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NATIONAL IMAGE BUILDING IN THE CONTEXT OF KYRGYZSTAN'S SOFT POWER STRATEGIES

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ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ НАЦИОНАЛЬНОГО ИМИДЖА В КОНТЕКСТЕ СТРАТЕГИЙ МЯГКОЙ СИЛЫ КЫРГЫЗСКОЙ РЕСПУБЛИКИ

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Abstract. In today's international relations, the influence of states is not limited to their military and economic capacities. Cultural appeal, political values and a positive image on a global scale also become determining factors in foreign policy success. In this context, the concept of “soft power” developed by Joseph Nye is increasingly gaining strategic importance, especially for developing countries. For developing countries such as Kyrgyzstan, soft power stands out as an effective tool for supporting foreign policy goals without resorting to pressure or coercion. Kyrgyzstan has a remarkable soft power potential with its rich cultural heritage and increasing international visibility. In order to activate this potential, projects focused on culture and education, diaspora activities, promotion of tourism and promotion of art and traditions play an important role. In addition, diplomatic missions not only conduct official relations; they also assume a central function in terms of public diplomacy, cultural interaction and information sharing. This study examines the social media activities of Kyrgyzstan's embassies in strategically important countries (USA, China, Russia, Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan) in line with Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy priorities and regional sensitivities using descriptive content analysis. In this context, it is evaluated how digital diplomacy tools contribute to the process of building national image and supporting foreign policy goals.

Аннотация. В современных международных отношениях влияние государств определяется не только их военным и экономическим потенциалом, но также культурной привлекательностью, политическими ценностями и позитивным имиджем на глобальном уровне, которые становятся решающими факторами успеха внешней политики. В этом контексте разработанное Джозефом Наем понятие «мягкой силы» приобретает всё более стратегическое значение, особенно для развивающихся стран. Для таких государств, как Кыргызстан, мягкая сила выступает в качестве эффективного инструмента поддержки внешнеполитических целей без применения давления или принуждения. Кыргызстан обладает значительным потенциалом мягкой силы благодаря богатому культурному наследию и растущей международной видимости. В активации этого потенциала важную роль играют проекты, ориентированные на культуру и образование, деятельность диаспоры, продвижение туризма, а также популяризация искусства и традиций. Кроме того, дипломатические представительства выполняют не только функцию ведения официальных отношений, но и играют центральную роль в сфере публичной дипломатии, культурного

взаимодействия и обмена информацией. Данное исследование проводит описательный контент-анализ активности кыргызских посольств в социальных сетях в странах, имеющих стратегическое значение с точки зрения внешнеполитических приоритетов и региональной чувствительности Кыргызстана (США, Китай, Россия, Турция, Азербайджан, Казахстан и Узбекистан). В этом контексте оценивается, каким образом цифровые дипломатические инструменты способствуют формированию национального имиджа и достижению внешнеполитических целей.

Keywords: soft power, public diplomacy, Kyrgyzstan, foreign policy, national image.

Ключевые слова: мягкая сила, публичная дипломатия, Кыргызстан, внешняя политика, национальный имидж.

The 21st century, as in many other areas, stands out with changing methods and approaches in international relations. Throughout history, relations between societies and states have been maintained with classical methods such as communication, negotiation, and in cases of disagreement, war or direct conflict. However, technological advances and the acceleration of globalization have significantly transformed the understanding of diplomacy in the international system.

As part of this transformation, the concept of public diplomacy has gained special importance. With the evolution of the international system into a more participatory, transparent and society-based structure in the post-Cold War period, diplomacy has also entered a process of "civilianization". In this process, civil society organizations, the public and individuals have become direct stakeholders of foreign policy processes; and diplomats have been compelled to take these actors into consideration [1]. In this context, public diplomacy stands out as a foreign policy tool that is based more on social interaction and aims to establish long-term and sustainable relations compared to traditional diplomacy.

The concept of "public diplomacy", which was first used by American diplomat Edmund Gullion in 1965 to describe information and cultural exchange, has been enriched with various academic definitions over time. Cull (2008) lists the basic components of public diplomacy as listening, cultural exchange, communication strategies and interaction with international public opinion [2]; Tuch (2003) defines the concept as "a government communication process that aims to explain a nation's thoughts, ideals, institutions, culture and current policies to foreign publics." [3]. While Djerejian (2003) states the purpose of public diplomacy as "to promote national interests by influencing foreign public opinion"[4], Manheim (1994) considers public diplomacy as a process aimed at convincing the public opinions of other countries in line with national interests [5].

One of the most important tools that underlies public diplomacy and increases its functionality is "soft power". According to Çiçek (2022), public diplomacy can be considered as a strategic form of communication based on soft power; focusing on public opinion and civil society. In this way, it is possible to influence foreign public opinion and support national interests through cultural and political values [6].

This study aims to examine the soft power strategies that Kyrgyzstan uses in building its national image. For "small states" such as Kyrgyzstan, which have limited opportunities in terms of hard power elements, soft power is considered one of the main tools for achieving positive diplomatic results, increasing international visibility and supporting national interests. Kyrgyzstan's rich cultural heritage, history and national identity have been consciously used as a diplomatic tool by various leaders since it gained independence in 1991. Thanks to cultural diplomacy activities

carried out on different platforms, from historical monuments to international festivals, the country positions itself as an actor that embraces both traditional and modern values.

The article analyzes the historical development of Kyrgyzstan's soft power policies and their current manifestations. The celebration of the anniversary of the Manas Epic, city and state anniversaries, and cultural projects such as the World Nomad Games are considered as soft power tools and the contribution of these activities to foreign policy strategies is evaluated.

In terms of effective use of soft power potential, Kyrgyzstan's diplomatic missions abroad have a critical position. These missions not only conduct official relations between states, but also play an important role in shaping the international image through cultural promotion, public diplomacy, and interactions in the field of education. In this context, the aim of the study is to analyze the soft power practices of the Kyrgyz Republic through the activities of its embassies in countries such as Türkiye (Ankara), Kazakhstan (Astana), Azerbaijan (Baku), Uzbekistan (Tashkent), Russia (Moscow), China (Beijing), and the United States (Washington).

The study also examines the theoretical foundations of the concept of soft power and the function of embassies in the practical application of this concept is evaluated.

Conceptual Framework

The Emergence and Development of the Concept of Soft Power. The concept of “soft power” was introduced to the literature of international relations by American political scientist Joseph S. Nye. In his book *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*, published in 1990, Nye defines soft power as “the capacity to get others to do what is desired; this is achieved through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or material incentives” [7].

Nye later deepened this concept in his book *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, stating that a state's soft power capacity is based on three basic sources: (1) culture (when attractive to others), (2) political values (when consistently applied in both domestic and foreign policy), and (3) foreign policy (when perceived by others as legitimate and based on a moral basis) [8].

Nye's approach argues that power in international relations is not based solely on material resources, namely military or economic means; he also argues that normative appeal and communicative legitimacy play a decisive role in foreign policy success. In cases where military or economic power is insufficient, soft power, defined as “attraction” and “agenda-setting” capacity, is used [8].

The acceptance of the concept of soft power at the theoretical level has brought about a significant paradigm shift not only in international relations theory but also in applied fields such as public diplomacy. In this context, soft power goes beyond the “realpolitik” approach and stands out as a new foreign policy tool suitable for the more complex, multi-actor and normative-based structure of the post-Cold War period. The effective use of soft power depends on the existence of certain conditions. According to Yapiçı, these conditions are; sufficient resource capacity, the state's ability to correctly analyze its influence mechanisms at the strategic level, and the recognition of this influence by international actors and its acceptance as legitimate [9].

Zaharna (2007) emphasizes that the permanence of soft power can only be achieved through systematic and long-term communication strategies. According to him, the success of this power is directly dependent not only on the content of the message conveyed, but also on how, when and through which actors the message is conveyed [10].

As a result, soft power offers a holistic strategic communication model that goes beyond traditional forms of power, supported by cultural and normative tools. In this respect, soft power has

become an indispensable foreign policy element that states resort to not only in global competition, but also in the construction of international reputation, legitimacy and sphere of influence.

Soft Power in International Relations: Global Manifestations. Today, soft power has become an integral part of the foreign policy strategies of states in the contemporary international system. Tools such as cultural diplomacy, media, education, humanitarian aid and public communication are increasingly used to support the national interests of countries, build a positive international image and gain the sympathy of the global public. In this context, the soft power strategies of different countries vary in line with their own historical, cultural and political contexts.

Russia bases its soft power on a strategy based on “high culture” and aims to achieve its foreign policy goals in this direction. In the country’s strategic documents, soft power is defined through tools such as cultural diplomacy, international media access, maintaining relations with citizens abroad and cooperation with religious institutions. As emphasized in President Vladimir Putin’s work titled “Russia and the Changing World”, soft power is positioned as a fundamental instrument for achieving foreign policy goals through information transfer and cultural interaction [11].

Japan, on the other hand, stands out in the global cultural market with its own unique products; it spreads its national values through elements such as manga, anime, J-pop, video games and gastronomy. These cultural products not only increase Japan's soft power capacity, but also integrate with the country's foreign trade and brand strategies [12; 13].

Türkiye shapes its soft power strategy through television series, humanitarian aid activities, cultural diplomacy institutions and international education programs. Institutions such as the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), Yunus Emre Institute and the Turkish Maarif Foundation contribute to the development of intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding, as well as promoting the Turkish language, history and culture [14; 15].

China is trying to build its soft power through both traditional and digital media platforms. Confucius Institutes constitute one of the cornerstones of China’s education-based soft power strategy; along with international news networks, social media, cultural events and research centers as other components of this strategy. In particular, the Chinese media’s efforts to expand its regional influence through Russian-language publications in Central Asia are noteworthy [16].

The United States is one of the leading actors that maintains its soft power with its capacity to shape global cultural norms. American values such as individualism, freedom and democracy are disseminated on a global scale through the Hollywood film industry, television series and music industry. These media products are not only entertainment tools, but also carriers for the transmission of ideologies and values [17].

These examples showcase that soft power has become a fundamental component of states’ foreign policy strategies, beyond being a mere cultural promotion tool. In an environment of increasing global competition, soft power elements with a high capacity to influence international public opinion both build reputation and provide long-term diplomatic gains for states.

Kyrgyzstan’s Soft Power Strategies.

Historical Background: Silk Road Doctrine. After gaining independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan adopted soft power as a strategic tool to support its foreign policy goals and gain visibility in the international arena. The country’s geopolitical location in the center of Central Asia, its rich historical heritage, its multicultural social structure, and its nomadic lifestyle-based traditions give it a distinctive cultural appeal. Kyrgyzstan’s efforts to structure its international image by highlighting these unique elements reflect its cultural diplomacy approach, which coincides with its claim to be a bridge between the East and the West.

Since the early years of independence, the country's leaders have used historical and cultural heritage, along with the discourse of open society, as one of the fundamental pillars of national image construction (<https://clck.ru/3Ma7eS>). During this period, Kyrgyzstan was described as the "island of democracy in Central Asia" and was frequently described as the "Switzerland of Central Asia" thanks to its stable political structure and natural beauties. These discourses have been evaluated not only as tourism promotion but also as strategic narratives aimed at encouraging direct foreign investment [18].

Kyrgyzstan, which declared its independence on August 31, 1991, has built its foreign policy on the goals of developing friendly relations and strengthening regional cooperation based on the principle of respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity [19]. In this context, the country's main foreign policy priorities include strengthening national security, creating appropriate international conditions for development goals and reinforcing a positive international image [19].

One of the most important documents in line with this vision is the "Silk Road Doctrine" developed during the Akaev administration. This doctrine, which was formalized with the Foreign Policy Concept adopted on May 17, 1999, aimed to position Kyrgyzstan as the contemporary heir of the historical Silk Road [20].

The doctrine aimed not only at increasing diplomatic relations, but also at supporting regional cooperation, openness and a multi-faceted foreign policy approach. This document, which showcases Akaev's foreign policy vision, introduces Kyrgyzstan as "a peaceful and multi-ethnic society with a rich spiritual heritage of the East and the West" and positions the country as a micromodel reflecting the cultural diversity of the historical Silk Road [21]. The doctrine not only calls for the use of historical heritage as a symbolic element, but also for the revival of the Great Silk Road under contemporary conditions, and within this scope, it calls for cooperation and integration without political or economic obstacles for the states located on the Silk Road route [22].

The Silk Road Doctrine also distinguished Kyrgyzstan from the nationalist or isolationist approaches that rose in the post-Soviet period by emphasizing principles such as collective action, disarmament and regional integration [23].

This doctrine, which is frequently emphasized in Akaev's discourses, positioned the country as a reliable actor open to cooperation in the international community [23].

In this context, it is possible to consider the Silk Road Doctrine as the first institutional and holistic expression of soft power in Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy. This strategy, which is based on both historical elements and a vision for the future; It provided an intellectual basis for cultural diplomacy practices and national image construction, and contributed to the country's differentiation in the international arena. However, in order for soft power strategies to be effective, a continuous, institutionalized and multi-dimensional foreign policy approach is needed. In this context, although the Silk Road Doctrine presented a unique vision for its time, it was seen that it was not maintained within a strategic integrity over time and was not consistently applied in foreign policy practices.

The Manas Epic and Historical Anniversaries in the Construction of the National Image. Kyrgyzstan's strategy of using soft power tools in building its national image in line with its foreign policy vision has become evident especially since the mid-1990s. In this process, elements of cultural heritage were brought to the international arena through cultural diplomacy, aiming to both strengthen the national identity and increase the country's international visibility. Events organized around the Manas Epic and important historical anniversaries stand out as symbolic implementations of this strategy.

Preparations initiated in 1992 for the 1000th anniversary of the Manas Epic were one of the first and important steps of this effort; national cultural centers were established; exhibitions, academic meetings and educational activities were organized. In addition, the “Muras” project, led by the National Academy of Sciences of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Ministry of Education and Science, made scientific and educational contributions to the process (<https://clck.ru/3Ma4XQ>). The declaration of the year as the “International Year of Manas” by the United Nations in 1995 increased the global recognition of the epic and positioned it among the world’s intangible cultural heritage (file:///C:/Users/П/Downloads/A_RES_49_129-RU.pdf).

The celebrations of the 1000th anniversary of Manas have become a symbolic showcase of Kyrgyzstan’s soft power strategy. The events, which were held with the participation of representatives from more than 60 countries including Türkiye, China, the USA, Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Belarus, made significant contributions to both the international promotion and cultural prestige of the country (<https://clck.ru/3Ma4c2>).

In this context, another important event organized to emphasize the historical depth of the Kyrgyz state tradition was the 2200th anniversary of the Kyrgyz statehood celebrated in 2003. This celebration, based on references to the existence of the Kyrgyz in the 2nd century BC, has become a symbolic initiative that strengthens Kyrgyzstan’s international legitimacy and historical depth with the support of the UN, although its historical accuracy is controversial at the academic level [24].

Another symbolic initiative reflecting Kyrgyzstan’s cultural heritage is the 3000th anniversary of the city of Osh in 2000. This celebration aimed to emphasize urban and historical continuity beyond nomadic heritage. The event, which was held with the support of UNESCO and TÜRKSOY, strengthened Kyrgyzstan’s regional cultural diplomacy capacity and strengthened its international visibility (<https://clck.ru/3Ma4dv>).

In the following years, it is seen that soft power elements diversified and deepened. The World Nomad Games, which was launched in 2014, initially aimed to promote ethnic sports but soon turned into a multi-dimensional international event. This organization, which includes cultural exhibitions, folk music concerts and handicraft fairs as well as sports competitions, is put forward as a strong reflection of Kyrgyzstan’s goal of promoting the nomadic lifestyle on a global level. The World Nomad Games, which have been held for the fourth and fifth time in Türkiye and Kazakhstan, aim to gain continuity (<https://clck.ru/3Ma4zP>).

The “Green Heritage” campaign, which was launched with the declaration of 2022 as the “Year of Protection of Mountain Ecosystems and Climate Stability,” demonstrates that soft power tools based on environmental sustainability started to become evident in Kyrgyzstan’s foreign policy vision (<https://clck.ru/3Ma546>). Similarly, in 2023, a Presidential Decree was issued to ensure stronger support at the state level for initiatives aimed at protecting the snow leopard and its natural habitats and to recognize the snow leopard as one of the national symbols of the Kyrgyz Republic. Within the scope of the said decree, various ministries and institutions in the country were tasked with organizing events aimed at protecting the snow leopard population and ecosystem within the framework of international cooperation, exploring investment opportunities on international platforms, and making the national symbol visible in the tourism sector (<https://clck.ru/3Ma55b>). Another important step taken in this direction was taken in 2024. Under Kyrgyzstan’s leadership, the United Nations General Assembly declared October 23 as “International Snow Leopard Day” and 61 states, including Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, India, Kazakhstan, China, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, became co-presenters of the relevant resolution. This initiative has been a concrete reflection of Kyrgyzstan’s efforts to increase its visibility in the international arena through environmental sensitivities and to take an active role in global environmental diplomacy (<https://clck.ru/3Ma59P>).

In addition, Kyrgyzstan's participation in global organizations such as the Dubai Expo and the India International Trade Fair has also provided new and effective showcases in the construction of its national image; it has played an important role in the promotion of soft power elements based on environment, culture and nature.

On the other hand, developments in the field of digital diplomacy add a new dimension to the country's soft power strategies. For example, the viralization of the Kara-Jorgo dance on social media, the international successes of athletes such as Aisuluu Tynybekova and Aiperi Medet Kyzy, which have had a wide impact on digital platforms, show that cultural representation and national pride are reproduced in digital media (<https://clck.ru/3Ma5C6>).

All these developments reveal that Kyrgyzstan is implementing a multidimensional soft power strategy by combining historical heritage, cultural symbols, environmental awareness and digital media with a holistic approach.

Embassies as a Channel for the Application of Soft Power: Digital Diplomacy. The rapid development of new communication technologies and their multifaceted penetration into every aspect of life have brought about a radical transformation in international relations. Today, the conduct of international relations is not limited to interactions between states; it is also transforming into a more multi-layered and participatory structure with the increasing influence of transnational actors. This transformation process has made it possible for large segments of society to be directly involved in alternative communication channels, making diplomacy a central tool of foreign policy. In this process, states have sought to establish a balance between traditional diplomacy methods and digital communication technologies [25].

In this context, social media in particular has become an important platform for diplomatic missions, enabling direct, rapid and interactive communication with target publics. This development has paved the way for the formation of a new diplomatic field called "digital diplomacy" in the literature. Digital diplomacy is generally defined as a strategic form of public diplomacy that aims to create a positive international image of countries through social media and other digital platforms, to interact with the public and to support their foreign policy goals. Ciolek (2010) states that platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have not changed the basic purpose of public diplomacy, but have provided new tools that facilitate this process [26]. On the other hand, the studies of Simunjak and Caliendo (2018) reveal that social media has transformed traditional diplomatic norms. Donald Trump's foreign policy discourse, especially via Twitter, is considered the beginning of a new era in interstate communication [27].

Digital diplomacy can be defined in its most general sense as the use of the internet and information-communication technologies for diplomatic purposes [28]. Directly related to public diplomacy in this respect, digital diplomacy is considered as a subtype of public diplomacy by many researchers [29-31]. Rashica (2018) defines digital diplomacy as "the use of the internet and social media in the development of diplomatic relations as a form of new public diplomacy" [44].

Within the framework of these definitions, digital diplomacy is not a one-way communication based solely on the dissemination of information; it is a dynamic communication model that is based on mutual interaction with target publics and enables the strategic use of soft power. In this context, the visibility of embassies in the digital environment is considered one of the fundamental building blocks of digital public diplomacy [32]. In this respect, digital diplomacy stands out as a version of foreign policy activities adapted to the requirements of the digital age [33].

Digital diplomacy not only improves the international image of a state; it also undertakes multi-layered functions such as developing cooperation between states, providing rapid communication in times of crisis, and guiding global public opinion [34]. In this context, digital diplomacy has become an effective "soft power tool" that strengthens the position of states in the

international system. Social media platforms (X, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, etc.) are used as basic tools in this process in terms of reaching large audiences, establishing direct dialogue, and measuring public reactions [34]. Interaction data such as likes, shares, and comments constitute an important source in shaping the digital strategies of embassies; in this respect, embassies are not only institutions that fulfill traditional diplomatic functions, but also active public diplomacy actors of the digital age. In this general framework, analyzing how digital diplomacy tools work in practice and how embassies use these tools is important in understanding contemporary soft power practices. In this context, the activities of Kyrgyzstan's embassies in Türkiye (Ankara), Kazakhstan (Astana), Azerbaijan (Baku), Uzbekistan (Tashkent), Russia (Moscow), China (Beijing) and the United States (Washington) via social media platforms provide a meaningful sample to evaluate the effectiveness of the country's digital diplomacy strategies. In the next section, the social media usage practices of the diplomatic missions in question within the framework of public diplomacy and cultural promotion efforts will be discussed through descriptive content analysis.

Contribution of Embassies to Kyrgyzstan's Soft Power Strategy. Within the scope of this study, in order to examine how Kyrgyzstan's soft power strategies are reflected in the digital environment through foreign missions, the Instagram posts of the Kyrgyz Republic's embassies in Türkiye (Ankara), Kazakhstan (Astana), Azerbaijan (Baku), Uzbekistan (Tashkent), Russia (Moscow), China (Beijing) and the United States (Washington) were evaluated through content analysis. It was evaluated how the embassies presented the national image on social media platforms and which themes they highlighted as a part of cultural diplomacy. Observations show that Kyrgyzstan's diplomatic missions in different countries are showing an increasing tendency to utilize digital diplomacy tools. It is observed that the Kyrgyz Embassy in Ankara is relatively more active in using social media, and that content including cultural events, commemoration days and interaction with the public is frequently shared. For example, the "Kyrgyzstan Culture Days" event held in Ankara in 2023 was shared with the public via Instagram, and this content contributed to the strengthening of the country's international image (<https://clck.ru/3Ma5ET>).

The method used in the research is descriptive content analysis; evaluations were made based on the general visibility of the contents, types of sharing and their frequency, rather than deep contextual analysis based on themes. The study was based on quantitative observations rather than qualitative evaluation. The dataset consists of posts made on the Instagram accounts of the embassies in question between January 1 and June 30, 2024. During the analysis, the digital presence of each representative office, platform usage density and follower numbers were considered. The table below shows the Instagram usernames of the embassies included in the study and the number of followers they had as of March 2025.

Table 1

EMBASSIES' INSTAGRAM USERNAMES AND NUMBER OF FOLLOWERS

<i>Embassy</i>	<i>Instagram username</i>	<i>Number of followers (March 2025)</i>
Ankara	Kgembassyankara	2 739
Astana	-	
Baku	kyrgyzembassy_baku	172
Moscow	Kgembassy.ru	17,3 B
Beijing	kgembassy_cn	302
Tashkent	krembassy.uz	-
	kg.embassy.tashkent	499
Washington	Kgembassy	4 905

An active Instagram account of the Embassy in Astana, Kazakhstan could not be reached; it was observed that the embassies in Tashkent and Baku used multiple accounts. However, the

@krembassy.uz account in Tashkent could not be accessed later and the @kg.embassy.tashkent account was taken into account for the analysis. Similarly, it was determined that the @kyrgyzembassy_baku account in Baku had not been updated since 2020; therefore, it was excluded from the dataset.

As a result of the analysis, a total of 176 Instagram posts shared by the seven embassies were evaluated. The majority of the posts consisted of content related to diplomatic contacts. In addition to diplomatic activities, the other most frequently shared content types included consular services, events to meet with citizens, and educational programs, while cultural promotion activities were observed to have a relatively limited share. The share of consular announcements and events for citizens was determined as 16.48%, the share of forums and meetings related to economic-commercial cooperation was 10.23%, and the share of educational programs was 4.55%. It was observed that cultural promotional content was shared at a rate of only 7.39%. The table below shows this distribution based on diplomatic meetings and cultural events:

Table 2

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE
OF DIPLOMATIC MEETINGS AND CULTURAL PROMOTION POSTS

<i>Embassy</i>	<i>Diplomatic meetings</i>		<i>Cultural promotion</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>(%)</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>(%)</i>
Ankara	39	50,65	7	9,09
Astana				
Baku				
Moscow	1	0,94	3	2,83
Beijing		0,00		0,00
Tashkent	9	40,91	2	9,09
Washington	11	57,89	1	5,26
<i>Total</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>34,09</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>7,39</i>

The data in Table 2 show that embassies allocate limited space to cultural diplomacy activities. However, the content level and thematic depth of the examined cultural events reveal that these activities are used as an important tool not only for cultural promotion but also for the construction of national identity and the establishment of positive relations with the target public.

Thematic events such as the promotion of cultural heritage, commemoration of historical events and celebration of common traditional values, which Kyrgyzstan carries out especially through its diplomatic missions abroad, show the areas of application of soft power. The commemoration event organized by the Ankara Embassy dedicated to the 100th anniversary of Baken Kydykeeva, the program held in İznik for Kyrgyz soldiers who were martyred in the 13th century and the celebration of holidays such as Nooruz and Hydyrellez can be listed among these examples.

In addition, thematic events such as “Introducing Kyrgyzstan” have a high symbolic value in terms of strengthening ties with the diaspora and establishing cultural ties with host societies. In recent years, the “Green Heritage” campaign, which has been carried out at the national level, has also found a place in embassy posts. In light of all this data, the cultural content on the social media accounts of embassies can be evaluated as examples of Kyrgyzstan’s soft power strategies aimed at building its international image, reflected through digital diplomacy. When considered within the framework of Joseph Nye’s soft power theory, these practices stand out as part of Kyrgyzstan’s efforts to increase its visibility and reputation in the global arena by transforming its historical and cultural resources into a strategic instrument.

Conclusion

The foreign policy practice that the Kyrgyz Republic has been following since its independence clearly demonstrates that even a small landlocked state can gain visibility in the international arena by effectively using its historical and cultural heritage. This process, which began with the Silk Road Doctrine developed during the Askar Akaev era, has extended from UNESCO-supported cultural projects to globally notable events such as the World Nomad Games, and has reflected the country's efforts to build an image of an "ancient but open-minded republic."

Soft power strategies have made significant contributions to Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy goals. Cultural diplomacy activities have served not only to strengthen national identity but also to create a positive perception in the international public opinion and to strengthen multilateral relations. International sympathy and support, which are particularly difficult to achieve through classical geopolitical tools, have become possible through the flexible tools offered by cultural and people-based diplomacy.

This study analyzes how Kyrgyzstan uses soft power as a foreign policy instrument and how this strategy materializes in the digital environment through diplomatic representations. In light of Joseph Nye's theoretical framework, it has been revealed how soft power components such as historical identity, cultural heritage, public interaction and digital visibility gain meaning in the case of Kyrgyzstan.

A descriptive content analysis based on the Instagram accounts of seven embassies (Ankara, Astana, Baku, Tashkent, Moscow, Beijing and Washington) showed that the majority of the posts were diplomatic meetings, while cultural promotion activities were relatively limited. However, even these few cultural posts demonstrate the potential to become an effective tool of soft power at the contextual and symbolic level.

The example of Kyrgyzstan proves how important a role digital diplomacy tools can play in the public diplomacy strategies of "small" and "medium-sized" states. Strengthening the digital capacity of embassies, adopting a planned and thematic approach in content production and including more cultural diplomacy elements will contribute to the more effective use of this potential.

As a result, although Kyrgyzstan's soft power strategies do not currently have an institutional integrity, they have found an important ground for implementation through digital diplomacy. Turning these strategies into a more systematic, coordinated and goal-oriented structure will be decisive in terms of the country's global reputation and foreign policy capacity. In the long term, integrating soft power into the foreign policy vision with a holistic approach will enable Kyrgyzstan to position itself as an open, culturally rich and responsible actor in the international system.

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