



## Tourism as a Soft Power in Turkish Foreign Policy from the Perspective of Women Ambassadors: The Case of Africa

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### Article History

Received: 02.06.2021

Accepted: 25.08.2021

### Keywords

Tourism

Africa

Women ambassadors

Foreign policy

Gender

### Abstract

The aim of this study is to analyse one of the soft power elements of foreign policy: the tourism industry, Turkey-Africa relations in particular from the perspective of Turkish women ambassadors in Africa. In Africa's tourism sector, Turkey will create added value both for Africa and in terms of gaining economic and political power in Africa on the international platform. In this context, the positive developments since the 2000s, noting Turkey-Africa relations in tourism, will form the basis of this study. From this perspective considering the increasing number of women diplomats in Turkey and in the world of diplomacy, this study focuses on the evaluation of the tourism ambassadorship of Turkish women in Africa. In fact, the worldwide cracks that have begun in the male-dominated structure in diplomacy have also been effective in Turkey. Thus, female ambassadors were appointed to 16 of the 42 Turkish Embassies in Africa. Therefore, the effect of female ambassadors, who have an important place in Turkish foreign policy in Africa with their representation rate of 30%, has not only been limited to the development of tourism relations, but been an important factor that triggers cooperation in every field imaginable in Turkey's relations with African countries. Based on this, semi-structured in-depth interviews are conducted with female Turkish ambassadors in Zambia, Rwanda, South Africa and Ethiopia. Within the scope of the interviews (Turkish women ambassadors in Africa), the number of tourists in the country they are in for the tourism sector, tourist information activities, studies on services offered to Turkish tourists, visa agreements, the presence of a tourism agency, bilateral tourism agreements, Turkish investors' investments in the tourism sector, and women's employment in the tourism sector are analysed. In the analysis, there is a general consensus on the need to increase investments in areas such as transportation, energy, water and telecommunications, as well as infrastructural problems, the problem of reduction in biodiversity, which is a result of climate change, security (e.g., terrorism, ethnic separatist movements), political and economic stability problems. It is concluded that there is an important potential that can be developed in the fields of adventure tourism, convention and fair tourism, and health tourism, if a solution is found.

### Article Type

Research Article

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DOI:10.21325/jotags.2021.850

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the most important areas of the economy which is not just about tourist visits and their numerical data. So much so that tourism is a sensitive service sector that affects a wide range of sectors from the agricultural sector to the manufacturing sector, and it is also affected by many factors such as security and stability. Therefore, tourism is not only tourism, but also an industry. Tourism, which keeps rural areas alive (EAC, 2020), is much more important for the African Continent, where the majority of the population lives in rural areas, and developing or less developed countries are concentrated.

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), for the first time in the history of the continent, the number of tourists from all over the world has exceeded the 1 billion threshold (1 billion 32 million) (Tepebaş, 2014), and African countries have felt the presence of tourism in the increase of their economic prosperity. Africa, which has gained a significant momentum after 2012, was severely (70%) affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and suffered a loss of 1.3 trillion dollars (UNWTO, 2021; Ortahamamcilar, 2021). The pandemic has adversely affected the tourism industry and employment in Africa. In this context, the African Development Bank estimates that tourism-dependent economies such as Mauritius, Seychelles and Cape Verde are more negatively affected than other countries (Tepebaş, 2021). Africa, which aims to overcome this process with projects such as the “First Tourism Acceleration Program in Sub-Saharan Africa” jointly organised by the UNWTO and Google, puts “digitalisation in tourism” as a key element at its centre. Additionally, plans for regional African destinations are also made for sustainable tourism in the Continent (UNWTO, 2020).

Although Africa is suitable for all types of tourism (e.g., safari tourism, beach tourism, roots tourism, cultural/heritage and archaeological tourism, ethnic tourism, overland tourism) (Dieke, 2003, p. 289), it will be able to make a much greater economic contribution to this sector with the necessary investments. In this context, it may be stated that not only UNWTO but also the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund are active in the development of tourism in Africa. In this context, the Africa Regional Tourism Strategy of the World Bank (Christie, Fernandes, Messerli & Twining-Ward., 2013, p.10) and the IMF’s predictions on the Continent, especially Covid-19 (Behsudi, 2020, p. 37-39) are very important.

It is estimated that African tourism will bring more or less all sectors of the continent to life. Although the diversity in the African geography, rich cultural heritage, national parks, lakes, waterfalls and islands unique to the continent provide advantages in comparison to regional tourism, this potential cannot be exploited to the extent required due to the infrastructural deficiencies in Africa. At this point, there is a general consensus on the need to increase investments in areas such as transportation, energy, water and telecommunications in African countries. In addition to the infrastructural problems, the reduction in biodiversity, security (e.g., terrorism, ethnic separatist movements) and political and economic stability problems are other issues to which African states should find solutions (Tepebaş, 2014). Another issue that may affect the development of African tourism is health tourism. The Continent which sends a large number of African tourists to different countries, especially India for health tourism (Güven, 2018), should see this as a loss and not lose the domestic Continental tourist in this economic sense.

After all, tourism represents 9% of global trade for Africa and one in 10 jobs directly or indirectly, according to UNWTO data. On the other hand, the sector in which 54% of the workforce consists of women means an inclusive

growth for the African population. (Güvener, 2020). Additionally, tourism, which determines the bilateral and multilateral relations of countries, can be an important foreign policy tool for African countries.

Tourism brings together different cultures, establishing a stronger bond between countries and politicians and contributing to international peace. In this study, considering this feature of tourism, attention will be drawn to the importance of tourism in Turkey-Africa relations, which have developed positively. While tourism is claimed to be an important sector for Turkey, it may also gain economic strength and political effectiveness in Africa. Indeed, in accordance with its foreign policy and interests, Turkey signed 63 different Tourism Cooperation Agreements (TCA) with other countries, among which 11 are African countries. In 5 of these 11 countries, women ambassadors, from among the 16 in 42 African countries, are serving.

In light of these developments, the tourism element, which is considered as soft power-related foreign policy, the efforts of women ambassadors are expected to be effective in Turkey-Africa relations in the future. From this point of view, in the study, semi-structured in-depth interviews were held with female Turkish ambassadors in Africa, and their studies and evaluations for the tourism of the country they were in were analysed.

This study consists of three parts. In the first part, the methodology of the study is explained. In the second part, which consists of a literature review, the conceptual framework is presented to create the basis for the evaluations of women ambassadors. The conceptual framework of Turkey-Africa relations, foreign policy-tourism relations, the place of women in diplomacy are discussed. In the discussion and analysis part of the study, studies and evaluations of the women Turkish ambassadors in Africa on tourism in the countries where they serve are analysed. In the conclusion, an overall assessment with Turkey-Africa relations is presented, and recommendations are offered about what can be done for the development of the tourism sector.

## **Methodology**

The semi-structured in-depth interview technique was used in the study to look at tourism, which is defined as a soft power factor in Turkish foreign policy, from the perspective of women ambassadors in the African Continent. As stated by Kumar (1999), the in-depth interview technique is a technique preferred by researchers because it is a technique used to collect primary data. When this general technique is evaluated together with its preliminary preparations, the way it is carried out and the analysis process afterwards, it shows a structure that includes many techniques.

Social scientists criticise positivist research methods and express opinions affirming methods based on quality. In-depth interviewing is one of the methods that is accepted in this sense. In terms of women's studies, women's expression of their thoughts, feelings and memories in their own words increases the effectiveness of a study. This way, something can be learned from women, and women can be included in a male-dominated structure. At the same time, women's expression of their feelings and thoughts in in-depth interviews socialises them (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992, p. 19-21). Feminist researchers' use of the in-depth interview method has contributed to the social sciences. Concepts of the social sciences have changed and become concepts that include women. Moreover, new ways of looking at the world from different perspectives have been found. This multi-faceted structure of the in-depth interview method has matched the feminist content and increased the desire of feminist researchers to use this method (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992, p. 44-45). It is important for the validity of the study to determine the sample

representing the whole population to perform data analysis in a healthy manner in this method. As stated by Arksey and Knight (1999), the sample size should be chosen as a qualified majority due to the long analysis process. Based on this point, the sample of our study was determined from among the 16 Turkish women ambassadors in the African Continent study.

With the positive developments in Turkey's relations with Africa in recent years, the number of Turkish embassies in Africa has had an increase. In order to determine the women ambassadors serving in the Turkish embassies in the Continent and their work, the research was conducted primarily on the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs website. In this research, it was determined that 39 Turkish ambassadors were appointed to African countries, and 12 of them were women. There are Turkish women ambassadors in Algeria, Gabon, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Namibia, Zambia, Rwanda, South Africa, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Togo, and Sierra Leone. During the in-depth interviews with the women ambassadors, it was learned that women ambassadors were also serving in Botswana, Mozambique, Burundi and Equatorial Guinea. Thus, the actual number was learned to be 16, but the last four countries could not be contacted because they did not have e-mail addresses for their embassies. In order to reach women ambassadors and request a meeting for the study, again, an attempt was made to access their individual contact information on the website of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, since only the institutional phone and e-mail addresses of the embassies are shared on the website, the researchers tried to contact women ambassadors through their institutional e-mail addresses. A text explaining the purpose of the study was prepared, and this text was sent to the institutional e-mail addresses of the embassies in the country where the female ambassadors serve. In the annex of this text, questions prepared in accordance with the purpose of the study were also sent, and an appointment was requested. In the questions prepared for the semi-structured in-depth interviews, it was intended to obtain information about the number of tourists in the country they are in, tourist information activities, studies on services offered to Turkish tourists, visa agreements, presence of tourism representation, bilateral tourism agreements, investments of Turkish investors in the tourism sector, and employment of women in the tourism sector.

Four Turkish female ambassadors from Zambia, Rwanda, South Africa and Ethiopia responded positively to the appointment requests. One of them sent a written answer to the questions, and talks were held with the other three in February (2021) by making a live connection via Google Meet. The interviews lasted about one hour for each participant. The Togo ambassador in our sample could not be included in the analysis process, because it is a newly established embassy and has not started its operations. The Turkish female ambassador assigned to Sierra Leone was excluded from the sample because it was stated that she would be able to take office in March 2021 at the earliest.

Since the contact information of the four embassies mentioned above could not be reached, these countries could not be considered within the scope of the study. Therefore, the study was limited to four African countries. It is not possible to generalise the findings and analyses in our study to all Turkish women ambassadors serving in the African Continent. This was a limitation of the study.

The ethics committee approval document required for data collection for this study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Sakarya University of Applied Sciences with the decision numbered 045.99/11543 and dated 5 May 2021.

## Literature Review

### Turkey-Africa Relations: Past and Present

Turkey-Africa relations, showing a significant momentum in recent years, actually have a much deeper-rooted history. Considering the Turkish influence in Africa, it is possible to trace the process back to the 9th century. In this context, although African societies are known to have developed relations with Arab traders for the first time, their encounter and interaction with Turks can be dated back to distant history. In more recent history, the Ottoman Empire's activities to attract attention<sup>1</sup> and increase interaction with the African public were an important element in shaping the Continent and its relations with today's Turkey. Turkey-Africa relations have historically been analysed in studies on topics such as Tolunoğulları<sup>2</sup>-Africa relations, Ottoman-African relations, Turkey (independence process)-Africa relations, Turkey (independent process)-Africa relations, and the 1998 Opening to Africa Action Plan. Within the scope of this study, the historical process will not be discussed in great detail, since the evaluation of recent relations will be taken as the basis.

After the foundation of the Republic of Turkey, one of the key points determining the course of its relations with Africa was that Turkey turned towards the West and suspended its relations with the rest of the world including Africa. Another point is that Turkey needed to expand towards Africa after being left alone regarding the Cyprus crisis. Turkey, who strengthened its relations with Europe and the United States as a requirement of the international conjuncture in the 1960s, had remained indifferent towards starting closer relations with Non-Aligned African countries before they gained independence, but later, after these countries started taking part on the Greek side of the Cyprus issue within the United Nations, Turkey has come to realise the current situation, that is, these countries have had an effective status in the United Nations. In this process, the colonial period in the Continent started to be replaced by the period of independence. In 1965, Turkey sent its goodwill committees consisting of politicians, diplomats, journalists and members of academia to various African, Asian and Latin American countries to explain its stance in the Cyprus crisis. The first three of these delegations were directed to Africa, were to Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, Liberia, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Senegal, the second set of them was sent to Cameroon, Gabon, Congo, Central African Republic and Chad, and the third set was sent to Abyssinia, Kenya, Somalia, Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Malawi, Madagascar, Sudan, Libya and Tunisia (Fırat, 1997, p. 191-192; Fırat, 2007, p. 2).

The third and biggest breakthrough in African issues is the change of government that took place in Turkey in 1998 after the Opening to Africa Action Plan. With the Justice and Development Party government taking Turkey leadership and the globalisation process gaining momentum with technology, Turkey started to implement versatile policies. The African initiative, which may be regarded as the most important of these, has achieved such a great momentum that economic, political and diplomatic relations with the Continent have developed considerably with the existence of cultural and historical ties. It is possible to observe this situation in the trade volume of Turkey with the Continent, the number of embassies opened bilaterally, the flights of Turkish Airlines and even the scholarships given by NGOs and states to African individuals. Furthermore, the year 2005 was declared the Year of Africa in Turkey, a strategic partnership was declared by the African Union and African countries, and Turkey was elected as

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<sup>1</sup> It begins with the conquest of Egypt by Yavuz Sultan Selim in 1517.

<sup>2</sup> It is the Muslim Turkish state established in Egypt in 875.

a non-permanent member of the UN security council for the period of 2009-2010. Although the Continent's current relations with Turkey had been suspended for a certain period, of these relations continue to show a rapid growth today.

### **Foreign Policy and Tourism Relations**

During the Cold War, which ended after the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, many countries realised that the only key to effective and legitimate foreign policy is not having too many material resources or weapons of mass destruction. In this context, different ways to influence other countries have begun to emerge in changing foreign policy strategies. (Yegin, 2015, p. 8-9). One of different ways is the phenomenon of soft power.

Soft power is defined as “the ability of a country to manipulate the preferences of other countries in line with its own interests by using its own history, cultural values, social characteristics, educated population, traditions, art, cinema, architecture, music, etc.” Soft power replaced hard power because of international organisations, legal regulations and increasing public opinion in international politics, and asymmetric methods made conventional military methods ineffective (Akbaş & Tuna, 2012, p. 7-8).

Countries that determine strategies with hard power practices in their relations with other countries create a negative image by promoting a threatening or interventionist perception in the international public opinion. Soft power practices are accepted by the international public opinion and raise sympathy. At the same time, directing the country that is addressed with soft power practices towards common values, controlling it by attracting it, eliminates the need to use high-cost hard power. A country's history, culture, harmonious attitude, public and foreign political values it adheres to, education level, state institutions, traditions, ability to create an agenda in the international public opinion, and social characteristics are some resources that feed its soft power potential (Akbaş & Tuna, 2016, p. 78-79). Unlike hard power, soft power consists of a combination of elements such as technology, tourism, literature, poetry, universities, films, beyond economic and military elements, and it reveals the depth of the social capital of states (Kalm, 2010, p. 1).

The tourism industry, which is considered as a soft power element, is a sector that has grown rapidly after World War II, contributed greatly to the world's economy and continues to grow. The figures of UNWTO show that the number of tourists traveling around the world, which was 25 million in the 1950s, increased to 278 million in 1980, 674 million in 2000 and 1 billion 260 million in 2015. World tourism revenues increased from \$2 billion in the 1950s to \$1 trillion 260 billion in 2015, which accounts for 7% of the world's exports (UNWTO, 2016, p. 2-3).

The principle Turkey has adopted as “Turkish foreign policy aims a turbulent regional and international environment while protecting the interests of Turkey at the same time and the formation of favourable conditions for the achievement of peace and sustainable development in the world.” (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021) shows that it has adopted the use of soft power in foreign policy.

Güleç, İlban and Aydemir (2020, p. 292-293) stated that for Turkey, who has faced prejudice from Western countries and failed to make itself understood in Asia and Africa for many years, tourism has a significant place in foreign policy to be able to have an effective position in the global system. That is, with the added value created by the tourism industry, Turkey can gain both political influence and economic power on the international platform.

Since tourism brings different cultures together and enables people to socialise, it creates more robust relations between countries. Indeed, with this feature, tourism establishes a healthy and strong bond between politicians. Thus, it also serves international peace (Aydemir, 2014, p. 936). De Villiers (2014, p. 80) also states that tourism is an important factor in the formation of peace and brotherhood between host and visitor peoples by bringing together different cultures in different geographies. Additionally, he emphasises that political peace, security and economic development are essential for the realisation of this phenomenon.

In line with its foreign policy and interests, Turkey has signed 63 Tourism Cooperation Agreements in total, including 59 bilateral ones, 3 multilateral ones and 1 trilateral one. A total of 12 Tourism Cooperation Memoranda of Understanding, including one trilateral and 11 multilateral ones, were signed, in addition to a Tourism Joint Commission Meeting Protocol with the participation of 30 countries. In addition to these agreements and protocols, the 13th-Term Tourism Business Council with Germany, the 7th Tourism Forum with Greece, the 4th Regional Tourism Meeting with Syria and the 1st-Term Tourism Working Group Meeting with India were organised (Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2021a).

Turkey has signed a tourism agreement with 11 countries in Africa (Algeria, Republic of Ethiopia, Morocco, Ivory Coast, Gabon, South Africa, Republic of Congo, Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, Uganda). Some of these countries are middle-income countries, and they have common history cultural backgrounds with Turkey. However, in Sub-Saharan Africa, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana and Sudan are impoverished countries, and Turkey has also signed “Tourism Cooperation Agreements” (TCA) with these countries.

A TCA covers topics such as tourism education, investment, promotion and marketing, as well as other tourism-related issues in line with the recommendation of one of its parties. It is valid for a period of 5 years. If one of the parties does not notify the other party of the cancellation or renewal of the agreement through diplomatic channels 6 months before the end of the 5-year period, the agreement becomes valid for another 5 years (Turkish Ministry of Development, 2018, p. 12-13). Having examined the agreements between Turkey and African countries, Aydemir and Honey (2018) stated that all have similar qualifications. With these agreements, countries want to develop and market tourism products by sharing knowledge and experience, form working groups for tourism sector representatives in their countries and exchange technical knowledge by creating a mutual expert exchange environment with seminars and training organisations. The purpose of bilateral tourism agreements is to develop relations with mutual cooperation on tourism and increase the number of tourists coming to the country. However, in tourism cooperation agreements with African countries, it is a matter of using the cooperation with these countries in every field as a policy tool rather than this purpose. Likewise, the agreements signed so far had not had a significant impact on touristic travel. The number of tourists coming to Turkey from African countries is lower than a million. Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana and Sudan defined as Sub-Saharan African countries are some of the poorest countries in the world which are all far from Turkey. Income and distance to destination are important factors in touristic demand (Aydemir & Bal, 2018). Thus, the meaning of developing tourism relations between Africa and Turkey is not limited to tourism. In this context, tourism, as soft power in Turkish foreign policy, is an important factor that triggers cooperation in every conceivable area in relations with the Continent.

In terms of its general definition, foreign policy is a power tool that determines the relations of a country with other countries or groups of countries. In this context, although foreign policy has been referred to as state-level

relations with a realistic perspective until recently, it now includes all kinds of inter-communal interactions, with the effect of the rising globalisation and technology in the international system. Therefore, as much as politics, health, culture, civil society, social communication, trade, economy, education, tourism, and every other conceivable field are now in interaction with foreign policy. In other words, these areas are affected by foreign policy (e.g., treaties, cooperation, decisions), or they may affect foreign policy. Today, foreign policy, which is a power tool of states, goes beyond the state level and is intertwined with other soft power elements. Within the scope of the study, the relationship between foreign policy as a tool of power and the tourism industry as a soft power element of foreign policy is examined through interviews with Turkish women ambassadors in Africa.

### **Women in Diplomacy**

The Congress of Vienna, held in 1815, is an important beginning for the professionalisation of diplomacy. However, this Congress caused restrictions on the informal roles of women in diplomacy, in forming inter-state alliances and in political negotiations. It has been possible for women to take official roles in diplomacy since the first half of the 20th century. In this context, the first female diplomats were appointed in Brazil in 1918, in the United States of America (USA) in 1922 and in France in 1930 (Rumelili & Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm, 2020, p. 20-21).

In the history of the Republic of Turkey, Adile Ayda was the first female officer to the Foreign Ministry as a career diplomat, appointed in 1932. However, Ayda left the ministry a year later and switched to an academic career, and in 1958, she returned to the ministry and rose to the position of legation (Ergin, 2019). The reason for Ayda's leave from the Foreign Ministry was the decree enacted in 1934 that prohibited women from being appointed to foreign representation offices, and with the abolition of the decree in 1957, she returned to her diplomatic career (Rumelili & Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm, 2020). It was after 1954 that female professional officers began to be regularly recruited to the Ministry (Başkal, 2021, p. 43). Fatin Rüştü Zorlu's Foreign Ministry period was the first time when women took a real step in foreign affairs, and from 1957 to 1959, 6 women diplomats took office (Ergin, 2019). In 1972, 5 women were successful in the occupational civil service examination, and such a number of women diplomats was accepted to the Foreign Ministry for the first time (Başkal, 2021, p. 43). Meanwhile, Turkey's first female ambassador, Filiz Dinçmen, was appointed to the Hague (Netherlands) in 1982.

Since the first half of the 20th century, women's official duty in diplomacy did not immediately affect the change in the male-dominated and sexist structure of international relations and diplomacy. In the early 1990s, leading figures such as Ann Tickner, Sandra Harding, Christine Sylvester, Cynthia Enloe began to question why state and international administrators, or decision-makers in foreign policy are generally men, why women are not empowered in foreign policy, and the neutrality of international relations to gender issues. With these inquiries, the feminist international relations approach was born, and the causes of the absence of women in this field began to be sought (Tür & Koyuncu, 2010, p. 5). The questioning of the work at the United Nations 4th World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 with the effect of the gender mainstreaming strategy, increased the criticism and awareness of the sexist nature of diplomacy in male-dominated institutions (Rumelili & Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm, 2020). Unfortunately, from the 1920s to the 1970s, existing sexist practices in male-dominated diplomacy continued and affected women's careers in this field negatively. Marriage is prohibited for women diplomats in many Western countries. The difficulty in establishing a family-career-life balance caused women diplomats to resign by their own choice or for their superiors to create sexist job divisions based on the assumption that this difficulty would negatively



affect the professional mission of women diplomats. Within the framework of this division of labour, male diplomats were assigned to higher positions in the profession and with significant appointments in terms of status, while female diplomats were mostly employed in consular services in countries where the level of gender equality was high (Rumelili & Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm, 2020).

Volkan Vural, one of the former ambassadors, said that, in the past, there were very well-known foreign officials who viewed the existence of women negatively in the profession of diplomacy, and this view both created deterrence and discouraged women from entering the Ministry for many years, thus keeping the doors closed to women. According to Vural, the dominant view that women cannot serve in difficult positions or deprived regions, they will act under the influence of their spouses when they get married, and giving birth will negatively affect their professional continuity has been an important factor in the admission of women to the profession (Ergin, 2019).

Vural also stressed that this dominant opinion has begun to change in recent years in Turkey and worldwide. While the number of women is increasing in diplomacy, there are also firsts. Saudi Arabia has appointed women to its embassies in the USA in 2019 (trthaber.com, 2021) and the United Kingdom in 2020 (Yürük, 2020) for the first time. The European Union's (EU) policy director Laura Schiemichen (2019, p. 4) also noted that transatlantic partners advocated a progressive enlightenment, including gender equality in the world after the Cold War, and key figures such as Hillary Clinton, Condoleezza Rice, Madeleine Albright, Federica Mogherini and Catherine Ashton have been in a leading position in the diplomacy teams of significant world power on both sides of the Atlantic.

According to 2018 data, only 15% of the ambassadors serving around the world are women. In addition to numerous difficulties, the implicit thought that women act out of emotions and cannot keep secrets has been effective in this low number. Nevertheless, the number is increasing day by day. In the USA, where it was forbidden for women ambassadors to marry until 1972, the rate of women serving in foreign affairs reached the peak with 40% in 2017 and decreased to 33% in 2018. In EU countries, the rate of women reaching a peak in 2014 at 22% became 21% in 2018. Women are disproportionately included in underdeveloped African countries, multilateral organisations and formerly Soviet states (Schiemichen, 2019, p. 3-5).

In the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there are 64 women out of 257 ambassadors in general. Thirty-nine of these female ambassadors are tasked with foreign missions, and 25 are in the centre. The number of women in positions on the way to the embassy is gradually increasing. In the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, women have 16 deputy general director positions and 9 general director positions. Considering these figures, it is seen that 32.1% of general directorates and 30.1% of deputy general directorates are undertaken by women. Six hundred and eighty-eight of the 1921 career officers are women, constituting a ratio of 35.8% (gazetebirlik.com, 2021).

The region with the highest rate of Turkish women ambassadors is the Scandinavian region, where the lowest rate is in the Middle East. Nordic countries are followed by North America and EU countries. No female ambassador has been appointed to countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iran, Russia, Kazakhstan and South Korea. The reason why women ambassadors are so selective in their appointments is often explained by the prevailing conservative gender norms in these countries (Süleymanoğlu-Kurum & Rumelili, 2018, p. 9). Women ambassadors are mostly positioned in underdeveloped African countries such as South Sudan, Burundi, Niger, Ethiopia, Senegal, Benin, Chad and Congo. Every African nation is important to Europe. Regarding political activity in East Africa, Ethiopia is important

in terms of sending aid to Kenya, Somalia and South Sudan as the economic power of humanitarian aid. The more we go to the south of the Sahara, the more liberal behaviour is seen towards women (Schiemichen, 2019, p. 16).

Sixteen of 39 women ambassadors serving in Turkish foreign missions are in Africa. The countries where these women ambassadors are stationed are Algeria, Gabon, Ghana, Ivory, Namibia, Zambia, Rwanda, South Africa, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Togo, Sierra Leone, Botswana, Mozambique, Burundi and Equatorial Guinea (mfa.gov.tr, 2021). Turkey's rate of female ambassadors in Africa is 30.76%. Since the 2000s, in line with the positive developments in Turkey-Africa relations, the number of embassies opened in the Continent is increasing day by day. At the same time, the number of women in the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs is also increasing, and this increasing number is being utilised in embassies in Africa.

The male-dominated structure of diplomacy has begun to transform with the increasing number of women entering the profession. In 2014, the Swedish government announced that it would follow a feminist foreign policy, aimed at a gender-sensitive, cosmopolitan and human rights-oriented policy. In 2016, Julie Bishop, the first female foreign minister in Australia, adopted the "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy" and made it the main target of foreign policy (Süleymanoğlu-Kurum & Rumelili, 2018, p. 4). There is an expectation that with the leading roles that women will assume in diplomacy, normative and ethical values will come to the fore, and the effects of international conflicts and crises on women will be taken into account (Rumelili & Süleymanoğlu-Kurum, 2020). The rise of women's performance in diplomacy has also led to a rise in the prevalence of feminist approaches. This rise has led to an increase in international non-governmental organisation activities, as well as an increase in the activities of women's organisations and feminist groups in international relations issues such as refugees, human rights and the environment (Ataman, 2009, p. 8).

Within the framework of the concept of gender equality, thoughts on gender have recently focused on the policy of mainstreaming the issue of equal representation, based on the idea of "who is at the table and how policies of different genders affect people". How the presence of women will create new value rather than scientific contributions is being explored. In this context, effective leadership and effective diplomacy are important, and these must be in the hands of a diverse and inclusive set of individuals. Madeleine Albright drew attention to the importance of quality rather than quantity by saying, "Having more women at the table does not mean the whole world will be better. If you think so, you forgot about high school" (Schiemichen, 2019, p. 5).

Most cases in the book "Gendering Diplomacy and International Negotiation" compiled by Aggestam and Towns (2018) show that women can gain a place in diplomacy by displaying masculine characteristics. This situation is confirmed by the fact that Adile Ayda said she carried both masculinity and femininity together after she returned to her duty in diplomacy after 23 years and that ambassador Sumru Noyan stated she followed football matches to create a common language with her male colleagues. Additionally, women diplomats emphasised that the qualities of being a woman give them an advantage in diplomacy, they gather good intelligence because they are more active and social in the profession, they do not forget details because they are hardworking and organised, they solve problems successfully with empathy and communication skills, and they can reach local women more effectively. Therefore, these discourses reproduce the dominant masculine structure of the diplomatic institution, together with the positivity of women entering diplomacy (Rumelili & Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm, 2020).

## Discussion and Analysis

In this study, which aimed to look at tourism as a soft power element in Turkish foreign policy from the perspective of Turkish women ambassadors in Africa, the examples of the Republic of South Africa, Zambia, Rwanda and Ethiopia are discussed here. Considering that some types of tourism (e.g., beach tourism, ecotourism, adventure tourism,) have potential for all 4 countries, it may be stated that the definition of "exotic African country" may be appropriate for each of them. In this context, one may say that tourism, which is an element of soft power in foreign policy, has a very important potential in the economy of all 4 countries. Furthermore, types of tourism such as science tourism, convention and fair tourism and health tourism may be argued to have a potential for development. When Africa is examined in particular, it has been observed that 16 of the 44 ambassadors of Turkey to the Continent are women, the General Director of the Bilateral Political Affairs Office for Africa of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs is a woman,<sup>3</sup> and these number are increasing steadily. Additionally, the fact that women ambassadors have handed over their duties to other women diplomats is another important development identified in this study.<sup>4</sup>

Again, it was understood that none of the 4 interviewed ambassadors had encountered any obstacles or discrimination as female diplomats, and in contrast, they were supported. In this regard, breaking the male-dominated structure of diplomacy that had existed all over the world before the 1990s after the 1990s may be considered as a very important development for Turkish diplomacy. So much so that, according to Turkey's Ambassador to South Africa, Elif Çomoğlu Ülgen, the increase in the number of women diplomats in today's Turkey has reached levels comparable to Nordic countries. This result is based on the following:

- After the 1990s, female graduates sought careers in diplomacy,
- Women diplomats are enduring with great faith and will for the profession after being accepted into the profession and dedicate themselves to the profession,
- They arrange their private lives according to the requirements of the profession,
- The political authority has paved the way for women diplomats,
- Recruitment has been made for the profession without discrimination between men and women and according to the merit.

Therefore, according to Çomoğlu Ülgen, a diplomacy evolving from man to woman is seen in Turkish foreign policy. Besides, Çomoğlu Ülgen, who asserted that the female physiology is more sensitive in fast decision-making, multitasking and quickly accepting responsibility in Turkey's foreign policy, stated that she saw the relative benefits of working with women. At the same time, she stated that she, as a woman, always saw the advantages of being a woman in her mission, even in the most difficult conditions, compared to her male colleagues.

The biggest dilemma of South Africa, where women are at the forefront, is that it ranks in the top 5 in the world rankings in femicide, even though there are 50% women in the parliament. In the Republic of South Africa, which is the most important indicator that the representation rate of women does not prevent violence against women, the rate

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<sup>3</sup>Ambassador Nur Sağman, Deputy General Director of Bilateral Political Affairs for Africa, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

<sup>4</sup> South African Ambassador Elif Çomoğlu Ülgen will hand over her post to Ayşegül Kandaş.

of women in the tourism sector is high as in every sector. Therefore, the unemployment of women in tourism, which is one of the sectors most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, is another issue that draws attention. Considering the country as a whole, the income distribution is quite unfair. Such that, 85% of the property in the country belongs to 15% of the population. Ninety-five percent of the wealthiest 15% of the population is white. For this reason, racism is the biggest problem in the country. While the majority of blacks work in the service sector which includes tourism, especially those who benefit from domestic tourism are the wealthy minority. As a result, the majority of those who are unemployed in the field of tourism are black women. In this regard, the Republic of South Africa has prioritised women's employment in its tourism strategy announced in January 2021. Minimal incentives are foreseen in this tourism strategy, which is still on paper.

Considering Turkey-South Africa relations in the context of tourism, although there is no present agreement, this has been designated as a significant policy area in recent years. It may be argued that the fact that Turkish Airlines provided direct 9-hour flights to the country prior to the COVID-19 pandemic process, Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency activities and Turkish TV series which have expanded to Africa in recent years (especially the *Diriliş Ertuğrul* series) have been effective factors in bilateral tourism relations. Likewise, between 2016-2019, the number of tourists arriving at Turkey from the Republic of South Africa quadrupled (increased from 15,000 to 75,000). According to Çomoğlu Ülgen, the outgoing South African tourists to Turkey visit the country for a 2nd and 3rd time as they consider Turkey a safe, inexpensive, high-quality and beautiful destination. In addition to this, the preference of Turkish Airlines by South Africans is very prestigious for Turkey. On the other hand, the main reason for the low numbers of tourists coming from Turkey to South Africa is that closer geographical regions such as Europe and the Middle East are more inexpensive alternatives for travel for Turks, and traveling to South Africa is considered expensive and a luxury. This shows that it is essential for the Republic of South Africa to direct its investments in tourism towards mass tourism.

Stating that there are not many Turkish employees in the field of tourism in South Africa but believing that the number will increase in the near future, Çomoğlu Ülgen claimed that the geography, which does not harbour prejudices against Turks, is an important potential for Turkish tourism professionals.

Şebnem İncesu, who carried out her first ambassadorial duty in Zambia, described the increase in the number of women diplomats as "should be due to the conjuncture" like Çomoğlu Ülgen. Indeed, in Zambia, where women have important and high-level positions, it is observed that women mostly work in the agricultural sector. In this context, İncesu gave the good news that, regarding women's affairs between Zambia and Turkey, in February 2020, in the "First Term Joint Economic Commission Meeting" on the topic between the two countries, the "Cooperation Memorandum of Understanding on the Empowerment of Women" was signed.

İncesu stated that Zambia is a very rich country in terms of its natural and cultural heritage, especially the world-famous Victoria Falls, registered on the UNESCO World Heritage List, archaeological and historical protected areas that carry significance in terms of the history of the world and the Continent and vibrant wildlife within 19 national parks extending across an area of 65 thousand square kilometres.

Emphasising that tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors in Zambia, İncesu stated that tourism is one of the leading sectors that can diversify the economy in the 7th National Development Plan of Zambia. According to İncesu, in this respect, the international experience of Turkey in fields such as tourism, hospitality and tour guidance may be

made use of in Zambia. İncesu also said, the service sector is also suitable for investment in areas such as aviation services, information processing, health tourism, logistics, and consultancy.

Stressing that Turkish Airlines flights to Lusaka-Zambia could increase the flow of tourists between Turkey and Zambia, İncesu specified that there is no official representation office for tourism in the country. In recent months, the collaboration between the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency and the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism held training programs on various topics in Ankara and Lusaka for officials of the Zambian Tourism Ministry, the Zambian Tourism Authority Accommodations Institute and private sector representatives. TAC, which was signed between the two countries on 28 July 2018 and entered into force on 27 February 2019, foresees exchange programs between the parties through tourism training, technical assistance, educational trips and expert exchange in the fields of tourism. Zambia side created an Implementation Matrix on the agreement and submitted it to the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Although the absence of Turkish tourism professionals in Zambia is a negative issue, it may be stated that potential collaborations could be achieved in the near future.

In the words of Turkey's Ambassador Yaprak Alp in Ethiopia, which is accepted to have the roots of humanity, "Ethiopia is a very interesting place in terms of tourism. It was one of the first countries to accept Islam and a country that accepted Christianity in the 4th century. It is also one of the most established Christian countries. Judaism also has a long history in the country. Such that, Ethiopian Jews have older traditions than Israeli Jews. Therefore, the incredible mountains in the north, together with their churches, mosques and culture, take your breath away. The nature of Ethiopia is magnificent, and there are many places to visit in the country."

Turkey makes most investments in Ethiopia among Sub-Saharan countries. As Alp emphasised, 2.5 billion dollars of Turkey's 6-billion-dollar investment in Sub-Saharan Africa is made to Ethiopia. While there were 3 Turkish companies investing in the country in 2005, the number of Turkish companies investing reached 251 in 2021. However, unfortunately, there is no company investing in the field of tourism among these companies. The tourism agreement between Turkey and Ethiopia in 2017 has not yet been able to contribute to the development of tourism relations between the two countries. As the Ambassador stated, the most significant factor in this process is the political instability in Ethiopia. Therefore, after the tourism agreement, there was no large tourist influx from Turkey to Ethiopia, because tourism is a pleasure business.

Tourist travel from Ethiopia to Turkey and the world can only be achieved by the very rich in the country. This represents a very small audience. One can talk about an improvement in terms of health tourism from Ethiopia to Turkey. Turkey has become a more prominent destination for Ethiopians than other countries when the visa problems with Turkey were eliminated in health tourism, which used to be directed to Thailand and India. The discourses and efforts of the Turkish Embassy have also been effective in this. Since the distance between Ethiopia and Turkey is only 5 hours, bilateral relations can be developed much more easily in every field.

Yaprak Alp, who has been serving in Ethiopia for two years, has taken initiatives in tourism with her personal connections. When she took office, she noticed that Turks did not go to Ethiopia much as tourists, and she contacted her friends, who had a tourism company in Turkey. After these negotiations, 15-day tours were started from Turkey to Ethiopia. When the satisfaction rate in the tours was high, the tours were held every two months. Alp specified that there is a lot to do in the country to attract tourists. She underlined that the country's difficulties are valid for all investment areas, but it is an important market with a population of 105 million, and Turks are very popular in this

market, as well as stating that Ethiopia is one of the fastest growing economies in the world with a growth rate of 11%, and the first to come here wins. Alp drew attention to the city of Harar especially in terms of tourism investments. Expressing that she made a call to Turkish investors about the potential in the country through *Milliyet*, Alp said in this call that Harar is similar to feudal European cities, and investment in the region for businesses such as hotels and cafes will be profitable for Turkish tourism professionals. Underlining the serious ties between Harar and Turkey in this regard, Alp stated that the people of the region regard themselves as half Turkish. This is because, in the historical process, especially Ottoman officers married Ethiopian women, and kinship ties were established. Although Alp's call has not been answered yet, considering the increasing relations and investments between the two countries, it is thought that these will spread to the field of tourism in the coming years.

The tourism agreement signed between Rwanda and Turkey on 25 June 2019 has not yet entered into force. As emphasised by Ambassador Burcu Çevik, tourism is the second important source of income after the industrial sector of the country. Known as the "Land of the Thousand Hills", Rwanda is a beautiful, high-altitude country with a tropical climate just below the equator, with constant Spring, famous for its silver-backed gorillas worldwide. The country has natural parks. In the country, which has a tourism sector that focuses on ecotourism, important work is carried out to protect biodiversity and wildlife in order to ensure the sustainability of tourism activities. For this reason, Çevik drew attention to a tourism policy targeting Rwanda's high-income group. In other words, "a small number of people who will leave a lot of income" are aimed to arrive. From this perspective, ultra-luxury hotels are being built in the country. However, according to Çevik, they also need infrastructure for middle-income tourists in the country.

Expressing that Rwanda's tourism income, which was 131 million dollars in 2006 and reached 400 million dollars in 2018, Çevik said, the strategic steps taken have begun to bear fruit. Although there is no significant progress in terms of concrete tourism investments between Turkey and Rwanda, it is seen that Turkey indirectly contributes to Rwanda's tourism. The Kigali Conference Centre and Hotel Complex known as Rwanda's Landmark and the Kigali Arena Sports Complex were built by Turkish contractors. Rwanda has become the second most important destination in the Continent after South Africa in this field, giving importance to conference tourism. Rwanda earned 66 million dollars in revenue by hosting 220 international events and more than 45 thousand delegates attending these events in 2019.

Although it is not possible to talk about the presence of Turkish investors in the tourism sector in Rwanda, the country has recently started to attract foreign investors, especially from Gulf countries. Since 2000, tourism investments in Rwanda increased to 1.5 billion dollars, and the bed capacity of 623 in 2003 increased to 14,866 in 2018. The tourism sector is growing by 25% each year. For this, visa facilitation agreements were made with many countries, and other countries were provided with visa convenience at the border. Additionally, the destinations of RwandAir, the airline company of the country, have been expanded. Rwanda, a small landlocked country in Africa, has signed a cooperation agreement with its neighbour Kenya to offer joint tourism packages, taking a very clever step, as Çevik put it, to expand the small and modest tourism market it can offer. Rwanda, which is not one of the first countries to come to mind when it comes to safari and natural parks, plans to attract tourists coming to Kenya to its own tourism opportunities with this agreement.

Burcu Çevik stated that, in terms of tourism relations between Turkey and Rwanda, they are at the very beginning of the process. She emphasised that, after the tourism cooperation agreement signed in 2019, there has not been enough progress to realise concrete projects yet, and the process is at a very modest point. Although the number of people who have travelled from Turkey to Rwanda is not known (Çevik says that nobody came for this purpose during her tenure), the number of Rwandans who travelled to Turkey in 2018 was 469.

In order to ensure the development of tourism relations between Turkey and Rwanda, Çevik expressed that they continue their activities as an embassy, but they have a necessity for development. In this context, Çevik pointed out the importance of mutual promotional activities and gave the good news that they established a contact between the Association of Turkish Travel Agencies and the Rwandan Development Board. Thus, the two institutions can consult the opportunities they can offer each other in both countries and start effective cooperation on mutual issues. In Rwanda, Turkish tourism investors do not have investments that appeal to high-level income groups such as five-star hotels. Unfortunately, the hotel opened by a Turkish entrepreneur in Rwanda to a more modest standard ended its operations two years ago.

It should be stated that Turkish tourists or Turkish investors have the opportunity to obtain a visa at the border, and Turkish Airlines has been operating two-way flights every day of the week since 2012. Expressing that they fully support Turks who come to the country for investment, Çevik explained the main reason for not having a tourism representative in the Turkish Embassy in Rwanda as that the Turkish private sector has not started to invest. Similarly, Çevik observed that the efforts of the Embassy on tourism started to bear fruit, and a Turkish company working on touring natural parks with hot air balloons in Rwanda, as in Cappadocia in Turkey, has obtained the necessary permits, and it is thought that it will start flights in 2021.

## **Conclusion**

The African Continent, which is described in many ways such as the cradle of humanity, the oldest Continent, the virgin market, the Black Continent, and others, contains unique beauties with its geography, cultural structure and nature. African countries, being much more aware of this attraction in the 21st century, turned towards developing their tourism potential and received international support. When it comes to African countries, tourism should not only support the country's economy. For African countries, tourism is also a soft power factor in foreign policy.

The answer to the question of why tourism as a soft power element has not been used effectively and efficiently in African countries until recently is the chronic security problem in the Continent. Many factors such as incompetent governments, corruption in the economy, unequal and unfair income distribution and religious and ethnic conflicts may be listed under this problem area. Despite its chronic problems, it may be seen that domestic and foreign investments in African countries are directed to the tourism sector, which is considered as an area of soft power.

Within the scope of this study, it was aimed to evaluate tourism, which is a soft power element in Turkish foreign policy, from the eyes of female ambassadors working in Africa. In this context, interviews were held with the ambassadors Elif Çomoğlu Ülgen in South Africa, Şebnem İncesu in Zambia, Yaprak Alp in Ethiopia and Burcu Çevik in Rwanda, who agreed to be included.

The most important point of this study is that inferences with a multi-dimensional perspective are made specifically for African and Turkish foreign policy. The study handled the issues of women diplomats, tourism in

Africa and tourism which as an element of soft power in African foreign policy within the scope of Turkey's expansion in a comprehensive manner.

It was concluded that the effective and productive activities of Turkish women ambassadors in Turkish foreign policy in Africa and their support for Turkish investors are also a soft power element in African tourism. Likewise, it was understood that the tourism potential between African countries and Turkey will develop more by activating inter-state agreements and increasing collaboration with the Association of Turkish Travel Agencies and important tourism NGOs in African countries.

The implementation of the agreements to be made in the field of tourism with the Republic of South Africa, Zambia, Rwanda and Ethiopia and all African countries and directing investors involved in the field of tourism to the Continent will be the first move in tourism, which is an active soft power element in Turkish foreign policy.

### Declaration

The contribution of all authors of the article to the article process is equal. The authors have no conflict of interest to declare. The ethics committee approval document required for data collection for this study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Sakarya University of Applied Sciences with the decision numbered 045.99/11543 and dated 5 May 2021.

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