

**Thumbnail Image:**



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## **GPDNet's Successful Take-off** <sup>[1]</sup>

Global Public Diplomacy Network (GPDNet), the first global association for public diplomacy (PD) institutions, has taken off successfully under the first term president, Yunus Emre Institute of Turkey (2016-current). As the result of its fifth General Assembly, held in November 2018-where I was invited as one of the Korean delegation and participated in the assembly meeting-GPDNet is expected to accelerate its upward climb under the new leadership of the KATARA Cultural Village Foundation of Qatar this year. Before the next term presidency begins, the organization should evaluate the achievements of the first term president, the expectations of the second term president and the implications of GPDNet's current development.

GPDNet was born out of the Korea Foundation's initiative in October 2014, with an aim of establishing a solid platform for multilateral cooperation among non-profit national level institutions promoting cultural and public diplomacy. It was the first attempt to institutionalize a global association in the field of PD. As an interim president, the Korea Foundation sought for a way to share knowledge and encourage cooperation in line with the country's middle power

diplomacy. The sixth Korea Foundation Global Seminar in 2013, “Middle Powers and Public Diplomacy: Building a Network for Global Common Good,” laid the groundwork for the establishment of GPDNet.

President Seref Ates of the Yunus Emre Institute of Turkey was elected as a three-year president at the third General Assembly held in Krakow, Poland in June 2016 and kicked off the first GPDNet Term Presidency with ten members: Adam Mickewicz Institute of Poland, Balassi Institute of Hungary, Camões Institute of Portugal, Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange of Taiwan, Korea Foundation of South Korea, National Commission for Culture and the Arts of Philippines, National Institute for Cultural Orientation of Nigeria, Singapore International Foundation, Swedish Institute, and Yunus Emre Institute. As for GPDNet’s focus, the members agreed on the importance of the ‘cultural’ aspect of PD and started incorporating ‘cultural diplomacy’ into the major PD domain.

The Yunus Emre Institute, an international agency working to promote knowledge, language, culture, history and arts of Turkey, has successfully achieved its objective of establishing communication and building trust among cultural diversities. The Institute joined GPDNet as one of its founding members, and was willing to take on the organization’s first presidency, due to its belief in global cooperation through public and cultural diplomacy. In particular, the leadership of President Seref Ates enabled the Yunus Emre Institute to coordinate and organize international events with the full support of not only the central governments of Turkey, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Culture, and the Ministry of Education, but also within academic fields. With an integrated effort, the Yunus Emre Institute focused on materializing GPDNet projects to cope with prejudices and build new communication pathways through public and cultural diplomacy efforts.

Every project has been carefully designed, implemented and conducted during this period with a wide range of target audiences, such as youth, adults, academics and conflicted communities. One of the learned best practices was the first International Conference on the “Role of Public Diplomacy in Bridging Conflicted Communities Together,” where globally recognized academics, diplomats, bureaucrats and politicians gathered in Istanbul to discuss methods for building mutual relations among various states, such as engaging both conflictual and non-conflictual regions with multidimensional differences. The conference resulted in a published book, *Public Diplomacy: Strategic Engagement in Conflicted Communities*, which contributes to PD practices and academic literature. Another best practice was the “Tales for Everyone” project to build new narratives of peace, and to accumulate oral history through living storytellers. The Yunus Emre Institute, believing culture to be an important aspect of PD, is dedicated to cultivating a new way of conflict transformation through a culture aiming for ‘peace.’ This is what distinguishes GPDNet from propagandistic approaches to culture in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The origin of GPDNet, building networks with middle powers, does not contradict from the vision of a culture for peace. Although not including cultural giants may result in reverse prejudice, GPDNet adopts an open model by including the Japan Foundation and the British Council as observers to the first General Assembly. Adopting an open and inclusive model is recommended unless the potential of globalized and dominant culture eradicates cultural diversities. Also, it is expected that the inclusion of cultural giants could help elevate the discussions within the network.

## ***What we can expect from GPDNet is the possibility of conflict transformation through culture by providing a global platform for international PD institutions.***

The GPDNet tries to embrace all diverse cultures in the network and the Yunus Emre Institute has put that into practice. Since the first term presidency, GPDNet has expanded its Members, including KATARA Cultural Village Foundation of Qatar, Comunidade Academica para o Desenvolvimento of Mozambique (CADE), the Institute of the Lithuanian Language, and Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior of Mexico (IME). Both CADE and IME were granted full membership at the fifth General Assembly.

Most importantly, in this assembly, the KATARA Cultural Village Foundation has been elected as the second term President. By expressing great enthusiasm and capability, the KATARA Foundation will take over the presidency in this coming May when the Presidency Handover Ceremony will be held along with the Global Conferences and Panel Discussions in Istanbul by the Yunus Emre Institute. According to resolutions of the assembly, the KATARA Foundation will continue what the Yunus Emre Institute has implemented so far, such as cultural exchange programs, promoting GPDNet to expand its network, as well as adopting new projects to engage broader audiences.

The KATARA Foundation, mainly dealing with culture, history, arts, culinary arts, music, language and traditional heritages, is a promising president since the KATARA management is capable of incorporating resources and hands-on experiences into its great vision. The Foundation is well aligned with the country's national vision initiated a decade ago to "transform Qatar into an advanced society capable of achieving sustainable development" by 2030. In addition, Qatar will host the 2022 FIFA World Cup and continues every effort to make the mega event successful. The term presidency of GPDNet from 2019 to 2021 would not only enhance the capacity building of the network but also increase the global public's awareness about Qatar regardless of the current difficulties in the diplomatic relations.

The results of the fifth General Assembly show that GPDNet focuses on cross-cultural communications to open up space to engage more diverse entities to bring about mutual respect. In doing so, what we can expect from GPDNet is the possibility of conflict transformation through culture by providing a global platform for international PD institutions. This resonates the importance of expanding its members to share the essence of PD, cultivated by GPDNet, and to create more opportunities for mutual understanding with more diverse entities.

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