

Türkiye Government Gastrodiplomacy

Yara Alas

Gastrodiplomacy can be defined as a government's purposeful efforts to introduce its cuisine to foreign audiences to create deeper connections to its culture and nation. In broader terms, "gastrodiplomacy is the nexus of food and foreign policy and how countries communicate their culture through food...it is the idea that the flag can follow the fork."¹ Countries such as Thailand, Japan, Peru, Malaysia, and South Korea have already implemented worldwide gastrodiplomatic campaigns to help increase their nation brand. While the world has seen successful gastrodiplomacy campaigns that have helped build nation brands, it is now Türkiye's turn to continue using its history and the cultural heritage of its cuisine as a tool to create interest in Türkiye and to help reshape its national identity.

In December 2021, Türkiye began a national rebranding effort starting with an official name change from Turkey to Türkiye. One of the main reasons for this was that President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan wanted to distance the country's name from its association with other meanings of the word turkey, like the bird, which is known as an American Thanksgiving symbol. The Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, said this name change was also meant to increase the nation's brand value and boost Türkiye's international standing.

Türkiye has previously executed gastrodiplomacy campaigns led by the Yunus Emre Enstitüsü, a nonprofit organization created by the Turkish government in 2007 that promotes the Turkish language and culture around the world. YEE held "Diplomacy on the Menu" in October 2021 in Brussels, Belgium to showcase Turkish cuisine as a fellow Mediterranean cuisine and to highlight the commonalities between Turkish and European Union cuisines. YEE has also held recent gastrodiplomatic events in Spain, Argentina, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Directorate of Communications (DoC), which is housed in the Office of the President, was founded in 2018 and is responsible for publicizing and promoting the nation's foreign activities

¹ Sonenshine, Culinary Diplomacy, Gastrodiplomacy and Conflict Cuisine, pg. 10.

and state efforts to empower Türkiye's national brand. One of the five departments in the DoC is focused on social and cultural events, which includes gastrodiplomacy. Dr. Oğuz Güner, head of the DoC Public Diplomacy Office, noted that their efforts are largely focused on highlighting three Turkish cities that have been recognized by UNESCO as creative cities of gastronomy, although there are technically four: Gaziantep (2015), Hatay (2017), Afyonkarahisar (2019), and most recently, Kayseri (2022). Pistachios and kebab are a staple in Gaziantep, while künefe, a cheese-based dessert most traditionally associated with weddings, is a staple in Hatay. Afyonkarahisar is known for its pastirma, a cured meat, and sucuk, a spicy sausage. Kayseri is known as the Turkish 'city of dumplings' because of its manti, a small dumpling stuffed with minced meat. Dr. Güner also mentioned that they plan to release books and documentaries based on these cities. While gastrodiplomacy is only one small subsection of the DoC PD office, Dr. Güner noted that the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism also focuses on gastrodiplomacy and the DoC coordinates communication of their events.

The Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism has implemented gastrodiplomacy initiatives aimed at foreigners both in other nations and within its own borders, all to raise awareness of the nation's cultural value and importance. One of the ministry's most recent endeavors was Turkish Cuisine Week, an inaugural week-long gastrodiplomacy program held from May 21-27, 2022, with promotional events in Türkiye and across the world. Turkish Cuisine Week differed from previous gastrodiplomacy efforts because it was a large, targeted effort in branding Türkiye as a culinary destination, at both an international and national level, and building upon its already existing UNESCO culinary presence. One of the overarching goals of the campaign was to highlight Turkish cuisine as healthy, waste-free and sustainable. The campaign also coincided with the launch of *Turkish Cuisine With Timeless Recipes*, a gastronomy book published under the leadership of First Lady Emine Erdoğan, under the auspices of the Presidency, in cooperation with the Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency, and with the support of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. The Turkish Cuisine Week website offered recipes of traditional dishes, cooking videos by award-winning Turkish chefs including

Ismet Saz, Ali Ronay, and Sinem Özler, and academic articles about Turkish cuisine's history, sustainable impact, and nutritional value.

International events were also organized by Turkish diplomatic missions in target cities and the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism. One such event was held at Turkish House, the headquarters of multiple Turkish diplomatic missions in New York and a center of Turkish cultural activity. This New York event featured classic Turkish dishes prepared by Turkish Master Chef Ismet Saz. Speakers included: Consul General of Türkiye Reyhan Özgür, Turkish Ambassador to the U.S. Hasan Murat Mercan, and First Lady Emine Erdoğan. Guests in attendance included journalists and members of the Turkish Embassy. Similar events were held in other foreign cities including Los Angeles; Kuala Lumpur; New Delhi; Nagoya; and Neuss, Germany.

In addition to international events, national events were also held to celebrate Turkish Cuisine Week. First Lady Emine Erdoğan and Minister of Culture and Tourism Mehmet Nuri Ersoy attended a gastronomy festival in Balıkesir to kick off the campaign. A second event in Mardin was held to showcase local food to international tourists. Academic and culinary workshops and panels were held at Yaşar University, Izmir University of Economics, and Dokuz Eylül University. Furthermore, restaurants offered special menus during Turkish Cuisine Week. For example, head chef Savaş Özkılıç of the Hilton Istanbul Bosphorus offered a menu curated specifically for the event.

Turkish Cuisine Week was a notable attempt to brand Türkiye as a culinary destination; however, it's impossible to determine if Türkiye's world perception has improved based on this single campaign. The campaign's website is eye-catching and easy to navigate, but it does not have any social media links since the campaign has no centralized social media platforms. There was some social media presence on various Turkish government accounts promoting the campaign in their respective cities, but the campaign's overall social media presence was minimal. On Instagram, the hashtag #TurkishCuisineWeek had just over 500 tags. A promotional

video created by the Turkish Embassy in Dhaka, Bangladesh only had 71 views; a similar video by the Turkish Embassy in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago only had 84 views. While local offices oversaw events in their cities, the lack of a central account to monitor and promote content appears to have limited potential measurable reach and impact. There are also no sources documenting the campaign's success and/or failure and impact. While this was only the first year of the Turkish Cuisine Week campaign and it was set to a yearly endeavor, there has been no promotion yet for 2023.

Sources

"Eight Great Gastrodiplomacy Nations." *USC Center on Public Diplomacy*, 5 Nov. 2016, <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/story/eight-great-gastrodiplomacy-nations>.

Sonenshine, Tara, et al. "Culinary Diplomacy, Gastrodiplomacy, and Conflict Cuisine: Defining the Field." *Is the Kitchen the New Venue of Foreign Policy?: Ideas on Food as a Tool for Diplomacy, Building Peace and Cultural Awareness*, Stimson Center, 2016, pp. 9–11, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep10919.6>.

<https://turkishcuisineweek.com/>

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/06/03/middleeast/turkey-name-change-mime-intl/index.html>

<https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/why-turkey-is-now-turkiye-and-why-that-matters-52602>

<https://www.npr.org/2022/06/02/1102596510/turkey-changes-name-turkiye-united-nations>

<https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/turkiyes-first-annual-turkish-cuisine-week-launches-with-a-celebration-of-anatolian-flavors-301558919.html>

<https://www.trtworld.com/art-culture/turkish-cuisine-week-events-kick-off-in-different-cities-around-the-world-57359>

<https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/local-dishes-introduced-in-turkish-cuisine-week-173992>

<https://www.dailysabah.com/life/turkish-cuisine-week-starts-with-balikesir-gastronomy-festival/news>

<https://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/gaziantep>

<https://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/hatay>

<https://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/afyonkarahisar>

<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/culture/turkish-city-of-dumpling-eyes-to-be-gastronomy-center/1577102>

<https://www.yee.org.tr/en>

<https://izmir.ktb.gov.tr/TR-321074/turk-mutfak-haftasi-21--27-mayis-2022-tarihleri-arasind-.html>