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# Turkey's Soft Power Policies in the Occupied Areas of Cyprus and the Balkans: Objectives, Agents, and Implications (Part A)

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# Research Paper

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December 2022  
No. 12

*Cover Picture: Hala Sultan Camii  
The largest mosque in Occupied Cyprus*

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# Turkey's Soft Power Policies in the Occupied Areas of Cyprus and the Balkans: Objectives, Agents, and Implications (Part A)\*

## Introduction

The present study explores Turkey's soft power practices in the illegally established Turkish Cypriot state ("TRNC")<sup>1</sup> contrasted with experiences from Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH). Essentially, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive account of the Turkish government's soft power approach and objectives in geopolitical areas of critical interest. Despite Turkey's large-scale military presence in Cyprus, - following the July-August 1974 military invasion-, and parallel to Ankara's decisive intervention in Turkish Cypriot political and economic affairs, Turkey has been exercising a socially transformative influence in the occupied areas of Cyprus, adjusted in accordance to the ruling AKP's (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi - Justice and Development Party) "doctrinal diktats".

**Despite Turkey's large-scale military presence in Cyprus, - following the July-August 1974 military invasion-, and parallel to Ankara's decisive intervention in Turkish Cypriot political and economic affairs, Turkey has been also exercising a socially transformative influence in the occupied areas of Cyprus, adjusted in accordance to the ruling AKP's "doctrinal diktats".**

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\* This paper is published in two parts. Part B is to be released in January 2023.

<sup>1</sup> "TRNC" (Turkish Republic of North Cyprus - Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti, KKTC) refers to the self-declared and internationally non-recognized de facto Turkish Cypriot state that was illegally established (Declaration 1983) on the island's territory occupied by the Turkish military forces during the 1974 military invasion of Turkey in Cyprus. The international community considers the northern part of the island as part of the Republic of Cyprus and in this report the term "TRNC" is therefore used in brackets to denote the entity's illegal and non-recognized status. The area of Cyprus invaded and occupied by the Turkish military forces, and where today Turkish Cypriots reside, stretches through the entire northern part of the island.

Since 1974, Turkey's military presence as a "security guarantor", and Ankara's financial support and guidance in the policy affairs of the Turkish Cypriot community have created a relation of dependency between Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot community that inhabits the occupied territory of Cyprus since 1974.

Turkey is indeed exercising all forms of power and influence on the Turkish Cypriot community in a way that serves the perceived mutual interests of both parties but allows little room for autonomy to the latter. This is true to the extent that when states use their soft power, they have the intention to change the attitudes or behaviour of a target audience rather than adjusting or "playing their part" in a more inclusive or diverse context built in more reciprocal terms. Nevertheless, despite the obvious power-gap

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between the two, Turkey benefits from holding on to its strategic interests on the island and to its "moral duties" for the protection of the Turkish Cypriot community. Due to an internalised fear of subjugation to the Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriot leaderships have generally conformed with Turkey's suzerainty over vital issues of social and political substance. Following the "Annan Plan" failure in 2004 and the subsequent collapse of inter-communal talks at Crans-Montana in 2017, this type of "practical exchange" has been growingly regaining its momentum. Turkey has been gradually becoming more than a mere security and economic provider to the illegally established Turkish Cypriot entity, advancing its influential role well into the public sphere with the view to lure, incentivize and harmonize the Turkish Cypriot community with AKP's mainstream politico-religious ideology.

This study identifies the means and implications of Turkey's soft power as a supplement to Turkey's conventional diplomatic activity and military presence in Cyprus, and accounts for the coherence of its policies in Cyprus with selected cases from the Balkans. The strategic purpose of Turkey's soft power in the occupied areas of Cyprus is matched with evidence from a selected number of ethnic/Muslim communities in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, namely the Bosniaks or Bosnian Muslims and the Kosovars or Kosovo Albanians. Although acknowledging the particularities of each case, target communities in Cyprus, BiH, and Kosovo are rather similar in four major aspects:

- i) existence of internal ethnic divisions (all three communities live in divided states/societies);
- ii) common religious identification (all three communities are Muslim);
- iii) constitutional dysfunctions and issues of legal recognition, and
- iv) a legacy of ethno-nationalist violence.

These cases provide a brilliant pool of knowledge for identifying the aims, means and implications of Turkish soft power through a multitude of state-related agents.

The first aspect of the analysis focuses on the preservation and diffusion of traditional and non-traditional elements intended to promote the ethno-cultural alignment of the Turkish Cypriot community with the worldview and ideals of Turkey's conservative Islamic nomenclature. For doing so, the study examines the means and implications of i) the invigoration of sponsored religiosity and cultural infrastructure, and ii) the role of education. The second aspect goes beyond the ipso facto "dependency relations" in services, trade, fiscal issues, and transportation, focusing on i) infrastructural dependence, and ii) humanitarian projections and asset control. The final section illustrates the experiences of Turkey's soft power activity in Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH). This could allow us to consider the depth and implications of Turkey's

grassroots penetration and manipulation of culture, religion, humanitarian or (human-centric) economics, and thus facilitate conclusions over its coherence and impact.

The study analyses Turkey's soft power by:

- i. Clarifying its "grand narrative" and identifying the means of Turkey's soft power initiatives in the occupied areas of Cyprus
- ii. Assessing its intensity and implications in the occupied areas of Cyprus.
- iii. Examining the relevance and coherence of Turkey's soft power practices with evidence drawn from the ethnically divided states of Kosovo and BiH.

## I. Turkey's Soft Power Activity in Turkish Occupied Cyprus

### Religion, Culture and Education

The "patron-client" relations between Turkey and the so-called "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" ("TRNC") extend over a range of structural sectors, including those of military security, economy, culture, and education. However, contrary to the Turkish Cypriot community's direct and more obvious economic, military and diplomatic dependency, Turkey's socially infiltrating role in the occupied parts of Cyprus has been put aside in criticisms regarding the depth and extent of Turkey's policymaking practices in Cyprus. Of course, the well-evidenced influx of Turkish settlers in Cyprus since 1974 has drawn the relative attention of analysts concerned with the demographically distortive practices employed by Turkish governments and their effects on the island's ethno-cultural fabric.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> According to the 2011 census, "TRNC" had a de facto population of 294,906 (excluding Turkish military personnel). Of the latter, 190,494 were "TRNC" citizens, 80,550 Turkish nationals, and 15,215 had other nationalities. However, the total citizen and non-citizen population living and working in "TRNC" by 2017 is estimated around 370,000 (excluding Turkish army personnel 25,000-30,000). Between January 2012 and April 2017, "TRNC" granted 12,890 new citizenships. Around 42,000 of citizens currently living in "TRNC" island

However, since the rise of the AKP in power, the instrumentalisation of religion, both as a symbolic and substantial power-tool, has become increasingly more visible in the Turkish Cypriot social space. Its effects clearly collide with educational, media and cultural motifs that aspire to extend beyond “religiosity” to affect social perceptions (vis-à-vis consolidating the image of the powerholder) and harmonize local attitudes.

Since 1974, Turkey has been acting formally as the sole guarantor of the Turkish Cypriot entity’s viability by imposing a hard framework of fiscal, trade, military and diplomatic dependency, and by preserving the secular nationalist (Kemalist) notion of Turkishness. Rauf Denktash’s staunch Kemalist adherence ensured there would be no diversion. By contrast, the AKP capitalized on Turkey’s tight grip on Cyprus to promote an alternative, more conservative and Islamic-centred ideological and political agenda. As accurately observed, Ankara’s conservative political cadres in synergy with local Turkish Cypriot authorities have engaged in “a social engineering exercise among the Turkish Cypriot community in order to strengthen their ‘weak’ religious features”, while at the same time effecting changes that alter Cyprus’s traditional landscape and historical physiognomy.<sup>3</sup>

**Ankara’s conservative political cadres in synergy with local Turkish Cypriot authorities have engaged in “a social engineering exercise among the Turkish Cypriot community in order to strengthen their ‘weak’ religious features”, while at the same time effecting changes that alter Cyprus’s traditional landscape and historical physiognomy.**

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were born in Turkey. We can estimate that there are 60.000-62.000 “TRNC” citizens with Turkish ancestry, either having been born in Turkey or having both parents. In addition, there are 26.635 legally working Turkish nationals in the island. There are approximately 55.000 Turkish citizen students in the island. It is important to note that almost 30% of “TRNC” (approx. 1/4) citizens are either born in Turkey or born of parents of mainland Turkish origin. This excludes families with one member born in Turkey (mixed) and some families originating from the first post-1974 settlers). For more see: Hatay, Mete (2017). “Populations and Politics in North Cyprus: An overview of the ethno-demography of north Cyprus in the light of the 2011 census.” Report 2/2017. PRIO Cyprus Centre and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

<sup>3</sup> Moudouros, Nikos (2019). “The AKP’s “pious youth in Cyprus” Project and the Turkish Cypriot ‘deviations’”. *Journal of Muslims in Europe*, 8: 25-47, 28



Ankara has been accused for trying to align the Turkish Cypriot community with AKP's prevailing Islamic and socially conservative attitudes and compromise the secularist

**Conservative Turkish imams have always found it difficult to penetrate and alter the socially embedded Turkish Cypriot religious attitude through Islamic preaching and lecturing, while some have regarded much of the Turkish Cypriot community as deviant or even "kaffir".**

orientation of the Turkish Cypriots through the imposition of an artificially implanted Islamic identity. This dynamic, however, has created tensions because a portion of the Turkish Cypriot community perceives this not only as an attempt to impose a cultural change, but also as a means of tightening Ankara's political control and manipulation over the Turkish Cypriot community.

Historically, Turkish Cypriots belong in their majority to the dominant Turkish Sunni-Muslim Hanafi sect and they have been generally regarded as moderately religious with broad exposure to and acceptance of secular norms. Interestingly, however, one of the most prominent worldwide figures of Sufi Islam, Mehmet

Nazım Adil, better known as Sheikh Nazım (Şeyh Nazım), was a Turkish Cypriot and lived much of his later life in the town of Lefke (Lefka) in Cyprus. Access to limited quantitative information on the matter of Turkish Cypriot religiosity revealed that while the "two-thirds of the Turkish Cypriots identify themselves as religious individuals, and the overwhelming majority view religion and God as important in their lives, they however, seem to hold mixed feelings towards organized religion and the intrusion of religious principles in social life. According to a research study, attendants at regular Friday prayers are only 7.9% of the respondents and most Turkish Cypriots either never attend mosque services (45.8%) or do so on religious holidays or less often (41.9%).

Furthermore, some 70% of respondents support limiting the influence of religious leaders on voters and 76% support limiting religious leaders' influence over government.<sup>4</sup> It is no wonder that conservative Turkish imams have always found it difficult to penetrate and alter the socially embedded Turkish Cypriot religious attitude through Islamic preaching and lecturing, while some have regarded much of the Turkish Cypriot community as deviant or even "kaffir". Obviously, for as long as the Turkish Cypriots stuck to their secular orientation, nationalist objectives and unwavering attachment to Turkey, religious practice could hardly ever become a subject of intense political concern for Ankara. However, that was to change following the rise of AKP in power. The

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conservative Islamic-nationalist value system endorsed by AKP was to become the central component in redefining "Turkishness" within and outside Turkey, and the Turkish Cypriot community would be no exception.

In recent years, Turkey eagerly encourages the gradual transformation of the Turkish Cypriot social landscape by interfering into its geospatial and cultural components. The erection of several mosques across the occupied areas of Cyprus is probably the most visible and outspoken manifestation of Turkey's religious soft power.

On a short history note, two thirds of all mosques in rural Cyprus were traditionally built without a minaret, whereas those with adjoined minarets were traditionally built in relevance with the characteristic thicker and shorter (8-12 metres height) Turkish Cypriot

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<sup>4</sup> Yesilada, Birol (2009). "Islam and the Turkish Cypriots". *Social Compass*, 56(1): 49–59

minaret style. This architectural tradition blended in well with the humble rural Cypriot environment.

In reality, from 1974 to 1980, parallel to the initial change of local toponyms from Greek to Turkish, and the transformation of (some) Christian churches into mosques, it was becoming increasingly evident that religion would be somehow used more intensively as a means of consolidating the distinctive character and separate status of the territories held by the Turkish Cypriot community. Given the strong identity attachment of Greek Cypriots to their Orthodox Church, and considering the centrality of the Church in mobilising Greek national struggles, the symbolic antithesis of “who owns power” was to be centred on and expressed through a recognizable, symbolic and visible denominator that distinguished the two communities: religious affiliation.

Nine mosques were built between 1974 and 2002 in various towns and villages across the occupied areas of Cyprus with the finances of the Turkish Embassy in Nicosia.<sup>5</sup> Yet during the 90s, the initial objective of mosque construction had to do with empowering the projection of Turkish Cypriot legacy, jurisdiction and rule over the area. Interestingly, mosques were built in villages and rural terrains where no or few Turkish Cypriots had ever resided. Between 1999 and 2003, 14 new Ottoman style mosques with distinctively high minarets were built with the financial support of successive Turkish governments, including the Nuretin Ersin Pasha Mosque in Kerynia and the Osman Fazil Polat Pasha in Famagusta (named after two commanders of the invading Turkish army in 1974). However, this small number of mosques was built to remind Turkish Cypriots of Turkey’s key role in “liberating them from the repressive Greek Cypriot administration”, instilling

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<sup>5</sup> An Djavit, Ahmet (2016). “The Development of Turkish Cypriot Secularism and Turkish Cypriot Religious Affairs”. Eastern Mediterranean Policy Note No. 8. Av.at: [https://ccea.unic.ac.cy/wp-content/uploads/EMPN\\_8.pdf](https://ccea.unic.ac.cy/wp-content/uploads/EMPN_8.pdf)

into the Turkish Cypriot collective consciousness a clear and unambiguous message of gratitude to Turkey.

With the rise of the AKP in office, and given the rejection by the Greek Cypriots of the controversial “Anan Plan”, a more dynamically intrusive policy of religious penetration was adopted with the aim to trigger spatial transformation and embrace the Turkish Cypriot community into Turkey’s new vision of “mainstream Turkishness”.

**Between 2007 and 2019, a large-scale construction programme aimed at the erection of 53 new mosques, many of which included disproportionately to their size tall minarets amidst Cyprus’ plain and sandy rural terrain.**

In accordance with Erdoğan’s political view that “secularism is a style of management, Islam is a moral principle” and true to his classic motto “the mosques are our barracks, the minarets our bayonets, the domes our helmets and the faithful our soldiers”, the AKP has encouraged blending the Ottoman Islamic past with Turkish nationalism and neoliberal economics.<sup>6</sup> The sprouting of high-capacity Ottoman-style mosques, with long, whitewashed minarets and domes visible from miles away, constituted an indication of Ottoman architectural revival and conquering pride as previously portrayed in the structures of the Ömeriye

Mosque (Augustinian Church of Saint Mary), Lala Mustafa Pasha Mosque (formerly Saint Nicolas Cathedral) and Selimiye Mosque (Saint Sophia Church).

Between 2007 and 2019, a large-scale construction programme aimed at the erection of 53 new mosques, many of which included disproportionately to their size tall minarets amidst Cyprus’ plain and sandy rural terrain. Interestingly, many mosques were built near or within abandoned Greek Cypriot villages. This clearly attests to the political driven

<sup>6</sup> Matthews, Owen (23 November 2002). “The minarets are our bayonets”. The Spectator. Av.at: <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/-the-minarets-are-our-bayonets->

nature of mosque-building projects across the occupied areas of Cyprus. Nearby the remnants of Greek Orthodox Christian churches, mosques were built as testimonies of the new ethno-cultural order. Nonetheless, although by the end of 1991 there were 141 mosques in the occupied areas, 58 of them did not have imams for performing the religious prayers.<sup>7</sup> In 2014 out of the 260 imams, who were paid from the budget of the so-called “Prime Ministry” of the “TRNC” and another 120 imams received their salaries from the Turkish Embassy in Nicosia.”<sup>8</sup> Clearly, the erection of numerous mosques in the occupied areas of Cyprus has not been a matter of coincidence or even the result of the necessity for servicing the faithful.

**Alongside to the numerous war-hero statues, monuments and flags, favoured mostly by the secular governments in Turkey, AKP’s systematic implantation of glittering Ottoman mosques is not only meant to consolidate Turkey’s deep-rooted presence on the island, but also to project AKP’s vision of “Turkishness”.**

Large mosques were erected in prominent locations such as hills and major highways as visible signs of presence and ownership. New mosques were built in proximity to the ruined and abandoned Greek Christian Orthodox churches, in Greek Cypriot villages and elsewhere, signalling a sense of Islamic dynamism and boosting the antithesis of power and domination over the old Christian element. Alongside to the numerous war-hero statues, monuments and flags, favoured mostly by the secular governments in Turkey, AKP’s systematic implantation of glittering Ottoman mosques is not only meant to consolidate Turkey’s deep-rooted presence on the island, but also to project AKP’s vision of “Turkishness”.

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<sup>7</sup> An Djavit, Ahmet (2016). “The Development of Turkish Cypriot Secularism and Turkish Cypriot Religious Affairs”. Eastern Mediterranean Policy Note No. 8.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

With the tacit approval of local authorities, the AKP's educational reforms in Turkey were also introduced, to some extent, into the Turkish Cypriot public education curriculum. Since 1974, Turkey has been actively patronizing the educational sector<sup>9</sup>. Nonetheless, religion classes were introduced into schools in 2009-2010 ("Religious Culture and Ethics" - Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Dersi) based on textbooks from the Turkish Ministry of Education.<sup>10</sup> Culture and religion are increasingly seen together as one. The Turkish Embassy also acts in coordination with the EVKAF administration (Cyprus Foundations Administration) for supporting cultural-site constructions and renovation projects, as well as charity and religious events.

EVKAF has received considerable funding from the Turkish Relief Board for renovating numerous mosques and Ottoman Inns (Han) across the occupied areas of Cyprus.<sup>11</sup> The Turkish government has been also active in appointing imams and dispatching primary and secondary teachers to Cyprus. Perhaps the most interesting example of how education collides with religion is the construction of a huge Ottoman style mosque (Yakın Doğu Üniversitesi Camii), funded by Turkey's Diyanet and built within the premises of the Near Eastern University. The mosque is comprised of 33 domes, four minarets, holding a capacity of 10.000 people, making it the largest mosque in Cyprus.<sup>12</sup>

However, the scope and depth of Turkey's involvement in education is much more dynamic and multifaceted. Diyanet and the Turkish Ministry of Education have been providing scholarships for Turkish students wishing to attend the two major Theological faculties in the occupied areas of Cyprus, one at the Near East University and the other

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<sup>9</sup> Heindrich, Béatrice (2015). "Islamic Religious Education in Cyprus Laws, Actors, Past and Future". *Journal of Muslims in Europe*, 4: 7-37.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid: 21

<sup>11</sup> Annual Report (2014) of the Projects Realized with the funding of TIKA and the Turkish Relief Board cooperation with EVKAF Av.at: <http://www.evka.org/site/dokuman/2014FaliyetRaporu.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Founding Rector of Near East University Suat İ. Günsel accepts Religious Affairs Consultant Erdoğan Eken and His Delegation". Near East University. Av.at: <https://neu.edu.tr/founding-rector-of-near-east-university-suat-i-gunsel-accepts-religious-affairs-consultant-erdogan-eken-and-his-delegation/?lang=en>; <https://neu.edu.tr/about-near-east/projects-in-progress/neu-mosque/?lang=en>

one at the University of Social Sciences (Sosyal Bilimler Üniversitesi). Almost all these students (approx. 600-800) come from Turkey, while a small number of attendees originate from Anatolian settlers in Cyprus. Nonetheless, today there are about 15 private universities operating in the occupied areas of Cyprus with a total estimate (2018 est.) of 93.292 students, out of which, 52.135 come from Turkey, 27.538 from third countries, and 13.619 from Cyprus (occupied).<sup>13</sup> Through Turkey's Health and Rehabilitation Centre, the Turkish government has financed the construction of a Health Studies department at the European University of Lefke and renovated its library (approx. 183.000 euros). Also, in accordance to a bilateral investment protocol signed between Turkey's Middle East Technical University (METU) and the Turkish Embassy, Turkey agreed to finance the construction of an R&D Complex at METU in the occupied areas of Cyprus under the auspices of the Turkish Embassy's Economic Cooperation Office. A landmark project that has emphatically highlighted Turkey's involvement in the Turkish Cypriot religious and educational sphere has been the opening of the "The Hala Sultan Divinity College" and its nearby "Hala Sultan" mega-mosque at the northern outskirts of Nicosia in 2013. Apart from the giant mosque, the "Hala Sultan" complex, funded by Diyanet, includes an Islamic imam hatip gymnasium, a Religious Studies College with student dormitories, and a conference centre.<sup>14</sup>

However, uneasy relations between the Turkish Cypriot governing coalition with Ankara, which regarded also the management of the Islamic complex, had bluntly led to an abrupt cut of the annual sustenance funding received from Ankara, and this ultimately resulted in the collapse of the ruling coalition and its replacement by another that was

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<sup>13</sup> The Higher Education Council in Turkey (YOK) is the one that accredits the departments at universities in "TRNC". Given that 80% of the students are from Turkey, the accreditation by YOK is very important in recognizing and validating the international standing of "TRNC" degree certificates. For more see: Ekici, Tufan (2019). *The Political and Economic History of North Cyprus: A Discordant Polity*. Palgrave MacMillan: 234.

<sup>14</sup> Collins, Dylan (July 9 2018). "Massive Turkey-funded mosque stirs unease in secular north Cyprus". *The Times of Israel*. Av.at: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/massive-turkey-funded-mosque-stirs-unease-in-secular-north-cyprus/>

evidently more favourable to Ankara's objectives. The new government coalition formed in May 2019 was comprised of the National Unity Party and the Peoples' Party, headed by Ersin Tatar and Kudret Özersay ("Deputy PM" and "Minister of FA" of the de facto entity's administration) with the aim to smoothen relations with AKP and reinforce Turkish Cypriot ties with Ankara. The formation of the new government coalition was only a prelude to the upcoming Turkish Cypriot 'presidential' elections in November 2020, which brought about the departure of Mustafa Akinci and the entry of Ersin Tatar, a staunch supporter of Turkish Cypriot separatism and a two-state solution, in the Turkish Cypriot 'presidential office'.

**Connected to the Embassy of Turkey is Turkey's Yunus Emre Institute (YEI), typically known for providing Turkish language courses and promoting Turkish culture abroad. YEI is Turkey's "cultural" soft power face to the world.**

The Turkish Embassy in Nicosia acts as the coordinating body for disseminating religious and cultural soft power across the occupied areas of Cyprus. Numerous events including national commemorations (18th of March Çanakkale Victory, 15th July Coup Memorial etc.), cultural projects (art exhibitions, cultural site renovations, the International Bellapais Music Festival etc) and educational programmes are coordinated or supported by the Turkish Embassy in cooperation with major official state-to-public agencies.<sup>15</sup> For example, through the Turkish Embassy in Nicosia, the YTB (Ministry of Culture - Overseas Turks and Relative Communities Directorate) provides funding for a range of cultural and artistic activities, seminars and educational mobility programs.<sup>16</sup> Connected to the Embassy of Turkey is Turkey's Yunus Emre Institute (YEI), typically known for providing

<sup>15</sup> The Turkish Embassy in Nicosia and Turkey's Ministry of Youth and Sports and Ministry of Education and Culture organize student camp programmes to Turkey's historic Çanakkale area (in summer 2017 about 5.260 students from "TRNC" participated).

<sup>16</sup> Turkish Embassy Bulletin (February 1 2016). Turkish Embassy in Nicosia. Av.at:

<http://nicosia.emb.mfa.gov.tr/Content/assets/consulate/images/localCache/1/cfbdbb6b-0f86-4faf-9f26-9ec290fc1417.pdf>



Turkish language courses and promoting Turkish culture abroad. YEI is Turkey's "cultural" soft power face to the world. YEI is particularly active in promoting Islamic textbooks (and interpretation), seminars and co-organizing exhibitions and events with the support of Turkey's Ministry of Culture. More recently, YEI has signed an agreement with the Cyprus International University for the compulsory teaching of the Turkish language and culture to foreign students. Notably, YEI in Nicosia (occupied part) is frequently visited by government officials from Turkey.

Turkey's crude intention to control and supervise major activities linked to the upbringing of the Turkish Cypriot youth was clearly manifested in June 2014 with the signing of an agreement between Turkey and the "TRNC", which provided for the opening of an "Overseas Coordination Office" by the Turkish Ministry of Youth and Sports in the "TRNC".

Turkey's clear-cut intention was to increase oversight and approval of leisure and extra-educational activities (cultural events, sporting events etc.) taking place in occupied Cyprus. Despite fierce criticism, the agreement was ultimately enacted on June 13, 2016 and entered into force after a Constitutional Court verdict requesting minor amendments. Also, following pressures from Ankara, the Turkish Cypriot government abolished legislative prohibitions on the political activity of religious officials arriving from Turkey to work at the Turkish Cypriot Directorate of Religious Affairs.

Radical demographic changes (settlers, workers etc.) constitute a major source of concern. Some would argue that mainland Turkish communities in the occupied areas of Cyprus could reinforce the AKP's Islamic nationalist mantra, especially in times of important decision-making processes vis-à-vis the Cyprus Question. A portion of settler, local and mixed communities (local/settler) are deeply affiliated with Turkey and the AKP, forming thus a distinct support basis for AKP's policy objectives that cuts across much

of the political spectrum.<sup>17</sup> Yet the more the Turkish Cypriot community immerses into the Turkish Islamic-nationalist indoctrination (viewed by many progressives and conservatives alike as dangerous and offensive), the less likely would be for the Greek Cypriots to sustain their desire for a settlement.

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The threat of radical shifts in the social, demographic and religious outlook in the occupied areas of Cyprus has obviously failed to catalyse a popular Greek Cypriot push towards a speedier settlement of the Cyprus Question. By contrast, Turkey's persisting patronage and growing social interference in Turkish Cypriot affairs has alienated Greek Cypriots even further.

Interestingly, to promote Turkey's soft power framework, Ankara uses a combination of traditional financial, security and diplomatic means of engagement with the Turkish Cypriot community. Ankara uses traditional power tools as pressure tools for allowing soft power projection. To put it more

succinctly, capitalising on the long-standing insecurities and dependencies of the Turkish Cypriot community, Turkey highlights the political undertones of dominance through financial blackmail and intimidation including in return the unhindered promotion, acceptance or normalization of the new Islamist paradigm. This allows Turkey to exert power by disseminating messages and symbols of command through splendour, prompting the conservative-religious segments of society to ally with Turkey's power-

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<sup>17</sup> Weise, Zia (10 February 18). "Turkish Cypriots fear being part of Erdoğan's 'pious Generation'" Politico. Av.at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/turkish-cypriots-fear-recep-tayyip-erdogan-pious-generation-islam-mosque>

projection, discouraging dissent and preparing the ground for a more deep-cutting political change.

## Economics and Social Infrastructure

The considerable growth of the Turkish economy during AKP's rule (particularly between the years 2003-2017) has, despite its evident precariousness (inflation, currency devaluation, growing national debt, corruption and distortive market practices), considerably reinforced Turkey's soft-power capacity.

AKP sought to enhance the scope and impact of its new foreign policy strategy by drawing into Turkey's increased capacity for economic extroversion (FDI's,

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trade deals, loans and humanitarian aid, public grants). This allowed Turkey to increase economic control and bolster foreign dependencies.

However, the nature of economic dependency between the Turkish Cypriot community and Turkey is much deeper and complex compared to that with other states. Since 1974, Turkey has been practically sustaining the economy of the occupied territories in Cyprus. It has not only acted as the security provider, guarantor, and political supervisor of the self-declared Turkish Cypriot state, but it also plays a major role in its economic sustenance and survival. The illegal Turkish Cypriot entity remains therefore militarily, diplomatically, and financially dependent on Turkey, and this dependence affects

policymaking.<sup>18</sup> The formal aid received from Turkey (roughly one quarter of “TRNC” budget) has been very important in keeping the economy afloat.<sup>19</sup>

The major repercussion of this officially well-meant “humanitarian assistance” is the fact that it has ultimately become embedded into a “web of political and economic relationships pulling the ‘north’ (i.e. the occupied areas) into Turkey’s economic orbit in such an extensive and complex manner that the process has probably become irreversible.”<sup>20</sup> The large extent of the occupied areas’ dependence on Turkey for its export trade, commercial activity, services, telecommunications, and transportation is a well-documented reality. Gradually, Turkey has created a “hostage situation” in Cyprus. Turkey offers financial assistance through loans and grants in the form of two-year Economic Protocol Agreements and on the fulfilment of fiscal terms and regulations.<sup>21</sup>

The Office of Development and Economic Cooperation of the Embassy of the Turkish Republic in the occupied areas of Cyprus plays a central role in distributing economic aid and monitoring the implementation of the economic protocol agreements.<sup>22</sup> Indicatively, in 2015 Turkey allocated the amount of 1.496 billion TRY (Turkish Lira) (approx. 181 million euros), and in 2017, an amount of 1.858 billion TRY (approx. 233 million euros) was again allocated to “TRNC”.<sup>23</sup> But, in 2018, after a six-month long delay due to political tensions between Turkey and the governing coalition in occupied Cyprus, and following governmental change in the latter, Turkey handed out approximately 430 million euros to “TRNC” and agreed to implement a succeeding economic protocol for

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<sup>18</sup> Freedom House (5 October 2018). Freedom in the World 2018 – “Northern Cyprus”. Av.at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5bcdce24a.html>

<sup>19</sup> Ekici, Tufan (2019). *The Political and Economic History of North Cyprus: A Discordant Polity*. Palgrave McMillan: 52

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*: 34

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*: 117

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*: 45

<sup>23</sup> Turkish Embassy Bulletin Issue 14 (February 1 2016). Turkish Embassy in Nicosia. Av.at: <http://nicosia.emb.mfa.gov.tr/Content/assets/consulate/images/localCache/1/4b771bca-59dd-4913-9a1d-6d80168d4fb1.pdf>; “TRNC” GDP amounts to 3.8 billion euros with an estimated debt of about 980 million euros (approx. 1/4)

the period of 2019-2021. At the same time, Ankara has been pushing harder for fiscal reforms and privatization measures in return for loans and financial hand-outs. Notably, the heads of the “Central Bank of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus”, monitoring all commercial banks in the occupied areas are directly appointed by Turkey.

**Since governance without financial aid from Turkey would cause a lot of economic difficulties and that would cost politicians their seat at the parliament...for as long as the Turkish Cypriot governments did not criticize Turkey and her involvement in ‘northern Cyprus’, they continue to receive assistance from the ‘motherland’.**

On top of this, the Turkish Cypriot entity relies heavily on imports from Turkey (goods and services), “turning out a lot more than the total aid from Turkey is being used to buy goods and services from Turkey”.<sup>24</sup> Hence, Ankara effectively commands decisive powers over the fiscal, monetary and economic policies and influences critically substantive matters of governance and legislation in the Turkish Cypriot community. As rightly observed, “Since governance without financial aid from Turkey would cause a lot of economic difficulties and that would cost politicians their seat at the parliament...for as long as the Turkish Cypriot governments did not criticize Turkey and her involvement in ‘northern Cyprus’, they continue to receive assistance from the ‘motherland’.”<sup>25</sup>

Turkey can therefore justifiably remind Turkish Cypriots of its genuine ethnic, moral and humanitarian motives, while at the same time tightening its grip over occupied Cyprus’ economic and political life. Turkey has also invested in several public works and AKP has encouraged private Turkish investors to pour large amounts of money into building

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<sup>24</sup> Ekici (2019). The Political and Economic History of North Cyprus: A Discordant Polity, 114

<sup>25</sup> Ibid: 117

projects.<sup>26</sup> Such projects have included large resort complexes and housing developments.

**Using Turkish contractors, the Turkish government financed (393 million euros) and completed the construction of an undersea water pipeline connecting Turkey with Cyprus in 2014, providing the latter with a much-needed water supply for drinking and irrigation purposes.**

However, AKP's perception focuses particularly on the "humanitarian strengthening" of dependency ties through asset control and critical infrastructure. Using Turkish contractors, the Turkish government financed (393 million euros) and completed the construction of an undersea water pipeline connecting Turkey with Cyprus in 2014, providing the latter with a much-needed water supply for drinking and irrigation purposes. Moreover, the previously state-run Ercan Airport is today administered by the AKP-friendly Taşyapı Group, to which the construction of a new terminal and runway has been granted.<sup>27</sup> In July 2021, on the anniversary of the Turkish invasion in Cyprus,

president Erdogan announced the completion of plans to build a new government complex that would include a presidential residence and parliament building in occupied Nicosia to symbolize a dynamic articulation of statehood.<sup>28</sup>

In December 2019, TİKA (The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency) inaugurated the opening of its Cyprus offices (in Turkish occupied Nicosia). Indicative of Turkey's soft power perception is Nuri Ersoy's, Turkish Minister of Culture and Tourism,

<sup>26</sup> Ağartan, K., Ayşe Buğra, Osman Savaşkan. (2015). *New Capitalism in Turkey: The Relationship between Politics, Religion, and Business*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 173

<sup>27</sup> "Local company 1st to partner with Ercan airport" (December 6 2012). LGC News. Av.at:

<https://www.lgcnews.com/local-company-1st-partnership-with-ercan-airport/>

<sup>28</sup> Stamouli, Nektaria. In Cyprus, Erdoğan provokes on anniversary of Turkish invasion, Politico EU, July 20, 2021 <https://www.politico.eu/article/cyprus-recep-tayyip-erdogan-anniversary-turkey-invasion/>

statement during the inauguration ceremony: “It was important that TİKA, which is one of the Turkish nation’s ‘moral values’ opened an office in the “TRNC”.

TİKA turns the humanitarian and conscientious principles of the Turkish people, which are based on their national and moral values, into tangible activities and projects.”<sup>29</sup> The Turkish Ambassador to “TRNC” Ali Murat Başçeri underlined that “TİKA will be the locomotive of development in the “TRNC.”<sup>30</sup>

In turn, the Prime Minister of the self-declared Turkish Cypriot state, Ersin Tatar, reminded of the need to strengthen the bonds between Turkey and the “TRNC”, which he said has played an important role for Turkey’s security.<sup>31</sup> This is a vivid example of how economic development, political culture, and interest blend for the shaping of an orchestrated soft-power policy. Indicative of its political undertones, upon the instructions of President Erdoğan TİKA’s first project in “TRNC” was to renovate Alparslan Türkeş’ House (and turn it into a museum). Türkeş was the Turkish Cypriot founding father of Turkey’s far-right Nationalist Movement Party (AKP’s coalition partner), founder of the Grey Wolves (Bozkurtları), and a prominent figure among Turkish ultra-nationalists.<sup>32</sup>

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*Part B is to be published in January 2023*

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<sup>29</sup> Turkish Cypriot and Turkish Media Review No. 222/15 (November 21-23 2015) Av.at: <http://www.hri.org/news/cyprus/tcpr/2015/15-11-23.tcpr.html> ; İkbâl Arslan, Muhammet (December 16 2019). “Turkish Cyprus becomes strategic center in region: PM”. Anadolu Agency.

<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/turkish-cyprus-becomes-strategic-center-in-region-pm/1675484>

<sup>30</sup> “TİKA opens office in TRNC” (December 12 2019). BRTK. Av.at: [https://www.brtk.net/?english\\_posts=tika-opens-office-in-trnc](https://www.brtk.net/?english_posts=tika-opens-office-in-trnc)

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> Ultra-nationalist and neo-fascist youth organization affiliated with the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) in Turkey