



Health Diplomacy in Turkey as the Interface of Health and Foreign Policy

Sağlık ve Dış Politikanın Kesişimi Olarak Türkiye’de Sağlık Diplomasisi

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the tools of health diplomacy, which has become an increasingly widespread soft power strategy in Turkish foreign policy, and to evaluate the results of its implementation. Health diplomacy activities were tried to be analyzed by organisational and institutional data and documents within their historical context. Due to its geopolitical, geoeconomic and geostrategic importance, Turkey uses humanitarian health aid as a diplomatic tool to develop and strengthen its bilateral relations with the countries of the Caucasus, the Balkans, the Middle East and Africa. In this context, medical diplomacy tools such as establishing of health facilities abroad, scientific collaborations, granting scholarships to foreign students in medical sciences, providing direct medical care, humanitarian aid activities of non-governmental organizations; it serves to bringing countries closer together, strengthening diplomatic influence, positive image and religious ties in the region, and also searching for new markets. Thus, health diplomacy, which is the interface of the relationship between health, foreign policy and trade, plays a catalytic role in achieving Turkey’s foreign policy goals.

Keywords: Health diplomacy, Foreign policy, Medical diplomacy, Humanitarian assistance, Turkey.

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Öz: Bu çalışma, Türk dış politikasında giderek yaygınlaşan bir yumuşak güç stratejisi haline gelen sağlık diplomasisinin araçlarını incelemeyi ve uygulama sonuçlarını değerlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Sağlık diplomasisi faaliyetleri, tarihsel bağlamı içerisinde örgütsel ve kurumsal veri ve dokümanlarla çözümlenmeye çalışılmıştır. Türkiye jeopolitik, jeoekonomik ve jeostratejik önemlerinden ötürü Kafkasya, Balkanlar, Orta Doğu ve Afrika ülkeleri ile ikili ilişkilerini geliştirmek ve güçlendirmek için insani sağlık yardımlarını, diplomatik bir araç olarak kullanmaktadır. Bu doğrultuda yurtdışında sağlık tesisleri inşa edilmesi, bilimsel işbirlikleri, yabancı öğrencilere burs verilmesi, tedavi amaçlı hasta getirilmesi, sivil toplum kuruluşlarının insani yardım faaliyetleri gibi araçlar; ülkeleri birbirine yakınlaştırma, diplomatik nüfuzu, bölgedeki olumlu imajı ve dini bağları güçlendirme yanında yeni pazar arayışlarına da hizmet etmektedir. Böylece sağlık, dış politika ve ticaret arasındaki ilişkinin kesişim alanı olan sağlık diplomasisi, Türkiye’nin dış politika hedeflerine ulaşmasında katalizör rol oynamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sağlık diplomasisi, Dış politika, Medikal diplomasi, İnsani yardım, Türkiye.

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1. Introduction

Since the American political scientist Joseph Nye introduced the concept of soft power in the 1990s, the governments have now begun to look for ways to legitimize their desired policies through a system of cultural and ideological values without the need for military and economic hard power elements. One of the dimensions of soft power, which involves the ability to attract through persuasion and attraction, shape preferences and influence others, is health diplomacy. For this purpose, the governments that want to establish superiority in foreign policy and international relations have tried to create a positive image for themselves through public diplomacy or bilateral and multilateral diplomacy mechanisms. With the cessation of health from being purely a technical, humanitarian and non-political activity (Fidler, 2005: 181), health diplomacy has gained "the character of a mechanism designed to advance the national interests of countries in the field of foreign policy, especially for developed countries" (Dolatabadi and Kamrava, 2021a: 1). Indeed, according to Kickbusch (2011: 1-3), health through health diplomacy; it has become more critical than ever in security policies, development strategies and trade agreements. Moreover, global health security has become "an integral part of foreign policy as government officials and international organizations increasingly embrace global health diplomacy as a tool to simultaneously conduct programs and improve health and international relations" (Drager and Fidler, 2007: 162). Recently, the Covid-19 pandemic has also created an excellent opportunity for global health diplomacy by triggering the way for new policies based on health, economy and security (Taghizade et al., 2021: 1-9).

Today, through health diplomacy, which is more than a humanitarian aid tool, Turkey uses health services as a foreign policy tool with political, economic and social goals just like Cuba, China, India, Brazil and Iran. The diplomatic gains of health aids and the benefits derived by harmonizing soft power with foreign policy have been appealing to developing countries such as Turkey. In this context, the main purpose of the study is to examine the tools of health diplomacy, which has become an increasingly widespread soft power strategy in Turkish foreign policy, and to evaluate the results of its implementation. In this study, first of all, the concept of health diplomacy and its origin and the historicity are discussed and how health and foreign policy become connected are investigated. Then, various medical diplomacy tools used in Turkish foreign policy by illustrating how health diplomacy functions as a soft power element are discussed in detail. Finally, by comparing the example of Turkey with the experiences of other countries, it is analyzed what kind of results are obtained or tried to be obtained from these initiatives.

1.2. Historical Background of Health Diplomacy and Foreign Policy

The fact that global health problems have become a subject of foreign policy has aroused great interest in the concept and practices of health diplomacy (Labonté and Gagnon, 2010: 1-2). The historical foundations of global health date back to the mid-19th century, when cooperation and the search for common solutions emerged between states to control infectious diseases such as cholera, typhoid, plague, yellow fever that threatened international security. The inadequacy of the measures taken by the states against epidemic diseases within their borders and the fact that the quarantine processes caused great commercial damages were instrumental in taking the first step towards health diplomacy. As a matter of fact, the doors of international diplomacy were opened in 1851 when European countries came together to cooperate to prevent the spread of epidemic diseases at the world's first health conference. Later, various international health conferences held in cities such as Paris (1859), Istanbul (1866) and Vienna (1873) served as a political and commercial mission aimed at the emergence of sanitation reform movements and keeping measures at a level that would not harm international trade (Barona, 2015: 5-9). This development was followed by the adoption in 1892 of the International Sanitary Convention, which aimed to control infectious diseases on the continent. Thus, public health began to occupy an important place on the agenda since the middle of the 19th century, and then with the establishment of various humanitarian organizations and foundations (such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, the

Rockefeller Foundation) and international organizations (such as the World Health Organization), direct and indirect health diplomacy activities at the global level gained momentum.

Peter Bourne (1978: 121), a special adviser to U.S. President Jimmy Carter, who stated in early 1978 that the role of health and medicine as a means of improving international relations had not yet been fully explored in the United States, suggested that the field of health could be a bridge for the removal of diplomatic barriers and dialogue. For this reason, he stated that medical diplomacy can be a tool in the establishment of communication channels between nations in periods of tension or deterioration of international relations. Bourne (1978: 121-123) said that nations cannot be expected to become close members of the global community when there is no dialogue or exchange between them, arguing that mutual national interests do not end with weapons sales, for example, but that health can perhaps provide the best way with minimal political overtones. In the early 2000s, the SARS epidemic in China and then diseases such as Zika, Ebola, HIV/AIDS, H1N1 Influenza A and bioterrorism began to threaten global security. Finally, the Covid-19 disease, which has become a pandemic since March 2020, has also strengthened and transformed the global threat perception related to health, safety, trade and travel. As a matter of fact, in the last 20 years, the concept of global health diplomacy has gained importance with the understanding that these health problems, which pose direct threats to national and global security, can no longer be solved only at the technical level and require political negotiations and joint solutions through multi-actor mechanisms (Katz et al., 2021: 593). Thus, with health becoming one of the main agenda items of foreign policy, policy-making processes have emerged in which state and non-state actors respond to global health problems within and beyond the health sector.

Global health diplomacy is defined "as multi-layered and multi-actor negotiation processes that shape and guide the global policy environment for health" (Kickbusch et al., 2007: 230). This definition also corresponds to WHO's understanding of health diplomacy. According to WHO (2014), health diplomacy; outlines the commitment of various actors to improve relations between states and work together to protect and promote health, reduce poverty and promote equality. As a matter of fact, in 2008, WHO Director-General Margaret Chan (2008: 498) stated that the current interest in global health in foreign policy opens a window of opportunity and therefore the health lens should be included in foreign policy. However, there are also approaches that consider the promotion of global health in the context of supporting national interests. For example, in the globalizing world, Fauci (2007: 1169) underlined that infectious diseases pose a threat to political, economic and social stability, and defined medical diplomacy as "winning the hearts and minds of people in poor countries by exporting health care, expertise and personnel to help those who need it most". Both of these definitions address the concept of health diplomacy from the perspective of soft power, which sees medical assistance as a means to achieve non-medical goals.

2. Methodology

In order to reveal the health diplomacy tools and outlook of Turkey, literature was searched in large databases such as Web of Science, Scopus, Google Scholar, PubMed/Medline search engine by using keywords such as 'health diplomacy', 'global health diplomacy', 'medical diplomacy'. As a data collection tool, official websites and annual activity reports of institutions such as the Ministry of Health, General Directorate of EU and Foreign Affairs, Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (*TIKA*), Council of Higher Education (*YÖK*), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, OECD, World Health Organization (WHO) were examined. Then, the statistics, books and brochures, reports, bulletins and newspaper articles published by these institutions were analyzed. The basic statistical data needed in this qualitative study were obtained with the official permission letter from the Ministry of Health Directorate General for Public Hospitals and the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (*YTB*) and included in the analysis with the descriptive analysis approach.

3. Results

While states are making initiatives for global peace and justice with humanitarian aid activities; on the other hand, they are interested in health diplomacy to build credibility, political reputation and influence, and to strengthen relations with other countries. In this context, although Turkey's interest in health

diplomacy started relatively late in the 1980s, it gained momentum in the 2000s. Especially with the health diplomacy activities carried out in coordination by the Ministry of Health and TİKA, the field of health has been shaped as a soft power element. The tools of health diplomacy shaped by humanitarian, social or commercial objectives in many countries of the world can be expressed as follows (Bourne, 1978: 116): the establishment of health facilities abroad, scientific collaborations and training of health personnel, granting scholarships to medical students from abroad, exporting and donating drugs and medical equipment, health assistance activities and treating foreign patients.

3.1. Establishing and Operating Health Facilities Abroad

Establishing and operating hospitals or medical centers abroad can significantly enhance a state's international reputation and influence. In line with this goal, Turkey is actively conducting a policy of building and operating health facilities in order to improve its political, cultural and economic relations with the countries of Africa (Sudan, Somalia, Niger, Libya), the Near East (Syria, Palestine), the Balkans (Albania), Central and East Asia (Kyrgyzstan, Bangladesh) (Table 1).

In this context, Sudan is one of the countries where a bilateral cooperation protocol has been signed and health facilities have been built and operated. The works that started in 1984 with the promise of the President of the Republic of Turkey turned into the Decision of the Council of Ministers in 1985. ‘Kalakla Turkish Hospital’, which was tendered in 1993 upon the commitment to establish a ‘health center’ in Khartoum in 1987 and opened in 1996, has become to getting old physically and medical equipment over time and has become unable to meet the needs (Ministry of Health, 2007: 5). In this direction, it was first aimed to improve the physical aspects of Kalakla Turkish Hospital within the framework of the “Protocol between the Government of the Republic of Turkey and the Government of the Republic of Sudan on Cooperation in the Fields of Health and Medicine” dated December 10, 2003. Later, as a result of the joint work carried out with the Federal Ministry of Health of Sudan, the Ministry of Health of Khartoum State, the Embassy of Khartoum and the Ministry of Health in order to provide an effective and efficient health service of the hospital, Kalakla Turkish Hospital was renovated and started to serve on June 25, 2007. In parallel, Sudanese health personnel were trained on various topics in Turkey and Sudan. At the same time, the operating room, obstetrics and gynecology clinic, delivery hall, sterilization center, radiology center of the Teaching Hospital located in Juba, the capital of South Sudan, are equipped with devices and materials supplied from Turkey. 15 medical personnel of Juba Teaching Hospital received training in public hospitals affiliated to the Ministry of Health in Ankara between 5 June and 4 July 2008 (Ministry of Health, 2008: 23-38).

In 2006, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's visit to Sudan as part of his visit to the Darfur Region to visit thousands of people who were left homeless due to the civil war opened a new door of health diplomacy. Erdoğan, who was the first leader to visit the Darfur Region, drew attention to the human tragedy in Darfur and ordered the construction of a large and modern hospital in Nyala. In order to maintain the health services in the best way in Sudan (Darfur), the ‘Cooperation in Health Program’ was signed in 2007 for the establishment of a hospital under modern conditions and the construction and equipment was completed in 2012. In 2013, the hospital operate-transfer protocol of Nyala Sudan Turkey Training and Research Hospital was signed and subsequently the official opening of the hospital was held on February 28, 2014. The hospital, which is the largest and most modern health facility in the region, serves the people of other countries in the region as well as Sudan.

Hospitals in Somalia and Niger, the other two countries that cooperate in the field of health in Africa, continue to provide quality health services to the people of the region. Due to their strategically important positions for Turkey, health facilities are also operated in Albania and Kyrgyzstan. The 180-bed (35 thousand m² closed area) Palestine-Turkey Friendship Hospital, the construction of which was started by TİKA in Gaza in 2011 and completed in 2017, is the largest hospital in Palestine. In addition, humanitarian aid hospitals have been opened in Bangladesh and Syria. In order to help the Rohingya Muslims who fled the persecution in Myanmar and took refuge in neighboring Bangladesh, AFAD

started to provide health services to the 50-bed Bangladesh Field Hospital on February 8, 2018 under the coordination of the Ministry of Health. Again, after 2011, since the hospital infrastructure in the region was destroyed due to the internal turmoil in Syria, Turkey took the opportunity to take steps to meet the health needs of the devastated country. In this context, humanitarian aid hospitals were opened in Al-Bab (200 beds), Rasulayn (200 beds), Çobanbey (200 beds), Azaz Vatan (200 beds), Jarablus (100 beds), Telabyad (83 beds), Mare (75 beds) and Afrin (75 beds) in the north of Syria, making significant contributions to meeting the health needs of the people in the region.

Table 1: Turkish Hospitals Operating Abroad (31 December 2021)

	Mogadishu Somalia Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Training and Research Hospital	Nyala Sudan Turkey Training and Research Hospital	Niger Turkey Friendship Hospital	Bangladesh- Turkish Field Hospital	Turkey- Albania Fier Friendship Hospital	Bishkek State Hospital of Kyrgyz- Turkish Friendship
Opening Date	29.09.2014	28.02.2014	30.05.2019	8.02.2018	21.04.2021	2.08.2021
Land Capacity (m ²)	63.000	70.000	5.840	2.500	50.000	12.000
Closed Area (m ²)	13.500	11.000	5.070	675	17.425	10.339
Bed Capacity	250	150	44	50	150	72
Current Turkish Staff	65	54	40	30	55	32
Current Local Staff	636	306	135	25	228	143
Number of outpatients (per month)	29.989	12.801	3.684	35.443	2.798	502
Number of Inpatients (per month)	1.185	561	337	375	228	65
Number of Surgical operations (per month)	589	347	243	200	89	8

Source: Directorate General for Public Hospitals, the Ministry of Health of Turkey.

3.2. Scientific Collaborations, Training of Health Personnel and Providing Scholarships

The cooperation process between states in the field of health and medicine is carried out by bilateral agreements. According to the March 2022 data of the Ministry of Health, 155 agreements have already entered into force with 74 countries in the field of health (ABDİGM, 2022a). In the bilateral agreements signed by the Ministry of Health, issues such as the exchange of health personnel and experts, the exchange of information and experience on all health-related issues, the provision of direct contacts between scientific institutions, and the support of commercial initiatives of the private sector are included.

The quality of medical education in Turkey has led to an increase in demands for Turkey's cooperation for the training of health personnel in countries with which there are close diplomatic relations. Turkey welcomed these demands as a means of expanding its influence and intensified educational and scientific cooperation activities in many countries. Especially after the establishment of the University of Health Sciences (SBÜ) by the Ministry of Health in 2015 with the Law No. 6639, the level of scientific cooperation has increased. SBÜ, which has a usage protocol with 8 medical faculties and 60 training and research hospitals, has the authority to open programs that provide education in foreign languages and to cooperate with higher education institutions abroad, including conducting joint programs with foreign higher education institutions. In this context, the following abroad education units have been opened by SBÜ (2022): Faculty of Health Sciences in Mogadishu/Somalia; Vocational School of Health Services in Mogadishu/Somalia, Nyala/Sudan, Moro/Philippines, Bukhara/Uzbekistan and Çobanbey/Syria; Faculty of Medicine in Bukhara/Uzbekistan and Çobanbey/Syria and Institute of Health Sciences in Khartoum/Sudan. It is foreseen that the level of education and scientific cooperation abroad will increase in the future.

In 2021, 224,048 foreign students were receiving education in Turkish universities, 80,110 of which were newly enrolled. In the fields of health sciences (such as medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, nursing, midwifery), a total of 33,027 students were receiving education, 12,276 of whom were newly registered (YÖK, 2022). This shows that approximately 15% of foreign students in Turkish universities are studying in areas related to health sciences. One of the successful programs carried out in health diplomacy is that the state provides scholarships to foreign students. According to the data of the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB), 1001 students were given scholarships in the field of medicine and health sciences in 2021. As can be seen in Table 2, it is understood that the number of foreign students awarded scholarships in the field of medicine and health sciences has increased over the years in the period of 2015-2021 and that Syrian, Afghan, Azerbaijani and Greek students are predominant.

Table 2: Number of Scholarships Awarded in the Field of Medicine and Health Sciences and Distribution by Country (2015-2021)

Countries	Years						
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Afghanistan	18	22	26	20	29	54	64
Albania	5	11	11	14	22	21	25
Azerbaijan	18	18	12	19	31	40	53
Bosnia and Herzegovina	5	5	6	2	2	3	9
Bulgaria	2	6	4	8	5	4	6
Ethiopia	4	6	6	6	3	9	12
Philippines	2	1	2	35	30	4	7
Palestine	26	21	20	28	25	24	36
Ghana	9	5	4	3	5	1	3
Iraq	12	11	10	23	21	32	26
Iran	13	21	6	21	17	19	20
Kazakhstan	10	9	1	12	10	6	20
Kosovo	9	13	12	11	53	32	34
TRNC	2	6	9	12	18	33	19
North Macedonia	9	6	7	10	12	9	7
Egypt	7	4	8	10	10	9	29
Uzbekistan	3	8	1	3	5	11	16
Pakistan	2	2	4	4	14	20	23
Russia	7	3	5	7	3	5	8
Serbia	6	4	5	4	7	3	7
Somalia	2	16	6	18	14	12	10
Sudan	11	6	7	11	3	4	20
Syria	176	278	408	81	67	198	275
Tanzania	6	3	2	5	8	9	9
Turkmenistan	4	4	3	6	5	7	7
Jordan	-	5	7	6	8	12	21
Yemen	10	6	6	28	13	14	32
Greece	28	17	14	30	50	43	48
Other Countries	76	84	79	100	136	116	155
Total	482	601	691	537	626	754	1001

Source: Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB).

3.3. Donation and Export of Vaccine, Drug and Medical Equipment

Another activity of the Turkish government in the field of health diplomacy has been the sale and donation of vaccines, drugs, medical devices and equipment to many countries around the world, especially to neighboring countries. In addition to the public and private sectors, non-governmental organizations provide drugs and medical equipment support to many countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Azerbaijan, especially African countries. On the other hand, the export of devices and consumables for medical diagnosis and treatment is also developing as a health diplomacy tool (Altılı, 2020: 144-147). The transfer of such medical humanitarian aid to other countries plays an important role in the promotion and popularization of states.

The Covid-19 pandemic has provided new possibilities and opportunities for strengthening soft power diplomacy. Due to disruptions in the supply chain, many countries around the world have experienced difficulties in the supply of many products, especially personal protective equipment and vaccines, in the fight against Covid-19. In this period, countries such as China, Russia and India have strengthened their global power with the policies they have developed under the name of 'mask diplomacy' and 'vaccine diplomacy' (Lee, 2021: 61-64). In this context, Turkey has provided various assistance against the difficulties created by the virus for developing countries, especially African countries. Through the Ministries of Health, Foreign Affairs and National Defense and other institutions and organizations; 161 countries and 14 international organizations (such as OCHA, UNICEF, CARICOM, Islamic Development Bank) contributed to the fight against the pandemic (ABDİGM, 2022b). Public relief was provided to 132 countries through the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of National Defence, TİKA, the Turkish Red Crescent, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Interior and associations. The Ministry of Health provided grant support to 54 countries in the form of medical supplies and devices (medical and surgical masks, gowns, overalls, glasses, sterile or non-sterile gloves, protective equipment such as disinfectants; diagnostic kits, drugs, ventilators). In addition, financial assistance was provided to 50 countries by the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities, the Turkish Red Crescent, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and non-governmental organizations (ABDİGM, 2022b).

In the context of the measures taken against Covid-19; the export of personal protective equipment, which is important in terms of effectively managing the stock and supply of critical products used in the fight against the pandemic, not disrupting the provision of healthcare and protecting public health, was linked to preliminary permission with the 'Communiqué on the Amendment of the Communiqué on Goods Subject to Prohibition of Export and Preliminary Permission' published in the Official Gazette dated March 4, 2020 and no 31058. In this context, export permits have been granted to 75 countries and 5 international organizations for medical products used against Covid-19. Vaccine grants were made to a total of 12 countries (TRNC, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Libya, North Macedonia, Tunisia, Senegal, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Montenegro, Uzbekistan and Burkina Faso). Vaccine grants were requested from 25 countries for Turcovac, the domestic vaccine developed by Turkey (ABDİGM, 2022b), and 130 thousand doses of Turcovac vaccine were sent to the Democratic Republic of Congo. Thus, Turkey has had the opportunity to show solidarity and cooperation with neighboring or close countries through health diplomacy.

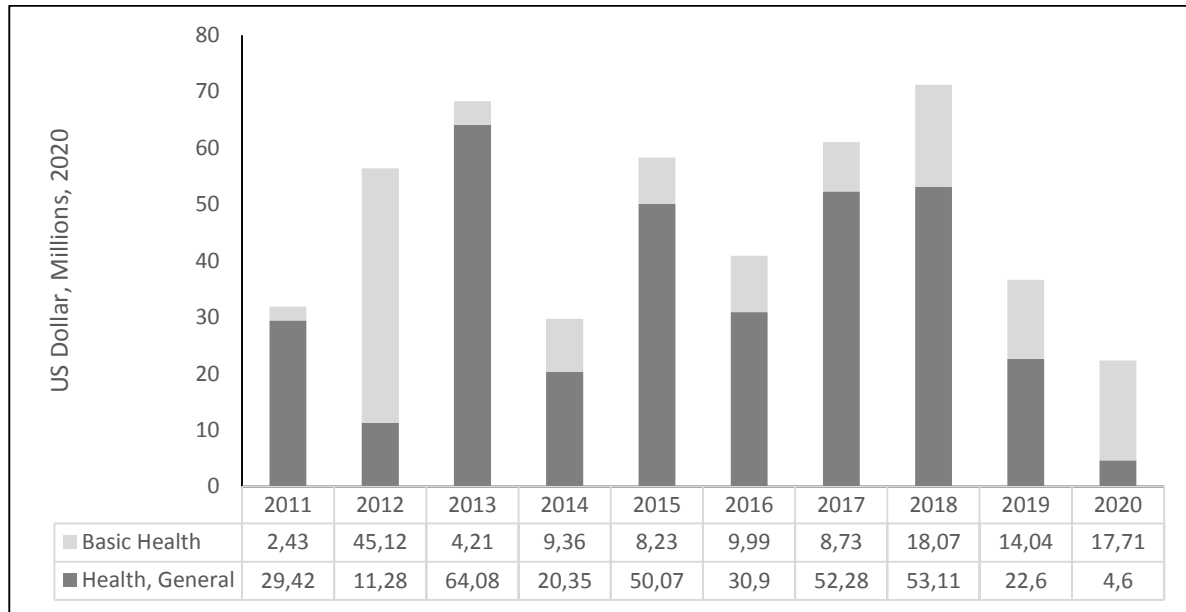
3.4. Health Assistance Activities

In the field of health, which is one of the main indicators of sustainable development, Turkey supports various projects in many developing countries to ensure access to basic health services, improve maternal and child health, fight against infectious diseases, and reduce deaths due to non-communicable diseases (Figure 1). As a result of the institutionalization of global health diplomacy, TİKA, which is a public diplomacy institution, coordinates humanitarian aid activities in the field of health together with the Ministry of Health, AFAD, and the Turkish Red Crescent. With the official development assistance coordinated by TİKA (2021: 59-60), activities such as modernization of health facilities (construction, renovation, maintenance, repair, equipment), ambulance grant, medical laboratory installation, health screening, medical device and material assistance, surgical procedures, training of doctors and health personnel, consultant and doctor assignment, congress, workshop, seminar support are carried out. For example, TİKA (2022: 15) provided training support to 587 doctors/health personnel with the modernization of 8 health facilities in the health sector, the equipment of 76 health facilities in 2021.

In the field of health, many non-governmental organizations, especially the Turkish Red Crescent, carry out emergency and humanitarian aid activities. Turkey's humanitarian aid programs play an important role in developing bilateral relations, especially with countries in the Near and Middle East and Africa. The countries where Turkish NGOs implemented the most projects in 2020 were Yemen, Syria, Ethiopia and Somalia, respectively. For example, rehabilitation services and psychosocial support services were provided to the wounded and disabled (4,563 people) in the Gaza Strip. Since 2006, eye health projects have been implemented in many countries including Niger, Kenya, Pakistan, Lebanon, Somalia, Yemen,

Afghanistan, Mauritania, Tanzania, Congo, Sudan, Autonomous Republic of Chechnya, Uganda, Cameroon, Mali and Bangladesh” (TİKA, 2021: 181-184). In 2020, more than 12,500 health screenings were carried out with 6 projects carried out in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Mali, Niger, Pakistan and Tanzania. In the 4 nutrition health centers built in Aden; Children under the age of 5 and pregnant/nursing mothers are provided with nutritional therapy and preventive health services, and in this context, 2,500 people were treated in 2020. Health services were provided to 11,380 people through the clinic located near the camp where 50,000 local refugees live 13 km away from the city of Mogadishu in Somalia (TİKA, 2021: 182-183).

Figure 1: Amount of Official Development Assistance in the Health Sector, Turkey (2011-2020)



Source: OECD International Development Statistics (2022).

3.5. Hosting for Patients from Various Countries and Health Tourism

Within the framework of the health cooperation agreements made between the Ministry of Health and the Ministries of Health of other countries, patients who cannot be treated in their countries are treated free of charge in Turkey within a certain quota. As of the end of 2021, agreements have been made with 12 countries within this scope and the annual quota number is 1320 patients. Again, within the scope of the Basic Law on Health Service No. 3359, the treatment of maximum 400 foreign patients in public hospitals per year who request treatment in Turkey and whose requests are deemed appropriate by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Health is covered by the Ministry of Health. As can be seen in Table 3, the number of patients brought to Turkey mainly from countries such as Afghanistan, Albania, Palestine, Kyrgyzstan, Sudan and Somalia within the scope of bilateral cooperation in the field of health and medicine decreased in 2020 and 2021 due to the impact of the pandemic.

One of the ways to increase Turkey's soft power and provide foreign exchange income is health tourism. Turkey is an ideal health tourism center with its strategic location, historical and natural beauties, hot springs, sea and climate. It is also a preferred medical tourism region with its qualified human resources, qualifications in the field of health, price advantages and well-equipped hospitals in every way. In recent years, it has developed its tourism infrastructure with state support and its share in the world tourism market has started to increase gradually. While most of the international patients who prefer Turkey are neighboring countries (such as Iraq, Azerbaijan, Georgia), European countries such as the England, Germany, Holland, France and the Turkic Republics such as Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan come to our country to be treated. Within the scope of medical tourism, the most preferred branches of international patients in Turkey are obstetrics and gynecology, eye diseases, child health and diseases, plastic surgery,

orthopedics and traumatology, cardiac surgery, organ transplantation and oncology. There is also a high demand for hair transplantation, botox and other aesthetic procedures especially from Middle Eastern countries (Küçük, 2019: 303-304). With the driving force of health diplomacy, health tourism in Turkey is expected to show a national leverage effect in development.

Table 3: Number of Patients Treated under Bilateral Agreements and Distribution by Country (2017-2021)

Countries	Years				
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Afghanistan	278	273	224	58	13
Albania	100	103	97	22	17
Azerbaijan	49	84	44	14	18
Bulgaria	12	23	11	9	11
Djibouti	10	25	4	2	2
Palestine	29	145	59	49	25
Gambia	1	23	21	14	3
Georgia	3	5	2	2	1
Kazakhstan	4	4	3	2	6
Kyrgyzstan	98	94	102	29	30
Kosovo	107	93	100	27	15
TRNC	28	76	19	0	2
Lebanon	0	1	1	0	7
Moldova	3	5	8	8	4
Mauritania	2	23	18	9	5
Niger	0	48	50	23	8
Uzbekistan	8	12	8	5	3
Russia	2	5	7	2	3
Somalia	42	7	83	82	44
Sudan	101	99	94	42	15
Ukraine	7	9	12	10	20
Yemen	92	97	94	36	9
Greece	10	15	14	6	5
Other countries	37	36	38	17	14
Total	1.023	1.305	1.113	468	280

Source: Directorate General for Public Hospitals, the Ministry of Health of Turkey.

4. Discussion

In the last 20 years, many countries around the world have addressed their foreign policy agendas with humanitarian, strategic, ideological and economic motives with a holistic approach with health policies. Behind these initiatives, the effort of countries to protect their own hegemonic interests, to secure access to raw materials in foreign countries, to increase their influence in the global health field as a donor has come to the fore. Thus, health has formed an integral part of foreign policy with its structure increasingly intertwined with 'aid', 'trade' and 'national security' in many countries. For example, health has become a driver of development policy and programs in some countries, such as Canada (Khazatzadeh-Mahani et al., 2018: 9). For the United States, which has been engaged in health diplomacy for many years, global health is of strategic importance for ensuring national and global security. In this context, the United States follows a multilateral and multi-sectoral approach by developing close cooperation with international organizations. It also makes effective use of health attachés serving in geostrategic regions such as Brazil, China, India, Mexico, South Africa, and in the US mission at the UN and other international organizations in Geneva (US Department of HHS, 2022).

On the other hand, especially Cuba and BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China) are trying to improve and develop their international politico-economic positions through health diplomacy by using health care as a foreign policy tool. As the most spectacular example, Cuba has been striving to improve its international status and gain prestige in the international community since the 1960s through medical diplomacy. Cuba sent 132,000 medical personnel to 103 countries between 1961 and 2014 and provided free medical education to thousands of developing country students in medical schools (Erman, 2016: 87-90). In addition to political gains, Cuba has also gained economically through medical diplomacy. Since the early 2000s, Cuba has sent nearly 20,000 medical personnel to Venezuela in exchange for 100,000 barrels of oil per day at a 40% discount (Feinsilver, 2010: 85-104; Kickbusch, 2011: 2). China has also made significant contributions to Africa's health and health infrastructure since the first medical mission reached Algeria in the early 1960s. China has sent more than 15,000 doctors to more than 47 African countries and treated nearly 180 million African patients. Also after the 3rd China-Africa Summit in November 2006, China started to build 30 hospitals and 30 malaria fighting centers throughout Africa and provided \$37.5 million in grants for malaria drugs (Youde, 2010: 157). China's growing diplomatic aid relations with Africa include hard and soft power elements. From a hard power perspective, health diplomacy provides China with great ease of access to markets and natural resources (such as oil, mining, fishing) in Africa and supports China's agriculture, energy and infrastructure investment strategies. In the study conducted by Shajalal et al. (2017), a statistically significant relationship was found between China's health aid and exports to African countries. In countries such as Angola and South Sudan, the purchase of oil in exchange for financing health projects showed that health aid was linked to commercial projects rather than grant-based. Another example is the signing in 2007 of a \$9 billion agreement between China Railway Engineering Corporation and Sinohydro and the Democratic Republic of Congo, which included the construction of 32 hospitals and 145 health centers in exchange for 10 million tons of copper and 400,000 tons of cobalt (Killeen et al., 2018: 10). From a soft power perspective, it is seen that health diplomacy contributes to China's achievement of a positive image throughout Africa. In recent years, one of the factors that have increased China's geopolitical and geo-economic influence on the African continent has been the Covid-19 pandemic. As seen in the Covid-19 pandemic, China has succeeded in expanding its status as a leading supplier of humanitarian aid and public health products to African countries.

Similarly, from the beginning of the 20th century, Brazil began to intervene in international cooperation programs in the field of health, first with foreign aid and then as a 'laboratory' for the implementation of policies designed by international organizations for the promotion of public health in Latin American countries. "Climate change, trade liberalization, clean energy policy, negotiations on non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, and health-related diplomatic activities (especially the fight against infectious diseases) have helped Brazil establish itself as a serious permanent member of the UN Security Council" (Lee and Gomez, 2011: 61-64). Thus, thanks to its technical capacity and national expertise in the field of health, Brazil has become an important force in regional and global competition. Two notable examples of this type of diplomacy, referred to as 'niche diplomacy', are the cooperation of the Ministry of Health on the treatment of HIV/AIDS and the breast milk banking network pioneered by the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz). In this direction, Brazil has come to the forefront in areas such as human resources training, technology and knowledge transfer as well as strengthening national health institutions through technical cooperation programs especially in Latin American and African countries (Gayard, 2019: 4-5).

India's soft power strategy through health diplomacy has been directed towards the African continent with its humanitarian and geopolitical dimension. India's relationship with African countries in the health sector is particularly concentrated in the following areas: "a) To establish manufacturing units and health infrastructure in African countries, b) To export high-quality and low-cost Indian pharmaceuticals, and c) To provide medical care to all Africans through medical tourism in Indian hospitals" (Mol et al., 2021: 1119). In this context, India conducts health diplomacy for African countries through various programs such as Focus Africa Programme, Team-9 Initiative and Pan Africa e-Network (PAeN). "Under the Focus Africa Programme (2002), life-saving generic drugs and pharmaceuticals are exported at low

prices to countries such as Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa and Tanzania" (Mol et al., 2021: 1119-1120). The Team-9 (2004) initiative provides India with opportunities for education and technology transfer in the field of pharmaceuticals and healthcare. Through PAeN, India shares its expertise in tele-education, telemedicine and ICT services with 53 African countries to minimise the challenges of the healthcare sector (James and Bhatnagar, 2019: 31-33). The investments of Indian private hospitals in Africa have also reached significant dimensions. For example, Apollo Hospitals, which is a multinational Indian hospital chain, builds health facilities in countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Zambia and Tanzania, provides consultancy services and trains medical doctors in these countries (Mol et al., 2021: 1120).

Russia, another actor in the field of health diplomacy, has accelerated its work on global health, especially after hosting the G8 summit in 2006. It strives to build global health capacity by allocating funds in coordination with WHO and other international organizations, especially to combat infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, hepatitis B and malaria (Bliss, 2011: 4-5). After 1980, Iran has made health diplomacy a mainstay and an effective tool to promote itself as a reliable and compassionate partner, to gain prestige and reputation, to highlight the fruits of the revolution and to deepen its relations (Dolatabadi and Kamrava, 2021a: 2-10). For example, Rafsanjani's visit to Kenya, Sudan, Uganda and South Africa in September 1996 enabled Iran to focus on health and medical cooperation. Subsequently, Iran provided financial assistance to Tanzania, Congo, Kenya and Nigeria to improve health systems and build hospitals (Dolatabadi and Kamrava, 2021b: 66). Iran, which provides direct medical assistance to other countries in the Middle East with similar motives, has built at least 20 hospitals in Lebanon's cities damaged by Israeli attacks between 2007 and 2016, 4 in Iraq, where the Shiite population is high, 2 in Afghanistan and 1 in Syria (Dolatabadi and Kamrava, 2021a: 5).

In the Turkish context, it is seen that health diplomacy plays an important role in the attempts to accelerate the political, military, cultural and socio-economic relations of the country. As part of the geopolitical competition for influence with China, India, Russia, Brazil, the United States and Western European countries, it can be said that Turkey uses humanitarian aid as a diplomatic tool to develop and strengthen its bilateral relations, especially with countries in the Balkans, the Caucasus, the African continent and the Near and Middle East. For this purpose, health diplomacy tools such as the establishment of health facilities abroad, bringing patients for treatment, scientific collaborations, granting scholarships to foreign students, donating drug and medical equipment and health humanitarian aid activities of non-governmental organizations are used. These tools serve to bring countries closer together, strengthen diplomatic influence, positive image in the region and religious ties, as well as search for new markets. However, it cannot yet be said that this has a very positive effect in terms of the promotion of health services and therefore attracting medical tourism.

Turkey's investments in the field of health in Albania, Kyrgyzstan, Sudan, Somalia, Palestine and Libya, which seek geopolitical influence, have strategic consequences. When we look at how health diplomacy affects Turkey's investment and exports abroad, it is seen that African countries have become a center of attraction in terms of trade and investment. The increasing young population of the African continent, its workforce and rich natural resources, and the necessity of developing energy, infrastructure, transportation and technology for their access to markets make Africa a great market for all countries of the world. As can be seen in Table 4, when the trade volume of Turkey and African countries where health diplomacy is active is compared, it is observed that imports and exports are increasing and Turkish investments are gradually expanding. According to TURKSTAT data (2022), Turkey's trade with African countries was 4.3 billion dollars in 2002 and exceeded 29 billion dollars in 2021. In addition to the historical and religious dynamics of Somalia and Sudan, its strategic and geographical location and natural resources have been attractive for Turkey. Somalia's Mogadishu airport and port are operated by Turkish companies, and Turkey's largest military base abroad after Qatar is also here. In this respect, as Drager and Fidler (2007: 162) have emphasized, it can be argued that health diplomacy serves an important function as the interface of the relationship between health, foreign policy and trade. As a matter of fact, in the study of Sosthenes (2019: 68), in which Turkey's health diplomacy policy was

analyzed based on stakeholders views, it was stated that health diplomacy is an important tool in creating a market for Turkey's trade volume.

Table 4: Development of Trade and Investment Volume in Countries where Health Diplomacy is Effective (2014-2021)

Countries	Foreign Trade Statistics				Investments
	Import (Thousand US \$)		Export (Thousand US \$)		
	2014	2021	2014	2021	
Somalia	1,718	7,918	63,728	354,859	After the transformation in Turkey-Somalia relations in 2011, new commercial areas have emerged. For example, Mogadishu International Airport (taken over by Favori LLC in September 2013) and Port of Mogadishu (by Albayrak Group since October 2014) have been operated by Turkish companies. With the opportunities arising in the agriculture, livestock and fishing sectors, especially in construction, transportation and communication, the total value of Turkish companies' investments in Somalia has exceeded 100 million dollars (Abdulle, 2019: 468).
Sudan	19,618	104,933	331,378	278,755	Turkish companies are mainly concentrated in the fields of iron and steel, agricultural products, marble, furniture, cement, transportation in Sudan. For example, while Yapı Merkezi Group was constructing bridges and shopping malls in Khartoum, the capital of the country, Karadeniz Holding (Karpowership) realized the first floating power plant project in Sudan.
Niger	40	10,482	35,519	78,183	After the signing of an economic, commercial and technical cooperation agreement between Niger and Turkey in 2013, trade volume and investments began to develop. For example, Summa Group started gold exploration activities in Niger in 2016. In 2018-2020, the construction of the Ministry of Finance building in the capital Niamey, the construction of Diori Hamani International Airport and the Radison Blu Hotel and Convention Center were completed.
Albania	100,34	60,788	327,919	790,304	Turkey has more than \$3,5 billion in investments in Albania, including contracting services. The contribution of the Free Trade Agreement, which has been in force since 2008, to the development of trade relations is quite high. Nearly 600 registered Turkish companies operate in Albania and employ about 15,000 people. In this context, Turkey is one of the largest foreign investors in Albania (Erdoğan, 2022).
Kyrgyzstan	119,998	86,461	467,514	749,304	In Kyrgyzstan, where approximately 300 large or small Turkish companies operate, Turkish investments amount to 3 billion dollars and the annual trade volume between the two countries is gradually increasing (Oğuz, 2022).

Source: Compiled by the author from TURKSTAT data and open sources.

5. Conclusion

Considering the health manpower capacity, experience, knowledge and medical technology; Turkey has great potential to strengthen its rising global soft power status. In this context, health diplomacy offers a valid and concrete tool to increase Turkey's soft power and international prestige in its foreign policy. In recent years, medical diplomacy tools such as the establishment of health facilities abroad, scientific collaborations and training of health personnel, granting scholarships to medical students from abroad, donation of drugs and medical equipment, health aid activities and treatment of foreign patients have contributed to Turkey's soft power.

In the 21st century, Turkey, which has made global health aid an integral part of foreign aid programs, has focused on the development of health systems and the construction of hospitals in the Caucasus, the Balkans, the Near and Middle East and African countries due to their geopolitical, geoeconomic and geostrategic importance. Especially as a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Central Asian Turkic Republics achieved their independence, which was instrumental in shaping Turkish foreign policy and therefore health diplomacy. Especially as a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the independence of the Central Asian Turkic Republics was a factor in the transformation of Turkish foreign policy and thus in the shaping of health diplomacy. Similarly, the relations between African countries and Turkey, which started with the 'opening policy' in the late 1990s and continued with the 'partnership policy', increased the emergency and humanitarian aid activities without any political-ideological targets. Health investments and medical aid in these countries directly and indirectly contribute to Turkey's achievement of its foreign policy goals. However, in recent years, Turkey has started to use health diplomacy as a basis for the development of trade as well as humanitarian purposes. However, it cannot be said that the desired goals have yet been achieved both in the trade of drugs, medical devices and equipment and in increasing Turkey's attractiveness as a destination center in terms of medical tourism. In our opinion, International Health Services Inc. (*USHAŞ*), which was established in 2019 as the relevant institution of the Ministry of Health in order to promote Turkey in the field of international health services and to support the development of the health tourism industry, should assume a more active role in the field of health diplomacy. Again, Turkey's appointment of health attachés in countries with bilateral cooperation agreements or where potential services can be provided in the field of health can also serve as a catalyst in the activation of the health and diplomacy network. Finally, there is a need to develop Turkey's national capacity in the field of vaccines, drugs and medical supplies, which have provided significant gains to many countries in health diplomacy as seen in the Covid-19 pandemic.

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