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Turkey's *Soft Power* towards Serbia: Implications for the Security and Stability in the Region

Turecka *soft power* wobec Serbii. Wpływ na bezpieczeństwo i stabilność w regionie

• Abstract •

The purpose of this article is to analyze Turkish soft power towards Serbia in the 21st century. From a methodological point of view, this article is based on quantitative and qualitative research methods. In addition, the study uses content analysis, including newspaper articles, archival documents and other statements by individual politicians and intellectuals. The results of this research indicate that Turkey has established several public diplomacy institutions to influence Serbian public opinion, such as the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), Diyanet, and the Yunus Emre Institute (YEI). Turkey has strengthened its influence in Serbia and other Balkan countries through their activities. It has significantly improved the image of Turkey and Turks in Serbia. It has also increased the popularity of the Turkish president in the region. On the other hand, such a policy strengthens stability in the Balkans and reduces conflicts between Serbs and Muslims in the Balkans, which is important for regional security.

• Abstrakt •

Celem artykułu jest analiza tureckiej *soft power* wobec Serbii w XXI wieku. Z metodologicznego punktu widzenia niniejszy artykuł opiera się na ilościowych i jakościowych metodach badawczych. W badaniu wykorzystano analizę treści, w tym artykuły prasowe, dokumenty archiwalne i wypowiedzi poszczególnych polityków i intelektualistów. Wyniki tych badań wskazują, że Turcja utworzyła kilka instytucji dyplomacji publicznej w celu wywierania wpływu na serbską opinię publiczną, takich jak Turecka Agencja Współpracy i Koordynacji (TIKA), Diyanet i Instytut Yunus Emre (YEI). Dzięki ich działalności Turcja wzmocniła swoje wpływy w Serbii i innych krajach bałkańskich. Znacząco poprawiło to wizerunek Turcji i Turków w Serbii, a także zwiększyło popularność tureckiego prezydenta w regionie. Z drugiej strony polityka ta wzmacnia stabilność sytuacji na Bałkanach i zmniejsza konflikty między Serbami i muzułmanami, co jest ważne z punktu widzenia bezpieczeństwa regionalnego.

Keywords: soft power; regional security; Serbia; Turkey; TIKA; Diyanet; Yunus Emre Institute

Słowa kluczowe: *soft power*; bezpieczeństwo regionalne; Serbia; Turcja; TIKA; Diyanet; Instytut Yunus Emre

Introduction

From Cold War-era propaganda to current-day pop culture, countries use soft power to influence others without coercion. During the Cold War, the USA and Russia had a competition first on hard power such as nuclear power, heavy weapons, and alliances. After 1970, the meaning of *power* emerged in different ways according to the activities of the USA and Russia. Moreover, they tried different ways and factors to compete in fields such as public opinion, education, science, society, and political discourse by discovering that hard power is insufficient to gain predominance in current international relations and systems. At this time, new actors such as NGOs, multi-national companies, agreements, and transnational organizations started to occur as global players. The current international system shows that new actors have the power to change or challenge something against states such as human rights, environmental issues, globalization, social media, etc. So, the governments have started to use all those actors as an instrument of their foreign policy (Paçaoğlu, 2020, p. 39). If *power* is the ability to affect others to get the outcomes one prefers, and that can be accomplished by coercion, payment, or attraction and persuasion, *soft power* is the ability to obtain preferred outcomes by attraction rather than coercion or payment (Nye, 2017).

Different scholars have discussed many assumptions about introducing the new term that arose in that period. As one of the first, Joseph Nye tries to explain it in the book *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* in 1990. The coined term “soft power” was officially used for the first time. He used this expression to describe a country that influences another country through culture and values in society (Nye, 2005). Nye describes soft power as “to convince the other side as to what one side wants to do” (Nye, 2008, p. 94). A government that wants to achieve its goal in world policy should look attractive to the countries which will be eager to follow it. Soft power attempts to influence indirectly by creating a desire for the power holder’s goals, whereas hard power relies on coercion and military power to achieve its objectives. Nye highlighted three crucial aspects to be taken under consideration in the process of improvement of soft power, such as (1) the use of peaceful ways to provide peace and stability, (2) the use of references to the culture and tradition to make the message more familiar, and (3) the use of media

and technology in public diplomacy. Soft power implementation into diplomacy and foreign policy is regarded as the most efficient way to build influence without using military force and long-term benefits (Nye, 2017). It creates attraction and encompasses nearly everything other than economic and military power (Cooper, 2004), based on the ability to convince other countries to follow another one by using a collaborative narrative (Gilboa, 2008, p. 60; Wilson, 2008). Moreover, it includes education, culture, tradition, art, and national and international signs, as well as extending the security of own good prestige by damaging others' prestige (Lee, 2019, p. 210).

Turkey started to use actively "public diplomacy" in foreign policy when the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power. Turkish decision-makers mainly focus on the region where Muslims and Turks, in particular, live. It refers primarily to post-Ottoman countries, communities of Turkish origin and related communities such as Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, etc. Turkey pays attention to the Balkan region due to having a common history, culture, and neighbourhood. Internal war in Balkan gives Turkey soft power in the region by being a member of NATO, hosting the people from the region, and being a voice of Balkan Muslims in the international environment. However, Turkey has no huge influence like the EU or Germany in the region because of economic instability (Paçaoğlu, 2020, p. 44). Turkey has several institutions which are focused on improving soft power in other countries in different ways such as art, movies, music, sports, education, and religious issues. The institutions are called Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), Yunus Emre Institution (YEI), Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB), and Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyamet).

The aim of this article is to examine Turkish soft power in Serbia. For this purpose, entities such as Diyanet, YEI and TIKA are analyzed. Moreover, the authors try to determine how the activities of these institutions affect Turkey's image in the country and reflect on the security of the Muslim community in Serbia. The article is divided into four parts. In the first part, the authors analyze the historical background of Turkey-Serbia relations. In the second, they focus on the policies of the Diyanet religious organization in Serbia. In the next section, the authors will present the activities of YEI in Serbia. Finally, the role played by the government organization TIKA will be presented.

Methodology

The methodology enables the identification of various ways to conduct research and to draw a roadmap for reaching scientific judgments. In this research, a mixed research method consisting of qualitative and quantitative research was implemented. In the qualitative research method, thematic, documents, and content analysis were used. With these methods, current data were searched, and also survey was used to reveal how soft power tools are used by Turkey in Serbia and to see how it affects the prejudices and perceptions of Turks. This study involved conducting a literature review focused on the subject matter and analyzing relevant articles and government documents. The collected data used in this study are limited to the Turkish and English languages. As a result, this method is aimed to reveal how successful Turkey is in the public diplomacy policies that it tries to implement for Serbia.

Literature review

The literature selected for the theoretical section was carefully and extensively selected and subsequently analyzed in terms of the article's topic. The article contains not only scientific texts from books and magazines but also up-to-date online articles that are relevant to the present times. The literature scanned the years between 2002 and 2022. In Esra Erguvan's (2010, pp. 7–150) comprehensive examination, a broad overview is given of TİKA,¹ one of Turkey's soft power tools, and its overall impact on Turkish soft power is explored. Fatma A. Kelkitli (2013) examines the Turkish foreign policy during the AKP period² specifically focusing on the Western Balkans. The study explores the policies implemented and analyzes the impact of the guiding principles that shape Turkey's approach to the Western Balkans within its overall foreign policy framework. Turkish scientist Kadir Sancak (2016) investigated how Turkey contributed to its soft power in the Balkans, Central Asia, and the Middle East in the popular culture that emerged today, along with the culture from the Ottoman tradition. Other Turkish authors, Hülya Eşki Uğuz and Rukiye Saygılı (2017), centered their study on the concepts of public diplomacy and soft power within the context of the Balkans. Their focus lies on highlighting the influence of Turkish soft power in the region, analyzing it within the framework of these terms. Erman Akıllı and Bengü Belkis Çelenk (2019) in their article pay attention to the Syrian crisis in

¹ TİKA: Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency.

² AKP period started by party's coming to power in 2002 by winning the elections.

the context of nation branding on Turkish foreign policy in the framework of TIKA's soft power. Talha Yavuz and Şirin Elcim (2020) conduct a study that analyzes the utilization of soft power tools in Serbia through Turkish public diplomacy from 2002 to 2019. The article focuses on the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency, the Yunus Emre Institution, and the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities as key components of Turkey's soft power strategy. Miloš Todorović (2021) examines the growing influence of soft power through the activities of TIKA and analyzes the impact of TIKA's restoration efforts in the Balkans, Asia, and the Caucasus region. Limited research has been conducted on Serbia in the context of studies. Furthermore, numerous articles delve into Turkey's utilization of soft power in the Balkans, but the methods employed by Turkey for soft power have diversified over time. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that many studies solely focus on the TIKA institution. The analyzed articles indicate a tendency towards general regional studies, leading to the oversight of country-specific points.

Serbian-Turkish relations in historical perspective

Relations between Serbia and Turkey have never been easy. Serbian lands were under Ottoman control for almost 500 years. During this period, they underwent a process of Islamization. As a result of it, the number of mosques in Serbia grew with a number of Muslim populations. In the 18th century, according to a famous Ottoman writer Evliya Çelebi, there were 273 mosques (Fajić, 1995, pp. 18–19). The development of the Islamic community in Serbia did not, at the same time, mean that the Ottoman authorities restricted the religious life of Serbian Orthodox. As anthropologist Milica Bakić-Hayden rightly noted, “[...] when the Ottomans came to Europe, their state was much more tolerant towards Christianity than western Christians were towards one another during the Reformation and the 17th century” (Bakic-Hayden, 2011, p. 9).

During the First and the Second Serbian Uprising (1804 and 1814–1816), a Serbian principality was formed which was partially independent from the Porte. In the beginning, Serbian authorities tolerated the Muslim community. For example, in 1818 at the initiative of Prince Miloš, Dervish Bey's minaret in Jagodina was restored. However, during the period of strengthening the Serbian State and its growing independence from the Porte, the attitude toward the Muslims and their heritage changed. In 1830 the sultan, under strong pressure from the prince, gave an order that all the Muslims were to leave the country by the end of the year and the Turks were allowed to stay in garrisons, among other places in

Belgrade as well. It soon, however, proved that the time defined for moving out was too short and in 1833 it was decided to prolong the period of displacement for another five years. After this period expired, several thousands of Muslims remained in Belgrade.

The next attempt to displace the Muslims from Serbia occurred during the rule of the second government of Prince Miloš and his son Mihailo Obrenović (1858–1867). On June 3, 1861, there were rumors about a murder of a Serbian boy by the Turkish army. The news radicalized the Christian population and caused anti-Turkish demonstrations. The local Muslims hid in fortresses guarded by the Ottoman army. To solve the problem, a conference in Istanbul suburb Kanlıdži was organized in 1862. It was then decided that all the Muslims apart from Muslim Gypsies had to leave Serbia and that all the mosques had to be destroyed. The destruction of the Turkish fortress in Belgrade occurred during the next 5 years. After that decision, only a small Islamic community remained in Belgrade. It is estimated that in 1874 it was reduced to 36 people. Serbian authorities had a more tolerant policy towards them. Obrenović ordered that the only remaining mosque in Belgrade, Bajrakli mosque, was restored especially for them in 1867. However, the Minister of Education gave an order that the mosque had to be closed due to Muslims leaving Belgrade during the Turkish-Serbian war (1876–1877). Two years later, when the Muslims came back, Bajrakli mosque was reopened and in 1893 it was restored again by Aleksandar Obrenović (Bakić-Hayden, 2011).

The Balkan wars waged by Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Montenegro against the Ottoman Empire were also significant in relations between the Ottomans and Serbia. As a result, in 1912, the division of Novopazarski Sandžak (an area of about 8,500 square kilometers) took place. Cities such as Novi Pazar, Sjenica, Priboj, Prijepolje and Tuzin were annexed to Serbia, while Pljevlja, Bijelo Polje, Berane and Rožaj were annexed to Montenegro (1913). The majority of the area was inhabited by Muslims (Kujawa, 2020, p. 114). After the First War, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, which included Serbia and the Turkish Republic, made efforts to normalize bilateral relations. In 1934, Greece, Turkey, Romania and Yugoslavia signed the Balkan Pact, which aimed to maintain the geopolitical status quo in the region after WWI. The signatories also agreed to suspend all disputed territorial claims against each other and their immediate neighbours. Four years later, Turkey and Yugoslavia signed an agreement to resettle Muslims from Yugoslavia to Turkey (mainly Albanians and Bosnians) between 1938 and 1952.

The resettlement of Yugoslav Muslims to Turkey was supposed to solve both countries' problems. For Yugoslavia, the population exchanges were beneficial because they perceived Muslim minorities as a "V Column". For the young Turkish

state, on the other hand, the refugees were seen as an injection of fresh blood. First, immigrants from the region (primarily “Turks” from Macedonia, and Western Thrace) were especially favoured because they were Sunni. Second, they were much more economically developed than Anatolian peasants. Third, much of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s republic, as well as some of the bureaucratic, military and legislative elite in the republic, were of Balkan origin. Fourth, immigrants from the Balkans were able to settle areas (especially in Thrace) depopulated by the expulsion of Jews and Armenians. In this way, they reinforced the Turkishness of these areas (Šeta, 1999, p. 461).

After World War II, communist Yugoslavia was established, and Turkey became associated with Western countries. However, this did not affect the deterioration of relations between the countries. The communist government of Yugoslavia, headed by Josip Broz Tito, was anxious to maintain close relations with countries inhabited by Muslims. To strengthen the positive image of his country in this part of the world, he improved conditions for the Muslim community (*Svečano...*, 1965, pp. 51–58). In the 1960s, capital of Yugoslavia became the center of a sudden development of Islamic culture. At Belgrade University, the Institute of Oriental Studies and Oriental Philology in Iranian, Arabic and Turkish language was opened. Besides, Muslim monthlies *Preporod* [Rebirth] and *Glasnik* [Messenger] were published in Belgrade. Such development of the Islamic community made Muslim spiritual leaders very glad, so they expressed their affinity towards Communist authorities, particularly Josip Broz Tito. On the opening of restored mosques, they greeted him with expressions of gratitude: “Let our dear leader the Marshal of Yugoslavia Josip Broz Tito live. [...] Let the brotherhood and unity among our people live” (*Svečano...*, 1965, pp. 39–40).

Supported by the Communists, the Islamic community had the ambition to grow. In 1964, during the meeting of the Supreme Council of the Islamic religious community in SFRY held in Belgrade, Islamic leaders started talking about Slavic Muslims from Turkey, who had left Serbia during the 1930s. They concluded that: “Apart from the mentioned issues, the issue of the returnees from Turkey ought to be solved in a more organized and efficient manner. Regarding this, the conclusions ought to be made consistently as to the fact when the moving out was at its highest rate. Difficulties that still appear upon requests for a return from Turkey ought to be eliminated more quickly. It is to be defined what the Republic and the Federation are supposed to do so that the process of returning the Muslims from Turkey is carried out under the same conditions as for all other returnees regardless of national identity and the country which they are coming from. Local councils could propose concrete measures to the Republic and the Federation” (*Svečano...*,

1965, pp. 39–40). The policy of the Communist authorities towards the Islamic community was led by interest. By supporting the Muslim community, they wanted to improve the reputation of Yugoslavia in the international arena, particularly with rich Islamic states which would like to invest in the development of the country. To reach these goals, they were supported by the Belgrade Mosque as well, as it was the first place that foreign delegations of Muslim countries would visit (*Delagacija...*, 1969, pp. 653–655; *Alžirska...*, 1969, pp. 516–522; *Saopštenje...*, 1990, p. 117; *Zaključci...*, 1989, p. 110; *Izveštaj...*, 1990, pp. 129–130; *Treće...*, 1988, p. 3).

In Turkey, on the other hand, secular elites' interest in the fate of Muslims in communist Yugoslavia was negligible. However, after Turgut Özal came to power in 1983, there was a change in Turkey's foreign policy vectors. He wanted to transform Turkey into one of the world's leading powers. Özal envisioned Turkey as a key player in the geopolitics of the Balkan–Caucasus axis and Russia and the Black Sea region. To achieve this goal, Özal decided to return to roots. Unlike the Kemalist establishment, he stopped treating the Ottoman past as the Dark Ages. Özal wanted to use its cultural and historical heritage to increase its influence in the region and strengthen its economic and political relations with the countries of the region. The first step in this direction was the establishment of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC), led by Turkey and the Russian Federation, bringing together all the countries of the Balkans and the Caucasus, which was to serve as a model for a multilateral political and economic initiative. Turkey under Özal leadership had more ambitions than just reinforced relations with the Black Sea countries. It pursued a multi-track policy. At the same time, Özal opened Turkey to the countries of the Middle East, as well as became a close ally of the West. During his rule, he also played a key role in Turkey's efforts to join the European Economic Community in 1987. He was seen internationally as a close ally of the United States and Germany.

However, the Turkish prime minister's plans for regional cooperation were thwarted by the war in the former Yugoslavia. Initially, Turkey resisted any support for the breakup of the former Yugoslavia for fear of a similar situation in the south-east, where pro-Kurdish troops were growing in strength. It was only after seeing Western support for the newly formed states in the Balkans and seeing the brutality of the regime of Slobodan Milošević's nationalist government that Turkey decided to support the independence of the former Yugoslav republics. Since then, Turkey's goal has been to support Bosnia internationally so that intervention would occur and bloodshed would stop. Thanks to Turkey's intercession, a Contact Group for Bosnia and Herzegovina was established at the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) meeting in Istanbul in June 1992. It consisted of a delegate from the Secretary

General of the OIC and representatives from Turkey, Iran, Egypt, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, and Malaysia, which represented the European Union (Bougarel & Clayer, 2001, p. 402). Turkey has made attempts to help Bosnian Muslims in the face of Serbian aggression. To this end, Ankara opened the arms embargo for Bosnia and Herzegovina for discussion. Turkey demanded the lifting of the embargo or its equal implementation. In addition, Turkey kept its request to join the UN armed forces on the agenda. In the end, the result desired by Turkey was achieved. First, twelve Turkish warplanes joined the UN force. Then Ankara was invited to a meeting on military contributions to the UN peacekeeping force in Bosnia and Herzegovina on March 8, 1994. Shortly thereafter, on March 23, 1994, the UN Secretary General invited Turkey to send troops to Bosnia and Herzegovina. A Turkish military contingent of about 1,500 was deployed to the Zenica area of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 1995, after the UN transferred its military responsibilities in Bosnia and Herzegovina to NATO, the Turkish contingent continued to serve under IFOR (Implementation Force).

Another crisis in relations between Serbia and Turkey occurred during the Kosovo conflict in 1999. Turkey, as a NATO member, supported the alliance's intervention to protect Kosovar Albanians from Serbian forces. In particular, it made available its aircraft, military personnel and the Incirlik air base in southern Turkey, which was one of the main bases used by NATO forces during Operation Allied Force. During the operation, NATO aircraft took off and carried out bombing raids on military targets in Serbia. In addition, Turkey sent a submarine to patrol the Adriatic Sea to monitor the situation and support Allied operations. Despite these actions, Turkey did not sever diplomatic relations with Serbia. Above all, it sought to maintain good political relations with Belgrade and bring about a peaceful solution to the Kosovo crisis. The adoption of such foreign policy vectors was, on the one hand, due to the need to protect the Muslim community in Kosovo, and on the other hand, Serbia was one of the intermediate transit countries for Turkish goods to Europe. Escalation of this conflict to other countries could lead to a break in the supply chain and thus cause problems for the Turkish economy. The breakthrough in Serb-Turkish relations occurred after the pro-Islamic Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power. Since then, it has begun the process of building close relations with the Balkan states. To achieve this goal, Turkey promoted soft power. One of the main architects of this policy was the foreign minister of Turkey, Ahmet Davutoğlu. His policy of "zero problems with our neighbours" has led to establishing relationships with neighbouring countries on the principles of peace and mutual security. He also believes that all obstacles that hinder the economic and cultural integration of the region should be removed. Moreover, Davutoğlu expresses the belief that Turkey is

on the road to becoming a regional superpower. Deep historical links and geographic proximity with Arabs, Kurds, Persians, Central Asia, the Balkans and the Caucasus help Turkey carry out this task.

According to Davutoğlu's opponents, what is hidden behind the idea of "zero problems with neighbours" is Turkish "neo-ottomans". They believe that Turkey seeks this as a way to restore its influence from the times of the Ottoman Empire. They also argue that bilateral agreements signed by Turkey and Arab countries on free trade and the abolition of visa requirements are the beginning of the new "Union of Turkey". In response, Davutoğlu claims that Turkey's key priority remains integration with the EU. However, referring to the Ottoman tradition, he believes that the EU cannot and should not impede Turkey's relations with its neighbours, because Turks have had close trade relations with Arabs since long before the birth of the idea of a united Europe. In addition, Davutoğlu openly acknowledges that he had taken inspiration for his concept from the doctrine of the founder of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, summarized as "Peace in the Homeland, Peace in the World", and from the philosophy of Muhammed Celeddin-i Rumi. The latter was the founder of the Mevlevi Order, a great mystic and one of the most famous Sufi poets. His tomb, to which thousands of pilgrims come every year, is located in Konya, where Rumi spent most of his life. Davutoğlu, who comes from the same city, says that his message of peace, dialogue, love of God, human beings, respect for Islam, tolerance of other religions (mono and polytheistic) and respect for cultural diversity is reflected in Turkey's foreign policy.

***Soft power* tools and methods: analysis of three chosen Turkish soft power institutions**

1. Diyanet

One of the most important organizations to play a key role in the process of reinforcing the Turkish position was the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet). This organization was founded in 1924 by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic. Under Erdoğan and his most conservative Islamist AKP government, the institution's importance has grown significantly. Headquartered in Ankara, the organization has some 120,000 employees who, among other things, are responsible for the content of weekly Friday prayers in Turkey's 85,000 mosques. With an annual budget of more than 1 billion euros (\$1.17 billion), Diyanet has more money at its disposal than Turkey's Ministry of Interior and Foreign Affairs. It currently has more than 100,000 employees, serving nearly 80,000 mosques

with imams, almost all of whom are now graduates of the country's 27 theological faculties. In addition, it has a strong influence in Europe. Through its foundations, such as Germany's DITIB (Türkisch-Islamische Union der Anstalt für Religion, Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs), Diyanet operates nearly 1,000 mosques in Germany alone and many more in other European Muslim countries. Considering the fact that nearly 70 per cent of Muslims in Germany regularly attend Diyanet mosques, it can be argued that Turkey's Diyanet is a more significant religious provider, even if it is not involved in high-level debates about "European Islam". In his religious views, Diyanet represents the moderate Hanafi school. However, in recent years it has increasingly succumbed to conservative influences. According to many observers, after the pro-Islamic AKP party came to power in 2002, the organization changed its character. It promotes conservative lifestyles and supports Turkey's interests in the world. After the Turkish army invaded northern Syria, the head of the Diyanet called on the faithful to pray for Turkey's victory. Diyanet leaders also celebrated Azerbaijan's victory in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020. In turn, they refused to participate in a protest organized by Muslim associations in Cologne against Islamic terror. The rise of conservative influence is also evidenced by the decision of the board of the Diyanet National Youth Organization to resign, accusing the association of suppressing any liberalizing tendencies (Kujawa, 2021, pp. 149–159; Öktem, 2010, p. 32).

In the Balkans, Diyanet began its activities in the 1990s. The most obvious contribution to the region has been its role as a facilitator of the reconstruction and construction of mosques (Öktem, 2010, p. 32). In addition, it is organizing the hajj, providing scholarships to students to study in religious high schools, in faculties of theology and post-doctoral courses. It also provides professional training for imams, translating the Quran into the languages of the host countries, organizing educational programs for religious personnel, and publication of books. Diyanet focuses on rebuilding Ottoman heritage in all countries of the Balkan.

In Serbia, Diyanet not only promotes the country's Muslim heritage but above all has played the role of mediator between the Muslim religious communities: Islamic Community of Serbia (Islamska zajednica Srbije – IZS) in the center in Belgrade and Islamic Community in Serbia (Islamska zajednica u Srbiji – IZuS) in the center in Novi Pazar, which are in dispute with each other. Both consider themselves legal representatives of Muslims living in Serbia. To solve this dualist structure, Serbian President Boris Tadić asked for help from Turkey to end this division in 2009. This conciliation process is called by the public a Turkish enterprise. After this situation, Diyanet was given permission to draft an agreement for reconciliation. The process has taken 2 years. The solution prepared by Diyanet was to step down both heads

of communities and make them united in one. The main center was to be located in Novi Pazar. That reconciliation was rejected by the IZS. Turkish Diyanet tried to unite the two communities again in 2013, but both groups refused to. As a result, Diyanet started to support a group of imams that was independent of both the IZS and IZuS. This support caused a new crisis among Sarajevo, Belgrade, and Ankara in the region. The head of the IZuS blamed Ankara for trying to create a “new Islamic community” devoted to Turkey. This situation spoiled Turkish relations with Sarajevo and Novi Pazar. As a result of it, Diyanet recognizes and supports only the IZS which is close to government in Serbia. That decision broke the trust of Diyanet in the Sandžak region and closed some future opportunities for Ankara (Muhasilović, 2018, p. 77).

2. Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA)

Another key institution that promoted Turkish interests in Serbia was the International Technical Agency of the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA). Its establishment took place in 1992. In the beginning, it was under the direct control of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In 1999, TIKa came under the control of the head of the government. Since Erdoğan's party came to power, TIKa's role has grown significantly. TIKa's budget between 2003 and 2013 grew five times. The purpose of the organization was to promote Ankara's influence and presence in strategic regions through socio-cultural, economic, and humanitarian projects. TIKa has funded various projects related to education, health, infrastructure, reconstruction, culture, and humanitarian assistance around the world. The scale of projects is wide from work against harelip syndrome in Uzbekistan to early pregnancy problems in the African continent. Also, TIKa is building the Somali parliament building, along with a military base where the Turkish military will train Somalian security forces against terror.

TIKA is an obvious institution in the Balkan region which has many centers in it. It started its activities in 2007 by signing the Belgrade Program Coordination Office Protocol (PKO). TIKa continues its activities in education, health, agriculture, animal husbandry, infrastructure, etc., in Serbia. TIKa has done over 225 projects from 1992 to 2017 (TIKA Balkans, 2018, p. 63). However, it should be noted that the main beneficiaries of these activities are mainly Muslims of Serbia. In particular, investments are being made in the Sandžak region, a region with a Muslim population. Table 1 presents the main TIKa activities starting from 2007 till 2021.

Table 1. Main TIKa Activities in the Years 2007–2021

Year	Activity	Type of engagement
2007	opening computer and foreign language courses in Preševo	Education
2008	building a primary school and sports center in Novi Bazaar	Education
2009	restoration at Serbia/Tutin Bosnian science institution and supporting with equipment technical equipment in Turkish class at Belgrade University afforestation activities in Nova Bazaar	Culture/ historical heritage/ education
2010	restoration activities of the Belgrade Sheikh Mustafa Mausoleum renovation and equipping of the newly built building for Novi Pazar State University	Religious/ education
2011	medical supplies at Arencelovats State Hospital and Belgrade Dr. Dragica Mišović hydromassage room and equipment such as physical therapy devices in Sremčica disabled dormitory	Medical care
2012	construction of schools in the villages of Starčeviče, Dobrinja, and Naboye printing of Ottoman records within the Novi Bazaar Russian Archive Directorate provision of 7 hoeing machines to Priboy Municipality 100 milking machines to the Peshter region renovation of New Varoš Technical High School and Niš University Faculty of Economics Auditorium	Education/ culture/ historical heritage/ agriculture
2013	equipment to the Sandžak Association for the Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms material support to the Bosniak National Council ³ 40,000 raspberry roots to 20 farms in Arilye Municipality laparoscopy device to Priyepolye Hospital, portable microscope to Subotitsa Hospital greenhouse procurement activities carried out for the municipalities of Kuršumliya, Priboy, Priyepolye, Rashka, and the Novi Pazar Agricultural Union	Human rights/ agriculture/ medical care
2014	installation of a heating system in Bogatić School, improvement of interior and exterior facades construction of Novi Bazaar Rashka Bridge 20-ton capacity cold storage to Kuchevo Municipality 40 milking machines to Brus Municipality	Education/ infrastructure/ agri- culture
2015	phacoemulsification devices to the Ophthalmology Clinic of Zvezdara Hospital new bridge to Bračin village of Razany Municipality greenhouse to the municipalities of Nova Varoš, Tutin, Bujanovac, and Ljuboviya	Medical care/ infrastructure/ agri- culture
2016	bee-hive support and beekeeping training to 60 beekeepers from the municipalities of Novi Pazar and Tutin construction of Vrbas Friendship Park for disabled children rooftop renovation support and equipment for King Petar I Elementary School	Agriculture/ education

³ The Bosniak National Council is a political party representing the interests of the Muslim community in Serbia. It was founded in 1991 by the Muslim leader of Sandžak, Suleiman Ugljanin.

Year	Activity	Type of engagement
2017	renovation of the Gynecology and Obstetrics Department of Serbia-Novi Bazaar State Hospital	Medical care
2018	modernization of the Supreme Court Building and restoration of the Sokollu Mehmet Pasha Fountain	Historical heritage
2019	restoring the Syenitsa Valide Sultan Mosque and restoring the Ram Fortress	Religious
2020	an education set consisting of 11 books was provided to 1670 students to support education in the mother tongue of the Bosnian minority in the Sandžak region	Education
2021	waste collection system, one garbage truck and three containers were provided in Bilaç village	Agriculture

Source: TIKa, Faaliyet Raporları (2007–2019; 2020–2021).

As shown above, TIKa has been continuing its events in different fields. Mostly, it takes responsibility for the renovation and restoration of Ottoman heritage. With this purpose, it has done many projects such as restoration activities of the Belgrade Sheikh Mustafa Mausoleum, restoration of the Sokollu Mehmet Pasha Fountain, restoration of the Syenitsa Valide Sultan Mosque, and the Ram Fortress. TIKa is also paying attention to humanitarian activities in a region inhabited mostly by Muslims (an area called Sandžak). Also in education, TIKa has done many projects to help Muslim students and for better education such as opening computer and foreign language courses in Preševo, building a primary school and sports center in Novi Bazaar, providing technical equipment in Turkish classes at Belgrade University, providing medical supplies at Arencelovats State Hospital and Belgrade Dr. Dragica Mišević, sending an education set consisting of 11 books that was provided to 1670 students.

TIKa also had projects about social aid such as making a hydromassage room and providing necessary equipment (physical therapy device in Sremčica disabled dormitory), provision of 7 hoeing machines to Priboy Municipality, 100 milking machines to Peshter region, providing equipment to the Sandžak Association for the Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms, material support to the Bosniak National Council, giving 40,000 raspberry roots to twenty farms to support Arilye Municipality, laparoscopy device to Priyepolye Hospital, portable microscope to Subotitsa Hospital, greenhouse procurement activities were carried out for the municipalities of Kuršumliya, Priboy, Priyepolye, Rashka, and the Novi Pazar Agricultural Union, supply of 20-ton capacity cold storage to Kucevo Municipality,

supply of milking machines to Brus Municipality, supply of greenhouse to the municipalities of Nova Varoš, Tutin, Bujanovac and Ljuboviya, a waste collection system was established, and one garbage truck and three containers were provided in Bilaç village.

3. Yunus Emre Institute (YEI)

The third institution that played an important role in maintaining close relations between Turkey and Serbia was the Yunus Emre Institute. This organization introduces Turkish culture, language, art, and history all over the world. It started to provide various activities in 2009. It is the first center established in Bosnia. Currently, it has 83 cultural centers from Asia to Africa. At the opening ceremony of this institution, Ahmet Davutoğlu⁴ said that “it is not a coincidence that we open the first center in Balkan. That is a strategic decision in which we think carefully about where to open first” (Bilkan, 2009, p. 3). It shows that YEI is one of the actors which plays a critical role in increasing Turkish soft power and influence in the region.

The purposes of Yunus Emre institution are to teach the Turkish language and provide events related to culture, history, and art in the region. Moreover, YEI collaborated with many universities to open the Turology department. In many countries, it has cultural centers to continue its events by introducing Turkish art, cuisine, culture, and history through workshops, exhibitions, and competitions. Besides that, the economy is one of the keys to making its activities sustainable, so Turkey is not able to race with other actors in the region. This is not enough for the YEI institution to be considered on an equal footing with the TIKA institution in the region. Table 2 presents the selected activities of YEI in Serbia in the years 2014–2021.

Table 2. Selected Activities of YEI in Serbia in the Years 2014–2021

Year	Activity	Type of engagement
2014	the revival of Traditional Turkish Handicrafts, summer schools and courses, overseas book sales, and library projects (8.251,04 TL)	Education
2015	an agreement to open a Turcology department in two universities in Serbia (Novi Sad University and Belgrade University); (844.605,82 TL)	Education
2016	Turkey-Serbia Intercultural Art Dialogues Project; symposiums on Serbian history at Belgrade Yunus Emre Institute; the University of Novi Sad has signed the Turkology protocol	Education

⁴ The Foreign Minister of Turkey in that period.

Year	Activity	Type of engagement
2017	YEI arranged many events related to art, history, and culture, such as: “The Cities of Serbia in Ottoman Period” seminars; “Modern Turkey, Balkans, and Europe” conferences; “Stories from Turkish Literature” translation workshop; “Blue-Red Istanbul” painting exhibition by Duygu Serin; “Ottoman Empire in the Context of Balkan-Venice Relations” international symposium; “Balkan Melodies from Istanbul to Belgrade” by Nina Strugar; “Istanbul from My Window” painting exhibition by Željka Mićanović Miljković; “Andan İçeru” concert; “Classic Music Concert” by Güray Başol; Turkology Conferences, Borusan Quartet Classical Music Concert, and events of July 15	Culture/ education
2018	“Photograph Books Exhibition from Turkey”; Our Ancient Civilization Ottoman Music; Mozart Concert – Tepecik Philharmonic Orchestra; Kemançeş Turkish Archery Exhibition in Belgrade–Novi Pazar ; Turcology meetings and conversations on the Turkish language; Tahir Aydoğdu Trio Concert; introduction of Turkish tastes; events of Europe Language Day; Pedals Turn for Democracy – July 15 Cycling Run	Culture/ education/ entertainment
2019	the Trio Cultural event which includes the Turkish Language, Culture, and Cuisine, such as: Conversation of Yunus Emre Culture and Arts; Türkiye on the Screen: Turkish Movie Night; Culture and Solidarity Night of Turkish Diaspora; meetings of Turcology; Traditional Turkish Archery Course; “The World at My Dream” painting competition; Cultural Melodies from the Caspian to the Danube Belgrade and Novi Sad Concert; TÜRKSOY Soloists Concert Accompanied by Kazakhstan Red Army Chamber Orchestra; Fest of Gastronomy: “Kitchen of Antep; Serbia Children Fest “Happy Children”; Belgrade Movie Nights; demonstration of costume in Serbia and Anatolia; Pedals Turn for Democracy – July 15 Democracy Cycling Race; TÜRKSOY Youth Orchestra Novi Pazar Concert; Balkan Folklore Festival: Crossing Borders; 21 st Traditional Starboard Sports Games; International Belgrade Book Fest and Meeting of Ahmet Ümit Okur; Turkey Week in Belgrade; Preševo Turkish Course; Ebru Art Instructor Course	Culture/ education/ entertainment
2020	the “Turkish World Opera Stars” concert which was one of the big events in the country participated by many ambassadors from Kazakhstan, Turkey, Albania, and Lebanon, as well as Serbian Deputy Minister of Culture and a Serbian parliamentarian; “Pro-za Balkan International Literature Fest”; “Intercultural dialog” that is funded by the EU and Turkey	Culture/ education/ entertainment
2021	“Turkish Documentary Week” in Belgrade – it emphasizes real-life stories by telling them artistically; in that week, there was ten Turkish documentary and three documentaries of international guest movies; Tamburica Fest which is held in Novi Sad, Turkish Artists, and many Balkan artists become part of this event; it included many Anatolian songs played with Western instruments	

Sources: Yunus Emre Enstitüsü Faaliyet Raporu, 2015; Yunus Emre Enstitüsü Faaliyet Raporu, 2016; Yunus Emre Enstitüsü Faaliyet Raporu, 2017; Yunus Emre Enstitüsü Faaliyet Raporu, 2018; Yunus Emre Enstitüsü Faaliyet Raporu, 2019; Yunus Emre Enstitüsü Faaliyet Raporu, 2020, Yunus Emre Enstitüsü Faaliyet Raporu, 2021.

4. The Gülen Movement

In addition to Diyanet, TIKA and YEI, there were other NGOs operating in Serbia. One of the most recognizable was the Gülen movement, which had several institutions in Serbia. The movement's activities focused on education, especially among Serbia's Muslim community. For example, it established an elementary school in Belgrade, dormitories in Novi Sad, a cultural center and foundations named "Bridge" and "Horizon" in Novi Pazar. After a failed 2016 coup attempt in Turkey, the Turkish president recognized the Gülen movement as a terrorist organization. In addition, the Turkish president calls on all countries to surrender members of this organisation. Serbia, unlike Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, was one of the countries that cooperated with Turkey very actively. In 2019, the two governments signed a security cooperation agreement. As a result, from July 15, 2016, to January 20, 2021, Turkey submitted 16 requests for the extradition of its citizens from Serbia. The Justice Ministry's response was to approve the extradition of five individuals to Turkey. However, Serbia's Ministry of Justice does not provide information on how many extradition requests for Turkish citizens were approved and how many were rejected. The ministry also did not respond to a question about whether any Turkish citizens had been granted asylum in Serbia (Živanović, 2019; Anadolu Ajansı, 2016a).

Discussion: Serbian public opinion about Turkey

As a result of the activity of Turkish institutions, the opinion on Turkey in Serbia has changed. A survey conducted by the Turkish institute Bilgesam in 2012 found that Orthodox Serbs have 46 per cent sympathy for Turks, while 50 per cent have sympathy for Russia. The survey also asked Serbian residents what they thought of Turkey. The opinion is that Turkey is a modern country and living standards are very good. Orthodox Serbs agreed with this opinion (53 per cent). The survey also took into account the opinion of Serbian Muslims. This shows that Muslim Serbs feel sympathy and are close to Turks (78.9 per cent). The Turkish president is particularly popular among them. This is evidenced at least by the rallies of support for Erdoğan during the country's 2023 presidential elections, which were attended by several thousand Muslims from the Serbian town of Novi Pazar (Bilgiç & Akyürek, 2012, pp. 71–73). The good atmosphere between the two nations has implications for state relations. Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić during meetings

with Turkish President, said, among other things, that Serbia's relations with Turkey have reached the highest level in recent history. "We can say that this is the 'golden age' of Serbian-Turkish relations", Vučić said (Srbija, 2022).

Conclusion

The Balkans had played a key role in the Ottoman Empire for centuries. However, the collapse of that state led to a shift of focus to Anatolia. After the establishment of a secular-based Turkish Republic, there was little attempt to regain influence in the region. Their attention was mainly focused on internal problems. However, as the situation in Turkey normalized, the vectors of its foreign policy changed. The first attempt to rebuild its position in the Balkans was made in the 1980s by Turkish Prime Minister Torgut Özal. However, this initiative was interrupted by the 1992–1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and it was only after the AKP party came to power that the Balkans were once again in Turkey's orbit. Since then, the Turkish authorities, with the help of organizations such as Diyanet, TİKA and YEI, have sought to strengthen their position in the Balkans. Each of them had different goals to improve Turkey's influence around the world. TİKA is mostly focused on the restoration of Ottoman heritage and improving collaboration and cooperation with other countries. YEI works on introducing Turkish culture and tradition. YTB tries to improve scholarships to create opportunities to study in Turkey. Lastly, Diyanet is the delivery of religious services all around the world. Turkey's purpose is to have influence and good prestige in the region, which these tools are intended to provide.

The involvement of these institutions in Serbia was not accidental. First, it realizes that Serbia plays a key role in maintaining stability in the region. Without an agreement with this country, building peace in the Balkans is impossible. Second, maintaining good relations with Serbia will help Turkey secure its supply chains to Europe. Disruption of the transport of Turkish products to the European Union would have serious implications for the country.

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