
Targeted soft power in Turkish new foreign policy and its impact on origins of in-bound tourists

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Abstract

This article is a preliminary study on impact of targeted soft power on origins of in-bound tourists. By focusing on the case of Turkey, it argues that the origins of foreign visitors to Turkey is affected by its targeted soft power policies within the new Turkish foreign policy. Since the AKP government came to power in 2002, Turkey experienced a significant foreign policy orientation shift. This new foreign policy doctrine prioritizes increasing country's soft power towards targeted regions. Using several foreign policy tools, Turkey tries to increase its soft power among countries that have cultural and historical ties to itself. Increasing soft power of Turkey in these targeted countries significantly and positively impacts the number of in-bound tourists since early 2000s.

Keywords: Targeted soft power, Turkish foreign policy, Turkish tourism

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1. Introduction

In November 2002, following the economic crisis of 2001 in Turkey, the AKP as a new political party branded as conservative democrats, blending neo-liberal economic policies with conservative political Islam rhetoric gained majority of votes (34.28%) to form a single-party government. The government followed an extensive economic and social reform process in line with the EU accession process and resulted in substantial economic growth, which helped the AKP to win four consecutive elections and stay as the ruling party till this day.

In addition to the reforms in economic and social areas, one can observe unprecedented changes in Turkish foreign policy orientation and rhetoric during this period. This “new Turkish foreign policy” doctrine includes an emphasis on increasing country’s soft power particularly towards targeted regions. This article examines the relation between “targeted soft power” goals in Turkish foreign policy and their impact on the origins of tourists visiting the country. The research question of the article is “how targeted soft power approach in new Turkish foreign policy affect the tourist profile of the country?”

In answering this question, the article first defines “targeted soft power” based on the literature on trade mark concept of “soft power” by Joseph Nye. It then puts forward the new priorities in Turkish foreign policy since 2002. Finally, it addresses the soft power targets of Turkey and how they correlate with the origins of in-bound tourists. The findings show a strong correlation between targeted regions where Turkey tries to increase its soft power and number of tourists visiting the country from these regions. The results of this article lead the way to further research on how foreign policy priorities of tourism-based emerging economies can impact the number and origins of tourists.

2. The Turkish new foreign policy

In addition to several economic and social reforms, the AKP government, since coming to power in 2002, is responsible for unprecedented changes in Turkish foreign policy. Party leaders such as Recep Tayyip Erdogan (Prime Minister of Turkey 2003-2011, President of Turkey 2014-today) and Abdullah Gul (Prime Minister of Turkey 2002-2003, Deputy Prime

Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs 2003-2007, President of Turkey 2007-2014), as well as several party elites contributed to the changes in Turkish foreign policy during the AKP government. Turkish scholar Pinar Ipek (2015), based on Goldstein and Keohane’s theoretical approach, attributes the changes in Turkish foreign policy to the convergence of principled and causal beliefs of AKP elites. She points out some of the major actors in AKP government who were influential on shaping AKP’s foreign policy vision.

Among these elites Ahmet Davutoglu (Chief Advisor of Foreign Policy to the Prime Minister 2003-2009, Minister of Foreign Affairs 2009-2014, Prime Minister 2014-2016) is one of the most influential figures in shaping Turkey’s foreign policy. Davutoglu in his book “Strategic Depth: Turkey’s International Position” (2001) formulated a new foreign policy approach for Turkey, which was the blueprint for Turkish foreign policy under the AKP government. The idea of Strategic Depth is rather a simple one. Turkey, due to its unique geographic location between Asia, Europe and Africa as well its historical and cultural ties inherited from the Ottoman era, has the responsibility to be an active agent in its region. Turkey’s foreign policy cannot be reduced to one dimension or one region like the West, as it has been the case during the Cold War.

During his post as Minister of Foreign Affairs, Davutoglu wrote an article to Center for Strategic Research (2011) where he summarizes the strengths of Turkish Foreign Policy. Firstly, he states that the new Turkish foreign policy “is formulated with reference to a holistic understanding of historical trends and a sense of active agency”. Turkey’s “historical depth, geographical positioning and rich legacy in international affairs” enables it to formulate a foreign policy through “a solid and rational judgment of the long-term historical trends and an understanding of where we are situated in the greater trajectory of world history”.

Secondly, Turkey can build a “proactive foreign policy” as it has established a stable and peaceful domestic order. Since Turkey has established the security-freedom balance, now it is “more self-confident about its international position, and is trusted by its neighbors and the international community”.

And thirdly, Turkey is reintegrating with its neighbors and consolidating ties with its region. He claims that one of the strengths of the new Turkish foreign policy is reconnecting with the people in its region “with whom we shared a common history and are poised to have a common destiny”.

In the same article, he states that Turkey is following a value-based foreign policy while defending its national interests by assuming “the responsibilities of a global actor” and being recognized “as a wise country in the international community”. While becoming a wise country, he continues that Turkey needs “new instruments which might be missing in Turkey’s traditional foreign policy toolkit”.

Another party elite, Ibrahim Kalin (special advisor to Recep Tayyip Erdogan during his Prime Ministry and Presidency), also comes from an academic background like Davutoglu and draws a map of the changing international environment and Turkey’s position in his writings. He often emphasizes the changes in power centers in the world and the declining importance of the West in world affairs. In a 2009 article in *Insight Turkey*, he calls for a new vision and geographical imagination for Turkey in the 21st century. He also claims that Turkey, which he defines as “a modern country larger than a nation-state and smaller than an empire”, still has power and responsibilities over “Turks, Arabs, Persians, Kurds, Bosnians, Macedonians and others in its vast neighborhood”. Putting Turkey in a central position in the region due to its history, geography and culture is mirroring Davutoglu’s “Strategic Depth” vision for Turkish foreign policy.

The principles he puts forward for Turkish foreign policy includes a new imagination, a different geo-strategic map and a new set of tools. The new imagination contains moving ahead of the “bridge” country image to a central position. The new geo-strategic map means engaging with previously ignored regions of the world while maintaining relations with traditional partners. And the new set of tools entitles moving beyond the traditional hard power-oriented tools to ones that meet the changing nature of the international environment such as soft power generating tools of foreign policy. His use of the concept of soft power is rather broader than the original definition of Joseph Nye. He suggests that “soft power

in the non-Western world... is grounded in some larger concepts of cultural affinity, historical companionship, geographical proximity, social imagery and how all of these create a sense of belonging”.

As can be seen from the writings of the architects of new Turkish foreign policy, Turkey in this new era put emphasis on increasing its soft power particularly towards targeted regions, most of which has been ignored since the Westernization project of republic era. Before moving forward with policies that Turkey has been using in order to increase its soft power in target regions and its relation to origins of tourists visiting country, it is timely to define and conceptualize “targeted soft power”.

3. Targeted soft power and its place in Turkish new foreign policy

Despite their fundamental differences on theoretical, conceptual and methodological issues, one commonality among established International Relations approaches such as Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism, Feminism, Post-Modernism is that power matters in international relations. Since the beginning of the academic field in early 20th century, there is an on-going scholarly debate about material versus relational understanding of power.

A frequently used definition of power by Robert A. Dahl (1957) defines power as “A causing B to do something that B would not do otherwise”. This approach sees power in terms on material resources such as military, economy and demographics. Power as relation approach can be traced back to Lasswell and Kaplan’s seminal work “Power and Society” (1950). This type of power as defined by in Baldwin’s (2002) article “is an actual or potential relationship between two or more actors (persons, states, groups, etc.) rather than a property of anyone of them”. Based on this division about power some IR scholars focuses on “brute material forces” while others on “ideas and cultural contexts” (Wendt, 1999). Embedded in relational approach of power, norms, values, ideas and cultural contexts matter in defining power.

Based on this century long debate Joseph Nye (1990; 2004; 2007; 2011) introduced the concept of “soft power” which he defines as “the ability of affect others through the co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuading, and eliciting positive attraction in

order to obtain preferred outcomes” (Nye, 2011: 20). He adds that “the ability to establish preferences tends to be associated with intangible assets such as an attractive personality, culture, political values and institutions, and policies...” (Nye, 2004, p. 6). He states that “all power depends on context-who relates to whom under what circumstances-but soft power depends more than hard power upon the existence of willing interpreters and receivers (p. 15-16). He also claims that culture is a source of soft power “in places where it is attractive to others” (p. 11).

By reading Joseph Nye’s concept in depth, we can understand that soft power is related to context which includes culture and other similarities between nations. Therefore, while countries are trying to increase their soft power, they can do so focusing on overall soft power of the country or relative soft power based on targeted regions, states or groups of individuals. Some policies can add to the soft power of a country in the eyes of international community in general while other policies can be more channeled towards certain targets. By this understanding I introduce the concept of “targeted soft power”, which is defined as “attractiveness of a country towards a particular nation, public or a group of individuals in order to gain recognized power status and influence policies in line with national interests of the home country”.

Soft power lays in the center of new geo-political imagination, rhythmic, proactive and multidimensional foreign policy of Turkey, as repeatedly stated in Turkish foreign policy rhetoric. In addition to increasing its military capabilities and economic growth, Turkey has invested a considerable amount of resources on soft power generating policies and institutions over the last decade. In line with primary resources of soft power which are “the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political notions and policies”, Turkey has been following a foreign policy particularly rooted in this value-based definition of power.

Cultural attractiveness is particularly emphasized by Turkish foreign elites. For example, Ibrahim Kalin (2011) notes that “Turkey’s soft power is different from that of other countries in its form and content. Turkey’s soft power potential, which extends from the Balkans and the Middle East to inner parts of Central Asia, emerges from the cultural and historical

experience it has inherited”. Similarly, influential International Relations scholar Meliha Altunisik (2008) praises increasing soft power of Turkey in its region by stating that “it is clear that in recent years Turkey’s soft power in the region has increased. Thus, Turkey’s military and economic might in the region is now supported by its soft power, particularly through its increasing attractiveness and its ties with conflicting actors in the region”.

Cultural affinity and geographical proximity are two main pillars of Turkish soft power policies. Therefore, it can be argued that Turkey tries to increase its soft power in a targeted fashion. Targeted soft power aims to increase attractiveness of a country towards a particular nation, public or a group of individuals with the goal of creating friendly relations in order to influence policies in line with national interests of the home country. The remainder of this article focuses on whether or not Turkey’s target soft power policies affect the origins of tourists visiting the country.

4. Tools of targeted soft power for Turkey

During the AKP government, Turkey has created several government institutions while redefining the roles of the existing ones in line with its targeted soft power policies. Public diplomacy efforts were in the center of this policy supported by several governmental and non-governmental institutions such as TIKA (Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, The Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities, TRT (the Turkish National Broadcaster), Anadolu Agency (Turkish semi-governmental news agency), Kizilay (the Turkish Red Crescent), the Yunus Emre Foundation (the Turkish cultural foundation), and several non-governmental organizations. With the goal of increasing coordination among these institutions towards a common goal of increasing Turkey’s targeted soft power with political, diplomatic, economic and cultural activities, The Office of Public Diplomacy under the Prime Minister’s Office was founded in January 2010 with the motto of “Turkey has a message and a story to share”.

During this period Turkey used several visible tools to contribute to its targeted soft power policies. One of the activities that Turkey pursued over the last 15 years

was to increase its diplomatic missions. Increasing official representation of Turkey abroad was one of the tools that was emphasized in multi-dimensional foreign policy vision of Ahmet Davutoglu as he states that “our axis is in Ankara, and our horizon is 360 degrees” (kdk.gov.tr). During this period number of Turkey’s diplomatic missions increased from 163 in

2002 to 228 in 2015. The highest number of increases in Turkish diplomatic missions happened respectively in Africa and Asia. In 2002, among 54 countries in Africa, Turkey only had 12 embassies and 2 consulates. In 2015, this number increased to 39 embassies and 4 consulates.

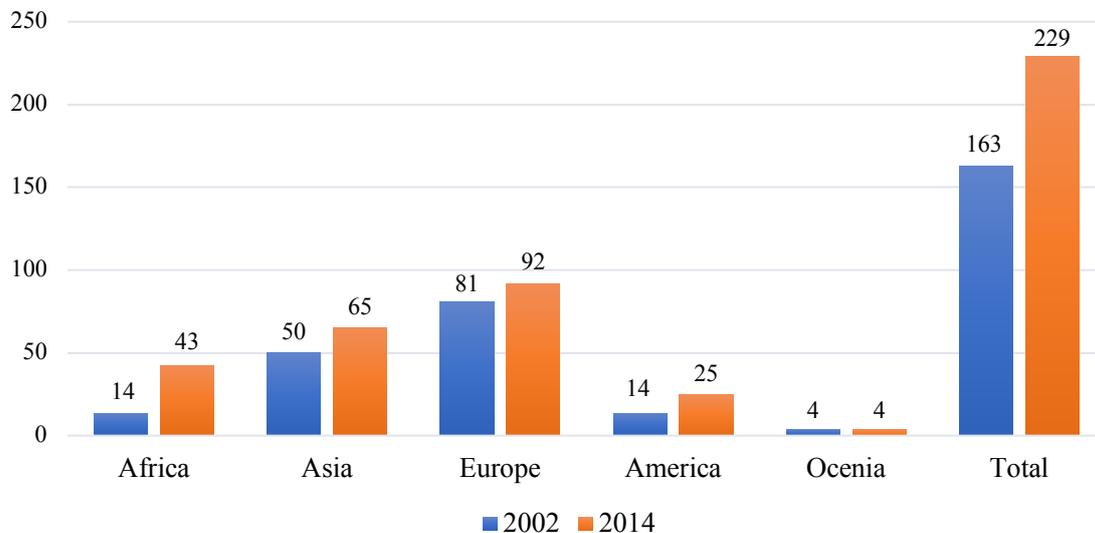


Figure 1. Turkish diplomatic missions in 2002 and 2014

Number of foreign students in higher education has been used as one of the indicators of a country’s attractiveness in several indexes. Increasing number of foreign students in a country is correlated with a country’s soft power. According to UNESCO data

base on in-bound internationally mobile students, the number of foreign students in Turkey has increased from 18.337 in 2002 to 72.178 in 2015, approximately 300% increase (Unesco.org).

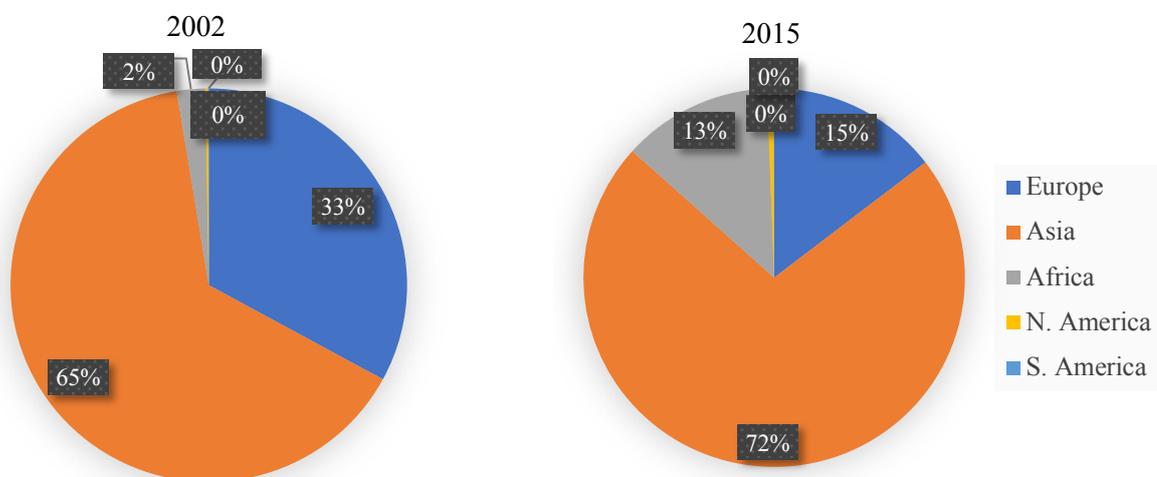


Figure 2. Percentage of in-bound foreign students by continent in 2002 and 2015

The highest increase in absolute number of foreign students in Turkey was from Asia region which includes the Middle East. While the number of students from Asia was 10.504 in 2002, it reached 51.597 in 2015. The number of students from Africa region

reached 9.125 in 2016 from only 376 in 2002. The highest percentage increase in foreign students in Turkey has been from this continent. In the same period, foreign students from Europe, despite its geographic proximity, did not show any dramatic

change with 5.367 in 2002 and 5.497 in 2009. With increasing availability of scholarships to students from Eastern Europe and the Balkans, number of foreign students from Europe reached to 10.435 in 2015. As can be seen in the graph, number of foreign students in Turkey by region shows a correlation with the regions where Turkey is seeking targeted soft power.

Table 1. Soap opera exports by country

Targeted Regions	Targeted Regions	Other
Afghanistan	Lebanon	Germany
Albania	Macedonia	Austria
Azerbaijan	Malaysia	Czechia
U.A.E.	Egypt	China
Bahrain	Uzbekistan	Estonia
Bosnia Herzegovina	Pakistan	Croatia
Brunei	Romania	Sweden
Bulgaria	Syria	Switzerland
Algeria	Tunisia	Japan
Indonesia	Oman	Korea
Morocco	Jordan	Latvia
Georgia	Yemen	Lithuania
Iraq	Ukraine	Hungary
Iran	Greece	Russia
Montenegro		Slovakia
Qatar		Slovenia
Kazakhstan		Thailand
Kuwait		Taiwan
Libya		Vietnam

Promoting a country's culture and values through movie and TV show industry is not a new practice. The Hollywood was an effective tool in the hands of US government during the Cold War to gain worldwide attractiveness to liberal Western values and the Hollywood effect is still relevant today. Within the last decade, Turkey has also started to use this tool particularly through its high-quality production soap operas. According to Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 70 Turkish soap operas are broadcast in 75 countries across the world as of 2014. In addition to its contribution to the country's economy, "reaching some of the highest ratings in the countries they are broadcast, Turkish soap operas contribute to Turkey's image as a strong means of soft power" as stated in the website of the Office of Public Diplomacy.

Airlines companies have a crucial role on international tourism and integrating between tourists

and destinations in the world (Demir, 2017). Turkish Airlines (THY) is arguably the most recognizable national brand of Turkey. National brands, according to Gaye Asli Sancar (2015), "serve as tools to communicate the public diplomacy" by contributing to "the familiarity, reputation, and quality of the country in question all over the world". Turkish government in recent years put special emphasis on the growth of THY and as its flag-ship carrier, it is used as an economic, political and soft power tool, and "one of the dynamos of Turkey's active foreign policy" (kdk.gov.tr). Awarded as best airline in Europe for four consecutive years, THY now flies to 264 destinations, 219 of which are international. While flying to 55 countries in 2002, THY increased its destination countries to 108 in 2015, which makes it the airlines that flies to the highest number of countries in the world. In addition to its contribution to Turkey's economy with 11.1 billion dollars revenue and 603 million dollars net operating profit in 2013, it is used as a soft power tool following a growth strategy in line with the priorities of Turkish foreign policy. The highest increase in THY flights was observed to the targeted regions of Turkish foreign policy particularly in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Since 2002, destinations in Africa increased from 4 to 42, in the Middle East from 111 to 34 and in Asia from 15 to 45 (kdk.gov.tr).

Official development assistance (ODA) was added to Turkey's foreign policy toolkit and have been an integral part of the targeted soft power policy. The Turkish model of foreign aid is neither purely based on security or economic interest of Turkey nor needs and democratic performances of the recipient countries. Rather Turkey's goal with its development assistance policy is to create a network of states, nations and groups of individuals that has a positive view of Turkey and willing to support Turkey towards reaching its ambitions of becoming a regional power and an active agent in international affairs. In doing so, Turkey focuses on a targeted audience that is historically, geographically or culturally similar to itself as it expects to see the highest return for its investment in terms of soft power. Therefore, cultural affinity and historical ties are the main determinants of Turkish aid during this period.

As the evidence supports, Turkey uses several tools to increase its soft power in target regions during the

period studied here. The following part addresses the main question of this article that whether or not the origins of tourists visiting Turkey during this period have been affected by the target soft power policies of

Turkey. In other words, do we observe a correlation between origins of in-bound tourists and the regions targeted by soft power policies of the new Turkish foreign policy?

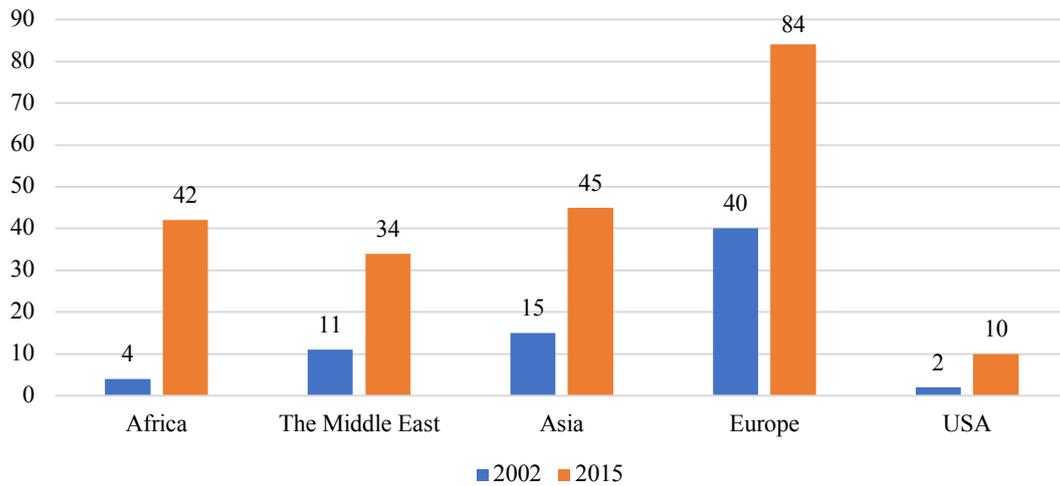


Figure 3. Number of THY international flights by region in 2002 and 2015

5. Correlation between targeted soft power and in-bound tourists

Figure 5 below compares the number of tourists visiting Turkey from 15 OECD countries in 2002 and 2017. These countries are outside of Turkey’s targeted soft power regions within the new Turkish foreign

policy. Although important trading partners of Turkey and traditional origins of in-bounds tourists to Turkey, during the time period studied in article, we do not observe a significant increase in number of tourists from these countries. In fact, in the case of Austria, Italy, Ireland and Japan, there is decrease in visitors since 2002.

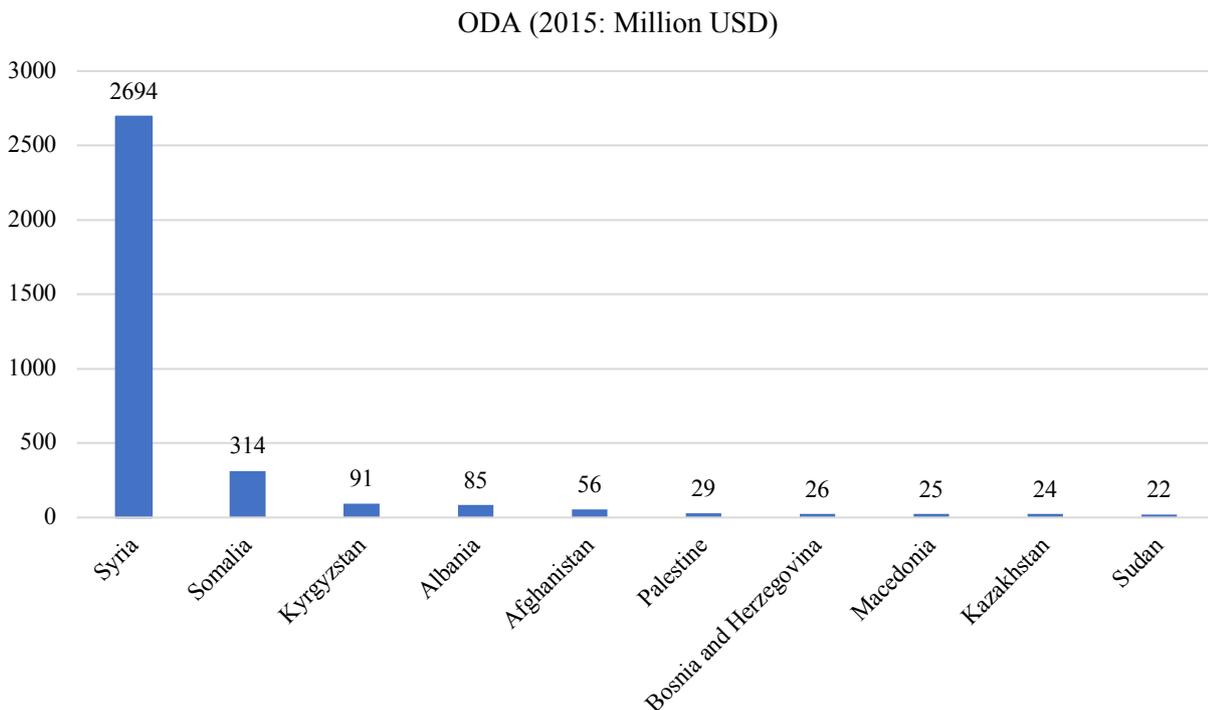


Figure 4. Top 10 recipients of Turkish ODA in 2015

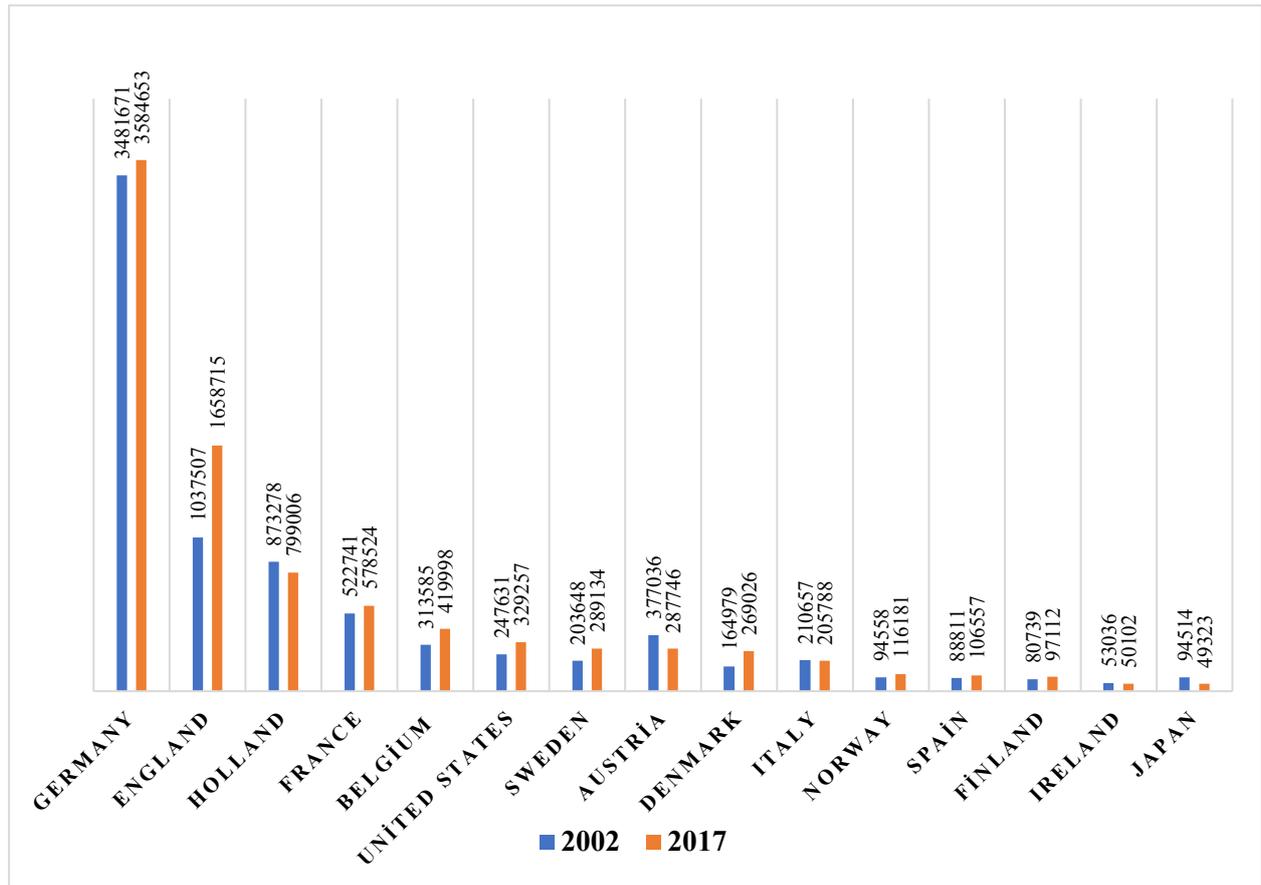


Figure 5. In-bound tourists to Turkey from 15 OECD countries in 2002 and 2017

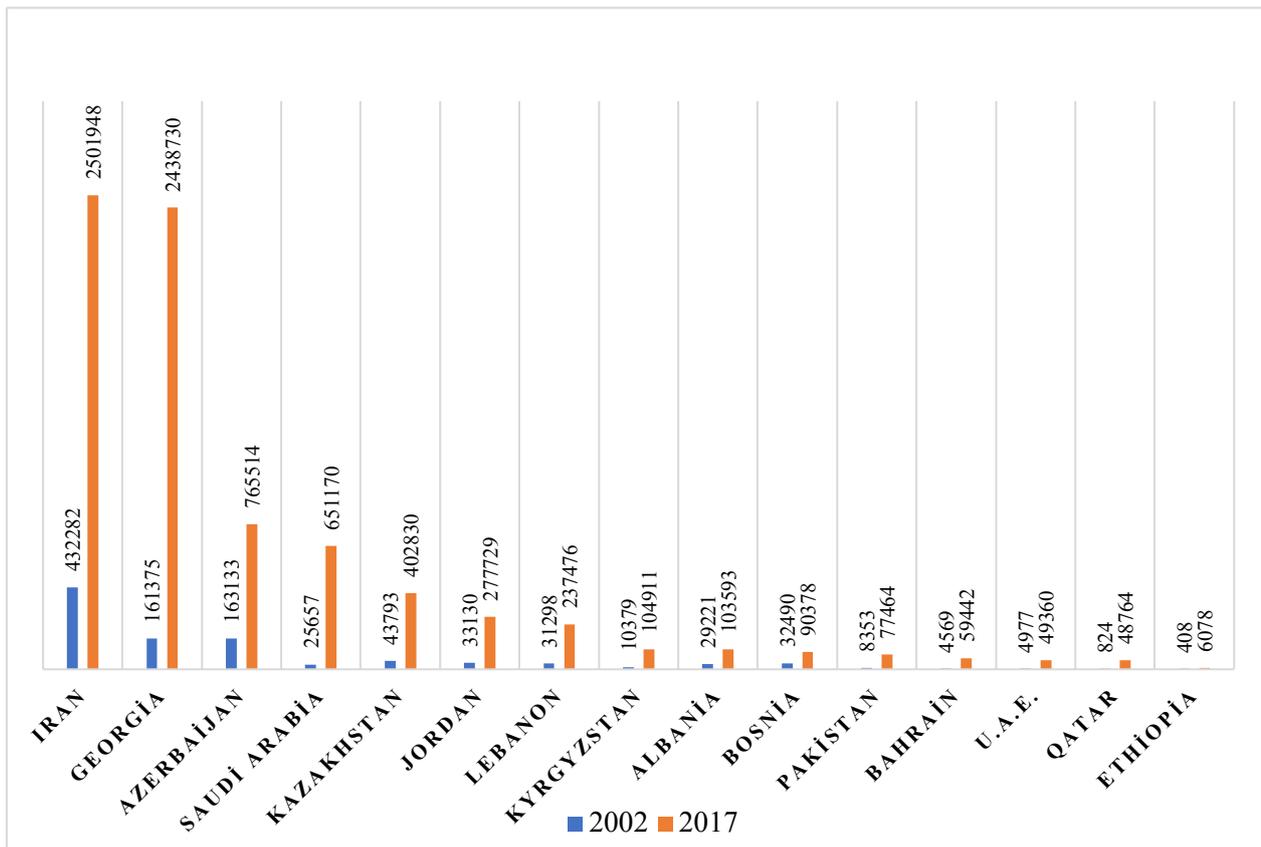


Figure 6. In-bound tourists to Turkey from 15 targeted countries in 2002 and 2017

Figure 6, on the other hand, shows an opposite trend in number of tourists from targeted regions of Turkey's new foreign policy. It is evident that there is a drastic increase in number of tourists from 15 countries that are culturally and historically similar to Turkey, which are the main targets of Turkish soft power policies. As argued in this article, Turkey mainly focuses on regions that has a cultural or historical tie, which includes countries in former Ottoman territories, such as the Middle East and the Balkans, Turkic republics in Central Asia, and majority Muslim countries in Africa.

In all the 15 countries in the figure that are within the targeted regions for Turkey, we see a significant increase in number of in-bound tourists as high as 25,15, and 5 folds for Saudi Arabia, Georgia and Iran, respectively. The relatively stable number of tourists from OECD countries and the dramatic increase in number of visitors from targeted regions cannot be explained with natural fluctuation of tourists to Turkey. It is a result of a planned shift of foreign policy priorities for Turkey, particularly a result of its targeted soft power policies.

There is a visible correlation between origins of tourists visiting Turkey and official development assistance recipients, importers of Turkish soup operas, new destinations of THY flights, origins of in-bound foreign students and other tools of target soft power for Turkey. Therefore, we can conclude that for an emerging economy with a significant tourism industry, a foreign policy approach that prioritizes targeted soft power can affect the origins of in-bound tourists.

6. Conclusion

With its "new Turkish foreign policy" doctrine under AKP government, Turkey reoriented its foreign policy priorities within the last two decades. Seeking a recognized regional power status, the AKP foreign policy elites have been using several tools including increasing countries soft power particularly within targeted regions. Turkey has invested in soft power generating policies towards regions where it has historical and cultural ties. This article studies the impact of targeted soft power policies of Turkey on in-bound tourists visiting the countries. The data shows a

correlation between the regions that are targeted by Turkey's soft initiatives and number of tourists visiting the country from countries in these regions.

The finding of this study is preliminary and only leads the way for further research on this topic. This article only puts forward a hypothesis that there is a positive correlation between soft power target regions and number of in-bound tourists from those regions. To argue a causation between the two, further quantitative analyses are necessary. A study that includes several other emerging economies with serious tourism industry and a cross-sectional time-series analysis of factors that affect the origins of in-bound tourists can yield more robust results.

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