



## Political Intermediaries and Turkey's State-to-Society Diplomacy in the Balkans

### Siyasi aracilar ve Türkiye'nin Balkanlarda Devletten-Topluma Yönlü Diplomasisi

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#### Abstract

The Justice and Development Party governments in Turkey have placed public diplomacy into the service of foreign policy as a multi-dimensional tool-kit to be utilized in extending the overseas communication beyond governments towards their publics. And this may be the first time in the Republican history that by the Justice and Development Party era, people abroad have found Turkey's mission bodies more accessible and reachable in terms of both institutional presence and of institutional willingness to involve in their affairs/problems. The Justice and Development Party governments have accordingly adopted a comprehensive 'state-to-society' public diplomacy agenda, targeting for instance the so-called 'kin communities', by which shared civilizational memories, values and histories are often recalled and promoted in building relations. The target communities have thus been encouraged to embrace such identity frames and hence to re-negotiate and when possible redefine their sense of belonging in a civilizational sense. This is a development which brings the constitutive appeal of the country's *new* foreign policy into a brighter light. Based on this, this paper initially questions the constitutive influences Turkey has possibly posed to the targeted communities abroad. Moreover, in the implementation of such *state-to-society* public diplomacy, certain political figures in Turkey have functioned as intermediaries between the public diplomacy bureaucracy and the communities abroad, as facilitators of Turkey's access to the targeted communities, and vice versa. These political elites have mostly been the members of the ruling party in the Parliament, acted as the chairman of inter-parliamentary friendship groups, accompanied prime ministers and presidents in their visits to target communities, and used their personal ties and networks to bring the targeted communities closer to Turkey, and vice versa. They therefore have direct involvement in the conduct of overseas *state-to-society* policy and have personally contributed to the country's public diplomacy campaigns. This paper, at this juncture, secondly aims to unfold this intermediary role of the political elites, which would help garner a better understanding of the sources and causes of Turkey's societal influences abroad. The paper uses Turkey's relations with the Bosniak and Albanian communities in the Balkans as case studies to trace the *state-to-society* diplomacy and the intermediaries' roles within it. To better observe both the influence and the intermediaries' facilitative role, interviews are conducted with some of the political intermediaries who took part in Turkey's reach to the kin communities in the Balkans.

**Keywords:** Public Diplomacy, Political Intermediaries, Foreign Policy, Turkey, Balkans

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**Öz**

Türkiye’de Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi hükümetleri kamu diplomasisini, yurtdışı iletişimi ülke yönetimlerinin ötesinde halklara doğru taşımak için kullanılacak stratejik bir dil ve çok-boyutlu bir enstrüman olarak, dış politikanın hizmetine sundu. Ve belki de Cumhuriyet tarihinde ilk kez yurtdışındaki insanlar, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi dönemiyle birlikte, Türkiye’nin misyon kurumlarını hem kurumsal mevcudiyet hem de onların ilişkilerine/sorunlarına müdahil olma istekliliği anlamında daha erişilebilir ve ulaşılabilir buldular. İletişime geçilen halkların ilişkilerine/sorunlarına müdahil olma istekliliği kapsamında Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi hükümetleri kapsamlı bir devletten-topluma yönlü, örneğin *akraba toplulukları* hedef alan, bir kamu diplomasisi gündemi benimsedi ve bu kapsamda ilgili topluluklarla ilişki geliştirilirken ortak medeniyet hafızası, değerleri ve tarihi sıklıkla hatırlatıldı ve desteklendi. Hedef topluluklar da bu minvalde kimlikleri üzerine düşünürken ilgili medeniyetsel zihni çerçeveleri benimsemeleri ve aidiyetlerini medeniyete referansla yeniden müzakere etmeleri ve mümkünse yeniden tanımlamaları yönünde teşvik edildi. Bu durum ülkenin *yeni* dış politikasında mevcut kurucu (şekillendirici ve etki doğurucu) istekliliği daha da görünür kılan bir gelişmedir. Bu zeminde, bu çalışma da öncelikli olarak Türkiye’nin hedef topluluklar üzerinde oluşturdukları muhtemel kurucu etkileri sorgulamaktadır. Dahası, ilgili devletten-topluma yönlü kamu diplomasisinin yürütülmesinde, Türkiye’de belirli siyasi figürler kamu diplomasisi bürokrasisi ile yurt dışındaki topluluklar arasında, Türkiye’nin o topluluklara o toplulukların da Türkiye’ye erişimini kolaylaştıran, araçlar olarak görev aldılar. Bu siyasi elitler ekseriyetle parlamentoda iktidar partisi üyelerindendir, parlamentolar arası dostluk grubu başkanlıkları yapmışlardır, hedef toplulukları da içeren yurtdışı gezilerinde başbakanlara ve cumhurbaşkanlarına eşlik etmişlerdir ve kişisel bağlantılarını kullanarak hedef toplulukları Türkiye’ye Türkiye’yi de hedef topluluklara yakınlaştırmışlardır. Onlar ayrıca, ülke dışındaki devletten-topluma yönlü siyasetin uygulanmasında doğrudan rol almışlar ve ülkenin kamu diplomasisi uğraşlarına doğrudan kişisel katkı sunmuşlardır. Bu makale, tam da bu noktada, ikinci olarak ilgili siyasi elitlerin aracılık rolünü açığa çıkartmayı hedeflemektedir; bu Türkiye’nin yurtdışındaki etkilerinin kaynaklarının ve nedenlerinin daha iyi anlaşılmasına yardımcı olacaktır. Çalışma, devletten-topluma yönlü diplomasinin ve araçların bundaki rollerinin izini sürmek için Türkiye’nin Balkanlar’da yaşayan Boşnak ve Arnavut topluluklarla ilişkilerini vaka incelemesi olarak seçmiştir. Çalışma kapsamında, bahsi geçen etkiyi ve araçların bu etkinin oluşumundaki kolaylaştırıcı rollerini daha iyi gözlemleyebilmek için Türkiye’nin Balkanlarda yaşayan topluluklarla ilişki geliştirmesi sürecinde yer almış bazı siyasi araçlarla röportajlar yapılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kamu Diplomasisi, Siyasi Araçlar, Dış Politika, Türkiye, Balkanlar

**Introduction**

One of the characteristic features of the Justice and Development Party (JDP) era foreign policy has been the governments’ enthusiasm in building direct contact and communication with the (kin) communities abroad. This however has not been a novelty for the country; yet may be the first time in the Republican history, with the JDP, the kin communities have found Turkey’s mission bodies more accessible and reachable in terms of both institutional presence and institutional willingness to become involved in their affairs/problems. By the same token, following particularly the Kemalist era policy towards the Turkish speaking Muslim communities in the surrounding countries by which they were intended to be built as ethnic Turks, only during the JDP era, Turkey has prioritized the replication of certain cultural sentiments and identities

abroad by communities with which Turkey has been argued to be sharing history and culture (Tabak, 2016: 7-29). This state-to-society relationship was, on one hand, concomitant to the new foreign policy language and vocabulary developed with reference to humanitarianism, culture, history, memory and civilization, and on the other a result of the public diplomacy instruments designed to facilitate the realization of the world vision developed based on the relevant language. This relationship thus involved developing of direct and constitutive ties with kin communities, co-religious communities, diaspora communities and nationals abroad.

As a policy practice promoting a civilizational belonging (Islamic civilization) and a transnational historical memory (Ottoman memory) that eventually serves to Turkey's *new* world vision – whether imperial or not –, this state-to-society foreign policy has posed constitutive influences on the target communities. At the least, it often encouraged them to re-negotiate and when possible redefine their sense of belonging in civilizational sense, without challenging or bypassing the loyalties the target communities enjoyed towards their own countries or the countries hosting them. This paper therefore initially questions Turkey's constitutive influences on the targeted communities abroad.

This influence in fact brings the constitutive appeal of the country's *new* foreign policy into a brighter light and is no doubt a result of successful public diplomacy campaigns. Among several public diplomacy mechanisms employed in imposing influence on the target communities, this paper draws a particular attention to the facilitative role the political intermediaries played in building and sustaining relations between Turkey and the target kin communities. In view of that, in the implementation of the *state-to-society* public diplomacy, certain political figures in Turkey have functioned as intermediaries between the public diplomacy bureaucracy and the communities abroad, and as facilitators of Turkey's access to the targeted communities, and vice versa. These political elites have acted as the chair of inter-parliamentary friendship groups, accompanied prime ministers and presidents in their visits to target communities, and used their personal ties and networks to bring the targeted communities closer to Turkey, and vice versa. Coming mostly from a migrant background and mostly being the members of the ruling party in the Parliament, these intermediaries have directly involved in the conduct of overseas *state-to-society* policy and have personally contributed to the country's public diplomacy campaigns. This paper, at this juncture, secondly, aims to unfold this intermediary role of the political elites, which would help to provide a better understanding of the sources and causes of Turkey's influences abroad.

In the application of Turkey, therefore, the public diplomacy campaigns involved a function of posing community level and constitutive influences abroad and an extra agency (intermediaries) further facilitating the imposition of such impacts. The paper takes Turkey's relations with the Bosniak and Albanian communities in the Balkans as case studies to trace the taking place of both processes. To better understand and explore such processes, the paper makes use of interviews conducted with some of the political intermediaries involved in the conduct of Turkey's overseas state-to-society relations.

## Public Diplomacy, Constitutive Influences and the Intermediaries

Public diplomacy is a broad policy domain enabling building and maintaining political and/or cultural communication with foreign publics and intervening in foreign public opinion and perception. The relevant literature suggests that public diplomacy allows or has been used by governments to achieve diverse conclusions abroad, including but not limited to, speaking to foreign publics, listening to them, understanding their attitudes and changing their perceptions (Delaney, 1968, s. 4; Malone, 1988, s. 3; Cull, 2008, s. 32; Gregory, 2008, s. 274-5). It has also been an instrument of manipulation (via propaganda), communicating the legitimacy of state actions, crafting self-representation (image cultivation), creating sympathy, achieving a mutual understanding of national ideals, framing policies in foreign/international media outlets, branding national images, promoting their culture internationally, enhancing and operationalising soft power, and diffusing normative frameworks to the target audience (Cull, 2009, s. 19, 21; Pratkanis, 2009, s. 114; Mor, 2007, s. 661-2; Deibel and Roberts, 1976, s. 15; Tuch, 1990, s. 3; Dinnie, 2015, s. 118, 254; Mitchell, 1986, s. 4; Schneider, 2005; Nye, 2008). Apparently, giving a voice to the governmental and/or national causes abroad has been a primary concern in public diplomacy and the *influence* posed to the target is an assumed component of public diplomacy, a conclusion expected to be eventually achieved. Confirmingly, having seen that public diplomacy enables states to develop and sustain direct and moulding contact with communities, and that public diplomatic practices have been implemented in various forms such as digital diplomacy, humanitarian diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, diaspora diplomacy or civil societal diplomacy<sup>1</sup>, the possible *constitutive* character of public diplomacy practices thus the primacy of posing constitutive influences become quite self-evident.

This confirms that “public diplomacy is not a mere technique” (Melissen, 2005, s. 6); it is a “process by which direct relations are pursued with a country’s people to... *extend the values* of those being represented” (Sharp, 2005, s. 123, emphasis added). This paper thus confirmingly suggests that via public diplomacy overseas audiences may be socialised to certain mind-sets and identities via several monologue (one-way communication), dialogue (two-way communication) and even collaboration-based public diplomacy mechanisms and techniques including but not limited to international advocacy, exchange programs, international broadcasting, cultural diplomacy, humanitarian diplomacy, digital diplomacy – the list can be extended (Cowan and Arsenault, 2008). Such mechanisms are accompanied by conventional means such as public diplomacy practitioners’ relation-building and direct communication with the target audience through press releases, radio broadcasts, face-to-face dialogue, meetings, and other platforms for developing mutual understanding (Melissen, 2005, s. 14; Colel, 2011; Clinton, 2010). These instruments also involve collaboration with nongovernmental sector and international organizations with expertise while implementing the public diplomacy campaign.

These are all important mechanisms by which the message or the representation of the cause (image) is delivered to the audience and the influence is secured – yet, this paper argues, there

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<sup>1</sup> This is a development that can be better understood with reference to *new public diplomacy* debates in international relations (see Melissen, 2005).

are intermediaries (of several kinds), with ties with both the public diplomacy conducting government and the target community, facilitating the taking place of the influence. The intermediaries could be civilian individuals, institutions or political figures and they essentially have to have access to the target audience. Yet, the public diplomacy literature has not so far shown a bold interest in the role of those intermediaries, except studies on NGO contribution to public diplomacy or parliamentary and cultural diplomacy for international trust building. Yet, again there the individual political intermediaries and their relation with the target have not been much elaborated – so, the intermediary role has been mostly understood as part of a one way communication and has been attributed to institutions (Zöllner, 2009; Ogawa, 2009). The individual intermediaries' role in diplomatic context has yet been elaborated, for instance, in conflict studies, as there are bunch of studies in conflict resolution, trust building, track II (citizen) diplomacy, and secret diplomacy highlighting the role of intermediaries in foreign political contexts. In the conflict resolution, trust building and track II diplomacy, for instance, intermediaries, both official and unofficial ones, are thought as those involving in building trust between conflicting parties to end the conflict and providing private dialogue that lead parties' exchanging communication (Chigas, 2003; Mogensen, 2015; Seo and Thorson, 2016). Here, the intermediaries are seen as more likely to involve in persuasion and utilize their personal ties or institutional credibility to break the distrust or to build one. In the secret diplomacy, similarly, intermediaries are put in charge to secure flow of information and communication between adversaries and negotiate a possible resolution (Bjola and Murray, 2016).

Without assuming that the intermediaries – as actors of foreign policy or international politics – are very influential, reliable or a commonly utilized instrument for overseas policy conduct, this paper questions their role in public diplomacy context through elaborating their utilization by governments in running relations with the kin communities. In our research, intermediaries are observed to be political elites from the governmental circle with close ties with the target audience and they, this paper will suggest, contribute to the governmental efforts to influence the target communities.

### **Public Diplomacy in Turkey's Experience: Plural Manifestations, Diverse Conclusions**

In Turkey's experience, retrospectively speaking and confirming Melissen's saying that public diplomacy is an "old wine in new bottles" (2005, s. 4), conventional public diplomatic practices have been always present in the foreign policy domain – in the form of irregularly employed overseas public communication. Their occasional employment has been particularly seen in running Turkey's relations with the *Outside Turks* – the supposedly ethnic Turkish and kin communities living abroad (Tabak, 2016) –, in branding Turkey as a Western nation<sup>2</sup>, and in encouraging a transnational fight against the *enemies* of the country and the 'Turkish nation' such as the PKK (Kirişçi, 2004) or the *Yüzellilikler* (Boyar and Fleet, 2008) – a group of Ottoman citizens

2 Melissen confirmingly draws attention to Kemal Atatürk's embarking on public diplomatic practices for branding Turkey as a Western country hence for constructing a novel national and state identity. See Melissen, 2005: 3.

fled to particularly the Balkans and North Africa after the Republican regime denationalized them for being accomplice to invader countries during *the War of Independence*. Yet, public diplomacy, as a strategically planned and employed foreign policy instrument with subsequently built organisational structures and deliberate discourses, is seen to be integrated into the domain of foreign policy in Turkey only towards the new millennium.

It was initially through redefining the official duties of several state bodies<sup>3</sup>, and later through opening new governmental bodies with overseas missions<sup>4</sup> in the scope of which public diplomacy has been operationalised as a strategic overseas communication tool in the country. So, having drastically changed what is understood from *foreign policy* and *diplomacy* in the country, public diplomacy has institutionally and administratively become a solid part of the official foreign policy in the last few decades. Concomitant to the multiple institutional involvements, during the JDP era public diplomatic practices have been implemented in the forms of *humanitarian diplomacy*, *cultural diplomacy*, or *diaspora diplomacy*; therefore, the public diplomacy has had plural practical manifestations.<sup>5</sup>

First of all, public diplomacy has been discussed in the scope of a quite ambivalent aim of implementing and increasing the country's so-called soft power. Here, public diplomacy has functioned and been utilised as the "platform" by which the soft power of the country is "implemented", as the founding president of the Office for Public Diplomacy (KDK) İbrahim Kalın once argued (Kalın, 2011, s. 7). To him, since a country's soft power capacity is *defined* by "the acceptance of (its)... policies as legitimate by others", for Turkey, public diplomacy has functioned as a prominent political communication tool "to share a coherent and convincing account of its own story with the rest of the world" (Kalın, 2011, s. 9, 8). In Turkey's utilization, this correlation between soft-power and public diplomacy manifested itself most of the time as discursive and behavioural practices of operationalizing history, culture and geography of the country – as assets of the country's soft power capacity – to build, maintain, and enhance relations with the neighbouring countries and surrounding regions (Kalın, 2011, s. 7).

Secondly, public diplomacy has come to be considered as a prominent instrument of nation-branding by the JDP governments – as it has been done so throughout the Republican history in redefining Turkey as a Western nation. Accordingly, via public diplomacy, during the last one and a half decade, Turkey has been endeavoured to be branded as a humanitarian actor (Sancar, 2015, s. 36), as a Muslim country well-adjusted to secular, democratic modern world (Ulusoy, 2015, s. 166) and as the leader of the Muslim world (Ungör, 2015, s. 216) that brings together the

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3 Including the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA, 1992), the state channel TRT, the state news agency Anatolian Agency (AA), Presidency for Religious Affairs (Diyanet), Directorate General of Press and Information under the Prime Ministry (BBYGM), Ministry of Culture.

4 Including the Yunus Emre Institute (YEI, 2009), the Office for Public Diplomacy under the Prime Ministry (KDK, 2010), the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB, 2010), and more recently the Maarif Institute (MI, 2016).

5 For further discussion on Turkey's public diplomacy see Şahin and Çevik, 2015; Karadağ, 2016.

Western and the Eastern worlds, for instance, via international initiatives such as the Alliance of Civilizations.<sup>6</sup>

Thirdly, during the JDP era, as a noteworthy novelty, the non-governmental organisations have been worked on to be integrated in to the realm of overseas public diplomatic communication, particularly with reference to the soft power aims and humanitarian power claims. Such integration – securing cooperation and coordination between public institutions and non-governmental organizations – is what the Office of Public Diplomacy has been employed with in conducting public diplomacy and foreign policy.<sup>7</sup>

Fourthly and by the establishment of the YTB (the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities), Turkey began initiating for fighting against Islamophobia, particularly in Europe, as part of which relations with both co-nationals/citizens living abroad and Muslim minority communities of all background throughout Europe were developed (Oktay, 2015; Öktem, 2014).

Fifthly and more recently, public diplomacy has become the key instrument in waging Turkey's all-out overseas war against what is now called as Fetullah Terror Organization (FETÖ). Turkey, as part of this mission, deployed traditional and multi-tasked institutions such as TIKA, Diyanet, Yunus Emre Institute (YEI) and YTB, and established a new institution, the Maarif Institute, for taking over the now infamous Gülen schools abroad and for opening new ones replacing them. Dealing with a transnationally organized structure has shown the necessity of employing targeted foreign policy practices in the community level by which both official and grassroots level support to the structure could be cut off; this is what Turkey has been endeavouring recently.

Sixthly and as a final example, the public diplomacy mechanisms served to Turkey's building state-to-society relations abroad and influencing the target communities in line with the civilizational world vision promoted by the government. President Erdoğan, confirmingly, described for instance the *duty* of the field officers of TIKA as follows

TIKA employees should be aware of the fact that in addition to the projects they carry out in the countries, they are the transmitters of Turkey's history, civilization, culture and values [to those places], [and in those places] they work as modern *alperens* [conquerors of hearts and minds]. Actually, this is true for all of our representatives, our businessmen, representatives of all non-governmental organizations (TIKA, 2015a).

The public diplomacy contributors and practitioners therefore are all described as part of this mission of achieving influence over governments and communities. As examples of influence Turkey has so far achieved, for instance, 'support for Erdoğan rallies' has been organized in several countries in several occasions both before and after the failed coup attempt in Turkey on July 15, 2016. As a response to the Gezi protests in Turkey in 2013, for

6 See the following paper for Turkey's nation-branding efforts via public diplomacy, Al-Ghazzi and Kraidy, 2013.

7 For grassroots cooperation abroad between government bodies and NGOs, see Aras and Akpınar, 2015.



instance, local people and organizations in Malaysia, Indonesia, Yemen, Palestine, Macedonia and Bosnia Herzegovina initiated ‘support for Erdoğan rallies’. In Malaysia, for instance, the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM) published a memorandum of support and organized a rally to show support to the Turkish government during the protests (Anadolu Agency, 2013b; MoS, 2013). A similar rally was organized in Gostivar, Macedonia on June 14, 2013 with the participation of thousands of (the cited figure was 80 thousand) ethnic Turks, Albanians and Bosniaks to support Erdoğan and to give a response to the Gezi protests. Among the participants of ‘support for Erdoğan rally’ in Gostivar, there were political party leaders, ministers, deputy prime-ministers and heads of Islamic authorities from Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Bulgaria (Anadolu Agency, 2013a). On the same day, another pro-Erdoğan rally was organized in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Hürriyet, 2013). After the failed coup attempt in Turkey, in late July and throughout August 2016 several rallies were organized in Montenegro, Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Sandzak (Serbia) to stand against the coup attempt and to show support to the ruling government (Time Balkan, 2016; Sabah 2016; TIKA, 2016; Anadolu Agency 2016). The rally in Sandzak, for instance, was organized by the ‘Society of Friends of Turkey’ in collaboration with main Bosniak political parties and social and cultural organizations. In a final example, again in Sandzak, days before the historical Presidential referendum in Turkey in April 2017, a pro-Erdoğan rally was organized by the local Muslim population. During the rally, people called the Turkish nationals living in the Balkans and the ethnic Bosniaks living in Turkey to vote for Erdoğan (vote for YES) at the referendum (Time Balkan, 2017). There are other indicators of the influence. To discuss in brief, for instance, in Macedonia, Kosovo, Sandzak or Bosnia, Erdoğan’s visits have been responded with a rousing welcome by the common people and he often delivered public speeches to the local crowds. Moreover, most of the countries considered as kin states, have shown support to Turkey’s fight on FETÖ, except for Albania. Moreover, the influence is also suggested to be occurring in the form of triggering intra-societal contestations regarding, for instance, civilizational belonging, socialising communities into certain mind-sets and transnational historical identities, or planting an ethno-political and ethno-cultural accord and harmony among people who appreciate Turkey’s efforts for maintaining Ottoman era cultural heritage (TIKA, 2015b; Tabak, 2016). This however does not mean that Turkey’s public diplomacy brings an unquestioned and total influence over the target; we will further discuss this below.

### **State-to-Society Public Diplomacy in the Balkans and Political Intermediaries**

In its broader approach towards the Balkans, the JDP has followed three priorities; maintaining ‘high level political dialogue’, achieving ‘maximum economic integration’ and making sure of the ‘preservation of the region’s multi-ethnic, multicultural, multi-religious social structure’ (TIKA, 2015b). This brought about a bold and interfering social and cultural dimension to the foreign policy, manifesting itself as, for instance, an emphasis on a (Islamic) civilizational interpretation of *history, culture* and *geography* of the region and on a transnational historical (Ottoman)



memory utilized most observably in building, maintaining, and enhancing relations with the kin communities in the region. The Balkans, within this scope, has become a showcase for the interfering will of Turkey, as once former Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu stated in his address to 'The Ottoman Legacy and the Balkans' Muslim community today' conference in Sarajevo in October 2009;

As the Republic of Turkey, we would like to construct a new Balkan region based on political dialogue, economic interdependence, cooperation and integration, as well as cultural harmony and tolerance. These were the Ottoman Balkans, and hopefully we will re-establish the spirit of these Balkans.<sup>8</sup> (Quoted in Boskovic, Reljic and Vracic, 2015, s. 107)

Turkey's increasing institutional presence in the region by the JDP's coming to the power confirms this alike. Accordingly, by the JDP, TIKA, TRT, Diyanet, YEI, Kızılay all extended their missions throughout the Balkans and even cooperated there with Turkey-based nongovernmental organizations of humanitarian and religious kind (Baklacioğlu, 2015; Aras, 2012). TIKA has so far established offices in Albania (Tirana), Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo), Kosovo (Pristina), Macedonia (Skopje), Montenegro (Podgorica), and Serbia (Belgrade). Similarly the YEI has opened cultural centres all over the region – in Albania (Tirana, Shkodra), Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo, Mostar, Fojnica), Kosovo (Prishtina, Prizren, Peja), Macedonia (Skopje) and Serbia (Belgrade). All these institutions have given prime importance to establishing communication and relation especially with the Albanians and Bosniaks – and also the ethnic Turks – throughout the Balkans, as communities with which Turkey has argued to share a multi-ethnic civilizational history and kinship.<sup>9</sup> Those communities, as the remnants of the Ottomans and as kin communities, have been seen as 'natural' allies of Turkey and as the communities to which Turkey naturally owes a historical responsibility.<sup>10</sup> Below is a brief examination of Turkey's approach to two of the communities, the Albanians and the Bosniaks<sup>11</sup>, and of the intermediaries' utilization throughout.

8 Davutoğlu's this statement is an exemplar of his interpretation of Turkey's world vision. For further debate on this vision, see Tufekci, 2013; Tufekci, 2014.

9 Non-Muslims in the region have alike been given importance. TIKA accordingly provided financial support to Christian minorities in the Balkans in the scope of which several places of worship were restored (such as the St. George Church in Kumanovo, Macedonia) or were provided supply assistance (such as Fojnica Fransiskan Monastery in Bosnia and Herzegovina) or Macedonian Orthodox Church Domitian of the Most Holy Virgin Mary. See TIKA, 2015b.

10 Throughout the Balkans, Turkey-Alumni Associations have been established by those who studied in Turkey via the scholarship provided by the Turkish government. These alumni associations work as 'Turkey's ambassadors' in their home countries thus as extensions of Turkey's soft power for a lasting influence. Also, there are political parties in the Balkans taking Turkey's JDP as role model. Even though not publicly articulated, they embrace JDP's rhetoric and political discourses and use them in their political campaigns, maintain close relations with the JDP's department of international relations. They yet deny their connection with the JDP (Balkan Insight 2014). In Macedonia, the second largest ethnic Albanian party, BESA (Oath) and in Kosovo the Justice Party are the most commonly articulated ones that are suggested to be following the JDP's path.

11 It should be said that these communities are not treated in essentialist or perennial manners – the Albanian or the Bosniak this paper refers to are the communal categories defined as so by the Turkish institutions (and by intermediaries), by the communities themselves (via their representatives), or by the states they are resided in.

### ***Turkey, Albanians and the Intermediaries***

Albanians are at the target of Turkey's public diplomacy in three main countries; Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia and in each country the agenda of the public diplomacy has remained mostly the same. In all three countries, Turkey has aimed to 'remind' the Albanians that they were once part of a great civilization that ruled the world – they thus should embrace their history under the Ottoman rule rather than being antagonistic towards it. This is seen important because of the fact that the transnational Albanian nationalism, following the official nationalism in Albania, defined the Ottomans as invaders and oppressors and the national historiography depicted them as the hated other. In line with this, Turkey's close relations with the Albanians in the Balkans since early 1990s, its unconditional support to Kosovo in the country's search for international recognition, and its vast humanitarian and development aids have not been changed such feelings a lot. Turkey's concern has rather been branded as neo-Ottomanism.

As a means to overcome this, Turkey's overseas institutions and missions did several things. They articulated, in every instance, that the Albanians share the same culture, history and geography with Turks, they contributed a lot to the Islamic civilization and even joined Turks in establishing it (Haberler, 2014; Tabak, 2017). Albanians' Muslim identity has, at this juncture, been intended to be protected. Turkey's heavily restoring historical and religious sites in throughout Kosovo and Albania (TIKA, 2013a; UNESCO, 2013) has initially served well to this cause. Yet, additionally, via such restorations Turkey recalled the Ottoman history of the Albanians, something followed by formal and informal requests for a change in history, culture and geography course curriculums and textbooks in Albania and Kosovo that long denied the Ottoman past, depicted Ottomans as invaders, blamed them for 'killing' Albanians or for forming a 'ruthless' rule in the Balkans (Balkan Insight, 2013; Kamusella, 2016). Moreover, to further the argument that Turks and Albanians share history, Turkey features historical figures known to be Albanian and who served to Ottomans or to the Turkish Republic. It is rhetorically in circulation in official and public communication that there were 33 (or 28, 35) grand viziers and hundreds of viziers and pashas of Albanian origin in the Ottoman Empire; Sami Frasheri<sup>12</sup> (called as *Şemsettin Sami* in Turkey) contributed to the building of both Turkish and Albanian nationalisms; the poet of Turkey's national anthem, Mehmet Akif Ersoy, is an Albanian whose father was born in Kosovo; and Albanian origin people in Turkey who migrated throughout the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and between 1920s and 1953 from particularly Kosovo and Macedonia to Turkey represent the Turkish-Albanian brotherhood.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, while the official bodies deliver such messages directly to the Albanian communities, public diplomacy facilitators contribute to make sure the messages are correctly received in the

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12 He was the author of the very first modern Turkish language dictionary, the very first Turkish language novel and the very first Turkish language encyclopaedia during the Ottoman Times, and as often called, was one of the pioneers of Turkish nationalism. In Albanian historiography, he is considered as the ideologue and one of the founders of Albanian nationalism (Bilmez, 2003).

13 For a rhetorical use of Albanian Sadrazams in the Ottoman state, Sami Frasheri, Mehmet Akif and many others by President Erdoğan in his visit to Tirana, see TCCB, 2015; DHA, 2012.

ground. Among those facilitators, Rifat Sait, a former Justice and Development Party MP and the former chairman of the Turkey-Albania inter-parliamentary friendship group at the Turkish Parliament, had played an influential role in enhancing Turkey's public diplomacy towards Albanians throughout the Balkans.

Before, during and after he acted as an MP, Sait, coming from an immigrant Albanian family, has involved in several projects facilitating Turkey's reach to the kin communities in the Balkans including Turks, Bosniaks, Pomaks or Torbeshis, yet particularly to the Albanians. In our interview, he, having admitted acting as intermediary between Turkey and the kin communities in the Balkans, stated that as part of such a facilitator role, he often visited the communities, took their opinions, was often invited to accompany Prime Minister or President in their visits to Albanian communities in the Balkans or in their hosting official guests from Albania or Kosovo, organized workshops at the Parliament, initiated projects within the South East European Cooperation Process Parliamentary Assembly, organized independence ceremonies for Albania and Kosovo in Turkey and abroad, initiated joint projects with NGOs from the Balkans, organized think-tanks gatherings for initiating a Balkans information exchange network, worked to make the Balkans a subject of hot discussion in Turkey, shared the grief of Albanians both in the Balkans and Turkey, lobbied for the establishment of a ministry on kin communities, collaborated in the YTB's opening a branch to İzmir where – to Sait – 1,5 million Balkan immigrants live. He further stated on this regard that, “when the TIKA was first established, when no one knew about the TIKA in the Balkans, we [himself] introduced the TIKA to leading cultural and social elites/figures in the Balkans, brought them together, mediated their knowing to each other” (Interview with Rifat Sait)<sup>14</sup>.

Such practices enhanced the public diplomacy's easy access to the target communities, yet also facilitated the occurrence of the influence. As examples exemplifying the intermediaries' contribution to the creation of Turkey's influence on particularly the Albanian communities, Sait expressed that, for instance, he has involved in mediating conflicts between Albanians and ethnic Turks particularly in Kosovo and Macedonia. Sait argued accordingly that

both the government and we [himself] worked to unite them and tried to solve problems between them, [as similarly] I did so in Bulgaria against the attempts of breaking the good relations between the Pomaks and the Turks... There are 80 thousand Turks in Macedonia and 70 thousand Albanians, they do not come together. ... [and] it is Turkey who will bring those people together. (Interview with Rifat Sait)

As an exemplary step of this kind, Turkey held meetings via the Office of Public Diplomacy, to the organization of which Rifat Sait provided assistance, which brought kin communities from Kosovo, Macedonia, Bulgaria together. As he stated and in addition to afore listed practices of intermediating, Sait organized conferences for the flourishing of an Ottoman memory, something needed, to him, to unite those *distinct* communities. As Sait further stated,

<sup>14</sup> Sait also stated that “of course today there is no need for such a mission for us, as [communities in the Balkans now] know TIKA”.

Albanians and Turks have mutual stereotypes towards each other. Albanians tend to call Turks either as assimilated Albanians or Gypsies with reference to their historical Yorukh background. [And also] Albanians believe that during the Yugoslavia period Turks cooperated with Serbs against Albanians... all these come together with nationalism... and build antagonism towards each other.

This is something that, via such gatherings, Sait tries to overcome. Moreover, Sait has several times come together with ministries from Kosovo and Albania to encourage them to change the antagonistic expressions against the Ottomans in the curriculums and textbooks, as part of which, for instance, he brought Kosovo's Minister of Education to Turkey. Moreover, as a final example, Sait argued that he has taken several steps to back Turkey's fight against FETÖ in the Balkans, especially in Albania. He, to break FETÖ's influence on Albanians, many times came together with influential Albanian officials to convince them to close down FETÖ schools and cooperate with Turkey in its fight.

Nevertheless, having taken all those efforts spent by Sait, it is still not clear how consequential those and many other meetings and initiations have been, as it is quite hard to measure the influence emerged out of such initiations and involvements. Yet, it is clear that as an intermediary, Sait played a role in 'Turkey's and public diplomacy bodies' reach to the Albanian communities throughout the Balkans and some developments – such as political parties formed in Macedonia and Kosovo following Turkey's JDP's path, their embracing of Ottoman and Islamic civilizational memories (The Justice Party in Kosovo and BESA Party in Macedonia as Sait expressed) or some amendments made in curricula – make us believe that Turkey's state-to-society relations targeting Albanians worked to gain their backing to a certain extent and in the happening of this, along with official bodies, Rifat Sait, and may be several other intermediaries, played an influential role.

### ***Turkey, Bosniaks and the Intermediaries***

In Turkey's reach to the Bosniaks, informal and nongovernmental level supports provided to the Bosnians fighting against Serbian army in the early and mid-1990s have played a key ground in building a solid communication and relationship afterwards. Turkey since then has been a *carer* for the Bosnians in especially discursive level (yet backed by diplomatic and developmental aid providing) and in the community level and such a role has seems to be well received; at least this is what political circles in Turkey believe. This *carer* position is a self-imposed role and owes to the belief that Bosnia is a 'formerly ruled geography' and the Bosniaks were the loyal people of the great Ottoman state who for centuries watched and guarded the Western frontiers of the state. This belief led to an idea in the contemporary era, especially after the massacres the Bosnians were exposed to during the Bosnian war in the early and mid-1990s, that they are 'entrusted' to Turkey by the Ottoman state to be taken care of and to be protected. This role of being entrusted to Turkey came to be heavily discussed when Prime Minister Erdoğan visited Alija Izetbegović in his death bed in a hospital in Bosnia on 18 October 2003, one day before İzetbegovic passed

away. Erdoğan, having recalled such visit, later frequently expressed that – something went viral and turned into the motto of Turkey's public diplomacy campaigns towards Bosnia afterwards – during his visit Izetbegović, as a *last will*, told him that “protect my Bosnia, look after her, I entrust her to you”.<sup>15</sup>

Based on such a role, which is categorically denied to be part of a so-called neo-Ottomanism (Kalin, 2011, s. 10), Turkey generously utilized TIKA and other diplomatic instruments to *look after* Bosnia. In order to re-erect the Ottoman cultural heritage throughout Bosnia, TIKA restored or reconstructed numerous historical sites including but not limited to the Mostar Bridge, Konjic Bridge, Mehmed Paša Sokolović Bridge, The Maglaj Kuršunlu Mosque, Emperor's (Hünkar) Mosque (TIKA, 2013a, 2013b; Anadolu Agency, 2017b; World Bulletin, 2013; Hürriyet, 2017). Such monuments, many of which were destroyed during the Bosnian war by the Serbian forces, represent the cultural heritage of the Islamic civilization and contribute to the identity of Bosnia and Bosniaks. Nevertheless, such aids were not confined to cultural sector; from infrastructure to health, education and women empowerment hundreds of other projects have continuously been financially funded by TIKA. Along with TIKA, there were other institutions interested in establishing constitutive communication with the Bosniaks. The YTB, for instance, provided the Bosniak students with scholarship to carry out their under – and post-graduate studies in Turkey, organizes annual Turkey-alumni meetings<sup>16</sup>, encourages Turkey-alumni to establish Turkey-alumni associations to maintain Turkey's communication and contact with those who were once given scholarship, and promotes projects on enrichment of Ottoman cultural heritage in Bosnia in order to keep the *shared* historical memory alive (Surkovic, 2017; YTB, 2015). Along with YTB, Diyanet sponsors several students each year to study at imam-hatip schools (in İstanbul, Kayseri and Konya) and theology faculties in Turkey and maintains strong relationship with the Islamic Community (official religious authority) in Bosnia to promote Ottoman-Turkish cultural religious practices thus to break the influence of what is called as Salafi/Wahhabi Islamic practices and groups (Tabak, 2017; Karadeniz, 2011).

Nevertheless, Turkey's state-to-society public diplomacy not only targeted the Bosniaks living within Bosnia, to the minority Bosniak communities living in Serbia, Kosovo and Montenegro, Turkey has provided scholarships and religious facilities and restored historical sites and mosques in the areas they live in<sup>17</sup>. Yet more than that, whenever possible Turkey's high officials personally visited them. In a recent example, President Erdoğan, as part of his official visit to Belgrade, visited Novi Pazar of the Sandžak region in early October 2017 where he addressed a huge crowd

15 The expression is as follows: “Bosna'mı koruyun, Bosna'ma sahip çıkın, o size emanet”. This has come to headlines many times, especially during the anniversary of his death. See, for instance, Haberturk, 2010; Akşam, 2014; Yenişafak, 2016; Anadolu Agency, 2017a.

16 The most recent of those meetings was organized on 25 November 2017 with the participation of the president and several members of Association for Turkey-Alumni in Bosnia (YTB, 2017b). YTB also launched a training program Turkey-Alumni Associations. Via such training programmes the number of the alumni associations is aimed to be increased and accordingly the alumni are encouraged to establish associations in their home countries (YTB, 2017a).

17 Among hundreds of works of this kind, last June Diyanet Association distributed the Qur'an and its Bosnian translation to Bosniaks in Podgorica, Montenegro (Anadolu Agency, 2017c).

who welcomed and chanted for Erdoğan while waving Turkish flags and the green and blue flags of Serbia's Muslim community. There were banners read "Welcome Sultan" signed by *Evlad-ı Fatihan* (grandchildren of the Ottomans). He visited the town with Serbia's President Aleksandar Vucic, who said in his address to the crowd that "I know I am not going to be welcomed here like Erdogan is... But at least I can come out and say that I am working in your best interest" (Reuters, 2017). Confirming this, as Reuters reported, a local Muslim stated that "Erdogan is our nation's leader, Vucic is our state leader, this is the greatest day for us Muslims to have them both here" (Reuters, 2017).

One of those accompanied Erdoğan in his visit to Novi Pazar was Hüseyin Kansu – to whom I call as one of the intermediaries between official Turkey and the Bosniak communities throughout the Balkans and with whom I conducted an interview – and he confirmed the affection shown to Erdoğan. Kansu, a former PM of *JDP*, *Refah* and *Fazilet* parties and one of the founding members of the JDP, has been often invited to accompany ministers, Prime Ministers or Presidents in their visits to Bosnia or Bosniak communities in the Balkans or in their hosting official guests from Bosnia since 1995. Between 1995 and 2007, he uninterruptedly acted as the chairman of the Turkish-Bosnia-Herzegovina inter-parliamentary friendship group in the Turkish Parliament and worked throughout to enhance Turkey's bilateral relations with Bosnia and Bosniak communities in the Balkans. In explaining the role he played throughout, to which this research calls an intermediary role, Kansu endeavoured to report the developments in the Balkans regarding mostly the Bosniaks to Turkish public opinion via Parliamentary speeches, media statements, conference addresses. In return, he equally endeavoured to explain the 'true intentions' of Turkey to Bosnia and Bosniak communities against the accusations of neo-Ottomanism and imperialism. This intention of Turkey is explained by Kansu as follows:

when the Republic of Turkey was established the Westerners, particularly Britain, mandated us not to involve in the geography we previously ruled... With the end of the Cold War, Turkey started watching over its historical kin communities (in the Balkans)... with the contribution of nongovernmental organizations... (This involvement was also because) there was a yearning for Turkey in the Balkans, it was a reunion after a long break. There is this love of Turkey in the heart of our people living in the Balkans. As a response to this love, there has been done great huge beneficial works in the Balkans [by Turkey] with also the use of the facilities of NGOs, universities, charities. (Interview with Hüseyin Kansu)

Furthermore, to Kansu, this intention is a *natural* response – as there is already a high volume of transnational dynamic communication and ties running between the millions of historical Balkan immigrants living in Turkey and their relatives throughout the Balkans. Having descended from an immigrant Bosniak family and based on a similar transnational kin relationship, Kansu has various high post owner official acquaintances in Bosnia. He has often visited Bosnia accompanying official and semi-official delegations from Turkey and mediated these delegations' meetings with local officials. He, equally, has accompanied Bosnian officials in their visits to Turkey and facilitated their contact and communication with Turkish authorities. He lobbied



in Turkey for the restoration of historical sites in particularly the former Yugoslavian republics damaged during the wars as early as mid-1990s. He similarly lobbied for the expansion of public diplomacy institutions in the Balkans towards localities where Bosniak populations live. Moreover, particularly in the case of the Bosniaks living as minorities in Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Macedonia, as Kansu stated, he has occasionally guided their community leaders and elites and given advice to them on issues related to their relations with Turkey and to their responses to policy changes in their host countries. In exactly the same manner, during 15 July coup attempt in 2016, Kansu acted as key person in securing the reliable flow of information between Turkey and the Bosniaks living in the Balkans. Right after the coup attempt, he paid several visits (exactly 13 visits) to Bosnia and other places such as Sandzak and Montenegro and gave speeches at conferences and public meetings organized by universities or municipalities to contribute to Turkey's fight on FETÖ. In one of those visits Kansu accompanied Mehdi Eker, the JDP's deputy-president and director of foreign affairs, to attend a conference in Sarajevo – entitled “15 July 2016 Coup Attempt”, organized by Turkish Embassy, YEI and a local think-tank, Stratis – in order to inform and mobilize the Bosniaks about FETÖ threat and the coup attempt (Star, 2016).

I have managed to receive positive response for interview only from Mr Sait and Mr Kansu as political intermediaries, yet there are others – with whom I could not establish fruitful communication – acted as intermediaries between Turkey and kin communities in the Balkans. Among them, for instance, Hakan Çavuşoğlu, a Western Thrace borne Turkish citizen, was the former chairman of the Turkish-Bosnia-Herzegovina inter-parliamentary friendship group and is the incumbent deputy Prime Minister. He was born in Gümülcine (Komotini), Greece, and studied in Turkey with the scholarship given by the Turkish government. Another example would be the former Minister of Health and Minister of Labor and Social Security Mehmet Müezzinoğlu who was also born in Gümülcine studied in Turkey and sought asylum from Turkey in 1983. A final example may be Hüseyin Bürge who is the chairman of the Turkish-Macedonia inter-parliamentary friendship group, the former mayor of Bayrampaşa Municipality in İstanbul<sup>18</sup> between 1994 and 2011, and the founding chairman of the Union of Balkan Municipalities. Çavuşoğlu, Müezzinoğlu and Bürge, similar to Sait and Kansu, have involved in explaining Turkey's intentions to kin communities abroad and in informing the Turkish public opinion about kin communities and their problems. They have paid countless visits to Balkan countries and accompanied Turkey's Presidents and Prime Ministers during their official visits to the Balkan countries. They used their positions to direct the resources of TİKA, Diyanet, YEI, YTB and other institutions – such as the Ministry of Health – to the service of kin communities abroad. As part of their involvements in the inter-parliamentary friendship groups, they invited and hosted ministers and MPs from the Balkan countries at the Turkish Parliament and arranged closed group meetings with ministers, deputy-prime ministers (including the one in charge of overseeing TİKA, Diyanet and YTB) and the president (see Meclis Haber, 2011; Milliyet, 2012). This is something observed also by my other interviewee, Davut Nuriler, a Bosniak descent

18 Bayrampaşa is a district populated mostly by Balkan immigrants.



Turkish citizen acted as the founding coordinator of TIKA Sarajevo office (2003-2005). Having stated that “Turkey’s influence over Albanians and Bosniaks [in the Balkans] is quite low”<sup>19</sup>, he yet confirmed that Sait, Kansu, Çavuşoğlu, Müezzinoğlu, Bürge and many others have facilitated Turkey’s reach to the local public and communities through networking and building trust, and have endeavoured to increase Turkey’s influence accordingly (Interview with Davut Nuriler). Nuriler also said that he has “work[ed] with those above listed names”, but particularly with Hüseyin Kansu, in developing projects targeting the kin communities – particularly Bosniak communities – in the Balkans.

## **Conclusion**

Governments utilize public diplomacy for several purposes, one of which is posing intentional constitutive influences on the communities with which a direct communication is aimed to be established. Turkey, equally, has utilized public diplomacy mechanisms for several purposes one of which has been tuning in the kin communities in the Balkans and influencing them as part of a state-to-society foreign policy. Such a policy, while facilitating Turkey’s message to be heard more vocally and embraced more broadly, also facilitated the communities’ reach to Turkey. Nevertheless, between Turkey’s public diplomacy mechanisms and the target communities, a group of people from Turkey, from the ranks of the governing party, played an imperative role in facilitating Turkey’s reach to the target communities in the Balkans. This group of political figures, to whom this paper calls intermediaries, have acted to make Turkey’s influence on Albanian and Bosnian and even ethnic Turkish communities a lasting one. They worked to build trust in the target community towards Turkey’s public diplomacy institutions and helped those institutions to build networks among political and community circles in the target country. They made the target communities’ needs known by the public diplomacy institutions.

In my observation, these intermediaries have all been active in migrant organizations before and after their political lives therefore have had access to nongovernmental networks in both Turkey and the target state/community. They all are descended from families migrated to Turkey from the Balkans and all have ethnic consciousness as Albanian or Bosniak yet boldly adhere to Turkishness as the national identity. They all have knowledge of native languages of the target communities. They all have had intense communication and contact with governments and community leaders in the Balkans thus have been the supporters of the national causes of those states. They, in this vein, endeavoured to involve in the relations of the target communities with other kin communities in the Balkans. They accordingly supported Albanians’ and Bosniaks’ having good relations with ethnic Turkish communities – both in cultural and political means. They all valued Turkey’s providing scholarship to students from target communities and

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19 This is, to him, mostly because Kosovo and Albania follow the U.S.’ lead in foreign policy. Moreover, to him, for the Albanians Islam comes only after their Albanian national identity, so a policy based on religious brotherhood towards them does not bring the expected influence. Yet, as he suggested, this is not the case for the Bosniaks – as the shared Islamic motifs in identity bring them closer to Turks. (Interview with Davut Nuriler)

encouraged those communities to send their children to Turkey, by which an additional bond between those communities and Turkey would be established. Finally, they strictly embraced Turkey's religious and civilizational rhetoric in dealing with the Balkans.

All these characteristics contributed to Turkey's state-to-society foreign policy and to the target communities' having a trust on Turkey's intentions in the Balkans and on discourses it produces about inter-communal kinship relations. The emergence of pro-JDP political discourses and political parties or the organization of several 'Erdoğan meetings' throughout the Balkans are clear manifestations of the success of state-to-society relations and may be of the intermediaries. This yet does not mean that Turkey's influence over kin communities is total – it however means that there is an undeniable influence and the intermediaries have contributed to its occurrence.

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