



FEBRUARY 2021

Whose Long Arm? Challenges to Understanding Turkish Diaspora Politics

In October 2019, Turkey intervened in northern Syria, yet the effects were felt across Europe. As Turkey dispersed Kurdish militias and dismantled their fledgling administration, Kurdish protests against the Turkish offensive drew thousands of people onto European streets. In Rotterdam, they led to small but violent skirmishes, resulting in the detention of two dozen protesters after clashes between Kurdish and Turkish protestors.¹ In Berlin, the car of a Turkish diplomat was set on fire in a suspected arson attack. In Nuremberg Kurdish protesters attacked a Turkish-owned shop and in Cologne a Turkish-German man was stabbed, causing serious injuries.

October 2019 was not the first time that Turkish politics spilled out into the streets of European cities. In March 2017, the Dutch police clashed with Dutch-Turkish citizens on the streets of Rotterdam. It was the climax of a stand-off between the Turkish and Dutch governments. Earlier, Dutch authorities had blocked Turkish government ministers from addressing political gatherings in The Hague and Rotterdam in the run-up to Turkey's constitutional referendum, which aimed to give more powers to Recep Tayipp Erdogan. AK Party politicians were out to win votes among the diaspora. A year earlier, in 2016, a coup in Turkey led to severe unrest in the

Turkish communities in European countries and intimidation of Gülen supporters.

This Clingendael policy brief seeks to explain these visible manifestations of Turkish politics in European cities. Why does Turkish politics lead to unrest in Rotterdam and Berlin and what institutional mechanisms facilitate this? The brief highlights various drivers, institutional manifestations and historical changes, but also points out that there are a number of uncertainties and questions about the motivations for, and *modus operandi* of, Turkey's influence in European societies. These questions are all the more relevant as European policy-makers increasingly seek to take measures in order to curb this.

The main argument developed in this brief is that effective policy 'at home' (in Europe) will require better knowledge of socio-political developments 'abroad' (in Turkey). The first and second parts of this brief, therefore, show how the drivers of Turkish influence on the diaspora have changed over time. The third section highlights how present-day diaspora politics is institutionally anchored in Western Europe. Most of the practical examples in this brief are drawn from the Dutch context, but the dynamics will be familiar to those observing this phenomenon in other Western European countries.²

* The authors are grateful to Ana Uzelac and Engin Yüksel for their role in preparing this policy brief

1 Algemeen Dagblad (16 October 2019), '[Nog vier verdachten grimmig protest in Rotterdam zitten vast: meerdere agenten gewond geraakt](#)'.

2 Ayca Arkilic, '[How Turkey's outreach to its diaspora is inflaming tensions within Europe](#)', Washington Post (16 March 2018).

1. Drivers of Turkish diaspora 1960-2012: remittances and monitoring the opposition

Turkish policy towards its diaspora has changed significantly since the 1960s. Then, many Western European countries recruited Turkish labourers on temporary contracts under guest-worker programmes. During those years, Ankara tried to maintain and strengthen ties with its diaspora in an attempt to secure a flow of remittances. Assimilation of the migrants in their host societies was therefore undesirable, as it would weaken their loyalty to the Turkish state. Similarly, Western European countries had no intention of preventing this early manifestation of Ankara's 'long arm', since they ultimately wanted the migrants to return to their home countries. The goals of Turkey and its Western European counterparts seemed to be aligned.

At the end of the 1970s the Turkish authorities decided to expand their diaspora policy, mainly due to two major developments. Firstly, the oil crisis and the ensuing economic crisis in the mid-70s prompted Western European countries to end their temporary labour migration schemes. Many Turkish labour migrants realised that after returning to Turkey it would be much more difficult to remigrate to Europe, and thus opted to stay. Secondly, the Turkish government knew that the growing flow of remittances contributed significantly to its gross domestic product (GDP) (see graph 1). The two developments seemed to come together harmoniously in the 1970s: the Turkish diaspora opted to stay in Western Europe, which was of great economic benefit to Ankara.

These developments culminated in a major policy shift in 1982 – just after a coup in Turkey. Turkey passed a new nationality law, which gave its diaspora the right to acquire dual nationality. In that same year 'diaspora policy' was anchored in the Turkish constitution, dictating that the Turkish government should "take the necessary measures to ensure family unity, the education of the children, the cultural needs, and the social security of Turkish citizens working abroad, and to safeguard their ties

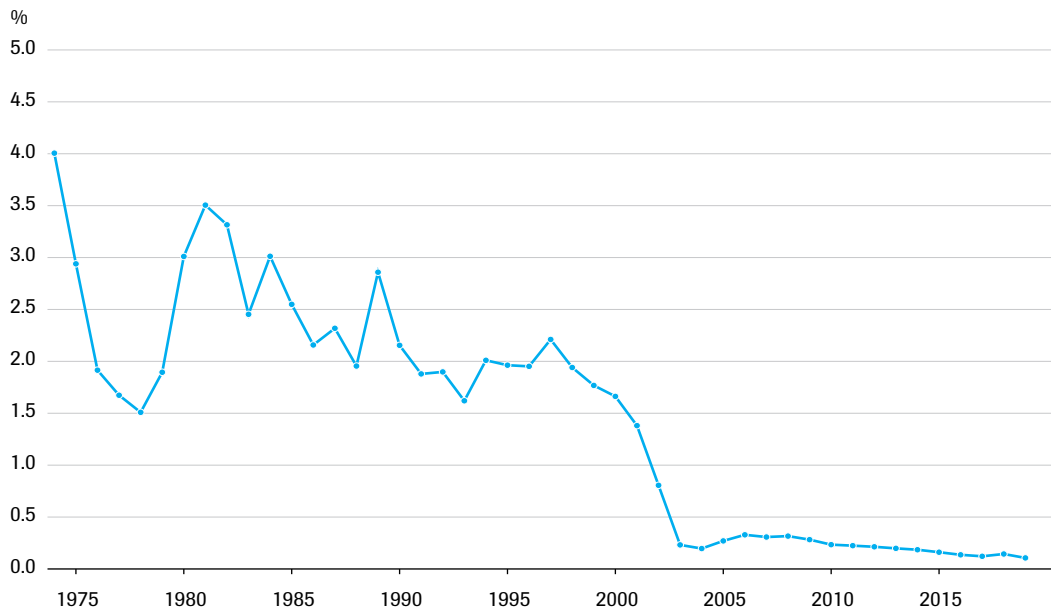
with the home country and to help them on their return home".³ Politically, Turkish citizens abroad were mobilised to safeguard the 'national interest', and to confront 'hostile opposition', such as Islamists, Kurdish nationalist and Kurdish left-wing groups, in their countries of residence.

Around this time, Turkish opposition parties mobilised their supporters in Europe. The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), for instance, made an effort to mobilise members of the Turkish diaspora against the military coup in 1980. Ankara responded by consolidating its bases in the diaspora communities: umbrella organisations were set up to unify actors that could promote the 'national interest', including conservative, religious and nationalist groups. It was in this period that one of the more prominent Turkish diaspora associations, *Diyanet*, was founded. It was originally a network of mosques founded in several European states to offer Turkish communities abroad a state-sanctioned form of Muslim religiosity which would not pose a threat to the secular nature of the Turkish republic.

During the 1990s and 2000s Turkey steadily increased its involvement with its diaspora – although the motivation for doing so partly changed. As the Turkish economy boomed, the importance of remittances for the Turkish economy plummeted in this period, especially during the mid-2000s (see graph 1). Nevertheless, the political motivations remained relevant. The organisations were particularly useful for monitoring political opponents, helping Turkish citizens abroad to voice their demands to their Western European home countries and maintaining strong ties with the diaspora.

3 An English version of Turkey's constitution can be accessed via https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Turkey_2017.pdf?lang=en

Graph 1 Personal remittances (Percentage of Turkish GDP)



Source: World Bank, accessed via <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?locations=TR>

Hence, the Turkish government’s current involvement with its diaspora is certainly not a new phenomenon. Ever since the start of larger-scale labour migration to Western Europe, Ankara has attempted to keep its finger on the pulse of ‘its’ communities abroad. One key take-away from this brief historical overview is that Turkish involvement has had different drivers. This raises the question of what characterises the present AKP involvement with its diaspora.

2. AKP-style diaspora politics: creating a voting bloc and monitoring the opposition

The rise of the AKP (AK Party) government in the 2000s under Recep Tayyip Erdogan has had a major effect on the extent and focus of Turkey’s involvement with its citizens abroad. As the AKP continued to increase its control of state institutions, it further cemented the ties between the Turkish diaspora and the state. To some extent, the drivers of AKP engagement with Turks abroad were the same as previously: the diaspora was a valuable source of remittances (even though its relative economic relevance had decreased significantly) and, in some cases,

a *de facto* arm of Ankara to combat political opposition abroad. However, the Erdogan government introduced a third, more aggressive, driver for its diaspora policy: it made Turks abroad a key asset in the national vote in Turkish elections.⁴

Until 1995, Turks abroad did not have voting rights. Between 1995 and 2014 they could vote, but they had to travel to Turkey to cast their ballots. This constituted a significant barrier to participation. This barrier was taken down in 2014, when the Erdogan government granted Turkish citizens abroad the right to vote from their countries of residence. This process became much simpler over time: in 2014 they still needed to make an appointment with the embassy or consulate, in 2015 appointments were no longer necessary and by 2017 Turks abroad could vote at any embassy or consulate in any country they wanted. The barrier to participation was thus lowered over time, which partially explains the higher turnout among diaspora communities, as can be seen in table 1.

⁴ A final amendment in 2012 to the Law on Elections and Electoral Registers, which regulates the practical aspects of overseas voting procedures.

Table 1 Turnout of overseas voters

Vote	Year	Turnout in %
General elections	2007	8.88
Referendum	2010	7.68
General elections	2011	5.03
Presidential elections	2014	18.9
General elections (June)	2015	36.84
General elections (November)	2015	44.79
Constitutional Referendum	2017	47.90
General and presidential elections	2018	50.33

Source: Yanasmayan, Kaşlı (2019)

The diaspora vote had become crucial for President Erdogan to secure election victories at home. He continued to entrench his power by converting Turkey's parliamentary system into a presidential one – first through a 2017 referendum changing the scope of presidential powers and then through the 2018 elections referenced in table 2. The AKP openly courted the 2.5 million registered overseas voters, including attempts to conduct

pro-referendum rallies in the Netherlands and other European countries. Erdogan openly risked a confrontation with European states, which have become increasingly dismissive of Ankara's 'long arm'.

The turnout of the Turkish diaspora may not seem very high. But those that do vote primarily favour the AKP or the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP), as can be seen in the 2018 elections (table 2). In Europe, the AKP has a political advantage. In the 2018 presidential elections, for instance, President Erdogan secured 59% of the votes in the diaspora communities, compared to 50.8% domestically. In the Parliamentary elections that were held simultaneously, around 51% of the diaspora vote was cast for the AKP, compared to 42% domestically. Even more strikingly, the AKP won the constitutional referendum in 2017 by a 2.5% margin among voters in Turkey, but abroad the margin was 19% in the AKP's favour. In other words, the AK Party can improve its election result by electorally enfranchising diaspora communities.

Table 2 Turkish diaspora electoral statistics for 2018 parliamentary elections

Country	Voters	Turnout	AKP	HDP	CHP	MHP	IYI
Germany	1,436,629	46.03	55.69	14.78	15.55	8.39	3.35
France	339,738	47.46	55.05	24.55	8.91	8.07	1.86
Netherlands	260,865	46.61	63.00	9.13	12.67	10.19	3.30
Belgium	141,947	53.84	64.35	9.59	10.56	9.68	3.33
United States of America	105,912	29.66	15.30	21.36	47.92	2.25	11.17
Austria	104,305	50.05	62.52	11.80	11.40	8.90	2.74
United Kingdom	99,404	42.53	18.48	49.21	24.47	2.94	3.81
Switzerland	97,543	51.37	31.52	40.53	17.23	5.89	3.16
Australia	46,347	32.80	42.62	16.30	30.73	2.63	5.80
Sweden	39,031	28.12	36.42	37.10	13.54	7.75	4.23
Denmark	35,012	34.36	50.52	27.04	11.82	6.99	2.51
Canada	28,518	44.18	23.09	32.58	33.94	2.60	6.34
Saudi Arabia	20,926	30.28	49.82	9.42	32.93	3.56	2.55
Italy	15,026	46.00	28.48	30.84	31.06	2.57	5.33
Greece	11,023	8.75	18	33.89	36.32	3.68	6.11

Source: C. Mekik, A. Blais & S. Cakir (2019)⁵

5 C. Mekik, A. Blais & S. Cakir (2019), How do Turks abroad vote?, Turkish Studies , 21:2, 208-230.

These numbers make it clear why Ankara is so interested in motivating its diaspora to vote: it is a voter bloc that has the potential to decide elections. The AKP has usually secured victories with tight margins during the most recent elections. Since 2015, its victories stem from a coalition with the nationalist MHP. Around this time Erdogan recalibrated his political image in more nationalist terms, possibly because of a change of heart but likely driven by the need to tie the MHP to the AKP project. Erdogan's nationalist position is evidenced by a hard-line stance on the Kurdish peace process (terminated in 2015), the Kurdish question in Turkey, Syria and Iraq, the relevance of Turkish ethnicity and frequent referencing of Turkey's Ottoman history. In 2011 then Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, for example, expanded the diaspora policy's scope to include not only Turkish citizens living abroad but also other Turkic people, which would cover people in Central Asia, for instance. In diaspora-related institutions expressions such as 'Ummah geography' and 'Ottoman residues' entered the vocabulary.⁶

The Islamic-nationalist agenda proved crucial for the AKP election victory in 2018. And so, two factions within Turkey that were historically at odds with each other, namely the nationalist and religious groups, currently find themselves in an alliance of convenience. The ramping up of Ankara's involvement with 'its' citizens abroad is thus mainly explained by a somewhat feeble alliance that requires the support of small constituencies (like the diaspora abroad) to survive. Hence, it is a domestic political calculus that makes the AKP willing to confront European countries by mobilising diasporas: it is a necessity for political survival.

The effect is that the voter base abroad has arguably become the primary driver of Turkish diaspora policy. The advent of the AKP has not only made the diaspora a tool for domestic political power, but it has

also strengthened the power of the Turkish diaspora communities.

The nationalist movements in the diaspora communities have been used to monitor Turkish Islamic communities since the pre-AKP era. But the AKP regime has stepped up its activities to monitor and intimidate political opponents as the power of the diaspora has grown and the ties between the AKP and nationalists have strengthened. For example, in 2016 a failed coup attempt against President Erdogan resulted in a massive clampdown not just on alleged coup plotters in Turkey but also on a whole range of important political actors, primarily tied to the Gülen movement. The Gülen movement was held responsible for masterminding the coup attempt and many with suspected ties to the organisation, including civil servants perceived as insufficiently loyal, independent or critical journalists, and academia, were targeted. More than 100,000 public officials were suspended or fired, while almost 50,000 were arrested.

The failed coup attempt showed how internal political struggles in Turkey can be exported to other European countries. Actions against the Gülen movement were not just carried out in Turkey. In many European countries Gülen supporters were intimidated and pressured, some of which continues until today. Hence, the diaspora is in the eye of the storm: some members seem to be 'recruited' by the Turkish state against the opposition. Others are themselves a target of monitoring and/or intimidation.⁷

The increased involvement with the diaspora has also led Turkey to make some subtle (*de facto*) changes to its citizenship regime. Forcing political allegiance upon the diaspora in Europe is to some extent creating two categories of Turkish citizens abroad – those

6 B. Baser & A. Ozturk (2020), Positive and Negative Diaspora Governance in Context: From Public Diplomacy to Transnational Authoritarianism, *Middle East Critique*, 29:3, 319-334.

7 Algemene Inlichtingen en Veiligheidsdienst, AIVD Jaarverslag 2019, <https://www.aivd.nl/documenten/jaarverslagen/2020/04/29/jaarverslag-2019>. Tweede Kamer, 35 228 nr. 4 Eindverslag Parlementaire Commissie naar Ongewenste Buitenlandse financiering, 14. https://www.tweedekamer.nl/sites/default/files/atoms/files/eindverslag_pocob.pdf. See also: Tweede Kamer, vergaderjaar 2015-2016, 32 824, nr. 194.

with full citizenship rights and those with restricted citizenship rights. Loyal non-resident Turkish citizens can enjoy full citizenship rights, from voting to working, investing and travelling in and out of the country freely. Political dissidents (such as members of the Gülen movement) at home and abroad are deprived of citizenship rights, or threatened with persecution/arrest if they exercise them for the purpose of returning home.

While the more active stance of the AKP *vis-à-vis* its diaspora is a reality for European policy-makers, the question arises as to how the Turkish state will relate to its diaspora in the future. After all, the AKP-MHP coalition is a pragmatic and likely a temporary alliance. Would an eventual end of this alliance also entail a broader shift away from the AKP's current Islamic-national stance? Or has Islamic nationalism become an integral part of the AKP ideology? This suggests that Ankara's current diaspora policy may continue. But what will happen to the drivers of diaspora engagement if the Turkish political landscape is reshuffled? Will the present allies in European societies (AKP and MHP supporters) find themselves at loggerheads in Europe? Will the diaspora continue to play such an important role in the vote? These questions are critical, and answers to them will determine whether, and how, Ankara's policy towards the diaspora will change. The role that domestic Turkish politics plays as a driver for the politicisation of the diaspora is a reminder that understanding Turkish internal politics should be the starting point for policy-making in Europe.

While it is not the purpose of this brief to explore the future, one thing is clear: it is unlikely that Turkish involvement with its diaspora will cease after a possible end of the Erdogan regime or the AKP-MHP alliance. The vote abroad is sizeable and likely to retain importance as, amid slim majorities, other parties are also trying to sway the diaspora in their favour. Since voting abroad was a relatively simple endeavour in 2017, it is likely that larger diaspora-hosting states will continue to serve as an election battleground for Turkish competitive domestic politics.

3. Institutional manifestations of Turkish diaspora politics

This policy brief closes by considering what institutionalised mechanisms could facilitate the spill-over of Turkish domestic politics into European societies. Over the decades Ankara has set up a vast institutional framework in most home countries with large Turkish communities. The goals of these institutions are to help strengthen the ties with and (in some cases) project influence on its diaspora. The key question is how these institutions should be evaluated. For some, they are a visible manifestation of Ankara's 'long arm' and have therefore been the subject of political discussions for a long time. Others argue that these institutions are barely subject to undesirable Turkish control and fall within the acceptable engagement every state has with its diaspora.

The religious organisation *Diyanet* (Turkish Islamic Union or DİTİB) is one of the most visible institutional manifestations of Turkish influence abroad. It was founded in 1982 in Berlin with the aim of giving Muslims "a place to exercise their religious beliefs and to make a contribution to integration". The Turkish conceptualisation of 'integration' should not be confused with the definition most Western European states would use today. Integration in the Turkish sense means that the diaspora needs to be incorporated into the social structure of its home societies, but without completely assimilating or abandoning its Turkish roots.⁸ *Diyanet's* religious role stems from being an official branch of the Turkish state Presidium for Religious Affairs (DİB). Since its creation, DİB has sought to promote a version of Islam that is compatible with the official policy of a secular Turkish state. In order to achieve its goals, *Diyanet* appoints Imams to mosques outside Turkey. It ensures that the Turkish

8 Y. Aydin (2014), The New Turkish Diaspora Policy: Its aims, their limits and the challenges for association of people of Turkish origin and decision-makers in Germany, *SWP Research Paper, RP10*. https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2014_RP10_adn.pdf

diaspora adheres to a version of Islam that is not at odds with the regime in Ankara.

A second major institution is the *Office for Turks Abroad (YTB)*, which was founded in 2010. On its official website YTB explains briefly why it was created: “In the 2000s, [...] our diaspora in Europe faced educational and employment hardships, institutionalised racism and discrimination, Islamophobia and citizenship rights issues. It was these issues that came to the forefront and caused Turkey’s diaspora policy to focus on producing solutions for these problems.”⁹

This fragment highlights the Turkish perception that racism, intolerance and a lack of social opportunities against ‘its’ people are growing. YTB was created to help address these issues, by focussing their activities on four groups, namely: (1) Turkish citizens abroad; (2) related communities (non-Turkish citizens sharing an ethnic heritage with Turkey); (3) international students (mostly diaspora students who would like to pursue their higher education in Turkey); and (4) non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that promote the Turkish language and culture in diaspora-hosting countries. With the support of the Turkish state, YTB is expanding rapidly, most visibly by ramping up the foundation of so-called ‘weekend schools’, where children of Turkish origin can enrol for informal education in Turkish language and culture.¹⁰ In 2019, YTB had 56 offices in 17 countries. According to YTB’s own statistics, during the Covid pandemic, the institute has financially supported over 150,000 Turkish workers abroad living in 14 countries.¹¹

In 2007 the *Yunus Emre Institute* was founded to “increase the number of people who forge bonds with, and are friendly to, Turkey all around the world”.¹² It is a cultural institute that is superficially very similar to Germany’s ‘Goethe Institut’, France’s ‘Maison Descartes’ and the UK’s ‘British Council’. In other words, it serves to project ‘soft power’ in the form of cultural exchange, language courses and promotion of Turkish arts. Some scholars argue that the ideological underpinning of *Yunus Emre* is distinctly ‘Neo-Ottoman’, referring to Turkey’s desire to exert influence on territories that were formerly part of the Ottoman Empire.¹³ *Yunus Emre* started by opening chapters in Balkan cities with a sizeable Turkic population, such as Sarajevo, but also entered many major Western European cities such as Berlin, Amsterdam, Cologne and Paris. Currently, *Yunus Emre* has founded 58 cultural centers worldwide, most of them in the Balkans and Western Europe (according to its own statistics).¹⁴

Yunus Emre appears to have been founded in response to the influence of the Hizmet organisation, which is tied to the Gülen movement. Hizmet has no official organisational structure and no membership scheme, but it is considered one of the largest Muslim networks in the world. According to some estimates, around 2,000 schools worldwide have ties with the Hizmet movement.¹⁵ The movement was very influential in Turkey, and was an ally of then Prime Minister Erdogan when his AKP was elected in 2003. Hizmet is said to promote

9 YTB Website: <https://www.ytb.gov.tr/en/abroad-citizens/general-information-2>

10 For instance: YTB announced in 2019 it would create 12 extra weekend schools in the Netherlands. The Dutch cabinet expressed its deepest concerns regarding these developments. See: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2019/02/13/kamerbrief-turkse-weekendscholen>

11 Zuhail Demirci, ‘Turkish agency helps citizens abroad amid outbreak’, Anadolu Agency (16 May 2020).

12 Website Yunus Emre Institute: <https://www.yee.org.tr/en/corporate/vision-mission>

13 See for example: A Kaya & A. Tecmen, The Role of Common Cultural Heritage in External Promotion of Modern Turkey: Yunus Emre Cultural Centres, Working Paper 4, EU/4/2011 (Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University, European Institute, 2011), 13. https://eu.bilgi.edu.tr/media/files/working-paper4_2.p

14 Website of Yunus Emre Institute (2): <https://www.yee.org.tr/en/corporate/yunus-emre-institute>

15 For instance, the British Parliament arrived at this estimated number after hearing several representatives of the Gülen movement in the context of the 2016 coup attempt and its aftermath. The report of the British Parliament can be found here: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmfaff/615/61507.htm#footnote-161>

a social, altruistic and tolerant version of Islam. As mentioned previously, the Gülen movement, and consequently Hizmet, was persecuted in and outside Turkey after the failed coup attempt in 2016.

A final organisation is the *Islamic Community Milli Görüs*. It was founded in 1969 and promotes a conservative version of Islam. Though not officially connected to the Turkish state, *Milli Görüs* also aims to strengthen the ties between Turks abroad and Turkey, and promotes the preservation of their language and identity. The organisation also sponsors Imam education in diaspora-hosting countries.¹⁶

Are Turkish institutions in Europe a vehicle for Turkey's influence?

This list of organisations leads to two observations. First of all, it appears that Turkish diaspora policy is institutionalised in various Western European states. Hence, if controlled or partly directed by Turkey, they could be efficient vehicles for exerting influence. Second, institutions like the Hizmet movement and *Milli Görüs* are not officially connected to the regime in Ankara, but have an active interest in influencing domestic Turkish politics. This inevitably means that Turkish internal fault lines will be reproduced in diaspora-hosting states through this set of (rapidly expanding) institutions.

Despite these conclusions, it is important to realise that there is major controversy surrounding the extent to which these institutions are controlled by or respond to official Turkish state policy and could potentially have adverse consequences for diaspora-hosting states. In the Netherlands several studies have been conducted to probe this question, many of them commissioned by the Dutch government. Generally, these analyses have concluded that even if there is some form of control from Ankara, the impact of Turkish institutions on the 'integration' (in the 'Dutch'

sense) of Dutch citizens with a Turkish background is limited.

For example, a literature review study by Sunier and Landman concluded that Turkish organisations are very diverse in their orientations and mostly attempt to reconcile European and Islamic values. In fact, the research claimed that Turkish institutions improved the participation of Dutch citizens with a Turkish background in Dutch society.¹⁷ Likewise, a 2017 report by the consultancy firm 'RadarAdvies' concluded, on the basis of group interviews with Dutch Turks, that Turkish religious organisations were not an impediment to 'integration'.¹⁸

But there are also more critical voices, such as the recent 2020 report by the 'Parlementaire Onderzoekingscommissie naar ongewenste beïnvloeding uit onvrije landen' ('Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry into the Undesirable Influence of Unfree Countries' – POCOB). The report states that: "In visible and invisible ways, organisations and governments of unfree countries are attempting to steal the hearts and minds of our Muslim communities. This could lead to the creation of parallel societies."¹⁹ The report focussed predominantly on *Diyanet* and religious organisations originating from the Gulf states. The Parliamentary Committee thus considers the influence of *Diyanet* to be a considerable threat to the integration of Dutch-Turks, and national security interests.

Moreover, Dutch security agencies have warned in general terms of the danger of

16 In the Netherlands, for example: <https://www.parool.nl/nieuws/milli-gorus-blaast-imamonderwijs-nieuw-leven-in~b2400e6e/>

17 T. Sunier & N. Landman (2014), Turkse Islam. Actualisatie van kennis over Turkse religieuze stromingen en organisaties in Nederland. Accessed via https://fsw.vu.nl/nl/Images/TRSO_rapport_SunierLandman_2014_tcm249-409607.pdf

18 Radar Advies (2017), Wat zijn dat nou voor clubs? Praktijkonderzoek naar SICN, ISN (Diyanet), Milli Görüs, en Hizmet (Gülen). Accessed via <https://www.radaradvies.nl/wp-content/uploads/sites/1/Wat-zijn-dat-voor-nou-voor-clubs-praktijkonderzoek-naar-vier-TRSOs.pdf>

19 Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal, (On) zichtbare invloed: verslag parlementaire onderzoekingscommissie naar ongewenste beïnvloeding uit onvrije landen https://www.tweedekamer.nl/sites/default/files/atoms/files/eindverslag_pocob.pdf [My translation C.H.]

‘undesirable foreign influencing’ (in Dutch: ‘Ongewenste Buitenlandse Beïnvloeding’) of diaspora communities, but in fact often cite Turkey as an explicit example.²⁰ A letter to the Dutch Parliament from the Ministry of Justice and Security and the Ministry of Internal Affairs singles out *Diyamet* as a vehicle for gathering intelligence on Turkish opposition in the Netherlands and claims opposition communities are put under severe pressure.²¹

These more critical findings come from a policy and research agenda that focusses less on whether ‘integration’ is promoted by Turkish institutions and more on the extent to which these institutions could be and are being used to further Turkey’s political aims. It highlights a clear need to do more research to disentangle whether Turkey is actively using these institutions, with what specific aims, how effective Turkey is in controlling these institutions and whether Turkish influence is yielding success among diaspora communities.

In conclusion, it is clear that the combined findings of all of these reports show that an attempt to understand the influence of Turkish organisations in Europe is multi-layered. An exclusive focus on whether these organisations contribute to the ‘integration’ of Dutch-Turks may overlook their role as a political instrument for Ankara. Likewise, a focus on political instrumentalisation should not obscure the fact that these institutions appear to fulfil a need among the diaspora for integration into Dutch society. Hence, future research needs to better disentangle both functions (facilitating integration and political instrumentalisation) and understand drivers. From this, we might determine the extent to which Turkish organisations are ‘undesirable’ influencers.

20 See for example: Analistennetwerk Nationale Veiligheid, Geïntegreerde Risico-analyse Nationale veiligheid <https://www.nctv.nl/documenten/publicaties/2019/6/07/geintegreerde-risicoanalyse-nationale-veiligheid> p. 12.

Algemene Inlichtingen en Veiligheidsdienst, AIVD Jaarverslag 2019, <https://www.aivd.nl/documenten/jaarverslagen/2020/04/29/jaarverslag-2019>

21 <https://www.nctv.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2018/03/16/kamerbrief-ongewenste-buitenlandse-inmenging>

4. Conclusion

This Clingendael policy brief has sought to explain why Turkish politics sometimes publicly manifests itself in European cities. It finds that the drivers of Turkish diaspora policy have been constantly shifting since the advent of Turkish diaspora politics in the 1960s. In the past, remittances and a desire to monitor the opposition were the most important factors. More recently, the AKP government has increased its attempts to influence the diaspora community by using it explicitly as a voting bloc.

The brief also discusses the institutional manifestations of Turkish influence in Europe. It highlights five organisations that are tied to parts of the Turkish political landscape, including its alliances and enmities. These fault lines are also ‘exported’ to European countries. The key finding on these institutions is that it remains unclear to what extent they are used to further (or challenge) Turkey’s state interests. Tracking the politics within and between these institutions and their relative subservience to Ankara is key to a better understanding of Turkey’s influence in Europe.

Studying the drivers and institutional manifestations of Turkey’s influence in Europe is important as many European states are grappling with formulating a policy towards Turkey’s ‘long arm’. This policy brief highlights that there are four key questions that should be answered if policy-making is to become truly effective:

1. First, what is the relationship of diaspora institutions with Ankara? Answering this question is important because it allows governments to determine whether the different institutions represent a ‘desirable’ or ‘undesirable’ influence. The key challenge is not to recognise the unclear nature of this relationship *per se*, but rather to construct research strategies that allow the potential effects of the Turkish state on (parts of) the diaspora to be identified. For example, it is assumed that institutions with a stronger political connection to Ankara are more likely to represent an ‘undesirable’ influence, but there is very little evidence

to that effect. Embedded anthropological research could offer new insights.

2. Second, how do European citizens with a Turkish background perceive the role and politics of the different diaspora institutions? Different groups in the diaspora have different needs and desires. A recent Clingendael survey showed that diaspora communities have very diverse perspectives on the degree of interference from their 'countries of origin'.²² Some oppose foreign interference. For example, the survey highlighted that 80% of the diaspora communities (not just the Turkish) were against meddling of foreign powers in their affairs, whilst 56% were in favour of a ban on foreign investments in mosques, churches and weekend schools. However, others may perceive influence more positively. Researching the susceptibility of Turkish European citizens to Turkish organisations in European countries and the drivers that make citizens attentive to Ankara's messages is key to a better understanding of Turkey's influence in Europe. Further investigation and action with regard to the diversity of views within these communities is crucial to formulate an effective tailor-made policy. This can be achieved through a combination of deep engagement through focus-group discussions and large-scale surveys amongst the Dutch-Turkish population, whilst focussing predominantly on the politics of these institutions.
3. Third, how will changes in the AKP-MHP alliance impact Turkey's involvement with and in Europe? This brief has made it clear that Turkish domestic politics has a very strong influence on its diaspora policy. The AKP and MHP alliance has changed the political landscape not only within Turkey but certainly also abroad amongst its diaspora communities. The nationalists and religious groups that were pitted against each other in the past now find themselves in an alliance

of convenience. A major question is how an eventual collapse of this coalition would affect the relationship between the different diaspora institutions in Europe. It points to a wider problem of how to develop sound policy when the domestic drivers of Turkish interference may change when the regime or the regime's strategies for political survival change.

4. Fourth, in the longer run and looking beyond the AKP-MHP coalition, the question is how Turkish diaspora politics may change when there is a shift in Turkey's domestic politics. Answering this question will allow policy-makers to truly pursue a proactive agenda. Specific questions include:
 - a) How will the Turkish political landscape develop in the short to mid-term?;
 - b) Would a different regime, either with or without the AKP, lead to a different type of diaspora policy?;
 - c) How prevalent is the ideology of Islamic nationalism, and will it persist even if the influence of President Erdogan and his AKP diminishes?;
 - d) How relevant will the European diaspora community be as a voting bloc in the near future?;
 - e) Are there any other, new, drivers for Turkish diaspora policy that will become relevant in the near future?

This requires a better understanding and monitoring of political developments inside Turkey. Scenario analysis to explore these questions could also be a viable research strategy.






In short, European governments may believe that Turkish foreign interference constitutes a security risk, but there is a major need to better understand dynamics among the Turkish diaspora to improve governments' responses. Existing research is surprisingly unclear on the extent, shape and drivers of Turkish foreign interference. Without clear evidence on how foreign interference takes shape, which groups within the diaspora are or are not susceptible and how Turkish domestic politics will develop, it is unlikely that policy-making will be truly effective. If anything, an evidence base for policy-making on foreign interference is urgently needed.

22 K. De Bruijne, C. Houtkamp & M. Sie Dian Ho (2020). Zorgen over Buitenlandse Inmenging. <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/zorgen-over-buitenlandse-inmenging>

About the Clingendael Institute

Clingendael – the Netherlands Institute of International Relations – is a leading think tank and academy on international affairs. Through our analyses, training and public debate we aim to inspire and equip governments, businesses, and civil society in order to contribute to a secure, sustainable and just world.

www.clingendael.org
info@clingendael.org
+31 70 324 53 84

 @clingendaelorg
 The Clingendael Institute
 The Clingendael Institute
 clingendael_institute
 Newsletter

About the authors

Christopher Houtkamp is a Research Fellow at the Clingendael Institute. He focuses on the quantitative analysis of the Clingendael Foreign Affairs Barometer, a large-scale opinion survey gauging Dutch people's attitudes towards a wide range of foreign affairs. He also works for Clingendael's 'Connected Security' programme.

Kars de Bruijne is a Senior Research Fellow with the Clingendael's Conflict Research Unit. Kars specializes in civil conflict, conflict data, and the security implications of civil conflicts for Europe's interest. Moreover, he works on traditional authorities, hybrid governance, gangs and elite politics in West Africa and the Sahel. He is also a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Sussex on African regimes and elite violence (since 2018).