

"In exercising the soft power, of one of the most important target groups is the youth, whose passionarity can ensure success in a given task. At the same time, Russian agents of soft power are paying insufficient attention to the youth of Kyrgyzstan, focusing on the highest levels of government", noted Zamira Muratalieva, PhD in Political Science and an expert of the Institute for Strategic Analysis and Prognosis, KRSU, in an article written exclusively for cabar.asia.

Follow us on [LinkedIn!](#)

The concept of "soft power" was introduced into the foreign policy lexicon and practice of the Russian Federation recently. The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation as of 2013 first mentions "soft power" as one of the formats of its foreign policy in the modern geopolitical realities. At the same time, the USA have actively used "soft power tools" during the past 25 years, having developed an impressive number of various tactics and gained considerable experience. In view of these circumstances, it seems appropriate for Russia to adopt Washington's achievements, but with a different substantive content.

The founder of the concept of "soft power", professor of the Harvard University George Nye defines "soft power" as "the ability to influence people through the appeal of their ideas rather than coercion". He identifies three its sources: culture (aspects that are attractive to others), political values (accepted in other countries) and foreign policy (when it is perceived by other states as legitimate and having moral grounds). [1] Consequently, the "soft power" in the context of international relations can be defined in terms of a French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu as a tool of "symbolic struggle" for influence [2]. In the course of this struggle, new social groups are constructed, and a new vision of the "right" socio-political and world order is formed by presenting to the world community the value system of some country in a favorable light.

The United States have practically no ideological competitors after the collapse of the Soviet Union. And capitalist-socialist model of China or Latin American countries (Cuba, Venezuela) cannot act as a real alternative because the former relies on the economic dimension of its foreign policy, and the latter exhibit a low level of socio-economic development, which prevents building a model image of the State for other countries. For

this reason, representatives of the American scientific community in the early 1990s could do quite ambitious statements in the context of the ideological "end of history", universality and justice of democratic values, as well as the US mission to spread them. American think tanks and NGOs have played a huge role in building the image of a generator of democratic morality in the United States. "Think Tanks", through their representative's statements at round tables, conferences, public lectures, media and cyberspace, are, on the one hand, "advertising managers" of the national brand of the state, and, on the other hand, they offer specific tools and tactics to promote this brand using non-public consultation mechanisms for public bodies.

The role of NGOs as "mini shop windows" of political and cultural values of the United States is worth noting. By financing a number of social projects in local communities, the United States implicitly demonstrate the advantages of their way of life, social and political order.

Thus, it appears that the main objective of the Russian Federation in the context of creating an attractive role model for Kyrgyzstan and turning into one of the centers of gravity should be the conceptual design of its vision of the international order.

Metaphorically, the development of tools of "soft power" of Russia in Kyrgyzstan can be regarded as the development of new railroad corridor. The train, which must pass through it, is a new vision of the world by Russia and of its role in it, the route is a long-term foreign policy strategy, rails are agents of influence (think tanks, NGOs). The Eurasian concept must not only disclose the unique location of Russia between East and West. It should indicate why it is more profitable for Kyrgyzstan to deepen cooperation with Russia in the cultural and political aspects. In this respect, a key role belongs to analytical centers, as well as student exchange programs and expert platforms.

In the latter case, Russia has achieved some results, given the fact that over the past two years, many Russian experts visited Kyrgyzstan, a series of round tables and conferences with the participation of representatives of Russian non-governmental organizations was held (Russian International Affairs Council, Russian Cooperation, Public Diplomacy Fund of Gorchakov, Foundation "Eurasians - the new wave") and the Russian Embassy in the Kyrgyz Republic. As a result, the KR has become the leader in the number of publications on the Eurasian integration processes [3]. However, the expert dialogue and the subsequent reflection of the participants of that dialogue in the media are classified by some experts not as a "soft power" but as "soft propaganda", which in some cases takes place due to the lack of professionalism of certain agents of influence. [4]

Speaking about Russia's soft power, we should pay special attention to the education system, which acts as an integral element in building an attractive image of a country. If we compare with the experience of Turkey, Russia is poorly working in the regions.

Turkish schools and Turkish education have become a broad network covering the whole country and enjoy great popularity among the general population. The Turkish education system is adaptive, quickly absorbs and uses innovative teaching methods. Turkish high schools have become for many citizens in Kyrgyzstan an example of quality and promising education. Speaking openly about the Russian system of education in Kyrgyzstan, it is more classical and very slowly takes innovation and active teaching methodology. Education is the most important component of soft power, the image that is associated with the country and its people, the center of attraction of youth and education of new generations. However, unfortunately, it is too early to talk about the successful experience of the Russian education. We need a systematic and comprehensive work to improve education and create conditions for its promoting and exit to a new level.

Speaking of higher education, the most successful is the American experience. The American University of Central Asia (AUCA) objectively is a potent intellectual center, which attracts the most academic students, i.e. individuals who are trained and motivated and purposefully study for the sake of knowledge, not a diploma. Round tables and conferences conducted at the AUCA are distinguished by their effectiveness and wide media coverage, have the effect of feedback when following the event, specific proposals and recommendations are produced. If we talk about similar Russian actions, the largest part of them is held just for the formal reporting. Often, the organizers do not understand the goals and objectives of the activities, simply writing off the funds. In fairness it should be noted that the cut of funds can take place everywhere: in the US, in the European and the Turkish experience. However, the direction and destination of the Russian cash could be optimized. In exercising the soft power, of one of the most important target groups is the youth, whose passionarity can ensure success in a given task. At the same time, Russian agents of soft power are paying insufficient attention to the youth of Kyrgyzstan, focusing on the highest levels of government. For example, if we look at the case of creation of the Kyrgyz-Russian fund, it is possible to identify a number of shortcomings and deficiencies. For instance, the general public, businesses, young entrepreneurs of Kyrgyzstan still do not know how to get a loan from this fund, what its purpose is and how it differs from the usual bank. "Soft power" should be guided, in our opinion, first of all, by the general population, the social strata, and only then by the political elite. Then the image of the state will be a great success and have the influence that can be used in the right way.

This aspect suggests a very positive experience of China in the allocation of funds to strengthen its own soft power. Firstly, the Chinese money in Kyrgyzstan are rarely written off and always delineated with time frame for their return. Secondly, allocation of funds is accompanied by the creation of jobs for the Chinese population, and thirdly, as a rule, Chinese goods and equipment are bought for Chinese money which allows developing China's own economy. Fourthly, the scope of Chinese investment differs in its profitability.

At the same time, agents of the Chinese soft power care that the intentions of China in the allocation of certain funds seem the most altruistic and unselfish in the media.

Taking into account the fact that in Kyrgyzstan, as in other Central Asian states, in fact, there are no established channels of implementation of the recommendations of experts in political decision-making process, and the expert dialogue, of course, being an important part of "soft power", cannot be its only source. It is necessary to impact on the local community level through NGOs. The case of Kyrgyzstan proves it: experts reveal the advantages of the Kyrgyz Republic's entering in the Customs Union, and the population receives help in solving the important problems from US NGOs which form a positive image of the United States and may use the resulting credibility to implement their goals. The US experience has shown that the "soft power" involves primarily a targeted approach, which, on the one hand, leads to considerable financial investment, but on the other hand, it ensures long-term results. Russia may use different methods of work used by American NGOs. For example, it can make suggestions for financing of certain projects on a 50:50 conditions, by cultivating the idea of collective problem solving, which is especially important, particularly for Kyrgyz producers whose development in Eurasian structures depends on the consolidation of their businesses.

In addition, Russia has a unique power to influence Kyrgyzstan, which is not in the United States - the migrants. A well-thought-out migration policy is important here, which, on the one hand, is aimed at meeting the socio-economic needs of Russia, and, on the other - on the formation of its attractive image. In this respect, NGOs can act as an important mechanism. In particular, they can be engaged in clarifying the rights of migrants in Russia or mediate in the organization of business activities of a separate group of migrants with reference to their country of residence (e.g., marketing of products, the purchase of materials for production or organization of dealer firms- intermediaries between Russian and Central Asian markets) that will help to employ a certain number of citizens of the Central Asian republics on the territory of their residence. At the same time, funding for these NGOs can be carried out not only from the state budget, but from the practice of the United States, it can come from large companies, in exchange for tax breaks.

It should also be noted that Russia, as the successor to the USSR, still has such a unique instrument of soft power as a common history. So, the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the victory has showed that this holiday can be quite a strong consolidating factor for millions of people not only in CIS, but also abroad. It is important to keep in mind a common history, which could serve as a uniting point for the implementation of these integration projects. In 2015, the action of the immortal regiment united 12 million people worldwide, including citizens of such countries as Estonia, Israel, Mongolia, Norway, Germany, Greece

and others.

Based on the above, it appears that the following is of great importance for Russia for the successful implementation of soft power in Kyrgyzstan:

- First of all, Russia needs to fill the meaningful concept of Eurasianism, so that it caused a clear associative array. For example, the United States are clearly associated with democracy and human rights. It seems appropriate to emphasize its irreducibility to communism as the ideological bases of restoration of the USSR. It is possible to appeal to the works of Western political scientists who have qualified Eurasianism as an alternative to communism (Zbigniew Brzezinski: "For the first time, Eurasianism emerged in the 19th century, but it has become more common in the XX century as an explicit alternative to Soviet communism [5];
- Secondly, it is important to cultivate the development of analytical centers engaged in applied research in the territory of the Central Asian republics (it is also expedient to open branches of the Russian "think tanks" in the Central Asian republics and involve local experts), which will lay the basis for the strategy and tactics of foreign policy of Russia, as well as the efficient operation of Russian NGOs. The efficiency of the tandem "think tank - NGO" has been proved in the US;
- A separate area should be the work on the ground in the understanding of the generation and implementation of regional projects, and towards greater attention to the needs and expectations of the general public;
- Third, there is a need to develop a long-term migration policy in the functioning of the Eurasian Union;
- Fourth, great importance is played by common history, which under the correct approach can act as an element of soft power to consolidate and mobilize the general public far beyond the state borders of Russia;
- Fifthly, to work towards the popularization of the Russian language, including through the organization of language centers (including the activities in preparation of potential migrants), training of teachers, programs for the exchange of students and school children, as well as towards the promotion of cultural peculiarities of the Russian society (the working principle of the American Corners). At the same time, given the multi-ethnic character of the Russian society, it seems appropriate to encourage cultural exchanges with individual subjects of the Russian Federation (Bashkortostan, Tatarstan, and others.). In addition, it is important to continue contact with graduates of Russian universities in

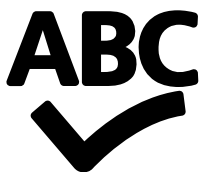
order to deepen relations with Central Asian youth and “fix” the positive experience of soft power.

In general, Russia needs to strengthen the work of all the constituent elements for the success of soft power in Kyrgyzstan. It should be noted that the instruments of “soft power” are expensive and designed for long consistent impact. Their influence is virtually unnoticed in the short term, but ensures long-term results. In this context, train metaphor is applicable. The train will follow only the constructed railroad tracks. Moreover, it will be accepted in the destination point only when there is the right product - ideas - is present. Russian export products should be an idea and an attractive image of Russia based on the concept of Eurasianism, common history and culture, as well as a balanced foreign policy.

The views of the author do not necessarily represent those of CABAR

References

1. CSIS Commission on Smart Power. A Smarter, More Secure America / Edited by Armitage R., Nye J. // URL: http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/071106_csissmartpowerreport.pdf (2007)
2. P. Bourdieu. Practical meaning // URL: <http://gtmarket.ru/laboratory/basis/3069/3078>
3. Denisenko E. Kyrgyzstan became a leader of the publications on the Customs Union and the EEU //URL: http://www.vb.kg/doc/297534_kyrgyzstan_vyshel_v_lidery_po_pyblikaciiam_o_ts_i_eaes.html (22 December 2014)
4. Shakirov O. Russian Soft Power under Construction // URL: <http://www.e-ir.info/2013/02/14/russian-soft-power-under-construction/> (14 February 2013)
5. Z. Brzezinski, The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives // URL: <http://read.virmk.ru/b/bzezinsky/index.htm>



If you have found a spelling error, please, notify us by selecting that text and pressing *Ctrl+Enter*.