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## *Education as a Soft Power Instrument of Foreign Policy* Aidarbek Amirbek<sup>a</sup> Kanat Ydyrys<sup>b</sup>

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### Abstract

Nowadays, the number of countries that regard that education is the best way to promote their national interests on the world stage is increasing. Especially big powers started to pay special attention and importance to the use of education as an effective instrument/source of soft power.

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### Introduction

Any State aims to strengthen its position and prestige in the international arena, as well as to create favorable conditions for its long-term socio-economic development. To achieve these goals, state uses a variety of foreign policy tools of both hard and soft power (Nye, 2009, p. 7). However, it is observed that after the fall of the bipolar world order, many states tend to use soft power aiming to achieve their foreign policy goals. The main reasons behind this tendency are an increase of interdependence among states and the heavy price that nations pay for *achieving* foreign policy *objectives* with the use of hard power. In this context, soft power instruments started to occupy a more effective position in the foreign policy of the countries, and we can foresee that this position will continue to rise in the coming period.

If we consider the role that soft power and education play in the foreign policy of the state, it is important to note that soft power is a concept developed in 1990 by political theorist Joseph Nye of Harvard University to describe the ability to attract and co-opt rather than coerce, and use economic, cultural and political force as means of persuasion (Nye, 2009, p. 8).

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### **Education as an Effective Soft Power Instrument**

Culture and education come to be one of the most effective soft power instruments. In line with this, soft power is contrasted with 'hard power', which implies using of military force and coercion. In this aspect, it is important not only to use military force or economic sanctions to force change in other countries, but also it is crucial to shape the agenda of world politics and attract them (Nye, 2005, p. 14).

Nowadays, the leadership in the world politics is increasingly determined by the ability of the state to help develop its neighbors or competitors (Bogaturov, 2006, p. 12). Moreover, in the transition period of the world political system states have to fight for the right to determine the values and the regulatory component of the modern world order. Competition between different values and models of national and socio-economic development is one of the key trends of the new millennium. Today, this kind of leadership is impossible without advancing human development - the basis of the formation of the new knowledge-based economy. That is why many ambitiously developing states (such as Brazil, Russia, India and China) which are eager to adopt innovative economic model, pay special attention to the modernization and internationalization of their national education systems (Nye, 2008, p. 94).

Only a developed education system that meets the requirements of innovative high-tech economy, and is integrated into the international educational and scientific space, can become one of the major competitive advantages of the modern state in the "global competition for minds" and attract the most talented foreign students. The provision of educational opportunities for foreign students is one of the most important instruments of soft power of the state (Cowan & Arsenault, 2008, s.10).

Successful foreign students who along with the learning the language will gradually become acquainted with the achievements of science and culture of the host country. These students can gain valuable social capital after having being studied abroad. Consequently, after coming back with acquired knowledge and personal relations, they are expected to become effective transmitters of the language and culture of the country where they had studied (Nye, 2005, p. 12). As a result, the effectiveness of exposure to the outside world with the help of national education as an instrument of soft power is much higher than by military force or others.

### **International Education and Geopolitics**

It must also be emphasized that the education system has always been the main engine of prosperity of a particular state. After all, it is known that, any state is able to show considerable achievements in the level of prosperity by the help of the viable mechanism of educational system. Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia and other East Asian countries might serve as a striking example of this (Nye, 2005, p. 12). At the same time, the education system can be used as an instrument of soft power in the sphere of politics and geopolitics.

Currently, the number of countries that regard that education is the best way to promote their national interests on the world stage is increasing. Thus, the countries such as China, Germany, Russia, the US, Turkey and a number of developed European countries have implemented a variety of high education programs for competent and promising young people from around the world. Especially big powers for the first time in history started to pay special attention and importance to the educational system of their universities (Nye, 2004, p. 16). For instance Mohamed Morsi ex-president of Egypt, who studied at the University of Southern California, Mikheil Saakashvili, who studied Masters at Columbia University, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan studied at Harvard University and the Japanese Crown Princess Masako, who studied at Harvard University (Nye, 2004, p. 24).

Further, it should be emphasized that the educational system today is closely intertwined with the concept of politics and/or geopolitics (Nye, 2005, p. 4). Graduates studied in the foreign countries become not only highly qualified personnel in their countries, but they also may become a so-called "Trojan horse" (Tremblay, 2010, p.117).

Shortly, unfolding political events have demonstrated that political leaders may show sympathy and favor to the countries where they studied. In particular during the Afghan war the Soviet officials used to get Afghan political and intellectual elites to accept Soviet ideology with the aim to establish Soviet-friendly regime. For instance one of them was Nur Mohammad Taraki. It should be noted that Taraki was Secretary-General of the PDPA and the leader of the faction "Hulk" (People). Also, it is known that the Soviet Union sought to introduce the Afghan people with their ideology through the pro-Soviet Afghan officials who were studied in the USSR. However, excessive rigidity of the Soviet Union and the forced introduction of their views and ideology affected

negatively, and subsequently Afghan people felt alienation and distrust to the Soviet Union and its views (Filimonov, 2010, p. 12).

However, currently the U.S. implements this project (educational project) much more delicately. But, the most important triumph in the fact that many young people aim to study in the United States. Thanks to, high quality education the U.S. government can successfully implement its strategy in the framework of politics and geopolitics, not only regionally, but also globally (Cooper, 2004, p. 168).

Nowadays, more countries are trying to form world quality and accessible system of education to students from all over the world. Such countries as the United States are perfectly informed about the fact that the education system is one of the most essential instruments in terms of dominance in the global political arena. Everyone knows that the educational system allows the improvement of economic and political situation of the country (Nye, 2009, p. 17). Thus, if one country is dominating in some part of the world both politically and economically, it means that it is also dominant in the geopolitical aspect in the given part of the world.

## Conclusion

Finally, it should be noted that the educational system is one of the vitally important spheres, and its degradation leads to the degradation of the entire country. Also, it is worth noting that the efficiency of university education as a soft power instrument can only be assessed in the longer term. Culture and values take time to diffuse and take root, but once they do, they remain deeply rooted for a long time. Making this foreign policy tool more effective requires patience and hard work.

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