

TODAY'S ZAMAN

'Turkish schools behind Turkey's soft power in Middle East'



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Marco Padovan, Italian businessman and a member of the Turkish-Italian Trade and Cooperation Association, said during a round table meeting held in İstanbul on Wednesday that Turkish schools play a crucial role in the increase of Turkey's soft power in the Middle East and North Africa.

Speaking during the round table meeting titled "Turkey's Soft Power in the Middle East: Possibilities and Limits," which was hosted by the Journalists and Writers Foundation (GYV), Padovan pointed to the importance of the private Turkish schools that have been established around the world.

During the meeting, which was attended by many prominent Turkish and Italian academics and journalists, Padovan said Turkey's increasing soft power in the Middle East, Central Asia and North Africa is a positive outcome of private Turkish schools.

Padovan went on to say that Turkey's soft power has played a crucial role in the growing economic strength of Turkey in recent years, adding that private Turkish schools serving the Middle East, Central Asia and North Africa and their Turkish-speaking graduates have also played a crucial role in the growing influence of the Turkish economy in foreign markets. Explaining that the number of private Turkish schools had outpaced the number of Italian school around the world, Padovan said that while there are 170 Italian schools in various countries worldwide, the number of Turkish schools globally is well over 1,000.

Nurşin Günay Ateşoğlu, a professor at Yıldız Technical University who also spoke at the meeting, offered an opinion on the reason behind Turkey's recently growing economic and diplomatic power in the region. Ateşoğlu said it is not only because of Turkey's growing strength, but also because of other countries' shortcomings in the region.

Carola Cerami, an academic from the University of Pavia, said the European Union has lost its power in the Middle East in recent years but can regain this power by leveraging Turkey's influence in the region. She also added that blocking Turkey's membership in the EU is not mutually useful for Turkey or the EU.

Adriana Cerretelli, a journalist from Italy, pointed to the reasons why some EU member countries are trying to block Turkey's EU accession. He said neither the shortcomings of Turkey's democracy nor its huge population worry these countries; the real concern is Turkey's growing power.



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