

A.M. Dikanbayeva<sup>1</sup> , M.S. Sarybayev<sup>2\*</sup> , R.Y. Utkelbay<sup>2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Kazakhstan

<sup>2</sup>Narxoz University, Almaty, Kazakhstan

\*e-mail: meiram.sarybaev@narxoz.kz

## **FRENCH SOFT POWER MODEL AND ITS ADAPTATION IN CENTRAL ASIA: CULTURAL DIPLOMACY, TOURISM, AND NATIONAL BRANDING**

This article examines the application of the «soft power» concept using the case of France and analyzes the potential for its adaptation by the countries of Central Asia, taking into account the specific socio-political and cultural contexts of the region. Special attention is given to the key instruments of French soft power, including cultural diplomacy, tourism promotion, educational programs, student exchange initiatives, national branding development, support for creative industries, and the organization of international cultural events. These elements contribute significantly to strengthening France's positive and sustainable image on the global stage. The empirical basis of the study consists of the results of a sociological survey conducted among students, postgraduate students, young professionals, and international relations experts from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. The methodology of the research includes content analysis, comparative analysis, and statistical data processing. The findings reveal that France is primarily perceived in the region as a reliable cultural and educational partner, while its political and economic influence remains relatively limited. The authors conclude that there is a need to diversify the tools of soft power, placing greater emphasis on the expansion of educational partnerships, the development of tourism, support for creative industries, and the strengthening of cultural dialogue. Enhancing these areas could open new prospects for deepening cooperation between France and the countries of Central Asia across multiple sectors.

**Key words:** soft power, cultural diplomacy, France, Central Asia, national branding, tourism.

А.М. Диканбаева<sup>1</sup>, М.С. Сарыбаев<sup>2\*</sup>, Р.Е. Уткелбай<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Әл-Фараби атындағы Қазақ ұлттық университеті, Алматы, Қазақстан

<sup>2</sup>Нархоз Университеті, Алматы, Қазақстан

\*e-mail: meiram.sarybaev@narxoz.kz

### **«Жұмсақ күштің» француз моделі және оның Орталық Азиядағы бейімделуі: мәдени дипломатия, туризм және ұлттық брендинг**

Бұл мақалада Францияның «жұмсақ күш» тұжырымдамасын қолдану тәжірибесі және оның Орталық Азия елдерінде бейімделу мүмкіндіктері қарастырылады. Зерттеу барысында француз «жұмсақ күшінің» негізгі құралдары, мәдени дипломатия, туризмді алға жылжыту, білім беру бағдарламалары, студенттер алмасу жобалары, ұлттық брендті дамыту, креативті индустрияларды қолдау және халықаралық мәдени шараларды ұйымдастыру, жан-жақты талданады. Бұл бағыттар Францияның халықаралық аренадағы беделін нығайтуға айтарлықтай әсер етеді. Эмпириялық база ретінде Қазақстан, Қырғызстан, Өзбекстан және Тәжікстан елдеріндегі студенттер, магистранттар, жас мамандар мен халықаралық қатынастар саласындағы сарапшылар арасында жүргізілген социологиялық сауалнама деректері пайдаланылды. Зерттеуде мазмұндық талдау, салыстырмалы талдау және статистикалық әдістер қолданылды. Нәтижелерге сәйкес, Франция Орталық Азияда көбінесе мәдени және білім беру салаларындағы сенімді серіктес ретінде қабылданады, ал оның саяси және экономикалық ықпалы салыстырмалы түрде шектеулі. Авторлар Францияның аймақтағы ықпалын арттыру үшін «жұмсақ күш» құралдарын әртараптандыру қажеттілігін атап өтеді. Білім беру бағдарламаларын кеңейту, туризмді дамыту, креативті индустрияларды қолдау және мәдени ынтымақтастықты нығайту арқылы Франция мен Орталық Азия елдері арасындағы байланыстарды жаңа деңгейге көтеруге мүмкіндік бар.

**Түйін сөздер:** жұмсақ күш, мәдени дипломатия, Франция, Орталық Азия, ұлттық брендинг, туризм.

А.М. Диканбаева<sup>1</sup>, М.С. Сарыбаев<sup>2\*</sup>, Р.Е. Уткелбай<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Казахский национальный университет имени аль-Фараби, Алматы, Казахстан

<sup>2</sup>Университет Нархоз, Алматы, Казахстан

\*e-mail: meiram.sarybaev@narhoz.kz

### **Французская модель «мягкой силы» и ее адаптация в Центральной Азии: культурная дипломатия, туризм и национальный брендинг**

Статья посвящена исследованию применения концепции «мягкой силы» на примере Франции и анализу возможностей её адаптации странами Центральной Азии с учетом их специфических социально-политических и культурных условий. Особое внимание уделяется инструментам французской «мягкой силы», таким как культурная дипломатия, продвижение туризма, образовательные программы, программы обмена студентами, развитие национального бренда, поддержка креативных индустрий и организация международных культурных мероприятий. Эти элементы способствуют формированию устойчивого и позитивного имиджа Франции на мировой арене. Эмпирическую основу исследования составляют результаты социологического опроса, проведённого среди студентов, аспирантов, молодых специалистов и экспертов в области международных отношений в Казахстане, Кыргызстане, Узбекистане и Таджикистане. Методология исследования включает контент-анализ, сравнительный анализ и статистическую обработку полученных данных. Результаты исследования показывают, что Франция воспринимается в регионе прежде всего как культурный и образовательный партнёр, тогда как её политическое и экономическое влияние воспринимается сдержанно. Авторы приходят к выводу о необходимости расширения спектра инструментов «мягкой силы», акцентируя внимание на развитии партнёрских образовательных программ, туризма, поддержке стартапов в сфере креативных индустрий и укреплении культурного диалога. Усиление этих направлений открывает новые перспективы для углубления сотрудничества между Францией и странами Центральной Азии в различных сферах.

**Ключевые слова:** мягкая сила, культурная дипломатия, Франция, Центральная Азия, национальный брендинг, туризм.

## **Introduction**

In today's globalized world, where competition for international influence continues to grow, countries in Central Asia are increasingly turning to successful examples of soft power to enhance their visibility and reputation abroad. France is widely recognized around the world for its ability to maintain a significant global influence through vibrant cultural exchanges, a well-developed tourism sector, and strategic efforts in shaping its national image.

This research explores the possibility of adapting certain aspects of France's soft power approach to suit the unique context of Central Asia. Special attention is given to practical strategies that could help Central Asian countries enhance their international standing, boost tourism, and strengthen economic attractiveness. Specifically, the study emphasizes how cultural diplomacy can effectively deepen diplomatic relationships, attract foreign investment, and support the economic diversification goals of Central Asian states.

The importance of this study lies in the growing interest among Central Asian nations to transition from economies heavily dependent on natural resources toward models driven by intellectual capital

and cultural heritage. France's extensive experience in cultural policy and regional promotion provides a valuable framework for Central Asia. These insights can guide the development of impactful national branding strategies, helping the region seamlessly integrate into global cultural and economic networks.

Thus, examining the mechanisms behind France's soft power and evaluating their applicability to Central Asia could significantly strengthen the region's international profile. Additionally, it can contribute to crafting a solid model for socioeconomic progress based on leveraging cultural and tourism potentials.

## **Methodology**

The study is based on a comprehensive analysis of theoretical and empirical data covering the concept of «soft power», cultural diplomacy, tourism marketing and national branding. Systematic, comparative and interdisciplinary approaches have been used as a methodological basis to identify key mechanisms for implementing the «soft power» policy in France and assess their adaptability to the conditions of Central Asia.

*Research methods include:*

Content analysis is the study of scientific publications, strategic documents and official reports related to the French model of «soft power» and its impact on international relations.

The comparative analysis is a comparison of the mechanisms for promoting the national brand and cultural diplomacy in France and Central Asian countries.

The sociological method is to conduct a questionnaire survey among students, undergraduates and specialists in the field of international relations from five Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan) in order to identify the perception of French cultural and economic influence in the region.

Statistical analysis is the processing of survey data to identify key trends in attitudes towards French «soft power» in Central Asian countries.

The use of these methods provides a comprehensive analysis of the subject of the study, and also allows us to assess the prospects for adapting the French experience in the context of the socio-economic and cultural characteristics of the region.

## Literature review

The study of the soft power phenomenon and its role in international relations has a well-established theoretical foundation. The concept was first introduced by Joseph Nye in the late 20th century and was further elaborated in his works, where he defines soft power as a state's ability to influence other countries through cultural, educational, and diplomatic instruments rather than military or economic coercion (Nye, 2015).

One of the key dimensions of soft power is cultural diplomacy, which has been extensively examined by scholars such as Mark Leonard (2002) and Simon Anholt (2005). They emphasize that national branding and cultural promotion abroad contribute to strengthening a country's international image and enhancing its global influence. In this context, France is considered a successful example of utilizing cultural policy in international relations (Rusakova, 2015).

The French model of soft power is primarily based on the promotion of culture, arts, and education. Studies by S. Foucher (2018) and P. Bourdieu (1984) demonstrate that France's cultural influence is shaped through institutions such as Alliance Française, Campus France, and the Institut Français, as well as through French-language media, the film industry, and gastronomic diplomacy. Analysis in-

dicates that these instruments reinforce France's international presence, enhance its attractiveness as a tourist destination, and facilitate business relations.

National branding and tourism marketing, as integral components of soft power, are widely discussed in the works of Kate Duncan (2014) and Philip Kotler (2019). These authors highlight the importance of regional marketing and strategies for attracting investors and tourists to strengthen a country's national image. Research suggests that France effectively utilizes elements of the creative economy and public-private partnerships in cultural heritage management, positioning itself as a global leader in the tourism industry (Ministère de la Culture, 2022).

Regarding Central Asia, the adaptation of Western soft power models has been explored by Russian and Central Asian scholars. Karimov (2023) analyzes the development of Uzbekistan's national brand in the tourism sector, while Abdullayeva (2022) examines Central Asia's potential for promoting cultural tourism. However, research indicates that the region lacks a coherent national branding strategy and a unified concept of cultural diplomacy, limiting the effectiveness of soft power as a tool for international influence.

Thus, existing academic studies confirm that the successful implementation of soft power policies requires a comprehensive approach, including the development of cultural infrastructure, educational programs, tourism, and digital diplomacy. The French experience may serve as a model for developing effective strategies in Central Asia; however, its adaptation must consider regional specificities and the socio-economic dynamics of the region.

## Theoretical Foundations of Soft Power

The concept of soft power was first formulated by American political scientist Joseph Nye in the late 20th century and has since been widely applied in international relations research. According to Nye, soft power is the ability of a state or other actor to influence the behavior of other countries not through military or economic coercion but through the attractiveness of its culture, political values, and foreign policy strategies (Nye, 2015).

The key components of soft power include:

- Culture, encompassing language, arts, traditions, and lifestyle, which contribute to shaping a country's positive image on the international stage.
- Political values, such as democratic institutions, the rule of law, and human rights protection, which can foster trust within the global community.

- Ideas and diplomacy, including participation in international organizations, humanitarian aid, educational programs, and cultural exchanges.

Academic research emphasizes that soft power is not a static category but evolves and transforms in response to the global context. In the 21st century, digital technologies and social media have become crucial tools for the dissemination of soft power, enabling states and non-state actors to promote their culture and values on a global scale (Rusakova, 2015).

France wields soft power with considerable skill. Centuries of cultural heritage form the bedrock of France's global standing, further amplified by a comprehensive framework of educational and cultural entities. Organizations like Alliance Française, Campus France, and Institut Français are key players. They form part of a unified cultural diplomacy strategy, employed strategically to showcase the French national identity internationally. The nation serves as a model; demonstrating how safeguarding cultural legacy, embracing modern nation branding techniques, and actively collaborating with international bodies collectively fortifies a country's global influence (Ministère de la Culture, 2022).

For countries in Central Asia, the potential for developing soft power strategies – notably in the domains of cultural diplomacy and national image-making – is considerable. However, unlike France, the region has yet to formulate an integrated policy framework that harnesses cultural and educational resources as instruments of foreign policy. This aspect emphasizes the criticality of studying the best world practices, transforming them considering the unique socio-political and economic conditions of the Central Asian countries. It is necessary to carefully analyze foreign achievements and adapt them, developing regional approaches that meet the specific socio-political and economic reality of Central Asia.

### **The French model of soft power**

France acts as a leading player, successfully using soft power tools to strengthen its international status. The French model is based on the integration of cultural diplomacy, educational projects, tourism marketing strategies and the formation of a positive national image. These institutions not only provide education but also serve as platforms for deepening bilateral relations with other countries (Ministère de la Culture, 2022).

In addition, tourism is a significant component of France's soft power, playing a key role in shap-

ing its international image. A well-thought-out state policy in the field of cultural heritage attracts a huge number of tourists, introducing them to historical monuments, museums and culinary traditions of the country. The state actively employs public-private partnerships (PPP) to finance the maintenance and restoration of cultural heritage sites, ensuring the continued attractiveness of France as a global tourist destination. Additionally, considerable attention is given to marketing strategies aimed at promoting French culture and tourism abroad (Rusakova, 2015).

France also effectively integrates educational initiatives within its soft power strategy. The country's higher education institutions attract international students by offering a wide range of scholarship programs. Many French universities are ranked among the top global academic institutions and ensure academic mobility through agreements with leading universities worldwide (Campus France, 2023).

The economic dimension of France's soft power is reflected in the significant contribution of cultural and creative industries to the country's GDP. According to official data, in 2022, France's cultural sector generated €47.1 billion, accounting for approximately 2% of the national economy. This figure surpasses the contribution of the automotive industry, highlighting the substantial economic value of culture as a resource. Government support for creative industries, including arts, cinema, and fashion, has established France as a global hub for cultural innovation (Ministère de la Culture, 2024).

The French soft power strategy, by all accounts, is an exemplary example of targeted and effective government action. This approach is based on a balanced combination of different areas: cultural exchanges, work on a positive image of the country, educational projects and tourism development. It is in these areas that France has sent impressive financial investments and organizational capacities. The long-term effect of these efforts is clear in the widespread popularity of France around the world and its enduring cultural influence spanning different regions of the planet.

### **Central Asia: a region fraught with untapped potential of «soft power»**

France is a curious precedent for the Central Asian states aimed at strengthening their influence and increasing their global status. The ability of this country to convert its cultural uniqueness into a diplomatic advantage demonstrates the real effective-



ness of «soft power» provided it is carefully integrated into the political structure of the state, with a clearly formulated strategy for international cooperation. The experience of France can encourage the Central Asian countries to develop more logical and strategic approaches to demonstrate their identity and increase their international prestige.

One of the most significant areas for possible adaptation is cultural diplomacy. Unlike the already established system of cultural institutions and programs operating on behalf of France abroad, most Central Asian countries have yet to develop centralized and long-term strategies to promote their languages, arts and traditions on the world stage. Although there are disparate cultural initiatives in the region, they often lack coherence and international reach. Following the experience of France, Central Asian governments could create specialized cultural centers, support traveling exhibitions, sponsor artists and scientists, and invest in digital platforms that would bring their cultural narratives to a global audience.

Another important domain is national branding and tourism marketing. France has long used its tourism sector as a vehicle for soft power, presenting its culture and values through world-renowned heritage sites, cuisine, fashion, and festivals. Meanwhile, Central Asia, home to the Silk Road, ancient cities, and unique ecological landscapes, has immense potential to do the same. But underinvestment in infrastructure, service quality, and international promotion continues to limit the region's appeal to global travelers. To change this, countries like Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan could draw on the French example of public-private partnerships, regional branding strategies, and tourism-focused diplomacy.

The economic dimension of soft power, especially in the realm of creative industries, remains largely untapped in Central Asia. Unlike in France, where sectors such as film, design, music, and fashion play an important role in the economy, these industries in Central Asia are still in early stages of development. However, with the right support, such as grants for cultural startups, film subsidies, and international creative festivals, the region could turn its artistic heritage into a driver of both cultural influence and economic growth.

France's investment in education and academic exchange is another pillar of its soft power strategy that could be adapted to the Central Asian context. Initiatives such as scholarship programs, international campuses, and bilateral university partner-

ships have helped France build long-term influence across the globe. Central Asian countries could benefit from expanding their own international education programs, encouraging student mobility, and engaging more actively in global academic networks. Implementing these measures would serve the dual purpose of elevating the standards of higher education and fostering stronger diplomatic and cultural connections with nations globally.

Employing French «soft power» initiatives could potentially offer Central Asian countries avenues to enhance their international influence, attract greater investment, and stimulate economic growth. To accomplish these objectives, a collaborative effort among different governmental bodies is essential; specifically, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Culture, Education, and Tourism must work in concerts. It is important to establish effective cooperation with representatives of business and civil society. The main task is not just to copy the French experience, but to adapt it to the peculiarities of historical development, cultural values and strategic priorities of the Central Asian countries.

### **Tourism as a lever of regional marketing**

Beyond making a profit, the tourism industry is an effective means of promoting the region and expanding international contacts. Tourism stimulates the inflow of foreign direct investment, helps to create a favorable international image of the country and contributes to the diversification of the economy. In various parts of the world, tourism provides a significant contribution to the formation of GDP, increased employment, and the development of related industries such as transportation, the hotel industry, and the construction sector. The tourism industry in Central Asia, which has not yet reached its full potential, opens broad prospects for strengthening the potential of soft power. With its rich historical heritage and the interweaving of diverse cultures, this region has significant potential to attract foreign tourists, which leads to increased recognition in the world. Strategically thought-out tourism development is a promising catalyst that provides not only economic benefits but also contributes to increasing cultural attractiveness on the world stage.

The French example is a strong proof of effectiveness. The systematic support of the tourism industry, carried out through public investments, thoughtful advertising campaigns and special attention to cultural and historical tourism, has allowed France to form a tourism ecosystem recognized

worldwide. The competent integration of historical sites, world-famous museums and the dynamically developing hospitality sector into a single national identity offers a suitable model for the Central Asian states aimed at achieving similar results. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) play a key role in financing the restoration of monuments, developing tourist routes, and promoting cultural heritage on the international stage (Ministère de la Culture, 2022).

Though there are unique natural and cultural sites, the potential for tourist growth in Central Asia is still underused. Rich historical traditions related to the Silk Road as well as abundant natural resources appropriate for eco-tourism and mountain tourism abound in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. Central Asia still has several hurdles in growing its tourism industry even with its wealth of historical and cultural resources. These include poor marketing initiatives, inconsistent service quality, limited worldwide awareness of its tourism potential, and underbuilt infrastructure.

In this sense, the French model offers insightful lessons that might help shape the development of a more efficient tourism policy in Central Asian countries. The following correction options are possible:

- The development of cultural tourism, as well as the expansion of the list of cultural heritage sites. This implies the demonstration of unique national traditions, outstanding sights and places rich in history on the international stage.

- Enhancing the role of the state through policy support, providing investment incentives, stimulating public-private partnerships and implementing specialized programs aimed at improving standards of service in the tourism sector.

- Development of strategic initiatives aimed at brand formation and marketing activities. This area includes: the use of digital technologies, participation in international tourism exhibitions and active interaction with global tour operators to increase the region's recognition and attractiveness for tourists.

### **Central Asia's national branding**

In the modern era, national branding is a key management tool, fulfilling the task of not just international positioning, but attracting investment, stimulating tourism and broadcasting foreign policy goals. More developed countries often achieve this through close cooperation between government agencies and commercial organizations. This synergistic approach ensures that the country's key advantages – cultural, economic, and symbolic – are presented on the world stage.

France is an example of global success. Her constant attention to cultural diplomacy, carefully developed territorial marketing and active promotion of tourism demonstrate the effectiveness. This success highlights the need for continued government involvement in shaping and disseminating a clear national image. In contrast, the Central Asian States, despite their rich cultural background, are just beginning to build similar strategic approaches. According to the National Brand Index developed by Simon Anholt, France is among the leaders in global recognition, largely due to its rich historical and cultural heritage, gastronomic traditions, high quality of life and strong government support for creative industries (Anholt, 2022).

In Central Asia, the process of forming a national brand is still in its infancy. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan can boast of rich cultural heritage closely related to the history of the Great Silk Road, nomadic civilization and ethnic traditions. Nevertheless, the region is experiencing certain difficulties, including poorly developed marketing approaches, the lack of a clear national branding strategy for entering the international arena, and insufficient government funding for creative industries.

In some Central Asian States, there has been significant progress in creating national branding strategies. For instance, Uzbekistan has actively enhanced its tourism branding by emphasizing its cultural and historical heritage (e.g., Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva) and attracting international tourists through state initiatives in infrastructure development and visa liberalization (Abdullaeva, 2022). Kyrgyzstan has positioned itself as the «Switzerland of Central Asia» actively promoting eco-tourism, mountain tourism, and the World Nomad Games, which have gained international recognition.

Kazakhstan also holds considerable potential for national brand development, yet its global promotion remains fragmented. In 2012, experts identified the key elements of Kazakhstan's national brand, including the oil industry, international sporting events (e.g., Asian Games, participation in Tour de France), and cultural-humanitarian initiatives (e.g., Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, the Congress of World Religious Leaders) (Koshenoy, 2012). Despite this, the lack of a unified marketing strategy and insufficient integration into global branding networks are narrowing Kazakhstan's horizons in this area.

For the successful formation of a national brand in Central Asian countries, the following key factors must be considered:

- development of a comprehensive national branding strategy, including marketing, cultural and diplomatic tools;
- promotion of cultural heritage and tourism potential, including active participation in international exhibitions, festivals and cultural exchange programs;
- using digital technologies and social media to increase global brand awareness;
- government support for creative industries such as cinema, design, music and the IT sector, which can become important drivers of the development of a national brand;
- development of international partnerships and integration into global competitiveness indices, which will strengthen the reputation of the countries of the region at the global level.

Thus, the adaptation of the best practices of national branding, including the French model, can contribute to increasing the international competitiveness of Central Asian countries, strengthening their cultural and economic influence, as well as developing tourism and investment attractiveness of the region.

The sociological survey and its analysis

As part of the study, a sociological survey was conducted aimed at identifying the perception of French cultural, economic and political influence in Central Asian countries. The focus was on assessing France's role in the region, the effectiveness of its «soft power» policy, and the prospects for adapting

French experience in the fields of cultural diplomacy, education, and tourism.

### Survey methodology

The survey was conducted among students, undergraduates and specialists in the field of international relations, which allowed us to obtain representative data reflecting the opinion of professionally interested groups. The survey involved respondents from five Central Asian countries:

- Uzbekistan – 51 people,
- Kazakhstan – 31 people,
- Turkmenistan – 16 people,
- Tajikistan – 4 people,
- Kyrgyzstan – 4 people.

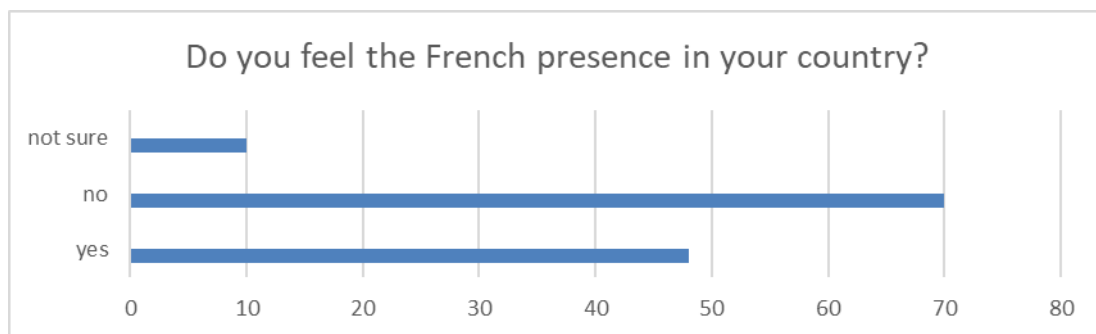
The survey was conducted in several languages, which ensured the accuracy of the answers and expanded the reach of the target audience.

### Survey results and their interpretation

#### 1. Perception of the French presence in the region

To the question «Do you feel French influence in your country?» the answers were distributed as follows:

- 48 respondents (38%) noted that they feel the French presence.,
- 70 respondents (55%) answered negatively.,
- 10 people (7%) found it difficult to answer.



**Figure 1** – Perception of French Presence in the Region  
*Source: made by the authors based on an online survey*

These data indicate that France, despite its active participation in international projects, is not perceived by many respondents as a significant actor in the region. This result may be because

the French «soft power» is mainly represented in the cultural and educational sphere and does not cover the broad social and economic strata of the population.

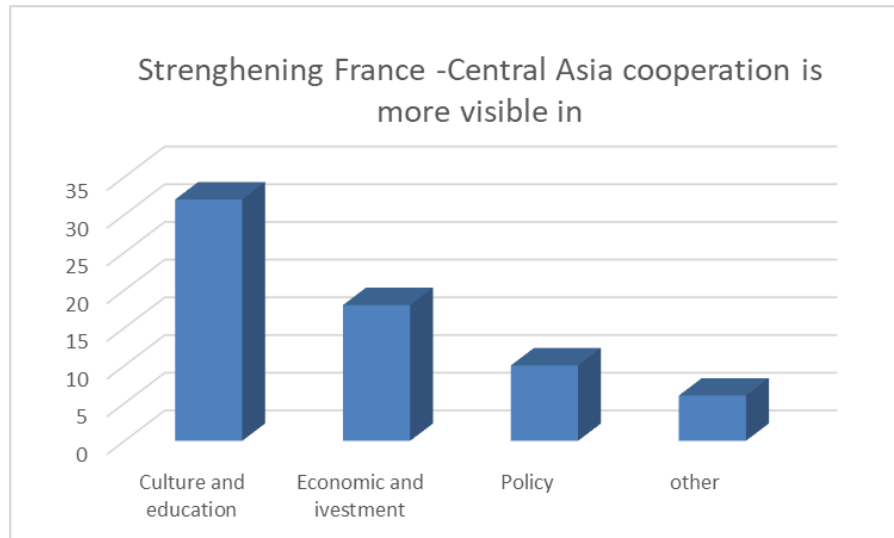
## 2. Assessment of France-Central Asia Cooperation

Respondents identified the areas where cooperation with France is most noticeable:

- Culture and education – 32 respondents (48%);
- Economy and investment – 18 respondents (27%);
- Political engagement – 10 respondents (15%);

- Other sectors – 6 respondents (10%).

Most respondents (48%) associate France's influence primarily with educational programs and cultural diplomacy, confirming the significance of initiatives such as Campus France and Alliance Française. However, the results suggest that economic and political ties between France and Central Asia are perceived as relatively weak.

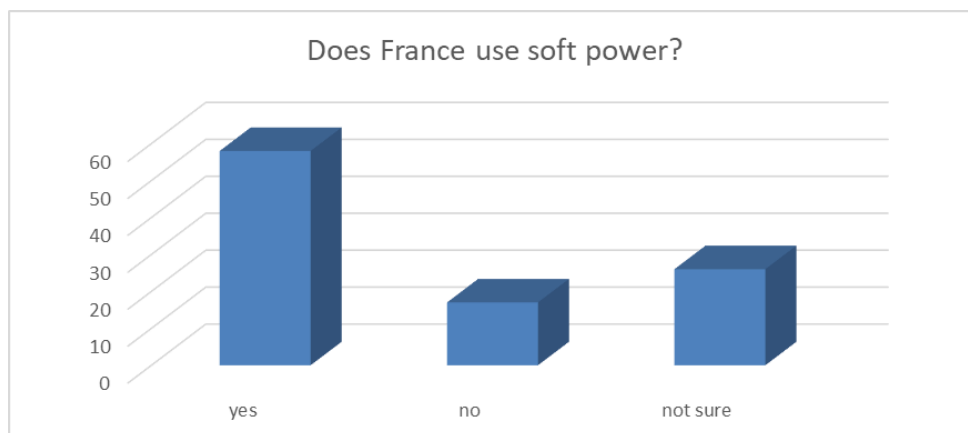


**Figure 2** – Assessment of France-Central Asia Cooperation  
Source: made by the authors based on an online survey

## 3. The influence of French «soft power» in the region

To the question «Is France using a soft power strategy in Central Asia?» The respondents gave the following answers:

- 58 people (45%) believe that France actively uses «soft power»;
- 17 people (13%) disagree with this statement;
- 26 people (42%) could not give a definite answer.



**Figure 3** – Perception of French Soft Power in Central Asia  
Source: Compiled by the authors based on an online survey



Respondents who support the idea of using «soft power» by France noted that the key instruments of this influence are educational programs, cultural initiatives and diplomatic projects. Those who disagreed with this statement pointed out that French influence in the region is not as pronounced as that of other global actors such as China, Russia and Turkey.

#### 4. Prospective Areas for Cooperation

Respondents were also asked which areas of collaboration with France should be further developed:

- Expansion of educational programs – 67 respondents (65%);
- Development of the tourism industry – 30 respondents (29%);

- Support for cultural initiatives – 24 respondents (23%);

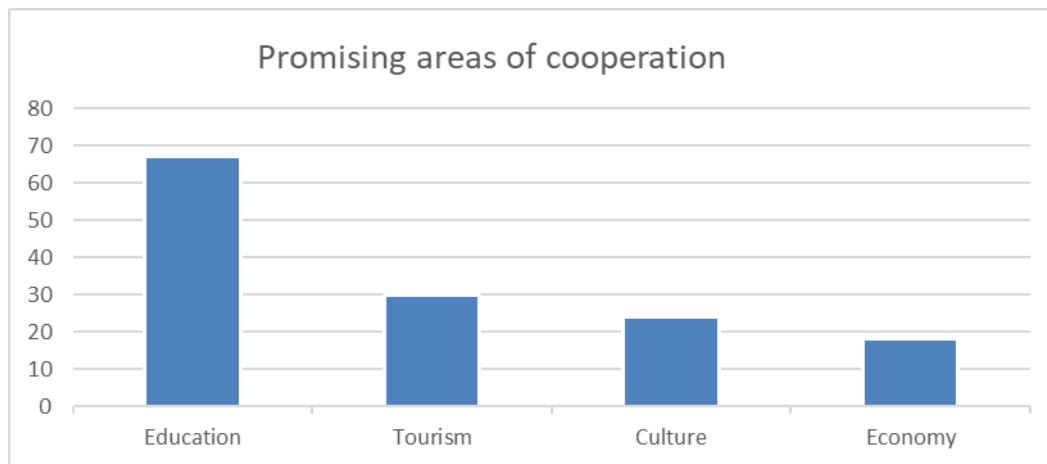
- Economic cooperation and investment – 18 respondents (17%).

The strongest demand (65%) is for educational programs, demonstrating high interest among young professionals and students in academic mobility and cultural exchange with France.

Tourism development (29%) is another significant area, indicating potential for bilateral initiatives in tourism branding and marketing.

Cultural initiatives (23%) remain an important sector, reflecting demand for exchange programs, exhibitions, and Francophone projects.

With just 17%, economic cooperation is at the bottom, indicating that France is not seen as a significant economic ally in the area.



**Figure 4 – Prospective Areas for Cooperation**

Source: made by the authors based on an online survey

#### Key Results of the Regional Assessment:

- Across the countries of Central Asia, a prevalent viewpoint holds that France's presence isn't highly visible. This implies that the country's influence through non-coercive means in the region has not yet achieved its maximum effect.

- France is linked more frequently to cultural and educational initiatives compared to its financial or political interactions; this facet of France's engagement is seen in a more favorable light.

- Cooperation in the realm of education surfaced as a sector with considerable potential for expansion, mirroring the strong emphasis on student exchanges and the fostering of intercultural communication.

#### Detailed study of sociological survey outcomes

Four major questions form the basis of the sociological survey analysis, and results are shown visually. Every part is reviewed in depth here.

##### 1. View of French Impact in Central Asia

- Yes, 48 respondents (38%) confirm French influence;

- No, there is no French influence – 70 respondents (55%);

- Unsure: 10 respondents (7%);

Fifty-five percent of respondents, more than half, do not see French influence in their countries,

hence France is not well known as a major world player in the area.

The fact that France participates in cultural and educational projects may explain why just 38% of respondents recognized the existence of French influence.

According to the survey, 7% of respondents were unsure, indicating a lack of understanding of France's soft power presence in the area.

France's soft power approach in Central Asia seems to be underutilized or focused on certain social sectors, such as the academic world. France must grow its cultural activities, improve diplomatic ties, and broaden its information policy to improve its influence.

## **2. The places where France is most visibly cooperating**

### *Distribution of Responses:*

- Education and culture: 32 replies (48%);
- 18 respondents (27%) mentioned the economy and investment;
- Political engagement – 10 respondents (15%);
- Other industry – six respondents (10%).

The significance of institutions like Campus France and Alliance Française, as well as academic mobility programs, is highlighted by the fact that about half (48%) of respondents primarily link France with culture and education.

A mere 27% acknowledged France's economic impact, indicating either a small amount of French commercial activity in the area or a lack of understanding of economic initiatives.

The least recognized area was political participation (15%), which might suggest France's restricted participation in Central Asian diplomacy.

10% of categorized collaboration falls into the «other» category, which may include cultural endeavors and humanitarian activities that don't fall into the primary categories.

France is mostly viewed as a cultural and educational collaborator, while its economic and political influence is still restricted. France's strategic position in the area might be improved by bolstering economic collaboration and diplomatic interaction.

## **3. Does France Employ Soft Power in Central Asia?**

### *Distribution of Responses:*

- France does indeed use soft power, according to 58 out of 130 respondents (45%);
- France does not employ soft power, according to 13% of the 17 respondents;
- 26 (42%) of survey participants were unsure;

The fact that 45% of respondents feel that France uses soft power in the area supports the nation's cultural and educational involvement.

A lack of understanding of France's efforts was shown by the 42% of respondents who were unsure.

The fact that just 13% of people think France does not employ soft power suggests that cultural, educational, and humanitarian initiatives continue to have some effect.

Although France uses soft power tactics, its influence is still inconsistent. Raising public knowledge and awareness of French activities in Central Asia requires improving marketing and communication tactics.

## **4. Future Areas of Collaboration with France**

### *Distribution of Responses:*

- 67 respondents (65%) said there was an increase in educational opportunities;
- 30 respondents (29%) said that the tourist sector is growing;
- Funding for cultural projects – 24 respondents (23%);
- Economic cooperation and investment – 18 respondents (17%).

### *Analysis:*

Education (65%) was identified as the most highly demanded area for cooperation, reflecting strong interest in academic mobility, scholarships, and collaborations with French universities.

Tourism (29%) was also seen as a promising area, which aligns with the region's rich cultural heritage and tourism potential.

Cultural initiatives (23%) remain a notable sector, indicating continued demand for exchange programs, exhibitions, and Francophone projects.

Economic cooperation (17%) ranked lowest, suggesting that respondents do not view France as a key economic partner in the region.

To deepen cooperation with Central Asia, France should not only expand educational programs but also actively develop the tourism sector, cultural projects, and economic initiatives.

### *General Conclusions from Survey Analysis*

France is primarily perceived as a cultural and educational partner, while its influence in other fields (economy and politics) remains weak.

Tourism and national branding in Central Asia present strong potential for collaboration with France but require more active promotion.

Approximately 42% of respondents are unaware of France's soft power presence, indicating a need to enhance marketing campaigns and diplomatic engagement.

France can expand its influence through investments in creative industries, digital diplomacy, and public-private partnerships in tourism and culture.

#### *Recommendations*

- strengthen France's diplomatic and economic presence in the region.
- develop a comprehensive strategy to promote French cultural and educational initiatives in Central Asia.
- encourage greater involvement of the private sector and French business initiatives in regional projects.
- launch targeted marketing campaigns to increase awareness of France's cooperation opportunities in Central Asia.

The survey results provide valuable insights into strengthening bilateral ties and creating more successful soft power tactics in the area.

### **Suggestions Based on Research Results**

The following recommendations may be made after analyzing the French soft power model, its reception in Central Asian nations, and the data from the sociological study:

- Create national cultural diplomacy organizations modeled after the Alliance Française and Institut Français, whose mission would be to spread national culture, language, and customs overseas. Develop a national branding strategy that includes marketing positioning for Central Asian countries as attractive destinations for tourism, education, and investment.
- enhance participation in international cultural and educational initiatives, such as exchange programs, exhibitions, film festivals, and tourism forums;
- create a unified tourism brand for central asia, like france's strategy of promoting itself as a cultural and gastronomic hub of europe;
- implement public-private partnership (ppp) mechanisms in the tourism sector to develop infrastructure, improve service quality, and attract international investors;
- establish international tourist routes (e.g., the great silk road), incorporating historical and natural landmarks across multiple countries in the region;
- strengthen the use of digital marketing to promote national tourism products through social media, online platforms, and international travel agencies;
- in line with campus france initiatives, boost the number of scholarship programs available to students and scholars from central asia;

- establish joint research initiatives and dual-degree programs with the top institutions in the world;

- to increase access to french educational materials, introduce distance learning and digital education programs;
- raising awareness of french «soft power» in the region.

Given that more than 50% of respondents do not feel a French presence in the region, it is recommended to strengthen information campaigns promoting French cultural, educational and investment initiatives in Central Asia.

To develop diplomatic cooperation, including holding joint cultural events, festivals and exhibitions, which would contribute to strengthening bilateral relations.

5. Promote the growth of creative industries like design, cinema, fashion, and digital technologies, which have the potential to be a crucial element of national branding and soft power.

Actively implement French experience in the development of the cultural sector as an economic resource, including grant systems, tax incentives, and investment programs for creative entrepreneurs.

The adaptation of the French soft power model can serve as an effective tool for Central Asian countries in enhancing their international image, attracting tourists and investors, and developing cultural diplomacy. The successful implementation of these measures requires a comprehensive inter-agent approach that includes government support, active business participation, and the utilization of modern marketing technologies.

### **Conclusion**

In the context of global competition for international influence, the strategy of soft power has become a crucial tool for strengthening states' positions on the world stage. France, with its centuries-old traditions of cultural diplomacy, demonstrates a successful model of leveraging cultural, educational, and tourism potential as a means of shaping a positive national image and attracting foreign investment.

This study has shown that Central Asian countries possess significant potential for implementing soft power mechanisms; however, their utilization remains limited at this stage. The analysis of the French experience and the results of the sociological survey have identified several key areas requiring active development:

Strengthening national branding and territorial marketing to enhance the international recognition of the region's countries.

Developing cultural diplomacy through the establishment of institutions like Alliance Française, the organization of international festivals, and the expansion of cultural exchange programs.

Expanding educational programs, including academic mobility, joint university projects, and digital education initiatives.

Promoting the tourism industry through public-private partnerships, the preservation and promotion of historical and cultural heritage, and the creation of international tourist routes.

Supporting creative industries as a key driver of economic development and a unique cultural asset for the Central Asian countries.

The results of the sociological survey showed that the French influence in the region is still not sufficiently noticeable, but interest in French educational and cultural programs among Central Asians is high. This confirms the need for France's more active participation in the region, as well as the adaptation of its experience by Central Asian countries to form effective international positioning strategies.

Thus, the application of the principles of the French «soft power» model in Central Asia can contribute not only to strengthening the international image of the region, but also to economic diversification, attracting investments and creating a sustainable system of cultural and educational interaction at the international level. However, the successful implementation of these initiatives requires a long-term strategic approach, comprehensive reforms and interstate cooperation.

## References

- Anholt, S. (2005). *Nation Branding: A practical guide to building a country's reputation*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Harvard University Press.
- Foucher, S. (2018). *La diplomatie culturelle française: Stratégies et perspectives*. L'Harmattan.
- Leonard, M. (2002). *Public diplomacy*. Foreign Policy Centre.
- Nye, J. S. (2015). *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*. PublicAffairs.
- Rusakova, O. F. (2015). *Soft power: theory, resources, discourse*. Ekaterinburg: Publishing House «Discourse-Pi».
- Abdullaeva, M. (2022). Sozdanie turisticeskogo brenda Uzbekistana: Vozmozhnosti i vyzovy. CABAR Asia. <https://cabar.asia/wpcontent/uploads/2022/08/Policy-Brief-Turism-ru-upd.pdf>
- Campus France. (2023). *Mobilité étudiante et coopération universitaire*. <https://www.campusfrance.org>
- Karimov, A. (2023). Formirovanie natsional'nogo brenda Uzbekistana v oblasti turizma. Uzbekistan – strategiya 2030 s tochi ki zreniya molodykh uchenykh: ekonomika, politika i pravo. <https://inlibrary.uz/index.php/strategy-2030-youngscientists/article/view/28708>
- Dikanbayeva, A.M., Sarybayev, M.S. (2024). Soft power tools in Central Asia: towards a closer relationship with France. *French Politics* 22, 64–81. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41253-023-00235-y>
- Koshenov, A. (2012). Eti desyat brendov sozdali imidzh Kazakhstanu. *Tengrinews.kz*. [https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan\\_news/eti-desyat-brendov-sozdali-imidj-kazahstanu-216095](https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/eti-desyat-brendov-sozdali-imidj-kazahstanu-216095)
- Ministère de la Culture. (2022). *Économie de la culture en France: Rapport annuel 2022*. <https://www.culture.gouv.fr>
- Official Website of the President of Uzbekistan. (2024). President held a dialogue with youth. <https://president.uz/ru/lists/view/7357>
- Ranking.kz. (2022). Uroven' prestupnosti v stranakh Tsentral'noy Azii: Analiticheskiy obzor. <https://ranking.kz>
- Sheraliev, M. Z., & Dzhurabaeva, M. G. (2022). Put' razvitiya Respubliki Uzbekistan na primere «Tsifrovogo Uzbekistana 2030». *Zien Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 7, 7-9.
- Tengrinews.kz. (2023). Chto zhdet Kazakhstan, kogda spros na neft' rukhnet iz-za global'nogo potepleniya. [https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan\\_news/jdet-kazakhstan-spros-neft-rukhnet-iz-za-globalnogo-446843](https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/jdet-kazakhstan-spros-neft-rukhnet-iz-za-globalnogo-446843)
- UNESCO. (2022). Kul'turnye i tvorcheskije industrii v Tadzhikistane: Fakty i tsifry. <https://www.unesco.org>
- Inform.kz. (2023). Chto takoe kreativnaya industriya i kak yeyo razvivat' v Kazakhstane? <https://www.inform.kz/ru/chto-takoe-kreativnaya-industriya-i-kak-ee-razvivat-v-kazahstane-5d9d0a>

## Information about the authors:

*Dikanbayeva Assiya Maratovna – PhD student at the Department of International Relations and World Economy, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University (Almaty, Kazakhstan, e-mail: a.dykanbaeva@mail.ru).*

*Sarybayev Meiram Seisenbayevich (corresponding author) – PhD, Associate Professor at Narxoz University (Almaty, Kazakhstan, e-mail: meiram.sarybaev@narxoz.kz).*

*Utkelbay Rysbek Yerlanuly – Master of Social Sciences, Narxoz University (Almaty, Kazakhstan, e-mail: u.rysbek@gmail.com).*

**Авторлар туралы мәлімет:**

Диканбаева Асия Маратовна – Әл-Фараби атындағы Қазақ ұлттық университетінің халықаралық қатынастар және әлемдік экономика кафедрасының докторанты (Алматы, Қазақстан, e-mail: a.dykanbaeva@mail.ru)

Сарыбаев Мейрам Сейсенбаевич (корреспондент-автор) – PhD, Нархоз университетінің қауымдастырылған профессоры (Алматы, Қазақстан, e-mail: teiram.sarybaev@narхоз.kz)

Уткелбай Рысбек Ерланұлы – әлеуметтік ғылымдар магистрі, Нархоз университеті (Алматы, Қазақстан, e-mail: u.rysbek@gmail.com).

**Информация об авторах:**

Диканбаева Асия Маратовна – докторант кафедры международных отношений и мировой экономики, Казахский национальный университет имени аль-Фараби (Алматы, Казахстан, e-mail: a.dykanbaeva@mail.ru).

Сарыбаев Мейрам Сейсенбаевич (корреспондент-автор) – PhD, ассоциированный профессор, Университет Нархоз (Алматы, Казахстан, e-mail: teiram.sarybaev@narхоз.kz).

Уткелбай Рысбек Ерланұлы – магистр социальных наук, Университет Нархоз (Алматы, Казахстан, e-mail: u.rysbek@gmail.com).

Previously sent February 27, 2025.

Re-registered March 11, 2025.

Accepted May 30, 2025.