Religion, Ethnicity and Transnationalism: Turkish Islam in Belgium

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Since the 1980s, the growing assertion of religion in the public sphere has led to a fierce challenge\(^1\) vis-à-vis the secularization thesis that had marked social sciences since the Enlightenment.\(^2\) Among others, this challenge has manifested itself in two related fields, namely immigration and transnationalism: First, while Europe has been considered by some as an exception to the desecularization process underway,\(^3\) others have pointed to an expanded role of religion even in Europe.\(^4\) In either case, however, the increasing assertion by immigrants regarding their religious identity in the

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public space as well as their demands for the accommodation of their religious needs by the European societies have been seen as confirming the weakness, if not the complete decline, of the secularization paradigm. Thus, around the mid-1980s, one could see the beginning of a shift in the literature on immigration in Europe, from an analysis of immigrants and immigration in Europe within the framework of ethnicity, on the one hand, and socioeconomic integration, on the other, toward a focus on religion with a growing realization that against all expectations, these ethnic minorities refuse to confine religion to the private sphere.\(^5\) Hence, religion, and more specifically Islam, has become the focal point of academic interest and debates on the integration of immigrants.

Second, the study of transnationalism has increasingly focused on Muslim networks that go beyond the nation-state.\(^6\) Thus, beyond mere people’s migration, globalizing social and political movements and the emergence of a global Muslim discursive space or public sphere\(^7\) now constitute what can be called a paradigm of “global Islam.” The study of Muslim transnationalism has emphasized the importance of the identification of second- and third-generation Muslims with a “transnational umma,” leading to the emergence of what Olivier Roy\(^8\) has called “faith communities” or Ruba Salih\(^9\) has termed “neo-communities.” The main underlying idea behind this argument on the new type of communities is that young Muslims in Europe have lost their links to the original culture and tradition of the first generation and have been de-ethnicized or deculturized.

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This article stands at the intersection of studies of religion, ethnicity, and transnationalism by focusing on the role of the Directorate of Religious Affairs in Turkey (hereafter the Diyanet) in the Exécutif des Musulmans de Belgique (hereafter the Exécutif) in Belgium, the Muslim representative institution established in 1999. Based on the Belgian case, I attempt to understand how the Diyanet tries to project “Turkish Islam” in Europe, that is, a particular understanding by the Turkish state of Islam as limited to the private sphere as well as enlightened, peaceful, and compatible with modernity and democracy. In doing that, the Diyanet distinguishes itself not only from the understanding of Islam in Shi’a Iran or Wahhabi Saudia Arabia, but also from other Turkish groups with different religious tendencies, such as the Milli Görüş movement. Thus, this article aims to explore the continuing relevance of ethnicity in understanding immigration in Europe and proposes to examine closely the relationship between religion and ethnicity within the framework of a transnational network such as the Diyanet. In fact, the Diyanet seems to resist any tendency for a deculturation or de-ethnicization of religion. In other words, transnationalism of “Turkish Islam” as propagated by the Diyanet can demonstrate how ethnicity can continue to remain an important factor in understanding Islam in Europe, a factor that has been mentioned by some scholars within the transnationalism literature but not sufficiently explored.

10. The term “Turkish Islam” is used here to denote this particular understanding by the Turkish state of Islam, which is presented as the “true Islam,” and the Diyanet is seen as its institutional representative. Others have used the term to connote all the ways Islam is being lived in Turkey in all its manifestations. Mehmet Aydin, a theologian and the former minister of state responsible for the Turks abroad and the Diyanet, prefers the term “Turkish Muslimness,” which he defines as “Islam as taught and experienced today in Turkey.” Mehmet Aydin, “Diyanet’s Global Vision,” special issue of The Muslim World 98 (April/July 2008): 164–72. For Hakan Yavuz, on the other hand, “Turkish Islam” is that “authentic” Islam—a particular synthesis of heterodox and orthodox traditions of Ahmet Yesevi and Mansur Maturidi, respectively. Hakan Yavuz, “Is there a Turkish Islam? The Emergence of Convergence and Consensus,” Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs 24 (October 2004): 213–32. While Aydin seems to see “Turkish Islam” as best represented by the Diyanet, in Yavuz’s analysis, this “particularized and localized” version of Islam is juxtaposed to Kemalism, which, in his words, is “a top-down secularist model, along with its tightly controlled religious bureaucracy” (ibid., 226). In fact, this “Turkish Islam” is considered as more democratic in its orientation and compatible with modern society unlike its Kemalist counterpart. Finally, when Jeroen Doomernik talks about “Turkish Islam in Europe,” he uses the term to denote all associational, sectarian, and ideological manifestation of Islam as experienced by immigrants originating from Turkey in Europe. Jeroen Doomernik, “The Institutionalization of Turkish Islam in Germany and the Netherlands: A Comparison,” Ethnic and Racial Studies 18 (January 1995): 46–63.

11. See, for example, Mandaville, “Muslim Transnational Identity,” 491–506.
Remaining initially passive, the Diyanet-linked Diyanet Foundation soon became the most important organization in the Exécutif, effectively steering this body from 2005 to 2008, during which the Diyanet can be said to have secured a disproportionately high significance and representation in this institutional arrangement in contrast to the number of Muslims of Turkish origin in Belgium, who are only the second-largest Muslim community in that country, after Moroccans. This article will focus on how the Diyanet sees the institutionalization of Islam in Belgium and what role it plays within this process. An understanding of Islam as closely attached to the Turkish culture has been a crucial feature of the Diyanet’s perception of the Turkish/Muslim community as well as the institutionalization of Islam in Belgium. Thus, rather than a de-ethnicized or deculturized conception of Islam, the Diyanet’s perception of the institutionalization of Islam is strongly based on an ethnicized Islam, one “with culture,” resisting what Olivier Roy called a “religion without culture.”12 A comparative analysis of the Diyanet’s position helps to see how, despite some ambivalences in the position of the Milli Görüş (National Outlook) movement, the contrast of the Diyanet’s position with that of the Milli Görüş is striking, and the latter can be said to provide a counterexample.

The research in this article is based on field work, consisting of in-depth interviews conducted in Brussels in June 2008. Research was also updated with one e-mail correspondence and one telephone interview in January 2010. Among the interviewees were Diyanet Foundation officials, some of whom were also former members of the Exécutif from 2005 to 2008; an official of the Turkish state; former members of the Centre pour l’égalité des chances (Centre for Equal Opportunity) of the Belgian Ministry of Justice, which was closely involved in the establishment of the Exécutif; and a prominent representative of the Milli Görüş. The names of the interviewees are kept anonymous upon their request; hence interviews have been identified by a specific number given to each interview.

This article will first examine the history of the Diyanet and its nature, with special emphasis on its transnationalism, which it has adopted especially since 1980. It will then review the history and the main dynamics of the institutionalization of Islam in Belgium and its culmination in the establishment of the Exécutif des Musulmans de Belgique. Finally, it will analyze the perception of this process by the Diyanet, by also closely looking into the position of the Milli Görüş.

12. Roy, La Sainte Ignorance.
The **Diyanet** in Europe

Established in March 1924, the *Diyanet* was designed as an administrative organ of the state, responsible for the appointment of the religious personnel and the upkeep and maintenance of mosques. By designing the *Diyanet* as a mere administrative branch of the state with no sacred significance attached to it, the founding Kemalist elite weakened its status and prestige within the new national state. The regime also engaged in a series of radical secularizing reforms to construct a modern westernized nation-state which was imagined as antithetical to Islam. However, the *Diyanet* has over time become an important institution, partially due to a great improvement in its budget and number of personnel especially after the 1970s, when the right-wing governments started to see in Islam a source of influence and votes. The emergence of the so-called “Turkish-Islamic Synthesis” as the unofficial ideology of the Turkish governments since the early 1980s was also an important factor in improving the fortunes of the *Diyanet*.

Originally designed as a domestic tool of control over religion, the *Diyanet* has also become, since the early 1980s, an instrument of control outside Turkey, overseeing Muslim immigrants of Turkish origin. Three interrelated developments have been influential in such a transformation: first, realization of what was perceived as years of neglect in meeting the needs of immigrants to preserve their national and religious identity; second, the concern with the rise of many political and religious movements deemed as dangerous by the Turkish state and the corollary aim of combating the influence of those groups; and third, the increasing perception of Islam as the cement of national unity and the consequent association between Turkish and Muslim identities under the impact of the “Turkish-Islamic Synthesis.”

Institutionalization of Islam in Belgium

Following *Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich*-IGGiÖ (Islamic Religious Community in Austria [IRCA]) of Austria in 1979 and *Comisión Islámica de España* (Islamic Commission of Spain) in 1992, the *Exécutif* was established in 1999 as one of the recent examples of Muslim representative institutions in Western Europe, part of the process of the institutionalization of Islam in Europe, understood as the integration of Islam into the institutions of European countries, often with the implicit aim of controlling Islamic communities and “nationalizing” Islam. The emergence of the question of the recognition of Islam in Belgium coincided with the end of the legal immigration in August 1974. The foreign policy interests of the Belgian government in the aftermath of the 1973 oil crisis as well as the rapid increase in the size of the Muslim community, which outnumbered both the Protestants and the Jews, led to the recognition of Islam as one of the official religions in Belgium in July 1974. The Law of 1974 together with the 1831 Constitution guaranteeing state support for official religions meant the acknowledgement of financial support to the administrative organization of the local Muslim communities. However, the


24. Ibid., 114.
financial privileges envisaged by such a recognition could not be granted to the Muslim community until 1999 due to the absence of a representative organ for Muslims. Even though the Law of 1974 did not mention such a necessity, the absence of such an administrative organ in Islam presented such practical problems as the salarying of imams and the choice and selection of teachers and material in the instruction of Islam in public schools, which was another important privilege granted by the recognition of Islam by the Law of 1974. Until 1990, it was the Islamic and Cultural Centre (Centre Islamic et Culturel [CIC]) that was considered the main interlocutor for the Belgian state, although this did not mean the recognition of the CIC as the chief representative organ of Islam (organe chef du culte) by the state because the CIC did not have a complete legitimacy in the eyes of the Belgian Muslims.

It was the growing sense of anxiety, by the mid-1980s, over the weak integration of Muslims into the Belgian society that constitutes the crucial factor in the establishment of a Muslim representative body. With the onset of an economic crisis as well as a political-institutional crisis by the late 1980s—the latter triggered by the acceleration of the process of communitarianization of the country with Flemish and Walloon communities asking for more autonomy from the federal government—pushed the government to establish a Commissariat Royal à la Politique des Immigrés (Royal Commission for Migrant Policy). Among the proposals of the Royal Commission was one to hold democratic elections to constitute a Muslim representative council, which would exclude the embassies and thus turn the question of institutionalization of Islam into a “Belgian debate.” The government rejected the proposal for elections, but the idea was taken up by the CIC, who independently went on to organize elections for the Muslim community. The open confrontation between the Belgian state and the CIC led to the refusal of the Ministry of Justice to recognize the

28. Ibid., 89.
29. Author’s interview 3 (June 2008).
30. The ruling government was a coalition that included the Christian Democrats, the Flemish Socialists, and the Walloon Socialist Party. While the first two accepted the proposal for elections, the Socialist Party rejected it out of a fear of what it saw as communitarianization. At the end, there was no majority for the proposal. Ibid.
elections of January 1991 and the establishment of a Conseil Supérieur des Musulmans de Belgique. In any case, the lack of government approval for the electoral process caused either a lack of interest or suspicion vis-à-vis the elections on the part of several organizations, including the Diyanet Foundation while the other important Turkish organization, Milli Görüş, did participate.\textsuperscript{31} In July 1990, the government formed a council of its own, Conseil Provisoire des Sages, whose members it handpicked. Although the Diyanet Foundation was represented by a few members in this council, the Conseil des Sages could not have much legitimacy on the part of the broader Muslim community. In other words, it is possible to say that the institutionalization of Islam had reached a “dead end” in the early 1990s.\textsuperscript{32}

The exit from the deadlock was made possible again by the efforts of the Royal Commission, which established in fall 1992 a Comité technique (Technical Committee). The committee in turn founded in November 1993 a constituent assembly of fifty-one members who elected an Exécutif provisoire des musulmans de Belgique of seventeen people, recognized by the government in November 1994. As its name suggests, it was a provisional representative council with limited authority and without a widespread legitimacy. Nevertheless, the relative consensus on the method of its establishment helped the moderation of tension and led to the creation of some trust between the government and the Muslim community broadly.\textsuperscript{33} This atmosphere resulted in a compromise on a final solution to the problem of institutionalization, that is, elections for the establishment of a permanent Muslim representative body.\textsuperscript{34} With the elections in December 1998, a 68-member assembly\textsuperscript{35} was formed to choose among themselves a 17-member Exécutif. It was this 17-member administration that was to act as the organe chef du culte or the official interlocutor for the state. A screening of the members was envisaged between the elections and the selection of the administration to allow the government to exclude the radical members from the administration,

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 92; Author’s interview 3 (June 2008).
\textsuperscript{33} Renaerts and Manço, "Lente Institutionalisation de l'Islam," 94.
\textsuperscript{34} Author’s interview 3 (June 2008).
\textsuperscript{35} Among these sixty-eight members, fifty-one were elected through universal suffrage, seventeen members were co-opted, ten members came from the Exécutif provisoire, and the remaining seven were nominated by the government. There were twenty-seven Moroccans, seventeen Turks, twelve converts, and twelve from other nationality origins. As for the Exécutif, seven were Moroccan, four were Turks, three were converts, and three were from other nationality origins. Renaerts and Manço, “Lente Institutionalisation de l'Islam,” 97.
which was, in the words of one interviewee, “the beginning of new problems.”

The *Exécutif des Musulmans de Belgique* was recognized by the government in May 1999. However, the *Exécutif*’s first term proved to be a disappointment as legitimacy posed problems from the beginning due to government screening as well as inherent tensions between the General Assembly and the *Exécutif*, the former constantly questioning the legitimacy of the latter. As a result, the *Exécutif* of 1999 resigned collectively in 2002, and the new *Exécutif* was not recognized by the government, which organized new elections. A new assembly with a new *Exécutif* was recognized in 2004. While the second term was relatively more successful in solving some issues related to the needs of the Muslim community, the second *Exécutif* also suffered from similar problems as well as problems related to corruption, active involvement of the Belgian state, nationality divisions, and divisions inside different nationality groups.

**Turkish/Muslim Immigrants, the *Diyanet*, and the *Exécutif***

The Muslim community of Belgium consists mainly of Muslims of Moroccan and Turkish origin. The Muslim population of Turkish origin is about two hundred thousand or around 30 percent of the Muslim community. Within the Turkish community, the *Diyanet* Foundation is the most important organization in terms of the number of mosque affiliations as well as in its role as the principal partner for Belgian authorities. The *Diyanet*-led mosques number approximately sixty, many more than the thirty its closest rival, *Milli*.
Görüș, has and more than the BIF, which was officially established in 1981.43

Besides the financial and administrative backing of the Turkish state,44 the Diyanet’s strength has been rooted in the rather paternalistic attitude of the Turkish state, aiming to attract the loyalty of immigrants of Turkish origin.45 The Turkish diplomats do meet regularly with imams residing in Belgium since they think that it is their job “to be interested in everything that is of interest to the Turkish community.”46 In fact, imams are accountable to the Counselor for Religious Services, a diplomat, and himself accountable to the ambassador.

The way in which the Diyanet Foundation has related to the process of institutionalization of Islam in Europe can be analyzed in terms of three dominant attitudes: respect, caution, and skepticism and resentment. In the first place, the Diyanet has been respectful of the Belgian state’s demands, decisions, and laws vis-à-vis the Muslim community in the process of institutionalization. The former Minister of State in Turkey in charge of the Turks abroad and to whom the Diyanet was attached, Mehmet Aydın, has stated that one of the main principles governing Diyanet-linked local Muslim organizations in Europe is that “these organizations should never be involved in any act committed against the interests of the host country.”47 In the same way, Ali Dere, the current chairman of the Department of Foreign Relations of the Diyanet, has pointed out that “religious services abroad take the official and social expectations of the relevant countries into account.”48 This respect for the laws and demands of the Belgian state has been demonstrated at the initial stages of the institutionalization, when the Diyanet Foundation withdrew from the electoral process and remained outside the Conseil supérieur des musulmans de Belgique upon the lack of approval of the Belgian state regarding the elec-

42. Author’s interview 4 (June 2008).
43. Different estimates are given by different interviewees. Author’s interviews, June 2008. Milli Görüş (National Outlook) is a religio-political movement, associated with the strand of parties, starting from the establishment of Milli Nizam Partisi (National Order Party) in 1970, led by Necmettin Erbakan, the long-time leader of political Islam in Turkey.
46. Author’s interview 5 (June 2008).
tions for a Muslim council in early 1990, while the Milli Görüş movement followed the CIC’s initiative and persistence in holding elections. In the same vein, the Diyanet Foundation did choose to participate in the formation of the Conseil des Sages in 1990, which the Ministry of Justice formed as an alternative during the confrontation with the CIC regarding the elections, although it had little legitimacy as a co-opted body. In another instance, Milli Görüş sued the Belgian Ministry of Justice for its intervention in deciding to organize new elections. This happened when the first term of the Exécutif had ended with the collective resignation of all its members in 2002. As a result, the Ministry of Justice did not recognize the new Exécutif board formed from among the General Assembly. According to Milli Görüş representatives, the Ministry of Justice intervened illegally in the process and violated the statute of the Exécutif by authorizing the elections for the General Assembly. The Diyanet Foundation, however, sided with the Ministry of Justice and made it clear to Milli Görüş representatives that “the state intervention at this particular moment is necessary.”

Second, caution is the second principal characteristic of the Diyanet Foundation’s approach to the institutionalization process. This caution has been best exemplified in its decision not to participate actively in the 1998 elections for the first Exécutif. Influential in this decision was what the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Diyanet Foundation saw as the “ambiguity” and “uncertainty” surrounding this prospective body. Thus, while not altogether boycotting the elections, the general attitude was one of “wait and see.” In the words of one Diyanet representative, “They did not want to get themselves into an adventure.” This stood in sharp contrast to the 2004 elections, when it was Milli Görüş that remained passive as it opposed and even sued the Ministry of Justice for having intervened in the internal affairs of the Exécutif.

50. Author’s interviews 3 and 7 (June 2008).
51. Author's interviews 1, 4, and 7 (June 2008).
52. Author's interview 4 (June 2008). In fact, the statute had envisaged the elections of only one-third of the sixty-eight-member assembly at the end of five years. Author’s interview 1 (June 2008).
53. Author’s interview 1 (June 2008). Also, the Diyanet Foundation saw new elections as “an opportunity for improved Turkish [read as Diyanet] representation” in the General Assembly and in the Exécutif as well as “for a more high-quality representation as many in the outgoing assembly spoke neither Flemish nor French.” Ibid.
54. Author’s interview 2 (June 2008).
55. Author’s interview 1 (June 2008).
The Diyanet Foundation, this time, chose to get actively involved in the Exécutif, and both the embassy\(^{56}\) and the Belgian politicians of Turkish origin were also influential in this decision. Based on the experience with the first Exécutif, there was, according to a Diyanet official, certainly the calculation that the Exécutif was there to stay. Second and related to that, it was better to be “in” to help in the shaping of this institution.\(^{57}\) Compared with the Milli Görüş-dominated representation of the Turks in the 1999 Exécutif, the Diyanet Foundation and the Turkish diplomats also intended to generate a Turkish representation that was more in line with the reality, both in terms of the percentage of the Turks and the number of mosque affiliations with the Diyanet having the upper-hand.\(^{58}\) As a whole, the idea in 2005 was that “when you are not in the administration, you have no say.” An interviewee used the metaphor of a theater: “In 1998, we were the audience; in 2005, we got on the stage.”\(^{59}\) The active Diyanet mobilization as well as the passive stance of both Milli Görüş and Moroccans\(^^{60}\) produced a huge success for the Turks in general and, more particularly, for the Diyanet Foundation.\(^{61}\)

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56. In fact, according to an interviewee, the embassy took the elections so seriously that the Turkish diplomats actively helped in the mobilization of the electorate and in the surveillance of the process. Ibid. See also Kaya and Kentel for this point. Kaya and Kentel, Belçika Türkleri, 65–66.

57. Author’s interview 2 (June 2008).

58. Author’s interview 1 (June 2008).

59. Ibid.


61. In the General Assembly of the 2005 Exécutif, there were forty members of Turkish origin, of which thirty-two were elected from the Diyanet ticket whereas eight were from outside the Diyanet commissions. While this does not mean that all eight were of the Milli Görüş, among the thirty-two, there were seven members of the Milli Görüş tendency who got elected from the Diyanet ticket. As a whole, among the fifteen of non-Diyaneş tendency, there were twelve members of Milli Görüş and three of other tendencies: one independent, one Sülêymanç, and one of Wahhabí tendency. In the Exécutif, the repartition was the following: eight Turks, six Moroccans, and three converts. The presidency went also to one of the Diyanet Foundation representatives, Coşkun Beyazgül. In fact, while the representation of the Turks was supposed to be proportional to the General Assembly, which would have necessitated ten Turks, the Diyanet wanted to give a better representation to Moroccans, who fared behind their numerical dominance in the Belgian Muslim community. Thus, the Diyanet Foundation wanted to prevent the Morroccans’ resentment and be as inclusionary as possible. In the same way, among the eight Turks in the administration, one seat was given to a Milli Görüş representative, whereas the seven remaining were Diyanet representatives. Nevertheless, the Milli Görüş resented a great deal this “one” seat because it had expected two. Author’s interview 1 (June 2008).
The third component of the Diyanet’s approach to the process of the institutionalization of Islam in general and to the Exécutif in particular can be called a combination of skepticism and resentment. In the first place, the Diyanet is skeptical of the possibility of creating a “Belgian Islam,” if this is conceptualized as one independent of the influence of the countries of origin of the Muslim community. Accordingly, as Belgium has no tradition of Islam before immigration started in 1960s, “Belgian Islam” would need to be based on the various communities and associations of Muslims. Hence, a deculturized “Belgian Islam” is considered as incompatible with the “sociological reality” on the ground.62

From the perspective of Turkish state officials and the Diyanet Foundation, the nationality divisions among Muslims are too sharp and important for allowing such a project in the first place. The Turks, they point out, are too attached to the mother country.

After the corruption scandal that implicated the Exécutif, the Ministry of Justice suspended all funding to this institution. “L’Exécutif des Musulmans de Belgique ranimé,” August 29, 2008, http://www.rtlinfo.be/info/archive/164169/l-executif-des-musulmans-de-belgique-rani..., accessed on January 4, 2010. In addition, twenty-two people, including the top administration, resigned in early 2008 “to let the investigation by the prosecutor work in all freedom.” Author’s interview 1 (June 2008). As a result, the profile of the representation of the Turks in the Exécutif changed. Among the seventeen-member Exécutif, there are seven members of Turkish origin, seven of Moroccan origin, one of Pakistani origin, and two converts. While the president, Şemsettin Ugurlu, is of Diyanet origin, it is more difficult to establish a direct connection between Turkish members and their institutional affiliation in the new administration. Author’s e-mail correspondence and phone interview (January 2010). The new Exécutif was elected on March 14, 2008, and was officially recognized on May 9, 2008, by the Belgian Ministry of Justice. “Arrêté royal portant reconnaissance des membres, titulaires d’un mandat au sein de l’Exécutif des Musulmans de Belgique,” May 9, 2008, http://staatsbladclip.zita.be/moniteur/lois/2008/05/19/loi-2008009362.html, accessed on January 4, 2010; author’s e-mail correspondence and author’s phone interview (January 2010). While its first nomination was for one year, it was extended to December 31, 2009, and then for another six months, until June 30, 2010.

As the royal decree stated, the new Exécutif was in charge of preparing plans for the creation of a new representation scheme. “Arrêté royal,” Author’s e-mail correspondence and author’s phone interview (January 2010). Hence, a Commission de Renouvellement (Committee of Renewal) has been established within the Exécutif, in charge of evaluating different views on and proposals for a new representative Muslim body. Author’s phone interview (January 2010); Ricardo Gutierrez, “Réformer l’islam sans les musulmans,” Le Soir, December 8, 2009, http://archives.lesoir.be/islam-les-projets-de-refonte-de-l-executif_t-20091208-00R8C..., accessed on January 21, 2010; and Gutierrez, “La fin du scrutin islamique,” Le Soir, 08.01.2010, http://www.pressbanking.com/main/view?print=1&from=a&pos=1&mode=html, accessed on January 8, 2010.

62. Author’s phone interview (January 2010).
and, in the words of a Turkish state official, the most “resistant” to integration.\textsuperscript{63} In fact, it is especially because of immigrants’ strong attachment to their home countries that the immigrant community originating from Turkey has been distinguished from that of Moroccan origin.\textsuperscript{64} The strong communal bonds lead to a closed but rich associational life to preserve communal solidarity in comparison with Moroccans.\textsuperscript{65} The Turkish community is also characterized by stronger links to mosques, whereas the Moroccan community has low mosque attendance, weaker religious identity, and less homogenous religious orientations.\textsuperscript{66} In fact, Turks of all tendencies, \textit{Diyanet} and \textit{Milli Görüş} alike, as well as Turkish state officials pride themselves on being better organized than the Moroccans.\textsuperscript{67} The lack of organization among Moroccans is often cited as a problem for the Muslim community in its relations with the Belgian state by both the \textit{Diyanet} and \textit{Milli Görüş} representatives. An interviewee stated that it is impossible to negotiate with the Belgian state “when there are ten people claiming to represent a Moroccan mosque.”\textsuperscript{68} A \textit{Diyanet} Foundation representative has explained the contrast between the two communities in terms of the distrust Moroccans have toward their own state and hence their embassy and each other, which an interviewee linked to the colonial past of the Moroccans.\textsuperscript{69} Thus, because of the belief in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{63} Author’s interview 5 (June 2008).
\item \textsuperscript{64} The Turkish Community in Belgium is described as a latecomer, rural in origin, and linguistically marginalized because the immigrants have no prior knowledge of either French (in contrast to Moroccans) or Flemish, little educated and low-skilled, with strong family bonds and geographic concentration. Manço, “Les Organisations Islamiques;” 143–58; and Kaya and Kentel, \textit{Belçika Türkleri}, 31.
\item \textsuperscript{65} However, their participation in the Belgian associational life remains weak in comparison with Moroccans, who are more actively involved in the Belgian public sphere. Manço, “Les Organisations Islamiques;” Dirk Jacobs, “Multinational and Polyethnic Politics Entwined: Minority Representation in the Region of Brussels-Capital,” \textit{Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies} 26 (April 2000): 289–304. Dirk Jacobs also explains the weak associational activity of the Turks in Belgian society in comparison with both their rich associational activity within the community and with the Moroccan involvement in Belgian social life in the Brussels region with two factors: language and this region’s preference for individual participation in civil society which Turks have difficulties with. Jacobs, “Multinational and Polyethnic Politics,” 289–304.
\item \textsuperscript{66} Lesthaeghe and Neels, “Islamic Communities in Belgium,” 139; Manço and Kanmaz, “Belgique,” 89.
\item \textsuperscript{67} Author’s interviews 1, 2, 4, and 5 (June 2008); Manço and Kanmaz, “Belgique,” 94.
\item \textsuperscript{68} Author’s interview 4 (June 2008).
\item \textsuperscript{69} Author’s interview 1 (June 2008). Kaya and Kentel mention the limited communication between the two communities and the existence of many prejudices on both sides vis-à-vis each other. Kaya and Kentel, \textit{Belçika Türkleri}, 32.
\end{itemize}
the strength of home country ties and communal bonds of Turks and of this deep-rooted contrast between the Turkish and Moroccan communities, the Diyanet is skeptical of a conception of a “Belgian Islam.”

The Diyanet is also concerned with the prospect of absorption of Turks within a “Belgian Islam” and hence also with their losing connection to Turkey. The Diyanet Foundation argues that “the mosque is often the link that ties the Turks to their language.” This is why, the foundation claims, it is important for imams to use Turkish in their sermons, even though it does recognize the need for these imams to know also the language of the host country, Flemish or French, to gain a better understanding of the condition of the community and to reach out especially to the second and third generations. Accordingly, the mosque is not solely a place of worship but also one of socialization; it is therefore important to keep mosques as “Turkish” as possible. The Diyanet Foundation makes the same claim also about the religious instruction in public schools. It emphasizes the need to teach Islam to students in Turkish rather than in Flemish or French. In these claims, we can see that the Diyanet Foundation associates closely language, religion, and ethnicity, a dominant theme of the “Turkish-Islamic synthesis”: Language is an essential component of national identity and religion can help its survival. Furthermore, having a secure financial and organizational infrastructure and the backing of the Turkish state, the Diyanet Foundation does not see the point of asking the Belgian state to pay for its imams or for the teachers of Islam.

This attitude stands in sharp contrast to that of Milli Görüş, which needs desperately the financial support of the Belgian state through the establishment of a Muslim representative body. Thus, according to both the Diyanet Foundation and Milli Görüş representatives, Milli Görüş’s expectations from the Exécutif are high, and the recognition of its mosques by the Belgian state through the Exécutif is crucial for the financing of these mosques and their imams. In other words, the Diyanet Foundation regards the Exécutif as an institution

70. Author’s interview 2 (June 2008).
71. Author’s interviews 1 and 4 (June 2008). In fact, a Diyanet Foundation representative also said that it is easier for the Diyanet Foundation to raise money for the mosques since “people trust and feel attachment to their state [the Turkish state],” whereas Milli Görüş encounters more difficulties in this. Accordingly, the attachment to Turkey as well as the strength of the Turkish state’s organizational infrastructure is demonstrated when one compares the much higher number of people who registered to vote in 2004 elections than in 1994. When, in 1994, the Diyanet remained out of the picture, only six thousand people registered from the Turkish community. But in 2004, when the Diyanet Foundation got actively involved, the number increased to approximately forty thousand people. Author’s interview 1 (June 2008).
in which it participates rather reluctantly. Staying outside cannot be an option “as the Belgian state wants [the Diyanet] to be in.”72 Also, a desire to at least have the opportunity to shape the process of the institutionalization of Islam and the future of the Muslim community73 also plays a role. In fact, the Diyanet Foundation believes that the Exécutif in its present structure is doomed to fail74 because it is incompetent in solving the problems of the Muslim community. In its current structure, the foundation argues, the Exécutif is struck by legal holes and double-standards of the Belgian state and is subject to the whims of changing governments. As such, the Diyanet Foundation has the impression that the Belgian state does not take the Exécutif seriously, even though the state considers it the only interlocutor and shows this by financing this institution only.75 In contrast, Millî Görüş sees the Exécutif as a tool for its survival.

While practical considerations certainly play a role, a different conception of identity of the Millî Görüş explains better its approach to the question of institutionalization. Millî Görüş is translated as “the National Outlook,” but the movement defines itself not as a national but as a religious movement, thus admitting explicitly that it remains loyal to the original meaning of the word milli, before it adopted the modern connotation “national” at the end of the nineteenth century.76 In fact, a Millî Görüş representative said that the name of the movement itself was a “camouflage” to hide the Islamic character of the movement because Turkish law forbids the establishment of an openly Islamic political party. The official name of the Belgian branch of the Millî Görüş movement, Belcika İslam Federasyonu (BIF), is, in itself, a testimony to the inclusionary character of their organization, a Millî Görüş representative argues, even though at present the organization addresses Muslims of Turkish origin only. Prioritizing its

72. Author’s interview 1 (June 2008).
73. A Diyanet official said that “they have to be in it [the Exécutif] as even if it is not such an important institution now, it no doubt will be in twenty years time.” Author’s interview 2 (June 2008).
74. Recently, the Diyanet Foundation has been leading a new formation within the Muslim community called as La Plateforme Citoyenne des Musulmans de Belgique. Author’s phone interview (January 2010).
75. Author’s interviews 1 and 6 (June 2008). An instance that reveals how “the Belgian state does not take the Exécutif seriously” was related to the issue of the Feast of Ritual Sacrifice. When the Exécutif determined a different date than the Saudis for the starting of the Feast, the municipality followed the decisions of the Moroccans, who themselves followed the Saudis. Hence, the interviewee said, the Belgian state did not refrain from undermining the authority of the Exécutif, which was supposedly established to be the sole interlocutor for the Belgian state. Author’s interview 1 (June 2008).
76. Author’s interview 4 (June 2008).
Muslim identity over its ethnic identity, it has a more sympathtetic approach to the concept of “Belgian Islam." From this perspective, it is very critical of the Diyanet Foundation’s stance regarding the salarrying of imams: In the first place, it believes that the Turkish state’s persistence in sending imams from Turkey and paying for them is not sustainable in the long term, as was demonstrated when the recruitment of teachers of Islam from Turkey was discontinued by 1988 despite the wishes of the Turkish state.77 Second, while the Turkish state can afford to pay for the Diyanet imams, Milli Görüş needs the financial support of the Belgian state. In that, it claims that the Turkish state does not want to lose control of the imams and mosques.78 From the perspective of the Diyanet Foundation, the sympathy of Milli Görüş for a “Belgian Islam” is rooted in its desire to outgrow its secondary position “under Diyanet’s shadow.” The foundation believes that the concept of a “Belgian Islam” will make the Milli Görüş more effective in the Muslim community and increase its influence on the Belgian state.79

Crucially, the Diyanet Foundation’s scepticism vis-à-vis the institutionalization process turns frequently into resentment. Notwithstanding the Belgian state’s preference for the Diyanet rather than Milli Görüş in its relations with the Turkish community of Belgium,80 as well as the prominence of the Diyanet Foundation in the Exécutif from 2005 to 2008, the Diyanet Foundation has the impression that the Belgian state does not respect its opinions sufficiently. The Diyanet Foundation sees itself as the only Muslim organization in Belgium with the necessary historical experience to carry out religious services. According to one of its representatives, if the Exécutif is an administrative body in charge of carrying out religious services for the Muslim community, then it should respect the historical experience of an institution like the Diyanet and try to benefit from it.81 In fact, the claim to a rich historical experience is a prevailing theme of the self-image of the Diyanet. Therefore, according to the former minister Mehmet Aydın, the Diyanet “deserves to be acknowledged as one such global institution.”82 There is also an observable sense of superiority and exceptionalism that accompanies this self-image. In the words of Aydın,
Diyanet is not only a reliable institution in terms of its infrastructure, leadership, departments, and services, but it is also far ahead, in many respects, of similar religious organizations in other Muslim countries with regard to the knowledge, experience and skills it has gained over the centuries, if we take the Ottoman experience into account. The history, mission and vision of Diyanet makes its situation exceptional in many ways.83

In fact, according to a representative of the Diyanet Foundation, this relatively insufficient appreciation of the institution stems from the Belgian state’s reservation about “the Diyanet wanting to dictate a Turkish model,” whereas the intention, the Diyanet claims, is nothing more than “inviting [the Belgian authorities] to benefit from [our experience].” It argues that the Belgian state’s fear is that “if they [the authorities] give us [the Diyanet Foundation] a more privileged recognition, then others would ask for it also.”84 Aydın makes a similar point when he states that “the help Diyanet provides to Turkish communities in Europe and elsewhere should not be seen as interference in the domestic affairs of those countries. Europe needs more efficient Islamic organizations that function in religious and cultural domains.”85 According to the Diyanet Foundation, the Belgian authorities confuse “influence” and “interference.” The first one is seen as natural as it would be impossible to cut the link of the Turkish community to their culture. However, the Diyanet Foundation argues that there has never been interference.86 Thus, the “official” character of the Diyanet Foundation seems at times to be a liability.87

However, its “official” character is also an asset because the Belgian state has traditionally favored the Diyanet Foundation over Milli Görüş mostly for its association with the Turkish state and as a result of the Turkish diplomacy. A representative of the Diyanet Foundation has expressed this Janus-faced nature of the organization as follows: “Even though the Belgian government

83. Ibid.
84. Author’s interview 1 (June 2008).
86. Author’s phone interview (January 2010).
87. The counselor for Religious Services of the Turkish Embassy is also the president of the Diyanet Foundation. This also constitutes a central point of Milli Görüş criticism vis-à-vis the Diyanet Foundation as the former blames the latter for being the “state” as opposed to their own “civil society” character. Author’s interview 4 (June 2008). Thus, from the perspective of the Milli Görüş, their organization has a more autochtone or to use the terminology of Felice Dassetto (1996), “implanted” nature as opposed to the “transplanted” Diyanet Foundation. Felice Dassetto, La Construction de l’Islam Européen: Approche Socio-Anthropollogique (Paris: Harmattan, 1996). For an evidence of the Belgian state’s suspicion about the Turkish and Moroccan governments’ interference, see Gutierrez, “La Fin du Scrutin Islamique.”
does not like the Diyanet, that is the [foreign] governments, they will nevertheless come to us [because] we know how to do it [religious services] best.\textsuperscript{88} More importantly, however, as expressed in the statements of the current president of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, Diyanet is perceived as the extension of the secular Turkish state and an advocate of a “moderate” and “rational” Islam compatible with modernity and democracy.\textsuperscript{89} While Milli Görüş claims that the diplomatic advantage of the Diyanet Foundation somehow generated a more favorable attitude toward that organization on the part of the Belgian state,\textsuperscript{90} the Diyanet Foundation argues that there has always been a shadow of doubt over the Milli Görüş movement because of the nature of its religious orientation and that the question marks regarding Milli Görüş remain on the part of the Belgian intelligence.\textsuperscript{91} One member of the Milli Görüş tendency in the Exécutif provisoire of 1993 had been refused by the Ministry of Justice\textsuperscript{92} which, according to an interviewee who worked at that time for the Centre pour l’égalité des chances of the Belgian Ministry of Justice, said “no Milli Görüş! [in the Exécutif provisoire].”\textsuperscript{93} It is also possible to say that Milli Görüş acted independently and sometimes in open confrontation with the Belgian state, as mentioned earlier.

Notwithstanding the different expectations from and perception of the institutionalization of Islam and the Exécutif, it is possible to say that the Diyanet Foundation has a rather ambivalent relationship with the Milli Görüş movement. On the one hand, despite using a polite language by trying not to generalize to all Milli Görüş organization and members, the Diyanet Foundation is disturbed by what it sees as the open anti-(Turkish) state stance and discourse of some of its members, which one interviewee likened to a “floating mine.” It also claims that the Diyanet Foundation and the Exécutif of the 2005–2008 period have suffered a great deal from the attitude of some members of Milli Görüş in the general assembly, who conspired against the Diyanet Foundation representatives and the Exécutif. One could also observe a sense of superiority over Milli Görüş on the part of the Diyanet Foundation, priding itself for its constituency’s attachment to the Turkish state.\textsuperscript{94}

\textsuperscript{88} Author’s interview 2 (June 2008).
\textsuperscript{90} Author’s interview 4 (June 2008); Lesthaeghe and Neels, “Islamic Communities in Belgium,” 134.
\textsuperscript{91} Author’s interview 6 (June 2008).
\textsuperscript{93} Author’s interview 7 (June 2008).
\textsuperscript{94} Author’s interview 1 (June 2008).
Nevertheless, the Diyanet Foundation also claims to embrace all members of the Turkish community, including Milli Görüş. In fact, the Diyanet Foundation’s representatives in the Exécutif state that they have helped Milli Görüş have its mosques recognized by the Ministry of Justice.\(^{95}\) A Diyanet Foundation representative also said that in the past “the rulers in Turkey discriminated among Turks” but that such mistakes should be abandoned. As such, the foundation believes that political ideology is irrelevant for members of the organization as long as they can work together. Hence, the establishment of a committee of consultation within the framework of the Diyanet Foundation, bringing together members of all tendencies.\(^{96}\) In the same way, another Diyanet Foundation representative has stated that one can no longer find the past radical discourse in the Milli Görüş in Belgium today.\(^{97}\) Another Diyanet Foundation representative similarly said that “Milli Görüş suffers from its own history [rather than its present attitude].”\(^{98}\) While the grassroots relationship between the two sides had always showed moderation and pragmatism,\(^{99}\) there is now more dialogue between people since they no longer mind going to each other’s mosques.\(^{100}\) In fact, what may be observed is rather a rapprochement between the Diyanet and Milli Görüş. While some observers trace back the origins of this rapprochement to the impressive success of the Refah Partisi (Welfare Party) in municipal elections in 1994,\(^{101}\) most see the turning point with the coming to power of the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP; the Justice and Development Party) in 2002, a split party from the Milli Görüş movement of Necmettin Erbakan,\(^{102}\) even though the AKP claims to have burned the bridges connecting it back to its Islamist past. The second claim is evidenced by a circular sent to all Turkish diplomatic representations abroad by the former minister of foreign affairs turned current president of the Republic, Abdullah Gül,
instructing them to embrace Turks abroad of all tendencies. 103 Hence, it is possible to argue that while a certain tension remains between the two organizations, they moved closer to each other during recent years. Nevertheless, the differences over their respective identities as well as their approaches to, perception of, and expectations from the institutionalization of Islam continue to be relevant.

Conclusion

The processes of the institutionalization of Islam and the establishment of Muslim representative organizations seem to present interesting dilemmas and ambivalent implications for the Diyanet: On the one hand, through its long history of partnership with the host countries, its being one of the most important religious organizations in Europe as well as its image as the representative of the secular Turkish state and an Islam compatible with modernity and democracy, the Diyanet is an important actor that European states have to reckon with. This can provide venues for the Turkish state to be influential in the shaping of an emergent “European Islam.” On the other hand, however, for the Diyanet Foundation, the Exécutif has the risk of eliminating the autonomy and control of the Diyanet over the Turkish/Muslim community. As this article has argued, this concern is directly related to Diyanet’s understanding of Islam as based on culture. The Belgian case demonstrates that the Diyanet’s perception of, and role in, the process of the institutionalization of Islam manifests the continuing relevance of ethnicity in the Turkish/Muslim community and its resistance to deculturation. In a way, these two implications of the institutionalization of Islam in Belgium for the Diyanet may be understood within the framework of two dynamics of transnational religion, and more specifically, of transnational Islam, that Peter Mandaville refers to: “When Islam travels there are engendered not only conversations with the societies into which it enters, but also important dialogues within Islam itself—in other words, engagement with the Muslim ‘other’.”104 To put it differently, the Diyanet’s encounter with the Exécutif involves, on the one hand, the Belgian society and politics, and, on the other hand, alternative definitions of the Muslim community. In the articulation of its own understanding of Islam, the Diyanet defines its own “Muslim subjectivity”105 primarily on the basis of Turkishness.

103. Author’s interview 5 (June 2008).
104. Mandaville, Transnational Muslim Politics, 110.
105. Ibid., 188.