**Extended Abstract**

**International Imam Hatip High Schools as a Soft-Power Element**

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**Abstract**

International education has begun to hold an important place in the public diplomacy of states as a soft-power element. These days, short-term student-exchange programs at the high school and college levels, summer schools that involve language education, scholarship academic studies, and vocational training programs have become diplomatic vehicles to which states give importance. The Ministry of Education has put into practice new types of schools that take particular focus on language teaching and cultural sharing in this context. From these schools, the International Imam Hatip High Schools (IIHHs) have become institutions where 1,400 students from 72 countries undergo education. On the decrease of public diplomacy (one of Turkey’s important foreign policy tools) due to internal and external factors, Turkey aims to re-strengthen its public policy using educational tools. Both politicians and diplomats have expressed expectations directed at positive effects on the point of foreign students being partners in the fields of politics and economics in the future of Turkey when they complete their education at IIHHs and return to their countries. This study attempts to show that, in struggling with elements harmful to the perception of Turkey, IIHHs are aimed at indirectly contributing to Turkish foreign policy as an important tool in disrupting the impact power of movements found in extremist rhetoric and activities.

**Keywords**

Public diplomacy • Soft power • International Imam Hatip High Schools • Exchange diplomacy • Religious education

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States, as main actors of the international system, operate the processes of public policy in the name of influencing foreign public circles and providing an indirect foreign policy gain. Soft power, being one of the fighting tools of international politics, constitutes a significant position in today’s international relations through the various public diplomacy tools that states put into practice. Many public policy studies involve providing images and information about a country. States, putting this into practice using a variety of methods, increase day by day the tools that will appeal more to foreign peoples’ public opinion. Exchange diplomacy constitutes an important leg of public diplomacy as an element of international education. The existence of education related to soft power has a long history. The short-term student exchange program at the high school and college levels, summer schools, scholarship academic studies, and vocational training programs these days have become diplomatic instruments to which states give importance. On this point, states’ various applications in this field have been included in the study.

The study has revealed Turkey’s downward change of direction in its capacity as a soft global power. On this note, Turkey has been seen to attempt filling the spaces occurring in soft power by implementing new school types whose particular focal area is on language teaching and cultural exchanges through the goals of the Ministry of Education. Through the 2016 Education Foundation Act, establishing global education institutions was targeted, while International Anatolian Imam Hatip High Schools (IIHHS) were established in the various cities of Turkey. These schools have today become institutions where 1,400 students from 72 countries undergo education. The study attempts to reveal how, on the decrease of public diplomacy (one of Turkey’s important foreign policy tools) due to internal and external factors, Turkey aims to re-strengthen its public policy using new educational tools. On this point, statements included in academic writing through the rhetoric of government officials and bureaucrats of the Ministry of Education’s General Directorate of Religious Education have become the basis of the study’s argument. Additionally, the countries where students registered in these schools are chosen from and parent profiles show Turkey to have an expectation that ultimately will lead to soft power. The expectations of foreign students currently receiving education at IIHHS directed at being partners in Turkey’s economic and political fields when they finish and return to their countries has been seen to be publicly stated by both politicians and diplomats. This study attempts to demonstrate that, in struggling with elements harmful to Turkey’s international respectability and positive perception, indirect contributions to Turkish foreign policy as an important tool in disrupting the influence of movements found in extremist rhetoric and activities are indirectly targeted through IIHHS.