

Turkish Local Communities and City Diplomacy with Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Abstract: ‘City diplomacy’ is gaining ground in the rapidly urbanizing globalized world. With the end of the Cold War Turkish local communities got the chance to intensify relations with their counterparts in the Balkans. Today, Turkish local communities actively restore the Ottoman legacy in the Balkans, help the spread of Turkish language in the local schools, and organize mass humanitarian events.

On the other hand, Turkish city diplomacy also faces challenges in the region and often is misunderstood and criticized for its actions. The hegemony of a single party (AKP) politicizes the cooperation more than necessary, causing obstacles in conducting efficient city diplomacy. The non-governmental organizations often create a headache for Turkish diplomacy. Failure to adopt the ‘smart city’ and ‘humanitarian city models’ as a mode of cooperation raises a question whether Turkish local communities could stay a relevant factor in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the long term.

Key Words: Local communities, city diplomacy, municipalism, sister cities, municipality unions, smart cities, humanitarian cities

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Introduction

One of the main channels of Turkish influence in the Balkans goes through city diplomacy. This type of diplomacy is turning into an important element of Ankara's public diplomacy. This work aims to present Turkish city diplomacy in Bosnia and Herzegovina with all its advantages and shortcomings. Although several works are dealing with Turkish city diplomacy, this is the first academic work that particularly focuses on city diplomacy between those two friendly countries. Although it is generally a success story, the internal problems in both countries prevent city diplomacy to be upgraded to a higher level. Turkey's problem with the tight centralist system has politicized the country's city diplomacy. It is almost entirely in the hands of a single party, which has its preferences in the region. Ideological motivations and identity issues are an important ingredient in the relations between Bosnian and Turkish local governments.

Among the aims of the work was to show how city diplomacy between the two countries is limited to relation with the Bosniak-majority municipalities. On the other hand, Bosnian counterparts which are often victims of the decentralized state, ethnic fragmentation, and weak budgets fit the expectations of the Turkish government in that sense. Failure of the Turkish local communities to implement concepts like 'smart city' or 'humanitarian city' raises a question of whether they can go beyond the restoration of the Ottoman legacy in the region and small-budget projects with questionable impact. The success in introducing new modes of cooperation would prolong the success of Turkish city diplomacy, while the introduction of some 'alien' traditions in the region, like in some cases from the past, would be only counterproductive.

Turkish constitutions were crucial in providing an understanding of the Turkish provincial organization. In compiling the work the author used the scarce literature. There is not a single work that would extensively write on city diplomacy between the two countries. In that sense, this work probably is the first of that kind. When it comes to Bosnian local communities the situation is even more problematic. Academic sources are very scarce. Deficiency in the literature was filled with the extensive use of annual reports from the Turkish public diplomacy institutions that are actively involved in city diplomacy between BiH and Turkey. Media reports and web sources were also very helpful in filling the gaps. Interview conducted with the Secretary-General of the TDBB, the municipality union that is most active in BiH, provided some insight into the city diplomacy between the two countries.

What are the local communities?

Local communities represent the lowest level of administrative governance in a certain state.¹ Generally local authorities come with the local elections. The character of a local community depends on the very nature of a country it is part of. Some local authorities enjoy more autonomy some less. This depends on whether they are part of a centralized or federative state. The stronger central state authority's local communities have less autonomy in decision-making. In federations and confederations, local communities enjoy a wide range of liberties.² Sub-national entities representing local governments differ from country to country. Those entities are; provinces, regions, departments, prefectures, districts, municipalities, counties, townships, towns, boroughs, parishes, villages, and others.

Local Communities and Democratization

The development of local communities is interconnected to a general level of democratization.³ In essence, local governments are based on democratic principles like liberty, participation, and efficiency.⁴ As the closest level of authority to the ordinary people are local governments they represent important instances for the political representation of the citizens.⁵ So, the development of the local governments is important from the context of overall democratic development and the preservation of human rights in society.⁶ According to Henri Pirenne rise of cities during the Late Medieval was even responsible for the emergence of modern Western civilization.⁷

1 Rod Hague and Martin Hague, *Comparative Government and Politics: An Introduction*, 6th Edition, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004): 239.

2 Ibid, 228-246.

3 Zakaras, Alex, "John Stuart Mill, Individuality, and Participatory Democracy" in J.S. Mill's Political Thought: A Bicentennial Reassessment, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

4 L.J. Sharpe, "Theories and Values of Local Government", *Political Studies*, Vol. 18. No: 2, (1970).

5 W.J.M. Mackenzie, *Theories of Local Government*, (LSE: London, 1961.); A. M. McBriar, *Fabian Socialism & English Politics 1884-1918*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 109.

6 Rüßen Keleş, *Yerinden Yönetim ve Siyaset*, (Istanbul: Cem Yayınevi, 2012): 49-96.

7 Henri Pirenne, *Medieval Cities: The Origins and the Revival of Trade*, 4th printing, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), p. 168-240. and Henri Pirrene, *A History of Europe: From*

City Diplomacy

As globalization and urbanization are advancing cities are gaining importance. Some megalopolises have larger economies than the majority of the independent states. For instance, the Metropolitan New York Area has a larger GDP than the whole of Russia which is the sixth-largest in the world and is considered to be a macro-regional power. For instance, forty percent of global finances pass through the City of London.⁸

Globalization and urbanization induced the process of professionalization of the local communities that in turn has created a need for local governments to create networks of cooperation across the globe. Today local administrations are international players, thus a need for the developments of a new form of diplomacy that would coordinate the interaction among the local governments was born. The type of diplomatic activity that is responsible for maintaining the normal relationship among the local communities is known as *local diplomacy* or *city diplomacy*.⁹ City diplomacy has grown into one of the main branches of public diplomacy. It serves the local communities both in and outside the national borders to share mutual experience and knowledge to improve the quality of their services. It often represents an important element of the bilateral relations between the two countries. Dense traffic in the relations between two foreign municipalities is an indication of functioning bilateral relations. For Alexandra Sizoo and Arne Musch, city diplomacy doesn't eliminate the role of the state in diplomacy, but rather serves as a supportive element of state diplomacy.¹⁰

Van Der Plujim and Melissen also recognize the rising role of local governments in public diplomacy, where some cities are developing a consistent "municipal foreign policies."¹¹ For both authors city diplomacy plays an important role in the aspects of; security, development,

the Invasion to the XVI Century, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1936; reprint, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1958)

⁸ "City of London jobs: Are growing steadily", City of London, March 2019, Accessed on July 3, 2019, doi: <https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/business/economic-research-and-information/Documents/city-statistics-briefing.pdf>

⁹ Sabiha Tuğba Ekşi, *Dünyada ve Türkiye'de Kardeş Şehircilik*, (İstanbul, TDBB, 2018): page 27, 28.

¹⁰ Alexandra Sizoo and Arne Musch, "City Diplomacy", in *City Diplomacy*, ed. Arne Musch, The Hague, Deltahage, 2008, 4. Quoted in, Sabiha Tuğba Ekşi, *Dünyada ve Türkiye'de Kardeş Şehircilik*, (İstanbul, TDBB, 2018): 28.

¹¹ Rogier van der Plujim and Jan Melissen, "City Diplomacy: The Expanding Role of Cities in International Relations", *Netherlands Institute of International Relations-Clingendael*, Paper No. 10 (April, 2007), doi: www.uclg.org

economy, culture, networking, and representation.¹² Recently, “city diplomacy” is active in solving environmental problems, conflict prevention, conflict resolution, post-conflict reconstruction, and preservation of cultural heritage.¹³ The expanding role of local communities created a need for the invention of new models. Among those models is the concept of “Human Rights City.”, which is a concept that emphasizes improvement of human rights, social, economic and cultural rights among the residents of a municipality according to international human rights standards.¹⁴ Also, the technological advancement has created a concept of ‘smart cities’ in the developed countries.¹⁵

Turkish Local Communities and the Historical Debate on Turkey’s Governance Model

Turkey inherited a centralist state model from its Ottoman predecessor.¹⁶ The Republic’s first Constitution of 1924 only provided

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Alexandra Sizoo and Arne Musch, *City Diplomacy: The Role of Local Governments in Conflict Prevention, Peace-building and Post-conflict Reconstruction*, in *City Diplomacy: The Role of Local Governments in Conflict Prevention, Peace-building and Post-conflict Reconstruction*, ed. Arne Musch, Chris van der Valk, Alesandra Sizoo and Kian Tajkshsh, (The Hague: VNG International, 2008), 7-27.; Alain Tschudin and Albert Trithart, “The Role of Local Governments” in *Sustaining Peace in Sustaining Peace in Practice*, eds. Youssef Mahmoud, Lesley Connolly and Delphine Mechoulan, International Peace Institute, (2018): 30-35.

¹⁴ The concept of human rights cities has settled in modern local government sector with the emergence of global human rights movements. More and more cities around the globe are receiving a status of ‘human rights cities.’ This concept has just recently started being practiced in Turkey. In November, 2017 TDBB brought together its few Turkish member municipalities together with Sweden’s Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights (RWI) in order to sign the ‘The Human Cities Project’ protocol. For more see: “Human Rights Cities Project Cooperation Protocol was Signed Between the TDBB and RWI”, *TDBB*, Accessed on January 12, 2019, doi: <http://www.tdbb.org.tr>

¹⁵ ‘Smart City’ is a local government that relies on the latest technological advancements in order to increase operational efficiency, share information with the public and improve the quality of its services and citizens’ welfare.

¹⁶ For the organization of local governments in the Ottoman Empire see: İlber Ortaylı, “Belediye”, *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 5. (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 1992), 400., İlber Ortaylı, *Türkiye İdare Tarihi*, (Ankara: Cedit Neşriyat, 2008): 435-443. and Birgül Ayman Güler, “Yerel Yönetim Tarihi”, *Belediye Dergisi*, (July, 1994): 4-6, doi: <http://birgulaymanguler.net/files/1-9guler.pdf>, Ekrem Buğra Ekinci, “Osmanlı İdaresinde Adem-i Merkeziyet ve İmtiyazlı Eyaletler”, *Türk Hukuk Tarihi Araştırmaları*, No. 6, 2008., Bayram Bayraktar, “Günümüzde Yeniden Değerlendirilmesi Gerek Bir Düşünür: Prens Sabahattin Bey”, *Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi* Vol. 18 No. 29, 1996, 51-61., Halil İnalçık, “Centralization and Decentralization in Ottoman Administration.” in *Studies in Eighteenth Century Islamic History*, ed. Thomas Naff & Roger Owen, (Carbondale, IL.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1977): 27-52.; Abdulhamit Kırmızı, “19. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Taşra İdaresi’

limited autonomy to local communities.¹⁷ Local authorities were represented by the four different organs: provincial judicial representations (*İl tüzel kişiliği*), provincial councils (*İl Meclisi*), boards of management (*İl Yönetim Kurulu*), and via a provincial president (*İl Başkanı*).¹⁸ The state also delegated a Governor (*Vali*)¹⁹ as a representative of the central authority in the provinces whose one of the main tasks was to interfere in potential disagreements between the central and local governments.²⁰ The dual provincial authority was composed of an elected and an appointed representative and this system continue to be maintained up until today. The transition to a multi-party system in 1946 along with rapid urbanization created a demand for a more liberal constitution that was finally introduced in 1961.²¹ By Article 116 of that constitution, local governments were composed of Provinces (*İl*), Municipalities (*Belediye*), and Villages (*Köy*).²² However, despite some relaxations, the provincial organization remained highly centralized.²³ Social unrest during the 1970s and the eruption of the war against PKK terrorism in the 1980 exacerbated dilemmas regarding civil liberties. The military blamed the liberalization that was introduced by the Constitution of 1961 for the chaos. Turkey's experiment with liberalism was interrupted by the 1980 military coup. The new Constitution of 1982 ordered strict centralization.²⁴ The organization of the local administrations remained vested at the provincial, municipal, and village levels.

in *Selçukludan Cumhuriyete Şehir Yönetimi*, ed. Erol Özvar and Arif Bilgin (İstanbul: Türk Dünyası Belediyeler Birliği-TDBB, 2008), 301.

17 "Turkish Constitution of 1924", Articles 89, 90 and 91.

18 "1924 Anayasası", *Teşkilatı Esasiye Kanunu*, Kanun Numarası: 491, Kabul Tarihi: 20/4/1340 (1924)

19 The word *Vali* comes from Arabic word *Wali* meaning a divinely inspired leader; saint. 20 Rüşen Keleş, *Yerinden Yönetim ve Siyaset*, (İstanbul: Cem Yayınevi, 2012), 163.

21 "1961 Anayasası", *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Anayasası*, Kanun No: 334, Kabul Tarihi: 9/7/1961

22 "Madde 116", 1961 *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Anayasası*, T.C. Resmi Gazete, No. 10816, 1961, doi: <http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/arsiv/10816.pdf>

23 Özcan Altaban, "1960-1973 Dönemi Belediyeciliğine Genel Bakış" in *Türk Belediyeciliği'nde 60 Yıl Uluslararası Sempozyumu Bildiri ve Tartışmalar Kitabı*, Ankara: Ankara Büyükşehir Belediyesi Yayını, 1990, 317-325, quoted in Hüseyin Can, "Yerel Yönetim Birliklerinin Belediyelerin Kardeş Şehir İlişkilerine Katkıları: Türk Dünyası Belediyeler Birliği Örneği", Master Thesis, Dumlupınar Üniversitesi, Kütahya, (2018)

24 "Article 127", *The Constitution of the Republic of Turkey(1982)*, (Translated by Erhan Yasar), doi:<http://www.anayasa.gen.tr/1982Constitution-EYasar.htm>

An important step in local governance was the creation of the metropolitan municipalities²⁵ during the 1980s.²⁶ The reason for the introduction of metropolitan municipalities was due to a boom in the urban population. Law No. 3030 passed through certain changes until Metropolitan Municipality Law No. 5216 was adopted in 2004. With the Metropolitan Municipality Law No. 5216, fourteen new metropolitan municipalities were formed.²⁷ The latest change in the number of Metropolitan municipalities occurred in 2012. With Law No. 6360, fourteen new municipalities were raised to the status of metropolitan municipalities thus increasing their total number to thirty.²⁸ Some minor changes to the organizational structure of the local communities (See Tables 1 and 2) came with the new Metropolitan Law. Authority of the local communities belongs to two main groups: those ‘based on representation’ who come to the office via elections and those appointed by the central government whose authority is grounded in the ‘principle of appointment’.²⁹ (See Tables 1, 2 and 3) It is also important to remind that the reformist spirit that came with the AKP party during the 2000s caused by Turkey’s EU ambitions at the time influenced the local governments as well. One of the requirements of the EU accession process was giving more autonomy to local governments.

Table 1: Local governments formed with elections

Local government office		Officer in charge
Special Administrations (<i>İl özel idareleri</i>)	Provincial	Provincial General Assembly (<i>İl Genel Meclisi</i>) ³⁰
Municipality (<i>Belediye</i>)		Mayor (<i>Belediye Başkanı</i>)

25 Büyükşehir Belediyesi in Turkish

26 Uğur Yıldırım, Zehra Gül and Soner Akın, “İl Mülki Sınırı Büyükşehir Belediye Modelinin Getirdiği Yenilikler”, *Eskişehir Osmangazi Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi*, 10 (2), Eskişehir, (2015): 205-229. doi: http://iubfdergi.ogu.edu.tr/makaleler/14495928_10-2_A%20C4%9EUSTOS%202015_Makale_0.pdf

27 “5216 Sayılı Büyükşehir Belediyesi Kanunu”, *Mevzuatı Geliştirme ve Yayın Genel Müdürlüğü-Mevzuat Bilgi Sistemi*, Accessed on June 23, 2018, <http://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.5.5216.pdf>

28 Ibid.

29 Rüşen Keleş, *Yerinden Yönetim ve Siyaset*, 30.

30 Members of the Assembly are elected by the people through elections. After that, the Head of the Assembly and provincial committee are formed among the elected members of the Assembly.

Local government office	Officer in charge
Village (<i>Köy</i>)	Village representative (<i>Muhtar</i>)

Table 2: Elected local governments after being raised to the status of Metropolitan Municipality

Local government Office	Officer in charge
Metropolitan Municipality (<i>Büyükşehir Belediyesi</i>)	Mayor of Metropolitan Municipality
Municipality (<i>Belediye</i>)	Mayor (<i>Belediye Başkanı</i>)
District (<i>Mahalle</i>)	District representative (<i>Muhtar</i>)

Table 3: Local government offices formed by the appointment of the central state authority

Local government office	Officer in charge
Special Provincial Administrations (<i>Valilik</i>)	Governor (<i>Vali</i>)
District Governorship (<i>Kaymakamlık</i>)	District Governor (<i>Kaymakam</i>)
Ministry Province/County (<i>Bakanlık Temsilcilikleri-İl/İlçe</i>) ³¹	Provincial Director/County Director (<i>İl Müdür/İlçe müdürü</i>)

Turkey's Sister-City Relations

Turkey experienced the first international twinning back in 1965 when Istanbul became a sister city to Rio de Janeiro. Especially during the 1990s number of sister city relations expanded rapidly.³² After former Soviet republics of Central Asia gained independence in the earlier 1990s,

31 Some Ministries, like Ministry of Education or Ministry of Health, have their representative offices at the local government level.

32 Fahri Solak, Interview by Jahja Muhasilović, Interview with Fahri Solak, Secretary-General of the TDBB, Conducted on January 9, 2019.

under Turgut Özal's (1927-1993) pro-active foreign policy Turkish municipalities entered into many sister-city relations with the region's local communities.³³

After the long pause caused by the Cold War during the 1990s, Turkish local communities also became more active in the Balkans.³⁴ In the next decade, even more, town twinning would be signed with the municipalities in the Balkans.³⁵ Turkey's EU ambitions were another driving force for the Turkish local communities to extend the network of sister cities. Also, some internal reforms like the adoption of the Municipality Law No. 5393³⁶ from 2005 pushed municipalities to raise the number of overseas twinnings.³⁷

By the mid-2017 Turkish local communities had 1619 sister cities around the world.³⁸ The most sister cities, 646 of them, were in Europe, representing around forty percent of all the twinnings.³⁹ Among the five countries with whom Turkey has the most sister city relations, four are from the Balkans. Municipalities from this region represent more than a quarter of all twinnings Turkish local communities have overseas. Four-hundred-thirty-nine municipalities from the Balkans have sister city relation to Turkish municipalities. If Greece is added to this number, then the number rise to 525 municipalities, representing 32 percent of all sister cities Turkish municipalities have.⁴⁰ Hundred and twenty-three Bulgarian municipalities have sister city ties to Turkish counterparts. This country champions the list of the Balkan countries. Bosnia and

33 "Kardesehirler", kardesehirler.org.tr, 2017

34 Özcan Sezer and Tuğçe Bayram, "Yerel Yönetimler Arası İşbirliğini Geliştirmede Yerel Ağların Önemi: Balkan Ülkeleri Yerel Yönetimleri ile İşbirliğini Geliştirme Potansiyeli" 1. Karadeniz ve Balkan Ekonomik ve Politik Araştırmalar Sempozyumu Bildiriler Kitabı, *Batı Karadeniz Kalkınma Ajansı Yayını*, Zonguldak (2014), quoted in Hüseyin Can, "Yerel Yönetim Birliklerinin Belediyelerin Kardeş Şehir İlişkilerine Katkıları: Türk Dünyası Belediyeler Birliği Örneği", Master Thesis, Dumlupınar Üniversitesi, Kütahya, (2018), 129.

35 Tarkan Oktay, "Türkiye'deki Belediyelerin Türk Cumhuriyetleri ile Kardeş Şehir İlişkileri", in *Türk Dünyasında Yerel Yönetimlerin Sorunları*, ed. Deniz İşçioğlu, KKTC, 11-28., doi: http://www.tarkanoktay.net/index_html_files/tarkan%20oktay-%20turk%20dunyasi%20kardes%20sehir%20iliskileri.pdf

36 Çiğdem Akman, "Evaluating the Current Situation via Town Twinning Practices in Turkey", *Journal of Süleyman Demirel University Institute of Social Sciences-Süleyman Demirel University*, CIEP Special Edition, (2016): 1058, doi: <http://dergipark.gov.tr/uploads/issuefiles/446c/eeb1/af3b/58a4208447b16.pdf>

37 Ibid. 1055-1071

38 Special Provincial Administrations are excluded from this number.

39 Balkan region is not included in the statistic.

40 Sister Cities of Turkey All Over the World", *Kardeş Şehirler*, Accessed on November 10, 2018, <http://www.kardesehirler.org.tr>

Herzegovina comes second with 101 sister municipalities, followed by Greece with 86 and North Macedonia with 75 sister cities to their Turkish counterparts.⁴¹ According to 2017 statistics provided by *kardessehirler*, a website launched by the Union of Turkish World Municipalities-TDBB, Europe together with the Balkan region is responsible for more than two-thirds of all sister city relations of Turkey.⁴² These statistics undoubtedly demonstrate the importance of the Balkans in Turkish city diplomacy.⁴³ The importance of the region becomes even more apparent when compared to Central Asia, where there are only 92 sister city relations with Turkish counterparts. This number is lower than the number of twinnings with Bosnia and Herzegovina alone.

Table 7.6 *Regional Distribution of Turkey's Sister Cities Abroad*⁴⁴

REGION	TOTAL NUMBER OF SISTER CITIES	RATE (%)
Europe	646	39.9
Balkans	439	27.1
The Middle East and North Africa	134	8.3
Central Asia	92	5.7
Asia-Pacific	86	5.3
South Caucasus	80	4.9
Sub-Saharan Africa	62	3.8
North America	37	2.3
Latin America	23	1.4
South Asia	20	1.2
Total	1619	100

Table 7.7 *Number of Sister Cities in the Balkans Region (Without Greece)*⁴⁵

BALKANS REGION		
COUNTRIES	NUMBER OF SISTER CITIES	RATE (%)
Bulgaria	123	28.0
Bosnia and Herzegovina	101	23.0
Macedonia	75	17.1
Romania	45	10.3
Kosovo	35	8.0
Montenegro	26	5.9
Albania	18	4.1
Croatia	7	1.6
Slovenia	4	0.9
Serbia	5	1.1
Total	439	100

41 Greece is fifth if Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is counted. TRNC has 88 sister cities, two more than Greece. Turkey is the only country in the world that recognizes the TRNC as a state, thus this entity is not counted in the statistics provided above.

42 Union of Turkish World Municipalities

43 Ibid.

44 "Sister Cities of Turkey All Over the World", Kardeş Şehirler, Accessed on March 4, 2018, <http://www.kardessehirler.org.tr>

45 Ibid.

The Role of Turkish Municipality Unions in City Diplomacy

Municipality unions are important platforms for conducting city diplomacy. They often boost cooperation among the local communities. Turkey has dozens of municipality unions operating on different levels, from the provincial to the national.⁴⁶ The first example of setting regulations among the local communities stretches back to the Ottoman period to a 1913 law known as *Idare-i Umumiye-i Vilayet Kanunu Muvakkati*.⁴⁷ During the 1920s local community unions at the rural level were formed to meet their common necessities.⁴⁸ The first constitutional regulations regarding the municipality unions were introduced in the Constitution of 1961. Regional unions like the municipality unions of Aegean, Marmara, and the Black Sea were formed.⁴⁹ Even the Ministry for Local Governments was founded in 1978. However, it was abolished only one year after its foundation.⁵⁰

Unions that operate at the national level exceed the numbers of those that are international scope. The largest nation-wide municipal union is *Turkey Municipality Union* (TBB).⁵¹ TBB was launched in 1945 as a “public interest association.”⁵² It was reorganized in a way to reassemble all Turkish municipalities under one roof by a 2002 decision from the Council of Ministers. Through this change in legal status, all Turkish municipalities were required to become TBB members.⁵³

46 Yakup Altan, Uysal Kerman and Mehmet Aktel, “Köy Kanunu Tasarısı Taslağı Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme”, *Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi-Dumlupınar Üniversitesi*, No. 26, (2010): 56-65. doi: <http://www.acarindex.com/dosyalar/makale/acarindex-1423876635.pdf>

47 Cenk Reyhan, “Yerel Yönetim Metinleri (XX): 1913 Tarihli Vilayet Genel İdaresi Geçici Kanunu”, *Çağdaş Yerel Yönetimler Dergisi*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 129-154. doi: http://www.todaie.edu.tr/resimler/ekler/91fbf770f89b0c2_ek.pdf?dergi=Cagdas%20Yerel%20Yonetimler%20Dergisi

48 Yakup Altan, Uysal Kerman and Mehmet Aktel, “Köy Kanunu Tasarısı Taslağı Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme”, *Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi-Dumlupınar Üniversitesi*, No. 26, (2010): 56-65.

49 Founded in 1975 as *Municipality Union of Marmara and Straits* (Marmara ve Boğazları Belediyeler Birliği). Union will get its to present name of *Municipality Union of Marmara* (Marmara Belediyeler Birliği) in 2009. doi: <http://marmara.gov.tr/>

50 Rüveyda Kızılböğe Özasan and Orhan Veli Alıcı, “Türkiye’de Yerel Yönetim Bakanlığı Deneyimi ve Günümüzdeki Gerekliğin Sorgulanması”, *International Periodical for the Languages, Literature and History of Turkish or Turkic*, Vol. 10/1, (2015): 351-366. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7827/TurkishStudies.7627>

51 Türkiye Belediyeler Birliği in Turkish

52 “History”, *TBB*, Accessed on December 27, 2019, doi: <https://www.tbb.gov.tr/en/home-page/history/>

53 “Power, Functions and Responsibilities”, *TBB*, Accessed on December 27, 2019, doi: <https://www.tbb.gov.tr/en/home-page/power-functions-ve-responsibilities/>

Union of Turkish World Municipalities-TDBB

Unlike TBB which operates domestically, the Union of Turkish World Municipalities (TDBB) handles international operations. The idea for an international union goes back to the 1990s. Increased city diplomacy with Central Asian and Balkan countries after the Cold War required a municipality union that would coordinate these new sets of relations.⁵⁴ For that purpose “IV. Summit of the Statesmen of the Turkic-speaking countries” was organized in 1996. At the summit a *Tashkent Announcement* calling for the improvement of economic, educational, cultural, tourism, and other ties among the Turkic countries. Another summit was held in 2000 in Baku, Azerbaijan where a decision to work on the “improvement of the cooperation between the local communities” was declared.⁵⁵ Three years later, the TDBB was formed by Turkey's Council of Ministers.⁵⁶

Although the name of the Union indicates the Turkic world, TDBB is more active in non-Turkic countries. By the latest data from early 2018 the total number of TDBB's member municipalities was 1140.⁵⁷ Members come from 28 different countries.⁵⁸ The TDBB today is most active in the Balkans, the Middle East, the Caucasus, Eastern Europe, Central Europe, South Asia, and Africa. In the Balkans, members come from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, and Serbia. Although TDBB primarily focused on Central Asia during its initial years, today the majority of its projects are conducted in the Balkans.⁵⁹

54 Fahri Solak, Interview by Jahja Muhasilović, Interview with Fahri Solak, Secretary-General of the TDBB, Conducted on January 9, 2019.

55 *2017 TDBB Faaliyet Raporu*, (Istanbul: Türk Dünyası Belediyeler Birliği, 2018): 13

56 TDBB was formed with the decision No. 2003/6464 published in *Official Gazette* the same year.

57 Union's budget comes from the fee Turkish member municipalities pay according to the size of their population For more see: “Charter of Union of Turkish World Municipalities”, Union of Turkish World Municipalities-Official Website, Accessed on April 11, 2018, <http://www.tdbb.org.tr>

58 Not all foreign members are sovereign countries. Some various special administrative units like Moldovan Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia, or unrecognized states like Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. “Members”, Union of Turkish World Municipalities-Official Website, Accessed on December 24, 2018, <http://www.tdbb.org.tr>

59 “About us”, TDBB, Accessed on January 6, 2019, doi: <http://www.tdbb.org.tr>; Fahri Solak, Interview by Jahja Muhasilović, Interview with Fahri Solak, Secretary-General of the TDBB, Conducted on January 9, 2019.

Bosnian Local Communities

Unlike their Turkish counterparts, Bosnian local communities enjoy much greater levels of autonomy.⁶⁰ Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is an extremely decentralized country that is composed of two ethnically dominated entities (*entiteti*): the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and the Republika Srpska (RS). The later entity is unitary in structure, while the former is divided into ten cantons (*kantoni*). Seven cantons have Bosniak majorities, while the remaining three are dominated by Bosnian-Croats. Each entity and canton are highly autonomous and their internal formation is state-like in structure.⁶¹ In total, there are 143 municipalities in BiH: 79 in the FBiH, and 64 in the RS in which all mayors are elected by the people. Despite this, Bosnian local communities are often criticized for having better cooperation with foreign municipalities than among themselves.⁶² The reason for this absurdity might be in the absence of a municipality union at the national level.⁶³ There are two main domestic municipality unions for each entity.⁶⁴ The country's ethnic divisions further complicate the situation. Along lacking a central platform, Bosnian local governments also suffer from a chronic lack of finances.

Turkish City Diplomacy in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Unlike European city diplomacy in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkey emphasizes the cultural aspect in relationship with this country.⁶⁵ Bosnia-Herzegovina is amongst the countries where Turkish city diplomacy is most active. Regarding twinning relations, Bosnian towns are again

60 Mehmet Uğur Ekinci, "Bosna Hersek Siyasetini Anlama Kılavuzu" (Ankara: SETA, 2014): 31, 32.

61 The two entities and the cantons have their presidents, prime ministers, ministries and parliaments.

62 "Bh. gradovi bolju saradnju imaju s evropskim gradovima nego unutar drzave", *Klix*, Accessed on April 23, 2018, <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/bh-gradovi-bolju-saradnju-imaju-s-evropskim-gradovima-nego-unutar-drzave/171109035>

63 Two major municipality unions exist in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Both, *Association of Municipalities and Cities of FBiH* (SOGFBiH) and *Union of Municipalities and Cities of Republika Srpska* (SOGRS).

64 Bosnia and Herzegovina is composed of two entities, Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, also known as Bosniak-Croat Federation and Republika Srpska which is the Serb-majority half of the country. Two major municipality unions exist in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Both, *Association of Municipalities and Cities of FBiH* (SOGFBiH) and *Union of Municipalities and Cities of Republika Srpska* (SOGRS) are on the entity level.

65 Birgül Demirtaş, "Türkiye'de Yerel Yönetimlerin Dış İlişkilerinin Analizi: Merkez-Çevre Etkileşimini Yeniden Düşünmek", *Uluslararası İlişkiler/International Relations*, Vol. 13, No. 52, *Türk Dış Politikası Özel Sayısı* (2016): 151-173.

among the leaders.⁶⁶ For instance, Gorazde and Sarajevo were the seventh and ninth most popular foreign municipalities with whom their Turkish counterparts had the most sister city relations in 2014.⁶⁷ Since Turkish local governments have larger resources, the relationship is mostly one way where Turkish municipalities invest in BiH rather than vice versa.

Although the number of sister-city relations is high, not all of the Turkish municipalities are active in BiH. The majority of twinings do not go beyond a protocol of cooperation. Each municipality has a different reason for being active in the region. Sometimes it is simply connected to a particular mayor's vision. Often there is a demand from the Bosnian sister municipality for cooperation. In that case, it is proof that the choice of a municipality for twinning has been paid off. Some municipalities become active in the region because of their membership in a municipality union.

It is important to point out that some Turkish local communities show interest in the region because large Balkan populations reside inside within its confines. Demographic characteristics can be a strong motivation for local administrations to develop international relations.⁶⁸ This phenomenon is known as the "kinship bond"⁶⁹ This phenomenon is relevant especially in the Marmara and Aegean regions where local communities traditionally have large *Muhacir*⁷⁰ populations.⁷¹ In those areas people from the Balkans have cultural associations⁷² for preserving their cultural heritage. Like in the example of *Bosna-Sancak Associations*,⁷³ the largest Bosniak association in Turkey, they often grow into a strong lobbying force. For mayors, Balkan populations and their associations represent both political challenges and opportunities. Having a large number of voters originating from the region pushes some mayors to

66 Tarkan Oktay, "Türkiye'deki Belediyelerin Türk Cumhuriyetleri ile Kardeş Şehir İlişkileri", 19.

67 Ibid.

68 Sabiha Tuğba Ekşi, *Dünyada ve Türkiye'de Kardeş Şehircilik*, 109-112.; Kerem Öktem, "Global Diyanet and Multiple Networks: Turkey's New Presence in the Balkans", *Journal of Muslims in Europe*, (2012): 54.

69 'Soydaşlık bağı' in Turkish

70 Old Ottoman Turkish term for the Muslim emigrants and refugees from the Balkans that settled in the Anatolia and other Ottoman lands that were not lost to the Balkan nation states and Russian Empire. The root of the word Muhacir is Arabic meaning a 'migrant.'

71 It is estimated that people from Balkans and Caucasus represent between one-third and one-quarter of Turkey's total population.

72 'Dernek' in Turkish.

73 'Bosna Sancak Derneği' in Turkish.

pursue more active policies in the Balkans, which in turn provides them votes in elections.

Istanbul's working-class municipality of Bayrampaşa has had a large Bosniak community since the first half of the twentieth century.⁷⁴ It is estimated that almost half of Bayrampaşa's population originates from the region.⁷⁵ It is also home to NGO's like the *Bosna-Sancak Association*. The presence of Balkan populations has turned Bayrampaşa into an important local diplomatic actor. The municipality has a set of different activities in the region, however its most recognized aspect is its on-going cultural diplomacy.

Since 2005, the municipality organizes the "Fertility Convoy"⁷⁶ which provides mass *iftars*⁷⁷ across the region during the month of Ramadan.⁷⁸ The convoy travels as far north as the Croatian capital Zagreb. Iftar meals are served to hundreds of people. The program became a recognized brand of the Bayrampaşa Municipality. The Bosna-Sancak Association organizes "Bosnia-Sancak Culture Days" inside Turkey and promote Bosnian culture through theatre plays, *Sevdalinka*⁷⁹ concerts, and Bosnian movies. In addition, they also host famous Bosnian singers and promote many other cultural activities.⁸⁰

Bursa Metropolitan Municipality, Ankara's Keçiören and Altındağ municipalities, and Konya's Selçuklu Municipality are also active in local diplomacy with Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Ottoman-era stone bridge in Goražde is set to be restored with the help of Ankara's Keçiören Municipality.⁸¹ The reconstruction of the Ottoman-era square next to the bridge is also planned as well. TDBB and the *Directorate General of Pious Foundations*⁸² are also taking part in the project. This project reflects the

74 It is estimated that up to 40 percent of Bayrampasa originates from the Balkans.

75 Özgenur Reyhan Güler, "Bayrampaşa İlçesindeki Demografik Yapının Bayrampaşa Belediyesi'nin Kültür Politikalarını Üzerindeki Etkileri", *Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi (RTEÜ Journal of Social Sciences)* 1: 67-88.

76 'Bereket Konvoyu' in Turkish.

77 Ramadan evening meal.

78 Marija Mitrović, Dušan Reljić and Alida Vračić, "Elsewhere in the Neighborhood: Reaching Out to the Western Balkans", in *Turkey's Public Diplomacy*, ed. B. Senem Çevik and Philip Seib, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015): 115.

79 Traditional Bosnian folk song.

80 "Bosna-Sancak Kültür Günleri başlıyor", *Posta*, Accessed on, April 22, 2018, <http://www.posta.com.tr/bosna-sancak-kultur-gunleri-basliyor-haberi-1341936>

81 2017 TDBB Faaliyet Raporu, (Istanbul: Türk Dünyası Belediyeler Birliği, 2018): 41.

82 Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü in Turkish.

successful cooperation of the local community, a municipality union, and a public diplomacy institution.⁸³

Ankara's Keçiören Municipality is quite active in BiH. In 2014 they helped finance the construction of a large Islamic complex in Goražde.⁸⁴ Altındağ Municipality constructed a modern culture center in its sister city Visoko.⁸⁵ Bursa Metropolitan Municipality and the Municipality of Osmangazi have been very active in preserving Sarajevo's Stari Grad district's Ottoman cultural heritage. City diplomacy between the two countries also supports the construction of sports venues. In the small town of Donji Vakuf, a sports hall was constructed through the cooperation of three different municipalities. Building a sports venue, culture complex, helping a school with the equipment, restoring a square, or an Ottoman bridge certainly improves Turkey's soft power standing in BiH.

TDBB's Role in City Diplomacy between the Two Countries

TDBB became more active in the region after 2015 due to Turkey's shifting foreign policy objectives.⁸⁶ Increased diplomatic traffic and higher levels of diplomacy have positively impacted local communities and municipality unions.⁸⁷ Today the Union has more than sixty member municipalities from the region. The number of twinnings rose significantly after 2007.⁸⁸ However, as a practice has shown, the majority of twinnings generally do not bring the expected feedback they initially sought. Thus, municipality unions like TDBB are good platforms for maintaining communication between sister cities and serving as a mediator for keeping relations active. The number of projects coordinated by the TDBB confirms that Bosnia and Herzegovina has become an important destination for Turkish city diplomacy. Between 2015 and 2019, almost fifty different projects were either finished, under construction, or waiting to be started. This amount is much higher in

83 In April 2020 this project appeared to be halted because of Goražde's mayor's differing vision.; "Muhamed Ramovic: Goražde smo ucinili privlacnim investitorima, moramo se nastaviti boriti", *Klix*, Accessed on April 23, 2018, <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/muhamed-ramovic-Goražde-smo-ucinili-privlacnim-investitorima-moramo-se-nastaviti-boriti/180101048>

84 *Keçiören Belediyesi 2014 Faaliyet Raporu*, (Ankara: Keçiören Belediyesi, 2015): 157

85 The mayor of Visoko, Amra Babic, has a positive reputation in Turkish Islamist circles for being the first Bosnian mayor to wear a headscarf.

86 Interview with Fahri Solak, conducted on January 9, 2019.

87 Vedad Halilović, Interview by Jahja Muhasilović, Interview with Vedad Halilović, former foreign relations expert at the TDBB, Conducted via web on 12.04.2018.

88 "Kardessehirler", *kardessehirler.org.tr*, Accessed on May 8, 2020.

comparison to any other country that is a member of the Union.⁸⁹ Thirty Bosnian local communities were members of the TDBB by early 2020.⁹⁰

Doboj Bridge

TDBB rose to prominence in Bosnia and Herzegovina after making the Serb-majority municipality of Doboj a fellow member. This move elicited harsh criticism from the country's nationalist Serb politicians, particularly, President Milorad Dodik and his SNSD party. The mayor of Doboj, Obren Petrovic, went through a lot of trouble for joining the Union.⁹¹ However, Petrovic's membership soon paid off with a significant infrastructure project supported by the Union. Although TDBB generally does not finance infrastructure-related projects, it accepted to finance the "Bridge of Friendship" between the towns of Doboj, located in the RS and Doboj Istok, located in the FBiH, signaling that it was a peacemaker to the region by connecting two ethnic communities.

Turkish Language Classrooms

Together with the *Yunus Emre Institute*⁹², TDBB supports the promotion of the Turkish language in Bosnian schools. It is responsible for the reconstruction of more than twenty classrooms that participates in the Yunus Emre Institute's "My Choice is Turkish" program. This is program for coordination of Turkish language as an elective class in Bosnian schools. As a result of these efforts, more than eight thousand Bosnian kids are taking Turkish as an elective class.⁹³ TDBB also provided a thousand reading sets for the attendees of the Turkish Language classes.⁹⁴ The majority of financing for this project comes from TDBB's Turkish member municipalities.

89 For more see: *2015 TDBB Faaliyet Raporu*, *2016 TDBB Faaliyet Raporu*, *2017 TDBB Faaliyet Raporu*, and *2018 TDBB Faaliyet Raporu*

90 "Members", TDBB, Accessed on May 17, 2020, doi: http://www.tdbb.org.tr/?page_id=2587&lang=en

91 "Doboj izlazi iz 'Turskog sveta'", *Novosti*, 10.03.2015. Accessed on January 12, 2019, doi: http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/republika_srpska/aktuelno.655.html:537628-Doboj-izlazi-iz-Turskog-sveta

92 "Yunus Emre Institute", *Yunus Emre Institute*, Accessed on May 8, 2020, doi: <https://www.yee.org.tr/en/corporate/yunus-emre-institute>

93 "Bosna Hersek'te 17 Türkçe Dil Sınıfı Eğitim-Öğretime Açıldı", TDBB, Accessed on April 18, 2018, doi: <http://www.tdbb.org.tr>

94 *2015 Yunus Emre Enstitüsü Faaliyet Raporu*, (Ankara, Yunus Emre Enstitüsü, 2015), 132.

Preservation of the Historical Legacy

Many mosques, Sufi lodges⁹⁵, bridges, and madrasahs are restored with the help of sister cities. Municipality unions and other public diplomacy institutions, like TIKA⁹⁶, work together to help preserve the region's Ottoman legacy. Sometimes even local customs are financed through municipality unions. Financial support is provided to "Days of Ajvatovica" which is the largest Muslim festival in the Balkans which draws tens of thousands of people every year.⁹⁷ Financing is done in cooperation with the Muftiate of Travnik who also co-hosts the event.

TDBB has also worked with the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina on building a multifunctional Islamic center in the town of Glamoč and constructing the Islamic Community's representative office in the northwestern town of Ključ. The Union's projects are generally financed with the help of a Turkish sister city, while some are jointly financed by the TDBB and a sister city. Some projects include more than two co-financiers such as in the case of the Ottoman bridge in Goražde where the Turkish Directorate for the Pious Foundations was also involved.

Connecting Bosnian Local Governments to the World

A few years ago, TDBB started actively working to increase direct communication between the local communities of its member countries.⁹⁸ Bosnia and Herzegovina and Azerbaijan were chosen as pioneers for this new project. A delegation composed of Bosnian mayors and businessmen paid a seven-day visit to Azerbaijan where they had a chance to meet face-to-face with their Azerbaijani counterparts.⁹⁹ The visit was thematical, only targeting municipalities with similar firms and other relevant industries. A few months later, an Azerbaijani delegation paid a

95 *Tekke* in Turkish.

96 Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency.

97 "TDBB's Support to 509th Ajvatovica Festival", *TDBB*, Accessed on May 3, 2020, doi: <http://www.tdbb.org.tr/?p=14351&lang=en>

98 Interview with Fahri Solak, Conducted on January 9, 2019.

99 "TDBB Bosnia and Herzegovina Delegation Visited Azerbaijan", *TDBB*, Accessed on May 8, 2020, <http://www.tdbb.org.tr/?p=12590&lang=en>

similar visit to BiH.¹⁰⁰ A similar interaction occurred between BiH and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC).¹⁰¹

It is important to point out that the majority of overseas projects go through the municipalities that are in the administrative board of the Union, which means the majority of the 151 Turkish members are inactive. Many municipalities are small and distant and thus have a limited capacity to operate internationally. Things became even more difficult following the devaluation of the Turkish Lira against USD in more recent times. As a result, the capacity of Turkish local governments has been significantly reduced over the past couple of years.¹⁰²

Relations Monopolized by the Two Political Parties

The majority of city diplomacy with Bosnia and Herzegovina is run by a single party. Municipalities controlled by opposition parties remain almost completely absent in these relations.¹⁰³ Opposition parties in Turkey have failed to benefit from the diplomatic channels opened by the AKP. The ruling party governs 43% of the country's municipalities and often ideological motivations lay behind many twinnings.¹⁰⁴ The dominance of a single party in city diplomacy sometimes causes certain ideological-based preference in choosing regional partners.

Bilateral relations between BiH and Turkey are criticized for being monopolized by the two political parties, SDA in Bosnia and Herzegovina and AKP in Turkey. The city diplomacy between the two countries is often under criticism as well. Some mayors from the SDA are often accused of having a submissive relationship with the Turkish government. The most notable example is Abdulah Skaka, the Mayor of Sarajevo. In 2018, the City of Sarajevo decided to make Orhan Pamuk, Turkish Nobel laureate, "honorary citizen of Sarajevo". Soon after announcing its intentions the city administration pulled back the decision. Due to Pamuk's bad terms with the Turkish government for his views on the Armenian genocide relations with Turkey were too important to be ruined over Pamuk. It is not clear whether the city was

100 "TDBB Azerbaijan Delegation Visited Bosnia and Herzegovina", *TDBB*, Accessed on January 6, 2019-01-06 doi: <http://www.tdbb.org.tr>

101 "TDBB Northern Cyprus Municipality Delegation Visited Bosnia and Herzegovina", *TDBB*, Accessed on May 8, 2020, doi: <http://www.tdbb.org.tr/?p=15106&lang=en>

102 Sabiha Tuğba Ekşi, *Dünyada ve Türkiye'de Kardeş Şehircilik*, 134.

103 "Metropolitan Municipality of Izmir, a CHP majority municipality, has done some minor projects in the past through Kemal Baysak, a prominent Bosniak living in Turkey." Interview with Vedad Halilović, Conducted via web on 22.04.2018.

104 Ibid. 133.

pressured from the Turkish side or it was simply the mayor's will to cancel the award.

The mayor of Sarajevo was amid a similar scandal two years before. In 2016, a Turkish professor teaching math in a Bosnian school that is believed to belong to the Gulen movement received a "Plaque of the City of Sarajevo" from the Commission for Elections and Appointments of the City Council of the City of Sarajevo. The professor was awarded for training dozens of mathematicians and bringing many awards from international maths competitions to the country. The City authority immediately reacted. As soon as the professor received the award it was taken from him.¹⁰⁵ The city's move was harshly criticized by the majority of political parties.

Skaka's open and unconditional support for the Turkish government and the President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was best seen in his refusal to meet with the newly elected Mayor of Istanbul Ekrem İmamoğlu in 2019.¹⁰⁶ Although the visit to Sarajevo was one of İmamoğlu's first foreign visits and the two cities have sister city relations, Skaka preferred to take Erdoğan's side. Skaka again launched an avalanche of criticism for "embarrassing Sarajevo." As he refused to meet Istanbul's mayor, the leadership of the Sarajevo Canton, at the time run by a coalition of opposition parties, used the chance to host him.

Cooperation only with the Bosniak-Majority Municipalities

Another common claim is that Turkey is favoring Muslims in the region. When analyzing twinnings and TDBB's members, one finds that most of the twinned municipalities have Bosniak majorities. For instance, out of TDBB's members, only three out of thirty municipalities do not have a Bosniak majority.¹⁰⁷ The municipalities of Doboj from Republika Srpska and Zepce from Federation are the only exceptions. Also, membership in the TDBB is reserved almost exclusively for municipalities from the FBiH, especially to those municipalities with

105 "Slučaj "Plaketa": Bivši učenici podržali profesora Lafcioglua, politizacija nagrade neprihvatljiva", *Klix*, Accessed on May 19, 2020, doi: <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/slucaj-plaketa-bivsi-ucenici-podrzali-profesora-lafcioglua-politizacija-nagrade-neprihvatljiva/161101004>

106 Since the first days of his terms the mayor is not in good terms with the Turkish president
107 "Members", *TDBB*, Accessed on May 3, 2020, doi: http://www.tdbb.org.tr/?page_id=2587&lang=en

Bosniak majorities.¹⁰⁸ There is only one member municipality that is not from the FBiH.

TDBB's leadership does not see their vision and the strategy as a reason for this reality; instead they place blame on the attitudes towards collaboration on the RS. When asked about the policies and vision of the TDBB regarding the Republika Srpska, TDBB's Secretary-General Fahri Solak said,

"Despite TDBB's openness the domination of nationalistic sentiment in certain countries defines the relationship with the TDBB.... here the approach from TDBB is not influential, but the approach of the interlocutor (other side)."¹⁰⁹

In recent years Turkey started acting more as an independent player in the region. Turkish local communities are also deficient in cooperating with other countries in the region. Some municipal unions like *Council of European Municipalities and Regions* (CEMR) that are active in Bosnia and Herzegovina can serve as a good platform for cooperation since both Turkey and Bosnia and Herzegovina are members of that union. In order to overcome the barriers from the non-Bosniaks and diversify its partners in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkish local communities should consider acting through international platforms like CEMR. This possibility seems less likely as Turkey has distanced itself from the EU in the recent years.

Disruptive Role of the NGOs

In the past, some joint projects between local governments, public diplomacy institutions, and the non-governmental sector have proven to be costly for Turkey's image in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A public "mass circumcision" of disadvantaged Bosnian children was organized in 2014 by the Istanbul Educational-Cultural Center, an NGO led by the conservative Turkish Muslims stationed in BiH, the Yunus Emre Institute, and the Eskişehir Municipality.¹¹⁰ Turkish Minister of Education was even present at this event stamping the mark of official Turkish diplomacy. However, the event resulted in a public outcry. The circumcisions were performed according to the Anatolian tradition by

108 The leadership of the Union refuted the claims of having ethnic priorities or faith restrictions, Interview with Fahri Solak, Conducted on January 9, 2019.

109 Interview with Fahri Solak, Conducted on January 9, 2019.

110 Anadolija, "U subotu kolektivno sunećenje 150 djece u Sarajevu" *Klix*, April 17, 2014. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/u-subotu-kolektivno-sunecenje-150-djece-u-sarajevu/140417078>

dressing kids into clothes alien to Bosnian culture.¹¹¹ Some interpreted the event as an attempt at “Turkifying” Bosnian children. This event triggered a robust public debate about Turkey’s ambitions in BiH and even triggered anti-Turkish sentiment among parts of the population that are generally pro-Turkey.

Unlike many local Turkish governments, TDBB does not cooperate with Turkish NGOs abroad; instead they prefer to cooperate with the local sector. This strategy has prevented mistakes like those done by the Eskişehir Municipality. One of those local NGOs is EMMAUS¹¹² that together with the TDBB has completed a few successful projects in BiH.¹¹³

Economic Challenges Ahead

The devaluation of the Turkish Lira that has started in 2018 has created some serious problems for Turkey’s local diplomacy. The crisis over Lira has caused the Turkish economy to slow down. The weakened Lira decreased the purchasing power in Turkey making overseas investments expensive. The economic slowdown has already been felt in terms of the number of newer projects being undertaken in BiH. It is also very likely that the recent crisis surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic will further slowdown cooperation between Turkish and Bosnian municipalities and significantly reduce the capacities of the local communities in two countries.

Concluding Remarks

Turkish local diplomacy has become one of the main instruments of the official public diplomacy. Especially in the last two decades many local communities managed to become a recognized soft power tool in the Balkans. City diplomacy is especially active in restoring the historical legacy from the Ottoman period. Yet, the Turkish local communities appear to have reached their zenith due to shortcomings in the internal structure. The centralist model of the administrative organization has brought too much politicization to the work of the local communities. Being too attached to the central government certainly paves the way to Turkish local communities in favoring particular local communities in the

111 Circumcisions among Balkan Muslims are not performed publicly and collectively.

112 “MFS-EMMAUS”, *Emmaus*, Accessed on May 8, 2020, doi: <https://mfs-emmaus.ba/en/home/>

113 “TDBB Cultural Houses in Doboj Istok-Kids and Youth Center were Inaugurated”, *TDBB*, Accessed on April 18, 2018, doi: <http://www.tdbb.org.tr/>; “Appreciation Plaque for TDBB from Bosnia and Herzegovina’s EMMAUS Association”, *TDBB*, Accessed on April 18, 2018, doi: <http://www.tdbb.org.tr>

region as it was often the case with their Bosnian partners. The city diplomacy between the two countries is a victim of two affiliated political parties. As Istanbul Mayor's visit to Sarajevo in 2019 proved, there is even a political boycott when a mayor outside the mentioned ideological frame is trying to reach out to its Bosnian counterparts. Since the autonomy of the local communities is connected to the level of democratization in a society, Turkish local communities might get more autonomy as Turkey's democracy progresses.

Not keeping up with the latest global trends like working on the development of the concept of 'humanitarian cities' is certainly limiting the capacities that Turkish local communities can offer in the region. Turkish local communities have to update their work to remain an attractive partner for their counterparts in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Organizing *iftar* meals is addressing only limited segments of the Balkan population. But, working more actively on municipal models like 'smart cities' or 'humanitarian cities' probably would be welcomed by everyone in the region. More cooperation with the partners from the EU would certainly provide necessary assistance for Turkish local communities in shifting to the latest models of municipalism.

A cooperation of the official diplomacy and the track-two diplomacy led by the non-state sector is a characteristic of successful diplomacy. In the past, the Turkish non-state sector was proved to be harmful to Turkish diplomacy. They often instigate some alien events and traditions that were harshly criticized by the Bosnian population. Turkish local communities co-sponsored some of those events. Turkey lacks a coordination body that would prevent official diplomacy channels like local communities from joining harmful projects.

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