

**Religion, Immigration, and the Turkish Government in Germany:  
Reexamining the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (DITIB)**

James Gibbon

Princeton University

[jgibbon@princeton.edu](mailto:jgibbon@princeton.edu)

Tel: +90-539-477-3873

## Abstract

Institutional ties between Muslim migrants in Europe and their countries of origin are often viewed with suspicion, but sending states remain involved in migrant religious affairs. This is true even though European states increasingly seek partnerships with local representatives of Muslim communities. The largest Muslim organization in Germany is the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (DITIB), a branch of the Turkish government’s Directorate of Religious Affairs. Hundreds of imams are sent to mosques in Germany by the Directorate and they follow policies set by administrators in Ankara. In this way, a Turkish government agency plays a key role in shaping migrant religious practices on foreign soil, but there is currently no research that explicitly connects developments at the Directorate in Turkey with DITIB’s actions and rhetoric on the ground in Germany. Drawing on participant-observation in DITIB mosques and interviews with DITIB personnel in Germany and religious officials in Turkey, this paper situates DITIB in its proper context by showing how new leadership of the Directorate of Religious Affairs and events such as 9/11 have altered DITIB’s approach to integration and Turkey’s role in German religious affairs. Implications for the study of transnationalism are discussed.

The involvement of sending states in migrant affairs is an enduring concern in debates over Muslim immigrants in Europe. Ties to the homeland, especially those promoted by foreign governments, have raised suspicions that migrants are uncommitted to becoming full participants in the host country and pose a security risk. Laurence (2006) argues that European states began taking this issue seriously as Muslim organizations became more assertive in the late 1980s. This assertiveness led host countries to shift course and engage Muslim representatives directly, co-opting them into various integration initiatives rather than outsourcing state-Islam relations to Muslim diplomats and sending state governments. Although the German government has moved in this direction, the largest Turkish Muslim organization in Germany is still the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (DITIB), a branch of Turkey’s Directorate of Religious Affairs (DRA). Imams are sent to DITIB mosques in Germany by the DRA, their training has been supervised by this agency, and they follow policies prescribed by administrators in Ankara. In this way, a Turkish government agency plays a key role in shaping migrant religious practices and debates over state-Islam relations on foreign soil.<sup>1</sup>

Although DITIB is the largest Turkish religious organization in Germany, there is surprisingly little research that addresses the organization in its own right, certainly nothing on par with the attention shown to groups like Milli Görüş, the Süleymançıs, or the Caliphate State. We have seldom heard the voices of DITIB imams or seen how institutional changes at the DRA affect DITIB’s actions on the ground or the nature of

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<sup>1</sup> I use the descriptor “Turkish” throughout the chapter to indicate a connection to Turkey, not as a marker of ethnicity.

transnational ties between Germany and Turkey.<sup>2</sup> The result is a simplistic and static portrayal of DITIB, one that mirrors many of the equally superficial portrayals of the DRA. I aim to do two things in this chapter. First, I demonstrate how the standard characterization of DITIB as focused entirely on the homeland is outdated by discussing change in DITIB’s approach to integration. My second objective is to place DITIB in its proper context by showing how changes at the DRA have affected DITIB’s actions and rhetoric in Germany.

### **Sending States and their Nationals Abroad**

Until recently, research on sending state interventions in the affairs of nationals living abroad has focused on economic and political matters. A notable contribution to this literature is Østergaard-Nielsen’s 2003 edited volume, which surveys a range of sending state initiatives sponsored by Mexico, Turkey, India, and the Phillipines, among others. Summarizing these interventions, Østergaard-Nielsen identifies three main interests of sending countries regarding emigrants: (1) to sustain the flow of economic resources, (2) to garner political support and suppress political dissent, and (3) to “promote the upward social mobility of overseas nationals” (2003:4). Accordingly, sending states have prioritized such things as enabling the transfer of remittances, protecting emigrants’ rights, encouraging diaspora politics and lobbying on behalf of the homeland, extending the right to vote from abroad, and offering dual citizenship.

Choate’s (2007) detailed account of Italy’s overtures to its emigrants around the

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<sup>2</sup> For an important exception available in Turkish see Rüşen Çakır and İrfan Bozan, *Sivil, Şeffaf ve Demokratik Bir DRA İşleri Başkanlığı Mümkün mü?* (İstanbul: TESEV Yayınları, 2005).

world in the early 20th century illustrates how countries also engage in a variety of cultural as well as economic and political initiatives. Specifically, the Italian state supported religious institutions such as the Scalabrinian missionary order and religious schools, in part because the Catholic Church was concerned about the exploitation of Catholics abroad, the erosion of traditional morals, and the break-up of the family. DRA officials have long expressed the same concerns about Turkish migrants in Germany. In both cases the state is concerned about their citizens abroad and the repercussions of ignoring how they adapt to and are influenced by the host society.

Although Laurence (2006) focuses on the policies of receiving states toward migrant Muslim communities, he also provides a glimpse of sending state involvement in migrant religious affairs. Laurence highlights how the governments of France and Germany found it financially and politically expedient to outsource religious service provision to official representatives of Algeria, Morocco, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. These countries worked through their consulates and embassies to propagate interpretations of Islam that were compatible with homeland concerns, and they also monitored the actions of religious associations that were seen as challenges to their religious and political authority. European states have begun building institutional structures to manage Islam-state relations and reduce the influence of foreign governments in domestic affairs. For the time being, however, DITIB remains very active in Germany and the DRA continues to play an important role in guiding the organization.

### **DITIB and the DRA**

A brief overview of religion-state relations in Turkey is useful for understanding

DITIB’s origins and the influence the DRA wields over it. After founding Turkey in 1923, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his associates introduced sweeping reforms designed to create a modern nation-state united by a common Turkish Muslim identity. Inspired by French positivism and Durkheimian social theory, Republican elites viewed religion as an obstacle to modernization but also recognized its potential to unite a diverse population, so they took steps to consolidate and extend institutional controls over religion that had been established during the Ottoman Empire. To that end, the DRA was founded in 1924 to replace the Ottoman Ministry of Religious Law and Charitable Foundations. Sufi lodges and shrines were closed down, religious brotherhoods were outlawed, and the DRA assumed control over mosques, preachers, and religious teaching. Today the DRA remains at the helm of Turkish public religion and is the largest and most significant player in the Turkish religious market. It has an annual budget of \$1.6 billion US dollars and around 88,000 employees, it manages more than 77,000 mosques, oversees all legal Koran courses in the country, and organizes the pilgrimage to Mecca.

The DRA’s foray into Europe has been summarized succinctly by Kroissensbrunner (2002), who notes that the DRA sent religious personnel to Europe for short stays, typically during the month of Ramadan, as far back as the early 1970s. DITIB’s first office was opened in Berlin in 1982 and the organization was established nationally with headquarters in Cologne in 1984. As of June 2009, DITIB had grown to represent 889 member associations, each registered as a non-profit cultural association.<sup>3</sup> Individual DITIB associations primarily oversee mosques, but larger branches also offer folklore,

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<sup>3</sup> This number changes frequently. For the latest figure visit DITIB’s website: <http://www.DITIB.de>

Turkish, and German classes, and provide scholarships to the children of Turkish migrants to attend university.

DITIB is unlike other cultural associations because the overwhelming majority of its paid staff are imams funded and appointed by the Turkish government. Trained in religious high schools and theology faculties across Turkey, these imams are sent on four-year assignments to lead prayers and meet the religious needs of Turkish immigrants. As of 2006 there were approximately 530 imams employed by the Turkish government who were working in Germany on four-year contracts.<sup>4</sup> An additional 130 imams were in Germany for one-year stays and were paid jointly by the DRA and the local DITIB associations where they worked (Rıdvan Çakır, personal communication, July 12, 2006). Although usually unmonitored in their day-to-day activities, the imams are constrained by their position as civil servants in the Turkish government. According to DRA rulebooks in Ankara, imams must abide by the following principles: “remain conscious that one is an employee and authority of the Turkish state, protect the honor and pride of the profession everywhere and at all times, always follow the rules of courtesy and manners, act according to Islam’s foundational beliefs, worship, and morals, and protect the honor and esteem of the Turkish nation” (Çekin 2003).

It is hard to know with certainty the number of Turkish migrants in Germany affiliated with DITIB, but it is reasonable to assume that DITIB enjoys the highest level of support relative to all other Turkish religious associations.<sup>5</sup> A 2005 report by the Center for Studies on Turkey (Stiftung Zentrum für Türkeistudien) shows that 23 percent

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<sup>4</sup> While each of the 889 associations has an affiliated mosque or *mescit*, not all of them are large enough to receive a government-appointed imam.

<sup>5</sup> See Ögelman (2003) and Pfaff (2007) for additional studies supporting the claim that DITIB is the largest Turkish religious organization.

of Turkish migrants interviewed in a nationally representative telephone survey claim to be a member of a religious association in Germany and, of those, 77 percent report being a member of DITIB. In other words, approximately 18 percent of the Turkish migrant population claims membership in DITIB. The same study shows that of the 79 percent who claim to attend a mosque at least once a year, 80 percent choose to attend a DITIB mosque. This suggests that about 63 percent of the Turkish migrant population attends a DITIB mosque once a year. The next largest Turkish religious association in Germany according to the 2005 report is Milli Görüş; the telephone survey showed that only two percent of Turkish-origin immigrants claimed to be a member.<sup>6</sup>

DITIB’s relationship with the DRA is notoriously difficult to describe because of its legal status and close ties to the Turkish state. On the one hand, DITIB officials emphasize the organization’s independence from the DRA and its rootedness in Germany civil society. On the other hand, the organization is staffed by hundreds of Turkish civil servants whose salaries are paid by the Turkish state and whose understanding of DITIB sometimes contradicts official talking points. A DITIB imam who had completed two years of his four-year assignment described the organization as follows:

DITIB is a state institution. That is, it’s the representative of the Directorate of Religious Affairs here [in Germany]. It is not the representative of an individual; it represents the official state view. That’s why DITIB is not a religious community like Milli Görüş or the Süleymançıs; DITIB is the state. Whatever view the state holds, we hold the same view. At the end of the day, this organization has a leader; there is the Directorate of Religious Affairs, there are other agencies. We maintain our existence here according to the daily correspondence we receive from the Directorate: Do this. Do that.

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<sup>6</sup> Naturally, a telephone survey asking respondents to volunteer their affiliation with Milli Görüş will underreport the true number of members. Even before 9/11 and the incident at a Milli Görüş mosque where an imam preached that atheist Germans were destined for hell, Milli Görüş was added to a list of “extremist” organizations that German intelligence was to keep under surveillance.

His view is the opposite of how DITIB’s leaders portray the organization, so how and to what extent the DRA affects DITIB's operations and objectives remains an open question.

Recent scholarship suggests it is necessary to problematize the classic assumption that the DRA exists to defend and propagate a Kemalist rendering of Islam, that is, an Islam restricted to the private realm with no relevance for public affairs. Coşkun’s (2006) study of articles published in DRA journals in the 1990s shows that DRA officials had considerable leeway to challenge state discourse and Kemalist historiography, at least until the coup in 1997. Referring to the state’s ban on headscarves, one DRA article “stressed repeatedly...that the state is ‘hurting’, ‘offending’ and ‘wronging’ ‘the people’, acting against fundamental freedoms and being ‘undemocratic’...and that it has made a ‘tactical mistake’ by positioning state and religion in opposition to each other” (Coşkun 2006:18). Coşkun discovered that articles celebrating Turkish military victories written before the coup mostly ignored Atatürk and focused instead on religious aspects of Turkey’s pre-Ottoman and pre-Republican history, which was a common feature of Islamist discourse at the time (Çınar 2005). After the coup, articles on Atatürk started appearing again and frequently discussed his religious faith and views on Islam. Overall, Coşkun shows that the DRA promotes strong loyalty to the nation-state but also provides the “Islamic face” of the state, a type of religious nationalism that has been granted more or less freedom in different eras.

This research problematizes descriptions of DITIB that are commonplace in the literature on Turkish migrant religion. A typical example is found in Ögelman (2003:169): “DITIB [is] a franchised sending country leverage organization promoting a moderate Islam acceptable to the Turkish Regime,” and, “DITIB uses a franchised

authority structure to promote Kemalist-Islamic identity compatible with the Turkish regime.” Another description is offered by Schiffauer (2007:73): “[DITIB] stands for an Islam that understands the role of religion as strictly restricted to the private realm,” and he describes the DRA as the “administration of Kemalist Islam.” To be fair, neither Ögelman nor Schiffauer aim to provide detailed treatments of DITIB, but their characterizations of the organization reveal and reinforce uncritical acceptance of the notion that there is a unified state ideology in Turkey that only tolerates private faith. As will be discussed below, however, communal religious identity and public morality have featured prominently in DITIB rhetoric since 9/11 and the appointment of Dr. Ali Bardakoğlu as the DRA’s president in 2003.

DITIB is the product of Turkish migrant initiative, German laws, and Turkish state backing, which leaves the organization in an awkward position. As nebulous as the term integration can be, German observers of DITIB and its relationship with the Turkish government suspect that *this* is not integration. Cultural and familial ties to the homeland are one thing, but surely DITIB’s symbiotic relationship with a foreign government, especially in an arena as critical as religion, does not bode well for the integration of Turkish migrants into mainstream German society. As the following sections of this chapter reveal, DITIB’s role in immigrant integration is changing in a way that should alleviate some of these concerns.

### **DITIB on Integration<sup>7</sup>**

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<sup>7</sup> Findings are based on research conducted in Germany and Turkey between 2006 and 2008. In June and July 2006 I interviewed DITIB officials, imams, and staff in Berlin and Cologne, including four imams, DITIB’s president, general secretary, and director of interfaith dialogue, and the president, vice president, and religious attaché of DITIB-Berlin. I also interviewed the assistant to DITIB’s president and a former DITIB

DITIB has been contrasted with groups like Milli Görüş because of its strong focus on Turkey and minimal support for the integration of Turkish Muslims, by which I mean acquisition of German and participation in mainstream social, political, and educational institutions. DITIB’s focus on Turkey remains deeply entrenched today, but considerable changes have occurred over the last decade. This is most pronounced in DITIB’s stance toward integration.

Before discussing integration, it must be acknowledged that Turkey is still a focal point of DITIB personnel. DRA employees arriving in Germany express surprise at the extent to which Turkish migrants have lost touch with their cultural and religious roots, and many see their job in terms of restoring national and religious values among their compatriots. The DITIB imams interviewed for the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation’s 2005 report on the DRA make it clear that Turkey is a major focus of DITIB activity and rhetoric. They speak about needing to recapture second and third generation youth, many who cannot speak proper Turkish or have never set foot in a mosque; they tentatively support the training of Islamic leaders in Germany, but stress that proper training is only possible in Turkey where one can experience lived Islam; they are deeply skeptical that Turkish Muslims can be united with Muslims of other ethnic

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translator. Interviews averaged one hour and ranged from 20 minutes to two hours. All interviews were conducted in Turkish and recorded. Translations in the text are my own.

Data were also gathered during visits to DITIB’s central mosque in Berlin, which I frequented in order to arrange interviews, get my hair cut at the barber shop in the corner of the mosque’s teahouse, and drink tea with men who hung out in the teahouse. I attended this mosque and another DITIB mosque four times to observe Friday prayers.

Data also come from interviews I conducted in August 2006 when I visited the DRA in Ankara and spoke with officials who supervise DITIB activities and with those who had served as DITIB imams and religious attachés in Germany. Additional insights are derived from 20 months of fieldwork I conducted in Turkey in 2007 and 2008 that focused on the production of DRA sermons.

backgrounds either in worship or under the umbrella of Euro-Islam.

All the DITIB officials and imams I interviewed spoke about integration using the familiar distinction between integration and assimilation. In other words, all DITIB officials spoke positively about integration providing it was distinguished from assimilation. This distinction can be found in language of the Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland (Central Council of Muslims in Germany) from 2001<sup>8</sup> and even language of the Christian Democratic Union dating back to 1977.<sup>9</sup> All interviewees said it was essential that Turkish migrants learn German, for instance, but there was concern that when Germans tell them to integrate they mean that migrants should abandon their distinct cultural and religious traditions. The religious attaché overseeing Berlin’s mosques illustrates this clearly:

In our sermons, meetings, and speeches, we always encourage our people to integrate into this society. We want our people to be integrated. Of course, sometimes this "integration" comes to mean "assimilation." Naturally, because we came from another culture, another religion, we're going to have our differences. We have to accept each other with these differences. ‘Ah, but you're from a different religion!’ Yes, I'm from a different religion. The important thing is accepting our differences and showing respect. Showing respect to these sensitivities, we're endeavoring in this area to provide the integration of our people. And this is what's necessary...Of course we want [Germans] to respect our religious sensitivities. This is our right.

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<sup>8</sup> “Cultural differences – for example, wearing a head scarf – must be tolerated and accepted by the social majority. The disappearance of individual heritage – and identity – must not occur under integration, because this development would lead to a false equation with assimilation. It must also be expressly acknowledged that integration is not a process of removing supposed “deficiencies” among migrants. The goal is rather, a new balance between rights and duties through the clear and manifest expectations of legally guaranteed rights.” Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland, “Statement of the Islamic Council on the Report of the Immigration Commission,” in *Germany in Transit: Nation and Migration, 1955-2005*, ed. Deniz Göktürk, David Gramling, and Anton Kaes (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 185.

<sup>9</sup> “Integration does not mean an assimilation which works toward making foreign workers and their families into Germans.” In Peter O’Brien, “Continuity and Change in Germany's Treatment of Non-Germans,” *International Migration Review* 22 (1988): 123.

An imam put it this way:

Of course, when you say integration, sometimes assimilation is meant. We are absolutely against this. We are here as Turks, as Turks and also as Muslims, and we want to live and die like that. I mean, “We came, we live here, let’s become completely German” – we don’t want that, we’re against that. Maybe there are those in German government offices or German authorities who want that, but we’re absolutely against that.

Another imam described integration as follows:

What is integration and tolerance? Accepting everyone with their religion, language, customs, culture, civilization and living together well. Not, ‘He should be like me; so should she.’ For example, in Turkey right now, churches are open and their bells ring. For example, synagogues are open and they ring. In sum, [in Turkey] churches, synagogues, and mosques are right next to each other in some places.

Two issues were mentioned repeatedly as evidence that Germans were interested in assimilation rather than integration: citizenship tests and resistance to broadcasting the call to prayer (the *ezan*). The citizenship test introduced in the German state of Baden-Württemberg, for instance, was understood to mean that Turkish values are unacceptable. The test has 30 questions covering areas like art, history, civics, and values.<sup>10</sup> One question asks what you would do if your grown son told you he was gay and wanted to live with another man. Another asks, “What do you say to the statement that a woman must obey her husband and, if she disobeys, he is allowed to beat her?” The designer of the questionnaire, Heribert Rech, Minister of the Interior in Baden-Württemberg, says there are no right answers and that the test is merely meant to facilitate citizenship interviews, but my informants were concerned that this type of test could perpetuate

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<sup>10</sup> A similar 100-item test proposed by the state of Hesse is available online in English: <http://www.signandsight.com/features/675.html>

exclusionary attitudes against migrants.<sup>11</sup>

Several interviewees mentioned restrictions on broadcasting the call to prayer as an issue at the heart of integration, but they refrained from criticizing German policies in public. A press release issued by DITIB in fall 2006 about the construction of the organization’s new mosque in Cologne quoted DITIB’s president at the time, Rıdvan Çakır, saying the following: “We believe in showing the people around us, our neighbors, respect. Until German society reaches a consensus on this issue, we have no intention to broadcast the call outside [the mosque].” DITIB’s ties to the Turkish government, Turkey’s history of keeping religion out of politics, and German-Turkish bilateral relations make DITIB less likely than independent Turkish religious groups to engage in legal battles over such issues. But as will be outlined in the next section, this does not mean that DITIB lacks a strategy for tackling these topics or framing integration in a particularly advantageous way.

### *Educating Germans: Lessons from the Ottoman Legacy*

DITIB actors have a solution for the integration versus assimilation dilemma: the Ottoman *millet* system. Interviewees consistently referred to the Ottoman *millet* system as a model of interreligious harmony and a wealth of experience that could be brought to bear on current integration debates. Rıdvan Çakır, DITIB’s president during my

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<sup>11</sup> The strongest condemnation of this test came from a former DITIB employee who said the test warranted comparison of Turkish migrants with European Jews under the Nazis. The test, he claimed, suggests that Germans find Turks and Muslims unacceptable just as they are, which he identified as the origin of ethnic strife. Drawing comparisons to conditions under the Nazis, while fairly common among Turkish migrants, is extremely contentious in the German public sphere and recently resulted in the high-profile firing of Dr. Faruk Şen, former director of the Center for Studies on Turkey in Essen.

research, noted that the Ottoman system is something Germans could learn from because it allowed believers from different religions to worship more or less as they pleased:

When I met with the Pope, I told him, ‘In Turkey, people of various languages, religions, and races lived together without fighting for five centuries. This is an experience, and the European Union needs to benefit from this experience.’ You’ll ask me if Europe hasn’t also had this experience, and no, it hasn’t. How do I know? Because last year I was at the opening ceremony of a mosque in Munich, and a representative of the Pope said, ‘Until 1936 we weren’t able to open a church or school in this region.’ That is, even in an area with people from the same religion it wasn’t possible to open a church. I said in my speech following his that in Istanbul, church bells have rung for 551 years and no one interferes or has opposed this. That’s why our experience, especially in terms of harmony is quite extensive, and we need to explain this [to Germans/Europeans].

A DITIB imam in his late 20s also looked to the Ottoman legacy for lessons on integration, telling me about Sultan Abdülhamit II and the facility he built in 1895 for the elderly and destitute that contained a church, synagogue, and mosque. He shared this illustration of state-sponsored religious coexistence immediately after recounting an example from his own experience growing up in Istanbul:

At one end of [my] street was a mosque, and at the other end was a church. At one end of the street there was the call to prayer, and at the other end of the street were church bells. We were never disturbed by this. Sometimes, a couple times, we gave a warning that if the time they were to ring the bells overlapped with our prayer time, they should ring them either before or after the call to prayer. But we were never upset by the sound of the bells...About 50 steps from this church, there was a synagogue. There along the coast, a synagogue, church, and mosque within a triangle. Here [in Germany], you can’t give the call to prayer. Those who tell us to integrate should first look at this very simple example...I’m taking this example right from my life...I don’t consider the people who tell us to integrate, integrate, integrate to be very sincere. Of course, you can’t say this directly to people in a sermon; as a Muslim, you have to be harmonious with the environment where you live.

A DITIB official in Berlin argued that the problem facing Germany, and Europe more broadly, is that it has a single culture. He contrasts this with the United States and Turkey where there have been mosques, synagogues, and churches side-by-side for years:

This is a natural thing for me. I collaborate with Jews, I collaborate with Christians, because whichever region of Turkey you go to, churches, synagogues, and mosques are side-by-side. One person’s worship is on Friday, one is on Saturday, and one is on Sunday. On Monday, all of them go to the same café and play cards. There’s no culture problem. Because there is just one culture in Europe, Europe is going to have many more problems.

These idyllic – some would say fanciful – portrayals of religious harmony are part of an effort to redefine the Turkish minority (Amelina and Faist 2008:95). Arguing that Ottoman and modern Turkish experiences can be a lesson for Europe helps turn the tables on the Germans and puts the onus on them to defend their resistance to certain public expressions of Islamic faith like the call to prayer.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, emphasizing Ottoman history is a conscious effort to present Turkey as a more desirable member of the European Union, one with a long pedigree of tolerance and multiculturalism (Rıdvan Çakır, personal communication, July 12, 2006). Whether anyone will take the Ottoman heritage seriously as a factor in integration debates remains to be seen, but it has the potential to be a salient component of migrant self-perception: I met a second generation Turkish waiter at a pizza parlor in Berlin who insisted that he was from the Ottoman Empire.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Evolution of DITIB and its approach to integration*

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<sup>12</sup> Invoking the Ottoman legacy is not unique to DITIB. Seufert (1999:320) writes that Milli Görüş referenced the Ottoman *millet* system to justify its support for multiculturalism; he cites the transcript of a speech by Turkey’s current prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, published in a Milli Görüş magazine in 1996. It is unclear how widely the organization employed this justification and whether it influenced DITIB discourse. Given how often and how widely I encountered this rhetoric I suspect it was suggested as a talking point by the DRA, possibly in its courses for personnel about to work overseas.

<sup>13</sup> He did so until he realized I spoke Turkish; then he said he was Turkish with Turkish citizenship.

The idea that DITIB promotes a private form of Islam does not accord with DITIB’s growing commitment to the public presentation of Islam and the agency’s rhetoric on integration. I begin this section with a lengthy quotation from Dr. Ali Dere, the director of the DRA’s Foreign Relations Department who oversees DITIB’s work. In his remarks, Dr. Dere touches on the DRA’s commitment to migrant integration, the centrality of expressing one’s faith publicly, and the transformative role of the DRA’s new president, Dr. Ali Bardakoğlu; he also alludes to Turkey’s Ottoman legacy.

We describe the countries we go to as places we need to adapt to and as opportunities we need to take advantage of. That is, we tried to present these places as sites where we can once again exemplify and relive our historical experience of living together with different cultures. In this way we believe we actually contributed to the adaptation process of our people living in Western countries. Our children will learn German, let them learn French, by all means teach [them], obtain a good position, let your relationships with your neighbors be as good as possible because this isn’t just the need of the day, it’s what religion commands. You have to be even more careful as good people because it will be understood that you have a particular religion. That’s why you need to be more moral, more right, more honest. We have always explained these things in our sermons (*vaaz*). We explained to them that Islam is being represented there, that it’s an environment where people will take you as an example and that you are responsible in this regard. So we’ve always discussed being more harmonious, more right, and more honest. Thus, we believe we have contributed to them adapting to those countries.

I don’t want to criticize [the other religious groups], but we didn’t politicize religion; we didn’t give any room for politics. We perceived religion as religion and explained that the power and values taken from religion need to be reflected in daily life. Thus, like the president of the DRA has emphasized, we aimed for a religiosity based on morals, not a religiosity shown by symbols like, “I pray a lot” – not like that, but a religiosity based on morals. So, with the slogan of, “You’re only religious to the extent that you’re moral and you show it”...that’s how we made it easier for our people to become part of that society. In other words, we think we make it easier to be a German, a Frenchman.

This quotation encapsulates three factors that play a role in the DRA’s changing approach to integration. First, DITIB’s focus on the presentation of Islam is related to 9/11 and the increasing scrutiny of Muslims in non-Muslim countries (TESEV 2005). As the recipient

of regular hate mail, DITIB is well aware of increasingly negative attitudes toward Muslims following 9/11 and other terrorist attacks. While the agency had been reluctant to condemn every act of violence linked to Islam – as one official put it, “I’m not a part of it, so why should I have to distinguish myself from it!” – it knew there was a cost to remaining silent. Consequently, on November 22, 2004, DITIB organized a demonstration against terrorism in Cologne that drew crowds estimated between 20,000 and 50,000.<sup>14</sup>

A second reason to attend to the presentation of Islam and the Turkish community at large are the implications for Turkey’s EU membership. DITIB president Rıdvan Çakır said that he viewed Turkish migrants in Germany as an advance team that could shape attitudes about Turks and thereby influence Turkey’s accession to the EU. It was their job to show Germans how Turks really were, which meant displaying the tolerance and morality found in the Ottoman tradition and contemporary Turkish Islam.

Third, the DRA has undergone significant changes since Dr. Ali Bardakoğlu became president of the agency in 2003. First, it is noteworthy that Bardakoğlu’s background is in academia and that he did not become DRA president by working his way up agency ranks; he was a professor of Islamic law at Marmara University when appointed to lead the agency. When he came to office, he brought other academics with him to fill top administrative positions and this new cadre has pursued projects designed

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<sup>14</sup> The Cologne mosque controversy also suggests that DITIB is no longer shying away from public confrontation or debate (see: Mark Lander, “Effort to build a large mosque rattles some in Cologne,” *New York Times*, 3 July 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/03/world/europe/03iht-cologne.4.6472047.html>). DITIB also boycotted the Second Integration Summit, hosted by Chancellor Angela Merkel in Berlin (see: “Merkel Hails Integration Milestone, Hits Back at Critics,” *Deutsche Welle*, 12 July 2007, <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,2680461,00.html>).

to promote scholarship and increase religion’s public presence. These include ambitious measures to increase staff capabilities and broaden the agency’s services by expanding into sectors where religious actors were not commonly found, such as family counseling. The DRA has also recently funded the free distribution of religious literature and organized hundreds of conferences on religious topics that are open to the public. The agency’s emphasis on expanding religious services beyond facilitating worship reached its peak with the DRA’s 2009-2013 strategic plan, released in fall 2008, which includes measures to transform 200 mosques into social and cultural centers by building libraries, classrooms, and tea houses on their grounds. As Dr. Dere indicates, this flourishing of religious initiative has affected the agency’s international operations and spurred greater emphasis on public morality within DITIB mosques.

### *Preaching*

It is one thing for DITIB and DRA administrators to talk about integration and quite another for preachers on the ground to do so. German citizens have been especially concerned about the preaching at Turkish mosques following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and a widely reported 2004 incident in which a Milli Görüş imam was secretly recorded by a German TV station preaching that Germans were unbelievers who would burn in hell (Poggioli 2004).

DITIB sermons could not be more different. For one thing, the sermons (*hutbe*) read in DITIB mosques between 1997 and 2006 were mostly identical to those read in Turkey. DITIB imams simply used the same sermons, approximately 400 words each, prepared by experts in Ankara that were distributed in the DRA’s monthly journal or via

the Internet (Gibbon 2008). Ready-made sermons were both time-saving and a convenient way for imams to avoid getting in trouble should anyone object to a sermon’s content because the imams could not be held liable.

Mr. Çakir described tolerance and integration as fundamental to Islam and argued that DITIB preachers would not need to modify their sermons in order to promote these two objectives. He stated that principles like respect, brotherliness, and neighborliness are essential to integration and have always been taught in DITIB’s sermons. Broad themes of getting along with others are indeed found in the sermons, but these types of general moral admonitions are by no means tailored to the situations of migrants. One example of a ritual sermon that did speak directly to an integration issue was written by DITIB personnel in Berlin and encouraged Turkish-origin German citizens to vote:

Sometimes we read sermons dealing with integration...In fact, we read a sermon about German elections; we prepared this ourselves. You know, saying that in the coming days there will be an election and our German citizens, that is, our Turkish-origin German citizens must go and exercise their democratic rights, their right to vote.

Friday worship at DITIB mosques is organized as it is in Turkey, with a 35-45 minute extemporaneous sermon called a *vaaz* before the beginning of ritual prayers followed by the ritual *hutbe*, a 5-10 minute sermon delivered after ritual prayer has begun. It is in the *vaaz* that the imam is likely to mention topics specifically related to integration. For instance, I listened to a sermon on gossiping about women and the potentially disastrous consequences of spreading rumors about their chastity. Afterwards, I confirmed with the imam that honor killing was the issue that had prompted the sermon, which is significant because honor killing is often identified by Germans as an example of how Turkish migrants are completely alien and have values that are incompatible with

European society. Although the imam was apprehensive about addressing the topic directly, he recognized its relevance for the Turkish community.

I asked another imam how the sermons read in Germany address the subject of integration and he said they usually speak about such issues in the *vaaz* because its format allows them more flexibility and freedom:

Of course we treat this subject [i.e., integration]. For example, since we’ve experienced these issues with our own children...For one thing, learning a language is not against our beliefs or national values. The biggest problem, that is, the biggest problem for states who have accepted migrants, or have minorities, or guests, is for their own language not to be spoken at the desired level...That’s why the thing to be done here is for us to encourage language learning. For instance, we gave, and are giving, English, German, Turkish, and math courses in our mosque.

Sermons addressing issues that migrants face in Germany, whether *vaaz* or *hutbe*, represent a dramatic departure from DITIB sermons of the past. An informant who preached in DITIB mosques in the mid-1990s gave me a copy of a sermon he preached in 1995 that admonished listeners to help orphans and widows in the villages of Turkey. The focus was entirely on Turkey and encouraged sending donations there to help charities. While additional data is hard to come by, my informant told me this sermon was typical for that time.

DITIB has not only begun paying more attention to managing the public presentation of Islam, it has also started developing social service programs to serve Turkish migrants. The president of DITIB-Berlin explains:

DITIB isn’t only involved with religion...Scholarships are given, there are sporting events. We teach German, not just religion...DITIB is like a grocer because you can get everything you need from it. Actually its entire nature lies in that fact....Someone dies, people come to DITIB. People come to DITIB after a birth, for education they come to DITIB, to learn to read they come to DITIB, for Turkish, for Arabic, etc. DITIB is a state unto itself.

Mr. Çakır elaborated on this saying that it has been within the last three years that DITIB has greatly expanded its provision of services to include language classes, tutoring, and sport clubs for youth. This is consistent with observations by Amiraux (1996:45) and Schiffauer (2007:91) that DITIB lags behind other religious groups and often tries to imitate their programs; these social services have long been offered by Milli Görüş, for instance. The president of DITIB-Berlin argues that DITIB’s late entry into service provision is linked to the gradual evolution of Turkish migrants’ position in Germany society: first they were guests, then foreigners, then immigrants, and now minorities. Likewise, he said, DITIB’s understanding of its mission has changed over the years, with an increasing focus on social services.

In fact, the view that DITIB’s social programs have expanded dramatically was not shared by all within the agency. A member of the second generation who worked with DITIB leaders countered statements praising the social services and activities provided by the agency. He said that there is nothing to attract youth to DITIB mosques after they finish the Koran courses and that the women’s branches of DITIB exist merely in theory. In other words, if DITIB is making a turn toward providing social services and activities, especially those that would attract second and third generation migrants, it is a very wide turn indeed.

### **Transnational Education Networks – “Religion is a field of knowledge”**

Focusing on scholarship is one strategy that the DRA, and by extension, DITIB, uses to distinguish itself from other religious associations. Whereas Sufi brotherhoods or groups like Milli Görüş rely on charismatic authority as their source of legitimacy, the

DRA argues for pride of place based on claims that it performs the highest quality Islamic scholarship and produces what DRA officials refer to simply as “correct knowledge.”

The DRA’s emphasis on education and knowledge has had a direct impact on DITIB. Dr. Ali Dere, director of the DRA’s international projects, makes this point while discussing how the DRA stresses the importance of basing religious practice on sound scholarship and how this distinguishes DITIB from other religious groups in Europe.

In addition to not politicizing religion in Europe, we stressed that religion is a field of knowledge. We expressed that healthy information, not personal authority or superstitions, would be dominant over there. And I think this is important: what are we basing our religious services on? We declare that they are based on knowledge, and as a good example of this, we send academics abroad from Turkey for conferences as the opportunity arises. Most of the colleagues we send, at least 50 percent of them, are university graduates... We send academics from Turkey – professors, other ranks – and thus, this sphere, we are trying to explain and show that the religious sphere is a scholarly sphere.

The DRA has put its money where its mouth is by endowing two Islamic theology professorships in Frankfurt’s Goethe University in 2004. That the professors hail from Turkey is not the only connection to the homeland; the students in this masters program visit Turkey during the academic year to receive lectures from Turkish theology professors in Istanbul.

Another example of DRA involvement in religious education that spans borders is the program to bring German-born Turkish immigrants to Turkey for theological training. The DRA has begun a program to bring about 40 young men at a time from Germany to train at Turkish universities, and the goal of the program is to educate people who will return to Germany and serve as theology professors and imams. These Turkish-origin students will be in a better position to address local needs of the community, serve as

liaisons with Germans, and possibly create the institutions necessary to raise up the next generation of religious leaders from within Germany.

A final example of transnational information exchange are the DRA sermons mentioned earlier. Originally “imported” from Turkey and used with minimal modification in DITIB mosques across Germany, the centralized sermon regime came to an end in June 2006. The system had many critics, including leaders within the DRA. Everyone realized that a sermon about following traffic rules was inappropriate for villages with no traffic lights and sermons that failed to address issues related to the migrant experience were inadequate for Germany. Additionally, critics within the DRA were concerned about how this centralized system reflected on the agency - just when the Turkish government was trying to strengthen its democratic credentials and hasten EU membership, it looked like a government agency was restricting religious expression, dictating what could and could not be said in the mosque. Perhaps most importantly, the DRA thought its imams were becoming lazy. The sermon policy was changed so that committees of DRA-appointed religious figures in each of Turkey’s 81 provinces became responsible for producing sermons; in Germany, 12 different regions or large cities would each have a committee responsible for sermon production. While the transition to localized sermon content within Germany was a top-down decision delivered by DRA administrators, it has given DITIB more autonomy, allowing the agency to give greater attention to the issues facing their migrant constituents.

### **DITIB’s Success in the Religious Market**

Why is an organization that ostensibly offers so few social services and activities

doing so well in terms of total mosques and membership? There are surely multiple factors, from DITIB’s ties to the Turkish state to its apolitical approach to religion, but I want to suggest one possibility that has not been addressed in the immigration or Islam literatures: there is demand for what I call “Vanilla Islam.”

DRA and DITIB officials are careful not to describe the German religious scene as a competitive market. Dr. Ali Dere describes DRA imams as being sent to serve everyone, which is why they do not see themselves in competition with the *cemaats* (i.e., Milli Görüş, Süleymancıs, etc.):

In the courses for imams that we’re going to send abroad we tell them: You are an officer of one of Turkey’s institutions that provides public service. When you go there, whoever asks you for service, you’re going to serve them. However much your sphere of duties means that we obtain a visa, we obtain residency permission, and you go to a particular mosque, whoever comes to you and wants to get information, you’re going to help them. It’s not, ‘I’m a member of this group or that group.’ (“Ben şucuyum, bucuyum,” değil.)

Positioning oneself in the religious market as a noncompetitor can have a strategic advantage. DITIB’s religious “products” and social services may never appeal to those who have a taste for more demanding sectarian faith, but by seeking to provide lowest-common-denominator religious services it is possible to reach a wider swath of the market than “niche” organizations like Milli Görüş or the Süleymancıs (Introvigne 2005).

The DRA entered the German religious scene in order to provide “neutral” religious goods – in other words, religious goods that people could consume regardless of their political beliefs. Needless to say this does not mean that DITIB’s founding was apolitical (Ewing 2003:424). But in practice DITIB mosques would not exclude or condemn people because of the clothes they wore or the political leaders they supported. Everyone would be welcome at the mosque and at the very least could fulfill their religious

obligations. This was not necessarily possible at the mosques belonging to various religious communities; too many *mescits* had become sites to recruit people for political causes or to promote goals that were not acceptable to migrants who simply sought to perform their prayers. By suggesting that the DRA is inclusive I do not mean to say it represents all – Alevis, for instance, have long brought attention to the Hanafi Sunni bias of the DRA. Instead, the DRA facilitates the bare necessities of Islamic practice so that almost any Muslim who attends worship or steps into a mosque to pray should feel comfortable (e.g., even Turkey’s Shiites will pray at DRA-operated Sunni mosques).

This is why I refer to the DRA’s brand of Islam as “vanilla Islam”: it is the most widely consumed type among its competitors just as vanilla is the most widely consumed flavor of ice cream out of countless varieties. DITIB offers little that could be called exciting or innovative, but it is remarkably consistent. Members of Milli Görüş often criticize DRA sermons for being lightweight, but if nothing else they are mercifully short and relatively benign. Moreover, tolerating DITIB’s rhetoric for the sake of meeting religious obligations is already familiar to Turkish Muslims who attend Friday prayers in Turkey where the only option is usually to attend a DRA mosque.

Is there actually any demand for this bland fare? In answering this question it is worth considering a finding from research on American Christianity. In her research on American congregations, Nancy Ammerman (1997) identified “Golden Rule Christians” who are not especially committed to attending church every week and not overly concerned with religious doctrine. Instead, they enjoy aspects of worship and the church’s emphasis on good deeds, and they believe the church has an important role to play in teaching morals to their children. I suggest there are Muslim counterparts who

are satisfied by what the DRA and DITIB offer, and these Muslims could be called “Golden Rule Muslims.” They are generally pleased with the religious services provided by DITIB and find nothing objectionable – if nothing very exciting, either – in the wholesome sermons that link religious and national values with being a good person. Because they are also concerned about the moral upbringing and religious identity of their children, however, they would like more programs for young people (this is the issue that draws the most complaints about DITIB, see TESEV 2005).

This leaves DITIB both a winner and a loser. Its consistent vanilla Islam remains very attractive to many Turkish migrants, especially those of the first generation, and avoids media scorn for anything resembling radicalism. However, second and third generation migrants may find little that holds their interest apart from the provision of basic religious services. Milli Görüş, on the other hand, offers a variety of activities like sports and computer classes, although its strongest appeal may come from providing a distinctive religious identity based on stricter beliefs and practices.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has reexamined a migrant religious organization by taking seriously its connection with a foreign government agency and by exploring its changing approach to integration. The two are not unrelated. The DRA has recently experienced a period of growth that has promoted religion’s role in the public realm far beyond what typical accounts of Turkey would lead us to expect. This has affected DITIB’s practices as well, leading imams to redouble their efforts to encourage *public* morality, promote integration, and raise awareness that whatever Turkish migrants do will be taken as

representative of Islam. These developments in DITIB rhetoric and practice cannot be fully understood without attention to changes at the DRA.

Currently understudied, sending state activities conducted abroad deserve to be addressed in the context of research on transnationalism. One of the five conclusions regarding transnationalism that Alejandro Portes specified in his 2003 *International Migration Review* article was that transnationalism is about grassroots activity. This was not an empirical claim, but rather a prescription for making grassroots activity the proper focus of transnational studies. Portes argues that too much attention has been given to state and corporate actors and it is now time to look more closely at grassroots actors on the ground. Others, including Waldinger and Fitzgerald (2004), argue that you cannot understand these actors without including the role of states.

The case of DITIB supports the argument that ignoring or excluding states in transnational studies results in an incomplete understanding of international migration, for here there is a blending of governmental enterprise and local, civilian initiative: the migrants themselves form mosque associations and then “top them off” with an appointed preacher from the homeland. This paper has focused on the government side of the equation, but future research should address the motivations and concerns of migrants who establish mosques and then choose to affiliate with DITIB. Are founders primarily from the first generation with stronger ties to Turkey? Is the prospect of receiving a free imam the central motivating factor or, as religious minorities under suspicion, do Turkish migrants seek the legitimacy offered by state patronage? In order to understand the present situation of Turkish migrant integration in Germany, it is important to consider the larger context of international and domestic relations that shape actions and

opportunity spaces of migrants on the ground. In doing so, however, it is also necessary to address the roles played by specific government representatives of the sending state, in this case Turkish religious elites, who interact with and perhaps transform the grassroots.

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