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Gastrodiplomasi Özel Sayısı

Media Positioning in German-Speaking News Coverage of the Döner Kebab Dispute

Döner Kebap Uyuşmazlığının Almanca Haber Medyasında Sunumu ve Medyanın Konumlanışı

Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the debate that emerged from Türkiye's attempt to register "Döner Kebab" in the European Union as a Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG) product. The study approaches this process within the framework of mediated gastrodiplomacy, understood as a field in which food, diplomacy, and journalism intersect in the production of public meaning. Drawing on Nye's concept of soft power and Althusser's notion of ideological state apparatuses, it argues that German-speaking media assume two contradictory functions in this debate. On the one hand, the media contribute to Europe's symbolic appeal by presenting the culinary culture carried by guest workers migrating from Türkiye to Germany as a symbol of cosmopolitanism and cultural openness. On the other hand, when the name, ownership, and market access of döner turn into a regulatory struggle, news discourse shifts toward economic protectionism, boundary-making, and the defense of local interests. This hypothesis is tested through qualitative framing analysis, comparing how news texts define the issue, distribute responsibility, construct legitimacy, and foreground particular solutions. The findings show that German-speaking media embrace the discourse of pluralism primarily insofar as it protects internal diversity and economic interests. As a result, the study demonstrates that the German-speaking media sphere displays a strategically inconsistent position.

Keywords: German-speaking media analysis, gastrodiplomacy, döner kebab, Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG), soft power

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Öz

Bu makale, Türkiye'nin "Döner Kebab"ı Avrupa Birliği'nde Geleneksel Ürün Adı (Traditional Speciality Guaranteed, TSG[2]) olarak tescil ettirme girişimiyle ortaya çıkan tartışmayı incelemektedir. Çalışma, bu süreci gıda, diplomasi ve gazeteciliğin kamusal anlam üretiminde kesiştiği aracılı gastrodiplomasi çerçevesinde ele almaktadır. Nye'nin yumuşak güç yaklaşımı ile Althusser'in devletin ideolojik aygıtları kavramından hareketle Almanca medyanın bu tartışmada iki çelişkili işlev üstlendiği ileri sürülmektedir. Bir yandan medya, Türkiye'den Almanya'ya göç eden misafir işçilerin taşıdığı mutfak kültürünü kozmopolitizm ve kültürel açıklığın simgesi olarak sunarak Avrupa'nın sembolik cazibesine katkıda bulunmakta; öte yandan dönerin adı, mülkiyeti ve pazar erişimi düzenleyici bir mücadeleye dönüştüğünde haber söylemi ekonomik korumacılık, sınır çizme ve yerel çıkarların savunusuna yönelmektedir. Bu hipotez, nitel çerçeveleme analiziyle sınanmış; haber metinlerinde sorunun nasıl tanımlandığı, sorumluluğun nasıl dağıtıldığı, meşruiyetin nasıl kurulduğu ve hangi çözüm önerilerinin öne çıkarıldığı, karşılaştırmalı incelenmiştir. Bulgular, Almanca yayımlanan medyanın çoğulculuk söylemini daha çok iç çeşitliliği ve ekonomik çıkarları koruduğu ölçüde benimsediğini göstermektedir. Sonuç olarak çalışma, Almanca yayımlanan medyanın stratejik açıdan tutarsız bir görünüm sergilediğini ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Almanca yayımlanan medya analizi, gastrodiplomasi, döner kebap, Geleneksel Ürün Adı (Traditional Speciality Guaranteed, TSG), yumuşak güç

Introduction

The study aims to examine the debate surrounding Türkiye's initiative to have 'Döner Kebab' registered as a Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG) within the European Union as an example of 'mediated gastrodiplomacy', a field where food, diplomacy and journalism converge to shape public perception.

Gastrodiplomacy is commonly described as the strategic use of cuisine to communicate national culture and generate soft power through public-facing engagement (Cooper, 2025; Domrongchai, 2022; Demirağ, Turgut, & Ongun, 2025; Mayer-Heft G. , 2021; Yılmaz & Kılıçoğlu, 2019; Moscato, 2018; Rockower P. S., 2012). Food operates as a "low politics" medium that can make a country appear familiar, likeable, and culturally rich (Paarlberg, 2023; Setiawan, Purnomo, & Nihayati, 2025; Sorensen, Moller, & Jackson, 2022). Yet the success of gastrodiplomacy depends not only on state-led campaigns or culinary entrepreneurs, but also on how media narrates food-related controversies (Nair B. B., 2021). News does not simply report; it frames (Entman, 2010). It selects a storyline, identifies winners and losers, and tells audiences what is at stake.

[2] Avrupa Birliği yönetmenliklerinde kullanılan "Traditional Speciality Guaranteed" terimi Türk Patent Enstitüsü tarafından "Geleneksel Ürün Adı" olarak kullanılmaktadır. Makalede Türk Patent Enstitüsü tarafından kullanılan terminoloji esas alınacaktır.

Recently, the German-speaking media has repeatedly used the döner kebab to express the bonds in German-Turkish daily life. A widely circulated video clip shows Chancellor Angela Merkel ordering a döner with "lots of cabbage and onions" turning the snack into a staged sign of proximity to ordinary, multicultural consumption (Matzerath, 2014). Later, the symbol took on a presidential diplomatic role when Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier brought a 60-kilogram frozen döner skewer to Türkiye and was filmed carving it at a reception in Istanbul, an act that was later described in commentary as "döner diplomacy" (Der Spiegel, 2024a; Bianet, 2024). The debate that followed, which on the one hand welcomed the recognition of migrant entrepreneurs and on the other raised concerns about stereotyping and racialization, reflects the central tension explored in this article: mediated gastrodiplomacy can generate soft power, but it can also reproduce boundary-making and resentment (Der Spiegel, 2024a; Bianet, 2024).

The discussion analysed here focuses on the European Union's Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG) quality scheme (EU, 2021), a technical legal instrument. Türkiye's umbrella organisation, the International Döner Federation (Uluslararası Döner Federasyonu, UDOFED), sought to register 'Döner' as a TSG, a label aimed at protecting a traditional recipe or production method rather than a specific geographical origin. In 2024, during the opposition period, the German Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Regional Identity (BMLEH) and other German food industry associations objected, warning that it would lead to significant market distortions. By September 2025, the applicant withdrew their request, thereby concluding the procedure.

At first glance, this story seems like bureaucracy. However, because döner kebab is not just a meal, it has turned into a 'food war' in the public eye. In Germany, döner kebab is widely accepted as a symbol of everyday multiculturalism: a street food icon shaped by Turkish immigration and local adaptation (İncetahtacı-Günal, 2025; Tolgensbakk, 2019). In Türkiye, amidst widespread debates in the region, particularly regarding ownership of culinary culture, it is being mobilised as national heritage. In the media, these layers are transformed into competing frameworks concerning originality (authenticity), identity and economic interests (Brulotte & Di Giovine, 2014).

This article puts forward a main hypothesis: German-speaking media generally uses narratives about migrant cuisine as soft power to praise openness and cultural hybridity (gastronomic diplomacy), but when a labelling tool such as TSG threatens the European market, the same media abandons gastronomic diplomacy and shifts to a defensive framework. The analysis concludes that this selective stance benefits European actors and constitutes strategically inconsistent framing when viewed from a normative perspective: the discourse of diversity is embraced when it preserves local advantage but rejected when it restricts it (Herman, 1992; Jung, 2001).

Theoretical framework: Dramatic change from Nye to Althusser

The dispute over the European Union registration of Döner Kebab as a Traditional Speciality Guaranteed product demonstrates how food-related controversies can acquire meanings that extend far beyond regulatory classification. In this case, a quality-scheme application developed into a public debate over cultural heritage, symbolic ownership, and economic interests. This article approaches the case through a theoretical framework that connects Nye's concept of soft power with Althusser's theory of ideological reproduction. Doing so helps explain how the same culinary symbol can be framed either as an expression of cosmopolitan exchange and mutual recognition or as an object of defensive boundary-making shaped by media discourse.

According to Nye (1990; 2008), soft power is a relationship built through perception. Culture generates soft power when audiences interpret it as attractive and legitimate. Food is uniquely suited because it is sensory, every day, and shareable. It can create goodwill without requiring agreement on geopolitics. In Europe, migrant cuisines often serve dual soft-power functions: they help European states narrate themselves as open and cosmopolitan, and they allow origin countries to gain recognition for cultural contributions.

Althusser (2004) argues that social order is reproduced not only by law and force but by institutions that shape common sense. Media organisations, as ideological state apparatuses (ISAs), addresses their audiences as subjects such as consumers, citizens and moral communities. In the "Döner dispute", the recurring subject position is the threatened European consumer or small business owner who must defend "our" market from an external rule. Lexical choices such as ban, dictate, backs down, and breathes a sigh of relief are not neutral descriptions; they position the reader inside a moral drama.

Framing analysis operationalizes the intersection of soft power and ideology. A frame selects aspects of reality and makes them more salient. We ask: do frames invite attraction and mutual recognition (gastrodiplomacy), or do they invite defensive boundary-making (ideology)? Mediated gastrodiplomacy highlights that journalists co-author diplomatic meaning because they decide whether a culinary story is an exchange ritual or a contest.

The dispute also reflects a broader pattern sometimes described as culinary nationalism: the use of foods as emblems of national identity that must be defended, claimed, or recognized. Media systems can amplify culinary nationalism because conflict is newsworthy. Food controversies are easy to personalize, easy to visualize, and easy to moralize. In this sense, the Döner case illustrates how attention incentives can convert a quality-scheme application into an identity battle. This dynamic aligns with the earlier draft's argument that the media logic is "conflict builds attention": Heritage becomes spectacle, and spectacle crowds out nuance.

Background: Döner, EU Quality Schemes, and the TSG Timeline

The EU's quality policy (EU, 2021) tries to balance two objectives that frequently collide: protecting heritage and enabling fair competition. "The Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and "The Protected Geographical Indication (PGI)" are geographically anchored instruments. Their logic is to prevent outsiders from using a place-based name without producing within the defined region and method. TSG differs because it protects a 'traditional' composition or production method rather than a location. A product can therefore be made anywhere, but only under the protected name if it follows the specification.

As the TSG method (EU, 2021) is principle-based, it is particularly prone to conflict when a food product has multiple mainstream varieties. What appears to be cultural preservation to one side may seem like market restrictions to the other. In the case of döner, the debate focused on the definition of permitted meats and preparation details. The symbolic question – who owns döner – became inseparable from the practical question – what could be sold under that name.

The rotating spit technique and the term "Döner" (TDK)[3] (derived from the Turkish verb 'dönmek', to rotate) have long histories within Ottoman and Anatolian culinary practice. SWR's (no date) news report emphasizes documentation of the method in Bursa in the early nineteenth century and links it to plate dishes such as "Iskender kebab". Having said that, for many Europeans 'a döner' means a snack format nowadays meaning shaved meat placed into pitta bread with vegetables and sauces, like a take-away food. This street food form is closely linked to Turkish migrant worker entrepreneurship in Germany and is often described as an innovation originating in Berlin.

Names are economic assets. In fast food, brand recognition is part of the product. If a term like "Döner" were legally narrowed, the change would not only affect menus but also consumer expectations, supplier chains, and marketing. Producers who do not meet the specification would have to decide between reformulating recipes, rebranding, or relying on consumer familiarity with alternative names such as 'rotisserie meat' or 'shawarma'. Therefore, what appears to be a cultural label is experienced as a competition rule.

The public controversy unfolded in three phases. First, the EU publication of the application of Döner Kebab by UDOFED as a TSG in spring 2024 opened a formal opposition window, and the story entered German news as a regulatory question with cultural symbolism. Second, in summer 2024, German institutions and associations lodged objections to the applications, and outlets increasingly used conflict language (ban, dictates, Brussels vs Ankara) that made the issue legible as a culture-war story. Third, in September 2025, outlets reported that UDOFED withdrew the appli-

[3] Türk Dil Kurumu (Turkish Language Institution)

cation, ending the procedure. This withdrawal was framed as closure and relief, often as a victory for "Döner diversity". This shift in tone across phases is central: it marks the movement from soft-power storytelling to defensive market framing.

Methodology

Objective and methods

The objective of this article is to examine the dispute surrounding Türkiye's attempt to register its "Döner Kebab" as a Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG) product in the European Union and to consider this process as an example of gastrodiplomacy conducted through mediation.

In this study, eight news media outlets from German-speaking countries, (7 media outlets from Germany and 1 media outlet from Austria) namely Tagesschau (2025), Die Welt (2025), Österriechischer Rundfunk-ORF (2025), Westdeutscher Rundfunk Köln-WDR (2024), Die Zeit (2024), Südwestrundfunk-SWR (no date), Freie Presse (2024) and Südwest Presse-SWP (2024), were chosen and evaluated.

The news outlets included in this study were selected through purposive sampling based on their institutional relevance, public visibility, and representational value within the German-speaking media landscape, as identified in the 2025 Digital News Report jointly published by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism and the University of Oxford (Newman et al., 2025). The sample includes both public-service and privately owned media organizations, as well as national and regional outlets from Germany and Austria, thereby enabling a comparative examination of news framing across different editorial and structural contexts. Outlets such as Tagesschau, ORF, WDR, SWR, Die Welt, and Die Zeit were selected because of their prominence in public discourse, broad audience reach, and agenda-setting influence, whereas Freie Presse and Südwest Presse were included to incorporate regional perspectives and to extend the analysis beyond the national level. The composition of the sample thus allows for variation in ownership structure, geographic scope, and journalistic orientation to be taken into account within the analysis of German-speaking news media. However, because the sample is weighted more heavily toward German outlets, the findings should be understood primarily as reflecting the German media context, with Austrian coverage represented to a lesser extent.

Analytical expectations derived from the hypothesis

Building on Nye's theory of soft power and Althusser's concept of ideological state apparatuses, this study advances three expectations. The first expectation (E1), drawing primarily on Nye, is that German-speaking media will frame döner as a cosmopolitan success story, thereby reinforcing a positive image of openness, diversity,

and integration. The second expectation (E2), informed mainly by Althusser, is that once the TSG application is framed as a potential restriction, media coverage will shift toward market and sovereignty frames, casting Türkiye's claim as an external intervention in everyday life in Europe. The third expectation (E3), also grounded in Althusser's perspective, is that during the withdrawal phase German-speaking media will celebrate diversity chiefly as the restoration of the status quo, rather than as the outcome of a cooperative solution based on shared cultural heritage.

Findings

Coding and interpretation

Each news article was coded for four frame clusters as follows:

- Market intervention (code A);
- Bicultural ownership (code B)
- Heritage threat (code C)
- Defensive objection (code D)

It was also coded whether the news story mainly performs a soft-power logic (attraction and mutual recognition) or an ideological defence logic (boundary-making aligned with domestic interests).

The news stories were also summarized, in Table 1 and examined for stable patterns that appear across outlets and time. Empirical observations (selective framing) were separated from normative evaluations.

Table-1 German-speaking media outlets and dominant framing

German-speaking media outlets	Publication date	Headline	Dominant frame(s)
Tagesschau: German public-service television network (2025).	September 25, 2025	"Protection application withdrawn: Doner kebab dispute in the EU ended / Protection application withdrawn: Doner kebab remains doner kebab."	A, B, C, D
Tagesschau indicates that UDOFED withdraws its EU TSG application; the Commission's confirmation ends the procedure. A successful TSG would have tied the name "döner" to a strict EU-approved specification (meat/age, preparation, marination, cutting). Reports describe the draft as so technical that it even prescribed details like strip thickness and knife length, narrowing what could be sold under the name. The proposal is presented as unusually narrow (older-cattle beef or lamb plus tightly specified processing), so widely sold German/EU variants (veal, poultry, vegetarian versions, minced-meat variants) would likely need renaming or reformulation; German associations warn that 80-90% of shops could be affected. Germany is framed as the central market (about 400 tons produced daily in Europe; about 3.5 billion Euros annual turnover overall, around 2.5 billion Euros in Germany). DEHOGA welcomes withdrawal to avoid renaming, legal uncertainty, and consumer confusion. UDOFED advisor Ms. Huriye Özener stresses symbolic recognition of Turkish origin and claims no intent to harm Germany's market. Anna Cavazzini from EU Parliament argues the bid had little chance because döner has evolved through variation and cannot be protected like a static "copyright". The dispute closes without standardization: Döner remains diverse in the EU and shops retain naming flexibility. Relief and market stability dominate; origin recognition is acknowledged but kept secondary to economic risk			

Die Welt: German national daily newspaper (2025).	September 25, 2025	"Germany breathes a sigh of relief Türkiye backs down in kebab dispute."	A, B, D
Die Welt says that UDOFED withdraws the EU TSG application (25 Sep 2025), framed as Germany preserving "döner diversity". If approved, döner sold across the EU would have needed to follow uniform rules (permitted meats and animal age; specified marinade ingredients; slice thickness and marination time), pushing popular German variants toward renaming or recipe change and potentially shrinking what German consumers recognize as "döner". The report treats the conflict as both economic and political: a single specification is portrayed as reshaping everyday German street food, raising questions of who may set standards for Germany's market and creating fears of legal uncertainty. Döner is presented as a major sector (estimates cited: about two million sold daily in Germany; about 400 tons produced daily across Europe; about 60,000 jobs; around 2.4 billion Euros revenue in Germany and 3.5 billion Euros across Europe). The reason for withdrawal is presented as unclear; interpretations include that UDOFED stepped back to avoid an expected rejection due to limited institutional support. German producers welcome the result as preserving variety and avoiding re-labelling costs. The immediate regulatory threat disappears, though the dispute could return if a new application is filed later. Authenticity is translated into compliance costs and naming sovereignty, positioning readers as domestic consumer-stakeholders.			
Österreichischer Rundfunk (ORF): Austria national public broadcaster and news website (2025).	September 25, 2025	"Germany breathes a sigh of relief Türkiye backs down in kebab dispute."	A, B, D
According to ORF, UDOFED withdraws its 2022 TSG application after roughly 3.5 years of controversy. The proposed "one recipe" approach would have constrained ingredients and processing (older-cattle beef or specified sheep cuts; tightly limited chicken specifications; detailed marinade and slicing rules), making many Austria/Germany-normal variants non-compliant (e.g., veal, turkey, potentially vegetable döner). German and Austrian objections are framed as protecting established practice and consumer choice against an external definition that would require renaming or reformulation. Macro-figures are used to justify stakes (about 400 tons produced daily; about 60,000 jobs; around 2.4 billion Euros annual sales in Germany; around 3.5 billion Euros in Europe). UDOFED is said not to have offered a clear public rationale; interpretations include withdrawal to avoid an official rejection. German producers read the outcome as preserving "döner diversity". Diverse recipes can continue without EU-level constraints for now. Economic scale and "relief" framing interpellate audiences as affected stakeholders; tradition is invoked mainly to legitimize resistance.			
Westdeutscher Rundfunk Köln (WDR): German public-broadcasting institution (2024).	July 26, 2024	"Dispute over the rotisserie: When can a doner kebab be called a 'doner'?"	A, D
WDR explains the procedural beginning: UDOFED's TSG application and BMLEH's formal objection, triggering EU consultations and review. A successful TSG would reserve the name for products made according to the defined "traditional" specification, which the report associates with strict meat and processing rules (limiting common German variants). The fight is framed as a naming boundary dispute: BMLEH warns of noticeable economic repercussions and argues the definition does not match German production standards; UDOFED is positioned as seeking EU recognition of a traditional method and naming protection. Sector size is used to show why naming matters (about 400 tons produced daily in Europe; around 3.5 billion Euros annual sales in Europe; around 2.4 billion Euros in Germany). This story does not describe a withdrawal (it predates the 2025 outcome). Instead, it contrasts BMLEH's disruption argument with UDOFED's authenticity-and-recognition claim. At this stage, the controversy is open-ended: a standards bid meets a state-backed economic objection. Authenticity becomes procedure and cost, anchoring interpretation in domestic market risk more than cultural exchange.			
Die Zeit: German national weekly newspaper (2024).	August 26, 2024	"Who owns the doner kebab?"	A, B, C, D
ADie Zeit frames the TSG bid as a struggle over ownership, detailing objections (Dehoga, ATDID, BMLEH) and illustrating impacts via a Berlin shop owner (Ali Ersoz). If "döner kebab" were tied to a strict beef/lamb/chicken template, common German products (veal, turkey, vegetarian options) would fall outside the category and require renaming and rebranding; some larger producers are portrayed as less exposed because they already use alternative labels such as "rotisserie". Definitional authority is central: the piece adds an identity layer (culinary nationalism) and highlights intra-diaspora contestation, including claims that the term is too general to protect and that UDOFED did not consult German-based Turkish producers. It also notes that the product's history is not neatly national, with references to Ottoman-era lineages and related regional traditions (often invoked to question whether a single narrow origin claim fits the EU criteria). The article amplifies scale with higher-end estimates (18,000-25,000 restaurants; up to 5 billion Euros annual revenue; 60,000-80,000 employees) and shop-level costs (about 5,000 Euros for new signage and about 10,000 Euros for broader rebranding, as cited). This story does not describe a withdrawal. It contrasts UDOFED's origin/tradition justification with critics' claims that diversity and contested histories undermine a narrow protected definition. Naming rights become a proxy for status, identity, and market power, while the practical concern remains who can keep selling what without costly legal uncertainty. Die Zeit makes the power struggle explicit while still anchoring the narrative in stakeholder costs and market control.			
Südwestrundfunk (SWR): German regional public broadcasting corporation (no date).	No date	"Is the doner kebab a German invention from Berlin?"	A, C, D

SWR Culture debunks the "invented in Berlin" claim and traces the rotating-spit method to Türkiye (Bursa, early 19th century), while crediting Kadir Nurman with popularizing the portable Berlin snack form. Not discussed as EU policy; instead the piece clarifies what "tradition" could mean: technique and plated traditions are tied to Turkish culinary history, while the everyday German meaning is the migrant-shaped adaptation into flatbread-to-go. The dispute background is explained as an ownership problem: method, format, and meaning travel and change through migration and markets, making binary "invented here" claims misleading. No sector numbers are cited; the economic angle is narrative (adapting a dish to fast-food demand). The piece supplies historical context that other outlets sometimes mobilize in the standards dispute. This is closest to a cultural circulation frame, but in the wider corpus such history is often reabsorbed into defensive arguments for preserving local variety.			
Freie Presse: German regional daily newspaper in the Chemnitz region (2024).	July 24, 2024	"Discussion about a kebab ban: This is how the operators in Plauen are reacting."	A, D
This particular Freie Presse news story surveys Plauen operators about the prospective TSG specification and its consequences. If adopted, the name "döner" would be restricted to products meeting a fixed recipe focused on meat/processing rules; the article lists concrete parameters attributed to the proposal (including minimum animal age, skewer composition, and specified additions) and uses humour about alternative product names if "döner" became restricted. The policy fight is translated into everyday shop talk and quality signalling: Operators range from unconcerned (expecting no changes) to sceptical (doubting enforceability) to supportive (seeing stricter standards as a quality guarantee). Instead of macro statistics, the economic register is micro: menu practicality, pricing expectations, and quality claims. The story reports that some operators anticipate price effects, while others emphasize that customers are mainly concerned with taste and value. This story does not describe a withdrawal. It presents local expectations and attitudes rather than an outcome. Local sellers interpret the same EU initiative through different risk tolerance and competitive strategies (e.g., upgrading to "quality" versus maintaining familiar low-threshold offers). The local angle intensifies interpellation as small entrepreneurs and customers; the dispute becomes livelihood and price-quality trade-offs rather than international recognition.			
Südwest Presse: German daily newspaper based in Ulm (2024).	August 16, 2024	"Dispute between Brussels and Ankara: Discussion about a kebab ban: This is how the operators in Plauen are reacting."	A, B, C, D
The Südwest Presse news article is referenced mainly through its headline and positioning. The headline cues Brussels vs. Ankara conflict and a consumer-visible ingredient shift, implying that standardization would translate into everyday change in what people buy as "döner" and potentially reclassify familiar products. By foregrounding interstate conflict and potential ingredient change, the report dramatizes standardization as external imposition and aligns readers with local consumption habits. Because only the headline-level summary is available here, the snapshot is best read as evidence of how regional outlets can compress the policy mechanism into a simple "ban" trope. As summarized, it reinforces the "ban/disruption" narrative even though the legal mechanism is a naming/recipe standard. The excerpt supports a defensive-ideological reading (market disruption and consumer identity as primary hooks), with cultural history secondary.			

Overview: two story modes in German-speaking reporting

The news analysed show that German-speaking media can produce two different stories about "Döner". One is a cultural story of migration and shared everyday life. The other is a regulatory story about naming rights, market disruption, and national autonomy. Our hypothesis predicts that once TSG labelling is at stake, the second story mode dominates. The summaries confirm this across media outlet types.

Dominant frames: economy, objection, and the defense of consumer choice (codes A and D)

As is clear from Table 1, the main concerns of the media focused on market intervention (code A) and defensive objections (code D). Tagesschau, Die Welt, ORF, and WDR foreground the practical consequence of the specifications proposed in TSG by Türkiye, which possibly would result in questioning the quality and name of Döner produced in Germany. This produces a chain of implied costs - recipe changes, rena-

ming, legal uncertainty - and a chain of moral evaluations: the regulation is framed as disproportionate and harmful. Industry associations and government actors appear as defenders of local livelihoods. This sovereignty rhetoric is explicit in Der Spiegel's coverage of the dispute, which quotes Cem Özdemir (Member of German Parliament) for rejecting "dictates from Ankara" and insisting that people in Germany should decide for themselves how "Döner" is prepared and eaten (DerSpiegel, 2024b).

The diversity argument as defensive pluralism (Code B)

Many news items praise "döner diversity" and invoke migration history to argue that the product belongs to more than one tradition. Yet diversity is used primarily to defend the existing market ecology rather than to invite a cooperative heritage solution.

Withdrawal framing and moral closure (Code C)

Withdrawal coverage frames the end of the procedure as relief and victory, consolidating the moral evaluation that the status quo is good. This final framing step matters because it stabilizes the audience's interpretation and retroactively delegitimizes the original heritage claim.

Turkish-side framing

The manuscript identifies a contrasting cluster of Turkish frames. These frames emphasize national heritage, origin recognition, and cultural appropriation anxiety. The problem is defined as symbolic loss: if the name döner becomes a generic category in Europe, Türkiye's cultural authorship is diluted. Responsibility is assigned to European market actors who, in this view, benefit from the dish while denying origin recognition. Remedies include legal protection, official recognition, and narratives of rightful ownership.

This contrast does not imply that one side is "correct" and the other is "wrong". It shows how the same administrative procedure can be narrated as either cultural diplomacy or cultural threat. In Nye's terms (1990; 2008), Türkiye's appeal to EU recognition can be read as a soft-power strategy. In Althusser's (2004) terms, German-speaking media's resistance can be read as ideological reproduction of market-national common sense.

Discussion

Across the news corpus, the Döner Kebab dispute is framed less as a cooperative process of cultural recognition than as a struggle over regulation, naming authority, and market stability. Although the coverage occasionally retains traces of gastrodiplomatic meaning, the dominant pattern is one in which symbolic recognition is progressively displaced by concerns about economic disruption and domestic control. This

shift is analytically significant because it reflects the movement from a Nyean logic of soft power, in which food can function as an attractive and legitimate cultural resource, toward an Althusserian logic, in which media discourse organizes readers as subjects who must defend familiar economic and social arrangements. In this respect, the dispute shows how a food item that ordinarily circulates as a symbol of openness and hybridity can be reframed as an object of threat once it enters the field of legal classification and market regulation.

From the perspective of Nye's theory, some reports still preserve elements of cultural attraction, legitimacy, and shared heritage. These are most visible where outlets refer to the Turkish origin of döner, its transnational development, or its evolution through migration and adaptation. SWR Kultur offers the clearest example of this tendency by presenting döner as a product of historical circulation, showing that the culinary technique, serving form, and everyday meaning of the dish developed across different contexts. Die Zeit also leaves room for this perspective by acknowledging contested histories, shared lineages, and the difficulty of reducing the product to a single national narrative. In these instances, döner appears as a cultural bridge rather than a fixed possession, which aligns closely with Nye's understanding of culture as a source of symbolic attraction and soft power.

However, this softer and more open framing is not dominant across the corpus. Most outlets instead rely on a discourse that is more convincingly explained through Althusser's concept of ideological state apparatuses. Tagesschau, Die Welt, ORF, WDR, Freie Presse, and Südwest Presse all give considerable emphasis to expressions such as strict specification, renaming, legal uncertainty, consumer confusion, recipe change, market disruption, and economic repercussions. These terms do more than describe the issue; they position readers as affected consumers, shop owners, or domestic stakeholders whose everyday practices are being threatened by an external rule. In Althusserian terms, the media interpellate audiences into subject positions grounded in defense, caution, and market loyalty. The problem is therefore not framed primarily as whether Turkish culinary heritage deserves recognition, but whether recognition would disrupt the established order of European and especially German food markets.

A further pattern emerging from the analysis is the repeated translation of authenticity into cost, compliance, and definitional control. In several reports, what begins as a heritage claim is recast as a question of who has the authority to decide what may legally be sold under the name "döner." This is especially clear in WDR and Die Zeit, where naming becomes a boundary issue tied to legitimacy, economic consequence, and symbolic ownership. Die Welt and Tagesschau intensify this logic by foregrounding production volumes, turnover, employment, and the potential effects on the majority of shops. ORF adopts a similar structure by linking the "one recipe" framing to consumer choice and established practice. Even Freie Presse, despite its

local focus, translates the dispute into menu naming, quality perceptions, pricing, and commercial practicality. Across these cases, the central concern is not cultural exchange but the preservation of existing economic routines.

At the same time, the corpus shows that the media do not reject diversity altogether. Rather, diversity is welcomed only under specific conditions. It is positively valued when it supports a narrative of openness, cosmopolitanism, or culinary variety within Europe, but it becomes less acceptable when linked to a formal claim that may alter market access or naming rights. This selective embrace of pluralism is particularly visible in the contrast between the celebration of "döner diversity" after the withdrawal and the resistance to a protected specification during the dispute itself. In this sense, diversity is not framed as the basis for a cooperative heritage solution, but as the restoration of the existing status quo. Such a pattern supports the article's broader argument that German-speaking media display a strategically inconsistent position: they are willing to celebrate culinary plurality as long as it does not challenge domestic market arrangements or symbolic control.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the Döner Kebab dispute was covered mainly through a defensive media logic in which economic risk, local continuity, and consumer reassurance outweighed the language of recognition and cultural legitimacy. While Nye's soft power remains visible in isolated references to origin, circulation, and shared culinary history, the dominant interpretive structure across the corpus is Althusserian. Media organizations do not merely report the controversy; they help reproduce a common-sense understanding in which European everyday life, domestic market practices, and local economic interests appear as the primary objects of protection. The dispute therefore illustrates how mediated gastrodiplomacy can quickly lose its integrative and symbolic potential when food becomes entangled with legal standards, ownership claims, and the politics of market regulation. In the German-speaking media context, döner is celebrated as a symbol of diversity only until diversity begins to carry regulatory consequences.

Soft power thrives when audiences can enjoy a cultural artefact without feeling controlled. In everyday contexts, German-speaking media can celebrate döner as a symbol of pluralism and integration, offering a win-win attraction. TSG labelling changes the conditions because it introduces a legal boundary and potentially forces costly change. Once naming rights become regulated, the story shifts from taste to rules.

The corpus indicates that German-speaking media typically refuses to narrate the label as cooperative heritage recognition. Instead, it frames the attempt as restriction, imposition, or retaliation. This reframing can turn a soft-power initiative into reputational damage for the initiator and into strengthened soft power for the defender (Europe as protector of diversity and consumer freedom).

Althusser (2004) helps explain why resistance appears natural. Media, as an ISA, reproduces ideology by making certain problem definitions obvious. When the stories stress legal uncertainty and economic harm, the implied moral conclusion is that objection is responsible and necessary. The audience is interpellated as a domestic stakeholder who should defend market plurality. This ideological effect is reinforced by ban metaphors and sovereignty language.

To make the framing dynamics transparent while reducing repetition, this subsection condenses the German-language news corpus into eight short case snapshots. All items revolve around UDOFED's attempt to register "Döner kebab" in the EU as a Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG), the objections by German actors (including BMLEH), and the later withdrawal. Each snapshot follows the same template. Across outlets, audiences are addressed primarily as consumers and domestic stakeholders facing renaming, compliance, and legal uncertainty (Althusser, 2004), while origin narratives appear mostly as supporting arguments for resisting standardization rather than as soft-power bridges of mutual recognition (Nye J. S., 1990; 2008). In this corpus, historical-origins material appears mainly as context, whereas regulatory and economic risk cues structure the dominant narrative arc. Because the corpus is summary-based and German-focused, results should be treated as indicative. Future work can extend to full-text analysis, additional European countries, and audience reception.

Conclusion

The analysis supports the hypothesis: German-speaking media uses gastrodiplomacy as soft power in everyday cultural storytelling but largely refrains from gastrodiplomacy when TSG labelling threatens domestic markets. It switches to defensive frames centred on economic repercussions, sovereignty, and consumer choice. In the withdrawal phase, diversity is celebrated as restoration of the status quo. In normative terms, this selective stance is hypocritical. German-speaking media promotes a discourse of openness and shared culture when it is beneficial yet resists formal heritage recognition when recognition could impose costs. Döner, therefore, becomes a clear case of instrumental multiculturalism: shared culture is celebrated until shared culture becomes law.

For public diplomacy, the case shows that legal heritage strategies can backfire if opponents successfully define them as bans. For media studies, the case illustrates how cultural objects can be mobilized as ideological instruments. For policy, the case suggests exploring compromise instruments: recognizing origin narratives while preserving space for established variants.

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