

ifa ECP Monitor Country Report

# Turkey

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## 1. External cultural policy objectives in geopolitical context

Turkey's central geographic position is clearly reflected in its foreign cultural and education policy (ECP) priorities. As the 2017 Soft Power 30 identifies, "Turkey commands a critical geopolitical position as the Europe-Asia bridge" (Portland, 2017, p. 50). Turkish ECP represents this divide, with its focus oscillating between drawing closer to the European Union and cementing its influence in the Middle East and Central Asia. Since the 1990s, Turkey has used ECP to build partnerships and spread influence in its neighborhood in the post-Soviet world, notably the Turkic countries of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

Turkey is the world's 19<sup>th</sup> largest economy in nominal GDP (€680 billion in 2019). This figure leaves its economic scale well below that of larger European countries like Germany and France, as well as superpowers like the US and China, but places it among the major "emerging markets" in the world.

**Table 1: Economy of Turkey**

	2019	% change since 2015
Population (millions) / ranking	82	+5.5
GDP, market prices (€ million)	679,510	-12.55
GDP ranking	19 <sup>th</sup>	+1
GDP per capita	8,230	-17.11
R&D economy (%GDP) <sup>1</sup>	1.03	-.17

Sources: Eurostat, World Bank

Turkey outperforms its economic rank in both hard power and diplomacy rank, placing 10<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>, respectively. It has less soft power, ranking only 29<sup>th</sup>, according to the USC Soft Power 30 Index. Still, Turkey's relatively low global rank belies strong regional influence. Indeed, Turkey explicitly targets its foreign and cultural policy to Central Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, eschewing the more global approach of the traditional ECP powers.

<sup>1</sup> Expressed as Gross Domestic Expenditure on R&D (GERD) (Eurostat).

**Table 2: Geopolitical and geoeconomic position of Turkey**

	2019	Change over 2015	
Hard power rank <sup>2</sup>	10	-	-
World trade indicators / ranking (\$ million)	29 <sup>th</sup>	-4	↓
Soft power rank <sup>3</sup>	29 <sup>th</sup>	-1	↓
Diplomacy rank <sup>4</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	-1	↓

The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), which has consolidated control of the Turkish state and moved in an increasingly authoritarian direction under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has also sought to build links with Middle Eastern countries. This has been effective, with Turkish soap operas a particularly popular source of entertainment in Arab countries, in spite of strained diplomatic ties with countries like Egypt. The USC Center on Public Diplomacy points out that “while the country’s politics is currently the subject of an international criticism, Turkey’s image in the mind of the average person on the Arab street has become quite positive”, a trend described as “soft power at its best” (Portland, 2016). Another notable trend has been Turkey moving slowly away from a pro-Western orientation, including the European Union. This drift is partially the result of Turkey’s authoritarian turn, which has become particularly pronounced after the failed 2016 coup. In the years since, AKP has cracked down on dissent and solidified its control of the state apparatus, much to the alarm of the West. However, even with deteriorating relations and stalled accession negotiations, European tourism and influence among the Turkish diaspora in Europe are still important for Turkish ECP.

Turkey has explicitly described foreign cultural and educational policy as a key factor in its “2023 Vision” to mark the centenary of the Turkish Republic. In a 2017 speech, President Erdoğan remarked that Turkey must “exert strenuous efforts, study hard and sweat blood to obtain cultural power” and that “we should rediscover and rebuild our national and cultural values, which reflect the native Turkish culture and arts, against cultural alienation and imperialism” (Presidency of The Republic of Turkey, 2017). In line with this political reasoning, in recent years, Turkish ECP has also reflected the increasing importance of Islam, as well as declining relations with the West and the desire to more actively shape politics in the Middle East.

<sup>2</sup> 2019 Military Strength Ranking. (2020). Retrieved 2 September 2020, from <https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.asp>.

<sup>3</sup> Soft Power 30. (2020). Retrieved 2 September 2020, from <https://softpower30.com/>.

<sup>4</sup> Global Diplomacy Index. (2020). Retrieved 2 September 2020, from <https://globaldiplomacyindex.lowyinstitute.org/>.

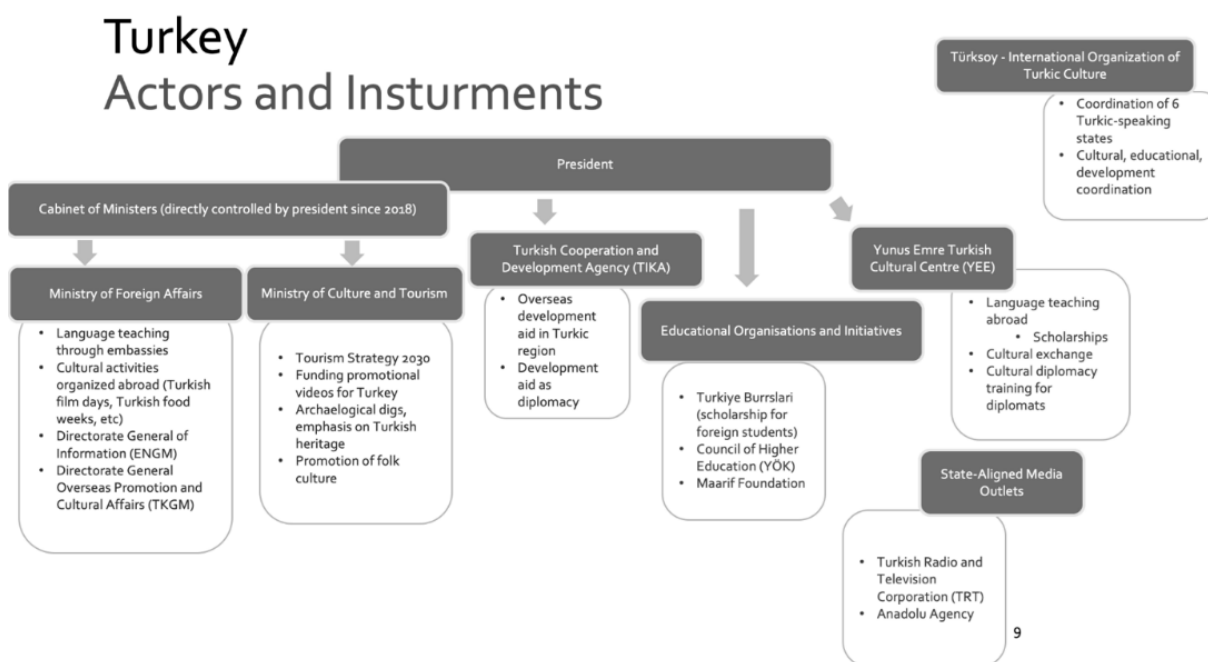
## 2. External cultural policy: an overview

**Table 3: Key ECP Statistics of Turkey**

	2019
Number of countries with ECP activities	Min. 48
Total number of institutions abroad	Approx. 100 (plus 2,000 Diyanet mosques)
Total number of FTE staff engaged in ECP activities	Approx. 8,000
Government financial support (€ million)	Min 125 million
Comparative ECP Ranking	medium

Turkey has traditionally followed a state-centric approach to cultural policy, under which the government took responsibility and exercised substantial control of over ECP, similar to how it was traditionally conducted in countries like France. At the beginning of the last decade, however, the Turkish government decided that it should adopt a more “arm’s length” approach to account for shifts in the Turkish cultural landscape. In 2012, the AKP released a cultural policy strategy that explicitly sought to “break with the French model” in order to come closer to more decentralized “English model” (Polo, 2018, p. 82). Despite such talk, the basic institutional structure has not devolved as much as the Turkish authorities claim to have intended. Instead, the Turkish Arts Council (Türk Sanat Kurumu, or TUSAK), which was supposed to have been based on the British Arts Council, has barely gotten off the ground, and the overall ‘reform’ agenda has stalled. As a result, much of the official Turkish ECP landscape remains centralized, with an absence of arm’s length institutions.

**Figure 1: Institutional map of Turkish ECP**



### 3. Fields of ECP

Several Turkish ministries are directly involved in ECP. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs organizes a series of cultural programs abroad such as “Turkish Culture Days/Weeks”, “Turkish Film Days”, “Turkish Festivals”, “Turkish Food Week,” and artistic events. In 2019, over 100 different events were held around the world (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.b).

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism conducts a wide array of cultural events and programs, in addition to promoting tourism. Established in its current form in 2018 by direct Presidential decree, it has led on initiatives such as Turkish World Research Agency, which was in turn supported by agencies like the Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA) and the Turkish Culture and Arts Joint Management, Türksoy (Ministry of Culture and Tourism Republic of Turkey, 2019). It is also responsible for promoting Turkey (such as through online videos) and has pushed for an increased role in managing cultural heritage sites. Field-specific institutions are presented below.

#### 3.1. Culture and the arts

**Table 4: Key statistics on culture and the arts**

	2019	2015
Number of countries present	Yunus Emre Institute: 48 Diyanet: 145	Yunus Emre Institute: 30 Diyanet: -
Number of institutes	Yunus Emre Institute: 58 Diyanet: Over 2,000	Yunus Emre Institute: 38 Diyanet: Approx 2,000
Number of FTE staff	Yunus Emre Institute: 553 Diyanet: 104,814	Yunus Emre Institute: 380 Diyanet: 117,378
Number of artists in exchange programs	Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts: 30	-
Budget (€ million)	Yunus Emre Institute: 25.8	Yunus Emre Institute: 28.54

The Turkic Council, originally founded in 2009, serves as the umbrella organization for the Turkic Speaking Countries. The idea for the council was first put forward by Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev in 2006. It consists of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkey, with Hungary (whose prime minister, Victor Orban, has emphasized Hungarians as an “Eastern people”) (Hungarian Free Press, 2018), Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan holding observer status (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.a).

A wide range of cultural cooperation programs fall under the remit of the Turkic Council. It runs the Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation, which aims to “protect Turkic Cultural Heritage by supporting and financing its activities, projects and programs and to carry out the necessary works” (Turkic Council, n.d.). The Council organizes a youth platform to encourage cooperation and cultural interchange between the countries. It is also very active in the

realm of sports diplomacy, holding the biennial World Nomad Games (Turkic Council, 2019c). The first Turkic Council University Sports Games also took place in 2018 in Baku, Azerbaijan. The Council is also affiliated with a number of educational initiatives, which will be discussed in the following section.

Türksoy is international cultural organization of countries with Turkic populations, originally founded in 1993. Its members consist of Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, as well as 8 non-sovereign observer states. Its headquarters is in Ankara and it is funded the culture ministries of member states, with specific events and programmes being funded by local governments, universities, and NGOs (Türksoy, n.d.).

The Yunus Emre Cultural Centre (YEE) was founded in 2007 at the direct decree of President Erdoğan. Its stated aim is to "provide services abroad to people who want to have education in the fields of Turkish language, culture and art, to improve the friendship between Turkey and other countries and increase cultural exchange" (Yunus Emre Institute, n.d.d). With 58 centers in 48 countries, YEE pledges to increase its number of locations to 100 by 2023, as part of the centenary of the Turkish Republic (Yunus Emre Institute, n.d.a). Turkish cinema, an important element of the country's ECP, is internationalized in partnership with YEE. According to its own figures, its total budget was nearly €26 million in 2019 (Yunus Emre Institute, 2019, p. 140). It is discussed further in the following section on language.

Turkish International Cooperation and Coordination Agency (Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı Başkanlığı, or TİKA) was founded after the fall of the USSR in 1991 and is aimed at strengthening relations with the former Soviet Republics of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. TİKA continues to emphasize the ties between itself and the other Turkic-speaking countries, stating that "Turkey and the countries in Central Asia consider themselves as one nation containing different countries" (TİKA, n.d). TİKA is largely responsible for overseas development aid, but also contributes to cultural exchanges.

In addition to a series of goals regarding development, part of its mandate is "implementing cultural cooperation programs abroad and cooperating with centres engaging with Turkish culture" (TİKA, 2017, p. 15). It is active in over 160 countries, and has 60 offices in 58 countries (Ibid., p. 19). Altogether, more than 100 cultural buildings have been constructed or refurbished, and 33 educational buildings were built in 2017 alone (Ibid., p. 9). Its 2015 budget (the last year for which data is available) was 383,000,000 Turkish Lira, roughly €130,000,000 at the time (TİKA, n.d.). It operates under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (Ibid.).

In line with the increasing role placed on religion under President Erdoğan, The Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs (known as Diyanet), has grown substantially in significance. Diyanet prepares the weekly sermon for 85,000 mosques within Turkey and roughly 2,000 abroad (Ahval News, 2018; 2019b). The agency has attracted some negative attention in the West, as there has been fear that Diyanet is used to spy on potential dissidents, with the German government launching an investigation into such accusations in 2017 (Deutsche Welle, 2017).

### 3.2. Language

**Table 5: Statistics on Turkish language promotion**

	2019	2015
Number of countries where courses are offered	48	30
Number of students enrolled		
In-class	144,000 cumulative (100k as of 2017)	8,628
Online reach	320,000	381,000 (2017)
Number of candidates for Turkish language qualifications	-	-
Number of language teachers	-	-
Budget (€ million)	25.8	28.54

A significant part of YEE's efforts center around teaching the Turkish language abroad. The individual Institutes offer Turkish lessons and exams, ranging from the beginner to intermediate levels. As of 2020, nearly 150,000 students had taken courses from YEE, a figure that grows slightly every year (Yunus Emre Institute, n.d.c). Its 2017 revenues for language courses were 3,048,100 ₺ (Yunus Emre Institute, 2018a, p. 149). YEE offers a scholarship to students who wish to learn Turkish, offering between 250 and €525 per month (European Funding Guide, n.d.). It also organizes a summer school every year for roughly 700 students, who take immersive language courses and tour some of the most famous historical sites in Turkey (Yunus Emre Institute, 2018b).

The geographic distribution of Yunus Emre Centres reflects Turkey's regional aims, rather than a broader global ambition. Of 58 institutes, only those in Washington, Johannesburg, Tokyo, Kuala Lumpur, and Seoul fall outside of Turkey's immediate vicinity of MENA, Europe and Central Asia (Yunus Emre Institute, n.d). The individual institutes seek to “carry out studies for Turkish teaching in the cultural centers established abroad to accomplish the purposes of this law as well as conducting culture and art activities to promote our country, and giving support to scientific researches [sic]” (Yunus Emre Institute, n.d.b).

TIKA also works on promoting Turkish, with many projects designed to spread the language, such as a school that was recently reconstructed in North Macedonia and offers Turkish language courses (TIKA, 2019, p. 37).

### 3.3. Primary and secondary education

**Table 6: Statistics on foreign primary and secondary education**

<i>Maarif Foundation</i>	<b>2019</b>	<b>Change since 2015</b>
Number of countries	43	n/a
Number of schools	333	n/a
Number of students	Approx. 40,000	n/a
Number of staff / teachers	7327	n/a
Budget (€ million)	Approx. 77	n/a
Government financial support (€ million)	Approx. 77	n/a

A crucial development in Turkish foreign educational policy has been the influence of the Maarif Foundation on Turkish schools abroad. The Foundation was founded by the Turkish government under the instruction of President Erdoğan after the failed 2016 coup. Maarif's chair, Birol Akgün, has claimed that the Foundation now controls 191 schools taken over from the anti- Erdoğan Gülen movement (which was blamed for the attempted coup) in 21 countries (Stockholm Center for Freedom, 2019a).

The government has used coercive means to pressure Gülenist schools to shut down, such as banning students educated at them from studying in Turkey (Ibid.). The range of the Foundation is now global. Akgün has claimed that they have official representations in 52 countries, with 333 actual schools in 43 countries. Maarif thus presents an important extension of AKP's mission of expanding its control over Turkish ECP. Its yearly funding from the government has recently increased to over €80 million and has approximately 40,000 students and 7,000 teachers under its umbrella (Ahval News, 2019a).



### 3.4. Tertiary education and science

**Table 7: Statistics on international tertiary education in Turkey**

	2019	2015
Number of countries	167	-
Number of universities / colleges	None, 20 core internationalizing	-
Number of foreign students <sup>5</sup>	125,138	72,178
Number of students at trans-national higher education (TNE)	17k outgoing with Erasmus, roughly 100k total	16k outgoing with Erasmus
Number of government scholarships awarded	Over 40,000, 5000 fully funded with Türkiye Scholarship	-
Number of staff / teachers	-	-
Budget (€ million)	YÖK: 14.8 Türkiye Scholarship: 17.7	YÖK: 16

The Council of Higher Education (YÖK) was established 1981 and designed to coordinate all higher education activities centrally. It consists of 207 universities throughout Turkey, with the bulk (60) located in Ankara and Istanbul (The Council of Higher Education, n.d.). 20 of these are part of the core group of universities that the government has designated for internationalization. Its annual budget is €14.8 million (The Council of Higher Education, 2019). There are currently about 100,000 students abroad, and roughly 115,000 foreign students studying in Turkey. This latter figure places Turkey near the bottom of OECD rankings, percentage-wise (Study in China, n.d.).

First implemented in 2012, the government-funded Türkiye Scholarship program has grown rapidly in recent years. After receiving roughly 4,000 applications in its first year, numbers rose to nearly 145,000 in 2019 (Presidency of Turks Abroad and Related Communities, n.d.). The program funds international students for all types of post-secondary education and is advertised in over 20 languages (Türkiye Burslari, n.d.).

Students are provided with university placement, airfare, accommodation, health insurance, and free language courses for one year (Ibid.). Nearly 40,000 students from 167 countries were awarded scholarships last year, at a total cost of €17.7 million (e-Bursum, 2019, p. 32). Around 5,000 of these are fully funded. The program also consists of an alumni network, which is primarily centered in MENA and Central Asia (Turkey Mezunlari, n.d.).

<sup>5</sup> Data based on Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students | UNESCO UIS. (2020). Retrieved 2 September 2020, from <http://uis.unesco.org/en/uis-student-flow>.

The Turkic Council also fosters education links between the Turkic-speaking countries. There is currently a planned Turkic University Association and member states have also collaborated to write Common Turkic History Textbook in order to emphasize their shared past (Turkic Council, 2019a).

The Orkhun Exchange Program is another shared initiative currently in the pilot phase. In the 2017-2018 academic year, 43 students of member universities from the politics and IR departments utilized the program (Turkic Council, 2019b). The program will ‘expand significantly’ this year, after the previous academic year was considered highly successful.

The Turkic Academy was established in 2012 as part of the Turkic Council and has “the aim of coordinating scientific researches on the language, literature, culture, and history of Turkic people and evaluating the contribution of the Turkic civilization to the human civilization based on indigenous sources (Turkic Council, n.d.b). TABIP, the Academic & Scientific Cooperation Portal of Turkey, coordinates scientific action under the banner of the Yunus Emre Institute. TABIP states its mission as “establishing academic and scientific collaborations and conducting scientific diplomacy activities” (TABIP, n.d.). A total of 299,000 academics and 66,270 projects were registered on the portal in 2018 (Yunus Emre, 2018a, p. 119).

### 3.5. Foreign Media

**Table 10: Statistics on foreign broadcasting in Turkey**

	2019	2015
<b>TV</b>		
Number of countries broadcasted to	TRT World: 4 Offices, world-wide broadcast	TRT World: 4 Offices, world-wide broadcast
Number of languages	5	5
Number of channels	18	18
Audience / weekly (million)	260	-
Digital & social media audience (million)	-	-
Budget (€ million)	180	Approx. 70-140
<b>Radio</b>		
Number of countries broadcasted to	-	-
Number of languages	38	38
Number of channels	14	14
Audience (million)	-	-
Digital & social media audience (million)	-	-

	2019	2015
<b>New Media</b>		
Social networks following	TRT World: Twitter 350k YouTube: 1 million subscribers Facebook: 2.7 million	-

Turkish Radio and Television (TRT) is a venerable institution in Turkey, having been established in 1964. TRT was a founding member of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) in 1972. It operates 18 TV channels and 14 radio stations in Turkish, English, Arabic, Azeri, and Kurdish. Much of its revenue is levied by taxes, similar to the license fee-based model of the BBC in the UK. Its budget is roughly €180 million (US Department of Justice, 2019). Legally, it is required to pursue the national goals of the country. In practice, this has been reflected by increasingly pro-government views.

TRT World is the main foreign broadcasting component of TRT (TRT World, n.d.). It was founded in 2015 and broadcasts in English 24 hours per day through broadcasting stations in Washington D.C., London, and Singapore. TRT World has 351,000 Twitter followers, nearly 3 million Facebook likes, 1 million YouTube subscribers, and a weekly audience of 260 million (Stalinsky, 2019). It has been criticized as government propaganda, particularly following a series of layoffs after the failed 2016 coup (Stockholm Center for Freedom, 2019b).

The use of digital diplomacy has taken new significance since the failed coup d'état. To coordinate digital diplomatic efforts after the coup attempt on July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016, various diplomatic missions used the hashtag #1507mfa to tweet about their outreach activities in their host countries (Sevin, 2018).

## 4. Challenges and future outlook

In Turkey, ECP has been subordinated to a primarily domestic agenda which seeks to control dissent and establish pro-Islamic and centralized state with focus on heritage and identity. Indeed, the AKP government's instrumentalization of ECP shows no signs of abating. In a 2019 speech, President Erdoğan stated that "I regard the cultural and artistic issues as important a matter of survival as the fight against terror, as the foreign policy and basic areas of service. In the new era, we will address our shortcomings and elevate culture, arts, architecture and urbanization to their rightful place" (*Hürriyet Daily News*, 2019).

The content of such a focus has put Turkish ECP in a predicament, however. On the one hand, AKP has been successful in extending its influence across cultural policy both at home and, in some instances, in its broader neighborhood of Central Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. In addition to controlling important media outlets, the Turkish government has spread influence with the YEE cultural centers and by taking over foreign schools.

On the other, there has also been pushback from countries alarmed by Turkey's autocratic turn. The Portland Soft Power 30 (2017) finds that "Turkey would benefit from working on

its international perceptions – it ranks at the bottom of our polling data. Negative perceptions have likely not been helped by the failed military coup; a referendum to secure greater powers for President Erdoğan; and country-wide restrictions on media, civil society, and academia.” Regardless of international backlash, Turkey’s ECP strategy exhibits considerable strengths in Central Asia and parts of the Middle East. Although Turkey will face increasing headwinds if it stays on its autocratic path, Turkey’s ECP strengths should not be underestimated.

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