External and Domestic Challenges for Turkey’s Soft Power and The Role of The EU

*Assist. Prof. Dr. Selcen Öner
Bahçeşehir University
Department of EU Relations

e-mail: selcen.oner@eas.bahcesehir.edu.tr

Abstract

Turkey, which has a democratic and secular political system with a predominantly Muslim population and an EU membership prospect since 1999, has had an increasing influence in its neighbouring regions which have increased its soft power. However, after the start of Arab uprisings, uncertainty in the Middle East and stall of the negotiations with the EU have challenged Turkey’s soft power in the region. This article discusses challenges and prospects facing Turkey’s soft power, especially since 2011, during the AKP government’s third term. It firstly analyses the place and role of soft power in Turkish foreign policy and evaluates the series of new soft power instruments. Secondly, it discusses the stagnation in the reform process and the domestic challenges facing Turkey’s soft power, particularly deficiencies in freedom of speech and freedom of the press, and lastly the role of the Gezi Park protests, and the EU in changes to Turkey’s soft power.