Ottoman soft power and its place in the international system

Osmanlı yumuşak gücü ve uluslararası sistemdeki yeri

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ABSTRACT

Soft power is a new concept in international relations and its history has been a question of interest in recent years. The term has been also widely used in the studies of Turkish foreign policy in the last two decades. This study aims to demonstrate that the use of soft power in Turkish foreign policy was not new and has a history of its own which dates back to the Ottoman Empire. The study will not present a historical study of its own that focuses on a certain event or phenomenon but bring together examples of how the Ottoman Empire has used means of soft power in its relationship with other states. By comparing these examples over time, it hopes to call attention to how Ottoman soft power has changed over time depending on the shifts in the international balance of power.

Keywords: Abdülaziz, Abdülhamid II, Ottoman state, pan-islamism, soft power

JEL Codes: F50, N45, Y80

ÖZ

Yumuşak güç, uluslararası ilişkilerde kullanılan yeni bir kavramdır ve tarihi son yıllarda merak konusu olmuştur. Kavram, son yirmi yıldır yapılan Türk dış politikası çalışmalarında da kullanılmıştır. Bu makale, Türk dış politikasındaki yumuşak güç kullanımının yeni bir durum olmadığını ve Osmanlı İmparatorluğu dönemine geri giden bir tarihi olduğunu göstermeyi hedeflemektedir. Çalışma, tek bir olay üzerine odaklanarak kendi tarihsel araştırmasını ortaya koymak yerine, Osmanlı devletinin diğer devletlerle olan ilişkilerindeki yumuşak güç kullanımının çeşitli örneklerini sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Böylelikle farklı örnekler arasında zamansal bir karşılaştırma yapılarak, Osmanlı yumuşak gücünün, değişen uluslararası güç dengelerine göre nasıl adapte olduğuna dikkat çekilecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Abdülaziz, II. Abdülhamid, Osmanlı devleti, Panislamizm, yumuşak güç

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Introduction

Soft power is a new concept of international relations first coined by Joseph Nye in his article "Soft Power" (1990). In this study, Nye defined soft or co-optive power as the ability of a country "to get other countries want what it wants" as opposed to hard or command power which can be described as "ordering others to do what it wants" (1990). Nye also claimed that using soft power was less costly than military intervention (1990). Even though Nye developed more complex and refined definitions of soft power in his later work (2004), this study will stick to this broader definition that was initially made. It is also important to note that the 1990s provided a fertile ground for this term to gain value as the end of the Cold War was marked by the victory of liberalism as pointed out by Fukuyama's seminal "end of history" thesis (1992).

In the 2000s, however, a decade after the end of the Cold War, new rivals to the American-led hegemonic world developed as the unipolar system gradually turned into a multipolar one. Therefore, soft power's convenience was questioned as analysts criticized the fact that using soft power without resorting to hard power would not be sufficient in convincing states or other international actors to follow desired policies (Fan, 2008). The 9/11 attacks were a major turning point in developing this new perspective. However, especially in the Middle Eastern context, the 2003 occupation of Iraq showed

the United States that only using hard power would not be sufficient either as the resistance movement continued after the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime (Nye, 2008a). Therefore, a new concept was introduced to the literature, and smart power was described as a combination of soft and hard power (Nye, 2008b, 2009). Arab Spring seems to have further contributed to Nye's belief in smart power as he says "to deal with a government and a civil society requires an extraordinary ability to use both hard and soft power" after recognizing the power of the people in the Egyptian and Tunisian developments (2011b).

The importance of soft power for Turkish foreign policy became visible not in the 1990s when the concept was first coined but in the 2000s (Oğuzlu, 2007). There were several reasons for this. First, Turkey was not in a position to use soft power in the 1990s when it was bothered by both economic problems and political instability. Moreover, as the United States had to use smart power with the occupation of Iraq and later on resorted to the strategy of leading from behind with the Obama administration, the role of soft power player was delegated to Turkey which was supposed to lead by example. This was also in line with the contemporary aims of the Turkish foreign policy which were described as establishing a good relationship with Turkey's neighbors parallel to its EU membership process (Altunışık, 2008). Last but not least, the United States' new policy of the Broader Middle East and North African Initiative also created a suitable environment for Turkey to use soft power (Altunışık, 2005). Thus, "discussions on Turkey's soft power are interconnected to Europe's and the United States' need for security and to locating a moderate Muslim voice in the Middle East" (Çevik, 2019).

In this context, Turkey was seen as the precursor of soft power in the Middle East in the 2000s. It was frequently identified as a model country (Altunışık, 2005). Turkish politicians welcomed this new image as their foreign policy was based on developing a good relationship with neighboring countries. For this purpose, a variety of soft power tools were used. While there was a reference to the common historical and cultural roots of the shared Ottoman past with the Arab countries, sports diplomacy came to the forefront in the case of Armenia. There was also an emphasis put on Turkish TV series which became popular not only in the Middle East but also in the Balkans and Latin America even though there is no clear evidence of whether the state consciously made use of them in its soft power policy. As for Africa, scholarship programs and humanitarian or development aid can be counted as other examples of Turkish soft power (Çevik, 2019). Last but not least, another area where Turkey used its soft power was playing the role of mediator in regional conflict resolution (Altunışık, 2008). However, in recent years, Turkish foreign policy had to use also hard power more frequently as developments in the aftermath of the Arab Spring required state officials to pay more attention to security issues, and thus, the attention paid to soft power gradually faded away.

Given this background, this study aims to remember the concept of soft power not by focusing on current developments in Turkish foreign policy but in a different arena of research. While the early 2000s came to the forefront as the decade in which soft power was on the agenda of Turkish foreign policymakers, this period was by no means the first time Turkey used soft power. Ottoman Empire was also a user of soft power throughout its history. However, contrary to the existence of soft power in Ottoman diplomacy for a long while, there is not much literature on this subject.

Even though the Ottoman state's means of providing legitimacy within the domains of the empire has been a point of interest (Deringil, 1998), there has been not much research on how Ottoman statesmen tried to establish legitimacy outside the borders of the empire. Only recently, an article has been published on Ottoman soft power in which the author analyzes two case studies: the distribution of Ottoman medals to Indian subjects of the British Empire and the administration of the overseas estates of deceased Ottoman subjects in Canada (Ahmed, 2020).

This study hopes to call attention to some other examples of Ottoman soft power both before and during the 19th century. Paying attention to the Ottomans' use of soft power may contribute to research in this field as research on this concept usually associates the history of soft power with the 19th century. However, as Fan suggests, "the thinking behind the concept of soft power can be traced even back more than 2000 years" (Fan, 2008). Similarly, as the following pages will show, Ottoman statesmen used soft power not only in the 19th century but even in its early period. Moreover, as the above-mentioned analysis showed, the literature on Turkish soft power proliferated at a time when this was in line with the contemporary US and EU policies. Therefore, providing examples from the Ottoman case may contribute to the existing literature by showing that Turkish foreign policy used soft power even at times when this did not suit Western interests and policies.

This perspective may contribute to the existing literature on not only Turkish soft power but also to the general theoretical discussions on soft power. As pointed out by some analysts, Nye's concept has been criticized for its Western-oriented nature assuming that only liberal democracies can assert soft power (Fan, 2008; Thussu, 2014). Nye suggests that "an authoritarian system has a hard time generating soft power because much of soft power is generated by civil society, not by governments" (2011b). Going one step further, there is a tendency to differentiate soft power from sharp power and Nye concludes that "openness and limits on deliberate deception distinguish soft from sharp power and should remain the hallmark of democratic public opinion" (2020). However, as new research shows, a variety of non-Western countries can also assert soft power ranging from providing humanitarian aid to presenting an alternative economic model. Therefore, research on Ottoman soft power may contribute to the literature in both time and space dimensions, first by orienting our attention to a period when modern democracies did not emerge yet and secondly to a space that is generally not associated with Western politics.

For this purpose, this study will be organized into two parts. In the first part, the use of soft power in the early period of the Ottoman Empire will be analyzed. Here, examples of soft power tools including marriage diplomacy, capitulations, and the Orthodox Patriarchate will be discussed. Then in the second part, which will focus on the 19th century, attention will be paid to the reigns of two consecutive sultans. In line with its organization, the study will use a comparative method on a diachronic basis. First, the article will compare 19th century-usage of Ottoman soft power with the previous centuries. Second, another comparison will be made between the two sultans of the 19th century. The comparison of Sultan Abdülaziz and Sultan Abdülhamid II will display how the use of soft power depended on the changes in the European balance of power. This is important for the main argument of the article because, as also the comparison of the earlier centuries

with the 19th century will show, how and why the Ottoman state used soft power changed according to how the balance of power in the European state system changed. Therefore, it is difficult to conclude that the use of soft power was actually independent of hard power.

Both comparisons will show that the Ottoman Empire's soft power cannot be analyzed in isolation from the changes in the international system. Therefore, the Ottoman case may demonstrate that using soft power alone would not be sufficient to enable a state let other actors do what it wants. In the long run, this perspective may raise attention to further research on the Ottoman Empire as a user of smart power as well. This new approach to Ottoman history may also bring into the field a theoretical dimension by exemplifying the Ottoman Empire as a precursor of both realist and liberal theories of international relationships.

Early Examples of Ottoman Soft Power

Marriage Diplomacy

The Foundation Era: During its foundation era, the Ottoman Empire established marriage bonds with several states around its vicinity (Goffman, 2014; Sander, 2014). For example, Sultan Murat I married Tamara, a woman from the Bulgarian dynasty, and made this kingdom a vassal of the Ottoman state in the 1370s. His son Bayezid married Devletşah Hatun, the daughter of the Germiyanoğulları principality and thus the Ottomans acquired land in western Anatolia as dowry. In return, Germinyanoğulları received Ottoman protection to balance a common rival, Karamanoğulları principality. Later, Bayezid also married Despina, the daughter of the Serbian king. This marriage symbolized the vassal status of the Serbian kingdom after its defeat in the Kosovo War of 1389. Last but not least, Sultan Bayezid also acquired the territory from the Aydınoğulları principality by marrying their daughter Hafsa Hatun in 1390 (Çekiç, 2018; Sakaoğlu, 2015).

Mehmet I and Murat II also married the daughters and granddaughters of Dulkadiroğulları and Candaroğulları principalities, respectively. Both were political marriages. When Emine Hatun became the wife of Mehmet I, the Dulkadiroğulları principality acquired Ottoman protection from the Mamluks (Sakaoğlu, 2015). By then, this principality was an arena for the power struggle between three surrounding and bigger states: the Ottomans in the west, the Mamluks in the south, and the Akkoyunlu in the east. This policy of establishing marriage bonds with the Dulkadiroğulları principality continued in the following decades when Mehmet II also married their daughter (Sakaoğlu, 2015).

Similarly, when Murat II married Hatice Halime Hatun, the Candaroğulları principality was scene to a political struggle. This time, the struggle was carried out not against other states but within the principality itself. There was an internal feud between Isfender Bey and one of his sons. In this political context, Murat II annexed a part of the Candaroğulları principality and in return, Isfender Bey chose to establish a marriage bond between the two states to prevent further Ottoman expansion (Sakaoğlu, 2015). By doing so, the Ottomans expanded their territories not only through wars but also by peaceful means.

As seen in these examples, however, Ottoman statesmen established marriage bonds not only with Anatolian principalities, but

they followed this policy also in the west with their non-Muslim rivals. The most famous example is Sultan Orhan who made the Ottoman principality a part of the Byzantine palace by marrying the daughter of a dynastic family in Istanbul which saw the Ottomans as an ally against other powers in the capital. Sultan Orhan married the daughter of the next Byzantine emperor Kantakuzenos in 1346 and thus became the groom of the Byzantine palace. He used marriage diplomacy to make use of the competition among the political cliques in Istanbul.

Back then, there was an internal conflict in the Byzantine Empire, and during this civil war of 1341–1347, the palace was divided between different families. One clique preferred to ally with the Serbian kingdom against the Ottoman Empire, whereas the other clique saw the Serbs as a more urgent threat than the Ottomans and therefore preferred to combine their forces with the Ottomans against the Serbian king (İnalcık, 2017a; İnbaşı, 2010; Turan, 2015). The marriage bond between the Ottoman sultan and one of these cliques in the Byzantine palace was a direct result of this policy. In the end, Sultan Orhan's father-in-law managed to take control of the palace and the territories around Istanbul with the help of the Ottomans and became the next emperor (Sander, 2014). Thus, marriage diplomacy ended the war of succession in the Byzantine palace (Başkan, 2017).

As a result of this marriage diplomacy, Sultan Orhan acquired territory for the first time in the European continent right across the Dardanelles (Goffman, 2014; İnalcık, 2017a; Sakaoğlu, 2015). In other words, the Ottomans started conquering European territories by not only making wars but also by using soft power. Moreover, marrying Orthodox women helped Ottoman statesmen not only to expand their territories by peaceful means but also by creating a peaceful context within the empire.

Another famous political marriage between an Ottoman sultan and a Christian princess was between Murat II and Mara Despina, the daughter of the Serbian king. As a result of this marriage, the Ottomans conquered more territories of the Serbian kingdom which had already become a vassal of the Ottoman state. In addition, the king also agreed to pay a certain amount of money as dowry. Initially, however, this political marriage did not yield the desired results. As the Ottoman state failed to prevent a reproachment between the Serbian and Hungarian kingdoms, the sultan decided to make a final war with the Serbs and conquered the rest of their territories in 1438. Thus, although the marriage of Murat II with Mara did not initially establish a peaceful relationship between the two states, this former Serbian princess played a more important role in Ottoman diplomacy during the reign of her stepson Mehmet II. When Mehmet II conquered Istanbul in 1453 and allowed other states to establish permanent embassies in the new Ottoman capital, the Venetian ambassadors visited Mara Despina to get information from her about the new sultan. She continued to be an intermediary between the Venetians and the Ottomans for a few more decades until her death. For example, she was a mediator between the two states during the negotiations before the 1463–1479 war. She also had a well-established tie with the Republic of Ragusa which had already become a vassal of the Ottoman state in 1365. Mara Despina also cared for the welfare of the Orthodox subjects of the Ottoman Empire and thus had a say in the election of important figures in the Eastern Orthodox Church. She also had close ties with the Phanariot

families in Istanbul. Thus, Mara Despina was not only a good example of Ottoman marriage diplomacy but also an important figure in Mehmed II's policy of protection of the Orthodox community after the conquest of Istanbul as will be discussed below (Sakaoğlu, 2015).

Marriage Diplomacy in the Following Centuries

Women continued to be actors of soft power in Ottoman diplomacy in the next centuries as well. Especially, during the 16th and 17th centuries which are known as the "Reign of Women," female members of the dynasty played an important role not only in the internal politics of the empire but also in its foreign relations. By this time, the Ottoman Empire had become one of the most powerful states in European politics and had ceased seeing itself as the first among equals when its foreign relations were concerned. Therefore, by this time, female members of the Ottoman dynasty were no more the daughters of other dynasties. Ottoman sultans had started marrying Christian slaves, but they were not allowed to continue practicing their own religion and had to convert to Islam. However, these women, who became powerful figures in the Ottoman palace as either the wife or mother of the sultans, kept their ties with their original birthplace. These organic ties were used as a tool in Ottoman diplomacy to establish a friendly relationship with certain European states.

Hürrem Sultan, the wife of Suleiman the Magnificent, played an important role in the Ottoman–Polish relations because of her Ukrainian ties. Her daughter Mihrimah also became a part of the letter diplomacy between the two countries. Hürrem Sultan also sent letters to the female members of the Safavid dynasty. Nurbanu Sultan, the wife of Selim II who ruled the empire after his father Suleiman, was a key figure in Ottoman–Venetian and Ottoman–French relations. Similarly, Nurbanu's daughter-in-law Safiye Sultan was also originally a Venetian and she played a similar role as the wife of the next Sultan Murat III. She once managed to prevent the break of a war between the two states because of a problem related to the corsairs and let the Venetians pay compensation to the Ottoman state. She was also effective in conducting letter diplomacy with the Queen of England Elizabeth I and with the House of Medici in Florence (Bilim, 2019; Peirce, 1993, 2020; Sakaoğlu, 2015).

During these years, both Poland and Venice were rivals of the Ottoman Empire. Poland and the Ottoman Empire were trying to take control of the Eurasian steps on the northern side of the Black Sea coast (İnalcık, 2017b). To the south, the Ottoman state and Venice were both trying to control the eastern Mediterranean. However, at the same time, Ottoman statesmen had to keep these states on their side to balance their relationship with stronger enemies. As far as the Ottoman–Polish relations was concerned, the main rival was the Habsburgs. When it came to the Ottoman–Venetian relations, both states were concerned about the expansion of the Portuguese to the Far East which threatened the Mediterranean trade that was one of the main sources of revenue for both the Ottomans and the Venetians. Therefore, the Ottoman Empire had to compete with Poland and Venice on one front while at the same time continuing a relatively stable relationship with both of them on another front. At that point, female members of the Ottoman dynasty came to the stage and played an important role in keeping an informal dialogue with their original states, thus allowing the Ottoman sultan to stay behind from formally negotiating certain issues with these states (Bilim, 2019).

Religious Diplomacy

The Use of the Patriarchate as a Diplomatic Tool

Marriage diplomacy is a good example of how the Ottoman Empire made use of soft power in its expansion policy. It shows that the Ottomans used marriage diplomacy not as a tool of identity politics and that they established dynastic ties not only with their Muslim neighbors but also with Christian states. In the following centuries, the Ottomans continued this pragmatic policy by developing informal alliances with certain sects within Christianity depending on the balance of power in European politics.

Initially, the above-mentioned alliance between the Ottomans and the Byzantines lasted only for a short while, and soon, another clique took control of Byzantine capital in 1354. The new power-holders of Istanbul preferred a unified Christianity and therefore suggested allying with their Catholic co-religionists. They were planning to come over the schism within Christendom and revive the Greco-Roman civilization by establishing close ties between the Catholic Papacy in Rome and the Orthodox Patriarchate in Istanbul (İnalcık, 2017a).

In 1439, this clique went so far in officially uniting the two churches by declaring loyalty to Rome, but this decision was accepted by neither the Orthodox Byzantine society nor the Patriarchate (Ercan, 2010; Turan, 2015). On the contrary, this policy made it easier for the Ottomans to conquer Istanbul as some residents preferred Muslim rule over Catholic domination. Therefore, the patriarch said that he would prefer to see the Turkic turban rule over Istanbul rather than the Latin hood (Bilim, 2019; Ercan, 2010).

After the conquest of Istanbul, Sultan Mehmet II intended to create a world empire. He saw himself as the new Roman emperor and used the title of kaiser on the coins that he printed after the conquest (Turan, 2017). Subsequent sultans continued this imperial policy. This idea peaked when Suleiman the Magnificent started sitting on a throne with a splendid crown on his head to give the message that, instead of the Holy Roman Emperor, he was the successor of the Roman Empire (Goffman, 2014; Turan, 2015).

The Patriarchate played an important role in this imperial policy. After the conquest of Istanbul, the newly appointed patriarch was selected from the clique which was opposed to the unification of the Catholic and Orthodox churches (Ortaylı, 2017; Sander, 2014). The new patriarch believed that the collapse of the Byzantine Empire was in favor of the Orthodox world because the Patriarchate could now act freely from the Papacy. Moreover, the Ottoman sultan gave the Patriarchate extensive privileges like collecting taxes and providing education and justice services to the Orthodox community. Moreover, in the official state protocol, the patriarch was treated equally with ministers (Turan, 2015). In return for these privileges, the sultan expected the Patriarchate to guarantee the unity and loyalty of its Orthodox subjects. Therefore, in the long run, this privileged position of the Patriarchate helped the Ottoman state to legitimize its expansion in the Balkans.

For example, before the conquest of Cyprus, the patriarch asked the islanders not to resist Ottoman occupation so that they could end the Catholic Venetian rule over the island (İnalcık, 2017a). A year before the conquest, representatives of the island had already sent to the Ottoman Empire a letter demanding the

conquest of the island by the Ottomans. Therefore, some residents did not resist the occupation. On the contrary, they provided logistical support to the Ottoman soldiers (Çevikel, 2010). Similarly, Ottoman statesmen used the divide between the Orthodox population and their Catholic rulers (Knights Hospitaller) during the conquest of Rhodes as well (Fleet, 2016). Therefore, in the long run, the divide within the Christianity gave the Ottomans a chance to use the Patriarchate as a means of soft power in its Balkan expansion. While the patriarchate was used in the expansion of the empire in the Balkans, it is also important to note that the Ottoman state also made use of its own Muslim clergy in its conquest of the Anatolian peninsula. The *ulema* was frequently sent to other Turkic principalities as envoys to solve problematic issues (Elçi, 2019).

A Second Attempt with the Protestants

The Ottoman state tried to follow a similar policy when the Protestant Reformation started in Western Europe. Both the Protestants and the Ottomans had a common enemy: the Habsburg dynasty which controlled the Holy Roman Empire. Therefore, Protestants were allowed to make propaganda in the Hungarian and Romanian territories of the Empire (İnalcık, 2016, 2017b). In return, countries like England continued to trade with the Ottomans, and contrary to the ban of the Holy Roman Emperor, they sold the Ottoman Empire strategic goods like steel and gunpowder (İnalcık, 2017b; Turan, 2015). As will be analyzed in the following pages, the policy of capitulations also played an important role in these commercial relations.

Contrary to the Orthodox community however, which which was in close contact and therefore more familiar with the Ottoman rule, Protestants living in western Europe saw the Ottomans as a threat rather than a friendly state which could be a potential ally. Therefore, when Suleiman the Magnificent sent an envoy to Martin Luther and offered Ottoman protection, he simply replied "God Bless Me!" (İnalcık, 2017b). Luther also used anti-Ottoman propaganda to widen his own denomination. He saw the Turks as a godly punishment sent to the Catholics because of their sinful mistakes. However, just like the Ottomans, Luther was also a realist and therefore he did not hesitate to use the Ottomans also as a positive image in his anti-Catholic propaganda. The Protestant reformation and the following sectarian wars were not only a religious conflict within Christianity but states used this era also to increase their political power in opposition to other dynasties. The French were an example of this policy as they, as a Catholic state, made an alliance both with the Protestants and the Ottomans to decrease the power of the Habsburgs which controlled most of central Europe and the Iberian Peninsula (Isom-Verhaaren, 1996).

Protestant Reformation was also accompanied by peasant revolts in most of Europe. In this context, to take the support of the peasants, Luther compared the economic policies of the Habsburgs with that of the Ottomans. According to him, the Ottoman Empire was more successful in securing the welfare of its subjects. The Ottoman central state administration provided a more regular taxation policy than the arbitrary power of the feudal lords (Faroqhi, 2017; Goffman, 2014; İnalcık, 2017a; Turan, 2015). Therefore, in the following years, other Protestant leaders preferred to increase their dialogue with the Orthodox Patriarchate in Istanbul (İnalcık, 2017b). Thus, although not as successful as among the Orthodox community, Ottoman statesmen continued to use the Patriarchate as a symbol of their soft power over the Christian world.

Economic Diplomacy

Economic Tools of Soft Power

The Ottoman Empire also used economic diplomacy as a means of soft power. The most effective economic tool of Ottoman soft power was the capitulations. From today's point of view, capitulations are usually treated in a pejorative way as the major cause of Ottoman decline. According to this view, by giving economic privileges to foreign merchants, capitulations prevented Ottoman industrialization. However, during the height of the empire's power, capitulations were given by Ottoman sultans as a symbol of their both economic and political predominance.

As a centrally administered state, the major economic concern of the empire was to make sure that there was a sufficient supply of goods in the internal market (İnalcık, 2017b). Therefore, Ottoman statesmen gave privileges to foreigners to facilitate imports. In contrast to the mercantilist policies of their European counterparts, Ottoman monarchs applied provisionist policies which favored imports over exports (Faroqhi, 2017; Goffman, 2014). Thus, capitulations were useful means of providing legitimacy and an example of how the Ottoman state applied rationalist and realistic policies. Moreover, capitulations helped facilitate Mediterranean trade when other alternative trade routes had started to be used in the Age of Discoveries.

As for foreign relations, capitulations were used as a diplomatic tool to widen the anti-Habsburg alliance in Europe. By giving economic concessions, the Ottoman state helped France, Netherlands, and England become independent actors from the Holy Roman Empire (Faroqhi, 2017; İnalcık, 2017a; Turan, 2015). In other words, the Ottoman Empire economically supported the modern state-building process in Europe in opposition to the Habsburgs who ruled both Spain and Austria and claimed a universal right over all of Christendom. As Nye suggested "successful economic performance . . . can produce both the hard power of sanctions and restricted market access as well as the soft power of attraction and emulation of success" (2011a). In the Ottoman case, the empire seems to have utilized its economic success as a means of soft power by engaging neutral states in its policy of combating common enemy forces. As for the expansion in the East, the Ottoman state also used economic means by purchasing lands from Anatolian principalities. For example, territories around Isparta were acquired from the Hamidoğulları principality by this means (Çekiç, 2018).

Economic Symbols of Soft Power

The Ottoman Empire also used economic symbols as a means of soft power. The Ottoman state provided all the supplies that foreign envoys needed once they entered Ottoman territories (Bilim, 2019; Özkan, 2017). To take care of their needs, a state official was appointed who accompanied the envoys wherever they went. This allowed the Ottoman state not only to keep a close eye on the envoys to prevent espionage but also symbolically to demonstrate the economic power of the empire (Dönmez, 2018; Gürkan, 2012).

Before meeting with the sultan, envoys were hosted in a feast and they were required to wear a sumptuous fur kaftan. This implied that their look was not appropriate to appear before the sultan. Then, the envoys were asked to wait for a while before being accepted by the sultan who would not directly talk with the envoys, but let his bureaucrats act as intermediaries between

himself and the diplomatic representatives of other states (İskit, 2012; Özkan, 2017). Similarly, the Ottoman state also cared for the good appearance of its envoys. Before going to foreign missions, they were provided with splendent clothes and accessories (İskit, 2012).

Envoys were accepted to the palace usually on the same day when the salaries of the soldiers were distributed in an official ceremony (Turan, 2015). During the meetings held with the envoys, officials also intentionally discussed matters of foreign aid sent to other countries. Thus, Ottoman statesmen eagerly showed their soft power during diplomatic negotiations. Another popular subject matter was the evaluation of petitions sent by Ottoman subjects (İskit, 2012). All these showed to the envoys not only the economic power of the Ottoman empire but also how it used its wealth for the sake of its own and other states' subjects' welfare and well-being. This was a symbolic message displaying not only the richness of the empire but also its just and fair administration. Therefore, when meeting with the envoys, the sultan would keep his sword on one side as the symbol of his military power and his seal on the other side as the symbol of his political power based on justice (Turan, 2017).

Sending luxurious gifts to other states was also frequently observed (İskit, 2012; Özkan, 2017; Tuncer, 2017). However, the Ottoman Empire's policy of gift-giving seems to have changed over the course of time. As the empire started to gradually and relatively lose its military power, gifts received from other states were interpreted as a display of Ottoman soft power. This change in attitude was seen in the way gifts were portrayed in Ottoman miniatures. At the height of the empire's power, gifts were displayed in a marginalized way often depicted in the corners of the imagery. They were symbolized by closed boxes and disguised from the public view. Gradually, however, instead of neglect, the Ottomans showed more interest in disclosing the variety of the gifts they received from other states to underline the fact that the empire was still seen as superior by other states. Additionally, even though the number of gifts received actually declined, they were included in the miniatures more often (Casale, 2018). Thus, as Işıksel points out, "a polity's capacity for unilateral action is only as great as its effective power and symbolic capital. As long as the sultans' supposed or real military superiority continued, the Ottoman claim of unilateralism and centricity made sense both practically and ideologically" (Işıksel, 2019).

The Nineteenth Century

The Reign of Abdülaziz
In the 19th century, two consecutive eras come to the forefront as a fertile ground to understand how the Ottoman Empire used soft power. These two periods coincide with the sultanates of Sultan Abdülaziz (r. 1861–1876) and Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909). In the 19th century, the Ottoman state used soft power not to symbolize its superiority but to prove that the Ottomans were an equal partner of the European state system.

The marriage diplomacy showed that the Ottoman state used soft power in its early years as a means of emphasizing the pluralistic vision of the empire. While the main concern of the state was to territorially expand, sultans did not hesitate to marry female members of neighboring Christian or Muslim dynasties to widen their territories. At the height of its power, the Ottoman Empire used soft power in an inclusive way. For example, after the conquest of Istanbul, the Orthodox Patriarchate was used

as a tool in diplomacy to facilitate further expansion. Instead of establishing an equal relationship with other entities in a pluralistic way, by the mid-15th century, the Ottoman Empire had started seeing itself as superior. In this context, the Patriarchate was used as a messenger to invite Orthodox societies to be a part of the empire. A similar call was made to the Protestants, but this policy was not as successful as in the case of the Orthodox community due to several reasons like geographical distance or the lack of an institutional structure like the Patriarchate.

At the height of its power in the middle of the 16th century, the Ottoman state also started using economic institutions like the capitulations as a diplomatic tool for establishing soft power. However, in the 19th century which will be analyzed in the following pages, Ottoman statesmen used soft power not to create an equally pluralistic or superiorly inclusive structure of cultural politics and economy. In this era, Ottoman bureaucrats used soft power not to include but to be included in the Concert of Europe.

Abdülaziz's Visit to Europe
Abdülaziz was the first and last Ottoman sultan to visit European countries. The main goal of his trip in 1867 was to take part in the industrial expedition held in Paris. The sultan was invited by other rulers to their capital cities, and thus, the Paris trip turned out to be Europe-wide. The Ottoman state had previously participated in several world fairs, but the Paris exposition was unique because the empire was directly represented by the sultan. During his visit, Abdülaziz made negotiations, and some of these produced positive results. France decided to deport from its territories the members of the Young Ottomans which were a major source of the opposition movement against the Ottoman regime. The visit was also an example of how the Ottoman state had started using newspapers as a propaganda machine. In 1858, a media office was founded to address the European public and shape the European public opinion in favor of the Ottomans (Turan, 2015). In this context, the sultan's visit was widely covered in European newspapers and the Ottoman Empire used this as an opportunity to underline the fact that it was an equal partner of the European state system.

The European political environment provided an appropriate climate for the Ottoman Empire to improve its image using tools of soft power like media outlets. Sultan Abdülaziz's reign coincided with a long peace between the Ottoman Empire and the European countries. At that time, European powers were willing to keep peace with the Ottoman Empire due to several reasons. During this period, European states were engaged in several wars related to the German and Italian unification processes. They also had to deal with colonial uprisings like the Great Sepoy Rebellion in India. Thus, they were hoping that keeping good relations with the Ottoman Empire would help improve their relations with their own Muslim subjects in the colonies (Gülaçar, 2016). In this context, they were at least as eager as the Ottoman Empire to spread the word about the friendly relationship between the two sides. Therefore, both Ottoman and European statesmen were interested in using communication networks including newspapers. Russian Tsar Alexander II was concerned about these developments which created a fertile ground for Ottoman–European rapprochement. After the trip of Sultan Abdülaziz, the Tsar invited him to Saint Petersburg to break Russia's isolation in the European balance of power after the Crimean War. However, Abdülaziz declined this offer by

stating that they would host each other a few times every year if it were that easy to reach Ottoman–Russian friendship thanks to a few visits (Karcı, 2017).

This peaceful era was accompanied by much turmoil when the internal politics of the empire was concerned (Tuncer, 2017). There were several uprisings around the empire. Serbian and Romanian problems had been only recently resolved when Sultan Abdülaziz had set sail for Europe. Moreover, a revolt in Bulgaria had just started (Gülaçar, 2016) and the Cretan revolt continued when the sultan visited European capitals. However, these revolts did not become matters of concern for the European powers during the diplomatic negotiations (Tuncer, 2017; Turan, 2015). This attitude was quite in contrast to what would follow during the next sultan's reign. As mentioned above, European states wanted to maintain their good relationship with the Ottoman state and promised to protect the territorial integrity of the empire in an era when Russia was expanding in the east. In other words, in their "Great Game" with Russia, European powers like Britain needed to keep the Ottoman Empire on their side. This, however, did not last long and changed dramatically at the end of the 1870s as will be discussed below.

The fact that the European balance of power played an important role in the way the Ottoman state used soft power can be observed also in the example of Pan-Islamism. In contrast to the next sultan, Sultan Abdülaziz was hesitant to refer to this policy in his relationship with the Turkic khanates of Central Asia. In the 1860s when Russia was expanding in the region, these states saw the Ottoman Empire as the unifier of Islam and therefore asked for help in response to Russian expeditions. The Ottoman state, however, hesitated to send help not only because of logistical reasons like the distance between the two regions but also because of its politics based on balance of power. Thus, in an era when the Ottoman Empire was in a peaceful relationship with Russia in the aftermath of the Crimean War, Ottoman statesmen asked the khanates to comply with the treaties that they have signed because the empire was not powerful enough to risk its peace with Russia (Çalışkan, 2018). Thus, the Ottoman Empire followed a realistic logic in its policy of Pan-Islamism and applied this policy in practice only when it suited its interest as will be the case during the reign of Abudülhamid II.

The Reign of Abdülhamid II

During the reign of Abdülhamid II, just like in that of his predecessor Sultan Abdülaziz, there were several uprisings in the empire, most notably of which were observed in the eastern provinces. There were at least two waves of Armenian revolts in the first half of the 1890s and then in the early 1900s. Armenian rebels also used other means of destabilizing the empire like the bomb attack on the Ottoman Bank in 1896 and the assassination attempt to Sultan Abdülhamid II in 1905 (Özcan, 2010b). The details of these events are beyond the scope of this article, but what is relevant to the content of this article is how these events were covered in the European press. As mentioned above, European states barely paid attention to similar revolts in Crete or the Balkans which took place in the 1860s. At that time, the press was more interested in covering the trip of Sultan Abdülaziz as the Ottoman Empire was still seen as an ally to balance Russian expansion. This attitude soon changed as a result of shifts in the balance of power in Europe.

Before Sultan Abdülaziz, Sultan Abdülmecid was another Ottoman sultan whose image in the European public opinion was positive. For example, during the 1848 rebellions, several Hungarian rebel leaders had taken refuge in the Ottoman Empire. Even though Austria and Russia had asked for their return, Abdülmecid refused this offer and the refugees stayed in the Ottoman Empire. This decision was well accepted by Britain. There was such joy in the British society about the Ottoman attitude that several British youngsters freed the horses of the Ottoman ambassador's carriage and pulled it on their own as a gesture (Subaşı, 2018). Hence, when the western European powers were engaged in their own internal struggles like the 1848 rebellions and when Russia used this political environment to advance its own interests in the Balkans, the Ottoman Empire was seen as a useful balancing actor.

Starting from the late 1870s onward, however, European powers were no more interested in protecting Ottoman territorial integrity. Instead of Russia, they had to deal with a much closer competitor, namely, Germany which had recently finished its unification process and started to be a major industrial and military power. Thus, to balance Germany, European powers like the French and the British decided to improve their relationship with Russia, and this in turn meant that they could sacrifice their friendly relationship with the Ottoman Empire. Hence, similar events including the nationalist uprisings were dealt with in a completely different manner in the European press depending on when they took place. Contrary to Abdülaziz who was depicted as a friendly ally and a modern sultan, Abdülhamid II was given the nickname "Red Sultan" because of the "bloody" methods he used to suppress the uprisings. Although Sultan Abdülaziz did not suppress riots less roughly and although Abdülhamid II continued the modernization process of his predecessors, there was a huge contrast in the image of the two sultans because of the changes in the European balance of power.

In response, Abdülhamid established the Foreign Press Office to keep track of and refute all the related articles published in the European newspapers. He also made use of friendly state's media outlets like *Gazet de Allgemeneine* which was published in Germany. In these journals, the Ottoman Empire published articles that described the events from the Ottomans' point of view. Ambassadors and diplomats were also asked to regularly follow European media outlets and to support and fund the ones which were pro-Ottoman. They were also required to send the translation of the related articles to the Ottoman capital (Çavdar, 2017; Sander, 2014; Tuncer, 2017).

Pan-Islamism

Abdülhamid II used Pan-Islamism as a means of soft power. As a matter of fact, the first sultan to officially acquire the title of the caliph as an international symbol was Abdülhamid I. According to the Treaty of Aynalıkavak which was signed in 1779, Russia recognized the Ottoman sultan as the caliph of Crimea which had become an independent country in 1774 (Ortaylı, 1995). This was only a response to a similar "Pan-Christian" project of Russia. In 1774, the same year when Crimea gained independence, the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca had identified Russia as the protector of Orthodox Ottoman Christians and the Ottoman sultan as the caliph of the Muslims living in the Russian empire (Ortaylı, 2016). Thus, the idea of establishing bonds with Muslims living in other states' territories through a common religious identity and unity

became a part of Ottoman foreign policy in the late 18th century as a reaction to other states' expansionist policies.

During the next sultans' reign, however, the Ottoman state did not resort to Pan-Islamism in practice. The era of Selim III was marked by the events following the French Revolution. The Ottoman Empire became a part of the Napoleonic wars with the French invasion of Egypt in 1798. During the next 15 years until 1812 when the Egyptian problem was completely solved, the Ottoman Empire could play one European power against another. First, Ottoman statesmen made an alliance with England and Russia, and after the French retreated from Egypt, they turned their face to a more friendly France when the empire's allies refused to evacuate their forces from the Ottoman territories. A similar political situation prevailed during Mahmud II's reign. During the Egyptian crises of the 1830s, the sultan could play its former allies against one another. So, the presence of a multipolar international system at the turn of the 19th century allowed the Ottoman state to follow a flexible foreign policy and thus, the empire did not need to use soft power frequently.

This political context began to change during Abdülhamid II's era when stricter blocs of alliances started to emerge on the eve of World War I. Thus, Abdülhamid II became the first sultan who effectively applied Pan-Islamist ideology. By using Pan-Islamism as a tool of soft power, the sultan aimed to shape the empire's relationship with several European states. First, he tried to balance Pan-Slavism. The second target of Abdülhamid's Pan-Islamist policy was Britain where a huge Muslim population lived in the colonies. This was also valid for Russia (Turan, 2015). For example, during the Russia-Ottoman war of 1877-1878, Muslim subjects of Russia rebelled against the tsardom (Çavdar, 2017). There was always a risk that this might happen again.

There was a difference in what the Europeans and the Ottomans understood from Pan-Islamism, however. Ottoman statesmen called their policy *İttihad-ı İslam* which can be translated as "Islamic Unity." By this, they meant the cultural and historical unity of all the Muslims living in the world. Therefore, contrary to his predecessors who were not eager to use the title, Abdülhamid II frequently emphasized that he was the caliph of all the Muslims (Çavdar, 2017; Turan, 2015). Thus, he claimed to be the religious head of Muslims rather than their political leader. What the Europeans understood from Pan-Islamism was however quite different. European leaders interpreted Pan-Islamism to imply that the sultan intended to follow an expansionist policy. The image of Abdülhamid II as an irredentist leader and Pan-Islamism as an actual threat was useful to legitimize the colonial policies of the European powers who had to protect Christianity from the sultan's Islamic expansion (Özcan, 2010a).

In contrast, Abdülhamid's policy did not aim to politically unify the Muslim world by conquering all the territories where they lived. The sultan was realist and knew that neither the economic nor the military power of the empire was sufficient to practice such a worldwide unification (Turan, 2015). He knew that creating a gigantic Muslim Empire would be an unsuccessful adventure that would only further weaken and destabilize the Ottoman Empire rather than save it. Therefore, what he meant by Islamic unity was pragmatically interpreted and he applied this policy by using the empire's soft rather than hard power. Therefore, being the center of the caliphate provided an appropriate element.

Thus, Abdülhamid II used Pan-Islamism for defensive rather than offensive purposes. Pan-Islamist discourse was a good example of Ottoman Empire's deterrence policy and psychological warfare. The sultan believed that the possibility of the empire to declare jihad was a stronger weapon than actually declaring it. The ineffective response that the Ottomans received when they finally declared jihad during World War I would prove that Abdülhamid II was right. He said, "for us, jihad was a power only by name, not in body" (Çavdar, 2017; Turan, 2015; Yasamee, 2021). This sentence clearly implies that the sultan interpreted Pan-Islamism as soft rather than hard power.

For this purpose, Abdülhamid II intended to present Pan-Islamism as a much more dangerous threat than it actually was. For him, Pan-Islamism was a bluff, and he wanted the Europeans to believe that Pan-Islamism was a potential risk that could be used by the Ottomans as a weapon. Accordingly, the sultan was depicted like those other European monarchs who saw themselves as protectors of Christians living in the Ottoman Empire. Just like the French and the Russians who claimed to represent the rights of the Catholic and the Orthodox communities living in the Ottoman realms, respectively, Abdülhamid II, as the head of the Islamic caliphate, represented the rights of all the Muslims living in the European colonial territories (Turan, 2015; Yasamee, 2021). Thus, reference to Islamic unity was a response to Europeans' manipulation of religion in foreign policy for their own imperial interests (Karpat, 2001).

To practice this policy, Abdülhamid II used diplomatic methods. Former sultans had already opened several consulates in major colonial cities where Muslims lived like Bombay, Calcutta, Sri Lanka, and Singapore. The main mission of these consulates was to protect the Ottoman Empire's commercial interests. Abdülhamid II continued to open consulates in other places like, for example, Jakarta (Özcan, 2010a; Turan, 2015). However, during his reign, as the center of the caliphate, the Ottoman state also started using the consulates to solve the problems of Muslims who were living in colonial empires as the subjects of other states (Çavdar, 2017; Kılıç, 2018). Another way of making the Ottoman sultan visible as the caliph was to publish articles in Indian or Moroccan newspapers. A popular subject matter of these articles was the description of the Friday prayer ceremonies where the sultan met with his residents and where petitions from the public were collected. Thus, the image of the sultan as the caretaker of his subjects was widely distributed in the Muslim world (Turan, 2015).

The Ottoman Empire also used its Muslim identity to help friendly states, especially in their conflicts with the Ottoman Empire's rivals. When Germany asked for help, the Ottoman Empire sent an envoy to China to inculcate that the Muslims should not get involved in the Boxer Rebellion which took place from 1899 to 1901 (Turan, 2015). Similarly, during the American–Spanish War of 1898, the United States asked for help from the Ottoman Empire when they learned that there were Muslims living in the Philippines. In response, the Ottoman Empire declared a religious order asking the Pilipino Muslims to help the United States in their war against the Spanish Empire (Ayhan, 2010). These examples show that the Ottoman Empire used Pan-Islamism not to trigger revolts in other states' territories but to keep its good dialogue with either an ally like Germany or with neutral states like the United States.

The Case of the Hejaz Railway

Abdülhamid II used Pan-Islamist policy for the purpose of internal politics as well. During his reign, the rate of Muslims living in the Ottoman Empire had dramatically increased. The recent loss of the Balkan territories where most of the Ottoman Christians lived was one of the main reasons. Secondly, most of the Muslims living in the lost territories had migrated to the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, the sultan used the increasing number of Muslim subjects living in his own realms as an advantage for the empire. The best example of this was the construction of the Hejaz railway which connected Damascus to Medina. The railway would make it much easier for the Muslim pilgrims to reach Islamic holy cities. It would both reduce the costs and decrease the duration of the travel. Therefore, the construction was financed by donations from Muslims living all over the world. Abdülhamid II's call to all the world Muslims in 1900 was well-received, and one-third of the construction costs were financed by Muslim donations from India, Egypt, and Bosnia. In return, the Ottoman Empire gave medals or certificates to the donators (Karcic, 2014).

What the sultan aimed at was much more complex than only facilitating pilgrimage. He was also planning to use the railway to reach the Ottoman provinces in the Arabian Peninsula in an easier way. This was especially important after the British occupation of Egypt which resulted in the loss of control of the passage through the Suez Canal (Karcic, 2014; Turan, 2015). In other words, the sultan wanted to create an alternative land route and decrease the empire's dependence on this seaway. Hence, Abdülhamid II used Pan-Islamist rhetoric not to expand his territories but to consolidate his own power within the empire. The example of the Hejaz railway shows that the Ottoman state used Pan-Islamist policy for pragmatic purposes in a realistic and practical way rather than to create an Islamic empire based on ideological grounds (Deringil, 1998).

Rapprochement with Germany

Abdülhamid's Pan-Islamist policy was also in line with another of his foreign policy visions: establishing good relations with Germany. Germany and the Ottoman Empire preferred to create an alternative element of balance as a response to the rapprochement between Britain, France, and Russia. Since Germany did not rule over a huge Muslim population unlike Britain or Russia, the Kaiser was not concerned about Abdülhamid's pretensions to be the religious leader of all the world Muslims. Therefore, Germany supported the Ottoman state's Pan-Islamist policy (Alkan, 2010). In return, the Ottoman Empire saw Kaiser Wilhelm II as the de facto leader of Ottoman Protestants to balance the protective claims of Britain over the same community. Hence, Kaiser was allowed to open a Protestant church in Jerusalem during his second visit to the Ottoman Empire in 1898 (Sander, 2014).

The Kaiser had performed another official trip to Istanbul previously in 1889. By then, Wilhelm II had also visited Jerusalem and these two visits were widely covered in the European press. Just like Sultan Abdülaziz's visit to Europe in 1867, the Ottoman state used these two visits to depict a picture of the empire as an equal and important partner of the European state system. Especially during Kaiser's second visit, the Ottoman Empire was isolated from the Concert of Europe as a result of the recent Armenian revolts, the Cretan question, and the 1897 Ottoman–Greek war (Alkan, 2010; Sander, 2014; Turan, 2015). Therefore, the image of the friendly relationship between the Ottoman state and Germany served to break the exclusion of the Ottoman Empire from the European state system. Additionally, Abdülhamid II also underlined the fact that he was not only the caliph of all world Muslims but also still the political leader of all non-Muslim subjects of the empire. The permit given to Germany to open a Protestant church in Jerusalem was means of giving this message. Thus, the image of the Ottoman Empire as a pluralist community was still used as a tool of soft power at the end of the 19th century.

Conclusion

This study analyzed various ways in which the Ottoman state used soft power. This was by no means independent from the balance of power in the European state system. During the establishment of the empire when it was still seeing itself as the first among equals, Ottoman statesmen used marriage diplomacy to widen their territories by creating alliances through family bonds. As the empire was feeling more secure after the conquest of Istanbul, the Ottoman state started to use the Orthodox Patriarchate as a tool of diplomacy to underline its inclusive nature. Later at the height of its power, the Ottoman state also used economic means of soft power like the capitulations. In the 19th century, the main concern of the empire was to depict a picture of itself as a partner in the European balance of power. Sultan Abdülaziz was luckier in applying this policy as European powers, especially Britain, still needed to keep the Ottoman Empire on their side to balance Russia. However, as there was no need to maintain the territorial integrity of the empire after the "Great Game" of the 19th century between Russia and Britain was over, Abdülhamid II tried to fill this gap by both approaching Germany as a new alternative ally and by underlining the fact that he was the religious leader of all the Muslims living in the world. By following these policies, the sultan made use of soft power tools like cultural diplomacy as in the case of picturing the empire as the center of the Muslim world and by using press channels to underline the pluralistic nature of the empire as in the case of the opening of the Protestant church in Jerusalem. Although this study has presented a general overview of Ottoman soft power, further research using archival sources may help enrich studies of Turkish foreign policy by bringing to light less well-known examples. This in turn can help scholars and decision-makers to develop new perspectives on the subject.

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Bu makalenin amacı, Osmanlı devletinin yumuşak güç kullanımını tarihsel örnekler ışığında ele almaktır. Cevaplamaya çalıştığı temel soru, Osmanlı devletinin yumuşak gücünün değişen uluslararası koşullardan ve güç dengelerinden ne ölçüde etkilendiğidir. Bu bağlamda makale, metodolojik olarak tek bir dönem ya da olay üzerine odaklanarak tarihsel bir araştırma yürütmek yerine uzun erimli bir zaman dilimi dahilinde karşılaştırmalı bir analiz yaparak tarihi boyunca Osmanlı devletinin yumuşak güç kullanımının uluslararası sistemde yaşanan dönüşümlere dayalı olarak nasıl değiştiğini incelemeyi hedeflemektedir.

Osmanlı İmparatorluğu topraklarının büyük bir kısmını savaşarak ele geçirse de sınırlarını genişletmek için diplomatik araçlara da başvurmuştur. Kuruluş ve genişleme dönemlerinde evlilik diplomasisi, din diplomasisi ve iktisadi diplomasi şeklinde üç ayrı yumuşak güç unsuru kullanılmıştır. İmparatorluğun Avrupa'nın halen baskın gücü olduğu bu dönemde Osmanlı devlet adamları devletin kapsayıcı ve çoğulcu yönetim yapısına dikkat çekmeye çalışmıştır. Kuruluş döneminde çevresindeki devletler ve hanedanlıklarla evlilik yoluyla aile bağları kurarak topraklarını genişlettiği gibi sonrasında ise hanedanlığın önde gelen kadın mensupları aracılığıyla çeşitli devletlerle diplomatik bağlantılar kurulmuştur. Din diplomasisinde ise İstanbul'daki Fener Rum Ortodoks Patrikhanesi, özellikle halkı Ortodoks olup Venedik gibi Katolik ve Latin kökenli devletlerin kontrolü altındaki Kıbrıs gibi coğrafyaların fethinde devletin çıkarı gereği bir yumuşak güç unsuru olarak kullanılmıştır. İktisadi diplomaside ise özellikle kapitülasyonlar aracılığıyla Habsburglar gibi güçlü rakiplerin karşısında Avrupa'da güçlenmekte olan İngiltere, Fransa ve Hollanda gibi devletlere destek verilmiştir.

Yumuşak güç kullanımı on dokuzuncu yüzyılda da devam etmiştir. Ancak bu döneme gelindiğinde yumuşak gücün amacı farklılaşmıştır. Bu dönemde Osmanlı devleti yumuşak gücünü, imparatorluğun Avrupa siyasi sisteminin önemli bir parçası olduğunun altını çizmek için kullanmıştır. Bu politikanın işe yarayıp yaramadığı, Avrupa güç dengelerinde yaşanan önemli dönüşümlere göre değişkenlik göstermiştir. Osmanlı devletinin toprak bütünlüğünün Avrupa devletleri tarafından garanti altına alınmadığı yüzyılın son çeyreğinde yumuşak güç kullanımı yüzyılın ilk dönemlerine kıyasla zorlaşmıştır. Bu yüzden Osmanlı devleti Müslüman dünyasını yumuşak güç kullanabileceği yeni bir alan olarak görmeye başlamıştır. Bu tespitin teşhisi noktasında özellikle Sultan Abdülaziz ve II. Abdülhamid dönemlerinin karşılaştırılması, Osmanlı devletinin yumuşak gücünü uluslararası sistemin temelini oluşturan Avrupa güç dengesindeki değişikliklerden bağımsız olarak kullanamadığını göstermesi açısından faydalı bir örnek sunmaktadır. Zira Abdülaziz döneminde de aynen II. Abdülhamid döneminde olduğu gibi imparatorluğun çok çeşitli bölgelerinde isyanlar çıkmasına rağmen kendi ulusal çıkarı gereği bu isyanlar Avrupa devletlerinin gündeminde yer almamıştır. Aksine, isyanların devam ettiği bir dönemde Sultan Abdülaziz, Avrupa devletlerinin hükümranlarının daveti üzerine Avrupa başkentlerine geniş çaplı bir seyahat düzenlemiştir. Almanya'nın birliğini sağlamasının güç dengelerinde yarattığı etki sonrasında ise Avrupa devletlerinin Rusya karşısında Osmanlı devletine yönelik izledikleri dengeleme siyasetine gerek kalmamış ve ortak Alman tehdidi karşısında Rusya ile yaşanan yakınlaşma neticesinde Osmanlı devleti ile Avrupa devletleri arasındaki ilişkiler olumsuz bir seyir izlemeye başlamıştır. Bunun üzerine Osmanlı devleti, II. Abdülhamid döneminde Avrupa devletlerinden ziyade Müslümanların yaşadığı coğrafyalara yönelik bir yumuşak güç uygulama noktasına geçmiştir.