

Implementation of Russian “Soft power” Foreign Policy Strategy in Kyrgyzstan

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Abstract

The article reveals and discusses the various tools used in implementing the Russian “soft power” foreign policy strategy in Kyrgyzstan. It reviews trade and economic cooperation, a priority area of work in bilateral relations between Russian and Kyrgyzstan. The author analyzes the activities of Russian organizations and cultural centers that promote and support humanitarian projects in Kyrgyzstan. Considerable attention is paid to Russian educational programs, projects and grants. Key factors are identified that have determined the development of Russia’s “soft power” in Kyrgyzstan at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries.

Key words

foreign policy, soft power, cultural influence, bilateral cooperation, Russia, Kyrgyzstan

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To implement its foreign policy and fulfill national interests in the field of international relations, states use a variety of tools which are largely related to the category of “force”. It should be noted that the majority of the definitions in this category have one common component – the impact to

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control others. This impact can be carried out in various forms such as “hard power”, “economic power” and “soft power”. In this regard, it should be emphasized that “hard power” implies a coercive approach to international relations, especially involving the use of military force. In turn, “economic power” attempts to use economic leverages of influence, which at present are considered to be quite significant. An alternative to “hard power” and “economic power” is “soft power”. This is considered to be an influential approach to international relations. This term was first introduced by American scholar J. Nye, who understands “soft power” as the ability to achieve what one wants through persuasion rather than coercion. He identifies three main components of this concept: culture, political ideology and diplomacy (Nye, 2004, pp. 10-13). In the modern situation, the role of the state in international relations system is determined not only by its economic and military resources and development level of political institutions, but also by its cultural potential. International cultural cooperation has become an integral part of foreign policy of modern states. Indeed, culture has a special role in implementing foreign policy objectives, aimed at strengthening the state’s international position, as well as providing favorable external conditions for its development (Гыкасов, 2013).

When discussing the Russian “soft power” strategy, it is appropriate to note that in Russia the concept of “soft power” in foreign policy is quite new. The President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin officially used the term in the context of Russian foreign Policy in February 2013 (for comparison, the USA has been using tools of soft power for more than 25 years) (Филимонов, 2010: 125). In outlining its own “soft power”, Russia is guided by Nye’s definition (Nye, 2004, pp. 10-13).

One of the main components of Russia’s “soft power” in Kyrgyzstan is the common history of the two states. This is a fundamental fact of unity, transmitted from generation to generation. The history of relations between Kyrgyzstan and Russia is not idyllic, but long-standing, centuries-old ties were established between the countries (Боропаева, 2000). There were some difficult moments in history that remained controversial for a long period. After Kyrgyzstan gained independence, these events were discussed with particular care. One controversial episode of history is the suppression of the Kyrgyz uprising by tsarist Russia in 1916. Nevertheless, there are many positive examples from history where the

fates of the Kyrgyz and Russian peoples were intertwined. The Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945 is one of these.

This historical event determined the social memory of two peoples for a long period. Indeed, social memory is a fundamental criterion for the unity of the Russian and Kyrgyz peoples. For over seven decades, a common spirit of Soviet patriotism was formed. The period of socialism, like any historical period, had its positive and negative aspects. The ideological standards of Soviet life removed all ethnic parameters of a person's self-determination. This in turn meant that the Kyrgyz lagged far behind the phenomenon of "Soviet people". Having only a limited significance to Kyrgyz traditions and customs, the national culture of the Soviet peoples underwent unification. The level of national identity was low. This primarily affected the preservation of the Kyrgyz language. Despite the negative influence of the Soviet period on the self-determination of the Kyrgyz nation, there were also positive factors in the unity of Kyrgyzstan and Russia. There was a surge in the cultural development of nomads: literature and various types of art began to develop.

From the historical point of view, Russian "soft power" has been present in Kyrgyzstan for more than 150 years, since the accession of northern Kyrgyzstan by the Russian Empire on January 17, 1855 (История Кыргызстана, 1983).

Thus, Kyrgyz-Russian relations, which were always at a fairly high level, further developed after July 21, 1991, when the Treaty on the Foundations of Interstate Relations between Kyrgyzstan and the Russian Federation was signed. At that time, the president of the Kyrgyz Republic Askar Akaev stated that "the path that Russia must take is also the path of Kyrgyzstan, because it is the path of democracy, the path of rebuilding human dignity" (Акаев, 1998, с. 123).

Diplomatic relations between the Russian Federation and the Kyrgyz Republic were established on March 20, 1992. The legal framework of Kyrgyz-Russian bilateral cooperation consists of more than 300 treaties, agreements and other documents regulating specific areas of interstate cooperation. The main political documents are the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between the Kyrgyz Republic and the Russian Federation, signed on June 10, 1992, and the Declaration on Eternal Friendship, Alliance and Partnership between the Kyrgyz Republic and the Russian Federation signed on July 27,

2000, as well as the Agreement between the Russian Federation and the Kyrgyz Republic “On Economic Cooperation” for 2000-2009.

The Russian Embassy in Kyrgyzstan was established on October 8, 1992. It organizes official visits at the level of heads of state, government, ministries, regions, etc., and carries out extensive work in political, trade, economic and cultural-humanitarian fields. A Consulate General of Russia has been operating in Osh since March 1, 2002.

The Embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic in the Russian Federation is the successor of the Plenipotentiary Representation of the Kyrgyz SSR in Moscow, in accordance with the Decree of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic of September 14, 1993. To continue economic and trade relations, a representative office was established as part of the Embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic, and the trading and commercial house “Kyrgyzstan” was established.

At different periods of bilateral cooperation, the first president of Russia Boris Yeltsin, and later presidents Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev, as well as prime ministers, chairmen of the State Duma and Federation Council (both chambers) and heads of ministries and departments of Russia visited Kyrgyzstan. It should be noted that Yeltsin’s first visit to Kyrgyzstan took place even before the Kyrgyz Republic gained independence on July 20, 1991. Later, Yeltsin repeatedly visited Kyrgyzstan to attend meetings of the CIS Interstate Council, CSTO, SCO, etc. Putin and Medvedev also came to Kyrgyzstan on several occasions, and participated in multilateral forums.

In turn, presidents of the Kyrgyz Republic also repeatedly visited Moscow. Akaev’s first official visit to the Russian Federation took place on March 26, 1996 (Akaev went to Moscow many times on unofficial and working visits, as well as for multilateral events). Kyrgyzstan presidents Kurmanbek Bakiev, Roza Otunbaeva, and Almazbek Atambaev also repeatedly visited Russia. Additionally, prime ministers, speakers of the Jogorku Kenesh (parliament) and heads of ministries and departments of the Kyrgyz Republic visited Russia on multiple occasions.

During these visits, a number of memoranda, agreements on cooperation in the political, trade, economic, cultural and humanitarian fields were signed. On many important international issues, the parties hold identical or close positions.

Moscow and Bishkek also work closely in international organizations, primarily in the UN, OSCE and others, and in regional structures such as the CIS, EurAsEC, CSTO, SCO.

However, 20th-century diplomatic relations between the two states did not lay the foundation for a lasting strategic partnership between Moscow and Bishkek. The main reason was that Russia's foreign policy in the 1990s was primarily aimed at developing relations with the West. Under the Minister of Foreign Affairs A. Kozyrev, the prevailing opinion was that Russia had freed itself from the underdeveloped states of Central Asia, and would be able to modernize quickly and enter the club of developed democratic states. Given this position, the Yeltsin administration paid little attention to Central Asia for a number of years. As a result, Kyrgyzstan was left to confront its many internal and external problems alone, until Russia changed its foreign policy in the early 2000s of its own accord.

Nevertheless, political contact at the level of presidents and heads of government of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Russian Federation was maintained constantly. Inter-parliamentary relations continue to develop both on a multilateral basis (within the inter-parliamentary assemblies of CIS, CSTO and EurAsEC), and in a bilateral format. The heads of the parliaments of both countries periodically exchange visits.

The priority area for Russia was and remains cooperation with Kyrgyzstan within the CIS – real cooperation in the economic sphere and free trade. Kyrgyzstan agreed to maintain the structure of the CIS economic bodies. An example of the active development of trade and economic cooperation between the CIS member states is the Free Trade Zone Agreement signed on October 18, 2011 in St. Petersburg. This agreement is designed to give an additional impetus to the growth of national economies and the potential of the Commonwealth as a whole.

The participation of the Kyrgyz Republic in the Collective Security Treaty Organization allowed the small country to combine measures to ensure the military security of Kyrgyzstan, based both on the country's forces, and in cooperation with the armed forces of other participating states, primarily Russia. At the Bishkek session of the Collective Security Council in October 2000, an Agreement was signed on the status of the formations of forces and means of

the collective security system, and a plan of basic measures for the formation of a collective security system of the CSTO member states for 2001-2005. A regulation on the working group of the Council of Ministers of Defense for the Collective Security Treaty was also approved.

Although according to experts and analysts the SCO is considered to be a Chinese regional project, Russia is a key player and occupies a special place in this organization. Russia and the Kyrgyz Republic are both organizers of the SCO and have the same rights within it. However, Russia, with its enormous political weight and economic potential, has a significant impact on other SCO member countries, mainly among the post-Soviet republics. Almost all the initiatives of Kyrgyzstan voiced within the SCO are supported by the Russian side. In general, the positions of Russia and Kyrgyzstan are in many respects similar.

One of the priority areas of bilateral relations between Russia and Kyrgyzstan is trade and economic cooperation. Since independence, more than 200 international treaties have been signed, a significant part of which concern the trade and economic bloc (Esenbekova, 2011). It should be recalled that in the 1990s the restrained nature of trade and economic processes between the two countries arose from a number of objective problems resulting from the collapse of the USSR and the breakdown in economic ties between the republics. Moreover, the Russian economy itself was in a state of decline and crisis. There are no analogues in world history to the crisis that Russia faced in the 1990s, because of its complex nature – economic, social, ideological and political. Therefore, Russia was not able to maintain economic relations with the republics of the former USSR, including Kyrgyzstan. According to statistics, in 1992 bilateral trade between Russia and Kyrgyzstan decreased on average by 26 times compared with 1991. During 1992-2003 annual trade volumes were in the range of US \$200-350 million US (Esenbekova, 2011).

Russian-Kyrgyz trade began to develop more dynamically only when V. Putin came to power. The reason for this is the recovery of the Russian economy and the reorientation of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation in relation to the CIS countries. Hence, for the period 2003-2007 bilateral trade grew by more than 4.3 times. According to 2006 data, the share of Kyrgyzstan in Russia's foreign trade was only 0.13 percent. According to the 2007 statistics, the trade turnover between Russia and Kyrgyzstan increased by 95.2 percent

compared to the previous year and amounted to about US \$1,175 million (about 33.1% of the Kyrgyz and 0.21% of the Russian trade). The volume of Kyrgyz deliveries to Russia reached US \$363 million (about 34.9% of Kyrgyzstan's exports, 0.18% of Russia's imports), and the volume of deliveries from Russia reached US \$812 million (about 32.3% of Kyrgyzstan's imports, less than 0.23% of Russian exports) (Esenbekova, 2011).

Today, Russia ranks first in the total volume of trade of Kyrgyzstan with other states (more than 27%). According to the Federal State Statistics Service, the trade turnover between the two countries in 2014 amounted to US \$1.9 billion. Of these, US \$1.2 billion is accounted for Russian exports to Kyrgyzstan and only US \$0.1 billion is from imports to the Russian Federation from Kyrgyzstan.

January – December	Commodity Turnover	Import	Export
2011	1,714.0	1,429.6	284.0
2012	2,003.7	1,784.6	219.1
2013	2,193.8	2,040.3	153.5
2014	1,974.6	1,851.9	122.7

Table 1. Dynamics of mutual trade between Kyrgyzstan and the Russian Federation for 2011-2014, *in millions of US dollars*

Source: National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic. International economic activity. Dynamic tables. URL <http://www.stat.kg/ru/statistics/vneshneekonomicheskaya-deyatelnost/>

During the visit of Kyrgyzstan President A. Atambayev to Moscow in September 2012, an intergovernmental agreement was signed between the Russian Federation and the Kyrgyz Republic on the settlement of the debt of Kyrgyzstan to Russia for a total amount of close to US \$500 million. As a result of meetings and negotiations, the presidents of the two countries V. Putin and A. Atambayev agreed to write off the debt of Kyrgyzstan in the amount of US \$489 million for previously granted loans. The document was signed by the Minister of Finance of the Kyrgyz Republic O. Lavrova and the Deputy Minister of Finance of the Russian Federation S. Storchak.

An agreement was also reached on investments in the hydropower sector (the construction of the Kambarata-1 Hydroelectric Power Station and the Verkhne-Naryn Hydroelectric Power Station Cascade) in the amount of about 2.5

billion US dollars. As part of Putin's official visit to Kyrgyzstan on September 20, 2012, two intergovernmental agreements were signed on the construction and operation of the Verkhne-Naryn cascade of hydroelectric power stations with a total capacity of about 190 MW and the Kambarata-1 hydroelectric power station with a capacity of 1.6–1.9 MW. The project for the construction of the Verkhne-Naryn cascade (Akbulunskaya and three Naryn hydropower plants) was implemented by RusHydro. However, work begun in June 2014 was suspended due to lack of funding by the Russian side.

At the same time, in order to ensure favorable conditions for the republic to enter the EAEU, Russia has not only assumed financial obligations: a grant of a US \$200 million to equip customs points/terminals, laboratories, etc. and to complete the roadmap of Kyrgyzstan to join the Customs Union. Since then, a Development Fund has been created, and Kyrgyzstan received unprecedented opportunity to export fruits and vegetables and meat products to Russia without tariff barriers.

Moreover, by 2014 Russia had invested over US \$62.29 million in Kyrgyzstan (Рудов, 2001, с. 11-12). There are close to 200 enterprises operating in Kyrgyzstan with Russian capital, including Gazprom Neft-Asia OJSC, Karabaltinsky Mining Plant OJSC, Tien Shan-Olovo LLC, Orel Chemical and Metallurgical Plant OJSC, and Foreign Economic Association OJSC Tekhnopromexport.

In May 2003, Gazprom signed an Agreement with the Russian government to cooperate in the gas sector. In 2006, Gazprom Neft established a subsidiary, Gazprom Neft-Asia, which became the largest operator in the wholesale and retail markets for petroleum products and liquefied petroleum gas.

Currently, Russia supplies more than 90% of all fuels and lubricants to Kyrgyzstan. The right to import and distribute duty free petroleum products was granted to Gazprom Neft-Asia, a Russian company in Kyrgyzstan. On July 26, 2013 an Intergovernmental Agreement was signed on in the field of transportation, distribution and sale of natural gas between Kyrgyzstan and Russia.

On April 10, 2014, an agreement was signed between Russia and Kyrgyzstan which allowed Gazprom to purchase a 100% stake in Kyrgyzgaz OJSC for a symbolic sum of US \$1. Gazprom agreed to pay the debts of Kyrgyzgaz, which in total were estimated at no less than US\$40 million. In addition, the Russian

company expressed its readiness to invest approximately 20 billion rubles in the development of the gas infrastructure of Kyrgyzstan and geological explorations in the country².

At the end of 2014, an oil refinery built at the expense of Russian investors was commissioned in Tash-Kumyr (Jalal-Abad Oblast) for the production of world-class fuels – Euro-3 and Euro-4.

On the basis of the inter-state agreement between Moscow city government and the government of the Kyrgyz Republic on international cooperation in trade-economic, scientific-technical, humanitarian and cultural areas between the countries, the Moscow city government opened a branch office in Bishkek on October 26, 2000, in order to diversify and boost trade and economic cooperation between the two countries.

Additionally, ethnic Russian and Russian-speaking citizens living in Kyrgyzstan can be ranked as a serious Russian “soft-power” factor. Indeed, according to 2014 data, more than 400 000 native Russian speakers (6% of the country’s population) or close to 365 000 ethnic Russians, 27 000 Tatars and 1700 ethnic Chechens lived in Kyrgyzstan. Other nationalities amounted to about 30 000 people, mostly peoples of the North Caucasus: Karachais, Balkars, Ingush and peoples of Dagestan, as well as Kalmyks. The vast majority of the Russian-speaking population lives in the north of the country - in the capital of Bishkek, the Chui and Issyk-Kul regions. Less than 20 000 live in the south, of whom 12 000 are ethnic Russians, 6 000 Tatars, and the rest representatives of other ethnic groups (Мыса кызы, 2017, с. 156).

It should be noted that in Kyrgyzstan ethnic³ Russians occupied high-rank-ing government posts during the period under review. A number of ethnic Russians in Kyrgyzstan held parliamentary and other government posts, contributing to the development of the economy, culture, healthcare and science.

² Gazprom buys Kyrgyzgaz assets for one dollar, RBK, 10.04.2014. URL: <https://www.rbc.ru/economics/10/04/2014/57041aea9a794761c0ce8c13> (all links accessed 01.10.2022)

³ Kuznetsov G., First Vice-President of the Kyrgyz Republic (1991-1992), also served as Vice Prime Minister for Economics of the Kyrgyz Republic (1992-1993); Silaev B.I. as acting Prime Minister (1998), First Deputy Prime Minister (1998-2000), Mayor of Bishkek (1995-1998); Tanaev N.T. as Prime Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic (2002-2005); Chudinov I.V., Prime Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic (2007-2009); Kostyuk A.V. as Minister of Agriculture and Land Reclamation of the Kyrgyz Republic (2000-2005), Deputy Prime Minister of the Technical Government of the Kyrgyz Republic (2010-2011); Lavrova O.V., Minister of Finance of the Kyrgyz Republic (2012-2015).

One of the important areas of Russian “soft power” influence is the cultural and humanitarian mechanisms of interaction between the Kyrgyz Republic and the Russian Federation. In Kyrgyzstan, there are numerous Russian centers, foundations, associations, unions, etc. Of these, the largest and most effective is the Slavic Fund of Kyrgyzstan, created on October 29, 1991, during the Soviet era. The management of the Fund declares its main areas of work to be education, culture, maintaining relations with Russia, protecting the rights of compatriots, charity work, analyzing the migration situation in Kyrgyzstan and the CIS, developing proposals on migration issues, and working with the Council of Compatriots under the State Duma of the Russian Federation. Most prominently, the fund works in the education and culture field. The Slavic Fund is officially represented as part of the Assembly of the Peoples of Kyrgyzstan.

In 2005, the Russian “Harmony” Culture Center joined the Assembly of the Peoples of Kyrgyzstan, which organizes thematic photo exhibitions, folklore concerts, meetings with artists, writers and various competitions.

Founded in 1935, the State Russian Drama Theater named after N.K. Krupskaya (on December 10, 2008, by the Decree of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Drama Theater was named after the People’s Writer of the Kyrgyz Republic, Chingiz Aitmatov) is one of the most important cultural centers of Russian influence. The specific repertoire and the numerous cultural and educational events held at the theater allow us to consider the Russian Drama Theater as one of the centers of Russian “soft-power” influence on the country.

One of the key elements of Russian “soft power” in Kyrgyzstan is the Russian Orthodox Church. The domestic and foreign policy of Kyrgyzstan constantly stimulates discussions about the faith of Russian diaspora in Kyrgyzstan. The importance of Orthodoxy as a stabilizing factor in the political life of the country is highly relevant; the Russian Orthodox Church plays an important role in maintaining and increasing Russia’s influence in Kyrgyzstan (Ночова, 2006, с. 179).

At the end of the 20th century, with the collapse of the Soviet state, the Russian Orthodox Church opened a new chapter. In 1990 a religious school began operating and in 1998 a theological seminary was established. Since then, the number of parishes has almost doubled – from 56 to 100. Four monasteries

were opened: three for women, one of which is located in Kara-Balta, and one for men. Dozens of churches have been restored and built, and Orthodox newspapers and magazines were launched (in 2002 the first Orthodox newspaper entitled “Orthodox World” began publishing in Bishkek). A candle manufactory and a printing house for religious icons, calendars, and books were opened (Abdyraeva, 2009, pp. 49-54).

At the beginning of the 21st century various Russian foundations and organizations, such as “Russky Mir Foundation”, began working more actively in Kyrgyzstan. “Russky Mir Foundation” is an organization that promotes the Russian language and culture. The organization also supports programs that teach the Russian language in various countries of the world (Немешина, 2007). The foundation has been operating in Kyrgyzstan since 2009, providing grant support to numerous educational projects. It cooperates with the state and non-governmental organizations.

In Kyrgyzstan, the foundation has three centers – in Bishkek, Osh and Kant, which, together with Kyrgyz specialists, participate in the preparation of Russian language textbooks, taking into account the national characteristics of the Kyrgyz Republic. Additionally, the foundation continues to organize courses for Russian language teachers in the country.

Furthermore, on June 7, 2011, the office of the Russian Center for Science and Culture (Rossotrudnichestvo) officially opened its office in Bishkek. Its main areas of work are the promotion and support of cultural или educative projects in Kyrgyzstan, disseminating the history of the Russian Federation and its foreign policy, educational, scientific, cultural and economic potential in Kyrgyz society. In addition, the organization is working to expand and strengthen ties with its Kyrgyz partners in areas such as museums, theaters and cinemas, concert and exhibition halls, discussion clubs and other organizations with a cultural profile. Rossotrudnichestvo also promotes the Russian language in multi-ethnic Kyrgyzstan and establishes ties between Russian and Kyrgyz universities, as well as allocating quotas for Kyrgyz citizens to study in Russian universities.

The Osh representative office of Rossotrudnichestvo assists residents in the south of the country in establishing cooperation, ties, etc. in the cultural and education fields.

Through Rossotrudnichestvo, quotas are annually allocated to Russian universities in numerous fields. In 2014, Rossotrudnichestvo increased its budget to train graduates from Kyrgyzstan from 175 students to 419. Additionally, Russian universities recruited 290 applicants from Kyrgyzstan for under their quota, and 130 Kyrgyz citizens were accepted by Russian universities for free tuition on a general basis (not related to the Rossotrudnichestvo quota). Besides the quota mentioned above, Kyrgyz citizens are able to apply to Russian universities through the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the CIS, the Ministry of Emergencies, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Customs Service and the State Drug Control Committee.

In addition, representatives of Russian universities (Tomsk Polytechnic Institute, Ural Federal University, Altai State University, etc.) come to Bishkek to recruit students on an annual basis.

An important factor in maintaining the cultural influence of Russia in Kyrgyzstan is of course the status of the Russian language. According to Article 10 of the current Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic (2010), the Russian language has the status of an official language⁴. This status was initially granted in the 2001 edition of the Constitution. The official status of the Russian language, the presence of a solid Russian diaspora and the existing Russian-speaking environment in the country (universities, schools, theaters, cultural centers, etc.) support the printing and publishing of Russian language books in the country. During the period studied, there were a number of bookstores in Kyrgyzstan primarily selling Russian-language books (Book World, Polonia, Foliant, Alliance, Academic Book, Odyssey, Rarity, etc.).

Russian educational programs, projects and grants are considered to be an important component of Russia's "soft power" in Kyrgyzstan. One of the largest and best-recognized universities in Kyrgyzstan is undoubtedly the Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University (KRSU). It was established in 1993 in accordance with the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between the Kyrgyz

⁴ Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic of 2010, Official website of the government of the Kyrgyz Republic. URL: <https://www.gov.kg/ru/p/constitution>

Republic and the Russian Federation. In 2004, by the decree of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, the university was named after the first President of the Russian Federation Boris Yeltsin.

In addition, there are 4 branches of Russian universities in the country: the Baltic State University Voenmekh named after D.F. Ustinova, a branch of the Moscow Institute of Entrepreneurship and Law, a branch of the Russian State University of Trade and Economics and the Kyrgyz-Russian Academy of Education. Besides the Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University, there are Russian language and literature faculties at the Kyrgyz National University, Kyrgyz State University named after I. Arabaev, Bishkek State University, Osh State University and Issyk-Kul State University, which have existed since the Soviet era.

At most universities, students are taught in Russian. The majority of school subjects are taught exclusively with Russian textbooks. As of 2014, 52.6% of the Kyrgyz population speaks Russian (for comparison, the percentage of Kyrgyz citizens who can communicate freely in English does not exceed 1.2%)⁵. According to statistics, schools where instruction takes place in the Kyrgyz language make up 64.2% or 73.1% of the total number of students in the country, and in Russian – 9.14% or 17.9% of students; 65% of children enrolled in pre-school education are taught in Russian⁶.

At present, the majority of children taught in Russian are not ethnic Russians, a situation that has existed since the second half of the 1990s. Despite this fact, the number of schools teaching in the Russian language increased from 143 in 2002 to 203 in 2012.

According to the 1999 census of the Kyrgyz Republic, Russian was the mother tongue of 14.7% of the population. According to the 2009 census, 48% of the population of the country declared knowledge of the Russian language. In addition, 482 243 people spoke Russian as their native language.

In the media and information space of Kyrgyzstan, Russian-language media (TV, newspapers, radio, social networks) have an almost total advantage over English/Turkish/Chinese sources. Digital satellite television packages in

⁵ Dubnov A. How Russians live in Kyrgyzstan, Russian Unification Union of Compatriots, 15 June 2013. URL: http://korsovet.kg/new/Kak_givut_russkie_v_Kirgizii

⁶ Duishebaeva K. In Kyrgyzstan, 52.6 percent of the population speak Russian, 6 March 2013. URL: <https://24.kg/archive/ru/community/149489-v-kyrgyzstane-russkim-yazykom-vladeyut-526.html/>

Kyrgyzstan include at least 50 Russian TV channels. The following Russian TV channels are broadcast nationwide: “First”, “Russia”, “NTV”, “REN-TV”, “MIR”. However, with the transition to digital television, no more than 2-3 television channels will remain free to access (as of December 2014 only MIR was officially included).

Russian-language newspapers and magazines make up approximately 50% of all published newspapers and magazines in the country. There is an abundance of Russian language newspapers such as “Vecherny Bishkek” (Evening Bishkek) published daily and “Argumenty i Fakty” (Arguments and Facts), “Slovo Kyrgyzstana” (Word of Kyrgyzstan), “Komsomolskaya Pravda”, “Moskovsky Komsomolets Kirghizii” (Moskovsky Komsomolets in Kyrgyzstan), “Delo №...” (Case number), “Obshchestvenny reiting” (Public rating), “Respublika” (Republic), “Liberalnaya gazeta” (Liberal Newspaper), “Chyuskiye izvestye” (Chuy News), “Ekho Osha” (Echo of Osh), “MSN”, “News Asia” published weekly.

Thus, Russian “soft power” is comprised of cultural, historical, informational and educational influences. In Kyrgyzstan – after a century and a half of joint history, with the significant role of the Russian language, a similar mentality, closeness and integration, institutions and practices – Russia exercises the strongest cultural and informational “soft power”. Since the mid-2000s this influence has been backed financially through loans and grants.

Geographical proximity, a shared history, as well as military-strategic partnership and economic cooperation arising from the need to find an optimal solution to both domestic and regional problems, are among the key factors that determined the development of Russia’s “soft power” in Kyrgyzstan in the late 20th – early 21st centuries. This in turn has objectively contributed to the development of cooperation between Kyrgyzstan and Russia.

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Реализация российской мягкосиловой стратегии в кыргызстане

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Аннотация: В статье выявляются и анализируются внешнеполитические инструменты, используемые при реализации российской мягкосиловой стратегии в Кыргызстане. Определено, что приоритетным направлением работы в двусторонних отношениях между Россией и Кыргызстаном является торгово-экономическое сотрудничество. В статье рассматривается деятельность российских организаций и культурных центров, продвигающих и поддерживающих культурно-образовательные проекты в Кыргызстане. Большое внимание уделяется российским образовательным программам, проектам и грантам. Выявлены ключевые факторы, определившие развитие «мягкой силы» России в Кыргызстане в конце XX – начале XXI вв.

Ключевые слова: внешняя политика, мягкая сила, культурное влияние, двустороннее сотрудничество, Россия, Киргизия

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