

REGIONAL FEATURES OF FRANCE'S "SOFT POWER" IN CENTRAL ASIA

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Abstract. *The article's primary purpose is to analyze the essence of "soft power" and the priority areas and mechanisms of "soft power" in France's foreign policy. This country has successfully implemented its "soft influence" internationally and continues strengthening work in this strategic area. The article emphasizes identifying the specifics of French "soft power" in the Central Asian dimension based on the cases of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. As a result of the study, it is stated that over the past decades, Western European countries like France have been actively using "soft power" tools, while Central Asian countries have yet to master this foreign policy resource. In this regard, the study of the French experience looks pretty relevant.*

Keywords: *soft power, J. Nye, France, Central Asia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, cultural diplomacy, science and education*

Introduction

Politics has always been a struggle for power, influence, and interests. However, the forms of this struggle are determined by specific historical conditions. Changes in these forms are, in turn, reflected in the development of political theory. One of the relatively recent but has already managed to prove its scientific and practical significance in current theoretical innovations is the concept of "soft power." Joseph Nye defined soft power as the power that occurs "when one country gets other countries to want what it wants," so it is the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment¹. In other words, "soft power" can be understood as the ability of socially organized actors in the public political space to achieve their goals by persuasion and winning sympathy from participants in political processes interacting with them.

The relevance of this article is determined, first of all, by the fact that the concept of "soft power" has been increasingly found in recent years in official documents of foreign policy departments of the world and scientific literature, which indicates the growing demand for this phenomenon. The increasingly active use of "soft power" by states requires further understanding of this concept and a detailed analysis of the practical experience of its application. According to various international rating studies, France is one of the leaders in effectively using "soft power" due to its unique historical experience and effective foreign policy. In this regard, the study of theoretical and applied aspects of French "soft power" in the direction of Central Asia looks pretty relevant. This is explained, firstly, by the lack of knowledge of this issue both abroad and in domestic scientific circles; secondly, by the fact that the experience of the French Republic can be partially implemented to solve the

¹ Joseph S. Nye. Soft Power and Public Diplomacy Revisited // The Hague Journal of Diplomacy 14, 2019.

functional problems of the foreign policy of Central Asian countries.

Literature review

The topic of “soft power” attracts considerable attention from foreign, Russian, and domestic scientists; many scientific works have been published on this issue. First, many authors, the creator of the neologism “soft power,” American political scientist J. Nye, defined it as “the ability to achieve desired results through one’s attractiveness, and not through coercion or bribery.” His works pay great attention to US soft power policy.

A significant contribution to understanding the transformations that have occurred with the phenomenon of “power” in international relations was made by the studies of such foreign scientists as R. Dahl, G. Morgenthau, J. Nye, R. Keohane, D. Baldwin, S. Anholt, Y. Fang,² and many others. An analysis of their works allows us to trace the gradual evolution of views on the problem of the use of “power” in international relations. In earlier works, “power” was seen as the main means of influence in international relations. Subsequently, researchers made a significant contribution to understanding the transformations that occurred with the phenomenon of “power” in international relations with the advent of the era of globalization.

Russian scientists, such as E.P. Panova, O.F. Rusakova, E.M. Kharitonova, M.M. Lebedeva, P.B. Parshin, I.A. Yudin³ and others are also actively engaged in this topic. Their works examine the theoretical and applied aspects of “power” and “soft power,” provide a comparative analysis of them, propose prospects for adapting Western theories to Russian political discourse, and explore trends in the use of “soft power” by Western states for propaganda, ideological and subversive activities.

In domestic science, research into the concept of “soft power” is at an early stage. At the same time, an authoritative circle of scientists in Uzbekistan contributes significantly to analyzing and assessing this phenomenon—for example, Sh. Tadjiev⁴, in his works, presented a strategic analysis of world political processes and events

² Dahl R. The Concept of Power // Behavioral Science, 1957; Morgenthau H. Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace. The 3rd edition. – NY, 1964; Nye J. Soft Power and Public Diplomacy Revisited // The Hague Journal of Diplomacy 14 (2019); Keohane R.O., Nye J.S. Jr. Power & Interdependence (4th Edition). – Pearson, 2011; Baldwin D. Power and International Relations // Handbook of International Relations. / Eds.: Carlsnaes W., Risse T., Simmons B.A. – Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2013; Anholt S. Competitive Identity, the New Brand Management for Nations, Cities, and Regions. – New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007; Fan Y. Soft power: power of attraction or confusion? // Place Branding and Public Diplomacy. – 2008. – V.4.

³ Panova Y.P. «Myagkaya vlast'» kak sposob vozdeystviya v mirovoy politike. Dissertatsiya na soiskanie nauchnoy stepeni kandidata nauk. – M.: MGIMO(U) MID Rossii, 2012; Rusakova O. F. Kontsept «myagkoy» sili (soft power) v sovremennoy politicheskoy filosofii. // Nauchniy Yejegodnik Instituta filosofii i prava Ural'skogo otdeleniya Rossiyskoy akademii nauk. Vipusk 10. – Yekaterinburg, 2010; Kharitonova Y.M. “Myagkaya sila” vo vneshney politike gosudarstva: opit Velikobritanii (vtoraya polovina 1990-x – 2010-e gg.): dis. kand. polit. nauk: 23.00.04. – 2017; Lebedeva M.M. «Myagkaya sila»: ponyatie i podxodi». Vestnik MGIMO-Universiteta. 2017, 3 (54); Parshin P.B. Dva ponimaniya «myagkoy sili»: predposilki, korrelyati i sledstviya. Vestnik MGIMO-Universiteta. 2014, 2(35); Yudin N.A. Sistemnoe prochtenie fenomena myagkoy sili. // Mejdunarodnie protsessi. 2015. – T. 13.– № 2.

⁴ Tadjiev Sh. «Myagkaya sila vo vneshnepoliticheskoy praktike Uzbekistana». Monografiya, Universitet mirovoy ekonomiki i diplomatii. T., 2020.

taking place in Central Asia based on the development of theoretical aspects related to the category of power in international relations. He paid particular attention to the potential and prospects for using Uzbekistan's "soft power" at the present stage. A. Bobokhonov's⁵ research is aimed at studying the successfully operating mechanisms and instruments of China's "soft influence," in particular, in the direction of the Central Asian region. A. Faizullaev⁶, in turn, considers "soft power" as state branding and talks about the importance of purposefully creating a favorable image abroad.

There are few studies on France's "soft power," particularly in Central Asia. Among Russian researchers, one can highlight the works of S.I. Kosenko⁷ and V.A. Nagornov⁸, who note the key role of "soft power" in maintaining France's priorities in the system of international relations, since pursuing a policy of "soft power" allows France, to a certain extent, to defend its national identity, authority, and influence. The foreign cultural policy of France is considered in the works of such authors as Yu.V. Nikolaeva, D.A. Khachatryan, M.V. Pisareva and others. Researchers note that France was one of the first to introduce culture into its foreign policy activities; the interaction of culture and politics allowed the country to achieve significant political success.

Among foreign scientists, in particular, this issue is dealt with by E. Kavalski⁹, who examines relations between the European Union and Central Asia in the context of the "Far Neighborhood" policy. A. Houguet¹⁰, whose works are aimed at studying French and German soft influence in the Russian Federation, highlights the features of cultural diplomacy as one of the most powerful tools of "soft power." E. Eren¹¹, in turn, in his research studies the educational policy of cultural institutions that operate abroad and analyzes the educational policy of the Alliance Française in the context of "soft power."

"Soft power" in French foreign policy

Touching upon the topic of "soft power" of France, it is necessary to mention the importance of this concept in the foreign policy of the country under study. In the absence of close military-technical cooperation, the instruments of "soft power" allow official Paris, to a certain extent, to maintain its influence in different parts of

⁵ Bobokhonov A. *Myagkaya sila vo vneshnepoliticheskoy praktike Kitaya* (Tsentral'noaziatskoe izmerenie). Avtoref. diss... dokt. filosofii (PhD) po polit. naukam – Tashkent: UMED, 2023.

⁶ Faizullaev A. «Myagkaya sila», imidj i dinamichnost': kakim stanovitsya Uzbekistan i yego vneshnyaya politika. 27.06.2017. El. resurs. Podrobno.uz // Faizullaev A. Podtalkivanie: «myagkaya» sila na puti k seli. 14.01.2019. Gazeta.uz

⁷ Kosenko S. I. «Myagkaya sila» kak faktor kul'turnoy diplomatii Frantsii // Znanie. Ponimanie. Umenie. - 2014. - №1

⁸ Nagornov V.A. «Myagkaya sila» po-frantsuzski // Vestnik mejdunarodnix organizatsiy: obrazovanie, nauka, novaya ekonomika. - 2014. - T. 9. - № 2.

⁹ Kavalski E. *The European Union and Central Asia: Absent Soft Power in a Far Neighborhood*. // *Soft Power in Central Asia*, The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2021.

¹⁰ Houguet A. *La Diplomatie Culturelle Allemande et Française en Fédération de Russie. Entre Soft Power et Accommodation*. Technischen Universität Chemnitz, 420 p., 2022.

¹¹ Eren E. *Education Policies as a Tool of Soft Power: Alliance Française and Yunus Emre Institute*. Current Research in Social Sciences, 6(2), 2020.

the world. Against the backdrop of the dominance of American culture and the English language, France's actions aim to preserve national identity and cultural diversity. Thus, according to the Russian French scholar E.O. Obichkina, the “soft power” of France (the attractiveness of culture and lifestyle, the universal nature of values, etc.) is one of the main factors that compensates for the lack of military-political potential and allows it to act with global claims¹². In turn, S.I. Kosenko notes that it is “soft power” that helps France, in a competitive environment, to maintain its priorities in international affairs and defend its positions¹³.

Considering the diversity and interdependence of the “soft power” tools, which cover a wide range of internal and external sources, we think it advisable to dwell only on the most significant areas where France demonstrates its potential.

As a developed country, France has successfully implemented its “soft power” internationally and continues strengthening its work in this strategic area. International ratings testify to French potential in terms of soft power. According to Brand Finance's annual study of national brand perceptions, the Global Soft Power Index, France is among the top 10 countries in 2024, ranking 6th behind countries such as the US, UK, China, Japan, and Germany¹⁴. According to the Anholt Nation Brands Index for 2023, France is in 8th place, although a year earlier, it was in 5th position¹⁵. It should be noted that according to the indicators of the category **“Culture and Heritage”** (there are also categories “Familiarity”, “Influence”, “Reputation,” “Business and Trade”, “Management”, “International Relations,” “Media and Communications”, “Education and Science”, “People and Values” and “Sustainable Future”), France has the best results along with the USA and Italy. France demonstrates its soft influence in **“Familiarity”** and **“Media / Communications”**.

Speaking about the **“familiarity”** (recognizability) of a particular state, it is essential to emphasize that in the modern realities of growing international competition, increasing a state's attractiveness in the form of the country's image is a unique resource. The positive image component determines the level of success, attractiveness, competitiveness, and influence of the state in the international arena. Let's look at several areas through which the image of France is especially clearly illustrated in the modern world. Thus, the French presence in international organizations, particularly as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, is one of the important vectors of French influence worldwide. France is a member of more than 150 international organizations and hosts the world's second-largest assembly of diplomatic missions and the headquarters of international organizations, including

¹² Obichkina E.O. Korona ushedshey imperii. Frantsiya: Velichie previshe vsego // Rossiya v global'noy politike. - 2005. - № 6.

¹³ Kosenko S. I. «Myagkaya sila» kak faktor kul'turnoy diplomatii Frantsii // Znanie. Ponimanie. Umenie. - 2014. - № 1.

¹⁴ Global Soft Power Index 2024. <https://static.brandirectory.com/reports/brand-finance-soft-power-index-2024-digital.pdf>

¹⁵ The Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brands Index –2023. https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2023-10/NBI_2023_Press_Release_Supplemental_Deck_WEB.pdf

the OECD, UNESCO, Interpol, etc.

France has a significant influence on the solution of many pressing international problems, which has a very positive effect on the favorable image of the country. It is not for nothing that according to the latest indicators of The Good Country Index, which evaluates the contribution of countries to the common good of humanity, France is in the list of TOP 10 leaders¹⁶. This issue can be considered using environmental problems as an example. France is fully participating in the international community's efforts and developing inclusive diplomacy to respond to the urgent challenges posed by the climate and environmental crisis. Responses to crises affecting global public goods are broadly multilateral, and 2015 marked a turning point with the adoption of the Paris Agreement and the Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030¹⁷.

In recent years, sports diplomacy has become a key tool of French image policy. In particular, the 2023 Rugby World Cup and the 2024 Paris Olympic and Paralympic Games are unique opportunities for France to communicate its vision and work to make sport accessible, inclusive, and sustainable to international authorities, the sporting community, and the general public.

In the academic sphere, the development of exchanges, the attraction of the best students, and the popularization of French higher education significantly increase the country's "recognition" level. Positive results in this direction can be seen in international thematic rankings, such as the World University Rankings of the Times Higher Education publication (includes 1906 universities across 108 countries) and Quacquarelli Symonds (consists of 1500 institutions across 104 locations), in which, according to the results for 2024, universities in France included in the list of the 50 best universities in the world¹⁸.

It cannot be disputed that in the minds of representatives of other countries, the image of the head of state is primarily connected with the state image, as the youngest French head of state since Napoleon I, incumbent President E. Macron entered the country's political life in 2016. According to a survey by the French Institute of Public Opinion (Institut français d'opinion publique, IFOP) conducted by Le Journal du Dimanche, Macron began his first five-year term with a 62 percent approval rating¹⁹. This was higher than François Hollande's popularity at the start of his first term (61%) but lower than Sarkozy's (65%)²⁰. His popularity fell sharply in 2018, reaching around 25% by the end of November, with dissatisfaction with his

¹⁶ Good Country Index, Results 2023. <https://index.goodcountry.org/>

¹⁷ Climat et environnement. France Diplomatie. <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/politique-etrangere-de-la-france/climat-et-environnement/>

¹⁸ World University Rankings 2024. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2024/world-ranking?page=1#> <https://www.topuniversities.com/world-university-rankings>

¹⁹ "Popularité: Macron fait un peu mieux que Hollande, un peu moins bien que Sarkozy, deux semaines après l'élection". LCI (in French). Retrieved 2 August 2017. <https://www.lci.fr/elections/sondage-cote-de-popularite-emmanuel-macron-edouard-philippe-aupres-des-francais-deux-semaines-apres-son-election-2052720.html>

²⁰ "Macron's popularity similar to predecessors as mandate kicks off". The Telegraph. Retrieved 2 August 2017. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/05/20/macrons-popularity-similar-predecessors-mandate-kicks/>

presidency expressed by protesters in the "yellow vests"²¹ movement. Mass protests of the "yellow vests" and the so-called "Benalla affair"²² provoked a controversial reaction and a reassessment of the work of the Macron government not only in France but also in many countries worldwide. And today, according to an Ipsos poll on the eve of the upcoming elections to the European Parliament, the most popular leader in the European Union is the President of France. However, 62% of his compatriots have an unfavorable opinion of him. Thus, 41% of Europeans have a positive opinion about him. His popularity is a majority sentiment in Romania (57%), Greece (55%), Germany (53%), Denmark (52%) and the Netherlands (50%), but this figure drops to 28% in his own country²³.

France has a rich **cultural heritage** with solid arts, cinema, food, sports, and tourism performances. France is also home to cultural icons, including the Eiffel Tower and the Louvre, and many museums, galleries, and UNESCO World Heritage sites. The global response and outpouring of support from both French citizens and the international community during the April 2019 fire at Notre Dame Cathedral served as a powerful reminder of France's unique position, demonstrating the enormity of its global cultural heritage. The international appeal of French culture is also confirmed by events such as the Cannes Film Festival, Tour de France Bastille Day, etc., which people worldwide follow.

The Louvre remains the most visited museum in the world; according to the famous international magazine The Art Newspaper, it occupies a leading position with almost 8 million visitors annually²⁴. It is not for nothing that tourism is one of the most critical sectors of the French economy. According to the latest official government data, its share of the country's GDP is 8%. It should also be noted that according to the latest International Travel and Tourism Development Index report published by the World Economic Forum, which lists 117 countries, France is among the top 5 countries with the best performance. It ranks 4th after Japan, the USA, and Spain²⁵.

The positioning of France as a country with a rich cultural heritage seems fair and justified since the French government is implementing various projects to stimulate interest in French culture among domestic and foreign audiences. France has the most extensive network of cultural institutions in the world. It includes 137

²¹ "In France, Macron's Popularity Hits Record Low". Newsweek. Retrieved 3 December 2018.

<https://www.newsweek.com/france-macrons-popularity-hits-record-low-1135709>

²² On 18 July 2018, Le Monde revealed in an article that Macron staffer Alexandre Benalla impersonated a police officer and beat a protester during the May Day demonstrations in Paris earlier in the year, and was suspended for 15 days before being demoted. The Élysée Court failed to refer the case to the public prosecutor and a preliminary investigation into the case was not opened until the day following the publication of the article, and Benalla's lenient sentence raised questions in the opposition about whether the executive branch deliberately chose not to inform the prosecutor under with the requirements of the Criminal Procedure Code.

²³ Zelenskyy is Europe's most popular leader but there are big geographical swings, our poll reveals (05.04.2024). <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/04/05/which-eu-countries-like-and-dislike-zelenskyy-the-most-euronews-poll-shows-big-swings-in-o>

²⁴ The-100-most-popular-art-museums-in-the-worldwho-has-recovered-and-who-is-still-struggling? (27.03.2023). <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2023/03/27/the-100-most-popular-art-museums-in-the-worldwho-has-recovered-and-who-is-still-struggling>

²⁵ Travel & Tourism Development Index 2021: Rebuilding for a Sustainable and Resilient Future (24.05.2022). <https://www.weforum.org/reports/travel-and-tourism-development-index-2021/shareables-214a5b33ff>

departments for cooperation and artistic work of embassies, which can rely on 96 Institut Français and their 135 branches, six binational cultural centers, and 832 Alliance Françaises worldwide²⁶.

Institut Français is under the direct authority of the departments for cooperation and cultural work of the French embassies. At the same time, the Alliance Française is a public organization that follows local legislation and enjoys legal autonomy. Their main task is to develop the teaching and use of the French language, disseminate French and francophone culture, and encourage diversity and intercultural dialogue. Today, the number of French speakers is more than 300 million people on five continents of the world. French is the fifth most spoken language in the world after Chinese, English, Spanish, and Arabic. In addition, French is one of the official languages of international organizations such as the UN and UNESCO and a working language of the World Trade Organization, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, etc. It is an official language (in 32 governments and in most international organizations), language of instruction (more than 80 million people, in 36 countries and territories), foreign language (learned by more than 50 million people in 115 countries), language of international media (TV5MONDE, RFI or France 24, as well as Euronews, BBC News, Chinese CGTN or Russian RT) and the language of the Internet (where it ranks 4th)²⁷.

In the field of popularization of the French language, the activities of the International Organization of the Francophonie (in brief, The Francophonie, IOF) also deserve special consideration, which is an international organization representing countries and regions where French is a lingua franca (bridge language) or customary language, where a significant proportion of the population are francophones (French speakers), or where there is a notable affiliation with French culture. The Francophonie is also an institution dedicated since 1970 to promoting the French language and political, educational, economic, and cultural cooperation among the 88 member countries.

As noted earlier, **“media and communications”** represent the next most important area in forming French “soft power”. It is important to note that France Médias Monde (TV channel France 24, radio station Radio France Internationale) and its subsidiary Canal France International (CFI) play a central role in this area. These media are a driving force in promoting democratic values, combating disinformation, and ensuring pluralism and freedom of the press. In this regard, they are essential components of France's comprehensive diplomacy. For example, CFI projects aligned with French official development assistance focus on youth, digital technology, gender equality, sustainable development, Francophonie, combating disinformation, and strengthening democracy. The agency's activities are mainly carried out in regions of priority importance in French foreign policy: sub-Saharan Africa, the

²⁶ Diplomatie culturelle de la France. <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/ru/politique-etrangere/diplomatie-culturelle/>

²⁷ La langue française dans le monde. Édition Gallimard, 2022.
https://www.francophonie.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/Synthese_La_langue_francaise_dans_le_monde_2022.pdf

Maghreb, and the Middle East.

TV5MONDE, in turn, develops strategic plans covering four years. The current strategic plan (2021-2024) was adopted at the end of 2020, and the goals are to provide access to French-language materials online, strengthen cooperation in Africa, and increase the visibility of environmental issues. This strategy draws heavily on the activities of the French-language digital platform TV5MONDEplus, created in September 2020. This platform, with subtitles in five languages, is now available in almost every country. This kind of media broadcasting is carried out to strengthen interest in the French language and attract attention to disseminating the French vision of world order.

Thus, we can conclude that the combination of various instruments of “soft power” ensures the influence and promotion of the national values of the state. The French experience of securing national interests with the help of “soft power” resources demonstrates the ability to achieve results through the formation of the country’s international image, targeted popularization of culture and national language, as well as the development and implementation of strategic media communications activities that are aimed at ensuring an effective policy of influence in the international arena.

Regional Vector of French “Soft Power” (Kazakhstan’s and Uzbekistan’s Cases)

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the acquisition of national sovereignty and independence by the former Soviet republics, new state entities appeared on the historical stage in the form of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Tajikistan, the Republic of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Foreign countries, especially European ones, began to show keen interest in these new Central Asian states. France occupied a special place among them, the first to recognize their political sovereignty, and was determined to establish strong political, economic, and cultural relations.

It can be stated that a new milestone in relations between France and the newly declared countries of Central Asia began in 1991; it was during this period that the foundations of partnership relations were laid when France, in its statement, accepted the status of newly independent countries formed after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Over the past decades, relations in various fields have been established between the countries. It is worth noting that a content analysis of the websites of official French missions in Central Asian countries demonstrates a more active use of soft power in relations with **Kazakhstan** and **Uzbekistan**. These two countries represent Central Asia's most dynamically developing economies and are accordingly viewed by France as essential partners. It should also be noted that France actively participates in bilateral projects financed by the European Union in its countries of presence in many areas since French “soft power” can be effectively implemented within the EU. In this regard, it is noteworthy that Kazakhstan is the only Central Asian country with which the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with

the European Union was ratified in 2020²⁸, while such an agreement with Uzbekistan is at the initial stage²⁹.

In this regard, to more accurately consider the issue under study, we think it is advisable to focus on assessing the effectiveness of French "soft power" in the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Uzbekistan. Regarding **Kazakhstan**, it should be noted that diplomatic relations with France were established on January 25, 1992. The agreements underlying the bilateral relationship were signed during a visit by President F. Mitterrand in September 1993. Bilateral cooperation intensified in June 2008 with the signing of the Strategic Partnership Agreement. The political dialogue, facilitated by many bilateral visits, is constant; several contacts are carried out at the ministries and parliaments.

Thus, an analysis of the speeches of the heads of state during the visit of K.J. Tokayev to France in November 2022³⁰, as well as the official visit of E. Macron to Kazakhstan in November 2023³¹, illustrates the main tools and successes of the "soft power" policy pursued by France in the Republic of Kazakhstan, which in turn can be traced mainly in such areas as **culture, science, and education**.

The agreement on cooperation in art and culture, signed in September 1993, characterizes the intercultural interaction between the two countries. Currently, the French network of cultural institutions in Kazakhstan is represented by four Alliance Françaises, with 2,000 students. After Alliance Française Almaty and Nur-Sultan, in recent years, the distinctive sign of the Alliance Française Foundation was assigned to two more centers: Shymkent and Karaganda.

Under the auspices of the OIF, the French Embassy in Kazakhstan, in collaboration with the embassies of Armenia, Belgium, Canada, Morocco, Romania, Tunisia, and Switzerland, as well as with the Kazakh Alliance Françaises, annually holds a multidisciplinary French language festival "Francophone Spring". Thus, the 2024 program presented more than 90 events in several cities of Kazakhstan and broke the attendance record. Artists came from France to Kazakhstan, especially for this occasion, to give concerts, present their films, and hold master classes and creative meetings³².

The cinematic collaboration is also a striking example of intercultural interaction between France and Kazakhstan. Thus, on May 15, 2024, on the sidelines of the 77th Cannes Festival, the General Director of the National Center for Cinematography and Animation (CNC) and the Chairman of the Board of the State Center for Support of

²⁸ EU – Kazakhstan relations (03.08.2021) https://www.eeas.europa.eu/kazakhstan/proekty-es-s-kazakhstanom_ru?s=222

²⁹ Uzbekistan i YeS zavershili peregovori po Soglasheniyu o rasshirennom partnyorstve i sotrudnichestve (7.07.2022) <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2022/07/07/eu/>

³⁰ Sovmestnoe kommyunike Frantsuzskoy Respubliki i Respubliki Kazaxstan (Eliseyskiy dvorets, 30.11.2022) <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/ru/dossiers-pays/kazakhstan/evenements/article/communiqu%C3%A9-conjoint-entre-la-france-et-le-kazakhstan-elysee-30-11-22>

³¹ Ofitsial'niy vizit Prezidenta Frantsuzskoy Respubliki Emmanuelya Makrona v Astanu. <https://kz.ambafrance.org/Oficial-nyj-vizit-Prezidenta-Francuzskoj-Respubliki-Emmanu-elya-Makrona-v-3974>

³² 14-y vipusk Frankofonnoy Vesni v Kazaxstane s rekordom poseshaemosti (15.05.2024) <https://kz.ambafrance.org/14-j-vypusk-Frankofonnoj-Vesny-v-Kazahstane-s-rekordom-poseschaemosti>

National Cinema (KazakhKino) signed an additional agreement to the Agreement on cooperation in the field of cinema, concluded in Paris on November 30, 2022, during the official visit to France of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan³³. The text strengthens cooperation and exchange of experience in supporting the dissemination and distribution of cinematographic works of each of the two countries on their territories.

In science and education, France and Central Asian countries support such types of cooperation as the exchange of students and schoolchildren, collaboration between universities and educational institutions, expansion of French language teaching in Central Asian countries, cooperation in scientific research, etc. France has convincing achievements in science and innovation; its scientific products and the highest level of research have received worldwide recognition. It ranks third in Europe and sixth in the world regarding research and development³⁴. France is involved in world-scale projects (European Synchrotron, Large Hadron Collider, Telescope-ESO). It is part of the global scientific network thanks to the presence of 250 large scientific organizations worldwide (CNRS, CIRAS, INRA, INSERM, IRD, Institute Pasteur, and others.).

As for the scientific presence of France in Kazakhstan, the formation of bilateral relations in education and science was laid down by the Agreement between the National Academy of Sciences of Kazakhstan and the National Center for Scientific Research of France, which concluded in 1994. Currently, in the educational sphere, the French government gives priority to the training of elites and expanding the list of French universities based on partnership under the Presidential Scholarship Program “Bolashak” of the Academy of Civil Service of Kazakhstan and the academic mobility program for training officials of the National School of Administration. It also pays special attention to increasing student mobility, in particular, thanks to a growth in the number of scholarships under the Abai-Vern program, a joint program of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs of the French Republic. An important role is also given to the activities of the Campus France Bureau, which was officially opened in Kazakhstan in April 2010. Campus France in Almaty and Astana inform Kazakh students about higher education programs at universities in France, registration procedures, possible travel financing options (scholarships), types of visas, and procedures for obtaining them.

Regarding **French-Uzbek relations**, it should be noted that France was among the first states—on January 3, 1992—to recognize the independence of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Diplomatic relations between the countries were established on March 1, 1992; in June 1992, the French Embassy began operating in Uzbekistan, and in March 1995, the Uzbekistan Embassy in France.

³³ Kinematograficheskoe sotrudnichestvo mejdu Frantsiej i Kazaxstanom v fokuse Kannskogo Kinofestivalya, 2024. <https://kz.ambafrance.org/Kinematograficheskoe-sotrudnichestvo-mezhdu-Franciej-i-Kazahstanom-v-fokuse>

³⁴ Tableau de Bord de l'Attractivité de La France. Recherche et Innovation. 2023. https://investinfrance.fr/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/2023_TBA_Recherche-et-innovation_FR.pdf

In the development of Uzbek-French relations in recent years, official visits of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev, to France in 2018, 2021, and 2022 played an important role, which made it possible to intensify bilateral cooperation after the decline in relations that followed the introduction of European sanctions in the period 2005-2009. In turn, E. Macron's state visit to Samarkand in November last year³⁵ became a symbolic step in the history of bilateral relations since it was the first official visit of a French head of state to Uzbekistan in the previous 30 years, which indicates the growing interest of the French side to Uzbekistan. Following the negotiations, France expressed its readiness to support Uzbekistan's efforts to strengthen confidence in Central Asia, the country's accession to the WTO, and the early signing of the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the European Union. The parties also paid particular attention to strengthening interaction in the cultural, educational, and innovation sectors.

Today, relations in the educational sphere between Uzbekistan and France have been brought to an excellent level of development. Over the past five years alone, over 50 agreements and memorandums of understanding in various areas of study have been signed between the two countries. In 2019, a joint faculty of the Paris International Fashion Academy was created at the Tashkent Institute of Textile and Light Industry, a branch of the Vatel Business School for Management of Tourism and Hotel Business at Bukhara State University. Following the meeting of heads of state in Samarkand, a decision was also made to open a joint Uzbek-French university³⁶.

During the official visit, the parties welcomed the opening of a branch of the Alliance Française in Samarkand to develop further bilateral cooperation in cultural and language exchange. The country's first alliance branch was opened in Tashkent in 2015. Before this, the French Cultural Center, named after Victor Hugo, operated in Tashkent since 2002 and transformed in 2011 into the Institut Français in Uzbekistan³⁷. During the year, more than 1000 students study at the Alliance Française, so within the walls of this institution, there is also the Campus France Bureau, which is one of the examples of a new stage in strengthening university cooperation between the two countries. This agency provides students with information about scholarship programs, assistance in choosing a specialization, paperwork, and information about language courses in specialized centers in France.

Thus, to summarize the above, we can conclude that French interest in the Central Asian region is growing, as evidenced by the deepening of French-Kazakh and French-Uzbek relations through high-level political dialogue. This dialogue aims to strengthen the French soft presence in the region's countries by actively using cultural diplomacy and scientific and educational exchange.

³⁵ Prezident Uzbekistana Shavkat Mirziyoev vstretil prezidenta Frantsii Emmanuelya Makrona (2.11.2023) <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2023/11/02/mirziyoyev-makron/>

³⁶ Uzbekistan – Frantsiya: osnovannie na prochnom doverii i drevney drujbe otnosheniya prodoljatsya na urovne strategicheskogo partnerstva (03.11.2023) <https://uzlidep.uz/ru/news-of-uzbekistan/15115>

³⁷ Frantsuzskiy kul'turniy sentr pereimenovan (1.03.2011) <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2011/03/01/fr/>

Conclusion

Thus, based on the results of the analysis of the activities of the French government in implementing the policy of “soft power” in the international arena, in particular in the Central Asian dimension, the following relevant conclusions can be drawn.

Firstly, the concept of “soft power” in foreign policy practice can be considered a way of mastering and expanding transnational political spaces, corresponding to modern international relations in conditions of increasing globalization and interdependence. Competition for cultural, educational, scientific, information, and other spaces regulated precisely by “soft power” is expanding. Analysis of the experience of France allows us to consider the policy of “soft power” of this country as a way of forming and expanding transnational political spaces united by the French language, culture, education, international development programs, and other components of French “soft power.”

Secondly, today, the policy of “soft power” of France is carried out in such fundamental areas as 1) the targeted formation of a positive image of the country to ensure proper “recognizability” of the state abroad; 2) the implementation of cultural diplomacy through promotion of national language, traditions and values with the help of non-profit organizations and the academic community; 3) developing the presence of French media platforms in the world and cooperation in the media sphere to implement the priorities of the policy of influence, which in turn coincides with the goals of cultural diplomacy.

Thirdly, despite the significant geographical remoteness, the Central Asian region seems to be essential for France, as evidenced by the establishment of diplomatic relations immediately after the countries of the region gained independence; visits to the post-Soviet republics of French delegations of a political and diplomatic nature also confirm this. An analysis of the French soft power presence in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan shows that the French soft power policy in Central Asia is primarily carried out through maintaining a rich cultural dialogue and strengthening scientific and educational ties.

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