



PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN CONTEMPORARY WORLD ПУБЛИЧНАЯ ДИПЛОМАТИЯ В СОВРЕМЕННОМ МИРЕ

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Research article

People's Diplomacy in Contemporary Central Asia: Towards Integration and Prosperity

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Abstract. Central Asian countries have been recognized by the international community as independent states since 1991. The region's location makes it a geostrategic "bridge" linking the East and the West, therefore it plays a crucial role in establishing connections between the world's leading countries. In the last three years, Central Asia has witnessed a change in perspective integration, with a view to new cooperation in the field of People's diplomacy. The aim of the article is to analyze the significance and perspectives of Public diplomacy for developing integration processes in the region.

Keywords: People's diplomacy, Public Diplomacy, Eurasia, Central Asia, inter-ethnic relations, friendship societies

1. Introduction

At present, with the appearance of new states and, consequently, new global challenges, the international arena is rapidly changing. Currently in the world, there exist about 6000 nationalities/ethnic groups. The Central Asian region, situated in the heart of Eurasia and inhabited by more than 75 million people (over 150 various nationalities), is becoming one of the vital strategic regions of the world. The majority of the region's population are Turkish-Persian speakers.

Indeed, the Central Asian region occupies the territory, crucial not only from the geopolitical point of view, but also from geo-economic, geo-cultural and geo-historical perspectives. The region is a strategic "bridge" between the East and the West, rich in natural resources, and home to ancient cities, such as Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, Kesh, Termez, Fergana valley (Uzbekistan), Ashgabat, Dashovuz, Marv (Turkmenistan), Khujand, Dushanbe (Tajikistan), Shimkent, Aktobe, (Kazakhstan), Osh (Kyrgyzstan) Kashgar, Khotan (Xinjiang

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region, China), which are located in the heart of Eurasia and historically were part of the ancient Great Silk Road.

Central Asian Turkic and Persian-speaking Muslim peoples are similar to each other in their cultural, linguistic and religious uniqueness. The region shares borders with Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, Russia, India, and Iran. The neighbor countries, although stimulating the region's cooperation with the world market, negatively impact Central Asia with unnecessary clashes of interests and competition for hegemony in the region. All Central Asian countries are multinational states: besides the Russian diaspora, they are populated by Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Germans, British, Polish, Koreans, Chinese, Arabs, Jews, Persian and Indian ethnicities, Uyghur and Dungan peoples, Azerbaijani, Armenians, Georgians, Moldavians, Greeks, and other nations. Nowadays, in the light of the rapid globalization process, one of the most important objectives for all countries of the world is to promote peace, stability and increase sustainable development through integration.

According to American scientist Fredric Starr, the situation in Central Asia and the regional inter-ethnic processes are guaranteed to grab the attention of the world's leading countries [1. P. 71–82].

The paper is based on the existing Ph.D. research work regarding the prospects and problems of People's diplomacy in Central Asia, as well as surveys and interviews of national and international scholars and experts. The paper attempts to examine the relations between Central Asia and neighboring countries from the regional perspective, while focusing on the dynamics of the bilateral relations, multilateral cooperation and the potential of a more comprehensive partnership between Central Asian countries.

2. Public Diplomacy and Its Importance

In 1965, Edmund Gullion, Dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, was “the first to use the idiom in its contemporary meaning”, namely, Gullion's concept of public diplomacy in international relations.

Public diplomacy deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policy. It includes traditional diplomacy, the cultivation of public opinions in other countries, the dialogue of interests between groups and nations, and the process of intercultural communication [2]. The mechanism of public diplomacy rests on the ability of a state (through official and non-official channels) to influence the society of other countries. According to Joseph Nye, soft power is “attractiveness”, while public diplomacy is a tool to increase the attractiveness [3. P. 70].

In early 1991, the Central Asian region experienced international competition over its resources and suffered small-scale tensions between the interested countries [1]. Currently, inter-ethnic tensions are expanding to the global level, as the major countries of the world are seeking ways to get access to resources and gain geo-strategic control, especially in developing countries. In light of the cur-

rent state of the world, promoting regional integration in Central Asia offers many opportunities from geopolitical, geo-economic and logistical standpoints.

One of the public diplomacy tools is governmental scholarships. The demand for the Russian language in Central Asia has decreased, while English, German, French, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese are rapidly gaining popularity. This is especially true in regards to English, the fluency in which opens possibilities for international career and business. The knowledge of English also offers the best educational opportunities inside Central Asia, such as the American University of Central Asia (Bishkek) and the three campuses of the Aga Khan University of Central Asia (Khorog in Tajikistan, and Tekeli in Kazakhstan) [4. P. 74–75].

3. Analysis of Public Diplomacy in Central Asia

Central Asian states are members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Commonwealth Independent States (CIS), China's 'One Belt, One Road' initiative, the Eurasian Economic Community and others. The significance of these organizations is undeniable in regard to investments and regional integration.

According to Nye, Russia made the following proposals concerning public diplomacy in Central Asia:

- Increasing daily communication with the foreign public through media and IT mobilization;
- Promoting systematic long-term networking and engagement of scholarship programs as part of Russia's soft power strategy in the region;
- Establishing close trans-boundary relations with the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, especially in Central Asia, which now represent the biggest market for both Eastern and Western countries [3. P. 72].

Russia is the main affiliate of Central Asian countries and China is the main potential economic partner of the region. The Russian language is still widespread in the region, and the Chinese language is becoming increasingly popular. Branches of numerous Russian universities are open in all Central Asian countries except Turkmenistan, and Confucius Institute is promoting Chinese language and culture in the region. The number of students from Central Asia enrolled in Russian, Chinese, South Korean and Japanese universities keeps steadily growing. Citizens of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan have the right to enter Russian universities on equal terms with Russian citizens. International organizations in the region, such as JICA (Japan), ITEC (India), TIKA (Turkey), KOICA (Republic of Korea), and others are expanding their activities targeted at mutual collaboration [5. P. 2]. The above mentioned states and organizations are encouraging cooperation and integration through cultural and public diplomacy tools. As the scholar Anholt put it, the image of the country and region is formed by a wide range of factors represented in the hexagon. These are six natural 'channels'

through which countries typically convey their images to the world: tourism, exports, people, governance, culture and heritage, and investment [6. P. 18].

4. Uzbekistan' integration initiatives

Uzbekistan is the most populated and one of the most influential states in Central Asia. At present, by means of People's diplomacy, the government of Uzbekistan is providing a sustainable development strategy for the country and promoting regional integration – the two most significant directions of the region's current policy.

It is noteworthy that 35 million citizens of Uzbekistan (which is about 50% of all Central Asian population) have secondary and higher education¹.

It should also be emphasized that the region's population is multi-ethnic: the Uzbeks make up about 3.1% of population of Kazakhstan, 14.0% of Tajikistan, 14.6% of Kyrgyzstan, 5.0% of Turkmenistan, and 9% of Afghanistan [7. P. 365–387].

The ongoing rapid globalization process is bringing with it different kinds of unexpected issues worldwide. Contemporary Uzbekistan's external policy (both in relation to the immediate neighbors and other foreign countries) is based on the principles of public diplomacy. In the context of the adopted strategy, in February 2017, Leader of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoev endorsed a new national strategic plan called "Development Strategy in 2017–2021". The Fifth guideline of the Strategy outlines new state agencies and public organizations necessary for implementation of public diplomacy in the country and abroad. Among such agencies are the Committee on Inter-ethnic Relations and Friendly Cooperation with Foreign Countries under the Ministry of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Public Diplomacy Center of Uzbekistan of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The primary objective of the Committee is to implement the state policy on inter-ethnic relations: maintain various nations and ethnic groups' cultural activities domestically and support friendly cooperation with foreign countries, including the Uzbek Diasporas and organizations abroad. The main goal of the Center is to enhance collaboration by encouraging people's diplomacy mechanisms among the SCO member countries [8].

In 2016, Uzbekistan initiated a new integration process in Central Asian region. The process is based on neighborly relations, friendly cooperation, new reforms, and novel approaches built upon the principles of public diplomacy. The President of Uzbekistan started his new political course conforming to the concepts of openness and mutually beneficial partnership both with the historical neighbors and remote countries. For example, in November 2017, upon the initiative of the Uzbek President, an international conference "Central Asia: Single His-

¹ Central Asian nations. *Wikipedia*. Available from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Asia. Accessed 30.01.2019.

tory and Common Future, Sustainable Development and Cooperation on Prospects” was held in Samarkand.

In 2018, within the framework of the abovementioned initiative, a new Center of Public Diplomacy of Uzbekistan under the umbrella of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization was established. Aimed at the region’s prospective development, the Center fulfills the following functions:

- Assistance in strengthening mutual trust and good-neighborliness, inter-ethnic and inter-religious harmony, as well as development of inter-civilizational dialogue between the SCO countries;
- Reinforcement of cultural and humanitarian ties with the SCO countries, including arrangement of reciprocal visits of delegations;
- Maintaining a friendly atmosphere of interaction between the SCO countries’ civil institutions, in particular, youth and women’s organizations;
- Promoting cooperation between the SCO countries in the information communication field: development of information resources and expanding media interaction with a view to pursue the SCO’s primary objectives, while abiding by the fundamental principles. The collaboration in the information field includes preparation and regular publication of educational and analytical materials on the achievements of the SCO countries in the cultural and humanitarian spheres;
- Using people's diplomacy tools in order to bring the SCO countries and their peoples closer together and consolidate the feeling of mutual trust and neighborly relations [9].

5. Processes and Dynamics of Cooperation

At present, Central Asian countries are actively engaged in the process of comprehensive partnership on order to invigorate and strengthen relations. The new government of Uzbekistan is taking every effort to increase the dynamics of the bilateral relations built on the principles of public diplomacy. The regional governments created new opportunities for extended cooperation by opening borders, launching new airline connections, holding cultural and educational events, encouraging the regional tourism, etc. Uzbekistan gave the go-ahead for students from Turkmenistan, Uyghur, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan to enroll in Uzbek higher educational programs, which is an important step for developing the integration process in Central Asia.

Uzbekistan is involved in numerous diplomatic practical activities in the region to promote integration, including grand-scale international conferences, such as “Central Asia: Single History and Common Future, Sustainable Development and Cooperation Prospects” in Samarkand and “Peace Process, Security Cooperation and Regional Connectivity” (devoted to Afghanistan) in Tashkent. These projects played a key role in introducing Uzbekistan’s new development strategy to the rest of the world and implementing integration processes of the region. Moreover, in the course of the conferences, numerous practical solutions to the existing regional challenges were offered.

In the recent years, at the behest of Uzbekistan and with the cooperation of Central Asian countries, major international conferences on regional integration have been held and significant progress on applying public diplomacy has been achieved.

5.1. International Conference on Central Asia

In November 2017, upon the initiative of the President of Uzbekistan, the international conference “Central Asia: Single History and Common Future, Sustainable Development and Cooperation Prospects” was organized in the ancient Uzbek city Samarkand. As a result of the conference, significant practical success in boosting cooperation and integration process between the regional countries was achieved [12, 2017]. Among the major achievements directed at long term problem solving was the Treaty on the Junction Point of State Borders signed by Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan also achieved an agreement on 85% of their border. Moreover, flights to Tajikistan were restarted and the process of delimitation and demarcation of state borders between the countries was completed. Another achievement of the conference was the creation of the Regional Economic Forum, the Association of Regional Authorities (hokims) and Central Asian business groups. The development of transportation corridors (the construction of the new Turkmenabad – Farab automobile and railway bridges, Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran-Oman routes, and Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan-China railroad) was a significant advancement in the process of regional integration [10].

As a result of the implementation of public diplomacy by Uzbekistan, mutual trade volume between the regional economies sprung from 20 percent to almost 70 percent. As the ties between the regional partners are strengthening, cultural and humanitarian exchange, as well as practical cooperation for ensuring security and stability in Central Asia are increasing. Currently, the biggest problems in the regional security area are instability in Afghanistan, the Aral Sea ecological disaster, deficiency of water resources, terrorism, religious extremism, transnational crime and drug trafficking. To deal with the regional security issue, Uzbekistan uses the instruments of preventive diplomacy introduced by the United Nations. The country is trying to strengthen the interaction with the CIS, SCO, OSCE, and other international and regional agencies. However, stable and sustainable development in Central Asia is impossible without achieving peace in neighboring Afghanistan, which is currently one of Uzbekistan’s top priority tasks. Tashkent actively participates in the economic reconstruction of the neighboring country, including the development of transportation and energy infrastructures and human resource training.

According to the UN experts, effective cooperation of Central Asian countries can increase the regional GDP by at least fifty per cent in the next 10 years. Central Asia has colossal natural and human resources opportunities: it is officially one of the «youngest» regions as to the age of the population (60% young adults). In the light of this, Uzbekistan put forward “Convention on the Rights of the Youth” and accepted a special UN resolution “Education and Tolerance” at

the General Assembly session in New York. In order to protect the young population from extremist influences and educate them on the true humanistic values of Islam, Uzbekistan established Imam Bukhari International Research Center in Samarkand and the Center of Islamic Civilization in Tashkent.

As a result of the conference, the UN General Assembly adopted a special resolution on strengthening regional and international cooperation for peace, security, and sustainable socio-economic development in the Central Asian region. The resolution encourages a constructive dialogue, mutually beneficial cooperation and a consistent approach to the resolution of the current regional problems. Undoubtedly, this step can serve as a vivid example of successful public diplomacy implementation by Uzbekistan. As part of the people's diplomacy, the government of Uzbekistan seeks to reinforce the active cultural and humanitarian partnership by holding cultural events (Days of Culture) and supporting educational and tourist exchange. A simple and open dialogue is a sure way to support the environment of mutual understanding, friendship, and integration in Central Asia. The "Central Asian Home" is aimed at ensuring sustainable development, stability, and prosperity in the region.

5.2. International Conference on Afghanistan

On March 26, 2018, Uzbek government initiated international conference on Afghanistan "Peace Process, Security Cooperation and Regional Connectivity" took place in Tashkent. As a result of the conference, Tashkent Declaration on Afghanistan was signed. The convention is an important part of Uzbekistan's peace strategy aimed at providing stability and increasing cooperation in the region. The security of neighboring Afghanistan remains a pressing issue and is one of the key directions of the regional integration policy. We carefully examined numerous global forums on Afghanistan (for example, ones in Kabul, Moscow and Istanbul), the SCO and Afghanistan international contact group, regional economic cooperation conference on Afghanistan and, particularly, Uzbekistan's speech during the UNGA's 48th session in 1993. We also studied the 1998 "6+2" diplomatic negotiation (six regional neighbors, USA and Russia), which, with the addition of NATO in 2008, became "6+3". Uzbekistan always actively participates in supporting the peace process and regional integration. In 2018, the first meeting in the format (C5+1) (Central Asia + Afghanistan) was held in Uzbekistan. It is our hope that the new format will not only lead to integration success in Central Asia but also positively affect regional cooperation with Afghanistan through economic and infrastructural projects [11].

In September 2017, at the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York the Leader of Uzbekistan confirmed his strategy on security and stability in the region, and in November of the same year, another international conference on Central Asia was held in Samarkand. The objective of the conference was to strengthen integration of Central Asian countries, this time including Afghanistan. Uzbekistan is closely monitoring the current situation in Central

Asia and Afghanistan, and the prospects of development in the region have generated a keen interest of the international community. The location of Central Asia is strategically important, as it connects Europe and the Middle East, South and East Asia. Moreover, the region is rich in natural resources, has a stable market and a unique cultural legacy. Consequently, the region has caught the attention of the world's leading countries, which, at times even causes a clash of interests. However, it is important for the regional countries to stay united and keep cordial relations to sustain stability. As for settling the situation in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan's standing is based on three interrelated levels: domestic, regional and global.

Central Asian countries have a long history of sharing borders, therefore, regional stability, sustainable development, and good-neighborliness are crucial for successful integration, as well as achieving political goals and economic prosperity. Peaceful resolution in Afghanistan will give access to a huge market, enable entry to the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf and establish connections between the Middle Eastern and European markets. Afghanistan's regional neighbors will also benefit from these opportunities. Therefore, security issues in Afghanistan are not merely of domestic or regional significance, they have a global reach. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is playing a crucial role in the regional integration: all Central Asian countries are members of this geopolitical cooperation and are involved in regional consolidation activities.

6. Discussions and Conclusions

Central Asia is one of the world's most strategically important regions. Public diplomacy is a necessary tool for promoting regional integration and securing Central Asia's standing in the international arena. The regional countries' shared history, religion, language, traditions, and challenges are the basis for successful integration. In the past two years, the Central Asian states started rapidly moving towards integration thanks to the initiatives of the new Uzbek Government, whose goals are to strengthen cordial relations and cooperation in the region.

The Leader of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoev visited every country in Central Asia with the purpose of strengthening ties and encouraging cooperation between the nations by means of public (People's) diplomacy. Uzbekistan is creating many new opportunities for the peoples of neighboring countries by opening its borders and engaging in joint projects.

Furthermore, international and regional organizations play a vital role in promoting robust relations in Central Asia by building a strong partnership between the nations and ensuring regional stability.

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Научная статья

Народная дипломатия в современной Центральной Азии: в направлении интеграции и процветания

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Аннотация. Страны Центральной Азии признаны международным сообществом как независимые государства после 1991 года. Геостратегическое расположение региона позволяет рассматривать его в качестве геостратегических «моста» между Востоком и Западом, он играет крайне важную роль в соединении ведущих стран Евразии. В течение последних лет в Центральной Азии произошли изменения и процессы, обеспечивающие новые перспективы для интеграции и развития сотрудничества в области народной дипломатии. Целью статьи является изучение значимости и анализ перспектив народной дипломатии для развития интеграции в регионе. В международных отношениях особое внимание уделяется развитию сотрудничества между странами, что исследуется в рамках анализа внешней политики.

Ключевые слова: народная дипломатия, публичная дипломатия, Евразия, Центральная Азия, межнациональные отношения, общества дружбы

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