

Summary

Kazakhstan positions itself as a "Middle Power" and projects a profile accordingly. This vision defines Kazakhstan's place in the international arena. As a medium-sized state, Kazakhstan must develop its public diplomacy through peaceful, responsive, and dynamic communication. Public diplomacy is an important strategy aimed at promoting its interests in cultural and humanitarian spheres to foreign publics through direct communication.

In terms of public diplomacy, Kazakhstan strives to strengthen its image through cultural events, conferences, and humanitarian engagement, collaborating with various actors such as the media, experts, and civil society organizations. Open to the world, Kazakhstan maintains dialogue with diverse cultures and religions and has successfully established good relations with its neighbors and other countries.

Kazakhstan's historical heritage, educational opportunities, peaceful foreign policy, energy resources, and international achievements enable it to pursue pragmatic policies in a multipolar world. Kazakhstan's greatest appeal is its people—its multinational and cosmopolitan nature. Kazakhstan established its state by uniting people from diverse ethnic groups and religions, and has achieved significant success by preserving this diversity. This is a long-term strategy and one of the fundamental elements that strengthens Kazakhstan's identity.

Kazakhstan's Understanding of Soft Power in Foreign Policy, Potential and Performance.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Zhanat MOMYNKULOV - Lecturer at Lev Gumilyov Eurasian National University

Kazakhstan is the ninth-largest country in the world by area and one of the most important states in the Turkic World. When Kazakhstan is mentioned, its vast geography and strong Kazakh identity come to the fore. Kazakh identity is one of the fundamental drivers of the country's soft power. Furthermore, its rich energy resources, oil, and the city of Astana stand out. Astana is not just a change of capital but also a symbol of a new nation-building project.

As a medium-sized state, Kazakhstan's soft power is a relatively new issue that raises various questions and intrigues. In today's era, at a time when the realism school in international relations is gaining ground and the focus on hard power rather than soft power is increasing, it is important to evaluate Kazakhstan's public diplomacy and soft power performance in foreign policy.

Kazakhstan, surrounded by major powers such as China and Russia, is a rising middle power, situated between West and East. Kazakhstan positions itself as a "Middle Power" and projects a profile accordingly. This vision defines Kazakhstan's place in the international arena. Especially during the presidency of President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, Kazakhstan demonstrated a flexible and lenient approach to international diplomacy. In this context, Kazakhstan has strived to project a more Asian, hybrid, and soft international image under former President Nursultan Nazarbayev and current President Tokayev.

In the 1990s and 2000s, with revenues from energy resources, Kazakhstan collaborated with international companies to gain Western support, particularly in democratization and liberalization. Kazakhstan's goal is to strengthen itself internationally through all kinds of ties and to stand out as a nation. During the Nazarbayev era, Kazakhstan positioned itself as a "Buffer State" and, by taking an active role in platforms such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations (UN), strived to become a "golden bridge" between the West and the East. In this context, it aimed to establish itself in the international community as a pragmatic, open, and responsible actor.

As a medium-sized state, Kazakhstan must develop its public diplomacy through peaceful, soft, and dynamic communication. Soft power also influences the policies of major powers towards Kazakhstan. Public diplomacy is an important strategy that aims to promote its interests in cultural and humanitarian spheres to foreign publics through direct communication. Kazakhstan has sometimes been very successful in building its international image, while at other times it has encountered some challenges. Especially in relations with the West, criticism of democratization and the political system, or some negative media coverage, are among the most significant challenges. However, overall, Kazakhstan has successfully established its international image and proven itself. In terms of public diplomacy, Kazakhstan strives to strengthen its image through cultural events, conferences, and humanitarian engagement, collaborating with various actors, including the media, experts, and civil society organizations. Kazakhstan has established good relations with its neighbors and other countries through its openness to the world and its dialogue with diverse cultures and religions. Since gaining independence in the 1990s, Kazakhstan's public diplomacy has been conducted in three main areas:

- Creating a positive image globally,
- Being seen as a reliable and impartial partner,
- Contributing to economic development by attracting foreign investment.

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These goals are pursued in the political, economic, and cultural spheres, through official and unofficial channels, media, and humanitarian relations. According to Joseph Nye, soft power is the ability to attract others to act in accordance with one's wishes. Kazakhstan's appeal, however, is shaped not by hard power—that is, military might—but rather by its "Smart Power" approach. As a country sandwiched between China, Russia, and other major powers, Kazakhstan strives to survive and progress by pursuing a multi-vector foreign policy.

Culture is one of the cornerstones of Kazakhstan's soft power. Kazakh identity, nomadic culture, Kipchak openness, and Asian values are important elements of this identity. Education, media, diaspora diplomacy, prominent figures, and Kazakhstan's geopolitical position allow it to play a strategic bridge between West and East. According to President Tokayev, in today's age of realism, "Central Powers" can bring greater peace to the world by pursuing balanced policies with all. Kazakhstan plays an active role in international platforms such as the UN, OSCE, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and Asian security organizations, and strives to maintain a balanced policy in its relations with Russia.

During the Nazarbayev era, Kazakhstan made significant investments to strengthen its international image. In terms of diaspora diplomacy, approximately five million Kazakhs live abroad. To effectively work with the diaspora, Kazakhstan is working to establish organizations such as a "Citizens Fund" and the "Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB)," inspired by Turkey's model.

When soft power is mentioned, education is the first thing that comes to mind. Kazakhstan has made significant strides in the field of education. For example, thanks to the "Bolashak" scholarship program, approximately 15,000 Kazakh youth have studied at leading universities in the United States, the United Kingdom, and around the world. This has raised Kazakhstan's international profile. Turkey's contributions are also invaluable in this regard. The Ahmet Yesevi Turkish-Kazakh University and other educational projects have provided significant support for Kazakhstan's development. Nazarbayev University has also achieved significant success in this area.

From a cultural diplomacy perspective, educational projects related to Kazakhstan's identity, particularly the "Bolashak" program and joint initiatives with Nazarbayev University and the Turkic World, are of great importance. Currently, approximately 40,000 foreign students are studying at Kazakh universities, and approximately 10 percent of them, or 4,500, are receiving scholarships provided by Kazakhstan. This is a significant indicator of soft power. Indeed, Kazakhstan aims

to become a center for education. Branches of leading global universities are opening in various regions of Kazakhstan, and this number has reached nearly 15. Education is a soft power tool that strengthens Kazakhstan's potential as a center focused on intelligence and reason.

Culturally, Kazakhstan possesses a unique heritage. In Almaty, traditional Kazakh culture, blended with the Soviet era, is developing, while in Astana, a more cosmopolitan, modern culture, led by young people, is developing. Astana is a significant symbol in Kazakhstan's branding. Turkestan, on the other hand, has been highlighted as the center of the Turkic World. Symbols such as the dombra, nomadic games, the Golden Man, the Alatau Mountains, and the Caspian Sea are important parts of Kazakhstan's cultural identity. Traditional beverages like kumiss and Kazakh cuisine are also representative of this identity.

Religious and cultural tolerance are also cornerstones of Kazakhstan's soft power. Since 2003, Kazakhstan has held the Congress of World and Traditional Religion Leaders 15 times. Bringing together numerous leaders in Astana, from the Pope to prominent scholars of the Islamic world, Kazakhstan emphasizes a tolerant and unifying Muslim identity.

Projects related to the Turkic World have great potential. A common alphabet, shared history, and cultural ties are supported by the concept of "Creative Industries," which Tokayev frequently emphasizes. Kazakh pop culture is rapidly developing, influenced by YouTube channels and social media. Especially since the Ukrainian War, the decolonization process in Kazakhstan has accelerated, and a cultural revival is taking place. This is a very important process. Overall, it can be said that Kazakhstan has a high potential for culture and youth.

Conclusion

According to President Tokayev, Kazakhstan's greatest appeal is its people—its multinational and cosmopolitan nature. Kazakhstan established its state by uniting people from different ethnic groups and religions and has achieved significant success by preserving this diversity. This is a long-term strategy and one of the fundamental elements that strengthens Kazakhstan's identity.

Kazakhstan's historical heritage, educational opportunities, peaceful foreign policy, energy resources, and international successes enable it to pursue pragmatic policies in a multipolar world. Relations with the diaspora and the Turkic World can be effectively utilized in cultural diplomacy. As a historical and cultural center of the Turkic World, Kazakhstan

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reinforces this role with symbols like the Altai Mountains. Kazakhstan's soft power elements include its national identity, national culture, post-Soviet heritage, influences from Asia, energy and logistics resources, and balanced relations with all states.

Central Asia has begun to take shape as a regional powerhouse, parallel to the Turkic World. Kazakhstan is using all its strengths to pursue a balanced policy. In this context, Astana aims to exert influence on multinational platforms through international organizations. Due to its geographical location and cultural identity, Kazakhstan maintains close relations with Russia, China, the West, the Islamic World, and the Turkic World. These relations shape Kazakhstan's identity and enable it to pursue soft power policies in a realistic world.

Kazakhstan's significance lies in its location at the intersection of China, Russia, the West, the Islamic World, and the Turkic World. In this respect, Kazakhs see themselves as part of both the European, Asian, Muslim, and Russian worlds. In this challenging geography, Kazakhstan acts as a shield between Russia and China, as well as the Turkic and Islamic worlds. As Kazakhstan slowly but surely builds its soft power, it must maintain balanced relations with the major powers in its region. Ultimately, Kazakhstan has the potential to become a "smart" and "Asian country." Kazakhstan is expected to maintain its balance in cooperation with the Turkic World, Central Asia, Turkey, and other friendly countries and achieve significant success in the field of soft power.

About the Author

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Zhanat MOMYNKULOV - Lecturer at Lev Gumilyov Eurasian National University

Zhanat Momynkulov is a Kazakh academic specializing in Political Science and Oriental Studies, and a researcher pursuing his career as a public intellectual. He completed her undergraduate and graduate degrees in Arabic and Oriental Studies at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University and earned a Candidate of Philosophical Sciences (Kandidat) degree in 2009. He has gained academic experience at prestigious institutions such as Minya University in Egypt and the University of Minnesota in the USA, and has also earned international recognition as a Bolashak Program scholar.

He began his academic career as a lecturer at KazGU University and subsequently held various administrative and research positions at the Academy of Civil Service under the Presidential Administration of Kazakhstan. He most recently served as Head of the Department of Political Science at Lev Gumilyov Eurasian National University, where he currently holds the title of Associate Professor. Momynkulov, an expert in public diplomacy, Turkic World relations, educational administration, and international relations, speaks six languages and has over 150 scientific publications. He has received certificates of appreciation from various government institutions and continues to contribute to the development of analytical approaches in public policy and education.

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Throughout history, shaping the perceptions of societies has been one of the most fundamental elements of domestic and foreign policy. As the nation-state structure became widespread and nation-states emerged as the main actors in international relations, public diplomacy along with traditional diplomacy began to play a crucial role in shaping these relations.

Diplomatic relations between states are conducted by diplomats, including ambassadors and consuls. These diplomats also engage in public diplomacy, which serves a vital function in interstate relations. Public diplomacy activities have a significant impact not only on the citizens of a state but also on its leaders. Public diplomacy plays a pivotal role in shaping the relations between states alongside other diplomatic activities.

The aim of the project Public Diplomacy in Foreign Policy conducted in collaboration with Cappadocia University and Ankara Center for Crisis and Political Studies (ANKASAM) is to discuss the principles for implementing public diplomacy, identify key activities and highlight public diplomacy efforts undertaken by foreign diplomats in Türkiye. The ultimate goal is to contribute to shaping Turkish Foreign Policy and influencing decision-making processes.

For detailed information about the project;
<https://commonhorizon.kapadokya.edu.tr/> You can reach us from the address.

Prof. Dr. Şafak OĞUZ

Prof. Dr. Şafak OĞUZ became an Associate Professor in 2019 and a full Professor in 2024. He retired in 2021 after 23 years of service in the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF). During his time there, he also worked for the United Nations (UN) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). His expertise lies in Weapons of Mass Destruction, Terrorism (WMD), International Security, International Organizations and Peace and Conflict Studies. Prof. Dr. Şafak OĞUZ currently serves as the Acting Dean of the Faculty of Economics, Administrative and Social Sciences at Cappadocia University. He is fluent in English and German.

Prof. Dr. Mehmet Seyfettin EROL

Prof. Dr. Mehmet Seyfettin EROL graduated from the Department of Political Science and International Relations at Boğaziçi University (BU) in 1993. After completing his Master's Degree at BU in 1995, he was accepted to the PhD program at BU in the same year. After completing his PhD at Ankara University in 2005, Prof. Erol became an Associate Professor in 2009 in the field of "International Relations" and a full Professor in 2014. His areas of expertise are "Geopolitics", "Crisis Management", "Security", "Turkish Foreign Policy" and "Central Asia".

Prof. Erol has published numerous scientific articles and books on these subjects. He is the author and editor of various journals such as Eurasia File, Black Sea Studies, Gazi Akademik Overview, Journal of Regional Studies, International Crisis and Political Studies and contributor for national radio-television programs such as TRT, A HABER, TV NET, CNN TÜRK and HABERTÜRK.

Prof. Erol, whose opinions have been published in Turkey's leading magazines and newspapers has been deemed worthy of many awards, including Writers and Artists Foundation of the Turkic World (TÜRKSAV) in 2007, "Turkish World Service Award" in 2015 and Writers' Union of Turkey (TYB) "Press-Intellectual Award".

Prof. Erol has lectured at Ufuk, Ankara and Gazi Universities. As a faculty member in the Department of Relations at the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences at Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University, he served as an expert, coordinator and founder president in Türkiye's leading think tanks (ASAM, SDE, GSAM, USGAM). He has been the founding chairman of Ankara Crisis and Politics Research Center (ANKASAM) since 2016.