

**The Efficacy of Turkey's Soft Power Activities Under the Justice and Development Party's
Rule**

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Abstract: Turkey's foreign policy began to increasingly rely on soft power with the Justice and Development Party (AKP) coming to power in 2002. Economic development and political reforms achieved in Turkey provided the AKP government the means to use the existing soft power instruments and create new ones to pursue its foreign policy goals. Despite the use of extensive soft power resources, Turkey's foreign policy has been facing many challenges, even in the countries which have been receiving the strong support of Turkey. This situation raises the question of whether Turkey's soft power policy has been efficient. In this paper, I will try to measure the success of Turkey's soft power activities by conducting case studies on Kosovo and Kyrgyzstan. I will argue that although Turkey's soft power activities have yielded positive results in economic relations, Turkey's intrusive policies and the democratic backslide in the past decade have significantly damaged its image and rendered its soft power activities less effective.

Key Words: AKP, Turkey's Foreign Policy, Soft Power Instruments

I. INTRODUCTION

During an iftar dinner organized by the Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of Kyrgyzstan in May 2019, the Ambassador of Turkey to Kyrgyzstan made an unusual scene by scolding the organizer of the event. In the video of the incident that later went viral on social media, the Turkish Ambassador is outraged by the invitation of the director of Sapat educational institution Orhan İnandı, to the event.¹ The Turkish Ambassador said “During Ramadan, you invite a terrorist, what kind of muftayat is it? I built you a mosque for \$ 35 million, and you put me at one table with a terrorist. Why do you invite the head of FETO organization? I will tell you that you will have to choose between Turkey or terrorists.”² The Turkish Ambassador was accusing the Kyrgyz officials of inviting a member of the Gülen Movement that is designated by the Turkish government as a terrorist organization in May 2016. He was irritated that the Kyrgyz officials are returning Turkey’s costly favors by continuing to keep their close relations with the Movement.

The incident triggered a discussion about the mosques constructed by the Turkish Diyanet Foundation.³ In its comprehensive report about these mosques, the Turkish edition of BBC News suggested that these mosques are built in many countries and their cost has reached to \$ 0.5 billion. Bishkek Republic Central Imam Sarakhsi Mosque is one of the biggest of these mosques and styled after Ottoman architecture. Eşref Yalınkılıçlı regards these activities as Turkey’s attempts to wield soft power. Besides constructing mosques, the Turkish government also carries out restoration projects of the historical buildings from the Ottoman era as part of its soft power policy. He further posits that the Turkish government pursues a neo-Ottoman agenda and aims for the leadership of the Islamic world. And because the concept of school prevails over the concept of mosque in Central Asia, conflicts such as the above could arise.⁴

Although the incident involving the Turkish Ambassador appears to be an isolated one, it contains elements of Turkey’s foreign policy, namely the factors of identity politics, the use of soft power and the patronizing attitude towards a Central Asian state. In other words, building mosques in surrounding countries in Ottoman architecture at exorbitant costs and in return bluntly expressing its

¹ Orhan İnandı was forcefully disappeared on 1 June 2021 to be illegally transferred to Turkey according to news outlets.

² Jazgul Masalieva, Ambassador of Turkey to Kyrgyzstan leaves iftar of SDMK with scandal, 2019. [online] 24.kg. Available at: <https://24.kg/english/117313_Ambassador_of_Turkey_to_Kyrgyzstan_leaves_iftar_of_SDMK_with_scandal/> [Accessed 10 April 2021].

³ The Turkish Diyanet Foundation was established the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) in 1975 to support the activities of Diyanet. The Foundation is permitted by the law to collect money for its activities, such as building mosques in Turkey and abroad, organizing relief campaigns and providing scholarships to the students at religious schools, among others.

⁴ “Türkiye yurt dışında nerelerde cami inşa etti, bu camilerin maliyeti ne?”, *BBC News Türkçe*, 2019. Available at: <<https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-48294387>> [Accessed 12 April 2021].

demands offer an insight into Turkey's foreign policy under the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi, AKP). Considerable economic development provided the AKP government the tools to pursue an active foreign policy in its surrounding. To the extent permitted by domestic and international conjuncture, the use of soft power has come to constitute one of the key aspects of Turkey's foreign policy during the AKP era. Introduced by renowned scholar Joseph Nye, soft power is defined as the ability to change the behaviors of others through attraction rather than coercion. AKP's reliance on soft power has led to many academic studies being conducted on this subject.

The early studies that focus on the rise and the elements of Turkey's soft power argue that democratization and economic growth have increased Turkey's popularity and endowed the government with the means to pursue a proactive foreign policy. Its mediation efforts between the countries and opening to new geographies like Africa were explained by referring to the concept of soft power. In this regard, Turkey's humanitarian and development aid activities have increased Turkey's soft power and received particular attention of the scholar. The activities of the Turkish Development and Cooperation Agency (TIKA) and the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) have been discussed within the broader picture of Turkey's foreign policy.⁵ However, the activities of government institutions, namely the Presidency of Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) and Yunus Emre Institute Cultural Centers (YEE) that were established during the AKP rule are yet to be included in the discussions in a wholistic manner. The contradiction as in the above incident between the decline of Turkey's soft power since the early 2010s while at the same time the Turkish government continued to increase its soft power activities requires an answer. The research question of this paper is whether Turkey's soft power activities yield results that are satisfactory for the Turkish government.

In answering this question, my intent is to gauge the efficacy of these activities. After discussing the soft power concept in Turkey's foreign policy, I will provide an outline of Turkey's soft power activities relying on the annual reports of the government institutions and show how these activities have influenced Turkey's relations with other countries. This paper contributes to the literature with the two case studies on Kosovo and Kyrgyzstan, the major recipients of Turkey's assistance. It will also shed light on the relationship between Turkey's soft power activities and their influence on bilateral relations, by using trade, investment and tourism figures as benchmarks. As the concept of soft power embeds changes in the behaviors of parties, I will also point out to challenges Turkey

⁵ For discussions about Turkey's soft power, see Yohanan Benhaïm and Kerem Öktem, "The rise and fall of Turkey's soft power discourse. Discourse in foreign policy under Davutoğlu and Erdoğan." *European Journal of Turkish Studies. Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey* 21 (2015).

faces in influencing the course of action in these countries. I will argue that Turkey's soft power activities have contributed to the development of its bilateral relations, increase in its investments, mounting of tourists visiting Turkey. However, the decrease of Turkey's popularity due to its slide into authoritarianism has led to resistance to some of its activities. Furthermore, its bold pressures on foreign governments that can be construed as interference in domestic affairs have faced defiance, suggesting the limits of Turkey's soft power.

II. METHODOLOGY

Turkey's foreign policy has been facing serious challenges and according to veteran Turkey analyst Henry Barkey, it is in ruins today.⁶ This debacle happened despite the increasing use of soft power instruments by the Turkish government, leading to the question of whether the soft power activities of the Turkish government are effective. Quantifying or measuring the effectiveness of soft power is not an easy task and there is a clear-cut method to do this. Soft power does not only derive from the activities that are carried out in foreign countries. The attractiveness of a country also relies on the legitimacy and credibility of its intangible assets, and the actions of its government.⁷ Although the intangible aspects of soft power will be discussed in this article, this study will mainly focus on the concrete activities of the government institutions. I will benefit from the annual reports published by TİKA, Diyanet, YTB and Turkish Cultural Centers and trace the change in their activities, such as the amount of development assistance, the number of cultural activities, the amount of money they spent.

These institutions operate in many countries and measuring their activities in all countries is beyond the scope of this study. Instead, I will confine this study to two countries from two different geographies. As can be seen from their annual reports, these institutions have been more active in the Balkans and Central Asia, in Kosovo and Kyrgyzstan in particular. Before explaining how the efficacy of the soft power activities will be measured, it would be pertinent to justify why these two particular countries from the Balkans and Central Asia have been selected as case studies. I will briefly point out the common aspects of Turkey's policies towards these two regions, before elaborating on the reasons for the selection of Kosovo and Kyrgyzstan. Both of these regions occupy a special place in Turkey's foreign policy, as demonstrated by the high amount of Turkey's soft power activities. Turkey considers itself as a Balkan country and it has historical bonds with this region. Since the 1990s, Turkey has been actively engaging with the Balkans and contributed to international ef-

⁶ Henri J. Barkey, "Erdogan's foreign policy is in ruins." *Foreign Policy* 4 (2016).

⁷ Joseph S. Nye, *The future of power*, "Public Affairs" (2011).

forts like NATO intervention in Kosovo to bring stability and security to the region. Turkey initiated international mechanisms to solve the regional problems. As Turkey views economic integration of the region with the European and Trans-Atlantic structures to its own interests, the regional cooperation mechanisms are tasked with promoting the integration of the regional countries into the Western structures.⁸

Turkey's perception of Central Asia is different. While focusing on its historical presence in the Balkans, Turkey highlights its shared linguistic and cultural ties with Central Asia. Upon the creation of new states in Central Asia, Turkey became one of the first countries recognizing their independence. The primary goal of Turkey in this region has been building free-market economies and functioning states. To that end, Turkey established TİKA to coordinate its development assistance to these new countries. The International Organization of Turkic Culture (TURKSOY), established in 1993, has been promoting common Turkic culture, art, language and historical heritage. Turkey also views its relations with the Central Asian countries from a strategic perspective and views the region as vital for global energy security. As a result, Turkey's relations with the region have been deepening and diversifying since the end Cold War.

As to the selection of the two particular countries, both Kosovo and Kyrgyzstan are small-sized countries in terms of their economy and population in their respective regions. Their economies rely on foreign government transfers, including support from Turkey, and remittances of immigrants. As one of the first countries recognizing their independence, Turkey has been supporting them in economic, political and diplomatic fields, and contributing to the efforts of both countries to establish and consolidate state institutions. Turkey's economic activities with these two countries are comparable in nature. Both countries have considerable foreign trade deficits with Turkey because both have a limited amount of export to Turkey. In addition, Turkey has significant direct investments in both countries. An approximate number of 500 Turkish companies operate in Kosovo and the total value of their investment is around 340 million Euros. Similarly, Turkey has some 300 companies operating in Kyrgyzstan, that have 250 million dollars of investment.⁹ The number of tourists from the two countries visiting Turkey is also close, indicating the matching level of people-to-people contacts. More importantly, the soft activities of Turkey's public institutions in the two countries

⁸ For Turkey's foreign policy towards Balkans, see the website of Turkey's Foreign Ministry. Available at <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-with-the-balkan-region.en.mfa>

⁹ "İŞİMİZ, TİCARİ DİPLOMASİ.", DEİK. Accessed March 02, 2021. <https://www.deik.org.tr/basin-aciklamalari-turkiye-kirgizistan-is-forumu-istanbul-da-gerceklesti>

bear commonalities. Both countries have been receiving a huge amount of development aid, hundreds of scholarships for students, extensive activities of Diyanet.

Besides the abovementioned commonalities, Turkey's perception of these two countries has a close overtone. The following quotations from the website of the Turkish Foreign Ministry indicate this similarity.

On Kosovo: "Turkey attributes utmost importance to the stability, territorial integrity and development of Kosovo, as well as her integration with the European and Euro-Atlantic structures and consolidation of friendly and constructive relations with her neighbors in the region."

On Kyrgyzstan: "Turkey attaches importance to Kyrgyzstan, maintaining stability and development in Kyrgyzstan. In this context, we support Kyrgyzstan at every level from the beginning of the political and institutional transformation process."¹⁰

As can be noticed, stability, development and institutional building of these two countries occupy a central place in Turkey's policy.

Having explained the reasons as to why Kosovo and Kyrgyzstan are picked as case studies, it would be in order to clarify how I will measure the outcomes of Turkey's soft power activities in these two countries. First, I will outline the soft power activities and the change in these activities over the years. Then, I will examine the outcomes of these activities on bilateral relations. I will look at bilateral trade volumes, Turkey's investments and the number of incoming tourists from these two countries. Turkey's investments and the number of companies in these two countries and the sectors they operate will also be analyzed in order to be able to weigh the strategic aspect of the economic relations.

Evaluating the results of soft power activities simply by looking at the abovementioned variables would fall short in honoring the purpose of the soft power concept. As the concept embeds the attributes of changing someone's behavior without coercion, one must also assess the influence factor into consideration. In this framework, by looking into some foreign policy issues, I will evaluate whether Turkey's influence on Kosovo and Kyrgyzstan yields the expected result for the Turkish government. In other words, has Turkey been able to influence the behaviors of these two countries on specific foreign policy issues? To that end, I will draw upon the most salient conflicts arising in

¹⁰ See the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Available at https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey-and-kosovo_en.mfa and <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey-and-kyrgyzstan.en.mfa>

bilateral relations. The disagreements over the presence and activities of Gülen Movement in these two countries provide a useful benchmark to evaluate Turkey's soft power. I will check whether Turkey has achieved any tangible gains or secured any concessions through its intensive pressures on the Kosovar and Kyrgyz governments. Here it is important to note that while democratic and developed countries have resisted the pressures of Turkey about Gülen Movement, the countries which lag behind in terms of democratic functioning or economic development have mostly given in to its pressures by closing down the schools affiliated with Gülen Movement or extraditing its members to Turkey.¹¹ In this respect, the fact that both Kosovo and Kyrgyzstan are defined by Freedom House, an NGO that tracks the democratic functioning of the states, as partly free countries provide a suitable ground for effectual analysis.

In addition to Gülen Movement, some other foreign policy issues may also serve as a useful basis to measure Turkey's influence on the governments of these two countries. Appertaining only to Kosovo, I will look at the strong opposition of the Turkish government to Kosovo's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, and opening its embassy in West Jerusalem. I should state that the above-mentioned challenges in bilateral relations could be linked to various factors however, I believe they are important indicators of the success of Turkey's soft power.

III. EXISTING LITERATURE

Turkey's economic development, democratization and pursuit of active diplomacy in addition to its more visible presence in international platforms brought the soft power concept into the discussions of Turkey's foreign policy. Korkut and Civelekoglu point out that Turkey started to rely on its economic and soft power to pursue its interests in the surrounding countries as of 2009.¹² Öniş and Yılmaz find the emphasis on soft power by the AKP governments striking, especially when taking the securitization of international politics in the post 9/11 terrorist attacks context into consideration. They suggest that giving significant priority to the use of soft power and endeavoring for friendly relations with the neighboring countries have been the main characters of AKP's foreign policy. With the European Union (EU) being the main reference point of foreign policy during the early years of the AKP government, Turkey began to act as a benign regional power rather than simply pursuing self-interests and use more of its soft power. As reflected in its eagerness to promote the Alliance of Civilizations Initiative at international platforms, Turkey became more interested in a global role to facilitate intercultural dialogue benefiting from its Islamic identity and

¹¹ For the scale of Turkey's fight against Gülen Movement in foreign countries, see Nate Schenkkan, "The Remarkable Scale of Turkey's" Global Purge." *Foreign Affairs* 29 (2018).

¹² Korkut, Umut, and Ilke Civelekoglu, "Becoming a regional power while pursuing material gains: The case of Turkish interest in Africa.", *International Journal* 68, no. 1 (2013): 187-203, 193.

growing ties with the West. This initiative added a normative aspect in Turkish foreign policy that enhanced Turkey's moral standing in the international community and increased its soft power.¹³

The emphasis on the use of soft power and being a benign actor gave rise to academic studies focusing on the humanitarian aspect of Turkey's foreign policy. Analyzing the status of Turkey's Official Development Assistance, Fidan and Nurdun state that Turkey's aid program was emboldened with the establishment of TİKA in 1992. Turkey's aid activities were targeted first towards the Central Asian countries and with the AKP coming to power in November 2002 more regions were included. The amount of Turkish aid began to increase dramatically within the first few years under the AKP government, from \$ 73 million in 2002 to \$ 601 million in 2005. While some of this increase is related to more proper reporting, Turkey's new policy as a donor country had also a significant effect. Although security and economic concerns were the main sources of Turkey's aid, the political and cultural significance of the changes in the surrounding regions also played an important role for Turkish aid. According to the authors, the Turkish aid was demand driven and the major chunk of the aid was used for institutional development/capacity building of the newly established countries. Cultural projects such as Turkish language teaching constituted a significant number of Turkish activities.¹⁴

As the amount of Turkish humanitarian and development assistance grew, this aspect of Turkey's foreign policy attracted closer attention. Haşimi, who served as Prime Ministry Public Diplomacy Coordinator until 2015, claims that international development assistance has become an indispensable aspect of Turkey's foreign policy, pointing out the increasing ranking of Turkey as a donor country. He relates Turkey's activities in this field to its venture of being a global player and asserts that Turkey's aid activities are in tandem with its rise as in the regional and global context and growing capabilities.¹⁵ As aid activities came to be an inseparable part of Turkey's foreign policy with the AKP coming to power, TİKA's role in foreign policy also increased in parallel to its growing network of offices in foreign countries.

In the discussions about Turkey's soft power, Diyanet has attracted significant attention. The resources at its disposal and the extent of its activities have been examined by scholars mainly from the perspective of identity politics. In this regard, it is noteworthy to point out that the AKP has

¹³ Ziya Öniş and Şuhnaz Yılmaz, "Between Europeanization and Euro-asianism: Foreign policy activism in Turkey during the AKP era", *Turkish Studies* 10, no. 1 (2009): 7-24.

¹⁴ Hakan Fidan and Rahman Nurdun, "Turkey's role in the global development assistance community: the case of TİKA (Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency)", *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans* 10, no. 1 (2008): 93-111.

¹⁵ Cemalettin Haşimi, "Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy and development cooperation", *Insight Turkey* 16, no. 1 (2014): 127-145.

eliminated the remaining elements of the autonomous structure of Diyanet to instrumentalize it for social engineering both in Turkey and abroad. Assigned new responsibilities, Diyanet started to act as a parallel diplomacy player. The motivation behind this change was AKP's desire to enhance Turkey's influence on Muslim communities abroad.¹⁶ Although Diyanet has been provided huge resources and new roles by the AKP government, the outcome of this policy seems to fail to satisfy the AKP government. In their article where they analyze Diyanet's activities in the Balkan countries, Öztürk and Gözaydın claim that Diyanet has been instrumentalized by the government to shape Balkan Islam according to the Turkish understanding. However, they doubt the success of Diyanet's activities and conclude that while some local actors welcomed Diyanet's activities, others viewed them suspiciously. It is noteworthy to state that the intrusive and patronizing attitude of Turkey was not received positively in the region.¹⁷

While the use of soft power instruments concerned mainly Turkey's foreign policy, it is important to point out that the use of soft power instruments and pursuing a more intrusive foreign policy coincides with the growing authoritarianism within Turkey.¹⁸ Some scholars interpreted the soft power policy as President Erdoğan's attempt to strengthen his grip on power and establish a hegemonic political system.¹⁹ In this regard, each watershed moment in Turkish politics has brought about a dramatic change in foreign policy. The constitutional referendum in 2010 that granted the AKP government critical executive power also paved the way for more intrusive foreign policy during the Arab uprisings that started at the end of the same year. Similarly, Gezi Park protests in 2013 and the attempted coup in 2016 paved the way for the concentration of more power in the hands of Erdoğan's government, allowing it not only to instrumentalize soft power activities but also to resort to hard power in the international conflicts. Aras argues that increasing authoritarianism has resulted in reckless, identity-based and emotionally charged foreign policy making by the AKP government and eventually decline of its soft power.²⁰ The diminishing impact of the European Union on Turkey due to the stalemate in the EU accession talks eliminated the need for the AKP government to continue to anchor its foreign policy with the EU, resulting in the deterioration of Turkey's

¹⁶ Ahmet Erdi Öztürk, "Transformation of the Turkish Diyanet both at Home and Abroad: Three Stages", *European Journal of Turkish Studies. Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey* 27 (2018).

¹⁷ Ahmet Erdi Öztürk and İftar Gözaydın, "A Frame for Turkey's Foreign Policy via the Diyanet in the Balkans", *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 7, no. 3 (2018): 331-350.

¹⁸ Burak Bilgehan Özpek and Nebahat Tanriverdi Yaşar, "Populism and foreign policy in Turkey under the AKP rule." *Turkish Studies* 19, no. 2 (2018): 198-216, 212.

¹⁹ Benhaïm and Öktem, "The rise and fall of Turkey's soft power discourse", 3.

²⁰ Bulent Aras, "The Crisis and Change in Turkish Foreign Policy After July 15", *Alternatives* 44, no. 1 (2019): 6-18, 2.

image.²¹ This rendered Turkey's soft power discourse irrelevant and decreased scholarly interest in Turkey's soft power significantly.²²

While Turkey's soft power was decreasing as a result of political developments, the government institutions continued to use a large amount of money for soft power activities such as development aid and other kinds of support to foreign countries, despite the economic slowdown.²³ However, the impact of the soft power activities of the Turkish government has been reduced. For instance, TİKA started to be presented as a government body that aims to renovate Turkish mosques and other historical buildings, although most of its activities concern economic development and institutional capacity building.²⁴ The allegations about intelligence gathering by the Diyanet staff dissidents in foreign countries have put the activities of Diyanet under scrutiny in some countries.

While on the surface Turkey's influence appears to remain high in the countries that receive the bulk of development aid and other kinds of support from the Turkish institutions, the return of these soft power activities for Turkey merits a deeper discussion. I believe, the recent developments taking place in this regard justify this need. For instance, Turkey has been hosting millions of Syrian refugees and has spent over 30 billion dollars so far. However, turning them into a political tool against the EU prevented translation of its efforts into soft power. Similarly, the return of activities such as opening up Turkish Cultural Centers or providing scholarships to thousands of students is also questionable as these Centers receive little interest and the scholarships fail to excite the best candidates in most countries.²⁵ Although the decline of Turkey's soft power and possible reasons behind this have been studied, the discrepancy between the increasing number of soft power activities and their murky outcomes for Turkey's foreign policy necessitates an answer. I will try to shed light on this contradiction by conducting two case studies on Kosovo and Kyrgyzstan.

²¹ Karabekir Akkoyunlu, Kalypso Nicolaidis, and Kerem Ökten. "Turkey's Western Condition." (2013). Available at http://kalypsonicolaidis.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/2013_TheWesternCondition.pdf

²² Benhaïm and Ökten. "The rise and fall of Turkey's soft power discourse.", 3.

²³ For the relationship between political factors and economic development in Turkey, see Daron Acemoglu and Murat Ucer, *The ups and downs of Turkish growth, 2002-2015: Political dynamics, the European Union and the institutional slide*. No. w21608. National Bureau of Economic Research, 2015.

²⁴ Asli Aydıntaşbaş, *From Myth to Reality: How to Understand Turkey's Role in the Western Balkans. European Council on Foreign Relations*, 2019.

²⁵ Ahmet Erdi Öztürk, "Transformation of the Turkish Diyanet both at Home and Abroad: Three Stages." *European Journal of Turkish Studies. Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey* 27 (2018), 10.

CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND THE USE OF SOFT POWER IN TURKEY'S FOREIGN POLICY

In order to be able to effectively gauge the efficacy of Turkey's soft power activities, it is necessary to provide the theoretical framework for the investigation of these activities.

1.1. The Concept of Soft Power in International Relations

Joseph Nye introduced the concept of soft power in 1990 to challenge than the widely held view that U.S. power is declining. In his article published in 1990, Nye argues that military might and other traditional sources of power, namely geography, population, raw materials are losing relevance in the definition of power. Instead, technology, education and economic growth are gaining significance. The proof of power, he says, lies in the ability to change the behaviors of other states, rather than in resources. Besides, the use of force has become more costly. He believes that five factors have played a role in this change: economic interdependence, transnational actors, nationalism in weak or poor states, the spread of technology and the changing political issues.²⁶ According to him, soft power arises from a country's culture, political ideas, and policies.²⁷ And a country's culture and ideology are attractive, and its power seems legitimate, it will encounter less resistance to its demands.²⁸

Nye has been refining the concept of soft power depending on the changing conditions in world politics. His views on China's attempts to increase its soft power are particularly enlightening for this research. He believes the impressive growth of China's economy, and military might has frightened its Asian neighbors, leading them to seek allies to balance China. On the other hand, Nye suggests that the neighbors of the U.S. are not afraid of its power. For this reason, China has spent billions of dollars to increase its soft power through aid programs to Africa and Latin America, established hundreds of Confucius Institutes around the world, provided scholarships to foreign students to encourage them to study in Chinese education institutions, invested in English broadcast from China. The restrictions on politics make the Chinese institutions turned to culture for soft power activities, rendering political ideas as one of the most important sources of soft power unused. As a result, the return of all these activities has been limited because of the contradictory message sent by the Chinese government by cracking down on the human rights activists, jailing journalists and human rights lawyers, etc. The efforts to make Xinhua, China's state-run press agency, compete

²⁶ Joseph S. Nye, "Soft power." *Foreign policy* 80 (1990): 153-171.

²⁷ Joseph S. Nye, "Soft power and American foreign policy." *Political science quarterly* 119, no. 2 (2004): 255-270, 256.

²⁸ Nye, *Soft Power*, 167.

with CNN or BBC have failed. That is why Nye suggests “the best propaganda is not making propaganda” and “credibility is the scarcest resource” in the age of information.²⁹

As the analysis of Turkey’s use of soft power and effectiveness is the subject of this study, it is worth mentioning a little more about the constituting elements of soft power. According to Nye, digital diplomacy and the power of the diplomatic network, attraction to cultural outputs, appeal of business-friendly and innovative economic model, commitment to human rights and quality of democracy of a country constitute the building blocks of that country’s soft power. Nye believes that soft power works through institutional, cultural and ideological factors. He argues the policies of democratic countries that respect human rights, embrace human rights and have a strong justice system encounter less resistance at bilateral and international levels.³⁰ Nye claims that most of the soft power of a country comes from civil society. In this vein, he believes China and Russia’s soft power ambitions are doomed to fail because of their repressive policies on civil society.³¹ Although Nye’s soft power approach has been criticized for being too elusive and hard-to-measure, US-centric and overemphasis on the concept as a means for the global powers to succeed in world politics, however there is less disagreement over the toolkits of soft power employed by the governments such as cultural products, development assistance or quality of the education.³²

1.2. Discussions About Turkey’s Soft Power

Although Nye himself never mentions Turkey with regard to soft power discussions, his observations on the Chinese soft power are illuminating for this study. Similar to the one of China, Turkey experienced a dramatic rise in terms of economic might until 2007 under the AKP government. The average growth in this period was 7 percent. Besides the commitment to International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) austerity program, the enhancement of Turkish democracy, the diminishing of the influence of the military on politics and the growing political participation in Turkey have played important roles in this growth. On the other hand, the growth of Turkey’s military power was limited, and the budget of the Turkish Defense Ministry remained stable during this period.³³ Coupled with Turkey’s efforts to have peaceful relations with the neighboring countries, Turkey’s rise was not

²⁹ Joseph Nye, "China's Soft Power Deficit to catch up, its politics must unleash the many talents of its civil society", *The Wall Street Journal*, (8 May 2012). Available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702304451104577389923098678842>

³⁰ A. Erdi Ozturk, “The Ambivalence of Turkey’s Soft Power in Southeast Europe”, (January 2, 2020). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3595006>

³¹ Joseph Nye, "Soft power: the origins and political progress of a concept", *Palgrave Communications* 3, no. 1 (2017): 1-3.

³² Shin-Wha Lee, "The theory and reality of soft power: Practical approaches in East Asia." In *Public diplomacy and soft power in East Asia*, pp. 11-32. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2011.

³³ Merve Seren, "Turkey’s Military Spending Trends", *Insight Turkey* 22, no. 3 (2020): 183-214.

perceived as a threat in the region. In line with Nye's views, Turkey's economic development contributed to the increase of its soft power.

Unlike the 1990s when Turkey's foreign policy was security-oriented, Turkey aimed to be a benign regional power during the AKP era.³⁴ Besides trying to minimize problems with neighboring countries, the Turkish government focused on improving trade and economic relations. Analyzing Turkey's new foreign policy approach, Kirişçi argues that the Turkish state is no longer the sole actor in foreign policy making. He points to how the needs and demands of the Turkish private sector started to have growing impact on Turkey's foreign policy decisions. He calls this new phenomenon trading state.³⁵

Turkey's soft power became a popular subject in scholarly research and media. The number of academic studies focusing on Turkey's soft power abounded until 2013. Academics tried to understand and give meaning to Turkey's new foreign policy under the AKP government with the soft power concept. Some scholars presented Turkey as a model for the Arab countries, one that combines democracy with Islam. Turkey's growing ties with the EU and democratization and liberalization of its institutions enhanced its prestige and prevented negative interpretation of Turkey's activism. Benhaïm and Öktem demonstrate how the concepts of soft power and model country were employed in Turkey's foreign policy under the AKP rule and point to the surge in the number of academic articles -the number of academic articles containing soft power rose from 5 in 2007 to 113 in 2013- on Turkey's soft power.³⁶

1.3. Turkey's Soft Power Instruments

On the website of the Turkish Foreign Ministry, Turkey's democracy, growing economy and trade, being an emerging donor, liberal visa regime, historical bonds with the neighboring countries, extensive diplomatic network-currently top fifth in the world, cultural outputs like soap operas are defined as the sources of its soft power. Some government institutions are mentioned to be the key actors of Turkey's soft power. Among these, TİKA, Diyanet, YTB and Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Centers are the leading ones that strive for Turkey's soft power. The state-run news agency AA, Turkish Radio and Television Corporation's (TRT) foreign language programs, and AKP affiliated think tank SETA emphasize Turkey's influence in the neighboring countries and promote it as the

³⁴ Öniş and Yılmaz, *Between Europeanization and Euro-asianism*, 8.

³⁵ Kemal Kirişçi, "The transformation of Turkish foreign policy: The rise of the trading state", *New Perspectives on Turkey* 40, no. 1 (2009): 29-57.

³⁶ Yohanen Benhaïm and Kerem Öktem, "The rise and fall of Turkey's soft power discourse. Discourse in foreign policy under Davutoğlu and Erdoğan." *European Journal of Turkish Studies. Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey* 21 (2015).

soft power leader in the region. These institutions employ valorizing language about Turkey's cultural, religious and education-oriented activities in Southeast Europe, particularly the Balkans. They communicate the message with the public that Turkey's foreign trade, direct and indirect investments, and various types of humanitarian aid activities as sources of its soft power.³⁷

Although scholarly work bases Turkey's soft power mostly on the democratic, economic and identity-based changes that the country has been going through under the AKP rule, I will focus on the activities of the abovementioned government institutions in this study. The reason for this concerns the purpose and the methodology of this paper. As I intend to appraise the effectiveness and the outcomes of Turkey's soft power policy, I shall focus on the tangible activities of the government institutions.

Following this background information, it is in order to elaborate on the activities of Turkey's public institutions. First of all, it should be noted that the AKP government not only used the existing institutions like TİKA and Diyanet, but it has also created other institutions to boost Turkey's soft power. One can observe that the AKP government started to use TİKA and Diyanet more effectively, as Turkey's capacity and facilities dramatically expanded. In this framework, under the AKP rule, Turkey started to increase the amount of humanitarian and development aid, enhance the cultural and religious activities abroad, and expanded its presence in other regions besides its close surrounding. Turkey has pursued its goals through diplomatic means, soft power and creation of economic interdependence, as its involvement in the region and beyond became more comprehensive, multi-faceted, and deeper under the AKP.³⁸

In addition, the increasing economic and institutional capacity of Turkey under the AKP rule enabled the enlargement of the scope of activities in the targeted countries. Soon after coming to power, the AKP government expanded and further institutionalized its activities. In this sense, Central Asia, the Balkans, the Middle East and Africa have been the focal points of Turkey's soft power. Elaborating on Turkey's soft power activities will help us better understand the priorities and motivations behind Turkey's foreign policy.

³⁷ Ahmet Ozturk, "Turkey's Soft Power in Southeast Europe during the AKP period", *Southeast Europe in Focus*. August 2020: 29-49, 2.

³⁸ For details, see Bulent Aras, "The Crisis and Change in Turkish Foreign Policy After July 15." *Alternatives* 44, no. 1 (2019): 6-18; Meliha Altunisik, "The Turkish-Israeli rapprochement in the post-Cold War era." *Middle Eastern Studies* 36, no. 2 (2000): 172-191; Ahmet Sözen, "A paradigm shift in Turkish foreign policy: Transition and challenges." *Turkish studies* 11, no. 1 (2010): 103-123.

TİKA

Established in 1992, the Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency (TİKA) was primarily tasked with coordinating Turkey's development aids to the Turkic Republics in Central Asia and cooperation activities in the fields of economics, education, culture, art, history, research, language and alphabet, ethnography, tourism, administration, justice, security, communication, environment, science and technology.³⁹ TİKA carries out its activities through its program coordination offices around the world and under the AKP rule TİKA has considerably expanded the geographic scope of its activities. In 2002, TİKA had only 12 such offices. This number rose to 33 in 2012. Currently, there are 62 offices in 60 different countries. Therefore, the fact that 90 % of TİKA's activities so far have been carried out during the AKP rule should not come as a surprise.⁴⁰ Besides, the amount of development aid that comprised about \$ 85 million in 2002 reached \$ 8.120 billion in 2017. Although some of this increase was caused by more efficient calculations following other institutions sharing data with TİKA, the ODA figures continued to rise in the subsequent years.⁴¹

TİKA's activities mainly focused on institutional development and capacity building in the fields of banking, tax training, improvement of private sectors, tourism, customs, diplomacy, public governance, insurance, statistics, agriculture, development of small and medium-sized enterprises as well as social cooperation in the Eurasian countries. According to Hakan Fidan, who was then the chair of TİKA, these activities were quite successful.⁴² The geographic locations of the countries from Colombia to the Philippines where TİKA has been active and opened up offices indicate how the Turkish government has striving to be a global player. TİKA's presence and its activities in these countries with regard to economic development and infrastructure building provided new markets for the Turkish private sector. Hence, the huge leap in bilateral trade volume with these new markets, such as Africa and Latin America vindicates the arguments of Kirişçi, the scholar who dubbed Turkey's new policy as trading state.⁴³

³⁹ Hakan Fidan, "Turkish foreign policy towards Central Asia." *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 12, no. 1 (2010): 109-121, 101-113.

⁴⁰ "Turkish Aid Agency TİKA Marks 28th Anniversary of Foundation." *Anadolu Ajansı*. Accessed April 29, 2021. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkey/turkish-aid-agency-tika-marks-28th-anniversary-of-foundation/1718736>

⁴¹ Pinar Ipek, "Ideas and change in foreign policy instruments: soft power and the case of the Turkish international cooperation and development agency." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 11, no. 2 (2015): 173-193.

⁴² Hakan Fidan and Rahman Nurdun, "Turkey's role in the global development assistance community: the case of TİKA (Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency)." *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans* 10, no. 1 (2008): 93-111, 104.

⁴³ The website of Turkish Foreign Ministry states that the trade volume with the continent rose to \$ 25.3 billion in 2020 from \$ 5.3 billion in 2003.

Diyanet

The increasing activities of the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) is another factor in the discussions of Turkey's soft power. The AKP governments used Diyanet to realize its social engineering policies, thus broadened its scope of activities by giving it new tasks such as providing spiritual guidance in correction facilities or nursing homes. Diyanet was given millions of dollars for its activities abroad by the AKP governments. Previously aiming to provide religious services to Turkish nationals living in Europe, Diyanet started to more actively engage in additional countries where Muslim communities live. It is now represented in more than 30 countries with 61 branches. It has been building many mosques around the world but especially in the surrounding region, distributing religious books, giving scholarships to students who would study in Turkey's religious institutions.⁴⁴ Considering the scope and amount of its activities, it would be convenient to argue that Diyanet has been conducting religious diplomacy on behalf of the Turkish government. One can also argue that Diyanet has been given the purpose of galvanizing support for the AKP government among the Turkish minorities and polish the image of moderate Turkish Islam.

Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Centers

Yunus Emre Institute was established in 2007 and soon it opened up many branches around the world. Organized in British Council format, Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Centers were tasked with promoting Turkish culture and language. Starting their activities with 2 branches in 2009, there are currently 58 Turkish Cultural Centers in 46 countries. Similarly, the annual number of activities immediately jumped from 15 to 942 in the same period. Besides organizing cultural and linguistic activities tailored for the conditions of the host countries, Turkish Cultural Centers have been cooperating with the many "Turkology" departments of universities.⁴⁵ Located in the squares of the main cities, Turkish Cultural Centers have contributed to the visibility of Turkey and enhanced cultural affinity with the host nations. Considering that culture is an important source of soft power, such activities are likely to have contributed to Turkey's soft power.

Presidency for Turks and Related Communities Abroad (YTB)

Established in 2010, YTB was given the responsibility for the coordination of the Turkish Scholarships program. To attract brighter students, YTB rebranded Turkey's scholarship policy and significantly widened the scope of the program. Scholarship quotas and the amount of allowance provided to students were increased. Besides, it has been establishing associations for the alumni of the Turkish universities to nourish their bonds with Turkey, organizing cultural events or training for youth

⁴⁴ Ahmet Erdi Öztürk, "Transformation of the Turkish Diyanet both at Home and Abroad: Three Stages." *European Journal of Turkish Studies. Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey* 27 (2018).

⁴⁵ "Yunus Emre Enstitüsü." August 13, 2020. Accessed May 09, 2021. <https://www.yee.org.tr/tr/kurumsal/yunus-emre-enstitusu>.

such as camps and leadership programs, etc. At its annual reports, one can see that YTB has been constantly broadening its portfolio of activities. It has also been honest in stating its goal. These reports show that the Turkish government considers 5 million Turkish minorities and 200 million cognates (or *soydaş* in Turkish) living abroad as an important source of soft power. What is striking in this regard is that YTB has been more intensively engaging with the Turkish and other Turkic or Muslim minorities abroad and offering legal counsel to help fighting discrimination against them. Attempting to physically contact with people, YTB officials have been welcoming hundreds of thousands of people at the Turkish gates in the land borders or airports. Funding scholarly research in foreign countries on Turkish diaspora, migration and the situation of the Turks abroad shows YTB's attempts to sharpen the effectiveness of its activities.⁴⁶

Other Soft Power Instruments of Turkey

As stated above, diplomatic network constitutes an important source of soft power. Striving to increase its soft power and find new markets for the Turkish private sector, the Turkish government under the AKP rule has exerted unmatched efforts to broaden its diplomatic network. Turkey has been opening up new diplomatic missions around the world. Within 18 years during the AKP rule, the number of Turkish diplomatic missions has reached 243 from 262, which has made Turkey rank among the top five countries. Although most of these new diplomatic missions were opened up in the African continent, the existing missions in the Balkans and Central Asia were strengthened and a few new consulates were added to Turkey's expanding diplomatic network. In this regard, Turkey opened up consulates in Prizren (Kosovo), Burgaz (Bulgaria), Aktav (Kazakhstan), and embassies in Montenegro and Kosovo.⁴⁷ Similar to the Turkish Foreign Ministry, Turkey's national carrier Turkish Airlines (THY) dramatically extended its network of destinations during the AKP governments, especially in the African continent. THY is providing services to 51 airports in 36 African countries. While THY was carrying 10 million passengers in 2000, this figure reached 75 million in 2018.⁴⁸ All of these steps significantly increased Turkey's presence around the world and boosted its economy, resulting in its soft power.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ For further information, see the annual reports of YTB. Available at <https://www.ytb.gov.tr/kurumsal/faaliyet-raporlari>

⁴⁷ The number of Turkish diplomatic missions in Africa rose from 12 in 2002 to 42 in 2020. More information about Turkey's diplomatic network and personnel can be found on Turkish Foreign Ministry's 2020 Performance Program. The document is available at <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/data/BAKANLIK/DB-2020-yili-performans-programi.pdf>

⁴⁸ Lebel Julien, "Turkish Airlines: Un outil stratégique turc à l'international." *Études de l'Ifri* 8 (2020).

⁴⁹ Senem B. Çevik, "Reassessing Turkey's soft power: the rules of attraction." *Alternatives* 44, no. 1 (2019): 50-71.

CHAPTER 2: TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY UNDER THE AKP

In the previous chapter, I have demonstrated how the AKP government has relied on soft power in foreign policy and elaborated on the use of soft power instruments. As the purpose of this paper concerns the efficacy of the soft power activities and their impact on Turkey's foreign policy, it would be useful to mention the making of foreign policy during the AKP era. Examining the changes in Turkey's foreign policy under the AKP leadership and highlighting the factors and ideational forces behind its foreign policy making will help us understand Turkey's motivations and expectations regarding its use of soft power instruments, thus allowing us to better evaluate the soft power activities.

2.1. The Changes in Turkey's Foreign Policy

The AKP's foreign policy contains some important elements of change or discontinuity. First, although Turkey's quest for EU membership began a long time ago, the AKP government initiated a vigorous policy as soon as it came to power. After the European Union decided to start the accession talks with Turkey if it fulfills the Copenhagen political criteria, the AKP government passed 7 harmonization packages from the parliament that significantly democratized Turkey. Turkey accorded precedence to international agreements over the domestic law, lifted the death penalty, improved freedom of expression, permitted broadcast in the Kurdish language, etc. Öniş and Yılmaz describe this period between 2002 to the end of 2005 as the Golden Age of Europeanization in Turkey. However, despite all the efforts and the reforms undertaken by the AKP government, the EU started to send unhelpful signals similar to those in the 1990s that later weakened the AKP government's enthusiasm for EU membership.⁵⁰

Second, the emergence of new states following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the 1990s gave rise to excitement in Turkey. Turkey was among the first countries to recognize their independence and the topic of "Turkish world from the Adriatic to the Chinese wall" was being heatedly debated in policy circles and media. Turkey tried to develop political, economic and cultural relations with the newly independent states in Central Asia, but the efforts witnessed a steady decline in the mid-1990s for several reasons and failed to produce any concrete results.⁵¹ Turkey's interest in the post-Soviet geography revived during the AKP government in parallel to its weakening enthusiasm for EU membership. This was defined by scholars as a shift in Turkey's foreign policy from "Europeanization to loose Europeanization in parallel to soft Euro-Asianism", although the

⁵⁰ Öniş and Yılmaz, *Between Europeanization and Euro-asianism*, 16-17.

⁵¹ Bülent Aras, *Turkish Policy toward Central Asia. SETA Policy Briefs*, No:12, 2008.

EU and the Atlanticist elements remained Turkey's key foreign policy orientation, albeit in a more flexible and looser form, for a while more. In this framework, the AKP government revived the Black Sea Economic Cooperation forum, developed buoyant economic relations with Russia, increased economic interdependence with Georgia and boosted relations with Central Asian countries by focusing on linguistic and cultural ties.⁵²

Third, the end of the Cold War also made way for Turkey's engagement in the Balkans. Turkey's initial engagement with the Balkans was mostly about protecting the safety of Turkish and other Muslim communities during the inter-ethnic conflicts, hence contributed to the efforts of the international community to establish peace and security.⁵³ Focusing mostly on peace-keeping operations and nation-building activities, Turkey's policies and activities in the Balkans during the 1990s fell short of bringing out deep political and economic relations. The deepening of relations with the Balkan countries was only possible during the AKP government because the conditions both in the Balkans and Turkey were not conducive for meaningful cooperation. Balkans were stricken by ethnic conflicts and Turkey was in political and economic turmoil.

Analyzing the shift in Turkey's foreign policy during the AKP era, Sozen claims that "Turkey muddled though without a clear strategy in its foreign-policy making in the 1990s." He believes that political instability and severe economic crises prevented a design of concrete foreign policy strategy in the 1990s. However, the AKP government, he argues, brought a clear vision, a new direction, a set of principles and a new strategy for foreign policy.⁵⁴ These principles were put forward by Ahmet Davutoglu, then chief advisor on foreign policy to the prime minister, as follows: "Balance between freedom and security, zero problems with neighbors, multidimensional and multi-track policies, a new diplomatic discourse based on firm flexibility, and rhythmic diplomacy."⁵⁵

2.2. The Domestic Factors in the AKP's Foreign Policy

The deep insecurity felt by the AKP government vis-à-vis the Kemalist bureaucratic elite of Turkey constituted one of the critical factors that shaped the foreign policy projection of Turkey. The Is-

⁵² Öniş and Yılmaz, *Between Europeanization and Euro-asianism*, 8-9.

⁵³ Bülent Sarper Ağır and Murat Necip Arman, *Turkish foreign policy towards the western Balkan since the post-cold war era: Political and security dimensions*. Boca Raton, FL, USA: Brown Walker Press, 2016.

⁵⁴ Ahmet Sözen, "A paradigm shift in Turkish foreign policy: Transition and challenges." *Turkish studies* 11, no. 1 (2010): 103-123.

⁵⁵ Ahmet Sözen, "Changing fundamental principles in Turkish foreign policy making." In *Annual Conference of the International Studies Association, San Diego, USA* (2006), 22-5.

lamist background of the AKP cadres had elicited deep skepticism among the Kemalist establishment that targeted the Islamists during the 28 February post-modern coup attempt in 1997. Therefore, despite coming to power in November 2002 parliamentary elections with a landslide victory, the AKP's power remained volatile. Therefore, the AKP government searched for legitimacy and security. Besides forming a "democratic coalition" with the support of liberals in Turkey, the AKP government ably utilized the integration with the EU, aligned its foreign policy accordingly and vehemently undertook many democratizing reforms, hence received the support of the Western actors.⁵⁶ Orientation towards the EU enabled democratization and economic development in Turkey, thus increasing Turkey's soft power.

The AKP government acted cautious in foreign policy to avoid confrontation with the Kemalist center in its few years. However, securing the majority of seats in the parliament and the charismatic and intense leadership of Prime Minister Erdoğan enabled the government to run the country without major political disruptions.⁵⁷ According to Öniş, despite the disagreements and heated debates in Turkey, the rejection of the motion by the parliament to allow the use of Turkish territories by the US military during the War of Iraq broke the resistance of EU-sceptics in Turkey and unintendedly brought Turkey closer to the EU. He further believes that had Turkey participated in the Iraq War, judicial and political reforms, namely closing down the national security courts that were controlled by the Kemalist cadres and broadcasting in the Kurdish language would have not been possible.⁵⁸

The AKP government performed an outstanding success in the economy that had important ramifications on foreign policy. The government's strong commitment to the IMF program and fiscal stabilization and structural reforms that were embedded in that program showed the country out of the deep economic crisis in 2001. The democratizing reforms as part of the EU integration process, the political stability in the country and the government's initiatives to attract foreign investment constituted a virtuous cycle for tremendous economic growth during the early years of the AKP government. This success comprised a major turning point for a country that was struck by a decade-long political instabilities and deep economic crises and paved the way for the economic rise of the

⁵⁶ For discussions about the utilization of the EU accession by the AKP government, see Ihsan D. Dagi, "The justice and development party: Identity, politics, and discourse of human rights in the search for security and legitimacy." *The emergence of a new Turkey: democracy and the AK Parti* (2006): 88-106; and Ihsan Dagi, "Islamist Parties and Democracy: Turkey's AKP in Power." *Journal of Democracy* 19, no. 3 (2008): 25-30.

⁵⁷ Soner Cagaptay, 2019. "Erdogan's Empire: Turkey and the Politics of the Middle East". Bloomsbury Publishing, 91.

⁵⁸ Ziya Öniş, "The political economy of Turkey's Justice and Development Party." *Available at SSRN 659463* (2004).

Anatolian cities that came under the umbrella organization of MÜSİAD (The Independent Industrialists and Businessmen's Association).⁵⁹ The impact of Turkey's growth on foreign policy is three-fold. First, Turkey began to have greater means and stronger confidence to wield soft power. Second, new entrepreneurs forced the government seek for new markets. Third, the fact that Turkey had the know-how for sustainable economic growth polished its image in the eye of other countries.

2.3. Ideational Forces Behind the AKP's Foreign Policy

Being one of the key decision-makers in Turkish Foreign policy, Ahmet Davutoğlu not only brought a new vision to the foreign policy, but he also later had the chance to implement his vision first as Foreign Minister in 2009, and then as Prime Minister in 2014. His "strategic depth" doctrine calls for Turkey's activism in post-Ottoman geographies as a natural legacy of Turkish history. Therefore, AKP's foreign policy orientation was defined by many as neo-Ottomanism.⁶⁰ İpek highlights the role of ideational forces and how ideas matter in implementing foreign policy and argues that Davutoğlu's strategic depth doctrine was shared also by other foreign policy elite of the AKP government.⁶¹ Hakan Fidan, president of TİKA and head of the National Intelligence Service, argues that the change in Turkish Foreign Policy happened as a result of the "reconstruction of the previous geographic imagination in policymaking circles". He asserts that the "new geographical imagination gave rise to novel interpretations of the Eurasian region in the minds of foreign policymakers".⁶² Kalin attributes the new geographic imagination as "a new idea of time and place [that] makes it possible for Turkey to produce its own concepts and build a new vocabulary." He ascribes the change to "a profound mental transformation", praising Davutoglu's work and policy as a narrative effort to see the world from a non-Eurocentric perspective.⁶³

Having a stronger self-confidence, the AKP government started to implement a novel foreign policy in other areas as well. Once seeing as chaos and instability centers, Turkey started to see the Balkans, Central Asia region and Caspian basin, the Middle East as potential spheres of influence. Coming from a conservative background, the new elite believed the necessity of a mind change regarding the Turkish Foreign Policy and defined Turkey's position as a central rather than being just

⁵⁹ Ziya Öniş, "The political economy of Turkey's Justice and Development Party." *Available at SSRN 659463* (2004).

⁶⁰ Alexander Murinson, "The strategic depth doctrine of Turkish foreign policy." *Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 6 (2006): 945-964

⁶¹ Pinar İpek, "Ideas and change in foreign policy instruments: soft power and the case of the Turkish international cooperation and development agency." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 11, no. 2 (2015): 173-193.

⁶² Bülent Aras and Hakan Fidan, "Turkey and Eurasia: Frontiers of a new geographic imagination." *New Perspectives on Turkey* 40, no. 1 (2009): 195-217, 197-199.

⁶³ Ibrahim Kalin, "Soft power and public diplomacy in Turkey." *Perceptions* 16, no. 3 (2011): 5. p-6-7

a bridge between the East and the West.⁶⁴ Turkey started to perceive its surrounding regions as its natural hinterland. In addition to seeking economic and trade opportunities in this region, Turkey sought regional leadership, craved patronage of the Muslim world and took part in the conflicts in its neighborhood.⁶⁵ Turkey increased its engagement with the surrounding regions and cultivated ties with new geographies such as Africa. To this end, Turkey began to use the existing soft power instruments more efficiently and created new ones. Turkey's active diplomacy and enhancing image, in general, enabled its election to the non-permanent membership in the UN Security Council for the term 2009-2010.⁶⁶ In this framework, I will analyze Turkey's use of soft power activities in Kosovo and Kyrgyzstan and evaluate their efficacy in its foreign policy.

⁶⁴ Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Stratejik derinlik: Türkiye'nin uluslararası konumu." (2001).

⁶⁵ Yohanan Benhaïm and Kerem Öktem. "The rise and fall of Turkey's soft power discourse. Discourse in foreign policy under Davutoğlu and Erdoğan." *European Journal of Turkish Studies. Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey 21* (2015).

⁶⁶ Berdal Aral, "Turkey in the UN Security Council: Its election and performance." *Insight Turkey* (2009): 151-168, 153.

CHAPTER 3: CASE STUDIES

CASE STUDY 1

KOSOVO: TURKEY'S LITTLE BROTHER OR EQUAL PARTNER?

Despite its small size, Kosovo has been one of the main targets of Turkey's soft power activities. Turkey has also been supporting Kosovo's economic development, institutional building and international integration. However, it appears that Turkey has a decreasing influence and deteriorating image in Kosovo. In this chapter, I will outline Turkey's soft power activities in Kosovo and point out their outcomes on bilateral trade, investments and tourism numbers. Then, I will present some challenging issues in bilateral political relations and analyze the reaction of the Kosovar authorities to the demands of the Turkish government. I will argue that although Turkey's soft power activities have paved the way for an increase in Turkey's investments in Kosovo and the number of Kosovar visitors to Turkey, their effect on Turkey's image in the eye of the Kosovar government and people is debatable. Moreover, challenges in bilateral political relations also point to the limit of Turkey's influence on Kosovo.

3.1.1. Historical Background

The visit of Turkey's Prime Minister Erdoğan to Kosovo in October 2013, only two weeks to the local elections in the country, lays an interesting preface to the long historical background of Turkish-Kosovar relations. Some details of the visit point to the historical bonds, as well as elucidate the state of current bilateral relations. Erdoğan visits Kosovo with a large delegation, including several ministers and many businesspeople. He participated in the opening ceremony for the new terminal building and facilities for Pristina International Airport. Edi Rama, Prime Minister of Albania, came to Kosovo for this occasion, turning Erdoğan's visit into a trilateral summit. The three prime ministers then went to the city of Prizren where they were greeted by the enthusiastic people waving the national flags of the three countries. During his speech to the crowd, Prime Minister Erdoğan said: "We all are the people of a common history, a common culture, a common civilization, and a structure in which we are friends, relatives and brothers to each other. Don't forget, Turkey is Kosovo and Kosovo is Turkey." In his emotionally loaded speech, he greeted Turks, Albanians, Bosnians, Macedonians and other ethnicities of the Balkans to highlight the shared historical and cultural ties

and added that he feels home in Kosovo. Echoing the remarks of Prime Minister Erdogan, Prime Minister Thaci said “Prime Minister, welcome to your home.”⁶⁷

Exchange of candid words and a strong emphasis on the historical bonds by both leaders are demonstrative of the long-standing relationship between the two nations. A summary of historical relations will help us better understand today’s politics, especially when the subject matter is soft power. The presence of ethnic Turks in the region starts in the 14th century and continues until the early years of the 20th century. During this period, the Ottomans shaped the demographic composition of the region by relocating ethnicities and heavily influenced the cultural and religious structure. Ottomans brought Albanians and Turks to the places known today as Kosovo.⁶⁸ Upon the ethnic cleansing campaign of the Yugoslavs during the interwar period, Turkey negotiated the transfer of Muslim Albanians, who were treated as Turks by both sides, to Turkey from 1933 onwards.⁶⁹ As a result of the demographic changes, while 27,920 people identified themselves as Turks at the census conducted in 1921, their number remained at the level of 10 to 12 thousand in the following decades-10,833 in the census of 1991.⁷⁰ Today, while around 18 thousand ethnic Turks live in Kosovo, according to the Turkish National Security Council estimate some 1.2 million Albanians, mostly from Kosovo, live in Turkey.⁷¹

The Turkish community in Kosovo was a recognized ethnic minority and their language was accepted as an official language under Yugoslavian rule. During the ethnic clashes, they showed solidarity with Albanians against the Serbian repression in the 1990s and established their political party.⁷² While Turkey’s support helped protect their cultural rights and their representation in politics, the small Turkish community in Kosovo promotes the image of President Erdoğan by calling him global leader or protector of Muslims. However, this presents a misguided influence of Turkey in Kosovo and evokes bitter memories of the Ottoman times among Kosovar Albanians.⁷³

3.1.2. Turkey’s Foreign Policy Towards Kosovo

⁶⁷ Anadolu News Agency. 2021. Türkiye Kosova, Kosova Türkiye'dir. [online] Available at: <<https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/turkiye-kosova-kosova-turkiyedir/209538>> [Accessed 3 February 2021].

⁶⁸ Ferenc A. Vali, Bridge Across the Bosphorus: The Foreign Policy of Turkey, Baltimore and London, *The Johns Hopkins Press*, 1971, 197.

⁶⁹ Noel Malcolm, Kosovo, A Short History. *New York, New York University Press* (1998), 282-286.

⁷⁰ Robert Elsie, Historical dictionary of Kosovo. Vol. 79. *Scarecrow Press*, (2010), 473

⁷¹ Ibid, 471

⁷² Ibid, 474

⁷³ Sylvie Gangloff, "Turkish policy towards the conflict in Kosovo: the preeminence of national political interests." *Balkanologie. Revue d'études pluridisciplinaires* 8, no. 1 (2004).

Turkey's historical ties to the region have had a profound influence on its foreign policy towards Kosovo. Besides Turkey's policy to support the Turkish community, the Turkish elite had an affinity towards Albanians in their struggle against the Serbian repression. Turkish government started to support the efforts of Kosovars for self-rule after Kosovo's constitutional autonomy was abrogated by the Serbian rule in 1989. Turkey's President Turgut Özal became the first leader to meet with Ibrahim Rugova, President of the partially recognized the Republic of Kosovo, in 1992. Turkey's initial strong support to Kosovo was replaced with a cautious policy in the subsequent years for two reasons mainly. First, Turkey prioritized the security of the Turkish community during the ethnic tensions in Kosovo over the independence initiatives. Second, Turkey was concerned that Kosovo's independence could set a precedent for the Kurdish separatists. Notwithstanding, Turkey carefully aligned its policies with the Western countries and joined NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR). Turkey also followed suit when the Western countries decided to push for the independence of Kosovo after the NATO intervention, and it became one of the first countries recognizing Kosovo's independence in 2008.⁷⁴ Considering that there are still five member countries of the European Union that have not recognized Kosovo's independence, Turkey's bold decision to immediately recognize Kosovo's independence has great value. It is important also to note that the presence of the Albanian diaspora in Turkey played an essential role in Turkey's decision.⁷⁵

Turkey has been supporting Kosovo since its independence in 2008. Most importantly, Turkey contributed to the stability and state-building efforts, provided economic assistance, advocated its recognition by other states and integration to international platforms, European and Euro-Atlantic structures in particular.⁷⁶ Drawing again on Prime Minister Erdoğan's visit to Kosovo in 2013, one can see the marks of Turkey's foreign policy and its soft power activities in Kosovo. For example, Erdoğan's utterance of "Turkey is Kosovo and Kosovo is Turkey", overuse of the word "brother" during his speech and reminding that the author of Turkish national anthem's is of Kosovar descent demonstrate the tremendous affinity felt towards Kosovo.⁷⁷ Erdoğan also underlined the support

⁷⁴ Kurdish separatism became a serious concern for the Turkish government in 1994. By 2008, when Kosovo declared its independence, Turkey seemed less concerned about the Kurdish question, thus immediately recognized Kosovo's independence.

⁷⁵ Birgül Demirtaş Coşkun, "Kosova'nın Bağımsızlığı ve Türk Dış Politikası (1990-2008)", *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Cilt 7, Sayı 27 (Güz 2010), s. 51-86.

⁷⁶ The website of Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

⁷⁷ Prime Minister Erdoğan used the word "brother" more 17 times during his speech. He called the attendees brothers, said that all communities in Balkans lived brotherly for centuries, and wished that brotherhood prevails in the region.

Turkey is extending to Kosovo. He said Turkey offers economic assistance to Kosovo, restores historical building in the country through TİKA, undertakes many projects such as the stream improvement of the river passing through Prizren, the city where he delivered this speech.⁷⁸

3.1.3. Soft Power Activities of the Turkish Government in Kosovo

In this section, I will elaborate on Turkey's increasing number of soft power activities in Kosovo through its public institutions.

TİKA

Establishing its Coordination Office in Kosovo in 2004, TİKA has been the most prominent Turkish institution active in the country. Pursuant to Turkey's goal to enhance cultural and political relations and contribute to the economic and social development of Kosovo, TİKA has been carrying out many projects in different sectors. Following the legislative amendment in 2008 giving TİKA the assignment of conducting restoration projects abroad, TİKA precipitated the restoration projects of the historical mosques and monuments from the Ottoman era in Kosovo. TİKA promptly restored and equipped the mosques around the country within a few years. Through these projects, the historical bonds between the two nations are highlighted. Also, as these mosques are usually located in the city centers, they provide the Turkish government visibility in the eyes of Kosovars.⁷⁹

Besides restoration projects, TİKA has also provided vocational training programs, funded many cultural projects, renovated and equipped educational facilities, and so many others. According to the reports of TİKA, Kosovo has been among the top ten receivers of development assistance from Turkey. The amount of the development assistance to Kosovo is stated in the following chart:

⁷⁸ "Türkiye Kosova, Kosova Türkiye'dir." Anadolu Ajansı. Accessed June 10, 2021. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/turkiye-kosova-kosova-turkiyedir/209538>.

⁷⁹ Tika.gov.tr. 2021. *TİKA - Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı Başkanlığı*. [online] Available at: <https://www.tika.gov.tr/tr/haber/tika_kosovada_kultur_mirasina_sahip_cikmaya_devam_ediyor-6017> [Accessed 3 February 2021].



Source: Turkish Development and Cooperation Agency’s Annual Reports. The numbers are in million dollars.

The diversity of TİKA’s activities is also worth mentioning here. As for the activities to contribute to capacity building, TİKA has been organizing multiple training programs. As a leading project, TİKA included Kosovo to its International Police Training Cooperation Project in 2017. This project was initially launched in 2007, with Kyrgyzstan and Albania as pilot countries. Via this project, the Turkish Police service shares its vast experience with Kosovo and other neighboring counties in the fields of narcotic and other organized crimes.⁸⁰ In addition, TİKA has renovated and equipped primary schools and dormitories, provided students with thousands of schoolbooks, helped treatment of 100 critical patients in Turkish hospitals each year, granted cash and food to orphanages, provided farmers breeding animals to contribute to sheep and goat reclamation, arranged training programs for medical doctors, veterinarians and vocational courses for women, cultural activities. These projects have primarily polished Turkey’s image in the eye of Kosovars. Many people from different segments of society and public institutions, as a result, have had the chance to experience Turkey’s helping hand.

Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Centers

The other leading Turkish institutions wielding soft power in Kosovo are the Turkish Cultural Centers. Established in 2009, the Institute defines its goals as “winning Turkey friends through organizing cultural diplomacy activities and properly presenting Turkish values, language and art.” In this regard, Turkish Cultural Centers offer Turkish language courses, organizes cultural activities with the participation of local and Turkish artists. Indicative of the importance Turkey attaches to Kosovo, it has opened up three Turkish Cultural Centers, while most other countries only have one. These Centers have increased the number and broadened their activities in time, from offering

⁸⁰ See TİKA’s 2019 Annual Report. Available at <https://www.tika.gov.tr/upload/sayfa/publication/2019/TIKAFaaliyet2019ENGWebKapakli.pdf>

Turkish language courses to holding panels on autism.⁸¹ Parallel to Turkish Cultural Centers' activities from 2009 onwards, Turkish soap operas played a significant role in increasing Turkey's popularity among the people. This is important particularly for strengthening the cultural aspect of Turkey's soft power in Kosovo. On the other hand, some of the activities of Turkish Cultural Centers such as "Turkish Language Festivals" appear to target only ethnic Turks.⁸² Attended by high-level Turkish politicians and bureaucrats, these activities serve to strengthen the bonds between the Turkish community and mainland Turkey.

Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB)

With its 18 thousand Turkish population, Kosovo has been one of the main targets for YTB activities. YTB even declared the year 2016 as Kosovo year and organized some events special to this country. Kosovar students have been generously benefiting from these scholarships since the start of the program in 1992. Each year, at least 100 Kosovars are granted scholarships to study at the leading Turkish universities. Compared to the population, Kosovo ranks first in terms of the number of students receiving scholarships from the Turkish government.⁸³ Kosovo is also among the few countries where the exams and interviews for the distribution of these scholarships are held.⁸⁴ By inviting bright students from foreign countries, Turkey not only aims to improve the quality of its education but also wants to create human bridges with other nations. This has been reflected in YTB's vigorous efforts to keep the Turkish universities alumni's relations with Turkey alive through funding the establishment of alumni associations and holding regular meetings with them. The increasing number of applications to Türkiye Scholarships each year points to Turkey's attractive image in this regard.

Diyanet

Kosovo has also been one of the main targets of Diyanet's activities. During his to Kosovo in 2018, Diyanet's President Ali Erbaş called for cooperation to bring "authentic religious knowledge" to people. His counterpart expressed gratitude for Turkey's help. Erbaş's statement during the meeting that Kosovo has the highest Muslim population in Europe is indicative of the prevalent perception

⁸¹ The only other country hosting three Turkish Cultural Centers is Bosnia Herzegovina.

⁸² Pristine.yee.org.tr. 2021. Ülker Arena'da Görkemli Türkçe Bayramı. [online] Available at: <<https://pristine.yee.org.tr/tr/haber/ulker-arenada-gorkemli-turkce-bayrami-0>> [Accessed 3 February 2021].

⁸³ "Türkiye'den Kosova'ya Anlamlı Bir Tanıtım Programı Daha." *KOSOVAHABER*. Accessed April 04, 2021. <https://m.kosovahaber.net/?page=2,12,34699>.

⁸⁴ YTB's 2014 Annual Report. Available at https://ytbweb1.blob.core.windows.net/files/resimler/activity_reports/2014-faaliyet-raporu.pdf

among the AKP cadres.⁸⁵ Since the 1990s, Diyanet has carried out a wide range of activities in Kosovo, including offering scholarship for religious education in Turkish schools, organizing educational programs for imams, dispatching imams during the month of Ramadan to give religious sermons to the locals, publishing and handing out religious materials in Albanian language local languages.⁸⁶ As part of its broader policy, Diyanet has intended to build an ostentatious mosque in Ottoman-style in Pristina, the capital city of Kosovo. However, the project provoked a public discussion over its grandiosity and architecture as a symbol of Turkey's overbearing influence, causing a delay in construction for years.⁸⁷ As the construction of the mosque continued to face opposition until 2020, President Thaci had to release a statement in favor of the project.⁸⁸ When considering that a massive cathedral was built on adjacent land in 2007 without resistance, one can notice the imposition by the Turkish government on Kosovo.

Soft power activities of the Turkish institutions are received with ambivalent feelings. While TİKA's restoration projects fail to generate excitement, contributions in the fields of education and capacity building, and support to farmers or other small entrepreneurs are always welcome. Türkiye Scholarships organized by YTB is a great opportunity for students who wish to study in Turkish universities most of which offer better education. However, the war waged against Gülen Movement by the Turkish government has devastating consequences for the success of the scholarship program. This will be further elaborated on below. Distribution of scholarship unevenly among the ethnic groups and giving most of them to Turks causes suspicions for the intentions of the Turkish government among the Albanian majority. Language courses provided by Turkish Cultural Centers are shown little interest. Although it is widely believed that Diyanet's presence in the country helps the fight against radicalism, their further benefit is doubtful. In all these things, one thing is clear. Activities reminding the bitter Ottoman past in the region are received with negative sentiments, rather than serving Turkey's soft power. But these symbolic impositions are usually tolerated in return for good relations with Turkey and its support. On the other hand, we would be mistaken to think that the AKP government targets only foreign audiences with these activities. Turkey's visibility through such activities is important for the AKP leader Erdoğan to continue his global player

⁸⁵ Diyanet.gov.tr. 2021. *Diyanet İşleri Başkanı Erbaş Kosova'da*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.diyamet.gov.tr/en-US/Institutional/Detail/12143/diyamet-isleri-baskani-erbas-kosovada>> [Accessed 3 February 2021].

⁸⁶ Korkut, Şenol. "The Diyanet of Turkey and its activities in Eurasia after the Cold War." *Acta Slavica Iaponica* 28 (2010): 117-139, 131-134

⁸⁷ The groundbreaking ceremony of the mosque was held in 2012 with the participation of President, Prime Minister and Leader of the Islamic Community of Kosovo. The mosque, almost a carbon copy of other Ottoman mosques, is estimated to cost around 40 million euros. The construction could start only in 2020.

⁸⁸ Aa.com.tr. 2021. *Kosova Cumhurbaşkanı Taçi'den Priştine Merkez Camisi'ne destek mesajı*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/kosova-cumhurbaskani-hasim-thaciden-tdv-katkilariyla-yapilacak-pristine-merkez-camisine-destek-mesaji/1919238>> [Accessed 3 February 2021].

rhetoric within Turkey.⁸⁹ TİKA's renting busses and fetching crowds not only from Kosovar cities but from the surrounding countries to join Erdoğan's rally in Kosovo precisely serve this purpose.

3.1.4. The Effects of Turkey's Soft Power Activities

After evaluating how the activities of these public institutions are received in Kosovo and their effects on Turkey's soft power, I will now look at how the benchmarks are turned out as a result of these activities. As I have explained in the methodology section, I will high level bilateral visits, trade volume and investments and the number of Kosovars tourists visiting Turkey. I will also analyze contentious issues to test the efficacy of Turkey's soft power on Kosovo.

High-level bilateral visits

Two aspects of high-level visits are particularly important: frequency and the message given to the public. 13 high-level visits have taken place since the independence of Kosovo in 2008.⁹⁰ It is important to note that the inauguration of the projects undertaken by the Turkish institutions, such as the opening ceremony of the Pristina Airport terminal building or the restoration of mosques built during the Ottomans, in Kosovo has provided convenient opportunities for these visits to happen. The high number of visits also suggests close political relations. The fact that Kosovar politicians visit Turkey more often demonstrates Turkey's gravity or soft power on the Kosovar government.

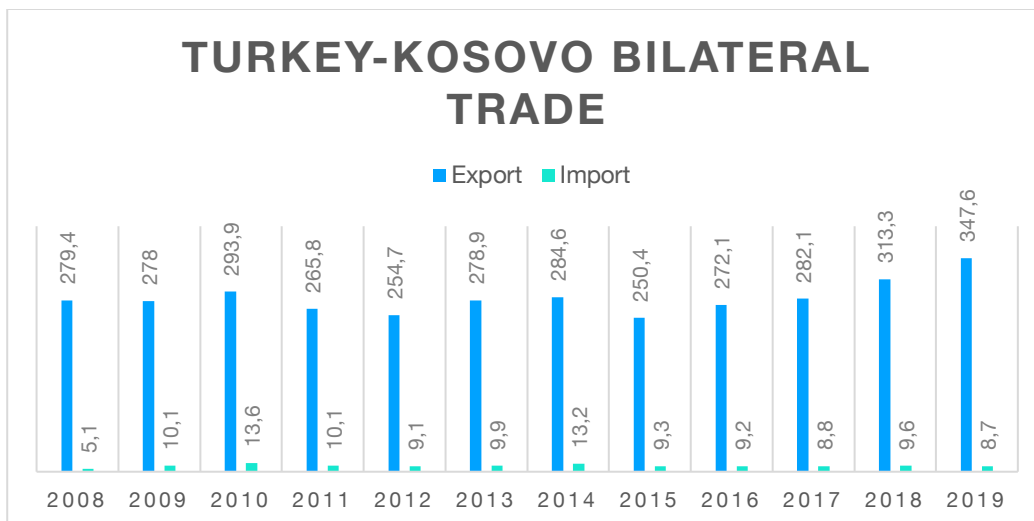
On the other hand, some of these visits bear special important diplomatic meanings. For instance, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kosovo Behgjet Pacolli paid one of his first official visits to Turkey upon assuming the office in 2017. Also, Prime Minister Hashim Thaci visited Turkey on the 7th anniversary of the independence of Kosovo in 2015. These details are mentioned in the press statement of the Turkish Foreign Ministry to highlight Turkey's important position in the eye of the Kosovar government. The most recent high-level visit by President Thaçi, accompanied by Foreign Minister Pacolli, in September 2020 happened only two weeks after Kosovo's decision to establish diplomatic relations with Israel. The motivation behind this visit, which is to mollify Turkey's disappointment in Kosovo, also demonstrates how Kosovo takes Turkey's concerns seriously. Things unfolded in this regard continue to upset the Turkish government, but that will be dealt with below.

⁸⁹ Aslı Aydıntaşbaş, *From Myth to Reality*, 25.

⁹⁰ The numbers are compiled from the websites of Presidency and Foreign Ministry of Turkey.

Bilateral Trade and Investments

As can be seen in the chart, Turkey's export rose from 279 million US dollars in 2008 only to 347 million US dollars in 2019. In the same period, Turkey's import reached 8.7 million dollars in 2019 from 5.1 million dollars in 2008. According to the 2017 report of Turkey's Commercial Counsellor's Office in Kosovo, these figures do not reflect the potential.⁹¹ In order to boost bilateral trade, the two countries signed a free trade agreement in 2013. This was the first free trade agreement that Kosovo had signed. However, the agreement went into effect only in 2019 due to delays in domestic ratification delays in Kosovo. This shows the constraints of Turkey's influence on Kosovo, despite its economic assistance and support in different fields. Turkey's imposition on the Kosovar government can also be seen in this example.



Source: Turkish Statistical Institute. The numbers are in million dollars.

Although the trade volume does not represent the “excellent political relations” as defined also by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the direct investments by the Turkish companies offer a more promising picture concerning the return of Turkey's soft power activities.⁹² Currently, Turkey is the third foreign direct investor in Kosovo with its 382.1 million euros of investments between the years of 2007-2017. (Turkey was the biggest investor in the years of 2012 and 2013.)⁹³ The value of the contracting projects undertaken by the Turkish construction companies has reached over 1 billion euros. In addition to several Turkish banks operating tens of branches in Kosovo,

⁹¹ See 2017 Annual Report of Turkey's Commercial Counsellor Office in Pristina. Available at <https://tica-ret.gov.tr/data/5b8a43355c7495406a2276e2/Kosova.pdf>

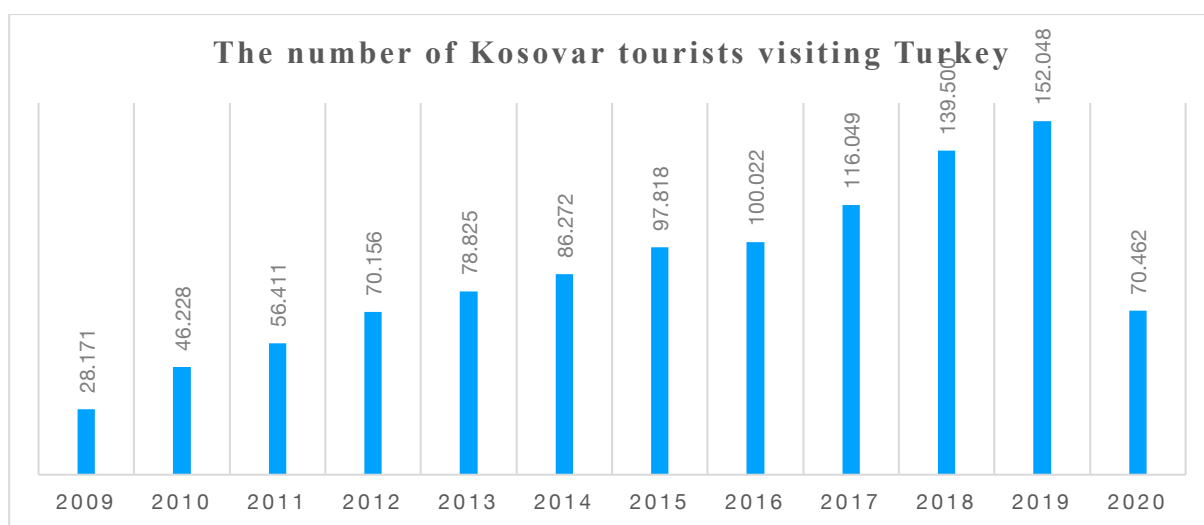
⁹² See the website of Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Available at https://www.mfa.gov.tr/reasons-between-turkey-and-kosovo_en.mfa

⁹³ Die Morina, "Turkey Funds Renovation Projects in Kosovo." *Balkan Insight*. October 12, 2018. Accessed March 3, 2021. <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/07/04/turkey-continues-supporting-projects-in-kosovo-through-tika-07-03-2018/>.

strategic companies such as Kosovo Energy Distribution and Supply Company and Pristina International Airport have been owned or operated by the Turkish companies.

Tourism

Turkey has been an attractive country for Kosovar tourists, the number of whom is on rise since 2008. One can say that all the activities of the Turkish institutions touching the lives of Kosovars, their promotion campaign are paying off.⁹⁴ Similarly, besides Albania and Germany, Turkey is one of the main countries sending visitors to Kosovo.⁹⁵ This certainly demonstrates Turkey's soft power.⁹⁶



Source: Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism

3.1.5. Challenges in bilateral political relations

The case of Gülen Movement, a religious movement inspired by the teachings of US-based cleric Fethullah Gülen, presents rather a paradox with regard to Turkey's soft power. With its extensive network of prestigious schools, cultural centers and entrepreneurial initiatives abroad, the Movement had composed the bulk of Turkey's soft power.⁹⁷ However, the Erdoğan government's waging war against the Movement following the corruption scandal that targeted four of his ministers in late 2013 reversed the picture. The war against the Movement triggered a series of events that led to

⁹⁴ "Yearly Bulletins." *Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism*. Accessed April 08, 2021. <https://www.ktb.gov.tr/EN-249299/yearly-bulletins.html>.

⁹⁵ SeeNews. 2019. "Foreign Tourist Arrivals to Kosovo Increase 19% in 2018 ". Available at [https://see-news.com/news/foreign-tourist-arrivals-to-kosovo-increase-19-in-2018-table-645703#:~:text=PRISTINA%20\(Kosovo\)%2C%20March%207,statistical%20office%20said%20on%20Thursday](https://see-news.com/news/foreign-tourist-arrivals-to-kosovo-increase-19-in-2018-table-645703#:~:text=PRISTINA%20(Kosovo)%2C%20March%207,statistical%20office%20said%20on%20Thursday)

⁹⁶ Cagaptay, Soner. *The rise of Turkey: The twenty-first century's first Muslim power*. Potomac Books, Inc. (2014), 60.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 60.

the crumbling of Turkey's soft power. Gradually intensifying the crackdown both in Turkey and abroad, Erdoğan's government officially designated the Movement a terror organization in May 2016.⁹⁸ The government has so far arrested tens of thousands of its members, seized the Movement's all media outlets, schools, major companies in Turkey that are worth over 30 billion dollars⁹⁹, took over 213 schools in 19 countries-mostly underdeveloped.¹⁰⁰

In its fight against the Movement, the Turkish government has chosen the Balkans, including Kosovo, a battleground. Success in the Balkans would set a precedent for other countries and proves Turkey's ambitious role in the region. Yet, despite all of its efforts and the immense amount of pressure put on Kosovo, the Turkish government failed to convince Kosovars to close down the schools and extradite alleged the members of Gülen Movement to Turkey. This led the Turkish government to carve its own way in the country and rely on the personal relationship between Erdoğan and Thaci. In a murky operation, Turkey whisked away six teachers to Turkey. The act caused a political crisis in Kosovo. Left in the blank, Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj of Kosovo had to fire his Interior Minister and Chief of Intelligence for their involvement in this operation.¹⁰¹ To prevent a similar incident, the Kosovar government enunciated its support for the activities of the Gülen Movement in the country and granted asylum to its Turkish teachers.¹⁰² Turkey has undoubtedly failed to convince the Kosovar government on a subject that is on top of its agenda. The fact that Turkey had to resort to shady means to get what it wants from Kosovo points to the limits of Turkey's soft power in Kosovo. Another result of the fight with the Movement concerns the quality of students benefiting from the Türkiye Scholarships. Top scoring students going to the schools of Gülen movement now choose European or American universities over Turkish ones, as the authoritarian practices of the Turkish government exacerbated Turkey's image in Kosovo.

Another foreign policy challenge that tests Turkey's soft power in Kosovo revolves around the establishment of diplomatic relations between Kosovo and Israel. In return of recognition by Israel, Kosovo has opened up an embassy in West Jerusalem, defying Turkey's pressures. Kosovo has

⁹⁸ "Turkey Officially Designates Gulen Religious Group as Terrorists." Reuters. May 31, 2016. Accessed May 09, 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-gulen-idUSKCN0YM167>.

⁹⁹ "15 Temmuz Sonrası El Konulan Mal-mülk Miktarı 32 Milyar Dolar!:" Ahval. Accessed April 13, 2021. <https://ahvalnews.com/tr/arastirma/15-temmuz-sonrasi-el-konulan-mal-mulk-miktari-32-milyar-dolar>.

¹⁰⁰ "Türkiye Maarif Vakfı Başkanı Açıkladı: 96 ülke Bize FETÖ Okullarını Vermedi." Sözcü Gazetesi. February 21, 2020. Accessed May 09, 2021. <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2020/gundem/turkiye-maarif-vakfi-baskani-acikladi-96-ulke-bize-feto-okullarini-vermedi-5639655/>.

¹⁰¹ Valerie Hopkins, "Erdogan's Great Game: Turkish Intrigue in the Balkans." Subscribe to Read | Financial Times. January 14, 2021. Accessed May 09, 2021. <https://www.ft.com/content/d99f7b3d-5dcc-4894-a455-1af5a433175f>.

¹⁰² "Kosovo Grants Asylum to Turkish National." Prishtina Insight. April 06, 2018. Accessed May 09, 2021. <https://prishtinainsight.com/kosovo-grants-asylum-turkish-national/>.

made it clear that it does not shy away from upsetting Turkey once again on sovereignty matters. Considering that Turkey has been tremendously advocating for Kosovo's recognition since its independence in 2008 and Turkey's high sensitivities on the issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict so much that it has strained relations with Israel due to the developments surrounding the Jerusalem debate, the boldness of Kosovo's act against Turkey's will becomes more apparent. In response, Turkey has only released releasing harsh statements that define Kosovo's step as a violation of international law.

Conclusion

To conclude, Kosovo has been one of the main targets for the soft power activities of the Turkish public institutions. Providing development aid, restoration of historical buildings, opening up many cultural centers, offering hundreds of scholarships to Kosovar students, and many other activities have undoubtedly contributed to Turkey's soft power in Kosovo. The frequency of high-level visits, the increase in bilateral trade volume-albeit modest, the investments of the Turkish companies in critical sectors in Kosovo and the increasing number of Kosovar tourists visiting Turkey, all point to the positive return of Turkey's soft power activities. However, Turkey's resorting to murky activities in illegal renditions of Turkish citizens and strong pressure on the Kosovar government to close down the schools run by Gülen Movement damaged Turkey's image and raised suspicions over Turkey's influence in Kosovo. The fact that Turkey has failed to influence the behavior of the Kosovar government on the matters that concern Kosovo's sovereignty points to the limits of the effectiveness of Turkey's soft power activities. In other words, Kosovo welcomes Turkey's support and tolerates its imposition for continuation having good bilateral relations. However, its defiance of Turkey's attempts to interfere in its domestic politics underlines that Kosovo does not want to be treated as a little brother but as a proper partner.

CASE STUDY 2

KYRGYZSTAN: A SISTER REPUBLIC OR STRATEGIC PARTNER?

Turkey has been supporting the institutional building and economic development of Kyrgyzstan since the independence of the latter. Benefiting from linguistic, ethnic and cultural affinities, Turkey aimed at improving its bilateral relations with Kyrgyzstan by undertaking many soft power activities. In this chapter, I will provide the background of bilateral relations, outline Turkey's soft power activities in Kyrgyzstan and point out their outcomes on bilateral trade, investments and tourism numbers. Then, I will present some challenging issues in bilateral political relations and analyze the reaction of the Kyrgyz authorities to the demands of the Turkish government. I will argue that although Turkey's soft power activities have facilitated Turkey's investments in Kyrgyzstan, increased the number of Kyrgyz visitors to Turkey. However, judging from the disagreements on the activities of Gülen Movement in Kyrgyzstan and the unwillingness of the latter to meet Turkey's demands raises questions about Turkey's soft power in Kyrgyzstan.

3.2.1. Background of Relations

Turkey's relations with the Central Asian Republics were established after the independence of the latter in the early 1990s. Turkey's relations with these newborn states have been underpinned by the linguistic and ethnic ties. Since then, the Turkish government took some steps to cultivate and deepen its relations with the new Turkic republics. Viewing these nations as "Turkic sister republics", Turkey campaigned for the inclusion of the new states into international organizations. In addition to paying a number of official visits to announce its support for these countries, Turkey signed numerous agreements to establish a legal basis of bilateral relations. Frequent flights with those countries were established, Turkish satellite TV was broadcast in the region. Turkey's most prominent move was to create TİKA to extend development aid and ensure capital flow to these countries in their state-building efforts. Turkey also organized regular summits with the Turkic-speaking countries as of 1992.¹⁰³

The following quote from the website of Turkey's Foreign Ministry effectively defines Turkey's priorities towards Central Asia. The Ministry states: "Turkey is the first country which recognized Central Asian countries. Since 1991, our desire for a stable, independent and prosperous Central

¹⁰³ Hakan Fidan, "Turkish foreign policy towards Central Asia." *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 12, no. 1 (2010): 109-121.

Asia has guided our policies towards the region towards building free-market economies and functioning democracies. Given our common historical, linguistic and cultural ties, we have sought to increase engagement with this region on a broad range of issues.”¹⁰⁴ It is noticed that no alteration has been made in this quote on the website since at least 2011, showing Turkey’s consistent vision towards the region.¹⁰⁵ Wheeler, Conflict and Security Advisor at Saferworld, presents five pillars of Turkey’s Central Asia policy. These are a) to develop bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the fields of politics, energy, economy and culture, b) to contribute to the resolution of the regional conflicts, c) to become an energy hub in the region, d) to help state-building efforts of the Turkic republics and offering development aid and e) to assist them to develop relations with other countries.¹⁰⁶

In line with the strategy outlined above, Turkey became the first country to recognize the independence of Kyrgyzstan. Since then, Turkey has been exerting efforts in all fields to help Kyrgyzstan become a functioning state. In this framework, Turkey has spent diplomatic efforts to include Kyrgyzstan into the international organizations, such as membership to UN and OSCE and participation in the NATO’s Peace for Partnership Program, offered considerable amount of aid especially during the early years of its independence. Devised by Turkey’s President Turgut Özal, Turkey hoped that this policy would benefit Turkey economically and politically.¹⁰⁷ However, Turkey failed to meet the expectations of those countries, thus political and economic relations remained limited during the 1990s. In addition, Turkey’s attempts to promote liberal democracy and an open economy in those countries also fell short of bearing fruit, forcing it to accept the authoritarian regimes of these countries for regional stability and security.¹⁰⁸ As a result, Turkey’s extensive interest in the Central Asian States started to wane in the second half of the 1990s. Political instabilities and economic struggles at home also played a role in this. Kurmanbekova argues that Turkey’s initial robust presence in the region and support to the opposition in Uzbekistan caused concerns among the regional countries, paving the way for a period of detachment.¹⁰⁹

During the AKP rule, the Turkish government dropped the bridge discourse and reoriented its engagement with the region in accordance with its own vision. Turkey’s interest in Central Asian

¹⁰⁴ See website of Turkey’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Available at: https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-relations-with-central-asian-republics.en.mfa#:~:text=Central%20Asia%20is%20a%20strategically.as%20well%20as%20trade%20corridors

¹⁰⁶ Thomas Wheeler, "Turkey’s role and interests in Central Asia." *Saferworld Briefing* 3 (2013), 4.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 3.

¹⁰⁸ Bayram Balci, ‘Turkey Lowers Its Sights on Central Asian Reform’ *World Politics Review Op-Ed* (2013)

¹⁰⁹ "CTSS as an instrument of Turkey's geopolitics in Central Asia." CABAR.asia. November 11, 2020. Accessed April 5, 2021. <https://cabar.asia/ru/sstg-kak-instrument-geopolitiki-turtsii-v-tsentralnoj-azii>.

countries has renewed with the AKP coming to power in 2002. Although Turkey was still an aid recipient country in the early 2000s, its government began to vigorously increase its humanitarian aid from US 120 million dollars in 1999 to 1.3 billion dollars in 2011 as part of pro-active diplomacy in the world.¹¹⁰ Regarding Turkey-Kyrgyzstan, Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University was established in 1995 in Bishkek to enhance cultural and linguistic bonds between the two countries, constituting a leap forward in bilateral relations.¹¹¹ In addition to declaring friendship and cooperation agreements signed in 1997, the two countries augmented their relations by establishing the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council in 2012. Today, Turkey defines Kyrgyzstan as a *strategic partner*.¹¹²

On the other hand, Kyrgyzstan is a small and poor country where Russia has immense influence. It currently has two military bases in Kyrgyzstan, controls the strategic industries of the country and hosts Kyrgyz labor migrants whose remittances are an important source of revenue for the Kyrgyz economy. Recalibrating its relations with great powers, Kyrgyzstan has moved to close down the American base and seek more investment from the EU countries and China.¹¹³ Hoping to balance the great powers, Kyrgyzstan and Turkey utilized forums, including High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council and Turkey- Kyrgyzstan Business Forums to improve political, economic and cultural relations.¹¹⁴ Kyrgyzstan is aware that Turkey's power is no place to be compared with Russia and China, thus follows a cautious foreign policy. Prioritizing its own interests, it has defied bullying from Turkey, like refusing to shut down the schools owned by Gülen Movement.¹¹⁵

3.2.2. Soft Power Activities of the Turkish Government in Kyrgyzstan

With the renewal of Turkey's interest in the region, Turkey has increased its soft power activities in Kyrgyzstan through TİKA, Turkish Cultural Centers, YTB and Diyanet. In this chapter, I will be

¹¹⁰ Assel Tutumlu and Yakın Doğu Enstitüsü YDE. "TURKEY-CENTRAL ASIA RELATIONS: A STRATEGIC OVERVIEW." (2020), 23-25.

¹¹¹ Joseph Stetar, Colleen Coppla, Li Guo, Naila Nabiyeva, and Baktybek Ismailov. "Soft power strategies: competition and cooperation in a globalized system of higher education." In Higher education, policy, and the global competition phenomenon. *Palgrave Macmillan*, New York (2010) 191-203.

¹¹² See website of Turkey's MFA. Available at <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye-kirgizistan-cumhuriyeti-siyasi-iliskileri.tr.mfa>

¹¹³ Christopher Schwartz and Alisher Khamidov for The Diplomat. "Kyrgyzstan: Corrupt, Anarchic – and Stable?" – The Diplomat. August 18, 2016. Accessed May 02, 2021. <https://thediplomat.com/2016/08/kyrgyzstan-corrupt-anarchic-and-stable/>.

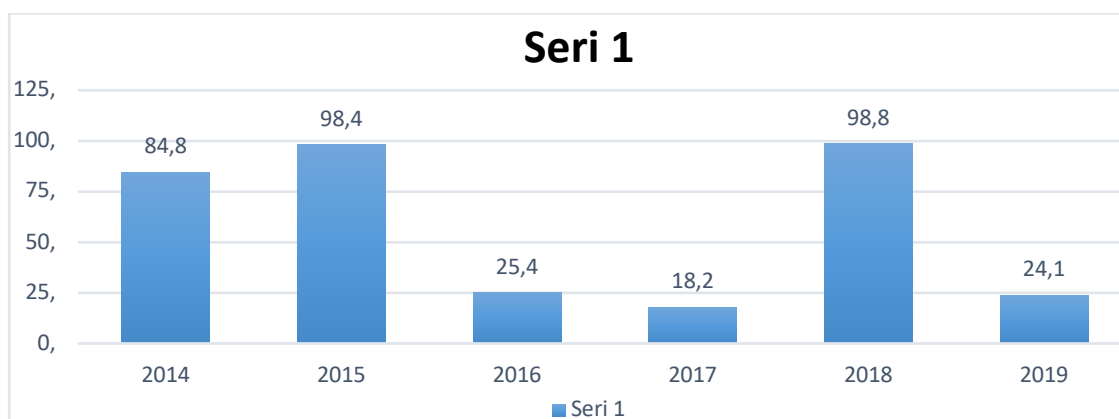
¹¹⁴ Assel Tutumlu, TURKEY-CENTRAL ASIA RELATIONS, 24.

¹¹⁵ Christopher Schwartz and Alisher Khamidov for The Diplomat. "Kyrgyzstan: Corrupt, Anarchic – and Stable?" – The Diplomat. August 18, 2016. Accessed June 1, 2021. <https://thediplomat.com/2016/08/kyrgyzstan-corrupt-anarchic-and-stable/>

elaborating on the activities of these institutions and evaluate their effect on bilateral high-level visits, trade volume and investments, tourism. Then, I will test the efficacy of Turkey's soft power by discussing a contentious foreign policy matter.

TIKA

TIKA has been active in Kyrgyzstan in the field of economy, trade, technology, education and the social sphere since the independence of the country. Establishing its office in Bishkek in 1993, TIKA on the one hand has been mainly providing technical assistance, such as offering training programs, supplying of technical equipment and constructing of facilities in key sectors; while on the other hand supporting cultural projects, conferences, seminars to contribute to the bilateral relations. TIKA has been helping the state-building efforts through organizing training programs and constructing facilities in diverse fields, with a focus on health and education sectors, including prestigious projects like Bishkek Kyrgyz-Turkish Friendship Hospital.¹¹⁶ According to the OECD data, Turkey remained as the top provider of the official development assistance in the years 2007, 2009, 2010 and 2011. The following chart shows that Turkey's development assistance to Kyrgyzstan. Although the amount of Turkish assistance to Kyrgyzstan considerably fluctuates, overall Kyrgyzstan has remained one of the leading countries that receive Turkish development aid. The fluctuation is caused by the changing needs of the country due to natural disasters or political instabilities such as the social unrest in 2010.



Source: Turkish Development Assistance Reports (TIKA). The numbers are in million dollars.

Cultural Activities of the Turkish Government

¹¹⁶ For detailed information on the activities of TIKA, see its Annual Reports. Available at <http://www.tika.gov.tr/en>

Unlike the Balkans where the majority of the Turkish Cultural Centers are located, there are only two of them in Central Asia, Astana and Baku. Although language proximity cast doubt on the need for such Turkish Cultural Centers, that mostly offer language courses, the Turkish government has been attempting to open one in Kyrgyzstan. Nonetheless, cultural cooperation with Kyrgyzstan has been carried out through other platforms.¹¹⁷ Initially, the leaders of the Turkic-speaking countries hold summits to enhance cultural cooperation, in addition to exploring ways for further cooperation in political and economic fields. Assessed by the analysts as Turkey's efforts to expand its influence in the region,¹¹⁸ these summits culminated in the establishment of the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States (CCTS) in 2009. Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University stands out as a good example of Turkey's soft power activities. Providing education in Turkish and Kyrgyz languages, the University has diversified the cooperation between the two countries. The university has 3500 Kyrgyz students and so far, has educated thousands of students with competitive skills in engineering and other fields who speak English and Turkish at the working level, nurturing Turkey's soft power in the country. However, although vigorously pursued by Turkey, these platforms and attempts to enhance common Turkic identity seem to fail to resonate with the local population, especially the youth. For them, Kyrgyz, Muslim and nomadic identity comes before the Turkic identity. Ironically, those who have a connection with Turkey and received education in Turkish schools, majority of these owned by Gülen Movement, tend to speak Turkish and more closely follow identity politics in this regard.¹¹⁹

YTB

The activities of YTB have been a good source for Turkey's soft power in the country. Coincidentally, Turkey started the government scholarship program in 1992, the year diplomatic relations were established between Turkey and Kyrgyzstan. Since then, 4500 Kyrgyz students have been given scholarships by the Turkish government. Although presented to the Turkish public as a success story, the efficacy of Türkiye Scholarships in Kyrgyzstan is disputable. First of all, only 1400 of all the Kyrgyz students given scholarships have been able to graduate from Turkish universities. The low rate of success is most likely caused by the dropouts of Gülen Movement schools' alumni due to the crackdown on the Movement in Turkey and decreasing quality of Kyrgyz students who

¹¹⁷ For information about the cooperation and consultation mechanisms, such as TURKSOY, TURKPA, Turkish Business Council, International Turkic Academy, The Turkic Cultural Heritage Fund, Turkic Chamber of Commerce and Industry (TCCI) between Turkey and the Central Asian countries, see the website of the Turkish Foreign Ministry. Available at: <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turk-konseyi.tr.mfa>

¹¹⁸ <https://cabar.asia/ru/sstg-kak-instrument-geopolitiki-turtsii-v-tsentralnoj-azii>

¹¹⁹ Interview with Kyrgyz journalists and Turkish diplomats who served in Kyrgyzstan.

are offered scholarships. In addition, the ranking of Kyrgyz students' number in Turkey dropped from 8th to 13th place during the period between 2013 to 2018.¹²⁰

Diyanet

As in many other countries that have Muslim community, the major activities of Diyanet in Kyrgyzstan consist of offering stipends to students for their education at religious schools in Turkey, supporting religious education in the country through establishing a theology faculty in the city of Osh, publishing and distributing religious materials in the Kyrgyz language, and sending imams for religious sermons during the month of Ramadan. Although Diyanet has been continuing to undertake these activities, as of 2008 it stopped sending imams to Kyrgyzstan during Ramadan.¹²¹ Building an ostentatious mosque in Ottoman style in the center of the capital city, however, serves as a symbol of Turkey's influence in the country. Diyanet's mosque in Bishkek was opened during the visit of President Erdoğan, accompanied by President of Diyanet, in November 2018. Erdoğan's speech during the opening ceremony points to Turkey's priorities in its Kyrgyzstan policy, as well as reveals its expectation to utilize the construction of a mosque for political purposes. President Erdoğan said:

"My Lord make our unity and solidarity forever. I emphasize that we must be vigilant against terrorist organizations like FETO who are trying to get sedition between us. I wish that this monumental work, which will ensure the strengthening of the common ties of religion, language, history, culture and brotherhood between Kyrgyzstan and our country, will be instrumental in good service."¹²² It comes as no surprise that the Turkish Ambassador scolds Kyrgyz officials to act against Gülen Movement in return for constructing a mosque in Bishkek.

3.2.3. The effects of the soft power activities of the Turkish government on bilateral relations

Turkey's soft power activities have led to an increase in bilateral trade with Kyrgyzstan. More high-level bilateral visits have taken place, and the amount of humanitarian aid to Kyrgyzstan grew considerably. As was explained in the previous case study, I will evaluate the efficacy of the soft power

¹²⁰ Azamat Maksüdünov, Hasan Gül, and Meerim Asanbekova. "Country Image Effect of Turkey on International Students' destination Choice: An Example Of Kyrgyzstan." *Electronic Turkish Studies* 14, no. 4 (2019), 2556.

¹²¹ Korkut, Şenol. "The Diyanet of Turkey and its activities in Eurasia after the Cold War." *Acta Slavica Iaponica* 28 (2010): 117-139, 131.

¹²² Bishkek Republic Central Imam Sarakhsi Mosque Opened to Worship with Prayers. Accessed March 08, 2021. <https://www.diyamet.gov.tr/en-US/Content/PrintDetail/11921>.

activities of the Turkish government in Kyrgyzstan by looking at the changes in the selected benchmarks.

High-level Bilateral Visits

Since the establishment of bilateral relations during the visit of Kyrgyz President's visit to Turkey in 1991, the high-level bilateral visits have been one of the main drivers of the relations between the two countries. Since then, many high-level visits have taken place in a continuous manner. Besides the Turkic Council Summits, the Strategic Council established by the two countries in 2012 has provided a useful avenue for the leaders of both countries to meet on regular basis. In addition to the high number of visits, some details regarding these visits are also indicative of close bilateral relations and Turkey's soft power in Kyrgyzstan. For example, during Prime Minister Erdoğan's visit to Kyrgyzstan in 2011, President Atambayev called him "Ağabey" as a sign of respect to Erdoğan and preferred to speak Turkish during the press conference with him. Erdoğan reciprocating his gesture by calling him "brother".¹²³ Indeed, Kyrgyz leader explicitly told the visiting Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan in 2013 that they see Turkey as a model for the development of their country.¹²⁴

Trade Volume and Investments

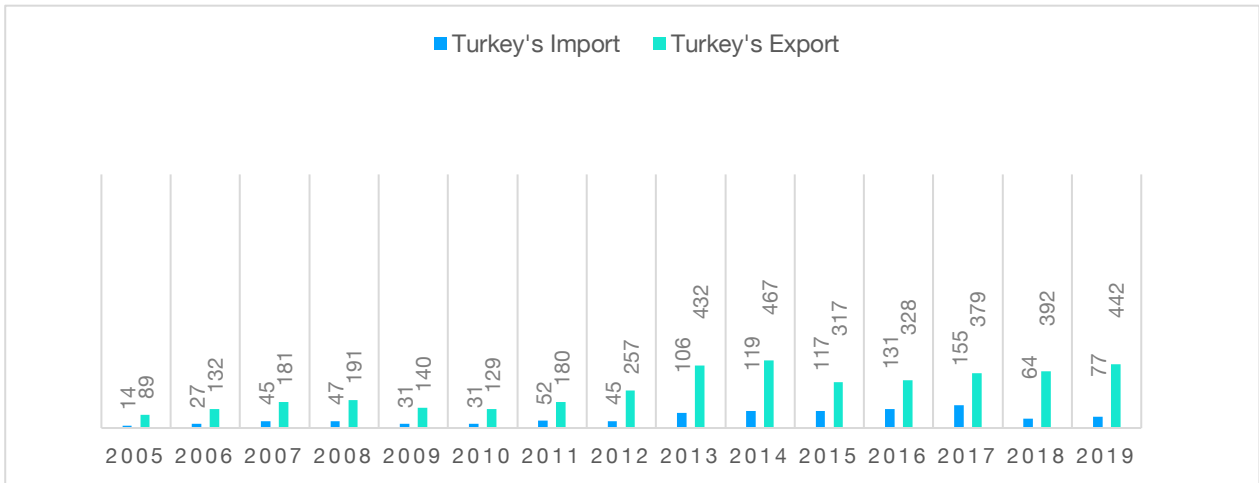
Although Turkey's soft power activities have contributed to an increase in the number of high-level visits, the impact of these visits and Turkey's activities in Kyrgyzstan on bilateral relations is dubious. The chart below shows that Turkey's efforts to translate its soft power and assistance into economic returns have not been successful. Indeed, the Turkish Foreign Ministry admits that the trade volume fails to meet the potential and states that the target is to reach 1 billion dollars in trade volume.¹²⁵ The Turkish investments in Kyrgyzstan present a gloomier picture as for the efficacy of

¹²³ BOSTANCI, Mustafa. "Ak Parti Dönemi Türkiye-Kırgızistan Siyasi İlişkileri", *Uluslararası Dünden Bugüne Türkiye-Kırgızistan İlişkileri Sempozyumu Bildiri Kitabı*, 22-24 Mayıs 2015, Kastamonu 2016, s. 189- 200.

¹²⁴ Hurriyet Daily New. 'Kyrgyz democracy gives Turkey hope: PM ' *Hurriyet Daily News* 10 April 2013

¹²⁵ Turkey's MFA. "Kyrgyzstan's Economy", accessed April 3, 2021. <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/kirgizistan-cumhuriyeti-ekonomik-iliskileri.tr.mfa>

Turkish activities. Turkey's ranking dropped to 7th in 2013 from 2nd place up until 2006, among the

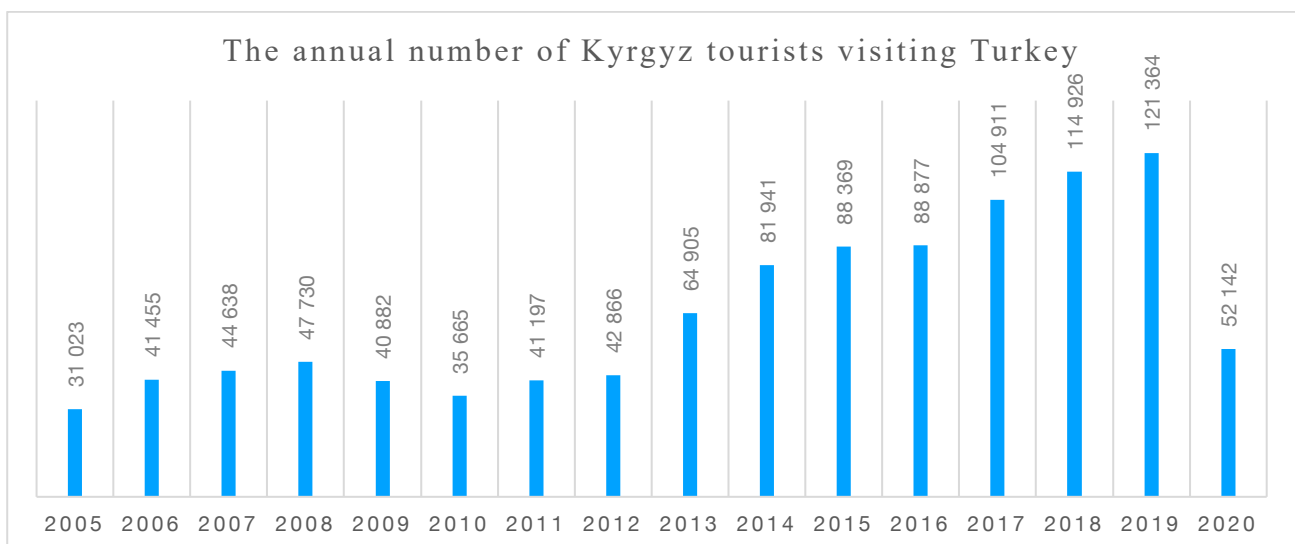


largest investors in the country.¹²⁶

Source: Ministry of Economy of Turkey. Numbers in million dollars.

Tourism

The increase in the number of Kyrgyz tourists visiting Turkey in the period of 2002 to 2019 is higher than the overall increase in the incoming international tourists to Turkey, 4 times vs 3.5 respectively. The popularity of Turkey as a tourist destination for the Kyrgyz people points to its growing soft power in Kyrgyzstan. A slight decrease in 2010 is caused by the political instabilities in Kyrgyzstan and the decline in 2020 is obviously a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.



Source: Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism

3.2.4. Foreign Policy Challenges

¹²⁶ Wheeler, Turkey's Role and Interests in Central Asia, 8.

As described above, contentious foreign policy issues provide a useful benchmark to test the efficacy of soft power. The key area of tension in bilateral relations between the two countries emanates from the extensive presence of Gülen Movement in Kyrgyzstan, presenting a litmus test for Turkish diplomacy or its influence on the Kyrgyz government. Gülen Movement has been active in Kyrgyzstan since the independence of the country. Dozens of schools established in Kyrgyzstan by the Gülen Movement since the independence of the country have contributed to bilateral relations until the movement itself being the major source of contention between the two countries.¹²⁷ The low quality of education in the country stemming from the recurring political instabilities and corruption has provided ideal conditions for the development of the Movement. As a result, Kyrgyzstan has become one of the few countries where the Movement is deeply entrenched in the education system with its 90 million dollars investment. The Movement operates over 20 schools and one university, the best performing schools in the country that are attended by children of the elite, making the cost of its eradication from the system extremely high. Therefore, the demands of the Turkish government from the Kyrgyz government to shut down the schools, or ensure their transfer to the Turkish Maarif Foundation, which was established to take over the Gülen Movement schools in foreign countries and extradite its teachers have created a predicament in the bilateral relations.¹²⁸

Turkey's pressure on Kyrgyzstan peaked during Erdoğan's visit to Kyrgyzstan in September 2018. Erdoğan hinted that Turkey will hold back its economic assistance to the country if inaction continues concerning the presence of Gülen Movement.¹²⁹ However, despite the enormous pressures of the Turkish government, Kyrgyzstan has rejected Turkey's demands. The Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry summoned the Turkish Ambassadors and asked him to end his derogatory campaign about these schools. President Atambayev of Kyrgyzstan rebuked the Turkish government's claims that Gülen Movement could be planning a coup in Kyrgyzstan, calling them absurd. The employees at these schools were held in pre-trial detention upon the request of the Turkish government but they were soon released by the courts.¹³⁰ So far, only the names of the schools were slightly altered, and the Kyrgyz Education Ministry was made one of the shareholders. However, Turkey's activities in Kyrgyzstan continued unabated. Failing to take over the schools of the Movement, Maarif Foundation

¹²⁷ "The role of education for the nationalizing regimes in Central Asia: the case studies of Fethullah Gulen schools in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan." PhD diss., American University, 2005.

¹²⁸ Atay Moldobaev, "Hizmet" in Kyrgyzstan as a "Litmus Test" for Turkish Diplomacy." *Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting*, 2016.

¹²⁹ "Erdogan Visit Delights Some in Kyrgyzstan, Annoys Others." Eurasianet. Accessed May 09, 2021. <https://eurasianet.org/erdogan-visit-delights-some-in-kyrgyzstan-annoys-others>.

¹³⁰ Catherine Putz, "Turkey Seeks Extradition of 2 Gulen School Employees From Kyrgyzstan." – *The Diplomat*. December 31, 2019. Accessed May 09, 2021. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/12/turkey-seeks-extradition-of-2-gulen-school-employees-from-kyrgyzstan/>.

is yet to open its first school in Kyrgyzstan. Turkey's Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu said that this is a sign of importance Turkey attaches to Kyrgyzstan.¹³¹

Conclusion

In short, the ethnic and cultural ties with Kyrgyzstan have ensured Turkey's strong support to the Kyrgyz government. In this framework, various Turkish government institutions have undertaken many activities and provided considerable economic support. These activities have undoubtedly contributed to the enhancement of bilateral relations, facilitated Turkey's investments in the country and led to an increase in popularly contact, such as increase in the number of tourists. However, the controversy revolving around the Gülen Movement is indicative of the limits of Turkey's soft power, or the inefficacy of Turkey's activities on the core issues. In other words, the Turkish government has failed to influence the behavior of the Kyrgyz government, despite all its soft power activities and economic support. Two interrelated motivations have played a role in this outcome: the national pride and the importance of sovereignty for the Kyrgyz government and people. The change of the structure of the schools, that is to increase the government control over them, and the emphasis by the Kyrgyz officials on sovereignty while standing up to the pressures of Turkey are clear indications of this attitude. With the same feelings, the condescending behavior of the Turkish Ambassador in Bishkek was also strongly condemned.

¹³¹ "Turkey's Maarif Foundation to Open School in Kyrgyzstan." Anadolu Ajansı. Accessed May 09, 2021. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/turkeys-maarif-foundation-to-open-school-in-kyrgyzstan/2170803>.

IV. CONCLUSION

The economic and political conditions in Turkey prepared a conducive ground for the AKP's landslide victory in the parliamentary elections in 2002. Restrained by the power of the Kemalist bureaucracy at home, the AKP government sought an ally in the EU both to strengthen its legitimacy among the wider Turkish public and international actors and attract foreign direct investments that were critical for Turkey's recuperating economy. The political and economic reforms carried out for EU membership, the Europeanization of Turkey's foreign policy and the high economic growth polished Turkey's image tremendously. Seen as an example of the compatibility of democracy and Islam, Turkey began to act more ambitiously in foreign policy by mediating between parties in the Middle East, reaching out to Africa to carve new political and economic relations, and pro-actively engaging with the Balkans and Central Asian countries. When the Arab uprisings started towards the end of 2010, Turkey's popularity was all-time high both in the region and the international community.

During this period, Turkey's intensified and diversified its soft power activities in the surrounding regions. These activities have been conducted by the existing and newly created government institutions, consisting of the main elements of Turkey's soft power. On the other hand, Turkey's excessive involvement in the Middle East and resorting to intrusive policies, and recurring failures in foreign policy have led to the diminishing of its soft power. By focusing on the soft power activities of the Turkish government in Kosovo and Kyrgyzstan, I have intended to measure the efficacy of Turkey's soft power policy. The soft power activities of the Turkish government have provided the ground for frequent political contacts and improvement of economic relations in Kosovo and Kyrgyzstan. Turkey's investments in critical sectors have mounted and the number of Kosovar and Kyrgyz tourists to Turkey has increased. However, its trade volume with these countries has been little affected.

I have also examined the effect of Turkey's soft power policy by looking at some foreign policy challenges. Pertinent to both Kosovo and Kyrgyzstan, Gülen Movement has presented a challenging factor for the efficacy of Turkey's soft power activities. These two countries refused to meet the demands of the Turkish government to shut down the schools and extradite the members of the Movement to Turkey. Kosovo has also defied Turkey's immense pressure and established diplomatic relations with Israel and opened an embassy in West Jerusalem. These instances raise questions about the efficacy of the soft power activities of the Turkish government, especially on matters that concern the sovereignty of the target countries. As stipulated by Nye, Turkey's ambitious

and intrusive policies and intensive propaganda by the government-affiliated agencies have led to suspicions, and the growing authoritarianism in Turkey damaged its soft power in the target countries. Therefore, although these two countries welcome the economic support and the activities of the Turkish government and tolerate its minor impositions for political and economic gains, they do not hesitate to defy Turkey's pressures. In other words, soft power activities of the Turkish government do not yield expected results for the Turkish government even in small countries for which the support of Turkey remains to be critical.

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