

“SOFT POWER” POTENTIAL IN TURKEY’S FOREIGN POLICY IN CENTRAL ASIA

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***Abstract.** Turkey’s relations with the Central Asian region have historical foundations, and there are common similarities between the countries both ethnically and religiously. Today, historical factors play an important role in the development and implementation of the modern foreign policy of this country in Central Asia. Its “soft power” potential in the region is mainly manifested in the fields of education, language, culture, and tourism. Turkey’s cooperation with the countries of the region in these areas is strengthened at the institutional level, and in terms of the influence of the “soft power” policy, it differs from one another on the example of individual countries.*

***Keywords:** Turkey, Central Asia, foreign policy, Joseph Nye, “soft power”, education, language, culture, tourism.*

The genesis of Turkey’s relations with Central Asian countries

After the collapse of the former Soviet Union, 5 countries gained independence in Central Asia. The Republic of Turkey, which is religiously and ethnically close, was the first to officially recognize the independence of all countries in the region. In 1992-1993, diplomatic relations were established between Turkey and these countries, embassies and other representative offices were opened in capital cities.

The Republic of Turkey was the first to officially recognize the independence of the Central Asian countries and to establish close relations. After all, the countries are united by historical foundations such as a similar language and culture, ancient traditions, a single religion, and eternal friendship. The culture of these peoples has many common aspects that are inextricably linked. The ancestors of today’s Turks entered the territory of modern Turkey from Movarounnahr. Therefore, in Turkey, the Central Asian region is considered as the land of ancestors. Turkey and the countries of Central Asia are the centers of historical communication between different cultures and civilizations and trade routes.

In the period after the independence of the Central Asian states, based on the above-mentioned important aspects and the principles of modern international relations, they strengthened bilateral and multilateral relations with the Republic of Turkey within the framework of international organizations and structures. Comprehensive cooperation relations in political, economic, social, cultural and other directions have been established between Turkey and the countries of the region. In particular, relations between Uzbekistan and Turkey reached a new level in 2017, and the leaders of the two countries approved the Joint Statement on “Strategic Partnership” and other important deals and agreements.

About the concept of “soft power”.

In international relations theory, the term “soft power” was first used by the American statesman and political scientist Joseph Nye in his 1990 work entitled “Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power”. Later, in 2004, the author explained in detail the factor of

“soft power” as a concept in the foreign policy of states in his book “Soft Power: The means to Success in World Politics” and other scientific articles.

According to Joseph Nye’s definition, “soft power” in international relations is a set of foreign political methods and tools aimed at influencing other countries and achieving desired results through mutual cooperation and the formation of a positive image of states. If “hard power” is the use of military and economic power by one country against another country, “soft power” arises from the attractiveness of its cultural and political goals. [1] In particular, the main tools of “soft power” include increasing the influence of the state language, demonstrating the country’s cultural and spiritual heritage, attracting foreign students and researchers to higher education institutions and providing various grant programs, developing and promoting tourism infrastructure.

In modern international relations, the world’s leading countries mainly use the potential of “soft power” in the development and implementation of the concept of foreign policy. Because the use of “soft power” means requires countries to have enormous political and economic opportunities, as well as financial and cultural resources.

“Soft power” factor in Turkey’s foreign policy in Central Asia

The potential of “soft power” exists in the foreign policy of the Republic of Turkey in Central Asia, and this factor is manifested in the example of tools such as education, language and culture. Its relations with the countries of the region in these areas can be studied bilaterally and generally.

Yunus Emre institutes are a clear example of the “soft power” tool in Turkey’s foreign policy. The institute is named after Yunus Emre, a great poet and propagandist of Sufism who lived in the 13th-14th centuries and made a great contribution to Turkish literature. Initially, the Yunus Emre Foundation was established in 2007 on the initiative of the then President of Turkey, Abdullah Gul, and in 2009, the foundation started opening institutions in foreign countries. By 2021, 64 Yunus Emre institutes have been opened in 55 countries of the world. [2] The main goal of the Yunus Emre institutes is to promote the culture, art, history and language of this country. At the opening ceremony of the institute in London, Abdulla Gul emphasized the following points: “Great countries exist not only with the help of diplomacy, but also with cultural capital. Yunus Emre Turkish Centers are the invisible power of Turkey”. [3]

Special attention is paid to the internationalization of higher education in Turkey and the attraction of foreign students. The Yunus Emre Foundation also provides scholarships for summer courses to teach the Turkish language. As part of scholarship programs, foreign students are paid the expenses related to living in Turkey, learning the Turkish language, participating in social and cultural events, and traveling around the country. The program is attractive to foreign students due to the fact that it does not impose any financial costs on the participants.

The Yunus Emre Institute was opened in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, in March 2010. Turkish speaking clubs have also been organized by this institute in some universities of Kazakhstan. In particular, in 2018, the number of 17-55-year-old students attending language courses at Nazarbayev University reached 168. [4] The courses are mainly attended by those who are interested in Turkish culture and literature and citizens who want to work in Turkish companies. The Yunus Emre Institute is engaged in the translation of Turkish language sources into Kazakh and Kazakh language sources into Turkish in order to introduce the unique culture and history of the two nations to the representatives of the two peoples.

Turkey has extensive cooperation with Kazakhstan in the field of higher education. In 1991, the International Kazakh-Turkish University named after Khoja Ahmed Yassavi was established in Turkistan, and in 1996, Suleyman Demirel Private University was established in Kaskelen, Almaty region. According to the Turkish Higher Education Council, 8,219 Kazakh students are studying at these state universities in 2022-2023. [5] Also, close cultural relations have been established between these countries.

Manas Kyrgyz-Turkish University, opened in 1995, is located in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan. Based on the cooperation agreement between the Ministry of Education and Culture of Kyrgyzstan and the Turkish Educational Association “Sebat” in 1992, the educational institutions established with the same name operate. Renamed as Sapat in 2017, these educational institutions include primary schools, international schools, high schools and Ala-Too International University. [6] In 2021, the activity of the Turkish educational fund “Maarif” was launched in the city of Bishkek, and the first school was opened by this fund. The issues of opening additional schools and professional lyceums within the framework of the “Maarif” fund were also discussed at the meeting held by the responsible officials of the countries. [7]

For Turkmenistan, Turkey is a close partner in the field of education. Thousands of students from Turkmenistan study in the leading higher education institutions of the Republic of Turkey. In 1994-2016, the International Turkmen-Turk University was operating in Ashgabat, where Turkish teachers taught together with local experts. According to the Turkish Council of Higher Education, in the future joint degree programs will be opened by the two countries, which will allow students to be admitted to bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral degrees. This educational format was created due to the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Ministry of Education of Turkmenistan and the Council of Higher Education of the Republic of Turkey. [8]

Tajik youth have a strong desire to travel to Turkey and study at these state universities. The cultural closeness of the countries plays an important role in the basis of this interest. Tajikistan and Turkey have common values, which is related to the name of the great thinker Jalaluddin Rumi, originally from Balkh, who lived in the 13th century, but who created in Konya. The rich spiritual legacy of Jalaluddin Rumi, a Persian poet and propagandist of Sufism, is equally appreciated and studied by both nations. On the initiative of the leaders of the countries, in 2018, an international symposium dedicated to the memory of Jalaluddin Rumi was organized in Dushanbe. [9] Also, Turkish artists often visit artistic parties, concerts and other similar cultural events held in Tajikistan.

Due to the high interest and demand for learning the Turkish language in Uzbekistan, it is taught as a second language by local and Turkish teachers in state higher education institutions. In particular, the Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies is the leading university in Uzbekistan for the development of the Turkish language, and the Department of Turkish Philology, established in 1991, is the first educational institution for teaching the Turkish language not only in Uzbekistan, but also in Central Asia. is counted. In recent years, research in the field of Turkic studies led to the establishment of a new faculty, and in 2020, the Faculty of Turkic Studies was established at the Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies. The most urgent task before the faculty is not only to teach Turkish language, but also to develop Turkic studies, that is, to train specialists and researchers in the field of Turkish linguistics, Turkish literature, Turkish politics, economy, history, and culture. [10]

It should be noted that tunes and music created by Turkish creators, especially feature films and TV series, entered Uzbek households and received great recognition from movie lovers. Using Turkey's experience and pavilion, the shooting of a historical TV series in honor of the national hero of the Uzbek people, the great commander Jalaluddin Manguberdi, in cooperation with the representatives of the arts of the two countries, confirms our opinion.

The general cultural relations of the Republic of Turkey with the countries of Central Asia can be studied on the example of the International Turkish Cultural Organization, TURKSOY. TURKSOY was initially named as the organization for the cooperative development of Turkish culture and art as a result of the agreement signed by the Ministers of Culture of the Turkish countries in Almaty in 1993, and in 2009 it was changed to its current name. The main task of this organization, whose headquarters is located in Ankara, is to support the spiritual closeness of the Turkic peoples and strengthen brotherly solidarity, to introduce Turkish culture to the whole world and to convey it to the younger generation. Within the framework of the organization, various festivals, forums, conferences, congresses and other meetings are held every year, which create an excellent environment for scientific and cultural figures of Turkic countries to exchange experiences.

Today, Turkey has a very developed tourism infrastructure and is one of the leading countries in the world in this field. The western region of the country, especially Istanbul, Izmir, Antalya, Bodrum and other cities, due to its geographical location, unique nature and historical heritage, have become major tourist destinations. Many citizens from Central Asian countries visit these cities every year for various purposes. The promotion of the tourism industry by the Turkish government and the relatively low costs and favorable conditions for foreign tourists attract the attention of the citizens of the region. In 2023, the flow of tourists reached a record level in Turkey, receiving 56.7 million international visitors with a 10 percent increase compared to the previous year. [11] Last year, the city of Istanbul recorded an 8.4 percent increase in the number of tourists compared to the previous year, and their number reached 17.37 million. Uzbekistan entered the top 10 in terms of the number of tourists visiting Istanbul, making up 389,700 people. [12]

Conclusion

Turkey's "soft power" potential in the areas analyzed above is shown to be at different levels in the case of countries in the region. In particular, it can be noted that Kazakhstan has close cooperation with Turkey in these areas compared to other countries in the region. Following the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey, existing Turkish schools, lyceums and universities in Central Asian countries will be closed or renamed. However, since all educational institutions financed by the fund of rebel groups are closed in Turkey itself, this factor does not have a serious effect on the cooperation of the countries in the field of education. On the contrary, the bilateral and general relations between Turkey and the countries of Central Asia have reached a new level recently. Turkey's religious and ethnic closeness and the practical experience of mutual cooperation create a basis for the effective operation of the "soft power" policy of this country in the region.

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