

Balkans Revisited

A Qualitative Content Analysis of how Turkey Pursues Soft
Power in Kosovo



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Abstract

In recent decades, the Republic of Turkey has emerged on the global stage. Through a number of state-run organisations, the country has built a notable presence across former Ottoman territories as well as in the broader Muslim world. This thesis investigates the activities of the Turkish state against the backdrop of Joseph S. Nye's theory of soft power through a case study of the Turkish presence in Kosovo.

To describe how Turkey pursues soft power in Kosovo, a qualitative content analysis of a number of Turkish state-run activities was conducted. This analysis builds on a broad range of sources, stretching from official reports from Turkish organisations, to some very recent academic studies within the field.

The study finds that Turkey creates the conditions for soft power through an instrumentalization of factors where Kosovo and Turkey are already alike—specifically, the Ottoman history and the religion of Islam. A thorough emphasis on education in the field of student exchange, as well as spreading the Turkish language, are also identified as notable factors.

Key words: Turkey, Kosovo, soft power, Balkans, foreign aid.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introducing the Study

When Joseph S. Nye coined the term “soft power” in 1990, it was primarily the American post-war success story he had in mind. American advances in foreign policy, Nye argued, was built not solely on military achievements, but also on the fact that American culture had achieved a kind of hegemony, and American “values” were being striven for abroad not only for instrumental reasons, but simply *because they were seen as good*.

As the world has become more multipolar since the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the American-hegemonic 1990s, there has been an increased interest in soft power measures from other countries. A quick search on the term in LUBsearch in 2021 results in more articles on China and Japan than concerning the United States among the top ten results.

In the last decades, scholars have noted how the Republic of Turkey has taken an active step into the soft power arena of world politics. Although it can be argued that the country has pursued foreign policy goals with rather active measures earlier in its history¹, and has been a donor of foreign aid since the 1990s, it is during the tenure of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which came to power in 2002 and especially with former minister of foreign affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu at the reigns that Turkey really emerged in this field (Öztürk 2021, p. 91, 111-113). The Balkans is a region where this has been very visible—this diverse region shares Turkey’s Ottoman history, and has been the subject of a distinct interest from Ankara ever since the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

A country where these developments have been especially true is the Republic of Kosovo. Independent since 2008, Kosovo is one of the world’s youngest states, and ranks among the poorest regions on the European continent (Nationalencyklopedin n.d.a). Turkey has been active in the country even since before the Kosovan declaration of independence, and Kosovo was, together with Albania and Macedonia, recognized as part of an “inner circle” of Turkish soft power potential by former foreign minister Davutoğlu (Dzogovic 2019, p. 103). Yet a thorough study on Turkey’s presence in the country was yet to be conducted.

Below, I present my attempt at this task. Looking at a number of Turkish state-run activities in Kosovo, I have analysed these using Nye’s theory of soft power. Rather than being a study of the underlying reasons for Turkey’s foreign policy towards Kosovo, or what Turkey specifically gains from such activities, this thesis is focused on *how* the conditions for Turkish soft power are created. The analysis builds upon information from Turkish actors active in Kosovo, as well as an abundance of previous academic work, most of it very recent. The study was conducted as a qualitative content analysis, building on a strategically chosen material.

¹ The Turkish intervention in Cyprus in 1974, which would later come to create the self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in 1983, is a good example (Kanol & Köprülü 2017, p. 392).

1.2 Purpose and research question

The purpose of this thesis is to examine an example of how Turkey wields, or rather *creates*, soft power abroad. This investigation is done through an in-depth study of Turkey's work in Kosovo, with the ambition to clarify and define the leading elements of these processes. The conclusion of this study should not be taken as generalising per se, but rather as a descriptive example of how a country strives towards soft power in a region where there is shared history. I also believe that by showing how soft power is striven for in practice, I can contribute in some way to a further development of Nye's theoretical framework.

My research question for this study is:

How is Turkey creating the conditions for soft power in Kosovo?

To reach this question, I have made the assumption that Turkey *does* try to create the conditions for soft power in Kosovo. This is, naturally, not entirely uncontroversial, but as I will show, the subject of Turkish soft power is rather established in the academic, as well as the wider, context (see 2.4).

I believe that this study is of high academic relevance, as research on Turkey's activities abroad, and especially within the framework of soft power and foreign aid, is quickly evolving. Even though there have been several studies on Turkey's work with soft power in the Balkans, Kosovo is still very much a blank spot within this field. Further, I believe that studying Turkey's instrumentalization of the Ottoman heritage serves to broaden our understanding of soft power in spheres with a common history—something which invites further research into other spaces than the post-Ottoman one.

In addition to the academic relevance, I have high hopes that the topics and findings discussed in this study are of interest to a wider audience as well. As the process of globalization continues, I believe that these kinds of activities are of increasing general concern. The study might also, in some way, be of help to policymakers in Kosovo as well as globally.

1.3 Disposition

Following the introduction and statement of purpose above, I briefly present Joseph S. Nye's theory of soft power, and my interpretation of it for this particular study in section 2. With this theoretical framework established, I introduce and discuss the method used for analysing Turkey's presence in Kosovo (section 3.). I find it favourable to properly introduce the theory used before discussing my method, given that the theory is a cornerstone of the study, while the method is rather an instrument of the analytical process.

In section 4., I present some relevant background on the relations between Turkey and Kosovo, and how Turkey has developed as an active party on the international arena. I then move on to my actual analysis in section 5., looking first at the very broad genre of culture and education, followed by a shorter section on the instrumentalization of religion. The

findings from the analysis are discussed in section 6., and I present my conclusion in section 7.

1.4 Limitations

This thesis was originally intended as a field study, primarily based on informant interviews and first-hand visits at relevant sites in Kosovo. However, due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, this proved impossible. Reaching out to relevant actors digitally instead would prove very ineffective, and much of the study thus had to be based upon pre-existing academic literature. It is hard to define the exact manner in which this has affected my findings, but I believe that I would have been able to present a greater contribution to the academic context if my original research design had been an available option.

Looking at my own role in researching this problem, I can identify a number of potential biases. First of all, I should disclose that I myself have taken courses via the Yunus Emre Institute—an actor very much relevant to my analysis. However, this has been restricted to the centre in Berlin, and without any contacts with the branch in Kosovo. Furthermore, I have more of a relation to Turkey than to Kosovo, since I have lived and studied in the former, and never even had the chance to visit the latter. This asymmetry might of course have shaped my interpretation in some way.

2. Theory

This study builds upon Joseph S. Nye's theory of *soft power*. The term has, since its inception in the early 1990s, become somewhat of a given concept in the study of international relations. It was further developed by Nye in a monograph published in 2004, and the concept is now something of an umbrella-term, with subdivisions such as nation branding and public diplomacy properly established as academic fields of their own. As Nye's text is unclear in certain respects, I have been helped by James Pamment & Karin Gwinn Wilkins (2018) on how to interpret soft power in the context of foreign aid.

2.1 Nye's Definition of Soft Power

Nye describes soft power as *co-optive*, in contrast to "hard" power which he deems *coercive* (Nye 2004, p. 7-8). While "hard" power might be the potential to force a country to do certain actions through military or economic means, soft power "rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others" (Nye 2004, p. 5).

A common source of soft power is culture. This covers *high culture* (literature, art, education etc.) as well as *popular culture* (mass entertainment) (Nye 2004, p. 11). These are both, of course, rather broad concepts, and Nye does not define them any more specifically. However, the spread of culture should not be *equated* with soft power, as the term covers other sources as well (Nye 2004, p. 11-13). The overarching goal of soft power is to create a more general *attraction* towards the power wielder—this includes admiration for, and aspirations to share, values specific to the power wielding country (Nye 2004, p. 30-31). A typical, and rather hands-on, tool in this respect is *education*: influencing teaching institutions in other countries, and, perhaps more importantly, offering scholarships to foreign students to study in the power wielding country itself, is described as a key long-term element when trying to achieve soft power (Nye 2004, p. 44-45; Pamment & Wilkins 2018, p. 7).

The educational measures mentioned above are generally seen as one contributing factor in *public diplomacy*—in itself one of several subdivisions of soft power (Pamment & Wilkins 2018, p. 7; Nye 2004, p. 109-110). Public diplomacy is separated from the classical understanding of diplomacy, as it is not communication between two states, but rather one state (the power wielder) communicating directly with the people or the NGOs of another state (Nye 2004, p. 107).

Public diplomacy as a soft power measure also shows the importance of language—the ability to communicate through a common language creates greater conditions for this exchange to be effective, and enables a deeper kind of mutual understanding, as the need for intermediating factors declines. Language is also a natural way of creating and maintaining cultural ties, and thus, attractiveness (Nye 2004, p. 75-76). Hence, language can be seen both as an element of culture in itself, but also as an enabler of deeper intercultural understanding. Returning to the idea of education and university exchange as a tool of soft power-creation, language also naturally plays a role as it enables visiting students to take part of education on the same terms as students native to the host country.

2.1.1 Foreign Aid as a Tool of Soft Power

Something which seems to be rather uncertain when it comes to discussing soft power is to what extent *foreign aid* can be considered a parameter. Nye himself puts foreign aid in the context of *economic* rather than *soft* power, but later argues that humanitarian aid also *can* serve as an instrument of the latter (2004, p. 31, 61-62). Being a donor country in this context “legitimizes and increases (...) soft power” (Nye 2004, s. p. 61).

Pamment & Wilkins (2018) further argues that humanitarian aid might serve as a tool of soft power, as it might, apart from its primary, economic or humanitarian effects, also have secondary benefits “derived from the pattern of interaction: a preference for a particular language, culture, values (...)” (p. 5). This is a more specified continuation of Nye’s argument of aid being a primarily soft power-*increasing* element than an actual soft power-*creating* element.

Foreign aid is not, however, always necessarily “humanitarian”—it might also be directed towards cultural activities in a more straightforward fashion. In this case, I believe it to be a clearly soft power-*creating* element, and will therefore interpret it so.

2.1.2 Clarifying and Operationalising “Soft Power”

As stated, soft power is much about attraction. Many aspects of what makes a country attractive are however internal to the power wielding country—some features of “attractiveness” cannot solely be portrayed to a foreign audience, but must be created from within. This limits soft power measures abroad to spreading knowledge about, and creating an increased potential for understanding and sympathizing with, the power-wielding state. I thus define the primary goal of *pursuing soft power abroad* as creating an *increasingly homogenized value-cultural space between the country pursuing soft power and another state*. Instruments are listed in the table below.

Table 1.
Instruments of Pursuing Soft Power Abroad.

Education
University Exchange
Language Education
Culture and values
Cultural projects
Communicating Certain Values
Popular Culture
Visibility of the Soft Power-pursuing Country

These instruments also serve as the basis for my operationalisation. While soft power is not restricted to state-run activities, I have chosen to look at these primarily, as the scope would otherwise be very broad. Without this kind of restriction for my study, the findings would not be as interesting, given the sometimes random elements present when creating soft power. Looking instead at measures taken solely by the state, a clear mapping of active policy is enabled. Pursuing soft power is hence operationalised as *state-run activities within the fields of education and culture and values, creating visibility for the power-wielding country.*

2.2 Assumptions on the Rationality of States

It is hard to combine the concept of soft power with an idea of states acting out of pure altruism. Of course, one could argue that a state might sometimes pursue soft power, and hence be generous out of “selfish”, or strategic, reasons, and at other times be more genuinely altruistic. Separating these two intentions, both in general and in the case I have chosen to examine, is however far beyond the scope of this study. Hence, I lean towards an instrumentalist understanding of states’ rationality, interpreting state action as a means to an end, driven by self-interest (Hollis 2002, p. 148-149). This is differentiated from “value rationality”, which is an understanding of rationality as being driven by certain values (Hollis 2002, p. 148-149). Interpreting state action as driven by value rationality might also seem relevant in this field—soft power, as mentioned above, is very much about spreading your own values. However, I would argue that the whole idea of pursuing soft power is based upon an instrumentalist way of thinking, as even value-based actions are undertaken with the strategic intention of maximising other values or interests.

2.3 Establishing Turkey’s Soft Power in the Academic Context

The assumption that Turkey does try to create the conditions for soft power in Kosovo is of course a subjective interpretation. However, I follow in the footsteps of a number of esteemed scholars from universities across the globe, as well as from Turkey itself (see Öztürk 2021; Kelkitli 2021; Dzagovic 2019 among others). Furthermore, several Turkish officials have themselves claimed that they pursue soft power—among them the current head of the Yunus Emre Foundation (Öztürk 2021, p. 152).

If this signals a clear shift from a Kemalist², isolationist understanding of Turkey’s role in the world towards a “neo-Ottoman” foreign policy, or rather a natural development towards Turkey’s western neighbourhood, is still a field of much debate. I do not attempt to

² The ideology of state linked to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founder of modern Turkey. The Kemalist approach to foreign policy is often exemplified with the quote “Peace at home, peace in the world”, which emphasizes non-interventionism (Cleveland & Bunton 2016, p. 366-367; Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2011).

understand or clarify what *drives* Turkish foreign policy in this study—that is a debate which, however interesting, is not within the scope of this thesis.

3. Method

This thesis is based upon an in-depth case study of Turkish state sponsored activities in, and relating to, the Republic of Kosovo. The study was conducted as a qualitative content analysis—however, rather than using texts as the basic units for analysis, I interpret certain *actions* of the Turkish state (Esaiasson et. al. 2017, p. 198, 211-213).

Building on the operationalisation of “*pursuing soft power abroad*” defined in section 2.1.2, I have identified a number of projects with soft power-characteristics. These projects were subsequently categorised by sector, analysed and interpreted. This interpretation was not an attempt at finding out whether the units qualified as soft power resources or not per se, but as to find out the *defining elements* of what makes up Turkish soft power in Kosovo.

While my research question could also have been answered with a more quantitative approach³, looking at total numbers of investment and distribution across sectors, I believe that there are aspects of soft power which are best analysed through a qualitative analysis. Returning to the instruments of soft power, several of these concepts are hard to grasp, and while a strict operationalisation could surely make this possible, I believe that ideas of values and culture are better served by using a thorough qualitative method, as it allows for an analysis of contextual meaning (Esaiasson et. al. 2017, p. 211-212). However, a quantitative study on Turkish activities in Kosovo would also be a much welcome addition to this academic field.

3.1 Material

This study is based upon strategically chosen official documents and information provided by official websites of relevant actors, as well as scholarly articles and other pre-existing sources. I also had the privilege of conducting a shorter semi-structured informant interview with Dr. Mehmet Ülker, head of the Yunus Emre Institute in Kosovo.

As I did not have the opportunity to research the relevant projects in person, I have tried to build a broad understanding using this mix of different sources. I further want to emphasize that this should *not* be taken as a literature review, even though the analysis builds upon some previous academic work. While the conclusions of the articles and monographs used have been of some help to my analysis, I have primarily looked at base facts of relevance to answering my research question.

The original sources used have almost exclusively been in English. However, I have also found a modest number of sources in Turkish, which I managed to use through a combination of my own, limited knowledge of the language, and online-based translation services. The information found in these Turkish sources have primarily served as entry points for facts I could later confirm using sources also available in English.

³ For an example of a study on soft power answered through a quantitative approach, see Kelkitli (2021).

3.1.1 Turkish Actors of Certain Interest

In this study, I have looked at three specific actors in particular, as they constantly recur across the field of Turkish soft power. Although the study is not limited to these three organisations, I believe that there is a point in specifying them.

Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı, TİKA for short—the official development assistance organisation of the Republic of Turkey.

Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, Diyanet for short—the Presidency of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Turkey.

Yunus Emre Enstitüsü, the Yunus Emre Institute—an institution promoting Turkish language and culture abroad.

4. Background

Below, I present a brief background to the two countries relevant for this study: Turkey and Kosovo. While both of them are incredibly rich in their history, and have seen dramatic political transformations in the more recent period, I choose to primarily focus on them in relation to each other, and within the scope of foreign policy and soft power, as this is of more direct relevance for my analysis. To further understand the internal changes in Turkey, and the effect these have had on foreign policy, I strongly recommend Öztürk (2021).

4.1 Turkey Emerging

Since the beginning of the 1990s, Turkey has emerged as a major contributor in the field of foreign aid (Fidan & Nurdun 2008, p. 110-111). Through the official development aid agency, TİKA, Turkey has created a strong presence in Central Asia, the Middle East and parts of Africa and Eastern Europe. The direction of Turkish aid has also shifted during the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government, from a focus on former Ottoman territories as well as other Turkic countries, to a more general Islamic outreach. A prominent example of this is the Turkish presence in Somalia, which has seen a great increase in recent years (Kavakli 2018, p. 618).

The shift in focus is representative for Turkey's general foreign policy development of the last decades. While standing by its strongly west-oriented foreign policy, with EU accession as a primary goal, the country simultaneously opened up for the "Turkic world" and the Balkans during the premiership, and later presidency, of Turgut Özal in the 1980s and -90s (Çevik, Sevin & Baybars-Hawks 2018, p. 181; Kavakli 2018, p. 615-616)⁴. This would, as mentioned above, change yet again with the ascension of the AKP to power. Today, being a "generous" global donor country is an important feature of how Turkey presents, or *brands*, itself internationally (Çevik, Sevin & Baybars-Hawks 2018, p 172-173).

Turkey's growing role as a donor country is just one of many examples of how the country is expanding its activities abroad. The Diyanet, for example, has supported Turkish Muslim communities abroad since the 1980s, and has increased its operations during the AKP—in the case of the Balkans, this ranges from providing religious literature to actual construction of new mosques (Öztürk & Gözaydın 2018, p. 343-344, 346). An example is the Great Mosque of Tirana in Albania, which was constructed by the Diyanet and visited by Turkey's president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan at its inauguration (Öztürk 2021, p. 156).

Another sector where Turkey has emerged on the global stage is the field of higher education. In the 1990s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey set up several scholarships for students from the then recently independent Turkic republics of Central Asia to study at Turkish universities (Kelkitli 2021, p. 45-46). This, too, has since shifted to a more

⁴ As the reader might note, this coincided with the liberalisation and later disintegration of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. This is of course not a coincidence—as the Eastern Bloc collapsed, the Balkan republics emerged, as did the Turkic republics of the former Soviet Union (Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan etc.). While the latter is defined as aid being "ethnically" connected, another aspect of the "Turkic world" is the common Turkic language family (Nationalencyklopedin n.d.b.).

global outreach, with several new exchange programs—most notably *Mevlana* and *Türkiye*—being founded in the 2000s (Kelkitli 2021, p. 46-47). Certain scholarships are also funded by the Diyanet, showing that the Turkish soft power surge is well integrated between different state run agencies (Kelkitli 2021, p. 42).

Education sponsored by Turkey is however not limited to university exchange. In 2007, the Yunus Emre Foundation was founded, with the mission of promoting Turkish language, culture, and history through cultural centres across the globe (Yunus Emre institute 2020a; Öztürk 2021, p. 110). The first centres of the institute established abroad were in the Balkans: in Bosnia Herzegovina and North Macedonia respectively (Öztürk 2021, p. 151). Today, the Yunus Emre Institute is running almost 60 centres, stretching from Japan to the US (Yunus Emre Institute 2020a).

4.1.1 Instrumentalization of Non-State Actors

Apart from the Diyanet, Turkey has also tolerated, and to some extent cooperated and benefited from, non-state actors in the religious field. One of the more prominent examples in this respect is the so-called Gülen movement, a network founded by the religious scholar Fethullah Gülen (Öktem 2012, p. 46-48). The network ran schools and colleges in Turkey up until 2016, and would come to establish itself in the Balkans after the fall of Yugoslavia. The first “Gülenist” school in the Balkans opened in 1993, and the network started operating in Kosovo in 2000 (Öktem 2012, p. 47). Öztürk argues that already during the reign of Turgut Özal, structures like the Gülen movement were instrumentalized as a resource of soft power by the Turkish state (2021, p. 78-79).

After an initial alliance between the AKP and the Gülenists there was a falling out in 2013 (Öztürk 2021, p. 120). This conflict was greatly enhanced by the 2016 attempted coup d’état in Turkey, which was blamed on the Gülenists, who in their turn claimed innocence. Purges of alleged Gülenist-affiliated individuals and institutions have since followed in Turkey, and the movement is no longer seen as an instrument of Turkish soft power abroad, but rather as a competitor, or a threat (Öztürk 2021, p. 122-125).

4.2 The Case of Kosovo

A major beneficiary of Turkish aid is the Republic of Kosovo. Even before its official declaration of independence from Serbia in 2008, the then-autonomous region was, in total numbers, the primary recipient of Turkish official development assistance (ODA) in Europe (Fidan & Nurdun 2008, p.100, 102). Given the relatively small population size of the country (approximately 1,8 million people in 2019 (The World Bank 2021)), this number is even more impressive.

Even though Kosovo now seems to have been surpassed by several countries in the Balkans in total numbers of Turkish aid, the country is still a prominent, and in many ways typical, beneficiary (TİKA 2020, p. 30). Kosovo is both situated in the former Ottoman region of the Balkans, and it has a predominantly Muslim population (Öztürk & Gözaydın 2018, p. 348). Furthermore, the country has a Turkish speaking minority, and Turkish is recognized as an official language in the municipalities of Prizren and Mamusa (Cvilak et. al.

2019, p. 9; Öztürk & Gözaydın 2018, p. 348). The Turkish presence is notable, not only through economic assistance via TİKA—the Yunus Emre Institute has three offices in Kosovo, a number matched only by Bosnia Herzegovina (Yunus Emre Institute 2020a). Like TİKA, the Diyanet was active in Kosovo several years before independence, establishing several schools and institutions (Öztürk & Gözaydın 2018, p. 348). The Diyanet is also overseeing the construction of Pristina’s new Grand Mosque (Colborne & Edwards 2019).

The relations between Turkey and Kosovo have been close since the 1990s. Turkey took an active role in the Kosovo war, and there was broad support for a recognition of Kosovo among the Turkish public even before the Kosovan declaration of independence (Demirtaş 2013, p. 168-169, 174-175). Further, the number of ethnic Kosovan Albanians is greater in Turkey than in Kosovo itself (Öztürk & Gözaydın 2018, p. 348).

5. Analysis

Below I present my analysis. Building on my collected empirical material, I have chosen to display certain sectors of Turkish activity which I deem especially relevant for the study of Turkey's soft power in Kosovo. However, categorizing these activities strictly has proven to be a difficult task, given the notable integration between sectors—are religious activities, for example, really possible to separate from educational measures when this education is of a religious character? Hence, this classification should be seen more as an overarching attempt at creating structure, rather than actually isolating certain sectors from each other. As the reader will notice, there is an almost constant overlap.

5.1 Education and Culture

5.1.1 The Ottoman Cultural Heritage

The Ottoman history is still very much visible in the Balkans, and Kosovo is no exception. Preservation of this cultural heritage is one of the major focal points of TİKA in the region, and the organisation recently made public their plans for renovating Pristina's *Fatih Hammam* (a historical Ottoman bath house) at a press conference together with the mayor of the Kosovan capital (TİKA 2021). This is not unusual—almost all renovation projects concerning Ottoman buildings in Kosovo are funded by TİKA (Sadriu 2019, p. 423). This kind of aid to buildings of cultural value is rather visible compared to other types of constructions, which makes it an effective resource of soft power.

One example of such a project is the *Sultan Murad Türbesi*, which is analysed in an article by Behar Sadriu (2019). The *türbe*, or shrine, is one of the oldest Ottoman structures in the Balkans, and has become somewhat of a symbol of Turkey's presence in Kosovo (Sadriu 2019, 421; TİKA 2014, p. 11). It was constructed to commemorate the Ottoman victory at the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, and was built in the years following this battle (Sadriu 2019, p. 421-422).

After decades of neglect in the Yugoslavian and Serbian period, the shrine was renovated by the Diyanet in 2005, with funding from TİKA. In 2010, an adjacent building was refurbished as a museum, with information in Albanian (the official language of Kosovo), English and Turkish. In the museum, the Ottoman Empire and Turkey are often equated, and Turkish flags hang by the entrance to the *türbe* (Sadriu 2019, p. 423, 427-428). This, like the holding of a press conference mentioned above, is a way of creating *recognition* of Turkey as an assisting power. The creation of the museum, and how the content is presented, can also be viewed as a sort of public diplomacy.

The *türbe* has become somewhat of a mandatory destination for visiting Turkish diplomats and politicians, while the interest among Kosovan citizens seems to be rather low (Sadriu 2019, p. 426, 429). This is interesting, as it, rather than serving as a beacon of Turkey to the Kosovan public, seems to be more directed at the domestic arena of Turkey itself. This could perhaps be viewed as an indication that the relation between the two countries which Turkey strives for is not just a one way relationship of Kosovo being “attracted” to Turkey, but rather a sort of exchange.

Sadriu argues that these kinds of processes serve as an act of appropriation of Ottoman cultural heritage, as well as a statement of the role of Turkey as protector of Muslims in the Balkans. This would, according to Sadriu, establish Turkey as a sort of patron, not only of the physical spaces, but also of the more abstract common heritage that the Ottoman history entails (Sadriu 2019, p. 426). Patronage of this sort is not something which Nye discusses directly within the framework of soft power, and I will return to this matter in my discussion (see section 6.).

I will dwell further on the issue of religious connections between Turkey and Kosovo in section 5.3, but it is worth noting that TİKA has been in charge of several renovation projects of Ottoman era-mosques as well (TİKA 2013). These projects, not unique to Kosovo but common across most of the post-Ottoman space, are referred to as “protection of *our* cultural heritage” (TİKA 2013, italics added). This could be understood as a way of appropriating the Ottoman history, and connecting it more directly to Turkey of today, but in the framework of soft power, I rather believe that it might serve to create a sense of *common* history and culture. The fact that it is Turkey who takes on the task of “protecting” this cultural heritage is however still an indicator of the central position the country claims in relation to other countries where it is active. The equation between Turkey and the Ottoman Empire in the museum is also a sign of this, and is something which strengthens Turkey’s visibility, as the country thus becomes a natural part of the Kosovan history.

5.1.2 Establishing Turkish as a “Lingua Franca”

As mentioned in 4.2, TİKA has been active in Kosovo since even before the state’s inception. Much of the initial support can be assumed to have been humanitarian aid, given the temporal proximity to the Kosovo war, but already in the early 2000s, a more direct attempt at soft power can be observed. In 2001, TİKA established *Yeni Dönem* (“New Era”), the first Turkish language TV channel in the Balkans, in Prizren, Kosovo, so that “*the Turkish community in the area will have a significant opportunity to keep their culture, language, history and traditions alive*”. The channel would, however, also broadcast in Albanian, Bosnian and Romani (TİKA n.d., p. 15).

The fact that *Yeni Dönem* was not simply an organ directed to Turkish speakers in the Balkans, makes the channel an effective tool of the spread of Turkish values and viewpoints to a wider audience. Establishing news media directed at a foreign audience is a rather common tool in this respect—compare Qatari *Al Jazeera* or the American funded *Radio Free Europe*. Furthermore, the Turkish state-backed news network *Anadolu Ajansı* is also present in Kosovo, as is the TV-channel TRT (Cvilak et. al. 2019, p. 9). The establishment of this kind of media actors abroad is something which Nye discusses as well, calling it “fast” media. This is compared to the “slow” media of cultural diplomacy, like literature and cultural exchange, which might have more genuine long-term effects compared to the more propagandist direct communication of TV and radio (Nye 2004, p. 102-107).

Turkish soap operas are also immensely popular across the Balkans, especially in Kosovo and a few of other countries⁵ (Dzogovic 2016, p. 112). While any exact numbers on local ratings could not be found, this is still of some concern, as it is a typical example of popular culture with a wide potential audience—in contrast to the field of higher education, which is more directed at future elites. Nye attributes great significance to popular culture in this regard, as it normalises the soft power wielding country to the general citizen, and even if that does not necessarily mean any alignment on policy issues, it is a chance to portray certain values (Nye 2004, p. 46-47).

When looking at “slower” types of interaction of language and culture, however, the Yunus Emre Institute must be considered. With three offices in Kosovo, the Institute arranges activities like music concerts and plays, but is also present at book fairs and other locally organized cultural events (Ülker 2021; Yunus Emre Institute 2020c). Most importantly, however, the Yunus Emre Institute arranges language classes. Birgül Demirtaş argues, a bit drastically perhaps, that Turkish, due to the work of the Institute, has been established as a sort of *lingua franca* of the Balkans, “unrivalled by any other regional language” (2013, p. 176-177). Kerem Öktem takes a more careful stance, stating that Turkish has made a “modest comeback among (...) elites” (2012, p. 58). TİKA has also supported education in Turkish language and on Turkish literature at several universities in Kosovo—Pristina University is one example (TİKA 2015, p. 70).

The spread of language is, as stated in section 2.1, a typical goal when creating the conditions for soft power. It can, for example, serve as an enabling element when welcoming international students—something Turkey learned in the 1990s. When creating the first international scholarships, centered on the post-Soviet Turkic republics, graduation numbers among exchange students were stunningly low, much due to lacking knowledge of the Turkish language (Kelkitli 2021, p. 46).

Further, in 2020, the Yunus Emre Institute in Kosovo also started a course in Ottoman Turkish (Yunus Emre Institute, 2020b). Ottoman Turkish, written in the Arabic alphabet, was largely eradicated with the latinization of Turkish in 1928 (Cleveland & Bunton 2016, p. 362). This, like the restorations of Ottoman structures, serves to revitalize the common Ottoman history—while there are no physical memories of the Ottoman past in modern Turkish, Ottoman Turkish was more of a dominating language among elites when Kosovo was part of the empire. Furthermore it serves to raise interest in Turkey, the inheritor-state of the Ottoman Empire.

The work of the Yunus Emre Institute can also be analysed against the backdrop of Turkey’s conflict with the Gülen movement (see section 4.1.1). Öztürk argues that much of what the institute does today, serves as a kind of replication of the work previously done by the Gülenists (2021, p. 151). In this context, it is relevant to mention that Turkey in 2018 urged Kosovo to close down Gülenist-run schools, while at the same time itself funding two, and planning to fund an additional seven, elementary schools in the country (Cvilak et. al. 2019, p. 11).

⁵ Dzogovic lists Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosovo, Croatia, Serbia, Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia as countries where “Turkish soap operas have secured a high rate of viewing” (2016, p. 112).

While the conflict with the Gülen movement is more of an internal Turkish affair, and hence not quite within the scope of this study, the kind of replication mentioned above is interesting, as it is obvious that the Turkish state deemed much of the Gülenists' work abroad as an important soft power resource. With the present conflict, the state has instead tried to replace, and in effect, monopolize these kinds of resources—something Nye would judge as an ineffective soft power strategy (2004, p. 73-75). Nye argues, with the US serving as his example, that soft power is most effective long term when it is not necessarily connected to the state only. He draws upon the example of the US in the era of the Vietnam war, a time when American policies were very unpopular abroad—but America kept it's attractiveness due to the plethora of (often anti-war) popular culture which was created simultaneously (p. 51-53).

In regard to cultural activities, it should also be noted that in the period between 2009 and 2013, Turkish investments in Kosovo within this particular field dropped rather sharply. This can be compared to Turkish total investments in Kosovo during the same period, which were more stable (Dzogovic 2019, p. 114). Even if more recent economic developments remain to be researched, this could be seen as a kind of retreat of Turkey in the soft power arena. On the other hand, it could be viewed as a down scaling after some heavy initial investments necessary to establish itself in the country. Looking at ODA from a range of other countries, Dzogovic notes a general declining trend in assistance to Kosovo during the period (2019, p. 113). Furthermore, even if total numbers of investments in cultural activities declined, it cannot be ignored that the first office of the Yunus Emre Institute opened within this same period (Pristina, 2011), and the other two opened in 2016 (Prizren) and 2017 (Peja) respectively (Ülker 2021).

I want to end this section with a return to Demirtaş (2013) and Öktem (2012), who both noted the increased role of the Turkish language in the Balkans. Without delving into speculation, I think that it should be taken into consideration that since these articles were published, the Yunus Emre Institute has opened two new centres in Kosovo, with all the increased capacity which that entails. While any more recent sources on the role of Turkish in the Balkans, or in Kosovo more specifically, could not be found, it is not at radical idea that the role of the language has been greatly enhanced, as, especially given that Turkish is also taught at universities, the number of speakers can be assumed to be accumulating. Returning to Nye's dichotomy between "fast" and "slow" interaction, it is obvious that Turkey pursues both these paths, and has identified the potential positive long-term effects of a deeper intercultural understanding.

5.1.3 Higher Education

University exchange is defined by Nye as a key element of soft power, and education is one of the fields I have identified where it is possible to actively pursue soft power abroad. As mentioned above, Turkey has had an active policy of university exchange since the 1990s, and this has seen a further expansion in recent years. The *Mevlana* exchange program was established in 2011, and came into effect in the academic year of 2013/2014 (Kelkitli 2021, p. 47). Exchange between universities and institutions within the framework of *Mevlana* is established by bilateral protocols, and the program is described by a Turkish university as

involving “higher education institutions all over the World without geographical discrimination” (Kelkitli 2021, p. 47; Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi n.d.). As of 2019, there were 1 600 Kosovan citizens studying in Turkey, and a majority of these were receiving some kind of Turkish state-backed scholarship (Cvilak et. al. 2019, p. 11). The Yunus Emre Institute is also cooperating with TİKA in promoting Turkish universities in Kosovo (Ülker 2021).

Further, the Diyanet offers scholarships as well, primarily for religious education at Turkish universities. These stretches from introductory Qur’an courses to post-doctoral studies. In 2009, the number of Kosovan recipients of these grants numbered 125 people, which, except for Bulgaria, was the highest total number among the countries in the Balkans (Öktem 2012, p. 43-44).

Looking especially at the scholarships from Diyanet, I believe this to be a rather straightforward creation of shared values—i.e. the Turkish state’s understanding of Islam. I will return to this matter in section 5.2. Also, while the number of recipients of these grants, and of Kosovan citizens studying in Turkey at large, might not seem that high, it has to be taken into consideration that these figures are probably yearly recurring, creating rather large cadres of academics and religious officials with a direct relation to Turkey (Öktem 2012, p. 43).

The importance of university exchange, and the welcoming of foreign students as a resource of soft power cannot be understated. While it is not something which affects the foreign public at large, it can create a friendly sentiment towards the host country among the visiting students—who might be the future elites of their home countries. This should not necessarily be understood as a way to make these students lean more towards the political order of the host country, but as these individuals get to know the new country, the idea is that they will at least not be estranged from this country later on in life, but have some kind of relation that might translate into some political gain (Nye 2004, p. 44-46).

5.2 Values and Religion

Looking at direct communication of *values*, this could have been a potential task for the Yunus Emre Institute. However, in the activities in Kosovo that the institute chooses to communicate in English on its official website, specific values are a rather absent concept (Yunus Emre Institute 2021). As I have already mentioned above, mass communication sources like TV can be seen as another effective tool in this respect, and overall cultural exchange serves as an indirect communication of values as well. In this section, I will instead focus on religious projects, as I have found that these might serve as yet another way of communicating Turkish values in Kosovo.

Nye does not mention religion in the framework of soft power much, but he considers Saudi Arabia’s sponsoring of its own, Wahabbist, interpretation of Islam around the world as exploitation of a soft power resource (Nye 2004, p. 96-97). Further, he notes the importance of religious organizations as non-state actors with great soft power potential (Nye 2004, p. 94). As I stated in section 2.1.2, I interpret religion as a potentially important subdivision of the larger field of *values*, and as I will show, I believe it to be a rather effective instrument of soft power.

Kosovo is a predominantly Muslim country, with around 90% of its population adhering to Islam (Öztürk & Gözaydın 2018, p. 348). With the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the Diyanet took on a more active role in supporting the Muslim populations across the Balkans. This was partly done on invitation from the emerging countries—as Muslim communities were in need of economic support from abroad, Turkey was seen as a more secular and “safe” alternative to the countries of the Gulf⁶ (Öztürk 2021, p. 80-82). Already in 1994, more than ten years before Kosovo’s independence, religious officials from the then-region were, together with counterparts from Albania and Bosnia, invited to the Eurasian Islamic Council in Istanbul (Sadriu 2019, p. 425).

As mentioned above, TİKA has been very active in the renovations of Ottoman-era mosques (see 6.1). Worth noting here is also the fact that several of these mosques were in need of restoration, or even rebuilding, after being damaged or destroyed by Serbian forces in the Kosovo war in the end of the 1990s. Kerem Öktem argues that these processes have been an important element in heightening the “self-confidence” of Muslim communities in the country (2012, p. 39). Öktem further notes that TİKA has supported the Islamic Union of Kosovo “significantly” (Öktem 2012, p. 38).

As I discussed in section 5.1.1, restorations of this kind seem to be an effective way of creating the conditions for soft power. “You can’t see the plummings, but you can see the minarets” as a political analyst claims in regard to the Turkish presence in Bosnia & Herzegovina (Cvilak et. al. 2019, p. 6). This might be especially true in the context of Turkey repairing mosques destroyed by Serbian forces—this puts Turkey on the side of Kosovo in a conflict which might still run deep in Kosovan society. This should also be seen in the light of Sadriu’s argument that Turkey is establishing itself as a “protector of Muslims” (2019, p. 426, see 6.1). While not necessarily displaying any *specific* values, it puts Turkey in a positive framework towards Kosovo—and thus displays the more abstract value of being pro-Kosovo.

Perhaps most striking is however the construction of *new* mosques. In 2019, construction on Pristina’s new Grand Mosque complex started—a project financed by the Diyanet as a gift from Turkey (Colborne & Edwards 2019). The mosque’s design is inspired by the classical *Selimiye* mosque in Turkish Edirne, and was drafted by a Turkish architectural firm (UFV Mimarlık n.d.). In contrast to the Great Mosque of Tirana, also constructed by the Diyanet and the largest mosque in the Balkans, there seems to have been an actual demand for a new mosque in Pristina as to harbour worshippers (Colborne & Edwards 2019; Öztürk & Gözaydın 2018, p. 346). Öztürk & Gözaydın argue that the mosque in Tirana was constructed even though the number of active believers in Albania is low, since the Diyanet *expected demand to follow* (2018, p. 346).

In 2014, the Bayrampaşa mosque was inaugurated in Mitrovica—named after the Turkish municipality which funded its construction (Colborne & Edwards 2019). This kind of process is not entirely unusual—as mosque construction abroad was previously without the legal reach of Diyanet, the organisation instead initiated the establishment of “twin-cities”. Municipal religious offices in Kosovo and Turkey were coupled with each other, and

⁶ The idea of Turkey being a “safer” option in the religious field is in itself a sign of successful soft power. This shows that Turkey’s internal policies on secularization made it attractive for the countries emerging on the Balkans.

mosques were financed through collection in Turkey. Another example is a recently constructed mosque in Prizren, financed by collections made by the local *mufti* in Turkish Antalya, and known as the “Antalya mosque” (Öktem 2012, p. 44-45).

Here I want to again raise the subject of *visibility*. To create the preconditions for soft power, the state’s actions must somehow be recognized by the local public, and this is clearly the case with the Bayrampaşa- and Antalya mosques. Whether the connection to Turkey will be visible in this sense in the case of the new mosque complex in Pristina remains to be seen, but in a way, the classical Ottoman design of the mosque already serves this purpose. This is a very concrete example of the creation of an increasingly homogenized space, as I mentioned in section 2.1.2, as it creates a direct esthetic connection.

6. Discussion

Looking at how Turkey builds the conditions for soft power in Kosovo, I have identified some overarching tendencies: the physical Ottoman heritage, the spread of Turkish language, and religious support. These in turn overlap with other sectors—for example, the field of language can really be seen as a subdivision of the educational sector of soft power, partly since it falls within the field of education at large, but also since it works as a possible enabler for further education at Turkish universities. The Ottoman heritage is perhaps the foremost among the determinants for Turkish soft power in Kosovo, as it plays into several of the other sectors as well, and is an overarching motivational element in Turkey’s presence in the country.

I find this to be of certain interest, as the Ottoman past does not only seem to be a motivational factor, but also something that itself is utilised in the Turkish quest for soft power. The *Sultan Murad türbesi* which I analysed in section 5.1.1 is a good example—building on Sadriu’s (2019) argument that this establishes Turkey as a sort of patron, I believe that this self-proclaimed protection of Ottoman-era cultural heritage is a definitive example of how this common heritage is instrumentalized. Given the role Turkey ascribes to itself in relation to these spaces, a certain responsibility is established—something which is further strengthened when Turkey is equated with the Ottomans, as is the case in the museum by the *türbe*.

To instrumentalize a shared political history, and the cultural ties which that creates, as a soft power resource is not something that Nye (2004) more than touches upon. Perhaps this can be explained by the American perspective which dominates his theoretical concept, as the United States does not have any proper “imperial history” itself⁷. However, the case of Turkish soft power, especially in a country like Kosovo, shows that a shared history of this kind might serve as an important factor in the pursuit of soft power. It might not be a *determining* element, but it is for sure a possible *enabling* element, as there is already a somewhat natural connection between countries with this kind of relation. A further study of how soft power is created and used in post-imperial spaces would therefore be very welcome.

Turning to more general cultural activities, the fact that these seem to play a more modest role compared to the broad investment in Turkish language, might not come off as that surprising. Nye argues that cultural success is often achieved through popular culture, a field which might enjoy the support of the state, but is often driven by private interests in some regard. I briefly mentioned the success of Turkish soap operas in the Balkans at large in 5.1.2—these might, while not necessarily being state-sponsored, be a more effective soft power resource than the cultural events organized by the Yunus Emre Institute. This, too, invites further research.

To continue on this note, I also find the role of non-state actors as a resource in the Turkish pursuit of soft power to be of great interests. While the relationship between these and the Turkish state seems to have been ambiguous, actors like the Gülen movement were

⁷ Of course, the United States is a country sprung out colonies, and has expanded in a colonial fashion. However, the country was never the centrepiece of any empire—at least not until more recent decades.

definitely up until recently a resource in building a positive view of Turkey in Kosovo and elsewhere abroad. While the Gülen-AKP conflict is not directly connected to the case examined, it had repercussions on how the Turkish state chose to continue its pursuit for soft power, as much of the work of the Yunus Emre Institute, and also of economic assistance at large, have since tried to mimic some of the Gülenists' work.

Moving on to the fields of language and education, it is clear in my analysis that these sectors, defined by Nye as “slow” compared to mass communication, are a centrepiece in how Turkey pursues soft power in Kosovo. This suggests that, while Turkey's emergence in the region is a relatively recent phenomenon, Turkey is there to play the long game. While yearly numbers of exchange students from Kosovo specifically does not say much in themselves, they still show that, as the years go by, a new generation of elites will have a stronger bond to Turkey, be it politically or only culturally. This is even more important when it comes to the scholarships for religious education offered by the Diyanet—in a field as ever changing as religion, the Turkish state has a potential influence over a number of future scholars and authorities. It is also noteworthy that, while being one of the smallest countries in the Balkans in terms of population, Kosovo is one of the foremost when it comes to students being awarded Diyanet scholarships. This might of course be a consequence of Kosovo being a predominantly Muslim country, while other countries on the Balkans are either more mixed between Muslims and Christians, or primarily Christian⁸ (Öztürk & Gözaydın 2018, p. 347-349). Nevertheless, it shows the soft power potential of a shared religion.

While this entire thesis is based upon Nye's theory of soft power, education and spread of language are perhaps the categories where the framework was most directly applicable. As I already discussed in my section on theory, the concept of soft power is really as much about what a country does internally as it is about foreign policy. I therefore had to interpret and operationalize some aspects, while these two fields could work rather well as they were. Perhaps this is since the concepts of educational exchange and spread of language are rather general, and travels along the boundary between the power-wielding state and abroad.

The way Turkey has worked with the Turkish language in Kosovo is of certain interest, especially given my interpretation of pursuing soft power abroad as creating an increasingly homogenized space. As Kosovo has a Turkish-speaking minority, Turkey had a natural entry point for some activities, particularly given that “turkishness” was a former unofficial determinant of Turkish foreign aid. The TV channel *Yeni Dönem* is a great example—established as a Turkish-language TV-channel for the Turkish minority, but broadcasting in other languages as well to reach the wider Kosovan audience. The fact that Turkish is recognized as an official language in parts of Kosovo may also have been a favouring element for Turkey, as this makes education in and on Turkish language more natural.

⁸ However, Albania's Muslim population is larger than Kosovo's in total numbers—yet the country still had fewer recipients of Diyanet grants in 2009 (the year examined by Öktem). This difference was one of a total of 21 persons, why it would have been interesting to see if this trend continued over the years (Öktem 2012, p. 44).

To summarize this discussion, I believe that Turkey has been favoured by the factors where Turkey and Kosovo already find themselves within a common space—history and religion. I further believe that this is a field where Nye’s theory of soft power could be developed, primarily by studying the use of soft power between centre and periphery in other former empires.

7. Conclusion

With this thesis, I have described and analysed how Turkey creates the conditions for soft power in Kosovo. Even though the study has been restricted to examining the actions of the Turkish state, my results show that Turkey operates in Kosovo through an impressive amount of different channels.

My findings show that Turkey instrumentalizes aspects where Kosovo and Turkey are already alike, in order to legitimize itself in the Kosovan context, and thus enable further soft power measures. The sectors where this is most obvious is within the fields of history and religion, both intimately connected to Kosovo's history as a province in the Ottoman Empire. Even though the number of native Turkish-speakers in Kosovo is very small, this aspect has also served Turkey's interest, as it has the potential of enabling the establishment of Turkish-language activities in a more natural way.

These processes are often very concrete, and therefore highly visible to the Kosovan public. They entail renovating Ottoman cultural heritage, as well as constructing new mosques. In the case of the *Sultan Murad türbesi*, this becomes as most explicit, with the flag of the Turkish Republic hanging by the entrance to the shrine. These kinds of renovations, particularly of buildings ravaged by war, increases Turkey's goodwill in the Kosovan context.

However, I have shown that Turkey operates in more abstract ways as well. A major concept in the quest for soft power is international student exchange, where Turkey has founded two new international scholarships, and sees a large number of Kosovan students visit Turkish universities. This serves as an important factor for achieving soft power in the long term, and the broad attempts at spreading the Turkish language may serve as an effective way of keeping these numbers high.

In the educational sector, Turkey, via the Diyanet, has also offered religious scholarships to Kosovan students, which might in the future bring Kosovo closer to the understanding of Islam sanctioned by the Turkish state. This is yet another example of how Turkey utilises factors where the two countries are alike. Worth noting is also that this kind of connection specifically is not possible with many other (if any) European countries.

To summarize, I find that through a vast combination of activities, the Turkish state pursues soft power in Kosovo primarily through a focus on **education**, **religion** and the **shared Ottoman history**. While the first one of these sectors is well integrated in Nye's theory of soft power, these findings invite further research on how religion and a common political history are instrumentalized as a resource of soft power. As the interest in soft power measures from emerging powers is growing, it becomes increasingly important to develop this theoretical framework.

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