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SELECTED INSTRUMENTS OF TURKISH SOFT POWER IN EUROPE

Wybrane instrumenty *soft power* Turcji w Europie

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Abstract

The article addresses Turkey's soft power, with an emphasis on its institutional dimension. The discussion focuses on the European continent and aims to show the resources of Turkish soft power and institutions' activities for its implementation in the European context. The first part of the paper is devoted to the methodological assumptions and the notion of soft power. Then, the evolution of the Republic's interest in the use of soft power, the resources of Turkish soft power, indicating to what extent they can be effective to European countries, and the activities of selected institutions that are the tools of soft power in Europe are described.

Keywords: soft power, Turkey, TİKA, Yunus Emre Institute, Diyanet, Istanbul Convention.

Streszczenie

Artykuł poświęcony jest *soft power* Turcji, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem jej wymiaru instytucjonalnego. Rozważania koncentrują się na kontynencie europejskim, a ich celem jest ukazanie zasobów tureckiej miękkiej siły i działalności instytucji służących jej realizacji w kontekście europejskim. W pierwszej części tekstu wskazano założenia metodologiczne oraz zdefiniowano pojęcie *soft power*, następnie przybliżono ewolucję zainteresowania Republiki wykorzystaniem *soft power*, zasoby tureckiej miękkiej siły, ze wskazaniem, na ile mogą być one efektywne w odniesieniu do państw europejskich oraz scharakteryzowano działalność wybranych instytucji, stanowiących narzędzie owej miękkiej siły w Europie.

Słowa kluczowe: *soft power*, Turcja, TİKA, Instytut Yunus Emre, Diyanet, konwencja stambulska.

Introduction

Over the last few decades, Turkey has evolved from a state based on and associated with hard power into a state that also seeks to implement the soft power concept in its foreign policy. “Also” because due to its geopolitical position and internal security challenges, Turkey cannot afford to give up hard power. Nevertheless, the government of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – AKP) brought about a significant increase in the Turkish authorities' interest in employing soft power in foreign policy, which translated into a dynamic development of institutionalized initiatives aimed at strengthening this aspect of Turkey's international activity. Thus, on the one hand, the number of the initiatives has grown; on the other hand, their activities have expanded into new areas, both the subject matter and geography. The study draws attention is focused on those which cover Europe. No one can fail to notice that there has been a considerable increase in the international recognition of Turkey and interest in its culture on the Old Continent.

The study aims to show the resources of Turkish soft power and institutions' activities serving it in a specific European context. Given the fact that today many Turkish institutions potentially strengthen the soft power of this country in Europe and that they are active in many areas, constituting a well-thought-out system of interrelated entities with specific competences and scope of influence, it was decided – due to the limited volume of the study – to focus only on a few projects. There have been selected ones that have the most significant potential for influencing Turkey's image in Europe and are somewhat representative of the unique resources of Turkish soft power due to their scope of problems and area of influence. Moreover, their development reflects the evolution of Turkey's soft power. Turkey operates in specific conditions on the European continent, affected by historical and political factors. The latter includes both the political situation on the Bosphorus, and the political values valued in Europe. It is characteristic for Europe that its states are generally Turkey's equal or more vital partners and, consequently, Republic can only partially use its resources and the potential of its institutions there. The main hypothesis assumes that the full use of soft power resources and institutions in the Old Continent is hindered by Turkey's certain inconsistency in this regard. On the one hand, Turkey's interest in the development of soft power in Europe is visible, both at the declarative and practical level, including by expanding the institutional base of soft power, but on the other hand, the Republic takes steps to limit the potential of its own resources and created institutions, or even actions to undermine the achievements of these institutions, own efforts and achievements in this field. Two institutions, the *Yunus Emre Institute (Yunus Emre Enstitüsü – YEE)* and the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (*Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı Başkanlığı – TİKA*), where consistency in the Republic's soft power building is evident, and two lacking such consistency – the *Diyanet – The Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı – DİB)* and the Istanbul Convention – were analysed. The

outlined hypotheses require answers to the following research questions: How long has the interest in soft power in Turkish foreign policy lasted? What resources does Turkey have in this regard? To what extent can it use them in Europe? What are the analysed institutions' origins and tasks? What is the scope of their activity on the Old Continent? What factors limit this activity? The article uses mainly two research methods, case study and institutional-legal, which allowed focusing on the institutional dimension of Turkish soft power, presenting the genesis of the selected institutions, characterising their activities and their *importance* on the European continent.

The soft power concept in contemporary international relations

Josef Nye popularised the concept of soft power. According to him, this term means the power of attraction, achieving a position in the international environment, and influencing other states' preferences with soft measures. The emergence of this notion was a response to changes visible in the international space at the end of the last century. These were manifested, among others, by the growing importance of non-military and asymmetric security threats, the increasingly widespread departure from the perception of strength and power in the traditional way, the progressive globalisation, the increasing influence of non-state actors, and the mediatisation of politics (Nye, 2007, pp. 34–38; Ociepka, 2013, pp. 16–18). Nye defined soft power resources as ones that cause such attraction (Nye, 2007, p. 35) and distinguished their three basic categories: culture, political values, and foreign policy. In his view, culture must contain attractive elements to others, universal and political values, and foreign policy takes account of generally accepted standards. Moreover, there is no dissonance between political practice and declarations, between actions taken in the domestic arena and those presented in foreign policy. Any discrepancies pose a threat to adequate soft power (Nye, 2007, pp. 40–44). Robert Łoś proposed a research model of soft power, which consists of six categories: diplomacy, socio-political category (e.g., political and civil liberties, free access to traditional and electronic media), popular and high culture (e.g. popularity and range of language, number of Nobel Prize winners in literature, export of cultural goods), education (e.g., number of foreigners studying at universities, ranking of universities), and socio-economic category (e.g., innovation and patents, development aid) (Łoś, 2018, p. 38).

The appreciation of the role of soft power in the modern world is evidenced, among other things, by the emergence of numerous rankings of states regarding their soft power and the growing popularity of the concept among international relations researchers. Julia Trzcińska writes about the fascination with soft power and the “race” of states “in ideas for promotion and attempts to reach international public opinion” (Trzcińska, 2019, p. 59). Increasing interest in developing soft power is manifested not only by state actors, but also by non-state actors (e.g., the European Union). The trend can also be

seen in the case of states hitherto associated primarily with hard power, which, as already mentioned, includes the Republic of Turkey.

The origin of Turkish soft power and an attempt at periodisation

In the second half of the last century, Turkey was a typical coercive power. This was influenced both by external factors concerning its functioning in the Cold War reality, and internal factors. However, the changes taking place from the 1990s onwards in the international arena, as well as internally, fostered a new perspective on the Republic's policy (Wódka, 2017, pp. 40–43).

Interest in the use of soft power in Turkey's foreign policy reaches the beginning of our century. Turkish researcher Senem B. Çevik points to mid-2000 as the date when the concept emerged in the political debate at the highest level. That was related to the AKP's outlook on a new foreign policy. Greater attention began to be paid to the Middle East and the Balkans, namely, areas that had been part of the Ottoman Empire in the past (Çevik, 2019, p. 56). Important factors influencing the possibilities of Turkish soft power development were undoubtedly the European Union accession aspirations and Turkey's international image as a modern, secularised, Western-facing country that could serve as a model for other Middle Eastern states. The concept of Turkey as a role model was also exploited in the domestic debate on soft power potential in foreign policy (Çevik, 2019, p. 56). Soft power was an essential part of the idea of strategic depth originated by Ahmet Davutoğlu, the tenets of which he set out in his book *Strategic Depth: Turkey's International Position*, published in 2001. For many years, he was one of R. T. Erdoğan's close associates. Davutoğlu advocated the need for greater use of soft power in foreign policy as a tool to reposition the state. He mentioned the Middle East, the Balkans, and the Caucasus as critical areas in this context, and one of the reasons for greater interest in the highlighted regions was historical considerations (Jędrowiak, Baraniuk, 2019, pp. 45–46). It is further worth noting that the Republic's good economic situation in the first decade of our century implied an interest in development assistance to African countries, which also proved to be an effective tool of Turkish soft power (Çevik, 2019, pp. 56–57).

However, in the second decade of our century, the events in Turkey – the failed military putsch and the fight against Fethullah Gülen's Hizmet movement – negatively impacted the development of Turkish soft power in Europe. The movement mentioned above was considered one of the most important tools of Turkish public diplomacy (Jędrowiak, 2017, pp. 471–477). As Jakub Wódka notes, it contributed significantly to the expansion and consolidation of Turkish influence by conducting lively educational and cultural activities on almost all continents (Wódka, 2019, pp. 207–210).

A very successful attempt to organise and periodise the evolution of Turkish soft power was presented by a Turkish researcher Ahmed Erdi Öztürk, who distinguishes three basic stages of its development:

1. 2002–2010. The years saw a successive rise of Turkish soft power. It was closely related to the then AKP policy, pro-EU foreign policy implementing the Davutoğlu concept, domestic policy successfully combining Islam with democracy, and the success of the Turkish economy in the background. During that period, today's institutions referred to as Turkey's soft power tools, such as TİKA, or the Yunus Emre Institute, became more active. It is also the time of activity of the already mentioned Hizmet movement.

2. 2010–2016. During that period, processes that contributed to a significant decline of Turkish soft power *took place*. In the domestic arena, power was centralised, democratic values were abandoned, economic problems were emerging, and the Kurdish issue was revived. In turn, in foreign policy, Turkey encountered obstacles in implementing its goals, and at the same time, the process of Islamisation of that policy commenced. Then, the fight against the Ankara government's hitherto ally in building soft power – the Hizmet movement – began not only inside the country, but also abroad.

3. Since 2016, i.e., after the failed military putsch, there has been an ambivalence of soft power. That is associated with a turn in domestic, as well as foreign policy, marking a decisive retreat from democracy, tensions in relations with the West, and a drastic increase in pro-Islamic and nationalist rhetoric (Öztürk, 2020a, p. 118).

These stages of Turkey's soft power development have also been accompanied by the evolution of its institutional resources, both in quantity and nature of activities. Even examining, as this text does, only a fraction of Turkish soft power institutions, one can observe that the amplitude of their activity coincides to a large extent with Ahmed Erdi Öztürk's periodisation of the evolution of Turkish soft power. Moreover, the loss of credibility of some of them, reduction of their activity, and even the resignation by the Republic from some of the institutions, is noticeable during the *ambivalence of soft power*.

Turkey's soft power resources

Regarding the soft power concept, The Republic of Turkey is a country characterised by relatively high potential. However, when analysing its resources, one may notice a certain asymmetry, mainly if one adopts a European perspective, i.e., the one under discussion in this study.

Culture is Turkey's unquestionable asset. According to already cited S. B. Çevik, it is the dominant Turkish soft power resource (Çevik, 2019, p. 63). When examining the possibilities of influence through the Republic's culture, the following points should be considered first. It is a country with a very diverse and rich cultural heritage, tangible

and intangible. That is confirmed by the number of Turkish sites on the prestigious heritage lists (world and intangible) of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (Turkey 2021; Poland 2021); there are more of them than in many European countries. Moreover, as observed in recent years, interest in Turkish culture is fostered by the dynamic growth of the popularity of Turkish cinematography, especially serials, which are part of mass culture. Interestingly, the success of Turkish soap operas is one of the driving forces behind the development of tourism. The phenomenon is in line with the film tourism boom observed recently, in which the trip purpose is determined by watching a film, a TV series, or other production (Stefanik, Kamel, 2011, pp. 4–5). Turkish TV series are nowadays sold to more than a hundred countries from Europe to Africa, and their viewers reach several hundred million. They are particularly popular in Arab countries. Nevertheless, it is impossible to analyse this phenomenon only in terms of entertainment, but it should also be looked at from a broader socio-cultural perspective. Turkish productions, among others, promote behavioural patterns and lifestyles, popularise the history of Turkey and the Ottoman Empire, and contribute to the interest in learning the Turkish language and Turkish products (Ağırseven, Örki, 2017, pp. 841–850; Anaz, Özcan, 2016, pp. 247–256; Woźnica, 2019, pp. 203–204). Undoubtedly, television series are thus one of the tools for building Turkey's soft power. In this context, Rafał Woźnica points to the phenomenon of media programming. Soap operas soften Turkey's image in foreign viewers and show Turkish society as attractive since using a product of mass culture eases reaching a broad audience (Woźnica, 2019, pp. 203–204). In Europe, Turkish high culture is also recognised, valued, and symbolised, for example, by the prizes awarded to Turkish films or directors at prestigious film festivals, or the Nobel Prize in Literature for Orhan Pamuk in 2006 (Çevik, 2019, pp. 63–64).

A language is also an important tool. Turkish belongs to the large family of Turkic languages widely spoken in Asia. It is also worth remembering that its speakers constitute a large diaspora on the Old Continent. A common cultural heritage and a shared history may also play an essential role. That is what the Turkish government hopes for when it comes to the Balkans, which in Davutoğlu's concept is a crucial region for building Turkey's position in Europe. However, it does not appear easy due to the widespread negative image of Ottoman rule and distrust of Turkey (Woźnica, 2019, pp. 200–204). Nonetheless, it is worth remembering that there are also countries in the Balkans where the role of a shared cultural heritage and shared history can be assessed as crucial, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sancak, 2016, pp. 19–21; Wasiak, 2020, pp. 92–113). As for the Balkans and to a lesser extent in a broader European perspective, the importance of education should be mentioned. Under the AKP government, the number of universities in Turkey has increased significantly – there were 76 in 2002 and already 206 in 2018. Turkish universities feature lists of the world's best universities, although the number of newly established ones does not directly translate into their prestige (Çevik,

2019, p. 63). On the other hand, they undertake cooperation with foreign higher education institutions, especially from countries with which Ankara cares about relations, and systematic growth in the number of foreigners studying in the Republic is noticeable (Çavuş, 2012, p. 31). Turkey offers scholarship programmes to enable students to study in the country; it also opens its educational institutions and supports education “on the ground”. An example of that is the funding of the International University in Sarajevo and the International Balkan University in Skopje (Woźnica, 2019, pp. 204–205).

The literature distinguishes religion, precisely the combination of Islam and modernity, as Turkey's soft power resource. There was a widespread opinion that the country could be set as a model for other Muslim countries; the success of the market economy, the relatively stable democratic regime (Wódka, 2019, pp. 148–149), and the fact that Islamic society functioned in a secular democracy, which proved that a Muslim democracy could exist, were cited. According to Tuba Çavuş, Turkey provided an example to other Muslim countries that the theory of the clash of civilisations can be reversed (Çavuş, 2012, p. 28). Public opinion polls conducted in Arab countries confirmed this potential for the attraction of the Turkish model in Islamic societies. In a poll conducted by the Turkish Economic and Social Research Foundation (TESEV) in Arab countries in 2010, more than 60% of Arabs pointed to the Republic as a model for the Arab world and as an example of the coexistence of democracy and Islam (Wódka, 2019, pp. 217–218). The possibility of combining these two values – Muslim religion and secularised democracy – was a significant element of attraction also for Muslim states located on the European continent, operating under European conditions, and aspiring to European structures. It also had the potential to attract those followers of Islam who, living in European states, seek to combine their religious values with democratic ideals. However, gradual Islamisation of social and political life has become increasingly apparent in recent years. Moreover, Turkey is trying to play a leading role in the Muslim world, competing with countries so far aspiring to be such a leader (Öztürk, 2020b, p. 1). The so-called religious diplomacy, which treats religion as one of the Turkish soft power resources and is conducted through several governmental institutions and non-governmental organisations, is connected to using this source of soft power (Wódka, 2019, pp. 204–205). The latter in the past included, for example, Hizmet, already cited many times. The so-called “mosque diplomacy”, linked to religious diplomacy, is also referred to as an instrument of soft power. For years, Turkey has been implementing a programme of building mosques practically worldwide, contributing to expanding Turkish influence (Wódka, 2019, p. 206). The increasingly visible presence of Islam in Turkey's domestic and foreign policy negatively affects the country's image in Europe, thus weakening its ability to exercise soft power on the Old Continent effectively. The increased fear of Turkey was also fostered by the combination of religious influence and the rise of authoritarian elements in Turkish politics, as was Ankara's post-2016 fight against the Gülen Movement and the methods used for that struggle (Öztürk,

2020b, p. 5). It leads to the most severe problem with the use of Turkish soft power resources, i.e., the Republic's foreign policy on the European continent. In the most general terms, it is the aforementioned Islamisation of Turkish politics and its apparent anti-Western turn. All this in the context of the size of the Turkish diaspora in European countries, whose possible use by Ankara as an instrument in the pursuit of political goals has raised concerns among Western politicians and in the context of Turkey's efforts to build influence in the Balkans, where it competes with other European states (Öztürk, 2020b, pp. 6-7). Furthermore, the process of (de)democratisation of the Turkish Republic and its impact on the Republic's foreign policy raises Europe's concerns (Wódka, 2019, pp. 132–150). However, it is worth recalling that Turkey officially still aspires to join the EU structures, and pursuing this goal was one of the stimulators of developing Turkish soft power on the Old Continent.

The institutional dimension of Turkish soft power in Europe

Among the most important institutions of Turkish soft power is TİKA. Its genesis dates to the early 1990s. At that time, the idea of closer relations with the Turkic-speaking post-Soviet republics emerged in Turkey. TİKA was primarily tasked with providing support to Turkic-speaking states and peoples, and supporting educational, social, cultural, economic, and commercial cooperation projects. During its first decade of activity, TİKA's primarily focused on Central and Central Asia and the Caucasus. After 2002, there was an increase in the Agency's activity, both the number of supported projects and geographical coverage. The post-Osma area gained much more importance. Hence, among other things, the support for projects in Europe and the Middle East improved, which, incidentally, corresponded perfectly with the increased interest in this area in Turkish foreign policy (Akıllı, Çelenk, 2019, pp. 142–143). Currently, the scope of operation of the organisation in question covers development assistance in a broad sense. The projects it supports concern, for example, infrastructure, tourism, education, and take place in basically every part of our globe (TIKA, 2020; TİKA, 2019).

In Europe, TİKA remains active mainly in the Balkans. A significant part of the Agency's resources has been directed to this part of the Old Continent in recent years, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo rank highest among Balkan countries benefiting from such support (TIKA, 2020; TİKA, 2019). That is not surprising given these countries' significance in Turkey's foreign policy (Woźnica, 2019, pp. 210–214), the common cultural space, and the fact that they undeniably need such development assistance now. It also should be noted that the Agency supports both projects implemented at the central level and those vital for local (*Balkan*) communities. The most important segments of the institution's activities in the Balkans include the reconstruction and restoration of Ottoman material heritage, in which the region in question abounds. These are often monuments threatened with destruction. Besides, it is not infrequently the case

that they play a role other than their original one. On the one hand, Renovation is conducive to nurturing the history of these lands; on the other hand, it creates an opportunity for the development of tourism (Woźnica, 2019 p. 212). Among the countries outside the Balkan Peninsula, a large amount of funding allocated to support Moldova draws attention. That is influenced by historical and economic considerations and not without significance is also the fact that Turkic-speaking Gagauzians live there. It is interesting to note that TİKA participated in the reconstruction of the Presidential Palace in Moldova, damaged during mass demonstrations in 2009 (*Turkish Development...2019*, p. 63).

The Yunus Emre Institute, which was established in 2007 and now constitutes a Turkish cultural diplomacy tool, is a relatively new soft power instrument. YEE deals with promoting native culture, art, history, language, and education, supports scientific research in this field, and cooperates with entities from other countries. Its activity manifests itself, among other things, through organising Turkish language courses and exhibitions, and supporting Turkish philology courses at universities. Currently (as of 10 March 2021), YEE has 58 cultural centres, spread practically all over the world (Yunus Emre Institute, 2021a). In defining its vision and mission, the Institute specifies the former as “to increase the number of Turkey's friends and people associated with Turkey worldwide”, while the latter as “to increase the visibility, positive relationships, and trust of Turkey in the international arena” (Yunus Emre Intitute, 2021b). The first facility of the Institute became operational in 2009 in Sarajevo, and it should be emphasised that the Balkan area is, next to the Middle East, among the most critical geographical directions of YEE activity (Donelli, p. 124). Bosnia and Herzegovina serve as an example of Turkish language courses and cultural projects successfully organised by YEE for all age groups. Thanks to the Institute, interest in the Turkish language is visibly rising (Wasiak, 2020, p. 103–105). However, the YEE's activities in the Old Continent are not constrained to the Balkans or neighbouring countries; the Institute's centres operate in Poland, Hungary, Belgium, Spain, and in other countries, such as Germany, Russia, and Romania, where there are two YEE facilities. Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo, are the record-holder in the number of the Institute's centres, with three ones in each country (*Yunus Institute*). The visible increase in the number of YEE centres is, on the one hand, the Turkish authorities' intended goal to increase their number to 100 in 2023 (Donelli, p. 124), but on the other hand, it reflects Europe's genuine interest in Turkish culture and language learning. It is related to Turkey's growing economic presence in Europe, the popularity of Turkey as a tourist destination for Europeans, the educational offer of Turkish universities, and the already mentioned popularity of Turkish TV productions. By bringing the Turkish culture and lifestyle closer, they result in their fans becoming more interested in learning the Turkish language.

The instrument of religious diplomacy is the Diyanet, which is the body responsible for Islam's institutional and organisational supervision. It was established in the

1920s as an institution utterly subordinate to the government, with little competence. Its importance began to grow over time, especially when its usefulness in advancing secular authorities' interests was recognised. The real breakthrough came at the beginning of this century after the AKP took over government reins. The Diyanet became the primary instrument for revitalising Islam's role and a valuable tool for achieving foreign policy goals (Wódka, 2019, pp. 204–206). One Turkish scholar has described it as “probably the largest and most centralised” Muslim organisation in the world, regarding the scope of activity “comparable only to the Vatican” (Wódka, 2019, p. 204).

Today, the Diyanet is a tool of Turkish religious diplomacy in Europe. Its activities, for obvious reasons, are concentrated in countries where there are numerous Muslim communities, primarily in the Balkans, where they are generally autochthonous minorities, and in the west of the continent, where numerous Muslim immigrants reside. In the Balkan countries, it cooperates with TİKA, which supports, among other things, projects carried out by the local Muslim communities. One of the effects of the restoration of Ottoman monuments is to improve the condition and size of the material base that the Diyanet can use. In the case of Western Europe, the Directorate cooperates with national and local Islamic organisations. In general, the Diyanet focuses on ensuring that Islam's followers can practice their religion freely and secures spiritual services for them. It is performed by taking care of mosques and other places important to Muslims, building new temples, providing religious education, opposing Muslims' discrimination in a given country, and sending imams from Turkey. It is worth noting that in the early 1990s, it was precisely thanks to such assistance that Muslim communities in the Balkans, often severely afflicted by the period of socialism, were able to function. However, nowadays, especially after 2016, the Diyanet's activity arouses numerous controversies in Europe. Firstly, in many countries, such intensive “religious diplomacy” is treated with a reserve and seen either as a means of radicalising Muslims (e.g., in France) or is associated with Ottoman rule, which evokes negative connotations in most Balkan states. Secondly, the Diyanet is perceived as a tool for pursuing the government's interests in Ankara in other countries and building its influence in the Islamic (Sunni) diasporas. This image has been influenced by some imams' activities and this organisation's use in the fight against Gülen supporters. As a result, President Macron, for example, has announced that from 2024 onwards, Turkish clerics will not be allowed to operate in France, while in Germany and Austria, Turkish imams are being accused of espionage, and the organisation's activities are considered one of the causes of creating parallel societies (Öztürk, 2020a, p. 124; Öztürk, 2020b, pp. 2–6)

The Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, also known as the Istanbul Convention, or the Convention on violence against women and domestic violence, adopted within the framework of the Council of Europe, is slightly different from the three projects described above. It was decided to give it some attention because of the institutionalised dimension of the work, and the

fact that it has been deliberately treated as a soft power instrument by the government in Ankara. The Convention was opened for signature in Istanbul on May 11, 2011. Thirteen countries, including Turkey, signed it. To date, their number has significantly increased. The focus of the Istanbul Convention is primarily on measures to combat and prevent violence against women. The parties undertake, among other things, to cooperate with NGOs working in this field, introduce appropriate educational programmes and legislative changes in this direction, define sexual violence (rape) based on the victim's lack of consent, and introduce various forms of assistance and support for victims of violence (physical, psychological, sexual (Article 36)). What is more, they undertake to criminalise the practice of forced marriage (Article 37). Violence committed against women and girls cannot be justified on cultural, religious, or the so-called honourable grounds. The adoption of the Convention took place when Erdoğan was Prime Minister, and it is emphasised that he contributed then to getting Ankara to sign and ratify the Anti-Harassment Convention (Szyszlak, 2020).

The solutions in the Convention help combat the phenomenon of so-called honour crimes, which have been a severe problem in Turkey for years, and whose victims are overwhelmingly women. The number of these crimes is not only not decreasing, but has been increasing in recent years. Moreover, the Turkish diasporas' problem is observed in Western European countries and is familiar to those societies. This situation translates into perceiving the Republic and Turkish communities in Europe (Fung, 2016, pp. 104–106, 119–126). The fact that the Convention, which aims to combat violence against women, including the phenomenon of the so-called honour killings, was adopted in the Turkish metropolis, borrowing its name simultaneously, and that Turkey was one of the first countries to sign and ratify the document, may have influenced its perception in European countries, which, after all, attach great importance to human rights and gender equality. That was confirmed years ago when the current President encouraged Turkish MPs to vote in favour of the Convention. Erdoğan argued then that the step would positively impact Turkey's perception in the international arena (Szyszlak, 2020). The Republic's commitment to adopting the document in question and its prompt ratification was also fundamental in the context of its efforts to become the European Union member. Meanwhile, last year a discussion heated up in the Republic on the sensibility of continuing to remain in the Istanbul Convention, and it became clear that there was a large group of politicians opting for an exit from the Convention. The President did not make any clear statements on the matter. Nevertheless, as experts point out, the Istanbul Convention is one of the international agreements, the denunciation of which affects the country's image in the world (Szyszlak, 2020). The very effect of the debate on remaining in the Convention was, among other things, to publicise in the world the problem of violence against women in Turkey and increase opinions about the regression of Turkish democracy and its Islamisation (Yalcin, 2020; Hassenkapm 2020). In July this year, President Erdoğan's decree invalidating the Republic's ratification of the

document in question came into force. In effect, Turkey has withdrawn from the Convention that is today regarded as one of the cornerstones of human rights protection in Europe, to the adoption of which it was instrumental in chairing the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe at the time and to which it lent the adjective 'Istanbul' to the name commonly used in the world. President Erdoğan's decision provoked an adverse reaction in Western Europe and translated into the international image of the Republic, which was dominated by the image of a country struggling with the problem of femicide, which is undergoing a rapid process of (de)democratisation and which does not respect European values (Altan-Olcay, Oder, 2021). In this way, the Republic has deprived itself of one of the critical tools for building soft power in the Old Continent.

Conclusion

The institutions approximated in this paper represent only a fraction of the actors that work to strengthen Turkey's soft power to a greater or lesser extent. However, their example is enough to evidence that such institutions are active in many areas and constitute a well-thought-out system. At the same time, it may be noted that even though Europe is a geographically close area for Turkey historical and partly cultural reasons, the impact of Turkish soft power here encounters several obstacles. Often, what might seem to be an opportunity for the Republic, such as a shared cultural heritage, a significant diaspora, or the possibility to influence Sunni Muslim communities living in Europe, does not significantly facilitate the building of *soft* power, and the advantages used in Central Asia or Africa do not work on the Old Continent. Undoubtedly, Ankara's inconsistency is one of the most severe impediments to the process. Sometimes, a project that could become an essential element of Turkey's 'pulling power' and positively impact its image becomes an instrument for short-term political goals or an element of internal political games, such as the Diyanet or Istanbul Conventions. Of course, political developments in Atatürk's homeland are of great significance in this context. It is worth recalling the opinion of the already quoted Ahmed Erdi Öztürk, who described Turkey as "an ambiguous actor" of soft power, stating that it is unable to effectively use the resources at its disposal in this field (Öztürk, 2020a, p. 125). It seems that without a well-thought-out long-term strategy that takes into consideration the Old Continent's specificity and gives the institutions used in building soft power more autonomy concerning internal politics, Turkey's chances for building efficient soft power in Europe will decrease. Nevertheless, strengthening soft power could become a fundamental element in the still declared efforts of the Republic of Turkey to join EU structures.

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