CHAPTER 1:
KINSHIP AND DIASPORAS IN TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY - AN INTRODUCTION

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Introduction
From the moment it came to power in 2002, Turkey’s Justice and Development Party (AKP) began to change the direction of Turkish foreign policy (TFP), making it more dynamic and multileveled and giving it a wider geographical scope and a more focused ideological drive. Partially rooted in Ahmet Davutoğlu’s vision of regional soft power, the Turkish state began successfully to emphasize its historical and cultural links to countries or minorities throughout Europe, Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Middle East. As Turkey’s regional influence grew, so did its economic strength, built in part on regional investments. Although Turkey’s soft power and the idea of Turkey as a ‘model’ for Muslim democracy have lost much of their glamour in the 2010s, Ankara has not stopped exerting ideological power and influence abroad.

One of the main ways in which the country achieves this influence is by courting its diaspora and playing ‘big brother’ to ethnic or religious groups that it perceives as kin communities. In one of his speeches in 2016, Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, speaking about the campaign to recapture Mosul in northern Iraq from ISIS, stated: “We cannot draw boundaries to our heart, nor do we allow it,” and went on to add that “Turkey cannot disregard its kinsmen in Western Thrace, Cyprus, Crimea and anywhere else” (TCCB 2016). From this perspective, it seems that akraba topluluklar, namely the communities that are perceived to have a shared history and culture with Turkey (a type of kinship) continue to play an important role in Turkey’s foreign policy agenda.

Against this background, the papers in this collective volume will investigate the dynamics of perceived kinship in Turkish foreign policy (TFP). We wish to examine: the roots of this
foreign policy approach and its particularities under the AKP; the ways in which Turkey demonstrates and builds power for akıamba topluluklar; the extent to and ways in which this policy regarding diaspora and perceived kin communities increases Turkey’s influence; the effects that the policy has on the politics, economy and social life of the diaspora communities and their relationship with host countries; and the kind of fractures or divisions that are created within the communities due to Turkey’s attempts to maximise its presence and influence over them.

**Diasporas and Kin Politics**

Two of the main concepts in this report are those of diaspora and kin-politics. Before moving on to the multileveled relations and dynamics between the homeland/kin-state and the diaspora/kin-communities, we first provide working definitions for these otherwise contested concepts. Initially referring to the identity that bound together Jews that were scattered all over the world, the concept of diaspora has undergone multiple transformations (Baumann 2013). According to a broad enough definition by Vertovec (2013: 63), diaspora is “an imagined community living away from a professed place of origin.” A more elaborate definition and perhaps more useful in the context of this report comes from Shain and Barth (2003: 452) who define diaspora as:

> a people with a common origin who reside, more or less on a permanent basis, outside the borders of their ethnic or religious homeland—whether that homeland is real or symbolic, independent or under foreign control. Diaspora members identify themselves, or are identified by others—inside and outside their homeland—as part of the homeland’s national community, and as such are often called upon to participate, or are entangled, in homeland-related affairs.

Although not the same, the concepts of diaspora and kinship often overlap and, depending on their definitions, are sometimes intertwined within the framework of globalisation and the transformation of the nation-state itself. A distinction sometimes made between diaspora and kin communities divides the groups into homeland citizens living abroad and ethnic/cultural/religious (non-citizen) kin living abroad, respectively (Adamson 2019: 225). However, this distinction is not often clear-cut. Much like Shain and Barth’s reference to a diaspora’s ethnic/religious homeland, Tátrai, Erőss and Kovály (2017: 203) note that nation-states have increasingly faced the need to deal with “the effects of losing ethnic-kin citizens due to emigration or demographic decline, while at the same time new, non-ethnic immigrants settled in their territories.”

To be sure, kinship studies have come a long way since their emergence in the 1800s (Peletz 1995). The end of the Cold War and the newly emergent world order brought about an enhanced interest in and attention to identity politics, culture, religion and ethnicity (Dickstein 1993; Duvold 2015; Maynard 2015). Samuel Huntington’s (1996) well-known work,
The Clash of Civilizations, became central to this body of literature and debate. Huntington (1996) made the case that the future of world politics would be dominated by conflicts between civilizations more than by anything else. He divided the world into eight major civilizations on the basis of culture and religion. And even though he never really explicitly defined kinship (Nossal 2018: 63-65), he saw countries, communities or peoples that shared the same civilization as kin among which there is often solidarity in times of conflict (Huntington 1996: 272-273).

**Turkey’s Kin Politics**
In the same work, Huntington lists Turkey among the countries he terms ‘torn’, namely, those countries that have “a single predominant culture which places it in one civilization but its leaders want to shift it to another civilization” (Huntington 1996: 138). This is a rather accurate description of what has taken place in Turkey at least since the establishment of the republic in 1923 and Mustafa Kemal’s top-down social engineering project of modernization and westernization. His reforms constituted a deep (civilizational) break from Turkey’s Ottoman and Islamic heritage. The new state of affairs brought about by Kemal created a lasting identity crisis between the two main currents (and their various manifestations) of secularism-republicanism and conservatism-ottomanism that have been in tension for most of Turkey’s history.

The election of the AKP to government and the consolidation of its power gave rise to the flip side of that crisis with the comeback of the conservative-ottomanist paradigm. Whereas under Kemal Turkish national identity acquired a racial-ethnic content, it eventually became more religion-tinged under the AKP. The AKP and president Erdoğan tried to re-connect the Turkish nation to its old roots while creating a national identity synthesis in which the Islamic component predominated over the ethnic (i.e., an Islamic-Turkish synthesis). And thus, at least in the narrative of the AKP and Erdoğan, the concept of the Turkish nation came to be closely associated with the Muslim nation (i.e., ummah, the global community of Muslims) (Tanir 2019).

To be sure, the country remains ‘torn’ in the sense that there are still domestic political and social forces that oppose Turkey’s new reality. However, the AKP’s new approach demonstrates an attempt to transform Turkey from a torn country into what Huntington calls a core country, not only in terms of the socio-political fabric but also with regard to its role in the international system (see also, Kalın 2011; Yurtnaç 2012): a state that “can perform its ordering function because member states perceive it as a cultural kin. A civilization is an extended family and, like older members of a family, core states provide their relatives with both support and discipline” (Huntington 1996: 156). This effort is not new and yet it has never been expressed in this degree and in the terms seen under the AKP.

The Turkish interest in the Muslim or Turkic people dates back to the Ottoman Empire or even to the emergence of Islam if we are referring to pan-Islamism as the notion of solidarity among Muslims (Baskan 2019: 97-98). Pan-Islamism returned as a political ideology during the late years of the Ottoman Empire along with Pan-Turkism: a movement that strove “for
some sort of union – cultural or physical, or both – among all peoples of proven Turkic origins, whether living both within and without the frontiers of the Ottoman Empire” (Landau 1995: 1). Pan-Turkism became a popular irredentist ideology that complemented Turkish nationalism during the years of the Turkish republic and especially in the 1960s and 1970s (Landau 1995: 4). In the context of pan-Turkism, ‘outside Turks’ (Diş Türkler) were central, consisting of “a wide range of groups comprising people of Turkic origins” mainly located in Russia (or the Soviet Union), such as the Tatars, Kazakhs, Turkmens, Uzbeks, etc. (Landau 1995: 7). In the 1990s Turkey tried to capitalise on these kin ties to increase its influence over the post-Soviet republics of Caucasus and Central Asia (Mango 1993; Fidan 2010).

Apart from these so-called outside Turks, it took the Turkish state a while to recognize labour-migrant Turks as diaspora; for the authorities they were “solely Turks abroad, or, as used in the daily vernacular, expatriates” (Ünver 2013: 183). However, with time, the permanence of Turkish citizens abroad came to be accepted and in the 1980s the Turkish state started developing policies and legislation in order to preserve the ties between the Turkish diaspora and the homeland as well as their culture and identity (Ünver 2013: 184). This political, institutional and legislative evolution is covered extensively in this report. Up until the 2000s, Turkey’s public diplomacy abroad, if limited, was for the most part directed at these two groups – the outside Turks and the Turkish diaspora. Under the AKP this changed radically. Not only did the new government accelerate “the state’s engagement policies towards citizens living overseas” (Açcapar and Aksel 2017: 141) but it also gradually widened the scope of social/identity groups of interest abroad.

One of the institutions that the AKP government established was the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Kin Communities (YTB), an agency that aims “to establish a reliable and reputable Turkish diaspora with common reflexes with the ability to determine [participation] in socio-economic, cultural, and political fields in the host countries and on the global level to build an institutional infrastructure” (Ünver 2013: 186). As the first Chairman of YTB, Kemal Yurtnaç (2012: 7-8) explained:

> Aware of the responsibilities that come with inheriting a rich history and a distinguished civilization, Turkey constantly interacts with those communities with whom it shares a common cultural heritage and sentiment across the globe. The Presidency coordinates services provided to kin and related communities, while ensuring the efficiency and productivity of those services... The Presidency ascribes utmost importance to improving the economic, social and cultural standing of kin and related communities living in different parts of the world... In recent years Turkey’s ties with kin and related communities in the Balkans, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Middle East, and Africa have acquired new dimensions.

This approach was consistent with Turkey’s new foreign policy under the AKP and its ideological underpinnings. The AKP, its leaders and ideologues, like Erdoğan and Ahmet Davutoğlu, went beyond a mere diaspora policy or even pan-Turkism, adopting a version of pan-Islamism in
their foreign policy akin to that of the 19th-century Ottoman Empire (Baskan 2019: Ozkan 2014). In a highly controversial speech, Erdoğan stated the following (TCCB 2016):

> Our physical boundaries are different from the boundaries of our heart. We should differentiate between them. We of course show respect for physical boundaries; but we cannot draw boundaries to our heart, nor do we allow it. Some ask us, “why do you care about Iraq, why do you care about Syria.” They are asking, “why do you care about Georgia, Ukraine, Crimea, Azerbaijan, Karabakh, the Balkans, North Africa” […] None of the places for which they ask us ‘what business do you have here,’ are foreign to us. I am asking you Rize my dear bothers. Is it possible to separate Rize from Batumi? Or is it possible to think [of] Edirne apart from Thessaloniki or Kardzhali? How come you can regard Gaziantep and Aleppo, Mardin and al-Hasakah, or Siirt and Mosul as places that have nothing to do with each other? You see something from us in any Middle Eastern and North African country you stop by between Hatay and Morrocco. You definitely come across a trace of our ancestors at every step you take along the geography extending from Thrace to Eastern Europe.

In another speech, two years later, Erdoğan made a similar statement:

> From this magnificent place I personally want to congratulate my brothers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Albania, Macedonia, Serbia, Western Thrace, Crimea, Bulgaria and Romania. We send our greetings to all the victims and oppressed brothers of ours in Sarajevo, Skopje, Xanthi, Komotini, Kardzhali and Mostar. We share our cordiality with these brothers whose souls and eyes are turned to Turkey, for those who pray for the success of Turkey. Every time I say it – these cities are physically located in the borders of other countries, but they are part of our spiritual boundaries. The meaning of Turkey does not fit within 780,000 kilometers. One half of our hearts are in Istanbul, Diyarbakir, Trabzon, Antalya, Izmir, and the other half is in Aleppo, Kirkuk, Jerusalem, Sandzak and Bukhara (cited in Gotev 2018).

From this perspective, it is evident that Turkey’s new kinsmen and brothers (akraba topluluklar) include not only Turkish citizens or Turkic peoples/ethnic Turks abroad but also Muslims generally speaking, and not least those who live in the post-Ottoman space. As Wigner (2018: 121) argues:

> Turkish politicians [under the AKP] use metaphorical kinship – and kinship metaphors – to legitimize Turkey’s foreign policy. A key aspect of this is how the actors attempt to unmake ethnic boundaries between different Turkic-speakers and tying former Ottoman Muslims to Turkey by claims of brotherhood.

Within the same framework, the Diyanet (Turkey’s Directory of Religious Affairs) has been transformed from an ideological state apparatus that started “as a protector of the Turkish
state’s understanding of Islam and secularism” under Kemal, “into a promoter, with the task of spreading Turkish nationalism and Islamic moral values both inside and outside of Turkish borders” under the AKP (Öztürk 2016: 633-634). As such, the AKP’s new approach regarding diasporas and kin communities demonstrates a significant transformation in Turkish foreign policy and its objectives, the ideological framework of the Turkish government, and Turkish identity itself, issues that are further explored in the chapters of this report.

‘Homeland’ Interactions with Diaspora and Kin Communities
Regardless of pursued state policies or established notions, the dynamics of interaction between the homeland and the diaspora or kin communities abroad are complex; they vary and manifest in different policies and attitudes. These can be categorised respectively into the homeland and diaspora/kin community policies and/or attitudes.

Diasporas and kin communities are important to Turkey for a number of reasons: first because of their national or cultural affinities; second because of the instrumental role that they can have in its own policies abroad. For example, Shain and Barth (2003: 449) argue that “diasporas [and kin communities, we might add] may become the pretext for state-sponsored irredentism—the effort by a homeland government to ‘recover’ territory populated by ethnic kin in a nearby state.” In the same vein, Ho, Boyle and Yeoh (2015: 206-207) define diaspora strategies as “proactive efforts… to birth, incubate, fortify and better leverage the transfer of resources from diaspora communities to their homelands,” while adding that these relationships are usually instrumental and may not have the best interest of the diaspora at heart.

Furthermore, in the context of diaspora or kin diplomacy, such communities abroad “are being sought out and engaged as potential diplomatic actors to fulfil diplomacy’s core functions of communication, representation and negotiation” for the homeland (Ho and McConnell 2019: 235). In short, homelands or migrant-sending states often pursue policies with the aim of mobilizing diasporas and kin communities for ‘national agendas,’ which may include influencing the domestic or foreign policies of host countries for the homeland’s benefit (Ho and McConnell 2019: 239; see also, Shain and Barth 2003: 450).

Beyond being utilized and instrumentalised by their homelands, diasporas and kin communities have their own perceptions, attitudes and policies. They themselves are able to become active in the politics of the host country as identity groups and instrumentalise the support of their homeland to achieve their own political ends. They can function as bridges in the relationship between their homeland and host country, as well as “exert influence on homelands when the latter are ‘weak’” for their own benefit (Shain and Barth 2003: 450-451). In this sense, diaspora and kin communities can have a partner relationship, a utilitarian relationship or even a hostile relationship with the homeland (Lee and Ayhan 2015: 62-63; Baser and Swain 2009). What is more, these communities are not monolithic and therefore different ideological and political currents can be found within them, often reflecting the politics of their homelands.
The chapters in this report take under consideration these complex aspects of diaspora and kin politics with respect to the case of Turkey and its diaspora-kin policy, with examples from Europe, the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean.

The Structure of the Report
The report is organized in two parts: one on Europe and one on the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean region - although there is some overlap between these areas. The first part includes three case studies from Europe: Bulgaria, Germany and Bosnia. In Chapter 2, Ahmet Erdi Öztürk looks at Turkey's relations with Bulgaria from a historical and contemporary perspective and through the lens of Bulgaria's Muslims and their role in or attitudes towards Turkish foreign policy. He argues that Turkish foreign policy under the AKP has been more actively instrumentalizing religion, an approach that creates a certain polarisation among Bulgarian Muslims. Therefore, according to Öztürk, Turkey’s soft power projection abroad—and not least among diaspora or kin communities—has not been particularly successful.

In Chapter 3, Bahar Baser and Ahmet Erdi Öztürk scrutinize the case of Turkey’s policy vis-à-vis its diaspora in Germany and suggest that Ankara’s “diaspora governance policy is a clear example of how diaspora engagement policies can bump into an invisible red line in host countries,” thus creating a number of problems. Baser and Öztürk explain how the synthesis of the Turkish diaspora in Germany has been undergoing changes over the past years and has been affected by political developments – and particularly the authoritarian turn – in Turkey. Furthermore, based on the Germany case, they argue that beyond certain benefits, diaspora engagement policies can “favour certain segments in the diaspora while disfavouring others.” As such, homeland policies vis-à-vis diaspora communities can have a great impact on the latter’s everyday life.

The next chapter, written by David Henig, documents how Turkey’s kin community foreign policy unfolds in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), and suggests that the dynamics of the BiH-Turkey relations need to be approached as an ongoing self/othering relationship. Henig offers a bottom-up perspective to trace how the local actors and communities articulate, respond and negotiate Turkey’s presence; to this end he examines the domains of economy, cultural heritage and education. The author argues that Turkey’s activities in these domains create frictions, foster critical reception and open a new field of opportunities, all of which allow the local actors to pursue their own goals beyond the realm of kin community policies and Turkey’s orbit of influence.

In Chapter 5, the first chapter of Part II, Nikos Christofis examines the case of Greece’s Muslim minority, and particularly the community in Western Thrace. Christofis provides a historical background to the Muslim minority in Greece since the early 20th century and then focuses on the 2000s and the AKP governance period. Through Turkish policies and statements by Turkish officials he demonstrates the AKP’s increased interest in and engagement with the Muslim minority in Greece, often at the expense of its relations with the Greek government.
However, Christofis suggests, Turkey seems to care enough about good (economic) relations with Greece and its Muslim minority that it might not be willing to compromise them for a more controlling relationship with that particular kin community.

Mete Hatay and Rebecca Bryant’s chapter focuses on Turkey’s kin politics vis-à-vis the Turkish-Cypriot community. More specifically, the authors provide a broad outline of the ways in which Turkish state attitudes towards Cyprus and Turkish Cypriots have changed over time, and the policy implications of such attitude changes. As Hatay and Bryant argue, for Turkey Cyprus has always stood somewhere between the ‘domestic’ and the ‘foreign,’ having influence in both realms of policy. With the AKP coming to power this narrative began to break down without, however, being fully replaced. What this change did create were increasing tensions between Turkish-Cypriots and Turkey as well as between Turkish Cypriots and Turkish nationals.

Chapter 7 concludes the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East case studies with Nur Köprülü’s take on Turkey’s diaspora/kin policy with regard to Palestine, which highlights the ‘new’ ideological and Islamist discourse in Turkey’s ‘new’ national identity and foreign policymaking. Köprülü argues that the AKP government perceives the Palestinians as a kin community – as a part of the global Muslim community – and sees them as central in rebuilding Turkey’s new diaspora and kin-community policy overseas. Furthermore, she demonstrates that the Palestinians and Palestine more broadly are key to Ankara’s regional foreign policy.

The volume ends with Chapter 8, namely the editors’ conclusions that attempt to summarize Turkey’s diaspora and kin politics taking into account the various case studies and the transformation of Turkish foreign policy more generally. Lastly, the authors comment on the future prospects of Turkey’s influence abroad through kin communities in light of the new political-ideological shifts within Turkey and within the diaspora and kin communities respectively.

References


