THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INFLUENCING THE POLITICS OF THE MIDDLE EAST: A COMPARATIVE EXAMINATION OF THE RUSSIAN AND TURKISH HIGHER EDUCATION MODELS

A. Kilani, M. Hawamdeh, A. Qteishat

RUDN University (RUSSIAN FEDERATION)

Abstract

Higher education has seen an unprecedented global development which led to its increased political, economic and cultural role. As knowledge and the capacity to apply it in practice become the strategic resources in contemporary time. Today, the role of higher education is increasingly growing in the foreign policy of countries as a tool for soft power. Developing the country's soft power and a positive image abroad by working with foreign publics is now key to creating an enabling environment for its foreign policy strategies and international standing in general. This article discusses the impact of higher education as a soft power on foreign policy the case study of Russia and Turkey in the Middle East and North Africa. The concepts of soft power and public diplomacy have become the catchwords among Turkish and Russian foreign policy. Over the past twenty years, Russia's and Turkey's vision and understanding of soft power have developed. Starting by focusing on an image-heavy perspective of Russia's and Turkey's soft power tools development, one of the spheres in Russia and Turkey with a strong public diplomacy potential in terms of promoting direct and long-term people-to-people contacts is higher education. Russia and Turkey have a long history of higher education cooperation with foreign countries particularly in the Middle East and North Africa. Positioning Russian higher education system as one of its soft power tools is not only an efficient way of boosting the country's attractiveness and global competitiveness, it is equally a key means of developing its most resource. Higher education is one of the soft power tools of Turkish foreign policy and to enhance the attractiveness it's in the middle east and north Africa. The article responds to the question, the extent to which higher education is a soft power on Russian and Turkish public diplomacy in the Middle East and North Africa.

Keywords: Education, Foreign policy, Higher education, Russia, Middle East, Turkey, Soft power.

1 INTRODUCTION

Any Government targets to reinforce its place and prestige in the international field, as well as to produce auspicious situations for its long-term socio-economic prosperities. To achieve these targets, governments uses a diversity of foreign policy implements of both hard and soft power. Conversely, it is detected that after the collapse of the bipolar global system, many countries incline to use soft power in order to attain their foreign policy aims. The key causes behind this propensity are an upsurge of interdependence amongst countries and the heavy price that states pay for attaining foreign policy goals with the use of hard power. In this framework, soft power tools started to inhabit a more actual place in the foreign policy of the states, and it can be foreseen that this position will remain to increase in the impending period (Wojciuk A. , 2018).

With the emergence of a multipolar world, numerous nations have rushed into dictating smaller nations through the use of education, culture, and language. In this paper, education will be the main object to be examined and not to exclude culture and language which are part of education as well. The paper will focus on the Turkish and Russian education policies in the Middle East and how they differ in concept. The reason to choose these two models appears to the geographical place of Turkey as a bridge between the Middle East and Europe, and Russia as the main contender of American hegemony globally in general, and in the Middle East in specific. In consequence, there will a definition of education utilization in soft power in the framework of this paper, then will examine both Turkish and Russian education strategy in the middle east, and finally draw a conclusion about the difference of both strategies and their effect on the region. In order to examine the influence of education policies as a soft power, this research will reply on resources from both educational institutions in Russia and Turkey (Kinser & Lane, 2016).
2 UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF EDUCATION IN SOFT POWER

The concept of soft power first appeared in 1990 by Joseph Nye, a professor of science American politics, who published an article in the foreign policy magazine entitled "Soft Power" and in his book issued the following year entitled "Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power". Nye's basic idea in his introduction to the concept is to emphasize the existence of another non-physical face of force, Based on the culture, values and credibility of the State's culture resulting from its consistent practices With these values, and the need of not to ignore this face as a result of the emphasis on the physical dimensions of the military And economic, which has been the central to the literature of international relations and foreign policy (Lane, 2016).

The major many countries have recognized the soft power potential of higher education. Many of the international students on scholarships are potential leaders who eventually return to their home countries to take up senior positions in the state, where they contextualize and diffused the knowledge learnt through their university education. Many countries offer scholarship programs for international students Where the education system that a country's conveys norms and values by foreign students “bringing with them the perspective of the country where they were educated” back home, and often further afield as they progress professionally.

More attention has been paid to trends in the internationalization of higher education and the connection this has to the contest for global influence. That building soft power is a key strategic function in the development of education hubs in the strategies countries in its external relations. The educational policy goes beyond "education, becoming one of the components of the foreign policy tools of States, one of the conceptual expressions of which is the concept of "soft power" of Joseph Nye." Higher education is also considered one of the tools of "soft power" in the international arena (McGill Peterson, 2014).

Soft power is an opportunity to get what you want through voluntary involvement, instead of using violence or use of money. It is closely related to the attractiveness of the culture of the state, its political ideas, international and domestic policy. Very often, the instrument of actualization of "soft power" is the educational system, which becomes one of the most powerful and attractive ways of development and dissemination of own ideals and values, where the education system was one of the most successful methods of implementing "soft power" in practice; identifying opportunities to bring the domestic education system to a qualitatively new stage of development).

Colleges and universities have become widely used in the policy of "soft power» many countries and institutions peace in the last 20-30 years. Higher education institutions help to instill in students and the General public a positive attitude to the policy of the state or the leadership of the country. This is particularly effective a tool for modern interconnected global society. In time have realized the advantages of impact world through education, universities in major countries include USA, Canada, Russia, China, Japan and other countries (Tierney & Lanford., 2015).

International education in public diplomacy has attracted the attention of governments and institutions around the world. If used successfully international education becomes an excellent tool for the foreign policy and interests of the state, including its "soft power".

In the vast majority of cases, the relevant literature studying this phenomenon has focused on the assessment of international education through the prism of the student program.

International education continues to gain recognition from governments and educational institutions as the main contribution to the "soft power". The positive experience of the movement of students and the development of intellectual commercial and social relationships at individual levels, resonates with the modern concept of "soft power", where values, culture and ideas play an important role in determining the impact at the global level, the Accumulated soft power potential of the relations, relationships and results essential experience of the individual it is not easy to include in the public diplomacy of the state.

Some experts do not want to impose state influence in the framework of public diplomacy on international education. For this group, international educational and exchange programs reflect interpersonal relationships that should not be considered a formal state effort in public diplomacy or soft power politics.

Currently, the numbers of countries relying on the pro-vision of higher education scholarships as a soft power in foreign policy are increasing. There are now many emerging countries offering such
scholarships such as Turkey, Russia, Brazil, and India, and others. This expansion is a result of the economic growth and development witnessed by these countries in the last period (Wojciuk A., 2018).

3 TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY AND HIGHER EDUCATION AS SOFT POWER

Higher education targeted at foreign students has become an integral tool for the Turkish foreign policy as soft power. Attracting foreign students to Turkey is becoming a means of transmission of Turkish culture abroad. In other words, through higher education scholarship programs, Turkey aims to promote its image abroad and promote its foreign policy towards the problems it faces with neighboring countries and the world in general. The effectiveness of this higher education scholarships means that Turkey is afforded the opportunity to establish a network of friends (political elites) in many countries in the world and in the Middle East in particular so that it can facilitate relations with other state (Yavuz & Topkaya, 2013).

According to the British Government Institute’s Soft Strength Index, Turkey ranked 25th in 2011, 20th out of 40 in 2012, 28th in 2015 and 30th in 2017. Turkish Scholarships is one of the foreign policy tools of Turkey as a soft power in the Middle East and international arena, supervised by the Turkish foreign ministry, during the planning and implementation stages of the Turkish Scholarship (Staub & Ktkgoz, 2014).

Türkiye Burslari is an educational exchange program in Turkey’s public diplomacy took it to generate soft power by way of creating cultural affinity and building relationships Turkey's initiative of international educational exchanges is analyzed against this backdrop in the case of the Türkiye Burslari program. The Turkiye Burslari is a tool of Turkish foreign policy. Correspond with the goals of Turkish public diplomacy, despite some difficulties, are receptive to Turkish culture likely to promote Turkey in their countries.

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Scholarship programmers, Türkiye Scholarships offers a range of programmers designed for each level of study, region and country, based on priority areas of study Candidates are provided a university and academic programmer guide through Türkiye Scholarships Information system (TBBS). It includes the following programs: Undergraduate scholarships, Postgraduate scholarships, Short-term scholarships, Success programmer and Research Scholarship programmer (Mizikaci, 2011).

The Turkish government offers at least 4,000 grants to study foreign students every year, where the number of foreign students in Turkey exceeded around 125 thousand students from all over the world hosted by Turkey and are currently educated at their universities, each year, students from more than 160 countries apply for scholarships in Turkey, the countries of the Middle East are the most countries whose students apply for Turkish scholarships, that's since the Justice and Development Party came to power in 2002, the foreign policy of Turkey underwent several strategic transformations in order to expand Turkey’s influence in the Middle East. For example, there are more than 300 Yemeni students who studying at Turkish universities within the Turkish scholarship program, there are 12,000 Syrian students studying at Turkish universities, Iraq 5012 students, Iran 6099 students, Libya 1943 students. The Turkish scholarship program covers university tuition and university housing for foreign students.

4 RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY AND HIGHER EDUCATION AS SOFT POWER

Since the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century, Russia has tried to develop the concept of soft power and its implementation mechanism. The idea of soft power was officially introduced into the Russian foreign policy doctrine in 2013, and senior Russian leaders (including President Vladimir Putin) announced that soft power tools were the most important in Moscow's foreign policy arsenal (Blank, 2017).

The “cultural component” of Russia's soft power lay on the attractiveness of Russian "high" culture all over the world and in the neighboring countries. For example, the Russian Ministry of Culture supports the annual Golden Theater Festival of the Golden Mask, which presents the leading Russian artists on the Baltic Sea. So far, cultural exchanges between Russia and the post-Soviet countries also tend to grow. Russia's higher education system remains attractive to students from former Soviet republics.
because the best Russian universities in Moscow, St. Petersburg and some other provincial cities are still able to afford international students with good training in humanity sciences (Karasik, 2017).

The Kremlin is looking at the Russian diaspora in post-Soviet countries as a conduit for soft power projection. For example, for the Baltic States, Moscow possesses a unique resource, where the Russian-speaking population accounts for about a third of the total population in Latvia and Estonia. Russian-speaking minorities in the post-Soviet countries view Moscow as a natural protector and have somehow a positive attitude toward Russia and Russian culture.

The process of institutionalizing soft power in Russia began even before the term itself became part of the vocabulary. In 2007, the Ruski Mir Foundation (Russian World) was established by presidential decree (although it has a non-governmental organization). The main mission of the Foundation is to strengthen the Russian language, culture and education system abroad (Baev, 2017).

After that, the Russian world, based on the cultural resources and the Russian language, is interpreted as the soft power capital that can be used to set the agenda (images of the future) and promote the sustainability of the Russian state "more people and communities" need Russia, the more sustainable it is.

For example, Russkiy Mir, appoints the best teacher and student of Russian language and culture for Professor position in Russkiy Mir and Student of the Russkiy Mir. It also has fellowships and training programs for international students and students to host in Russia. It also provides many conferences, competitions and Olympic and it gives many awards as well (Çelikpala, 2017).

In 2008, Rossotrudnichestvo, the Federal Agency for CIS (foreign nationals abroad and international humanitarian cooperation) was created with almost the same task as Russkiy Mir but with the status of government in the State Department. As President Medvedev said, the Agency would become "the main instrument of so-called soft power" (Government of the Russian Federation, 2012). Today, the agency includes representatives from almost all European countries, the United States, Canada, Asian, African and Latin American countries (Al-Makahleh, 2017).

Russia’s higher education system gradually built up its capacity for soft power. It has become international in nature by introducing the Bologna process and increasing the state’s share of foreign students for training in Russian universities. Academic exchange frameworks are diverse. State-funded “slots” are distributed to Russian universities through Russian embassies, with between 70 and 100 “slots” per country per year. A number of leading universities (such as the Russian People's Friendship University, the School of Economics, St Petersbourg State University and the Moscow State University) in addition to that, the enrolment is organizing students independently through competitions.

Russia saw the comeback of foreign students when stability was restored. At present, the education in Russia is still popular with potential international students. Many universities offer English language courses or preparatory courses before enrolment in a Russian-language program (Barmin, 2018).

Usually, a large number of young people from Asian countries come to study in Russia (the share of students seats from countries outside the former Soviet Union is 56.8 percent); half of them are Chinese nationals. The large inflow comes from North Africa and the Middle East which represents (18.5 percent), sub-Saharan Africa (15.9 percent) and Europe (5 percent). Based on a report published in March 6 (2018), issue of the German daily Frankfurtha Algmaina, there are signs that shows that students who traditionally go to universities in Russia are from China, India and Central Asia, it was noticed that in the past few years, there were an incensement in the number of students from Morocco and Algeria, Egypt and other African countries has also increased (Berman, 2018).

These students come from middle classes, the elites and privileged ones, who lean towards medicine, ICT and agriculture, while focusing earlier on studying the disciplines of law, history and international relations (Jensen, The Jamestown Foundation).

5 CONCLUSIONS

International education can impact foreign public opinion in a way that ropes a country’s national concern, building trustworthiness, dialogue, exchange of cultures, authenticity of message, and conceivably also intercultural discourse and understanding. Fostering genuine engagement, exchange, and partnership at the individual, institutional, and community levels, it can create soft power consequences for a given nation. Nevertheless those properties will be contingent on the
superiority and content of education, partnership and research occasions, and also on how students will feel on the campus, how they will acclimatize to the micro-bubble of dissimilar organization and, perhaps, culture. The present trends in the expansion of international education show that cultural magnetism has a low importance on the list of incentives driving the quantitative growth we are witnessing. And thus, as selective indication from available research displays, those organizations do not create soft power properties for current students. It also seems that at least in some circumstances, the establishment of offshore campuses of Western institutions is being perceived as a normative threat, and while for sure being attractive for many students.

For the situation of Russia and Turkey, each is attempting to acquire a hegemonic approach. For the case of Russia, it’s confronting the US cultural hegemony with its extended educational and research centres; while for Turkey, it’s trying to fill a gap in the Arab world since there is a lack of leadership amongst the Arab countries. Therefore, Turkey’s role was mainly to open language centres in the Arabic countries in order to spread its language and recently started to issue scholarship for Arab students. Russia’s legacy in scholarship goes back to its USSR history as a tool to confront the western block as it can be seen the same today.

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