

IDEOLOGY AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY: TURKISH NEO-OTTOMANISM

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Turkey, as most countries in the world, is increasingly employing public diplomacy methods to promote its interests and to reach foreign audience in order to create soft power. In order to understand the neo-Ottoman ideology and the practices used by Turkish public diplomacy institutions in the attempt to influence foreign audiences and create soft power, we will analyse, in the present paper, the way in which neo-Ottoman ideas and theses have been inserted into various activities and actions subsumed under public diplomacy, and we will identify the regions in different areas of the world where public opinion has become a target group. The Justice and Development Party (AKP) has made public its foreign policy goals, including that of increasing its influence in Muslim societies in the Balkans, the Caucasus, Central Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Considering the mentioned aspects, the paper explores the way in which AKP uses the instruments and institutions specific to public diplomacy to promote a neo-Ottoman ideology and to organise a foreign policy that reflects Ottoman imperial times.

Keywords: ideology; public diplomacy; neo-Ottomanism, Northern Africa; Middle East;

INTRODUCTION

In most analyses and theoretical studies, the main aim of public diplomacy is to influence and attract target audiences from a country to support the specific policies of another state, as well as to popularise and explain the institutions, the specific values of the particular state in all their complexity, so that opportunities for cooperation could be created and common objectives could be defined (Hlihor, 2017; Tuch, 1990; Waller, 2007).

Diplomacy is an activity pertaining to the field of foreign policy conducted by a state/non-state actor, which makes the transition from the use of *hard power*, entailing coercive and/or deterrent measures, to *soft power*, entailing persuasion and consent, obtained through activities related to knowledge, culture, entertainment, art, sport and, last but not least, the promotion of political and social values specific to an ideology. Public diplomacy has been used with relative success after the '90s. States have employed different actions and institutions pertaining to public diplomacy, depending on the way they have defined their foreign policy objectives in the medium and long term as well as on their historical, cultural and spiritual traditions (Pajtinka, 2019, p. 23). Political values and ideology have played an important role in promoting public diplomacy. The struggle for supremacy between the United States of America and the Soviet Union during the Cold War involved public diplomacy as well by weaponizing the information and the image belonging to the core ideology in the West (liberal democracy, with its specific forms) and in the East (Marxism-Leninism, with its national forms). The Soviet Union collapsed because people lost faith in communism (Hlihor, 2016, pp. 114-126). Free speech and personal freedom, values promoted by the West through means and institutions of public diplomacy, have converted the public opinion from the space of former socialist states (Datta, 2019). In fact, no public diplomacy activity/action today is neuter from the axiological perspective.

The confrontation between the Western liberal democracy and the state/non-state actors promoting various forms of ideologies that underlie authoritarian regimes will no longer have the intensity and scope of the Cold War, but it will not be won *“until we discredit their ideological allure”* (Ib., 2019). Some actors that want to become regional powers, such as Russia and Turkey, if we refer only to the states in the neighbourhood of the European Union, make full use of *soft*

power to get their foreign policy objectives materialised. To that end, they have built public diplomacy national institutions, having specific ideologies that have emerged in the past decades as a vector for transporting the mentioned objectives to the target, namely *Putinism* (Kolesnikov, 2022) and *neo-Ottomanism* (Maziad, Sotiriadis, 2020).

In this paper, we will analyse the way in which the ideas and theses of neo-Ottomanism have been inserted into various activities and actions subsumed under public diplomacy and we will identify the regions where public opinion has become the target group. The Justice and Development Party (AKP) has made public its foreign policy goals, including to increase its influence in the Muslim societies in the Balkans, the Caucasus, Central Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Thus, we will justify the research approach by exploring how the AKP uses the specific instruments and institutions of public diplomacy in a manner designed to promote neo-Ottomanism.

IS THERE A NEW ERA IN PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN TURKEY?

As an instrument of foreign policy, public diplomacy emerged and was institutionalised in Turkey relatively late compared to other countries, namely in the 2000s (Çevik, 2019, p. 56; Kalin, 2011, pp. 5-23). Professor Muharrem Ekşi states that it could be explained by two dynamics, which he considers to be key to the mentioned phenomenon. *“The first is the policy of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) to present itself as a model in the Islamic world, especially in the countries of the Middle East. The second is the high trade/economic growth of Turkey, which in the 2000s was the 16th largest economy in the world. This fact has allowed the construction of public diplomacy, which requires large amounts of money. Although public diplomacy is based on soft-power tools, its implementation requires <hard dollars>”* (Ekşi, 2019, p. 177).

Professor İbrahim Kalin states that, in Turkey, public diplomacy was established out of the need to counterbalance the negative image that was shaped in international policy because of *“the propaganda activities against Turkey as well as the imprudent policies developed by the governments in Turkey in the past. Extrajudicial killings, torture in prisons, the application of inadequate policies related to the Kurdish issue, violations of human rights, religious minorities, restriction of freedom of thought and belief and other similar problems have reinforced an extremely negative image for Turkey both domestically and internationally. In some circles abroad, Turkey is portrayed as a country that invaded Cyprus, killed Armenians and undertook military operations in neighbouring territories in the name of fighting the PKK*

(Kurdistan Workers’ Party)”. (Kalin, 2011, p. 16). Under such circumstances, the need for public diplomacy arose “so that Turkey’s new story can be told for the public worldwide in an efficient and comprehensive manner” (Özkan, 2013, p. 4).

Consequently, institutions and policies specific to the field of public diplomacy have been established and developed in Turkey within most important state institutions. Thus, the Presidency for the *Turks Abroad and Related Communities* as well as the Prime Ministry *Public Diplomacy Coordination Office*, renamed the *Public Diplomacy Office*, were established. The latter was established on 30 January 2010, following a presidential decision, under the Prime Minister of Turkey, with the aim of influencing and guiding the international community, having departments such as: Media Works, Political Communication, Cultural Works, Corporate Works, and Project Development. The main activities of the *Office* have included public diplomacy panels organisation, foreign policy advocacy programmes, foreign policy workshops and youth programmes in Turkey (Ekşi, p. 182). During the same period the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was restructured to include new directorates and departments specific to *soft power* vector-institutions. Thus, in 2010, ten new units were established within the Ministry. Among them, the most important and relevant in terms of public diplomacy are *the General Directorate for Information, the General Directorate for Overseas Promotion and Cultural Relations, the Deputy General Directorate for Cultural Diplomacy* (Ib., p. 180).

Following the model of European culture institutions, the *Yunus Emre Institute* was established in 2009 having as main goal to expand Turkish influence in the Balkans, the Middle East and Africa. The institute intends to meet the goal by introducing and promoting Turkey, its language, history, culture and art worldwide. Although the Yunus Emre Institute employs a nongovernmental institution-like operative principle, it is affiliated to both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Culture, which makes it part of the administration mechanism. It is worth noting that the president of Turkey is the honorary chair of the administration council (Ib.).

Moreover, there were established additional institutions and organisations in the context of public diplomacy for Turkish diaspora and the communities outside the borders of Turkey. All the mentioned institutions *“have become the new channels and mechanisms of the Turkish Foreign Policy”* (Ib., p. 179). To them, according to Professor Abdullah Özkan, there should be added *“the almost 200 universities in Turkey that could be mobilised in the context of public diplomacy”* (Özkan, p. 4). Even though Turkish authorities decided relatively late to employ public diplomacy-related soft power instruments, in the past years Turkey has become a strategic

player in the field in the Wider Black Sea Area, in the Balkans, Central Asia and the Middle East.

Nowadays, according to Professor Ibrahim Kalin, Turkey has multiple public diplomacy objectives (Kalin, 2011, pp. 17-19). One of them is related to the authorities as well as the civil society institutions desire to make the voice of Turkey “heard” in the regions of strategic interest. Other objectives refer to making the story and vision of the “new” Turkey known to as many target groups as possible, repairing the negative image it has in different societies, especially in the West, removing errors of perception, diluting prejudices and historical psychological fixations about Turkey. Last but not least, Turkey’s public diplomacy is aimed at promoting an image of a model modern Islamic state in Muslim societies across a wide geography, particularly in Central Asia and the Middle East, and, most importantly, at its becoming, through the influence thus gained, a regional and even global strategic player. Referring to this aspect, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan stated, in the article *Turkey as an Emerging Power*, published more than a decade ago, that “emerging powers require increased public diplomacy strategies that highlight the nation’s successes, compared to established powers that have already proven their position in the global order. If an emerging power seeks to be more highly regarded in the global arena, it requires that states acknowledge and appreciate its progression. Thus, Turkey’s increased public diplomacy efforts concerning the domestic transitions to a flourishing economy and strengthened democracy are a result of the emerging power status” (Erdogan, 2010; cited by Huijgh, Warlick, 2016, p. 14).

These objectives of Turkish public diplomacy are part of, or are subsumed under, a broader strategy of foreign diplomacy, built on the ideology of neo-Ottomanism. It became manifest after President Erdogan and his team, especially Ahmet Davutoglu, the foreign minister from 2009 to 2014, who also published, in 2001, the paper *Strategic Depth (Stratejik Derinlik)* came to power (Murinson, 2006, pp. 945-964). Davutoglu, a Professor and a politician, built his strategy for a modern Turkey on an idea that emerged in the geopolitical imaginary of Turkish leaders after the end of the Cold War, according to which the vast region of Anatolia is a bridge between Europe, Africa and Asia, and therefore “Ankara’s geopolitical interests must be pursued through a strategic depth that spans three continents” (Massara, 2022). Public diplomacy has thus become, for the leaders of the conservative regime in Ankara, a very good vector to the “target” of these ideas and visions about Turkey’s role and place in the world.

Turkish public diplomacy has made real progress in just a decade, mostly through institutional development in geopolitical spaces of strategic interest to Turkey. This fact has led Derya Büyüktanir, one of the acclaimed public diplomacy analysts, to state that “public diplomacy institutions are the new actors in Turkey’s foreign policy and have served as new channels and mechanisms for defining and implementing recent policies” (Büyüktanir, 2018, p. 2). The political and cultural elite of contemporary Turkey has understood that classical diplomacy becomes more effective if *soft power* instruments and institutions are employed.

The newly established public diplomacy institutions are also a product of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs restructuring (Açma, Kwachuh, 2021, p. 170). Therefore, these institutions work in cooperation with the newly established units within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to tailor Turkey’s foreign policy to the international environment. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was reorganised to add objective public diplomacy departments and directorates, such as the Directorate of Religious Affairs Abroad (*Diyanet*), which manages about 2,000 mosques and financially supports religious education in European, Latin- American and African countries, thus promoting Turkish culture. The department has 61 branches in 36 countries, including Lithuania, Russia and Belarus. In addition, it has published and distributed the Qur’an and other religious books in 28 languages and financially supported official Islamic representative institutions in the Balkans, continental Europe and Africa. It has also provided educational and material support to imams from foreign countries and organised official meetings such as the Eurasian Islamic Council, the Islamic Council of the Balkan Countries, the Muslim Summit of Latin American Countries and the Summit of African Religious Leaders. Thus, *Diyanet* has been playing a leading role among the other organisations under the Muslim umbrella (Öztürk, 2018, p. 23).

These new institutions have established the civilian aspect of Turkey’s foreign policy, helping to exercise public diplomacy through *soft power* activities, mostly related to the social perspective, rather than through the *hard power* approach, entailing political practices.

NEO-OTTOMAN IDEOLOGY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN CONTEMPORARY TURKEY

The conservative Justice and Development Party, which came to power under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdogan in 2002, brought Ottomanism back into the collective memory, highlighting the Islamic imperial glory of the Sublime Porte. Erdogan expanded the ideas launched by Ahmet Davutoglu in his “*Strategic Depth*” into his own geopolitical narrative (Pattnaik, Panda, 2022, p. 339).

Hakan Yavuz, an eminent Islamic Studies Professor at the University of Utah, explained the emergence and sanctioning of the term “*neo-Ottomanism*” (Yavuz, 2016, pp. 438-465; Yavuz, 2020). He stated that David Barchard, a British journalist, used the notion of *neo-Ottomanism* for the first time, *providing it with a definition while intuiting it will become a force in Turkish policy, one much more important than Islam*. (Yavuz, 2020, p. 4). David Barchard proves to be an expert in the history and the political realities in contemporary Turkey, which is backed by his career as “*The Guardian*” and then “*Financial Times*” correspondent in Turkey in the ’70s and the ’80s. The international community provides different interpretations for the term. Nevertheless, it certainly has an ideological connotation, being the best linguistic option to describe not only Turkey’s current foreign policy but also the way in which it is implemented (Avatkov, 2018, pp. 80-88). Hakan Yavuz considers that in order to understand neo-Ottomanism, “*one must examine how the ideal and memory of the Ottoman Empire persist as a guiding force in the ongoing nation-state project of the Republic of Turkey. Although Kemalist nation-building incorporated all means to suppress the Ottoman heritage, this imperial <ghost> has haunted the state and society since the empire’s collapse. As Turkey became more secular, thus moving closer to the West, the search for its lost soul has intensified. The Ottoman past offers a reservoir of experiences, lessons, and opportunities to shape the present and come to terms with the roots of Turkish identity. Therefore, as Turkey becomes more self-confident and economically prosperous, Ottomanism echoes in incrementally louder tones in every corner of Turkish society’s cultural, political, and social spaces*” (Yavuz, 2016, p. 440).

Although the Turkish nation has developed for more than a century, taking into account its historical evolution, ordinary Turks do not necessarily consider themselves members of a nation-state, but rather participants in a multicultural project. Turkey cannot be understood as a standard nation of Western civilization. It is a society with many identity groups, comprising a large number of diverse ethnic (at least 13), linguistic (at least 16 native languages) and religious groups. Hakan Yavuz believes that the memories of the Empire and Islam can be the main common denominators for these ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups for “*what is known today as the Turkish nation. Neo-Ottomanism offers a loosely (or broadly) defined amalgam of identity that would allow all these ethnic and linguistic identities to coexist. It offers a pluralistic view of Turkish identity*”. (Yavuz, 2014, p. 445). This mentality has been built in recent decades by appealing to the historical memory of Ottoman greatness, and it is not limited to the borders of present-day Turkey. Therefore, neo-Ottomanism, before constituting an ideological corpus,

was elaborated as a memory of the past through the specific means of art, film, history and many other forms of cultural expression, and then transferred into political actions and public discourse. One of the many examples in this regard is the historical fiction serial film “*The Magnificent Century*”, built on the idea of neo-Ottomanism and the synthesis of Turkish-Islamic civilisation. The series glorifies the Turks, portraying the Ottoman Empire as the superpower of the world where European emissaries are degraded at the sultan’s court and European states are powerless in the face of the absolute power of the Ottomans (Khan, Pembecioglu, 2019, pp. 216-219). The series was initially broadcast in Turkey and Northern Cyprus, later exported and broadcast in over 70 countries, including Romania. As an ideology, *neo-Ottomanism* can be identified with Turkey’s aspirations to become a regional power and can be interpreted as a Turkish foreign policy strategy formulated by AKP leaders who focused on expanding Turkey’s relations with the states in the territories that were formerly Ottoman. *Neo-Ottomanism* is often given the connotations of an imperialist ideology. It would also explain the desire of the governments formed by AKP leaders to implement in public diplomacy ideas and activities that are specific to neo-Ottomanism, so that “*the new ideology could be explained to the world*” (Açma, Kwachuh, 2021, p. 167) while the new image of the country in international relations is explained (Ekşi, Erol, 2018).

Neo-Ottomanism is not explicitly present in public diplomacy activities and actions, being wrapped in cultural-artistic, spiritual and other forms and expressions that make up a seductive image of Turkey for the target audience. The application of public diplomacy in the target societies is achieved through the *neo-Istimalet policy*¹. This type of diplomacy is not new in Turkey, being implemented both before and after conquering new territories, by establishing relations entailing social aid, education, language and culture. Moreover, even today, Turkey presents to the world “*its model of moderate Islam, having an attenuated secularism, which has incorporated the neoliberal capitalist economy*” (Ib., p. 3).

The strategic depth doctrine developed by Davutoğlu, which actually expresses the ambition of Turkey to become a regional power having influence in former Ottoman Empire territories, is translated into public diplomacy through *soft power* activities. The author himself defines it not as an influencing policy but as a “*zero problems with neighbours*” one. However, AKP narratives often present the Ottoman past as the basis for establishing closer relations with former members

¹ Istimalet – a policy of accommodation between the authorities established by the conquerors and the local religious authorities. It explains why not all the territories conquered by the Ottomans were Islamised. See also Kolovos, E. (2019). *Istimalet: What do we actually know about it?* In Marinou Sariyannis (ed.) (2019). *Political Thought and Practice in the Ottoman Empire*. Rethymno, pp. 59-70.

of the Empire. The motto of public diplomacy actions is expressed by President Erdogan himself: *“Our policy is not to create enemies but to establish stable ties with all countries. Turkey’s relations with Middle Eastern countries are only natural as is the case with Balkan or Caucasus countries”*. (Sandrin, Damasceno Toscano Costa, 2020, p. 284).

Another basic narrative of Turkey, projected in societies in which it has an interest, is its internal development, democracy, rapid economic growth, openness to the global economy. Through its public diplomacy Turkey conveys the image of a country capable of successfully blending traditional Islamic-Ottoman culture with socio-economic modernisation. The theme of modernisation is adopted by all its public diplomacy institutions in debates about classical modernity, multiple types of modernity, multiculturalism and sovereignty. The messages transmitted to the target audience show that the relationship between tradition and modernity simultaneously includes the ideal of a balance between conservative values and modern means. Turkey wants to be perceived as a country that transforms and redefines modernity by preserving its conservative values.

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND THE PROMOTION OF NEO-OTTOMAN TURKEY IN AREAS OF GEOPOLITICAL INTEREST. THE CASE OF THE BALKANS

The authorities in Ankara have almost naturally concentrated public diplomacy efforts in the regions that used to be part of the Ottoman Empire as well as in the areas of strategic interest, namely where the country desires to increase its political, economic and cultural-spiritual influence. Such concerted efforts can be noticed especially in the Balkans, the Middle East and Eurasia, namely where there are societies that share their cultural memory and knowledge with Turkey, and where Turkey intends to consolidate the regional leader position by employing public diplomacy. Neo-Ottoman ideology is wrapped up in the *Ottoman legacy* slogan (Atci, 2022, p. 554). The Turkish public diplomacy activity is present in many societies in Europe as well, considering not only the Turkish diaspora, accounting for over five million people who live abroad, but also the fact that Turkey aspires to become a member state of the European Union. Most of public diplomacy activities in Europe are related to the promotion of Turkish culture so that a positive image can be conveyed. Moreover, the EU hosts many Turkish schools and culture centres meant to strengthen the relations with Turkish diaspora (Huijgh, Warlick, 2016, p. 21).

The concentration of public diplomacy activities in the Balkans, immediately after the end of the Cold War, was determined by objective as well as subjective

considerations. In addition to the fact that Turkey considers itself a Balkan country too, many other factors determine the importance of the Balkans for Turkey. Thus, a large population of Balkan origin lives in Turkey as well as significant Turkish and Muslim communities live in the Balkans. This reality has historical roots, dating back more than 550 years ago. During this historical period, 62 of the 215 grand viziers of the empire were of Balkan origin. Moreover, the Empire’s relations with the peoples in the Balkan region, in terms of trade and security, were portrayed, in the fall of 2009, by Davutoğlu, a political leader and a renowned scientist, as a *“story of peace and success”* belonging to a *“golden age for the Balkans”* (Makovac, 2023, p. 25)². It is this perception of the Ottoman-Balkan past that has clear implications for Turkey’s current policy in the Balkans, in accordance with the desire to become the leader of the region. In this context, Ahmet Davutoğlu clearly expressed the mentioned perception in his controversial speech in Sarajevo, in 2009: *“Like in the 16th century, which saw the rise of the Ottoman Balkans as the centre of world politics, we will make the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Middle East, together with Turkey, the centre of world politics in the future. This is the objective of Turkish foreign policy, and we will achieve this. We will reintegrate the Balkan region, the Middle East and the Caucasus, based on the principle of regional and global peace, for the future, not only for all of us but for all of humanity”* (Ib.).

Alexander Murinson considers that *“Turkey’s expansion in the Balkan states after the end of the Cold War was one of the most important foreign policy agendas of Turkey, as it was its expansion in the Turkic states in Central Asia”* (Murinson, 2006, p. 945). The relative success of the multitude of activities, including public diplomacy, carried out in the Balkans in the early post-Cold War years made some opinion leaders launch a geopolitical vision entitled the Turkish World for Turkey. In the mentioned vision, Turkey starts from the Balkans and extends to Turkey, Central Asia, the Russian Federation and China (Atci, 2022, p. 554). Public diplomacy and other means and instruments specific to *soft power* have become vectors to the target in these spaces so that this geopolitical vision could be achieved. From this perspective, it is not at all surprising that the first branch abroad of the most important institution that organises public diplomacy activities, the *Yunus Emre Institute*, was established in Bosnia-Herzegovina on 17 October 2009, under the name *“The Sarajevo Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Centre”* (Ekşi, 2019, pp. 183, 184). By 2020, the institute had established 58 branches in various areas of interest

² Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu opening speech at a conference organised, in 2009, in Sarajevo, *“Ottoman Heritage and the Muslim Communities of the Balkans Today”*, cited by Makovac, M. (2023). *From Neo-Ottomanism to Pragmatism? Turkey’s Foreign Policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina since 2009*, <https://dspace.cuni.cz/bitstream/handle/20.500.11956/179220/120437473.pdf?sequence=1>, retrieved on 4 June 2023.

for Turkey. Out of them 15 are in the Balkans (Albania 2, Bosnia and Herzegovina 3, Croatia 1, Montenegro 1, Kosovo 3, Hungary 1, Macedonia 1, Romania 2, Serbia 1) (Kiliçaslan, 2020, p. 651).

The *Yunus Emre Institute* branches have as basic objectives to popularise Turkish art and culture to foreign audiences, to teach the Turkish language, to provide information about the Ottoman historical past and to attract sympathisers for Islamic spirituality. All this is important for exporting a positive image of Turkey to the world in general and to the Balkans in particular.

According to Professor Muharrem Ekşi, the *Yunus Emre Institute* develops a wide range of projects: Turkology, promoting the teaching of Turkish as a foreign language in the education system of the countries where it operates, the reconstruction of the cultural heritage of the Balkans, the revival of traditional Turkish crafts in the Balkans, the establishment of 100 libraries with Turkish language works, the translation of 100 Turkish books, the organisation of joint painting exhibitions, the commemoration of common history on site, the establishment of Turkish cafes, the Turkish distance education etc. (Ekşi, 2019, p. 185).

Public diplomacy activities in the Balkan countries with either Islamic religion or important Islamic ethnic minorities experienced a flourishing development in the period 2000-2016. After that date, there have been some setbacks in Turkey's Balkan policy. Ahmet Davutoğlu resigned as Prime Minister and, following the failed coup attempt on 15 July 2016, Turkey has intensified its efforts against the Gülen movement³, which was and still is particularly present and powerful in the Balkan countries (Güzeldere, 2021, p. 4). Mention should be made that the Turkish state has had such education institutions in Romania as well. After Davutoğlu's resignation as Prime Minister, Turkey has focused its public diplomacy and other soft power activities, especially on the Muslims in the Balkans, insisting on four main areas: religious institutions, Islamic history, education, mass media and popular culture, but even in these areas the results have not been spectacular (Güzeldere, 2021, p. 5).

Although the results of Turkey's public diplomacy activities in the Balkans have not been so spectacular in terms of increasing its influence, the fact that most of them have fallen into the cluster of neo-Ottoman ideas and regional hegemony aspirations has attracted the attention of other classical and non-state geopolitical

³ The Gülen Movement refers to a group of religious, educational and social organisations inspired and founded by Fethullah Gülen, a Turkish Islamic scholar. The movement advocates for a secular education for faithful Muslims, which they need to thrive in the modern world. At the same time, it also emphasises the importance of traditional religious teachings. To this end, the movement has inspired the establishment of a worldwide network of schools and other learning centres that focus on secular subjects in the classroom, while offering extracurricular programmes that emphasise religious themes.

players interested in this region of Europe. For example, in an article published in *The New York Times*, businessman George Soros called for more support for the countries of the Western Balkans on their way to EU membership, arguing that if the region is not integrated into the EU, "it will become a sphere of influence of third actors, such as Russia, China and Turkey". (Ekinci, 2019, pp. 40-41). A German historian described Turkey as part of a historical "great game" in the Balkans, pursuing its hegemony as an alternative to the EU integration (Ib., p. 41). Moreover, it is very difficult to promote, through public diplomacy, the image of Turkey as a model of reconciling Islam with democracy and that of a benevolent regional leader that implements a policy of *zero problems with the neighbours*, while Turkey intervenes militarily in Syria, against the Kurds (Euphrates Shield in 2016/2017; Olive Branch in 2018 and Peace Spring in 2019) (Sandrin, Damasceno Toscano Costa, p. 254).

CONCLUSIONS

The study, through the formulated working hypotheses, shows that state and non-state actors frequently resort to the resources of public diplomacy to promote their national and geopolitical interests in different regions or globally. However, public diplomacy cannot be effective if its specific actions are conducted without taking into account the political and cultural characteristics, stereotypes and historical psychological fixations of the target groups considered at a given time.

Turkey has not really gained a predominant role in the Balkans, as it would have liked, regardless of the diversification of public diplomacy activities and of the large amount of allocated resources. No matter how seductive the stories promoted could be, no matter how varied and attractive to the public the actions and activities carried out could be, if they are not anchored in the political reality of the respective society, public diplomacy cannot fulfil its purpose.

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