

# Re-Thinking Gastronomy as a Foreign Policy Instrument: Turkish Cuisine and Turkey's Gastrodiplomacy Activism

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## Abstract

Since the last quarter of the twentieth century, the actors of global politics have multiplied, and their relationships have diversified. This has also led to a redefinition of foreign policy strategies. States tend to increase their public diplomacy activities. Cuisine, the most tangible form of cultural resource, has become one of the powerful tools of public diplomacy. Food, dishes, and cuisine have played an essential role throughout history and have begun to be defined as a diplomacy tool. We define gastrodiplomacy as a public diplomacy activity that aims to attract people through food. Turkey has a unique culinary culture due to its location and multicultural character. A Turkish cuisine is a tool that deserves to be promoted in Turkish foreign policy and an opportunity for nation branding. This article examines the concept of gastrodiplomacy, identifies the components of Turkish cuisine, shows Turkey's gastrodiplomacy activities, and offers suggestions for Turkey's gastrodiplomacy initiatives.

**Keywords:** Gastrodiplomacy, Public Diplomacy, Turkish Cuisine, Nation Branding, Cultural Diplomacy.

## Original Research Article

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# Bir Dış Politika Aracı Olarak Gastronomi: Türk Mutfağı ve Türkiye'nin Gastrodiplomasi Girişimleri

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## Öz

Yirminci yüzyılın son çeyreğinden itibaren dünya ekonomisinde ve politikasında yaşanan gelişmelerle hem küresel siyasetin aktörleri çoğalmış hem de bu aktörlerin ilişkileri çeşitlenmiştir. Bu durum, dış politikada kullanılan stratejilerin de yeniden belirlenmesini gerektirmiştir. Bugün, devletlerin kamu diplomasisi faaliyetlerini arttırdığı gözlemlenmektedir. Kültürel kaynakların en somut hali olan mutfak, kamu diplomasisinin güçlü araçlarından biri haline gelmiştir. Tarih boyunca önemli bir yere sahip olan gıda, yemek ve mutfak, yirmi birinci yüzyılda özel diplomasi alanı olarak da tanımlanmaya başlanmıştır. Bu doğrultuda gastrodiplomasiyi, yemeği farklı toplulukları cezbetme olarak kültürel diplomasi ve ulus markalaşmasını destekleyen kamu diplomasisi faaliyeti olarak ifade etmekteyiz. Coğrafi konumu ve çok kültürlü yapısı sayesinde Türkiye, zengin bir mutfak kültürüne sahiptir. Türk mutfağının Türk dış politikasında öne çıkartılması gereken bir araç olduğunu ve ulus markalaşması için bir fırsat olduğunu düşünmekteyiz. Bu makalede, gastrodiplomasi kavramını inceledikten sonra, Türk mutfağının bileşenlerini tanımladık, Türkiye'nin gastrodiplomasi faaliyetlerini ortaya koyduk ve Türkiye'nin gastodiplomasi girişimleri için önerilerde bulunduk.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Gastrodiplomasi, Kamu Diplomasisi, Türk Mutfağı, Ulus Markalama, Kültürel Diplomasi

## Özgün Araştırma Makalesi

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## Introduction

Expansion and widespread use of transportation and communication facilities have led to the multiplication of actors in global politics due to globalization. It has also enabled the proliferation of strategies used in international relations. This has made it easier for states to reach out to other states' populations, which has increased public diplomacy activities. The increase in people's mobility between countries, the ability to learn about different cultures, and their sense of curiosity have allowed states to use cultural tools in their public diplomacy activities. Accordingly, cuisine, the most tangible form of cultural resources, stands out as one of the main instruments of cultural diplomacy.

Although food, dish, and cuisine have a pivotal historic role, its emergence as a specialized field in diplomacy and its detailed examination in the literature only began in the twentieth century. As such, gastrodiplomacy is a public diplomacy activity that aims to attract people by instrumentalizing food. It also supports cultural diplomacy and nation branding. Indeed, we observe that gastrodiplomacy is used to promote cuisine to contribute to nation branding, especially by states that aim to influence global politics. Governments, individuals, and businesses are directly involved in gastrodiplomacy, which appeals to taste and emotions using national cultural heritage.

The cuisine includes more than just food and drink. It expresses the cultural structure from preparing and serving food and beverages to the rituals around the table and food preservation. In this respect, due to its geostrategic location, the geography of Turkey, which has been home to different civilizations for centuries, has a great richness from product diversity to food diversity. Historically, Turkey's cultural influence extends from the Middle East to the Balkans, from North Africa to the Caucasus, allowing culinary interaction and ensuring that Turkish cuisine has a wide variety of food products and different cooking techniques.

Turkish culinary richness shows that Turkey has a comprehensive set of gastrodiplomacy tools. Turkish cuisine is a significant opportunity both in expressing Turkey's regional and global power claim and in national branding with the prominence of public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy in Turkish foreign policy. This article will first examine the concept of gastrodiplomacy, which is new in the literature. Then, the components of Turkish cuisine will be presented, and examples of Turkey's gastrodiplomacy activities will be given. It will also make suggestions for Turkey's gastrodiplomacy initiatives.

## Understanding Gastrodiplomacy

Developments in global politics add new issues to the world's agenda and increase the actors of international politics. The increase in transportation and communication has enabled communities in different parts of the world to be aware of each other. It has made it possible to focus on the people as the target audience of politics. This has increased the role of public diplomacy. Due to globalization, human mobility, and the boom in tourism encourage different societies to see and learn about each other's cultures and then spread them in their own countries. In this direction, states aiming to introduce themselves to the target societies and

persuade them conduct diplomacy activities by using their cultural resources as tools. Cuisine, the most substantial part of national culture and directly appeals to people's habits, tastes, and emotions, stands out as an essential tool of cultural diplomacy. As a crucial part of humanity, food, dishes, and cuisine have been symbols of need, pleasure, and power in history.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising that gastronomy is now being used as an instrument of diplomacy. In different periods, food, dishes, and cuisine have been used in diplomacy under other concepts, such as food diplomacy and culinary diplomacy. However, the conceptualization of gastronomy as a unique area of diplomacy is relatively recent. The term gastrodiplomacy was first used in 2002 in an article in *The Economist* titled "Food as Ambassador"<sup>2</sup> about Thailand's public diplomacy activities promoting its culinary culture and food.<sup>3</sup>

Rockower defines gastrodiplomacy as "the act of winning hearts and minds through stomachs", similar to Nye's definition of soft power as the ability to shape others' preferences through persuasion and charm.<sup>4</sup> Gastrodiplomacy, which uses cuisine as a tool, is a public diplomacy activity that fosters cultural diplomacy and nation branding by making culture tangible.<sup>5</sup> Even though historically, food and cuisine have always been involved in diplomacy, we actively use them as an instrument of diplomacy in the twenty-first century.

Gastrodiplomacy, which has become popular in recent years among states seeking to promote their cuisines and food cultures, has emerged as an effective tool to enhance cultural diplomacy.<sup>6</sup> Gastrodiplomacy centers on the non-verbal communication power of food. States aim to promote their cultures, enhance their international image, develop their food industries, and promote tourism through gastrodiplomacy.<sup>7</sup> In this context, gastrodiplomacy is often combined with nation branding. Simon Anholt defines nation branding as a strategic approach that builds on the strengths of places to improve their reputation.<sup>8</sup>

As part of gastrodiplomacy, most countries emphasize the dishes they want to brand in promoting their national cuisines. In this regard, South Korea is strengthening its gastrodiplomacy activities with kimchi, Taiwan with dim sum, and Peru with quinoa.<sup>9</sup> Asian countries are intensively practicing gastrodiplomacy. Their quest for power in a Western-

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<sup>1</sup> Neslihan Kul, *Mutfak, Kimlik, Diplomasi: Türkiye'de Gastro Diplomasi* (Ankara: Tün Kitap, 2019), 81.

<sup>2</sup> See: <https://www.economist.com/asia/2002/02/21/thailands-gastro-diplomacy>

<sup>3</sup> Juyan Zhang, "The Foods of the Worlds: Mapping and Comparing Contemporary Gastrodiplomacy Campaigns," *International Journal of Communication* 9, (2015): 568.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph S. Nye, "Soft Power," *Foreign Policy* 80, (1990): 153-171; Paul S. Rockower, "Recipes for Gastrodiplomacy," *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 8, (2012): 235.

<sup>5</sup> Rockower, "Recipes for Gastrodiplomacy," 235-236.

<sup>6</sup> Sam Chapple-Sokol, "Culinary Diplomacy: Breaking Bread to Win Hearts and Minds," *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 8, (2013):182; Rachel Wilson "Cocina Peruana Para El Mundo: Gastrodiplomacy, the Culinary Nation Brand, and the Context of National Cuisine in Peru," *Exchange: The Journal of Public Diplomacy* 2, no: 1 (2013): 14.

<sup>7</sup> Chapple-Sokol, "Culinary Diplomacy," 182; Mary Jo A. Pham, "Food as Communication: A Case Study of South Korea's Gastrodiplomacy," *Journal of International Service* 22, no: 1 (2013): 1-22.

<sup>8</sup> Simon Anholt, "Editor's Forward to the First Issue," *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 1, no: 1 (2007): 4.

<sup>9</sup> Burak Onaran, *Mutfakta Tarih: Yemeğin Politik Serüveni* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2019), 208.

centered world could be a key reason for this. Gastrodiplomacy activities involve not only government officials and chefs but also food and beverage companies, tv cooking shows, and social media.<sup>10</sup> It is possible to consider gastronomy -and therefore gastrodiplomacy- as the most potent tool of cultural imperialism.

The concept of gastrodiplomacy is often mentioned together with gastro-nationalism, food diplomacy, and culinary diplomacy in the literature and sometimes needs clarification. Therefore, it is vital to introduce these concepts to make complete sense of gastrodiplomacy. Gastro-nationalism is based on nationalist sentiments when producing, distributing, and consuming food, making and presenting dishes that are the cultural heritage of nations.<sup>11</sup> The nationalism in concept of gastro nationalism refers to the act of being aware of one's heritage and keeping it alive and promoting it, rather than being against the other. Accordingly, it is possible to consider gastrodiplomacy as promoting culinary heritage created through gastro-nationalism.<sup>12</sup> Thus, national or local cuisines represent one of the most effective tools in nation branding. Such nationalism in the cuisine, however, sometimes leads to conflicts between countries. The competition between Turkey and Greece over dolma, moussaka, tzatziki, and baklava is a case in point. One of the critical points of tension between the two countries is that the baklava served as "Greek baklava" at the Greek Independence Day celebrations at the White House on March 22, 2012.<sup>13</sup> The rivalry between Turkey and Greece is also reflected in the third actor.

Food diplomacy and culinary diplomacy have become increasingly popular concepts in the social sciences, notably in communication, tourism, and international politics. The basis of these concepts and gastrodiplomacy is culinary. Therefore, the blurred scopes of the concepts may need to be clarified. For this reason, specifying the concepts of food diplomacy and culinary diplomacy will ensure clarity and strengthen our definition of gastrodiplomacy. Food diplomacy is directly related to international efforts to mitigate world hunger. Food aid, the most common form of food diplomacy, is one of the tools used by states to achieve their foreign policy goals.<sup>14</sup> From this perspective, it is possible to use food diplomacy as an element of hard power and to provide food aid under specific conditions. Food diplomacy is fundamentally different from gastrodiplomacy. While food diplomacy is concerned with the vital and urgent aspects of food, gastrodiplomacy is centered on food's cultural, taste, and emotional impact. Culinary diplomacy involves menus, food techniques, and chefs, which are often prepared for specific protocols.<sup>15</sup> As such, while the target audience of culinary diplomacy includes certain

<sup>10</sup> Zhang, "The Foods of the Worlds," 569.

<sup>11</sup> Michaela DeSoucey, "Gastronationalism: Food Traditions and Authenticity Politics in the European Union," *American Sociological Review* 75, no: 3, (2010): 433.

<sup>12</sup> Onaran, *Mutfakta Tarih: Yemeğin Politik Serüveni*, 101

<sup>13</sup> "White House Dinner Sets Off a Turkish-Greek Food Fight," *Eurasianet*, 3 April 2012, accessed 19 November 2021, <https://eurasianet.org/white-house-dinner-sets-off-a-turkish-greek-food-fight>.

<sup>14</sup> Dana Lusa and Ruzica Jakeseviz, "The Role of Food in Diplomacy: Communicating and 'Winning Hearts and Minds' Through Food," *Media Studies* 8, no: 16, (2017): 102.

<sup>15</sup> Rockower, "Recipes for Gastrodiplomacy," 235-237.

elites, gastrodiploMACy targets everyone with no distinction of status. Moreover, while culinary diplomacy is based on more technical knowledge, gastrodiploMACy is centered on culture.

Cuisine, which has become increasingly important among the various diplomacy tools of the twenty-first century, is one of the areas in which countries are gradually expanding their activities. Accordingly, analyzing the actions of Turkey, which diversified its foreign policy instruments in the 2000s, in the culinary promotion and gastrodiploMACy will provide a different perspective on Turkish Foreign Policy.

## Turkish Cuisine and GastrodiploMACy

Dishes reflect culture through their food products, cooking methods, and serving. Cuisine emerges as an effective tool of cultural diplomacy due to its direct reflection of the culture's identity.<sup>16</sup> Cuisine does not only refer to the food and beverages of the region/country itself. The cuisine is the cultural structure that includes the preparation of food and beverages, cooking techniques, service, consumption, preservation, location and architecture of the kitchen, food ceremonies, and beliefs and practices around the kitchen.<sup>17</sup>

Turkish cuisine is one of the most sophisticated cuisines in the world. The reasons for the prosperous of Turkish cuisine can be traced to the historical characteristics of Turks and the geopolitical position of Turkey and its ethno-religious components. The nomadic lifestyle of the Turks has enriched Turkish cuisine. They have been in different geographies, used various foods, and adopted food production and storage conditions according to nomadic life. The coexistence of different nations and religions in Anatolia has also richened Turkish cuisine. The country's location on the Silk Road and the Spice Route has also directly influenced the cuisine. Consequently, the use of meat and fermented dairy products derived from the experiences of nomadic life, spices from Asia, the abundant vegetable and fruit richness of the Mediterranean, and the fertility of Mesopotamia's cereals have all contributed to the emergence of Turkish culinary culture.<sup>18</sup>

Central Asian experience, the Anatolian Beyliks, the "palace cuisine" of the Ottoman Empire, and the culinary understanding of the republic have formed the rich structure of Turkish cuisine. The most influential contribution to this cultural accumulation is the multinational and multi-religious approach of the Ottoman Empire in its territories across three continents.<sup>19</sup> The Ottoman Empire not only expanded with the lands it conquered but also met the cultures of those lands. It added the gastronomic fruitfulness of the region to Turkish cuisine with its geographical expansion. Indeed, Turkey's cultural influence extends from North Africa to the

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<sup>16</sup> Gizem Çapar and Uysal Yenipınar, "Somut Olmayan Kültürel Miras Kaynağı Olarak Yöresel Yıyeceklerin Turizm Endüstrisinde Kullanılması," *Journal of Tourism and Gastronomy Studies* 4, (2016): 108.

<sup>17</sup> Metin Saip Sürücüoğlu and Ayşe Özfer Özçelik, "Türk Mutfak ve Beslenme Kültürünün Tarihsel Gelişimi," 38. *İcanas Kongresi* (2008): 1291.

<sup>18</sup> Menekşe Cömert and Fügen Durlu Özkaya, "Gastronomi Turizminde Türk Mutfağının Önemi," *Journal of Tourism and Gastronomy* 2, no: 2 (2014): 63.

<sup>19</sup> Ertuğrul Düzgün and Fügen Durlu Özkaya, "Mezopotamya'dan Günümüze Mutfak Kültürü," *Journal of Tourism and Gastronomy Studies* 3, no: 1 (2015): 44.

Middle East, from the Balkans to the Caucasus, and this enriches its cuisine.

Religion and economics have influenced the development of the cuisine. Once the Turks accepted Islam, their eating and drinking habits changed, and the influence of Arab culture in the cuisine increased. Turkish cuisine excluded pork and the meat and milk of single-hoofed animals such as horses, donkeys, and mules after the adoption of Islam.<sup>20</sup> Thanks to economic activities, Turkish cuisine included sugar, rice, and coffee. Moreover, the rising interaction with Western culture, industrialization, and technological development during the republican period also affected the structure of the society and its cuisine.<sup>21</sup>

Turkey's broad landscape and unique climate are essential factors enriching Turkish cuisine. The fruits and vegetables grown in different regions of Turkey enrich Turkish cuisine both product diversity and the creation of different dishes. This shows Turkey's cultural affluency. Even among neighboring cities, there are different cultures, tastes, and cuisine.<sup>22</sup>

Turkish cuisine does not only include preparing, cooking, and serving food and beverages. Turkish cuisine is also one of the main components of social life. Food and beverages symbolize unity, sharing, and solidarity in Turkish society. Accordingly, Turkish cuisine encourages people to come together around the table and socialize, in contrast to the West's individualistic eating and drinking habits and fast-food culture, especially in America.

These features make Turkish cuisine one of the top cuisines due to its variety of products and cooking techniques. Turkish cuisine, as a significant tangible part of cultural heritage, represents Turkish identity. Therefore, Turkish cuisine should be a major tool for promoting Turkey's geographical, historical, and cultural heritage. It should be a key element of Turkey's public diplomacy.

## Turkey's Gastrodiplomacy Actions

The broadening of the issues and instruments of diplomacy creates significant opportunities for states that are not the dominant determinants of global politics. Accordingly, medium powers or emerging states conduct active diplomacy to achieve their regional and global ambitions. In the twenty-first century, culture is a powerful instrument for attracting and persuading societies and states. Turkey is likely to emerge in global politics with diplomacy based on its cultural richness.

States, the main actors in global politics, have started transferring their activities to other actors due to the evolution of foreign policy and diplomacy. In this regard, firms, non-governmental organizations, local governments, and even individuals conduct diplomatic initiatives in global politics. Non-state actors focus their activities intensively on cultural

<sup>20</sup> Sibel Öncel (2015), "Türk Mutfağı ve Geleceğine İlişkin Değerlendirmeler," *Journal of Tourism and Gastronomy Studies* 3, no: 4 (2015): 35.

<sup>21</sup> Kul, *Mutfak, Kimlik, Diplomasi*, 131.

<sup>22</sup> Oya Berkay Karaca and Sıla Karacaoğlu, "Kültür, Din ve Yemek Etkileşimi Çerçevesinde Arap Mutfağının Kavramsal Olarak İncelenmesi: Adana İli Örneği," *Hitit Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 9, no: 2 (2016): 563-565.

diplomacy. In gastrodiploMACy, one of the main elements of cultural diplomacy, individuals and companies play a leading role in additional states. Analyzing Turkey's gastrodiploMACy activities by presenting examples of state, firm, and individual initiatives allows for understanding the diversity and collaborations in Turkey's attempts.

Turkey has increased its gastrodiploMACy efforts in the 2010s. It aims to increase tourism revenues through gastronomy. In 2014, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism launched the "Turkey Home" campaign under Turkey's nation branding activities. The "GastroHunt" project was organized to promote Turkish cuisine as part of the campaign. To promote Turkish cuisine on digital and social media as part of the GastroHunt project, Daniel Krieger, Ana Sampaio Barros, Guilherme Da Rosa, Mehmet Kırallı, and Çiler Geçici, who have 2.5 million followers, visited Gaziantep, Çeşme, Alaçatı, and Istanbul on tour led by Arda Türkmen, one of Turkey's famous chefs.<sup>23</sup> They shared photos and videos of the tour on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Youtube. In this way, both the natural beauties of the cities and Turkish cuisine were promoted and contributed to the creation of a gastronomy route in Turkey.<sup>24</sup>

Another example of Turkey's state-led gastrodiploMACy activities is Turkey's participation in the Milan EXPO in 2015. Turkey directly used food as a promotion and communication channel in the event organized with the theme "Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life". The EXPO, held between May and October 2015, was attended by 145 countries and visited by 20 million people.<sup>25</sup>

Turkey took part in the fair with the theme of "Digging into History for Future Food". The visitors enjoyed Turkey's 4,170 square meter pavilion, its food and beverages, folk dances, historical objects, architecture, and design. Indeed, 5 million people visited the Turkish pavilion during the six-month event.<sup>26</sup> Turkey focused on 12,000 years of historical teachings and experiences at the fair and chose pomegranate as its symbol. Pomegranate is a symbol of abundance. Therefore, choosing pomegranate is an important message. It is an icon of both Eastern and Mediterranean cultures. It symbolizes health and balanced eating habits. It is also the main part of the new year rituals. Pomegranate is not dried and is a rare fruit that should be eaten fresh. Therefore, pomegranate emphasizes healthy products to feed the planet and highlights the similarities of different geographies. Turkey served 10,000 glasses of pomegranate sherbet, 1.5 million Turkish delights with pomegranate, 500,000 glasses of Turkish tea, 4,000 glasses of orange juice, Turkish breakfast for 100 people, 100,000 single Turkish delights, 7500 baklava, 50,000 Turkish coffee, 25,000 plates of dishes with bulgur and

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<sup>23</sup> T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, *2014 İdare Faaliyet Raporu*, (2014).

<sup>24</sup> For details: <https://webtv.kultur.gov.tr/Kategori/2028>

<sup>25</sup> "Expoda 4 Kişiden Biri Türk Pavyonunu Gezdi," *Habertürk*, 27 October 2015, accessed 28 December 2021, <https://www.haberturk.com/ekonomi/is-yasam/haber/1145306-expoda-4-kisiden-biri-turk-pavyonunu-gezdi>.

<sup>26</sup> "Milano EXPO 2015'te Türkiye Rüzgarı Esti," *TRT Haber*, 26 October 2015, accessed 28 December 2021, <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/kultur-sanat/milano-expo-2015te-turkiye-ruzgari-esti-211599.html>.



20,000 tarhana, manti and börek.<sup>27</sup>

Today, gastronomy is closely related to tourism. As such, many countries, such as France, Italy, and Spain, promote their cuisine to boost nation branding and increase their tourism revenues. The Republic of Turkey Ministry of Culture and Tourism has announced 2020 as the "Year of Turkish Cuisine". In this direction, it created various gastronomy routes to promote Turkish cuisine and aimed to be visited by domestic and foreign tourists.<sup>28</sup> However, Turkey postponed its gastronomy initiatives due to Covid-19, which has spread rapidly worldwide since the first months of 2020. Although this initiative was not implemented, the ministry's interest in gastrodiplomacy is essential for promoting Turkish cuisine.

The Presidency of the Republic of Turkey Directorate of Communications has also launched a project titled "Turkish Food from the Award-winning Chefs of the Mediterranean" in June 2020 to promote Turkish cuisine. The twelve world-renowned chefs have shown the unifying power of gastronomy and introduced the affluence of Turkish cuisine to the world. The chefs served Adana kebab (American chef Ben Ford), almond soup (Moroccan chef Myriam Ettahri Moussalit), lamb skewers and tzatziki (Palestinian chef Fadi Kattan), stuffed zucchini blossoms (French chef Vincent Angebault), baklava (Spanish chef Sergio Torres), karniyarik and chili pate (Israeli chef Rotem Ben Moyal), Black Sea style pide (Italian chef Bruno Barbieri), steamed sea bass and hummus (Libyan chef Lubna Ben Halim), stuffed grape leaves (Lebanese chef Joe Barza), stuffed lamb ribs (Egyptian chef Mostafa Seif), Kayseri ravioli (Tunisian chef Dhaker Bejaoui), stuffed lamb shirt (Turkish chef Yağız İzgül), kadayıf with custard (Greek chef Gabriel Nikolaidis). Thus, they contributed to the digital promotion of Turkish cuisine.<sup>29</sup> Notably, chefs from different countries of the Mediterranean region cooked dishes symbolizing different areas of Turkey as part of the project.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the fact that the chefs preferred dishes close to the cuisines and tastes of their home countries is essential evidence of the broadness of Turkish cuisine.

In 2020, the Directorate of Communications continued to focus on gastrodiplomacy. As the planner and conductor of Turkish public diplomacy, it aims to strengthen Turkey's gastrodiplomacy initiatives. Accordingly, on October 8, 2020, it organized the first meeting of the Gastrodiplomacy Committee with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the Foreign Economic Relations Board, the Turkish Exporters' Assembly, the Turkish Tourism Promotion and Development Agency and the Yunus Emre Institute to formulate Turkey's gastrodiplomacy strategy.<sup>31</sup> The

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> "Gastronomik Atak Başlıyor," *Milliyet*, 21 December 2019, accessed 10 January 2022, <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/ekonomi/gastronomik-atak-basliyor-6105701>.

<sup>29</sup> Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı İletişim Başkanlığı, "Türk Mutfağının Lezzetleri, Akdeniz'in Ödüllü Şeflerini Bir Araya Getirdi," 2020, accessed 10 January 2022, [https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/turkce/pozitif\\_iletisim\\_kampanyalari/detaylar/turk-mutfagin-in-lezzetleri-akdenizin-odullu-seflerini-bir-araya-getirdi](https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/turkce/pozitif_iletisim_kampanyalari/detaylar/turk-mutfagin-in-lezzetleri-akdenizin-odullu-seflerini-bir-araya-getirdi).

<sup>30</sup> For details: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCVWfAmvrJjDPzDd0x-i2Jmg>

<sup>31</sup> T.C. Tarım ve Orman Bakanlığı Avrupa Birliği ve Dış İlişkiler Genel Müdürlüğü, "Gastrodiplomasi 1.

contribution of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in the meeting shows the priority of food production in gastrodiplomacy. At the same time, the participation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs symbolizes a new chapter in Turkish diplomacy. The coming together of Turkey's principal institutions led by the Presidency to formulate Turkey's gastrodiplomacy goals is a hopeful step on the road to promoting Turkish cuisine and using it as an instrument of diplomacy. The participation of the firms, universities, civil society organizations, and local governments in the meetings will strengthen the multidimensional and holistic scope of the goals.

Books are another critical tool in promoting cuisine. Several cookbooks have been published in order to record and promote Turkish cuisine and culture. Some books only have recipes, while others are about food culture and rituals. Accordingly, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism published the book "Turkish Cuisine with Timeless Recipes" in 2021. The fact that the book was prepared under cover of the Presidency and led by Emine Erdoğan, the First Lady, shows the importance of the project and gastrodiplomacy. The book highlights the healthy and zero-waste sides of traditional recipes. In the book's publicity, the historical origins of Turkish cuisine, gastrodiplomacy, and branding through gastronomy are often emphasized.<sup>32</sup> The book has been translated into several languages, primarily English, Spanish, and Arabic. An important initiative for promoting Turkish cuisine is to present the book as a gift to delegations visiting Turkey.

Turkey's most important initiative on gastronomy and gastrodiplomacy is the Michelin Guide in Istanbul. Istanbul has been selected as the 38th international destination of the guide following the initiatives of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Turkish Tourism Promotion and Development Agency.<sup>33</sup> Michelin inspectors assess the quality of products, mastery of flavor and cooking techniques, the chef's personality in the dining experience, harmony of the flavors, and consistency between inspectors' visits.<sup>34</sup> The Michelin Guide, announced in October 2023, includes 53 restaurants from Istanbul. Araka, Mikla, Neolokal, and Nicole received one star, and Turk Fatih Tutak was awarded two stars. Neolokal has also been awarded a green star for its environmentally friendly and ethical approach.<sup>35</sup> The similarities among the starred restaurants are that they use various products from Turkey and interpret traditional flavors. For now, the Michelin guide is limited in Turkey. However, it is an

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Komite Toplantısı Gerçekleştirildi," 11 October 2020, accessed 10 January 2022, <https://www.tarimorman.gov.tr/ABDGM/Haber/575/Gastrodiplomasi-1-Komite-Toplantisi-Gercekleştirildi>.

<sup>32</sup> "Emine Erdoğan, 'Asırlık Tariflerle Türk Mutfağı' Kitabının Tanıtımına Katıldı," 4 September 2021, accessed 14 January 2022, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/130343/emine-erdogan-asirlik-tariflerle-turk-mutfagi-kitabinin-tanitim-programina-katildi>.

<sup>33</sup> Türkiye Otelciler Birliği, "Türkiye Michelin Rehberi'ne Girdi," 2022, accessed 28 March 2023, <https://www.turob.com/tr/haberler/2022/show/1215/istanbul-michelin-rehberine-girdi>.

<sup>34</sup> "Michelin Guide Inspectors," n.d., accessed 28 March 2023, <https://guide.michelin.com/th/en/michelin-guide-inspectors>.

<sup>35</sup> "Michelin Guide," n.d., accessed 28 March 2023, <https://guide.michelin.com/tr/en/istanbul-province/istanbul/restaurants>.

essential initiative for the promotion of Turkish cuisine. Preparing lists of other Turkish cities will both contribute to Turkey's branding and increase Turkey's tourism revenues.

Cities where food products are grown and dishes turn into a cultural element become famous in gastronomy and gastrodiplomacy. In this respect, Turkey, with its cities spread across its broad geography, has different products, tastes, and cultures. These diversities contribute to the authenticity of Turkish cuisine and lead to varying initiatives for promoting local gastronomy. Gaziantep is the first city in Turkey that comes to mind when it is mentioned gastronomy and the city. The "Emine Göğüş Culinary Museum" was opened in 2008 to promote the multicultural cuisine of Gaziantep. In this museum, the first culinary museum opened in Turkey, the cuisine equipment of Gaziantep is exhibited, and local dishes are presented with visuals.<sup>36</sup> The museum, visited with enthusiasm by both domestic and international tourists, promotes the plenitude of Gaziantep cuisine. As a significant producer of cereals, spices, and fruits, especially dried fruits, Gaziantep became part of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network for Gastronomy in 2015.<sup>37</sup> Thus, Gaziantep was officially recognized as a gastronomy city. It contributes to the global promotion of Gaziantep cuisine.

Along with Gaziantep, Hatay is another gastronomic city in Turkey. Hatay, hosting different civilizations throughout history, joined the UNESCO Creative Cities Network for Gastronomy in 2017.<sup>38</sup> The inclusion of Hatay cuisine in the network contributes to the branding of local delicacies such as baba ghanouj, pepper with walnuts, humus, olive salad, thyme salad, skim-milk cheese salad, sarmaiçi, öcçe, kaytaz pastry, aşşür, Damascus oruk, maklube, künefe with cheese, and pumpkin dessert.<sup>39</sup> Hatay Metropolitan Municipality opened the UNESCO Hatay Gastronomy House in March 2019 to promote and institutionalize Hatay cuisine.<sup>40</sup> With this initiative, the city's gastronomy goals have been projected. In 2022, Hatay Metropolitan Municipality founded the Gastronomy Academy to train well-equipped chefs who know gastronomy's history, anthropology, communication, and economics.<sup>41</sup> Another important initiative in Hatay is the Gastronomy Village, developed jointly by Samandağ Municipality and Samandağ Women's Initiative and Production Cooperative.<sup>42</sup> The project, created in

<sup>36</sup> Türkiye Kültür Portalı, "Emine Göğüş Mutfak Müzesi- Gaziantep," n.d., accessed 10 January 2023, <https://www.kulturportali.gov.tr/turkiye/gaziantep/gezilecekler/emine-gogus-mutfak-muzesi>.

<sup>37</sup> UNESCO Creative Cities Network, "Gaziantep," n.d., accessed 10 January 2022, <https://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/gaziantep>.

<sup>38</sup> UNESCO Creative Cities Network, "Hatay," n.d., accessed 10 January 2022 <https://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/hatay>.

<sup>39</sup> Hatay Gastronomi, "Yöresel Yemekler," n.d., accessed 10 January 2022, <http://hataygastronomi.com/yo-resel-yemekler>.

<sup>40</sup> "Hatay Gastronomi Evi, Türkiye'ye Rol Model Oldu," *Hürriyet*, 8 June 2022, accessed 30 May 2023, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/lezizz/galeri-hatay-gastronomi-evi-turkiyeye-rol-model-oldu-41536333/1>.

<sup>41</sup> "Hatay Gastronomi Akademisi Açıldı," *Hatay Büyükşehir Belediyesi*, 26 April 2022, accessed 30 May 2023, <https://hatay.bel.tr/icerik/hatay-gastronomi-akademisi-acildi>.

<sup>42</sup> "Samandağ'ın Gururu," *Habertürk*, 6 June 2022, accessed 30 May 2023, <https://www.haberturk.com/hatay-haberleri/97851235-samandagin-gururu-oldu-gastronomi-koyu-ornek-proje-secildisamandag-belediyesinin-ortakligi>.

cooperation with local actors, aims to develop gastronomy tourism. Hatay's gastronomy initiatives are on the rise, and projects to promote Hatay cuisine have been successful. The city was hit hard by the February 6 earthquake. Its residents say that they rely on the city's history, culture, and cuisine to build the city back.<sup>43</sup> In fact, in the aftermath of the earthquake, Hatay solidarity days were organized in metropolitan cities, and relief efforts were made based on Hatay cuisine. It is also observed that people from Hatay who are now in different cities are trying to survive by cooking and selling food. Hatay Gastronomy House continues to host its guests in Mersin.<sup>44</sup>

In 2019, Afyonkarahisar, not located in the south of the country, unlike Gaziantep and Hatay, became a member of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network for Gastronomy.<sup>45</sup> Afyonkarahisar is famous for its sausage, Turkish delight, and cream. These food products show the city's capacity for animal husbandry. Moreover, the city's location on Turkey's tourism routes encourages people to discover its dishes and promotes its cuisine. It is an important achievement for Afyonkarahisar to be the third city on the list after Gaziantep and Hatay. Indeed, many local cuisines in Turkey are more popular and prosperous than Afyonkarahisar. The fact that Afyonkarahisar's place on the list is the success of local actors. Three Turkish cities are part of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network for Gastronomy, which includes 36 cities. Turkey has an honorable place in the list as the third country after Brazil and China, each with four cities on the list. Brazil, China, Turkey, Mexico, Spain, and South Korea are the top countries. This shows that gastronomy is used as an effective diplomacy instrument by countries that claim to be regional and global powers.

The certification of food products and dishes in the country is just as crucial as the accreditation of cities as global gastronomy cities. Accordingly, three food products of Turkey are listed on UNESCO's "Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity". Firstly, Keşkek was added to the list in 2011.<sup>46</sup> Keşkek is served on special occasions and celebrations. Two or four people must work together to make keşkek. It symbolizes solidarity in Turkish culture. Turkish coffee was entered into the list in 2013.<sup>47</sup> The certification of Turkish coffee has helped promote the coffee-making method and its rituals. Finally, lavash-yufka was listed as a joint product of Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkey in 2016.<sup>48</sup> It shows the cultural

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<sup>43</sup> "Humusçu İbrahim: 'Antakya'ya Yine İnsanlar Gelecek, Yemek Yiyecek, Yine Gezecekler,'" *Nehna*, 24 March 2023, accessed 30 May 2023, <https://nehna.org/humuscu-ibrahim-antakyaya-yine-insanlar-gelecek-yemek-yiyecek-yine-gezecekler/>.

<sup>44</sup> "Depremde Hasar Gören Hatay Gastronomi Evi Kapılarını Mersin'de Açtı," *Hatay Büyükşehir Belediyesi*, 27 April 2023, accessed 30 May 2023, <https://hatay.bel.tr/icerik/depremdede-hasar-goren-hatay-gastronomi-evi-kapilarini-mersinde-acti>.

<sup>45</sup> UNESCO Creative Cities Network, "Afyonkarahisar," n.d., accessed 10 January 2022, <https://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/afyonkarahisar>.

<sup>46</sup> UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, "Ceremonial Keşkek Tradition," n.d., accessed 8 January 2022, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/ceremonial-kekek-tradition-00388>.

<sup>47</sup> UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, "Turkish Coffee Culture and Tradition," n.d., accessed 8 January 2022, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/turkish-coffee-culture-and-tradition-00645>.

<sup>48</sup> UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, "Flatbread Making and Sharing Culture: Lavash, Katyrma, Jupka,

similarities of the countries. Finally, çay (tea) was listed as a symbol of identity, hospitality, and social interaction of Azerbaijan and Turkey.<sup>49</sup> Tea, the most consumed beverage, together with Turkish coffee, is a socializing element in Turkey. Personal and institutional initiatives for listing cities and products in UNESCO contribute to Turkey's gastrodiplomacy activities.

Turkish coffee is the most popular product that comes to mind when promoting Turkish food and beverages. Although Turkey is not a coffee producer, the techniques of coffee preparation and traditional cultural rituals have helped Turkish coffee to become a brand. As such, Turkish coffee and its tradition of friendship, hospitality, and having fun together were listed on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity List in 2013.<sup>50</sup> The listing of Turkish coffee on the UNESCO list demonstrates that coffee is an integral part of Turkish traditions and its impact on social life. Turkish coffee producers are some of Turkey's oldest institutions. It shows coffee's historical importance. In addition, serving Turkish delight with coffee highlights the role of coffee in gatherings and conversations. The global prominence of Turkish coffee and its local prestige and influence make it a key tool in promoting the country.

In this respect, the initiatives of Gizem Şalcıgil White, who served as the president of the American Turkish Association in Washington DC between 2013-2017, are remarkable in using Turkish coffee as a cultural diplomacy tool. Gizem Şalcıgil White, known as the "Turkish Coffee Lady" over time, has voluntarily contributed to Turkey's gastrodiplomacy activities with her projects Turkeyfe and the Turkish Coffee Truck. In addition, she has also established her initiatives in North America, where coffee consumption is the highest in the world. This has enabled Turkish coffee to be promoted in an attractive market. In 2008, Şalcıgil White founded Turkey's first digital coffee house with the Turkeyfe project to bring Turks and people from all over the world together to share their experiences in Turkey.<sup>51</sup> Turkish coffee as a platform for sharing experiences reflects the notion of coming together and sharing life experiences, which is an integral part of Turkey's coffee culture. Thus, the initiative reminded us of the saying, "the heart wants neither coffee nor coffeehouse, the heart wants to chat, and coffee is an occasion." Kurukahveci Mehmet Efendi, a leading Turkish coffee brand, began to support the project in 2011. Thus, the project has expanded. Accordingly, the project kicked off an event series titled "Turkish Coffee: From the 16th Century to the 21st Century and Beyond" at the Embassy of Turkey in Washington and the Turkish House in New York in cooperation with the Washington Turkish-American Association.<sup>52</sup> The historical focus in the title of the events emphasizes that Turkish coffee and culture have been practiced for centuries. In addition, the private sector and

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Yufka," n.d., accessed 8 January 2022, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/flatbread-making-and-sharing-culture-lavash-katyrma-jupka-yufka-01181>.

<sup>49</sup> UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, "Culture of Çay(tea)," n.d., accessed 28 March 2023, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/culture-of-ay-tea-a-symbol-of-identity-hospitality-and-social-interaction-01685>.

<sup>50</sup> UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, "Turkish Coffee Culture and Tradition".

<sup>51</sup> Türk Kahvesi Kültürü ve Araştırmaları Derneği, "Türk Kahvesi ve Kültürel Diplomasinin 40 Yıllık Hatırı Var," n.d., 8 January 2022, <https://turkkahvesidernegi.org/index.php?icerik=guncel-kahve-haberleri-icerik&medya-merkezi=menuactive&menuguncelkahve=active&icid=10>.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

state institutions have recognized and started to support personal initiative over time. It is an actual example of the variety of actors and cooperation in Turkey's public diplomacy activities.

Her initiatives led to new projects. In this direction, the Turkish Coffee Truck, which was inspired by food trucks, one of the primary vehicles of street culture in North America, was opened up to promote Turkish coffee by Şalcıgil White. As part of the project, Turkish Coffee Truck organized events in cities, universities, and landmarks across the United States in 2012 with the motto "Turkish Coffee: Taste of Friendship for 500 years".<sup>53</sup> The truck came to Turkey in 2013 for the "Brand Turkey" conference to publicize its activities in the United States. Sponsored by the Ministry of Tourism and the Kurukahveci Mehmet Efendi, the vehicle toured Europe, including the Netherlands, Belgium, and France.<sup>54</sup> The project, run by volunteers, promoted Turkey and Turkish coffee. It served Turkish coffee to over 15,000 foreigners at the World Bank, NATO Headquarters, the United States Congress, Turkey's foreign missions, and various festivals.<sup>55</sup> Multiple institutions have supported Gizem Şalcıgil White's projects. The Turkeyfe was selected as the cultural diplomacy project of the year by Digital Diplomacy Review in 2013, while the Istanbul Tourist Guides Chamber gave the project a cultural sustainability award.<sup>56</sup>

Any relations or emerging crises in global politics directly impact gastrodiploacy activities. The 2008 Economic Crisis, one of the major global crises of the twenty-first century so far, profoundly shaped diplomacy. In this respect, Mey, one of the leading alcoholic beverage producers in Turkey, has attempted to both promote the company and contribute to Turkey's gastrodiploacy activities by taking a different approach to the process, considering the 2001 Turkish economic crisis. Accordingly, in November 2008, Mey sent a "bailout package" to the prime ministers of European countries that had begun to feel the effects of the crisis. It consists of a bottle of new raki, a glass, and an ehlikeyf. Through this, Mey promoted raki as Turkey's alcoholic beverage.<sup>57</sup> The letter signed by Mey CEO Galip Yorgancıoğlu in the bailout package reads as follows:

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<sup>53</sup> The events were held in Washington, Baltimore, New York City, New Haven and Boston, George Washington University, Georgetown University, New York University, Yale University and the Empire State Building.

<sup>54</sup> Türk Kahvesi Kültürü ve Araştırmaları Derneği, "Türk Kahvesi ve Kültürel Diplomasinin 40 Yıllık Hatırı Var".

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Gizem Salcıgil White, "Awards&Trademarks," n.d., 8 January 2022, <http://www.gizemsalcigilwhite.com/awards-trademark/#prettyPhoto>.

<sup>57</sup> This is a two-compartment ice container. It keeps drinks cold.

*“Dear Prime Minister, we have prepared an entire bailout package for you. You may find it a bit ‘a-la-turca.’ You may also not be used to the smell of anise. However, you should try this unique flavor to understand how we Turks can manage a crisis. We know the easiest and most fun way to get out of crises. We know that solidarity with each other, and unique and deeper conversations are suitable for all kinds of crises, when we feel joy, sorrow, enthusiasm, or sadness. That’s why we have been drinking Yeni Raki for years. How about including this unique suggestion among all the billion-dollar packages you are preparing against the possibility of the global crisis spreading to Europe and consulting ‘an elder’ to overcome the crisis? We hope you enjoy it; we hope we can overcome the crisis together...”<sup>58</sup>*

By taking this initiative, Mey sent a message of solidarity to European countries and promoted the Turkish alcohol industry, raki, and raki culture. Indeed, it emphasized coming together and solidarity in that letter. Although Mey’s main aim was to take precautions against the potential recession in the alcohol sector because of the economic crisis, the company contributed to promoting Turkey’s food and beverage sector through this activity.

Turkey’s gastrodiplomacy story is characterized by state, individual, and firm initiatives. Individual and firm initiatives are worthwhile for promoting the country in addition to economic benefits. However, it is quite clear that state initiatives focus on tourism. To transform the potential of Turkey’s abundant cuisine into a diplomacy instrument, it is necessary to consider cuisine alongside the dimensions of communication, image, dialogue, and cooperation.<sup>59</sup>

## Conclusion

Over the last few years, we have observed an increasing interest in gastronomy and gastrodiplomacy at the state level in Turkey. Turkey’s use of gastrodiplomacy, one of the instruments of transformed diplomacy of the twenty-first century, is crucial for determining its position in world politics. The abundance of Turkish cuisine gives Turkey an advantage for gastrodiplomacy activities. However, we observe that gastrodiplomacy activities have been inadequate and ineffective in recent years.

Turkey has the potential to be one of the world leaders in gastrodiplomacy. However, despite these initiatives, Turkey is unable to realize its gastrodiplomacy potential. The main reason for this is that decision-makers consider foreign policy as a separate and high level field. Due to this approach, it is thought that cuisine cannot be a foreign policy tool. Turkey’s recent initiatives on gastrodiplomacy are encouraging. We have some suggestions to ensure the institutionalization of these initiatives. Turkey has to take state, local actors, private sector, and individual-level initiatives. Indeed, a national plan is needed for the country to engage in gastordiplomacy initiatives and use Turkish cuisine to brand Turkey. This national plan

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<sup>58</sup> “Türkiye’den Avrupa Başbakanlarına Rakılı ‘Kurtarma Paketi’ Yola Çıktı,” *Radikal*, 26 November 2008, accessed 10 January 2022, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/ekonomi/turkiyeden-avrupa-basbakanlarina-rakili-kurtarma-paketi-yola-cikti-910096/>.

<sup>59</sup> Fikret Soner, “Uluslararası Halkla İlişkiler Çerçevesinde Oluşturulan Gastrodiplomasi Modeli: Türkiye İncelemesi ve Öneriler,” (PhD Dissertation, T.C. Maltepe Üniversitesi, 2020) 236.

should be designed starting from the local level. Niche food products of Turkey should be defined and registered. Also, local producers should be supported to grow these products. The Turkish Patent and Trademark Office's "Geographical Indications" initiative has started to do this. Although this initiative is supported by the local components of the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey, its impact remains limited. For this reason, it should be emphasized that this initiative will create economic opportunities for the locals and is essential for promoting Turkey. Therefore, cooperation between local government institutions, the private sector, and individuals is crucial.

Highlighting local dishes is another way to use Turkish cuisine to brand the country. When we look at Turkey's current gastronomic promotion campaigns, we see that Turkey emphasizes Turkish coffee, Turkish delight, baklava, kebab, and doner kebab. However, Turkish cuisine is much more than all of these. Today, information on local cuisines is kept hidden and not accessible to the public. To remember and promote the abundance of Turkish cuisine, it is first necessary to know the food and beverages in local cuisines. For this, local food and beverages and culinary cultures should be recorded, starting with villages and towns. Afterward, the recordings should be shared with the community, especially the locals. For Turkey to initiate a gastrodiplomacy attack and bring its cuisine to the forefront, Turks must first know and protect their cuisine. Utilizing state institutions, Turkey's international brands, and films and TV series is essential to continue Turkey's culinary branding and gastrodiplomacy efforts. It would be worthwhile to emphasize the local character of Turkish cuisine in the dinners organized for delegations visiting Turkey. In addition, serving various Turkish tastes on Turkish Airlines will contribute to promoting Turkey. It is obvious that the cuisines of multiple countries, especially French and Italian cuisines, are introduced through movies and TV series. In this respect, Turkish films and TV series should also be used directly to promote Turkish cuisine. Films and TV series can show the cooking techniques and serving of dishes while introducing the culinary culture and rituals around the table.

In conclusion, the success of Turkey's gastrodiplomacy will be ensured by the awareness of its cuisine's abundance by the public, especially the authorities, and the creation of global initiatives. The state can't carry out gastrodiplomacy initiatives alone. Accordingly, the process should be pursued multi-actor and multi-dimensional by establishing committees involving local actors, firms, universities, and non-governmental organizations.

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