



INSTITUTO  
UNIVERSITÁRIO  
DE LISBOA

---

## **Religion and Foreign Policy: The case of the Turkish Diyanet in Africa**

Inês de Araújo e Silva

*Master* in International Studies,

Supervisor:  
PhD, Gonçalo Rocha Gonçalves, Assistant Professor,  
ISCTE – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

September, 2025

History Department

## **Religion and Foreign Policy: The case of the Turkish Diyanet in Africa**

Inês de Araújo e Silva

*Master* in International Studies,

Supervisor:

PhD, Gonçalo Rocha Gonçalves, Assistant Professor,  
ISCTE – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

September, 2025

## Acknowledgements

---

I will be forever grateful to my parents and loved ones for their unconditional trust and support.

To my advisor, Professor Gonalo, for his patience, guidance, and continual encouragement.

## Resumo

---

Esta dissertação explora a Presidência dos Assuntos Religiosos da Turquia (Diyanet) enquanto ferramenta da política externa turca aplicada ao continente africano, entre 2016 e 2024. Fundada em 1924 num contexto secular, a Diyanet passou a ser um ator transnacional que promove a influência religiosa, cultural e ideológica turca sob o Partido da Justiça e Desenvolvimento (AKP). Estudos anteriores focaram-se frequentemente no contexto europeu, porém este projeto aborda a dimensão africana, menos explorada, onde o envolvimento diplomático, económico e religioso da Turquia se ampliou significativamente sob as estratégias de «Abertura à África» e «Política de Parceria com África». Empregando uma abordagem mista, este projeto integra uma análise quantitativa dos relatórios anuais da Fundação Diyanet da Turquia (TDV) e uma análise qualitativa do discurso. Com base nos relatórios, foram examinados indicadores como a construção de mesquitas, a distribuição do Alcorão, bolsas de estudo e parcerias, além do estudo do enquadramento narrativo, os mecanismos retóricos e os silêncios institucionais. As conclusões demonstram que a Turquia usa a herança otomano-islâmica, a solidariedade islâmica e a autoridade institucional informal para diferenciar a sua abordagem da dos concorrentes ocidentais e do Golfo. Mais precisamente, o trabalho da Diyanet, que vai desde programas educacionais a projetos de segurança alimentar e trabalho humanitário, funciona como um meio prático e performativo de influência que incorpora a autoridade religiosa e ideológica turca ao mesmo tempo que sustenta os objetivos estratégicos de Ancara na arena internacional.

**Palavras-chave:** Diyanet, Turquia, África, Religião, Política Externa, Diplomacia Religiosa

## Abstract

---

This dissertation explores the Presidency of Religious Affairs of Türkiye (Diyanet) as a tool of Turkish foreign policy across the African continent between 2016 and 2024. Established in 1924 in a secular environment, the Diyanet has transitioned to a transnational actor under the Justice and Development Party (AKP) that promotes Türkiye's religious, cultural, and ideological influence. While prior research has often focused on the European context, this project addresses the less mainstream African dimension, where Türkiye's diplomatic, economic, and religious engagement amplified significantly under the "Opening to Africa" and "Africa Partnership Policy" strategies. Employing a mixed-method approach, this project integrates both a quantitative analysis of Türkiye Diyanet Foundation's (TDV) annual reports and a qualitative discourse analysis. It analyses indicators such as mosque construction, Qur'an distributions, educational scholarships, and partnerships, while additionally analysing the narrative framing, rhetorical devices, and institutional silences in the reporting. My findings demonstrate that Türkiye uses Ottoman-Islamic heritage, Islamic solidarity, and informal institutional authority to set its agenda apart from both Western and Gulf competitors. Precisely, the Diyanet's work, ranging from education programs to food security projects and humanitarian work, operates as both a practical and performative means of influence to embed Turkish religious and ideological authority while sustaining Ankara's strategic goals in the international arena.

**Keywords:** Diyanet, Türkiye, Africa, Religion, Foreign Policy, Religious Diplomacy

# Table of Contents

---

Acknowledgements .....	
Resumo .....	i
Abstract .....	ii
Table of Contents .....	iii
List of Figures .....	iv
Glossary of Acronyms .....	v
Introduction .....	1
Objectives and Discussion .....	1
Methodology .....	2
Structure .....	7
Identity, Laicism, and Religious Diplomacy: The Reframing of Türkiye’s Foreign Policy ..	8
1.1. Religion, Foreign Policy and the Power of Identity .....	8
1.2. State, Secularism, and the Birth of the Diyanet .....	11
1.3. The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy .....	17
1.4. The Diyanet: An Instrument of Turkish Foreign Policy .....	21
The Diyanet and Turkish Religious Diplomacy in Africa .....	24
2.1. Mapping Faith and Influence: An Analysis of the Türkiye Diyanet Foundation in Africa .....	31
2.2. Direct Religious Diplomacy .....	32
2.3. Humanitarian Diplomacy .....	38
2.4. Budget Evolution .....	41
2.5. African Agency and the Governance of Religious Diplomacy .....	41
Conclusion .....	44
Sources and Bibliography .....	48
a. Sources .....	48
b. Bibliography .....	50

## List of Figures

---

<b>Figure 2.1:</b> Turkey’s Presence in Africa (2020) .....	29
<b>Figure 2.2:</b> Mosque of Islamic Solidarity, in Mogadishu, Somalia. ....	34
<b>Figure 2.3:</b> Abdülhamid II Mosque, the biggest in Djibouti.....	34
<b>Figure 2.4:</b> The 2 <sup>nd</sup> edition of the Diyanet Foundation International Kindness Awards/International Benevolence Awards .....	40

## Glossary of Acronyms

---

<b>AKP</b>	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi / Justice and Development Party
<b>AU</b>	African Union
<b>CHP</b>	Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi / Republican People's Party
<b>DEİK</b>	Dış Ekonomik İlişkiler Kurulu / Foreign Economic Relations Board of Türkiye.
<b>DİB (Diyanet)</b>	Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı / Presidency of Religious Affairs.
<b>DİTİB</b>	Diyanet İşleri Türk-İslam Birliği / Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>IHL</b>	International Anatolian Imam Hatip High School.
<b>MFA</b>	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Republic of Türkiye)
<b>MÜSİAD</b>	Independent Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>TASAM</b>	Türk Asya Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi / Turkish Asian Center for Strategic Studies
<b>TDV</b>	Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı / Türkiye Diyanet Foundation
<b>TİKA</b>	Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı Başkanlığı / Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency
<b>TUSKON</b>	Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists of Türkiye

# Introduction

---

## Objectives and Discussion

In recent decades, the Presidency of Religious Affairs of Türkiye (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*, hereafter also referred to as Diyanet) has increasingly enticed scholarly attention as an institution that lies at the intersection of religion, domestic policymaking, and Turkish foreign policy. Established in 1924 as an instrument used by the state to impose control over religion, within the secular republican framework of the then newly established Turkish nation-state (Berkes 1998; Davison 2003), the Diyanet has been the object of profound transformations over time, particularly under the rule of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). Diyanet then evolved from a largely bureaucratic domestic agency into a transnational actor, admittedly employed to advance Türkiye's strategic interests abroad (Öztürk & Sözeri 2018; Öztürk & Baser 2022). Even though early literature focused predominantly on the Diyanet's role in shaping Türkiye's internal religious field (Altınordu 2021; Gözaydın 2020), contemporary scholarship has highlighted its function as a mechanism of Turkish soft power and ideological diplomacy in regions such as the Balkans and Central Asia (Öztürk & Sözeri 2018; Kaya 2019; Öztürk & Baser 2022).

Two principal currents of analysis can be identified in this field of inquiry. The first, adopting a soft power and religious diplomacy perspective, assesses the Diyanet as a vehicle for promoting a model of moderate Sunni Islam, thereby enhancing Türkiye's rebranded image as a benevolent Muslim-majority power (Öktem 2012; Mandaville & Hamid 2018). The second, holding a more critical standpoint, interprets the Diyanet's transnational expansion as a vector of authoritarian statecraft and ideological control, aimed at monitoring diaspora communities, countering political opposition, particularly in the post-2016 coup attempt context, which will be further analysed, and projecting a state-centric religious identity abroad (Öztürk & Sözeri, 2018; Öztürk & Baser, 2022; Yavuz, 2009). Nevertheless, existing empirical research has overwhelmingly focused on European contexts, where Diyanet's activities are most visible and politically scrutinised.

In contrast, the role of the Diyanet in Africa - where Türkiye's diplomatic, economic, and security presence has expanded rapidly since the launch of the "Opening to Africa" initiative in 1998 and its re-articulation as an "Africa Partnership Policy" in 2013 (Yimer, 2024; Mehmet,2012) - remains largely underexplored, although there have been some studies touching upon this thematic. Whereas most existing literature acknowledges religious diplomacy's symbolic and material role in Türkiye's African engagement (Öktem, 2012; Yimer, 2024), there is a void regarding systematic analyses of the Diyanet's concrete activities, strategic functions, interplay with the post-Gülen diplomacy and interactions with African states and societies.

Therefore, that is precisely the gap this dissertation aims to address by providing a primary source-based analysis of Diyanet in Africa. Using the institution's annual reports, focusing on both quantitative and qualitative data, we aim to examine its projects and activities, particularly as to how they can be examples of a foreign policy strategy that utilises religious symbols, and the discourse patterns that can be identified across the reports that showcase the intentional transmission of a particular narrative. The ultimate purpose is to investigate the Diyanet's role as an instrument of Turkish foreign policy in Africa between the years of 2016 and 2024. The period is marked by intensified religious diplomacy following the Gülen movement's decline and the consolidation of state-led religious outreach (Öztürk & Baser 2022). By taking on this objective, the intent is to contribute to broader and more in-depth analysis and debates on transnational religious actors, the diffusion of authoritarian, religion-based regimes, and the complex entanglement of religion and foreign policy in a neo-Ottoman imaginary.

### **Methodology**

The analysis of Diyanet's action in Africa is based on a mixed-method empirical approach, primarily relying on the official annual activity reports of the Türkiye Diyanet Foundation, produced between 2016 to 2024. Through a grid of analysis, the reports have been examined both quantitatively - assessing, in numbers, the foundation's activities - and qualitatively, by looking at the discourse, interpreting narratives, silences and possible rhetorical strategies employed. This combination aims to offer a more comprehensive and solid framework for understanding the Diyanet's operations in Africa and the ways through which its actions intersect with wider themes in foreign policy. In addition to the annual reports, I combine the use of primary diplomatic documentation, namely Ministry of Foreign Affairs policy documents and Türkiye-Africa Partnership Summit declarations, as well as TİKA and Türkiye Maarif Vakfi annual reports, and official speeches and press releases from the Presidency. These sources are important to validate chronological events, budgets and policy framings. This blend permits a more consistent and trustworthy interpretation and analysis of both self-representation and state policy practice from 2016 to 2024.

The reports that form the main empirical basis of this study are documents that narrate the foundation's projects, programs and achievements for each year. They comprise project inventories, some financial data, statistical tables and graphs, and narrative sections describing the Diyanet's mission - both in Turkey and abroad. The Türkiye Diyanet Foundation's annual reports perform as institutional narratives that mix inventories of its programmes, selective financial records and headline metrics. Their structure is very consistent across the years: messages from the leadership and an institutional overview are directly followed by thematic sections on religious education, humanitarian relief, international services, mosque construction,

publications, habitually concluded with annexes on contact information and affiliates. Relevant to remark is that authorship and oversight are internal and centralised. The reports document internal restructurings, list the Mütevelli Heyeti (Board of Trustees/Administrative Council), and describe the consolidation of departmental functions. Collectively, these reports reveal that operational units provide the raw material, yet the final compilation and editorial decisions are made at Diyanet's headquarters. This framing illustrates that the preparation and review of the documents belong to the Foundation's ruling bodies rather than with an independent editorial or methodological auditor (TDV, 2018, pp. 8–11).

The projected audience is hybrid, including domestic and international donors, partners, and the general public. Also, the rhetorical register is promotional, and it encompasses a moral tone. For instance, the 2017 report refers to the Diyanet's mission in terms of "iyilik" (benevolence) extended to "seven continents", an approach that is recurrent and establishes a civilisational tone for subsequent narratives (TDV, 2017, p.8). The measurements prioritise outputs rather than outcomes, as can be observed in the 2018 report, the education and social aid portions give details regarding the International Theology and Imam-Hatip programmes and for Ramadan activities, yet they do not specify how the recipients are tracked throughout the initiatives (TDV, 2018, p. 10, 27–28, 39; p. 11). This is a pattern that is repeated in the following years, as shown in the 2021 report, when the authorisation of hundreds of projects is highlighted as a significant performance marker, once again with narrow methodological comments (TDV, 2021).

All combined, the structure and characteristics of these reports advise a careful reading approach. Without a doubt, the reports are immensely valuable for the comprehension of priorities, geographical reach, and portfolios. However, they are also performative documents meant for a broad circulation.

The Diyanet's activities take place worldwide as it operated in more than 140 countries by the beginning of this decade. However, this study solely focuses on its involvement in Africa. I extracted all references to African countries and projects developed on the continent, as well as any textual notes relating to Africa as a whole. Limiting the data source to the official documents guarantees the accurate illustration of Diyanet's self-representation narrative within the larger scope of Türkiye's current religious foreign outreach. Therefore, all conclusions are empirically grounded in the foundation's statements and reported data.

The analytical grid was developed to aid in the analysis of the reports through a process that again mixed quantitative and qualitative approaches. This framework arose inductively after a first read-through of the documents and thus was established based on recurring topics and patterns identified across all reports. The chosen structure also aimed to capture the multidimensional nature of the Diyanet's activities and institutional dynamics. The main analytical points were: i) institutional capacity, as in personnel numbers and foreign deployments; ii) financial allocations, namely the amount dedicated to international activities; iii) projects

abroad, especially in Africa and with an inherent religious nature such as mosque construction, Qur'an distribution, and humanitarian aid; iv) inter-organisational cooperation, with African Islamic partners and/or Turkish state agencies; v) discourse patterns or specific religious terms invoking certain values such as "brotherhood" for instances or references to an Ottoman heritage; vi) education and training, which includes the awarding of scholarships, institutional partnerships and imam training; vii) apparent communication strategies through Turkish and/or local media were also weighed.

Also, as previously mentioned, the framework of analysis includes a timeframe that spans from 2016 to 2024, which allows for the identification of trends, patterns or shifts. The quantitative metrics, for instance, the number of mosques built, wells dug, African students supported, or Qur'ans distributed, were also organised chronologically to assert the evolution of such metrics over time and in association with the broader Turkish foreign policy strategy towards Africa.

However, one of the principal absences in the annual reports examined is that of rigorous and consistent financial data, specifically relating to budgetary distributions. Numbers are frequently shown in an illustrative or grouped form, lacking a homogeneous framework that allows for a year-on-year comparability. In several instances, information concerning the budget is provided irregularly and is lacking contextualisation, thus substantially limiting the possibility of any definite longitudinal financial analysis. This limitation in methodological clarity vehemently weakens the quantitative diachronic analysis of the reports, thus compromising their utility and value for scholars pursuing an in-depth analysis of the scale and range of the Diyanet's engagement over time. At the same time, it illustrates that the primary objective is not to correctly inform on the Foundation's activities, but rather to accentuate its relevance and that of religious diplomacy.

Lastly, it is relevant to state that I recognise the margin of error inherent in the fact that I had to translate all documents from Turkish to English. Therefore, I acknowledge the possibility of certain inaccuracies or translation errors, as some graphs or figures were not possible to translate. Ultimately, however, such possibilities are not significant enough to hinder or invalidate the analysis of the Diyanet's actions and goals.

Although quantitative data provides a valuable insight into the Diyanet's presence in Africa, on its own, it is not sufficient to comprehend entirely the ramifications of such presence. That is precisely why this study aims to join quantitative content analysis with a qualitative discourse examination of the textual elements of the official reports. This assessment entails a close reading of the written sections (introductions, project descriptions, thematic overviews and official messages) to better navigate the way in which the Diyanet frames its initiatives and, for instance, which topics it chooses to give emphasis to.

This method starts with the acknowledgement that the Directorate's annual reports function not solely as archives of its institutional activities, but also as instruments of tactical communication. They also serve to help portray a certain image and validate the Presidency's activities via particularly detailed rhetorical options that align with the broader foreign policy goals and ideological values. Through the analysis of metaphors, thematic ideas and linguistic patterns, the discourse review helps to uncover the political and ideological traces that are embedded in the documents.

In practical terms, the examination involved the identification of rhetorical strategies and recurring patterns that place the Diyanet's activities within a broader civilisational and moral self-defined mission. A frequent repetition of terms such as "goodness" (*iyilik*) and of humanitarian undertakings frames the Diyanet as both a successor of Ottoman charitable traditions and as an ambassador of Islamic solidarity. I gave particular attention to how African countries and communities are portrayed, whether that be as active partners, passive recipients or members of a shared religious ummah. Additionally, sentences or phrases combined with references to Africa, such as "in need" or "oppressed regions", were examined, given the possible implications of such framing. Furthermore, attention was paid to the selective emphasis given to certain regions or countries, because such choices reflect strategic narratives and policies.

Notably, this analysis was also concerned with the silences. The lack of specific details, such as concrete locations, names of local partner organisations or identifiable African collaborators, was viewed as highly relevant. Frequently, the documents contained vague references to activities "across Africa" and even more habitually awarded the credit of success to the "support of our nation", with little to no mention of African agency. These absences in the narrative aid the creation of an image of the Diyanet as a self-sufficient benefactor, thereby lessening the visibility of African actors.

This study took note of these silences as part of the discourse analysis, appreciating how institutional self-portrayal is shaped by what is said but just as much by what is not. By taking into consideration the subtextual silences and the plain language, this method provides a nuanced overview of how the Diyanet builds its image, authority and legitimacy in its African activities. Important to note is that the analysis focuses on the actual content of the official documents, thus evading speculations and solely relying on representative quotes and rhetorical motifs as empirical indications. Following these discursal trends throughout time permits the assessment of continuity and/or change, for example, the emergence or decline of certain topics such as humanitarian conduct, pan-Islamic unity or Ottoman heritage, parallel to strategic or political shifts. By opting for this route, the discourse review goes beyond a superficial interpretation, illustrating how Diyanet's self-projected image supports and strengthens the Turkish larger diplomatic and ideological desires in Africa.

The methodological choice to examine the work of Türkiye's Directorate for Religious Affairs from 2016 onwards is justified by the intersection between structural transformations in Turkish foreign policy, institutional changes in Diyanet's internal, as a diplomatic instrument, positioning, and the intensification of Türkiye's strategic presence on the African continent.

In the last two decades, Turkish foreign policy underwent a significant reorientation, with the launch of the so-called "Opening to Africa" through the 1998 Action Plan, later reinforced by the adoption of the "Partnership Policy with Africa" in 2013. This upward trajectory was accompanied by important institutional and diplomatic milestones, namely the declaration of Türkiye as a strategic partner of the African Union in 2008, its accession to the African Development Bank in 2013, and the holding of the Türkiye-Africa Cooperation Summits in 2008, 2014 and 2021, which materialized a sustained vision of Türkiye's insertion into the African continent as an autonomous and influential actor.

From an economic and institutional perspective, Türkiye's involvement in Africa has considerably increased. The total trade between the Turkish state and the African continent rose from \$5.4 billion in 2003 to \$40.7 billion in 2022. (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye [MFA], n.d.; the Foreign Economic Relations Board of Türkiye [DEİK], 2023). Throughout the same period, the number of Turkish embassies in Africa increased from 12 to 44 (MFA, n.d.), indicating a notable increase in Türkiye's diplomatic activity in Africa. Türkiye's humanitarian activity has also become a distinguishing feature of Türkiye's involvement in Africa in the late 2000s and early 2010s, especially in relation to Türkiye's 2009-2010 Presidency of the United Security Council and later became established as a "humanitarian diplomacy" paradigm (Altunisik, 2019, 2022). Turkish Airlines also increased its African footprint from 4 airports in 2004 to 54 airports by 2025 (Anadolu Agency, 2025). Lastly, defence industry exports doubled from \$1.65 billion in 2015 to \$5.42 billion in August of 2025 (SETA, 2019; Hurriyet Daily News, 2025)

This multi-dimensional projection sets the stage for the growing role of Diyanet in foreign policy. Initially designed to tame religion under republican secularism, Diyanet was placed directly under the Prime Minister in September 2014; the then-Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said in May 2015 that the institution had "entered a new stage of development", which explicitly tied the institution to foreign-policy intentions and acknowledged Africa as a priority geography (Seufert, 2020). The institutional centrality of Diyanet continued to consolidate in 2016, when Binali Yıldırım placed Diyanet under the Prime Minister's Office and further systematised Diyanet under the 2018 Presidential Decree No. 4 reorganising state offices (Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, 2018; Seufert, 2020). After the 2016 coup attempt, the state moved to raise their formal instruments - specifically Diyanet and TİKA - as primary conduits for religious, humanitarian, and cultural outreach to Africa (Altunışık, 2019, 2022; Seufert, 2020). This reorientation led to the ability for Diyanet, and its branch the Türkiye Diyanet Foundation, to

implement concrete programs: notable projects include the Abdülhamid Han II Mosque in Djibouti (2019) and the Ghana National Mosque complex (2021), along with continent-wide convenings like the Third Summit of African Muslim Religious Leaders (Istanbul, October 2019), which solidified links to national Islamic councils, and broadened pipelines for training and scholarship (Anadolu Agency, 2019, 2021; Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, 2019a, 2019b).

### **Structure**

This dissertation will be structured in three substantive chapters followed by a conclusion. This first and introductory chapter has unpacked the research problem, stated the theoretical framing, and discussed methodology. Chapter I includes the conceptual and historical framework which is needed to assess the evidence on the relationship between identity, religion and foreign policy; Diyanet's evolution as a state religious apparatus, including constructivist and critical (and "authoritarian infrastructural power") perspectives. It also establishes what the Diyanet is and explores its structure and purposes. Chapter II contains the empirical core on Africa: it narrates the trajectory of Türkiye-Africa relations to the AKP period, and evaluates Diyanet/Türkiye Diyanet Foundation activities (programs, geographies, target publics), based upon the reports, by assessing their material and symbolic reach, with particular regard for dynamics in Muslim-majority countries and strategic interests. The dissertation resolves with a conclusion in which we recentre the focus on the guiding questions, synthesise findings, consider theoretical and policy implications, acknowledge limitations, and draft possibilities for future research.

# **Identity, Laicism, and Religious Diplomacy: The Reframing of Türkiye's Foreign Policy**

## **1.1. Religion, Foreign Policy and the Power of Identity**

To bring religion and foreign policy into the same discussion is to investigate the collision of two vast realms. This undeniable overlap is an intense and complex (yet underestimated) entanglement. In recent times, there has been a visible reappearance of religion in the public sphere, which has impelled academics to revisit classical secularisation theories, which had long prophesied a steady and permanent decline in religious influence as a result of modernisation (Berger, 1969, 2000; Casanova, 1994; Luckmann, 1967; Stark, 1999; Wilson, 1966). The field of International Relations has traditionally conceptualised the international sphere, particularly since the Westphalian settlement of 1648, as a secular arena governed by interactions among sovereign states. However, the terrorist attacks of 9/11, along with the growing visibility of ethno-religious conflicts worldwide, have prompted a significant reevaluation of religion's place in global politics (Sandal & Fox, 2013). In response, a growing body of scholarship has emerged, exploring the multifaceted role of religion in international affairs, including its contributions to peacebuilding (Gurses, 2015; Gurses & Rost, 2017), the practice of faith-based diplomacy (Marsden, 2014), and the influence of religious ideology on national foreign policy agendas (Amstutz, 2013; Inboden, 2008).

Although early secularisation theorists believed religious institutions' political influence would decline over time (Finke & Stark, 1992), recent evidence indicates the opposite. These institutions are increasingly active as domestic and international political players (Kalyvas, 1996). For example, Gill and Keshavarzian (1999) note that religious groups act as central nodes in shaping broader socio-political and economic systems. Case studies, such as Ben-Porat's (2013) examination of Israel, illustrate how religious bodies can oppose secular reforms, while Stepan and Linz (2013) and Wiktorowicz (2004) show how Islamic organisations can mobilise democratic and anti-Western political movements across the Arab region. Likewise, the Catholic Church has played a key role in democratic transitions in Latin America and Eastern Europe (Gill, 2008; Philpott, 2004). Buddhist groups have been influential in pro-democracy movements in Thailand, Myanmar, and Tibet (Cheng & Brown, 2006).

The international dimension of religious institutions' effect is also progressively more apparent. As Ammerman (2003) and Warner (2000) noted, religious actors are an increasingly salient factor in foreign policy analyses. Warner and Walker (2011) argue that the transnational character of many religious institutions enhances their influence in international politics. Over

globalisation, institutions such as the Roman Catholic Church, al-Qaeda, and Shi'a global networks have come to employ varying degrees of power over state behaviour and foreign policy agendas (Haynes, 2009). Furthermore, religious institutions may internationalise domestic grievances, connecting internal socio-political strains with broader geopolitical developments (Ghose & James, 2005; James & Özdamar, 2005). Philpott (2007) underlines the importance of state identity as a vital variable in understanding how religious heritage influences paths in foreign policy. National religious traditions may outline states' tactical behaviour and the institutional logic of their religious bureaucracies (Warner & Walker, 2011).

Indeed, this dissertation does not aim to explore the broad concept of religion or its role in foreign policy analysis. Instead, it focuses on how religious institutions and symbols have become key elements in the diplomatic strategies of both democratic and authoritarian regimes, as noted by scholars such as Haynes (2014) and Fox (2012). In examining Islam, in particular, as a form of statecraft, Mandaville and Hamid (2018) describe this trend as a competitive arena where players like Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran strive for influence through rival religious narratives. Within this context, Turkey's use of the Diyanet can be seen not just as cultural outreach but as a strategic assertion of normative authority, especially in Africa, where Islam offers shared ground and ideological leverage. However, as Haynes (2009) points out, religious diplomacy also needs to be examined for its potential to support authoritarian consolidation and ideological control under the guise of soft power.

Nevertheless, the classical study of foreign policy was long moulded by realist conventions that privileged material power and rational state interests. Precisely, Barnett and Duvall (2005) note a 'disciplinary tendency to associate power with realism...[and] rivals to realism typically distance themselves from "power" considerations'. Contemporary scholarship increasingly recognises that identities, beliefs, and symbolic resources can be as substantial as military assets or trade balances (Heibach & Taş, 2024; Altunışık, 2022; Haynes, 2013). In a state such as Turkey, where domestic political developments have long been deeply entwined with Islam, the religious domain serves not merely as a foundation of moral authority but also as a flexible utensil for outspreading influence well beyond Turkish national borders. Furthermore, as Heibach & Taş (2024) observe, neoclassical realism has indeed furthered our understanding of resource mobilisation, providing 'insights as to how states mobilise resources by highlighting, for instance, the instrumental role of ideology.

Before discussing the intricacies of the Diyanet and its foreign role, it is imperative to recall one of the most popular concepts in International Relations: soft power. Joseph Nye's (2004) seminal notion of soft power provides a starting point for grasping how states deploy non-coercive means - culture, values, and policies - to shape the preferences of others through attractiveness rather than force. Even though its definition is still debatable, as Altunışık (2022) observes, it can be argued that soft power derives from what a country is and does. Subsequently, the author notes

it is contextual and temporal: it draws its persuasiveness not merely from abstract cultural appeal but from the credibility of the state exercising it and the resonance it finds in local identities. In Turkey, this power has long rested on the dual foundation of its Ottoman-Islamic heritage and its modern experiment with secular republicanism (Gözaydın, 2020). The tension between these two poles has spawned domestic contention and a unique resource for international placement. In turn, in Mann's *Sources of Social Power*, his conceptualisation of ideological power is closer to the assumptions of agential constructivism than those of the soft power approach, as he views ideological power as deriving from the ability of actors to produce (or mobilise) meaning; norms; and aesthetics/ritual practices.

According to Altunışık (2022), the analysis of Turkey's rising soft power in Republican history should be divided into two periods. The first refers back to the National War of Independence, which led to the creation of the Republic. Unlike many defeated nations then, Turkey strongly rejected the post-First World War settlement imposed by the winning powers. This strong defiance and Turkey's eventual victory inspired various nationalist movements in colonial areas. They looked to Turkey's experience to develop their plans for gaining independence.

Turkey's War of Independence and the subsequent establishment of the Republic exerted a profound appeal across the Middle East and the wider Islamic world, serving as a potent source of hope for societies under colonial domination. Contemporary accounts firmly establish the significant impact of Turkey's struggle in Tunisia, Egypt, and Algeria. According to Esenbel (2013) and others, this influence reached deeply into Southeast Asia, especially in Indonesia and Malaysia. Indonesian nationalist leaders, such as Mohammad Hatta, boldly framed Atatürk's victories as symbols of a wider awakening, proclaiming Ankara to be the "Mecca of modern nationalism" and a guiding beacon for Asia's liberation.

This inspirational influence extended well beyond Muslim-majority contexts; in India, for example, Mahatma Gandhi's strategies against British rule were notably informed by developments in Anatolia (Sinha, 1994). Moreover, the sweeping reforms enacted by the Republican state in governance, secularisation, and modernisation solidified Turkey's symbolic capital, positioning it as a vital reference point for nations such as Iran, Tunisia, and Afghanistan in their state formation efforts.

Turkey's resolute anti-imperialist stance and rapid institutional transformation significantly enhanced its normative appeal. However, measures like the abolition of the Caliphate and the institutionalisation of laicism caused notable ambivalence among certain factions of the Muslim world (Hattemer, 2000). Thus, Turkey's early Republican trajectory serves as a striking reservoir of soft power, stemming from its unwavering resistance to foreign imposition and its bold reconfiguration of state-society relations during a period of rising nationalism and anti-colonial struggle (Altunışık, 2022).

The second pivotal phase of Turkey's soft power evolution, highlighted by Altunışık (2022), took off in the late 1990s and gained remarkable momentum throughout the 2000s. This era was marked by impressive socio-economic and political advancements, placing Turkey ahead of many of its Middle Eastern neighbours. The coalition government of Bülent Ecevit initially led the ambitious reform agenda that began in the mid-1990s from the Democratic Left Party. It was later amplified under the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP), which secured a parliamentary majority in late 2002.

In the early years of the AKP, Turkey significantly expanded its soft power as its foreign policy increasingly embraced non-coercive influence (Öztürk & Baser, 2022; Reiffenstuel, 2021). This appeal stemmed from Turkey's religious-civilisational identity and proactive international engagements (Öztürk & Baser, 2022; Yimer, 2024). The growth of the AKP stimulated a novel dimension in Turkey's image, particularly within the Islamic world. Through positioning itself as an exemplar of "moderate" Sunni Islam combined with democratic governance, the party presented the Turkish experience as a transformational model for Muslim-majority communities confronting entrenched authoritarianism (Yılmaz & Barry, 2020; Öztürk & Baser, 2022).

This discourse resonated with Islamist and liberal reformists across the Middle East and was received positively in many Western circles (Yılmaz & Barry, 2020). As a result, Turkey's active diplomatic tactics and domestic reforms during this decade enhanced its normative appeal and positioned the country as an influential reference for a democratic-Islamic synthesis (Öztürk & Baser, 2022). The continuing debates around this trajectory underscore the intricate relationship between identity, religion, and foreign policy (Yılmaz & Barry, 2020; Öztürk & Baser, 2022). This complex relationship is operationalised by states such as Turkey to cultivate domestic moral legitimacy while projecting symbolic values internationally (Öztürk & Baser, 2022). In the following section, we will consider how this dynamic has been institutionally manifested through the evolution of Turkish foreign policy, with a particular emphasis on the rising significance of the Diyanet within these foundational elements.

## **1.2. State, Secularism, and the Birth of the Diyanet**

As the Turkish Republic was founded in 1923, with its sovereignty entrusted completely and categorically to the nation, it signified a thoughtful political pledge to a modernisation plan based on laicism and the nation-state model. Precisely, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk viewed *laïcité*, along with republicanism, as the foundations of the new regime. Atatürk's idea of secularism required the organised removal of religion from the public sphere, constraining it to the domain of individual faith and practice. Within this context, religious freedom was framed as the defence of the individual faith, not as much as the acknowledgement of shared or institutionalised religious expression. Therefore, religion was projected to stay private, and state interference was only

considered valid when religion crossed with or became a challenge to public order (Gözaydın, 2008).

As Gözaydın (2008) noted, Atatürk articulated this vision very clearly: “We get our inspirations not from the heavens or invisible things but directly from life.” A statement such as this illustrates the positioning of an Enlightenment-style secularist who pursues the separation of religion from state governance to reduce the impact of religious urge and superstition in political life. The larger purpose of the early Republican management was to secularise the state and its political establishments, and also to plot a crucial transformation of the Turkish society, thereby attempting to build a rational, modern and Western-oriented civic body. This programme of reform and Westernisation peaked in the 1920s and 1930s, however, its administrative and intellectual foundations came from the late Ottoman Tanzimat period, specifically in the mid-19th century welcome of Western political and legal codes. Nevertheless, the Republican reforms were different not only by the extent but also by the intent of their secularisation: dissimilar from Ottoman reforms, which greatly accommodated religion, the Republican plan had in *laïcité* its principal goal.

One of the first and most substantial institutional transformations was the ratification of Law No. 429 on the 3rd of March 1924, which eradicated the Ottoman Ministries of Religious Affairs (Şeriye) and Endowments (Evkaf), and substituted them with the establishment of the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Reisliği). This restructure was symbolic of the new regime’s idea: the removal of religion from the sphere of politics and the institutionalisation of the Presidency as a bureaucratic unit under a strict state command (Gözaydın, 2008). The birth of the Diyanet signalled a deliberate decision not to award religious affairs the standing of a ministerial portfolio. Alternatively, the administration of Islam was to be appointed to an administrative department within the Prime Ministry, thus strengthening its subservience to a secular political authority. This model paralleled the French Republican system, namely the Bureau Central des Cultes within the Ministry of the Interior. Much like the French case, the reasoning for the centralisation of religious affairs under state control was outlined as assuring public order, which is a notion that, paradoxically, resonates with classical Islamic political theory concerning the ruler’s duty to prevent *fitna* (disorder) (Gözaydın, 2008).

To consolidate this laicist trend, constitutional amendments quickly followed. The passage that labels Islam as the state religion was eliminated; in 1937, the exact term “laik” was officially introduced to define the Turkish Republic. As per Article 1 of Law No. 429, the Presidency of Religious Affairs was instructed to supervise worship and faith aspects of Islam and superintend religious organisations. Simultaneously, other normative domains, namely those connected with law, were positioned under the select authority of the Grand National Assembly. This institutional and legal structure eradicated the sharia as a binding legal system in Turkey (Gözaydın, 2008).

During its early years of existence, the Diyanet's structure continued to be indeterminate. As Gözaydın (2008) explains, it was only with the 1927 Budget Act and the complementary civil service salary standardisation law (Law No. 1452, 1929) that the Presidency's central and provincial branches started to obtain a formal structure. Conversely, in 1931, the Diyanet's authority was reduced, as the administration and personnel of mosques were relocated to the General Directorate of Foundations, and the number of religious officials was limited via classification schemes based on "actual need". These adjustments were employed with no objection from the parliament, accentuating the political harmony and consensus on the need to lessen the institutional effect of religion.

Four years later, in 1935, the first law determining the organisational structure of the Diyanet was enacted, Law No. 2800. Nonetheless, Law No. 5634, passed in 1950 in the latter months of the Republican People's Party (CHP) government, awarded a more substantial alteration. This new legislation exhibited a clear change in religious policy and political climate, induced by the increasing demands from civil society and internal party discussions from the late 1940s. The reform changed the term "Reislik" (a trace of Ottoman terminology) to the modern Turkish "Başkanlık" and established new departments within the Diyanet<sup>1</sup>. Also, this marked the transfer of the management of religious personnel and mosques from the General Directorate of Foundations, indicating a new expansion of its institutional authority (Gözaydın, 2006). This Act ruled the Diyanet until the 1961 Constitution was promulgated. Afterwards, in 1965, a new draft law, which would be No. 633, was passed after a vast parliamentary debate. This new legislation gave a new definition to the Diyanet's mandate, then declared that it had the responsibility for "affairs related to the beliefs, worship and moral foundations of Islam," along with informing the public regarding religion and managing places of worship. The addition of "moral foundations" illustrated a significant ideological shift: while the early Republican elite had wanted to limit religion solely to the private realm, on the other hand, the post-1960s state started to sanction a more socially involved idea of Islam, yet still under state management (Gözaydın, 2008).

Later, in 1975, more legislative efforts to reform the structure and range of the Diyanet resulted in Act No. 1893, however, it was declined by President Fahri Korutürk and then returned to Parliament. The following year, and after adjustments, a new version was adopted, as Act No. 1982, yet it too was contested and annulled by the Constitutional Court in 1979 for procedural conflict with the Turkish Constitution. With a lack of new formal legislation to substitute it, the legal footing for the Diyanet persisted to be unclear, ruled instead by regulatory alterations and executive decrees. Posterior court decisions made clear that anterior laws could not be automatically reinstated following the annulment, thus allowing Law No. 633 to be the primary framework still in effect (Gözaydın, 2008).

---

<sup>1</sup> "Reis is the Ottoman equivalent of 'president', whereas 'başkan' is modern Turkish" (Gözaydın, 2006, p.3).

Also noted is how the shift to multi-party politics in 1950 exhibited a substantial turn in the Turkish religious landscape. As Altınordu (2021) points out, political parties started to acknowledge the electoral importance of religious identity, therefore, religion began to re-enter public discourse progressively. This transformation led the way to and intensified state sponsorship for religious services, namely the reconstruction of mosques and Quranic education, mostly via the Diyanet and its associated networks (Akan, 2017). Given the welcome of the 1961 Constitution, the Diyanet's position extended beyond simple mosque administration. The Presidency was now entrusted with the religious and moral "enlightenment" of the public, and its spread extended into media and education. Throughout this period, there was space for opposing religious ideologies, given that both "official" Islam spread by the state and additional grassroots religious movements, for instance, the Nurcus and Nakşibendis, appeared in the Diyanet's ranks (Altınordu, 2021; Bruce, 2011).

After the 1980 military coup, the Turkish government pushed a novel ideological strategy: the Turkish-Islamic synthesis. The mix of Sunni Islam and Turkish nationalism was intended to unite the nation against apparent left-wing threats and was, in fact, embedded in the Constitution of 1982. Precisely, Article 136 officially lifted the Diyanet's importance in supporting and promoting national integrity and solidarity (Öztürk & Sözeri, 2018). Throughout this time, the Diyanet's movements grew substantially internally and externally. With its resources improved, particularly its budget, the Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı (Turkish Diyanet Foundation) was created to assist its operations, and the organisation began to send imams to the Turkish diaspora in Europe, especially through the DİTİB network (Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs) in Germany and France (Çitak, 2010). As of the 1990s, the Diyanet was not solely a national religious administration, but also a greatly relevant actor in diasporic and regional religious governance, namely in the Balkans and Central Asia, which are both areas viewed as culturally and historically connected to Turkey (Altınordu, 2021; Öktem, 2012).

The greatest shift in the history of the Diyanet transpired under the AKP regime, given how the party substantially extended the Diyanet's international spread, institutional reach and ideological role (Altınordu, 2021; Öztürk & Sözeri, 2018). The appointment of Ali Bardakoğlu, an academic specialist in Islamic law, as President of the Diyanet in 2003 enabled the maintenance of a more republican and controlled perspective for the Diyanet's positioning (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, n.d.; Sunier, 2011). Under Bardakoğlu's leadership, the Diyanet increased particular social engagement activities (including programs focused on female religious professionals and diaspora services), but the President generally resisted attempts to morph the Diyanet into a formal arm of partisan policy (Öztürk & Sözeri, 2018). Bardakoğlu's departure in November 2010, after ongoing public debates over the role of religion in state policy (especially backlash over the headscarf) and tensions with pro-AKP figures, marked an institutional shift, where successive

leaderships were more easily galvanised to integrate the Diyanet with the AKP's interconnected religious and nationalist aims (Öztürk, 2016; Gözaydın, 2020; Öztürk & Sözeri, 2018).

After 2010, legislative reforms enabled the Diyanet to reach into formerly intact areas of society. Agreements were signed with ministries to offer nursing homes, counselling in prisons, family services, and halal certificates were issued; it launched a 24/7 fatwa<sup>2</sup> hotline and a dedicated television channel (Altınordu, 2021). As another example, in 2017, the Diyanet was even sanctioned to perform civil marriages, constituting a symbolic shift reflecting the corrosion of the secular-religious divide.

Much like in 1980, the 2016 failed coup attempt also marked a decisive moment. The Diyanet performed an evident public role in gathering religious groups against the insurgents. Thousands of employees with a suspected affiliation with the Gülen Movement were ousted from the Presidency. The then President of the Diyanet, Mehmet Görmez, described the state's resistance as a religious victory, emphasising the synergy between religion, the ruling party and national identity (Lord, 2018; Öztürk, 2018).

In the context of an ever-changing political landscape, the Diyanet has become one of the most ideologically contested and politicised organisations inside the Turkish state. Particularly over the last two decades, its projects and organisational structure have been progressively more in line with the political agenda of President Erdoğan and the AKP. This affiliation constitutes a relevant deviation from the Diyanet's previous posture as a bureaucratic institution, into a committed and dynamic actor in forming Turkey's public narratives. As it continues to realise its traditional command in the management of religious services, under the AKP rule the Diyanet has gradually assisted as an instrument of the government's ideological position, operating as a voice of the governing party (Öztürk, 2016).

The alteration of the Diyanet's position is most evident in the organisation's involvement with domestic political discussions and its active promotion of discourses that align with the AKP on issues of cultural and social importance. The Diyanet also increased its international scope by funding projects that symbolically strengthen Turkey's Islamic and Ottoman heritage. As will be further explored in this dissertation, these include the construction of mosques, restoration of sites from the Ottoman era in countries such as the Netherlands, Germany and Albania, which reflects an extension of its soft power diplomacy reinforced by religious infrastructure (Öktem, 2010; Ozturk, 2016).

Two main factors have aided this ideological evolution. Firstly, the AKP's handling of supposedly neutral reforms, namely in the sphere of democratisation, has allowed it to consolidate authority and subsidiary crucial institutions, including the Diyanet, to its larger political plan since 2011 (Özbudun, 2014, pp. 156–167). Secondly, according to Ozturk (2016), the leadership of

---

<sup>2</sup> An official statement or order from an Islamic religious leader (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.).

Mehmet Görmez, who acted as the President of the Diyanet from 2010 to 2017, played a very important role. Görmez became known as one of the most politically involved and publicly noticeable figures to run the institution. Throughout his term, he regularly spoke to the media and addressed a large scope of politically and socially charged matters, further clouding the frontiers between political messaging and religious authority.

Since the beginning of the 1980s, the Presidency of Religious Affairs has increasingly extended its regulatory power beyond the Turkish borders, employing its influence over Muslim religious practices and discourses in countries with substantial Muslim or Turkish communities. Throughout this time, which overlapped with the mass migration of Turkish workers to Europe, what were thought to be temporary passages progressively transformed into more permanent diaspora settlements. As a reaction to the concerns regarding rival Islamic influences within the referred communities, the Diyanet started to deploy imams to Europe, the Balkans in particular, and the Middle East. This transnational involvement had the goal to counterweight other Islamic authorities and uphold the political and religious allegiance of Turkish Muslims overseas to the Turkish state (Ozturk, 2016).

The Diyanet has endorsed a version of Sunni Islam in its foreign affairs that aligns with the government's interests, highlighting themes including human rights, ethics and the civic duties of the individual towards the state. These attempts were put into practice mostly via religious instruction and mosque networks. Nonetheless, and much like Öktem (2010) perceives, the Presidency's scope in international religious affairs went beyond the Turkish diaspora communities. Progressively, it took on a more political role, performing as a broadcaster of Turkish state policy under the semblance of a religious service provider. This progression reflects the Diyanet's evolution into a religious authority figure, but also a fundamental tool of public diplomacy and foreign policy (Ozturk, 2016).

As Ozturk (2016) detected, in 2015, the official statistics showed that Diyanet had over 117.000 employees, namely Qur'an instructors and muezzins<sup>3</sup>, and managed nearly 86.762 registered mosques. All the mentioned personnel are categorised as civil servants and are recipients of regular state salaries. The organisational development proves not solely the growth of administrative capabilities but also the enlargement of its mandate beyond its initial range. Throughout the decades, the institution has progressed from a modest organisation whose purpose was the supervision of religious services within the Turkish domestic population to a wide-ranging state device profoundly involved in the international dissemination of state-approved Islamic norms and the rule of religious life.

---

<sup>3</sup> An Islamic religious official, also known as mu'addin mu'adhdhin, proclaims the call to prayer (adhān) on Friday for public worship and the call to daily prayer (ṣalāt) (Britannica, n.d.).

### **1.3. The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy**

The previously explored change in the Diyanet is a reflection of a pivotal transformation in Turkish foreign policy, after the Justice and Development Party rose to power in 2002. The AKP's foreign policy plan combined Ottoman legacy, Islamic heritage, historical depth, and civilisational narratives. These ideological fundamentals were embedded in Ahmet Davutoğlu's Strategic Depth (2001), which framed the Turkish Republic as a "central power" with the capability and responsibility to apply its influence throughout various regions simultaneously, comprising the Balkans, the Middle East, the Caucasus, Central Asia and Africa (Ekşi, 2018, p. 266).

Moreover, Davutoğlu refused depictions of Turkey as solely a "bridge" between the East and the West. On the contrary, his argument explored a multidimensional and sovereign foreign policy, establishing Turkey as a civilisational player in world affairs. For a long time, Davutoğlu's framework has been linked with "neo-Ottomanism", a connection that has not passed without criticism. For example, Grigoriadis (2010) countered this association, warning that the term "neo-Ottomanism" originated from a 19th-century liberal movement whose purpose was to seek civic unity across religious and ethnic lines and was fleetingly awakened by Turgut Özal in the 1980s. While both invoked Ottoman symbolism, Grigoriadis contends they share little conceptual ground. Davutoğlu himself has rejected the "neo-Ottoman" label as "baseless," affirming that Turkey's close historical and geographic ties to the Arab world reinforce a collaborative and peaceful regional agenda (Cairo Review, 2012).

Throughout the 2000s, Davutoğlu's strategic thinking progressed, and that was reflected in Turkey's foreign approach, which incorporated elements of conflict resolution, multilateralism, and soft power. Davutoğlu recognised that two conditions needed to be met if Turkey was to fulfil its global desires: the normalisation of relations with its neighbours and domestic political stability. His famous "zero problems with neighbours" policy called for defeating "phobic syndromes" in Turkish diplomacy and engaging fruitfully with regional partners. Also, Turkey would intensify its connections with emerging players such as India, China, Brazil and Russia, and dynamically encourage inter-civilisational discourse, leveraging its Ottoman and Islamic heritage to mediate global conflicts (Grigoriadis, 2010).

To put this vision forward, the ruling party intensified its investment in public diplomacy. This concept was modernised in 1965 by Edmund Gullion, and it relates to state endeavours to impact foreign communities via informational, cultural and humanitarian measures. Under the rule of the AKP, public diplomacy developed into a focal point of Turkey's foreign policy for the very first time, and, according to Ekşi (2019) it was motivated by two principal factors: i) the aim to establish Turkey as an Islamic and democratic role-model for Muslim-majority nations; ii) Turkey's solid economic performance in the 2000s, which allowed for the needed investment in soft power infrastructure.

During this time, an institutionalisation of novel soft power instruments occurred. For instance, in 2007, with a task to lead cultural diplomacy, there was the Yunus Emre Institute; in 2010, the Public Diplomacy Coordination Office, which focused on centralising communications; and for the organisation of diaspora engagement, the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities. Simultaneously, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs suffered a restructuring in 2010, and consequently, ten new directorates were established, comprising those for cultural diplomacy and public information (Ekşi, 2019). The well-known Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) had an original focus towards Central Asia; however, it was also restructured in 2011, thereby expanding its humanitarian diplomacy to a global reach (Altunışık, 2019; Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency [TİKA], n.d.).

As a result of Davutoğlu's (2008) "multi-track foreign policy", Turkey commenced the extension of its influence to formerly marginal regions, namely sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. The signal was very clear after the occurrence of high-level summits with African states, severe embassy expansions (33 embassies were opened between 2009 and 2010), and the development of large-scale projects. Davutoğlu's projection was that by the year 2023 (marking Turkey's Republic centennial), Ankara would attain full EU membership, world economic status, peace with all its neighbours, and influence throughout various regions (Grigoriadis, 2010).

It is extremely important to highlight that these foreign policy modifications were coincidental with a deep rearrangement of Turkey's national identity. As it shifted apart from the very strict secularism of the Kemalists, the AKP boosted a Muslim-majority democratic identity, depicting the Turkish Republic as a world leader of the Muslim ummah. Pragmatically, as Altınordu (2021) describes it, religion, which was once limited to the private sphere, was now being instrumentalised as a fundamental vector of Turkish foreign policy. This transformation is directly connected to the upsurge of "Turkish Islam": a Sunni-Hanafi, culturally rooted, state-supervised, and moderate understanding of Islam, framed as a feasible religious alternative to Salafism and Western secularism.

Additionally, this shift echoed larger social science ideas surrounding identity. Erikson (1968) and Fearon (1999) describe identity as a socially constructed and historically reliable phenomenon, opposite to a static or innate essence. Within political settings, identity politics, as explored by Fukuyama (2018) and van Kersbergen & Manow (2009), can encourage democratic inclusion or aggravate polarisation. In the Turkish case, Islamic identity has been utilised to consolidate internal support while progressing its soft power overseas.

Delving more into the relation between identity and the state, Althusser (2014) has conceptualised the state as being made of two interconnected realms: the infrastructure and superstructure, the latter containing a myriad of state apparatuses functioning via ideological and repressive means. Repressive state devices operate through direct violence and coercion, such as the military, the judicial system or the police, and are tightly submitted to state command.

Conversely, ideological state apparatuses are habitually present within civil society, being made up of, for example, churches, schools, and the media, and working indirectly via the spread of central ideologies, thus formatting social behaviour minus explicit coercion.

Nonetheless, the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs does not effectively belong in either classification. Bureaucratically and legally, the Diyanet is a state institution that operates with a formal government apparatus, yet it does not conventionally employ violence or coercion. Much like Ali Bardakoğlu (2004, pp. 397–398), former President of the Diyanet, has noted, the organisation’s directive is the “production and transmission of religious knowledge” and in delivering to the public with “sound religious information”. Despite this seemingly neutral stance, the Diyanet is involved in ideological construction and identity formation, remarkably via the issuing of fatwas, and has, in particular settings, executed roles resembling social control, including suspected collaboration with national intelligence services (Öztürk & Sözeri, 2018).

With its vague positioning, that being legally repressive in structure but ideologically constructive in function, arguably, the Diyanet lies at the intersection of Althusser's (2014) repressive and ideological state apparatuses. However, its particular religious alignment and its supremacy in the rule of Islam in Turkey propose that the Diyanet is best described as a religious state apparatus that merges political functionality with theological authority at the disposition of state desires.

Nevertheless, the Diyanet’s evolution after 2010 should not be disassociated from larger political transformations. In the AKP’s first decade in government, the party upheld a decentralised outreach model: religious NGO’s, namely the Gülen movement, were significant in Ankara’s faith-based diplomacy, and it also opened cultural centres and schools across Central Asia and Africa. During this time, the Presidency’s international actions were supportive and modest (Heibach & Taş, 2024).

Yet, this fact shifted significantly after the ruling party’s separation from the Gülen movement following the 2016 coup attempt. As argued by Heibach and Taş (2024), Turkey’s foreign policy suffered a transformation leaning towards an authoritarian form of infrastructural power, whereby formerly independent non-state actors were either drawn under state control or immediately substituted. So, the Diyanet unequivocally benefited from this centralisation, as it was no longer limited to internal affairs and was now reestablished as a strategic player progressing Turkey’s ideal of a “safe” Islamic identity overseas. Additionally, it can be noted how the Diyanet is an example of a hybrid model of mobilisation, as it merges religious legitimacy, administrative authority and political loyalty to enlarge Turkey’s influence without the use of direct coercion methods. For instance, and as will be explored in the next chapter, its activities in Africa are both geopolitical and religious. Even though they are framed as a spiritual and humanitarian outreach, these projects achieve two purposes: counter the impact of Salafi or Gulf-

backed actors and to implant a Turkish-aligned Islamic worldview (Öztürk & Sözeri, 2018; Altunışık, 2022).

The foreign religious activism, as Öztürk and Sözeri (2018) put it, works in the service of several strategic goals. Firstly, it advances a distinctive religious discourse that counters other ideological influences, as Salafism or Shiism, markedly in the Balkans and in Africa. Secondly, it enables Turkey's government to preserve ideological power over its diaspora, particularly following the rupture of the AKP-Gülen alliance. Thirdly, it allows Ankara to establish itself as a moral and cultural leader in the Islamic world, emphasising the state's foreign policy purposes via religious legitimacy.

As Altunışık (2022) reminds us, soft power relies on consistency and credibility. However, Diyanet's affiliation with the AKP ideology attracts apprehension that religious diplomacy could disguise a strategic intention. This tension between influence and outreach is at the nucleus of Diyanet's modern ambiguity: legally bureaucratic yet functionally ideological and diplomatic.

The discussion of religious diplomacy in Turkey should acknowledge that it functions as a flexible repertoire rather than a consistent strategic approach. Historically, the Ottoman Caliphate proposed a universalist religious legitimacy. Later, the early Republic eliminated the Caliphate and subjugated religion to secular state control. Afterwards, under the AKP, this interplay was transformed once again, and the Diyanet now assists as a religious and political branch of foreign policy, exporting a specific Islamic identity that reflects the ideological guidance of the contemporary Turkish state (Öztürk & Sözeri, 2018; Öztürk & Baser, 2022). The AKP's reconception of national identity, with Sunni Islam as its base, has transformed Turkey's foundational values. While Kemalist secularism proposed a standardised, religiously neutral public sphere, the current government aims to foster a Sunni-Turkish identity that is hegemonic internally and that echoes globally.

Nonetheless, this approach has not gone without controversy. In various European countries, the Diyanet has encountered criticism due to its performance as a channel of Turkish state surveillance and political interference, in particular following the 2016 coup attempt. European intelligence agencies in Germany and the Netherlands have accused imams with an affiliation with the Diyanet of gathering information on Gülenists and other political dissidents, evoking stern concerns about the mixing of religious authority with state espionage (Öztürk & Sözeri, 2018).

This blend of foreign policy and religious identity defies conventional divisions between domestic governance and international diplomacy. Moreover, it uncovers the magnitude to which Turkish Islam under the AKP has evolved into an instrument of soft power and a statement of national sovereignty, exerted not only to influence others, but ultimately to also reimagine Turkey's position in the current world order.

#### **1.4. The Diyanet: An Instrument of Turkish Foreign Policy**

After the AKP's rise to power in 2001, the Presidency of Religious Affairs has been submitted to a deep renovation from a domestic religious institution to a focal element of Turkey's religious diplomacy (Öztürk & Sözeri, 2018; Öztürk & Baser, 2022). Until 2018, the Diyanet was constitutionally assigned to the Prime Minister's Office and was afterwards lifted under the presidential system reform to be directly managed under the Presidency, which reflects its elevated political importance (Gözaydın, 2020). This executive relocation has enabled a tighter state control over religious narratives, facilitating the government's purpose to align Diyanet undertakings with larger foreign policy goals (Yılmaz & Barry, 2020).

The budget awarded to the Diyanet has increased exponentially under the AKP, overtaking many ministries, which scholars have viewed as both a political investment in religious governance and a material reflection of its elevated positioning (Lord, 2018; Mandaville & Hamid, 2018). Financial data has shown a consistent double-digit increase, especially after 2010, permitting large-scale mosque building, religious education, imam training domestically and overseas and humanitarian aid (Öztürk & Sözeri, 2018). As an example, Türkiye's Diyanet Foundation humanitarian aid allocations rose from approximately \$53 million in 2014 to \$88 million in 2016 (TDV, 2016, p. 12).

The budgetary increase demonstrates the government's broader policy of implanting religion into the public sphere and foreign affairs (Yılmaz & Barry, 2020). It is clear that under the AKP, the Diyanet was transformed into a more activist and internationalist actor. From 2002 to 2011, it maintained an inclusive discourse compatible with EU accession efforts, advancing interfaith dialogue (Yılmaz & Barry, 2020). Yet, the post-2011 authoritarian consolidation came with a rhetorical shift toward preserving Sunni orthodoxy and promoting the Turkish-Islamic fusion as part of the state's identity projection (Öztürk & Sözeri, 2018; Öztürk & Baser, 2022). Internationally, the AKP has used the Diyanet as a leverage to foster cultural and religious influence, especially in areas where economic and political relations were growing.

Academics have debated whether the Diyanet's change signifies a separation from or continuity with earlier state control of religion. Some scholars, such as Kaya (2018), have argued that it persists as a "state Islam" tool subordinated to national interests. Others, such as Lord (2018), have stressed its increasing agency in shaping policy and lobbying for its own expansion. Nonetheless, a consensus is reached as it relates to how the Diyanet's boosted role under the AKP has blurred distinctions between internal religious regulation and external instrumentality, deeply embedding religion into Turkey's international identity (Öztürk & Baser, 2022; Yılmaz & Barry, 2020).

Structurally, the Diyanet broadened its domestic network of provincial and district mufti<sup>4</sup> offices, augmented its specialist departments (which include Religious Publications, Education Services, and External Relations) and increased collaboration with its charitable branch, the Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, which will be further analysed in the next chapter. The External Relations General Directorate has been specifically involved in the coordination of the institution's expanding portfolio overseas, namely Africa (Dere, 2008; Reiffenstuel, 2021).

To further understand Diyanet operations, it is relevant to characterise how the Presidency of Religious Affairs is organised. The Diyanet is structured as a centralised state administration institution with a pyramidal and extremely hierarchical structure that resembles Turkey's administrative system. At the head stands the President of Religious Affairs, appointed by the President of the Republic. The President is directly followed by Vice-Presidents and a senior advisory body, the High Council of Religious Affairs (Din İşleri Yüksek Kurulu), which is responsible for the issuing of binding religious opinions (fatwas) and informs on doctrinal issues (Mandaville & Hamid, 2018; Gözaydın, 2020).

In Ankara, the Diyanet's central organisation is divided into primary service units, each with clearly defined functional directives. Amongst the main departments are: the General Directorate of Religious Services, tasked with sermon coordination and mosque management; the General Directorate of Religious Education, responsible for overseeing imam training, Qur'an courses and the appointment of religious teachers; the General Directorate of Hajj and Umrah Services, which arranges pilgrimage logistics; the General Directorate of Religious Publications, which is accountable for the production and distribution of religious books, journals, and digital content; and the mentioned General Directorate of Foreign Relations (or External Relations), liable for the management of the Diyanet's transnational projects and the coordination with the Turkish Diyanet Foundation (Öztürk & Sözeri, 2018). Accompanying these are thematic sections such as the Youth Services Department, the Family and Religious Guidance and the Women's Religious Services, mirroring the institution's enlarged social role since the 2010s (Lord, 2018).

Underneath the main headquarters rests the provincial organisation. Each province (il) in Turkey has a provincial mufti's office, and every district (ilçe) has a district mufti's office, both subordinates hierarchically to the central administration. These bureaus manage Qur'an courses, local mosques and community programs, and guarantee the homogeneous delivery of centrally organised Friday sermons across the nation. Imams and muezzins who work in mosques are considered civil servants employed directly and remunerated by the Diyanet, assuring vertical control from Ankara to the smallest areas (Gözaydın, 2020).

Additionally, the Diyanet keeps an international organisational network, coordinated by the External Relations Directorate. Overseas, its structure is implanted within Turkish consulates and

---

<sup>4</sup> An Islamic legal authority who gives a formal legal opinion (fatwa) in answer to an inquiry by a private individual or judge (Britannica, n.d.).

embassies via religious services, counsellors and attachés. These officials are responsible for the supervision of Diyanet-affiliated associations and mosques, coordinating Turkish religious employees on assignment, and liaising with diaspora communities and foreign Islamic organisations. In Europe, this network is habitually organised via umbrella associations (again, as the DİTİB in Germany) that function underneath the Diyanet. On the other hand, in Africa, the network is usually project-based, working alongside the Turkish Diyanet Foundation on educational programs, mosque construction and humanitarian aid (Öztürk & Baser, 2022). This interlinked structure, a centralised managerial body in Ankara, hierarchical provincial and district offices, a global network of attachés and a parallel foundation, guarantees that the Diyanet functions as a unitary and vertically integrated religious administration, proficient in projecting influence from a mosque in a small village to international religious summits.

Lastly, the Diyanet's auxiliary institution, the Turkish Diyanet Foundation (Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı), operates as a legally separate yet operationally integrated foundation - reason why throughout the analysis of the next chapter its activities will ultimately fall on the Diyanet, as it is the central body. Established in 1975 and overseen by the President of Religious Affairs, the Turkish Diyanet Foundation funds several domestic and international activities that the Diyanet cannot directly finance under state budgetary rules, namely scholarships, humanitarian campaigns and mosque construction (Dere, 2008). Ultimately, the Turkish Diyanet Foundation operates as a flexible logistical and financial tool that increases the Diyanet's scope without violating state budgeting rules. Moreover, scholars have described the Turkish Diyanet Foundation as a "para-public" institution that hazes the line between civil society and the state, allowing for the Diyanet to function simultaneously as a constitutional figure and a transnational religious network (Mandaville & Hamid, 2018; Öztürk & Baser, 2022).

Essentially, the Turkish Diyanet Foundation is not solely a charity, it is also an essential part of the Diyanet's organisational system, as it provides logistical capacity, financial autonomy and legal flexibility required to implement domestic religious services and Ankara's faith-based soft power internationally (Öztürk & Sözeri, 2018). Within the context of this dissertation, the following chapter will address the Turkish Diyanet Foundation's annual activity reports to evaluate its patterns of approach and their ultimate significance in the African context.

## The Diyanet and Turkish Religious Diplomacy in Africa

In the previous chapter we have examined the evolution and structure of the Diyanet, establishing the base for the study of the Turkish religious diplomacy in Africa. The elevation of the Diyanet to a central foreign-policy tool under the AKP represents a paradigm shift rather than a mere institutional adjustment. Originally conceived to de-Islamicize the faith within the laic framework (Berkes, 1998; Davison, 2003), the Diyanet now operates transnationally in synchronisation with Ankara's political and strategic agenda, particularly in the aftermath of the amputation of the Gülen movement's foreign structure in the years following the 2016 coup attempt (Öztürk & Baser, 2022; Altınordu, 2021). This is particularly evident in Africa, where religious diplomacy is employed alongside other mechanisms to achieve political gains, as will be proven by this research. In this chapter, documentation regarding Diyanet's religious diplomacy in Africa will be scrutinised. The goal is to analyse and contextualise the weight and importance of actions such as mosque building, imam training, education networks, and ideational outreach into the broad framework of Türkiye's Africa policy.

Ambivalence has always characterised Türkiye's relationship with Africa. Some academics have referred to this relationship as "schizophrenic" because of the opposing impulses of attraction and rejection (Bilgiç & Nascimento, 2014). With roots tracing back to the Ottoman Empire, Türkiye's involvement with Africa came before the Republic of 1923. Many North African territories were among the empire at its height, such as Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and portions of Ethiopia (Mohamed, 2020; Mehmet, 2012). By the end of the nineteenth century, Ottoman influence had reached Sudan. Furthermore, the engagement with the Sultanate of Zanzibar demonstrates how the Ottoman diplomatic presence went as far as East Africa, despite the lack of direct territorial control, which illustrates a flexible and strategic utilisation of soft power (Uchegara, 2008). In parallel, one of Africa's most lasting political entities, the Kanem-Bornu Sultanate, formed diplomatic relations with the Ottomans, indicating that the Empire had a wide range of influence, even when lacking a sustained territorial rule (Saraiva, 2014).

Academics debate the interest of Ottomans in Africa, motivated by a mix of a shared Islamic identity and the continent's wealth in gold and diamonds (Mohamed, 2020; Mehmet, 2012). Some scholars even argue that the Empire's territorial and maritime expansion in the fourteenth century indirectly prompted the Europeans' exploration (particularly, the Portuguese) along Africa's southern coast, which culminated in the "discovery" of the Cape of Good Hope passage (Uchegara, 2008). Historical evidence of diplomatic and cultural exchanges dating back to the sixteenth century points to the clear existence of profound remnants between the Ottoman Empire and several African political entities in governance, military collaboration, trade, and religion

(Saraiva, 2014). Yet, these bonds progressively faded over time, caused by the changes in global political dynamics, the rise of European colonialism, and the establishment of modern nation-states, which redefined international borders and alliances (Yimer, 2024).

In the early Republican era, this link was abruptly and more severely cut. The founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923 brought a substantial alteration in Türkiye's national identity. Led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Türkiye embarked on a Westernisation project, where modernisation was associated with adopting European ideals and secular ideologies. This conceptual disruption systematically sidelined Ottoman heritage, including its ties to Africa, from internal political debates to foreign policy objectives (Walker, 2007). The attention on secularism and the intention to join the Euro-Atlantic community led Turkish policymakers to downplay religious and historical connections that could have sustained and developed relations with African nations.

Later in the twentieth century, and especially throughout the Cold War, Türkiye's policy towards Africa was mainly limited by its dedication to Western security interests. As a member of NATO since 1952, Türkiye's foreign policy was intimately aligned with broader Western strategies. This affiliation is apparent in its significant votes at the United Nations, namely abstaining on Algeria's seek for independence and supporting Western positions during the Suez Crisis. These events emphasised the lack of independent engagement with African nations. Furthermore, Türkiye's absence from the Non-Aligned Movement weakened its credibility among African countries, many of which viewed Ankara as being under U.S. influence. Even though Türkiye established embassies in Nigeria (1962), Senegal (1962), Kenya (1968), and the Democratic Republic of Congo (1976), these initiatives were isolated and did not amount to a comprehensive strategy for Africa. Aside from some reduced diplomatic efforts in the 1970s, largely directed at countering its diplomatic isolation over the Cyprus issue, Africa remained a Turkish minimal or marginal concern during the Cold War (Wheeler, 2005; Tepeciklioğlu, 2019, as reviewed in Canpolat, 2021).

In 1998, the first substantial shift occurred with the "Opening to Africa" initiative by the then Foreign Minister İsmail Cem. The policy was formally established through the Africa Action Plan, which aimed to diversify Türkiye's diplomatic ties, develop trade relations and augment the country's prominence on the African continent (Öktem, 2012; Wheeler, 2005). However, between 1998 and 2005, the initiative remained largely stuck to rhetoric due to two main factors: i) domestic political instability caused by the frequent government changes and economic crises in Türkiye (Tekin, 2012); ii) residual effects of the Sèvres Syndrome<sup>5</sup> prevented Türkiye from pursuing relations with regions like Africa, therefore remaining risk-averse (Turhan, 2021).

---

<sup>5</sup>The concept refers to a deeply rooted national psychological condition in Türkiye's political culture, recalling the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres, which had projected the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. It can be described as a defensive mindset that instils a persistent suspicion of foreign intervention and isolation (Turhan, 2021).

As soon as the AKP rose to power in 2002, a tremendous change occurred when Africa became a strategic priority, especially to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The state visits to Ethiopia and South Africa in March of 2005 were a breakthrough moment, making Erdoğan the first Turkish leader in decades to visit the region (The Africa Report, 2024; Wheeler, 2005). Türkiye then became an observer at the African Union in April 2005, and shortly after, gained accreditation to the AU in Addis Ababa (Ozkan, 2012). Another sign of the transformation of Türkiye's relation with Africa was the ascension to "strategic partner" at the 10th AU Summit in 2008, with Türkiye securing a seat on the UN Security Council with the backing of 50 African nations.

This shift reflected both a pragmatic interest and an ideological conviction. The reemergence of the Ottoman legacy - once suppressed, as previously explained - became a source for soft power projection. Erdoğan and his government decided to invoke historical ties to Ottoman provinces in North Africa, such as Algeria and Libya, to legitimise the Turkish "return". Africa became not just a destination for a renewed foreign policy strategy, but rather a part of a larger identity narrative aiming to position Türkiye as a global Muslim player with a civilizational mission (Bacik & Afacan, 2013).

Yet, the AKP's policy towards the African continent should not be reduced to a "neo-Ottoman" approach established in Ottomanist nostalgia. As emphasised by constructivist scholars, norms and identity are not fixed but rather constructed dynamically via discourse and practice (Zehfuss, 2002). As can be observed in Erdoğan's speeches, Africa is frequently framed as a partner in the struggle against colonial legacies and global inequalities, being an adamant advocate for "African Solutions to African Problems". Therefore, by constantly calling African states "our friends" and positioning himself as being against Western imperialism, Erdoğan articulates a moral diplomatic language aimed at developing egalitarian and post-colonial partnerships (Oruç, 2016). This can be seen as a rhetorical strategy that has worked as both a performative and a strategic way of forming a view of Türkiye as an alternative (and better) development partner.

This approach is closely based on Ahmet Davutoğlu's idea of "Strategic Depth," which we have pointed at before, framing Türkiye as a key player, thanks to its history, geography and religious heritage (Grigoriadis, 2010). For Davutoğlu, Africa is a natural zone where Türkiye's influence can flourish, established in the *umma* and bonded through centuries of social and religious ties. Sending Abu Bakr Effendi to the Cape of Good Hope in 1863, Ottoman support for anti-colonial struggles in Ethiopia and Sudan, and the 1575 defence pact with the Kanem-Bornu Empire are examples of this idea (Ozkan, 2012). Some critics have, however, argued that the projection of the "neo-Ottoman" or Ottomanist discourse to the region of sub-Saharan Africa lacks historical grounding, given that the incorporation of the area into the Ottoman political structures was marginal, secondary and greatly enclosed to the symbolic or sporadic ties rather

than constant administrative control or profound social and political amalgamation (Bacik & Afacan, 2013).

Nevertheless, this criticism does not value the symbolism attached to Ottomanism as a rallying narrative. Through constructivism, we can interpret this as an identity performance and not as historical revisionism that places Africa within Türkiye's civilisational sphere (Sunar, 2014, cited in Turhan, 2021). Also, this approach uncovers the extent to which Türkiye's Africa policy reflects larger changes in the global order, wherein emerging players aim to express post-colonial, post-Western visions on international engagement.

AKP's involvement in Africa also demonstrates the combination of material interest with symbolic outreach. The extensive diplomatic itinerary Erdoğan has had - doing 53 visits to 31 African countries by 2025 - is unprecedented in Türkiye's Republic history and reveals a leadership-driven foreign policy approach (Kamadan, 2025). For instance, the 2011 visit to Somalia that had the company of celebrities, NGO's and journalists, deeply impacted Turkish public consciousness, connecting humanitarian concern to national pride and foreign policy activism (İpek, 2016). Through this approach, the African continent became a place for economic opportunity and a performative state identity construction.

The change in the Turkish Africa policy ultimately illustrates a profound reframing of its global role. Shifting from the twentieth-century objective to embody European values, under the AKP's governance, Türkiye simply altered itself as a post-Western civilisational player (Grigoriadis, 2010; Ardiç, 2014; Yılmaz, 2017). Through constructivism, we can view the ways through which discursive strategies, leadership narratives and historical memory align to create a foreign policy strategy that is both geopolitically pragmatic and ideationally rooted (Turhan, 2021).

Therefore, Türkiye has made several efforts to reanimate these historical bonds in recent decades. A relevant landmark was the assembling of the First International Turkish-African Congress, organised by the Türk Asya Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi (TASAM) in Istanbul from 23 to 24 November 2005. It was precisely in this event that Türkiye officially declared 2005 to be the "Year of Africa" (Mohamed, 2020). The purpose of this summit was to foster economic, cultural, social and political ties between the Turkish nation and African states; advise solutions to present challenges on the continent; and launch organised frameworks for constant and sustained cooperation (Uchegara, 2008). The then Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül accentuated, during the summit, the depth of the historical ties amongst African countries and Türkiye, also expressing the Turkish intention to revitalise and foster said relations (Mohamed, 2020). Markedly, the visit of Alpha Oumar Konaré, an African Union Commission Chairperson, to Türkiye emphasised this attempt of proximity since it was the first official engagement by a regional African organisation since 1963, thus being viewed as a symbolic gesture marking a new era in bilateral relations between Türkiye and the African continent (Siradağ, 2023). However, it

was recognised that certain barriers still existed, namely the mutual absence of knowledge regarding each other's economic, political and cultural contexts. The event was hence viewed as a significant first step in recognising and addressing this lack of information and reestablishing previously inactive relationships via dialogue and a sustained institutional cooperation (Saraiva, 2014; Mohamed, 2020).

Much like has already been mentioned, after the rise to power of the Justice and Development Party, Türkiye's involvement with Africa became more ideologically driven. Davutoğlu's theory of "Strategic Depth", previously explored, claims Türkiye as a central actor that can project influence throughout Afro-Eurasia (İnaç, 2004). The Africa Action Plan, created in 1998 and operationalised in the 2000s, illustrates a vision whose purpose was to reframe Türkiye's global role beyond its previous Euro-Atlantic alignment (Akgün, 2010). Between 2009 and 2013, Ankara opened various embassies across the African continent, accompanied by high-level visits, development projects and humanitarian diplomacy. The Turkish-African Cooperation Summit of 2008 institutionally established these bonds and proved Türkiye's goal to become a strategic partner of the African Union (Wheeler, 2011).

Ankara's motives for the African involvement were versatile. In economic terms, Africa signified an emerging market and a strategic trade partner, especially as Türkiye's exports to sub-Saharan Africa have risen greatly after 2004 (Al-Suwaidani & Ahmed, 2019). Politically, Erdoğan's goal was to re-establish Türkiye as a relevant global actor, leveraging African support in multilateral organisations, hence fleeing dependency on Western alliances (Yaman, 2015; Biro, 2010). When it relates to culture, Ankara accentuated Islamic solidarity, civilisational outreach, and historical continuity, opposing the colonial background of Western actors (İnaç, 2016).

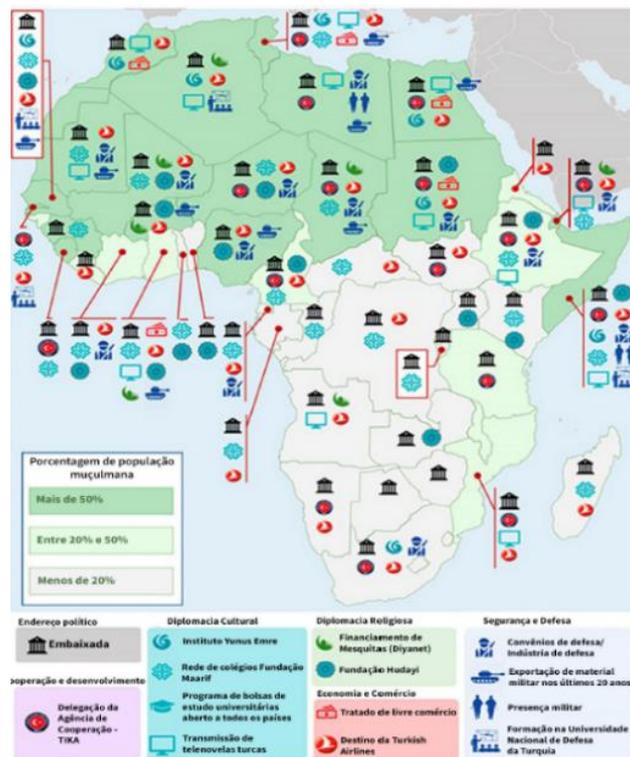
In the twenty-first century, the relations between Türkiye and Africa illustrate a convergence of ideological repositioning, historical memories and pragmatic realpolitik. What we have seen is a multi-dimensional engagement of the AKP's policy that is not just a remedial of what was not done during the Republican era, but a forward reframing of Ankara's position in worldwide politics. Having arrived at the Turkish-African relations of this century, and before we empirically analyse the impact of Turkish religious diplomacy in its foreign policy strategy towards Africa, we will delve into the other aspects of Türkiye's African approach and its subsequent gains.

Türkiye's exports to sub-Saharan Africa ascended from \$371 million in 2001 to \$5 billion in 2018, according to the Turkish Statistical Institute (Uysal, 2021). Newer numbers demonstrate that Ankara's total global exports amounted to \$255 billion in 2022, with a growing share directed towards African markets (Siradağ, 2023). African states primarily import capital goods, manufactured goods, iron and steel, construction materials, textiles, and food products from Türkiye. African exports towards Ankara are mainly raw materials such as oilseeds, minerals, cotton, coal and precious stones (Uysal, 2021). This trade relationship illustrates classical patterns of core-periphery economic relations, as Türkiye exports value-added goods and imports primary

commodities - a correlation that is rather criticised as prolonging dependency (Uysal, 2021). Even though Ankara has pursued an expansion across the African continent, its trade relations have stayed regionally focused. In the 2010s, Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and Libya, alongside South Africa and Nigeria, accounted for over 85% of the Turkish trade with Africa (Turkish Ministry of Economy, 2012). Still, Senegal, Ethiopia, Ghana and Sudan - emerging markets - have received increased attention in trade fairs, embassy openings, and bilateral agreements.

**Figure 1.1.**

*Turkey's Presence in Africa (2020).*



*Source: Sotero (2021)*

Türkiye's trade with muslim-majority African Countries rose substantially, with 40% of Turkish exports to sub-Saharan Africa being directed to these nations in 2018 (Uysal, 2021): Senegal, Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti, Mali, Niger, and Mauritania, where Ankara's framing of Islamic solidarity and state-led religious diplomacy (through Diyanet/ Türkiye Diyanet Foundation and Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency [TİKA]) have reduced transaction costs for Turkish Small and Medium Enterprises and developed opportunities for contracts in sectors of construction, textiles, food processing and basic manufactures (Uysal, 2021; Siradağ, 2023). The focus on a Muslim majority has been promoted through high-level visits, an increased number of embassies, and business council activities that prioritise these markets. The increasing growth in the Turkish-African trade has been enabled by business associations such as MÜSIAD

(Independent Industrialists and Businessmen's Association) and TUSKON (Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists of Türkiye), and state policy, which performed a fundamental role in launching Turkish Small and Medium-sized Enterprises to African markets. These networks have been particularly lively in Muslim-majority contexts, where a religious common ground and community platforms have facilitated this entrance. These organisations are closely aligned with the AKP's cultural and political base and ended up promoting Ankara's exports and facilitating contract acquisition, particularly in the infrastructure and construction sectors (Siradağ, 2023; Onis, 2010).

Also, a unique aspect of the Turkish economic involvement in Africa is the surge of the so-called "Anatolian Tigers" - lively, export-oriented Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, born in Anatolian provinces known for their conservative, religiously based values and robust ties to the AKP (Siradağ, 2023). Plenty of these companies had been formerly marginalised under Türkiye's economy - that is ruled by a secular elite - have viewed African markets more as areas for growth, partnership and cultural resonance. In Muslim-majority scenarios, specifically, these companies have leveraged reputational capital and cultural affinity constructed via humanitarian and religious initiatives to gain partnerships. Their expansion throughout the continent has deliberately shaped Ankara's image as not a traditional neo-colonial player but a development partner (İnaç, 2022).

As noted by Uysal (2021), these economic relations must be viewed and understood under a sub-imperialist framework, within which Türkiye, as a semi-peripheral actor, both contests and imitates existing global hierarchies. As previously mentioned, the uneven trade relationship wherein Türkiye exports capital goods and imports African raw materials gives an advantage to Turkish industries while inserting African economies into a production circuit centred around Türkiye. Simultaneously, the rhetoric of Muslim brotherhood offers African counterparts, especially in Muslim-majority countries, additional room to negotiate, often with requirements of concessional terms, local employment and technology transfer attached to deals, which negotiators actively seek (Süslüer & Alden, 2022).

In a different realm, it is relevant to look at Türkiye's growing military presence in sub-Saharan Africa. This area is a central pillar in the AKP's foreign policy strategy towards Africa. As described by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ankara has widened its defence footprint on the continent through arms exports, military training agreements and the institutionalisation of security partnerships with various African nations (Republic of Türkiye MFA, n.d.; AU-Turkey Joint Implementation Report, 2018). An extremely important achievement in this matter was the inauguration of Türkiye's first overseas military base in Mogadishu in 2017 (Reuters, 2017; Anadolu Agency, 2017), aimed at training Somali forces (Reuters, 2024) and boosting maritime security in the region of the Horn of Africa. This achievement highlights Ankara's two goals: contributing to regional stability and guaranteeing access to geostrategic maritime corridors like

the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea (Meester, 2019). Additionally, Türkiye's defence exports - mainly small arms, unmanned aerial vehicles and electronic surveillance systems - have gained increasing interest from African states, who are in search of cost-effective alternatives to Russian and Western suppliers (İnaç, 2022). Nevertheless, this increasing military involvement should not be observed in separation from Türkiye's general sub-imperial posture. As argued by Uysal (2021), Ankara acts as a semi-peripheral power that uses military and defence cooperation as leverage to establish influence over peripheral regions such as sub-Saharan Africa. Simultaneously, it integrates African nations into its capital accumulation circuits. As a complement, Türkiye strategically employs its military cooperation within a discourse of mutual sovereignty and development, separating its line of action from that of other actors (Sotero, 2021).

### **2.1. Mapping Faith and Influence: An Analysis of the Türkiye Diyanet Foundation in Africa**

As outlined in the Introduction Chapter, this chapter will now delve into an analysis of the Türkiye Diyanet Foundation annual reports between 2016 and 2024 that mixes quantitative tracking of activities with qualitative discourse reading of framing, silences, and rhetoric. I took all relevant entries and, using the inductive grid (capacity, finance, projects, partnerships, discourse, education/training, communication), traced longitudinal changes in mosques, wells, scholarships, and Qur'an distribution. The results convey the Diyanet's self-presentation in its own data and language. Despite the existence of limitations that have already been presented in the Introduction.

The amount of evidence collected from 2016 to 2024 indicates that the Diyanet has created a progressively consistent and clear template of religious diplomacy based on narrative framing, institutional footprint, and a sustained humanitarian investment. The official reports analysed for this study uncover the material infrastructure of Türkiye's influence on the continent and the symbolic vocabulary via which that influence is validated. Even though Africa is not usually a central focus of the reports' rhetoric, it is constantly one of the priorities when it relates to project employment, which points to a tactical form of "quiet centrality" that reveals the Turkish long-lasting foreign policy drives on the continent.

Erdoğan's party has repositioned institutions such as the Diyanet and the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) as tools of religious diplomacy. This religious involvement is not solely symbolic, it also adds to the ideological alliance of local Islamic elites with Turkish religious organisations, constructing soft networks of influence that cooperate with Türkiye's foreign policy desires. By giving prominence to its Islamic identity, Ankara defies secular Western models and the ultra-conservative Islam promoted by Gulf states (Yimer, 2024).

Returning to the content of the reports, one clear pattern arising from them is a recurrent and disproportionate highlighting of Muslim-majority countries such as Palestine, Syria, Somalia,

Tanzania and even Cyprus. The latter particularly serves as an example, given that the Diyanet's actions in Northern Cyprus illustrate Ankara's non-military tactic to claim geopolitical sovereignty and boost national cohesion through the means of religious infrastructure. Cyprus is portrayed as a religiously and culturally important place of Islamic preservation, with its symbolic relevance enhanced by its unresolved political status and tactical affiliation with Türkiye's interests. Even though these mentions are frequently contained within development and humanitarian contexts, they clearly contribute to the narrative construction of a transnational Islamic solidarity network. Using repetition as a narrative strategy, these places are symbolically linked through a common religious suffering and a shared identity.

On the other hand, Africa as a whole is not frequently featured, at least not explicitly, in textual sections of the reports. Rather, Africa is more often presented through the mention of specific countries. This disjointed approach reflects a tactic wherein, rather than engaging with a strategic discourse towards the whole continent, the Diyanet chooses to "charm" Africa via bilateral and project-based country arrangements. Notwithstanding this narrative choice, the data reveal an obvious and increasing institutional investment on the continent over the last decade. The relevant intensification of projects, namely in states like Chad, Niger, Somalia or Burkina Faso, clearly shows a commitment that goes beyond rhetoric.

This discursal and infrastructural investment and prioritisation suggest that the African continent contains instrumental value for Ankara's religious soft power, being valued not only for its geopolitical standing but for its great potential as a recipient of Turkish religious outreach, humanitarian projection and long-lasting influence underneath the umbrella of Islamic solidarity.

## **2.2. Direct Religious Diplomacy**

Building mosques has been one of the most utilised instruments of Türkiye's religious diplomacy strategy in Africa. Among the examples is the Abdülhamid II Mosque in Djibouti, which was finished in 2019, sponsored by the Diyanet, and built under Ottoman architectural traditions. The inauguration ceremony was treated with a substantial amount of importance, given the attendance of high-ranking Turkish officials. During the inaugural sermon, the hosts expressed high hopes that the mosque would "strengthen religious, cultural, historical, and fraternal ties between the peoples of Africa and Anatolia" (Directorate of Religious Affairs, 2019b). This proclamation echoes the Islamic principle of the ummah and is aligned with the Qur'an: "Indeed the believers are but brothers, so make peace between your brothers and fear Allah that you may receive mercy." (Al-Ḥujurāt, 49:10, The Qur'an). This discourse draws on a fraternal narrative and is fundamental in creating an emotional and religious closeness with Africans, thereby legitimising educational and religious activities - like those realised by the Diyanet - with an ultimate goal of developing trust and cooperation.

The Türkiye Diyanet Foundation prioritises goodness and service to humanity on all seven continents. (Türkiye Diyanet Foundation, 2017, Presentation)

The fraternity rhetoric functions as an important element of Turkish religious soft power, wrapping its foreign policy in a symbolic cape that aims to obtain influence and affinity (Süsler & Alden 2022). Beyond charity and religion, these projects exemplify both Türkiye's geopolitical and religious leadership role and the idea of a Turkish Islamic identity (Altunışık, 2022; Öztürk & Sözeri, 2018).

In Africa, religion is a foundation of Türkiye's initiatives towards differentiating its foreign policy approach from Western actors and regional competitors. Islam is not just employed as a faith-based common ground; it is also used as a civilisational framework via which Ankara recovers its historical footprint in the Horn of Africa and in the Red Sea. By evoking the Ottoman past as a "non-coercive" Islamic protector of African Muslims, it opposes itself to the colonial memories of European actors. In this framework, the geopolitical narrative is firmly intertwined with religious solidarity that aims to legitimise the Turkish presence in Africa as a friendly return, and not an incursion (Yimer, 2024).

Moreover, the strategic remembrance of a common Islamic heritage with Somalia, Djibouti and Ethiopia enables the construction of a moral geography where Türkiye is depicted as a restorative actor whose purpose is to revitalise Islamic ties previously cut by colonial powers (Yimer, 2024). This discourse particularly resonates in the Horn of Africa, a region where ties from Ottoman times can be selectively employed to position Türkiye as a historical and natural ally of Muslim populations.

Even though the construction of mosques has been largely viewed as a fundamental part of Türkiye's religious soft power, as previously explained, a study on the AKP's Africa policy stresses how these initiatives are not just expressions of cultural diplomacy, but rather performatively loaded acts of prestige. The building of grand mosques, as those in Djibouti and Mogadishu, is intentionally done to affirm Ankara's religious and architectural leadership on the continent, exceeding other competitors like the Gulf states. These structures transform not only into places of worship but into markers of soft power and of Türkiye's claim to being the biggest promoter of Sunni Islam in the Global South (İnaç, 2022).

**Figure 2.2.**

*Mosque of Islamic Solidarity, in Mogadishu, Somalia.*



*Source: (JamesA, 2013)*

**Figure 2.3.**

*Abdülhamid II Mosque, the biggest in Djibouti.*



*Source: (AA Photo, n.d.)*

Through the Türkiye Diyanet Foundation, sermons, public ceremonies, and senior-level visits serve as “proof points” for fraternity and authority. In 2017, the Diyanet’s administrative report emphasised “Ramazan Ayı Programları” (Ramadan Month Programs) in 88 countries to highlight the magnitude and ritualised form of these events (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı [DİB], 2017, pp. 83–85). When understood together, these stages of sermons, ceremonies, and senior-level appearances form the performative backbone through which the Türkiye Diyanet Foundation/Diyanet claims moral authority and regularises Türkiye’s religious-diplomatic influence on the continent. Each of these infers Türkiye’s moral authority and high ground, thereby legitimising its regional influence as a Muslim-majority, intent player on the continent of Africa.

By 2017, Quran distribution reached 582,696 copies delivered in 47 countries. The "Let the Qur'an be My Gift" (Hediyem Kur'an Olsun) programme serves as a permanent, donor-funded pipeline that procures, prints, and ceremonially distributes the Qur'an through Diyanet attachés and partner councils (TDV, 2017, pp. 30–31). The programme is designed as both devotional outreach and identity work: it carefully pairs editions to local recitational and script traditions (e.g., Warsh is widely used in the Maghreb/Sahel; Dūrī is used in a part of the Nile Valley). Distributions peak around Ramadan and ʿĪd al-Aḏḥā, and handovers are staged with local officials and clergy to tie the act into public ritual (TDV, 2018, pp. 54–56). In 2018, this localisation is evident in the handing out of Warsh and Dūrī editions in Niger and Chad, which draws attention to local practice rather than suggesting a uniform text (TDV, 2018, pp. 54–55). By 2022, the program scales into a mass operation of approximately 1.5 million Qur'ans in 40 languages - now also inclusive of African languages like Yoruba, Swahili, and Amharic - while Arabic and Turkish remain heavy within the bulk of the distribution (TDV, 2022, pp. 13–14). The messaging links religious giving to identity work and preservation, so even an act of giving a text is framed as preservation of creed, literacy, and orthopraxy.

There is a critical point of view previously explored, provided by Uysal (2021), as he frames Ankara's religious involvement in sub-Saharan Africa through a Sub-Imperialist logic. This theory says that Islamic soft power is not just a diplomatic instrument but is also a tool of ideological interjection. Türkiye reconfigures, in a subtle manner, religious authority in line with its Sunni-conservative, state-centric global view, by siding with African Islamic institutions (through training, funding, or narrative control). This fact is specifically clear in Türkiye's aim to eliminate competing Islamic ideologies and in its avoidance of pluralistic religious perspectives - Shi'ism, Salafism, or Gülenism - from the networks it fosters.

In this manner, religion works as the structure of what are, as formerly explained, asymmetrical relations under the frame of fraternity. For instance, the partnerships with national Islamic councils and the ideological training of imams are outlined as cooperation yet concurrently work to uphold Turkish religious norms and values and strengthen Ankara's political influence. Finalising this perspective, religious diplomacy also strengthens the larger patterns of influence and dependency, facilitating Türkiye's presence in Africa through spiritual and ideological validity that conceals its material wants (Uysal, 2021).

In Africa, the Diyanet seeks to shape local religious fields by formalising cooperation with national Islamic councils and umbrella bodies, as well as ministries of religious affairs, mufti offices, and mosque directorates, covering concrete areas such as imam training and certification (Diyanet, 2022, p. 40; 2022-2023 EĞİTİM ÖĞRETİM YILI AÇILIŞ PROGRAMI, n.d.), curriculum and textbook development, sermon (khutba) guidance, translation and printing of Qur'ans (TDV, n.d.; Anadolu Agency, 2018) and catechetical materials in local languages, joint conferences and seminars, scholarship quotas and clergy exchanges, and financial/technical

support for mosque administration and religious schools (TDV, 2019–2024). Through these partnerships, it promotes a state-sanctioned Sunni-Hanafi orthodoxy and builds durable organisational links that embed Turkish religious authority in national structures (Anadolu Agency, 2021). The collaboration involves the printing of religious books in local African languages, curricular help, and joint seminars with African clergy (Öztürk & Baser, 2022). As an example, the “Meeting of Muslim Religious Leaders in the Continent of Africa” of 2006, which joined representatives from 21 countries, illustrates Türkiye’s goal of creating transnational Islamic networks connected via Turkish coordination (Faik & Orakci, 2006). In the second Meeting, in 2011, a final Communiqué declared desires towards a long-term collaboration in training and education (Hürriyet Daily News, 2011)

Also focal to the Diyanet’s soft power strategy is youth and educational outreach. An overview of the documents provided by the Türkiye Diyanet Foundation reflects that a very limited image of student provision to Africans is delivered, largely unreported and poorly disaggregated, with a varying degree of efficacy. Starting in 2016, the organisation reported 503 students from Africa having received assistance (TDV, 2016, p. 63). In 2017, it is noted how “as of 2017, 682 students from 39 countries who came from Africa as scholarship holders of our Foundation or with the support of our Foundation are supported at the secondary level in International Imam Hatip schools” (TDV, 2017, p. 57). The series then appears in 2023 meeting “more than 11,000” students (which includes students from orphanhood/social assistance) (TDV, 2023, pp. 169–170), and in 2024, for example, 8,558 students received some type of assistance, which again does not disaggregate nationality nor modality (tuition reduction, scholarship, textbooks) (TDV, 2024, p.33).

These estimates need to be taken with caution as the category “students supported” aggregates together multiple modalities (scholarship, tuition, academic accommodation, materials, and social assistance) and does not systematically and explicitly separate legitimate support given in Türkiye as separate to interactions and service provision within the students’ countries of origin. There are significant gaps in the reporting, there is inconsistent vocabulary from year to year, and there is little explanation of the particulars of what constitutes encounters and deduplicated encounters. Essentially, the reporting should be thought of in orders of magnitude.

However, via an article published on the Foundation’s website in 2022, we can note that, at the time, 5.880 students were studying in Türkiye under the auspices of the Foundation (TDV, 2022). Furthermore, according to İhsan Açıık, Vice President of the Board of Trustees of the Turkish Religious Foundation:

Students and families’ interest in our scholarship programs grows every year, and this year, 7,825 students from 102 countries applied. 3,907 students applied to

the International Anatolian Imam Hatip High School, 2,951 to the International Theology Undergraduate Program, and 967 to our International Theology Graduate Scholarship Program. (TDV, 2022)

The Diyanet has written about its commission to set quotas for African students at Qur'anic schools, vocational religious high schools and universities providing higher religious education (Directorate of Religious Affairs, 2011; Mohamed, 2012, p. 50). These programs contribute to the development of the state institutional Sunni-Hanafi interpretation of Islam, determined by the state with no connection to Wahhabism or Shiism, which seeks to position the Turkish state in the role of moderate scholarly study of Islam (Yilmaz et al., 2017; Mandaville & Hamid, 2018).

Visibly, Türkiye's education-based projects have been instrumental in its foreign policy towards Africa, specifically under the AKP, working as a pillar of soft power and a way to develop lasting bilateral relations. During the 2000s, as Mohamed (2012) emphasises, Ankara sponsored the creation of various Turkish schools across Africa, firstly motivated by civil society networks, namely those associated with the Gülen movement - a transnational Turkish Islamic network inspired by Fethullah Gülen that developed dense infrastructures of schools, charities, media and business associations in Türkiye and abroad, dismantled following the 2016 coup attempt and its operations were transferred by the state to the Maarif Foundation<sup>6</sup> (Yilmaz et al., 2017). The schools provided a high-quality education (frequently in English, French or local languages) and placed focus on technology, science and moral instruction, receiving the reputation of academic excellence in countries like Senegal, Nigeria and South Africa. These institutions served as instruments in the promotion of Turkish linguistic and cultural familiarity and in establishing the basis for stronger economic and diplomatic relations in the following years.

Nevertheless, the control and nature of the Turkish schools on the continent changed substantially following the 2016 failed coup attempt and consequently the decline of Türkiye's government ties with the Gülen movement. As explained by Sotero (2021), the AKP government initiated a hostile campaign to allocate the control of Gülen-affiliated schools to the state-run Maarif Foundation, which was created for this particular purpose. Via bilateral agreements and diplomatic pressure, the Turkish state had succeeded in gaining control over dozens of schools in Africa, thereby strengthening state control over transnational education. This power transfer illustrates a larger centralisation of soft power instruments under immediate governmental management, in an attempt to associate educational content and institutional governance with AKP's strategic and ideological goals through religious diplomacy.

---

<sup>6</sup> The Türkiye Maarif Vakfı is a state-backed public foundation established by Law No. 6721 (2016) with a mandate to conduct formal and non-formal education abroad on behalf of Türkiye. In practice, it functions as the state's primary vehicle for education diplomacy in the post-2016 period, including the acquisition or replacement of former Gülen/Hizmet schools through bilateral agreements, especially in Africa (Akgün & Özkan, 2020; Sıradağ, 2023).

İnaç (2022) underlines the importance of the educational sector in Türkiye's Africa policy, given that the Maarif Foundation's operations have reached 25 African nations. Beyond educational purposes, these institutions are platforms established to transmit "Turkish values", particularly moderate Sunni Islam, political alignment and cultural affinity. Through hosting student exchange initiatives, providing scholarships and incorporating local students into Türkiye's higher education system, the goal is to cultivate a future generation of African elites who are sympathetic to Ankara. So, Turkish schools in Africa reflect more than an approach based on educational diplomacy, as they constitute a strategic investment in influencing these countries' cultural and political scenario, aligning with the Turkish long-term foreign policy perspective. As İhsan Açıık, Vice President of the Board of Trustees of the Turkish Religious Foundation, stated:

Our students, who are our volunteer ambassadors, especially in promoting Türkiye, demonstrate the value of our educational efforts to us. (TDV, 2022)

The projection of a state-backed, Sunni-oriented Islamic identity became a vital aspect of Türkiye's foreign policy actions. This approach is coherent with the AKP's long-term plan of rebuilding the Turkish state and society following Islamic-conservative lines, armoured via state institutions, namely the Diyanet and TİKA. These organisations are not purely cultural or humanitarian players, they are also essential to the Turkish foreign policy instruments. Using tools such as religious education, mosque construction, imam training and transnational religious networks, Ankara has endorsed a state-defined model of Islam that aligns with AKP ideals across Africa (Ngwa, 2019).

What separates Türkiye's sub-imperialist approach from that of classical imperialism is how civilisational and religious discourses are mutually constituted with economic interests. Dissimilar to former colonial actors, Ankara uses its Islamic identity and Ottoman legacy as leverage to paint its involvement as non-intimidating and culturally adjacent. However, as Uysal (2021) points out, sub-imperial players habitually imitate polarised or asymmetric power structures while seeming benign. Ankara's partnerships with African nations frequently include ideological interpellation, which constitutes a soft but strong claim of Turkish leadership under a religious and "moral" justification.

### **2.3. Humanitarian Diplomacy**

Between 2016 and 2024, the Diyanet's humanitarian portfolio in Africa widened markedly in both geographic reach and programmatic scale. This section examines the evolution of relief-focused interventions, especially water-well construction, food distribution, and crisis response,

alongside shifts in delivery capacity, partnerships, and funding, and traces the discursive framing that presents these activities as a moral obligation and Islamic solidarity.

In 2018, the Foundation provided 90.205 food parcels (worth over 17.6 million TRY) to 84 countries, “from the Far East to our African brothers and sisters whose hardships increase even more during Ramadan” (Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı [Türkiye Diyanet Foundation], 2018, pp. 28–29).

The Turkish Religious Foundation shared the joy of Ramadan with Muslims, especially in Africa, with iftar tables and aid packages it delivered during the Ramadan period. (TDV, 2018, pp. 28–29)

Simultaneously, the Diyanet’s institutional infrastructural development in Africa rose. In 2016, the Directorate built 27 water wells (TDV, 2016, p. 34). This impetus augmented in 2017, humanitarian and charitable services were worth over 3.5 million dollars and 141.140 dollars respectively, in 34 African nations, “in areas such as votive offerings, water well work, support for local religious administrations, humanitarian aid, etc.” (TDV, 2017, p. 58). Also, given the drought in the Horn of Africa and the humanitarian crisis that happened, more than 670. 000 dollars were donated to places such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Somaliland, Puntland and Sudan (TDV, 2017, p. 58). By 2023, the Diyanet had reported the opening of 1.150 water wells across 35 countries - many in Africa (TDV, 2023, p. 5). In the last year of analysis, 2024, the momentum continued, with the Directorate reaching figures like 1.334 wells worldwide (TDV, 2024, p. 4).

In the last two decades, humanitarian aid has also appeared as a fundamental tool of Türkiye’s foreign policy strategy toward Africa, exhibiting a mix of religious solidarity, moral responsibility and tactical intention under the AKP government. As Mohamed (2012) noted, Ankara’s involvement with the continent has progressively included humanitarian assistance projects, developed through state institutions, as the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) and the Turkish Red Crescent. These initiatives had the goal of tackling urgent humanitarian and developmental needs - such as the opening of water wells, healthcare and assistance during environmental catastrophes - but also fostering a benevolent image of Türkiye as a country with a Muslim majority that provides an alternative to Western aid models. Thus, humanitarian aid works as a clear soft power instrument and a method of political and religious messaging that stresses Ankara’s historical ties with Africa and its moral leadership, specifically in Muslim-majority regions. The referred approach established the foundations for bilateral relations with a more profound nature and facilitated the legitimisation of Türkiye’s broader economic and strategic interests.

In 2023, the solidarity campaign “I Stand With My Brother” pairs public rites (Friday sermons, prayer-time appeals, leader-attended ceremonies) with material relief (TDV, 2023, p. 90), including the opening of 261 water wells (TDV, 2023, p. 66). This bundling of wells and

food parcels makes humanitarian aid legible as a religious duty, aligning relief with fraternity and moral obligation. The 2024 cycle maintains strategy, with a broadened relief portfolio (e.g., cumulative well openings and orphan/student support), narrated as extensions of Sunni–Hanafi orthodoxy, communal solidarity, and Türkiye’s protective role (TDV, 2024, pp. 100-102).

As observed, public diplomacy has been tactically used to project Ankara as a benevolent Islamic actor. In the report of 2016, there is a highlight of the second “Diyanet Foundation International Kindness Awards” at the Haliç Congress Centre - now titled the “International Benevolence Awards”. Hosted by President Erdoğan, this edition received the presence of former Sudanese President Abdurrahman Swar ez-Zeheb, the then President of Religious Affairs Prof. Mehmet Görmez, several ministers and members of parliament, academics, and “guests from home and abroad” (TDV, 2016, p.41). This is congruent with the utilisation of ceremonial acts and elite endorsements as tools of soft power and public diplomacy (Nye, 2008; Öztürk & Sözeri, 2018; Öztürk & Baser, 2022). As stated on the Foundation’s website:

The International Benevolence Awards Program has been established and takes place every 13th of March, in order to reward the pioneers of benevolence from within Türkiye and around the world, with regard to the fact that goodness grows as it is shared and that making known, explaining and relaying even one act of kindness can encourage many others to take part in kind acts. (Türkiye Diyanet Foundation [TDV], n.d.)

**Figure 2.4.**

*The 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the Diyanet Foundation International Kindness Awards/International Benevolence Awards.*



*Source: (TDV, 2016, p.41)*

## **2.4. Budget Evolution**

As an institution funded by the state's central budget, the Diyanet's funds greatly increased in the late 2010s and early 2020s, considering data provided by reputable Turkish press that has noted a distribution "exceeding 16 billion TRY" for 2022 and an additional expected 117% growth for 2023 (Duvar English, 2021; Duvar English, 2022; Bianet, 2021). This rise was not surprising given previous indications, for instance, reports that the Presidency had overspent its allocation by 3 billion TRY in 2019 (Duvar English, 2019).

The Türkiye Diyanet Foundation's annual reports demonstrate a similar increase. For example, the document referring to 2017 shows over 3.5 million USD being spent in humanitarian services plus other charitable expenses, and in the following year, the Foundation kept expanding its activities (Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı [Türkiye Diyanet Foundation], 2017; Türkiye Diyanet Foundation, 2018).

Even though a thorough and complete analysis of the Diyanet's budget progression is not possible for the reasons previously explored, this evidence of budget increase and the Foundation's continuous widening of its scope of activities clearly illustrates the growing importance of this institution and its increasing application in Turkish religious diplomacy. As formerly noted, this increase is visible in Africa, where the number of projects implemented has grown throughout the years. So, it can be concluded that not only has Türkiye placed increasing importance in its religious diplomacy strategy, but also that the African continent is a significant site for its application.

## **2.5. African Agency and the Governance of Religious Diplomacy**

Recently, some scholars have begun to redefine their view of the interaction between the Diyanet and African countries by foregrounding African agency. An example of this is Süssler & Alden's (2022) perspective, wherein they claim that state and non-state actors are not passive recipients of Türkiye's developments, quite the contrary. The idea is that they strategically engage with Turkish initiatives by invoking the common language of Islamic solidarity and commercial partnership. Thus, African interlocutors design a negotiation space that enables them to pursue their own priorities. As an example, the tailored distribution of Warsh and Dürī Qur'an editions in Niger and Chad further shows how local ritual ecologies shape programme design, rather than Ankara unilaterally exporting a scriptural template (Türkiye Diyanet Foundation, 2018, pp. 55–56). Concluding this perspective, Turkish-African religious diplomacy can be perceived as an interactive ground where African players use Diyanet instruments as leverage to gain finance, training and visibility, while Turkey spreads its normative and strategic aims (Süssler & Alden, 2022).

So, in this dynamic, the Diyanet works as the operational centre between President Erdoğan's symbolism and practical outcomes. It transforms the presidential script, mosque inaugurations, public prayers and the fraternity rhetoric into programmed instruments: mosque construction and high-profile inaugurations, scripted sermons, Qur'an distribution, Ramadan programming, religious-education channels (namely the Imam-Hatip models endorsed during the 2011 African Muslim Religious Leaders Summit) (Süsler & Alden, 2022). In organisational terms, the Diyanet, commonly via attachés, functions alongside central state instruments, such as embassies and TİKA, while the Türkiye Diyanet Foundation finances and creates religious-humanitarian projects, giving depth and evidence to Erdoğan's "neo-Ottoman/civilisational" narrative (Süsler & Alden, 2022).

Institutionally, Türkiye's Africa policy appears increasingly structured and long-term in orientation. The foundation of Türkiye–Africa Summits, the propagation of Turkish embassies throughout the continent, and the operational rise of institutions such as TİKA and the Maarif Foundation demonstrate an attempt to maintain and strengthen Ankara's footprint. However, as noted by İnaç (2022), the longevity of this engagement is dependent on Türkiye's reaction to evolving African prospects relating to local ownership, equity and socioeconomic power. Solely relying on rhetoric is unlikely to be sufficient.

Although these efforts are habitually framed via the lens of soft power, critical perspectives arise that challenge this view. As Heibach and Taş (2024) argue, the Diyanet exemplifies "authoritarian infrastructural power". Its international activities represent not merely cultural exchange, but a means of ideological projection and domestic control. Indeed, its credibility has been questioned in light of its growing entanglement with the AKP's political apparatus. Studies have documented the Diyanet's post-2016 involvement in diaspora surveillance and its role as an intermediary in political messaging (Öztürk & Sözeri, 2018; Boyajian, 2013).

A great amount of this foreign policy strategy is related to Ahmet Davutoğlu's "Strategic Depth" doctrine, which accentuates Türkiye's Ottoman-Islamic heritage and civilisational bonds to African Muslim societies (Davutoğlu, 2001). This ideological background is a complement to Türkiye's pursuit of geopolitical autonomy and has enabled the birth of crucial turning points such as the 2005 Declaration of the "Year of Africa" and the 2008 Türkiye–Africa Summit (Siradağ, 2023).

Even before the 2016 rupture with the Gülen movement, Türkiye's faith-based foreign policy relied on NGOs and educational institutions connected to Gülenist networks. Their purging by the ruling elite after the coup attempt resulted in a concentration of religious diplomacy under state supervision, especially through Diyanet and TİKA (Siradağ, 2023; Yimer, 2024). Converging these factions allowed Türkiye to shift that religious outreach in line with its broader strategic objectives, especially in critical geographical areas such as the Horn of Africa, where Turkish support for religious infrastructure and humanitarian relief work has surged.

As Yimer (2024) argues, Turkish investments in Somalia, Sudan and Ethiopia - from mosque construction to educational structures and ideological diplomacy - further consolidate Türkiye's geopolitical posture. Erdoğan's religiously symbolic diplomacy in these countries forms the affective dimension of Ankara's influence, which amplifies and consolidates Türkiye's moral authority by feeding both domestic and foreign policy demands (Siradağ, 2023; Mohamed, 2012).

A comprehensive understanding of these dynamics must also grapple with the Diyanet's transformation from a national bureaucratic institution to a central connection in transnational religious diplomacy. As this section of the study demonstrated through empirical analysis of Türkiye Diyanet Foundation annual reports, Diyanet's operations in Africa extend far beyond charitable work - they represent the export of institutional models, religious norms, and symbolic narratives aligned with the AKP's ideological framework.

The discursive and material deployment of religious soft power is multilayered. On one level, it includes quantifiable outputs: the number of mosques built, water wells drilled, students educated, and imams trained. On another level, it entails rhetorical strategies: presenting Türkiye as a benevolent Islamic actor, positioning the Türkiye Diyanet Foundation as a "guardian of goodness," and promoting an image of Türkiye as a compassionate civilisational power. Both aspects are essential to understanding how soft power operates in practice.

Moreover, these mechanisms amount to more than benevolent outreach. As Uysal (2021) asserts, Türkiye's Africa policy also embodies elements of sub-imperialism, a strategy that merges religious legitimacy with economic expansion and political influence. What appears as solidarity may in fact function as a vehicle for capital accumulation and ideological hegemony under the guise of shared values.

By foregrounding Africa's place in Turkish foreign policy, not merely as a recipient of aid, but as a strategic frontier for religious and ideological engagement, this chapter has outlined the historical, discursive, and institutional contours of a multifaceted foreign policy apparatus.

## Conclusion

---

This thesis aimed to examine how the Presidency of Religious Affairs of Türkiye (Diyanet) functions as a tool of Turkish foreign policy in Africa, focusing specifically on the period between 2016 and 2024. To this end, it has sought to fill the gap between an expanding literature on religion and foreign policy and the under-researched reality of Turkish religious diplomacy in Africa. The research employed a combination of historical and theoretical study of the relationship between religion, identity, and international politics, with a detailed primary-source analysis of the Türkiye Diyanet Foundation's activity reports, as well as an overview and evaluation of relevant official diplomatic documentation and policy statements. The aim was to analyse how the Diyanet, which emerged as a domestic bureaucracy that sought to regulate Islam through a secular state, has become a transnational actor in the service of Ankara's strategic objectives.

A key finding of this research is how the Diyanet exemplifies the convergence of religion and identity in Türkiye's contemporary foreign policy. Secularisation theory, for example, has long predicted the steady channelling of religion away from the political and international arena. However, as demonstrated in Chapter I, the reinsertion of religion into the realm of international relations, especially after the attacks of 9/11, has led to an acknowledgement of the persistent relevance of religious institutions in forming state agendas. For Türkiye, the Diyanet represents a paradigmatic case of religion functioning not as an independent domain, but as an ideological tool of the state, employed for consolidating domestic legitimacy or extending symbolic power abroad.

This change is deeply linked to the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) redefinition of national identity. By positioning Islam at the heart of Türkiye's self-understanding, the AKP has made room for the Diyanet to operate as what Althusser (2014) might refer to as a "religious state apparatus": simultaneously bureaucratic, ideological, and transnational. In this regard, the Diyanet's foreign activity comprises much more than the diffusion of culture: they are a vehicle, or means of projecting identity, wherein Ankara claims a legitimate moral authority, while positioning itself against Western secularism and Gulf conservatism, in the Muslim world.

The Diyanet was established in 1924 to domesticate and bureaucratise Islam through republican laicism. Its focus was primarily inward-oriented, dealing with issues such as mosque management, Qur'anic teaching, and doctrinal oversight. Over subsequent decades, particularly from the 1980s, its focus expanded from its inward focus to also include management of diaspora religious activities and a limited transnational reach. However, the most significant transformation has occurred during the AKP's rule, particularly following the 2016 coup attempt. With the dismantling of Gülenist networks, the state has come to centralise the religious outreach in government institutions, notably the Diyanet and TİKA. The budgetary augmentation, the

elevation of the Diyanet in the presidential system, and its increasing entwinement with the strategic narratives of Ankara highlight the transformation.

Chapter II inserted the Diyanet activities in a wider trajectory of Türkiye–Africa relations. Whereas the early Republican period largely severed Ottoman-African ties in the name of Westernisation, the AKP has re-invigorated historical and religious ties to create the frame of Türkiye as a “post-Western” civilisational actor. This identity turn is operationalised through Davutoğlu’s concept of “Strategic Depth”, which interprets Africa not as a marginal periphery but as a natural zone of influence based on shared Islamic heritage.

The analyses of the Türkiye Diyanet Foundation reports has provided an in-depth analysis of how this institutional repositioning was operationalised. Projects in mosque construction, Qur’an distribution, imam training, and scholarships were neatly framed as acts of “iyilik” (goodness), “kardeşlik” (brotherhood) and a wider vision of civilisation. This rhetoric not only moralises Türkiye's presence in Africa but also creates a discursive context for Ankara to present itself as both a benevolent donor as well as a curator of historical Islamic solidarity.

Empirically, it is clear that Africa has been, and remains, both symbolically and materially, an important strand of Türkiye’s geo-foreign policy reorientation. Erdoğan's first-time state visits, Türkiye's recognition as a strategic partner of the African Union, and the grounded proliferation of embassies across the continent are all indicators of a longer-term strategic design. Adding this contextual content to the Diyanet mosque inaugurations and educational programs, and humanitarian interventions, each act becomes a proof-point of Ankara's religious diplomacy, deepening both moral and civilizational narratives.

The empirical analysis indicates that the Diyanet activity in Africa is linked to three interconnected modalities. Firstly, religious infrastructure has become a central point: symbolic projects, for example, the Abdülhamid II Mosque in Djibouti or the National Mosque in Ghana, are not solely places of worship, they also perform as emblematic structures that project Turkish-Islamic architecture, opposing Gulf-sponsored initiatives, and, in the end, giving material substance to Türkiye's claim to being a Sunni leader in the Global South. Secondly, ideological and educational outreach has had the goal to shape religious knowledge and create future African elites sympathetic to Ankara via scholarships, imam training, and Qur’an distribution in African languages, particularly following the shift from Gülen-affiliated schools to the state-run Maarif Foundation, after the 2016 coup attempt. This meant the Diyanet and its various affiliates became pivotal instruments of a state-approved Sunni-Hanafi orthodoxy. Thirdly, humanitarian diplomacy has combined language around the construction of water wells, Ramadan iftar programs, food parcels, and orphan support with Islamic solidarity, not only blending relief with religious legitimacy but also helping frame benevolence as a political message, which has differentiated Ankara from Western forms of aid while empowering Ankara's role and agency. Altogether, these modalities represent what could be called a "template of religious diplomacy,"

with material interventions and moral discourse linked within transnational networks and state structures.

Despite these features and objectives, the Diyanet's foreign policy role is subject to many contradictions. The humanitarian and benevolence language attempts to contrast Türkiye as a non-hegemonic assertive alternative, while the structural patterns of engagement indicate asymmetries. The trade dimension continues to operate in core-periphery logics with Türkiye exporting manufactured goods and importing raw materials. Likewise, religious diplomacy often underplays African agency by inserting Turkish leadership and silencing local partners.

Critical scholarship has cautioned against examining this engagement solely through the concept of soft power (Heibach & Taş, 2024; Uysal, 2021). Rather, the Diyanet presents a form of “authoritarian infrastructural power” and “sub-imperialism” where religious legitimacy, humanitarianism, and economic expansion operate to enhance Ankara's strategic stance. The Turkish Diyanet’s religious diplomacy, thus, is undercut by the way it is tied to domestic authoritarian consolidation and its non-pluralistic engagement with non-Sunni traditions.

Nevertheless, African actors are not passive recipients of Turkey's religious diplomacy. As Süssler & Alden (2022) argue, they can negotiate, adapt, and harness opportunities in Turkish religious initiatives for their own agendas, whether it be the localisation of the Qur’ân or obtaining education or funding via scholarships. The silences and omissions of Diyanet’s annual reports also reflect a reality not always steered directly by the organization but by the “recipients” of its programs.

In the end, this dissertation has aimed to advance our understanding of religion and foreign policy in three ways. First, it offered empirically grounded insights about the Diyanet in Africa, a region that has been neglected comparatively to Europe or Central Asia. Second, it brought together insights from constructivism on identity and critical perspectives on authoritarian infrastructural power, moving beyond solely soft versus hard power dynamics. Third, it highlighted the multilayered nature of religious diplomacy using the case study of the Diyanet by showing how economic material outputs (mosques, Qur’an distribution, wells, etc.) and symbolic narratives allow religious diplomacy to be effective.

Through a policy perspective, the findings demonstrate that Türkiye's religious diplomacy in Africa cannot be separated from its broader economic and geopolitical strategy. Framed under the guise of cultural exchange or altruism, this approach enables Türkiye’s rational purpose to enhance Islamic unity, renegotiate world hierarchies and preserve Ankara’s independence and power within an evolving international structure. The Türkiye Diyanet Foundation reports serve as valuable archival records, though they are performative documents privileging outputs to the detriment of outcomes, omitting financial information, and consistently neglecting African agency.

Given we now understand the institution that is the Diyanet, its programmes and objectives, future research may take this analysis in three additional categories: first, through ethnographic studies of how these Diyanet projects are received and contested in African communities; second, through studying how Turkish religious diplomacy interacts with competing actors, namely Gulf states and indigenous Islamic movements; and third, to place the Diyanet within larger conversations about authoritarian diffusion and the international politics of religion.

The Diyanet's case in Africa is a reflective embodiment of the complicated tie between religion, identity and power in international relations today. It is more than just a bureaucratic religious authority. The Diyanet has evolved as an aspect of Turkish foreign policy in its export of a state-recognised Sunni Islam, while inserting Ankara's narrative of civilisation into African contexts.

In this sense, the Diyanet becomes a site of continuity and rupture. Continuity in the sense of a long history of state-handed control over religion in Türkiye, and rupture in the transition to a transnational actor, working towards an AKP vision of a post-Western, Muslim-majority civilisational power. By analysing Diyanet's activities in Africa, this dissertation contributes to understanding broader dynamics that reveal how states orchestrate religion to respond to and reshape global orders.

Ultimately, Diyanet's operations in Africa compel us to rethink the ever-fluctuating boundaries between piety and *raison d'état*, intra-state governance and cross-border projection, and humanitarian relief and geopolitical leverage. Unlike what was once thought, religion is not disappearing. It is part of the institutional and discursive architectures in which contemporary power is produced, legitimised, and projected. Through a secular lens, this study also unsettles the usual "Church and State" imaginary (and its *laïcité* variations). Rather than enforcing a strict boundary, Türkiye's *laiklik* has consistently manifested as state oversight and institutional incorporation of religion within the apparatus of governance. In the transnational realm, that becomes a form of post-secular governance wherein religious authority and state strategy are mutually enabling. What is, therefore, at stake is not secularism eroding, but the reconfiguration of "multiple secularities" wherein laic frameworks exist alongside (and actively organise) the cross-border mobilisation of religious infrastructures aimed at shaping geopolitical ordering.

## Sources and Bibliography

---

### a. Sources

Bianet. (2021, October 19). Budget of Turkey's Religious Affairs Presidency to exceed 16 billion lira. <https://bianet.org/haber/budget-of-turkey-s-religious-affairs-presidency-to-exceed-16-billion-lira-252072>

DEİK — Foreign Economic Relations Board of Türkiye. (2023, September 19). Minister Bolat: Our trade volume with Africa reached 40.7 billion dollars.

Deniz Faik and Serhat Orakci, 'Afrika Kitasi Musluman Ulke ve Topluluklari Dini Liderler Toplantisi,' BSV Bulten 62 (2006). [https://www.bisav.org.tr/userfiles/yayinlar/makaleler/mecmua\\_\\_afrika\\_kitasi\\_musluman\\_ulke\\_ve\\_topluluklari\\_dini\\_liderler\\_toplantisi\\_241.pdf](https://www.bisav.org.tr/userfiles/yayinlar/makaleler/mecmua__afrika_kitasi_musluman_ulke_ve_topluluklari_dini_liderler_toplantisi_241.pdf)

Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı. (2019a, October 22). "3. Afrika Müslüman Dini Liderler Zirvesi" sonuç bildirgesinin okunmasıyla sona erdi.

Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı. (2019b, October 25). Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan 3. Afrika Ülkeleri Müslüman Dini Liderler Zirvesi'nde konuştu.

Directorate of Religious Affairs. (2019). Djibouti Abdulhamid Han Mosque opened for worship. <https://www.diyanet.gov.tr/fr-FR/Institutionnel/d%C3%A9tail/26153/le-prsident-des-affaires-religieuses-erbas-a-rcit-le-sermon-dans-la-mosque-dabdul-hamid-khan-ii-de-djibouti>

Duvar English. (2019, September 25). Directorate of Religious Affairs exceeds budget by 3 billion TL. <https://www.duvarenglish.com/domestic/2019/09/25/directorate-of-religious-affairs-exceeds-budget-by-3-billion-tl>

Duvar English. (2021, October 19). With new proposal, top religious body's budget to exceed 16 billion liras in 2022. <https://www.duvarenglish.com/with-new-proposal-top-religious-body-diyans-budget-to-exceed-16-billion-liras-in-2022-news-59244>

Duvar English. (2022, October 18). Turkish top religious body's budget to increase 117 pct in 2023. <https://www.duvarenglish.com/turkish-top-religious-bodys-budget-to-increase-117-pct-in-2023-news-61439>

Hürriyet Daily News. (2011, November 25). Africa seeks Turkish Islamic education - Türkiye News. <https://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/africa-seeks-turkish-islamic-education-7725>

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye. (n.d.). Türkiye–Africa relations. Retrieved September 3, 2025.

Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye. (2018, July 15). Presidential Decree No. 4 on the organization of ministries, affiliated, related and associated institutions and other institutions and organizations (Official Gazette No. 30479).

Republic of Türkiye. (2010, April 6). Law No. 5978 on the Organization and Duties of the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (Official Gazette No. 27544).

- Republic of Türkiye. (2011, November 2). Decree Law No. 656 on the organization and duties of the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) (Official Gazette No. 28103).
- Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA). (n.d.). History. Retrieved September 1, 2025, from <https://tika.gov.tr/en/institutional/history/>
- Türkiye Diyanet Foundation. (n.d.). International benevolence awards. TDV. Retrieved September 16, 2025, from <https://tdv.org/en-EN/our-activities/international-benevolence-awards/>
- Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı. (2016). Annual activity report 2016. Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı. <https://tdvmedia.blob.core.windows.net/tdv/MedyaOdas%C4%B1/Raporlar/TDV%20-%20Faaliyet%20Raporu%20-%202016.pdf>
- Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı. (2017). Annual activity report 2017. Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı. <https://tdvmedia.blob.core.windows.net/tdv/MedyaOdas%C4%B1/Raporlar/TDV%20-%20Faaliyet%20Raporu%20-%202017.pdf>
- Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı. (2018). Annual activity report 2018. Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı. <https://tdvmedia.blob.core.windows.net/tdv/MedyaOdas%C4%B1/Raporlar/TDV%20-%20Faaliyet%20Raporu%20-%202018.pdf>
- Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı. (2019). Annual activity report 2019. Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı. <https://tdvmedia.blob.core.windows.net/tdv/MedyaOdas%C4%B1/Raporlar/TDV-Faaliyet-Raporu%202019.pdf>
- Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı. (2020). Annual activity report 2020. Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı. <https://tdvmedia.blob.core.windows.net/tdv/MedyaOdas%C4%B1/Raporlar/TDV%20-%20Faaliyet%20Raporu%20-%202020.pdf>
- Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı. (2021). Annual activity report 2021. Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı. <https://tdvmedia.blob.core.windows.net/tdv/MedyaOdas%C4%B1/Raporlar/TDV%20Faaliyet%20Raporu%202021.pdf>
- Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı. (2022). Annual activity report 2022. Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı. <https://tdvmedia.blob.core.windows.net/tdv/MedyaOdas%C4%B1/Raporlar/TDV%20-%20Faaliyet%20Raporu%20-%202022.pdf>
- Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı. (2023). Annual activity report 2023. Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı. <https://tdvmedia.blob.core.windows.net/tdv/MedyaOdas%C4%B1/Raporlar/TDV-Faaliyet-Raporu-2023.pdf>
- Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı. (2024). Annual activity report 2024. Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı. <https://tdvmedia.blob.core.windows.net/tdv/MedyaOdas%C4%B1/Raporlar/TDV-Faaliyet-Raporu-2024.pdf>
- Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı. (2019). International Anatolian Imam Hatip High School – Application guide (2019–2020). <https://diyanetburslari.tdv.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/%C4%B0HL-Ba%C5%9Fvuru-K%C4%B1lavuzu-2020-ENG.pdf>
- Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı. (2022, March 24). 102 ülkeden 7.825 öğrenci Türkiye’de eğitim görmek için başvuruda bulundu [News post]. <https://tdv.org/tr-TR/102-ulkeden-7825-ogrenci-turkiyede-egitim-gormek-icin-basvuruda-bulundu/>

Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı. (2024). International Anatolian Imam Hatip High School – Application guide (2024). <https://diyanetburslari.tdv.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/IHL-Basvuru-Kilavuzu-2024-ENG.pdf>

## **b. Bibliography**

Al-Suwaidani, H. M., & Ahmed, H. H. (December 2019). Turkish policy towards Africa in the era of justice and development party. *al mosul: Centre for regional studies University of al Mosul ; journal of college of Education for women.*

Althusser, L. (2014). *On the reproduction of capitalism: Ideology and ideological state apparatuses.* London: Verso Books.

Altınordu, A. (2021). Religion and politics in contemporary Türkiye. In A. Salvatore, S. Hanafi, & K. Obuse (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of the sociology of the Middle East.* Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190087470.013.49>

Altunışık, M. B. (2019). Türkiye’s humanitarian diplomacy: The AKP model (CMI Brief 2019:05). Chr. Michelsen Institute.

Altunışık, M. B. (2022). “The Soft Power of Turkey in International Relations”, *Panorama*, Online, 11 November 2022, <https://www.uikpanorama.com/blog/2022/11/11/ma/>

Ammerman, N. T. (2003). Religious identities and religious institutions. In M. Dillon (Ed.), *Handbook of the sociology of religion* (pp. 207–224). Cambridge University Press.

Amstutz, M. R. (2013). *Evangelicals and American foreign policy.* Oxford University Press.

Anadolu Agency. (2019, November 29). Turkey inaugurates largest mosque in Djibouti. Anadolu Agency. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/turkey-inaugurates-largest-mosque-in-djibouti/1659573>

Anadolu Agency. (2021, July 16). Turkish-built mosque in Ghana opened to worshippers. Anadolu Agency. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/turkish-built-mosque-in-ghana-opened-to-worshippers/2307135>

Anadolu Agency. (2025, March 11). Turkish Airlines aims to integrate Africa with world. Anadolu Agency. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkiye/turkish-airlines-aims-to-integrate-africa-with-world/3506522>

Anadolu Agency. (2025, September 2). Turkish Airlines resumes flights to Libya’s Misrata after 10-year hiatus. Anadolu Agency. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/turkish-airlines-resumes-flights-to-libya-s-misrata-after-10-year-hiatus/3676691>

Ardıç, N. (2014). Civilizational discourse, the ‘Alliance of Civilizations’ and Turkish foreign policy. In *Turkey’s foreign policy options: EU anchor, alliance of civilizations, Arab world* (pp. 101–122). Insight Turkey.

Bacık, G., & Afacan, İ. (2013). Turkey discovers Sub-Saharan Africa: The critical role of agents in the construction of Turkish foreign-policy discourse. *Turkish Studies*, 14(3), 483–502. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2013.832040>

- Bardakoglu, Ali. 2004. “‘Moderate Perception of Islam’ and the Turkish Model of the Diyanet: The President’s Statement.” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 24:367–374.
- Ben-Porat, G. (2013). *Between state and synagogue: The secularization of contemporary Israel*. Cambridge University Press.
- Berger, P. L. (1969). *The sacred canopy: Elements of a sociological theory of religion*. Doubleday.
- Berger, P. L. (Ed.). (1999). *The desecularization of the world: Resurgent religion and world politics*. Eerdmans.
- Berkes, N. ([1964] 1998). *The development of secularism in Türkiye*. McGill–Queen’s University Press.
- Bilgiç, A., & Nascimento, D. (2014, September). Turkey’s new focus on Africa: Causes and challenges (NOREF Policy Brief). Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre. <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/183490/04208a7feefed486e3be192c27f0f40.pdf>
- Birol Akgün, M. Ö. (2010). Turkey’s Opening to Africa. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol.48, no. 4, 542-543.
- Boyajian, D. (2013, December 20). The myth of Turkish secularism. *Foreign Policy Journal*. <https://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2013/12/20/the-myth-of-turkish-secularism/>
- Bruce, S. (2011). *Secularization: In defence of an unfashionable theory*. Oxford University Press.
- Canpolat, M. D. (2021). Elem Eyrice Tepeciklioğlu, Turkish Foreign Policy on Africa: The Fundamental Dynamics, Opportunities and Challenges. Ankara: Nobel, 2019. *Cappadocia Journal of Area Studies*, 3(1), 116–119. <https://doi.org/10.38154/cjas.12>
- Casanova, J. (1994). *Public religions in the modern world*. University of Chicago Press.
- Cheng, T.-J., & Brown, D. A. (Eds.). (2006). *Religious organizations and democratization: Case studies from contemporary Asia*. M. E. Sharpe.
- Çitak, Z. (2010). Between “Turkish Islam” and “French Islam”: The role of the Diyanet in the Conseil Français du Culte Musulman. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 36(4), 619–634. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691830903421797>
- Davison, A. (2003). Türkiye, a “secular” state? The challenge of description. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 102(2–3), 333–350.
- Dere, A. (2008). The PRA of Türkiye: The emergence, evolution and perception of its religious services outside of Türkiye. *The Muslim World*, 98(2–3), 291–301. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.2008.00227.x>
- Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı. (2017). 2017 Yılı Faaliyet Raporu [2017 activity report] (pp. 83–85). <https://stratejigelistirme.diyamet.gov.tr/Documents/2017%20Y%C4%B1%C4%B1%20Faaliyet%20Raporu.pdf>
- Erdem, G. (2008). Religious services in Türkiye: From the Office of Şeyhülislâm to the Diyanet. *The Muslim World*, 98(2–3), 199–215. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.2008.00219.x>

- Esenbel, S. (November 4, 2013). Turkey and Indonesia: historical roots, contemporary business links. Middle East Institute. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/turkey-and-indonesia-historical-roots-contemporary-business-links>
- Fearon, J. (1999). What is identity (as we now use the word)? Unpublished manuscript. Stanford University.
- Finke, R., & Stark, R. (1992). *The churching of America, 1776–1990: Winners and losers in our religious economy*. Rutgers University Press.
- Fukuyama, F. (2018). *Identity: Contemporary identity politics and the struggle for recognition*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
- Ghose, G., & James, P. (2006). Third-party intervention in ethno-religious conflict: Role theory, Pakistan, and the war in Kashmir, 1965. In J. Fox & S. Sandler (Eds.), *Religion in world conflict* (pp. 133–150). Routledge.
- Gill, A. J. (2008). *The political origins of religious liberty*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gill, A., & Keshavarzian, A. (1999). State building and religious resources: An institutional theory of church–state relations in Iran and Mexico. *Politics & Society*, 27(4), 431–465.
- Gözaydın, İ. (2006). A religious administration to secure secularism: The Presidency of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye. *Marburg Journal of Religion*, 11(1).
- Gözaydın, İ. B. (2008). Diyanet and politics. *The Muslim World*, 98(2–3), 216–227. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.2008.00220.x>
- Gözaydın, İ. (First published in 2009) (2020). *Diyanet: Türkiye’de dinin yönetimi/Religious Regulation of Religion in the Republic of Türkiye*. İletişim Yayınları. ISBN: 9789750528606
- Grigoriadis, I. N. (2010). *The Davutoğlu doctrine and Turkish foreign policy (ELIAMEP Thesis 4)*. Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy.
- Gurses, M. (2015). Is Islam a cure for ethnic conflict? Evidence from Turkey. *Politics and Religion*, 8(1), 135–154.
- Gurses, M., & Rost, N. (2017). Religion as a peacemaker? Peace duration after religious civil wars. *Politics and Religion*, 10(3), 508–535.
- Hattemer, R. (2000). Atatürk and the reforms in Türkiye as reflected in the Egyptian press. *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 11(1), 21–42.
- Haynes, J. (2009). *Religion and politics in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa*. Routledge.
- Haynes, J. (2013). *An Introduction to International Relations and Religion*. Routledge.
- Haynes, J. (2014). *Faith-based organisations at the United Nations*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Heibach, J., & Taş, H. (2024a). Infrastructural power in foreign policy: Conceptualising states’ efforts to mobilise non-state actors. *International Relations*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00471178241265615>

- Heibach, J., & Taş, H. (2024b). Beyond the soft–hard power binary: Resource control in Türkiye’s foreign policy towards Sub-Saharan Africa. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 26(3), 311–326. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2023.2236510>
- Hurriyet Daily News. (2025, September 04). Defense and aerospace exports nearly double in August. *Defense News*. <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/defense-and-aerospace-exports-nearly-double-in-august-213230>
- İnaç, H. (2016). *Türkiye’nin Kimlik Problemleri*. Ankara: Ankara: Adres Yayınları.
- İnaç, H., Hadji, A., & Benmansour, Y. (2022). The prospect for Turkish foreign policy in Africa under AK Party governments. *Afro Eurasian Studies*, 9(3), 148–164. <https://doi.org/10.33722/afes.1095725>
- İpek, V., & Biltekin, G. (2013). Turkey’s foreign policy implementation in sub-Saharan Africa: A post-international approach. *New Perspective on Turkey*, 49, 121–156.
- James, C. C., & Özdamar, Ö. (2005). Religion as a factor in ethnic conflict: Kashmir and Indian foreign policy. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 17(3), 447–467. (Reprinted in J. Fox & S. Sandler, *Religion in World Conflict*, pp. 151–170)
- Kalyvas, S. N. (1996). *The rise of Christian democracy in Europe*. Cornell University Press.
- Kamadan, Y. (2025, August 5). Türkiye-Africa relations getting stronger in all areas. *TRT Afrika*. <https://www.trtafrika.com/english/article/472cf6c04261>
- Kaya, A. (2009). *Islam, migration and integration: The age of securitization*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kaya, A. (2019). *Populism and heritage in Europe: Lost in diversity and unity*. Routledge.
- Lord, C. (2018). *Religious politics in Turkey: From the birth of the Republic to the AKP*. Cambridge University Press.
- Luckmann, T. (1967). *The invisible religion: The problem of religion in modern society*. Macmillan.
- Mandaville, P., & Hamid, S. (2018). *Islam as Statecraft: How Governments Use Religion in Foreign Policy*. Brookings. [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/FP\\_20181116\\_islam\\_as\\_statecraft.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/FP_20181116_islam_as_statecraft.pdf)
- Maritato, C. (2020). *Women, religion and the state in contemporary Türkiye: The Diyanet’s gender politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Marsden, L. (2014). Faith-based diplomacy: Conservative evangelicals and the United States military. *Politics & Religion*, 7(3), 475–498.
- Mehmet Ozkan (2012) A New Actor or Passer-By? The Political Economy of Turkey’s Engagement with Africa, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 14:1, 113-133, DOI: 10.1080/19448953.2012.656968
- Meester, J., & van den Berg, W. (2019, May). *Turkey in the Horn of Africa: Between the Ankara Consensus and the Gulf Crisis*. Clingendael Institute. [https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2019-05/PB\\_Turkey\\_in\\_the\\_Horn\\_of\\_Africa\\_May\\_2019.pdf](https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2019-05/PB_Turkey_in_the_Horn_of_Africa_May_2019.pdf)

- Ngwa, N. R. (2019). Turkish-African relations: An institutionalist approach of Turkish foreign policy towards Africa. *Uluslararası İlişkiler ve Diplomasi Dergisi*, 2(2), 23–43. <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/986710>
- Nye, J. S. (1990). *Bound to lead: The changing nature of American power*. Basic Books.
- Nye, J. S. (2004). *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*. PublicAffairs.
- Öktem, K. (2010). *New Islamic actors after the Wahhabi intermezzo: Türkiye's return to the Muslim Balkans*. European Studies Centre, University of Oxford.
- Öktem, K. (2012). Global Diyanet and multiple networks: Turkey's new presence in the Balkans. *Journal of Muslims in Europe*, 1, 27–58. <https://doi.org/10.1163/221179512X644042>
- Onis, Ziya. (2010) "Turkey's Political Economy." *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 9, no. 3: 45-61.
- Oruç, S. (2016, June 6). Erdoğan's visit to Africa marks a new approach. *Daily Sabah*. <https://www.dailysabah.com/columns/saadet-oruc/2016/06/06/erdogans-visit-to-africa-marks-a-new-approach/amp>
- Özbudun, E. (2014). AKP at the crossroads: Erdoğan's majoritarian drift. *South European Society and Politics*, 19(2), 155–167. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13608746.2014.920571>
- Öztürk, A. E. (2016). Turkey's Diyanet under AKP rule: From protector to imposer of state ideology? *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 16(4), 619–635. DOI:[10.1080/14683857.2016.1233663](https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2016.1233663)
- Öztürk, A. E., & Baser, B. (2022). The transnational politics of religion: Türkiye's Diyanet, Islamic communities and beyond. *Turkish Studies*, 23(5), 701–721. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2022.2068414>
- Öztürk, A. E. (2018). Transformation of the Turkish Diyanet both at home and abroad: Three stages. *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, (27). <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejts.5944>
- Öztürk, A. E., & Sözeri, S. B. (2018). Diyanet as a Turkish foreign policy tool: Evidence from the Netherlands and Bulgaria. *Politics and Religion*, 11(3), 624–648. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S175504831700075X>
- Philpott, D. (2004). Christianity and democracy: The Catholic wave. *Journal of Democracy*, 15(2), 32–46.
- Philpott, D. (2007). Explaining the political ambivalence of religion. *American Political Science Review*, 101(3), 505–525.
- Reiffenstuel, A. (2021). *The instrumentalization of Diyanet's Islamic soft power within Turkey's faith-based foreign policy in Somalia*. ResearchGate.
- Reuters. (2017, October 1). Turkey opens military base in Mogadishu to train Somali soldiers. <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/turkey-opens-military-base-in-mogadishu-to-train-somali-soldiers-idUSKCN1C50J9/>
- Reuters. (2024, February 22). Turkey to provide maritime security support to Somalia – official. <https://www.reuters.com/world/turkey-provide-maritime-security-support-somalia-official-2024-02-22/>

- Sandal, N. A., & Fox, J. (2013). Religion in international relations theory: Interactions and possibilities. Routledge.
- Saraiva, L. E. (2014). O plano de ação turco para África e a lusofonia [Turkey's action plan for Africa and the Lusophone world]. IDN Brief (Fevereiro), 1–8.
- SETA — Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research. (2019). The rise of the Turkish defense industry [Policy report]. SETA. <https://www.setav.org/en/the-rise-of-the-turkish-defense-industry>
- Seufert, G. (2020). The changing nature of the Turkish State Authority for Religious Affairs (Diyanet) (SWP CATS Working Paper No. 2). Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik.
- Shinn, D. H. (2015). Türkiye's engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa: Shifting alliances and strategic diversification. Chatham House.
- Sıradağ, A. (2023). Turkey's foreign policy toward Africa: Three levels of analysis. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 60(4), 2257–2270. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00219096231215686>
- Sotero, L. M. (2021). Política da Turquia na África Sub-Sahariana. MEMO Publishers.
- Süseler, B., & Alden, C. (2022). Türkiye and African agency: The role of Islam and commercialism in Türkiye's Africa policy. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 60(4), 597–617. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X22000349>
- Tekin, O. (2012). Turkish foreign policy towards Africa: Motivations and interests 2001–2010 (Master's thesis, Fatih University).
- Telek, A., & Şar, E. (2017). Rethinking secularism as a political principle in the Middle East: From negative to positive understanding and perception of secularism. *Sources of Secularism: Enlightenment and Beyond*. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65394-5\\_13](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65394-5_13)
- The Africa Report. (2023, December 13). How did Erdogan manage to bring Ethiopia and Somalia together? <https://www.theafricareport.com/371873/how-did-erdogan-manage-to-bring-ethiopia-and-somalia-together/>
- Turhan, Y. (2021). Türkiye's foreign policy to Africa: The role of leaders' identity in shaping policy. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 56(6), 1329–1344.
- 2022-2023 EĞİTİM ÖĞRETİM YILI AÇILIŞ PROGRAMI. (n.d.). <https://konyaihtisas.diyanet.gov.tr/sayfalar/contentdetail.aspx?MenuCategory=Kurumsal&ContentId=342>
- Uchehara, K. E. (2008). Continuity and change in Turkish foreign policy toward Africa. *Gazi Akademik Bakış*, 2(3), 43–64.
- Uysal, G. (2021). Türkiye's sub-imperialism in sub-Saharan Africa. *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 53(3), 442–461. <https://doi.org/10.1177/04866134211003995>
- Warner, C. (2000). Confessions of an interest group: The Catholic Church and political parties in Europe. Princeton University Press.

- Warner, C., & Walker, S. G. (2011). Thinking about the role of religion in foreign policy: A framework for analysis. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 7(1), 113–135. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-8594.2010.00125.x>
- Wheeler, T. (2005). Türkiye and South Africa: The development of relations, 1860–2005 (SAIIA Report No. 47). South African Institute of International Affairs. [https://saiia.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/saia\\_rep\\_47\\_turkey\\_2005.pdf](https://saiia.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/saia_rep_47_turkey_2005.pdf)
- Wheeler, A. T. (2011). Ankara to Africa: Turkey’s outreach since 2005. *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 18(1), 43–62. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2011.564426>
- Wiktorowicz, Q. (Ed.). (2004). *Islamic activism: A social movement theory approach*. Indiana University Press.
- Wilson, B. R. (1966). *Religion in secular society*. Oxford University Press.
- Yaman, İ. H. (2015). Socio-Political Comparison of European National Anthems in the Context of Nation Building Strategies. *Süleyman Demirel University Journal of Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences*, 20(3), 17 - 34.1
- Yavuz, M. H. (2009). *Secularism and Muslim democracy in Türkiye*. Cambridge University Press.
- Yılmaz, I., Barton, G., & Barry, J. (2017). The decline and resurgence of Turkish Islamism: The story of Tayyip Erdoğan’s AKP. *Journal of Citizenship and Globalisation Studies*, 1(1), 48–62. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jcgs-2017-0005>
- Yılmaz, İ., & Barry, J. (2020). Instrumentalizing Islam in a “secular” state: Türkiye’s Diyanet and interfaith dialogue. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 22(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2018.1506301>
- Yimer, N. A. (2024). Understanding Türkiye’s return to the Horn of Africa: Historical legacies and their influence on current relations. *African Identities*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2024.2440092>
- Zehfuss M. *Constructivism in International Relations: The Politics of Reality*. Cambridge University Press; 2002.
- Zürcher, E. J. (2004). *Türkiye: A modern history* (Updated ed.). I.B. Tauris.