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Paradiplomatic Capacities of the Iranian Diaspora in Turkiye

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Extended Abstract

Globalization and glocalization have significantly reshaped the landscape of international relations, introducing innovative diplomatic tools such as paradiplomacy and the strategic utilization of diaspora communities. Paradiplomacy, as a form of sub-state diplomacy, empowers non-central governments and diaspora groups to engage in cross-border interactions, complementing formal state diplomacy. The Iranian diaspora in Turkey serves as a compelling case study due to its ability to influence bilateral relations through cultural, economic, and political channels. This study explores the paradiplomatic capacities of the Iranian diaspora in Turkey and evaluates how these capacities can enhance Iran-Turkey relations.

The research addresses the central question: What paradiplomatic potential

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does the Iranian diaspora in Turkey possess, and how can it impact bilateral relations? The study posits that the Iranian diaspora holds considerable paradiplomatic capabilities that can foster stronger ties between the two nations. By leveraging these capacities, Iran can expand its influence in the region while simultaneously strengthening its bilateral ties with Turkey. This research aims to shed light on the role of Diasporas as informal yet significant contributors to international relations, particularly in the context of neighboring countries with shared historical and cultural ties.

The research employs a causal (cause-and-effect) approach to analyze the relationship between diaspora activities and their diplomatic impacts. Data collection was conducted through a combination of library research (academic articles, policy reports, and historical records) and semi-structured interviews with Iranian diaspora members in Turkey, as well as experts in international relations and diaspora studies. The qualitative analysis focuses on identifying key areas cultural diplomacy, economic diplomacy, and political engagement where diaspora involvement can contribute to paradiplomatic efforts. This methodology ensures a comprehensive understanding of the Iranian diaspora's potential and the challenges it faces in Turkey.

The findings highlight three primary dimensions in which the Iranian diaspora in Turkey can exercise paradiplomatic influence:

Cultural Diplomacy: The Iranian diaspora acts as a cultural bridge, promoting mutual understanding through language, art, literature, and academic exchanges. Iranian cultural associations in Turkey organize events such as Persian language workshops, art exhibitions, and cultural festivals that introduce Turkish society to Iranian heritage. These activities foster people-to-people connections and strengthen cultural ties between the two nations. Additionally, Iranian cuisine and cultural traditions have gained popularity in Turkey, further enhancing cultural diplomacy.

Economic Diplomacy: Iranian entrepreneurs, investors, and business professionals in Turkey contribute significantly to trade and investment flows between the two countries. The diaspora facilitates business partnerships, joint ventures, and knowledge transfer, particularly in sectors such as tourism, technology, and manufacturing. For instance, Iranian-owned businesses in Turkey

often serve as intermediaries for circumventing international sanctions, facilitating trade in goods such as petrochemicals, agricultural products, and handicrafts. This economic engagement not only bolsters bilateral trade but also creates opportunities for collaborative ventures.

Political Engagement: Certain members of the Iranian diaspora engage in lobbying efforts, think tank collaborations, and policy dialogues that indirectly shape diplomatic relations. Their dual familiarity with Iranian and Turkish political landscapes positions them as informal mediators capable of addressing shared challenges. For example, diaspora members have participated in initiatives to promote regional stability and counter negative narratives about Iran in Turkish media and political circles.

The study underscores the Iranian diaspora's networking capabilities, transnational ties, and socio-economic influence, which position it as a valuable actor in paradiplomacy. However, the research also identifies challenges, such as political sensitivities, differing foreign policy priorities, and the lack of a cohesive strategy for diaspora engagement, which may limit the full realization of these potentials.

The Iranian diaspora in Turkey represents a unique asset for both countries, offering opportunities to strengthen bilateral relations across cultural, economic, and political dimensions. The study identifies several key factors that contribute to the diaspora's paradiplomatic effectiveness:

Transnational Networks: The Iranian diaspora in Turkey maintains strong transnational networks that facilitate cultural exchange, economic collaboration, and political dialogue. These networks enable the diaspora to act as a bridge between Iranian and Turkish societies, promoting mutual understanding and cooperation.

Shared Historical and Cultural Ties: Iran and Turkey share a rich history of cultural and civilizational interactions, which the diaspora can leverage to foster closer relations. The diaspora's efforts to highlight these shared legacies through events, publications, and media can counter divisive narratives and strengthen cultural bonds.

Economic Contributions: The diaspora's economic activities, particularly in trade and investment, serve as a critical component of Iran-Turkey relations. By facilitating cross-border commerce and promoting Iranian products in Turk-

ish markets, the diaspora contributes to the economic interdependence of the two nations.

Cultural Representation: The Iranian diaspora's cultural initiatives, such as organizing Persian New Year (Nowruz) celebrations and establishing Persian language schools, enhance Iran's soft power in Turkey. These activities not only promote Iranian culture but also improve Iran's image among Turkish citizens.

Despite these strengths, the research highlights several challenges that need to be addressed to maximize the diaspora's paradiplomatic potential. These include:

Political Sensitivities: The complex political dynamics between Iran and Turkey, including regional rivalries and differing foreign policy objectives, can create obstacles for diaspora engagement.

Fragmentation within the Diaspora: The Iranian diaspora in Turkey is diverse in terms of socio-economic status, political affiliations, and motivations for migration. This diversity can hinder the formation of a cohesive and unified diaspora strategy.

Resource Constraints: Limited financial and institutional support from Iranian authorities restricts the diaspora's ability to implement large-scale paradiplomatic initiatives.

The Iranian diaspora in Turkey possesses significant paradiplomatic capacities that can enhance Iran-Turkey relations in cultural, economic, and political spheres. By leveraging these capacities, Iran can strengthen its regional influence and foster closer ties with Turkey. However, realizing the full potential of the diaspora requires addressing the identified challenges through targeted policies and initiatives.

Policy Recommendations:

Develop a Comprehensive Diaspora Strategy: The Iranian government should establish a clear and cohesive strategy for engaging the diaspora in Turkey. This strategy should include mechanisms for supporting cultural, economic, and political initiatives led by diaspora members.

Enhance Institutional Support: Strengthening the role of cultural attachés and other institutional representatives in Turkey can provide the diaspora with the resources and guidance needed to implement paradiplomatic projects effectively.

Promote Cultural and Educational Exchanges: Expanding cultural and educational programs, such as scholarships for Turkish students to study in Iran and vice versa, can deepen people-to-people connections and foster mutual understanding.

Facilitate Economic Collaboration: Encouraging joint ventures and trade partnerships between Iranian and Turkish businesses can leverage the diaspora's economic influence to strengthen bilateral trade and investment.

Address Political Challenges: Diplomatic efforts should focus on reducing political tensions and building trust between Iranian and Turkish authorities, creating a more favorable environment for diaspora engagement.

By addressing these challenges and implementing the proposed recommendations, Iran can harness the paradiplomatic potential of its diaspora in Turkey to achieve strategic objectives and strengthen its regional position.

Key words: Paradiplomacy, Diaspora, National Power, Turkey, Iran.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in conducting this research study.