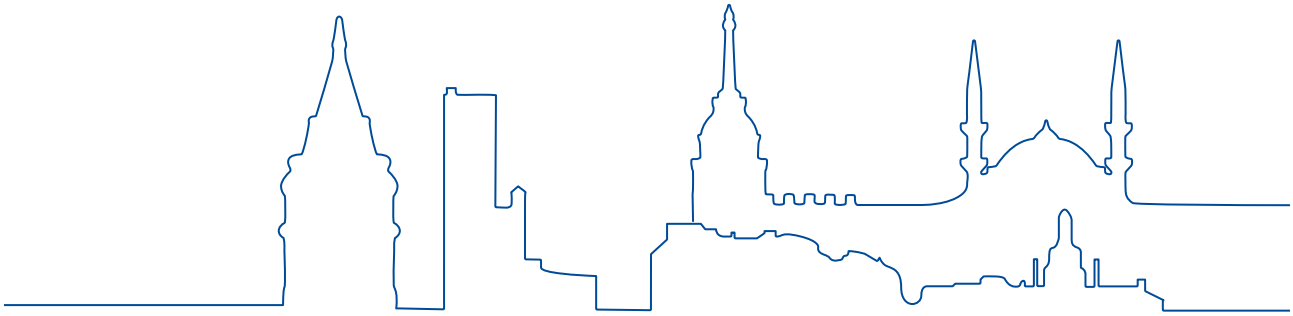


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DITIB AT A CROSSROADS: CAN TURKEY'S DIASPORA MOSQUE FINALLY CALL GERMANY HOME?

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The Turkish diaspora in Germany has evolved over sixty years from a group of "guest workers" into a permanent social reality. While the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Türk-İslam Birliği,* DITIB) has become the largest organization meeting the religious and cultural needs of this community, its organic and financial ties to the Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı,* or Diyanet) in Turkey remain both a structural hurdle and a subject of intense political debate. Therefore, today's diaspora politics in Germany necessitate that DITIB transforms into an independent, local institution capable of standing on its own feet within the German constitutional order rather than serving as an "instrument of influence" for Turkey.

Financial and Personnel Dependency

The most concrete indicator of DITIB's ties to Turkey is that the salaries of its religious officials are paid directly by Ankara. A senior DITIB official I interviewed in Cologne confirmed this structural dependency, stating that for DITIB to cover these costs itself, its budget would need to triple.

This situation creates a fundamental conflict with the goal of attaining Public Body Status *(Körperschaft des öffentlichen Rechts)* in Germany. DITIB itself currently operates as a registered association (eingetragener Verein, e.V.) and has publicly signaled its ambition to acquire this status. However, Germany emphasizes that religious communities must be self-governing and responsible for their own personnel, a condition DITIB cannot meet as long as its imams remain Turkish civil servants paid by Ankara.

Experts argue that DITIB's close ties to the Turkish state cause it to clash with Germany's principles of secularism and neutrality. Specifically, the reflection of Turkish domestic political developments and election campaigns in mosques has severely damaged the organization's image in German public opinion.

Tensions between Turkey and Germany after the 2016 coup attempt deepened suspicions regarding DITIB, leading German authorities to effectively "pull the handbrake." The organization found itself caught between two governments, expected by Ankara to serve as a reliable channel of religious outreach, and viewed by Berlin with growing unease as a vehicle for foreign political influence. Furthermore, viewing DITIB as a political instrument for Turkey weakens its ability to appeal to third- and fourth-generation youth, who increasingly develop

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a Germany-centered sense of belonging and feel little connection to an institution they perceive as speaking for Ankara rather than for them.

Training Imams at Home

The key to institutional independence lies in ending the practice of sending imams from Turkey and instead training religious officials within Germany. The 2023 "Declaration of Intent" between DITIB and the German Ministry of the Interior aims to gradually stop the arrival of imams from Turkey and train 100 imams locally per year. This step is vital for DITIB to cease being an "imported" structure and to begin producing local actors who know the language, cultural codes, and legal system of German society. Having imams resign from their Turkish civil servant status to sign direct employment contracts with German mosques will strengthen DITIB's claim of being an "institution for Germany" rather than a branch office of the Turkish state.

The significance of this shift cannot be overstated. An imam trained in Germany, fluent in the language and familiar with the social framework, is a fundamentally different institutional actor than one dispatched from Ankara for a fixed term with little stake in the society he serves. The generational gap within DITIB's own congregation makes this transformation urgent: younger Muslims born and raised in Germany are increasingly asking whether DITIB speaks for them at all.

The Diaspora Finding Its Own Voice

The future of DITIB depends on its courage to maintain the Diyanet as a source of religious reference while severing its administrative and political hierarchy. After decades of migration, Turkey must accept that the diaspora in Germany has genuinely "come of age." This means not only acknowledging the social and cultural maturity of a community that has put down deep roots in German society but also actively enabling DITIB to function as an independent institution, one that speaks on behalf of its congregation in Germany rather than on behalf of Ankara.

Allowing DITIB to stand on its own feet is not a concession Turkey will make at the expense of its influence. On the contrary, preventing DITIB's instrumentalization is likely to strengthen bilateral relations between Turkey and Germany in the long run. An organization that is trusted by German institutions, that participates in public life as a genuine civil society actor, and that is seen by its members as a credible advocate will do more for Turkey-Germany relations than one perpetually shadowed by accusations of foreign interference. In an increasingly chaotic world order, where alliances are being tested, Turkey and Germany need stable partnerships. DITIB, reformed and independent, could be a bridge.

Preventing DITIB's instrumentalization is a necessity not only for the social peace of Muslims in Germany but also for DITIB to preserve its own legitimacy among its congregation. When DITIB stops being an extension of Ankara and begins to speak as a primary stakeholder of Berlin and Germany, the diaspora will truly begin to stand on its own two feet, and both countries will be better for it.