

Influence of Nongovernmental Organizations on Forming Country Image and Developing the Country Brand Using Public Diplomacy

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Abstract

Country image and nation branding provide a competitive advantage for small and medium-sized enterprises in their internationalization. This paper analyzes the influence of Turkish nongovernmental organizations on forming country image of Turkey and developing the country brand using public diplomacy in the African continent. The published interviews and statements of Turkish and African politicians, business people and intellectuals argue that these organizations are effectively using public diplomacy to create the country brand. This paper focuses on the most active organization, the Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists of Turkey (TUSKON) which supports to its members in communicating with their potential customers in several occasions, and having a differentiating statement and a competitive advantage by promoting the brand image of the country. This civil society support is significant, especially for the small and medium enterprises of developing countries, when considered the weak international image and reputation of these countries.

Keywords

Employers' Organizations; internationalization of SME; country image; public diplomacy; nation brand

JEL codes: F10, L31

INTRODUCTION

The globalization of trade, finance and information generate a multitude of new options for Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to realize international business. However, despite the increasing opportunities to internationalize, as Albaum et al. (2011) argues, many SMEs can not follow up on these opportunities due to inadequate knowledge of international business and overseas markets. Because of their structural problems, SMEs cannot easily open international markets and develop their own brand identity that supports their internationalization. As Spence & Essoussi (2010) argue, the image of country origin can be used to strengthen brand equity in small and medium enterprises. However, creating and managing the country image is not an easy job and requires a joint effort of government, institutions, nongovernmental organizations and private companies (Valls, 1992).

This paper mainly focuses on the activities of one of these nongovernmental business associations, Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists of Turkey (TUSKON with Turkish acronyms), and analyzes the general development and contribution of Turkish NGOs to the internationalization of Turkish SMEs. TUSKON established in 2005, bringing together 7 regional federations with 151 business associations across the country (Özcan & Turunç, 2011), and became the largest umbrella employers' association of the Turkish business world. The primary objective of the confederation is to assist small and middle-sized enterprises, which form the mainstay of Turkish economy, to develop and expand into foreign markets. The confederation assists its members in their interaction with international markets, enabling them to communicate with their potential customers in several occasions. Furthermore, the confederation aims to provide them with a differentiating statement and a competitive advantage by promoting a Turkish brand image as seen in African case.

1. MANAGING THE COUNTRY IMAGE

1.1. The Country Image and Branding

Spence & Essoussi (2010) argue that if used properly brands provide a distinguishing statement and a competitive advantage in the present global competitive environment. However, since brand creation and management need resources and good communication skills, branding is generally associated with the big companies and believed that it is not a priority for small and medium companies. Spence & Essoussi (2010) argue that the use of the country of origin image support the brands, and therefore, as they note "the country of origin or inspiration of the brand can be used as a secondary association to strengthen brand equity in SMEs". Since, in this view, SMEs have limited resources for communication and brand identity creation, "the country of origin gives the brand an added value at a low cost" (Spence & Essoussi, 2010).

Branding, as Melissen (2005) argues, is cool and promising, and although it is not easy to create and manage, it attracts countries with a weak international image or a reputation. Since,

as Valls (1992) argues, managing a brand image requires a joint effort of government, institutions and nongovernmental associations and private companies. Moreover, as Melissen (2005) further notes "it is about mobilizing all of a nation's forces that can contribute to promote its image abroad". Along similar lines, Cignacco (2009) argues that the country image is a perception of the country as a whole; however, as he notes, it is composed of various elements such as culture and history of a country and current developments, issues of economic and trade policies, the technological development, major industries and services, and the importance of the country in global business.

1.2. Public diplomacy and soft power

Murrow center defines public diplomacy as a term dealing with the influence of public attitudes on foreign policy formulation¹. Melissen (2005) argues that public diplomacy "can pursue a wide variety of objectives, such as political dialogue, trade and foreign investment, the establishment of links with civil society groups beyond the opinion gatekeepers". With this function, public diplomacy is similar to propaganda, however, unlike propaganda, it is not a one way communication but a dialogue between the cultures.

Melissen (2005) also notes the importance of civil society actors arguing that "the new public diplomacy is not only about messaging, promotion campaigns, or even direct governmental contacts with foreign publics serving foreign policy purposes, but also about building relationships with civil society actors in other countries and about facilitating networking among non-governmental parties at home and abroad". Melissen (2005) further argues that "tomorrow's diplomats will become increasingly familiar with this kind of work, and to do it much better they will increasingly have to piggyback on nongovernmental initiatives, collaborate with non-official agents and benefit from local expertise inside and outside the embassy."

The main concern of application of public diplomacy is to gain power. However, this power is not traditionally defined power depending on the application of hard power with heavy weapons or economic power, but the power which is best described by the words of Joseph Nye that is the soft power which (as cited in Snow, 2009) "is based on intangible or indirect influences such as culture, values, and ideology."

Although soft power is a new concept, it has been applied for many years. Snow (2009) posits that many countries such as France, Italy, Germany, and the U.K. had gained and utilized the soft power before the United States. According to her, the United States relatively started later to utilize "culture for diplomatic purposes as an effort to shape its image in the global marketplace of ideas" (Snow, 2009). The United States, having all the necessary tools to pursue a successful public diplomacy leading to soft power, is the most successful country that applies soft power.

According to the University of Southern California, USC Center on Public Diplomacy, "an effective public diplomacy depends on; a compelling and credible representation of values, vision, and voice to the world in ways that demonstrate respect for all people and cultures; an acknowledgment that listening and dialogue lie at the heart of the public diplomacy process;

and the active involvement of nongovernmental actors such as the media, the business community, nonprofit organizations, and individuals."(as cited in Reinhard, 2009). Education, in this sense, plays an important role in promoting, as Tomlinson at al. (2013) note, "the national interest of a country through understanding, informing and influencing the foreign people".

1.3 Social Capital

Catts and Ozga (2005) describe the social capital as a "social glue that holds people together in families and communities and gives them a sense of belonging in an increasingly fragmented and uncertain world". They argue that trust is an important determinant to develop the social capital that binds the people together. While describing the bonding role of social capital they point out that it promotes "a sense of shared identity, in bridging communities to the wider world through networks that extend their communications with others, and in linking people to opportunities and structures of support" (Catts and Ozga, 2005). They propose that social capital should be promoted in schools because of its function to develop these capacities.

Securing the trust and mutual support through social groups is a necessity to be promoted since once the borders are loosened and the trust is developed and maintained among different groups, new opportunities are presented. Thus providing trust results in the enrichment of the social capital covering all the social groups.

Social capital is an important aspect of financial development. Fukuyama (2001) notes that "The economic function of social capital is to reduce the transaction costs associated with formal co-ordination mechanisms such as contracts, hierarchies, bureaucratic rules, and the like". Guiso at al. (2001) give Jewish diamond traders in New York as a typical example of trust, and note that "the level of trust within them is so high that they do not even need contracts". The location of these people in a structure of relationships seems to be an advantage for them.

2. TUSKON, Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists of Turkey

Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists of Turkey (TUSKON with Turkish acronyms), established in 2005, bringing together 151 business associations with over 14,000 businesses across the country (Özcan & Turunç, 2011) and became the largest umbrella employers' association of the Turkish business world. The aim was to help small and middle-sized enterprises which form the mainstay of Turkish economy, as well as, the big and growing companies to develop and expand into foreign markets. The domestic and international networking capacity of the confederation enables it to organize trade delegations from and to Turkey, international trade summits, trade and investment matchmaking that enable Turkish entrepreneurs to meet with the international business community. ⁱⁱ

The confederation defines the concept of the business summits (TUSKON, 2011a) as bilateral business meetings, exhibitions of products and complementary field trips to different regions of Turkey. These activities are at the heart of the commercial and bridge programs that are organized by the confederation. In World Trade Bridge programs, thousands of Turkish and foreign business people are matched according to their business profiles and sectors. In

addition to business people, foreign leaders and dignitaries, representatives of business associations, and journalists are invited to TUSKON's Trade Bridge Programs. (TCCC Newsletter, 2014). The confederation has organized almost 200 business and investment events in Turkey and abroad since its establishment to support Turkish business people to find partners and customers in overseas markets.

Besides the business summits, TUSKON organizes trade and investment delegations to foreign countries. Bilateral business meetings, forums, seminars and field trips for foreign leaders, business delegations are also organized by the confederation (TCCC Newsletter, 2014). For official delegations, the confederation also organizes events under the name of 'business and investment forums' with the participation of Turkish business people. By doing so, TUSKON aims to provide an opportunity for Turkish business people and business organizations to meet with the foreign officials and delegations. Furthermore, to support Turkish enterprises to integrate with the global business community, the confederation organizes trade promotion programs and workshops. (TUSKON, 2011b)

3. The socio - economic activities of TUSKON in Africa

3.1 Economic activities of TUSKON in Africa

The African Economic Outlook 2011 report documents that Turkey is placed among Africa's top five emerging partners along with China, India, Brazil and Korea. The commercial rapprochement between Turkey and Africa resulted in a sharp rise in trade. Turkey's trade volume with African countries has increased considerably, jumping from \$ 2.96 billion dollars USD in 2002 to \$20.7 billion dollars USD as of 2014. In this period, the participation of African countries in Turkey's total exports reached U.S. \$ 13.8 billion.ⁱⁱⁱ

With this tendency, Turkish trade with Africa differs from the total trade of Turkey with the world. The percentage change in Turkish exports to Africa is higher than the total overall export of the country. It should be noted that the tendency of decline in percentage change of imports to Africa is not observed in total imports of Turkey.

As a result of this change in both imports and exports, although, during this period, the overall trade balances of Turkey remained negative, the trade balance with Africa became positive after 2008. Turkey's trade deficit with African countries declined from 2006 turning to positive starting from 2008. It should also be noted that; now Africa is the only continent that Turkey has a positive trade balance.

These current relations between Africa and Turkey have been improved by the initiative of Turkish Business NGOs. TUSKON with its large network and capabilities is the most active Turkish Business NGO in this continent. The Confederation aims to promote Turkey's economic potential to the continent by organizing international business meetings and promoting the image of Turkey. TUSKON enables its member enterprises to compete with their rivals in terms of networking and marketing by facilitating their interaction in Africa.

The confederation is active in developing Turkey's ties with Africa in the economic field. According to Turkish Review journal "In addition to the government's active policy in the

region, efforts by TUSKON, particularly its annual trade meetings, seem to be highly influential in developing cooperation between Turkish and African businesspeople". ("Turkey's international trade: spotlight on Africa." 2014)

Through the Confederation, thousands of Turkish entrepreneurs have established business contact and realized business deals in the continent. Furthermore, TUSKON, by organizing trade summits and business delegations, is instrumental in taking African business people and the representatives of business organizations to Turkey. The first foreign trade bridge program, 'Turkey - Africa Foreign Trade Bridge -1', was organized in Istanbul, on May 8-9, 2006 with a total of 500 business people from 35 different countries, and 1,000 businesspeople from Turkey. About 40,000 bilateral business meetings were held between Turkish and African participants.

The confederation also organizes trade and investment delegations to African countries as a follow up to Trade Bridge Programs. In addition to TUSKON delegations, its member federations and their associations organize business trips towards Africa. Özkan and Akgün (2010) argue that "these summits not only bring Africa to the attention of Turkey but also, most importantly, create a venue for both sides to get to know each other and explore possible forms of cooperation".

The contribution of TUSKON to Turkey's African opening represents a convergence of civil society and state cooperation in political, economic and social issues. Valls (1992) argues that the management of a brand image of a country requires a joint effort of all the national institutions. TUSKON seems to provide an opportunity for Turkey to be promoted on a global scale.

Gananian author, Amponsah (2010) argues that "TUSKON endeavors to promote Turkey's tremendous economic potential to the world by organizing international business meetings under a unique concept called Foreign Trade Bridges (FTB) which have not only polished the image of Turkey as a reliable source of services and industrial products that offer diversified product spectrums and balanced quality and cost schemes; but have also provided Turkey with the opportunity to extend its hospitality and friendship to people from different part of the world.". Similarly, Africa Trade Magazine (2015) points out that Turkey's investments are characterized by strong sectoral diversification and argues that TUSKON has practically become synonymous with Africa and it is most active on the continent.

TUSKON is also active in the Middle East. Khalid Khalaileh, general manager of Canada International which has an office in Jordan, says in a TUSKON event he participated in 2010, that TUSKON has been doing a nice job in bringing businessmen from various countries together to make business deals. The activities of the confederation seem to make the impression that Turkey is a trusted country and a good alternative for India or China in Middle Eastern countries. Since, according to him, Turkey is not only a Muslim country and a trusted partner in business but also offers goods of high quality. Besides Khalaileh, Today's Zaman newspaper reports that "Ahmed Kharma, general manager of Kharma Trading and Importing Co., and Mahmoud Kamel Altrter, general manager of The Kind Land from Amman, told Today's Zaman that they welcome these kinds of TUSKON events, which have benefited them for years. Kharma said ceramic tiles, sanitary ware and central heating systems that his company was

focused on has made huge strides in business and picked up a momentum in ties with Turkey thanks to TUSKON's mediating role." ("Turkish, Arab firms meet on TUSKON bridge to expand trade", 2010)

3.2. Social activities of TUSKON in Africa

TUSKON members actively support social and humanitarian aid activities in Africa. TUSKON related Turkish NGO, Kimse Yok Mu (KYM, "Is Anybody Out There") is very active on this continent. KYM delivers emergency aid, provides food, medical services and tents in its IDP camps. (Africa Briefing No 92, 2012) KYM doctors voluntarily visit several African countries. The organization also provides directly or through partners scholarships, wheelchairs, meals for prisoners, vocational training for women, the construction of a sixty-bed hospital is also planned.

Since July 2011 KYM has been conducting assistance activities in Somalia, Uganda, Kenya and Ethiopia, whom are struggling with hunger and thirst. The association is giving a hand to Sudanese children in South Darfur with a new campaign. The aim of the campaign is to improve the standard of living for orphans. KYM launches "Water Wells" campaigns in order to ease the difficulty of obtaining drinking water in Africa. The organization has opened 2453 water wells in 15 African countries since 2011.^{iv}

Another TUSKON related organization in Somalia is the Nile Organization, a "non-profit and humanitarian organization which is mostly involved in operating schools and hospitals [...] currently Nile organization operates 4 schools with almost 450 students. " ("Turkish Nile Organization visits the Ministry", 2014). It also sponsors Somali students studying in Somalia, Turkey, Egypt, and Sudan. (Africa Briefing No 92, 2012)

TUSKON members actively support opening Turkish schools in Africa. As Bolton (2009) writes "before Turkish businessmen began to focus their commercial interest on Africa, intercultural dialogue activities had already been launched by the Gulen movement, a faith-based social movement named after the Turkish intellectual Fethullah Gulen. Former US Ambassador Shinn, who wrote a book^v on the activities of the movement in Africa, notes that there are more than 100 Turkish schools in Africa. As Shinn argues "these schools do not maintain an overt connection to the Gulen movement, but they show signs of adhering to the movement's philosophy" ("Hizmet in Africa: The Activities and Significance of the Gulen Movement with Ambassador David H Shinn", 2014).

TUSKON president Meral tells the Financial Times in an interview (Strauss, 2011) that, TUSKON is not a direct part of that movement, but the majority of its members supports Mr. Gulen's ideas. TUSKON members had taken the initiative for the establishment of Turkish schools in almost all African countries before these entrepreneurs came together under the umbrella of TUSKON. With the founding of TUSKON in 2005, these schools began to be sponsored by members of the confederation.

This connection made each of these schools, voluntary representatives of the confederation. In case of not being a legal representative of TUSKON, the Turkish school staff actively participates in the activities of the confederation. The entrepreneurs participating to

trade summits are mostly invited to Turkey by the Turkish school administrators who have close relations with the TUSKON representatives. Furthermore, in the last few years, we met some of these entrepreneurs who were graduates of these Turkish schools. Knowing Turkish and the culture of Turkey seems to facilitate their business contact in Turkey. Besides, the cooperation among the graduates of these schools facilitates the business interactions at all levels. For a businessman, a Turkish school graduate who speaks Turkish and English, apart from his national language, it is easier and more reliable to make contact with the graduates educated in the same tradition.

Paolo (2015) notes that thousands of African students, studying in these schools, are becoming acquainted with Turkey. The children of high bureaucracy, ruling elites and rich businessmen are among the students of these schools. The teachers and administrators integrate into the local community by learning the local culture and language. Besides, they have close relationships with the parents of their students most of whom are among the business and political elites of these countries. These relations also provide them with vital connections within the foreign communities.

Inan (2011) writes that the Turkish schools play an important role in Turkish foreign trade and investment. He observes that the parents, relatives, acquaintances of the students of these schools occupy important positions in these countries and they always arrange meetings with Turkish business people. He argues that Turkish schools, established in those countries, open their doors to Turkish business people and create opportunities for them.

As Paolo (2015) notes "TUSKON is establishing 'bridges of commerce' using the social infrastructure laid by the Turkish schools". These schools provide a knowledge base that facilitates the business negotiations for the Turkish businessmen. We have witnessed several times how easily a new comer Turkish business person has contacts with his partners in a short time. There is a clear synergy between these schools, and TUSKON and the confederation benefits from the network of these schools.

Turkish businessman Erdogan Akbas argues that the business people who do business abroad also have a chance to rely on resources and connections provided by Turkish schools in foreign countries. He argues that the teachers and administrators of these schools are able to assist with many problems the businessmen encounter, including support to overcome language and informational barriers. ("Africa offers small Turkish companies a chance to become tigers." 2012)

Turkish schools in Africa contribute to the development of ties between Turkey and Africa. The former Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc believes that these relations between different peoples are a multi-faceted issue; such as trade, culture, traditions and cooperation in education. He argues that the best quality education in Uganda is being given by the Turkish Light Academy set up in Kampala. He adds that "the Light Academy and its teachers were the pioneers of relations between Turkey and Uganda and that Turkey has left an indelible mark on this country thanks to these schools". ("Turkish schools key to success in Africa", 2011)

The chairman of the African Union and Foreign Minister of Equatorial Guinea, Esono wants to see the number of Turkish schools in Africa increased. Expressing his satisfaction on these Turkish schools, Esono states that these Turkish schools should be established in all provinces in

all African countries, since the current number of schools does not satisfy them at all. ("African Union president demands more Turkish schools", 2011)

Girma Birru, Minister of Trade and Industry of Ethiopia, praised the role of civil society groups in promoting mutual trade, TUSKON in particular and Turkish schools opened in Addis Ababa. He also mentioned the cooperation between TUSKON and Turkish schools, pointing out that the general director of the four Turkish schools in Addis Ababa, accompanied him during the 2009 TUSKON trade summit. He believes that these schools are the real bridges. (Fortune, 2009)

These Turkish schools seem to be affecting the social capital formation. (Holtzman and Nezam, 2004) define social capital as "networks, norms, and values that enable people to act collectively to produce social benefit". Fukuyama (2001) describes social capital as "an instantiated informal norm that promotes co-operation between two or more individuals". He argues that these norms are related to traditional virtues such as honesty, reliability and truthfulness, and reciprocity which bring the people together and collaborate.

In developing and multinational countries, social capital is an important aspect, especially in business interactions. Because, as (Guiso et al., 2001) argue, "the effect of social capital is stronger when legal enforcement is weaker". Besides, in multinational countries and in countries where there are difficulties in constructing national identity people find it difficult to trust other people.

Turkish schools seem to provide an efficient social capital for their graduates. Turkish schools seem to provide an efficient social capital for their graduates. This social capital as Kawachi (1999) notes "facilitates collective action for mutual benefit [...] and enhances the level of interpersonal trust and creates a good rapport between them". When there is a lack of information about the strangers it is difficult to calculate the trustworthiness. This formation of trust is important since it facilitates our social actions. Therefore, trust is an important aspect of social capital, since the degree of interaction and doing business with other people is closely related to the degree of trust.

TUSKON sponsored Turkish schools seem to be improving the image of Turkey in Africa. Nkhulise Siphos, a district director of education in South Africa, argues that these schools have helped repair the broken image of Turkey. He argues that they used to think that Turkey was like Iraq, but these schools have improved Turkey's image in their country. ("Turkish schools in S. Africa help repair Turkey's image." 2011). A teacher in the Galaxy International High School in Ghana, Sebile Ozleyen, argues that parents coming to register their children are prejudiced about Turkey and Turks; Ms. Ozleyen adds that the parents' ideas have changed after having seen the care they show for their children and their success in education. ("Turkish Schools Abroad Change Turkey's Image." 2011)

In most of the African countries, Turkish teachers are the first Turks that went there. Boztaş who works in one of the Turkish schools as a teacher in Tanzania argues that thanks to the Turkish schools in the country, Turkey is the only white nation without the negative associations among Tanzanian Africans. He further argues that while they call all other white people "mzungu," they call Turks "mturuki" to distinguish them ("Global education turns Turkish teachers into world citizens", 2011). Ali Kurt is another teacher, who works in Kenya,

argues that Kenyanians see the Turks as different from the other white people. ("Teaching the world how to speak Turkish", 2011)

These schools show that African-Turkish relations rooted in the micro level. Kalyoncu (2008) argues that "the intergovernmental affairs are pretty much influenced, if not solely determined, by the individual perceptions of the leaders of their mutual history and culture." The author further argues that "individuals' perceptions of a given country or culture, whether those of the man on the street or the state leader, are determined by their first encounter with the individuals or the group of individuals representing that particular country and culture". In that regard, Kalyoncu (2008) concludes that "Turkey enjoys not only the advantage of not having any colonial experience with the African countries, but also that of being well-represented in these countries from the very beginning".

TUSKON supported Turkish schools established through Africa seem to be proving themselves as an alternative way of public diplomacy. Turkey using the education as an effective tool for public diplomacy is now effectively turning to the area in which it is already familiar.

In the middle of an international competition, all the actors compete with each other by means of their economy, culture, and diplomacy. In this sense, the socioeconomic activities of TUSKON seem to be merging the love of Turkey and provide a competition area for Turkey. This area is unique because it provides Turkey with a sole global brand representing Turkey outside the borders.

These activities provide a close contact with Turkish culture and lifestyle enable an atmosphere for Turkey to be known as a country whose language and culture is learned. This familiarity also changes the negative perceptions of misunderstandings (especially in non-Muslim), prejudices of a Muslim country represented by Turkey. The schools, hence, with their dynamic communication channels play an important role to develop cooperation which leads to cultural and business relations between the host countries and Turkey. Every year, many businessmen visit the host countries make business contact. Under different circumstances, these kinds of contracts are not easy without any mediators. By opening the door for dialogue these educational institutions function as mediators. These mutual interactions provide effective communication channels, since thanks to these schools the ruling elites of the countries and the parents of the students obtain information about the Turkish culture and economy through visiting Turkey and participating the activities of TUSKON.

The teaching of Turkish to foreigners serves the Turkish national interest in several ways such as promoting trade and tourism and developing cultural relations with African countries. The aim of these educational institutions is to recruit and win young elites as partners and friends of Turkey and to arouse interest in knowledge and understanding of Turkey.

Another goal of these institutions, especially in non-Muslim countries is to promote a dialogue among the religions and cultures. In this sense, these organizations emphasize winning hearts and minds throughout Africa without aiming any specific target groups.

These nongovernmental organizations operate both nationally and internationally. For their missions abroad, they can be defined as humanitarian ambassadors of Turkey. As part of an international network of similar institutions and in collaboration with their sister agencies,

they supply worldwide relief assistance and humanitarian aid in the contexts of natural disasters. The intercultural dialogue activities of TUSKON related organizations aim to be a promoter of peace and interfaith dialogue. If this dialogue-oriented public diplomacy is evaluated by Turkey, there will be overall impacts of such an endeavor or disposition—internally and externally.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The context of international trade provides SMEs a wide range of possibilities that invite them to join a phenomenal commercial arena, the international market through the sale of their products to multiple destinations. Many Turkish small and medium-sized enterprises are, now, trying to find possibilities of trade in the African market.

APA News writes that Turkey not only seeks to do business with Africa, but also wants to develop Africa by encouraging its entrepreneurs to invest in Africa. ("Unprecedented strengthening of relations between Turkey and the African continent", 2011). Similarly, a South African author, Isilow (2012), while analyzing Turkish foreign policy towards Africa notes that "it is not only based on economic and trade objectives, but also incorporates a comprehensive approach which includes development of Africa through technical and project assistance in the fields such as fight against diseases, agricultural development, irrigation, energy, education and regular flow of humanitarian aid". He argues that many developed countries could now be envious of Turkey's new found position in Africa. According to him, Turkey has steadily won hearts in Africa.

TUSKON assists small and medium-sized enterprises to communicate with their potential customers in several occasions and to have a differentiating statement and a competitive advantage by promoting the Turkish brand image in the African continent. This assistance is significant, especially for Turkish SMEs when taken into account the weak international image or reputation of Turkey. As Spence & Essoussi (2010) indicate this "use of the country of origin image, support the brands, [...] enhance brand equity in SMEs".

Cignacco (2009) argues that the country image contains multiple overlapping factors and is formed by different symbolic representations, which forms a global projection that reflects the primary issues that differentiate one country from the rest, in the global environment. However, it is not easy to create and manage a country brand image, especially for developing countries (Melissen, 2005), and requires a joint effort (Valls, 1992).

The former member of the European Parliament and the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Lagendijk (2011) notes that "Turkey's Africa policy is an arena in which the interests of civil society organizations, business sectors and the state have largely converged, underlining the growing influence of domestic actors in shaping foreign policy". Along similar lines, Paolo (2015) notes that "these schools, based on cooperation between educators and business people, currently represent a precious tool in cultural diplomacy in Africa."

Turkish Business NGOs such as TUSKON and MÜSİAD, Independent Industrialists' and businessmen's association, as Özcan and Turunç (2011) note "provide mobilization that serve as local social and cultural institutions in addition to their commercial roles", which are

significant for Turkish SMEs to create new opportunities. Turkey's economic growth in 2000s is partly attributed to this conservative business community. As Uygur (2007) argues, these business organizations aim to provide a suitable atmosphere for gathering Turkish private business sector together. The development of Anatolian SMEs is given as justification of the significance of social cooperation which refers important Islamic values such as work ethics, morality, solidarity and responsibility of pursuing a common interest (Kirkbesoglu & Sargut, 2015). The comparative study of Arslan (2000) reveals that conservative business groups became more influential in Turkish business life, bringing their own work ethic which is very similar to the Protestant work ethics.

These organizations have significant networking capacity, which enables the member entrepreneurs to develop their social skills and access more business opportunities (Wahab and Rafiki, 2014). These networks also provide the entrepreneurs a large number of contacts and enable them to improve their the managerial capabilities (Carolis at al., 2009). Since as, Carolis at al. (2009) notes "the individuals with similar beliefs are attracted to each other, thus reinforcing a shared set of attitudes and behaviors".

In this paper, we sought to understand the contribution of TUSKON in the formation and implementation of the public diplomacy attempt on Turkish brand image in the African continent. The organizations of this kind, which contributes small and medium-sized member enterprises in terms of networking and marketing, has significant function that enables these enterprises to interact with potential customers and do business within a wide region. The main obstacle and hurdles that the small and medium sized firms come up against is the absence of knowledge about how to access to the international markets. In this sense, the success of the business organizations appears to lie in its ability to bring their members, most of whom are small and medium enterprises, to the international arena and support them in marketing and branding issues.

The economic, social and humanitarian activities of the confederation in Africa help the creation of a venue for Africa and Turkey to get to know each other and explore possible forms of cooperation. The emphasis of Turkish educational and business organizations is on investing in the minds and showcasing Turkey as a land of opportunities and ideas.

TUSKON example also points out that this public diplomacy, which sells a positive image of a country and promotes the country's economic and cultural resources, brings Turkey a unique opportunity which enhances cultural and economic relations with African countries. Applying to the definition of public diplomacy TUSKON and affiliated organizations are making an effort to promote and communicate Turkey's ideas and principles in this continent.

In this sense, the contribution of TUSKON to Turkish business community's African opening seems to represent a perfect convergence of civil society and business cooperation in economic and social issues. This new conception that develops and intensifies ties with African countries is likely to continue in future as it is supported widely by Turkish civil society.

ⁱ See Edward R. Murrow center of Public diplomacy webpage <http://fletcher.tufts.edu/Murrow/Diplomacy>

ⁱⁱ See Official website of TUSKON. http://www.tuskonwtb.com/?p=tuskon_hakkinda

ⁱⁱⁱ Turkish Statistical Institution (TURKSTAT). <http://www.turkstat.gov.tr>

^{iv}See official webpage of KYM <http://www.kimseyokmu.org.tr>

^vHizmet in Africa: The Activities and Significance of the Gulen Movement

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