal to the services of teachers of Islamic theology from the local community, trained in Turkish universities. They thus offer access to explanations of the Qur'an given in Romanian, and this allows some of the women taking part to choose the options presented by the Mufti's Office, given that they know Turkish at a basic level, and Islamic NGOs offer Quran courses taught by teachers from Turkey who do not speak Romanian.<sup>74</sup> This is also an example of the manner in which Turkey's policy towards the Muslim community from the region, the investment in preparing human resources and the encouragement for them to return to their host country, practically contribute to orienting the local community towards the official version offered by the Muftiate and supported by the *Diyanet*, as opposed to the counter-offers existing on the religious market.

The restoration of mosques is probably the initiative with the largest impact upon the self-confidence of the Muslim community, since a large number of them had degraded during the communist period due to a lack of investment.<sup>75</sup> Since the mosques are either directly administered by the Muftiate or by local

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<sup>72</sup> Interview with A. F., Constanța, Constanța County, 24 May 2016.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with F. S., Constanța, Constanța County, 31 July 2014; Interview with G. B., Valu lui Traian, Constanța County, 23 May 2016.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with C. A., Constanța, Constanța County, 27 May 2016.

<sup>75</sup> Marin, Manuela and Adriana Cupcea. 2014. *Comunitatea musulmană din Dobrogea în perioada comunistă (1948-1965) [Muslim Community in Dobruja, during Communist period, 1948-1965]*, in *Stalinizare și destalinizare. Evoluții instituționale și impact social [Stalinization and Destalinization. Institutional Evolutions and Social Impact]*, edited by Budeancă, Cosmin and Florentin Olteanu. Bucharest: Polirom, 297-301.

committees under the control of the Muftiate, the institution must approve any restoration works or new constructions, thus maintaining a monopoly for Turkey. The *Diyanet* assumed an active role in this segment of the time span between 1990 and 2000. Recently, this role was taken over by TIKA, which in 2016 presented a project to restore the historical mosques from Dobruja dating from the Ottoman period. Thus, TIKA tries to affirm Turkey's role as a moderate Islamic actor, a promoter of the Sunni Hanafi Islam and a neutralising agent against fundamentalist Islamic influences manifested by the Arab NGOs, which are also present in Dobruja but are mostly frequented by the community of Muslim immigrants from the capital. At the same time, the constant collaboration with the Muftiate recognised and supported by the Romanian state as the only authority representing the Romanian Muslim community,<sup>76</sup> both in restoration projects and in religious projects generally, strengthens the legitimacy of this local Islam as the official form of Islam in Romania. Equally important, the restoration of mosques is one of the most evident attempts to protect the community, and it has an effect not only at the level of the institutions, but also on a personal level, on the level of the community's collective mentality. It reaffirms Turkey's role as a protector towards the Muslims in the area. Just as the destruction of mosques in the communist period meant abandoning religion, at least publicly, their renovation and reconstruction now signifies a revival of the Islamic religion. We can thus say that going to the mosque is more common now not only among the older generations, but also among younger ones aged between 20 and 40, becoming particularly high during the religious service on Friday and the prayers conducted during the bayrams.<sup>77</sup>

As far as the activity of the *Yunus Emre* Cultural Centres is concerned, the Constanța branch ensures the permanent contact of the local community and the local cultural environment with Turkish culture, literature, art, and cinema productions, thus modelling the cultural preferences of the local community according to Turkish society. Even though this is not true for the entire community, there is a segment of the community segment – Turks and Tatars – who regularly attend the institute's events, providing a permanent public.

As a result of Turkey's isolation in the communist years and because of the lack of Turkish education in this period, the form of Turkish language spoken in Dobruja is more archaic, devoid of neologisms which the Turkish language in Turkey adopted during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, Turkish language courses in *Yunus Emre*, as well as Turkish-language classes in state education, ensure a connection to the literary language in Turkey, countering the tendency of mother tongue loss which exists especially among younger generations. Last but not least, one of the effects is the orientation of young Tatars towards the study of Turkish language, besides the fact that most of them study Turkish as a mother tongue in schools. The reasons cited are related to the usefulness of Turkish

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<sup>76</sup> The Status of the Islamic religion in Romania. Chapter VI. The creation and organisation of the Muftiate of the Muslim Community, art. 10. (1) *According to the law 489/2006 regarding religious freedom and the general regime of cults, the Muftiate has a legal personality, is the only religious institution representing the Muslims from Romania, operates in accordance to the laws of the Romanian state and the provisions of the current statute, as well as the Rules for organising and functioning of the Muftiate.* Available at <https://lege5.ro/Gratuit/gezdamrrga/statutul-cultului-musulman-din-11062008> (accessed: 19 February 2020).

<sup>77</sup> Field observations 2014-2016.

language knowledge, which offers them practical perspectives: the access to scholarships in Turkey, or possibly future integration into the labour market either in Dobruja or the capital, in Turkey or in Germany, where the most extensive Turkish community in Europe is settled. The courses are also attended by Romanian entrepreneurs who want to develop businesses in Turkey, by those interested in Turkey as a tourist destination, or simply by sympathisers with Turkish culture and history.

In both cases, TIKA and *Yunus Emre* Cultural Centres, we cannot speak precisely about an effect at the community level, but in general the effects of the two institutions' activities are directed towards the general public in Romania, regardless of ethnic or religious affiliation, the final result being in line with the proposed objective, i.e. Turkey's accumulation of soft power. While in the case of TIKA this effect is more visible at the diplomatic level, it can be said that the work of the *Yunus Emre* Cultural Centres has a greater impact on the general public and on the local stage through partnerships with local cultural institutions from the two cities where the centres are based, Bucharest and Constanța.

Although it is difficult to measure accurately in the five years of activity, the two cultural centres have contributed to the popularity of Turkey in Romanian society, at least in the south, ensuring the contact with Turkish culture, history, music and cuisine. Finally, the Turkish films promoted within the institutes, along with Turkish TV series broadcasted by the Turkish media in Romania, contribute to cultural understanding of Turkey and practically to the creation of a positive image of Turkey and Turks. In general, those watching these films underline that they recognise common behavioural and social patterns, which raise their interest in culture and the Turkish language. Turkey was the top tourist destinations in Romania before the wave of terrorist attacks in 2016 and the attempted *coup d'état* of 15 July the same year.

## Conclusions

All the aforementioned institutions have improved Turkey's soft power potential and its position as an influential actor in the region in the post-1990 period, both at state level and in individual perceptions. As I have shown, in the Dobruja case Turkey has implemented its foreign and kin state policies strategies for this purpose in multiple areas, turning the local Muslim community into a foundation for its soft power accumulation. The analysis shows that the religion has been the main field of interactions at the local level, and has actually been the main source of Turkey's soft power potential in the case of its actions in the Muslim community in Dobruja. The Turkish presence has started to change the visible face of Dobruja Islam by restoring Ottoman mosques, first through the *Diyanet* and then through TIKA, while the granted scholarships, the publications of the *Diyanet*, the offered religious services and the clergy taught in Turkey have contributed to a revival of Islamic religious practice, shaping the way in which the Dobruja Muslim community interacts and positions itself against the rest of the Muslim world. The Mufti has pointed out many times that by following the lines of the Islamic religious status he tries to develop institutional relations in agreement with Romania's foreign policy. Thus, the bilateral relations between Romania and Turkey developed since the beginning of the 1990s have certainly

influenced the development of connections between local Muslims and the institutions of the Turkish state and their renewed identification with the sphere of Turkish Islam. In Romania, since the community is of a modest size and lacks an Islamic theology faculty (although there are imams instructed in Turkey), one cannot speak of a consistent Islamic religious elite. This has an impact on the possibility of internally developing strategies for maintaining the Islamic religious identity. In this context, it can be stated that the Turkish Islam, represented by Turkish state actors closer to the local interpretation of the Islamic religion, represents the community's solution of withdrawal and preservation of Islamic identity.

How these Turkish state institutions will evolve in the future in relation to the community and in general at local level depends largely on the foreign policy relations between Turkey, the European Union and the USA. Romania's integration into the European Union in 2007 has already affected the local community's relationship with Turkey. The community members' interest in Turkey was originally an economic, cultural, symbolic and touristic one. Gradually, the economic one diminished after 2007. Along with the difficulty of obtaining an economic and social status similar to that in Romania in Turkey, the integration of the country into the European Union and the access to the benefits of free movement for those working in the EU have led to a shift. If in the early 1990s economic emigration was directed towards Turkey, after 2007 the EU became the first option for the members of the community looking for economic opportunities abroad. This new orientation has also been influenced by the Turkish policy of granting citizenship, which does not encourage settlement in Turkey. Prior to 2009, citizenship could have been obtained by marrying a Turkish citizen, without the need for a subsequent application for citizenship. Currently, according to Turkish state law, a couple must be married for three years without interruption, after which an application can be submitted to the Ministry of Internal Affairs.<sup>78</sup> In the case of an application for Turkish citizenship by foreigners, five years' residency in Turkey is mandatory, as is the proof of exercising the right to work. Therefore, Turkey's policy is not to encourage kindred groups to obtain Turkish citizenship and settle on its territory, but to encourage them to remain in the country of citizenship. Their presence there means an expansion of Turkish culture and language and, at the same time, an important point of support for Turkish state actors, acting in foreign policy in order to expand Turkey's influence as a regional leader. The case of the Muslims in Dobruja offers an insight into how Turkey under the AKP has intervened and shaped the politics and religious life of Muslims in the Balkans for this purpose, through a pragmatic approach that includes religious institutions and cultural policies.

Although the situation following the coup attempt of 15 July 2016 had a negative impact on the image of Turkey and its soft power potential, in the absence of a strong position by the EU and implicitly of the Romanian state, the Muslim community in Dobruja, as all the Muslim communities in the Balkans, complied with the official position of the Turkish state, continuing the cultural, educational and religious collaborations with its state actors present in Romania.

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<sup>78</sup> Turkish Citizenship Law 27256/2009.

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