

THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN TURKISH REACTIONS TO BALKAN CONFLICTS

The paper examines some of the different ways ‘religion’ affected Turkish responses to the ethnic tensions and conflict that have occurred in South East Europe since the end of the Cold War, focusing on the conflicts in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, and to a lesser extent on the case of relations with Macedonia. It seeks to provide a corrective to the tendency to make vague and often misleading generalizations about ‘religion’ in Turkey and its relevance to study of Turkey’s relations with other states and peoples. Religious factors are analyzed in terms of three connected yet distinct categories: (i) religious identity; (ii) the utilization and evocation of religious themes by political actors; and (iii) assumptions/worldviews that hold that religion is an important force in politics and international affairs. Was a sense of common religious identity with Muslim communities in South East Europe important to the Turkish reaction to the conflicts? How were religious themes evoked or used by political actors with regard to the conflicts? How important were worldviews that see religion as important in determining reactions to the conflicts? The article seeks to show why a full explanation of state and non-state reactions (and not just foreign policy outcomes) also requires attention to the various appearances of religious factors in reactions, to the intertwining of religion and Turkish national identity, and to the central place that the issue of religion occupies in politics over Turkey’s past, present and future.

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Religion has affected Turkish responses to the ethnic tensions and conflict in South East Europe since 1990 in a variety of ways. Focusing on the conflicts in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, and to a lesser extent Macedonia, I do not provide an overview of Turkey's relations with the region. The aim is a more limited one of providing a corrective to the tendency to make misleading generalizations about 'religion' and its relevance to Turkey's relations with other states and peoples. Religious factors will be analyzed in terms of three connected yet distinct categories: (i) religious identity; (ii) the utilization and evocation of religious themes by political actors; and (iii) worldviews that hold that religion is an important force in politics and international affairs.¹ This choice of categorization is not conclusive and overlap between categories exists, but it constitutes a reasonable starting point for breaking down the effects of religion.

A sense of common religious identity

Was a sense of common religious identity with Muslim communities in South East Europe important to Turkish reactions to the conflicts? The answer to this question must be both yes and no. On the level of official foreign policy, through comparing policy across the three cases of Bosnia, Kosovo and Macedonia, as well as placing this within the context of Turkish foreign policy in general, we can argue that a common religious identity did not 'constrain' foreign-policymakers or change the broad 'tenets' of Turkish foreign policy. While references were made to religious identity at various times by ministers and other politicians, and domestic groups often voiced their demands and concerns in terms of such language, the Turkish government was not constrained to act in accordance with religious identity, with other national interests being cited as more pressing instead. Thus appeals to religious solidarity did not force consistency across the cases or changes in policy. Similarly, a sense of religious identity did not alter Turkey's westward looking foreign policy, its policy of working within - and working to be included in - multilateral alliances and organizations, or emphasis on non-adventurist options in regional security and stability.² In fact, many of the moves by Turkey in reaction to the conflicts seem aimed at reinforcing Turkey's official commitment to its alliances and ties with the West, ensuring its inclusion in post-Cold War Western security arrangements, and proving its eligibility to be regarded as a responsible middle-tier power, reliable bridge between the West and others - be it a Turkic or Islamic world - and an indispensable actor in European security. In fact, concerns over Islamist politics seem

¹ By 'religious identity', I mean a sense, or a claim to a sense of identification of the self and others through religion, religious institutions, or religious beliefs. By 'the utilization and evocation of religious themes by political actors', I mean the use of, and references to, religious themes and language in politics. By 'assumptions/worldviews that hold religion as an important force in politics and international affairs', I refer to the fact that although actions and discourse may not necessarily be directly informed by religious identity or justified through religious themes, they may be shaped by a belief that religion is indeed an important - whether unavoidable, convenient or desirable - social and political reality that influences politics.

² Robins (2003) also makes this point, coupled with the assertion that, "the impact of the Bosnian crisis on Turkish public opinion and hence on policy has... been consistently overestimated". I would disagree, arguing that while there have been many generalizations about the impact of public pressure on foreign policy, the impact of conflicts in Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya, Nagorno Karabakh among others upon identity in Turkey has been largely neglected in scholarly accounts.

to have heightened insistence on loyalty to the central aims and principles of Turkish foreign policy, as part of establishment efforts to contain Islamist efforts to turn foreign policy into an area of contestation.

There are however several ways in which a sense of common religious identity influenced reactions to the conflicts, in both official foreign policy and non-state action. Certain moves by Turkey in response to the Bosnian conflict can be seen to fit both a picture of continuation of foreign policy along the priorities of the foreign ministry and as being in accordance with actions prompted by religious and historical solidarity. The sheer extent of intense Turkish diplomatic activity in support of the Bosnian Muslims, especially in the early stages of Turkish diplomacy, parliament's declaration for the lifting of, and if necessary, a violation of the arms embargo on Bosnian Muslims in July 1995, and involvement in a weapons corridor to the Bosnian Muslims in violation of the international embargo, are examples.³ More generally, at the official level, religious links have been one part of Turkey's official relations with Muslim communities in the region through the activities of the state religious directorate, to which I will return in the third section.

In non-state action, a sense of common identity was crucial to initiatives taken by a variety of groups resulting in both activities directed at the Turkish public and state, and transnational initiatives. This often involved a combination of religious and ethnic allegiances, as well as general humanitarian concerns, set against a combination of international and domestic political objectives. The most extreme reaction came in the form of volunteers for the Bosnian war. While the numbers were marginal, it is interesting that even the mainstream media covered the individuals in a somewhat positive light for their choice to go fight on the side of the Muslims. Islamists and ultra-nationalists also used the theme of volunteering for protest aims. More common were contributions to a variety of aid campaigns and participation in various protest meetings and other symbolic actions.

However, the use of these methods by the Welfare Party to further its aims within Turkey makes it difficult to ascertain the true motivations in such activities. Furthermore, the dangers of generalizing about 'Muslim sentiment' and ignoring the complex relationship between ethnicity, religion and national identity becomes perhaps most evident in relation to the substantial part of the population of Balkan origin or descent, and the activities and strategies of the numerous associations of Balkan immigrants.⁴ While they have appreciated the Islamists' concerns with the conflicts, they have often, for a variety of reasons, been keen to distance themselves from Islamist messages and mobilization. Finally, a blanket description of social action as 'Muslim sentiment' would be misleading given the vast array of organizations and institutions across the political and social spectrum involved in protest or solidarity. However, despite the reservations stated here, religious identity played a variety of roles in official and unofficial reactions to conflict in the region.

3 Milliyet, 25 July 1995. Regarding weapons corridor see Umur Talu article 'Yerin altından bir hatırlatma' (A reminder from underground) in Sabah 16 September 2003; and 'Appendix II – Intelligence and the War in Bosnia 1992-1995: The role of the intelligence and Security Services' in Report prepared by the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation, "Srebrenica: A 'Safe' Area" made public in April 2002

4 Specific figures are difficult given that the migration spanned both the 19th and 20th century. See Şule Kut (2000) and Kemal Kirişçi (1995).

Religious identity has also provided the material for instrumental uses of religion and the conflicts, to which I now turn.

Utilization of Religious themes

How were religious themes evoked or used by political actors with regard to the conflicts? Religious themes were used both internally and externally. They were thus both part of a dialogue with and about the external world and part of an ‘intensely national conversation’ about Turkish politics and society.⁵ It would take another article to analyze the role and motives of the media in relation to coverage of the conflicts, here it is worth noting the wide array of opinions that were represented in the press, patterns of hype/alarm followed by amnesia driven by the media in relation to the conflicts, and the distorting force of “the search for popularity and power” of the media.⁶ Here I dwell on two intertwined debates, over history and about the West, which combined arguments about the conflicts in Bosnia and Kosovo with arguments about Turkey, the key unifying reference being religion.

State elites and counter-elites have invoked history to justify their political aims, conceptions of the nation and their perceived role in the defense of it. Because historical memory is selective, the actors and the resources at their disposal crucially influence what aspects of the nation’s past are remembered. A central question in such debates has been the place of Turkey’s Ottoman past. The 1980s and 1990s witnessed important changes in the discourse and evaluation of Turkish history as a result of political developments, global change, and the rise of an autonomous sector in history research and publications in Turkey, with consequences for perceptions of how Turkey relates to the peoples and states in the surrounding areas (Özel & Çetinsaya 2001). It was in this context that the conflicts in South East Europe prompted and facilitated many arguments about Turkey’s responsibilities as heir to the Ottoman empire, romantic notions of a Golden age of order and harmony in the Balkans under the Ottomans, and – by taking such notions to their ‘logical’ conclusion – appeals for a new era of pax-Ottomanica. While these visions have been dismissed as fanciful by most commentators, such arguments go straight to the heart of Turkish national identity. Those emphasizing Turkey’s Ottoman past have criticized the state’s severing of links with the Ottoman and thus Balkan past within a greater discussion of their desired role for Islam in Turkey (Bora 1995).

In discussion of how the Muslim communities of South East Europe could be protected in the face of conflict, many Islamist intellectuals and politicians, often egged on by the media, called for greater Turkish involvement in the region – ranging from unilateral military intervention to support for the establishment of an anti-Crusader alliance to less radical proposals for increased political, economic and social involvement. Bora describes the formation by a group of Islamist intellectuals in

5 Jenny White uses this expression with regard to the debates in Turkey over clothing and the question of Islamist ‘tesettur’ covering by women. While the case at hand here is slightly different, I use it to highlight the striking way much of the debate would quickly jump from the external question, to the question of Turkey itself. For the context of White’s usage see White (2002: 52-3).

6 Asu Aksoy states in her analysis of news coverage between 16-24 May 1994, that “the search for popularity and power was the context in which the distorted reporting of the bombing of Gorazde in April 1994 took place... and, indeed, all consequent reporting of Bosnian events”. (Aksoy 1996: 166). Yael Navaro-Yashin describes the role of the media in creating “public cultures of alarm ... quickly followed by public amnesia” in the 1990s in Turkey. (Navaro-Yashin 2002:6).

1992 of the Bosnia Solidarity group (later Bosnia, Kosovo and Sanjak Solidarity Group) and their report “On the threshold of a new era: Bosnia and the Balkans” as the fullest expression of an Islamist approach to Turkey’s potential regional power role (Bora 1994, 1995). Here and elsewhere, a variety of proposals combined references to the Ottoman legacy and resulting responsibilities of defending ‘Islam’.

Such concerns were not limited to Islamists however, and found expression in various forums, official and unofficial. One admittedly original proposal came from Namık Kemal Zeybek at the 1995 Eurasian Islamic Meeting, at the time a chief advisor to the presidency, who proposed an Islamic corps, akin to the US peace corps, to peacefully promote Islam to counter threats and Christian missionary activities (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı [Religious Affairs Directorate], 1996). Religious and historical sensitivities overlapped in articulation of concern for the protection of Ottoman-Islamic legacy including widespread concern over the destruction of monuments and buildings in the conflicts, of which there was considerable media coverage.⁷ Turkey has been involved in the repairs and rebuilding of several Ottoman monuments in Eastern Europe, such as in the case of government aid towards the reconstruction of the famous Mostar bridge. The State Historical Organization also has ongoing projects documenting preservation and repair-work on Ottoman buildings in several Balkan states.

A theme often intertwined with the concerns and arguments above was criticism of ‘the West’. This comprised criticism of the US, European states, the UN, and the ‘New World Order’. The connection between Islamism and Turkey’s relationship with the West involves a powerful two-way process of influence. However, in common with many of the other dynamics discussed in this paper, Islamists did not have a monopoly on the issue, as leftists, nationalists, and ultra-nationalists all offered verdicts on ‘the West.’ Religion played a variety of roles in these perceptions and in explanations of the subsequent policies. Alongside challenges to the West were challenges to the state elite and to members of society charged with apathy and collaboration with the West, and at times a questioning of Turkey’s entire Westernizing/modernizing/nationalizing project. The banner at Islamist protests “Müslümanlar burada, Laikler Nerede?” [The Muslims are here, where are the secularists?]⁸ summarized the message.⁸ The vocality of Islamists on this subject decreased throughout the 1990s, and in the cases of tension and clashes in Kosovo and Macedonia, Western policy did not lend itself easily to such rhetoric. Another reason for this difference was the change in rhetoric on Westernization and the West that has taken place within parts of the Islamist movement since the 28 February process in 1997.⁹ This is most notable in the Virtue Party (and now the Justice and Development Party) “change in orientation from an anti-Westernist, conservative approach to a well-organized Westernist, modern and participatory stance”(Boztemur 2001: 125).

7 For examples of attempts to document the heritage subject to damage in Bosnia, see Candan Nemlioğlu (1996) and IRCICA Bulletin No.31 (1993), ‘Bosnia-Herzegovina, History, Culture, Heritage’.

8 For a discussion of grassroots Islamist perceptions of the religious status of secular Muslims see Jenny White (2002).

9 There is disagreement about how to characterize this process whereby the military, behind the scenes and through the joint military-civil National Security Council, forced the Welfare-led coalition to adopt a series of measures aimed at stemming Islamism in Turkey, and subsequently out of power.

Given the penalties for overt references to Islamist proposals for domestic change, it is possible to see why external events would be used to express sentiments about domestic issues. More widely, although it is impossible to prove the 'real' reasons behind action, the place of the Bosnian conflict in Islamist protest might be discernible from the nature of a series of protests that took place after Friday prayers in early 1992. In late April 1992, a 'Friday' demonstration took place in protest of events in Bosnia, yet we can place it in the context of a series of similar protests in February and March on the subject of Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as on the question of Algeria in January and February. While the existence of 'rival' meetings of Islamists and ultra-nationalists, and clashes between leftists and ultra-nationalists at meetings during this period cautions us against characterizing such mobilization as unified along specific Islamist domestic objectives, the evolving topics but continuous turnout suggest the importance of domestic political issues for such activism¹⁰. On the other hand, domestic divisions not only fuelled expressions of reactions to the conflicts, but limited expression of some level of national consensus, such as the disappointing turn-out of the Bosnia rally in Taksim Square in February 1993 attended by leading politicians, partly as a result of a backlash against the use of the issue for electoral gain (Bora 1994: 296).

Use in international politics

Turkish leaders in the 1990s and this decade have repeatedly used references to shared values, religious brotherhood and common Muslim sentiments. For reasons of space, I will dwell on three points about the use of religious themes by political actors. Firstly, any analysis of the use of religious themes is complicated by the connections between Islam and the Ottoman past and the fact that 'history' has often been used as a convenient euphemism for a variety of things, including religious links.¹¹ The evoking of 'history' makes it difficult to decipher what is meant by this term in each case, and to what extent there is an intended allusion to Islam as well. The term *akraba toplulukları* (related/kin communities), used also by the government in relation to non-Turkish populations such as the Bosnian Muslims, exemplifies the ambiguity in references to ties with outside groups. It mingles connotations of common ancestry, closeness resulting from past relationships, and more simply similarities and solidarity.¹² Historical ties have often been used by state actors to explain Turkey's particular concern over Turkish or Muslim communities vis-à-vis others, such as when foreign minister İsmail Cem stated in 1999 that "It is necessary

10 Cumhuriyet, 18 January 1992, 15 February 1992, 29 February 1992, 2 March 1992, 7 March 1992, 30 March 1992, 25 April 1992, 26 April 1992, 27 April 1992.

11 The opposite is also true. Some actors, including immigrant associations, have been keen to distinguish between religious and historical ties binding Turks and non-Turks together (interview, Culture and Solidarity Association for People of Prishtina, Istanbul, October 2003). I also do not wish to imply that all cultural links are necessarily religious. It is important that common cultural connections while related to religion, are not reducible or reduced to it. Belkıs Kümbetoğlu found during interviews with Bosnian refugees in the Pendik neighbourhood of Istanbul in 1994 that "almost all the Bosnians talked about a shared cultural origin and expressed that the Serbs had continuously belittled them as being Turks and implicitly or openly told them that they should go to Turkey even before the war... In [the refugees'] references to a Muslim country, they are referring more a shared cultural past than religious characteristics" Kümbetoğlu (1997: 248).

12 Hugh Poulton points out that 'kin' can be flexibly and liberally defined. He also points out that the question of who is a Turk has cropped up at many points in the Balkans. (Poulton 1997; Poulton & Taji-Farouki 1997).

that Kosovo is not dragged towards ethnic divisions and in this context we are especially concerned with the Albanians and Turks in Kosovo with whom we have a historical togetherness” where he uses the term *tarihsel birliktelik*.¹³ However, such usages are only meaningful if additional considerations of the kind of ties are loaded onto the term and hundreds of years of cohabitation, cooperation and cultural exchange with Serb and other non-Muslim populations are conveniently forgotten. These usages obscure a reading of history that is heavily influenced by nationalist assumptions. Bora argues that while extreme pan-Turkists promoted theories that Bosnian Muslims were really Turks, the nationalist-conservative intelligentsia displayed a more cultural based ethno-centrism by viewing the Ottoman experience from a retrospective nationalist perspective and presenting Muslims in the Balkans as having been part of the ruling nation (Bora 1995: 278).

On the other hand, uses of religious themes of brotherhood have at times been quite effortlessly converted to a more secular usage, as in bilateral relations with Macedonia, and in multilateral regional cooperation, cautioning us against taking at face value the numerous references to religion. Thirdly, there are both external and internal constraints limiting references to Islam and common religious terms. Islamophobia and Turcophobia in the rest of South East Europe as a result of powerful memories and myths surrounding the Ottoman Empire constrain Turkish activity in the region and overt references to Islam (Gangloff 2000). Internally, secular elites have been concerned that they should not play into the hands of Islamists in criticizing the West or emphasizing religion, whose perceived efforts to bring religion into the political and public arena are deemed a threat.

Worldviews that hold religion as important

How important were worldviews that see religion as important in determining reactions to the conflicts? Religion in this sense was very important to Turkey’s reactions to the conflicts in South East Europe in a sense that has often been neglected.¹⁴ It is perhaps under this heading that we can make most sense of the inconsistencies between the apparent strength of a common identification with ‘Balkan’ Muslims as ‘Muslims like us’, and the highly variable treatment of the various cases in both state and non-state action.

In Turkey religion is important to everyone, Islamists and secularists alike, in that there is common attention to religion’s public status and its implications for Turkey’s and Turkish identity. As Sami Zubaida has observed, “the ‘secular’ Turkish republic is imbued and obsessed with religion” (2000 [2003]: 299). This is not as paradoxical as it may seem. As Yael Navaro-Yashin states, “secularism is the state’s preferred self-representation or selected idea about itself. Secularism is not a neutral paradigm, but a state ideology as well as a hegemonic public discourse in contemporary Turkey” (2002: 6). Given that secularism is a response to religion, and given its centrality to debates about identity, regional positioning, and domestic political organization, it

13 Statement to the Press 4 July 1999 (own translation), Esenboğa airport on return from New York UN meeting regarding Kosovo. See also references to ‘historical ties’ to Bosnian Muslims by Necip Torumtay, former Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces (Torumtay, 1996).

14 A notable exception to this trend is Tanil Bora’s treatment of the subject and his emphasis on the influence of identity – national and religious among others – on perceptions of the Balkans and the case of the conflict in Bosnia.

should not come as a surprise that ‘religion’, alongside the concept of the state, is at the center of the world views of political actors in Turkey.

We also have to appreciate the degree to which national, ethnic and religious identities are intertwined in terms of the way they become the subject of politics and provide meaning to people. “Turkey embodies an irreconcilable paradox established during the foundation of the Republic in the 1920s. On the one hand, the state used Islam to unify diverse ethno-linguistic groups; on the other, it defined its progressive civilizing ideology in opposition to Islam” (Yavuz 2000: 22). The war of independence, reforms of the early years of the republic, transition to multiparty democracy, various alliances between party elites and different sectors of the public, and crises in Turkish democracy all shaped this paradoxical relationship. In the 1980s with emphasis on the ‘Turkish-Islamic synthesis,’ the relationship between Islam and nation evolved once again with official support to religion as an antidote against the ideological conflict of the 1970s. Islam was to be used to unify citizens through a common public culture. This, together with continuation, but to some extent dilution of the original Kemalist objective of monopolizing domestic control over Islam, contributed to the complicated relationship between Islam and national identity in Turkey in the 1990s. Because, “what is best for a nation in foreign affairs is never self-evident” (Rosenau 1980: 287), and “national identity helps define the parameters of what a polity considers is its national interests at home and abroad.” (Prizel 1998: 14), the intertwining of religious and national identity in Turkey plays a key constitutive role in perceptions of Turkey’s national interests. Religion plays a complex role in how the state formulates its national interests.

To turn to one facet of this complex set of relationships, it is worth looking at policies and practices involving the ‘Turkification’ of Islam. The state religious affairs directorate’s vast and well-funded activities and institutions indicate the state’s efforts to promote and control a form of Islam perceived to be compatible with the Westernized nation-state building project in Turkey – a “state Islam” (Cizre Sakallioğlu 1996). These efforts are also related to competition with other states that have sought to promote their own visions and versions of Islam in South East Europe and elsewhere, namely Iran and Saudi Arabia. A perception that this ‘outside’ interference corrupts the tolerance and distinctive features of Islam in South East Europe coexists alongside assumptions that Turkey should be the natural leader and mentor of the Muslim communities in the regions surrounding it. As a publication of the General Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces puts it: “Fundamentalist movements, in particular those emanating from our neighbor Iran, do not threaten Turkey but are a source of discomfort for Turkey... they do however pose a threat to other Muslim countries. Only a democratic and secular Turkey that believes in the West’s political, economic and social values can be a shield in the face of these backward forces” and constitutes the only model for the developing and newly independent Muslim states. (Öznel 1992: 69-70).

The directorate has facilitated a series of official links with Muslim communities in South East Europe based upon common religious identity. These include multilateral ties such as Eurasian Islamic assemblies organized by the directorate in 1995, 1996 and 1998 in Turkey (the fourth was held in 2000 in Sarajevo), bringing together religious representatives from across Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, as well as bilateral links through visits and cooperation between religious leaders, and

appointments of religious services counselors to various consulates abroad.¹⁵ It has also directed a variety of services spanning religion, education, aid and publications towards the perceived ‘dindaş’ (co-religionist) and ‘soydaş’ (of common descent) of Europe, including the Balkans. It is worth keeping in mind the activities of the directorate and its focus on religious ties when considering the focus on political ties emphasized in policy of the ministry of foreign affairs.

This emphasis on Turkish contact with Muslim communities in a Eurasian sphere shares an unintended and competing similarity with Islamist conceptualizations of Turkey as a leader of the Islamic world. More generally, the idea of a ‘Turkish Islam’ was neither new nor reserved to official circles. One example of an alternative promotion of a Turkish Islam also coincides with a wider effort to promote links between Turkey and other states in South East Europe in the work of organizations and businesses linked to Fethullah Gülen and his Neo-Nur movement (Yavuz 2003). According to Bülent Aras and Ömer Çaha (2000), “Gülen seeks to construct a Turkish-style Islam, remember the Ottoman past, Islamicize Turkish nationalism, re-create a legitimate link between the state and religion, emphasize democracy and tolerance, and encourage links with the Turkic republics”. The network has had various links with governmental circles and at times received praise from prominent politicians. However, Gülen has also been accused of seeking to undermine the secular state in an ongoing process of investigation since the late 1990s. Yavuz argues, “some military circles feel uncomfortable about Gülen’s external connections and his cooperation with other Ottoman and Turkic communities, particularly in the Balkans, Caucasus and Central Asia. They see these ties as a potential threat to the authority of Kemalist ideology and fear that Gülen will organize a powerful lobby abroad” (2000:33). This might be seen as developing an earlier historical concern “that a restorationist movement might be organized among the Turks and Muslims in the Balkans” (Bora 1995:114). The dynamics involved in efforts to promote and control various forms of Islam internally and externally point to the need for further attention to these dynamics in interpreting state and societal views of regional ties and policies.

Understandings of the relationship between Islam and the West, and how this bears upon Turkey’s position in the world, influence state and societal views of stability and order and Turkey’s positioning in the international system. This is a sensitive question, and goes to the heart of the challenge of the nation-building project. It shares similarities with the challenges faced by post-colonial nation-building elites, but there are also differences. Most notably, the dilemmas and challenges involved in Turkish attempts to combine Westernization and membership of the West with religious and national identity have become entangled in questions of whether Turkey is part of Europe. It is also influenced by isolationist/exceptionalist beliefs and the ‘outside power’ component of the Sevres-syndrome.¹⁶ For some of the same reasons that Turkey was able to pursue a more activist policy in surrounding regions, actors perceived a new set of threats to Turkey’s identity vis-à-vis other states and global alignments as reflected through its international positioning. From this perspective,

15 For details of participants, speeches, debates and decisions made at the meetings see the proceedings (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı 1996, 1998, 2000). Details of visits by religious leaders and other diplomatic or political representatives are outlined in ‘Diyanet’, a monthly magazine published by the Directorate.

16 Fear of a repeat of the carving up of Anatolia envisaged in the Sevres Treaty 1920, and in place of which the Treaty of Lausanne 1923 was signed after the Turkish War of Independence.

state and non-state reactions to the conflicts in the region cannot be seen as detached from Turkey's own concerns about its place in 'the West' and Europe, and this is connected closely, as many of the dynamics outlined above indicate, to questions about religion in Turkey.

On return from a visit to Germany in May 1996, Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz stated, "I saw that [the German policymakers] had, through Turkey's role in Central Asia, Caucasus, Black Sea basin and Balkans, understood the reality that Turkey is part of Europe." This statement is one of many that reveal the connections made by Turkish policy-makers between Turkey's involvement in surrounding regions and its identity as part of the West.¹⁷ In addition to official statements to this end, various policies indicate this preoccupation, such as over recognition of the Yugoslav successor states (Kut 1998), collaboration with the US such as in the undertaking of military projects in Albania and Turkey's involvement in the training of the Muslim-Croat federation army,¹⁸ persistent declarations of willingness to contribute to UN peace-keeping forces, and eventual contributions to successful peace-keeping efforts in both Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo.¹⁹ Here, considerations of regional influence and balance overlapped with fears of being marginalized in the changing European security environment, and specifically exclusion from new security arrangements emerging alongside the NATO alliance. Yet these considerations and fears are also intimately connected to perceptions of Turkey's and Turkish identity and it would be misleading to simply dismiss these moves as realist maneuvering given the way in which they are highly valued as one part of a realization of identity-related aims by Turkish political actors. The concern to prove that Turkey can combine its role as a Muslim yet Western/European actor internationally and regionally runs throughout many official and unofficial accounts of Turkey's policies and perceived role in South East Europe. Thus, I do not wish to deny that, "as in Bosnia, Turkey viewed the Kosovo crisis primarily in terms of the impact on regional stability and order" (Sayarı 2000: 178), but these views of stability and order are shaped profoundly by Turkish elite and counter-elite perceptions of religion, how religion relates to the nation, and how identity affects the nation's outside relations.

Conclusion: Reactions to the conflicts and 'Religion'

If religion matters, we must ask why there are clear differences between reactions to the conflicts in Bosnia, Kosovo and Macedonia. An indispensable part of the answer lies in factors such as the substantial differences in the intensity, duration and nature of the conflicts, differences in Western policy, considerations of 'balancing/competition' in particular with Greece in the region, and the position of ethnic Turks vis-à-vis the ethnic Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia. Yet a full explanation of state and non-state reactions (and not just foreign policy outcomes) also requires attention to the various appearances of religious factors in reactions, the

17 Statement to the press 18 May 1996 (own translation). These type of ideas are also shared by the military leadership in Turkey. See for example Chief of Staff Necip Torumtay's discussion of Turkey's role as a bridge between the Islamic and Christian worlds. (Torumtay 1996).

18 See İlhan Üzgel's analysis of cooperation and competition of Turkey in the Balkans and the importance of its relationship with the US (1998). For the context of Turkey's relations with Europe see Mustafa Türkeş (1997).

19 Interviews, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ankara, October 2003. Interview, Prof. Şule Kut, Istanbul, October 2003.

centrality of religion in politics over Turkey's past, present and future, and to the intertwining of religion and Turkish national identity. In common with other countries, "the important point is that identity appears at different places in the causal chain" (Telhami and Barnett 2002:7). Religious identity, the use of religious themes in politics, and a perception of religion as an important force in politics have influenced the way Turkey – comprising a variety of state and societal actors – reacted to conflicts in South East Europe.

Outside events affect security and threat perceptions, and conceptions of a national mission or role, in a variety of ways, with complex identity linkages. These might be ignored because identity components are considered a 'constant' or unquestionable part of the state's foreign policy or position in the world. Yet these are not constant, and the actors in Turkish politics are not fixed in their position. More attention to domestic debates in Turkey provides a sounder basis for anticipating future changes in foreign policy. Furthermore, the high instrumentalization of identity – be it religious, national or ethnic – does not detract from its importance but rather necessitates a more nuanced view of the way it features in reactions. Because the 'national interest' is a "pluralistic set of subjective preferences that change" (Rosenau 1980: 285) and identities are one source of such preferences, an effort to make sense of the intertwining of identities with international and domestic political interests is necessary if we are to fully grasp the resulting powerful and often explosive combinations of ideas, emotions and interests.

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