

LUKASZ SŁAWOMIR FRASZKA
Łódź
ORCID: 0000-0002-1423-652X

Turkish religious diplomacy in Austria

Introduction

The Westphalian system restricted state–religion relations to the private sphere, attempting to relegate religion from public life, this being associated with the growing importance of reason and the belief that religion had no influence on other aspects of human life. However, with the fall of the Iron Curtain, attitudes towards religion began to change. Over the past two decades, participants in international relations have begun to look for new strategies to increase their influence. These changes were an incentive to begin research on how religion affects state development and how it can be effectively used in foreign policy. “Religious diplomacy”, falling under the public diplomacy category, defined by Beata Ociepka “as a form of dialogue in international political communication, which, by building mutually beneficial relations with partners abroad, helps achieve the state’s objectives at international level” (2011: 288), has become such an instrument.

Certainly, “religious diplomacy” as a separate category of public diplomacy is not a new research problem, but it often seems to be underrepresented in Polish scholarship. The author sees “religious diplomacy” as a measure taken by a participant in international relations to use religion to promote their positive image on the international stage. As a result, it is involved in promoting (inter)religious dialogue among participants in international relations, such as nation states and their societies (Fraszka 2021: 559). In turn, Marcin Rzepka identifies it with “the ability to use religion to achieve specific goals, such as promotion [...] on the international stage, systematically building the image of a conciliatory country, and above all, one capable of dialogue” (2019: 201).

Alicja Curanović defines it as “a state activity consisting in the use of a religious factor in foreign policy; that is, the whole set of mechanisms for state

cooperation with religious associations in the pursuit of pragmatically defined national interest, use of the international activity of religious institutions, ideas and religious symbols (appropriately interpreted to comply with current political aims)” (2012: 7).

Furthermore, Abid Rohman points out that “the core agenda of religious diplomacy is the interaction between the government, the private sector, religious organisations, or the wider community in an effort to realise religious harmony or efforts to resolve religious based conflicts” (2019: 5–6). “Religious diplomacy [...] can be increased by strengthening cooperation in various fields, especially social culture and education” (ibid.: 13). The definitions quoted above also indicate that “religious diplomacy” focuses not only on the sacred but can also include various events outside the spiritual sphere (cultural events, educational programmes, etc.).

Under the leadership of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, whose Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) draws on Islamic traditions, religion has become an important instrument of Turkish foreign policy. As part of this policy, Turkey has built mosques, funded religious education, promoted the history of the Ottoman Empire, and extended its own Islamic style of leadership from Latin America to sub-Saharan Africa (Ozkan 2014: 225). Therefore, the promotion of the Turkish model of Islam, which is described as a moderate variety of Islam that can coexist with modernity and multiculturalism, has become a key point of Turkish religious diplomacy (Tabak 2017: 94). This has made “religious diplomacy” an important tool of soft power in strengthening Turkey’s international position.

Turkey’s political-religious activity in Austria, which is discussed in this article, has been viewed through the prism of “religious diplomacy”, which appears to be more than an attempt made by the state authorities to use the religious factor to promote the country on the international stage by influencing and shaping the preferences of the societies of other countries. The article discusses “religious diplomacy” as an instrument of Turkey’s foreign policy under the leadership of the AKP. It can be argued that the period of Erdoğan’s and the AKP’s rule is characterised by increased government commitment to promoting the Turkish model of Islam. Promoting Turkish Islam would become an important aspect of Turkish religious diplomacy among Austrians, especially those of Turkish descent, because for them it is the basis of multicultural life in the German-speaking world. However, it seems fair to say that Turkish religious diplomacy as an instrument for using religion to promote the country among native Austrians has proved ineffective. As a result of the lack of effectiveness in this field, Turkish religious diplomacy in Austria has focused

on mobilising the Turkish diaspora in Austria to take action and on shaping Turkish identity within that community.

The religious factor seems to shape current Turkish policy in Europe. On the other hand, Turkey's actions in this area can also be seen as an attempt to interfere in the internal affairs of another country – as will be illustrated by the example of Austria. The imams, preachers and Quranic teachers sent from Turkey to Austria have been state officials employed by the Directorate of Religious Affairs,¹ a state agency established in 1924. Therefore, Turkish religious diplomacy in Austria will be examined on the basis of the political-religious activities of the Austrian branch of that agency.

According to the Turkish constitution, the Diyanet is a state institution “which is within the general administration, shall exercise its duties prescribed in its particular law, in accordance with the principles of secularism, removed from all political views and ideas, and aiming at national solidarity and integrity” (*Constitution of the Republic of Turkey* 2017, Art. 136). Pursuant to this provision, the Diyanet was established to supervise religion, but under the AKP government it has taken on a new role, which is linked to the party's ambitions to make Turkey a leader among Muslim states in the Middle East and a guarantor of stability and security in the region (Smoleń 2011: 85) and to redefine Turkey's position on the international stage. As such, this institution is responsible for promoting Turkish culture and language through religious education programmes, or bridging the divide between Sunni Islam and Turkish nationalism (Tabak 2017: 89–90).

Islam in Austria

The expansion of the Habsburg Empire and the settlement of guest workers in Austria in the 1960s and 1970s are important factors in the history of Islam in Austria. Since then, Austrian Islam has been divided into two separate groups: the Bosnian and the Turkish (Kolb 2020: 373). The 1867 constitution protected religious freedom across the Empire, enabling Muslims to build mosques and practise their faith (Sezgin 2019: 873). The act of 1874 concerning the rec-

¹ There are several different translations of the name of the agency in Polish: *Prezydium do Spraw Religijnych* (A. Szymański, K. Kościelniak), *Urząd do Spraw Religii* (K. Wasilewski, M. Matusiak), *Kierownictwo do Spraw Religii* (J. Reychman), *Dyrekcja Spraw Religijnych* (J. Kapłońska), *Dyrektoriat do Spraw Religijnych* (J. Niemiec). The author uses the name Diyanet (short for Turkish *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*).

ognition of religion provided a legal framework for defining which Christian or non-Christian groups, including Muslims, could be recognised as religious societies. The act granted Muslims additional rights and privileges, such as the right to self-organise and govern their communities through communes, and the capacity to set up Islamic funds (ibid.: 874).

After Bosnia and Herzegovina were conquered by the Habsburgs in 1878, a significant number of Muslims were forced to live under Austrian rule (Kolb 2020: 373). In 1912, with the formal recognition of Islam, the legal status of Muslims in Austria-Hungary began to differ from that of Muslims in other European states (Rayachi 2018: 581–582). The 1919 Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye recognised these rights and privileges, guaranteeing the safety of minorities in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and confirming the capability of every citizen, irrespective of their religion and race, to hold prominent positions in the state (Sezgin 2019: 874).

Islam in Austria gained the status of a religious community, in accordance with international standards, quite early on. In principle, Muslims in Austria were granted the same rights as members of other religious communities, pursuant to the Islam Law (*Islamgesetz*). The law effectively guaranteed their right to practise Islam in public, to freely manage their internal religious affairs, and to establish religious, educational, and social organisations, foundations, and funds (Fürlinger 2010: 186).

In the mid-1960s, these communities began to exert pressure on the government to recognise the imperial laws of 1874 and 1912, which concerned Islam, as binding. In 1979, only the Hanafi school was recognised. The following year, all schools of Islamic law were recognised following a ruling by the Austrian Constitutional Court, which deemed these restrictions unjust (Marchal, Allievi, Dassetto et al. 2003: 165). Nevertheless, in 2008 Austria became the first country to pass a special law banning the construction of minarets, effective in the states of Carinthia and Vorarlberg (Allievi 2010: 33–34).

According to the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Islam has become the largest minority religion in the country – in 2016 it was practised by 8% of the population. The majority of Muslims in Austria observe Sunni Islam. Nearly 8% of Vienna's residents, mainly Turks and Bosnians, but also Afghans, Kurds, Chechens, Iranians, Arabs and Pakistanis, profess Islam. Most of the Muslims came to Austria from Turkey and Yugoslavia in the 1960s as guest workers (*Gastarbeiter*) (Lamrani 2019: 82). Consequently, “all Muslims who now live in Austria are immigrants, with the exception of converts, whose number is difficult to estimate; figures given by various sources oscillate between 500 and 2,000 people” (Nalborczyk 2003: 291).

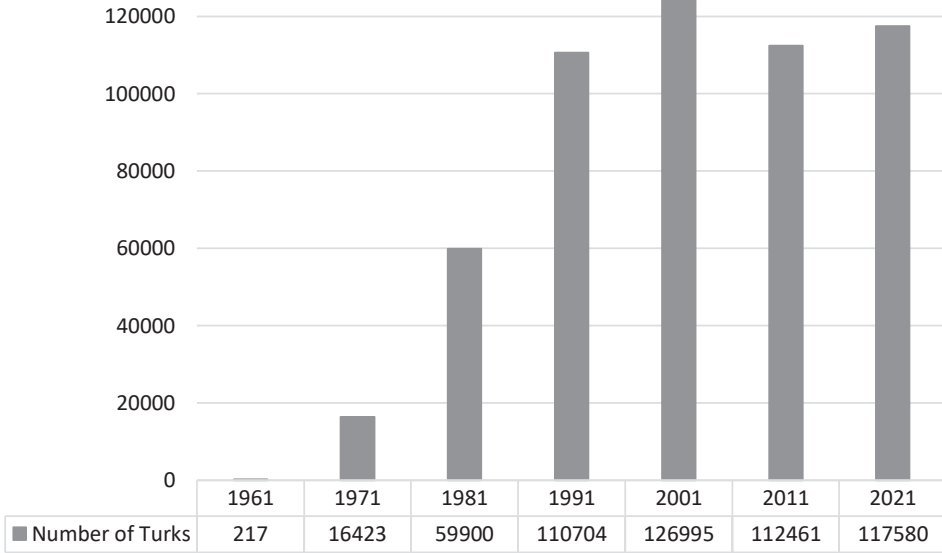
In recent decades, the number of Muslims in Austria has grown significantly, and so have the differences among them. According to 2017 estimates, 700,000 Muslims are living in that country. About half of Austrian Muslims are Austrian citizens. Most of them have Turkish roots. The second largest demographic group is people of Bosnian descent. Shia Muslims and Arabs make up the smallest part of the Muslim community in Austria (Kolb 2020: 373).

Turks in Austria

The Turkish community in Austria includes ethnic Turks who emigrated from Turkey and their descendants born in Austria, as well as ethnic Turkish groups coming from the Balkans, especially Bulgaria, Greece and Romania, and from the Levant – Cyprus and Syria. Turkish immigrants came to Austria in the early 1960s as workers employed directly by employers and manufacturers, even before their official recruitment agreement was signed. Individual contracts provided for temporary migration from Turkey to Austria, and upon their expiration the workers were supposed to return to their country of origin. Josef Klaus, then head of the Austrian federal government, made a decision to employ Turkish foreign workers. To this end, on 15 May 1964, Turkey and Austria concluded a bilateral agreement. Although Austria and most of the guest workers had no such intention, many of them stayed in Austria and started families there (Aslan, Heinrich 2010: 29–30).

Migration from Turkey to Austria did not start to play an important role until the early 1970s, when the number of workers arriving in Austria each year peaked at over 10,000. According to the 1971 census, there were about 16,000 Turks living in Austria, which accounted for about 8% of the total migrant population. Although official recruitment ended in 1973, the number of Turkish immigrants continued to grow thanks to family reunification, which had a significant impact on their decision to settle in Austria. As a result, a law governing the employment of immigrants was passed in 1975. This law provided financial incentives to encourage immigrants to return to their homeland. Nevertheless, in the mid-1980s, Austria's booming economy needed more workers, and as a result the demand for Turkish guest workers increased. Therefore, regulations that served to keep foreigners out of Austria and limit immigration, such as the Employment of Foreigners Act, which formalised the preferential treatment of Austrians in the labour market, indirectly contributed to the settlement of a previously mobile workforce. Until the end of the 1980s, Turkish immigrants were allowed to enter Austria on a tourist visa (Sievers, Ataç, Schnell 2014: 265).

Figure 1
The number of Turks living in Austria



Based on: Statista 2022 and Sievers, Ataç, Schnell 2014: 265.

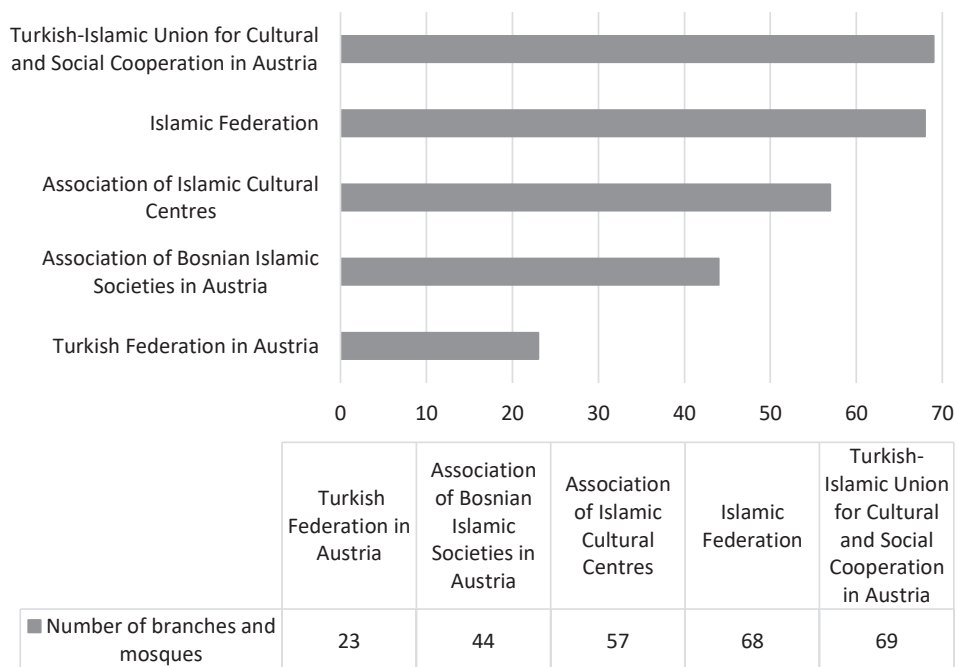
Turks from the Balkans came to Austria as guest workers in the 1960s and 1970s, followed by those seeking employment after the collapse of the Eastern Bloc in 1989. The most recent wave of Balkan Turks was seen after 2007, and was directly linked to the accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the European Union, which gave them the right to move freely as EU citizens. As for the immigration of Turkish Cypriots, most of them fled to Austria after the outbreak of the Cyprus conflict in 1974. Another wave was sparked by Cyprus' accession to the EU in 2004. The influx of Turkish Syrians is directly associated with the migration crisis in Europe between 2014 and 2019 and the civil war in Syria. According to the Turkish Embassy in Vienna, there are about 300,000 Turks living in Austria (Minority Rights Group 2022). Therefore, the official statistics published by Austria, including those shown in Figure 1, do not reflect the exact number of people who either fully or partially consider themselves to be Turks. This is also linked to the fact that Austrian residents cannot declare their ethnic origin in official censuses.

Institutionalisation of Islam in Austria

In 1979, the Austrian state recognised the Islamic Religious Community in Austria (*Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich*, IGGiÖ) as the official representative body of the Muslim community. As a result, the IGGiÖ was granted special corporate privileges, including control over Islamic religious instruction in Austrian public schools and the appointment of teachers to conduct such classes. The IGGiÖ targeted all Muslims in Austria, regardless of their background. It also initiated collaboration with the majority of local and national Muslim organisations (Sunier, Landman 2015: 50).

Figure 2

Numbers of branches and mosques run by selected Muslim organisations (February 2019)



Source: Statista 2021.

In recent years, there has also been a noticeable increase in the number of its branches in Austria, but only four of them are mosques with minarets, which regularly trigger emotional political debates. These mosques are located in Telfs in Tyrol, Saalfelden in Salzburg, Bad Vöslau in Lower Austria, and

Vienna-Floridsdorf. The last of these is also the largest and most famous mosque in Austria (*Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich* 2017).

When the Diyanet expanded its network to Europe, it refused to recognise the IGGiÖ's monopoly, arguing that Turks were not sufficiently represented in its bodies. As a result, it began to operate both politically and religiously through the Turkish-Islamic Union for Cultural and Social Cooperation in Austria (*Avusturya Türk İslam Birliği*, ATİB), which took on the task of promoting the Turkish model of Islam in Austria. This was possible owing to strong Turkish influence, because, among other things, the religious attaché of the Turkish embassy is the head of the Union (Kroissenbrunner 2003: 194).

The ATİB is Austria's largest Islamic organisation, and was founded as an association in 1990. At the time of its establishment it consisted of 31 branches; their number has increased to 69 at present. In recent years, the ATİB has founded and run several Muslim cultural and religious centres with prayer rooms; for example, in Bregenz in Vorarlberg (2000), Schwaz in Tyrol (2003), Lustenau in Vorarlberg (2005), Hall in Tyrol (2006), Vienna, 10th district (2007), Landeck in Tyrol (2009), Vienna, 21st district (2010), and one run by the Islamic Federation in Linz in Upper Austria (2007) – all without minarets (Fürlinger 2010: 190). These communities are financially self-sufficient entities with legal personality. Most of them are located in Vienna and Vorarlberg in western Austria (Fürlinger 2015: 234). The Austrian branch of the Diyanet is in charge of 69 of the 269 branches across Austria (Sunier, Landman 2015: 50). The ATİB had been the largest Muslim organisation outside the IGGiÖ until 2011, when it formally became a member of the latter.

Besides the ATİB, the largest organisations for the Turkish community in Austria include the Islamic Federation (IF) and the Union of Islamic Centres of Culture. The Islamic Federation is the Austrian branch of *Millî Görüş*, which was founded in 1987 and whose main goal is to serve Muslims of Turkish origin and their descendants. The organisation owns mosques, prayer houses and clubs in Vienna, Lower Austria, Upper Austria and Salzburg. It also claims to run 68 branches. The Union of Islamic Centres of Culture, in turn, is a Sufi organisation that provides religious services in 57 branches across Austria (Mattes, Rosenberger 2015: 139).

All Muslim organisations in Austria are involved in organising religious festivals and community events. Good examples here are Muslim festivities or community dinners during Ramadan. Additionally, there are celebrations known as *Maulid* to commemorate the Prophet Muhammad's birth, which include the singing of songs and recitation of poetry in honour of the Prophet, and reading of the Quran. During Ramadan, many Muslims give their *zakat*

(obligatory donation) to Muslims in less privileged countries, which helps to strengthen community spirit – the *ummah* (Öktem 2017: 54). Unlike most other organisations, the Turkish organisations are hierarchical and have spread throughout the country (Mattes, Rosenberger 2015: 138).

ATİB's political and religious activities before 2015

The *ATİB* was originally established to provide religious services to discourage Turks living abroad from joining Islamic organisations whose religious views differed from those of the Turkish government. After the AKP had come to power, the *ATİB*, the Islamic organisation with the largest number of members in Austria, completely redefined its policy towards the Muslim community. In this process, the Diyanet is eager to use the infrastructure of *ATİB* associations in Austria (Aslan 2018: 9–10). Besides religious activities, such as offering services with the help of imams sent from Turkey, and running mosques and prayer houses, the *ATİB* promotes folk festivals and other activities associated with Turkish customs (Mattes, Rosenberger 2015: 138).

Another activity of great importance is the burial fund for the repatriation of remains, for which as many as 25,000 Muslim families are registered. This matter is of great importance for Muslims, since it requires ritual ablution of the remains according to sex. The service involves washing of the remains in accordance with the Islamic rite, wrapping in a shroud, the saying of a funeral prayer, and burial with the head facing Mecca. However, because burial without a coffin is prohibited in Austria, Muslims are buried in coffins made of softwood (ATIB Union 2021a).

The *ATİB* also offers educational services, both for children and adults, such as German language courses, tutoring and homework help for the youngest, and various courses such as painting and graphics, professional orientation, reading and writing, rhetoric, values and orientation, and language courses for adults. Moreover, Muslims can attend a variety of seminars dealing with road traffic, professional life, health and addictions (ATIB Union 2021b).

The *Diyanet* promotes the Turkish model of Islam, characterised by apparent moderation, rationality and secularism, as an example or inspiration for Muslims worldwide and in Europe. As a result, the Turkish model of Islam has been put forward as a moderate kind of Islam which conforms to modernity and multiculturalism (Çitak 2010: 620). For the Turks themselves, the Turkish model of Islam “has become a central element of multicultural life in the German-speaking world” (Blaschke 1989: 7), and the authorities in Ankara regard

the *Diyanet* as the true representative of the Turkish nation, which should serve as an institutional model for European countries wishing to consider Islam part of existing national religious frameworks, both in terms of religious concepts, institutional missions and capabilities (Çitak 2013: 177).

There are four principles listed on the *ATİB*'s official website that all branches have to respect. The *ATİB*'s guiding principles are the Austrian Constitution and fundamental rights, and therefore it is driven by such values as democracy, freedom and equality of all people. In addition, the *ATİB* considers itself a non-profit civic organisation that works for a pluralistic society through its social, cultural, and religious activities. The *ATİB* branches operate on a voluntary basis. In order to promote greater tolerance and mutual understanding, the *ATİB* places interfaith dialogue with other religious communities at the forefront. In order to experience and promote peaceful coexistence, the *ATİB* places great value on cooperation with Austrian and European civil societies and non-governmental organisations. The *ATİB* is also committed to aiding and supporting young people's social, cultural or sports education as well as to creating appropriate conditions and infrastructure (ATIB Union 2021c).

According to these principles, the *ATİB*'s activities should focus solely on organising the religious, social and cultural life of the affiliated Turkish-Islamic mosque communities. Meanwhile, the Turkish government provides financial and organisational support to the *ATİB*, thereby ensuring the continuation of its operation. In turn, the *ATİB*'s affiliation to the *Diyanet* has contributed to it being considered a Turkish governmental institution (Çitak 2013: 178). If the *ATİB*'s internal organisation and goals are taken into account, then the organisation can be seen as a Turkish state institution which, operating within the Austrian legal system, is beholden to the Turkish state and the Turkish-Muslim population in Austria (Fürlinger 2015:234).

Table 1

Disputes related to the ATİB's branches

Location	Cause of the dispute	Forms of objection	Final decision
Telfs (Tyrol)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the construction of a minaret next to the existing Eyüp Sultan Mosque 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a petition against its construction signed by 2,400 people construction of a smaller minaret met with protests by Muslims 	Approved by the local authorities

Reutte (Tyrol)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> conversion of a former car dealership into a religious and cultural centre containing a prayer room, an office, seminar and youth rooms, a shop and two flats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a protest organised by residents 	Approved by the local authorities
Vienna-Brigittenau (Dammstrasse 37, 20th District)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> plans for the extension of a prayer centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a petition against its construction signed by 4,000 people advocating of the relocation of the centre and voices against the Islamisation of Austria 700 persons protested in front of the ATİB's centre under the banner 'No mosque in Brigittenau!' (13 September 2007) demonstration against construction of a Turkish mosque in the centre of Vienna attended by 700 people (14 May 2009) 	Approved by the local authorities
Spittal a.d. Drau (Carinthia)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> remodelling of the interior of the house to create a small prayer room, an office and a flat for the imam 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> petition against the prayer house. city council's vote against the redesignation of the building (finally overruled by the State government of Carinthia) 	Approved by the local authorities
Mauthausen-Albern (Upper Austria)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> application for the redesignation of a building in order to establish a new centre with a prayer hall, rooms for youth programmes and sports, and a shop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> collection of 2,000 signatures against the project smearing of the outer walls of the building with racist slogans 	Lack of approval from the local authorities
Hörbranz (Vorarlberg)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> selection of a plot (about 960 square metres) for the new centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> area zoned for enterprises – rejection of an application for the redesignation of the area 	Lack of approval from the local authorities
Nenzing (Vorarlberg)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> desire to buy a plot of land from the communal authority to build a mosque 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> petition against its construction signed by 200 people 	Withdrawal from purchasing the plot

Bad Vöslau (Lower Austria)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • application to the city to build a mosque with two minarets (15 metres high), a dome (12.5 metres high) and several small cupolas, as well as a prayer hall for 130 persons (250 square metres), a tea-house, a restaurant, an office and two classrooms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • protests against the construction • petition known as 'Cultural centre without minarets', which was signed by about 300 persons by the end of January 2008, and in February by 1,470 persons • bulk mailing against the construction project • demonstration against the building of the mosque in the city centre under the slogan 'SOS Abendland' (SOS Occident) attended by 250 people 	Approved by the federal government
Bludenz (Vorarlberg)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • plans for a new mosque with a minaret 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • arson in the Turkish consulate general in Bregenz, the capital of Vorarlberg • letters and e-mails sent to the mayor by opponents of the mosque • launch of a campaign for a change to the building law to prevent the construction of minarets 	Approved by the local authorities

Source: Furlinger 2010: 190–212.

Turkish religious diplomacy in Austria takes a variety of forms, the most important of which seems to be the running of the *ATİB* branches, especially mosques and houses of prayer. However, while Austrian Muslims support such a policy, it is an emotional issue which causes a great deal of controversy among the local population. This has been the reason for many disputes over mosques and prayer houses run by the *ATİB*, resulting in attempts to block their redesignation or operation. In the majority of cases, after lengthy negotiations the local authorities approved the plans, but the *ATİB* had to make major concessions on the final designs.

ATİB's political and religious activities since 2015

The imams' lack of understanding of Austrian society and the shortness of their stay in Austria, combined with a poor command of German, are seen as factors contributing to the isolation and poor social integration of Muslims of Turkish descent in Austria. Therefore, in February 2015, the Austrian parliament passed a new *Islamgesetz* (Islam Law), pursuant to which it is illegal to fund mosques and pay salaries to imams from abroad (BGBl. I N 39/2015). Under the new regulations, ATİB imams are no longer entitled to being employed as Turkish state employees in Austria. Additionally, nine imams who accepted salaries from abroad were made to leave Austria (Öktem 2016: 53).

This new Islam Law of 2015 seriously harmed relations between the Austrian government and the ATİB. The law was considered an act of hostility against the Turkish government, and Austria was accused of Islamophobia (Aslan 2018: 6). The law prohibits imams from receiving external funding, which calls into question their future in the ATİB. The most obvious effect of the new law on Islam is the loss of livelihood by those imams and religious workers whose salaries were previously supported by organisations based in third countries, mainly Turkey (Öktem 2017: 46).

One of the articles of the *Islamgesetz* states that the regions of activity of local member groups of Muslim umbrella organisations should not overlap, which may pose a threat to the survival of the ATİB, because regulations require the dissolution of such groups (Skowron-Nalborczyk 2016: 72). On the other hand, the ban applies to Islamic religious associations and their communities, and not associations such as the ATİB funded by the Turkish government (Dautovic, Hafez 2019: 45–46). Interestingly, in June 2016, a Turk named Ibrahim Olgun, with close ties to the government in Ankara, was elected new chairman of the IGGiÖ, and in December 2018 he was replaced by Ümit Vural – a Syrian Kurd of Turkish origin, who has been repeatedly accused by his opponents of being “Ankara’s puppet” and favouring the ATİB in the Shura Council (Schurarat), the highest body of the IGGiÖ, which, among other things, elects the chairman of the organisation (Muslims elected... 2021).

Currently, the ATİB exerts a strong influence on the activities of the IGGiÖ in Austria. An example of such influence may be a large-scale demonstration organised by ATİB associations against the Austrian National Council's declaration on the Armenian genocide in 1915 (Aslan 2018: 6). The impact of Turkish religious diplomacy in Austria was also evident during the pro-government protests on the streets of Austria in support of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan after the attempted coup in July 2016. This event made the public

aware of the impact of Ankara's recent actions on the Turkish community in Austria (Öktem 2016: 52–53).

There has also been much controversy over the instrumentalisation of mosques and their use for political purposes to shape the young generation through the Turkish model of “patriotic education”. Military drills and training for children, the re-enactment of the Battle of Gallipoli, and swearing on the Quran and sword to protect Turkey from its enemies are just a few examples (Aslan 2018: 7). These actions are inconsistent with the main goals of Islamic religious education in Austria, which include providing children and young people with veritable and reliable information, as well as a deep understanding of their own faith and spiritual direction. And as these children are growing up in a heterogeneous world, another goal is to develop in them a sensitive and open attitude towards diverse cultures and beliefs (Rayachi 2018: 582).

Austria was one of the first European countries to take measures to reduce Turkish influence on its territory. Since 2018, all kinds of Turkish election campaigns have been outlawed in Austria. This was a response to Ankara's decision in 2012 to grant Turks living abroad the right to vote and to be elected, which was meant to strengthen the political ties of the diaspora with the homeland. As a result, Turkish political parties began to place names of diaspora candidates on their voting lists and to cater for their needs and expectations in political programmes (Akçapar, Aksel 2017: 148; Baser, Öztürk 2019: 30–31).

To reduce the power of Turkish religious diplomacy, the Austrian government began organising German language courses and classes for immigrants to improve their understanding of the values of the Republic of Austria. Sebastian Kurz, while still Austrian Minister for Integration, stated that the reforms had been introduced so as to explicitly counteract the effects of Islamic extremism in Austria. In 2017, the Austrian government approved the *Anti-Gesichtshüllungsgesetz* (Anti-Face Veiling Act) and prohibited the public dissemination of the Quran (Öktem 2016: 53). Article 2(1) states that

Anyone who, in public places or in public buildings, hides or conceals their facial features by means of clothing or other objects in such a way that they are no longer recognizable commits an administrative offense and shall be punished with a fine up to EUR 150.00. The administrative offense can be prosecuted with a summary penalty notice according to §50 Administrative Penal Act 1991 of up to EUR 150.00. [...] (BGBl. I N 68/2017).

Moreover, in June 2018, Austrian authorities closed down seven mosques affiliated to the ATİB and dismissed 60 of the 260 Turkish imams preaching in Austria, accusing them of being funded by foreign countries (Jones 2020). The decision was taken after an investigation conducted by the Authority of

Religious Affairs into several mosques in Vienna that were financially supported by Turkey (Nazeef 2021). The Imam Hatip school² in Vienna, which Milli Görüş set up in 2017 with Turkish funds, was also closed down (Aslan 2018: 7–8).

In addition, Turkish religious diplomacy has faced other challenges. One of them is the increasing secularisation of the Muslim community in Austria, the Turkish one included, as around 15% of Austrian Muslims reject well-established organisational structures and renowned religious figures. This is most evident among second-generation (33.3%) and third-generation (11.1%) immigrants (Kolb 2020: 386). The next problem is that Austrian Turks are often registered in several different organisations across Austria, which prevents full coordination of activities and thus exposes the weakness of Ankara's management of the Turkish diaspora. Furthermore, for the Turkish authorities, the diaspora is not a potential partner but a means to an end, and their actions are focused on hindering the assimilation of Turks living in Austria.

Conclusions

A new approach to public diplomacy and the use of “new” tools such as a religious factor has enabled Turkey to take measures which give it a presence in Turks' everyday lives. Turkey is building its image on the international stage using the religious dimension of diplomacy, the so-called religious diplomacy. One of the reasons for using this type of diplomacy is that religion still plays a significant role in the socio-political life of modern societies. Therefore, “religious diplomacy” has become an important instrument of Turkish soft power when it comes to strengthening the country's international position.

Turkish religious diplomacy is characterised by the promotion of the Turkish model of Islam and the offering of an array of religious services. Turkey helps the Muslim minority in Western Europe and around the world by funding the construction and maintenance of mosques, as well as activities of Quranic schools and other religious organisations. Moreover, by

² Imam Hatip schools, founded in lieu of a vocational school to train government employed imams after madrasas in Turkey were abolished by the Unification of Education Act as a result of Atatürk's reforms, are responsible for tutoring the clergy. However, unlike other vocational schools, their curricula included the same amount of religious and secular instruction as traditional secondary schools. Turkish President R.T. Erdoğan graduated from one of these schools (Butler 2018).

remunerating quasi-governmental officials and enforcing religious commands and prohibitions, the government is capable of managing the observance of those religious commands and prohibitions. Other significant actions include the organisation of pilgrimages to Mecca and celebrations of various religious festivals (Szymański 2008: 35). In its foreign policy, Turkey refers to the *ummah* (the worldwide community of Muslims) because the Muslim community is a lever that the Turkish state under the AKP government uses to strengthen its presence in various parts of the world (Muhasilovic 2018: 64).

Turkish religious diplomacy in Austria is conducted through the Austrian branch of the *Diyanet*, the Turkish Islamic Union for Cultural and Social Co-operation in Austria, which is the largest organisation of the Turkish community in the country. The ATİB coordinates religious, social and cultural activities of the Turkish-Islamic mosque communities. When it comes to the legal status of ATİB, it can be described as running on two complicated tracks. On the one hand, the ATİB is an association established in accordance with the Associations Act (*Vereinsgesetz*), which operates as an umbrella organisation having 69 branches with over 100,000 members across Austria. On the other hand, it is a branch of the Turkish *Diyanet*.

Taking into account what has been said so far, the ATİB can be considered an agency of the Turkish government in Austria. Due to this dependency, the ATİB is under immense social pressure in Austria, where it is more and more often perceived by native Austrians as a political rather than a religious organisation. Its ineffectiveness is also linked to the attitude of the Austrian community towards Islam, best exemplified by the disputes and objections to the (re) construction of mosques and prayer houses.

All of the above-mentioned factors have contributed to the failure of Turkish religious diplomacy, understood as the ability to use a religious factor to promote the country in Austria and to influence and shape the preferences of Austrian society. In order to promote the Turkish model of Islam and preserve religious rituals, Ankara focused on extending its services mainly to Turks living in Austria, thereby limiting Turkish religious diplomacy to mobilisation of the Turkish diaspora. The Austrian government raised objections to this and introduced many measures with the purpose of reducing Turkish influence in their country. At the same time, this had a negative impact on the relations between the two countries. Turkey's political and religious activities, including those of the ATİB, have been significantly limited due to being in violation of the Islam Law.

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Lukasz Sławomir Fraszka, MA, Faculty of International and Political Studies, University of Łódź (lukasz.fraszka@gmail.com)

Keywords: “religious diplomacy”, Diyanet, Turks in Austria, Turkish model of Islam, political religious activities

ABSTRACT

Turkey's political-religious activity in Austria, which constitutes the research problem of this paper, is analysed through the prism of “religious diplomacy”. Therefore, the paper attempts to assess Turkish religious activity in contemporary Austria. The aim of this article is to determine the role and significance of religious diplomacy as a foreign policy tool of Turkey in the era of the rule of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Justice and Development Party (AKP). It can be argued that this period is characterised by the government's increased commitment to promoting the Turkish model of Islam. It seems that the

religious factor is shaping Turkey's current policy in Europe, but on the other hand, activity in this area can also be seen as an attempt to interfere in the internal affairs of another state – as is shown in the case of Austria. The state of Turkish religious diplomacy in Austria is analysed on the basis of the political-religious activities of the Austrian Diyanet branch, the ATİB. It seems that in this respect Turkish religious diplomacy as an instrument for using religion to promote the country among native Austrians must be considered ineffective. The lack of effectiveness in this field resulted in Turkish religious diplomacy in Austria being reduced to attempts to activate the Turkish diaspora in Austria and to shape a Turkish identity there.