SOFT POWER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND IN THE XXIST CENTURY
(Lessons for Republic of Moldova)

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Acest articol este bazat pe cercetarea efectuată în procesul elaborării lucrării și analizează conceptul de „soft power" și evoluția acestuia în Regatul Unit al Marii Britanii și Irlandei de Nord în secolul al XXI-lea. Marea Britanie este țara care ocupă primele poziții în majoritatea sondajelor și lucrărilor efectuate de renumite institute de cercetare și are o experiență bogată în utilizarea resurselor soft în promovarea imaginii statului.

Nowadays, in the globalisation era, most countries, if not all, are rethinking their old strategies of being coercive to the new ways of persuasions – trying to build an attractive space. This is basically the definition of soft power, the ability to attract and co-opt, rather than coerce, which is in contrast with hard power. In other words, soft power involves shaping the preferences of others through appeal and attraction. Building the positive perception and attractiveness of the states or regional entities represent another global goal and competition among international actors nowadays. And the UK is becoming a truly independent international actor, once the Brexit process is finished. Thus, it is interesting to see what actions and measures the UK will undertake after more than 47 years of being a member of the European Union, to make the country even more attractive and to influence the decisions at the regional and global level.

In international politics we distinguish two types of power: hard power and soft power. In this regard, we must mention that hard power is defined as the exercise of coercive force by a state to achieve the proposed goals, and usually refers to military power and pressure.

The concept of soft power comes as an alternative to military force and economic pressure. This concept is a relatively new one that appeared in international usage in 1990 and was introduced by Harvard University professor Joseph Nye. Through the soft power strategy, J.

Nye refers to the ability of an actor to influence other states in order to achieve their own goals through collaboration in certain areas aimed at persuasion and forming the positive perception globally [1, p.23].

The topicality of studying the soft power strategy and mechanisms consist primarily in increasing the importance of public diplomacy in international relations and the decline in the importance of hard power strategy and the use of armed forces to achieve countries' goals or objectives. Today it is no longer necessary to promote an aggressive policy, by using armed forces in order to achieve different goals.

Elements such as public or cultural diplomacy, foreign investment, and financial assistance programs are gaining preferences in the politics of the most democratic countries.

Studying and analysing the UK's soft power is a very interesting, at the time being, because mainly of two reasons: The first reason is, of course, Brexit – and here Brexit should be seen as a process and not as an event. The UK has never joined the EU with much desire and was always like a stepbrother to the Union, with its own immigration rules, currency, foreign policy, international aid etc. In this regard, the soft power strategy has also shaped a bit differently from the EU one, during many years of membership [2, p.15-16]. Now, this strategy will start to be even much more different as the UK has finally left the EU in January 2020. The second reason is that the UK has always been a unique country, from soft power perspective: the only one democratic monarchy; a very rich cultural background; and one of the biggest former imperial colony in the world. These all led to the fact that the UK is very powerful country, but at the same time, in the last 10-12 years, the Kingdom is always placing in the first position when it comes to soft power and public diplomacy. The overall research of soft power strategy of the United Kingdom is rather at the beginning of its stage, having in mind that is a very narrow concept and authors analysed in the past, mostly the soft power of the European Union as per general, and not going to much in details about specific countries.

Thus, the continued research on this issue adds value to the study of the soft power strategy of the United Kingdom.

The main institutions responsible for directing the soft power of British foreign policy are undoubtedly government agencies such as the

Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for International Development, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport [3, p.6-7].

However, these structures are not the only ones when it comes to the implementation of the soft power policy. A separate area on which the British government focuses is the direct promotion of English language by providing support to learners and teachers around the world, as well as through a large number of activities, one way or another related to the study of English. Great Britain actively uses the historical advantages associated with the prevalence and popularity of its national language in the world [4, p.53].

Moldova and the United Kingdom has a long history of bilateral relationship based on mutual friendship and good will of the both states.

The diplomatic relations between the two states were concluded on January 17, 1992 [5]. One of the largest diasporas of Moldovans is located in the UK, which makes our relations even more special.

The United Kingdom Government has offered direct assistance to Moldova within DfID programs, Good Governance Fund and Conflict, Stability and Security Fund. The UK's help for Moldovan civil society, especially mass-media sector is also a very consistent one – over three million pounds in the last six years. One of the best academic programme for Master degree – Chevening is also present in our country since 1993. Approximately 100 Moldovans pursued their Master's degree at of the finest universities in the world, including Oxford University, London School of Economics and King's College etc. The average tuition fee for one year-Master degree varies from 16 000 to 22 000 pounds. At the moment, the negotiation of the Political Partnership and Trade Agreement is taking place, which will transpose the provisions of the Moldova-EU Association Agreement.

These provisions will be applied bilaterally and will include both the political and the economic and free trade components, increasing the clarity of legal regulations and facilitating their implementation [6].

In these unusual circumstances that we are all living for the past four-five months, it is also important to state that the UK has not forgotten Moldova, and as a true partner gave a hand of help to those staying in the first line of fight against Covid-19 pandemic.

Even the national donation is not that big, with materials worth a bit more than 17 thousand pounds, the UK has given a lot more money for

the international-supranational bodies, such as World Health Organisation with over 300 million pounds contribution, making the UK the biggest contributor to the WHO for finding a vaccine for novel Coronavirus, as well as over 70 million pounds to GAVI, Vaccine Alliance, so to make sure that when the vaccine is find, it is available for all the countries in the world, including Republic of Moldova.

All the arguments from this article clearly demonstrate that the United Kingdom has a comprehensive and complex approach regarding its soft power strategy. The UK's soft power is not just a strategy that has to be implemented in a period of time but a government's vision on how to contribute to the constant development of the country and act as a force for good in the world.

References:

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