

Soft Power in Turkish Foreign Policy: New Instruments and Challenges

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INTRODUCTION

The term “soft power” was first used by Joseph Nye, who defined it as “the ability to shape the preferences of others” (Nye, 2004, p. 5). If others follow the lead of the power holder due to the power of attraction, we can speak of “soft power”. According to Nye (2004), soft power resources are cultural attraction, ideology and international institutions. Legitimacy and credibility are necessary conditions for the existence of “soft power”: because “if a state can make its power seem legitimate in the eyes of others, it will encounter less resistance to its wishes” (Nye, 1990, p. 167). As Altnay (2008, p. 61) argues, winning hearts and minds may be more effective than winning wars. While “hard power” assumes an emphasis on the agent, “soft power” emphasises the significance of perceptions of “others” about the agent. The middle-sized countries usually behave as “hard powers” if they think that there is an increase in threats to their security (Oğuzlu, 2007, pp. 82-84).

During the Cold War era and in the 1990s as well, Turkey was considered mostly as a “hard power” because of the high influence of its military in politics and deficiencies in its democracy and human rights. In the first decade of the 21st century several internal and external developments have positively contributed to Turkey’s “soft power”. Turkey as a secular, democratic state with a predominantly Muslim population has had a rising influence in the region after September 11. Especially after the Arab Spring there have been discussions on whether Turkey’s political and socio-economic transformation could provide an exam-

ple especially for the opposition forces in the Arab world (Benli Altunışık, 2011, p.1).

This article discusses the domestic and external factors which positively influence the “soft power” of Turkey in the first decade of the 21st century. The place and role of soft power in Turkish foreign policy is analysed and a series of new soft power instruments which have been introduced by Turkey are evaluated. Lastly the challenges to Turkey’s soft power are discussed.

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT AND TURKEY’S “SOFT POWER”

Several internal and external developments have positively influenced the “soft power” of Turkey in the first decade of the 21st century. The main internal development which caused changes in Turkish foreign policy approach is that the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which has an Islamist origin, came to power in 2002 together with a new elite and political agenda (Bilgin, 2008). The main external development was the prospect of EU membership for Turkey after the Helsinki Summit in December 1999 when Turkey was given an official candidate status. The Europeanization of Turkey, which was the main objective of the AKP during its first term in Government (2002-2007), has positively influenced its “soft power” especially by the introduction of several reforms in the areas of democracy, human rights and minority rights. These reforms decreased the influence of the military on politics and strengthened Turkish civil society. For instance, Öniş (2009, pp. 8-9) argues that these reforms lead to

a closer involvement of new actors in Turkish foreign policy, such as business organisations and civil society organisations. The EU played its part in these reforms by providing funds to the projects of Turkish civil society as well as opportunities for new interactions between civil society in Turkey and the member states, thereby positively influencing both the numerical development and the technical specialisation of Turkish civil society.

Launched in October 2005, the EU accession negotiations rapidly stalled because of the Cyprus issue and the resolute opposition to full membership of Turkey by the governments of France and Germany, who are major motors of European integration. The “Alliance of Civilizations” project was launched in 2005 by the Prime Ministers of Turkey and Spain, which was later adopted by the Secretary General of the UN to become an initiative of UN. Its priority areas are youth, media, education and migration. The goal of the project is interreligious and cross-cultural dialogue. It intends to generate a political will to counter prejudices, stereotypes and reciprocal misgivings between and among persons and groups belonging to different religious and cultural backgrounds (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, 2012). It was introduced as a response to rising tensions between different religions and cultures especially after September 11, by encouraging interactions and com-

mon projects.

During the second term (2007-2011) of the AKP government the cultural proximity with neighbouring countries was emphasized. In addition to its geostrategic importance, Turkey’s democracy and growing economy have



Catching Europe in Istanbul:

Erdan Genç, student in electrical engineering, Stuttgart, Germany:

„On the one side we have the typical Istanbul chestnut salesman with his little carriage, standing on Istiklal Caddesi trying to earn some money. On the other side we have those “shadows” of the people walking up and down this magnificent street. This shadowlike appearance is a hint for the rush everyone is in. When looking down to the shoes we can recognize high heels and sneakers. All together this reminds me of European influences in Istanbul. Another thing I really like about the picture is the color, which makes me think of what Orhan Pamuk describes as “hüzün”, a kind of melancholic feeling which is present all over Istanbul, especially in the days of winter.“

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become the political and discursive basis of the multi-dimensional and proactive Turkish foreign policy (Keyman, 2009, p.5). Turkey’s regional and global engagements have even expanded to Africa, Asia as well as Latin America. Its increasing proactiveness in regions such as the Middle East and the Balkans has been criticized as reflections of “neo-Ottomanism” (Ulusoy, 2005, p.245). İbrahim Kalın (2011, p.10), who is the Chief Advisor to

Prime Minister of Turkey and head of the Public Diplomacy Office, rejects the claims about “neo-Ottomanism” in the new Turkish foreign policy; rather he considers these tendencies as the reconciliation between Turkey and its history and geography.

During the second term of the AKP government there have been attempts to construct Turkey as a “center”. Turkey has become more active in international organizations such as the G-20, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), while it also became a temporary member of the UN Security Council for the 2009-2010 period. Due to its growing economy and proactive foreign policy in various parts of the world, Turkey is sometimes referred to as a “model country” for other countries in the Islamic world (Keyman, 2009, p. 12). Especially after the Arab uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East, it has been widely discussed whether the Turkish model can be a source of emulation for these countries, thereby further strengthening the soft power of Turkey¹.

THE ROLE OF SOFT POWER IN TURKEY'S FOREIGN POLICY STRATEGY

Ahmet Davutoğlu, who has been the Turkish Foreign Minister since 2009, has been influential in constructing a new approach in Turkish foreign policy which is based on the “Strategic Depth” (*Stratejik Derinlik*) doctrine.

1 TESEV's public opinion surveys in the Arab world showed that Turkey has been quite attractive in the region. This attractiveness comes from proactive Turkish foreign policy, the perception of Turkey's socio-economic transformation in the last decade as a success story and an increase of Turkish cultural products, particularly Turkish TV series, in the region. The popularity of these series has been influential in the increase in the number of visitors to Turkey from the Arab countries. (Benli Altunışık, 2011: 1).

The main discourse of this new vision in Turkish foreign policy is the “zero problem policy” (*komşularla sıfır problem politikası*) with its neighbours, which reflects Turkey's expectations with regard to its relations with neighbouring countries. Turkey wants to eliminate all problems in its relations with neighbours or at least to minimize them as much as possible. The main foundations of the new vision in Turkish foreign policy are security for all, political dialogue, economic interdependence and cultural harmony (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012).

According to one Turkish diplomat, Turkey's historical and cultural background, its democracy, the dynamism of its economy, its young population, its lacking colonial history, its “zero problem policy” which is in accordance with the “peace at home peace in the world” (*“yurtta barış dünyada barış”*) approach of Atatürk, are the main pillars of Turkey's soft power. He argues that the lack of a colonial background facilitates the recognition and acceptance of Turkey and its values especially in the countries which experienced colonisation in their history. He emphasized that in order to use all this potential, a country has to be powerful and stable, because nobody finds a country attractive, if it is weak and unstable (Interview, 2012). In particular the rising economic growth rates in Turkey during the financial crisis in the Eurozone have increased the self-confidence of Turkey and its attractiveness in its region.

Kalın (2010) contends that the soft power of Turkey is based on its historical and geographical depth. Its historical heritage and cultural depth have led to the emergence of new fields of interaction. Thus, the historical background of Turkey and its cultural connections with the neighbouring regions contrib-

ute to high levels of interactions with these regions. Kalin (2011, pp. 5-10) makes reference to Turkey's history, culture, geography, economic strength and democracy as the main basis of Turkey's soft power. He argues that the influence of Turkey's "soft power" extends from the Balkans to the Middle East and Central Asia. According to him a "new Turkey" is emerging as a result of a new geopolitical imagination and the creation of Turkish public diplomacy. This diplomacy is aimed at telling the story of a new Turkey to a wide audience in the world in an efficient and comprehensive way. Kalin defines public diplomacy as a platform for the implementation of "soft power".

The Office of Public Diplomacy was established within the Turkish Prime Ministry in 2010, which is one of the signs of institutionalization of "soft power" in Turkey. The activities of public diplomacy mainly have two pillars. One of them is "from state to society" and the other one is "from society to society". The first one focuses on explaining the policies and activities of the government to an international public by using official instruments. For the second pillar, civil instruments such as CSOs, research institutes, press and universities are used (Kamu Diplomasisi, 2010) during the communication activities. The goal of public diplomacy as one of the main instruments of Turkish foreign policy and its soft power is to increase the visibility of Turkey in international public opinion. Public diplomacy activities include science and technology, economy, tourism, culture, arts, foreign aid and media, which help to inform world public opinion about the new potentials of Turkey. By coordinating these activities, this office contributes to Turkey's strategic communication and efficient promotion in the world (Vizyon ve Misyon, 2010).

The activities of Turkish public diplomacy include conference series of "wise men", journalists group programs, country programs, meetings with the representatives of the foreign press, promotion activities, public diplomacy panels, foreign policy workshops, Europe meetings and the İstanbul Global Forum, which was held for the first time in October 2012 with the participation of politicians, academics, writers, journalists and artists. The conference series of "wise men" aims to bring politicians, intellectuals, journalists and specialists to Turkey such as Seyyid Hüseyin Nasr, Harvey Cox, George Friedman and Günter Verheugen. The journalist groups program aims to invite several journalists from the foreign press to Turkey. They usually stay for a week in Turkey, accompanied by high level representatives of public authorities. They can attend meetings together with several journalists, media representatives and research institutions of Turkey. Until now, journalist groups from Syria, Iran, Lebanon, Spain, USA, and Turkmenistan have participated in this program. The goal of the meetings with the representatives of the foreign press in Turkey is to give them a chance to come together regularly with Turkish decision-makers, who can inform them about various policies and recent developments in Turkey. The country programmes aim to bring together the researchers and specialists on Turkey from different countries and those from Turkey. The meetings are held in foreign countries and organized by cooperating with one of the leading think tanks of that country. Public diplomacy panels are organized each month in a different city of Turkey through cooperation with a university and with the participation of specialists and high level bureaucrats. The foreign policy workshops are

held in different cities of Turkey and include academics, foreign policy makers and PhD candidates. Europe meetings involve academics and thinkers, who are specialised in European identity and culture and conduct discussions about the future of Europe. For example, Gil Anidjar, Susan Buck-Morss, Ian Almond, Nilüfer Göle were invited to this program (Faaliyetler, 2010). In the last three years since the Public Diplomacy Office was established within the framework of the “wise men” conference series, 80 persons have been invited, while journalist groups from six countries were invited. In seven Turkish cities public diplomacy panels were held, and as part of the youth programmes student groups composed of 40 students were invited from Egypt, Tunisia and Libya (Koordinatörlüğümüz, 2013).

THE NEW INSTRUMENTS OF TURKEY’S SOFT POWER

The abolishment of visa requirements for neighbouring countries such as Syria, Egypt, Lebanon and Iran has positively influenced the “soft power” of Turkey by increasing interactions between Turkey and these countries. Turkish CSOs and business organisations such as the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB) and the Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists (TUSKON) have become more active in the neighbouring regions. The Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TİKA) is a state institution which operates under the Turkish Prime Ministry since 1992. It is regarded as a foreign policy instrument through which cooperative efforts have taken place in the Middle East, Caucasus, Central Asia, the Balkans and Africa (Kaya and Tecmen, 2011, p. 13). TİKA deals with projects in the fields of education, health, restoration, ag-

ricultural development, tourism and industry. TİKA Programme Offices were established first in Turkmenistan and then in 12 countries in 2002. It was expanded to 33 offices in 30 countries in 2012. In addition to the countries in which there are TİKA offices, it undertakes cooperative developmental activities in 100 countries. TİKA has been conducting projects and cooperative activities in the Balkans, the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America. The development funds of Turkey amounted to 85 million US dollars in 2002, and 1.273 billion US dollars in 2011 (TİKA, 2013).

In accordance with a multi-dimensional foreign policy, there is a necessity to pursue a multi-dimensional strategy for the promotion of Turkey abroad, which covers a broad spectrum ranging from economy and trade to culture, from social development to education and from cultural diversity to richness of intellectual life. The promotion of Turkey is directed not only at foreigners but also at Turkish communities living abroad. In order to promote Turkey abroad, exhibitions, Week of Turkey and Year of Turkey events and festivals are organized, Turkey participates in existing festivals and cultural events, while conferences on Turkish foreign policy are organized abroad and promotional publications and documentaries are produced. For instance, in 2003, 2008, 2009 and 2013 a “Year of Turkey” was proclaimed in Japan, Russia, France and China respectively. In 2009 which was proclaimed as “Turkish Season” in France, 600 cultural, social, political, economic, scientific activities were organized. That constituted the largest, the most comprehensive and longest series of events and promotion campaign realized abroad in EU countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012).

Along these lines, chairs for Turkish studies have been established in prominent universities abroad to increase the number of studies on Turkey in international academics and to establish a discussion platform on Turkey in the public opinion of foreign countries. One of the examples is the establishment of the “Chair of Contemporary Turkish Studies” at the London School of Economics. The Turkish Foreign Ministry and other relevant institutions have been preparing proposals to establish further chairs for Turkish studies in foreign universities and signing agreements in this regard (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012).

Cultural diplomacy is carried out within the scope of Turkish foreign policy under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism also takes part in the promotion of Turkish culture abroad (Kaya and Tecmen, 2011, p. 18). Turkish Cultural Centres were established by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The goal is “to promote Turkish culture, language and art and to contribute to bilateral relations between Turkey and other countries, as well as to help Turkish citizens in their adaptation to the country in which they live”. Currently these centres are operating in Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, Frankfurt, Almaty, Askhabad, Sarajevo, Tehran, Amman, Baghdad, Damascus and Jerusalem. In addition to these, Turkish Language and Literature Departments and Turkish courses which have been established within the foreign universities are supported by providing lecturers and technical equipment. Several Turkish Education Centres have been functioning abroad under the management of Ministry of National Education and TİKA (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012).

In addition, the Yunus Emre Institute was established in 2007 with the objective of intro-

ducing Turkish culture, society and language. It aims to conduct research for the improved promotion and teaching of Turkish culture, history, language and literature and to support scientific studies by cooperating with various organizations and informing the wider public with various publications of the results of such activities. It also contributes to the training of academics and researchers dealing with Turkish language, history, culture, art and music and provides training through certification programmes. It helps to establish Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Centers in different countries to promote the Turkish language, culture, arts and history. These centres promote Turkey through cultural activities, scientific projects and courses, while aiming to strengthen friendship ties and increase cultural exchange with other countries (Yunus Emre Institute, 2013). Davutoğlu, who is also the Chairman of the Yunus Emre Foundation Board of Trustees, argues that “foreign policy is not carried out solely with diplomacy but also with cultural, economic and trade networks”. During the opening ceremony of the Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Center in London, Turkish President Abdullah Gül argued that there have been two major foreign initiatives by Turkey in recent years. One of them is Yunus Emre Cultural Center and the other is TİKA. He stated that “great countries exist not only with their diplomats but also with their cultural assets” (The Great Countries, 2010). Yunus Emre centers were established in Albania, Belgium, Bosnia, Georgia, England, Iran, Japan, Kazakhstan, Turkish Northern Cyprus, Kosovo, Lebanon, Hungary, Macedonia, Egypt, Poland, Romania and Syria. The locations of the centers reflect the emphasis on the Balkans and the Middle East which is in accordance with the common cultural heritage

approach of Turkish foreign policy (Kaya and Tecmen, 2011, p. 11).

As was argued by a Turkish diplomat (Interview, 2012), cultural activities are usually very influential but their impacts can only be observed in the medium or long-term. They help to overcome prejudices and stereotypes about Turkey, especially in European countries and help to raise interest in Turkey and Turkish culture. Along these lines, the growing popularity of some Turkish series in the Middle East and the Balkans is another indicator of the increase in Turkey's "soft power".

CONCLUSION: THE CHALLENGES AND THE FUTURE PROSPECT FOR "SOFT POWER" OF TURKEY

Turkey, which has a democratic and secular political system with a predominantly Muslim population and an EU membership prospect since 1999, has had an increasing influence in its neighbouring regions. In the first and second periods of the AKP governments, Turkey tried to contribute to regional peace through constructive engagement and mediation efforts. Turkey's "zero problems policy" approach contributed to Turkey's "soft power", which includes a liberal visa policy with its neighbours and increasing communication and cooperation in the fields of economics, politics and culture.

The strategy of external promotion and projection of Turkish culture, which is at the core of the country's soft power, is however insufficient as long as hard power and uncertainty are dominant in the Middle East (Benli Altunışık, 2011, p. 2-3). As Oğuzlu (2007, p. 95) argues, when threats and challenges to security of Turkey increase, it will probably lead to an increase in the tendencies to act as a "hard power". Similarly, growing tensions between

Turkey and Syria, stalled negotiations with the EU especially because of the Cyprus issue, and the loss of momentum of the reform process particularly regarding freedom of speech and media have negatively influenced Turkey's "soft power". In order for the reform process in Turkey to gain speed again, several things must take place. Firstly PKK terrorism must be overcome and the Kurdish issue resolved, while the rising tensions with Syria must be quelled. With the beginning of the peace process regarding the Kurdish issue in 2013, Turkey's "soft power" may evolve positively if it is successful in ending PKK terrorism and solving of Kurdish issue. Secondly, if a new democratic Constitution can be introduced based on a compromise among different parts of Turkish society, it will positively influence the consolidation of democracy in Turkey. These developments would add new dynamics to the stalled negotiations with the EU. Given these preconditions, Turkey's "soft power" might increase in the medium or long-term.

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