

Abstracts

Nathalie Clayer

Diverse Stakes, Actors, Times, Spaces, and Materialities: The Construction of Mosques in Southeast Europe and the Case of (Interwar) Albania

This paper investigates the building process of mosques in Albania during the interwar period in three cities: Durrës, Sarandë, and Tirana. The comparison shows that the dynamics that contributed to the construction of these new places of worship were diverse and processual. Diverse stakes, actors, temporalities, spaces, and materialities form a useful matrix in order to study the building of mosques as processes and to understand the religious, social, political, and economic dimensions underlying them. This article also shows how such an analytical framework could be useful concerning the present time, even if transnational dimensions are more important today.

Kerem Öktem

Turkey's Imperial Gaze on the Balkans: Grand Mosques as Restorative Nostalgia

Since the early 1990s, Turkey has been a significant actor in the Western Balkans, but only since the late 2010s has this presence taken the form of highly visible symbolic architectural interventions. Focusing on the central mosque projects in Tirana and Prishtina, this article conceptualises them as material expressions of a Turkish imperial gaze rooted in a domestic project to re-sacralise and dominate urban space. Drawing on qualitative analysis of architectural forms, institutional arrangements, and local contestation, it argues that these mosques have different situated functions: for Ankara, they represent symbols of empire; within Turkey, they operate as instruments of domination; while locally, they acquire more pragmatic and relational meanings. The article theorises this disjuncture as nested imperialism, through which a middle power projects symbolic authority into a hierarchically subordinated region, primarily sustaining a self-referential imperial imagination for Turkish elites and domestic audiences.

Elif Becan

Neo- or Post-Ottoman? Rethinking Turkey’s Presence in the Balkans Through the “Children of the Conquerors”

This essay discusses the analytical utility of “neo-Ottomanism” by tracing the historical roots of Turkish influence in the Balkans. Drawing on archival sources, it explores the evolving meaning of *evlad-ı fatihan* (children of the conquerors), which was once a term of descent and has now become a strategic discourse in kin-state policy. I argue that Turkey’s engagement in the Balkans is not a recent phenomenon but a pragmatic continuum of Cold War-era frameworks, exemplified not only by post-imperial migrations but also by the creation of specific public institutions. I suggest that frameworks dating back to the 1950s predate today’s cultural diplomacy and investment strategies. In this context, “neo-Ottomanism” may be better understood not as a rupture but as an adaptation to evolving geopolitical contexts.

Chiara Maritato

Between Realities and Representations: The Expansion of the Diyanet’s Religious Services Abroad

In the past two decades, the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) has evolved from a domestic religious bureaucracy into a global actor. Based on extensive ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Turkey, Europe, and the Middle East between 2013 and 2022, as well as an analysis of Diyanet regulations and activity reports, this article explores how bureaucratization has both enhanced and limited the Diyanet’s international mission. Shifting the analytical focus from soft power to bureaucratic rationalization, it argues that the expansion of religious services abroad is a double-edged process: while enhancing Turkey’s global visibility and institutional coherence, it also fosters rigidity, routine, and symbolic performance. The article contextualizes the Diyanet’s transnational operations within the framework of state–religion relations and Weberian bureaucratization. It contends that standardized procedures, hierarchical reporting, and short-term appointments allow for rapid and wide diffusion, but they often weaken local legitimacy and engagement, particularly within long-established diaspora communities.

Ahmet Erdi Öztürk

Beyond Soft Power: Islam and Turkey’s Religious Statecraft in the Balkans

This article interrogates Turkey’s transnational religious engagement in the Balkans, showing how Islamic networks, institutions, and discourses have been strategically woven into its wider foreign policy repertoire. It argues that religion now functions as a flexible yet contested instrument of Turkish statecraft, enabling the government to project influence, perform cultural affinity, and sustain strategic linkages in a region historically tied to the Ottoman polity. Drawing on literatures on soft power, political transnationalism, and state-led religion, the article advances a mechanism-based framework – signalling socialisation and legitimation – to explain when and how religious initiatives translate into durable policy influence. Comparative case studies from Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia,

Kosovo, Albania, and Serbia demonstrate that effectiveness hinges on institutional credibility, lawful embedding, and local elite brokerage.

Amir Duranović

Restoring Heritage, Rebuilding Influence: Turkey's Role in Post-War Mosque Reconstruction in Bosnia and Herzegovina

This paper explores the role of the Republic of Turkey in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, with particular emphasis on the restoration of Ottoman cultural heritage. While Turkish involvement spans various sectors – the focus is placed on its cultural and religious engagement through mosque reconstruction. The study investigates key domestic and Turkish stakeholders who have shaped these restoration efforts, paying close attention to the motivations, collaborations, and power dynamics at play. Special emphasis is placed on the rebuilding of mosques destroyed during the 1992–1995 war, but also the accompanying changes in narratives and the revision of history.

László Szerencsés

Influence without Control: Turkey and Islamic Communities in Serbia

This article examines the limitations of Turkey's transnational authoritarianism in Serbia, with a focus on the country's Islamic communities. It argues that despite strong political ties between Ankara and Belgrade, Turkey failed to co-opt the dominant Muslim institution in Serbia between 2016 and 2021. The article demonstrates that the success of co-optation depends upon the targeted community's internal cohesion and its access to external support. The study finds that the Serbian political elites enabled selective repression aligned with Turkish interests. Yet the Novi Pazar-based Mešihat, embedded in Bosniak and Middle Eastern networks, resisted Ankara's influence. By contrast, the Belgrade-based Rijaset, lacking similar resources and legitimacy, became a willing partner. The article contributes to debates on transnational authoritarianism by highlighting the role of elite religious gatekeepers and the protective effect of ontological security (identity stability) in resisting foreign control.

Lura Pollozhani

Rebranding Turkey from Soft to Economic Power and Security Provider

This paper remarks upon a shift in perspective on the role of Turkey in the Western Balkans. It takes as a center the agency of the Western Balkans in the debate, not as a region to which things happen, but also a region within which things are happening. The article explores how the influence of Turkey has shifted from that of a soft power to an economic power and security partner and provider in the wake of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Looking at recent polls in the region and research done under the REUNIR project on the perception of external actors, Turkey emerges as a trusted partner. However, the countries of the region have also been changing, partly due to the prolonged EU enlarge-

ment process, and partly due to domestic shifts, marking a region which is open to autocratic tendencies, and as such, sees Turkey and its leadership as partners due to a similar way of looking at world politics. Thus, this article offers a new perspective as an initial step towards recognizing an important shift in perception and relations.

Susanne Sophia Spiliotis

Jews and Anti-Semitism in Greece: Not Heard. Not Seen. A History of Concealment

Survey evidence repeatedly indicates high levels of endorsement of antisemitic stereotypes and sentiments in Greece, the highest in Europe. Regular Greek surveys indicate that antisemitism is deeply ingrained in society. Historical analyses suggest that this is partly due to the Greek national narrative: exclusion of Jewish history as an integral part of the country's past has fostered a historical blind spot. This essay, however, shifts the focus to how widespread social acceptance of antisemitism persists with only limited resistance among the country's elite. It examines how this phenomenon is rooted in the unique structure of modern Greek identity, which continues to shape both cognitive and affective perspectives today. Using an epicultural lens – focused on durable cultural identity formations – the essay explores how “Hellenochristianismos” and “Romiosyni” sustain patterns of collective oblivion and a strategic disregard for antisemitic attitudes.

Moritz Rau von Nobbe

Cyprus Tightens its Migration Policy and Aims to Join Schengen

Since 1 January 2026, the Republic of Cyprus (hereafter Cyprus) has held the Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU), taking on a key coordinating and mediating role within the EU. This offers Cyprus the opportunity to bring its priorities to the EU agenda. One of Cyprus' aims is to present itself as a strong partner in tightening European migration policy, highlighting a sharp drop in asylum applications and record numbers of deportations and “voluntary” returns. EU Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration, Magnus Brunner, recently confirmed that the Commission had noted progress in Cyprus' Schengen bid, as the technical criteria regarding border management and data systems were being met. However, human rights organisations have repeatedly criticised Cyprus for illegal pushbacks and refugees' poor living conditions, evoking insecurity and poverty. This is also reflected in the recent report (April 2025) of the Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings.