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SPECIFICS OF THE USE OF "SOFT POWER" IN THE FOREIGN POLICY OF FRANCE

This article presents a multifaceted analysis of the concept of "soft power" within the framework of world politics; it attempts to break it into components by exploring its evolution and significance within global politics. Special attention is paid to the analysis of the French soft power model, its theoretical foundations, instruments of implementation, and effect on the international arena. The author analyzes the major elements of "soft power" of France – cultural diplomacy, promotion of Francophonie, research and academic cooperation, tourist appeal, and media policy. The comparison between the French and the American model is drawn, and the role of the historical context in the shaping of France's foreign policy strategy is discussed.

The study's aim is to clarify the specifics of France's "soft power" and how effective it is today in the face of the realities of international relations. The methods of comparative analysis, studying historical sources, and international ratings are used in the work. The results of the study indicate that "soft power" remains a controversial concept due to its ambiguity and complexity in practical application. Emphasis is placed on the pivotal stages in the development of the conception – from J. Nye's ideas to modern research in the sphere of international relations. However, an analysis of the French experience shows that France successfully uses cultural and diplomatic tools to enhance its influence – based on historical heritage, language, and institutional mechanisms.

The research expands on the theory of "soft power," illustrating its value as a practical tool in foreign policy strategy. The theoretical value of the work is the critical understanding of the phenomenon, which helps contribute to a better understanding of the mechanisms of influence within international processes. The practical value of the study is to justify the possibility of using the conclusions for formation of foreign policy measures focused on the enhancement of international prestige and influence of the states.

Keywords: soft power, France, cultural policy, country image, Francophonie.

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Францияның сыртқы саясатындағы «жұмсақ күшті» қолдану ерекшеліктері

Бұл мақалада «жұмсақ күш» түсінігінің әлемдік саясат шеңберінде көп қырлы талдауы берілген; Оның жаһандық саясаттағы эволюциясы мен маңызын зерттеуге талпыныс жасалуда. Жұмсақ күштің француз моделін талдауға, оның теориялық негіздеріне, жүзеге асыру құралдары мен халықаралық аренадағы ықпалына ерекше назар аударылады. Автор Францияның «жұмсақ күшінің» негізгі элементтерін – мәдени дипломатияны, франкофонияны ілгерілетуді, ғылыми-зерттеу және академиялық ынтымақтастықты, туристік тартымдылықты және медиа саясатын талдайды. Француз және американдық үлгілер арасында салыстыру жүргізіліп, Францияның сыртқы саяси стратегиясын қалыптастырудағы тарихи контексттің рөлі талқыланады.

Зерттеудің мақсаты – Францияның «жұмсақ күшінің» ерекшеліктерін анықтау және оның бүгінгі күні халықаралық қатынастардың шынайылығында қаншалықты тиімді екенін анықтау. Жұмыста салыстырмалы талдау әдістері, тарихи дереккөздерді зерттеу және халықаралық рейтингтер қолданылады. Зерттеу нәтижелері «жұмсақ күш» өзінің түсініксіздігі мен практикалық қолданудағы қиындығына байланысты даулы ұғым болып қала беретінін көрсетеді. Концепцияның дамуының негізгі кезеңдері – Дж. Най идеяларынан халықаралық қатынастар саласындағы заманауи зерттеулерге дейін баса назар аударылады. Француз тәжірибесін талдау Францияның тарихи мұраға, тілге және институционалдық тетіктерге негізделген ықпалын күшейту үшін мәдени және дипломатиялық құралдарды сәтті қолданатынын көрсетеді.

Зерттеу сыртқы саяси стратегияның практикалық құралы ретіндегі құндылығын көрсете отырып, жұмсақ күш теориясын дамытады. Жұмыстың теориялық құндылығы халықаралық процестердегі әсер ету тетіктерін тереңірек түсінуге ықпал ететін құбылысты сыни тұрғыдан

нуде. Зерттеудің практикалық маңыздылығы мемлекеттердің халықаралық беделі мен ықпалын арттыруға бағытталған сыртқы саяси шараларды тұжырымдау үшін қорытындыларды пайдалану мүмкіндігін негіздеуде.

Түйін сөздер: жұмсақ күш, Франция, мәдени саясат, ел имиджі, Франкофония.

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Специфика использования «мягкой силы» во внешней политике Франции

В данной статье представлен многоаспектный анализ концепции «мягкой силы» в рамках мировой политики; делается попытка исследовать её эволюцию и значение в глобальной политике. Особое внимание уделяется анализу французской модели мягкой силы, ее теоретическим основам, инструментам реализации и влиянию на международной арене. Автор анализирует основные элементы «мягкой силы» Франции – культурную дипломатию, продвижение франкофонии, научно-исследовательское и академическое сотрудничество, туристическую привлекательность и медийную политику. Проводится сравнение французской и американской моделей, обсуждается роль исторического контекста в формировании внешнеполитической стратегии Франции.

Цель исследования – определить специфику «мягкой силы» Франции и выяснить насколько она эффективна сегодня в реалиях международных отношений. В работе используются методы сравнительного анализа, изучения исторических источников и международных рейтингов. Результаты исследования свидетельствуют о том, что «мягкая сила» остается спорным понятием из-за своей неоднозначности и сложности в практическом применении. Акцент сделан на основных этапах развития концепции – от идей Дж. Ная до современных исследований в сфере международных отношений. Анализ французского опыта показывает, что Франция успешно использует культурные и дипломатические инструменты для усиления своего влияния – на основе исторического наследия, языка и институциональных механизмов.

Исследование развивает теорию «мягкой силы», иллюстрируя ее ценность как практического инструмента внешнеполитической стратегии. Теоретическая ценность работы заключается в критическом осмыслении феномена, что способствует более глубокому пониманию механизмов влияния в международных процессах. Практическая значимость исследования заключается в обосновании возможности использования выводов для формирования внешнеполитических мер, направленных на повышение международного престижа и влияния государств.

Ключевые слова: мягкая сила, Франция, культурная политика, страновой имидж, Франко-фония

Introduction

In the modern world, the idea of soft power holds a central position in international relations strategy. Unlike "hard power", based on coercive capability and military potential, "soft power" implies influence by means of culture, values, and diplomatic tools. However, refining this concept theoretically remains controversial, necessitating detailed analysis and an analytical understanding.

The relevance of the research topic is the escalating competition for influence in the international arena through "soft power". In the era of globalization, countries strive to consolidate their image within the world community, to develop cultural diplomacy, and to create a positive perception in the international community's eyes. Within this, the French model of "soft power" should be especially noted for its institutionalization and history.

The research subject is the phenomenon of "soft power" in international relations. The research topic is the French model of "soft power" and its primary tools. Examples are structured according to interdisciplinary research methodology: comparative analysis, content analysis of scientific and historical sources, and analysis of international ratings and statistical data. The research hypothesis posits that the French model of "soft power" is one of the most sustainable and efficient instruments of France's foreign policy with deep historical roots and institutional support, while its adaptation to modern challenges requires a revision of strategic priorities.

Literature Review

The notion of "soft power", presented by American political scientist Joseph Nye, is one of the most contentious and equivocal ideas in contemporary international relations theory. Despite its widely

distributed use, the concept remains controversial among researchers due to its vagueness and lack of a clear understanding metaphor.

Soft power, as first defined by Nye (1990), is the ability to make others do what you want without coercion; the ability to cause others to act in accordance with your wishes due to the attraction of their culture, political ideals, and institutions. However, in later articles (Nye, 2009, 2010), he revised his definitions, leading to critiques from scholars such as Fan (2008), Batalov (2014), Zahran & Ramos (2010) who pointed to the lack of rigor and clarity.

The relationship between "soft power" and its related concepts is a key issue. Many foreign scholars (Avtsinova, 2015; Emelyanova, 2018; Lebedeva, 2017; Smith, 2022; Clarke, 2016; Anholt, 2005; Tadjiyev, 2020) examine the distinctive and similar features of "soft power" compared to categories like cultural hegemony, public diplomacy, country image, country brand. French philosophers like Baudrillard (2000), Lipovetsky (2001), and Bourdieu (2007) treat it as a philosophical and psychological concept related to seduction, temptation strategies, and symbolic power, respectively.

The issue of quantifying "soft power" is also complex. Its impact relies on the audience's readiness to perceive put-up values, complicating measurement (Nye, 2004). Researchers employ various assessment approaches using international ratings like the Anholt National Brand Index and the Global Soft Power Index. However, Ivanov (2015) argues ratings might be politically and methodologically distorted, questioning their objectivity.

The French model of "soft power" exemplifies using culture and language as foreign policy instruments. Prominent foreign scholars study the rise of France's cultural policy as a "soft power" tool (Kosenko, 2001, 2014; Mukhamedyarova, 2014; Montbrial, 2002; Vaïsse, 2009; Martel, 2013). In the article special attention is paid to the phenomenon of Francophonie, which has been deeply studied by such French researchers as Tétu (1987) and Reclus (1986).

In conclusion, "soft power" remains complex and multi-dimensional, sparking debates among experts. Despite criticism, it plays an important role in international relations theory and practice, particularly concerning cultural diplomacy and shaping states' international images.

Description of materials and methods

The data for this study included scientific papers, articles, monographs, and analytical reports associated with the concept of "soft power" and its application in international relations. Quantitative analysis contained the examination of statistics reflected in ratings and indices, as well as the study of mobility and flows of countries in a respective descending and ascending order of "soft power" in place categories. The qualitative analysis focused on interpreting theoretical concepts, comparing and contrasting with a view to identifying key differences and similarities.

The study occurred in multiple phases. The first preparatory stage involved articulating the research question and formulating a hypothesis. The analytical phase was accompanied by a study of the theoretical foundations of the phenomenon of "soft power" and an analysis of the French model of "soft power". In the final stage, the results of the study were summarized; conclusions and recommendations for the future study and application of the concept of "soft power" in international politics were formulated.

The study employed a variety of methods. In the qualitative analysis, we used the historical and modern examples of "soft power" usage in France. The impact on the effectiveness of French soft power due to cultural, political, and economic factors was also discussed. Quantitative analysis was conducted through examining international rankings, including the Anholt National Brand Index and the Global Soft Power Index, to measure the effectiveness of soft power in various countries. Statistical data on France's cultural diplomacy, educational exchange, and media activities were also analyzed. The comparative method proved to be useful to assess differences in measuring soft power and identifying methodological limitations. It helped identify the main differences between the French model of soft power and the American one. The historiographical method was used to explore the formation of the idea of soft power in the French experience, paying attention to the formation of its cultural component and the Francophonie policy.

Results of the study include: determination of the key theoretical-practical components of the soft power concept; comparison of soft power with related concepts: propaganda, public diplomacy, cultural hegemony; analysis of measuring methods of soft power. Critical estimate of the measuring methods of soft power; description of the model of French soft power: historical roots and instruments, priorities of soft power; conclusions and recommendations on the soft power instrument in international politics and the framework for further research of the soft power concept.

Results

Despite the widespread use of the concept of "soft power" in world politics, there are still disagreements regarding this concept in the scientific community due to certain reasons.

Difficulties in defining the concept of "soft power"

In theoretical terms, the concept of "soft power" seems vague to many researchers from a scientific point of view. For example, Russian scientist Batalov (2014) notes the inconsistency of Nye in his definition of "soft power" and criticizes him for the lack of clarity in the wording. According to Zahran & Ramos (2010), "Nye's definition of soft power lacks rigor; its use is problematic and vague, making it difficult to obtain a rigorous definition of the concept". Nye (1990) initially described "soft power" as the ability to "make others want what you want". In his subsequent works, the scholar attempts to concretize the terms he introduced. Thus, in his well-known work, "Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics", he defines "hard power" in international politics as military power in combination with political, economic, and financial power and characterizes "soft power" by three main components: an attractive culture, political ideology, and foreign policy (diplomacy) (Nye, 2006). In the mentioned work, Nye also states that "soft power is more than just persuasion or the ability to motivate to action through arguments; it includes the ability to attract, which often leads to mutual understanding. Simply put, in behavioral terms, soft power is attractive power". Thus, Nye has repeatedly modified his definitions. Fan (2008) in the Nye's work identified five significantly different definitions of soft power, which allowed him to express the opinion that the concept of "soft power" is associated with various phenomena and should be cleared of confusion, and only after that can it become an effective tool for analysis in the field of international relations. In subsequent works, Nye (2012) already uses a different formulation, namely: "soft power" is "the ability to achieve results through persuasion and attraction, and not through coercion or bribery". In his later work, Nye (2014) identifies two types of "soft power": "over others" and "jointly with others", each of which defines its own instruments and resources of interstate dialogue.

The correlation of "soft power" with related concepts

The second wave of criticism of "soft power" is related to the lack of a unified understanding of the meaning of the term, which leads to its different semantic content on the part of researchers. This creates difficulties in operationalizing the concept in political science research, as multidimensional interpretations lead to the proliferation of various models and interpretations of "soft power".

This is where another critical position towards "soft power" comes from, which consists in the refutation of the novelty of Nye's concept by many representatives of the academic community. It is argued among political scientists that the concept of "soft power" was created under the direct influence of the concept of *"cultural-ideological hegemony"* of the famous Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci and contains modernized and appropriated Nye's interpretations of his ideas. For example, Avtsinova (2015) and Emelyanova (2018) believe that Gramsci was one of the first to study "soft" forms of hegemony, considering the ambiguity of the mechanism of power through coercion and persuasion. Characterizing the socio-political context of his time, the philosopher emphasized that revolution as an armed uprising was a thing of the past, "now the strategy of revolution is aimed at a cultural war". In his opinion, the undermining of cultural hegemony is a "molecular process". It is based on the gradual peaceful takeover of culture, media, education, and public and expert discourse, as a result of which the consciousness of people will change, and power will fall into the right hands.

A comparison of these teachings reveals that both concepts distinguish two types of influence: consent and violence in Gramsci, "soft" and "hard power" in Nye. Both emphasize the great importance of culture, values, and traditions in establishing hegemony. However, Gramsci, within the framework of communist ideology, considers hegemony to be a domestic political necessity, aimed at maintaining the power of the ruling class, while Nye considers "soft power" primarily as an international instrument of influence. In Nye's interpretation, "soft power" has a positive connotation aimed at creating an attractive image to attract allies and form coalitions. In Gramsci, it is expressed negatively.

The concept of "soft power" is also often associated with the concept of *"propaganda"*. According to Lebedeva (2017), in the realistic approach to international relations, these two concepts are identified, while in neoliberal theory there is a fundamental difference between them. The idea of attractiveness, when the opposite side voluntarily and consciously makes a choice, is something new introduced by Nye. Propaganda is not always based on attractiveness. Moreover, unlike propaganda, which can include manipulation of consciousness, "soft

power" is based on the prevention of such methods. Propaganda differs from the usual methods of presenting information by deliberate manipulation to achieve certain goals, which includes selective presentation of facts, arguments, symbols, and their possible distortion or omission (Smith, 2022).

The term "soft power" is also used in the same semantic connection as *"public diplomacy"* and *"cultural diplomacy"*. It is believed that the concept of "public diplomacy" was first proposed in 1965 to denote the process by which subjects of international relations achieve foreign policy goals by influencing the foreign public (Shamugiya, 2017). This is one way to influence the opinion and behavior of the populations of foreign countries. The fundamental difference of public diplomacy is that its methods do not include disinformation, and the basis of its mechanisms is the correct presentation of events beneficial to the state. Public diplomacy is only one form of "soft power".

In turn, the Western political science school notes a direct connection between cultural diplomacy and the state's "soft power". Western scholars define cultural diplomacy as a type of public diplomacy and an integral part of the "soft power" policy, which includes "the exchange of ideas, information, works of art, and other cultural components between states and their peoples to strengthen mutual understanding" (Clarke, 2016). However, while considering these two categories as a component of national soft power is justified, there are attempts to present soft power as a set of cultural activities that improve mutual understanding and reduce tension in the world. According to Nye (2014), this understates the importance of soft power.

The distinction between the concepts of "soft power" and *"country brand"* seems particularly important. The term "country brand" was introduced by the famous British marketer Simon Anholt, who defines the national brand as "the sum of people's perceptions of the country within six areas of state activity: export, public administration, tourism, investment and immigration, culture and heritage, and population" (Anholt, 2005). Close in meaning to the term "brand" is the concept of *"country image"*. The political image of the state is an important link both in international relations and politically. The problem of image in its modern sense began to be addressed in the late 20th century: in the West since the 1960s, in former socialist countries since the late 1980s. Boulding (1969) argues that national images of "other" states cause hostility in the international system. The image of the "other" must be interpreted as that of an enemy, filled with symbolic content.

One main difference between "soft power" and "country image" is that the former is a strategy of politically significant actions, while the image is something that arises through interaction, including implementing the strategy. Tadjiyev (2020) reveals such an interpretation of "soft power" through a constructivist approach, implying: "construction of meanings, ideas, values; manipulation of consciousness and perception of the target audience; 'mental bribery' of the target audience". This interpretation refers to a manipulative approach to "soft power", focusing it on the sign-symbolic and ideological-value levels. This impact is mainly reduced to PR communications, branding, and imaging ("brand-image PR communications").

Philosophical and psychological aspects of "soft power" have been explored by French thinkers such as Baudrillard, Lipovetsky, and Bourdieu. Baudrillard (2000) played a key role in forming the concept of *"seduction"* as a power mechanism via symbolic images. He argues that temptation dominates the symbolic universe where "simulacrum" (visual images and virtual objects) prevail. Much like Lipovetsky (2001), who introduces the category of *"temptation"* as an instrument of "soft power", considering it a universal strategy through all domains of public life – politics, economy, education, services, and daily practices. Political temptation here refers to the attractiveness of political institutions, leaders, thus incentivizing involvement. Bourdieu (2007) explores *"symbolic power"*, describing it as the capacity to impose social reality through acts of expression validating certain worldviews. Symbolic power works through language, art, culture, and science, giving legitimacy to existing power relations. It achieves coercive effects without physical or economic force, but only if its legitimacy is recognized.

The problem of measuring "soft power"

Assessing the effectiveness of "soft power" is a difficult task, however, as determining that the behavior of one country is attributable to the "soft power" of another country is extremely challenging. Nye himself observed that, where military force or economic measures can deliver relatively predictable results over a certain period of time, "soft power" is much more elusive. This is because many important resources of "soft power" are outside of the state's control, and its impact largely depends on the receptivity of the audience to the culture or values presented to it. Furthermore, the concept's author emphasized that acts realized by means of "hard power" can greatly influence the perception of the nation and cancel all the profit of "soft power" (Nye, 2004).

Despite significant difficulties and contradictions, approaches to solving this issue are discussed and improved. One of the approaches that was widely introduced into today's practice is of comparative nature. The comparative approach allows to make a broader assessment of the effectiveness of foreign policy actions of countries and explore the experience of leading states on "soft power". Regular studies can also make it possible to dynamically track changes in the permanent position of a country along with other states being the main subjects of foreign relations and make conclusions about the effectiveness of its foreign policy.

In the last decades of the 20th century, we have witnessed in the world a "rating revolution" launched by individual Western states, which included the establishment, rapid dissemination, legitimation, and transfiguration into the true power tool of the numerous inter-country indices that assessed and compared the countries according to different criteria: sovereign credit ratings; political risk, public administration quality, speech freedom, state culture's attractiveness indices; academic ratings and many others. Although rating projects tend to position themselves far away from politics, in practice, they are often used as promising tools of soft power for states and global institutions. Well-known ratings can help create attractive – or, conversely, repulsive – foreign policy images of various countries.

For all the advances of the global rating infrastructure, there are still basic objections to the notion that one should uncritically trust rating organizations and the knowledge and assessments they produce. Therefore, Ivanov (2015) identifies three main reasons for such an important position: political, methodological, and ethical.

The political objection relates to the ability to manipulate the data that is used in compiling the indices, which in certain cases allows someone to avoid lowering or, on the contrary, raising the value for specific indicators. The methodological objection is that countries' rating organizations practice it according to the neoliberal paradigm by the very fact of the existence of which Ivanov is convinced of the need to accept the fundamental position of global, systemic comparability of societies in their evaluation by certain universal standards. And the third ethical argument comes from the fact that there are currently no solid reasons for taking into account the presumption of objectivity of the compilers of ratings who adhere to the tradition of "neutrality" despite their ideological attitudes, national identity, and belonging to different structures.

Another challenge in drafting ratings could also be considered the need for their creators to search for parameters of comparison that enable them to compare states that have different economic potential, different levels of political influence in the world, a specific history and culture, as well as other peculiarities.

Discussion

The French model of "soft power"
The American "soft power" is less popular among French political scientists who prefer the phrase "puissance douce" (Sarybaev, 2020). This principle suggests a stable state foundation, devotion to universal values, a competent safeguard of national domestic identity and interests in the international arena.

For two centuries, France was the spiritual mentor of Western civilization. But the American idea of world leadership, developed at the beginning of the 20th century, gradually edged France out of this role. Since the ascension of Charles de Gaulle to power in 1958, France has aspired to restore international influence, both through warfare but also through "soft power", both as a means of restoring and, primarily, in the service of a French "shine" (rayonnement) in the world (Kosenko, 2014).

Later, a classical notion of "soft power", based on persuasion through culture, ideology, and effective foreign policy, became "influence diplomacy" (diplomatie d'influence) in the French geopolitical tradition. To this day, French people enjoy using this expression, which was introduced in the "White Paper on French Foreign and European Policy" (2008), as a substitute for the term "soft power". "Influence diplomacy" is a symbiosis of modern types of influence: cultural-humanitarian, political, economic, social, informational, and innovative-technological, which according to the French historian Vaïsse (2009), will promote strengthening of the role of France in global governance. Martel (2013) remarked that, unlike in the American model, in which private initiatives and civil society take a leading stage, French "soft power" of influence diplomacy is much more centralized and materializes through the state and the diplomatic corps.

Certainly, the foreign cultural policy apparatus of contemporary France is much centralized. France does not have a single conceptual document that regulates foreign cultural policy. The main provisions in this area are contained in official acts of various ministries and departments. Funding is done at the expense of the state budget, business commer-

cial activities, and private donations. The Ministry of Culture and Communication (MCC) is principally responsible for domestic cultural policy, while the lead role in shaping and implementing foreign cultural policy rests with the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs () and specialized operators. Foreign influence resources make up almost half of all financial resources allocated by the Quai d'Orsay (MEFA). The funding per year for this area of activity is around 5 to 6 billion euros.

Formation of cultural policy as an instrument of French "soft power"

France can legitimately be considered the founder of cultural policy. Formulating the concept of "soft power", Nye (2006) associated it with the French state, underscoring that "cultural policy and diplomacy are French inventions".

he importance of the cultural dimension of power is confirmed by many French researchers. Hence, the eminent political scientist Montbrial (2002) sees culture and ideology as moral resources that guarantee not only internal cohesion but also the country's edge on the international stage. According to the French historian Braudel (1987), any culture is intimately linked to society, its history, and geography and, thus, outside of society cannot exist, develop, and be transmitted.

Although the systematic use of culture as an instrument of foreign policy in France was formed during Charles de Gaulle's presidency (1958–1969), this activity has deep historical roots. According to Kosenko (2011), the cultural diplomacy can potentially start with the treaty of 1535 signed by the Emperor Francis I and Sultan Suleiman I, which involved the dissemination of French culture and language in the Middle East. In 1539, Francis I implemented the Villers-Cottrets ordinance that made French the required language to be used in state papers instead of Latin, making it the official language of the French state.

And some elements of the cultural policy were actively introduced in foreign diplomacy in the 17th century, in the time of Cardinal Richelieu and Cardinal Mazarin. They wanted to install brilliant thinkers and humanists in the posts of ambassadors, who would spread French values, science and art abroad. So, the diplomat Chanut, close to Mazarin, was sent as ambassador to the court of the Swedish Queen Christina to promote French scientific and cultural achievements. This practice was encountered as well: Rousseau served as secretary to the French ambassador in Venice in 1743, Voltaire was in the service of Frederick II at the Prussian court, and Diderot worked in the court of Catherine II in Rus-

sia from 1773 to 1775, Chateaubriand performed assignments for Napoleon in Berlin, London, and Rome (Mukhamedyarova, 2014).

Only in the 19th century the propagation of French culture became a deliberate strategy. The French diplomat Rebeyrol (1984) observed that there was no similar need before, since the time of Louis XIV the French language had disseminated by itself among the aristocracy, school establishments, literature, and theater. Since the mid-19th century, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs actively used the culture, and popularity of the French language to oppose British influence in the colonies.

Three new structures were established in 1945: the Directorate General for Political Affairs, the Directorate General for Economic, Technical, Financial, and Administrative Affairs, and finally the Directorate General for Cultural Relations and Employment of French Citizens Abroad (later renamed the Directorate General for Cultural and Technical Relations). Yet in the late 1950s and early 1960s, France under the Fifth Republic experienced new international challenges. These difficulties were related to the loss of the country's global authority after World War II against the backdrop of the onset of the Cold War, the instability of the Fourth Republic (1946–1958), and the collapse of the colonial era. It was under the founder of the Fifth Republic, Charles de Gaulle, that foreign policy became known as the "politics of greatness", which aimed to restore France to the ranks of great powers. A key plank of this strategy was developing relations with former colonies.

One of the major Gaullist initiatives was the policy of Francophonie to reinforce economic, cultural, scientific, and technical relationships with former colonial territories through the active use of the French language. The term thus acquired a political resonance, in keeping with action by France, as it sought to unite the Francophone world and extend its sphere of influence by means of language and culture (Tétu, 1987). In this way, the term began to be used in scientific and journalistic literature to refer to the foreign cultural policy of France as the policy to promote the political and economic interests of the Fifth Republic in the post-colonial states.

The term "Francophonie" was used for the first time in 1880 by the French geographer Reclus. He was describing what he called the cultural and linguistic communities that could bring together France and its colonies, emphasizing the role of the French language as a tool of colonial expansion and the dissemination of French civilization (Reclus, 1886). Reclus viewed Francophonie as "a living

organism" capable of incorporating new peoples on equal terms – an idea that resonated with the then-nascent discourse of "geopolitics".

The beginning of the formation of the world system of the Francophonie relates to the middle of the XX century, as a result of active work of the French-speaking countries of Europe and Canada. Some important organizations were created at this time, such as the International Organization of Francophone Journalists (1952), the Union of French Culture (1954), the International Council of Radio and Television Broadcasting (1955), the International Association of Francophone Sociologists (1958), the International Institute for the Defense of the Rights of the French Language (1961), the Association of Francophone Solidarity (1966), the International Assembly of Francophone Parliamentarians (1967), and the International Federation of Teachers of French (1969). These institutions actively participated in the diffusion of the French language, in the shaping of professional communities and the enhancement of intercultural flows.

Modern Francophonie is the result of a multi-year process. In 1970, the Agency for Cultural and Technical Cooperation was created in Niamey, which in 1998 became the Intergovernmental Agency of Francophonie, and in 2005 it was transformed into the International Organization of Francophonie (OIF). The first association of Francophone countries was initially a cultural link, but the modern Francophonie covers much broader areas of interaction: 1) promotion of the French language and support for cultural and linguistic diversity; 2) promotion of peace, democracy and protection of human rights; 3) development of education, vocational training and scientific research; 4) strengthening economic cooperation to achieve sustainable development". Today, the OIF gathers 93 states (56 member countries, 5 associate members, and 32 observers) and strengthens multilateral relationships in the political, economic, social, and cultural fields.

As a result, Francophonie is a stable component of France's "soft power" as it consolidates France's interests in strategically important regions, and especially in Northwest Africa. The interests of France in the Maghreb, in turn, are defined not only by history but also by economic and political motives. The area continues to pose threats like terrorism and illegal migration, so the dissemination of European values plays an important role in solving these problems. In the context of the migration crisis and the weakening of multiculturalism, France sees the promotion of its language and culture as an essential tool for assimilating newcomers.

Priority areas and tools of "soft power" of modern France

As a developed country, France has had great success in promoting its "soft power" internationally and continues to strengthen this strategic field. The country's strength in this area is further confirmed in international rankings. For instance, in the Global Soft Power Index (2024), France made it into the top ten, taking the 6th position. The country demonstrates its impact particularly clearly in such categories as "Familiarity" and "Media and Communications". Additionally, in the Culture and Heritage category (there are separate categories for Influence, Reputation, Business and Trade, Governance, International Relations, Education and Science, People and Values, and Sustainable Future), France performs the best results, alongside the United States and Italy.

1) International image of France

In the 21st century, with increasing global competition, the image of a state is becoming an important strategic resource, especially in the context of considering the "familiarity" of countries. A positive image is directly correlated with how successful, attractive, competitive, and influential a nation is on the international stage. Thus, it would be interesting to focus on those areas in which the most obvious appearance of the creation and strengthening of the international image of France in the modern world.

A significant role in international organizations is one of the significant vectors of French influence in the world. As a permanent member of the UN Security Council and one of the leaders in the European Union, France maintains significant presence. The country participates in over 150 international and intergovernmental organizations and has the second-largest network of diplomatic missions and headquarters of international structures, such as the OECD, UNESCO, and Interpol. This places France solidly within key associations like the G7 and G20, supported by strong economic and foreign trade potential and an advanced technological industry.

France's contribution to solving international problems helps to strengthen its positive image both at the level of recipient countries and in the international arena. As per the Good Country Index (2023), which ranks the contribution made by states to the common good of humanity, France is in the top ten, at 9th place. French aid is primarily administered through the French Development Agency (AFD), which manages projects aimed at economic and social development of partners and enhancing French international influence. France is the sixth-largest donor behind the US, Germany, EU institutions,

Japan, and the UK in terms of the official development assistance (ODA) to the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC). For 2023, ODA from OECD DAC member countries was reported at $223.7 billion, with France contributing $15.4 billion (0.5% of GNI). The Francophone countries of Africa remain a priority for France's ODA policy, largely due to historical, cultural ties, and established political relations.

The image of a peacemaker on the world stage is also inherent in France, as it aims to emerge as a global ideological leader and custodian of the values of the French Revolution. The country, under its well-known slogan "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" ("Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité"), undertakes significant efforts, from protection of human rights to conflict resolution and assistance to immigrants and refugees.

Famous personalities of France from different spheres and historical eras represent another powerful tool in fighting for its international identity. Political titans like Louis XIV, Richelieu, Napoleon, Charles de Gaulle, and Emmanuel Macron, alongside scientific legends such as René Descartes, Louis Pasteur, the Montgolfier brothers, and the Lumière brothers, elevate France on the global stage. Cultural icons like Coco Chanel, Christian Dior, Yves Saint Laurent, and Jean-Paul Gaultier have defined world fashion, while music is represented by stars like Mireille Mathieu, Patricia Kaas, Edith Piaf, and Joe Dassin. In cinema, France shines with names like Alain Delon, Luc Besson, Pierre Richard, Jean Reno, and Gérard Depardieu.

Sports diplomacy has emerged as a significant tool of France's image policy over the past several years. Hosting the Rugby World Cup in 2023 and the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games offers a unique opportunity to showcase its vision of accessible and inclusive sport. Despite some controversy related to organization, the Paris Games marked significant achievements. France also excelled in the medal tally, finishing in 5th place with 64 medals.

In the academic sphere, exchange development, attracting gifted youth, and promoting French higher education have substantially raised the country's reputation. The MEFA oversees strategy implementation, in consultation with the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. Achievements are evidenced by international rankings (Fig.1), such as the Times Higher Education World University Rankings (1906 universities), Quacquarelli Symonds (1500 universities), and the Shanghai Ranking (998 universities), where French institutions have performed remarkably. In addition, France consistently ranks 4th in Nobel Prize winners worldwide, with 71 laureates, illustrating its intellectual potential.

Figure 1 – French universities in world rankings

International Rankings	Position in top 100
THE World University Rankings (2024)	1. PSL University (40) 2. Paris-Saclay University (58) 3. Institut Politique de Paris (71) 4. Sorbonne University (75)
QS World University Rankings (2024)	1. PSL University (24) 2. Institut Politique de Paris (46) 3. Sorbonne University (63) 4. Paris-Saclay University (73)
Shanghai Ranking ARWU (2024)	1. Paris-Saclay University (15) 2. PSL University (41) 3. Sorbonne University (46) 4. Paris Cité University (69)

Source: Compiled by the author based on an analysis of primary sources

2) French Culture and Heritage

France is a shining example of a country that, through an effective, targeted, and highly debated state policy, has succeeded in preserving and defending its "cultural exception" for centuries. The international appeal of French culture is confirmed by many factors.

Literature, art and architecture form the foundation of France's great cultural heritage. For hundreds of years, outstanding philosophers, writers,

poets, artists, and sculptors have surrounded the country, making it a center of European culture. The literary, painting, and music greats of France – Voltaire, Montesquieu, Balzac, Hugo, Monet, Delacroix, Cézanne, Offenbach, Bizet, Debussy – have bequeathed to the world cultural treasures of incalculable value. Impressionism, Gothic, Rococo, and Renaissance – all this, as well as many other trends in art and architecture that had been fruits of French culture, even to these days remain a source of attraction for the international audience.

The concept of "art de vivre" ("art of living"), an alternative to the "American dream", is the design of leisure, the possibility of enjoying gastronomy, fashion, and other aspects of life (Sarybaev, 2020). It is not for nothing that the "Gastronomic Meal of the French" is part of the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity from UNESCO. The term "haute couture" ("high fashion"), another product of French culture, is a potent weapon in the nation's arsenal of attractiveness. Paris Fashion Week attracts the eyes of the entire world at least twice a year, with its prestigious shows organized by legendary fashion houses, including Chanel, Jean Paul Gaultier, Yves Saint Laurent, and many others. French luxury brands like Christian Dior, Louis Vuitton, and Guerlain and others, all established under the aegis of the transnational corporation Moët Hennessy – Louis Vuitton, filtered the world's fashion and style.

Tourism plays a key role in the implementation of the foreign cultural policy of the Fifth Republic, representing one of the most important sectors of the economy. It is 8% of the country's GDP, according to the latest government data. France invariably attracts tourists from all over the world: the Louvre remains the world's most trafficked museum (Fig. 2), and the country stood 4th in the International Travel and Tourism Development Index, behind only Japan, the United States, and Spain (2022). From the Eiffel Tower to the Louvre and hundreds of other museums, galleries, and UNESCO World Heritage Sites, no other country has produced as many cultural icons as France.

Figure 2 – The most visited museums in France

The most visited museums in France (top 5)	Total number of visitors	City	Position in the ranking
Louvre	7,726,321	Paris	1
Museum d'Orsay	3,270,182	Paris	6
National Centre for Art and Culture Georges Pompidou	3,009,570	Paris	9
Louis Vuitton Foundation	1,398,525	Paris	31
Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilizations	1,251,030	Marseille	42
Petit Palais (Small Palace)	1,085,517	Paris	47

Source: Based on data from the international magazine "The Art Newspaper" (2023)

The development of urban tourism has received special attention to attract foreign citizens, which is reflected in France receiving high places in the Global City Index. So, for the year of 2023, Paris places 2nd after London and New York, in the world's top three cities, and Marseille and Lyon are also in the world's top 100 best cities. Such a strategy will leverage the "singularity" of each city and thereby contribute to the attractiveness of France as a destination. Cannes is an example of successful positioning – it became a worldwide brand with the yearly International Film Festival. It continues to be among the most covered events in the world, and its top prize, the Palme d'Or, is among the world's most prestigious film awards, alongside the Oscars and Golden Globes.

Language is an important tool of soft power for France. Today, over 300 million people speak French across five continents, and it is the fifth most widely spoken language in the world. It is also one of the official languages of international organizations, including the UN and UNESCO, and a working language of the WTO, OECD, and other institutions. It is indeed an official language (in 32 states and governments and almost everywhere in international organizations), a language of instruction (more than 80 million people in 36 countries and territories), a foreign language (studied by more than 50 million

people in 115 countries), the international media language (TV5MONDE, RFI, or France 24 are also TV channels, as well as Euronews, BBC News, Chinese CGTN, or Russian RT) and the Internet language (ranked 4th) (Gallimard, 2022). According to OIF's forecasts, by 2050, the number of Francophones in the world would rise to 700 million people, or 8% of the total population – a significant portion of these will be from countries in Africa with a demographic boom, representing approximately 70% of the anticipated 700 million people.

The third largest diplomatic network in the world is used to spread French values and culture abroad with 163 embassies, 16 permanent missions, and 92 consulates. Simultaneously, French government agencies outsource some tasks to specialized operators. So, an extensive network of cultural institutions around the world is called upon to promote the French language and culture: 137 departments of cooperation and cultural work within embassies, 98 French Institutes, 830 branches of the Alliance Française, 180 Campus France agencies, as well as general education institutions and research institutes.

Media and communications play an important role in shaping French soft power. The expansion of French audiovisual media abroad and media cooperation align with the key objectives of Francophonie's cultural diplomacy. Having identified three main pillars: 1) promotion of the Francophonie and multilingualism; 2) digital innovation development; 3) global coverage providing a regional focus. The media holding France Médias Monde, which encompasses the France 24 television channel, the Radio France Internationale and Monte Carlo Doualiya radio stations, and its subsidiary Canal France International (CFI), plays a central role in this area. And these media platforms promote democratic values, counter disinformation, support the pluralism of the press and freedom of the press in countries where they operate, and they are therefore an instrument of French diplomacy. For instance, the activity of CFI includes fighting for youth, digital development, equality between sexes, sustainable development, promotion of Francophonie, and fortification of democracy. Company projects are mainly in regions of importance for France, such as sub-Saharan Africa, the Maghreb, and the Middle East. TV5MONDE, for its part, promotes the different aspects of Francophonie by producing general cultural content. Launched in September 2020, TV-5MONDEplus, subtitled in five languages, is available in almost every country in the world. This kind of media propaganda is not only meant to promote the language and culture but also a way of popularising the French vision of the world order.

Conclusion

From a theoretical point of view, it is important to note that despite its wide consideration and popularity, "soft power" remains a controversial concept. The author attempts to expose basic approaches to understanding this phenomenon through critical analysis, highlighting these main findings:

First, "soft power" suffers from vagueness in definition, hindering its application as an analytical tool in international affairs.

Second, its ambiguity complicates operationalization in political science, resulting in diverse interpretations that blur boundaries between related terms like country image, country brand, propaganda and cultural hegemony, etc.

Third, measuring "soft power" remains debated due to its indirect influence and time delay. Despite varying degrees of objectivity and potential research distortions, international ratings provide effective tools for quantitative assessment and long-term forecasting of trends.

In turn, based on the analysis of the French "soft power" model, the following conclusions are drawn:

First, France employs "soft power" in its foreign policy, with traditional cultural policy evolving into "influence diplomacy" through historical continuity in language and culture. It seeks to safeguard not just political, but also economic and humanitarian interests, integrating cultural and linguistic influence into foreign policy strategy and national security. Unlike the American model, the French approach centers on state-managed cultural and diplomatic influence.

Second, analyzing French "soft power" should transcend its cultural dimension. The analysis confirms that modern France's "soft power" extends beyond cultural policy (exemplified by Francophonie) to encompass the maintenance of a favorable international image and media strategies asserting the French Republic worldwide.

Third, despite its advantages, France must adapt to new global challenges and realities. With rising competition, France should update its" soft power" strategy and enhance coordination between public and private structures.

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