

## Comparative Analysis of Türkiye and Russia's Public Diplomacy on the Balkans: Example of the Russian World Foundation and Yunus Emre Institute

### Türkiye ve Rusya'nın Balkanlar'daki Kamu Diplomasinin Karşılaştırmalı Analizi: Rus Dünyası Vakfı ve Yunus Emre Enstitüsü Örneği

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#### Öz

Kamu diplomasisi devletlerin yumuşak güç araçlarını kullanarak birbirlerini sosyal, kültürel ve siyasal anlamda etkilemesiyle ortaya çıkan yeni bir diplomatik alandır. Rusya ve Türkiye bu yeni diplomasi aracını özellikle soğuk savaşın sona ermesinden itibaren yoğun bir şekilde kullanmıştır. Her iki ülke de jeopolitik açıdan güvenlik koridorunun önemli bir bölgesi olan Balkanlarda ortak kimlik araçlarıyla hareket ederek yeni bir diplomasi alanı olan kamu diplomasisini kullanmış ve kullanmaya devam etmektedir. Uluslararası İlişkiler teorilerinde kamu diplomasisi realist, liberal ve konstrüktivist perspektif ile değerlendirilmiştir. Makalede, Rusya ile Türkiye'nin kamu diplomasisi araçlarını nasıl kullandıkları aynı tarihte benzer amaçlar ile kurulan Rus Dünyası Vakfı ve Yunus Emre Enstitüsü üzerinden karşılaştırmalı analiz edilmiştir. Rus Dünyası Vakfı'nın en fazla etkili olduğu devletler olan Bulgaristan, Sırbistan ve Yunanistan'ın Rusya ile ilişkileri daha detaylı incelenirken, diğer Balkan ülkelerindeki Rus Dünyası Vakfı'nın faaliyetleri ile ilgili genel bilgiler verilmiştir. Rusya'nın faaliyet alanlarının içerik analizi yapıldığında, Rusya'nın kamu diplomasisine realist bir bakış açısıyla küresel ve bölgesel imajını restore etmek ve stratejik alan kazanmak için başvurduğu sonucu çıkmıştır. Türkiye, tarihi ve kültürel birlikteliğini korumak ve kuvvetlendirmek için bölgesel unsurlarla ortak hareket etme amacıyla kamu diplomasisini kullanmıştır. Türkiye'nin Balkanlar kamu diplomasi aracı olarak ise Yunus Emre Enstitüsü faaliyetleri incelenmiştir. Yunus Emre Enstitüsü'nün en fazla etkili olduğu bölgeler olan Bosna-Hersek, Kuzey Makedonya ve Kosova üzerinden faaliyetler daha detaylı incelenmiş diğer Balkan ülkeleri ile ilgili genel faaliyet bilgileri verilmiştir. Türkiye'nin faaliyet alanlarının içerik analizi yapıldığında ise Türkiye kamu diplomasisini konstrüktivist temelde, daha kapsayıcı, bölge ile iletişimini birliktelik üzerine kuran, bölgeyi kendisinin bir parçası olarak gören ortak kimlik ve kültür inşasını önceleyen bir amaç ile gerçekleştirmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Yunus Emre Enstitüsü, Rus Dünyası Vakfı, Balkanlar, Kamu Diplomasisi, Kimlik

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**Abstract**

Public diplomacy is a new diplomatic field that emerges as states influence each other socially, culturally and politically by using soft power tools. Russia and Türkiye have used this new tool of diplomacy intensively, especially since the end of the cold war. Both countries have used and continue to use public diplomacy, a new field of diplomacy, by acting with common identity tools in the Balkans, which is an important region of the security corridor in geopolitical terms. In the theories of International Relations, public diplomacy has been evaluated from a realist, liberal and constructivist perspective. In the article, the form which Russia and Türkiye use public diplomacy tools is analyzed with a comparison through the Ruskiyy Mir Foundation and Yunus Emre Institute, which were established at the same time for similar purposes. The states where the Russian World Foundation is most influential are Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece, and their relations with Russia have been studied in more detail. General information was given about the activities of the Russian World Foundation in other Balkan countries. When the content analysis of the fields of activity of Russia was made, it was concluded that Russia applied to public diplomacy with a realistic perspective to restore its global and regional image and obtain strategic area. Türkiye has used public diplomacy in order to act jointly with regional elements in order to preserve and strengthen its historical and cultural unity. Yunus Emre Institute activities as Türkiye's Balkans public diplomacy tool have been examined. Activities through Bosnia-Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Kosovo, which are the regions where Yunus Emre Institute is most influential, were examined in more detail and general activity information about other Balkan countries was given. According to the content analysis of Türkiye's fields of activity, Türkiye has realized its public diplomacy on a constructivist basis, with a more inclusive purpose, establishing its communication with the region on unity, and prioritizing the construction of a common identity and culture that sees the region as a part of itself.

**Keywords:** Yunus Emre Institute, Ruskiyy Mir Foundation, Balkans, Public Diplomacy, Identity

**1. Introduction**

Contrary to conventional diplomacy, public diplomacy is a kind of foreign policy activity in which nations shift from the use of coercive and deterrent power to the process of persuasion and consent, with the predominance of norms like knowledge, culture, identity, and civil society. Particularly during the 1990s, states have started to employ this sort of diplomacy successfully. Using public diplomacy, which has started to emerge in theories of international relations, varies depending on how a state views its foreign policy. Because the methods and regulations used to develop foreign policy-making instruments vary depending on the state tradition. As a result, each state's expressions are included in the theoretical framework that incorporates public diplomacy (Pajtinka, 2019, p. 23).

After defining public diplomacy's role in a state's foreign policy, this article will analyze how it fits within theories of international relations. The results of this debate will be contrasted with those of the Yunus Emre Institute, which attempts to rehabilitate Türkiye's heritage in the Balkans, and the Russian World Foundation, which effectively uses Russian culture, language, and tradition as a public diplomacy instrument in the Balkans. These two organizations were chosen since they were both founded in 2007 with the same goals and focused mostly on specific projects for the Balkan area. It will be decided where public diplomacy fits into both governments' foreign policy actions, and the operations of these public diplomacy tools in the Balkans will be

enquired. The outcomes will be used to examine the similarities and differences between these institutions in the Balkans. The following questions will serve as a structure for how the essay will specifically proceed. What distinguishes public diplomacy from traditional diplomacy? In the light of international relations theories, what role does public diplomacy play in state foreign policy strategies and how effective is it? What role does public diplomacy play and how important is it to Russia and Türkiye's foreign policy? What factors, if any, contribute to the Russian World Foundation and Yunus Emre Institute's performance as public diplomacy organizations in the Balkans?

## **2. Definition and Effectiveness of Public Diplomacy**

Being rational beings, states base their actions on strategic objectives and national interests. They have a framework that stresses harmony while mobilizing their resources to defend their survival and sovereignty in the global order. In order to prevent international anarchy, governments must also interact, meet, and share information with other states and other groups of people in society. If they choose not to, chaos and deregulation will result in anarchy, which will make it impossible to understand a sustainable international order (Steiner, 2004, p. 497). In an attempt to prevent wars and conflicts, governments endeavor to maintain an international order and do not disregard the flow of information in accordance with diplomatic laws and procedures. On the basis of this knowledge, the diplomatic process, which engages the communication mechanisms to maintain the international order, need to be a dependable, accessible, and open channel. These channels are well integrated into governments' foreign policy practices thanks to diplomacy. In essence, diplomacy is the art of conducting discussions between governments (Signitzer & Coombs, 1992, p. 138).

### **2.1. Transformation of Diplomacy**

As the globe goes through cyclical changes, the idea of diplomacy has changed structurally through time. When the system of balance of power was established, the shift from unilateral (ad hoc) diplomacy to mutual diplomacy, from secret diplomacy to open diplomacy, and from traditional diplomacy to public diplomacy channels actually occurred. Each diplomatic action has not prevented the next from occurring since this process has developed incrementally. Since diplomacy is a negotiation process that corresponds to all the capabilities applied by national governments to minimize the negative effects of their foreign policy and to satisfy their domestic political needs, every diplomatic element has therefore been of a nature that states should pay attention to in their behavior (Putnam, 1988, p. 434). The corporate state's inflexible and conventional view of diplomacy has ultimately given way to an open and public diplomacy strategy including both intrastate and trans-state entities as information has become more widely available (Sevin, 2017, p.19).

Public diplomacy is a foreign policy tactic used by governmental and non-governmental groups to influence and educate foreign public opinion via the use of social and cultural assets. It has emerged in a time of transition where the mechanism of persuasion and consent has gained importance against coercive and deterrent behaviors, where the strategic value of communication has increased with the acceleration of information flow and the phenomenon of public opinion has become more prominent (Snow, 2009, p. 19). States make it possible for the governing authority of convergent civilizations to form cultural alliances and ensure that societies engage culturally inside one another, increasing the possibility that states would work cooperatively. Because public diplomacy is a less dangerous and expensive activity that governments and international organizations perform on societies, nations frequently prioritize the search for a common denominator with other states' societies when using it as a tool in their foreign policy practices.

According to Joseph Nye, merely economic and military institutions are insufficient for determining foreign policy, particularly during the 1990s, and values, norms, and cultures have an influence on foreign policy tools that are part of the soft power component (Nye, 2016, p.37). An alternate field of power has arisen, where social processes are more prominent and a more inherited consensus is valid, replacing the notion that the conventional power conflict is the specific legitimate international sphere of influence (Sevin, 2017, p. 43). By examining the social dynamics in state action, the field of international relations has increased the weight placed on the person and society. By fostering economic, political, and cultural integration on a worldwide scale, globalization has established the atmosphere for the application of ideas, attitudes, practices, and technology at the global level as well as the development of international politics into global politics. Contrarily, the multi-actor system created by nuclear weapons in many states has driven civilizations to avoid confrontation in order to prevent the predictable negative effects of large-scale conflicts (Nye, 2004, p. 17-20). Public diplomacy is applied to a society that is open to cultural and political interaction with globalization. It is also increased or decreased by looking at the societies' reactions without interfering with the sovereignty areas of the states.

**Table 1.** Three Types of Power – Source: Nye Jr, J. S. (2004). *Soft power: The means to success in world politics. Public affairs.*

	<b>Behaviors</b>	<b>Primary Currencies</b>	<b>Government Policies</b>
<b>Military Power</b>	<i>Coercion Deterrence Protection</i>	<i>Threats Force</i>	<i>Coercive diplomacy War Alliance</i>
<b>Economic Power</b>	<i>Inducement Coercion</i>	<i>Payments Sanctions</i>	<i>Aid Bribes Sanctions</i>
<b>Soft Power</b>	<i>Attraction Agenda setting</i>	<i>Values Culture Policies Institutions</i>	<i>Public Diplomacy Bilateral and multilateral diplomacy</i>

States need to have attraction mechanisms that have an impact on another culture in order to deploy the public diplomacy instrument. These processes can be shown by things like shared cultural perceptions, norms, and values, as well as by economic and social systems. Societies that need these attraction techniques will have satisfied the requirements of direct persuasion and acceptance. Joseph Nye (2004) defined “soft power” as the power relationship that arises as a result of demands made by other nations when the cultures, political ideologies, and policies of governments become alluring. Soft power may be attained through a nation’s pursuit of the desired outcomes in international politics, by nations that share its values, serve as examples to others, and mimic its possibilities and wealth. Nye (2008) contends that a nation’s soft power is essentially based on three things; its culture in areas where it is appealing to others, its political ideals when it upholds them both domestically and abroad, and its foreign policy when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority (Nye, 2008, p. 95). By integrating these three sources into public diplomacy strategies, they have been instrumentalized.

### 2.3. Theoretical Perspective

All of the soft power instruments that states employ to influence other countries are covered by the umbrella of public diplomacy. But what are this idea’s theoretical counterparts in the field of international relations? Moreover, on what arguments does it ensure its effectiveness in global politics? Briefly explaining these questions through mainstream theories will help determine the place of public diplomacy in the international relations literature. Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism theories to public diplomacy are state, power, international system, and society differ due to their hypothetical differences in their concepts. Public diplomacy is not the ultimate objective to accomplish national interests, according to the principle of realism. Because the institutional state, the key player in the idea of realism, tries to sustain its existence through a power struggle and does not give much thought to public opinion in the grand scheme of things. The public opinion does not sufficiently demonstrate an interest in foreign policy, according to the realist paradigm, hence public diplomacy is given less relevance in official practices of foreign policy (Ari, 2018, p.116). A powerful state may, however, use its “national brand” which it has developed inside the international system, to affect how other states’ citizens feel about them. For instance, state-sponsored brands include those for Japanese electrical items, German automakers, and American gun market national firms. Foreign public opinion wants to connect with branded states on a social, economic, and political level. The branded nations profit from this arrangement in terms of access to a skilled labor force, tourism, and investment possibilities. Therefore, nations that have established themselves as global brands utilize public diplomacy to safeguard their interests and fortify themselves (Anholt, 1998, p. 397-398).

Liberalism theory, as the state is accepted as an important actor, non-state actors are also an essential element in foreign policy. For example, social groups, associations, religious organizations, international institutions are influential actors (Ari, 2018, p. 230). Since these institutions carry out their activities at a supra-state level, they have a more global activity without directly influencing

the nation-state model. Therefore, according to liberal theory, public diplomacy softens the rigid behavior of the states, which are still the main actors, and enables them to take different segments of the society into account. Therefore, since non-state actors are also important for liberal theory, public diplomacy also increases democratic conditions, cooperation, and interdependence with non-state actors. Therefore, public diplomacy is a foreign policy behavior preferred by liberal theory (Nye & Keohane, 1971, p. 332). For example, Erasmus (+), which carries out student exchange programs in the European Union, has created a social network by providing students with many training and course opportunities in different countries and has become a supra-state institution by ensuring the integration of societies with each other and thus contributed to foreign policy-making processes (European Commission, 2014). In summary, public diplomacy, along with the emergence of new areas of relations in foreign policy, has made it visible that it is crucial not only for states but also for non-state actors.

According to constructivism, international relations are socially constructed with structures and identities. States have an international identity with their value structures. The states that act with this identity in the international system are the structures that create anarchy in international relations. They have a supra-state identity with their unique attitudes and behaviors in international institutions and affect international politics (Van Ham, 2002, p. 260). Constructivist public diplomacy has a perspective based on norms, values, and identities. These phenomena gain different meanings in each state and international actor so that the communication between socially constructed meanings allows the public diplomacy activities of the actors (Kurki & Wight, 2007, p.25). Identities, values, and norms produced in a state or international actor can be imported by another society. Thus, states get closer to each other by applying public diplomacy over the meanings of common values, identity, and norms, and common interests are pursued by realizing social harmony. According to the constructivist theory, states' value, identity and norm relations create an area where public diplomacy is used effectively (Gilboa, 2008, p.68).

Public diplomacy has been evaluated as a foreign policy activity in international relations mainstream theories. Although public diplomacy has different importance for each theory, it remains important as a tool that ultimately affects societies from different perspectives and is considered by states in foreign policy decision-making. The theoretical background of the article is framed through the effect of public diplomacy on the behavior of states and societies as a foreign policy tool. Each state behaves differently in public diplomacy in this situation depending on its identity. Russia's "Russian World Foundation" and Türkiye's "Yunus Emre Institute" for the Balkans will be analyzed using theoretical factors. Both institutions will be compared through the realist public diplomacy's "national brand" and "image restoration," liberal public diplomacy's effectiveness in the foreign policy-making of "non-governmental actors" in the region, and the constructivist public diplomacy's "identity, value and norm" meanings creating a sense of partnership in the region.

### 3. Russia's Public Diplomacy Strategy Concerning Realist View

Following the establishment of a bipolar global order, the Russian Federation has experienced an internal identity crisis. Despite the fact that Russia's post-Cold War transition was driven by western integration, internal dynamics, particularly ultra-nationalist organizations, rejected this position. However, due to their anxiety that Russia would gather enough strength to once again become a major player in the world system, western structures were unable to fully trust it and were unable to pursue a true reconciliation regarding its position in the world, Russia has tested with several theses, including "Atlantic belt", "Nationalist conservatism" and "Eurasian foreign policy". A road map for image analysis that is influenced by Russia's collective identity creation has been created by these theses. Due to its Tsarist and Soviet past, the Russian Federation was seen as a threat by both local and international players who had a knowledge of the imperial and status quo states. As a result, the containment strategy used by international organizations during the Cold War against the Soviet Union was used for Russia with the expansion of NATO and the EU in the 2000s. The Kremlin was astonished on March 4, 2004, following Vladimir Putin's second election to the presidency, when Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia joined NATO on March 29, 2004. Additionally, Ukraine's EU and NATO measures have shown that Russia is becoming more and more surrounded. As the region engaged in conflict with the West, the Balkans and Eastern Europe were prioritized for action. However, the adoption of public diplomacy and soft power instruments became a more sensible strategy because implementing traditional power means would further damage Russia's image in the minds of the global public opinion. Additionally, it elevated civil society, social institutions, and communication channels to the forefront while strengthening democratic methods of domestic politics.

The public diplomacy of Russia is mainly based on the image restoration of the realist theory from the state-centered point of view. Significantly during the cold war period, in an environment where the media gradually increased its influence, the West positioned the USSR in its anti-democratic and authoritarian image and thus caused the countries in the immediate vicinity to move away from Russian society (Klyueva & Mikhaylova, p. 129). In the post cold war period, although this image was turned positive in the Balkan conflicts, namely the Bosnian war, it was later reversed by supporting Serbia against Kosovo, which was supported by the West ultra-nationalist elements in domestic politics. The Kremlin administration felt responsible for reproducing Russia's image in the international public opinion, did not hesitate to take drastic measures against NATO and EU expansionism in its immediate surroundings. Neo-imperial and militarist actions such as the 2004 Ukraine orange revolution, 2008 Russia-Georgia war, 2014 the annexation of Crimea, and lastly 2022 invading Ukraine have pushed Russia, which is trying to destroy the image problem in the neighboring countries with soft power elements, into a paradox (Wawrzonek, 2014, p. 759). Especially after Russia's occupation of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, although the Balkan countries' view of Russian culture has a negative impact, they still argue that this situation should be evaluated as the activities of the government, not the Russian identity. From this point of view, it is also evident that Russia does not hesitate to intervene with coercive and deterrent forces when its influence in the region grows, despite the fact that the motivation

for the Balkan countries' inclination towards NATO and EU institutions initially appears to be to achieve developed country conditions and to be in a security needs. Under these circumstances, Russia had to deal with existential concerns and began addressing the problems at its borders before joining the global conflict. This circumstance, which occurred in close proximity to Russia, also shaped the scope and location of Russian public diplomacy (Velikaya, 2020, p. 124).

Russia's norms in the public diplomacy process are language, religion, cultural heritage, and ethnic partnerships. From this point of view, it is understood more transparently why it chose the Balkans in terms of both security and impact. The Balkans is a risky region, as it is an area where NATO and the EU enlarged the most; at the same time, for Russia, it is an area where language, religion, culture, and ethnic partnerships can be used most effectively (Simons, 2011, p.338). Therefore, Russia intensified its public diplomacy activities in the Balkans to eliminate the risks in this security field. One of Russia's most critical public diplomacy tools in the Balkans is the "Russian World Foundation" institution. This institution was established in 2007, started from its near abroad region, and spread rapidly to many parts of the world. The Russian World Foundation aims to preserve and promote the Russian language, religion, cultural and ethnic heritage to the world. For this purpose, Russia has continuously increased the foundation's effectiveness by operating the persuasion and approval mechanism using soft power tools in the Balkan region (Gülseven, 2019, p. 41).

### **3.1. Russian World Foundation Activity in the Balkans**

Vladimir Putin emphasized in his annual speech to the Federal Assembly in 2006, he drew attention to the importance of the Russian World, that the necessity of preserving Orthodox religious values, giving due importance to the Russian language, and expanding the sphere of influence of Russian culture are priority social and political issues. In 2007, the Russian World Foundation was established by the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, by decree No. 796. The purpose of its establishment is to spread the Russian language, promote and popularize Russian culture, and create public opinion in favor of Russia (Russkiy Mir Foundation, 2007).

The Balkans are a geopolitical hotspot, a region with a dynamic geocultural scene, and a security zone for Russia. Due to several identity components, it is a region that may be impacted by the deciding power in the international system, therefore serving as a security area. Actors surrounding them position the Balkans as a security barrier since the region has frozen crisis zones that will lead to violence and instability. Since Russia saw the enlargement of the EU and NATO towards the Balkans after the Cold War as a security threat, it perceived the orientation to the Balkans as an ontological security issue (Secrieru, 2019, p. 3-4). As a geopolitical crossroads, the Balkans is the lebensraum of Russia, which wants to gain control of energy and economic connections, as it is the only land transit link between the Middle East and Europe and an essential region for Mediterranean activity. The Orthodox faith, Slavic ethnicity, Cyrillic alphabet, and Russian

ideals, which Russia has promoted to the center in identity formation, have all been used to try and build a geocultural alliance in the Balkan area (Bechev & Radeljic, 2018, p. 4). Finally, it is important to assess these procedures both as a technique and a goal. Gaining a security and geopolitical space is the goal, but expanding the geocultural zone, using public diplomacy and soft power instruments, and operating the persuasion and consent mechanisms are the ways to achieve it. The Russian World Foundation's activities, which are considered to be a public diplomacy tool by Russia, will be briefly examined in this section in the three Balkan nations where it has the most influence, and general information about the foundation from other Balkan nations will be provided in the form of a table.

### **3.1.1. Bulgaria**

The Russian World Foundation started its activities in the Balkans on January 29, 2009, in Varna, Bulgaria. The Russian World Foundation was opened in 5 different cities, respectively, in Plovdiv on June 3, 2010, in the capital Sofia on November 18, 2011, in the Kamchiya on September 21, 2015, and in Old Zagora on November 26, 2018. A Russian institute is also affiliated with the Russian World Foundation in Tarnovo. The activity of the Russian World Foundation in Bulgaria has some strategic purposes. Looking at the distribution of the Russian World in Bulgaria, it was first established in Varna, the most important Black Sea port city, and after the EU and NATO included Bulgaria in 2004 and 2007, respectively, in order to reduce Russia's influence in the Black Sea, this can be observed that Russian world was established as reciprocity to West orientation. In addition, Kamchiya is also an important port city on the Black Sea coast. It was opened in Plovdiv, Tirnova, and Old Sagra because there are regions where more conservative people live, who want to preserve their religious and ethnic identities. In these regions, the effectiveness of the Russian World Foundation is observed more than in Sofia. The Russian World Foundation has had 387 various activities since its establishment in Bulgaria until now. When we look at the content of these activities, the opening of schools has an important place in teaching the Russian language, education, and culture, especially for kindergarten and primary school children. Russian art is organized in activities aimed at the general public; ballet, opera, painting exhibitions, cultural film shows, Russian literature, and Russian theater festivals organizations. Conferences, films, and symposiums about Russian history, especially on the Ottoman-Russian war of 1877-1878, are important in expressing Tsarist Russia's influence on the independence of Bulgaria. In addition to all these, information is shared in universities and some schools about the tools developed by globalization, such as digitalization, cyber security, space technology, communication, and communication. The Russian World Foundation was founded on three main themes in Bulgaria: firstly, to break the expanding NATO and EU influence in the Black Sea, and secondly, to organize social activities related to Russian culture and history issues for the more conservative segment through common identity values and lastly, to develop and disseminate the latest technology and knowledge transfer at the point of the university and scientific developments. These three themes were supported by investments in energy and economy and formed long-term Bulgarian politics (Ruskiy Mir Foundation, 2009-2023).

### **3.1.2. Serbia**

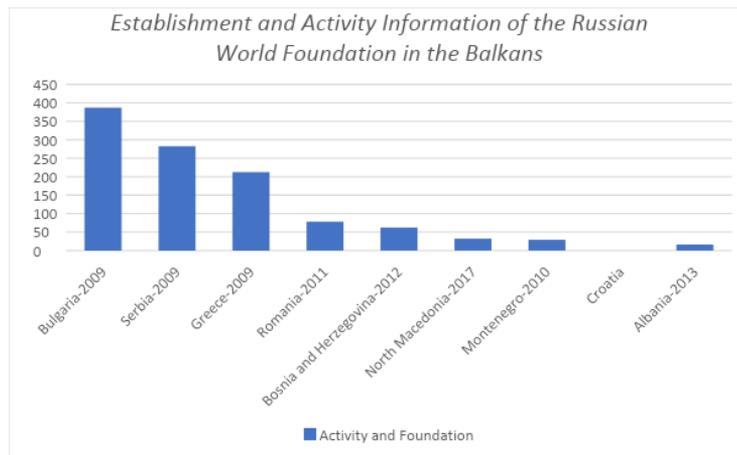
The Russian World Foundation was opened in Serbia, the first in Novi Sad on June 26, 2009, and the second in Belgrade on October 21, 2009. A total of 277 activities were carried out in Serbia until now. Historically, there has been a strategic partnership between Serbia and Russia. Serbia has a more centralized and nationalist identity structure than other Balkan countries. Therefore, Serbia repeated its attempts to dominate the Balkan region with a coercive force. Russia, with certain exceptions, acted together with Serbia as a natural ally with a common ethnicity, language, and religious norms. Serbia's ambitions to join the EU, which began in 2004, were unsuccessful because it was unable to completely fulfill the Copenhagen criteria and ontological security. The Russian World Foundation's operations now take place in a more welcoming environment thanks to the two countries' natural affinity (Subotic, 2011, p. 309-330). When we look at the activities, the Russian World Foundation, which acts together with the Orthodox Church, has chiefly brought its religious identity to the fore. In addition, it is seen that the attempt to increase the Russian sympathy of the society with cultural and artistic activities has increased rapidly. After Kosovo declared its independence unilaterally in 2008, Russia, with the Russian World institution, attempted to gain space by meeting the needs of the Orthodox churches and people in the Kosovo region, which it still considers as Serbian territory. More than 50,000 Kosovo Serbs applied for Russian citizenship in 2011. In this sense, a Russian influence was also felt in Kosovo. Apart from this, there are exchange and cooperation programs between Russia and Serbia in education. The Russian World Foundation provides language and education support, especially for students who will go to Russia from Serbia within these programs. In addition to these, a new gas flow between Russia and Serbia was started on January 1, 2021, under the name of the Balkan flow. According to TASS reports, 85% of the Serbian population expressed that they would like to have the Russian Vaccine Sputnik V. 15 On April 15, 2021, Serbia received the Sputnik V vaccine and became the first state to use it as vaccination in the Balkan region. When we look at the activities of the Russian World within Serbia, we see that Russia has an integrated and trust-based structure with the Serbian administration in line with its strategic interests in the region (Russkiy Mir Foundation, 2009-2023).

### **3.1.3. Greece**

The Russian World Foundation was established in Greece on December 19, 2009. Since its opening in Greece, the total number of activities has been 212. When we look at the activities of the Russian World Foundation, it is seen that culture and art organizations are in the majority. The Russian theme in theater, poetry, ballet, opera, and literature is predominantly handled and exhibited. The Russian World Foundation often carried out activities to remind the Byzantine heritage in Greece and tried to develop Russian-Greek cultural ties. In addition, with the partnership declarations of the Russian and Greek churches, the two Orthodox peoples came closer to each other. In 2016, Vladimir Putin and Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kiril visited the Greek Orthodox Church. The representatives between the two states exchanged views on

reconstructing historical sites that are important to Orthodoxy. Another point to note is that the Russian World Foundation implemented its first activities in Greece by establishing partnerships with the European Union institutions, not against them. For example, in 2009, the Russian World Foundation was opened in Greece with the European Thought Friendship Foundation. However, as the Russian influence began to increase in society, the Russian World Foundation endeavored to establish its cultural, religious, and historical partnerships. As of 2020, studies on Russian-Greek history have been accelerated. For example, in 2021, the outlines of the Russian-Greek world ancient city project were published, and work began (Russkiy Mir Foundation, 2009-2023)

When we look at the other Balkan countries, there has been less activity than the three Balkan countries examined, but the Russian World Foundation or an associated institution has been opened in all Balkan countries and has rapidly increased its activities. The Russian World institutions and their activity table in the Balkan region are shown below.



**Figure 1:** It was created as a result of country news reviews on the website of the Russian World institution. Internet Access Address: <https://russkiymir.ru/en/news/> Accessed Date: 5.3.2023

## 4. Türkiye's Public Diplomacy in the Balkans

### 4.1.1. Identical Process

As a means of influencing and directing the international community, public diplomacy has become very important for Turkish foreign policy, especially with the establishment of the Public Diplomacy Coordinator in 2010. Türkiye started to use the public diplomacy tool in foreign policy in the early 2000s, being aware of its civilization dynamics, traditional teachings, and historical heritage to promote its culture in the international arena and communicate more effectively with geographies with which it has special identity ties. Türkiye's public diplomacy strategy has followed

a different course than other countries using soft power (Ünalmiş, 2019, p. 138). The main reason for this difference stems from Türkiye's unique historical experience and the perspective of acting together with regional dynamics and being in cultural and psychological contact rather than a national brand in vast geography stretching from Central Asia to the Balkans. In particular, the historical and cultural ties of the Balkan region and Türkiye are robust. The reason for this is that the Republic of Türkiye, which inherited the legacy of the Balkan-centered Ottoman State, wanted to preserve its roots and establish an identical connection. In addition, Thrace, which is 3% of Türkiye, is included in the Balkan region. Therefore, Türkiye's public diplomacy behavior is evaluated on a constructivist basis in the context of international relations theories. As in every region in the Balkans, building social partnerships and bringing common identity values to cooperation takes place through regional ownership rather than regional ownership interest maximization.

#### **4.1.2. Ottoman Effect**

In addition to Türkiye being a Balkan country, many fundamental factors express the importance of the Balkans for Türkiye. Some of these factors are; The population of Balkan origin living in Türkiye, Turkish and Muslim communities in the Balkans, and the geopolitical position of the region. The existence of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans, from which the Republic of Türkiye inherited its historical heritage, has been around for 550 years. During this period, 62 of the state's 215 grand viziers were of Balkan origin, and relations with the peoples of the Balkan region as trade and security areas have been solid. After the 1877-1878 Ottoman-Russian war, the wave of migration from the Balkans to the present day has created a population of about 10 million Balkan origins in Türkiye. Approximately 3 million Turks and around 10 million Muslims live in the Balkans today. Türkiye acts to not leave Turkish and Muslim identities alone in the region as a minority by further strengthening its relations with a link based on a common heritage established in this geography (Yılmaz & Kılıçoğlu, 2017, p. 122).

From this point of view, the primary purpose of Türkiye's public diplomacy in the Balkans is to revive or protect its presence and identity, rather than using its national brand as a means of attraction. Therefore, Türkiye activates its soft power mechanisms by cooperating with the local people. Thus, an attempt is made to create an order by activating common identity elements. Although Türkiye defines its identity as a common ground for the Balkan peoples, having a strong and accurate image is vital for public diplomacy practices. Therefore, the structure and systematics of the public diplomacy mechanism should be coordinated to operate the relationship of persuasion and consent.

Türkiye defines its public diplomacy strategy as appealing to the hearts. The support he gave to Bosnia and Kosovo in the Balkan wars in the post-cold war period showed this. The international environment and national interests in Türkiye have pushed this method into practice. The public diplomacy programs implemented by Türkiye are defined as neo-Ottoman policies. Applying

the soft power tool to geography is realized with a neo-Istimalet policy. Türkiye is not unfamiliar with this type of diplomacy in terms of tradition. This policy, which was implemented in the Ottoman state against foreign societies before and after the conquest, was realized with the idea of establishing a connection and promotion from social aid to education, language, and culture (Kaya & Tecmen, 2011, p. 7).

#### **4.1.3. Public Institutions**

Since the 1990s, Türkiye's public diplomacy activities have started and gained momentum day by day, primarily through humanitarian aid activities and non-governmental activities carried out abroad in the field of education and official institutions such as the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA). In the 2000s, Türkiye changed its foreign policy understanding and expanded its claims by adopting a more active international relations method in its region and the world. In this context, Yunus Emre Institute was established on May 5, 2007, with Law No. 5653. Later, in 2010, Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities and Public Diplomacy Coordinatorship, and then in 2016, official institutions such as the Maarif Foundation to carry out public diplomacy activities such as education, language, culture, and diaspora in Türkiye were established (Ünalmiş, 2019, p. 147). Since the institution examined and compared in the article is Yunus Emre Institute, it would be beneficial to examine it in more detail. Yunus Emre Institute is an official institution established to promote the Turkish language, culture, and art, develop Türkiye's friendship with other countries, increase its social relations, and establish and operate cultural centers abroad. It aims to establish a communication and interaction mechanism through the soft power elements in public diplomacy tools. It achieves this through expanded education systems, universities, and non-governmental organizations abroad (Kaya & Tecmen, 2011, p. 11-13).

Yunus Emre Institute has 56 cultural centers abroad. In addition to the Turkish education given in cultural centers, support is provided to Turkish teaching and Turcology departments by cooperating with educational institutions in different countries. The Institute has 58 Cultural Centers in 48 Countries and 101 Turcology Departments in 50 Countries. It provides service in 74 countries and 159 contact points around the world. The Institute also encourages the opening of new departments by supporting existing departments by signing a Turcology project cooperation protocol with universities (Yunus Emre Institute, 2019, p. 11). Yunus Emre Institute aims to reach 100 cultural centers by 2023. On the other hand, within the scope of the Turcology project, the Institute continues to contribute to the prevalence of Turkish abroad by conducting different activities such as Turcology workshops, meeting programs with Turcologists working in the field of Turcology, symposiums, language and culture training programs, as well as writing and editorial courses and conversation programs. In addition, Yunus Emre Institute builds 100 libraries with 2000 books, consisting of works in the fields of Turkish language literature, history, culture, and art, in order to create resources for the studies to be carried out in Türkiye at the places where the Turkish Cultural Centers and Türkiye Studies Center are located. This project is

aimed to develop Türkiye's cultural exchange with other countries, as well as to create resources about Türkiye abroad. In addition to the library project, various projects such as Turkish village, Turkish bookstore, 100 Turkish translation projects, on-site history project and joint painting exhibitions with the contributions of the Central Bank, Turkish distance teaching, and Turkish days' activities, Turkish cinema activities are also carried out (Ekşi & Erol, 2018, p. 32).

Yunus Emre Institute carries out operations such as preserving, maintaining, and digitalizing manuscripts destroyed by wars in countries including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo, Serbia Montenegro, and Croatia within the scope of the project of reconstruction of cultural heritage. Bringing these works back to life is trying to understand the Ottoman Empire better today. Within the scope of this project, it aims to benefit from the historical experience of the Ottoman Empire, which made different nations live in peace in the past, to reduce the increasing nationalism and xenophobia, especially in Europe and the Balkans. The Institute specializes in calligraphy, illumination, miniature, marbling, glassware, tile, woodworking in various Balkan countries. He opened courses for handicrafts in the fields and gave the people living here a profession. In addition, it aims to bring the common cultural elements based on the Ottoman Empire back to life and revive the historical and cultural ties of the people of the region and Türkiye (Ekşi & Erol, 2018, p. 33-34).

#### **4.2. Yunus Emre Institute's Activity in the Balkans**

The Balkan identity gives a dynamic character with very different structures and features. Nevertheless, tradition, family, language, and culture are permanent phenomena surrounding Balkan identity. For example, despite being under the influence of the Soviet Union for a long time, when the dominant power disappeared, they re-discovered their national heritage. Therefore, the actors who want to establish relations with the states in the Balkan region have seen that this cannot be realized or permanent without considering their national identities. By accepting the legacy of the Ottoman Empire, Türkiye has shown that it maintains its claim in the region. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Balkans started to gain their independence and did this within the scope of protecting their core values. On the other hand, Türkiye has positioned its existence on the values of common identity with the societies there by activating the Ottoman heritage (Ekşi, 2017, p. 196-197).

With the 1990s, the deterrent power of traditional power tools has lost its effect. States have tried to create spheres of influence with soft power methods such as influence, attraction, and persuasion. However, Türkiye adapted its soft power tools to the conditions of its civilization accumulation and defined it in terms of national interest and revival, order, and stabilization. Because Türkiye's public diplomacy views the societies living there as a part of its unity and civilization, not as objects to be affected. Therefore, Türkiye has established links with the societies in the Balkan region by acting with the belief of peace and unity. As a tool for this, Türkiye established Yunus Emre Institute in 2007 to revive Turkish culture and language and carried out its first activities

starting from the Balkan region (Ekşi, 2015, p.722). Regarding the comparative aspect of the essay, it would also be relevant to examine these efforts via the perspective of three regional nations that stand out in accordance with Türkiye's idea of regional possession and shared identity. We'll look at the Yunus Emre Institutes' operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Macedonia where Türkiye's historical presence is perceived to provide establishment, and activity data for additional Balkan nations in the table.

#### **4.2.1. Bosnia-Herzegovina**

In an effort to create a stronger connection between the two populations and promote harmony, the Yunus Emre Institute established its first location outside of Türkiye in Sarajevo at the end of 2009. Later, exclusively in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it set up three Turkish cultural centers, adding two more in Foynica in 2011 and Mostar in 2014 (Yunus Emre Institute, 2019, p. 14). By eradicating Türkiye's presence in the area and its unfavorable reputation rife with misconceptions and biases, Yunus Emre Institute is crucial to achieving a new, more favorable position. This has accelerated cultural initiatives aimed at recovering the shared past and teaching Turkish. Focused subjects include the introduction of prominent locals, the transmission of historical materials, and collaborative artistic activities. To give a few decisive examples of these organizations;

In 2017, the book of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Ottoman Documents was introduced in Sarajevo (YEI Sarajevo, 2017).

In 2017, a concert of "Traditional Turkish Music and Folklore of Bosnia and Herzegovina" was held in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as part of the Watermark Festival. (YEI Skopje, 2017)

In 2018, within the scope of the "Ahidname Days 2018" program, the book "Messages of the Ahidname" was introduced in the program prepared in cooperation with the Yunus Emre Institute, the Bosnians Islamic Tradition Institute, and the Kiselyak Islamic Union Assembly (YEI Foynitsa, 2018).

In 2019, the promotional program of the work "Common Turkish Origin Words in Balkan Languages (Turkisms) Dictionary" was written by Turkologist Prof. Dr. Lindita Khanari Latifi from the Faculty of Letters of Tirana University in cooperation with Sarajevo Yunus Emre Institute and Sarajevo Maarif Schools was held (YEI Sarajevo, 2018).

In 2021, within the scope of the "My Choice is Turkish" project carried out by Yunus Emre Institute in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a 10-week online Turkish speaking club was organized for successful students who learn Turkish in the last year of secondary schools and high schools in all cantons where Turkish lessons are available. (YEI Mostar, 2021)

Thus, both the aim of regional ownership was realized, and the unity of the societies was ensured. Yunus Emre Institute carried out around 430 activities between 2009-2023 with three Turkish cultural centers in Bosnia-Herzegovina that increased the awareness of Turkish-Bosniak common identity. In recent years, the increase in the number of activities compared to the beginning and

the increase in participation show that Türkiye's public diplomacy impacts the society of Bosnia and Herzegovina (YEI Sarajevo, 2021).

#### **4.2.2. North Macedonia**

Yunus Emre Institute's Turkish cultural center opened in Macedonia in 2010 in Skopje. It aimed to achieve a regional interaction through culture and art and create a common academy platform by spreading knowledge in science and academia. In this respect, Macedonia has tremendous importance in reviving Türkiye's historical values. Some examples of Yunus Emre Institute's activities in the Skopje Turkish cultural center are as follows;

In 2015, an exhibition of Ottoman cultural influences was held in Macedonia. This exhibition presents nearly 120 textiles, clothes, authentic rooms, copper, tin, and tile-making works belonging to the Ottoman period in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries (YEI Skopje, 2015).

In 2016, a panel on "Oral Folk Products: Similarities in Macedonian and Turkish Idioms and Proverbs" was held in cooperation with the Skopje Yunus Emre Institute and Macedonian "Marko Tsepenkov" Folklore Institute (YEI Skopje, 2016).

In 2018, Skopje Yunus Emre Institute organized a "night of respect" for Macedonia's leading poets, writers, artists, and scientists in the capital city of Skopje (YEI Skopje, 2018).

In 2020, a language practice study was conducted for those who want to connect with Türkiye, speak Turkish correctly, speak clearly, and express themselves with the proper emphasis and body language (YEI Skopje, 2020).

Between 2010-2023, 180 events were held at the Turkish cultural center of Skopje Yunus Emre Institute. These events provided the development of Türkiye-Macedonia cooperation and contributed to exchanging information and ideas between the communities in the region (YEI Skopje, 2021).

#### **4.2.3. Kosovo**

Another intensive activity area of Yunus Emre Institute in the Balkans is Kosovo. Yunus Emre Institute opened three Turkish cultural centers in Pristina in 2011, Prizren in 2011, and Ipek in 2012 shortly after Kosovo declared independence in 2008. An essential link has been established by emphasizing the common behaviors, languages, institutions, and norms of both communities in Kosovo (YEI, 2019). A few decisive examples of Yunus Emre Institute's public diplomacy activities in Turkish cultural centers in Kosovo can be given as follows:

"In 2017, the sixth Turkish Jazz Week in Kosovo was held in Pristina and Prizren, Kosovo, with the organization of Pristina Yunus Emre Institute and the support of the Turkish Embassy in Pristina (YEI Prizren, 2017).

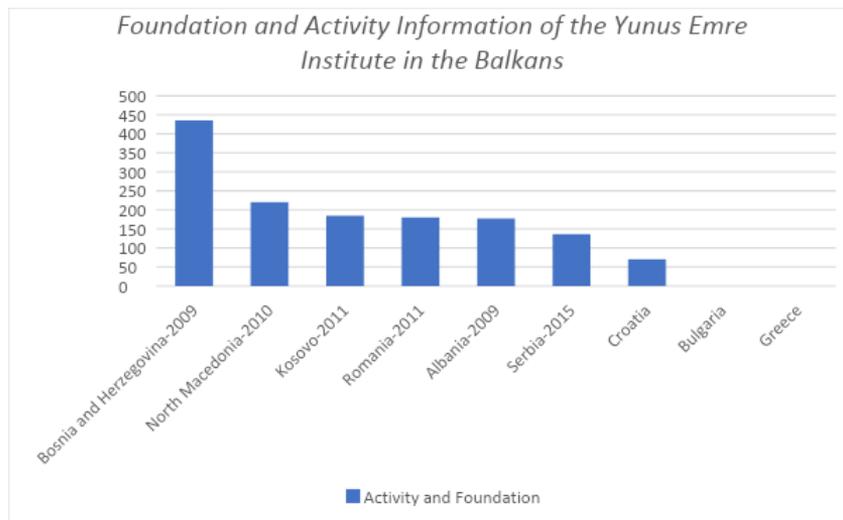
In 2018, Yunus Emre Institute organized the “Turkish Cinema Summer School” in Istanbul for 23 young filmmaker candidates from 20 countries (YEI Prizren, 2018).

In 2019, the book promotion “Turkish cultural bridges in Ipek – Ipek in Ottoman documents” was held. (YEI Ipek, 2019)

A digital commemoration program was held for Fahri Kaya, who produced many works on the survival of Turkish culture in the Balkans in 2020 and passed away at the age of 90 on March 23, 2020” (YEI Ipek, 2020).

211 events were organized along with these activities, Turkish language, music, painting, literature, traditional sports in three Turkish cultural centers between 2011-2023. The diversity of the fields of activity is also proof that Türkiye’s public diplomacy tools are rich in the region. (YEI Prizren, 2021).

The most important reason for their culture-centered policies is to establish a partnership with the traditions of the Balkan societies. Because culture establishes an ontological connection by revealing both societies’ common behaviors, languages, institutions, and norms. Thus, people make sense of the future by remembering their lost or forgotten values. Yunus Emre Institute’s public diplomacy activities in the Balkans reflect Turkish-Balkan self-identities to the international system in an existential partnership. It builds this not through a rational interest-based holistic state policy but the unity and harmony of societies (Yunus Emre Institute, 2014).



**Figure 2:** It was created from the information on the website of Yunus Emre Institute. Accessed address: <https://www.yei.org.tr/> Access Date: 2.3.2023

## **5. Differences and Similarities Between the Russian World Foundation and Yunus Emre Institute**

Since public diplomacy has a softer internal mechanism, the power struggle has transformed by conjuncture. Because states need different power variations in an environment where the individual and societies are at the center, civil societies' influence increases according to the changing system characteristics. Because the soft power risk used in public diplomacy is less and more permanent in societies. Ultimately, societies are pushed to a decision by responding positively or negatively to the various processes of interaction, if they make a favorable decision, activities are increased rapidly, and states benefit from it for a more extended period. In summary, every state builds its behavior to target its national interest, and public diplomacy is a widely applied strategy that benefits the national interests to remain more permanent and effective.

The first thing to note when comparing the Russian World Foundation and Yunus Emre Institute is that both organizations' first public diplomacy instrument was founded in 2007 and that its initial operations were carried out in the Balkan area. Although there are obvious contrasts between Russia and Türkiye, both nations approach their near surrounds from a controlling point of view because they seek to manage their local surroundings, which they perceive as a security region. The second is created through constructing a shared identity for that area rather than the identity that both states broadly promote. For instance, Russia attempted to create ties with Slavic and Orthodoxy, whereas Türkiye did so with Ottoman and Islam. The third is the development of a Western academic alternative in areas like culture, art, science, and history as well as the promotion of multiculturalism on a societal scale. The fourth is the formation of a counter-battle bloc through religious unification in opposition to a secular European expansion by supporting the endeavors of state-sponsored religious groups. By revitalizing history and highlighting its contributions to the Balkans at that time, it also promotes a sense of community and belonging in the area.

Comparing the Russian World Foundation and Yunus Emre Institute will highlight the difference between national interest and national integrity. By generating an alternative power in the Balkans, which has long been close to it, via the solidarity of common identity and the use of soft power instruments, the Russian World Foundation is attempting to reverse society's trend toward the European Union. On the other hand, Türkiye accepts the area as a part of the development of civilization and views its history in the Balkans as an extension of Türkiye. Second, while examining the theoretical framework, it should be noted that the two soft powers differ in terms of how public diplomacy is seen in theories of international relations. While the Russian World Foundation leans toward a realist understanding of public diplomacy because it bases the relationship on the struggle for political and national interests. The Yunus Emre Institute favors constructivism more because it implements the national unity agenda by drawing upon the unifying factor of common identity. Third, the Russian World Foundation got involved in a power struggle because it perceived the European Union and NATO as a threat in the Balkans, a crucial security region closes to Russia. But Türkiye understood that being in the Balkans was

more about maintaining historical integrity and regional dynamics than it was about gaining or keeping power. Türkiye has been a member of NATO since 1952 and submitted an application to join the European Economic Community in 1963. In this sense, Türkiye does not need to establish a counter-alliance in the Balkans. Forth, the Russian World Foundation has increased the intensity of its actions in Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Romania as a result of its efforts to adopt a soft power strategy towards Slavic and Orthodoxy. The activities of Yunus Emre Institute are concentrated on Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Albania, and Macedonia regions, which are more accepted and adopted as a culture due to the Turkish-Islamic and Ottoman heritage politics. Finally, the Russian World Foundation has undertaken initiatives that serve to remind the Balkan republics of their assistance in the Pan-Slavic policy's success in helping them achieve independence from the Ottoman Empire. For instance, Bulgaria presented itself as the rescuer of the 1877–1878 Ottoman–Russian war conferences in an effort to raise this consciousness in the society. The Yunus Emre Institute, on the other hand, attempted to delicately explain how Ottoman civilization, through its historical assemblies and traditional teachings, left an inclusive and comprehensive legacy in the Balkans without the necessity for any discriminatory rhetoric. When the two public diplomacy organizations were compared, it was determined that a total of 1403 activities were carried out by Yunus Emre Institute and a total of 1096 activities of the Russian World Foundation. In this sense, it is seen that the public diplomacy implemented by Turkey in the Balkans is more effective in terms of these two institutions.

## 6. Conclusion

Public diplomacy is an important foreign policy strategy that provides interaction and communication between states and societies under specific conditions using soft power tools. In particular, after the 1990s, when the deterrent power was relatively less effective, the social norms, identities, cultures of societies, and individuals came to the fore as a social construction process. In such an environment, states sought a partnership or influence by introducing elements such as culture, art, science, tradition, religion, and language in their historical background in order to attract and influence other societies. The importance of this power, which has more excellent permanence and influence, increased gradually when the war and conflict was limited.

Russia and Türkiye have actively used the public diplomacy tool in the field to a certain extent, based on their history and experience. While Russia established the Russian World Foundation in 2007 to keep alive and promote Russian culture, tradition, and language. Türkiye also founded the Yunus Emre Institute in 2007 to preserve and advance Turkish language, culture, and heritage. Although there are some similarities and differences between them, both states have entered into a competition by emphasizing the Balkan region. The regions where Yunus Emre Institute and the Russian World Foundation are influential are different. Because different identity dynamics determine a constructivist line at the point of acceptance of actors in the region. While the Russian World Foundation is acting with countries that adapt to Russia's Slavic and Orthodox identity, Türkiye has made an ontological attempt on the Turkish-Islamic and Ottoman heritage.

However, the possibility of intertwining these areas may also vary depending on the extent to which Russia and Türkiye will be active. Therefore, although both states continue their activities without interfering in each other's area, the possibility of conflict continues for the time being.

In order to minimize conflict in both states, a national promotion is carried out through culture, art, science, and technology. Since the mechanism of persuasion and consent is the most critical element in public diplomacy, the existence of an environment free from conflict is compatible with the wishes of both states. On the other hand, the Balkan states try to maintain this balance by prioritizing stability and welfare, especially after coming out of risky nationalist conflict processes.

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