

Turkey's Education Policies and Soft Power in Central Asia: the Case of Kyrgyzstan

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By

Ikramidin Zhakypaliev

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DECLARATION

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Name: Ikramidin Zhakypaliev

Date: January 08, 2024

Signature:

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the impact of Turkish educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan, focusing on Manas University, on Turkey's soft power in the region, particularly in the context of the post-2016 coup attempt. The study aims to understand how these institutions have influenced cultural exchanges, educational collaborations, and shaped perceptions of Turkey in Central Asia. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research analyzes both quantitative data and qualitative observations to assess the role of these institutions. Key findings reveal that Manas University and similar institutions have significantly contributed to promoting Turkish language and culture. They have also enhanced educational cooperation, fostering a positive image of Turkey among the local community and students. This contribution is especially notable in the wake of the political shifts following the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey. The study underscores the strategic use of education in advancing a nation's soft power, highlighting Turkey's approach in Central Asia. It provides valuable insights into the evolving dynamics of international educational diplomacy and its implications for Turkey's foreign policy. This research contributes to the broader discourse on soft power and international relations, offering a nuanced understanding of the interplay between education and national influence in a post-coup context.

Keywords: Turkish Educational Policy, Kyrgyzstan, Soft Power, Post-2016 Coup Impact, Manas University

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List of Abbreviations

AKP - Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)

BRI - Belt and Road Initiative

BTC - Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (oil pipeline)

DTAs - Double Taxation Agreements

EAEU - Eurasian Economic Union

FETÖ/PDY - Fethullahçı Terör Örgütü / Parallel State Structure (Fethullahist Terrorist Organization)

IPPA - Investment Promotion and Protection Agreements

KTMU - Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University

MoNE - Ministry of National Education

OTS - Organization of Turkic States

SCO - Shanghai Cooperation Organization

TANAP - Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline

TİKA - Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency

TMF - Turkish Maarif Foundation

TKDA - Turkic Council Turkic University Union

TRT - Türkiye Radyo ve Televizyon Kurumu (Turkish Radio and Television Corporation)

UNECE - United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In his speech at the 8th Summit of the Turkic Council, President Erdoğan announced the decision to rename the Council the Organization of Turkic States. He emphasized that this change reflects the Council's enhanced institutional framework and increased influence both within its region and internationally. He said: “Undoubtedly, this significant transformation should not merely be confined to verbal expression but should also be implemented in practice. Furthermore, throughout the summit, there were significant instances that we should consider.” Initially, Erdogan bestowed the Supreme Order of the Turkic World on President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan. In his address, he emphasized the significance of combating terrorist organizations, specifically highlighting FETO, which pertains to the Gulenist movement.¹ This summit showcases the institutional advancement of relations between Turkey and Central Asian countries through the concept of the Turkic world, which is developing within this process of regional integration. Emphasizing the significance of countering terrorist groups, specifically FETO, also known as the Hizmet Movement, exposes underlying issues in Turkey's involvement in the region. None of the member states consider the Hizmet movement to be a terrorist organization.

Central Asia has undeniably served as a crucial testing ground for Turkey's foreign policy tools, allowing for the development and refinement of its strategies. According to scholars Balci and Liles, Turkey's initiatives of the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TKA) in Central Asia significantly honed its expertise in international development. This experience proved invaluable, as TİKA subsequently expanded its scope of operations to other developing nations, effectively utilizing the insights and expertise gained from its engagements in the post-Soviet landscape. This strategic expansion highlights TİKA's evolving role as a key instrument of Turkey's cooperative and developmental efforts on a global scale, building on its foundational experiences in Central Asia.² However, in the sphere of educational initiatives since their

¹ Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, “We Are Changing the Name of the Turkic Council to the Organization of Turkic States,” [www.tccb.gov.tr](https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/133467/-we-are-changing-the-name-of-the-turkic-council-to-the-organization-of-turkic-states-), November 12, 2021, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/133467/-we-are-changing-the-name-of-the-turkic-council-to-the-organization-of-turkic-states->.

² Bayram Balci and Thomas Liles, “Turkey's Comeback to Central Asia,” *Insight Turkey* 20, no. 4 (2018): 11–26.

inception, local and global political changes have had an impact on Turkish educational institutions run by state and non-state actors in complicated relationships.

1.1.1 Background and Significance

The emergence of Turkish educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan, initiated by both non-state and state actors, has generated significant interest and discourse in recent times. Operational since the 1990s, these institutions, funded and supported by various entities, have served as conduits for advancing the Turkish language, culture, and education, strategically aligning with Turkey's objectives of exerting soft power in Central Asia. This MA thesis delves into the role of Turkish educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan, particularly focusing on the case study of Manas University within the broader framework of Turkey's soft power in the region.

The selection of this topic stems from an appreciation of the profound impact of soft power on international relations, especially in the realm of educational initiatives' influence on perceptions and the exertion of influence. Turkey's historical and cultural affinities with Central Asia, especially Kyrgyzstan, provide an opportune context for dissecting the dynamics of soft power. Notably, the Sebat/Sapat schools and Manas University established in Kyrgyzstan during the 1990s, later Maarif schools, stand as notable examples of both non-state and state actor-initiated Turkish educational institutions. These establishments have been instrumental in propagating the Turkish language, culture, and education, thereby significantly contributing to Turkey's soft power sway in the region.

Gaining an understanding of the role of Turkish educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan holds paramount importance in comprehending the wider implications of both non-state and state-driven soft power and educational diplomacy, especially considering the impact of the 2016 failed coup attempt in Turkey. The study endeavors to examine the impact of these diverse institutions, particularly state-backed Turkish higher education institutions in Kyrgyzstan, illuminating their efficacy in promoting Turkish culture and language, fostering educational cooperation, nurturing alumni networks, and shaping local perceptions of Turkey. Concentrating on these institutions enables comprehensive scrutiny of the specific strategies and influence propagated by these educational establishments in advancing Turkey's soft power ambitions in Kyrgyzstan over the preceding decades and in the aftermath of significant geopolitical events.

1.1.2 Hypothesis

The central hypothesis of this study is that Turkish educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan, especially Manas University, have played a significant role in enhancing Turkey's soft power in the region by positively influencing local perceptions and attitudes. This study posits that through cultural and educational exchanges, these institutions have effectively projected Turkey's cultural and educational values, thereby strengthening its international standing. Furthermore, it hypothesizes that the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey has impacted these perceptions, potentially altering the effectiveness and reception of these educational institutions as instruments of soft power. This research aims to investigate these shifts in perception and effectiveness, providing a nuanced understanding of the dynamic interplay between educational diplomacy and soft power in the context of Turkey-Central Asia relations and Turkey-Kyrgyzstan relations in particular.

1.1.3 Research Objectives and Questions

A primary research question that seeks to understand the breadth and depth of Turkish educational institutions' influence on influencing local perceptions and attitudes toward Turkey in Kyrgyzstan, particularly Manas University, serves as the primary guide for this study. This inquiry extends to understanding the impact of these institutions on Turkey's soft power in the region. The question is twofold: *To what extent have Turkish educational institutions, especially Manas University, facilitated cultural exchange between Turkey and Kyrgyzstan, and how are these interactions reflected in the perceptions and attitudes of both students and the broader community in Kyrgyzstan?* Additionally, *How has this influence evolved, particularly in light of the significant cultural exchanges between Turkey and Kyrgyzstan and the aftermath of the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey?*

To dissect this central inquiry further, the study will address several sub-questions, each aiming to illuminate different facets of the main research question. The first sub-question asks, *How do Turkish educational institutions promote Turkish language, culture, and educational collaborations in Kyrgyzstan, and what are the perceived impacts of these efforts on the local populace?* This inquiry is aimed at gauging the perceived impacts of these educational efforts on the local populace.

Additionally, the study probes, *In what ways do the presence and activities of these institutions, particularly Manas University, influence identity formation and cultural awareness*

among students and the local community in Kyrgyzstan? This examination is crucial to understanding the broader societal implications of Turkish educational initiatives.

Lastly, the research seeks to compare the effectiveness and influence of Turkish educational institutions with other soft power strategies employed by Turkey in Kyrgyzstan, such as economic alliances and diplomatic initiatives. The question posed here is, *How do Turkish educational institutions, including Manas University, compare in effectiveness and influence with other soft power strategies employed by Turkey in Kyrgyzstan?*

By addressing these research questions, the study aims to provide a thorough analysis of the role Turkish educational institutions have played in influencing Kyrgyzstan's perceptions of Turkey's soft power, particularly in the context of shifting geopolitical dynamics.

1.2 Literature Review

The existing literature on Turkey-Central Asia relations is extensive. However, research focusing on Turkish educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan, particularly within the context of Turkey's soft power influence in Central Asia, is moderately developed. Although there is a substantial amount of literature available, it often presents as a collection of scattered investigations and fragmented analyses. The literature review for this thesis is divided into three parts. The first part corresponds to Turkish diplomacy and policies in Central Asia. The subsequent part analyzes Turkish educational initiatives in other regions, with a particular focus on Africa and the Balkans. The final part, which is the primary aim of this thesis, comprehensively analyzes Turkish educational institutions, both public and private. This includes measuring the perceptions and attitudes of the recipients of Turkish soft power following the failed coup attempt in 2016.

The scholarship on Turkey's diplomatic endeavors and policy-making in Central Asia is comprehensive. Yet, it is imperative to sift through the prevailing narratives presented by these academic works. Russian scholars typically frame Turkey's involvement in terms of Pan-Turkism, Islamism, and Turanism, reflecting the geostrategic contest for influence. Western academics often interpret these actions through the lens of Neo-Ottomanism. Turkish academics, in contrast, celebrate this engagement as a reconnection with the Turkic world. Striving for objectivity, this thesis critically selects sources that offer balanced and accurate insights. The literature reveals two main trajectories in Turkey's diplomatic history in the region: Firstly, the evolution of Turkey's approach, segmented into three distinct strategic phases; and secondly, the emergence of Central

Asia as a proving ground for Turkey to hone its nascent foreign policy instruments, notably the Great Student Exchange Project and TIKA. Furthermore, the thesis examines Turkey's foray into international institutional development. While Chapter 2 will provide a detailed exploration of these elements, the overview here lays the groundwork for understanding Turkey's multifaceted relations with Central Asia.

Coming to part two, an academic discourse often revolves around Turkey's strategic use of educational initiatives to extend its influence globally. Scholars, primarily from regions such as South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, South Caucasus, North Africa, and the Balkans, provide varied perspectives on Turkey's educational policies. Furthermore, part two of the literature reveals the impact of the 2016 coup attempt on Turkey's educational policies, notably the strategic establishment of the Turkish Maarif Foundation and the reorganization of Gülen movement-linked schools.

For instance, Balci, a prominent researcher on private Turkish educational institutions, particularly Gülen movement schools, examined the curriculum and pedagogy employed in these schools that revealed the promotion of Turkish language education and the integration of Turkish cultural values. This research has shed light on the educational strategies used to enhance students' knowledge of the Turkish language and culture, as well as the broader implications for identity formation and cultural awareness among students.³

This thesis expands on such insights by studying the post-coup recalibration of Turkey's educational soft power, symbolized by the rebranding of Gülen movement-linked institutions and the creation of the Turkish Maarif Foundation. A significant gap remains in the existing literature concerning the post-2016 perceptions of Turkish soft power by students and alumni. This thesis aims to bridge this gap through original research, using Manas University as a case study to assess the contemporary impact and effectiveness of Turkey's educational initiatives in Central Asia.

³ Bayram Balci, "Fethullah Gülen's Missionary Schools in Central Asia and Their Role in the Spreading of Turkism and Islam," *Religion, State and Society* 31, no. 2 (June 2003): 151–77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09637490308283>.

1.3 Research Framework and Methodology

1.3.1 Theoretical Framework

This thesis centrally incorporates Joseph Nye's concept of soft power to examine Turkey's influence in Kyrgyzstan, particularly through its educational institutions like Manas University. Nye defines soft power as the capacity to shape preferences through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or monetary means.⁴ This influence arises from cultural appeal, political values, and foreign policies. Turkish educational initiatives in Central Asia, especially in Kyrgyzstan, manifest this soft power through the promotion of Turkish culture, language, and education, facilitating not just academic exchange but also acting as vehicles of cultural diplomacy to enhance Turkey's regional influence. This approach aligns with scholars like Bayram Balci, who underscore the critical role of cultural and educational exchanges in projecting a nation's soft power, supporting the strategic use of these tools in Turkey's foreign policy.

An additional component that enhances this framework is Hasan Kosebalaban's examination of nonmaterial context of Turkey's foreign policy, wherein the importance of identity and cultural politics is emphasized. Kosebalaban contends that distinct identity groups such as secular nationals(notably kemalists), national islamists, pro-Islamic liberals and secularist liberals shapes Turkey's foreign policy decisions, particularly in Central Asia. Turkey's different identity groups serve as a guide for its diplomatic interactions with the Central Asian republics, which it uses to increase its soft power in the region by leveraging shared linguistic, cultural, and historical ties. For the purpose of comprehending the resonance and reception of Turkey's educational outreach in Kyrgyzstan, it is essential to acknowledge the relationship between these identity dynamics.⁵

Incorporating the research on internationalisation of higher education is crucial for comprehending Turkey's foreign policy strategies in Central Asia. The internationalization of higher education is increasingly recognized as a strategic component of soft power, as it allows countries to extend their cultural and intellectual influence globally through academic exchange and collaboration.⁶ Turkey's educational strategies, including student exchange programs and the

⁴ Joseph S. Nye, "Soft Power," *Foreign Policy*, no. 80 (1990): 153–71.

⁵ H. Kösebalaban, *Turkish Foreign Policy: Islam, Nationalism, and Globalization* (Springer, 2011).

⁶ Georgiana Mihut, Philip G Altbach, and Hans De Wit, *Understanding Global Higher Education : Insights from Key Global Publications* (Rotterdam: Sensepublishers, 2017).

establishment of Turkish institutions, extend beyond academic objectives. They are strategic tools in Turkey's foreign policy, instrumental in exporting cultural values and strengthening diplomatic relations. These initiatives demonstrate how Turkey strategically employs educational diplomacy to bolster its soft power and deepen its connections in Central Asia, particularly in the context of the post-2016 political landscape.

Lastly, a crucial aspect of this theoretical framework is the understanding of post-Cold War dynamics, which are instrumental in comprehending Turkey's educational outreach in Central Asia. The end of the Cold War marked a significant geopolitical shift, presenting Turkey with new opportunities to engage with the Central Asian region. This period was characterized by the emergence of newly independent states from the Soviet Union, allowing Turkey to explore and reassert its historical and cultural connections with these nations. The framework emphasizes how these geopolitical changes influenced Turkey's foreign policy, particularly in leveraging educational initiatives. The establishment of Turkish educational institutions in Central Asia, such as Manas University, can be seen as a strategic move in this context, aiming to strengthen cultural and educational ties and reinforce Turkey's presence in the region. This perspective is essential for analyzing the nuances of Turkey's approach to extending its soft power through educational initiatives in the post-Cold War Central Asian landscape.

1.3.2 Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods research design to comprehensively analyze the impact of Turkish educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan, particularly Manas University, on Turkey's soft power in the region. This approach integrates both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, enabling a holistic exploration of how these institutions influence local perceptions and Turkey's international image. Qualitatively, the study involves participant observation, informal discussions with stakeholders, and document analysis to understand the cultural and educational nuances of these institutions. Quantitatively, it leverages surveys targeting over 100 students from Manas University to gather empirical data on their perceptions and experiences. This blend of methodologies ensures a balanced perspective, combining statistical analysis with in-depth qualitative insights. By triangulating data from various sources, the research design aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the evolving role of Turkish educational initiatives in

Kyrgyzstan's societal and cultural landscape, particularly in the context of the post-2016 political dynamics in Turkey.

1.3.3 Methodology and Data Collection

The methodology encompasses qualitative and quantitative techniques to offer a comprehensive perspective on the influence of Turkish educational institutions on Kyrgyzstan's perception of Turkey's soft power. Quantitative data is primarily collected through surveys administered to Manas University students. These surveys, designed to assess perceptions, attitudes, and experiences, are analyzed for trends and patterns. Recognizing limitations in resource availability and time constraints, the study focuses on student responses, acknowledging the practical challenges of broader stakeholder engagement.

Qualitative methods include in-depth discussions with instructors and students in Turkey and Kyrgyzstan, participant observation at Manas University, and analysis of various academic and policy-related documents. These methods provide contextual depth to the study. Additionally, the research examines the alumni networks of Turkish educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan to understand their long-term impact on Turkish soft power.

To provide a comparative perspective, the study occasionally employs a comparative analysis, evaluating the effectiveness of Turkish educational institutions against other soft power strategies like economic partnerships and diplomatic initiatives in Kyrgyzstan.

The triangulation of findings from different data sources—surveys, document analysis, alumni network studies, and participant observations—enhances the robustness of the analysis. This approach ensures a nuanced understanding of both state and non-state actor-initiated educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan and their role in projecting Turkey's soft power.

1.3.4 Positionality

In conducting this research on 'Turkey's Education Policies and Soft Power in Central Asia: The Case of Kyrgyzstan,' my unique positionality as both a product of the Turkish high school and a graduate of Manas University critically informs the study. This dual insider perspective enriches the research with valuable firsthand insights into the Turkish educational environment and its influence in Kyrgyzstan. However, this same positionality necessitates a heightened awareness of potential biases and the importance of maintaining objectivity throughout the research process.

My formative educational experiences in a Turkish school system provided me with an intimate understanding of Turkey's educational and cultural dissemination strategies. Similarly, my tenure at Manas University offered me an immersive experience of the dynamics of Turkey's soft power in Central Asia. These experiences, while invaluable, also pose a challenge in ensuring the impartiality of my analysis. To mitigate this, I will engage in reflexive practices, actively identifying and counterbalancing any personal biases. The employment of a mixed-methods approach, triangulating data from various sources, further aids in maintaining a balanced perspective.

Acknowledging this positionality is essential for ethical research conduct. It not only guides the formulation of research questions but also underpins the interpretation of data. My aim is to leverage this unique perspective to add depth to the study while rigorously upholding academic standards of neutrality and objectivity.

1.4 Scope and Limitations

This study, while comprehensive in its approach to exploring Turkey's soft power in Kyrgyzstan through educational diplomacy, recognizes several inherent limitations and risks. Primarily, the focus on Manas University and its students may introduce a sampling bias, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings to broader contexts. Additionally, the reliance on qualitative methods such as interviews and participant observation can be subjective, and personal biases may influence data interpretation. Efforts to counter this include the implementation of methodological triangulation and cross-verification of data.

The time-bound nature of the study also presents a constraint, particularly in thoroughly examining the impact of Turkish educational institutions before and after the 2016 coup attempt within the scope of an MA thesis. This limitation necessitates efficient time management and a focused research scope. Furthermore, self-reported data from surveys and interviews may be subject to respondent bias, where participants might convey socially desirable responses. Measures such as ensuring anonymity and creating a non-judgmental survey environment will be employed to mitigate this risk.

Access to comprehensive data is another potential challenge, as restrictions or the limited availability of certain information could constrain the research's depth. Lastly, the politically sensitive nature of the topic, involving Turkey's soft power strategy and international relations,

could attract diverse and potentially critical viewpoints. This will be navigated with a commitment to maintaining scholarly objectivity and a balanced presentation of findings.

In summary, while acknowledging these limitations and risks, this study aims to provide insightful contributions to the understanding of educational diplomacy and soft power in the context of Turkey-Kyrgyzstan relations, employing rigorous methodological approaches to ensure the reliability and validity of its conclusions.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is organized into five chapters, systematically examining Turkey's role and influence in Central Asia, with a specific emphasis on Kyrgyzstan.

Chapter II, 'Turkish Diplomacy and Policies in Central Asia since 1991', provides a foundational historical overview of Turkey's engagement in Central Asia, exploring political, economic, cultural, and educational initiatives. This chapter sets the stage by highlighting key developments, especially those post-2016, and establishes the broader context of Turkey's evolving role in the region.

Chapter III, 'Turkish Education Policies and Student Exchange with Developing Countries', delves into the dynamics of education as a facet of soft power. It analyzes various educational policies and initiatives of Turkey, including student exchange programs, and assesses the impact of significant events in 2016 on these policies.

Chapter IV, 'The Turkish Educational Institutions in Kyrgyzstan', represents the core contribution of this thesis. This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of Turkish educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan, focusing on Manas University as a case study. It offers insights into the evolution and current state of these institutions, emphasizing their role in cultural and social dynamics, challenges faced, and adaptations post-2016. This chapter's detailed examination of Manas University is central to understanding the nuances of Turkey's educational influence in Kyrgyzstan.

Chapter V, 'Conclusion', synthesizes the findings from the previous chapters, highlighting the contributions of this research to the existing body of knowledge and providing recommendations for future studies. This chapter concludes the thesis by encapsulating the study's overall insights and implications.

This structured approach ensures a comprehensive analysis of Turkey's multifaceted engagement in Central Asia. Each chapter contributes to building a holistic understanding, culminating in Chapter IV's pivotal examination of Manas University, which underscores the thesis's unique contribution to the topic.

CHAPTER II: TURKISH DIPLOMACY AND POLICIES IN CENTRAL ASIA SINCE 1991

2.1 Introduction

Since the 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union, Central Asia, encompassing Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, has gained prominence on the geopolitical stage. Rich in energy resources and situated at a strategic crossroads with deep historical connections to the Turkic and Islamic worlds, this region has attracted interest from global powers, including the Russian Federation, the United States, China, and the European Union. Among these actors, Turkey stands out due to its historical, linguistic, and cultural ties to the region.

Turkey's initial approach to Central Asia aimed ambitiously to serve as a model based on its secular, democratic governance and thriving private sector. However, facing realistic challenges, this vision evolved. In the early post-independence era, Turkey focused on establishing diplomatic ties and fostering economic relations with Central Asian states, being one of the first to recognize their independence and setting up embassies to deepen future engagements.

A key aspect of Turkey's involvement in Central Asia has been the shared Turkic heritage. The linguistic and cultural commonalities with Central Asian Turkic-speaking peoples have been pivotal in Turkey's efforts to reinforce regional ties. Turkey has actively promoted cultural and educational exchanges, utilizing these programs to strengthen the Turkic bond and enhance the region's familiarity with Turkish language and culture.

Economically, Turkey's ambitions extended to developing robust trade and investment relationships. Energy cooperation, particularly in oil and natural gas, emerged as a cornerstone of these efforts. Projects like the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline not only underscored Turkey's role in the energy sector but also positioned it as a critical transit hub connecting the Caspian Sea region with global markets.

Moreover, spread Turkish language and culture through cultural and educational influence, particularly that started by both state and non-state actors, and the establishment of schools, universities, and cultural centers like the "Yunus Emre Institutes" throughout Central Asia. These entities, offering high quality education, language courses, and cultural events, sought to foster a shared cultural identity among Turkic-speaking populations.

However, Turkey's Central Asian strategy underwent significant changes post-2016, particularly in the wake of the failed coup attempt in Turkey. This event had profound implications for Turkish foreign policy, including its approach to Central Asia. The Turkish government's increased efforts to counter the influence of the Gülen movement, which had established educational and civil society engagements in the region, led to shifting dynamics in its relations with Central Asian states.

This chapter provides a detailed examination of Turkey's diplomatic, economic, cultural, and educational engagements in Central Asia. It explores the evolving geopolitical landscape and analyzes how Turkey has adapted its strategies in response to regional changes. The chapter also scrutinizes the impact of the 2016 coup attempt on Turkey's Central Asian policies, offering insights into the complexities and nuances of Turkish diplomacy in this strategically significant region.

2.2 Political Engagement

Considering that Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan all share historical legacies and cultural affinities with Turkey, except Tajikistan, Central Asia has emerged as a region of profound geopolitical importance since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Turkey's interest in Central Asia is due to the fact that these countries share historical legacies and cultural affinities. The political engagement of Turkey in the region, which is a reflection of its desire to strengthen economic and political ties, has displayed a multifaceted character that has been shaped by a variety of factors. These factors include the early recognition of independence, strategic alliances, and aspirations to promote a governance model in the region, known as the Turkish model. These factors have greatly influenced its decision-making processes and its approach to international relations.

2.2.1 Historical Overview of Turkish-Central Asian Relations

The political engagement of Turkey in Central Asia since the dissolution of the Soviet Union can be categorized into three distinct periods, each characterized by differing approaches and ambitions. Turkish policymakers' ambitious vision of Turkey as a "big brother" to the Central

Asian states during the initial period, which lasted from 1990 to 1996, was evident.⁷ During this phase, driven by ideals like pan-Turkism and a shared Turkic heritage, Turkey aspired to play a leading role in guiding the newly independent Central Asian republics.

However, this period of high aspirations gradually gave way to a more grounded phase from 1996 to 2012. In this second period, Turkey adopted a more realistic and pragmatic approach, scaling back its grand visions in favor of more attainable, practical policies that focused on building sustainable and mutually beneficial relations. The lesson that an overly aggressive foreign policy in the region was not prudent given the risk of direct conflict with Russia and other regional states informed Turkey's policy initiatives as well. Instead, cooperation was seen as a more successful strategy.⁸ Despite the limitations posed by its modest economic and industrial resources, Turkey's strengthening of ties with nationalist leadership in the Turkic republics was anticipated to benefit its long-term influence in the region.

Turkey's adoption of a more assertive and institutionalized approach during the third period, which started in 2012 and has continued up until the present, is notable. Turkey's foreign policy in the region has evolved to adopt a more structured and institutionalized approach during the current period, which is characterized by a strategic reorientation towards Central Asia.⁹ This shift can be attributed to the maturation of Turkey's foreign policy in the area and its recognition of the evolving geopolitical landscape. Each of these periods exemplifies Turkey's evolving political involvement in Central Asia, illustrating a progression from ambitious conceptual leadership to practical collaboration and ultimately to a confident and organized regional strategy.

2.2.2 Diplomatic Strategies: Bilateral and Multilateral Approaches

A shared cultural and historical heritage, as well as the strategic interests that have emerged in the post-Soviet era, have shaped the political-diplomatic relations between Turkey and the Central Asian republics. The bilateral relations in the political sphere have been mutual visits at the highest levels, agreements on political cooperation, and the creation of institutional frameworks to support communication and cooperation.

⁷ Mustafa Aydin, "Foucault's Pendulum: Turkey in Central Asia and the Caucasus," *Turkish Studies* 5, no. 2 (June 21, 2004): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1468384042000228576>.

⁸ Hakan Fidan, "Turkish Foreign Policy towards Central Asia," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 12, no. 1 (March 2010): 109–21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448950903507560>.

⁹ Bayram Balci and Thomas Liles, "Turkey's Comeback to Central Asia," *Insight Turkey* 20, no. 4 (2018): 11–26.

Mutual visits are a cornerstone of this relationship. From President Erdogan's recent SCO summit engagement¹⁰ to President Tokayev's 2022 state visit to Turkey, leaders actively cultivate dialogue and understanding.¹¹ Bilateral agreements further solidify this bond. "Strategic Partnership Agreements" with each Central Asian nation serve as long-term roadmaps for joint endeavors in defense, education, and cultural exchange. Additionally, joint declarations on regional security tackle shared concerns like border control and counter-terrorism, showcasing a commitment to regional stability.¹²

Institutional structures enhance this cooperation. The Turkic Council, an intergovernmental organization fostering collaboration among Turkic-speaking nations, hosts regular summits and ministerial meetings, further solidifying ties. The International Turkic Academy, dedicated to preserving and promoting shared heritage, strengthens cultural cohesion through its branches across Central Asia. Furthermore, joint committees and working groups facilitate practical partnerships in areas like trade, tourism, and agriculture.¹³

Political cooperation has not been without its challenges. Differing geopolitical interests and domestic situations within each country can at times hinder progress. Nevertheless, the shared history, linguistic affinities, and commitment to regional stability provide a compelling foundation for continued collaboration. Through ongoing dialogue, joint initiatives, and institutional frameworks, Turkey and Central Asian countries are demonstrably building bridges in the political sphere, shaping a future of mutual benefit and regional resilience.

Multilateral cooperation between Turkey and Central Asian countries in the political sphere is complex and influenced by the interplay of various geopolitical factors. Turkey's engagement with the shifting political leadership in the area and the larger geopolitical context, in which Russia and China are significant actors, have shaped Central Asian states. The introduction of the

¹⁰ "Erdogan Arrives in Uzbekistan to Attend SCO Summit | Daily Sabah," accessed December 26, 2023, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/erdogan-arrives-in-uzbekistan-to-attend-sco-summit>.

¹¹ "Joint Statement of President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and President of The Republic of Türkiye Recep Tayyip Erdoğan On Enhanced Strategic Partnership — Official Website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan," accessed December 26, 2023, <https://www.akorda.kz/en/joint-statement-of-president-of-the-republic-of-kazakhstan-kassym-jomart-tokayev-and-president-of-the-republic-of-trkiye-recep-tayyip-erdoan-on-enhanced-strategic-partnership-104238>.

¹² "Türkiye's Relations With Central Asian Republics / Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs," accessed December 26, 2023, https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye_s-relations-with-central-asian-republics.en.mfa.

¹³ "Organization of Turkic States," Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı, accessed December 26, 2023, <https://www.turkicstates.org/en/turk-konseyi-hakkinda>.

presidential system in Turkey has also played a role in redefining its relations with Central Asian countries.¹⁴

Consequently, Turkey's political cooperation with Central Asian states is partly facilitated through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), where Turkey's status as a Dialogue Partner allows it to engage in political discussions related to international crime and terrorism. President Erdogan's aspirations for Turkey to become a full member of the SCO, especially after India and Pakistan's inclusion, reflect Turkey's shifting focus towards Asia and its desire to play a more active role in regional politics.¹⁵

Moreover, Turkey's involvement in the Middle East, particularly in Syria and Iraq, has had repercussions for its political strategies in Central Asia. The Turkish-Russian-Iranian stance on the conflict in Syria is one example of how Turkey's Middle Eastern policies are intertwined with its regional approach in Central Asia. The Astana Process, which offered an alternative avenue for peace in Syria, is another instance where Turkey leveraged its Central Asian connections to pursue strategic goals in other parts of the world.¹⁶

However, in the broader context of multilateral political cooperation, Turkey has adopted a pragmatic approach, preferring bilateral relations and economic niches over large regional forums, which has sometimes put it in competition with Russian interests. Despite this, Turkey's rapprochement with Russia in 2016 and its involvement in the Middle East conflicts have led to cooperation within the larger framework of Russia-China cooperation in the region.¹⁷

From Tutumlu's analysis, it is evident that Turkey's multilateral political cooperation with Central Asian states is dynamic and influenced by a range of factors, including its own domestic political changes, the strategic interests of other regional powers, and the evolving geopolitical landscape of Asia.¹⁸

To summarise, Turkey's diplomatic engagements in Central Asia, which include both bilateral and multilateral engagements, are dynamic and comprise a variety of facets. Regional factors continuously shape these relationships, which have their roots in both parties' shared heritage and strategic interests. geopolitical dynamics, Turkey's internal political shifts, and its

¹⁴ Tutumlu and YDE, "Turkey-Central Asia Relations," 1.

¹⁵ Tutumlu and YDE, "Turkey-Central Asia Relations," 4.

¹⁶ Tutumlu and YDE, "Turkey-Central Asia Relations," 11.

¹⁷ Tutumlu and YDE, "Turkey-Central Asia Relations," 2.

¹⁸ Tutumlu and YDE, "Turkey-Central Asia Relations," 1.

interactions with major powers like Russia and China, underscoring a complex but robust diplomatic landscape.

2.2.3 Policy Shifts and Developments

Turkey's political engagement in Central Asia has been characterized by a dynamic interplay of strategic alliances and shifting foreign policy goals since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The alliances Turkey formed with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the United States had a significant impact on the strategic approach it took toward Central Asia between 1990 and 1996. During this time period, Turkey made efforts to promote the "Turkish model," which is a system that is secular, democratic, and market-oriented. This model was intended to serve as a foundation for the development of the states that are located in Central Asia.¹⁹ This strategy aligned with Western interests and aimed to provide a counter-narrative to Iran's model of Islamic governance, positioning Turkey as a secular and democratic alternative in the region.

However, as Turkey's engagement progressed, there was a noticeable shift in its diplomatic strategy. Subsequent to the initial approach that was centered on the Western world, Turkey started cultivating closer ties with other major players in the region, particularly Russia and China. This shift, which was particularly noticeable from 1996 to 2016 and became more pronounced after 2016, marked the beginning of a transition to a foreign policy that was more pragmatic and multi-vector-driven. This demonstrated Turkey's capacity for adaptability in the face of the intricate geopolitical landscape of Central Asia, as well as its ability to strike a balance between traditional Western alliances and emerging regional partnerships.²⁰

Some scholars, the majority of whom are from the West and Russia, argue that the implementation of "New Ottomanism" under the leadership of the AKP and President Erdogan further signaled a significant shift toward a more assertive foreign policy.²¹ This strategy, which became especially apparent after the year 2016, placed an emphasis on Turkey's historical and cultural ties as a means of expanding its influence in matters pertaining to the region. Turkey's involvement in the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, which is a prime example of this assertive

¹⁹ Mustafa Aydin, "Foucault's Pendulum: Turkey in Central Asia and the Caucasus," *Turkish Studies* 5, no. 2 (June 21, 2004): 7, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1468384042000228576>.

²⁰ Hakan Fidan, "Turkish Foreign Policy towards Central Asia," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 12, no. 1 (March 2010): 109–21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448950903507560>.

²¹ Igor Torbakov, "Neo-Ottomanism versus Neo-Eurasianism?: Nationalism and Symbolic Geography in Postimperial Turkey and Russia," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (2017): 125–45.

stance, serves as an illustration of its active engagement in regional disputes to assert its geopolitical interests.²²

There have been significant repercussions for Turkey's foreign policy as a result of the internal political transformations that have taken place in the country, most notably the transition to a presidential system because of the failed coup attempt that occurred in 2016. The approach that was taken toward Central Asia during this time period was one that was more strategic and institutionalized. The goal of this approach was to find a middle ground between the necessity of preserving traditional alliances and the desire to seek out new partnerships to form.²³

In conclusion, Turkey's diplomatic strategies and alliances in Central Asia have developed over time. During the early post-Soviet era, Turkey advocated for a Western-aligned and ambitious vision. However, in later years, Turkey has adopted a more balanced and diversified approach. Adapting to shifting regional dynamics and reaffirming Turkey's position as a significant actor in Central Asian affairs, this development is a reflection of Turkey's sensitive foreign policy strategy.

2.3 Economic Engagement

Several important factors have shaped Turkey's economic engagement with Central Asia, which has been multifaceted. Emerging as a newly industrialized country, Turkey sought to expand into new markets, with a particular focus on the Central Asian states. Turkey's desire to integrate with Central Asian economies and gain access to priceless natural resources, particularly oil and gas, was the driving force behind this expansion. This chapter examines the intricate landscape of Turkey's economic engagement with Central Asia, highlighting the interaction between Turkey's industrial growth, energy interests, and its efforts to deepen economic cooperation with the region.

Turkey's development into a newly industrialized country, with a rapidly expanding economy and a burgeoning export-oriented industry, made it an appealing partner for emerging economies, including those in Central Asia. Turkish industries, in their quest for new markets, saw Central Asia as a promising destination. They offered a range of products, from construction materials to consumer goods. Turkish companies increasingly view Central Asia as an attractive location for investment and trade. To facilitate this process, Turkey implemented policies to foster

²² Stephanos Constantinides, "Turkey: The Emergence of a New Foreign Policy the Neo-Ottoman Imperial Model," *Journal of Political & Military Sociology*, 1996, 323–34.

²³ Bulent Aras, "The Crisis and Change in Turkish Foreign Policy After July 15," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 44, no. 1 (February 2019): 6–18, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0304375419837415>.

economic relations with Central Asian states, including Kyrgyzstan. Bilateral trade agreements and cooperation frameworks were established to facilitate the exchange of goods, services, and investments.²⁴

Furthermore, Turkey's pursuit of access to the region's abundant energy resources, particularly oil and gas, also served as a driving force behind its economic engagement in Central Asia. Central Asia, with its vast hydrocarbon reserves, became a central focus of Turkey's energy security strategy.²⁵ The oil and gas reserves in countries like Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan held the potential to meet Turkey's growing energy demands and reduce its reliance on external suppliers.²⁶

Particularly, Turkey actively sought opportunities to collaborate with Central Asian nations in the energy sector. This collaboration included the construction of pipelines and energy infrastructure. Projects like the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline and the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) exemplify Turkey's commitment to establishing energy corridors that connect the Caspian region and Central Asia to global markets through Turkey. These initiatives not only aimed to diversify Turkey's energy sources but also to enhance its role as an energy transit hub, bridging the East and the West.²⁷

2.3.1 Trade Relations and Economic Agreements

Central Asia, once viewed as a remote crossroads, has emerged as a promising economic frontier. In this landscape, Turkey has positioned itself as a key player, forging a vibrant trade and investment relationship with the region. Central Asia's rich resource endowment and emerging markets present attractive opportunities for Turkish businesses. Between 2002 and 2021, trade volume between Turkey and Central Asia skyrocketed from \$838 million to \$9511 million.²⁸ This

²⁴ Assel Tutumlu, "Turkey-Central Asia Relations: A Strategic Overview" (Nicosia: Near East Institute, September 29, 2020), <https://yde.neu.edu.tr/wp-content/uploads/sites/170/2020/09/YDE-Orta-Asya-29.09.2020.pdf>.

²⁵ Ali Emre Sucu et al., "Does Turkey Have a Central Asian Project?" *MGIMO Review of International Relations* 14, no. 3 (June 27, 2021): 82–96, <https://doi.org/10.24833/2071-8160-2021-3-78-82-96>.

²⁶ Ali Emre Sucu et al., "Does Turkey Have a Central Asian Project?" *MGIMO Review of International Relations* 14, no. 3 (June 27, 2021): 82–96, <https://doi.org/10.24833/2071-8160-2021-3-78-82-96>.

²⁷ Assel Tutumlu, "Turkey-Central Asia Relations: A Strategic Overview" (Nicosia: Near East Institute, September 29, 2020), <https://yde.neu.edu.tr/wp-content/uploads/sites/170/2020/09/YDE-Orta-Asya-29.09.2020.pdf>.

²⁸ "Trade between Turkey and Central Asia," accessed December 26, 2023, <https://www.eurasian-research.org/publication/trade-between-turkey-and-central-asia/>.

trajectory surpasses Turkey's trade growth with other regions, underscoring the unique synergy driving this economic bond.

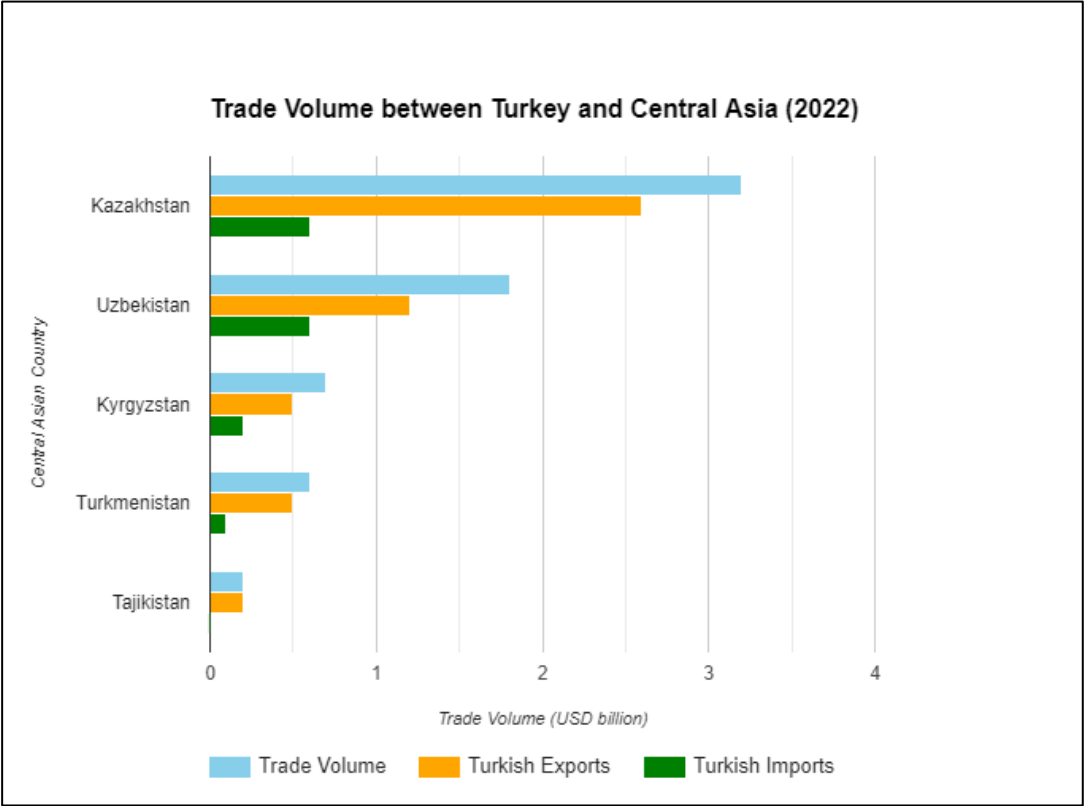


Figure 1 Trade Volume between Turkey and Central Asian Countries in 2022

A closer look reveals a pattern of Turkish exports focusing on manufactured goods, textiles, machinery, and food products, satisfying Central Asian demand for consumer goods and technology. In return, Central Asia exports raw materials like cotton, metals, and minerals feeding Turkey's industrial needs (International Trade Center, 2021). This economic complementarity serves as a powerful engine for bilateral trade.

Beyond trade figures, Turkish investments have blossomed in Central Asia, reaching \$15.2 billion by the end of 2022.²⁹ This capital stream flows primarily into key sectors like construction, tourism, transportation, telecommunications, and energy (Figure 3). These targeted investments play a crucial role in the region's development, contributing to infrastructure upgrades, job creation, and knowledge transfer. Turkish capital-fueled construction boom boosts tourism

²⁹ “Trade between Turkey and Central Asia,” accessed December 26, 2023, <https://www.eurasian-research.org/publication/trade-between-turkey-and-central-asia/>.

potential, while investments in transportation networks improve regional connectivity. Additionally, technology-driven sectors like telecommunications benefit from Turkish expertise, fostering a more digitally connected future for Central Asia. Investments in energy, a vital resource for both industrial and domestic needs, further highlight the long-term commitment of Turkish partnerships. This diversified investment portfolio showcases a mutually beneficial dynamic where Turkish capital meets Central Asian potential, laying the groundwork for a shared economic future.

Moreover, in the realm of economic diplomacy, Turkey has actively pursued a range of bilateral and multilateral agreements with Central Asian countries, seeking to bolster economic ties and promote mutual growth. Notably, the establishment of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) has been a cornerstone of this strategy. The Turkey-Kazakhstan FTA, implemented in 2010, has been particularly impactful, eliminating tariffs on 90% of goods and significantly boosting trade volumes.³⁰ A similar agreement with Kyrgyzstan in 2016 aimed at further tariff reductions, evidencing Turkey's consistent approach to fortifying its economic presence in the region. Additionally, ongoing negotiations for FTAs with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan indicate a continued commitment to expanding these economic relationships. Beyond FTAs, Turkey has signed Investment Promotion and Protection Agreements (IPPAs) and Double Taxation Agreements (DTAs) with all five Central Asian countries, providing Turkish investors with legal guarantees and protections, and preventing double taxation on income.³¹

Furthermore, Turkey's involvement in various sector-specific cooperation agreements, covering areas such as energy, transportation, and education, has facilitated joint projects and exchange of expertise. On a multilateral level, Turkey's role as a founding member of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) and participation in United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) initiatives exemplify its efforts in regional economic integration.³² However, challenges such as bureaucratic hurdles and political instability in some Central Asian countries, as well as competition from regional powers like China, pose significant obstacles. Looking forward, the future prospects are promising, with the potential expansion of FTAs to include

³⁰ "Trade between Turkey and Central Asia," accessed December 26, 2023, <https://www.eurasian-research.org/publication/trade-between-turkey-and-central-asia/>.

³¹ "Trade Map - Trade Statistics for International Business Development," accessed December 26, 2023, <https://www.trademap.org/Index.aspx>.

³² Thomas Wheeler, "Turkey's Role and Interests in Central Asia" (SaferWorld), accessed December 26, 2023, file:///C:/Users/Amin_stors/Downloads/turkeys-role-and-interests-in-central-asia.pdf.

Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and a focus on sectors like digitalization and sustainable energy, which could open new economic opportunities. Active participation in multilateral initiatives also remains key to enhancing regional connectivity and integration, which is beneficial for both Turkey and Central Asian countries.³³

2.3.2 Development Aid and Infrastructure Projects

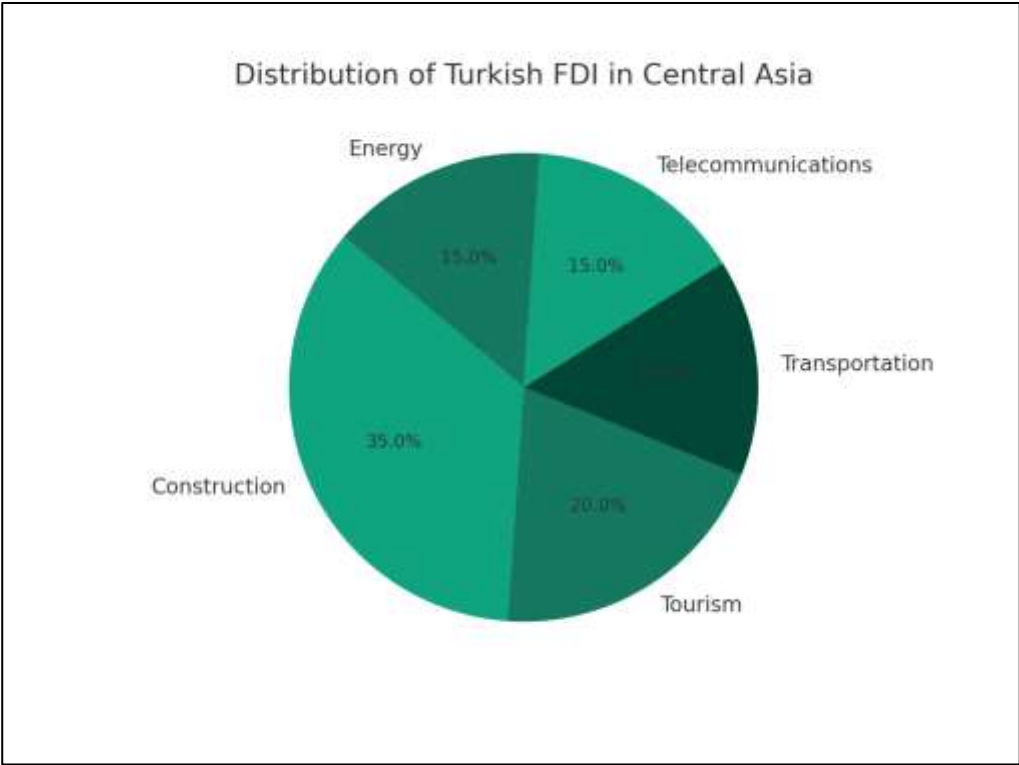


Figure 2. Sectoral Distribution of Turkish Foreign Direct Investment in

In recent years, Turkey has significantly stepped up its engagement in Central Asia, capitalizing on shared linguistic and cultural ties to bolster its geopolitical influence. This initiative is evident through organizations like the Organization of Turkic States (OTS), comprising Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkey, with Turkmenistan as an

³³ “Trade between Turkey and Central Asia,” accessed December 26, 2023, <https://www.eurasian-research.org/publication/trade-between-turkey-and-central-asia/>.

observer.³⁴ These affiliations underscore Ankara's strategy to secure a dominant position in the region.

The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), established in January 1992 under the Turkish Prime Minister's direct oversight, marks a pivotal point in Turkey's regional approach.³⁵ TIKA changed management in 1999 to reflect its expanded scope, particularly in Turkic-speaking regions of the former Soviet Union.³⁶ It had previously been under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' control. This shift, coupled with the AKP party's rise in Turkey, significantly increased TIKA's role and budget, allowing for an expansive reach in over one hundred countries.³⁷

Since the second Nagorno-Karabakh war, Turkey's focus in Central Asia has been primarily on forging economic and commercial partnerships.³⁸ According to the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, investments totaling more than 85 billion USD include significant infrastructure projects like the development of an international port in Ashgabat and the purchase of Almaty Airport in Kazakhstan.³⁹ These endeavors not only enhance regional connectivity but also position Turkey as a crucial transit link to Europe for these landlocked nations.⁴⁰

Beyond physical infrastructure, Turkey's developmental strategy emphasizes human capital.⁴¹ Through TIKA, Turkey has directed efforts towards sectors like education, healthcare, and vocational training.⁴² Over the past three decades, TIKA has implemented more than 30,000

³⁴Pravesh Kumar Gupta, "Organization of Turkic States: An Instrument of Turkey's Central Asia Policy," August 29, 2022, <https://www.vifindia.org/article/2022/august/29/organization-of-turkic-states-an-instrument-of-turkeys-central-asia-policy>.

³⁵"TIKA's History and Role in Turkey Foreign Policy," January 21, 2022, <https://www.specialeurasia.com/2022/01/21/tika-turkey-foreign-policy/>.

³⁶"TIKA's History and Role in Turkey Foreign Policy," January 21, 2022, <https://www.specialeurasia.com/2022/01/21/tika-turkey-foreign-policy/>.

³⁷"TIKA's History and Role in Turkey Foreign Policy," January 21, 2022, <https://www.specialeurasia.com/2022/01/21/tika-turkey-foreign-policy/>.

³⁸"Organization of Turkic States: An Instrument of Turkey's Central Asia Policy," August 29, 2022, <https://www.vifindia.org/article/2022/august/29/organization-of-turkic-states-an-instrument-of-turkeys-central-asia-policy>.

³⁹"Organization of Turkic States: An Instrument of Turkey's Central Asia Policy," August 29, 2022, <https://www.vifindia.org/article/2022/august/29/organization-of-turkic-states-an-instrument-of-turkeys-central-asia-policy>.

⁴⁰"Organization of Turkic States: An Instrument of Turkey's Central Asia Policy," August 29, 2022, <https://www.vifindia.org/article/2022/august/29/organization-of-turkic-states-an-instrument-of-turkeys-central-asia-policy>.

⁴¹"Turkiye's TIKa Carries out 30,000 Projects Worldwide in 30 Years," accessed December 26, 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkey/turkiye-s-tika-carries-out-30-000-projects-worldwide-in-30-years/2486175>.

⁴²"Turkiye's TIKa Carries out 30,000 Projects Worldwide in 30 Years," accessed December 26, 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkey/turkiye-s-tika-carries-out-30-000-projects-worldwide-in-30-years/2486175>.

projects globally, with a notable focus on health services, including training health personnel and developing health infrastructure.⁴³ Moreover, educational initiatives form a significant part of TIKA's strategy, supporting vocational institutions and providing training in IT, construction, and hospitality.⁴⁴ These efforts reinforce Turkey's commitment to educational infrastructure development.

In Kyrgyzstan, TIKA's influence is particularly noteworthy. Since establishing its office in 1993, TIKA has implemented over 900 projects, covering education, health, agriculture, and cultural contributions.⁴⁵ A key project includes the digitalization of Kyrgyzstan's century-old archives, preserving them for future generations.⁴⁶ During the coronavirus pandemic, TIKA's role extended to humanitarian aid, providing essential supplies to thousands of needy families.⁴⁷

Over the past 26 years, TIKA has completed 761 projects in Kyrgyzstan alone, reflecting Turkey's broader interest in the region's economic and cultural development.⁴⁸ These projects, ranging from archaeological cooperation to infrastructure development, have not only aided Central Asia but have also provided Turkey with invaluable experience in international development.⁴⁹

TIKA's establishment and its extensive projects in Kyrgyzstan and across Central Asia illustrate Turkey's strategic approach to fostering development and cooperation in regions with shared cultural and historical ties.⁵⁰ This involvement has not only strengthened Turkey's geopolitical stance but has also contributed significantly to the socio-economic growth of Central Asian nations. By understanding the impact and evolution of Turkey's initiatives through TIKA, we gain insight into the complexities and dynamics of regional development and international cooperation.

⁴³ "Turkiye's TIKA Carries out 30,000 Projects Worldwide in 30 Years," accessed December 26, 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkey/turkiye-s-tika-carries-out-30-000-projects-worldwide-in-30-years/2486175>.

⁴⁴ "Turkiye's TIKA Carries out 30,000 Projects Worldwide in 30 Years," accessed December 26, 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkey/turkiye-s-tika-carries-out-30-000-projects-worldwide-in-30-years/2486175>.

⁴⁵ "TIKA Supports the National Film Studio in Kyrgyzstan," accessed December 26, 2023, <https://orasam.manas.edu.kg/index.php/en/kirgizistan-2/4832-tika-supports-the-national-film-studio-in-kyrgyzstan>.

⁴⁶ "TIKA Supports the National Film Studio in Kyrgyzstan," accessed December 26, 2023, <https://orasam.manas.edu.kg/index.php/en/kirgizistan-2/4832-tika-supports-the-national-film-studio-in-kyrgyzstan>.

⁴⁷ "TIKA Supports the National Film Studio in Kyrgyzstan," accessed December 26, 2023, <https://orasam.manas.edu.kg/index.php/en/kirgizistan-2/4832-tika-supports-the-national-film-studio-in-kyrgyzstan>.

⁴⁸ Bayram Balci and Thomas Liles, "Turkey's Comeback to Central Asia," *Insight Turkey* 20, no. 4 (2018): 11–26.

⁴⁹ Bayram Balci and Thomas Liles, "Turkey's Comeback to Central Asia," *Insight Turkey* 20, no. 4 (2018): 11–26.

⁵⁰ Bayram Balci and Thomas Liles, "Turkey's Comeback to Central Asia," *Insight Turkey* 20, no. 4 (2018): 11–26.

2.3.4 Impact of Economic Engagement on Relations

Turkey's multifaceted economic engagement with Central Asia has been a result of both its strategic interests, particularly in energy resources, and its newfound status as a newly industrialized country. This chapter illuminates the intricate dynamics of Turkey's economic outreach to the region, emphasizing its efforts to expand market access for Turkish industries and secure access to Central Asian energy resources. The economic relations established during this period laid the foundation for deeper economic cooperation and paved the way for Turkey's continued involvement in the region in subsequent years.

These developments within Turkey's economic engagement with Central Asia unfolded alongside shifting global and regional dynamics. The subsequent chapter will delve into the changes and developments in Turkey's policies and actions towards Central Asia, particularly in the context of Russia and China's involvement in the region. It is within this broader framework that the evolution of Turkey's economic engagement with Central Asia can be better understood.

2.4 Cultural Influence and Educational Initiatives

Since 1991, Turkish cultural influence has witnessed a dramatic increase. Turkish television series and music have gained immense popularity in Central Asia, contributing to the dissemination of Turkish culture. The "Turkish soap opera phenomenon" has captivated audiences across Central Asia, offering a window into modern Turkish society and values. These cultural exports have not only entertained but also shaped cultural understanding between Turkey and the Central Asian states.⁵¹

However, central to Turkey's cultural initiatives in Central Asia were the promotion of Turkish language and culture through education. Recognizing the linguistic and cultural ties that bind Turkey and the Central Asian nations, Turkey has actively supported programs aimed at teaching Turkish in the region's schools and universities. Turkish cultural centers, often affiliated with Turkey's diplomatic missions, served as hubs for cultural exchange. These centers organized

⁵¹ Ayhan Nuri Yılmaz and Gökmen Kılıçoğlu, "Türkiye'nin Orta Asya'daki Yumuşak Gücü ve Kamu Diplomasisi Uygulamalarının Analizi," *Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları* 119, no. 235 (August 2018): 141–84.

language courses, cultural events, and exhibitions, providing Central Asian communities with insights into Turkish heritage and traditions.⁵²

In 1993, Turkey took the initiative to establish TURKSOY, an international organization focused on the promotion and preservation of Turkic culture, art, language, and historical heritage. The founding members included Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Azerbaijan. TURKSOY served as a platform for cultural diplomacy, enabling Turkey to engage with these countries on a cultural level, introduced Turkic values to a broader audience, and ensure their transmission to future generations.⁵³

Moreover, one of the primary instruments of Turkey's soft power has been the initiation of television broadcasting through TRT Avrasya, which began in 1992. This broadcasting effort was aimed at the Turkic world, intending to strengthen cultural ties and promote Turkish culture and language. By disseminating television programs across the region, Turkey could exert cultural influence and foster a sense of shared identity among Turkic peoples.⁵⁴

Balci, a leading scholar on the Gulen movement, posits that the strategic establishment and deep entrenchment of Gülen's community in Central Asia have played a crucial role in significantly enhancing Turkey's influence in the Turkic republics of the region since 1991. He suggests that the Gülen movement has been a major driver of Turkey's soft power in Central Asia, a region where Ankara's post-Soviet ambitions have not been fully realized as initially anticipated.⁵⁵

Akcali and Engin-Demir argue that there were two primary trends in building educational cooperation between Turkey and the Turkic republics. The initial initiative involved the establishment of a student exchange program, known as the "Great Student Exchange Project," which would serve as the foundation of Turkey's educational strategies. This program aimed to attract university-level students from various countries to Turkey by offering scholarships funded by the Turkish government. The second development involved the creation of several primary,

⁵² Munevver Cetin and Bahar Dogan, "Ministry of Education Turkish Overseas Schools as a Factor of Soft Power in Public Diplomacy: A Qualitative Analysis," *International Journal of Scientific and Technological Research* 6, no. 6 (May 2020), <https://doi.org/10.7176/jstr/6-06-10>.

⁵³ Hayriye Kahveci and Işık Kuşçu Bonnenfant, "Turkish Foreign Policy Towards Central Asia: An Unfolding of Regionalism and Soft Power," *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace* 12, no. 2 (2023): 195–218.

⁵⁴ Hayriye Kahveci and Işık Kuşçu Bonnenfant, "Turkish Foreign Policy Towards Central Asia: An Unfolding of Regionalism and Soft Power," *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace* 12, no. 2 (2023): 195–218.

⁵⁵ Bayram Balci, "The Gülen Movement and Turkish Soft Power," 2014, <https://sciencespo.hal.science/hal-03392661/document>.

secondary, and tertiary educational institutions in the Turkic republics and Turkic communities. The Turkish Ministry of Education established these institutions and various foundations, particularly those associated with the Nurcu community of Fetullah Gülen.⁵⁶

The Great Student Exchange Project was an educational project headquartered in Turkey with the objective of enhancing its influence in Central Asia and Caucasian countries. It sought to achieve this by providing scholarships to students from Turkic nations. The program sought to enhance linguistic, cultural, historical, and religious connections. Nevertheless, the project received criticism for its emphasis on quantity rather than quality and the absence of a monitoring system to assess students' advancement. Notwithstanding these difficulties, the desire to participate among students from Turkic republics remained strong, making it challenging to decrease scholarships without provoking diplomatic conflicts. In order to guarantee the project's enduring success and viability, Turkey required a more targeted strategy that prioritized quality, efficient guidance and counseling services, and a strong alumni monitoring system.⁵⁷

On the other hand, the Gulen movement in Central Asia has significantly influenced the education system by establishing schools that focused on information technology and sciences, taught primarily in English, and social sciences and humanities in vernacular languages like Russian and Turkish. This bilingual approach preserved local languages and cultures while integrating them with global academic standards. The selective and elitist schools attracted top students, potentially creating a well-educated elite with significant influence in their respective nations. The Gulen movement's educational initiatives extended Turkey's influence from the Mediterranean to the Chinese border, positioning it as a key player in Central Asia's cultural and educational domains.⁵⁸

In conclusion, Turkey's cultural and educational initiatives in Central Asia have been pivotal in strengthening its soft power in the region. Through the widespread appeal of Turkish media, the promotion of language and culture, and strategic educational programs like the Great Student Exchange Project and Gülen-affiliated schools, Turkey has fostered deep cultural and educational ties. These efforts not only promote Turkish values and traditions but also facilitate a

⁵⁶ Pınar Akçalı and Cennet Engin-Demir, "Turkey's Educational Policies in Central Asia and Caucasia: Perceptions of Policy Makers and Experts," *International Journal of Educational Development* 32, no. 1 (2012): 11–21.

⁵⁷ Akçalı and Engin-Demir, "Turkey's Educational Policies in Central Asia and Caucasia." 11-13.

⁵⁸ Bayram Balci, "The Gülen Movement and Turkish Soft Power," 2014, <https://sciencespo.hal.science/hal-03392661/document>.

shared cultural understanding, creating a strong bond between Turkey and Central Asian states. The multifaceted approach mentioned highlights Turkey's dedication to augmenting its cultural influence and establishing itself as a significant educational and cultural collaborator in Central Asia.

2.5 Changes and Developments after 2016

Significant shifts in Turkey's foreign policy, the changing landscape of the region, and the dynamics of the global environment all contributed to the significant changes that occurred in Turkey's engagement with Central Asia in the years that followed 2016. In this section, we delve into the different changes and developments that have played a significant role in shaping Turkey's evolving relationship with Central Asia during this time period.

The turning point in Turkey's post-2016 foreign policy can be traced back to the failed coup attempt that year. This event triggered a period of internal political consolidation as Turkey prioritized domestic stability and security. In tandem with these domestic priorities, Turkey recalibrated its foreign policy, adopting a more assertive and self-reliant stance. Central to this shift was the aspiration to safeguard Turkey's national interests and reduce its reliance on non-state actors. For instance, in the aftermath of the coup attempt, Turkey actively pursued the extradition of Fethullah Gülen, the exiled cleric residing in the United States, whom the Turkish government accused of masterminding the coup. This extradition request underscored Turkey's determination to bring those it deemed responsible for the coup attempt to justice.⁵⁹

In Kyrgyzstan, Turkish media reported that Ankara provided the Kyrgyz government with a list of 130 individuals allegedly associated with the Gülen movement. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, during his visit to Kyrgyzstan, raised the issue of the Gülen movement, stressing its threat to the security of all countries and urging Kyrgyz authorities to take action.⁶⁰ The Turkish government's request for the extradition of these individuals was seen as a predictable step, given the strained relations between Turkey and Kyrgyzstan following Kyrgyzstan's previous refusal to clamp down on Gülen followers after the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey.⁶¹ The situation presented

⁵⁹ The International Institute for Strategic Studies, "Turkey's Central Asia Policy," ed. Paul Fraioli, *Strategic Comments* 27, no. 3 (March 16, 2021): v–vii, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13567888.2021.1934252>.

⁶⁰ "Erdogan Urges Kyrgyzstan to Shut down Gulen Network | Reuters," accessed December 24, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kyrgyzstan-turkey-gulen-idUSKCN1LH3Q2/>.

⁶¹ "Kyrgyzstan and Turkey: There's No Getting Past Gulen | Eurasianet," accessed December 24, 2023, <https://eurasianet.org/kyrgyzstan-and-turkey-theres-no-getting-past-gulen>.

a challenging dilemma for Kyrgyzstan's leadership, as there were several Gülen-affiliated educational institutions operating in the country.⁶²

In Turkmenistan, security services reportedly detained dozens of alleged Gülen followers. The crackdown was intense, with reports of detentions and torture to extract information. Turkmenistan, influenced by its close economic ties with Turkey, appeared to be more receptive to Ankara's pressure compared to neighboring countries like Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Gülen-linked schools, known in Turkmenistan as "Turkish schools," had been established in the country since 1993 and were known for high educational standards, but most were closed by 2011, possibly due to changing political relations between Turkmenistan and the Gülen movement.⁶³

These actions were a part of Turkey's broader effort to suppress the Gülen movement, which it accused of orchestrating the 2016 coup attempt. This campaign has extended beyond Turkey's borders, affecting countries in Central Asia where the movement has historically had a presence. The responses of these countries to Turkey's requests and pressure vary, reflecting their individual political and diplomatic considerations.

The aforementioned overarching narrative brings attention to the situation surrounding Orhan Inandi, an individual of Turkish-Kyrgyz descent who served as an educator and held the position of head within the Sapat educational network located in Kyrgyzstan. On May 31, Inandi's sudden disappearance in Bishkek, accompanied by a lack of information surrounding the circumstances, triggered extensive demonstrations and engendered apprehension regarding his well-being. The subsequent discovery of the individual's vehicle in the central area of Bishkek on the following day, characterized by the doors being ajar and the presence of valuable possessions within, served to further intensify the enigma. The wife of Inandi expressed concerns, positing the possibility of his potential confinement within the premises of the Turkish Embassy. Subsequently, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan confirmed that Turkish intelligence was indeed responsible for Inandi's abduction, linking the incident to the broader campaign against the Gulen movement.⁶⁴

⁶² Catherine Putz, "In Kyrgyzstan, Erdogan Again Warns of Gulen Network Coup," accessed December 24, 2023, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/09/in-kyrgyzstan-erdogan-again-warns-of-gulen-network-coup/>.

⁶³ "Turkmenistan Cracking Down on Gülen Followers | Eurasianet," accessed December 24, 2023, <https://eurasianet.org/turkmenistan-cracking-down-gulen-followers>.

⁶⁴ "Erdogan Says Turkish Agents Abducted Educational Leader In Kyrgyzstan For Alleged Coup Ties," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 06:15:10Z, sec. Kyrgyzstan, <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-turkey-erdogan-turkey-gulen-inandi/31342458.html>.

Moreover, post-2016 era witnessed the ascension of regional powers, most notably Russia and China, in Central Asia. These countries extended their influence through ambitious economic initiatives, security partnerships, and diplomatic engagements. Russia, through its Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and China, via its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), emerged as central players in shaping Central Asia's economic and infrastructural landscape. Russia's influence in Central Asia was notably evident in the expansion of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), which Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan joined. This regional economic bloc sought to promote trade and economic integration among its member states.⁶⁵

Turkey's engagement with Central Asia unfolded within the context of this shifting regional power dynamic. Navigating these evolving dynamics required a nuanced approach, as Turkey sought to reconcile its interests and ambitions with the growing influence of Russia and China in the region. As Turkey pursued its economic interests in Central Asia, it faced competition from China, which had invested heavily in the region through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This competition led Turkey to explore innovative approaches to economic cooperation with Central Asian nations.⁶⁶

Furthermore, the post-2016 period witnessed increased security cooperation and intensified efforts to counter terrorism between Turkey and Central Asian nations. Turkey confronted security challenges stemming from the activities of various terrorist organizations, a factor that influenced its relations with Central Asian countries. Cooperation in intelligence sharing, border security, and counterterrorism measures became integral aspects of Turkey's engagement with the region. Turkey's experience in countering terrorism, particularly in its fight against groups like ISIS and the PKK, positioned it as a valuable partner for Central Asian nations grappling with similar security concerns. Collaborative efforts in intelligence sharing and security operations sought to address shared threats and enhance regional stability.⁶⁷

In the context of Turkey's ongoing efforts to repatriate individuals linked to the Gulen movement, which it regards as a significant security threat, the abduction of Orhan Inandi in

⁶⁵ Ali Emre Sucu et al., "Does Turkey Have a Central Asian Project?," *MGIMO Review of International Relations* 14, no. 3 (June 27, 2021): 82–96, <https://doi.org/10.24833/2071-8160-2021-3-78-82-96>.

⁶⁶ S. B. Kenzhebayev and A. M. Kussainova, "The Main Directions of Turkey's Policy in Central Asia," *Bulletin of the L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University. Political Science. Regional Studies. Oriental Studies. Turkology Series*. 142, no. 1 (March 10, 2023): 67–74, <https://bulpolit.enu.kz/index.php/main/article/view/103>.

⁶⁷ The International Institute for Strategic Studies, "Turkey's Central Asia Policy," ed. Paul Fraioli, *Strategic Comments* 27, no. 3 (March 16, 2021): v–vii, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13567888.2021.1934252>.

Kyrgyzstan emerges as a notable example. According to a report by Azattyk on July 5, 2021, these abductions are not isolated incidents but part of a wider strategy involving collaborative intelligence sharing. This strategy has led to several members of the Gulen movement being forcibly returned to Turkey.⁶⁸

Despite these shifting political and economic landscapes, Turkey's dedication to cultural and educational initiatives in Central Asia remained unwavering. Scholarships, Turkish language programs, and cultural exchanges continued to strengthen people-to-people ties and enhance mutual cultural understanding between Turkey and the Central Asian states. For example, Turkey significantly expanded its scholarship programs, offering opportunities for Central Asian students to pursue higher education in Turkish universities. The success stories of Central Asian scholarship recipients who returned to contribute to their home countries' development underscored the impact of these educational initiatives.

In conclusion, the period following 2016 ushered in significant changes and developments in Turkey's engagement with Central Asia. These shifts, driven by recalibrations in foreign policy, the rise of regional powers, and evolving economic realities, have shaped Turkey's multifaceted relationship with Central Asia in the contemporary era. This chapter provides insights into the nuanced nature of Turkey's evolving engagement with Central Asia amid a changing global landscape, with specific examples illustrating key developments and initiatives.

2.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, Turkey's engagement with Central Asia since 1991 has undergone a dynamic evolution, adapting to shifting geopolitical landscapes and internal political transformations. This multifaceted interaction is a testament to Turkey's strategic agility and its commitment to forging enduring ties with the region.

Turkish aspirations for shared leadership and Turkic heritage initially drove the country's foreign policy in Central Asia, which sought to influence the region through its secular, democratic model. However, facing the complexities of regional politics and external pressures, Ankara shifted to a more pragmatic and cooperative approach. In particular in the face of emerging powers

⁶⁸ “Erdogan Says Turkish Agents Abducted Educational Leader In Kyrgyzstan For Alleged Coup Ties,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 06:15:10Z, sec. Kyrgyzstan, <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-turkey-erdogan-turkey-gulen-inandi/31342458.html>.

like Russia and China, this phase was characterized by a balanced strategy that harmonized Turkey's traditional Western alliances with developing regional partnerships.

Economically, Turkey's approach has been proactive and resource-focused. As a newly industrialized nation, it aggressively sought to integrate with Central Asian markets, leveraging its exports while simultaneously tapping into the region's abundant energy reserves. Strategic initiatives such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline are emblematic of Turkey's significant role in the regional energy sector. These projects, alongside increased trade and diverse investments in sectors like construction, telecommunications, and energy, have not only spurred economic growth in Central Asia but also solidified Turkey's economic footprint there.

Culturally and educationally, Turkey has skillfully wielded soft power to strengthen its ties with Central Asian countries. The widespread popularity of Turkish media, concerted efforts to promote the Turkish language, and the establishment of educational and cultural centers have been instrumental in reinforcing cultural bonds. Key initiatives like the Great Student Exchange Project and the educational influence of the Gülen movement underscore Turkey's dedication to fostering cultural affinity and educational cooperation, enhancing a shared Turkic identity.

Significant changes in foreign policy came about in the post-2016 era, which was characterized by the failed coup attempt in Turkey. This period has seen a more assertive Turkey recalibrating its international stance while focusing on national security and sovereignty. The global ascendancy of regional powers like Russia and China in Central Asia necessitated a refined and adaptable Turkish strategy, balancing national interests with regional dynamics.

In summary, Turkey's engagement in Central Asia is characterized by its historical connections, cultural links, strategic ambitions, and a keen understanding of geopolitical shifts. The nuanced and adaptive nature of Turkey's policies in the region reflects its enduring commitment to a prominent role in Central Asian affairs. As these relationships evolve amidst ongoing regional and global changes, they offer valuable insights into the complexities of post-Soviet international relations and regional politics.

CHAPTER III: TURKISH EDUCATION POLICIES AND STUDENT EXCHANGE WITH DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

3.1 Introduction

In this part, the focus is on Turkey's educational outreach and its role as a significant tool of soft power in various regions, including South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia and the South Caucasus, North Africa, and the Balkans. These areas are essential in understanding the scope and impact of Turkey's initiatives like the Türkiye Scholarships, the Mevlana Exchange Programme, the Orhun Exchange Programme, and the Turkish Maarif Foundation. The examination of these regions is crucial for comprehending Turkey's influence in the sphere of international education.

Nye introduces the concept of soft power, emphasizing a country's ability to shape the preferences and attitudes of others through cultural and ideological appeal, as opposed to coercion or monetary incentives.⁶⁹ Education is identified as a key element of this soft power approach, aiding in the establishment of lasting relationships, the dissemination of cultural values, and the enhancement of a nation's global standing.⁷⁰ The Turkish educational programs in South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia and the South Caucasus, North Africa, and the Balkans exemplify these soft power tactics, aiming to create sustained academic and cultural links.

Fieldwork carried out in Istanbul, which included in-depth interviews with students from these regions, provides critical insights into the effectiveness and real-life impacts of Turkey's educational strategies. These interviews offer a comprehensive view of the diverse experiences of students from these regions, shedding light on their interactions with and perceptions of Turkish educational initiatives.

This chapter seeks to present an extensive analysis of Turkey's educational outreach as an instrument of soft power, with a particular focus on its influence and reception in the aforementioned key regions. By integrating theoretical perspectives with empirical fieldwork data, the chapter aims to provide a thorough understanding of Turkey's roles and strategies in the field of international educational diplomacy.

⁶⁹ Joseph Nye, "Soft Power and Higher Education," in *Forum for the Future of Higher Education (Archives)*, 2005, 11–14, https://www.academia.edu/download/36246953/soft_power_university.pdf.

⁷⁰ Nye, "Soft Power and Higher Education."

3.2 Education as a Tool of Soft Power

In contemporary international relations and diplomacy, soft power has emerged as a pivotal concept, denoting a nation's capacity to influence and achieve its foreign policy goals through attraction, persuasion, and cultural affinity rather than through force or coercion.⁷¹ Joseph S. Nye Jr. coined the term "soft power," which refers to a variety of strategies used by countries to promote their appealing culture, values, and ideas. Among the repertoire of soft power tools, education holds a crucial position, albeit sometimes underappreciated.⁷² This part aims to provide an extensive examination of education's role as a soft power tool, particularly in the context of Turkish education policies and initiatives, with a specific focus on student exchange programs with developing countries.

One of the primary facets of education's soft power influence is its ability to attract talent and foster cultural connections. Nations that offer high-quality education often become magnets for students and scholars from diverse backgrounds.⁷³ These individuals, who come to study in the host country, often form enduring relationships during their academic journeys. Whether these students return home, carrying their acquired knowledge and experiences with them, or choose to remain and contribute to the host nation's society, they become informal ambassadors who maintain strong connections, thereby establishing channels for continued engagement. These connections not only facilitate knowledge exchange but also support informal diplomatic efforts, positively impacting international perceptions and relations.⁷⁴

Additionally, education goes beyond mere attraction; it significantly shapes perceptions and values. By incorporating aspects of a nation's culture, history, and values into educational curricula and through cross-cultural exchanges, countries can create a sense of familiarity, mutual understanding, and goodwill among students and scholars.⁷⁵ These educational experiences can profoundly influence individuals' attitudes towards the host nation and its policies, fostering a

⁷¹ Alexander Vuying, "How Soft Power Works," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2009, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1466220>.

⁷² Joseph S. Nye, "Soft Power," *Foreign Policy* 80, no. 80 (1990): 153–71.

⁷³ Joseph S. Nye, "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616, no. 1 (March 2008): 94–109, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207311699>.

⁷⁴ Anna Wojciuk, Maciej Michałek, and Marta Stormowska, "Education as a Source and Tool of Soft Power in International Relations," *European Political Science* 14, no. 3 (April 17, 2015): 298–317, <https://doi.org/10.1057/eps.2015.25>.

⁷⁵ Geun Lee, "A Theory of Soft Power and Korea's Soft Power Strategy," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 21, no. 2 (June 2009): 205–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10163270902913962>.

sense of affinity that transcends geographical and political boundaries.⁷⁶ Moreover, education serves as a powerful platform for nations to promote their ideals and norms on the global stage. By integrating core values into educational institutions and initiatives, countries can disseminate ideas and principles that align with their foreign policy objectives, thereby increasing their influence in international affairs.⁷⁷

The relationships formed through educational exchanges not only contribute to short-term soft power objectives but also provide a sustainable and lasting impact, continuing to influence international perceptions and collaborations for decades. Thus, this chapter delves into the intricate dynamics of education as a soft power tool, exploring its nuanced aspects and broader implications within the context of Turkish education policies and initiatives, particularly through student exchange programs with developing countries. This analysis aims to gain a deeper understanding of Turkey's distinct soft power strategies and their ramifications for international relations in our increasingly interconnected world.

3.3 Turkish Education Policies and Initiatives

From the 1990s on, Turkey's educational policies and initiatives underwent significant evolution, reflecting the nation's strategic use of education as a tool of soft power projection. The creation of several significant initiatives aimed at promoting diplomatic and academic outreach marked this pivotal period in Turkey's approach to international education cooperation.

The inception of the Türkiye Scholarships program in 2012 was a pivotal development. Offering comprehensive support to international students in Turkish universities, the program aimed to attract students from developing countries, including those from South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia and the South Caucasus, North Africa, and the Balkans. This initiative sought to foster cultural diversity and create lasting international bonds.

Alongside the Türkiye Scholarships, Turkey implemented region-specific educational initiatives to effectively engage with various regions. The Mevlana Exchange Program, launched in 2011, facilitated academic and cultural exchanges with partner countries, encouraging students

⁷⁶ Giulio M. Gallarotti, "Soft Power: What It Is, Why It's Important, and the Conditions for Its Effective Use," *Journal of Political Power* 4, no. 1 (March 30, 2011): 25–47, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2158379x.2011.557886>.

⁷⁷ Anna Wojciuk, Maciej Michałek, and Marta Stormowska, "Education as a Source and Tool of Soft Power in International Relations," *European Political Science* 14, no. 3 (April 17, 2015): 298–317, <https://doi.org/10.1057/eps.2015.25>.

and faculty members to study and work in Turkey. This program enhanced educational partnerships and cross-cultural dialogue.

In 2014, within the framework of the Turkic Council, Turkey introduced the Orhun Exchange Program, targeting Turkic-speaking nations. Named after the ancient Orhun inscriptions, this program aimed to strengthen educational and cultural ties, especially with Central Asian countries.

Additionally, the establishment of the Turkish Maarif Foundation in 2016 marked another significant milestone in Turkey's educational outreach. As a state-run entity, the Maarif Foundation has established and managed educational institutions globally, disseminating Turkish culture, language, and education. Active in countries where Turkey aims to expand its influence, the foundation's schools, language centers, and cultural programs complement the government's scholarship initiatives, providing holistic educational opportunities and enhancing Turkey's soft power.

These initiatives collectively reflect Turkey's comprehensive strategy to foster educational partnerships, enhance cross-cultural understanding, and strengthen diplomatic relations with developing and Central Asian nations, alongside other strategic regions.

3.3.1 Türkiye Scholarships

The Türkiye Scholarships program, also known as Türkiye Burslari, inaugurated in 2012, represents a strategic initiative by the Turkish government to extend its educational and cultural influence globally. It is often considered a flagship program among other educational initiatives that are run by Turkey. This program, rooted in Turkey's broader foreign policy goals, sought to cultivate soft power by attracting international students, particularly from developing countries. The scholarship's design reflects Turkey's aspiration to bolster its global standing through cultural and academic diplomacy.

Since its inception, the Türkiye Scholarships program has played a crucial role in Turkey's educational diplomacy. Attracting over 180,000 students from 150 countries, it has positioned Turkey as an appealing destination for international education by providing comprehensive scholarships covering tuition fees, accommodation, health insurance, and monthly stipends.⁷⁸ Aras

⁷⁸ “Türkiye Bursları - Türkiye Scholarships Annual Reports,” accessed January 4, 2024, <https://www.turkiyeburslari.gov.tr/about/annualreport>.

and Mohammed argue that the role of the Türkiye Scholarships program in generating and disseminating Turkey's soft power is significant. They recognize the program as a significant instrument of state-sponsored educational scholarship targeted at international students, which is key to publicizing and diffusing Turkish culture and enhancing the country's attractiveness to international stakeholders.⁷⁹

In 2022, the program reached a notable milestone, receiving 165,918 applications from 171 countries. Following a rigorous selection process, 4,316 students were placed in short- and long-term scholarship programs, reflecting a 26% application/scholarship rate. This demonstrates the program's eclectic and target-oriented approach to selecting candidates. Aras and Mohammed emphasize the significant role of educational exchange in diffusing a state's cultural values. They argue that such exchanges contribute to developing a pool of intellectuals who can support state relationships globally.⁸⁰

The same year saw the inclusion of 4,199 new scholarship holders into the Türkiye Alumni family, further enriching the intellectual assets of international students. To enhance their experience, the program organized activities such as the International Student Awards, International Diplomacy School, and the International Student Internship Program. Furthermore, financial support for students also saw an increase in 2022. The stipend for undergraduate students was raised from 800 TL to 1,000 TL, for master's students from 1,100 TL to 1,400 TL, and for doctoral students from 1,600 TL to 1,800 TL.⁸¹

The application demographics in 2022 revealed that 60% of the applicants were male. Region-wise, South Asia led with 31% of the applications, followed by Sub-Saharan Africa with 23%. Other significant applicant numbers came from the Middle East, Central Asia and South Caucasus, North Africa, Europe, the Balkans, Asia Pacific, and North America, Latin America, and the Caribbean. The distribution of awarded scholarships by region indicated that Sub-Saharan Africa and Central Asia and South Caucasus were major beneficiaries, along with regions like the Middle East, North Africa, Europe, and the Balkans.⁸² Moreover, it acknowledges the growing

⁷⁹ Bulent Aras and Zulkarnain Mohammed, "The Turkish Government Scholarship Program as a Soft Power Tool," *Turkish Studies* 20, no. 3 (May 27, 2019): 421–41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2018.1502042>.

⁸⁰ Aras and Mohammed, "The Turkish Government Scholarship Program as a Soft Power Tool."

⁸¹ "Türkiye Bursları - Türkiye Scholarships Annual Reports."

⁸² "Türkiye Bursları - Türkiye Scholarships Annual Reports."

trend of countries, including emerging and developing nations, using higher education scholarships to further national interests on the global stage.⁸³

In terms of academic levels, the program awarded scholarships to 2,100 undergraduate, 1,086 master's, and 533 doctoral candidates in 2022. The short-term programs saw a total of 597 scholarships awarded across various levels, including 72 in research. The program's commitment to social inclusion and equal opportunity in education was evident, with nearly equal numbers of male and female candidates receiving scholarships in both long-term and short-term programs in 2022.⁸⁴

The scholarship distribution by academic areas showcased a significant focus on STEM fields, constituting 38% of the scholarships. This was followed by substantial allocations in Social Sciences, Health Sciences, Business and Management Sciences, and Arts and Humanities. Further aligning with Turkey's strategy to enhance its higher education system's internationalization and global ranking, 56% of qualified graduate students in 2022 were awarded scholarships to study at Turkish research universities.⁸⁵

According to Aras and Mohammed, while the Türkiye Scholarships program effectively contributes to Turkey's soft power, it faces certain challenges that need addressing to enhance its global competitiveness. A primary concern is the language of instruction, as many international students face difficulties with Turkish, impacting their overall academic experience. The study recommends that the program should incorporate more international languages, particularly English and French, into its curriculum. This approach would not only cater to a wider range of international students but also align with global educational standards. Additionally, there's a need for reform in the management of the program, ensuring that it takes into account the concerns and expectations of scholarship recipients. By addressing these issues, the Türkiye Scholarships program can significantly improve its appeal and effectiveness, further strengthening Turkey's educational diplomacy and soft power outreach.⁸⁶

During my fieldwork in Istanbul, I conducted interviews with several Türkiye Scholarship recipients, uncovering common issues they faced. One interviewee from Sierra Leone highlighted difficulties in obtaining essential documents like residence permits. Another prevalent concern

⁸³ Aras and Mohammed, "The Turkish Government Scholarship Program as a Soft Power Tool."

⁸⁴ "Türkiye Bursları - Türkiye Scholarships Annual Reports."

⁸⁵ "Türkiye Bursları - Türkiye Scholarships Annual Reports."

⁸⁶ Aras and Mohammed, "The Turkish Government Scholarship Program as a Soft Power Tool."

was the adequacy of the stipend; many respondents felt it insufficient for daily expenses, especially due to rising inflation and increasing prices for goods and services in Turkey. The fact that YTB, the government organization in charge of administering the Türkiye Scholarships, forbids scholarship recipients from working either part-time or full-time in Turkey, makes this problem worse.

Additionally, a majority of the interviewees perceived an inequality in the distribution of living facilities and financial support between local and international students. Despite these challenges, the overall sentiment towards Turkish educational policies and the country's soft power was positive. The interviewees generally found the Turkish people to be friendly and welcoming towards foreign students. They also appreciated the shared Islamic values and religious affiliations, which fostered a sense of community and belonging.

3.3.2 Mevlana Exchange Programme

The Mevlana Exchange Program is another significant initiative by Turkey, launched during the Justice and Development Party's (JDP) government's tenure and aimed at fostering international educational exchanges. This program is part of Turkey's broader strategy to utilize educational diplomacy as a soft power tool to build and enhance friendly relations with various countries. The Mevlana Exchange Program, along with the Türkiye Scholarships Program and the scholarship programs of the Türkiye Diyanet Foundation (TDV), represents Turkey's renewed interest in expanding its influence through cultural and educational means, particularly in regions such as Africa and the Middle East.⁸⁷

The Mevlana Exchange Program is designed to facilitate the exchange of students and academic staff between Turkish higher education institutions and those around the world. It is named after the 13th-century Persian poet and Sufi mystic Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi, known as Mevlana in Turkey, symbolizing the values of wisdom, humanism, and the quest for knowledge. According to the Higher Education Council's (YOK), the program's objectives are not only to promote academic collaboration but also to contribute to Turkey's foreign policy goals by creating

⁸⁷ Fatma Asli Kelkitli, "The Role of International Educational Exchange in Turkish Foreign Policy as a Reconstructed Soft Power Tool," *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace* 10, no. 1 (2021): 41–58.

a network of alumni who may have favorable perceptions of Turkey and potentially align with its foreign policy preferences.⁸⁸

Furthermore, the Mevlana Exchange Programme, a cornerstone of Turkey's international educational outreach, displays a notable regional focus in its exchange dynamics. Europe emerges as the primary beneficiary, accounting for about 40% of the exchanges, underpinned by strong historical and cultural ties. Central Asia follows, representing approximately 20% of exchanges, driven by linguistic and cultural affinities. The Middle East holds around 15%, while other Asian nations like South Korea, China, and Japan attract about 10%, reflecting Turkey's expanding academic relations. Though Latin America and Africa currently account for a smaller share, efforts are underway to bolster exchanges in these regions.⁸⁹ This pattern underscores the program's significant role in facilitating academic and cultural exchange, with a predominant emphasis on student mobility in fields like engineering, social sciences, and natural sciences.

Particularly, Ünal's empirical research on the Mevlana Exchange Program reveals the program has a significant positive impact on students' personal and professional development. Activities conducted during the program contribute to this development, leading to high levels of student satisfaction. The satisfaction levels are measured across various dimensions, including administrative management, socio-cultural structure, social infrastructure, community city, academic structure, and personal development, with a total of 29 items. The Cronbach Alpha values, indicating the reliability of the satisfaction measures, range between 76 and 90.1, suggesting a high level of internal consistency. Importantly, the research was a questionnaire-based study focusing on students from Kyrgyzstan-Turkey Manas University, which hosts a diverse student population from fifteen different countries. The study aimed to measure the satisfaction levels of these students with the exchange program and to evaluate their capacity to utilize it.⁹⁰

However, The Mevlana Exchange Programme, along with the Farabi Exchange Programme, experienced a significant disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Turkish Higher Education Council (YÖK) announced the cancellation of these student exchange programs

⁸⁸ Higher Education Council, "Mevlana Exchange Programme," accessed January 4, 2024, <https://uluslararasi.yok.gov.tr/en/international-students/exchange-programmes/mevlana>.

⁸⁹ Higher Education Council, "Mevlana Exchange Programme."

⁹⁰ Uğur Ünal, "International Strategies Framework Education of Diplomacy in Turkey (a Study on the Mevlana Change Program)," *Journal of Strategic Research in Social Science* 8, no. 2 (2018): 113–34.

for the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 academic years as a precautionary measure against the pandemic. This decision underscores the challenges faced by international education initiatives during global health crises. The future resumption of the Mevlana Programme remains uncertain, highlighting the need for adaptable strategies in international education to navigate such unprecedented disruptions.⁹¹ Prior to the suspension, the program had facilitated over 100,000 exchanges, markedly contributing to the internationalization of Turkish higher education. Looking ahead, the program aims to diversify its reach, targeting under-represented regions like Latin America and Africa, and placing a greater emphasis on collaborative research and digitalization. This strategic pivot reflects an adaptation to contemporary academic needs and a commitment to resuming its influential role in fostering international academic bridges once operational again.

3.3.3 Orhun Exchange Programme

The Turkic Council Turkic University Union officially launched the Orhun Exchange Programme following the adoption of the "Draft Regulation of the Turkic Council, Organization of Turkic States Turkic University Orhun Exchange Program" at a meeting held at Kyrgyzstan-Turkey Manas University in Bishkek on April 6-7, 2017. This marked the beginning of a significant educational initiative aimed at strengthening ties among higher education institutions within the Turkic-speaking world. The program's pilot project commenced in the 2017-2018 academic year, initially involving member universities such as Azerbaijan's Baku State University, several prominent universities from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan's Kyrgyzstan-Turkey Manas University, and Turkey's Atatürk University and Istanbul University. It was designed for undergraduate students and lecturers specializing in fields such as International Relations and Political Science.⁹²

Since its inception, the Orhun Exchange Programme has successfully facilitated the participation of 368 students and 146 teachers from various countries, indicating its effectiveness and growing influence. The program, offering tuition and accommodation free of charge with

⁹¹ Okancalik, "YÖK, Farabi ile Mevlana öğrenci değişim programlarını iptal etti," January 26, 2021, <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/canonicalUrl>.

⁹² "APPLICATIONS FOR THE ORKHUN PROCESS EXCHANGE PROGRAM ARE CONTINUING! | News," Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı, accessed December 28, 2023, https://www.turkicstates.org/en/haberler/applications-for-the-orkhun-process-exchange-program-are-continuing_1321.

additional costs covered, represents a substantial effort in promoting educational and cultural exchange.⁹³

The program's implementation phase began after the negotiation and adoption of the 'Draft Regulation of the Turkic Council Turkic University Orhun Exchange Program' during a meeting hosted by Kyrgyzstan-Turkey Manas University in 2017. The pilot project initially involved member universities from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkey, focusing on undergraduate students and lecturers in departments like International Relations and Political Science.

The program harkens back to the historical mobility of students and scholars during the Middle Ages, which contributed significantly to the Islamic Golden Age and the rise of Turkic civilization. This historical precedent underlines the program's commitment to continuing the legacy of knowledge exchange and cooperation, particularly along the historic Silk Road.⁹⁴

In the context of the contemporary global shift of economic and scientific influence from West to East, the Orhun Exchange Programme gains strategic importance. It positions the Turkic world as an emerging hub of international cooperation and academic exchange, thereby playing a central role in the interconnected global educational landscape.⁹⁵

The primary objectives of the Orhun Exchange Programme include facilitating cooperation and development among universities in Turkic countries, fostering joint research, academic exchange, and collaborative projects. This approach leverages the strengths and expertise of each participating institution to advance academic and scientific knowledge across the Turkic world.⁹⁶

However, the successful implementation of the program necessitates addressing certain challenges, such as ensuring harmonious interaction and academic language compatibility for effective communication and collaboration. Furthermore, aligning the diplomas issued within the

⁹³ “APPLICATIONS FOR THE ORKHUN PROCESS EXCHANGE PROGRAM ARE CONTINUING! | News,” Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı, accessed December 28, 2023, https://www.turkicstates.org/en/haberler/applications-for-the-orkhun-process-exchange-program-are-continuing_1321.

⁹⁴ Sebahattin BALCI, Hakan DÜNDAR, and Yunus Emre GÜRBÜZ, “Internationalization of Education: From Bologna Process to Orhun Exchange Programme,” *International Journal of Psychology and Educational Studies* 7, no. 1 (January 30, 2020): 170–81, <https://doi.org/10.17220/ijpes.2020.01.015>.

⁹⁵ Sebahattin BALCI, Hakan DÜNDAR, and Yunus Emre GÜRBÜZ, “Internationalization of Education: From Bologna Process to Orhun Exchange Programme,” *International Journal of Psychology and Educational Studies* 7, no. 1 (January 30, 2020): 170–81, <https://doi.org/10.17220/ijpes.2020.01.015>.

⁹⁶ Sebahattin BALCI, Hakan DÜNDAR, and Yunus Emre GÜRBÜZ, “Internationalization of Education: From Bologna Process to Orhun Exchange Programme,” *International Journal of Psychology and Educational Studies* 7, no. 1 (January 30, 2020): 170–81, <https://doi.org/10.17220/ijpes.2020.01.015>.

program with global educational standards, such as those of the Bologna Process and ECTS, is crucial for its continued success and broader recognition.⁹⁷

In sum, the Orhun Exchange Programme embodies a forward-looking vision that not only honors historical knowledge exchange but also embraces the contemporary significance of internationalizing education within the Turkic world. It positions Turkic countries as central players in the global academic landscape, fostering cooperation and advancing joint development among participating universities. Nonetheless, addressing challenges related to academic language, joint programs, and diploma recognition will be pivotal in ensuring the program's success and enduring impact.⁹⁸

3.3.4 Turkish Maarif Foundation

The Turkish Maarif Foundation (TMF), established under Law No. 6721, is a pivotal institution in Turkey's international educational strategy. It was set up with the objectives of providing formal and non-formal education, awarding scholarships, establishing educational facilities and dormitories, and training educators, among other educational initiatives. The TMF's activities align with local laws of the countries in which they operate.

TMF, established in 2016 by the Turkish Grand National Assembly, is a public foundation that carries out educational activities abroad on behalf of Turkey. TMF has been crucial in Turkey's entry into the global education market, an area it had not previously been involved in, as Metin Elik noted in his analysis. This involvement has also been influential in closing the schools linked to the Fetullahist Terrorist Organization (FETO), marking TMF's importance in Turkey's public, educational, and traditional diplomacy.⁹⁹

TMF operates legitimate, legal, education-licensed, fee-paying international schools. These schools opened based on Memorandums of Understanding or international agreements with host countries and educate citizens of the host country, other countries, and Turks abroad. TMF

⁹⁷ Sebahattin BALCI, Hakan DÜNDAR, and Yunus Emre GÜRBÜZ, "Internationalization of Education: From Bologna Process to Orhun Exchange Programme," *International Journal of Psychology and Educational Studies* 7, no. 1 (January 30, 2020): 170–81, <https://doi.org/10.17220/ijpes.2020.01.015>.

⁹⁸ Organization of Turkic States, "Education Cooperation," Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı, 2023, <https://www.turkicstates.org/en/isbirligi-alanlari#6-education-cooperation>.

⁹⁹ Metin Çelik, "Flexibility and Advantages of Turkish Maarif Foundation in Global Education Market Due to Its Hybrid Structure," *Adam Academy Journal of Social Sciences* 13, no. 1 (June 30, 2023): 127–50, <https://doi.org/10.31679/adamakademi.1272091>.

represents Turkey in "international school management," a field in which Turkey had not been previously involved as a state. This role is critical, especially since TMF is the only institution, apart from the Ministry of National Education (MoNE), authorized to open formal educational institutions abroad on behalf of Turkey.¹⁰⁰

As of now, the TMF has established representative offices in 52 countries and operates in 67 countries. It possesses nine training centers in countries like Afghanistan, Germany, Austria, France, Kosovo, Belarus, and Belgium; one university in Albania; and 42 dormitories globally. It runs 332 schools, universities, and education centers in 43 countries, catering to approximately 40 thousand students with a staff of 7,327 members abroad, including 405 Turkish citizens.¹⁰¹

TMF's inception was partly in response to the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey, linked to the Fetullah Terrorist Organization (FETO). One of its primary missions has been the takeover of schools previously operated by FETO and the establishment of Turkish educational institutions abroad. This move has significantly expanded Turkey's educational reach globally. The foundation has taken control of 214 FETO-linked schools in 19 countries and has established 108 schools in 24 countries, including the United States, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Tanzania. It operates in 67 countries with a network of 332 schools, universities, and education centers serving approximately 40,000 students. These figures underscore the foundation's substantial role in advancing Turkey's educational footprint worldwide.¹⁰²

The TMF plays a critical role in Turkey's soft-power diplomacy. By facilitating education in various countries, the foundation enhances cultural interactions and strengthens diplomatic ties. It serves as an instrument for cultural diplomacy, promoting Turkey's language, values, and cultural heritage. The educational activities of TMF not only contribute to the host countries but also foster cultural envoys for Turkey. This educational outreach forms a part of Turkey's broader strategy to influence global culture and politics, positioning the country as a key player in international relations and cultural exchanges.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Çelik, "Flexibility and Advantages of Turkish Maarif Foundation in Global Education Market Due to Its Hybrid Structure."

¹⁰¹ "Türkiye Maarif Vakfı," accessed January 4, 2024, <https://turkiyemaarif.org/dunyada-maarif>.

¹⁰² "Maarif Foundation Becomes Global Brand in Education for Turkey | Daily Sabah," accessed January 4, 2024, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/news-analysis/maarif-foundation-becomes-global-brand-in-education-for-turkey>.

¹⁰³ Haktan Kaplan, İbrahim Çimen, and Engin Balci, "TÜRKİYE'NİN EĞİTİM DİPLOMASİSİNDE TÜRKİYE MAARİF VAKFINİN ROLÜ," *Akdeniz Havzası ve Afrika Medeniyetleri Dergisi* 4, no. 2 (December 31, 2022): 120–28, <https://doi.org/10.54132/akaf.1209119>.

While the TMF has faced challenges in institutionalization and fulfilling field expectations¹⁰⁴, it remains committed to contributing to the universal goal of providing quality education for all, in line with the United Nations' 2030 vision for sustainable development.¹⁰⁵

In conclusion, the Turkish Maarif Foundation represents a significant aspect of Turkey's strategy to expand its global influence through education. Its activities in establishing schools and transferring FETO-linked schools under its management demonstrate a commitment to spreading Turkish culture and education globally. The foundation's role in Turkey's soft power diplomacy, coupled with its ambitious goals for the future, highlight its importance in Turkey's international relations and educational policies.

3.4 Impact of the 2016 Events on Educational Policies

In 2016, a failed coup attempt in Turkey had profound global implications, especially in the field of education. The Turkish government's response led to significant policy changes concerning international educational institutions.

In response to the coup, Turkey initiated a significant policy shift by establishing the Maarif Foundation. Tasked with overseeing schools linked to the Gülen movement, the foundation aimed to replace the existing management of these institutions. This move represented Turkey's strategic approach to restructure its international educational influence.¹⁰⁶

The global impact of the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey, particularly regarding educational policies, was significant and varied across different regions. In Africa, countries like Guinea, Niger, and Somalia responded to Turkey's requests by transferring control of so-called FETO-linked schools to the Turkish Maarif Foundation. This transition was part of a broader strategy by Turkey to mitigate the influence of FETO in international education.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ "Turkey's Maarif Foundation Aims to Teach Turkish across World," accessed January 4, 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/education/turkey-s-maarif-foundation-aims-to-teach-turkish-across-world/2292736>.

¹⁰⁵ "Turkey's Maarif Foundation Aims to Teach Turkish across World."

¹⁰⁶ Burak Erdem Çelik, "Turkish NGO Takes over Most FETÖ Schools Closed by African States," Daily Sabah, June 7, 2017, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2017/06/07/turkish-ngo-takes-over-most-feto-schools-closed-by-african-states>.

¹⁰⁷ SCF, "Senegalese Students Worried over Transfer of Gülen-Affiliated Schools to Turkey's Islamist Maarif Foundation," *Stockholm Center for Freedom* (blog), December 11, 2017, <https://stockholmcf.org/senegalese-students-worried-that-gulen-affiliated-schools-to-transfer-islamist-maarif-foundation/>.

In contrast, other countries displayed caution or reluctance in responding to Turkey's initiatives. The decisions to transfer or close these schools were influenced by a complex interplay of diplomatic relations, national educational policies, and public sentiment.¹⁰⁸

The Maarif Foundation's expansion into these regions signified a shift in Turkey's approach to international education, emphasizing the control of institutions linked to so called FETO. This move was seen as part of Turkey's broader efforts to counter FETO's, labeled as terrorist organization in Turkey, global presence and influence in the aftermath of the 2016 events.

In countries like Senegal, the transition of schools to Maarif management elicited concerns among parents and students about the potential changes in educational quality and ethos. The apprehension stemmed from uncertainties regarding the new administration's educational expertise and its broader implications for the students' future.¹⁰⁹

Criticism of the Maarif Foundation's expansion centered on concerns about the foundation's educational effectiveness and the perception of political motives. Critics questioned whether the takeover of these schools served educational purposes or political interests, highlighting the complex intersection of education and geopolitics.¹¹⁰

The 2016 coup attempt in Turkey led to a notable shift in global educational policies. While Turkey's efforts to transform Gülen-affiliated schools through the Maarif Foundation expanded its educational influence, the initiative was met with a diverse range of reactions, underscoring the intricacies of international educational policy in a post-coup context.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored Turkey's educational policies and their role as a significant tool of soft power in various regions. Initiatives like the Türkiye Scholarships, the Mevlana Exchange Programme, the Orhun Exchange Programme, and the Turkish Maarif Foundation have been instrumental in extending Turkey's cultural and diplomatic reach through education.

The Türkiye Scholarships program, since its inception in 2012, has drawn students worldwide and fostered a network of ambassadors, reflecting its strategic importance in Turkey's

¹⁰⁸ SCF, "Senegalese Students Worried over Transfer of Gülen-Affiliated Schools to Turkey's Islamist Maarif Foundation."

¹⁰⁹ SCF, "Senegalese Students Worried over Transfer of Gülen-Affiliated Schools to Turkey's Islamist Maarif Foundation."

¹¹⁰ SCF, "Senegalese Students Worried over Transfer of Gülen-Affiliated Schools to Turkey's Islamist Maarif Foundation."

foreign policy. Similarly, the Mevlana and Orhun Exchange Programmes have enhanced academic and cultural exchanges, contributing to Turkey's educational influence globally.

However, these programs face challenges, including language barriers, effective management and financial limitations, necessitating reforms to maintain their effectiveness. Despite these challenges, positive perceptions of Turkey's educational outreach indicate a strong foundation for continued influence in international relations.

Furthermore, the impact of the 2016 coup attempt significantly influenced Turkey's approach to international education, particularly with the establishment of the Turkish Maarif Foundation. This foundation's role in reorganizing schools linked to the Gülen movement underscored Turkey's strategy to consolidate its educational influence globally. The varied global responses to this initiative reflect the complex interplay of education, politics, and international relations in a post-coup context.

In conclusion, Turkey's educational outreach programs are pivotal in shaping its global image and soft power. By continuing to address challenges and adapt to changing global dynamics, including those precipitated by the events of 2016, Turkey can further strengthen its role as a key player in international education and cultural diplomacy.

CHAPTER IV: THE TURKISH EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN KYRGYZSTAN

4.1 Introduction

Within the complex network of global interactions and cultural diplomacy, the significance of educational institutions as channels for exerting soft power is becoming more widely acknowledged. This chapter explores the particular circumstances of Turkish educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan, which is a part of Turkey's wider strategic impact in Central Asia. The analysis is especially significant following the 2016 political events in Turkey, which have had a consequential impact on its worldwide educational outreach and the dynamics of its soft power. This chapter aims to clarify the complex details and implications of these institutions, offering insights into their functions, development, and the complex interaction between education and diplomacy.

The historical ties between Turkey and Kyrgyzstan, rooted in shared cultural and linguistic heritage, have provided fertile ground for Turkey's educational initiatives. Since the 1990s, a significant proliferation of Turkish educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan has been observed, encompassing a range of public and private entities. These institutions, beyond their fundamental educational mandates, have become instrumental in propagating Turkish language, culture, and educational paradigms. The inception and growth of these entities align with Turkey's objectives of wielding soft power in the region, a concept popularized by Joseph Nye, which emphasizes the ability to attract and co-opt rather than coerce.¹¹¹

In examining these institutions, a distinction between state-backed and private ventures reveals varied approaches and impacts. Private institutions, often funded and supported by diverse entities, have played a crucial role in advancing the Turkish language and culture. On the other hand, state-run institutions like Manas University represent a more direct extension of Turkey's educational and cultural diplomacy. The chapter pays special attention to Manas University, a flagship institution in this regard, as a case study to understand the broader implications of Turkey's educational outreach.

The significance of this analysis lies not only in understanding the educational landscape but also in appreciating the nuanced role of these institutions in shaping perceptions and attitudes. This is particularly relevant in the context of the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey, a pivotal event that

¹¹¹ Nye, "Soft Power."

has potentially altered the dynamics and perceptions of Turkish soft power. The influence of these educational entities extends beyond academic achievement, encompassing cultural exchanges, identity formation, and societal integration. They are not mere centers of learning but platforms for fostering mutual understanding and bilateral relationships.

Furthermore, this chapter aims to critically assess the challenges and criticisms these institutions face. Amidst evolving geopolitical landscapes and internal transformations within Turkey, these educational entities in Kyrgyzstan encounter both opportunities and obstacles. The analysis will explore how they navigate these complexities and adapt to the changing political and social environment.

Overall, the exploration of Turkish educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan offers a microcosm of Turkey's broader soft power strategy in Central Asia. Through this lens, we can gain a deeper understanding of the multifaceted roles these institutions play in not just educating but also in shaping the cultural and diplomatic fabric of the region. This chapter, therefore, stands as a crucial component of the thesis, providing a comprehensive analysis of the intersection between education, culture, and international relations in the context of Turkey-Kyrgyzstan dynamics.

4.2 The Turkish Educational Institutions

In Kyrgyzstan, Turkish educational institutions, encompassing both private and public entities, play a pivotal role in the educational landscape, reflecting different aspects of Turkey's soft power strategy and its evolving diplomatic relations in the region. The Turkish educational framework in Kyrgyzstan is classified into two main categories: private institutions affiliated with the Gülen movement and public institutions established through collaborative efforts between the Turkish and Kyrgyz governments.

The private institutions, initially operating under the Sebat network and later rebranded as Sapat, were established in the early 1990s. These schools, ideologically connected to Fethullah Gülen, became significant in Kyrgyzstan's educational sphere.¹¹² The network includes primary schools, high schools, and higher education institutions such then called International Ataturk Alatoo University, now renamed into Alatoo International University. Notably, before the 2016

¹¹² Bayram Balci, "Islam and Politics in Turkey: Alliance and Disunion Between the Fethullah Gülen Movement and the Justice and Development Party of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 25, no. 3 (May 4, 2023): 506–21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2022.2143859>.

political shift in Turkey, there was a close cooperation between the Turkish government and the Gülen-linked schools. This partnership was seen as mutually beneficial, aiding Turkey's educational diplomacy through the promotion of Turkish culture and language abroad.¹¹³

Public institutions, on the other hand, including the Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University, the Kyrgyz-Turkish Anatolian High School, and the Bishkek Turkish Primary School, were established after dissolution of USSR. They offer diverse academic programs and emphasize Turkish culture and language, aligning with Turkey's long-term educational and diplomatic goals.

Both private and public Turkish educational institutions have played crucial roles in cultural and educational exchange. The Sapat schools, despite the complexities following the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey, continue to be valued for their educational quality within Kyrgyzstan. Their contribution remains significant in addressing local educational needs while navigating geopolitical challenges.

The public institutions, such as the Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University, have established themselves as centers of academic excellence. Adhering to international standards, they contribute to global research and facilitate international collaborations, serving as platforms for cultural exchange and mutual understanding.¹¹⁴

Post-2016, the Turkish Maarif Foundation's involvement marked a strategic shift in Turkey's approach to educational influence in Kyrgyzstan. This move was seen as realigning the educational landscape with Turkey's revised diplomatic and cultural objectives, particularly in taking over schools formerly linked to the Gülen movement.

In conclusion, both the private (previously Gülen-affiliated) and public Turkish educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan are integral to the country's educational and cultural dynamics. Their diverse curricula and focus on cultural exchange not only provide quality education but also foster deeper connections between Turkey and Kyrgyzstan. These institutions, through their evolving roles and historical context, reflect the intricate interplay between education, politics, and international relations in the region.

¹¹³ Bayram Balci, "The Gülen Movement and Turkish Soft Power," 2014, <https://sciencespo.hal.science/hal-03392661/document>.

¹¹⁴ "Kırgızistan-Türkiye Manas Üniversitesi Dünyanın İyi Üniversiteleri Sıralamasında Yer Aldı," accessed December 30, 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/egitim/kirgizistan-turkiye-manas-universitesi-dunyanin-iyi-universiteleri-siralamasinda-yer-aldi/2609736>.

4.2.1 Private Turkish Educational Institutions

The establishment of private Turkish educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan, particularly those affiliated with the Gülen movement, provides a compelling case for analyzing the influence of Turkey's soft power in Central Asia. This section delves into their foundation, funding, support mechanisms, and the subsequent impact on cultural exchange.

The Gülen movement schools in Kyrgyzstan, part of a global educational network ideologically tied to Fethullah Gülen, were established in the early 1990s, coinciding with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. These schools, initially known as Sebat and later rebranded as Sapat, emerged as critical educational institutions. Sebat International Education Institute, established in the Kyrgyz Republic in 1991, played a pivotal role in this development, opening numerous schools and other educational facilities.¹¹⁵

The schools gained prominence due to their high performance and quality education, addressing an urgent need in the post-Soviet educational landscape. Despite political pressures, notably from the Turkish government after the 2016 coup attempt, the Kyrgyz government chose not to close these institutions, recognizing their educational value.¹¹⁶

As of today, the Sapat school network in Kyrgyzstan encompasses a diverse range of educational institutions. This includes 10 primary schools, each with unique designations, such as Akyltay and Seytek-Zhal, among others. The network also comprises 14 high schools, including the Manas Ata Talas boys high school and the Meerim Talas girls educational complex. Additionally, there is one United World International School. Furthermore, the network extends to higher education with the International Alatoo University, reflecting the comprehensive nature of the educational services provided by the Sapat network in Kyrgyzstan.¹¹⁷

Initially, these schools were perceived as an extension of Turkey's soft power, promoting cultural and educational ties. However, post-2016, the relationship between these schools and Turkish soft power became complex. The Kyrgyzstan government's decision to resist Turkish demands to close the schools, instead rebranding them from Sebat to Sapat, signified a nuanced

¹¹⁵ “Founder of Kyrgyzstan’s Gulen-Linked Schools Missing, Kidnapping Suspected – The Diplomat,” accessed December 30, 2023, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/06/founder-of-kyrgyzstans-gulen-linked-schools-missing-kidnapping-suspected/>.

¹¹⁶ “Erdogan Says Turkish Agents Abducted Educational Leader In Kyrgyzstan For Alleged Coup Ties,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 06:15:10Z, sec. Kyrgyzstan, <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-turkey-erdogan-turkey-gulen-inandi/31342458.html>.

¹¹⁷ “Our Schools,” *Sapat* (blog), accessed December 30, 2023, <https://sapat.edu/kg/en/our-schools/>.

approach to maintaining educational quality while navigating geopolitical pressures. This action underscored the schools' significance in Kyrgyzstan's educational sector and the broader cultural exchange between Kyrgyzstan and Turkey.

Following the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey, the Kyrgyz government faced significant pressure from Ankara, leading to the rebranding of the Kyrgyz-Turkish lyceums, known as Sebat, to Sapat. This network, comprising 16 lyceums, Ataturk-Ala-Too University, Silk Road International School, and several secondary schools and hostels, underwent substantial changes, including a new charter and corporate identity.¹¹⁸

The rebranding presented a dilemma for Kyrgyzstan. Despite Turkish allegations against Fethullah Gülen, whom Ankara accuses of orchestrating the coup, the Sapat schools maintained a strong reputation for educational excellence within Kyrgyzstan. The government's reluctance to close these schools was influenced by their quality and integral role in the national education system.¹¹⁹

Subsequent to the rebranding, the Kyrgyz government assumed greater responsibility for the Sapat schools, with the Kyrgyz Ministry of Education playing a more active role in their administration. This move was met with approval from the Turkish government, reflecting a nuanced balance between international pressures and domestic educational priorities. However, the long-term future of these institutions remains a topic of ongoing debate and political negotiation.¹²⁰

The enduring value of the Sapat schools is rooted in their academic excellence. Both parents and the government recognize their superior standards, especially in a context where state-funded education in Kyrgyzstan faces numerous challenges. The potential closure of these schools has raised concerns among various stakeholders, including alumni who attest to the positive impact of their education at these institutions.¹²¹

In conclusion, the Gülen movement schools in Kyrgyzstan exemplify the multifaceted nature of Turkey's soft power in Central Asia. Through providing quality education and fostering

¹¹⁸ Anastasia Bengard, "Kyrgyz-Turkish Lyceums Sebat Renamed into Sapat -," 24.kg, March 28, 2017, https://24.kg/english/48162_Kyrgyz-Turkish_lyceums_Sebat_renamed_into_Sapat/.

¹¹⁹ "Kyrgyzstan and Turkey: There's No Getting Past Gulen | Eurasianet," accessed December 30, 2023, <https://eurasianet.org/kyrgyzstan-and-turkey-theres-no-getting-past-gulen>.

¹²⁰ Jazgul Masalieva, "Turkey Satisfied with Change in Constitutive Personnel of Sebat -," 24.kg, July 14, 2017, https://24.kg/english/57543_Turkey_satisfied_with_change_in_constitutive_personnel_of_Sebat/.

¹²¹ "Kyrgyzstan: Antagonism Grows with Turkey Over Gülen Links | Eurasianet," accessed December 30, 2023, <https://eurasianet.org/kyrgyzstan-antagonism-grows-turkey-over-gulen-links>.

cultural links, these schools have played a crucial role in the region's educational landscape, albeit amidst complex political dynamics.

4.2.2 Public Turkish Educational Institutions

On the other hand, public Turkish educational institutions, established collaboratively by Turkish and Kyrgyz governments, represent more than just cultural and educational liaisons. While they undeniably contribute to the educational sector, offering diverse programs and facilitating language exchange, their role as instruments of Turkey's soft power strategy invites critical scrutiny.

Regarding, Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University (KTMU), founded on September 30, 1995, KTMU epitomizes the synergy between Kyrgyzstan and Turkey in higher education. It started in the 1997-1998 academic year with a focus on Turkology, History, Management, and Computer Engineering, and by the 2020-2021 academic year, it had expanded to 11 faculties and 3 schools, accommodating 5,950 students across diverse disciplines. The university, adhering to the Bologna Process, offers 78 academic programs from preparatory to doctorate levels. It emphasizes faculty contributions to research and international collaborations, which has helped establish KTMU as a leading Central Asian institution. Its role extends beyond academia, recognized through awards like the Dostuk Award and the Most Productive Organization at the Web of Science Awards, reflecting its commitment to Kyrgyzstan's holistic growth.¹²²

Similarly, Kyrgyz-Turkish Anatolian High School established in Bishkek, March 1992, shortly after Turkey recognized Kyrgyzstan's independence, the Anatolian High School offers a multilingual curriculum in Turkish, English, Kyrgyz, and Russian.¹²³ This institution prepares students for global citizenship and higher education, as evidenced by their consistent academic excellence in national assessments. It stands as a testament to Turkey's long-term commitment to educational diplomacy and cultural exchange.¹²⁴

Furthermore, Bishkek Turkish Primary School opened in 1999, this school serves the children of Turkish citizens in Bishkek, while integrating into the local educational landscape. It

¹²² "History," accessed December 30, 2023, https://www.manas.edu.kg/en/about_manas/history.

¹²³ Fetih Altay Merkit, "Kyrgyz-Turkish Anatolian High School: One School, Four Languages," *TuraNews* (blog), May 4, 2023, <https://turanews.kz/en/news/kyrgyz-turkish-anatolian-high-school-one-school-four-languages/>.

¹²⁴ "Turkish-Kyrgyz School for Girls Strengthens Mutual Ties," accessed December 30, 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/turkish-kyrgyz-school-for-girls-strengthens-mutual-ties-/1321837>.

offers a comprehensive curriculum, indicative of Turkey's efforts to maintain cultural ties with its diaspora and contribute to the local community. The school's success in national assessments underlines its commitment to academic excellence.¹²⁵

The Turkish Maarif Foundation, established by the Turkish government in the aftermath of the 2016 coup attempt, has extended its educational and cultural initiatives globally, including in Kyrgyzstan. The opening of its first school in Central Asia in Kyrgyzstan reflects an aspect of Turkey's foreign policy and educational outreach. These institutions are part of an international network spanning 43 countries, offering curricula that incorporate Turkish language and culture among other academic subjects.¹²⁶

The Maarif Foundation's establishments in Kyrgyzstan align with Turkey's objective of expanding its educational influence abroad. This initiative includes taking over schools formerly linked to the Gülenist movement, an organization designated by the Turkish government as a terror group (FETÖ). The foundation's involvement in Kyrgyzstan's educational sector is seen as a move to reshape the educational offerings while fostering cultural and diplomatic connections between Turkey and Kyrgyzstan.¹²⁷

These institutions collectively enhance the bilateral relationship between Turkey and Kyrgyzstan. They not only promote Turkish culture and language but also adapt to local educational needs, creating platforms for cultural exchange and mutual understanding. Their impact extends beyond traditional education, fostering cooperation and strengthening ties between the two nations.

In conclusion, public Turkish educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan are pivotal in the educational and cultural dynamics of the region. They serve as more than just academic centers; they are vital conduits for cultural exchange and play a significant role in bolstering bilateral relations between Turkey and Kyrgyzstan.

¹²⁵ T. C. MİLLÎ EĞİTİM BAKANLIĞI BAKANLIK / Y. DİŞİ-Kırgızistan / Kırgızistan Bişkek Türk İlkokulu, "TARİHÇEMİZ," accessed December 30, 2023, https://btio.meb.k12.tr/icerikler/icerik_1464935.

¹²⁶ DAILY SABAH WITH AA, "Turkey to Open First Maarif School in Central Asia in Kyrgyzstan," Daily Sabah, March 10, 2021, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkey-to-open-first-maarif-school-in-central-asia-in-kyrgyzstan>.

¹²⁷ AA, "Turkey to Open First Maarif School in Central Asia in Kyrgyzstan."

4.2.3 The Evolution of Turkish Educational Institutions post-2016

Since 2016, Turkish educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan have undergone significant changes. This period has been marked by a reorganization and adaptation reflective of broader political shifts in Turkey. This section aims to objectively analyze these changes and explore their implications for Turkey's educational diplomacy in Kyrgyzstan.

Post-2016 events in Turkey precipitated a notable rebranding and administrative restructuring of several Turkish educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan. The Gülen-affiliated Sebat schools, for example, were rebranded as Sapat. Concurrently, the Turkish Maarif Foundation was established during this period, marking its entry into the educational landscape of Kyrgyzstan.¹²⁸ However, contrary to initial expectations of taking over existing institutions, the Foundation's role was more constrained. It established only one school in Bishkek. This limited expansion can be attributed to the Kyrgyz government's refusal to shut down or transfer the Gülen-affiliated schools.¹²⁹ Consequently, the Turkish Maarif Foundation's ability to counter the influence of these schools through a broader network of institutions has been less than anticipated, illustrating the complexities of educational diplomacy and government relations in the region.

Furthermore, in recent years, notably post-2016, Kyrgyzstan-Turkey Manas University (KTMÜ) has been involved in organizing a series of seminars focusing on topics related to the so called Fethullahist Terrorist Organization / Parallel State Structure (FETÖ/PDY) referring to the Gulen movement, also known as Hizmet. It's important to note that while FETÖ is considered a terrorist organization in Turkey, it does not hold this designation in Kyrgyzstan. These seminars, which took place between November 16-18, 2021, were a collaborative effort between KTMÜ, the Ministry of Interior of Turkey, and the Turkish Embassy in Bishkek. Speakers such as Okan Kaplan, Deputy Head of the Department of Anti-Smuggling and Organized Crime, and Ertuğrul Uçar, Branch Manager of the Anti-Terrorism Department, led discussions on the influence and operations of FETÖ.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ "Maarif School Inaugurated in Bishkek," accessed January 4, 2024, https://akipress.com/news:662419:Maarif_School_inaugurated_in_Bishkek/.

¹²⁹ Jazgul Masalieva, "Visit of Recep Erdogan to Kyrgyzstan. Maarif to Replace Sapat Schools -," 24.kg, September 2, 2018, https://24.kg/english/94870_Visit_of_Recep_Erdogan_to_Kyrgyzstan_Maarif_to_replace_Sapat_schools_/.

¹³⁰ "Hain FETÖ'nün Çirkin Yüzü Kırgızistanlılar'a Anlatılıyor," accessed December 31, 2023, <https://www.manas.edu.kg/tr/news/2516>.

The opening seminar, held on April 16, 2021, in the university's Conference Hall, specifically targeted student audiences. The presentations, including "Exam Investigations" by Okan Kaplan and "Combatting FETÖ" by Ertuğrul Uçar, catered to initiating discourse among students. This was followed by sessions that broadened the audience to include representatives from various institutions, civil society organizations, and the media.¹³¹

The seminars were met with active student engagement, evidenced by the volume of inquiries and discussions that followed. In addition to the seminars, a video slide prepared by the Directorate of Communications of the Presidency of Turkey about the events of July 15th was shown to the students, providing further context to the discussions.¹³²

These developments at KTMÜ are indicative of a broader trend in Turkish educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan, where the curriculum is increasingly incorporating current political and security issues. This shift reflects a diversification of educational content to include socio-political topics of significance in Turkey, although they may be perceived differently in Kyrgyzstan.

The response from students to these seminars suggests a growing interest among young people in understanding complex political and global issues. This indicates an engagement with contemporary topics that extend beyond traditional academic subjects, highlighting an evolving approach in educational content.¹³³

However, the inclusion of politically charged topics in an educational setting also brings forth questions about the balance between educational objectives and political discourse. The long-term impact of such initiatives on perceptions of Turkey in Kyrgyzstan and the nature of Turkey-Kyrgyzstan relations might be an area for continued observation, particularly in the context of how educational institutions navigate the complexities of international relations and differing national perspectives on sensitive issues.¹³⁴

The curriculum and educational focus of these institutions have seen significant adjustments since 2016. In addition to the continued emphasis on quality education, there has been a notable shift to integrate the Turkish language and cultural studies. Moreover, many private institutions have adopted curricula using Cambridge Assessment International Education,

¹³¹ "Hain FETÖ'nün Çirkin Yüzü Kırgızistanlılar'a Anlatılıyor."

¹³² "Manas Üniversitesi'nde 15 Temmuz Programı Düzenlendi," accessed December 31, 2023, <https://www.manas.edu.kg/tr/news/4238>.

¹³³ "Hain FETÖ'nün Çirkin Yüzü Kırgızistanlılar'a Anlatılıyor."

¹³⁴ Adinai Kurmanbekova, "Kyrgyzstan and Turkey: Has a New Level of Relations Begun?," *CABAR.Asia* (blog), June 16, 2021, <https://cabar.asia/en/kyrgyzstan-and-turkey-has-a-new-level-of-relations-begun>.

indicating a move towards an internationally recognized standard of education. This shift aligns with the broader educational objectives set by the private educational institutions involved.¹³⁵

The restructuring and curricular shifts carry implications for Turkey's soft power in Kyrgyzstan. These changes signify an evolution in Turkey's approach to educational outreach and cultural diplomacy. The extent to which this reorganization has influenced perceptions of Turkey's soft power in Kyrgyzstan forms an important aspect of this analysis.

Responses to these changes within Kyrgyzstan have been varied. While the quality of education continues to be recognized, there is also awareness of the altered administrative structures and their potential implications.¹³⁶ The Kyrgyz government's adaptive approach to these changes, allowing the operation of schools under new management or branding, indicates a commitment to preserving educational opportunities while navigating the shifting educational landscape.

In summary, the post-2016 period has been a time of transition for Turkish educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan. Characterized by administrative reorganization, curricular adjustments including the adoption of the Cambridge Assessment International Education curriculum, and a recalibration of Turkey's educational diplomacy, these changes highlight the dynamic nature of international educational initiatives and their interplay with broader geopolitical factors. The impact of these developments on the perception and effectiveness of Turkey's soft power in the region remains a subject for continued observation and analysis.

4.3 Case Study: Manas University

4.3.1 Introduction

Manas University, also known as Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University, a prominent higher education institution in Kyrgyzstan, stands at the forefront of Turkish educational influence in the region. Established as a joint venture between the Kyrgyz Republic and Turkey, it represents a significant facet of the educational and cultural relationship between the two countries. This case study delves deep into the role of Manas University in advancing Turkish culture and education, evaluating its impact on local perceptions and the broader context of Turkey's soft power.

¹³⁵ "Our Schools."

¹³⁶ Masalieva, "Turkey Satisfied with Change in Constitutive Personnel of Sebat -."

Central to this analysis is the integration of survey data collected from Manas University's students and alumni. The survey, encompassing a range of questions addressing the university's educational quality, cultural influence, and the respondents' personal and professional development, provides crucial insights. This study aims to interpret these insights within the framework of the 2016 political shifts in Turkey, which have potentially influenced perceptions and reshaped the dynamics of Turkish soft power in Kyrgyzstan.

The survey data offers a unique opportunity to gauge firsthand the experiences and perceptions of those directly involved with Manas University. It enables an evaluation of how effectively the institution has merged Turkish educational standards and cultural elements with the local educational landscape. Furthermore, the analysis seeks to understand how these cross-cultural educational experiences at Manas University have shaped the views of students and alumni about Turkey, thereby contributing to or altering the narrative of Turkey's soft power in the region.

This case study, through its analysis of survey data and the contextual examination of Manas University's role, intends to contribute significantly to the understanding of Turkish influence in Kyrgyzstan's educational sector. It also aims to provide a nuanced view of the complexities involved in employing education as a tool of soft power in international relations.

4.3.2 Methodology of Survey Data Collection

The Manas University Student Survey was conducted to gather data on the academic experiences and perceptions of students related to Turkish education policies and soft power. The survey consists of three sections: demographic information, academic experiences, languages, extracurricular activities, and perceptions of Turkish education policies and soft power.

The survey design and structure consist of three sections:

Demographic Information: This initial section collects basic demographic data to contextualize the subsequent responses.

Academic Experience, Languages, and Extracurriculars: The second section explores students' academic journeys, linguistic proficiencies, and participation in extracurricular activities, aiming to reveal educational trends, diversity in language skills, and the impact of extracurricular activities on their university experience.

Perceptions of Turkish Education Policies and Soft Power: The final section seeks to gauge students' opinions on the influence of Turkish education policies and initiatives on soft power. It

is designed to capture feedback on academic, cultural, and language-related aspects supported by Turkey.

Sampling method: A combination of random and snowball sampling methods was utilized. This approach aimed to ensure a diverse representation of students, capturing a broad spectrum of experiences and perspectives.

Data Collection Process: The survey was administered online using Google Forms, a platform chosen for its accessibility and efficiency. This method facilitated widespread participation among the student community.

Response rate and Duration: Conducted in November 2023, the survey ran for approximately one month, yielding a total of 162 responses. This sample size is considered substantial for analyzing trends and deriving meaningful conclusions.

Confidentiality and Ethical Considerations: Participants were assured of confidentiality, with all responses treated anonymously and used solely for academic research purposes. This assurance was vital for encouraging honest and candid participation.¹³⁷

Overall, the methodology for the Manas University case study survey was meticulously designed to align with the research objectives, ensuring comprehensive and reliable data collection. This data will provide significant insights into the academic experiences at Manas University and the perceptions of Turkish educational influence among students and alumni.

4.3.3 Demographic Breakdown of Respondents

In this section a comprehensive demographic breakdown of the survey respondents have been presented offering essential insights into their diverse backgrounds. This section is crucial for contextualizing the survey responses, as it reflects the varied perspectives and experiences of the students at Manas University in relation to Turkey's educational influence in Kyrgyzstan. Understanding the demographic composition of the respondents allows for a nuanced analysis of their perceptions and attitudes towards Turkish educational institutions, particularly in the context of Turkey's soft power and educational policies.

Age Group:

18-20 years old: 43

¹³⁷Ikramidin Zhakypaliev, "Manas Student Experience Study Survey," Google Docs, accessed January 3, 2024, [MA Thesis Survey Data](#)

21-25 years old: 108

26-30 years old: 7

31 years and above: 4

Gender:

Female: 125

Male: 37

Nationality:

Kyrgyzstan: 152

Kazakhstan: 4

Other nationalities: Specific numbers not listed

Current Level of Education:

Bachelor's Degree: 129

Master's Degree: 12

Bachelor's degree: 9

Master's degree: 6

PhD: 3

Other categories: 3 (Student of masters degree, Higher School of Vocational Education, Other)

Field of Study:

Humanities: 57

Social Sciences: 45

Engineering: 22

Natural Sciences: 14

Tourism: 5

Economics: 4

Other fields: 11 (Communication, Economics and Management, International Relations, etc.)

Marital Status:

Single: 144

Married: 18

Others: Specific numbers not listed

Current Employment Status:

Employed full-time: 34

Part-time employed: 14

Student: 90

Unemployed: 15

Self-employed: 1¹³⁸

The demographic breakdown of survey respondents reveals a diverse group of individuals with a range of educational backgrounds, fields of study, and nationalities. The majority of respondents are undergraduate students, with a significant representation in Humanities and Social Sciences. This diversity enriches the study by incorporating various viewpoints, thus providing a comprehensive understanding of the impact of Turkish educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan. The varied demographic composition underscores the multifaceted influence of these institutions, offering valuable insights into their role in shaping perceptions and contributing to Turkey's soft power in the region.

4.3.4 Analysis of Survey Responses

The survey conducted at Manas University provides insightful data into the students' perceptions of Turkish cultural and educational influence. The analysis of the survey responses yields several key findings, which are instrumental in understanding the extent and nature of Turkey's impact on the academic environment and cultural exchange at the university.

1. Promotion of Turkish Culture and Language: The survey data indicates that a considerable portion of the respondents perceive the promotion of Turkish culture and language at Manas University as effective (63 responses) or very effective (75 responses). This positive reception underscores the university's successful integration of Turkish cultural elements into its educational framework, enhancing cultural understanding among students.

2. Influence of Turkish Exchange Programs: The responses suggest that the Turkish exchange programs and scholarships at Manas University are largely seen as "Moderately Influential" in attracting international students. This perception reflects the significant role these programs play in fostering an international student community and promoting cross-cultural interactions.

3. Quality of Turkish Language Programs: A significant number of respondents 'Strongly agree' (63 responses) or 'Agree' (74 responses) that Turkish language programs play a vital role in

¹³⁸ Zhakypaliev, "Manas Student Experience Study Survey."

promoting cultural exchange among students. 'Neutral' opinions are relatively fewer (22 responses), and disagreement is minimal (2 responses disagree, and 1 strongly disagrees).

4. *Collaboration with Turkish Academic Institutions:* A notable number of respondents view the collaboration between Manas University and Turkish academic institutions as "Extensive Collaboration." Such collaboration is vital in enhancing academic quality, facilitating research and exchange opportunities, and broadening the educational perspectives of students.

5. *Impact of Turkish Education Policies:* The influence of Turkish education policies on the academic quality at Manas University is predominantly perceived as having a "Significant Impact." This perception indicates the positive role these policies play in shaping the academic standards and offerings at the university.

6. *Contribution to Internationalization:* A large segment of survey participants agrees that Turkish education policies have positively contributed to the internationalization of Manas University. This suggests that such policies are instrumental in creating a more globalized and diverse academic environment.

7. *Influence of Turkish Culture and Values:* The survey reveals that respondents generally agree or strongly agree that Turkish culture and values have positively influenced the academic environment at Manas University. This consensus points to the successful integration of Turkish cultural aspects into the university's ethos and curriculum.

8. *Turkish Scholarships and Financial Support:* The availability of Turkish scholarships and financial support is widely recognized as significantly enhancing the diversity of students at Manas University. This finding highlights the role of financial support in promoting inclusivity and accessibility in higher education.

9. *Role of Turkish Language Programs in Cultural Exchange:* A majority of respondents acknowledge the vital role played by Turkish language programs at Manas University in promoting cultural exchange. This underscores the significance of language education in fostering mutual understanding and cultural appreciation.

10. *Impact of Partnerships with Turkish Universities:* The responses indicate that partnerships and collaborations with Turkish universities positively impact the academic experience at Manas University. Such partnerships enhance academic quality and provide valuable opportunities for knowledge exchange and collaboration. A majority of respondents 'Agree' (73 responses) or 'Strongly Agree' (63 responses) that partnerships and collaborations with Turkish

universities have a positive impact on the academic experience at Manas University. Neutral views are less frequent (23 responses), and disagreement is very low (2 disagree, and 1 strongly disagrees).¹³⁹

In conclusion, the survey responses from Manas University students and alumni indicate a generally positive perception of Turkish influence in various aspects of academic life and cultural exchange. These findings are instrumental in illustrating the multifaceted impact of Turkish educational initiatives in Central Asia, particularly in enhancing the academic and cultural landscape of Manas University. The next step is to perform cross-tabulation and correlation analysis to explore relationships between these perceptions and various demographic factors like age, gender, nationality, etc.

4.3.5 Cross-tabulation, Correlation Analysis and Interpretation of Data

The cross-tabulation of the survey responses regarding the effectiveness of Turkish culture and language promotion at Manas University across different age groups reveals interesting trends:

- Among the 18-20 age group, a significant number perceive the promotion as *'Effective'* or *'Very Effective'*.
- In the 21-25 age group, there is a noticeable inclination towards *'Effective'* and *'Very Effective'* responses, indicating a positive perception of the cultural and language promotion efforts.
- The 26-30 and 31+ age groups have fewer responses, but the trend toward positive perception (*'Effective'* or *'Very Effective'*) remains consistent.

This analysis suggests that younger age groups, who are likely the majority at the university, hold a favorable view of the Turkish cultural and educational influence. It's important to note that the

¹³⁹ Zhakypaliyev, "Manas Student Experience Study Survey."

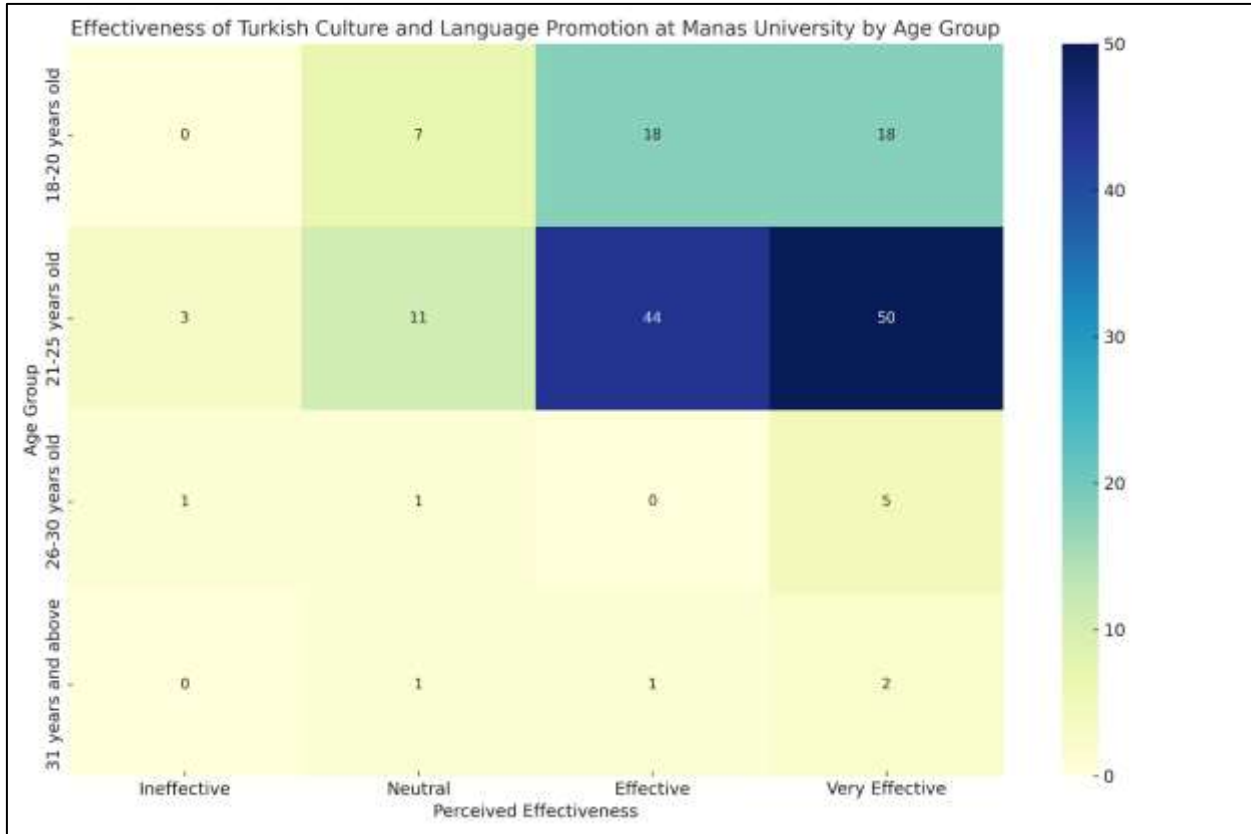


Figure 4. Perceived Effectiveness of Turkish Culture and Language Promotion at Manas

lower representation in the older age groups might limit the generalizability of these findings to those specific demographics.

The heatmap above visualizes the cross-tabulation of responses regarding the effectiveness of Turkish culture and language promotion at Manas University, categorized by age groups. The color intensity corresponds to the number of responses in each category, offering a visual representation of how different age groups perceive this aspect of Turkish influence.

Key Observations:

- The strongest positive perceptions ('Effective' and 'Very Effective') are predominantly seen in the 21-25 age group, which likely constitutes the bulk of the university's population.
- The 18-20 age group also shows a favorable view, although with fewer responses in total.
- Older Age Groups (26-30, 31+ years): Although these age groups have fewer responses, a positive perception ('Effective' and 'Very Effective') is still observable. This suggests a

consistent trend across all age groups in terms of positive perceptions towards Turkish culture and language promotion.

- Neutral and Negative Perceptions: The responses in the 'Neutral' category are more common in the 18-20 and 21-25 age groups, while 'Very Ineffective' and 'Ineffective' perceptions are minimal across all age groups. This indicates that negative perceptions are relatively rare.

Overall, the data points towards a generally favorable view of the effectiveness of Turkish culture and language promotion among the different age groups at Manas University, aligning with the hypothesis that Turkish educational institutions have positively influenced local perceptions and attitudes.

The correlation analysis between views on the role of Turkish language programs in promoting cultural exchange and the perceived impact of partnerships and collaborations with Turkish universities at Manas University reveals a moderate positive correlation (correlation coefficient ≈ 0.566).

Key Observations:

- Moderate Positive Correlation: This coefficient suggests that respondents who perceive Turkish language programs as playing a vital role in promoting cultural exchange are also likely to view partnerships with Turkish universities as having a positive impact on their academic experience.
- Interconnected Perceptions: The correlation indicates that students' views on language programs and academic collaborations are interconnected. A positive perception in one area tends to be associated with a positive perception in the other.
- Implications for Soft Power: This finding supports the idea that language education and academic collaborations are both crucial elements of Turkey's soft power strategy in education. Their combined effect appears to enhance the overall perception of Turkey's educational and cultural influence.

This correlation aligns with the central hypothesis of my study, suggesting that the educational initiatives and cultural exchanges facilitated by Turkish institutions, particularly Manas University, are instrumental in shaping positive perceptions and attitudes. The analysis reveals that

initiatives in language education and academic partnerships are not only influential on their own but also work in tandem to strengthen Turkey's soft power in the region. This finding is crucial in understanding how these educational strategies contribute to the overall narrative of Turkey's influence in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia.

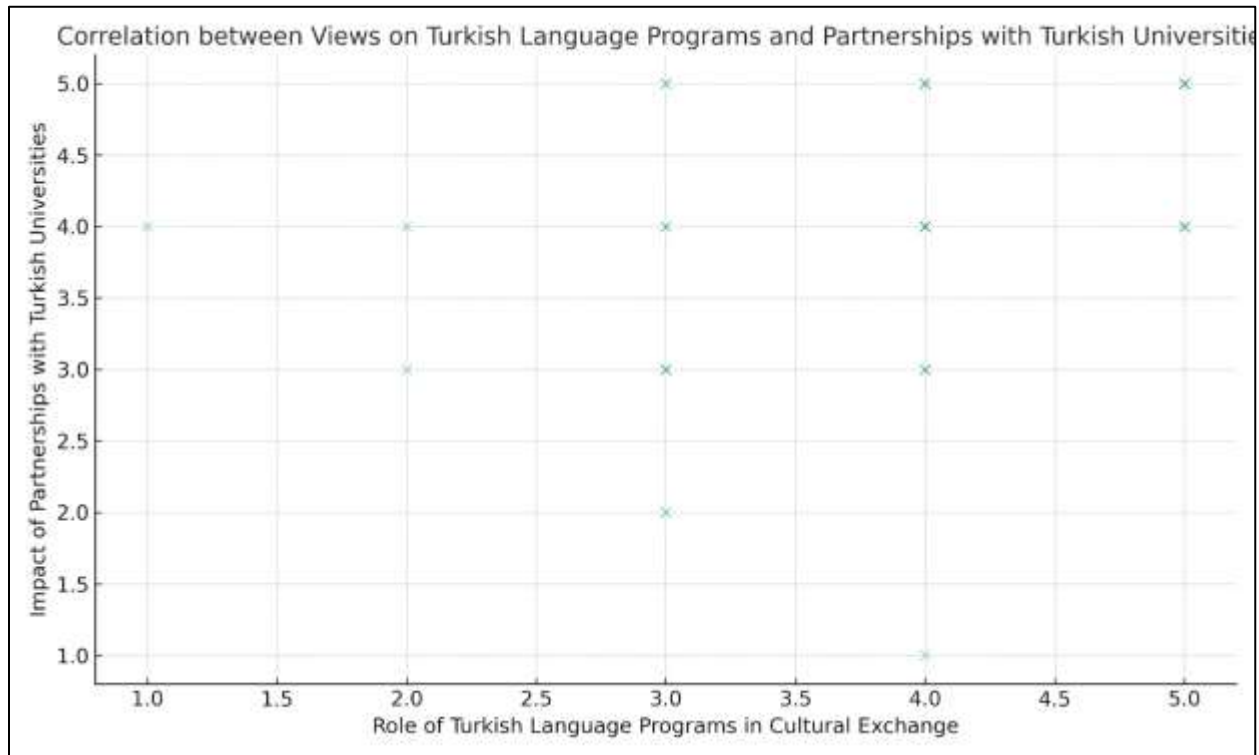


Figure 5. Correlation between Perceptions of Turkish Language Programs and Academic Partnerships

The scatter plot above visually represents the correlation between views on the role of Turkish language programs in promoting cultural exchange and the perceived impact of partnerships with Turkish universities at Manas University. Moreover The response options are:

'1': *Strongly Disagree*

'2': *Disagree*

'3': *Neutral*

'4': *Agree*

'5': *Strongly Agree*

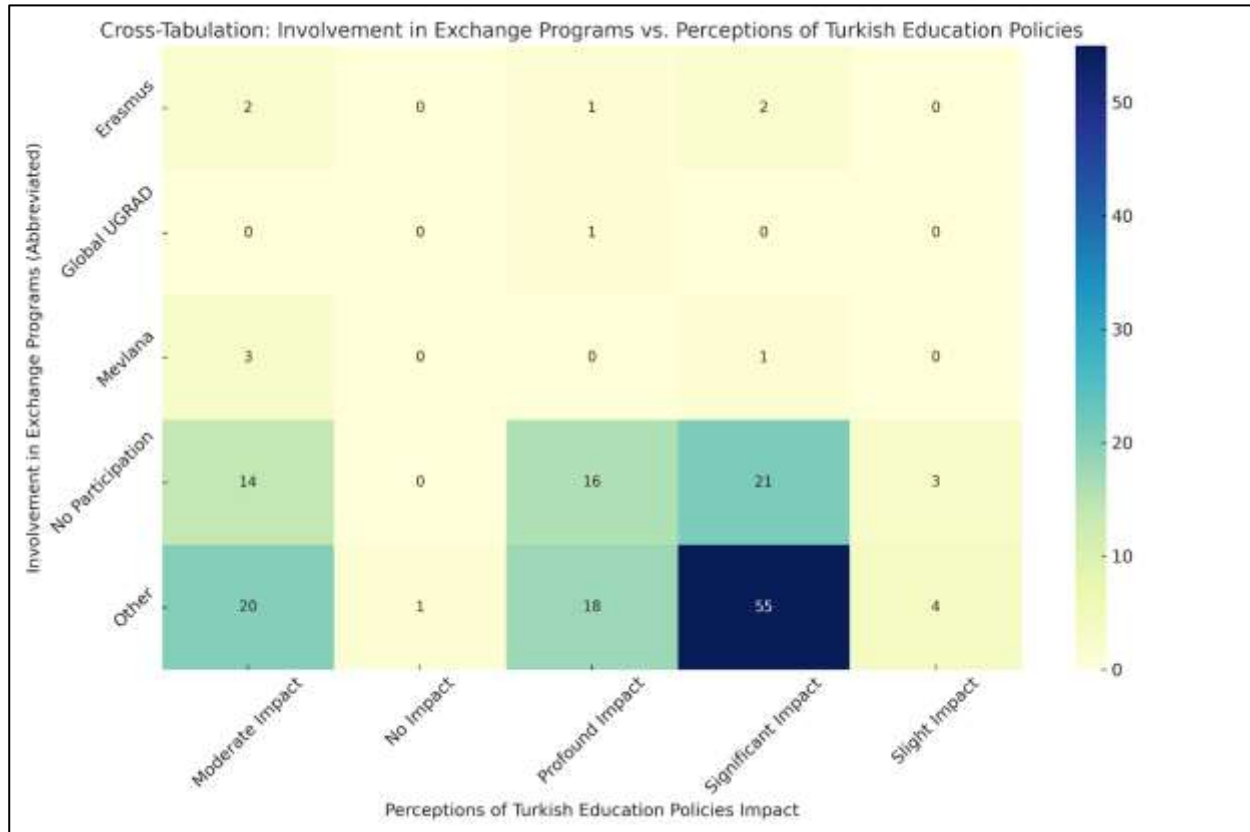
Key Observations from the Scatter Plot:

- The spread of points suggests a moderate positive correlation, indicating that as the perceived effectiveness of Turkish language programs in promoting cultural exchange increases, so does the perceived positive impact of partnerships with Turkish universities.
- The plot shows a general trend where higher ratings in one area are associated with higher ratings in the other.

The cross-tabulation analysis between participation in international exchange programs and perceptions of the influence of Turkish education policies on academic quality at Manas University reveals the following insights:

- A variety of responses indicate participation in different exchange programs, including Erasmus, Mevlana, Global UGRAD, and others.
- The majority of respondents who have not participated in any exchange program seem to have a range of perceptions about the influence of Turkish education policies, with some indicating significant impact.
- Among those who participated in specific programs like the Erasmus Exchange Programme and Mevlana Exchange Programme, there are varied perceptions of the impact of Turkish education policies.

This analysis suggests that while there are diverse perceptions among all students, those who have participated in exchange programs may have distinct views about the impact of Turkish education policies. The varied responses across different programs could reflect the unique experiences and impacts these programs have on students' perceptions.



The heatmap provides a visual representation of the cross-tabulation between students' involvement in various exchange programs and their perceptions of the impact of Turkish education policies on academic quality at Manas University.

Key Insights from the Heatmap:

Participation in Exchange Programs: The rows represent different categories of participation in exchange programs, including specific programs like 'Erasmus' and 'Mevlana', as well as a category for those who did not participate ('No Participation') and other less frequent responses grouped as 'Other'.

Perceptions of Turkish Education Policies: The columns represent respondents' perceptions of the impact of Turkish education policies, ranging from very negative to very positive impacts.

Distribution of Responses: The color intensity in each cell indicates the number of respondents who fall into each category. Darker shades represent a higher count of responses.

Interpreting the Trends:

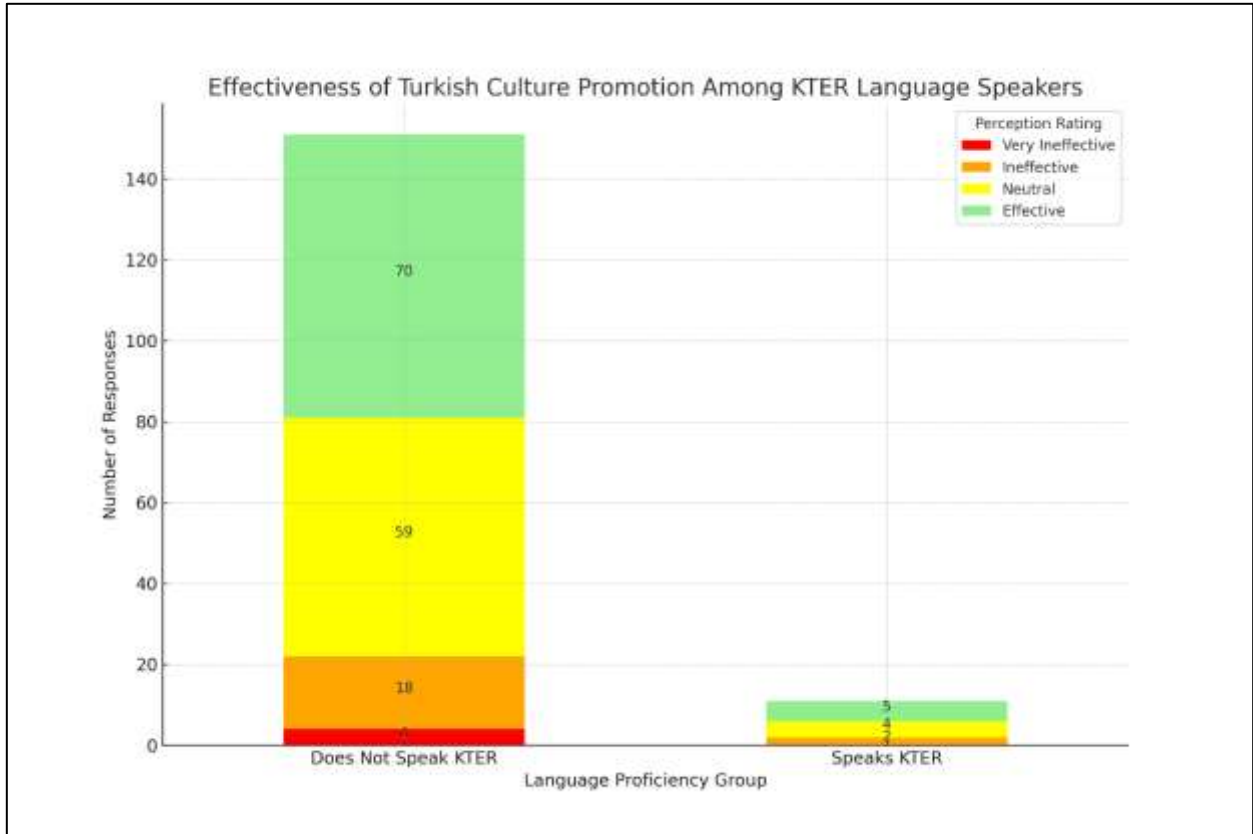
- Students who participated in specific exchange programs, such as 'Erasmus' and 'Mevlana', may have distinct perceptions of Turkish education policies, possibly influenced by their experiences in these programs.
- The 'No Participation' category shows a range of perceptions, suggesting that students who haven't participated in exchange programs also hold varied views about the influence of Turkish education policies.
- The 'Other' category encompasses a diverse set of responses, reflecting a broad spectrum of experiences and perceptions among the student body.

This heatmap aids in understanding the potential correlation between exchange program participation and perceptions of Turkish education policies, highlighting how different experiences might shape students' views on the educational influence of Turkey in Kyrgyzstan. This analysis is instrumental in evaluating the role of educational exchange programs as a component of Turkey's soft power in education.

The final cross-tabulation analysis explores how the perception of the effectiveness of Turkish culture and language promotion at Manas University varies among students who are proficient in different language groups: Kyrgyz, Turkish, Russian (KTR) and Kyrgyz, Turkish, English, Russian (KTER).

Analysis of KTR Group:

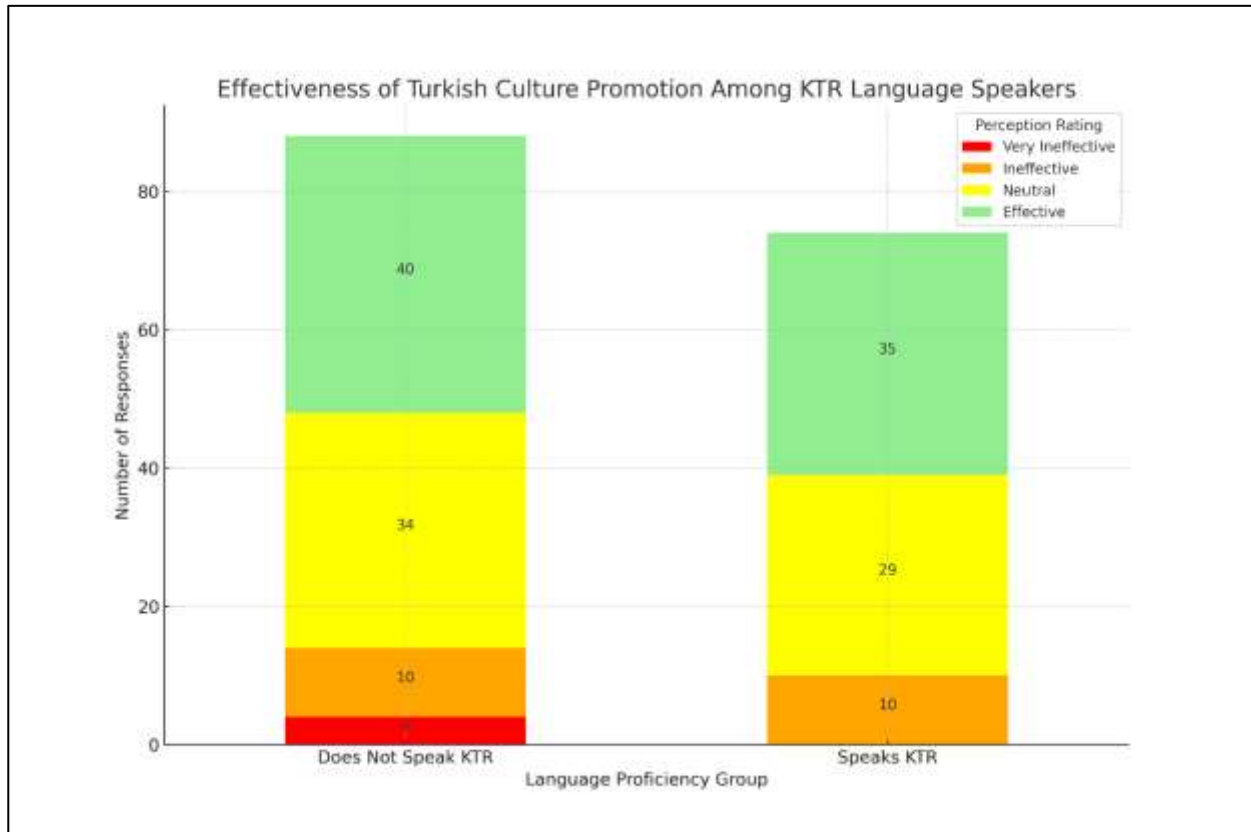
Does Not Speak KTR: There are respondents who do not speak all three languages (KTR) but perceive the promotion of Turkish culture and language positively, with some variations across the effectiveness ratings.



Speaks KTR: Students proficient in Kyrgyz, Turkish, and Russian generally view the promotion as effective, with a significant number rating it as very effective or effective.

Analysis of KTER Group:

Does Not Speak KTER: A majority of respondents not proficient in all four languages (KTER) still perceive the promotion of Turkish culture and language positively, with many rating it as very effective or effective.



Speaks KTER: Those proficient in Kyrgyz, Turkish, English, and Russian also tend to perceive the promotion positively, with a notable number considering it very effective or effective.

Interpretation:

Influence of Language Proficiency: Proficiency in multiple languages, especially those relevant to the region and international context, appears to influence students' perceptions positively toward the effectiveness of Turkish culture and language promotion.

Broader Cultural Exposure: Students who are multilingual might have a broader cultural exposure and understanding, which could contribute to a more favorable perception of cultural initiatives.

Overall, the analysis indicates that multilingual proficiency, particularly in a combination of local, regional, and international languages, is associated with a positive perception of the effectiveness of Turkish cultural and language promotion initiatives at Manas University. This suggests the importance of linguistic diversity in shaping students' cultural perceptions and experiences.

4.3.6 Conclusion

The case study of Manas University, a significant educational institution in Kyrgyzstan, provides insightful observations into the influence of Turkish educational policies and soft power in Central Asia. This conclusion synthesizes the key findings from the comprehensive survey conducted among the university's students and alumni, and interprets their broader implications in the context of international relations and cultural diplomacy.

- *Effective Cultural and Language Promotion:* The study findings indicate a generally positive reception towards the promotion of Turkish culture and language at Manas University. Most respondents perceive these efforts as effective or very effective, highlighting the university's success in integrating Turkish cultural elements into its educational framework.
- *Impact of Exchange Programs:* The Turkish exchange programs and scholarships at Manas University are perceived as moderately influential in attracting international students. These programs play a significant role in fostering a diverse student community and promoting cross-cultural interactions.
- *Quality of Turkish Language Programs:* The survey results show strong agreement among respondents on the vital role of Turkish language programs in promoting cultural exchange, underlining the importance of language education in fostering mutual understanding and appreciation among students.
- *Collaboration with Turkish Academic Institutions:* The collaboration between Manas University and Turkish academic institutions is viewed as extensive and beneficial. These partnerships enhance academic quality, offer valuable research and exchange opportunities, and broaden the educational perspectives of students.
- *Positive Influence of Turkish Education Policies:* The influence of Turkish education policies on the academic quality at Manas University is predominantly perceived as significant, indicating a positive role in shaping the university's academic standards and offerings.
- *Contribution to Internationalization:* A large segment of survey participants agrees that Turkish education policies have positively contributed to the internationalization of Manas University, suggesting that such policies are instrumental in creating a globalized and diverse academic environment.

- *Impact of Language and Cultural Proficiency:* The study reveals that multilingual proficiency, especially in languages relevant to the region and international context, is associated with positive perceptions of the effectiveness of Turkish cultural and language promotion initiatives at Manas University. This emphasizes the role of linguistic diversity in shaping students' cultural perceptions and experiences.

In conclusion, the Manas University case study illustrates the multifaceted impact of Turkish educational initiatives in Central Asia, particularly in enhancing the academic and cultural landscape. The positive perceptions of Turkish influence in various aspects of academic life and cultural exchange reflect the success of these initiatives. However, the evolving geopolitical contexts and the dynamics of international educational policies necessitate ongoing observation and analysis. The university's role in promoting mutual understanding and bilateral relationships between Turkey and Kyrgyzstan is a testament to the power of education in international relations. This case study contributes significantly to the understanding of Turkish influence in Kyrgyzstan's educational sector and offers insights into the complexities of employing education as a tool of soft power in international diplomacy.

4.4 Cultural and Social Impact

Turkish educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan have played a substantial role in cultural integration and exchange. Through the introduction of the Turkish language and culture into the curriculum, these institutions have facilitated a deeper understanding and appreciation of Turkish heritage among Kyrgyz students. Programs like cultural festivals, Turkish language competitions, and exchange opportunities have further cemented this cultural integration. This symbiosis of Kyrgyz and Turkish cultures contributes to the broader social tapestry of Kyrgyzstan, promoting a sense of global citizenship and cross-cultural understanding.

Moreover, Turkish schools and universities have significantly contributed to social development in Kyrgyzstan. Initiatives like community service projects, educational outreach programs, and collaborations with local organizations have reinforced their commitment to societal progress. These activities not only enhance the educational experience of students but also foster a spirit of communal responsibility and engagement.

4.5 Challenges and Criticisms

Post-2016 political events in Turkey have posed challenges for Turkish educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan. The rebranding of Gülen-affiliated schools and the introduction of the Turkish Maarif Foundation have necessitated a delicate balance between maintaining educational standards and adapting to new administrative directives. Navigating these political shifts while preserving their educational integrity has been a significant challenge.

The involvement of Turkish educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan has not been without criticism. Questions have been raised regarding the influence of Turkish politics in the educational content and the impartiality of the information disseminated, especially concerning events like the 2016 coup attempt. Furthermore, the overt promotion of Turkish culture and language in these institutions has sparked debates about cultural assimilation and the preservation of Kyrgyz national identity.

4.6 Conclusion

The landscape of Turkish educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan is complex and multifaceted. While they have made a significant contribution to Kyrgyzstan's cultural and educational fabric, they also must navigate a difficult environment characterized by political change and cultural sensitivities. These institutions have been instrumental in promoting cultural exchange and social development, but they also face critiques regarding their role in political discourse and cultural influence.

The success of these institutions in blending educational excellence with cultural promotion is evident, yet the balance between educational objectives and external influences remains a dynamic and ongoing negotiation. As Kyrgyzstan continues to evolve in its global engagements, the role of Turkish educational institutions in shaping the country's academic, cultural, and social landscapes will undoubtedly be a subject of continued interest and importance. This intricate interplay of education, culture, and international relations offers valuable insights into the broader dynamics of soft power and cultural diplomacy in Central Asia.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of Findings

The research undertook an in-depth analysis of Turkish educational influence in Kyrgyzstan, with a particular emphasis on Manas University as a public educational institution. The findings have provided insight on the complex nature of Turkey's soft power strategy in the region, which combines cultural diplomacy, educational outreach, and political engagement. Key findings from each chapter are as follows:

The investigation revealed that Turkey's diplomatic engagements have been instrumental in establishing a foundation for its soft power exertion in Central Asia. Economic partnerships, cultural agreements, and educational initiatives have all contributed to Turkey's influence in the region, with Manas University becoming a symbol of this strategy.

A comparative analysis demonstrated that Turkey's educational policies, including scholarships and exchange programs, have been effective in fostering relationships beyond Central Asia. Similar strategies in Africa and the Balkans have reinforced Turkey's image as a benevolent and culturally rich nation, enhancing its soft power globally.

The focus on Manas University highlighted the evolution of Turkish educational institutions as vectors of soft power. The post-2016 period, in particular, showcased the university's resilience and adaptability to geopolitical shifts, affirming its role as a critical agent in promoting Turkish cultural and educational standards.

Moreover, the empirical investigation into Manas University has offered unique insights into how state-led educational institutions function as tools of soft power. The case study, designed as original research within this thesis, has unearthed several key findings:

Cultural Integration and Linguistic Expansion: The data indicated that Manas University has significantly contributed to the cultural and linguistic integration of Turkish identity within Kyrgyzstan. The university has effectively promoted the Turkish language, which has become a bridge between the two nations, facilitating cultural understanding and exchange.

Educational Excellence and Regional Influence: Findings suggest that Manas University has established a reputation for educational excellence that has extended beyond Kyrgyzstan's borders, attracting students from across Central Asia. The university's quality of education, as perceived by its students, alumni and the academic community, underscores Turkey's commitment to high educational standards as a means of regional influence.

Soft Power and Public Diplomacy: Manas University serves as a living example of Turkey's soft power in action, where educational outreach has translated into increased political and cultural influence. The institution's ability to maintain its operational integrity and academic freedom post-2016 has strengthened Turkey's image as a resilient and sophisticated purveyor of soft power.

To conclude, Manas University, and the broader network of Turkish educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan, continue to play a pivotal role in Turkey's soft power strategy. This thesis has shown that through education, Turkey has not only spread its cultural and linguistic heritage but has also established a lasting influence on the regional dynamics of Central Asia. It is a testament to the power of soft power in shaping international relations in the modern world.

5.2 Contributions to Knowledge

This thesis attempted to contribute to the academic discourse on soft power and international relations by:

- Providing a comprehensive historical account of Turkish soft power strategies in Central Asia, with a new focus on educational diplomacy through non-state and state-led initiatives.
- Offering a novel comparative perspective of Turkish educational policies across different regions, which enhances the understanding of soft power's versatility and adaptability.
- Analyzing the post-2016 political events and their impact on Turkish soft power, which adds a temporal dimension to the understanding of international educational strategies.

5.3 Recommendations for Future Research

Future scholarly endeavors may benefit from longitudinal studies focusing on the trajectories of Manas University alumni, thereby elucidating the enduring impact of educational diplomacy. Comparative analyses of other Turkish public educational institutions across varied geopolitical landscapes would further contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of Turkey's global educational strategy.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

Selection Criteria for Interviewed Students:

To ensure that the interviews align closely with your thesis topic, consider the following criteria when selecting the five international students:

Nationality: Choose students from countries that have a substantial representation at Ibn Haldun University, reflecting the impact of Turkey's educational policies on a global scale.

Program of Study: Select students who are enrolled in various academic programs and degrees at Ibn Haldun University, providing a comprehensive view of the impact across disciplines.

Duration of Study: Interview both short-term exchange students and those pursuing longer degree programs to understand the influence of Turkey's educational policies over different time frames.

Cultural Background: Aim to include students from diverse cultural backgrounds to explore the cross-cultural dimensions of their experiences.

Language of Instruction: Consider students studying in both Turkish and English language programs, as language may influence their experiences and perceptions.

Section 1: Decision to Study in Turkey

1. What motivated your decision to study in Turkey at Ibn Haldun University?
2. Can you briefly introduce yourself and your background?
3. Were you aware of Turkey's education policies and initiatives before making your decision?
4. What were the key factors that influenced your choice of Turkey as a study destination?
5. Can you share your experiences with the application and admission process at Ibn Haldun University?

Section 2: Academic and University Experience

1. How would you describe the academic quality and curriculum at Ibn Haldun University?
2. What cultural or extracurricular activities have been available to international students?

3. In your opinion, what distinguishes Ibn Haldun University from other universities or study destinations?
4. How did you adapt to Turkish as the medium of instruction, and were there language support resources available?
5. Can you describe your interaction with local Turkish students and your experiences in this regard?
6. Have you had opportunities to participate in research projects, internships, or practical experiences?

Section 3: Cultural and Social Experiences

1. What are your thoughts on Turkey's efforts to promote educational cooperation and cultural exchange?
2. Have you encountered any challenges or obstacles during your time at Ibn Haldun University?
3. Can you share some memorable experiences or achievements during your academic journey in Turkey?
4. How would you describe your perception of the cultural and social aspects of living in Turkey?
5. In what ways has your time in Turkey influenced your personal growth?
6. Do you have plans to maintain connections with Turkey or collaborate with Turkish institutions in the future?

Section 4: Advice and Reflections

1. Have you participated in any student exchange programs or academic collaborations during your studies?
2. What advice would you offer to prospective international students considering Ibn Haldun University and studying in Turkey?

Appendix B

Manas Student Experience Study

Welcome to the Manas University Student Survey

Thank you for participating in this survey. Your feedback is valuable and will contribute to our research on the academic experiences of Manas University students, as part of a broader study related to the master's thesis project on "Turkey's Education Policies and Soft Power in Central Asia: The Case of Kyrgyzstan." Please answer the following questions candidly and to the best of your knowledge. Your responses will be kept confidential. Let's get started.

* Indicates required question

Email *

Name and Surname *

Age group *

Mark only one oval.

- 18-20 years old
- 21-25 years old
- 26-30 years old
- 31 years and above

Gender *

Mark only one oval.

- Male
- Female

Nationality *

Mark only one oval.

- Kyrgyzstan
- Kazakhstan
- Uzbekistan
- Turkey
- Other: _____

Current Academic Level *

Mark only one oval.

- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctoral degree
- Other: _____

Field of Study *

Mark only one oval.

- Social Sciences
- Natural Sciences
- Engineering
- Humanities Other:
- _____

Marital Status *

Mark only one oval.

- Single
- Married
- Divorced
- Widowed

Current Employment Status *

Mark only one oval.

- Employed full-time
- Employed part-time
- Unemployed Student
- Other: _____
-

Academic Experience, Languages, Extracurriculars

These questions explore students' academic journey, linguistic proficiencies, and involvement in extracurricular activities. Understanding these facets reveals trends in educational choices, linguistic diversity, and the impact of extracurriculars on their experiences.

1. Which academic year are you currently in? (Check one) *

Mark only one oval.

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior Senior
- Graduate Student
- Graduated/Alumni
- Other: _____

2. How would you rate the quality of academic resources and facilities at your university? *

1 = Very Poor 2 = Poor 3 = Neutral 4 = Good 5 = Excellent

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Very Excellent

3. Have you attended any academic conferences or workshops during your time at the university? (Check one) *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No Maybe
-

4. Have you participated in any international exchange programs or student * exchange initiatives? (Check one or more if applicable)

Check all that apply.

- Erasmus Exchange Programme
- Mevlana Exchange Programme
- Orhun Exchange Programme
- Other: _____

5. Are you currently learning or studying any additional languages? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No Maybe
-

6. Which languages are you proficient in? (Check all that apply) *

Check all that apply.

- Kyrgyz
- Turkish
- English
- Russian
- Other: _____

7. Are you involved in any extracurricular activities? (Check all that apply) *

Check all that apply.

- Sports
- Cultural clubs
- Volunteering
- Academic clubs
- None

8. Which sports or physical activities do you participate in? (Check all that apply)

*

Check all that apply.

- Football
- Basketball
- Tennis
- Martial Arts
- Other: _____

9. What motivated you to engage in extracurricular activities? (Check all that apply) *

Check all that apply.

- Personal interest
- Networking opportunities
- Academic or career enhancement
- Social engagement
- Other: _____

10. Have extracurricular activities positively impacted your university experience? (Check one)

*

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

Not sure

Perceptions of Turkish Education Policies and Soft Power

In this section, we aim to understand the perceptions and opinions of Manas University students regarding the influence of Turkish education policies and soft power. Your feedback on these aspects is essential in providing insights into the impact of academic, cultural, and language-related initiatives supported by Turkey. Please share your views by rating the provided statements.

1. In your opinion, how effective has the promotion of Turkish culture and language been at Manas University?

*

1= Very Ineffective, 2= Ineffective, 3= Neutral, 4= Effective, 5= Very Effective

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Very Very Effective

**2. Please rate the influence of Turkish exchange programs and scholarships *
in attracting international students to Manas University.**

Mark only one oval.

- Not Influential
- Slightly Influential
- Moderately Influential
- Highly Influential
- Extremely Influential

**3. How would you rate the quality of Turkish language programs offered at
Manas University in promoting cultural exchange? ***

1 = Very Poor 2 = Poor 3 = Neutral 4 = Good 5 = Excellent

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

**4. Please assess the extent of collaboration between Manas University and
Turkish academic institutions. ***

Mark only one oval.

- No Collaboration
- Limited Collaboration
- Moderate Collaboration
- Extensive Collaboration
- Comprehensive Collaboration

5. To what degree has the influence of Turkish education policies positively impacted the academic quality at Manas University?

*

Mark only one oval.

- No Impact Slight
- Impact
- Moderate Impact
- Significant Impact
- Profound Impact

6. Turkish education policies have positively contributed to the internationalization of Manas University.

*

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

7. I feel that Turkish culture and values have positively influenced the academic environment at Manas University.

*

1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

Mark only one oval.

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. The availability of Turkish scholarships and financial support significantly * enhances the diversity of students at Manas University.

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

9. Turkish language programs at Manas University play a vital role in promoting cultural exchange among students.

*

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

10. Partnerships and collaborations with Turkish universities have a positive * impact on the academic experience at Manas University.

1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>			<i>Strongly Agree</i>
				<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	