

THE ANALYSIS OF CURRENT TENDENCIES OF GENDER POLICY IN MODERN TURKEY

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Abstract:

The impact of the gender factor on Turkey's domestic and international policies is investigated in this article. Also, the use of gender as a "soft power" instrument to achieve geopolitical objectives.

Keywords: Gender policy, Turkey, soft power, film industry, geopolitics.

Gender equality concerns are extremely important in today's globe. Gender equality concerns are currently being addressed at the highest levels of government, with laws and initiatives being enacted to preserve women's rights and enhance women's participation in solving societal and governmental problems. Furthermore, the scientific and expert communities pay special attention to the gender issue; the object and subject of gender equality as a scientific problem are studied, dissertations and analytical reports are written in this area, and global indices and indicators on men and women's rights are developed. International law and international human rights agencies regulate the problem of gender. For example, one of the UN's stated goals in Article 1 of its Charter is to "achieve international cooperation... in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without regard to race, sex, language, or religion" and the UN Economic and Social Council has created a Commission on the Status of Women to monitor and protect women's rights around the world.

In the modern Republic of Turkey, the problem of gender is not only relevant, but also one of the components of politics. The female factor has had a crucial role and impact in determining both domestic and foreign policies of the state since the Ottoman Empire. This is despite the fact that a major portion of the population in both the old Ottoman Empire and current Turkey professes Islam, and de-facto social relations inside the state are based on Islamic canons, which does not require open public relations action by women. Today, in the Republic of Turkey, gender is present at the highest level of government in the person of Emine Erdoğan, First Lady of the country and wife of current President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who often participates in the organization of the highest state visits and receptions. Also, in some senior positions of higher state authority there are female representatives.

To what ends does modern Turkey use gender policy?

Gender is employed to attain geopolitical, geoeconomic, and strategic goals in addition to ceremonial and legal ones. Turkey develops and supports gender equality ideals for a variety

of reasons, **including European Union membership, destabilization of domestic situations in Turkish-interested nations, and balancing secular and religious elements in its own domestic political environment.** Simultaneously, different tools for leveraging gender as a political lever may exist. The majority of “soft power” is used to promote gender equality. Modern Turkey places a strong focus on “soft power” in the form of numerous Turkish international funds such as “**TICA**” or investment and technology in its foreign policy. The Turkish film industry, which largely advocates feminism and gender equality, is also a “soft power” instrument for Turkey.

Furthermore, Turkey has long wanted membership in the European Union, as well as social and economic integration with European institutions. Furthermore, joining the European Union provides Turkey with not just economic benefits, but also access to high and advanced technology, which is critical for the development of the Turkish economy, research, and defense capabilities. In this light, Turkey’s gender policy is particularly important, as it demonstrates the country’s commitment to European and universal human ideals.

The distinctiveness of Turkish society and the state’s social ties is another reason for the Turkish leadership to maintain gender equality. The Republic of Turkey is a secular state on paper. Despite this, the sacred religion of Islam exerts a profound religious influence in both society and government. Respect for equal rights for men and women can play a critical role in maintaining the balance between secularism and religiosity in such an environment.

Gender Politics as a Tool of “Soft Power”?

The employment of non-military techniques and non-armed tools to achieve the state’s geopolitical interests is referred to as “soft power”. The Republic of Turkey has used soft power tactics extensively in its foreign policy to date, primarily through international philanthropic institutions and the film industry. This approach to foreign policy on the side of the state is known as cultural diplomacy, and it is practiced by the majority of governments throughout the world. In Turkey, cultural diplomacy prioritizes the protection of women’s rights and the development of women’s involvement. The Turkish film industry’s products, which also focus on the protection of women’s rights, their position in society, and women’s activism, are the principal methods of cultural diplomacy in Turkey. When you look at the geography of Turkish TV shows and movies, you’ll notice that the majority of them are shown in areas where Turkey’s geopolitical interests are promising. The Turkish film industry’s products are transmitted in regions such as the Near East, Middle East, Maghreb (North Africa), and the Balkans, as well as in Central Asia in recent years¹. Turkish soap operas have been famous in the Middle East due to the typically acute problems for the region, which are touched upon by the writers of movies and soap operas, and might include issues such as social disputes, gender difficulties, feminism issues, and so on. The popularity of Turkish series is

¹ Zubkova A.I. Turkey’s Soft Power: The “Soft Power” Phenomenon as an Instrument of Cultural Diplomacy. – M.: RUDN, 2015. – P. 52.

owing to the fact that the protagonist's fate is usually at the core of the plot, with her issues resonating in some manner with the problems of women in the region. This demonstrates that the Turkish film industry creates soap operas and films by examining the characteristics of the local populace. However, given the Middle East's traditional and religious nature, it's worth noting that, despite the fact that Turkish soap operas and movies depict acute problems facing women in society, there's a disconnect between how local people in the region solve this problem and how screenwriters propose to solve this problem in the film industry's products. This circumstance sparked widespread family strife in Arab society, leading to the outlawing of Turkish soap operas and films in certain Arab countries. Nonetheless, the film industry's products have demonstrated their efficiency in promoting Turkish interests in foreign countries and garnering local public loyalty to Turkish values and objectives.

According to a 2011 poll conducted in North Africa and the Arab world by Turkey's Economic and Social Research Foundation about watching Turkish soap operas and movies, 74% of respondents said yes when asked if they had ever watched a Turkish soap opera, while 78 percent of respondents in the region expressed loyalty to Turkey, including 89 percent in Palestine and Saudi Arabia, 91% in Tunisia, and 78 % in Egypt².

However, by 2013, the statistics had reduced due to the Arab Spring and Turkey's role in it: 59 % for the entire region, 75 % for Palestine, 76 % for Saudi Arabia, 74 % for Tunisia, and 76 % for Libya. Egypt (from 86 % in 2011 to 38 % in 2013) and Syria (from 44 % in 2011 to 22 % in 2013) had the most significant reduction in ratings. The dip in Turkey's image ranking is attributable to the country's harsh position on the events in Egypt and the Syrian conflict in its foreign policy³.

Analyzing the outcomes of Turkey's cultural diplomacy, we can conclude that, notwithstanding the minor negative impact of Turkish TV shows and films, cultural diplomacy achieves the desired outcomes in general. As a result, a positive image of Turkey is currently forming across the Near East, Transcaucasus, Central Asia, and other territories within Turkey's geopolitical interest zone.

Turkey's Achievements and Shortcomings in Gender Equality

The Turkish film industry actively promotes gender equality, officials publicly demonstrate their commitment to equal rights for men and women, and the highest state authority encourages gender equality, but all of this is not enough for Turkey to be seen as a defender of democratic and universal values. Of fact, Turkey has made commendable successes in the field of gender equality for a country with a mainly Muslim population, but these gains are insufficient to deem Turkey evolved in this area.

²Akgun M., Gundogar S.S. Foreign Policy Program TESEV / Perceptions of Turkey in the Near East 2011. Available in http://www.tesev.org.tr/assets/publications/file/OD_Turkiye_Algisi_2011.pdf

³Akgun M., Gundogar S.S. Foreign Policy Program TESEV / Perceptions of Turkey in the Near East 2013. Available in [URL://http://www.tesev.org.tr/assets/publications/file/03122013120651.pdf](http://www.tesev.org.tr/assets/publications/file/03122013120651.pdf)

Women's political involvement and representation in national and municipal elected entities in Turkey is now lower than the worldwide average. Even while all political parties assign quotas and other optional special measures to boost women's representation in their ranks, women in public affairs confront severe hurdles in getting access to leadership roles and engagement in politics at all levels.

According to the 2021 Global Gender Gap Index, out of 156 countries in the world, Turkey ranks 114th in political empowerment and 140th in economic participation and opportunities⁴. This suggests that Turkey still has a long way to go in the area of gender equality.

Only one of Turkey's 17 cabinet ministers is a woman, and only 17.29% of lawmakers in the Turkish Grand National Assembly are female, well below the global average of 25.5 %. In local governance, women are similarly significantly underrepresented⁵. Women make up only 3% of mayors, 11% of municipal councilors, and just over 2% of mukhtars (village chiefs) as of 2019. In Turkey's private sector, women make up only 22% of executive positions, 18% of board members, and 11% of top management positions⁶.

Conclusions and projections for Turkey's gender equality progress.

First, it is important to recognize that modern Turkey advocates gender equality in order to attain its two strategic aims, not because of moral concerns about society or state power. The first and most significant goal is to establish

Turkey as a regional force in the Near East and other areas where it has geopolitical interests. The second is European Union membership. To attain these goals, a variety of strategies might be deployed, ranging from cultural diplomacy to military tactics. However, Turkey is content with merely the tools of its "soft power" thus far.

Second, Turkey is particularly adept in employing the tools of its "soft power" through the products of the Turkish film industry from a scientific standpoint. At a time when countries like Iran, Saudi Arabia, and, to a lesser extent, Israel, are competing for regional dominance in the Near East, it is not enough to fully realize the state's geopolitical aims. Turkey will have to deploy "hard power" tools sooner or later.

Third, based on Turkey's position in world rankings on gender equality, Turkey is still far from reaching acceptable outcomes in the field of gender equality, even when taking into account the population's religiousness and differences in social structure.

⁴ Global Gender Gap Index for 2021. Available in URL: https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf

⁵ Women in Politics: 2021. Inter-Parliamentary Union and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, UN Women. Available in URL: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/03/women-in-politics-map-2021>

⁶ Leadership and political participation. United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. UN and Women. Available in <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation>

Fourth, it will be impossible for Turkey to achieve gender equality at a level that is acceptable in the long run. Most certainly, public concepts of gender equality will be propagated, but there will be no progress on the level of political engagement and public activity by women.

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