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Turkey's geocultural soft power spheres centred on historical–cultural heritage

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Abstract

The study is an analysis of Turkey's initiatives to construct geocultural spheres of influence within the framework of its soft power policies. It constitutes a geographical and spatial examination of the activities of the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), the institutional principal actor of Turkey's constructivist, neoliberal utilitarian, and proactive foreign policies since 2002. The spheres of influence were identified on the basis of data derived from the TİKA's annual reports, including the spatial prioritization and distribution of its Program Coordination Offices (PCOs), along with the content analysis (via MAXQDA) of discourses centered on shared historical and cultural heritage. The geocultural spheres of influence identified in the study as Pre-Islamic, Ottoman, and Turkish–Islamic are not merely theoretical projections. Indeed, security and economically oriented regional integrations established with the Balkans, North Africa, and Sahel African countries based on the principles of "ownership" and "inclusiveness" constitute real political indicators of this. Furthermore, political and cultural formations such as the Organization of Turkic States and the common Turkic alphabet, owing to the TİKA's active roles, can be associated with all these activities and spheres of influence.

Keywords

Geocultural influence, soft power, cultural-heritage diplomacy, heritage area, TİKA, Turkey