Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations in Türkiye's Public Diplomacy Activities in the Context of New Public Diplomacy and Political Communication Discussions*

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Abstract

This article examines the role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Türkiye's public diplomacy. Firstly, it discusses how NGOs are positioned as a public diplomacy actor in the public diplomacy literature. The second part emphasizes that the changes and transformations in the communication and media order also affect international activities such as public diplomacy. Finally, the last section analyzes the role of NGOs in public diplomacy activities of Türkiye. As seen in the new public diplomacy approach and the internationalization of political communication strategies, it has been argued that NGOs have a multifaceted and multidimensional field of action in public diplomacy. Although NGOs are more prominent in public diplomacy with their humanitarian aid dimension, they can also

engage in vital activities for public diplomacy such as lobbying, producing a positive agenda, and establishing trust in the relevant society, and Türkiye should position NGOs in this way in its public diplomacy efforts.

Keywords

Public Diplomacy, New Public Diplomacy, Political Communication, Non-Governmental Organizations, Strategic Communication.

Yeni Kamu Diplomasisi ve Siyasal İletişim Tartışmaları Bağlamında Türkiye'nin Kamu Diplomasisi Faaliyetlerinde Sivil Toplum Kuruluşlarının Rolü[*]

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Öz

Bu makale Sivil Toplum Kuruluşlarının (STK) Türkiye'nin kamu diplomasisindeki rolünü incelemektedir. İlk olarak, STK'ların kamu diplomasisi literatüründe bir kamu diplomasisi aktörü olarak nasıl konumlandırıldığı tartışılmaktadır. İkinci bölümde, iletişim ve medya düzenindeki değişim ve dönüşümlerin kamu diplomasisi gibi uluslararası faaliyetleri de etkilediği vurgulanmaktadır. Son bölümde ise Türkiye'nin kamu diplomasisi faaliyetlerinde STK'ların rolü analiz edilmektedir. Yeni kamu diplomasisi yaklaşımında ve siyasal iletişim stratejilerinin uluslararasılaşmasında görüldüğü üzere STK'ların kamu diplomasisinde çok yönlü ve çok boyutlu bir hareket alanına sahip olduğu savunulmaktadır. STK'lar kamu diplomasisinde daha çok insani yardım boyutuyla öne çıksa da lobicilik, pozitif gündem üretme, ilgili toplumda güven tesis etme gibi kamu diplomasisi için hayati öneme sahip faaliyetlerde de bulunabilirler ve Türkiye kamu diplomasisi çalışmalarında STK'ları bu şekilde konumlandırmalıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Kamu Diplomasisi, Yeni Kamu Diplomasisi, Siyasal İletişim, Sivil Toplum Kuruluşları, Stratejik İletişim.

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Introduction

The concept of public diplomacy was first articulated by Edmund Asbury Gullion, an American diplomat, in 1965. This was a period of heightened American influence following the Second World War. It is indubitable that there have been instances of activities that can be regarded as public diplomacy in previous years and centuries. Nevertheless, public diplomacy has emerged as a dominant concept in the field of international relations, particularly in the latter half of the 20th century.

The articulation of states' priorities and political arguments at the international level, and their efforts to disseminate their own discourses to the people of other countries, represent the essence of public diplomacy. In contrast to traditional diplomacy, conducted primarily by states and their representatives, public diplomacy targets non-state actors, groups, and individuals in other countries. In public diplomacy, the primary interlocutor is not the state organs but the citizens of the country in question, more generally the public opinion of that country. The efficacy of public diplomacy hinges on the ability to attract the public opinion of other societies and persuade them in alignment with the interests of the country.

The ability to address not only the official organs of a country but also its public/society is a crucial factor in the expansion of foreign relations. Following the Second World War, there was an observable diversification of foreign policy actors. In addition to the official organs of the state, some scholars have argued for the primacy of unofficial relations and structures in the foreign policy-making process, and even for their superiority over official relations (Sönmezoğlu 35). The diversity of actors and different types of activities in relations between countries that started after World War II reached its peak in the 1990s with the widespread use of the Internet. It can be posited that these multifaceted activities possess two dimensions: the first is the addressing of the public through the state, and the second is the establishment of interaction *from the people to the people*. Both of these dimensions are "state-to-public activities, which aim to communicate the policies and activities of the state to the public using official tools and channels". On the other hand, "civil actors such as NGOs, research centers, opinion polls, media, opinion leaders, universities, exchange programs, associations and foundations are used in state-to-public activities" (Kalın, "Soft Power" 11).

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The principal factor in the evolution of public diplomacy from *people to people* is the developments in the communication and media ecosystem. When the concept of public diplomacy was first used in the 1960s, television was just becoming pervasive globally, and the use of the internet was not yet a possibility. When Joseph Nye first utilized the concept of soft power in 1990, the use of the internet was still in its infancy. Since the 1960s, when communication technologies accelerated, we have witnessed a rapid transformation and change in mass media, from television to the internet, from the internet to social media and digital platforms. It is clear that "working with publics, not just governments, is particularly important now that communications technologies have empowered individuals in terms of their ability to access information and connect with one another" (Seib 8). Thus;

> Scholars and practitioners recognize that non-state actors -such as business corporations, nonprofit organizations, private think-tanks, religious mission ary groups, transnational diasporas, and social networking communities- enhance the government-to-people initiatives (Zatepilina-Monacell 38).

It is imperative to exercise caution to ensure that public diplomacy initiatives do not devolve into the realm of propaganda, which is characterised by a negative connotation. At this juncture, it is crucial to elucidate the distinction between propaganda and public diplomacy. Propaganda is a unilateral endeavour that entails the manipulation of information for the purpose of influencing the recipient's opinion. In contrast, public diplomacy emphasises mutual communication and the utilisation of persuasive strategies. It is insufficient for public diplomacy to merely convey a message to the other party; a public diplomacy process that is not based on feedback is likely to be unsuccessful. Therefore, the prejudices and sentiments of the interlocutor towards the speaker are significant for public diplomacy (Karaağaç 701; Karabulut 177).

The rapid changes and transformations in the communication and media landscape are transforming public diplomacy in terms of communication and actors. Even those designated as *ordinary citizens* are recognized as actors in public diplomacy, and national and international broadcasting and communication opportunities are becoming more prominent. Today,

"sustaining the right information, transferring it in a timely manner and creating a healthy perception are the top priorities of public diplomacy management" (Özkan 6). The advent of this new change and transformation has led to the emergence of new studies in public diplomacy such as "digital diplomacy" (Bjola and Holmes).

As the primary goal of public diplomacy is to influence the public opinion of relevant countries, the advent of advanced communication technologies has led to a diversification in the actors engaged in public diplomacy. It is, particularly in recent years, acknowledged that NGOs and non-state organizations have become an effective and influential part of world politics (Broś 14). This is precisely where NGOs come to the fore as a public diplomacy actor, as NGOs can be extremely functional in interacting with other societies due to the different functions they undertake in societies.

This article examines the role of NGOs in Türkiye's public diplomacy efforts. A review of the literature on the subject reveals that NGOs are addressed in terms of humanitarian aid, (Tuna; Tarlanoğlu 1; Toker and Çağla; Balcı 1). Türkiye's activity, particularly in Africa and the Middle East, is considered within this context. This study aims to counter some studies arguing that NGOs, being civilian and independent rather than official, cannot be considered public diplomacy actors (Şahinoğlu and Seleş).

To that end, the article will recognize NGOs as valid actors of public diplomacy and argue against limiting their activities in humanitarian aid. Using content analysis and literature review methods, it will examine the evolving discourse on public diplomacy and political communication. It will emphasize the shift from traditional public diplomacy to new public diplomacy and the role of NGOs within this transition. It will specifically analyze the role of NGOs in Türkiye's public diplomacy. The study investigates how NGOs can serve as significant actors in Türkiye's public diplomacy, considering the country's rich history and foundation of associations. To that end, it elucidates how Turkish NGOs operate in many locations with shared cultural and historical ties. The concluding section will attempt to elucidate a prospective vision of the role of NGOs in Türkiye's public diplomacy activities.

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Transformation from Public Diplomacy to a New Public Diplomacy and Quests

Joseph Nye (*Soft Power* 31) posits that countries that are likely to be more attractive and gain soft power in the information and communication age are those that have multiple communication channels, whose dominant culture and ideas are closer to global norms, and whose credibility increases with their domestic and international values and policies. As Nye notes, public diplomacy offers countries a significant opportunity to enhance their international reputation and credibility. Unlike traditional diplomacy, the actors involved in public diplomacy and the international arena are not limited to states or sub-state entities. Since the end of the Cold War and the advent of the postmodern era, there has been a proliferation of actors in international relations. Therefore, "more cooperative diplomatic relations with various types of actors need to be actively pursued" (Melissen 5) for a transparent and trustworthy relationship between countries.

As one of these actors, Hochstetler argues that civil society fulfills three main missions in international politics: setting agendas, brokering peace negotiations and ensuring the implementation of diplomatic agreements. According to Hochstetler (179), the increasing density of civil society networks has facilitated the identification of shared experiences that are perceived locally but constitute part of global patterns. From women's movements to human rights violations in various regions of the globe, from disasters in war and epidemic zones to global warming, it is evident that civil society actors play a role in addressing international issues. NGOs can bring these issues to the agenda of the international community, as well as put pressure on countries to comply with agreements and commitments on these issues. In a manner consistent with Hochstetler, Sönmezoğlu asserts that contemporary NGOs engage in a range of activities including "lobbying, organising international campaigns, advising governments, and influencing voting citizens by raising awareness at the international level" (Sönmezoğlu 57). Consequently, since the 2000s, the international system in general and public diplomacy in particular have rapidly evolved to include a series of activities aimed at influencing foreign public opinion through civil institutions and NGOs.

The rise of NGOs as significant players in international decision-making has brought the concept of *new public diplomacy* to the forefront. According to Nancy Snow, traditional public diplomacy involves governments reaching out to foreign publics to inform, influence, and engage them to achieve national goals and support foreign policy. In contrast, new public diplomacy encompasses methods by which state officials and private individuals and groups directly and indirectly influence public attitudes and opinions, affecting the foreign policy decisions of another state (Snow 6). Snow underscores the growing influence of communication technologies and developments, which have led to the engagement of public opinion, particularly that of NGOs, in the formulation of foreign policy. Furthermore, as Simons (138) asserts, new public diplomacy "shall be used to try and make sense of the dimension of government-to-public (G2P) communication in the international sphere".

Snow codifies the involvement of civil actors in public diplomacy as a public diplomacy activity from the people to the people rather than from the government to the people. The transformation of NGOs into public diplomacy actors is not a voluntary choice; rather, it is a natural and necessary consequence of developments in communication technologies. In particular, social media platforms have enabled the masses to act as public diplomacy actors across borders. Indeed, the advent of "new public diplomacy in the new digital age" presents a challenge for public diplomacy practitioners and public relations officers (Snow 7). In this formulation, while the public diplomacy activity retains its essential meaning and nature, there is a clear differentiation in terms of the subjects. While in traditional public diplomacy, the main actor implementing public diplomacy was the state and its official organs, in the new public diplomacy the state organs are replaced by the people themselves, i.e. society and individuals (Ekşi 134).

Drawing attention to the cultural relevance of public diplomacy activities, Melissen argues that the increase in cultural elements in public diplomacy activities has blurred traditional distinctions. While cultural studies may discern that public diplomacy has invaded their field, the traditional vision of public diplomacy may feel that the increasing cultural influence and diversification has diluted the activities of influencing the publics of other countries. However, according to Melissen (22), "both will have to

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confront current transformations in diplomatic practice and transnational relations". What Melissen means by the current transformations is that public diplomacy can no longer be limited to direct messaging, promotional campaigns or contacts between state officials and the people of another country. As Nye ("The New Public Diplomacy") notes, the evolution of public diplomacy from one-way communication to two-way dialogue has transformed societies in the international arena into co-creators of communication.

The prevailing view, as espoused by figures such as Snow, Melissen, and Nye, is that public diplomacy has seen a diversification of actors, with NGOs and individuals playing more prominent roles. The use of communication tools, especially social media, allows non-state actors to easily engage in public diplomacy activities. This *democratizes* public diplomacy, making it no longer the exclusive domain of diplomats. The rapid expansion of social media since the 2010s has been one of the most significant developments in accelerating this diversification and transforming public diplomacy.

Nicholas Cull is also another figure who has attracted attention to these innovations in public diplomacy activities. Cull (12) defines diplomacy as "mechanisms other than war for managing the international environment and public diplomacy as building/establishing relationships with foreign publics to achieve this goal". Cull asserts that while new public diplomacy activities are compatible with traditional public diplomacy, they also signify a major shift in its practice. He distinguishes between public diplomacy and new public diplomacy as follows:

> In the contemporary context of public diplomacy, international actors are increasingly assuming non-traditional roles, with civil NGOs in particular gaining prominence. The communication mechanisms utilized by these actors to engage with global publics have evolved to encompass new, real-time, and global technologies, particularly the Internet. These technological developments have contributed to the blurring of the previously distinct boundaries between local and international news spaces. Public Diplomacy is increasingly replacing old propaganda concepts with concepts derived explicitly from marketing (especially nation branding) on the one hand and network communication theory on the other;

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perhaps most importantly, the New Public Diplomacy speaks of a new emphasis on direct people-to-people contact, with the international actor taking on the role of facilitator; and in this model the old emphasis on top-down messaging is eclipsed and the primary task of the new public diplomacy is characterized as 'relationship building' (Cull 13).

Comparing public diplomacy and nation branding, Szondi emphasizes the role of NGOs as strong public diplomacy actors and identifies a differentiation especially in terms of subjects. Szondi (17-18) lists the actors of public diplomacy as state and non-state actors, governments, officials, embassies, ministries of culture, NGOs and diasporas, while defining nation branding actors as national tourism boards, travel agencies; investment promotion and export agencies; boards of trade, chambers of commerce, multinational organizations. Indeed, as White (306) also states, non-state actors in public diplomacy include various organisations from both the private and non-profit sectors.

As seen in these discussions, it has become a generally accepted approach in the literature that there is or should be an actor-based diversification in the new public diplomacy. Within this diversification, generally referred to as *non-state actors*, there is a growing emphasis on NGOs. In the context of the accelerating globalization that commenced in the 1990s, the erosion of the state's monopoly in the international arena has been accompanied by a concomitant acceleration of international integration. Indeed, the phenomenon of globalisation has served to render the professional boundaries of diplomacy more porous (Saner and Yiu 4). Therefore NGOs have become more effective in addressing international issues where the state is absent or less involved. In this new context, where individuals themselves are media content producers, public diplomacy increasingly operates through local actors. Globalization and changes in communication and media have structurally supported the rise of NGOs in public diplomacy, prompting a reassessment of the relationship between public diplomacy and political communication. A clear example of this change is Türkiye's situation.

Türkiye is actively using NGOs to gain hearts of foreign audience. From Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), which is an

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entity with public legal personality and a separate budget allocation, to an autonomous and independent think tank such as The Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA), the state utilises such institutions to engage with foreign individuals. The discussion below shows how Türkiye's efforts overlap the theoretical version of public diplomacy.

Public Diplomacy and Political Communication

Political communication combines the disciplines of politics and communication, focusing on party campaigns, candidate image management, and effectively conveying political messages. While traditionally aimed at influencing voter behavior, political communication, like public diplomacy, can also adopt a broader perspective. To emphasize the international dimension of political communication, it is possible to define it as:

> the use of various types and techniques of communication by political actors to get certain ideological goals and policies accepted by certain groups, masses, countries or blocs, and when necessary, to transform them into action and put them into practice (Aziz 3).

In the new public diplomacy approach, the possibilities brought by the communication and media order cause public diplomacy to be addressed as a political communication process. The contemporary media and communication ecosystem demonstrates that public diplomacy activities are predominantly a communication process. The proliferation of communication technologies on a global scale substantiates the necessity for public diplomacy to be centered on communication and information. A 2024 report indicates that 5.61 billion individuals worldwide utilize mobile phones, representing 69.4% of the global population. It is estimated that over 66% of the world's population uses the internet, while over 5 billion people, representing 62.3% of the global population, have social media accounts. Globally, individuals dedicate approximately 400 minutes per day to internet usage (Wearesocial). These figures indicate that we are on the verge of a new era in the field of media and communication, driven by the Internet and social media and the increasing digitalization of society.

The emergence of new public diplomacy has been influenced by the globalization process and the consequent rapid increase in the interaction between societies, technological developments making the communication

and media order freer, and non-state actors, especially NGOs, becoming more prominent in international relations and public diplomacy activities. The focus on communication in the new public diplomacy also aligns it with the global communication network approach, which can be defined as an "online media order" (Ociepka 291). The constituent elements of this media order create an interconnected and even interdependent communication ecosystem. Similarly, in the context of the new public diplomacy, the actors are diverse, but each of these actors cannot convey the relevant message or discourse in isolation. Rather, they all contribute to the perception and image of the country in the eyes of other societies in an interconnected manner.

In this context, public diplomacy activities can also be defined as a "communication process" in which a country presents and explains its theses, historical and cultural elements, national and international goals in the international arena (Tiedeman 23). Given the objective of influencing and attracting the target audience, the content of the message is as important as the manner in which it is conveyed. The political communication dimension of public diplomacy activities concerns the choice of discourse, the methods and techniques to be used, and the manner of their delivery to target audiences. The following stages of political communication are used in public diplomacy activities (Kılıçaslan 373):

– Planning the message
– The process of impact of the message on the target audience
– Convincing the affected target group
– Mobilization of the target group
– Feedback
– The political actor's achievement of the desired result.

On the other hand, political communication has to be based on a strategy. In other words, the most important element of political communication is its strategy. A strategic communication plan must take into account the sensitivities and expectations of the other party, and construct the language of communication in a manner that aligns with these key themes. Whereas in public diplomacy;

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strategies require assumptions and judgements about interests, values, policy priorities, views of different publics, mediated communication environments, public opinion trends, national and international contexts, threats, opportunities, strengths and limitations of instruments, trade-offs between costs and risks, trade-offs between costs and benefits, short and long-term goals, partnerships with the private sector, partnerships with foreign governments, application of strategies to situations, political intuition and common sense (Gregory 8).

According to Nye, who emphasizes the importance of strategic communication, public diplomacy has three main dimensions: "day-to-day interaction", "the development of lasting relationships with key people over many years through scholarships, exchanges, training, seminars, conferences and access to media channels", and "strategic communication". In the strategic communication dimension, "a set of simple themes is developed, much like what occurs in a politi calor advertising campaign." (Nye, *Soft Power* 108). Through these campaigns, symbolic events and programs are planned to brand the main themes and communicate a particular government policy or state discourse. Thus, these themes are promoted and communicated to the relevant public.

Undoubtedly, almost all public diplomacy activities do not directly belong to *political* processes. Nevertheless, public diplomacy may use political communication in matters such as identifying target societies, persuasion, and relations with the media. Most importantly, it is necessary to transcend conventional media tools and develop more localized interaction opportunities to communicate the desired messages and discourses to the target public. As Nye notes, "the most effective communication occurs not through distant broadcasts but through face-to-face interactions" (*Soft Power* 142).

Considering the digital age of political communication and the social media context, the new public diplomacy approach appears to empower citizens, who are traditionally regarded as the least influential participants in political communication. Consequently, it can be posited that "new public diplomacy reflects the characteristics of political communication as a process in a network society where messages and efforts originate from numerous sources" (Ociepka 301).

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In Türkiye, public diplomacy activities have accelerated in recent years. But how can the place and position of NGOs in these activities be determined? Understanding the similarities and differences between Türkiye and other global case studies is paramount, as is identifying the opportunities and risks shaped by Türkiye's historical background and cultural context. Before delving into these questions, it is essential to provide a brief overview of the evolution of public diplomacy studies in Türkiye.

Public Diplomacy Activities and Positioning NGOs in Türkiye

In the 2000s, Turkish foreign policy has become more active and its scope has expanded. In this context, it can be stated that, in addition to traditional approaches, new phenomena such as public diplomacy have also been incorporated into the foreign policy-making process. In this regard, in addition to official institutions, NGOs have also become involved in the foreign policy-making process, which has expanded in both scale and scope. Given this expansion, the active and effective participation of NGOs in the process of organising public diplomacy activities in Turkish foreign policy has become an irrefutable reality.

In the existing literature on International Relations, the role of NGOs as actors within Turkish foreign policy is a notable area of interest. Many studies on this subject discuss the role of NGOs as foreign policy actors in relation to humanitarian and/or foreign aid. Indeed, even the studies focusing on NGOs' public diplomacy activities highlight the importance of humanitarian and foreign aid. For instance, Tarlanoğlu's (1) article analyses the transformation of Turkish foreign policy in the post-Cold War period within the framework of activism and multidimensionality. Accordingly, the activities of Turkish foreign policy towards Africa are analysed within the framework of public diplomacy and NGOs. In these activities, humanitarian aid was emphasised. In this regard, Balcı (1) has underscored the evolution of Turkish foreign policy by examining the African Initiative within this context, with a particular focus on the 2011 Somali famine case.

As highlighted in these studies, foreign and/or humanitarian aid is evidently a contributing factor to the soft power of states in the foreign policy arena. However, the contributions of NGOs in foreign policy or public diplomacy are not limited to foreign aid. Indeed, many fields of activity, including

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culture, education and religion, are functional for public diplomacy by NGOs. In fact, these activities can be more effective when combined with foreign aid. This functionality is emphasised by Güzel's (343) study, which focuses on the Yunus Emre Institute (YEE). In alignment with Balcı and Tarlanoğlu, Güzel draws attention to the shift in Turkish foreign policy and the emergence of the soft power phenomenon in the post-Cold War era. The argument is made that the negative perception of foreign aid among less developed nations can be mitigated through cultural diplomacy initiatives. In this regard, an analysis of the cultural diplomacy activities of the YEE in the context of Turkish foreign policy and public diplomacy was conducted.

In a further study that drew attention to the activities of NGOs in the fields of research, education and culture, as well as humanitarian and/or foreign aid in Turkish public diplomacy, Eren (36) emphasised that the scale of Turkish foreign policy has expanded and highlighted the importance given to public diplomacy in Turkish foreign policy. Furthermore, he emphasised the role of NGOs in the Turkish public diplomacy process, encompassing a wide range of activities such as humanitarian aid, foreign economic relations, architectural and cultural activities, education and research studies. In light of these observations, this study positions itself within the extant literature on the assumption that NGOs can be important actors in Turkish public diplomacy and that their activities are not limited to humanitarian and/ or foreign aid. Indeed, it is evident that Turkish public diplomacy is more effective when NGOs are active in Turkish foreign policy.

Since the 2000s, Türkiye has initiated the development of a multifaceted, active, and dynamic foreign policy vision. Türkiye pursues a proactive foreign policy in numerous regions, particularly in the Balkans, Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia, with which it has historical and cultural ties. In accordance with this foreign policy vision, Türkiye endeavors to "reconnect with its history and geography, attributes a strategic value to time and space in a globalizing world, and tries to leave behind the one-dimensional and reductionist perspective of the Cold War era" (Kalın, "Soft Power" 5). In the context of evolving foreign policy discourse of Türkiye, characterized by its multidimensional and proactive approach, it is evident that the global trend that emerged in the 2000s is discernible. This global trend is marked by the increasing visibility and influence of NGOs in the realm of international

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relations. Indeed, it has been asserted that NGOs have emerged as pivotal actors in the domain of international issues and public diplomacy (Keyman 512; Çevik 41). A clear example of this phenomenon can be observed in the context of global environmental issues, where NGOs have assumed pivotal roles in agenda-setting and shaping public opinion. A seminal example of this phenomenon can be seen in the role of NGOs at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, where they played a pivotal role in the discourse surrounding greenhouse gas emissions (Nye and Welch 474; Ekşi 76). Another pertinent example is Al Gore's Live Earth Coalition, which organised concerts in eight different metropolitan cities around the world to draw attention to global climate change in 2007 (Nye and Welch 474). NGOs were also instrumental in the banning of landmines at the Ottawa talks (Ekşi 76).

A similar trend has been observed in Türkiye's foreign policy and public diplomacy efforts, as the early 2000s witnessed both the institutionalization of public diplomacy through discourse and legal regulations and the emergence of NGOs as effective foreign policy actors. Although the establishment of significant public diplomacy actors, such as the TIKA, can be traced back to the 1990s, it was not until 2010 that the Public Diplomacy Coordinatorship (PDC) was established within the Prime Ministry. In 2010, the establishment circular of the PDC states that its purpose is "to ensure cooperation and coordination between public institutions and organizations and non-governmental organizations in the field of public diplomacy and strategic communication and promotion activities" (Resmî Gazete). As evidenced by these statements, the themes of strategic communication and collaboration with NGOs are anticipated to be central to Türkiye's public diplomacy during the establishment phase.

İbrahim Kalın, a prominent figure in the field in Türkiye, acknowledges the growing influence of NGOs in public diplomacy. According to Kalın, the primary actors of the Cold War era were nation-states and regional blocs. However, with globalization, new actors have emerged, including the media, public opinion polls, human rights organizations, and NGOs. This necessitates a more dynamic, multidimensional, and less controllable global system. Kalın situates NGOs at the center, asserting that "Turkish democracy and the dynamic structure of the Turkish civil society sector

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represent the most significant pillars of subtle power of Türkiye" (Kalın, "Türk Dış Politikası" 149).

In the realm of foreign policy, NGOs frequently assume a prominent role in peace negotiations. In particular, "international NGOs also played significant roles in the peaceful political movements that occurred in the former Soviet republics at the turn of the 21st century" (Zhang et. al. 47). In recent years, it is possible to find examples where these roles of NGOs have also been fulfilled by Turkish NGOs. For instance, IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH), a Türkiye-based NGO, has participated in the monitoring delegation of the peace talks between the Philippines state and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front to end more than 40-year civil war in the Philippines (IHH). In fact, the war ended with an agreement signed in 2014. During the severe famine in Somalia in 2011, Türkiye played a very important role both through its official institutions and NGOs. Since Somalia (and Africa) is still an unfamiliar area in Turkish foreign policy, NGOs have been actively involved as complementary actors in Turkish foreign policy. So much so that in this case, the Turkish aid model not only enabled the Somali people to overcome the famine, but also strongly established a positive image of Türkiye in the eyes of the Somali state and people (Balcı, 1).

One of the most significant reasons for NGOs to be effective actors in public diplomacy is their capacity to establish credibility and inspire confidence, both in Türkiye and in international literature. As stated by Leonard et al. (56) NGOs possess three distinctive attributes that are challenging for governments to replicate: credibility, expertise, and established networks. Individuals often scrutinize and question a state's diplomatic statements and actions, doubting their political motivations or the accuracy of information transmitted directly by governments. In contrast, NGOs have credibility that governments cannot independently establish due to their autonomous positioning. Each NGO possesses expertise in specific fields such as humanitarian aid, professional organizations, or global issue advocacy. This specialization, coupled with their trustworthy reputation, can make NGOs more credible in society's eyes than official authorities. Moreover, NGOs frequently engage in networking across various societal segments, including politicians, activists, and experts in diverse fields.

In Türkiye's foreign policy vision, NGOs primarily focus on humanitarian aid efforts. Several aid activities are being carried out, especially in Africa, based on religious and historical ties. Turkish NGOs are actively involved in various initiatives across the Middle East, Balkans, Caucasus, and especially in Africa. These activities encompass providing food and medical supplies, conducting cataract surgeries, constructing mosques or places of worship, digging water wells, and more.

In addition, NGOs' public diplomacy activities extend beyond humanitarian aid, encompassing diverse roles and instruments across modern diplomacy. Especially when it comes to global issues of concern to the international public, "NGOs have placed new concerns on the diplomatic agenda, framing them in a way that mobilizes people and brings specific solutions to global problems" (Hochstetler 188). So much so that globalized technologies and institutions, together with NGOs and international companies, transcend geographical boundaries and reduce the power of nation states (Schwab). In this respect, civil society activities have contributed significantly to the shaping of the international agenda and the legitimization of official agreements. In addition to humanitarian aid activities, the roles of NGOs in public diplomacy can be summarized as follows (Doğan and Cerit Mazlum 15-16);

- NGOs may become public diplomacy actors complementary to and in co-operation with the official organs of the state.
- They have the ability to penetrate into areas left vacant by the state in the international arena.
- In cooperation with political decision-makers, they can contribute to foreign policy by directly influencing their decisions.
- While some NGOs try to influence the decision-makers of their own country, others may pursue a strategy of influencing the decision-makers or society of the target country.
- NGOs can continue their activities through influencing international organizations and international institutions and setting their agenda.

It is possible to say that NGOs can not only contribute to the public diplomacy activities of the state in question by operating in parallel with and complementary to the foreign policy of the state, but they can also

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"develop a kind of public diplomacy practice on their own in conflict with the state or states, and even assume the role of an actor independent of the state in the international arena in this way" (Kurtuluş 193).

NGOs being primarily associated with humanitarian aid in Türkiye's public diplomacy is influenced not only by the country's Islamic cultural roots emphasizing philanthropy and benevolence but also by its global standing. According to the 2022 Global Humanitarian Aid Report prepared by the Development Initiatives organization, the United States is the world's largest aid donor, providing 9.768 billion dollars in assistance. Türkiye is the second largest aid donor, providing 5.587 billion dollars in assistance. However, in terms of its gross national product (GNP), Türkiye is the largest humanitarian aid donor, with 5.5 billion dollars. In terms of absolute amounts, Türkiye ranked third in 2013, 2014, and 2015, second in 2016 and 2020, and first in 2017, 2018, and 2019 (Taşdemir).

Although humanitarian aid activities are more prominent in Türkiye, there has been a diversification in the public diplomacy activities of NGOs, especially in recent years. As Leonard (Diplomacy By Other Means) notes, for governments to engage in activities beyond propaganda in their public diplomacy, it is essential to first comprehend the target audience, address any hostility towards their own culture, engage people on an emotional level, and demonstrate their relevance to the people in question. There are elements that differentiate Türkiye in terms of the position of NGOs in public diplomacy, too. NGOs, which are affiliated/related or associated with official state organs, are among the leading soft power actors of Türkiye, especially in Africa. Institutions such as Yunus Emre Institute (YEE), Türkiye Diyanet Foundation (TDV), Turkish Maarif Foundation (TMV) are the first examples that come to mind in this sense.

Besides, Turkish commercial associations contribute to public diplomacy as well. The Turkish Industry and Business Association (TÜSİAD), the Independent Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association (MÜSİAD), and the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Türkiye (TOBB) represent the most prominent NGOs engaged in this field. It is also evident that the influence of economically based non-state actors in international relations has increased since the 1970s. In accordance with the global trend, these economically based organizations in Türkiye can serve as an effective and

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active component of public diplomacy. Consequently, the growing significance of economic relations in foreign policy may prompt these organizations to adopt a more proactive stance in foreign policy, assume a mediating role in interstate disputes, and engage in lobbying activities (Aydemir 357).

Think tanks, operating under foundations or associations, are also influential actors in public diplomacy. SETA, the Turkish Asian Center for Strategic Studies (TASAM) and the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) are prominent examples. These organizations engage in activities such as interacting with foreign populations and advocating their countries' positions on the international stage. In this respect, think tanks "can be considered as a tool against phenomena such as the changing system, globalization, new world order, new power parameters and asymmetric warfare" (Şehitoğlu 312). In addition to many other activities, the public diplomacy activities of Turkish think tanks can be listed as follows (Bedir 19-22):

- Encouraging cooperation between Türkiye and the target country on cultural, economic, political, foreign policy issues, creating a dialogue ground to develop a common perspective on specific problems,
- Describing foreign policy arguments of Türkiye and paradigm to international interlocutors, keeping the country's image strong abroad and developing civil, intellectual, political and cultural relations that will pave the way for the foreign policy moves of official institutions,
- Providing information on political, economic, and social developments in Türkiye to academic, diplomatic, media and business circles abroad,
- Following the developments in different countries and presenting its opinions and suggestions on these developments to the relevant institutions, organizations and target audiences in Türkiye,
- Directly or indirectly influencing the foreign policy or political decision-making processes of Türkiye or the target country.

It can be argued that each of these activities has a lasting and positive impact on a country's public diplomacy, at least as much as humanitarian aid. Consequently, "think tanks and NGOs are of great importance in meeting the current needs of states in the international arena (human resources, consultancy, second opinion, training, research brokerage, etc.) and achieving their foreign policy goals" (Şehitoğlu 68).

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Türkiye's regional location significantly boosts its humanitarian aid efforts and underscores the growing importance of NGOs in public diplomacy. Positioned near conflict-affected regions like the Middle East and Africa, Türkiye can swiftly deploy aid via land and sea routes. Recent years have also seen increased focus on the Balkans and the Turkic world. This evolving regional and global context highlights the role of NGOs in Türkiye's public diplomacy efforts. Specifically, in managing relations with countries such as the Balkans and Greece, where bilateral issues exist, NGOs can effectively engage with the public, business, and academic sectors of these countries. To illustrate, the Turkish-Greek Media and Academia Forum Panels, convened by the Turkish Research Foundation (TAV) and the Institute of Global Affairs (IGA) with the assistance of Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications, constitute a noteworthy example. The inaugural panel was held on December 15, 2023, while the second panel is scheduled for May 11, 2024. The objective of these panel series is to sustain the recent favorable trajectory in Turkish-Greek relations, to underscore the shared characteristics between the two countries, and to deliberate on collaborative initiatives in pivotal domains such as culture and economics. As seen in various activities, in the Türkiye's public diplomacy NGOs contribute in three principal ways. These include humanitarian aid, economic relations and lobbying, and research and education.

Development aid is one of the areas where NGOs can act in coordination with governments and accelerate public diplomacy activities. Development aid is defined as financial resources, technical assistance and goods provided in the form of grants to support economic development and welfare (Yıldırım 2570). In fact, "development assistance, also known as foreign aid, is considered one of the most important components of humanitarian diplomacy" (Şehitoğlu and Güner 1777). Although development assistance is mainly a process carried out through official channels, voluntary aid, NGOs, religious groups, charitable organizations, foundations, and private companies are also included in the category of development assistance (Radelet 4). NGOs play a significant role in development assistance beyond financial grants from companies and economic organizations. They provide valuable local information and organizational coordination, facilitating the collaboration of non-state actors and official development assistance efforts in the recipient country. Therefore, NGOs can effectively contribute to development aid, enhancing the public diplomacy efforts of the respective country in positive ways.

Positive developments in Türkiye's public diplomacy, notably in cultural diplomacy with NGO contributions, are recognized in international assessments. For example, the Institute for Security Studies, a Paris-based EU think tank, highlights in its *Cards of Türkiye in the World* report that Türkiye's influence is expanding across the Western Balkans, South Caucasus, Middle East, and Africa, with an emphasis on education and soft power initiatives as crucial factors contributing to this growing influence in addition to economic considerations (TRT Haber). The most tangible proof that cultural diplomacy activities of Türkiye have found a response worldwide is its stable position in the Global Soft Power Index 2024 report, which analyzes the brand values and soft power of countries. The evaluation of 131,000 individuals from diverse countries has led to designation of Türkiye as the 25th country in the Soft Power Index, which encompasses 193 nations (Brand Finance). As stated in the same report, Türkiye was positioned 18th in terms of "Media and Communication", and 13th with regard to "Global Influence" (DoC). A further report pertains to Türkiye's diplomatic missions situated internationally. This particular indicator also offers a comprehensive overview of the implementation of Türkiye's foreign policy and public diplomacy activities on a global scale. The Global Diplomacy Index 2024, a publication of the Australia-based Lowy Institute, posits that Türkiye is the 3rd country with the strongest diplomatic network in the world, reportedly having 252 missions (Neelam and Sato 5).

Conclusion

Rapid developments in communication and media technology have profoundly affected social and political dynamics, diversified actors and created a unique international environment. These developments, together with the emergence of different actors in international politics, have significantly affected public diplomacy. Today, it can even be said that civilian elements are more prominent in public diplomacy than official institutions. In contrast to traditional state-centred diplomacy, a new approach to public diplomacy based on the interaction between civil societies is gaining strength.

In the context of international relations, where multilateral and multi-subject communication is dominant, NGOs will, or at least should, become more prominent in Türkiye's public diplomacy. However, it would be erroneous

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to consider NGOs solely in terms of their role in humanitarian aid. The potential for political communication to facilitate international interaction demonstrates that NGOs possess a public diplomacy capacity that extends beyond the realm of humanitarian aid.

One of the most significant advantages of NGOs in Türkiye's public diplomacy is their ability to foster trust and credibility more effectively than other entities. This is largely due to their capacity to establish face-to-face contact and build local relationships, which are crucial for forming trust and credibility. It is important to note that public diplomacy activities are primarily shaped by local dynamics. Establishing relationships with the public or sector representatives in the relevant country is more effective than managing reputation or image. Engaging with local elements through NGOs and interacting with local NGOs of the relevant society is an optimal mechanism for fostering trust and credibility.

The pervasive use of media, particularly social media, also facilitates the rapid spread of unverified information, including negative narratives about states. This can have a detrimental impact on a country's image and reputation, especially for countries susceptible to perception management campaigns like Türkiye. The public often becomes more skeptical of public diplomacy activities conducted by a state with a tarnished image and reputation. Therefore, fostering effective communication channels through non-state actors becomes crucial for building trust and legitimacy in the international arena.

Communication and media systems, while presenting advantages, also enable the dissemination of misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation. This can negatively impact a country's image, particularly for those vulnerable to disinformation campaigns, like Türkiye. NGOs, with their potential for direct audience engagement and bypassing media filters, offer a valuable tool for public diplomacy, facilitating the dissemination of factual information to target audiences. It is important to remember that the novel public diplomacy approach is centered on *building relationships*.

In the context of public diplomacy, the way a message is conveyed is as crucial as the content of the message itself. NGOs can enhance and collaborate with official state organs, thereby contributing to public diplomacy

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activities through the utilization of political communication opportunities and possibilities. It can be reasonably predicted that NGOs will become more prominent in the coming years in areas that have been left vacant by the state or where state organs are unable to penetrate for various reasons.

Therefore Türkiye must remain cognizant of the increasingly civilianized nature of public diplomacy in its initiatives. As public diplomacy activities become more civilianized and intertwined with the media, the state's withdrawal may accelerate. It may be more appropriate for the state to act as an *invisible hand*, providing operational support to NGOs' public diplomacy activities. In the future, the state is likely to adopt a more indirect and supportive role regarding NGOs while maintaining transparency in accordance with international standards. This approach would enable more indirect, penetrating, and sustained public diplomacy. What legal and institutional arrangements can be made for this purpose are the main questions and problems that await answers from both the relevant units and the academic world.

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The authors' contribution rates in this study are equal.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of this study. There is no conflict of interest between the authors.

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