



**THE ROLE OF COMMON CULTURAL  
HERITAGE IN EXTERNAL PROMOTION  
OF MODERN TURKEY:  
YUNUS EMRE CULTURAL CENTRES**

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## THE ROLE OF COMMON CULTURAL HERITAGE IN MODERN TURKEY'S EXTERNAL PROMOTION: YUNUS EMRE CULTURAL CENTRES

This Working Paper has been compiled from previous work conducted at Istanbul Bilgi University's European Institute in the context of the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Project entitled "Identities and modernities in Europe" (SSH-CT-2009-215949).

### **Description of the Identities and Modernities in Europe (IME) project**

Identities and Modernities in Europe (IME) is a collaborative research project funded by the European Commission as part of the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) under Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities. The IME project is carried out by a consortium composed of Kingston University, the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP), Helsinki University, Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques (Sciences-Po), the University of Duisburg-Essen, the Institute for Ethnic and National Minority Studies at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the International Centre for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations (IMIR), Istanbul Bilgi University and the University of Zagreb.

In its investigation of European identities, IME refers to a wide range of definitions of 'us, the Europeans' proposed and acted upon by various actors in and around the current European Union (EU), and in particular refers to nine cases: Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Turkey, and the United Kingdom.

The project addresses three major issues regarding European identities: what they are, how they have been formed and what trajectories they may take from now on. IME first investigates the diversity of European identities as it manifests in the nine cases. It then examines the various ways in which these diverse self-definitions have been formulated and maintained in the different societal, cultural and systemic settings with which they have been interacting through various processes and forces. Subsequently, IME aims to identify commonalities among the diverse European identities in these nine cases, which will form the basis for a grounded projection of

the possible trajectories European identities may take as the processes of European integration continue.

The Project, which began in May 2009, is expected to conclude in April 2012.

For further information about the Project, please visit:

<http://fass.kingston.ac.uk/research/european/ime/>

<http://eu.bilgi.edu.tr/research400.asp>

IME Project reports are available at:

<http://fass.kingston.ac.uk/public/ime/>

## Information on the Turkish Team

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# THE ROLE OF COMMON CULTURAL HERITAGE IN MODERN TURKEY'S EXTERNAL PROMOTION: YUNUS EMRE CULTURAL CENTRES

## Introduction

This study investigates the role of Yunus Emre Cultural Centres in the promotion of Turkish society and culture abroad with reference to the theory of multiple modernities - a theory that is likely to revitalize the role of culture and religion in social and political inquiries. We will argue that Turkey has recently begun instrumentalizing its language and culture in promoting Turkey abroad through the Yunus Emre Cultural Centres scattered around the world, and in doing so is making alternative use of a neo-Ottoman discourse and a modernist discourse dependent on the peculiarities of the location in question. It will be claimed that the current political elite in power is inclined to position Turkey as a hegemonic power among its neighbours (the Middle East, the Balkans, North Africa and the Caucasus as well as in the Central Asian Turkic republics) using a Turco-Islamist discourse, and in European Union countries by instrumentalizing the migrant entities of Turkish origin settled there. In both instances, it seems the Turkish political elite has proven that their manoeuvres comply with the multiple modernities paradigm: They have portrayed themselves as active political agents imposing their cultural, linguistic, historical and religious tenets on other nations, rather than being imposed upon by the linear form of modernity monopolized by the west.

These manoeuvres also indicate that the contemporary Turkish political elite is not willing to accept the hegemony of the linear form of classical European modernity, but offer instead an alternative form of modernity arising out of the cultural, religious and historical specificities of Turkey. However, it will also be maintained that what the Justice and Development Party government is pursuing is in line with the neo-liberal form of *governmentality*, to use Michel Foucault (1979)'s term, which is inclined to reduce the political, social and economic to the cultural and religious in the same vein as postmodernity (Dirlik, 2006).<sup>1</sup>

In this study, we will refer to our research findings from the FP7 project "Identities and modernities in Europe" (SSH-CT-2009-215949). Yunus Emre Cultural Centres are quite newly-established institutions, and hence our research on the relevant scientific literature did not yield any results. However, these centres have been discussed in daily newspapers, and the Yunus Emre Foundation publishes official bulletins which provide speeches, statements and opinions of political figures as well as providing an overview of the activities of the Yunus Emre Institute. Accordingly, newspaper articles and these bulletins<sup>2</sup> will constitute the primary resources we investigate and analyze. The speeches and statements of the leading figures were scrutinized through the Critical Discourse Analysis (Wodak, 1999, 2002, 2010). This means that the cho-

<sup>1</sup> For further information about the notion of *governmentality*, see Foucault (1979: 21). Michel Foucault describes the concept of *governmentality* as a collection of methods used by political elites to maintain their power, or as an art of acquiring power. In other words, *governmentality* refers to the practices which characterise the form of supervision a state exercises over its subjects, their wealth, misfortunes, customs, bodies, souls and habits. It is the art of governing.

<sup>2</sup> Please note that the Yunus Emre Institute Bulletins are published in Turkish only, and quotations from these in this study were translated by the authors.

sen texts were critically explored by the researchers in order to best place each of them in the discursive map of the Centres. In the meantime, an extensive literature review was also made in order to position the speeches of the chosen figures alongside the literature.

This paper will consist of two parts. The first part will provide information on the multiple modernities theory and how this theory is applicable to the Turkish case via an introduction to the academic literature on self-reflexivity and civil and civic participation in Turkey's modernization process as of the early 2000s. In addition to the introduction of these concepts as reference points for understanding the multiple modernities theory, the first part will also investigate the Yunus Emre cultural centres abroad, and will aim to elucidate on the discourses used by the political and bureaucratic elite in the establishment of these centres. The second part will primarily focus on the employment of the common heritage approach by these Centres, with particular emphasis on the reinforcement of cultural ties with neighbouring countries based on Turkish language and Islam. We will further argue that the revitalization and restructuring of cultural and religious affinity in contemporary Turkish cultural diplomacy constitutes an important example of how cultural politics and diplomacy contribute to the ways in which the Turkish modernization has become a non-linear and transformative process.

### **Multiple Modernities: A rupture from the classical modernity theories**

In a classical perspective, modernity was understood to be a linear and teleological process, spreading from the West to the rest of the world. Almost all the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century sociology teleologically took modernity as a one-way process, experienced by all nations being transformed from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*. Auguste Comte, Georg Wilhelm Fredrich Hegel, Ferdinand Tönnies, Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, Max Weber, Bronislaw Malinowski and several other social scientists assumed and claimed that all societies undergo the same transformations, but over differing periods of time. In the very end, they would all be "modern" in a Western sense. According to the metanarratives of modernity such as nation-state, the West, proletariat, high culture, teleological thinking, progress and totality, irrational attachments to the local, particular, tradition, roots, national myths and superstitions would gradually be replaced by more rational, secular and universalist social identities. In this frame of reference, modernization is equated with Westernization, a process which is very visible in the narrative of Turkish modernization. This belief also resulted in a subjective evaluation of Western-type civilization as the superior model of civilization, thus promoting Euro-American hegemony in the discourse on modernity.

A recent new form of literature heavily criticizes the linear perception of modernity. The Euro-American hegemony is called into question in the context of contemporary discourses on modernity generated and discussed by Schmucl N. Eisenstadt, Barrington Moore, Charles Taylor, Gerard Delanty, John Arnasson, Bo Strath, Peter Wagner, Willfried Spohn and Atsuko Ichijo. The ways in which such scholars debate modernity constitutes a separate literature on the idea of *multiple modernities*. The idea of multiple modernities opposes classical views of modernization, and therefore denies the monopoly of the West on modernity. Schmucl N. Eistenstadt admits that modernity was, in its origins, a Western project, spread to the rest of the world through military and economic imperialism, especially in the form of colonialism, but he concludes that the West has failed in the promotion of a homogenizing (cultural) program of modernity. Instead, Eisenstadt observes the emergence of new centres of modernity all round the world in which the originally Western model of modernity is continuously reinterpreted and reconstructed. The varying interpretations of modernity manifest themselves in different institu-



tional and ideological patterns, and are carried forward by various actors such as the agents of new social movements. In other words, multiple modernities theory maintains that modernity should not be understood as a linear and homogenising process *vis-à-vis* secularization or rationalization, but as a story of continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of political and cultural programmes (see inter alia Eisenstadt 2000, 2001, 2005; Delanty 2006; Arnason 2006; Martinelli 2007; Boldt, Bozec, Duchesne, Ichijo, Salvatore and Strath (2009)). Eisenstadt summarizes the idea of multiple modernities as follows:

“The idea of multiple modernities presumes that the best way to understand the contemporary world indeed to explain the history of modernities is to see it as a story of continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs. These ongoing reconstructions of multiple institutional and ideological patterns are carried forward by specific social actors in close connection with social, political, and intellectual activists, and also by social movements pursuing different programs of modernity, holding very different views on what makes societies modern” (Eisenstadt 2000: 2).

By the same token, Ibrahim Kaya (2004b: 37-39) argues that modernity is an open-ended horizon in which there are spaces for multiple interpretations. This immediately implies a critique of totalizing theories of modernity. He rightfully claims that it is modernity which makes it possible for radically plural world-interpretations to be expressed openly, and it is for this reason that the field in which human beings live necessarily becomes a field of tensions. Modernity’s openness to interpretation makes the concept of the plurality of modernities necessary.

### Multiple Modernities theory in Turkish academic literature

The idea of multiple modernities is debated in Turkish academic literature through the works of Nilüfer Göle, İbrahim Kaya, Ferhat Kentel and Ayhan Kaya. The works of Nilüfer Göle (2003 and 2009) and Kaya and Kentel (2005 and 2007) provide some alternative interpretations for the growing visibility of Islamic symbols in the public space in Turkey as well as in western European countries.<sup>3</sup> Their interpretation of modernity equates modernity with social (civil) and political (civic) participation. The social and political action of those who have strong faith in Islam makes them modern, although they do not fit into the classical definition of western modernity. What makes them modern is their act of protest, in other words their self-reflexivity, which they build against the detrimental forces of globalization, and their participation in public life.

Ibrahim Kaya makes theoretical interventions on the idea of multiple modernities through the works of Schmucl N. Eisenstadt, Johann Arnason and Peter Wagner. Scrutinizing the relationship between women and Islam in Turkey, Ibrahim Kaya (2004a) asserts that the current Islamism of veiled women may be understood as essentially modern since the act of protest and self-reflexivity is embedded in the very idea of modernity.<sup>4</sup> Kaya also argues that it is more plausible to talk about modernity in its plural form, as it is intertwined with multiple set of interpretations, as in Kemalism, Islamism, liberalism, national socialism, Fascism and Leninism (Kaya,

<sup>3</sup> Kaya and Kentel (2005 and 2007) discuss multiple forms of modernity in the framework of the Islamic diaspora in western Europe. To put it differently, they use the multiple modernity theory to scrutinize the role of the agency in minority context *vis-a-vis* hegemonic majorities.

<sup>4</sup> Schmucl N. Eisenstadt argues that self-reflexivity and protest are inherent constituents of modernity: “[Modernity] focused first on the evaluation of the major dimensions of human experience, and especially on the place of reason in the construction of nature, of human society and human history, as against the more expressivist dimension. Secondly, it focused on the tension between reflexivity and active approaches to human life. Thirdly, it focused on totalizing and pluralistic approaches to human life and the constitution of society and, finally, on control or discipline, on the one side, and autonomy or freedom, on the other” (cited in Delanty, 2004: 395-396).

2004b: 40). These works tend to propose that equating modernity with westernization in Turkey is a rather pathological inclination, based as it is on the assumption that western civilization is superior in comparison to others. On the contrary, the idea of multiple modernities does not yield to a kind of hierarchy between cultures, or civilizations, in a similar vein to what Eisenstadt (2005) calls *pluralistic modernity* with reference to Erasmus, Vico and Herder. In brief, multiple modernities literature in general, and the works of Turkish scholars in particular, argue that new centres of modernity are founded on the basis of increased self-reflexivity and intensified cultural tensions, leading to increased social and political participation as well as the contestation of the general Euro-American (or Western) hegemony and supposed superiority.

### The Origins of the Yunus Emre Foundation and Cultural Centres

There have been several state initiatives in Turkey aiming to promote culture and cultural cooperation. For instance, there are the Turkish Cultural Centres established by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as state initiatives, functioning in accordance with Regulations on Turkish Cultural Centres (1986) and under the Law on the Establishment and Functioning of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey. According to the Ministry, these centres have been established “with a view to promoting Turkish culture, language and art and in order to contribute to bilateral relations between Turkey and other countries, as well as to help Turkish citizens in their adaptation to the country in which they live.”<sup>5</sup> Turkish Cultural Centres are located in several cities abroad such as Berlin, Hannover, Köln, Frankfurt, Almaty, Ashkhabad, Sarajevo, Tehran, Amman, Baghdad, Jerusalem and Damascus.

In 2007, in addition to these Centres, the Yunus Emre Foundation was established, with the aim of introducing Turkish culture, society and language to the outside world. The Foundation was established as a state foundation under Law 5653, dated May 5, 2007, with its headquarters in Ankara. Article 1 of the Law identifies the purpose of the Act as the following:

“The purpose of this Act is, to introduce Turkey, its cultural heritage, the Turkish language, culture and art, and enhance Turkey’s friendship with other countries, increase cultural exchange, in that regard to present domestic and foreign information and documents on Turkey to the benefit of the world, to serve those who wish to receive an education in the fields of Turkish language, culture and arts, to establish a Yunus Emre Research Institution in Turkey and a Yunus Emre Cultural Centre abroad....” (Law 5653, Article 1).

Currently, there are ten *operational* Yunus Emre Cultural Centres in nine countries, as well as six centres in five countries that are expected to become operational by the end of 2011. The locations of these centres are as follows:

5 Official Website of the Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Available at: <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/>

**Table 1.**  
**Yunus Emre Cultural Centres Abroad**

Country	City	Opening Date	Region
Belgium	Brussels	18 October 2010	Europe
Bosnia-Herzegovina	Sarajevo	17 October 2010	Balkans
Albania	Tirana	11 December 2009	Balkans
Egypt	Cairo	03 March 2010	MiddleEast
Macedonia	Skopje	26 March 2010	Balkans
Kazakhstan	Astana	01 March 2010	Caucus
England	London	09 November 2010	Europe
Syria	Damascus	13 December 2010	Middle East
Kosovo	Pristina	27 August 2011	Balkans
	Prizren	26 August 2011	
Japan	Tokyo	In progress	Asia
Lebanon	Beirut	In progress	Middle East
Romania	Bucharest	In progress	
	Constanza	In progress	
Serbia	<i>TBA</i>	In progress	Balkans
Iran	<i>TBA</i>	In progress	Middle East

Source: The information in this table was compiled by the authors from the official website and the Bulletins of the Yunus Emre Institute.

The rapid proliferation of Yunus Emre Centres in various European, Balkan and Middle Eastern cities represent a unique case study in understanding the various aspects of modern Turkish culture and cultural policy priorities with respect to Turkish cultural diplomacy.

It is also important to note that the Yunus Emre Institute and the cultural centres have been given an important role in Turkish foreign policy. For instance, while Ertuğrul Günay, Minister of Culture and Tourism, calls these centres the “civil pillar of foreign policy” (Yunus Emre Bulletin, No: 7, 2010: 10), the chairman of the Yunus Emre Foundation Board of Trustees and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ahmet Davutoğlu, notes that “foreign policy is not carried out solely with diplomacy but also with cultural, economic and trade networks. He further argues that the mission of the Yunus Emre Institute is related to Turkish foreign policy’s strategic dimension and popularization of Turkish language, protection of Turkish cultural heritage, and the dissemination of Turkish culture to the outside world. This will enable us to place our historical-cultural richness in our current strategy” (Yunus Emre Bulletin, No: 7, 2010: 8). Similarly, in his opening speech in Tirana, Albania, President Abdullah Gül emphasized that:

“These centres are Turkey’s invisible power. I mean preserving the vitality of her cultural heritage is Turkey’s biggest power. Not many countries have this power. We should appreciate its worth” (Turkish Presidency, 11.12.2009).

Moreover, the symbolism in the name of the Institute and the locations of the centres are reflective of the changing foreign policy priorities of the state. In that sense, the emphasis on certain regions, primarily the Balkans and the Middle-East, is complementary to the common cultural heritage approach. This approach is further supplemented by an emphasis on the Turkish language and historical legacy. As we will further investigate, the locations of these centres also con-

stitute a challenge to the traditional understanding of Turkish modernity, which acknowledged the superiority of western civilizations.

### A Symbolic Name and the Turkish Language

The name of the institutions is significant in that Yunus Emre, a *Turkish poet* and *Sufi mystic* of the late 1300-early 1400s is considered the pioneering poet of Turkish culture. His name was chosen for the Institutes to convey the importance of Turkish language. To that effect, Prime Minister Erdoğan stated that:

“For thousands of years, we have been the carriers of a unique civilization, history and heritage in which we have moulded and collated different cultures, different civilizations, along with our own culture. Turkish is not the communicative language of the people living in these lands. Turkish is also a language of science, at the same time a language of arts and a language of literature. Turkish is the language of Yunus Emre, Pir Sultan Abdal, Karacaoğlan, Fuzuli, Baki, Nazım Hikmet, Necip Fazıl” (Yunus Emre Bulletin, No: 1, 2010: 4).

Similarly, Ertuğrul Günay noted that:

“We will establish a Yunus Emre Institute to tell the world about Yunus Emre...We will set up branches in many countries of the world. We will talk about Yunus. We will talk about his philosophy. We will show the world the riches of the Turkish language. Today, maybe belatedly we are doing what is necessary to show our respect for the Turkish language. Turkish is one of the most important languages of the world, prevalent and deeply-rooted, and a lot of *our people* speak this language outside the territories of Turkey” (Yunus Emre Bulletin, No: 1, 2010:7-8, emphasis ours).

As these quotes indicate, there is a growing emphasis on the Turkish language and Turkology.<sup>6</sup> In that respect, the Foundation also established the Yunus Emre Turkish Education Centre (YETEC), which anticipates teaching Turkish within the framework of the Yunus Emre Institution. The emphasis on the Turkish language is an important step in the introduction and recognition of Turkish as a common language in Turkic countries, but it also provides for a proficiency testing component, which is the Turkish Proficiency Examination System (*Türkçe Yeterlilik Sınav Sistemi*). This system anticipates the establishment of an examination, which will contribute to recognition of the Turkish language through an international standard while promoting the use of the language.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the director of the Yunus Emre Institute, Prof. Dr. Ali Fuat Bilkan stated that

“In addition to the success of the Turkish foreign policy, the investments of Turkish businessmen have increased the attention to the Turkish language. Turkey has gained visibility. As Turkey gained economic and political visibility, the popularity of our language has increased. Particularly in the Balkans and Middle East there is an interest in Turkey”.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> It is also important to note that there are various efforts that emphasize the importance of Turkish language in forging and/or strengthening cultural ties. One such effort is the Agreement Concerning the Joint Administration of Turkish Culture and Arts (TÜRKSOY) signed on 12 July 1993 in Almaty by Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. The Agreement established “TURKSOY”, which foresees cooperation among Turkish-speaking countries. As such, TURKSOY’s aims and activities revolve around identifying and promoting the common values of those countries, which is in line with the state’s growing emphasis on Turkish language and literature, <http://www.turksoy.org>.

<sup>7</sup> *Anadolu Ajansı*, 21.12.2010, <http://www.aa.com.tr>, entry date 10 May 2011.

<sup>8</sup> *Daily Zaman*, 19.01.2011, <http://www.zaman.com.tr>, entry date 13 May 2011.

President of the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (*Türk İşbirliği ve Kalkınma İdaresi Başkanlığı*, TİKA), Prof. Dr. Musa Kulaklıkaya, further indicates that Turkish businessmen and their economic investments, hence the economic ties that they forge, require Turkish language education.<sup>9</sup> TİKA<sup>10</sup> is a state institution established under Law 4668, published in Official Gazette No. 24400 on 12 May 2001, and which operates under the Turkish Prime Ministry. TİKA is considered a foreign policy instrument whereby cooperative efforts are carried out in Central Asia, Caucasia, the Middle East, the Balkans and Africa, in other words in regions where there is a shared language and culture. Kulaklıkaya explains the aims of TİKA as follows:

“Initially we are providing aid to countries with mutual historical, political and cultural backgrounds. These common backgrounds let us answer the needs of these countries much more expeditiously, and this created a nice synergy. As a result of our aid and efforts, we possess a tangible presence in the regions where we operate.” (UNDP, 2009)

Similarly, the Minister of Culture and Tourism, Ertuğrul Günay, noted that “Our people have been in Germany for the past 50 years. There is no Turkish Cultural Institute but there is Goethe Institute in Turkey, there is a Cervantes Institute in Turkey, there are French and English cultural centres. Now, as of 2008, there is Yunus Emre [Institute] in all Balkan and Middle-Eastern countries. We are opening Yunus Emre Institutes in Germany, England, Russia and France. We will teach Turkish and its dialects.”<sup>11</sup>

### Turkey: A Soft Power in the Cradle of Civilizations

While the promotion of Turkish language constitutes an important element of the Institute’s goals, a close analysis of the Yunus Emre Bulletins reveals that there are repeated references to the cultural heritage of Turkey, with particular emphasis on the ‘cradle of civilizations’ approach. To that effect, during his speech on the occasion of the opening of the Yunus Emre Foundation in Ankara, Chairman of the Yunus Emre Foundation Board of Trustees and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ahmet Davutoğlu stated:

“This foundation has two important standing goals. First, to enable the meeting of our national culture with the universal culture, and increase its influence in universal culture... In history, very few nations that have directly encountered different cultures and civilizations, have sometimes become the subject of those civilizations, sometimes generated cultural blends from these civilizations, sometimes participated in intense and active communication as our nation has” (Yunus Emre Bulletin 1, No: 1, 2010: 6).

Corresponding to the cultural heritage approach, the locations of the Institutes reflect the common cultural heritage approach with a neo-Ottoman undertone. As we will illustrate, these locations were in fact purposely chosen to strengthen the common heritage discourse. For instance, during his speech at the inauguration of the Yunus Emre Institute in Sarajevo, Mr. Davutoğlu stated that:

<sup>9</sup> *Daily Zaman*, 07.02.2011, <http://www.zaman.com.tr>, entry date 12 June 2011.

<sup>10</sup> For further information on TİKA, visit: <http://www.tika.gov.tr>

<sup>11</sup> *Anadolu Ajansı*, 20.12.2010, <http://www.aa.com.tr>, entry date 15 June 2011.

“This is the first cultural centre that we have opened. It is not a coincidence that the first centre is in Sarajevo. This is an informed decision that we made after much thought because, if we thought about where Turkish culture was reflected best, this place would be the city of Sarajevo. As Istanbul is the fundamental city of Turkish culture, Sarajevo is the city of our common culture. Similarly, in as much as Sarajevo is a city of the Bosnians, so too is Istanbul. Başçarşı and Kapalı Çarşı, Gazi Hüsrev Bey Mosque and Sultunahmet (Blue Mosque) have the same spirit. Istanbul and Sarajevo are two soul brothers” (Yunus Emre Bulletin No: 2, 2010:3).

Similarly, in his opening speech in Skopje, Macedonia, Davutoğlu noted that the common culture has been engraved into the streets of Skopje (Yunus Emre Bulletin, No: 5, 2010: 6). Most importantly, it has become clear *vis-a-vis* the locations of these centres that the Balkan region is important in the revival of cultural relations and cultural ties. Furthermore, these centres are also reflective of the motivations of the state to *influence* the culture of these regions. To that effect, Davutoğlu noted in Skopje,

“... We would like to make a novel contribution to cultural exchange in the Balkans. Cultural relations between Turkey and Macedonia will lead the way to a new Enlightenment in the Balkans.” (Yunus Emre Bulletin, No: 5, 2010: 7)

Corresponding to Davutoğlu’s statement, during the opening of the cultural centre in Astana, President Abdullah Gül stated that:

“We should not keep our language, culture and traditions only to ourselves. Rather, we should keep them alive and spread them. After learning our culture and language well, we should not hesitate to learn other cultures. While we have great history in Balkans and in this geography and our works remaining standing, training will be given at the Yunus Emre Culture centres here to those who wish to learn Turkish. There is a great demand for the centres. There are cultural centres in great countries. We will introduce Turkish Culture with the Yunus Emre Cultural Centres”.<sup>12</sup>

In the Turkish context, modernization was often defined as a transformation process along the lines of Western civilization, which inevitably meant the strengthening of Turkey’s ties with the West and a weakening of those with Eastern countries. Particularly in the Kemalist era, the introduction of Roman alphabet-based Turkish alphabet (replacing the Ottoman alphabet) and the establishment of the secular state (restricting the role of Islam in the public sphere) changed the dynamics of the Turkey’s relations with Middle-Eastern countries, and served to endorse the assumed superiority of Western civilizations.<sup>13</sup> However, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government has emphasized the predicament regarding Turkey’s role between Western and Eastern cultures. For instance, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan noted that Turkey has responsibilities towards the Middle Eastern region stemming from historical ties, and stated that:

“Turkey is facing the West, but Turkey never turns her back on the East. We cannot be indifferent to countries with whom we have lived for thousands of years. We cannot abandon our brothers to their fate”.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Anadolu Ajansı*, 26.05.2010, <http://www.aa.com.tr>, entry date 13 June 2011.

<sup>13</sup> See, Bozdağlıoğlu, Yücel (2008). Modernity, Identity and Turkey’s Foreign Policy. *Insight Turkey* Vol 10, No. 1: 55-75.

<sup>14</sup> *Daily Sabah*, 08.04.2010, <http://www.sabah.com.tr>, entry date 13 June 2011.



The revival of these discourses, emphasizing the common history and heritage of the Middle Eastern region, is also complemented by more assertive foreign policy and the institution of cultural initiatives in Middle Eastern countries. To that effect, in his speech at the opening of the Yunus Emre Institute in Cairo, Ahmet Davutoğlu stated that:

“It is not a coincidence that Cairo is selected for the third centre. The Cairo Yunus Emre Centre is also the first institute we have opened in the Middle Eastern region and the Arab world, because we consider Cairo the heart of the Arab world and believe that a culture active in Cairo will be active in the Arab world” (Yunus Emre Bulletin, No: 4, 2010:5).

All these political discourses indicate that Turkey is tempted to increase its authority as a pivotal power in the region. Its changing role in the region, specifically in the Arab world, is mainly shaped by the various kinds of drives it embraces:

- a) its *political drive*, made obvious by Erdoğan’s discourse on the Palestinian issue and AKP’s gradual distancing from Israel,
- b) its *cultural-religious drive*, visible in AKP’s cultural religious affinity with the Arab world rather than the Kemalist laicists,
- c) its *economic drive*, springing from the willingness of AKP’s electorate and the newly-growing Anatolian bourgeoisie to open up to emerging markets in the Middle East, Africa, the Caucasus, and Central Asia at a time of Euroscepticism, growing since 2005, and
- d) its *transformative drive*, or EU anchor, making it appear as a stable, democratic, liberal, peaceful and efficient country (Kirişçi, 2011).

Joseph Nye (2004: 5) defines *soft power* as “the ability to shape the preferences of others”. In other words, the ability to shape the ways in which the others act, think, imagine and perceive by means of cohesive instruments such as the ideological instruments of the state (popular culture, media, church, education institutions). In abolishing visa requirements for neighbouring countries like Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and Iran, Turkey shows its desire to increase its political and cultural impact in the region. When considered in combination with political communication processes such as the hero worship of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in the Muslim world after the now-famous Davos meeting, and US President Obama’s priority visit to Turkey, the effects of Turkish popular culture definitely warrant investigation. It seems that Turkey’s ruling political elite have invested in a culturalist and religious discourse to promote Turkey in the region as well as in the EU.

There is certainly a growing interest in Turkey among Middle Eastern countries. Turkey is considered an emerging soft power in the region. One might even see evidence of Turkey turning its *soft power* into *smart power*. The Commission on Smart Power constituted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), published a report co-chaired by Joseph Nye and Richard Armitage in 2007. In the report, the term ‘smart power’ was used as meaning a combination of *hard power* and *soft power*. The report puts forward the means for implementing US smart power, and calls on the US to specifically focus on five critical areas in order to become a *smart power*:

- 1) *Alliances, partnerships and institutions*;
- 2) *Global development*;
- 3) *Public diplomacy*;

- 4) *Economic integration*; and  
 5) *Technology and innovation*.<sup>15</sup>

Drawing on these suggestions made by the Commission on Smart Power, and considering Turkey's drives in the region, one could argue that Turkey is following in the footsteps of the US in order to become a hegemonic smart power in the region.

Using its role as a bridge between the continents, Turkey is becoming a trading country: Foreign trade volume was USD330 billion in 2008 and USD300 billion in 2010 compared to USD20 billion in 1985. Turkish entrepreneurs invest in neighbouring countries, including Iraq, Bulgaria, Georgia, Russia, Central Asia, Syria, Lebanon and Greece, through TUSIAD, MUSIAD, DEIK, TOBB, TUSCON, and TIM. Turkey has also signed free trade agreements with Syria, Jordan and Lebanon in line with European Mediterranean Policy and European Neighbourhood Policy. Similarly, Turkish universities are also attracting students from the Middle East, the Balkans and Central Asia. The newly-established Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities<sup>16</sup> attached to the Prime Ministry is dealing with the growing number of international students coming from the so-called 'related communities', a definition more or less culturally and religiously loaded, and in line with the neo-Ottoman *lebensraum* specified by the Yunus Emre Cultural Centres.<sup>17</sup>

The growing popularity of Turkish soap operas throughout the region is another indicator of Turkey's soft power potential in the region. In addition to the economic and political initiatives Turkey has recently undertaken, Turkish *soap operas* broadcast in the Middle East, the Caucasus, the Balkans and North Africa may also be viewed as a kind of soft power. According to Orhan, Turkey constitutes an example of a Muslim society coexisting with Western political values (Orhan, 2009). Turkish soap operas such as "*Noor*" (Gümüs), "*Sanawat ad Dayyaa*" (Ihlamlar Altında) and *Kurtlar Vadisi (Valley of Wolves)* have recently become very popular in the region in a way that has made Turkey a soft power culturally in her immediate neighbourhood. Hakan Altınay (2008) defines this new phenomenon with the following words:

<sup>15</sup> [http://media.csis.org/smartpower/071105\\_CSIS\\_Smart\\_Power\\_Report.pdf](http://media.csis.org/smartpower/071105_CSIS_Smart_Power_Report.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> The Presidency of Turks and Related Communities Abroad was established on 6 April 2010, and it is affiliated to the Office of the Prime Minister. It was established in order to coordinate Turkish citizens living abroad and to strengthen the ties with related communities. According to the first section of Law 5978 declaring the formation of the department, the main objective of the organization is to work with Turkish citizens living abroad and to help solve their problems. The second section of the law provides detailed information about the services and the activities of the department. The organization manages new social, cultural and economic activities with Turkish citizens and their descendents living abroad according to their needs and demands. It is mentioned that the activities of the organization are directed not only at Turkish citizens and their descendents abroad, but also at migrant organizations, non-governmental organizations abroad and professional organizations. In addition, it is worth mentioning that even though the main focus of activities is the Turkish diaspora, the department also concerns itself with foreign students coming to study in Turkey. It operates under three commissions: Consultancy Committee of Citizens Abroad (*Yurtdışı Vatandaşlar Danışma Kurulu*), Evaluation of Foreign Students Committee (*Yabancı Öğrenci Değerlendirme Kurulu*) and Cultural and Social Relations Coordination Committee (*Kültürel ve Sosyal İlişkiler Eşgüdüm Değerlendirme Kurulu*). For further details see <http://www.ytb.gov.tr>, entry date 20 August 2011.

<sup>17</sup> For a detailed analysis of the Presidency of the Turks Abroad and Related Communities see Çetin (2011).



“Soft power is also about arousing interest, capturing imagination and causing admiration. As the Arab media shows, Turkey *does* arouse interest in the Middle East. The Ankara Bureau of Al Jazeera is second only to Al Jazeera’s Washington Bureau among the news agency’s non-Arab offices in terms of the number of news stories filed. Evidently, viewers of Al Jazeera care about what is going on in Turkey. Arab television stations frequently broadcast derby football matches from Turkey. What is even more striking is the anecdotal evidence that popular Turkish TV shows such as *Televole* – a show depicting the lives of football players and fashion models – enjoy a substantial following in places like Egypt, Iran and Syria in spite of the obvious language barrier. This is significant because although they are considered tacky by the Turkish elites, such programs seem to capture the imagination of the average Middle Eastern person in respect to the good life” (Altınay, 2008: 59).

Hence, it is not surprising to see that the image of Turkey has recently undergone radical change in the Middle East. A 2010 survey conducted by TESEV in the Arab world revealed that 61 % of Arabs interviewed agreed that Turkey could be a model for the Arab World, 63 % agreed that Turkey sets a good example of the coexistence of democracy and Islam, and 64 % agreed that Turkey’s EU perspective makes Turkey an attractive partner for the Arab world (Akgün et al., 2010).

As we have previously established, modernity has been equated with Western cultures and perceived as a transformative process in line with Europeanization and Westernization. The Yunus Emre Centres and other institutions such as the Presidency of Turks abroad and Related Communities contest the classical understanding of modernity and constitute a test for Euro-American hegemony over modernization. In effect, the locations chosen and discourses expressed in the establishment of these centres focus on the revitalization of Turkey’s ties with eastern and regional countries. This introduces a new phenomenon in Turkish modernization where the Western model of modernization (also referred to as the classical model of modernity) is no longer the status quo. Furthermore, this phenomenon also raises questions about self-perceptions among ordinary Turks at home, and state perceptions of Turkish culture while it re-emphasizes itself in its role as modernizing agent.

In addition to Yunus Emre Centres in the Middle East and the Balkans, there are also centres in Europe, and it is noted that there are plans to open more there (Yunus Emre Bulletin, No: 7, 2010: 10). These centres, which serve as contact points in various countries, also emphasize the importance of cultural interaction and cultural representation in foreign policy and bilateral relations. To that effect, Abdullah Gül, who performed the opening of the Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Centre in London, stated that “great countries exist not only with their diplomats but also with their cultural assets” (Turkish Presidency, 09.11.2010). This statement is important in understanding the ways in which culture has become an important aspect of international relations. Furthermore, as Gül indicates, the discourses used in conjunction with the Yunus Emre Institutes rely on the protection and dissemination of Turkish culture abroad. The use of “cultural assets” is important because it is closely related to the use of certain *selected* cultural elements, particularly language and religion, or in other words assets, as a means of appealing to the defined cultural heritages to be utilized in strengthening societal and political ties.

In terms of the centres located in European countries, currently in London and Brussels, one sees that there is an emphasis on how these centres will constitute a “home” for Turks living in Europe. For instance, in his opening speech in London, Gül noted that: “This Centre will be a home for the four hundred thousand Turks in England. Our Embassy is surely their home but these Centres will be their ‘civil homes” (Yunus Emre Bulletin, No: 8, 2011: 5). As for the centre in Brussels, this city is home to a large migrant population, and the centre is expected to

contribute to the efficient introduction of Turkish culture and arts. Furthermore, the “cultural bridges” role of the centres in Europe will serve an important purpose in the promotion of Turkish culture during the EU accession process (Yunus Emre Bulletin, No: 8, 2011:18). The Founding Chairman of the Yunus Emre Board of Trustees, President Gül made a similar statement when he maintained that:

“These [Yunus Emre Centres] are Turkey’s invisible power. Keeping her cultural heritage alive is Turkey’s greatest strength. We should appreciate our past and our history. In today’s modern world, we should carry out our activities using modern methods and disseminate our solidarity and culture in the most favourable way” (Yunus Emre Bulletin, No: 7, 2010: 6).

In order to reveal the role of the Turkish foreign policy in the promotion of Turkish culture abroad, it is important to note that Turkey does not have an *official* foreign cultural policy.<sup>18</sup> Cultural diplomacy is carried out within the scope of Turkish foreign policy under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Within the scope of cultural promotion efforts, the Ministry enters into bilateral and multilateral agreements based on various priorities and principles. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism is another important state institution taking part in the promotion of Turkish culture abroad. These promotion efforts are highly dependent on political relations and foreign policy priorities and they are important elements in the introduction of Turkish culture abroad. In that sense Turkish modernity is in part shaped by Turkish foreign policy *vis-a-vis* cultural policies and cultural diplomacy efforts.<sup>19</sup>

While there are embassies and in some cases cultural attachés in European countries, recently the promotion of Turkish culture in the context of EU-Turkey relations has become an important aspect of the country’s approach to cultural promotion and cultural diplomacy. For instance, Egemen Bağış, Minister of EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator, notes that the Institute is “the most important communications project” in Turkey’s EU accession process (Yunus Emre Bulletin, No: 9, 2011:11). An analysis of Turkey’s European Union Communication Strategy (SGEUA, 2010) reveals that it is important to establish a “Turkish brand” under which Turkish culture is presented. However, at the end of the day, we should not forget that the essential aim of the institutes is to provide support for the diaspora – meaning that the central aim is not appealing to non-Turkish nationals.<sup>20</sup> As Abdullah Gül has highlighted several times, these centres aim to appeal to the Turkish diaspora and constitute a “home” where they can experience cultural events as a collective community. Similarly, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs declares that:

<sup>18</sup> In saying “official foreign cultural policy”, we are referring to pre-determined course of action carried out by the state.

<sup>19</sup> For further information on Turkish cultural policy, see Ada (2011).

<sup>20</sup> Full text of the European Union Communication Strategy is available at: <http://www.abgs.gov.tr/abis/?l=2>, entry date 15 June 2011.

“The basis of Turkey’s cooperation with the destination governments is the perception of integration constituted on, firstly, giving the immigrants a strong background of their native culture and, secondly, providing the mutual recognition by the immigrants and the local societies of each other’s culture, traditions and characteristics. Within the framework of this understanding, Turkey has been encouraging expatriate Turks and the destination countries to establish new bonds with each other which will lead to the formation of prosperous societies enjoying cultural diversity” (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs).<sup>21</sup>

In this framework, Yunus Emre Centres in Europe are instrumental in reaching out to the Turkish Diaspora in European countries and acknowledging their vitality in representing Turkish culture.

### Conclusion

It is very obvious to see that the Turkish electorate has become more attracted politically to AKP at a time when a culturalist and religious discourse has become globally very popular. The timing of Turkey’s European bid partly coincided with the aftermath of September 11, when Turkey, with its orientation to so-called *moderate Islam*, became instrumentalised by the USA and the EU as a role model for Muslim nations. Turkey was then pointed to as a bridge, not only between continents but also civilizations. A ‘moderate Islamic Turkey’ was praised by western countries in a way that also embraced the ruling party in Turkey. The instrumentalization of Turkey as a model for other Muslim countries was also welcomed by the Turkish political elite. PM Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and several other politicians as well as academics played along with this new role expecting that it would bring Turkey into a more favourable position in the European integration process. Turkey’s role as a mediator between Muslim and non-Muslim worlds was also credited by the United Nations when, together with the Spanish PM José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, Prime Minister Erdoğan was appointed by the UN to launch the *Alliance of Civilizations* initiative.

Against this background, the Turkish state’s promotional activities in European countries and in its own region were discussed in this paper, referring to the discourses of the ruling political party elite and of members of various institutions, primarily the Yunus Emre Cultural Centres. It was revealed that the AKP government has recently generated a cultural/religious/civilizational discourse on a parallel with the rhetoric of Alliance of Civilizations to promote Turkey in the EU and other parts of the world, using a neo-Ottoman discourse. In promotion activities in EU countries, Turkey has been emphasizing its differences, while emphasizing its cultural and religious affinities with neighbours in the Balkans, the Middle East, Africa, the Caucasus and Central Asia. In doing that, it seems that the ruling party is more concerned with revitalizing its hegemony in the region rather than advocating Turkey’s EU entry.

Turkey is willing to become a middle power, and recently has been trying to impose its hegemony in the region. However, it seems that there is a discrepancy between the ways in which the ruling political party (AKP) and the pro-European circles perceive the sources of Turkey’s becoming a soft power in the region. That is to say, AKP is likely to lean on the idea of *Pax-Ottomana* to become a hegemonic power, while pro-European circles are likely to believe that Turkey’s growing regional influence derives from its European perspective, which since 1999, has been perceived positively by neighbouring countries, in a way that has given Turkey a better ap-

<sup>21</sup> Official Website of the Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Available at: <http://www.mfa.gov.tr>, entry date 10 June 2011.

pearance in terms of democracy, human rights, economy and universal values. It seems that this will be the dilemma of the next decade, and one which the Turkish political elite will have to resolve.

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