

Turkey's Religious Diplomacy in the 2016 Global Islamic Calendar Congress

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Abstract

The absence of a universally accepted Hijri calendar has long generated socio-religious fragmentation across the Muslim world, with recurrent divergences over the start of Ramadan, Shawwal, and Dhu al-Hijjah. This article interprets the 2016 International Hijri Calendar Unity Congress in Istanbul not merely as a technical-astronomical gathering but as a strategic exercise in religious diplomacy orchestrated by Turkey's Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet). Using a descriptive-analytical qualitative design, the study synthesizes academic, institutional, and media sources to examine how Turkey leveraged agenda-setting, coalition-building, and procedural innovation to advance calendar unification. Historically embedded within a longer OIC-linked process (2005 Yemen resolutions; 2008 Mecca; 2013 Istanbul), the 2016 congress converted protracted deliberation into a vote-backed, criteria-specific decision package. Subsequent diffusion (most clearly the SGHC adoption by Muhammadiyah for full implementation from 26 June 2025) demonstrates Turkey's capacity to translate scientific-fiqh convergence into transnational policy uptake. Findings indicate that the congress projected Turkey as a modern, rational leader capable of reframing a civilizational problem while subtly contesting traditional Arab religious authorities. Yet universal consensus remains elusive due to sovereignty politics (notably in Saudi Arabia), OIC institutional inertia, and grassroots attachment to local rukyat. The article clarifies both the reach and the limits of Turkey's faith-based soft power in a polycentric Islamic order.

I. Introduction

Since its inception, the Hijri calendar has functioned not only as a dating system to determine the timing of religious observances but also as a fundamental pillar and symbol of Islamic civilization. It represents the collective identity of the Ummah bound by the same rhythm of time, which distinguishes it from other civilizations (Maskufa, 2018). However, it is ironic that for more than fourteen centuries, the Islamic world has not succeeded in realizing a single, universal, and predictive Hijri calendar (PP Muhammadiyah, 2025). This lack of standardization has become a prolonged civilizational dilemma, triggering widespread disruption across various aspects of life. Differences in determining the beginning of Ramadan, Shawwal, and Dhu al-Hijjah routinely cause Muslims in different countries, and even within the same city, to begin and end their fasting and celebrate major holidays on different days (Hürriyet Daily News, 2016). This disparity transcends mere ritual matters; it creates practical difficulties in government administration, economic planning, and cross-border social interactions (International Astronomical Center, 2016). The root of this fragmentation lies in a deep methodological schism between two main approaches: rukyat al-hilal (the visual observation of the new crescent moon) and hisab (astronomical calculation). The unending theological and jurisprudential debate between these two camps has perpetuated the absence of a consensus (Arafat & Budiwati, 2025).

Amidst this historical impasse, the geopolitical stage of the 21st century is witnessing the resurgence of Turkey as an influential global actor. Under the leadership of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) since 2002, Turkey's foreign policy has undergone a fundamental transformation. Ankara has gradually shifted from a rigid, Eurocentric Kemalist orientation toward a policy that is more multidimensional, proactive, and self-oriented (Käsehage, 2021).

This new policy actively re-embraces Turkey's historical and Islamic-Ottoman heritage, as well as forges closer ties with the Middle East, Africa, and the broader Muslim world (Cagaptay, 2025). One of the main pillars of this new strategy is the use of faith-based diplomacy as an effective instrument of soft power to expand influence, build a positive image, and project leadership at the regional and global levels (Oprea, 2024).

It is within this framework that the International Hijri Calendar Union Congress, held in Istanbul in May 2016, must be understood. This event was not a sudden initiative but rather the culmination of years of preparation by the Turkish state apparatus (International Union of Muslim Scholars, 2016). By taking the initiative to host and direct the congress, Turkey strategically positioned itself as a power that is not only concerned with but also possesses the intellectual and political capacity to solve one of the most perplexing civilizational problems facing the Ummah. This effort was implicitly a claim to leadership, offering a vision of a unified, modern, progressive, and science-

based Islam capable of overcoming the traditionalist debates that have led to stagnation (PP Muhammadiyah, 2025).

The choice of the calendar issue as a medium for diplomacy was a strategically clever move. This issue is technical (astronomy), religious (worship), and at the same time, highly political (a symbol of unity and authority). This allowed Turkey to engage with the Islamic world in a non-military and non-economic arena where it could claim intellectual and civilizational superiority. Instead of launching a direct and confrontational political challenge to established centers of Islamic power, Turkey offered a solution to a long-neglected “public good” problem. The proposed solution—based on modern *hisab* (astronomical calculation)—aligned with the grand narrative of the AKP, which seeks to fuse Islamic tradition with modernity. Thus, the congress became a low-risk diplomatic initiative with the potential for high rewards, operating on multiple levels—practical, religious, and geopolitical—to enhance Turkey’s prestige and influence (Hardiyan, 2014).

Despite extensive analyses of the Diyanet’s expansion and Turkey’s faith-based diplomacy (Öztürk, 2018; Öztürk & Sözeri, 2018; Baser & Öztürk, 2022; Kaya & Drhimeur, 2023; Yilmaz & Shipoli, 2022), scholarship has rarely interrogated the International Hijri Calendar Unity Congress (Istanbul, 2016) as a discrete case of religious diplomacy and norm entrepreneurship within polycentric Muslim governance. Most calendar-unification studies privilege technical/fiqh debates or regional regimes (International Astronomical Center, 2016; Maskufa, 2018; Mufid et al., 2020) rather than the diplomatic mechanisms—agenda-setting, coalition-building, and framing—through which a state actor seeks transnational consensus. Addressing this gap, this article examines how Turkey leveraged the congress to project soft power, contest competing authorities, and mobilize adoption beyond its immediate sphere, with particular attention to post-congress diffusion in Southeast Asia (PP Muhammadiyah, 2025; Muhammadiyah, 2025; Pusat Tarjih Muhammadiyah, 2025).

This research aims to answer the following central question: "How did the state of Turkey, through the 2016 International Hijri Calendar Union Congress, utilize religious diplomacy as an instrument of soft power to pursue a new socio-political consensus within the global *Ummah*, and what does this initiative reveal about the ambitions and limitations of Turkish foreign policy under the AKP government?"

To answer this question, this paper will first outline the research method used. Subsequently, the analysis will focus on three main aspects: first, the transformation of Turkey's Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) from a

domestic institution into a global diplomatic actor; second, the dynamics of the debate and decision-making process within the 2016 Istanbul Congress as an arena for negotiating a civilizational vision; and third, the impact and challenges faced in the effort to realize a post-congress consensus. Finally, the conclusion will summarize the main findings and their implications.

2. Research Method

This research employs a descriptive-analytical qualitative case study design focusing on Turkey's religious diplomacy through the 2016 International Hijri Calendar Union Congress. The study analyzes secondary data obtained from peer-reviewed journals, official documents, OIC and Diyanet resolutions, Muhammadiyah publications, and reputable media archives. Data collection was conducted through targeted database searches across Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and institutional repositories using keywords such as Diyanet, religious diplomacy, Hijri calendar, and Istanbul 2016. The data were critically synthesized and analyzed using process tracing to identify key diplomatic mechanisms—agenda-setting, coalition-building, and framing—embedded in Turkey's religious diplomacy strategy. Triangulation among academic, institutional, and media sources ensured validity and reliability, while negative-case analysis considered opposing perspectives, particularly those from Saudi Arabia and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), which provided contrasting theological and political interpretations within the global Islamic discourse.

3. Results and Discussion

A. The Transformation of the Diyanet: From Domestic Apparatus to Global Diplomatic Actor

To understand the significance of the 2016 Congress, it is essential to examine the radical transformation of the institution that served as its driving force: Turkey's Presidency of Religious Affairs, commonly known as the Diyanet. Established in 1924, the Diyanet was initially a product of the secular Kemalist state. Its purpose was domestic and restrictive to control and manage Sunni Islamic practices within Turkey's borders, ensuring that religion did not threaten state authority or the secular modernization project. For decades, its role was limited to administering mosques, training imams, and issuing fatwas aligned with state ideology (Öztürk & Sözeri, 2018; Bekdil, 2022).

However, since the AKP came to power in 2002, the Diyanet has undergone a remarkable metamorphosis, evolving from a controlled domestic bureaucracy into an expansive global institution and the spearhead of Turkish foreign policy (Kaya & Drhimeur, 2023). This transformation has been supported by a phenomenal budget increase—the Diyanet's annual budget has skyrocketed, surpassing even those of key ministries such as the Ministry of Interior and the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Bekdil, 2022). With these massive resources, its operational reach has expanded dramatically, now encompassing more than 145 countries worldwide (Öztürk, 2018). The Diyanet no longer merely manages the religious affairs of Turkish citizens but has become a powerful transnational actor. This internationalized role positions the Diyanet as a primary instrument of soft power and religious diplomacy in Turkey's global engagement (Oprea, 2024).

Historically, this outward reorientation was not episodic but accumulated across intergovernmental and expert forums in which Ankara and the Diyanet built agenda-setting capacity. From Turkey's engagement with early OIC deliberations on calendar coordination in the mid-1970s to the 2005 Yemen resolutions that replaced harmonization on the collective agenda, a pathway of institutional learning emerged (Organization of the Islamic Conference, 2005). Subsequent expert meetings and symposiums in Mecca (2008) and Istanbul (2013) consolidated cross-disciplinary coalitions between jurists and astronomers and elevated Turkey's convening power (International Astronomical Center, 2016; Öztürk, 2018). This incremental sequencing culminated in the 2016 International Hijri Calendar Unity Congress, where diplomatic entrepreneurship was operationalized into a vote-backed, criteria-specific decision package (International Union of Muslim Scholars, 2016).

Across these forums Turkey's contributions were cumulative: (a) agenda-setting shifting discourse from local rukyat vs. hisab to a global, science-anchored solution; (b) coalition-building uniting astronomers, fuqaha, and diaspora representatives to prioritize predictability for minorities; and (c) procedural innovation—moving stalemated fiqh debates toward a vote-backed resolution (80 vs. 27) that specified global criteria (altitude $\geq 5^\circ$, elongation $\geq 8^\circ$ before 00:00 UTC) (Maskufa, 2018; Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid PP Muhammadiyah, 2016; Presidency of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, 2016). These acts clarify Turkey's role not only as a convener but as a designer of workable institutional choices. Post-2016 diffusion further evidenced policy traction in Southeast Asia, most notably Muhammadiyah's formal adoption of the Single Global Hijri Calendar (SGHC) for full implementation from 1 Muharram 1447 H (26 June 2025), signaling the conversion of scientific-fiqh dialogue into transnational norm alignment (Muhammadiyah, 2025; PP Muhammadiyah, 2025).

Its activities abroad are diverse and strategic, including:

- 1) **Building a Global Mosque Network:** The Diyanet actively funds the construction of and manages mosques in various parts of the world, from the Balkans to Africa and Central Asia. These mosques serve not only as places of worship but also as cultural and educational centers that promote the Turkish

interpretation of Islam—which tends to be moderate and state-managed—and strengthen Turkey's image as a protector of Muslims.

- 2) **Educational and Cultural Programs:** Through scholarship programs, student exchanges, and religious courses, the Diyanet educates thousands of students and future imams from various countries. These programs aim to foster sympathy and a positive understanding of Turkey, as well as to create a network of future elites who have an ideological affinity with Ankara.
- 3) **Humanitarian Aid:** Through its affiliated foundation, the Turkey Diyanet Foundation (TDV), the institution carries out various large-scale humanitarian programs. Activities such as distributing sacrificial meat during Eid al-Adha, organizing mass *iftars* (breaking of the fast) during Ramadan, and channeling aid to disaster-stricken areas effectively combine religious rituals with humanitarian action, which significantly enhances Turkey's image and reputation in the eyes of the international public.

These activities are inherently linked to the broader objectives of Turkish foreign policy. At the geopolitical level, the Diyanet's expansion serves to counter the ideological influence of other regional powers—particularly Saudi Arabia, with its Wahhabism, and Iran, with its Shi'ism—by offering the Turkish “brand” of Islam as an alternative. Domestically, following the 2016 coup attempt, the Diyanet's global network was also mobilized to counter and dismantle the influence of the Gülen movement abroad, which the AKP government perceives as an existential threat. Ultimately, its main objective is to solidify Turkey's position as a leading voice and protector for Muslim communities worldwide, particularly in Europe and other diaspora regions. The hosting of the International Hijri Calendar Union Congress represents the culmination of this new, ambitious, and globally oriented role of the Diyanet (Kaya & Drhimeur, 2023).

This transformation of the Diyanet represents a phenomenon of the “statalization” of religious soft power. Unlike non-governmental transnational religious movements, the Diyanet operates with the full support—both financial and diplomatic—of the Turkish state. This makes it a unique, coherent, and very powerful actor in the global religious landscape. It is a hybrid entity that blurs the line between a religious institution and a foreign ministry. By formalizing and institutionalizing religious diplomacy through the Diyanet, the AKP government has created a “diplomatic-religious complex” that provides significant strategic advantages, including direct control over messaging, stable and massive funding, and the ability to integrate religious activities with the state's security and diplomatic objectives.

Key milestones include early OIC debates (1970s), the Yemen resolutions (2005), expert symposiums in Mecca (2008) and Istanbul (2013), the vote-backed criteria in Istanbul (2016), and full SGHC implementation by Muhammadiyah (2025)

(Organization of the Islamic Conference, 2005; International Astronomical Center, 2016; Öztürk, 2018; Presidency of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, 2016; Maskufa, 2018; Muhammadiyah, 2025; PP Muhammadiyah, 2025)."

B. The 2016 Istanbul Congress: A Stage for Negotiating a Vision of Islamic Civilization

Held from May 28 to 30, 2016, in Istanbul, the International Hijri Calendar Union Congress became the primary stage for Turkey to manifest its leadership ambitions. The event was grandly organized by the Diyanet, in collaboration with leading international astronomical and jurisprudential (fiqh) institutions, which lent it both scientific and religious legitimacy (Hürriyet Daily News, 2016). The high level of participation—attended by scholars, astronomers, and officials from around 50 to 60 countries, including Turkey, Malaysia, Egypt, the United States, as well as Gulf and European nations—affirmed the global significance of this meeting. The presence of representatives from Muslim minority communities in the West was particularly significant, as they have an urgent practical need for a definitive and predictable calendar to organize their religious and social lives (Girit, 2016).

The core debate within the congress revolved around a fundamental dichotomy that was more ideological than technical: the choice between the principle of *ikhtilaf al-mathali* (diversity of horizons for the crescent moon's appearance) and *ittihad al-mathali* (unity of horizons) (Presidency of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, 2016).

- 1) **Bizonal/Multizonal Calendar (*Ikhtilaf al-Mathali*):** This approach, representing a more traditional view, argued that each geographical region has its own horizon (*matlak*) for sighting the new crescent moon. Consequently, the start date of a new month could legitimately differ in various parts of the world. This option prioritizes the validity of local observation, whether visual or by calculation, and tends to preserve regional autonomy in calendar determination.
- 2) **Single Global Calendar (*Ittihad al-Mathali*):** Conversely, this approach, which was strongly supported by Turkey and the organizers, proposed the implementation of a single calendar for the entire world based on the principle of "one day, one date." This view treats the entire surface of the Earth as a single, unified *matlak*. Thus, if the crescent moon is seen or meets visibility criteria anywhere in the world, the new month begins simultaneously for all Muslims the following day. This approach explicitly prioritizes global unity over local tradition and autonomy.

After a fierce debate failed to reach a consensus, the deadlock was broken through a modern mechanism—voting. The result was a landslide victory for the single calendar proposal, which garnered 80 votes, far surpassing the bizonal option that received only 27 (Maskufa, 2018). This decision was a historic moment. The Congress officially adopted a resolution for a single global Islamic calendar with specific, science-based technical criteria: the new month begins simultaneously worldwide if the criterion of imkanur rukyat (the possibility of sighting the crescent) is met anywhere on Earth before 00:00 Coordinated Universal Time (UTC/GMT). The agreed-upon astronomical parameters were a minimum crescent altitude of 5° above the horizon and a minimum elongation angle of 8° (Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid PP Muhammadiyah, 2016). This decision marked a significant paradigm shift, explicitly prioritizing the method of hisab (accurate and predictable astronomical calculation) over the traditional practice of rukyat (subjective visual sighting dependent on weather conditions) (Presidency of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, 2016).

To provide a clearer picture of the Istanbul proposal's position relative to other existing systems, a comparison of the technical criteria is presented in the following table.

Table 1: Comparison of Major Islamic Calendar Criteria

Criteria	Global Islamic Calendar (Turkey 2016)	Neo-MABIMS Criteria	Wujudul Hilal Criteria	Umm al-Qura Calendar (Saudi)
Basic Principle	Global Unification (One Day, One Date)	Regional (Southeast Asia)	Local/National	National, with global influence
Method	Hisab Hakiki <i>Imkanur Rukyat</i> (Calculation based on the possibility of sighting)	Hisab Hakiki <i>Imkanur Rukyat</i>	Hisab Hakiki (Simple criteria)	Hisab (for civil use), Rukyat (for worship) - Hybrid
Min. Crescent Altitude	5°	3°	Above the horizon at sunset	the horizon at sunset
Min. Elongation	8°	6.4°	-	-
Territorial Basis	Global (the entire world as one <i>matlak</i>)	Regional (Brunei, Indonesia,	Local/National	National (Saudi Arabia)

Malaysia,
Singapore)

Source: Author

The decision-making process through voting was itself a strategic maneuver. For centuries, the debate over the calendar had been trapped in a jurisprudential deadlock, which no single authority was able to resolve. The Diyanet, as the organizer, was aware of this. Instead of holding a potentially endless open theological symposium, they structured the event as a "congress" with a clear objective: to choose one of two concrete calendar proposals. By inviting a diverse range of participants including many scientists and representatives of diaspora communities who pragmatically desired certainty the composition of the attendees was inherently skewed toward a science-based solution.

When the debate on the fundamental issue of the *matlak* (horizon) reached a deadlock, the shift to a voting mechanism a modern and democratic decision-making process, not the traditional *ijma'* (scholarly consensus)—allowed the pragmatic majority to prevail over the traditionalist minority. This was a procedural victory that achieved a substantive outcome unattainable through centuries of purely theological debate.

Prior to Istanbul 2016, technical meetings rarely produced implementable convergence; after Istanbul, a concrete decision package (criteria + adoption pathway via OIC) enabled targeted diffusion, particularly to non-Arab actors with strong modernist epistemologies (International Union of Muslim Scholars, 2016; Muhammadiyah, 2025). This before-and-after pattern underscores the distinctive diplomatic value of the congress beyond its scientific content.

C. Impact and Challenges in Realizing a Global Consensus

Immediately after the congress concluded, the next step was to transform the academic resolution into an internationally binding policy. The Diyanet was officially mandated to bring this single calendar proposal before the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) for adoption by its member states. This move clearly demonstrated Turkey's ambition not only to be the initiator of the idea but also the architect of a new order in global religious practice, which would effectively solidify its leadership (International Union of Muslim Scholars, 2016).

The most significant and positive impact of the Istanbul initiative came from Southeast Asia, the region with the world's largest Muslim population. Muhammadiyah, one of the largest and most influential modernist Islamic organizations in Indonesia and the world, responded very positively to the

congress's outcome. After a series of in-depth studies by its Tarjih and Tajdid Council, the Central Board of Muhammadiyah officially decided to adopt the Single Global Hijri Calendar (SGHC), based on the Istanbul criteria. This historic decision stipulated that Muhammadiyah would begin to fully implement the calendar starting from 1 Muharram 1447 H, corresponding to June 26, 2025 CE. This adoption by Muhammadiyah represents an extraordinary diplomatic victory for Turkey. It provides powerful legitimacy for the Istanbul consensus outside the Arab and Turkish worlds and demonstrates the appeal of a scientific, rational, and unifying calendar vision for modernist Islamic movements (Muhammadiyah, 2025).

However, the path to universal consensus has proven to be arduous and fraught with challenges. Success on one front has been offset by resistance and reluctance on others.

- 1) **Geopolitical Rivalry and Traditional Authority:** One of the main obstacles comes from the traditional power centers in the Arab world, particularly Saudi Arabia. While not openly opposing it, Riyadh has shown no enthusiasm for adopting the Istanbul calendar. Saudi Arabia continues to use its own version of the Umm al-Qura calendar for civil purposes and, more importantly, maintains the authority of its Supreme Judicial Council in determining the beginning of the months of worship through the method of local rukyat (moon sighting). Empirical data further emphasize that Saudi Arabia remains consistent in prioritizing national sovereignty over transnational religious coordination. The Umm al-Qura calendar, prepared by the King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology, serves administrative and civil purposes but remains separate from the determination of religious observances. This dual system reflects Saudi Arabia's deliberate balance between scientific precision and traditional legitimacy, while preserving its religious centrality as the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques. The Saudi government's recent decision to adopt the Gregorian calendar for official affairs—except those directly governed by Sharia—illustrates a pragmatic, sovereignty-based approach rather than full alignment with Turkey's global unification initiative. This position is not merely technical but represents a broader assertion of sovereignty and a defense of its status as the traditional epicenter of the Islamic world (FIW Online, 2025; U.S. Department of State, 2023).
- 2) **Institutional Inertia at the OIC Level:** Although the OIC has, on various occasions—including in the Dakar Declaration—voiced support in principle for the idea of unifying the Islamic calendar, the pan-Islamic organization has not yet formally and bindingly adopted the 2016 Istanbul resolution as the standard calendar for its 57 member states. More recent OIC resolutions do acknowledge the Istanbul Congress as one of the important initiatives toward unification (Saifullah, 2025), but this recognition has not yet translated into uniform

implementation. This reflects the inherent difficulty in achieving policy consensus among member states with diverse national interests and religious traditions (Organization of the Islamic Conference, 2005).

- 3) **Theological and Grassroots Resistance:** At the societal level, significant opposition comes from traditionalist Muslim groups who firmly adhere to the practice of local rukyat al-hilal (sighting of the new crescent moon) as a religious obligation that cannot be replaced by astronomical calculations. For them, the spiritual and communal experience of sighting the crescent directly is an inseparable part of worship. This highlights a gap between the elite consensus reached by scientists and officials in Istanbul and the living practices and beliefs at the grassroots level (Mufid, Zaiyadi, Nabawiyah, & Fasa, 2020; Turkiye Calendar Time Calculation Directorate, 2016).

Ultimately, the reception of the 2016 calendar does not just show success or failure; rather, it maps out a new ideological and geopolitical fault line within the contemporary Islamic world. On one side, a "Modernist-Unificationist" bloc has formed, spearheaded by Turkey and followed by actors like Muhammadiyah, which champions a vision of a standardized, science-based global Islam. On the other side is a "Traditionalist-Sovereignist" bloc, where countries like Saudi Arabia and organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama in Indonesia (with its emphasis on local *rukya*t) prioritize their own methods, jurisprudence, and religious authority. The calendar issue has been transformed into a marker of identity and political affiliation. Thus, Turkey's attempt to create consensus has, inadvertently, clarified and even sharpened the contours of the existing dissensus within the *Ummah*.

4. Conclusion

The conclusions of this study are as follows:

- A. The 2016 International Hijri Calendar Union Congress in Istanbul was an event that far transcended its technical-astronomical dimensions. This analysis shows that the congress was a superbly executed act of religious diplomacy, serving as a key pillar in the ambitious foreign policy architecture of the AKP government. Turkey, through the Diyanet, effectively leveraged a centuries-old civilizational problem as a stage to project its image as a modern, visionary, and solution-oriented leader of the Muslim world. This initiative was a tangible effort to build a new socio-political consensus centered on a Turkish-style vision of Islam: a vision that is rational, unified, and capable of addressing the challenges of the globalized era.
- B. The assessment of the congress's outcome must be nuanced. On one hand, the goal of achieving a universal consensus accepted by all Muslim countries remains far from reality. The obstacles are fundamental, rooted in deep geopolitical rivalries, established jurisprudential differences, and resistance from

traditionalist groups. However, it would be a mistake to judge the congress as a failure. The Istanbul initiative has succeeded in fundamentally changing the direction and framework of the debate. It definitively shifted the discourse from the endless debate on the legitimacy of *hisab* versus *rukyat* toward a paradigm that prioritizes a global solution based on scientific calculation. The Istanbul resolution has now become a powerful new benchmark that all future discussions on the Islamic calendar can no longer ignore.

- C. The greatest success of this diplomacy was its ability to build coalitions and gain support from highly significant non-Arab Muslim actors, most notably the full adoption by Muhammadiyah in Indonesia. This proves Turkey's capacity to project its normative influence far beyond its geographical and ethnic borders, penetrating the heart of the Muslim world in Southeast Asia. Ultimately, the 2016 International Hijri Calendar Union Congress will be remembered as a monumental case study of how religious and civilizational symbols can be instrumentalized as a sophisticated tool of soft power on the stage of 21st-century international relations. This event not only reaffirms Turkey's role as a key actor but also solidifies its position as a normative power seeking to shape the future of Islamic discourse and practice at the global level.

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