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## THE "SOFT POWER" FACTOR IN UZBEKISTAN'S FOREIGN POLICY: PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES.

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**Abstract:** *This article examines the role of soft power in Uzbekistan's foreign policy, highlighting both challenges and potential benefits. Soft power, defined as the ability to shape preferences through appeal and attraction rather than coercion, is increasingly significant in the global diplomatic landscape. For Uzbekistan, a nation strategically located in Central Asia, leveraging cultural diplomacy, educational exchanges, and media influence can enhance its international standing and foster stronger bilateral relations. Key opportunities for Uzbekistan include promoting its rich cultural heritage, increasing its presence in international educational institutions, and harnessing the potential of its youth in technology and innovation. These efforts can improve its image and foster goodwill among other nations. However, challenges persist, such as overcoming negative perceptions rooted in past political issues, addressing internal socio-economic disparities, and ensuring consistent policy implementation. The article argues that while Uzbekistan has made strides in utilizing soft power, a coherent and strategic approach is essential to maximize its impact. This involves not only promoting positive aspects of Uzbek culture and policy but also addressing underlying domestic issues that could undermine its credibility on the global stage. By navigating these challenges effectively, Uzbekistan can strengthen its soft power and play a more influential role in regional and global affairs.*

**Keywords:** *Uzbekistan, culture, soft power, cultural diplomacy, foreign policy, Central Asia, "regional power", tourism, historical monuments, multilateral initiatives and so on.*

**Аннотация:** *В данной статье рассматривается роль мягкой силы во внешней политике Узбекистана, подчеркивая как проблемы, так и потенциальные выгоды. Мягкая сила, определяемая как способность формировать предпочтения посредством привлекательности и привлечения, а не принуждения, приобретает все большее значение в глобальном дипломатическом ландшафте. Для Узбекистана, страны, стратегически расположенной в Центральной Азии, использование культурной дипломатии,*

образовательных обменов и влияния средств массовой информации может повысить его международный авторитет и способствовать укреплению двусторонних отношений. Ключевые возможности для Узбекистана включают продвижение своего богатого культурного наследия, расширение своего присутствия в международных образовательных учреждениях и использование потенциала молодежи в области технологий и инноваций. Эти усилия могут улучшить его имидж и способствовать развитию доброй воли среди других стран. Однако проблемы сохраняются, такие как преодоление негативных представлений, укорененных в прошлых политических проблемах, устранение внутреннего социально-экономического неравенства и обеспечение последовательной реализации политики. В статье утверждается, что, хотя Узбекистан добился успехов в использовании «мягкой силы», для максимизации ее воздействия необходим последовательный и стратегический подход. Это предполагает не только продвижение положительных аспектов узбекской культуры и политики, но и решение коренных внутренних проблем, которые могут подорвать доверие к Узбекистану на мировой арене. Эффективно решая эти проблемы, Узбекистан может укрепить свою мягкую силу и играть более влиятельную роль в региональных и глобальных делах.

**Ключевые слова:** Узбекистан, культура, мягкая сила, культурная дипломатия, внешняя политика, Центральная Азия, «региональная держава», туризм, исторические памятники, многосторонние инициативы и так далее.

**Annotatsiya:** Ushbu maqola O'zbekiston tashqi siyosatida yumshoq kuchning o'rni ko'rib chiqilib, muammolar va potentsial manfaatlariga e'tibor qaratiladi. Majburlash emas, balki e'tiroz va jalb qilish orqali imtiyozlarni shakllantirish qobiliyati sifatida tavsiflangan yumshoq kuch global diplomatik landshaftda tobora muhim ahamiyat kasb etmoqda. Markaziy Osiyoda strategik jihatdan joylashgan O'zbekiston uchun madaniy diplomatiya, ta'lim almashinuvi va ommaviy axborot vositalari ta'siridan foydalanish uning xalqaro mavqeini oshirishi va ikki tomonlama munosabatlarning mustahkamlanishiga yordam beradi. O'zbekistonning boy madaniy merosini targ'ib qilish, xalqaro ta'lim muassasalaridagi ishtirokini oshirish, yoshlarning texnologiya va innovatsiyalar salohiyatidan foydalanish O'zbekiston uchun asosiy imkoniyatlardan iborat. Bu sa'y-harakatlar uning obro'sini yaxshilashi va boshqa davlatlar o'rtasida yaxshi niyatni rivojlantirishi mumkin. Biroq o'tmishdagi siyosiy muammolardan kelib chiqqan salbiy tasavvurlarni bartaraf etish, ichki ijtimoiy-iqtisodiy nomutanosibliklarni bartaraf etish va siyosatning izchil amalga oshirilishini ta'minlash kabi muammolar saqlanib qolmoqda. Maqolada aytilishicha, O'zbekiston yumshoq kuchdan foydalanishda muvaffaqiyatga erishgan bo'lsa-da,

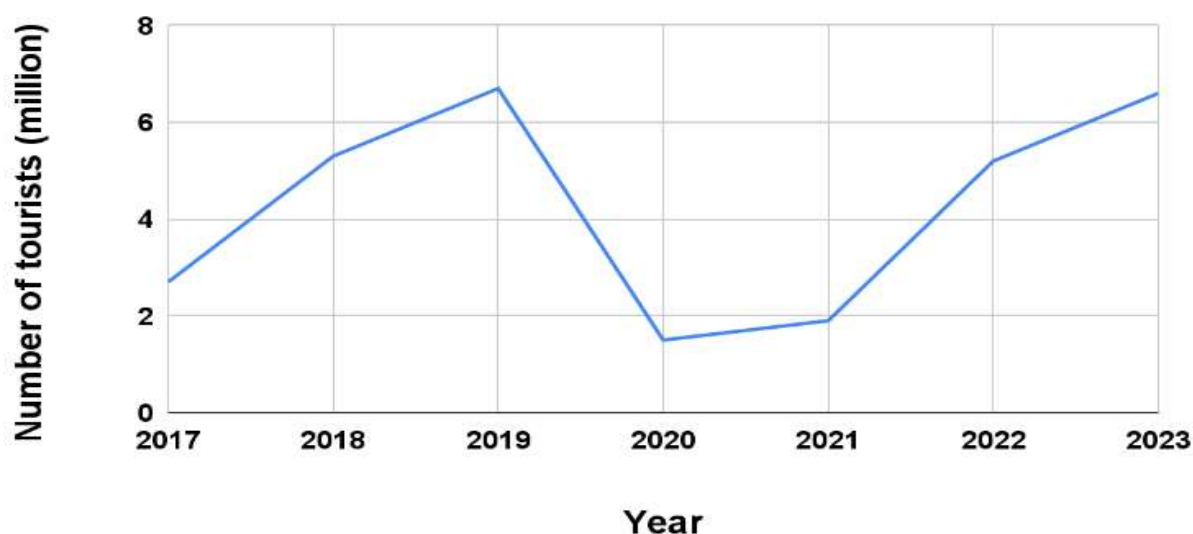
uning ta'sirini maksimal darajada oshirish uchun izchil va strategik yondashuv zarur. Bu nafaqat o'zbek madaniyati va siyosatining ijobiy tomonlarini targ'ib qilish, balki uning jahon miqyosida obro'siga putur yetkazishi mumkin bo'lgan ichki muammolarni hal etishni ham o'z ichiga oladi. Ushbu muammolarni samarali hal qilish orqali O'zbekiston o'zining yumshoq kuchini mustahkamlashi va mintaqaviy va global masalalarda yanada ta'sirchan rol o'ynashi mumkin.

**Kalit so'zlar:** O'zbekiston, madaniyat, yumshoq kuch, madaniy diplomatiya, tashqi siyosat, Markaziy Osiyo, "mintaqaviy kuch", turizm, tarixiy obidalar, ko'p tomonlama tashabbuslar va boshqalar.

Soft power refers to a country's ability to influence others through non-coercive means such as culture, values, and politics. This is different from hard power, which relies on military and economic power to achieve influence. Developed by political scientist Joseph Nye, this concept refers to a nation's ability to influence others through non-coercive means such as culture, diplomacy, and ideology. The use of soft power in the context of Uzbekistan's foreign policy presents challenges and opportunities.

Uzbekistan is the largest and most populous country in Central Asia, as well as its rich cultural heritage, because our country has not achieved the status of a **regional power** for nothing. Uzbekistan has great opportunities to increase its soft power and raise its international status. One such opportunity lies in its growing **tourism sector**. In 2023, the number of tourists who visited our country reached 7 million, if we look at the exact numbers, it reached 6.6 million, and 13,965 of them correspond to the share of the USA, last time such a high figure in 2019, it was 6.7 million.

### Number of tourists to Uzbekistan



Source: TourCentralAsia.com

Although in 2020-2021, due to the pandemic, the tourism sectors of almost all countries stopped working, but our country restored its potential in a short period of time. In 2023, most tourists came from Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyz Republic, Russia and Turkey, and from European countries came from Germany. This indicates that the tourism potential of our country has reached not only Asia, but also Europe and the USA.

With historical cities like Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva, Uzbekistan has many cultural monuments that have the potential to attract visitors from different parts of the world. In 2022, the Registan architectural monument of Samarkand was recognized as the most visited tourist destination. In 2023, Samarkand was recognized as the capital of the United Nations World Tourism Organization and hosted the organization's 25th assembly. In 2024, the city of Khiva became the capital of the Islamic world. it was noted. By promoting tourism and cultural exchange, Uzbekistan can showcase its rich heritage and foster positive feelings among foreign audiences. Growth in the tourism sector has certainly contributed significantly to our economy, in 2019, the weight of tourism in the economy is 1 billion 679 million dollars, which increased the GDP by 2.79%.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, in order to develop this sector, our country should also develop other cities in Uzbekistan that are distinguished by their historical and natural monuments.

In addition, the geopolitical position of Uzbekistan as a crossroads between the East and the West is of strategic importance in regional issues. By actively **cooperating with neighboring countries and participating in multilateral initiatives**, Uzbekistan can show itself as a bridge between different cultures and civilizations. Through diplomatic efforts and regional cooperation, Uzbekistan can strengthen the influence of soft power and contribute to stability and prosperity in Central Asia and beyond. 'p' means that he focused on the foreign policy. On November 11-12, 2022, the first summit of the Organization of Turkic States was held in Samarkand. At the 11th meeting of the Ministers of Economy and Trade of the Organization of Turkic States, the Agreement on the establishment of the Investment Fund of the Organization of Turkic States was signed in order to further deepen the trade-economic and investment cooperation. A concert program featuring the national folklore art of the member countries of the Organization of Turkic States was organized. It should be noted that this Summit was held by the leaders of the member states of the Organization under the slogan "New Era of Turkish Civilization: Towards Common Development and Prosperity" in support of the President's initiatives. More than 10 documents were

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<sup>1</sup> Data collated from World Bank and UNWTO

signed during the summit. In particular, its main document, the Samarkand Declaration, was adopted. It defines joint approaches to ensuring regional stability, security and sustainable economic development, strengthening transport links, as well as deepening cultural dialogue.

Another thing to mention is that another way to spread the soft power is the **language and to increase the resources created in the mother tongue**. If we look at the statistics, Germany and Turkey are the countries that allocate the most money for soft power in the whole world, and we know that these countries spread soft power through language from the activities of "Goethe" and "Ankara Dil Okulu" special language schools in our country. Fortunately, Ibrat Academy has started its activities in Uzbekistan to develop the Uzbek language, and on this platform there are Uzbek language courses in English and Russian, as well as Uzbek literacy courses also. There is also a special app on the website, and this app works anywhere in the world. In addition, a Wiki-scholarship project is being implemented in order to increase resources in the Uzbek language on the Wikipedia website.

There are as many challenges as there are opportunities.

A Central Asian country with a rich cultural heritage and strategic geopolitical position, Uzbekistan has a unique potential to demonstrate soft power on a global scale. One significant obstacle is **the partially closed politics in the past** that once characterized the country's political landscape and in the ideology of some countries, Uzbekistan still remains a closed country. However, with the initiative of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, in recent years, reforms regarding the liberalization of economy and society and human rights have been implemented in our country. And our president has set the priority of our country's policy to establish good relations not only with local neighbors, but also with the entire world community, and we hope that this will bear fruit.

In addition, **the lack of a coherent and coordinated soft power strategy** exacerbates the problems facing Uzbekistan. Although the country has a rich cultural heritage, including distinctive cuisine, music and architecture, these elements have not yet been systematically incorporated into a comprehensive soft power system. Without a strategic roadmap to promote Uzbekistan's cultural assets and values, its soft power efforts lack direction and effectiveness.

In conclusion, Uzbekistan's pursuit of soft power is both limited by problems and strengthened by opportunities. Although the partial isolation of previous eras and the lack of a coherent strategy pose significant obstacles, the country's cultural heritage, tourism potential, geopolitical position and economic growth, language and values

offer ways to enhance its soft power influence. By solving internal reforms, developing cultural exchange and actively cooperating with the international community, increasing the status of the Uzbek language and spreading it, Uzbekistan will overcome its difficulties and emerge as a strong player in the field of soft power diplomacy.

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