

Turkey's Soft Power towards Central Asian Countries after the Cold War

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Abstract: This paper tries to make a definition of 'power' concept at the beginning, then describes what soft power is that has been recently in the agenda of Turkey's Foreign Policy. Later, this study examines the Turkish Foreign Policy to the Central Asian countries soon after the Cold War era as based on the soft power theory which was propounded by Joseph Nye in 1990s and developed by him 2000s. Examining Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) period, the concept of soft power is used very often while defining foreign policy towards the Middle East. However, the current paper claims that this situation is not new for Turkey and soft power policies were also used at the beginning of 1990s towards the Central Asian countries though it was not named as 'soft power' which was probably an unknown theory for Turkey in the early 1990s.

Keywords: soft power, Turkish Foreign Policy, Central Asia, Soviet Union.

Özet: Bu çalışmada ilk olarak 'güç' tanımı tartışılmış, ardından son zamanlarda Türk Dış Politikası gündeminde çok fazla yer alan 'yumuşak güç' tanımı yapılmıştır. Daha sonra Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde Türkiye'nin Orta Asya ülkelerine yönelik politikaları yumuşak güç teorisi çerçevesinde ele alınmıştır. Bu teori literature 1990'ların başında Joseph Nye tarafından kazandırılmış ve yine Nye tarafından 2000'li yıllarda geliştirilmiştir. Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi döneminin Ortadoğu'ya yönelik dış politikası tanımlanırken yumuşak güç kavramına sıklıkla atıfta bulunulmaktadır. Bu metnin iddiası ise şudur; Türk Dış Politikasındaki yumuşak güç eğilimi yeni değildir ve yumuşak güç politikaları 1990'ların başında bağımsızlıklarını kazanan Orta Asya ve Kafkasya'daki Türki Cumhuriyetlere karşı da uygulanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: yumuşak güç, Türk Dış Politikası, Orta Asya, Sovyetler Birliği.

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Introduction

The relations among states were explained with the concept of hard power until the 1990s. During the Cold War, there was an armament race between Western and Eastern blocks. Just that the reason is sufficient to explain the international relations with hard power. With the end of the Cold War, the use of hard power was begun to be questioned.

In our age, hard power (military force) has become increasingly difficult to use and the use of soft power (economic cooperation, diplomacy etc.) seems more logical. In an anarchical international environment identified with the hard power, military capabilities of the states have not lost its importance. Soft power does not completely ignore the hard power (Yeşiltaş and Balcı, 2011: 14). Regarding this, soft power supports hard power and allows the use of hard power when required.

The concept of soft power was first introduced by Joseph Nye in 1990s (Nye, 1990). For Nye (2004: 5), soft power is the ability to influence the behavior of others to reach the outcomes you want by attracting and co-opting them rather than coercing. He expresses that there is no need for using sticks and carrots to attract the other country. Soft power prefers cooperation and interdependence instead of the use of force against a state. The use of money is also another means of persuasion.

The disintegration of the former Soviet Union strongly affected Turkey. The emergence of the new Turkic republics in Central Asia and the Caucasus after the collapse of the former Soviet Union provided Turkey with another important opportunity to expand its regional influence through an activist foreign policy. Turkey adopted some approaches in its regional policy towards Central Asia and the Caucasus. According to Hakan Fidan (2010: 109), these policies were; “helping to consolidate the independencies of the Turkic Republics; establishing an institutionalized platform between the Turkic Republics and Turkey; improving cultural and linguistic affinities and commonalities with those states; building a bridge between the world markets and Central Asia and the Caucasus for the economy and energy sources; and intermediating conflicts and contributing to the solution of problems by using peaceful dialogue.” As it is seen, Turkish policymakers chose soft power as a means of improving the relations with regional countries.

This study can be divided into three parts. First, the term power will be defined and the main assumptions of Realism in International Relations theories will be explained. Then, in the second part, hard power and soft power will be described and compared to each other while the concept of soft power will be given relatively more importance, mostly focused on

the concept of soft power. In the third and last part, this study analyzed Turkey's foreign policy towards Central Asia at the beginning of 1990s. This paper asserts that Turkey intended to use soft power on newly emerged Central Asian countries including Azerbaijan after the collapse of former Soviet Union. The historical relations of Turkey with these countries are also examined to prove this claim.

The definition of Power and Realism

The concept of power is one of the most important, most common and most cited concepts in international relations, especially in realism. 'Radical' realists exclude almost every concept from international politics except for 'power' and 'interest' (Donnelly, 2012: 51). For this reason, realism is the first phenomenon that comes into mind when considering the concept of 'power'. The word 'power' evokes realism as an IR theory when used in an academic text or speech. In order to facilitate the understanding of the concept of power, we should have some information about the basic assumptions of Realism.

Realism makes some basic assumptions about international relations. First of all, the state is the most important actor in international relations. For this assumption, the states' governments are the most important actors in international politics. International organizations, interest groups and individuals have no effect in international area. Secondly, the state is a unitary and rational actor. Domestic actors cannot make the state change its behaviour in international affairs. Thirdly, national interest is vital to the states. The primary priority of every state is to promote its national interest and get power for this aim. Fourthly, international system is anarchical. Hence, international relations among states are also conflictual. That means there is no higher authority to prevent conflict or mediate among states (Donnelly, 2012: 51). Fifth, all states want to stay alive, so security issues dominate the international agenda. Thus, states have to strengthen their military force to survive.

However, after the World War I, international system focused on peacekeeping. Therefore, collective security mechanism was designed to prevent a destructive war like the First World War. This mechanism failed to maintain peace against Japan's invasion of China in 1931, Hitler's invasion of Poland in 1939 and Stalin's invasion of Finland and finally the emergence of the Second World War. All those wars obliged to take more effective steps that caused Realism to be interpreted in a new way in international relations (Sandıklı and Kaya, 2012: 144). Because of being the most prominent theory from the end of the 1930s until the

mid-1980s, realism is often called as the 'Theory of the International Relations' (Aydın, 2004: 33).

The Role of Power in Realist Theory

The notion of power, as many of the concepts in social sciences, has different definitions. It's used in various contexts. Some scholars define power as capacity, some others define it as effect, another group of scholars identify it as the aim of the policy, and it is also described as a tool to reach a goal for the others (Arı, 2006: 134). Nevertheless, most of the current authors express that the concept of power is physical factor of the state.

From this point of view, the physical sense of power results in the use of force to attain the goal while behavioral power is the ability to change the behavior of others in order to get the desired results. Ahmet Davutoğlu divides power concept as potential data and fixed data. While fixed data include history, geography, population and culture, potential data is economy, technological capacity and military capacity (Davutoğlu, 2010: 17-24). In international relations, power means that one state influences the other state to do something (Holsti, 1964: 181). Karl Deutsch defines power as the "ability to prevail in a conflict and to overcome obstacles" and for Michael Sullivan "power is superiority, superiority is impact and impact is influence on other countries" (Sönmezoğlu, 2000: 160). According to Tarık Oğuzlu (2007: 82), "power is the capacity to influence other actors and shape their preferences through the possibilities in hand." On the other hand, Joseph Nye indicated that there are three basic ways to affect the behaviour of others: (a) you can coerce them with threats, (b) you can induce them with payments, (c) or you can attract and co-opt them (Nye, 2006, http://www.hks.harvard.edu/netgov/files/talks/docs/11_06_06_seminar_Nye_HP_SP_Leadership.pdf).

Although many definitions of power as a term is given above, it can also be divided into different concepts as hard power and soft power. Hard power relates primarily to coercive power such as the use of military force while soft power usually includes economics, diplomacy and cultural influence (Yeşiltaş and Balcı, 2011: 14).

Hard Power

Hard power is the use of military and economic instruments to influence other political actors' behaviors and shape their preferences to realize their own interests. It was until 1990s that the term "hard power" was used to express the relations among nations. The armament

race between Eastern and Western blocks showed why the relations were explained with hard power. However, with the end of the Cold-War, the use of hard power was begun to be questioned.

In our age, the use of hard power gets gradually difficult and therefore the use of soft power seems to be more reasonable. Nevertheless, the importance of military capabilities, which are identified with the hard power in anarchical international environment, did not disappear (Özdemir, 2008: 136). Also, soft power encourages hard power and it allows the use of hard power when alleged to be needed.

Soft Power

The concept of soft power was firstly theorized by Joseph Nye in early 1990s. For Nye (2004: 5), soft power is the ability to influence the behavior of others to get the outcomes you want by attracting and co-opting them rather than coercing. In today's information age, the most efficient power seems to have the ability to guide, persuade and bargain of the public opinion (Özdemir, 2008: 136). When a state's desire is shared by others, it becomes easier to take them under control. From this regard, when a state has become apparently legitimate, the possibility of using soft power against that country increases. This is a different way of using power, compared to hard power, some of whose instruments are coercion and payment.

Soft power can be used not just by states but also by the other actors such as film companies, religious groups, media and universities in international politics (Nye, 2004: 15). However, soft power, admitted as 'second face of power', mediately incents the states to attain its goal. According to Joseph Nye (2004: 5):

“A country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries – admiring its values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness – want to follow it. In this sense, it is also important to set the agenda and attract others in world politics, and not only to force them to change by threatening military force or economic sanctions. This Soft Power – getting others to want the outcomes that you want – co-opts people rather than coerces them.”

Soft power resources are the existences that produce seduction and this constantly leads to approve. According to Nye (2004), seduction is always more effective than coercion, and many values like democracy, human rights and individual opportunities are deeply seductive.

In his book, Nye (2004) argues that soft power is more difficult instrument for governments to use than hard power. There are two main reasons for this. First, many crucial resources are outside the control of states. Secondly, soft power tends to “work indirectly by shaping the environment for policy, and sometimes it takes years to produce the desired conclusions.” As can be understood from his book, there are three broad categories of soft power: “political, social, economic and cultural institutions of a country, political values and execution of foreign policy.”

Soft Power in Turkish Foreign Policy towards Central Asia

Because of the international system was divided into two blocks as Western and Eastern blocks, relations among countries of two blocks were restricted until the end of the 1980s. For this reason, during the Cold War, the countries who wanted to establish political, cultural, economic relations with a country from the other block needed to get permission from their own block leaders. That was the case when considering Turkey's relations with the Central Asian countries. During the Cold War period, the reason why Turkey failed to have good relations with those Central Asian countries, whose people were from the same ethnic origin and speaking same language, was that Turkey and the other Central Asian countries belong to different blocks. Due to the priorities of the “West”, Turkey did not give the necessary significance to the “East”. As a result of that, Turkey was caught unprepared when the Soviet Union collapsed (Fidan, 2010: 110).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, new countries emerged in Balkans, Caucasus and Central Asia. For Sabri Sayarı (2000: 173), “the emergence of Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan as independent states ushered in a new stage in Turkey's relations with the countries of Central Asia and Caspian region.” Also, the interest of the great powers focused on these areas. Since the 1990s, the US has been expanding both its economic and political power in the international system (Yesiltas, 2009: 29). Therefore, Central Asia and Caucasus, famous with rich energy resources, draw the interest of NATO, especially the USA, which is the prominent member of this organization. For many scholars, Turkey intended to establish historical, cultural, linguistic and religious ties with the new Central Asian states since 1991 (Karamyan, Ishtiaq and Naseer, 2012; Efeğil, 2009; Robins, 1993). In fact, today's Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) is in the harmony with the then Turkey in terms of foreign policy towards this region. MFA remarked that “Since 1991, our desire for a stable, independent and prosperous

Central Asia has guided our policy priorities in the region towards building free market economies and functioning democracies. Given our common historical, linguistic and cultural ties, we have sought to increase engagement with this region on a broad range of issues. In this respect, the High Level Strategic Cooperation Council mechanisms that we have established with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and the Cooperation Council with Tajikistan provide a useful basis to further our relations.”²

With the end of the Cold War, Turkey’s strategic importance had started to decrease for Western Countries, especially for NATO. So, Turkish policymakers worried about that unwanted situation. They had to do something to regain their strategic importance in Western World (Efeğil, 2008: 166). It might be the reason why Turkey pursued such an active foreign policy at that time despite not having any experience before (Oran, 2009: 237). Turkish policymakers thought that if they had got a chance to influence the new regional countries, Turkey would have been a more influential actor and pivotal state in the regional and world politics. That would restore the relations with the Western world again.

Another point affecting the regional policy of Turkey was the emergence of the Caspian region as potentially one of the largest energy suppliers in the World. Owing to the geographical position Turkey enjoys, part of its national strategy involves facilitating the transit of energy across its territory, which is central to the East-West energy corridor (Davutoğlu, 2008: 91). For Bülent Aras (2000: 39), “Turkey hoped to find guaranteed access to vital energy resources, lucrative oil transport revenues, and new markets for Turkish goods, especially in Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan.” Turkey’s own growing demand for natural gas also played a significant role in Turkey’s search for a larger pivotal state (Sayarı, 2000: 173). Russia was the main natural gas supplier of Turkey and Turkey was dependent on Russia regarding the natural gas trade. Turkey wanted to diversify it and the main target was to find new energy resources and reduce its dependence on Russia in the field of energy trade. Also the Western powers wanted to cut out Russia while transferring the natural gas to the West. Their plan was to provide the natural gas transmission and distribution piping systems of Central Asia to be conveyed to Europe through Turkey. Here, we see that Turkey aimed to increase its own economic interest. Turkey’s intention was to attract these countries’ attention by using some soft power tools such as common culture and economic cooperation.

The leaders of the Western states viewed Turkey as a country that supports their approaches towards those states (Robins, 1993: 593). Despite looking optimistically to the

² http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-relations-with-central-asian-republics.en.mfa

energy transfer, western countries didn't want radical or political Islam to rise in the region. Therefore, they decided to support Turkey -the only Muslim country with a secular and democratic regime in NATO (Balçı and Miş, 2008: 399)- as a model for those states (Ataman, 2002: 134). Turkish politicians, sharing the same ideas, suggested Turkey's secular, capitalist system as a model to the Central Asian and Caucasian states, too (Efegil, 2009: 73).

The then Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel remarked that, with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Turkey widened although its borders remain stable. He also stated, "Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are interested in our country. The borders will be opened. Turkey expanded despite of the fact that the borders remained stable. In other words, Turkey enlarged from Adriatic to the Chinese Wall. All nations in the Caucasus are brothers of us. Turkey is the apple of that region's eye" ("Sovyetler'in dağılması, Türkiye'yi büyüttü", Milliyet, 1992). We can understand from this statement that Turkey aimed to influence with an emphasis on the same ethnic origins and the same culture –which is one of the main elements of soft power theory. Additionally, Turgut Özal the then President of Turkey, remarked that Turkey served as a bridge between the Middle East and the Soviet Union for the businessmen. With this feature, Turkey would be a rising country of the 21st century ("Türkiye 21. yüzyılın flaş ülkesi olacak", Milliyet, 1989). He also added that "21st century will be Turkish Century if we don't make huge mistakes" ("Düşlerimizdeki Türkiye", Milliyet, 1992).

Serious concrete steps were taken to achieve those policies (Efegil, 2009: 73). At first, delegations were sent to the region by Turkey, then their tendencies were analyzed, later their independences were recognized, after that official ties were established. Then Turkey took into consideration their demands and cooperated with those countries (Oran, 2009: 237). Turkey was the first country to establish diplomatic and economic relations with all Central Asian countries.³

Turkey tried to develop economic, cultural, social and political relations with regional countries through some institutions. Some of these institutions were established in 1992 under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs such as the Turkish International Cooperation Development Agency [TIKA (Türk İşbirliği ve Kalkınma Ajansı)] and Foreign Economic Relations Board [DEİK (Dış Ekonomik İlişkiler Kurulu)] (Özkan, 2010: 120-121). Airline flights began among the capitals, satellite broadcasts over Turkey were set in these countries and educational scholarships were given to students (Weitz, 2006: 123). We see here the other

³ http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-relations-with-central-asian-republics.en.mfa

basic elements of soft power – economic relations. In addition to these economic policies, Turkey pioneered the process of “The Summits of Turkic Speaking Countries' Heads of States”, held since 1992 in order to increase solidarity between the Turkic Speaking Countries and to create new cooperation opportunities among them.⁴

All these new Central Asian countries and Azerbaijan joined ECO (Economic Cooperation Organization) in 1992, which had been established in 1985 during the rule of Turgut Özal government. Its founding members are Turkey, Iran and Pakistan. With the inclusion of the new members, Turkey pursued the way of strengthening its economic relations with those Central Asian countries. In 1994, Turkish Petroleum Company (TPC) joined a consortium of oil companies and the Azeri government was established to extract oil from the Caspian Sea fields (Sayarı, 2000: 174). The aim of the Turkish government was to increase its gas imports by that way Turkey signed a number of bilateral and multilateral agreements with Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. At the same time, Turkey was very enthusiastic for the construction of pipelines that transport Caspian energy supplies from Turkey to Western World and Europe (Sayarı, 2000: 174).

Turkey presented herself as a country which ‘will bring stability’ to the region, declared itself as a ‘regional power’ and used expressions like ‘21st century will be Turkish Century’ and ‘the union of Turkic states from the Adriatic to the Chinese Wall’ (Mufti, 1998: 38). Those policies and discourses show us that Turkey pursued soft power approaches to the new Central Asian countries. However, they were probably not conscious about the name of those policies called as ‘soft power’ because at those times soft power was not common as a concept for Turkish policymakers and maybe for the rest of the world.

As mentioned above, the soft power of a country is based primarily on three elements: culture, political values and qualified foreign policies (Nye, 2004: 11). Turkey wanted to influence those countries with the emphasis on common culture. In other words, they claimed that the new Central Asian countries and Turkey shared the same interests. By using the ‘Turkish Century’ discourses, Turkey tried to convince the new Central Asian countries that ‘Turkish community’ will be stronger with them.

Why did Turkey want to establish an impact on these countries? What was the aim of Turkey? Did Turkey really want pursue their interests or its own interests? Besides did Turkey managed to realize its policies? As an answer, it would be wrong to say that Turkey just considered those countries’ interests. We can even say Turkey often considered its own

⁴ http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-relations-with-central-asian-republics.en.mfa

interests. In fact, soft power policy requires it. According to soft power theory, your interest is primary when compared to the interests of others. Turkey seems to make co-operation with these countries for mostly its own economic and political interests.

Two important factors are necessary to be successful in soft power policy. These are legitimacy and reliability. The achievement of the soft power policy depends on the other countries' legitimization of your policy. Joseph Nye clarifies it as follows (2004: 10-11):

“When countries make their power legitimate in the eyes of others, they encounter less resistance to their wishes. If a country's culture and ideology are attractive, others more willingly follow. If a country can shape international rules that are consistent with its interests and values, its actions will more likely appear legitimate in the eyes of others. If it uses institutions and follows rules that encourage other countries to channel or limit their activities in ways it prefers, it will not need as many costly carrots and sticks.”

When we look at the events of that time, we can say that Turkey's policies failed in practice and were unable to attract those countries. Turkey's discourse of 'big brother' and failure of economic aid caused a negative image for the new countries of Central Asia. That is because they had just gained their independence and they did not want to new 'big brother' like Soviet Union. They also did not trust Turkey because of the disruptions of economic aid. To sum up, Turkey lost its effect on these countries.

According to Nye (2004: 11), some analysts over simplify soft power just as popular cultural power. They make the mistake by equating soft power tools with the cultural resources. They confuse behavior of attraction and cultural resources. Only cultural influences are away from being efficient. In order to use cultural influence effectively, the other assumptions –economy, political values and quality of foreign policies- must be used logically and effectively. Moreover, advanced economic resources are crucial to accomplish soft power policy. If the countries have insufficient economies, they are not able to attract the target country. Turkey's economic inadequacy was the main reason for the failure of influencing those Central Asian countries.

As a result, as Turkey's policies failed in the region, Russia Federation has totally established its dominance. In fact Turkish policymakers ignored the Russian influence on the region. Although the new countries of Central Asia were independent and their ethnic origins were Turks, the majority of the people of these countries speak Russian, and Russian was still the second official language. Hence, we can say Russian effect was another reason for the

failure of Turkish influence. Actually from the outset, Turkey and Russia –and maybe Iran– competed to achieve their domination over the region (Aras, 2000: 42). Turkey lost and Russia won this competition. So how did Russia manage to take these new Central Asian countries under its control? Did Russia use soft power, hard power or something else? That is another story. This paper only tried to explain Turkey’s soft power behaviours towards the Central Asia.

Conclusion

A country which uses soft power, aims to dominate or take the other country its own side by attracting her. However, there is no difference between hard power and soft power in terms of this aim (Nye, 2006: 4). Though their goals are the same, their means are different. While hard power prefers military power and economic sanctions to dominate other countries, soft power prefers some other tools like culture, political values, diplomacy to dominate or take own side. Joseph Nye (2004: 17) gives some examples of the USA’s soft power tools, and even Michael Jordan, Hollywood, Microsoft and Harvard is said to have been used as attractant.

Today, most of the time it is not possible to influence a country by using military force. These hard power policies are not regarded as legitimate anymore by the other country’s public. To attract the people of the other state, the policies intended to be implemented should be considered as legal and this makes it easier to dominate over that country.

Turkish foreign policy was revised with the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Fidan, 2010: 109). Turkey developed some policies to attract Central Asian countries in early 1990s and acted for its own interests. Turkey highlighted especially common culture, common history and common identity with those countries. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to state that Turkey wanted to dominate the new Turkic republics of Central Asia. Turkey pursued active policy to regain its strategic importance, tried to ensure economic growth by achieving economic benefits and prevent possible identity conflicts in the region.

Turkey’s efforts to expand its role and influence in the Central Asia gave some good results. For example, Turkey has succeeded in establishing its presence in new Turkic republics, especially in Azerbaijan, despite being unsatisfactory for Turkey. Besides, economic and cultural interactions between Turkey and the Turkic republics have increased

significantly in the post Cold War era (Sayarı, 2000: 175). As a conclusion, Turkey tried but could not succeed in implementing these policies due to the lack of advanced economies, absence of common borders, Russian presence in the region and the reluctance of the Turkic republics leaders to become dependent on another country after decades of dependence on the Soviet Union.

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