SOFT POWER AND ITS IMPACT ON FOREIGN POLICY DECISIONS

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Abstract. *Discussions about the use of soft power and its influence on foreign affairs have developed a lot in recent years, especially due to the great complexity characterizing the international scene and relations. In this context we can all agree on the importance of finding the best solutions to the present problems and hybrid threats at the international level. Using soft power in order to „build bridges" between international actors may represent one of the most efficient ways in order to find those solutions to the common problems. Therefore, in the present paper we will try to analyze and establish what is the impact soft power can have when it comes to making a foreign policy decision.*

Keywords: *soft power, decision-making, foreign affairs, multilevel guvernance, non-state actors.*

1. **Aspects of the foreign policy decision-making process**

It is never easy to define foreign policy. Like I always said, there are a lot of questions, problems and theories that apply to this area and it makes it difficult to give a clear and unique definition of what foreign policy represents (Petraşca, 2020: 143-144). But what is important to emphasize, instead, is how foreign policy decisions are made and what are the factors that influence this process. Like Joe D. Hagan argues in one of his papers, decision-making and decision-makers are an important part of the evolution of international relations (Hagan, 2001: 5-6).

Decision-making processes and decision-makers have often been placed at the basis of the distinction between the domestic and the foreign policy of a state. But in a context in which we talk more and more about the concept of governance in international relations, especially multi-level governance, and about the increasing role of various actors in the decision-making process, it is obvious that domestic and foreign policies often overlap or interact. Starting from Robert Putnam's theory, "the two-level games theory", the answer to the question "do domestic policies really determine international relations and *vice versa*?" is very clear: yes, sometimes the two determine each other (Putnam, 1988: 427). Putnam argues that staying at the table of the international negotiations, decision-makers are constrained on the one hand by the pressure of internal factors and the favorable policies they claim, and on the other hand by the need to minimize as much as possible the negative effects that these domestic demands could have on the international developments (Putnam, 1988: 434). The recent change of perspective in international relations presents a new image of the state, whose position is no longer that of a unitary actor placed at the forefront or at the crossroads of the two policy areas, namely the domestic and the foreign one, but it emphasizes more and more the networks

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developed between individuals and non-governmental organizations, the transnational and transgovernmental societies etc.

In an age of technology and digitalization, like the one we live in today, and considering the recent emergence of concepts such as digital diplomacy, it is obvious that the mutual influence between foreign and domestic policies is a reality we cannot deny. Social media platforms have become real foreign policy tools and, just to give an example, from promoting elements of national culture to being considered part of the national cultures, or from promoting different ideas and values to even presenting negotiation strategies in the field of foreign policy, these platforms have become a real influencing factor in decision-making processes. In their study of "domestic" digital diplomacy and the Nuclear Agreement with Iran, Corneliu Bjora and Ilan Manor show us how a foreign policy objective can be followed by influencing the public opinion or, in turn, by influencing with the help of the public opinion, through a Twitter account, for example. Such a means involves three main activities: creating messages and calibrating arguments in order to maximize the public's interest in the policy you want to propose, listening to the feedback and counteracting opponents' arguments in real time, and last but not least, engaging in a dialogue leading to the formation of coalitions with those who support you and the formation of connections with those who oppose your policy (Bjola, Manor, 2018: 27). Through these steps, a state actor can build the internal support needed to implement a foreign policy or to defend a foreign policy decision.

From the diversification of the influencing factors in decision-making, of the actors involved or of the levels at which a decision-making process takes place, also derives the appearance of the alternative models for analyzing the foreign policy decision-making processes. If the traditional analyzes of the foreign policy decision-making usually use three classical models to describe this process, explaining the typology, factors, levels and actors involved, the more recent alternatives to these models reflect a more complex approach. The three main models are the following: The Rational Actor Model, The Bureaucratic Politics Model and The Organizational Process Model[1] and some of the alternative models identified in the specialty literature are the following: The Political Process Model and The Inter-Branch Politics Model[2], The Cybernetic Model, The Prospective Theory, The Poliheuristic Theory, The Multiple Streams Model and The Psychological Approaches (Ciot, 2014: 117-157), The Small Group Model, The Group-Sharing Model, The Knowledge Model, The Elite Theory, The Risk-taking Based on Overconfidence Model, The Cognitive Patterns Model, The Pluralist Model, The Foreign Policy Change Model, The Criminal Liability Exposure Model, The Diversionary Foreign Policy, The Multilevel Network Theory, The Actors' Participation Model, The Rubicon Theory of War Model and The Ethical Foreign Policy Model (Musta, Rus, 2020: 38-53). The details about all these models and about the characteristics that differentiate them can be consulted in the bibliographic sources that were cited for each of the examples.

But what we want to emphasize in this paper and what these new models show us is that analyzing the decision-making process from a more recent perspective of international relations, especially that of multi-level governance, it should be noted, first of all, that in this context decision-making has extended far beyond the main representative institutions and that there are many other elements that can make a

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[1] "5 Key Approaches to Foreign Policy Analyses", Norwich University Online, September 11, 2017; https://online.norwich.edu/academic-programs/resources/5-key-approaches-to-foreign-policy-analysis, accessed August 20, 2021.

[2] *Ibidem*.

difference in foreign policy decisions, especially psychological elements. This creates much more room for the influence soft power approaches can have in international relations. With the multiplication of the public/private networks, from the lowest to the highest level, but also with the diffusion of the formal authority from the state, as a central actor, to other supranational and subnational institutions, decision-making has developed a more collective character and, in some way, a less formal one. This may lead to a more frequent use of "smart" and less "traditional" tools and strategies for developing and influencing foreign policies.

Like I said before, the many internal and external factors that can influence a foreign policy decision-making allow state and non-state actors to play an important role on the international scene using not just their military or economic power, but also other means of persuasion. For example, at the domestic level we can identify some influencing factors like the public opinion, the social groups - which can set the connection between state and society, the governmental organization - meaning democratic or authoritarian states and the leaders - with their personalities and values system etc. (Partowazar, Jawan, Soltani, 2014: 349-351), while the external influential factors in a foreign policy decision-making could be the military strength of a state - according to the realists, the economic wealth and interconnections between states - according to liberalism, and the international norms - according to the constructivists (Partowazar, Jawan, Soltani, 2014: 347-349). All these structures have a very important impact on foreign policy, even if we talk about "political, cultural, psychological, economic, national, regional, global, technological, ideational, cognitive and normative" structures, but especially the cultural ones were shown to have a high influence on the way institutions work, the policymaking being different from one culture to another[3].

Many of the actors involved in foreign policy decision-making, can often find themselves in a situation where, contrary to the realists' perspective, they cannot use their military power, or the so-called hard power, to directly influence these decisions. There is the possibility that these actors, by their nature, do not develop this type of power and even if they do, it is an insufficient or even inefficient principle (Petrașca, 2020: 150). Moreover, we must also consider the presence of non-state actors in foreign policies and international relations, which, if we do not refer to the armed non-state groups, significantly excludes the possibility of exercising hard power. Thus, in order to gain a relevant position on the international scene, they can use other "smart" means and strategies, which should actually reflect what in the specialty literature is called soft power.

2. Soft power and its role in foreign policy decision-making

Considering the impact that the end of the Cold War and the intensification of the globalization phenomenon had on the new global order and also given the importance of the new technologies and communication systems, which have definitely opened up access to information for almost any individual, it is clear that we are witnessing an international diffusion of power (Petrașca, 2020: 150). As a result, states have been forced to think about how to make others wanting the same things they are pursuing themselves without making exclusive use of economic or military power, without using coercion, but determining them to follow their example, to appreciate their values and principles or,

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[3] Sharifullah Dorani, "The Foreign Policy Decision Making Approaches and their Applications", August 4, 2019, https://cesran.org/the-foreign-policy-decision-making-approaches-and-their-applications.html, accessed August 20, 2021.

more precisely, to aspire to the same level of prosperity (Nye, 2004: 5). This translates into the concept of soft power, which, according to Vasif Huseynov, "concepualizes the instruments and policies that states employ to wield power over the minds and feelings of foreign publics" (Huseynov, 2016: 73). But what is important to mention, as Joseph Nye argues himself, is the fact that "most of a country's soft power comes of its civil society rather than from its government" (Nye, 2017: 2). This is why we tried to emphasize that the changing nature of the international relations, the emergence of a large variety of actors, even non-state actors, on the international scene and their transformation in influential factors determined the appearance of new decision-making models in foreign policy where concepts like soft power can have a major influence.

The soft power concept has become an increasingly used component in analyzes or even in foreign policy strategies. Moreover, talking about strategies, in recent years the soft power concept was "completed" by another one: smart power; it means "the succesful combination of hard and soft power resources into effective strategy" (Nye, 2017: 2). Over the last few years many states or international entities have begun to invest more resources in soft or smart power strategies. For example, in 2017 the UK government announced a £700 million Soft Power Fund; the European Union represents another example of making a great use of soft power in its external relations, while China has a large global network of Confucius Institutes (Doeser, Nisbett, 2017: 14).

Actually, there is an annual Portland Report presenting a global ranking of the countries that make the best use of soft power in their foreign policies and the last one, published in 2019, reflects the following top 10: the French Republic, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Kingdom of Sweden, the United States of America, the Swiss Confederation, Canada, Japan, the Commonwealth of Australia, and the Kingdom of the Netherlands[4]. Some of these states have long adopted this kind of approach in their foreign policies, or even put the basis for this soft power concept and other associated concepts, such as cultural diplomacy, but we will discuss such history examples more precisely in the next part of the paper.

Even if we have the certainty that more and more states are trying to enhance the role of soft or smart power in their foreign policies, it is important for us to understand how exactly can foreign policymakers respond to the evolving international challenges using their soft power strategies and instruments. It is known that with all the efforts made so far, the world today is marked by a high degree of instability and unpredictability. Unfortunately, there are a few examples such as mass migration, climate change, terrorism or infectious diseases, that are directly affecting us right now. We can see this in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, in the case of the extreme meteorological phenomena that the European continent is currently facing because of the major climate changes and which requires the support and intervention of several state or non-state partners, or, to some extent, we can also see it in the case of the situation in Afghanistan. These are situations in which smart power approaches and strategies could be the key in order to "build the global coalitions needed to tackle these challenges and ensuring respect for the rules-based international system in general. Prevention – which the persuasive force of soft power

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[4] "The Soft Power 30. A Global Ranking of Soft Power 2019", Portland, USC Center on Public Diplomacy, pp. 9-10; https://softpower30.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/The-Soft-Power-30-Report-2019-1.pdf, accessed August 21, 2021.

does particularly well – is usually better than cure"[5]. As we have pointed out before, extending your partnerships, building "friendships" and understanding your counterparts on the international scene can help enhancing your diplomatic ties, sharing the "know-how" of a country, improving commercial ties and the cooperation on shared areas of interest, strengthening institutions and civil society, stimulating economic prosperity and even developing your national security[6].

This attempt by international actors to emphasize the importance of using soft power in their foreign policies is justified by the interest in "maximizing their reputation, share their values through language, cultural heritage, sports, political pluralism and economic prosperity"[7] or "addressing domestic policy issues, such as those related to social cohesion or promoting the causes of the specific civil society groups"[8]. But what are the most important elements at the basis of a good soft power strategy and how can the results of such a strategy be evaluated? Because, as many specialists claim, it was never easy to determine "whether money is spent and policy designed to influence foreign politicians, ordinary citizens living overseas, people or countries that are allies, or those that are perceived as a possible threat. In almost all cases the target audience for Soft Power efforts is undefined or unidentifiable" (Doeser, Nisbett, 2017: 17), just like "there is no consensus on what Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy are for and what they actually seek to achieve. Policy in this area can be framed as skirmishes in a 'battle for hearts and minds', a means of gaining competitive advantage, a way to build national identity, to prevent wars or tackle unilateral or multilateral policy challenges like climate change" (Doeser, Nisbett, 2017: 17).

I think that soft power strategies encompass all these elements. First of all, it is important that those strategies address both the elite leaders in a state and also the public opinion, especially when it comes to long-term positive results (Petraşca, 2020: 152). An example in this regard, which we have also mentioned in previous papers, could be the failure of the relation between USA and Iran. Beyond the good relation developed between US and the Iranian Shah and government in the '70s, the Iranian civil society was not convinced and its anti-Americanism was one of the causes of the 1979 anti-Shah Revolution (Patalakh, 2016: 94). Going back to the subject of digital diplomacy and the use of social media platforms, now it is even simpler and more effective to use these platforms in order to convey the messages that are intended to reach the target audience. Secondly, when developing a soft power strategy, one have to consider the regional peculiarities and that "a soft power strategy, which is successful in one country, can misfire in a region that differs in its internal conditions. In other words, the reason for a strategy's failure or success can lie in the recipient's specificities rather than the features of the strategy itself" (Patalakh, 2016: 90).

Although measuring the effectiveness and the immediate results produced by a soft power strategy is quite difficult, there are still some aspects that need to be mentioned

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[5] John Dubber and Alasdair Donaldson, "How soft power can help meet international challenges", British Council, September 2015; https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/insight-articles/how-soft-power-can-help-meet-international-challenges accessed August 21, 2021.

[6] *Ibidem.*

[7] J.P. Singh and Stuart MacDonald, "Soft Power Today. Measuring the Influences and Effects", British Council, the University of Edinburgh, p. 8; https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/3418_bc_edinburgh_university_soft_power_report_03b.pdf, accessed August 22, 2021.

[8] *Ibidem.*

in such an evaluation. First of all, it is important to know "how well soft power activities establish credibility and generate trust in audiences and how well the activities of soft power actors are perceived"[9]. Secondly, it is "necessary to identify how the preferences and choices made by the targets of soft power have been affected"[10]. All these answers must be reflected in tangible benefits for the actor exercising its soft power. These benefits could come in different fields like politics, economy and culture, so we could evaluate the efficiency of a soft power strategy by analyzing the number of international students and tourists in a country, of foreign investments in a country, or by analyzing the voting patterns at the United Nations, for example[11].

Going back to the analysis of decision-making in foreign policy, we have to reiterate that any decision made on the basis of soft power involves the interconnection of a multitude of factors (internal and external, as well), actors (individual, national or international actors, non-state actors etc.) and instruments (domestic institutions, traditions, values, culture etc.). The goals to be achieved through soft power, like building a good reputation on the international scene, are projected on long periods of time, which means the decisions that stay behind them can be very well described by a Rational Actor Model. Aiming a long-time objective can give the decision-makers enough time to act rational and to prepare its strategy: to be informed about the status quo, to establish the proper goal to be achieved, to develop a solid knowledge of "cause and effect relationships that is relevant for assessing the expected consequences of alternative courses of actions" (Partowazar, Jawan, Soltani, 2014: 345).

In the same time, such cooperation objectives usually involve a large number of actors, characterized by a great diversity. Most of the time these actors have different interests, goals, viewpoints or individual political ideologies, and that is why making decisions in this framework requires some standard processes and procedures (as from the perspective of Organizational Process Model)[12] but also some malleability and openness to personal views (as from the perspective of the Political Process)[13] and combined efforts and cohesiveness towards achieving collective goals (as from the Inter-Branch Politics Model)[14].

There are also the other alternative decision-making models, presented above, which approach this process from a more recent perspective on international relations and which can also emphasize the importance of soft power and its capacity to influence foreign policy decisions. More specifically, it is about the psychological approaches models, where factors like group thinking or individuals' actual beliefs and perceptions are very relevant in making a decision (Ciot, 2012: 208). Because these factors may, in fact, be reflected and determined by soft power resources or instruments like culture, traditions, domestic institutions, economic models, politics, policies etc.

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[9] J.P. Singh and Stuart MacDonald, "Soft Power Today. Measuring the Influences and Effects", British Council, the University of Edinburgh, p. 25; https://www.britishcouncil.org/ sites/default/files/3418_bc_edinburgh_university_soft_power_report_03b.pdf , accessed August 22, 2021.

[10] *Ibidem*.

[11] *Ibidem*, p. 26.

[12] "5 Key Approaches to Foreign Policy Analyses", Norwich University Online, September 11, 2017; https://online.norwich.edu/academic-programs/resources/5-key-approaches-to-foreign-policy-analysis, accessed August 20, 2021.

[13] *Ibidem*.

[14] *Ibidem*.

Taking into account the complexity of the soft power concept, the number of related topics it may include, or the diversity of the actors involved, its influence on the decision-making process can also be described by the Pluralist Model, which is based on a dispersion of power in society (Musta, Rus, 2020: 44); by the Foreign Policy Change Model, which involves the redirection of a state's foreign policy caused by factors such as public opinion or other emerging actors (Musta, Rus, 2020: 45); by the Multilevel Network Theory or the Actors' Participation Model; but also by the Ethical Foreign Policy, if we refer to soft power strategies aimed at protecting the environment or the universal cultural heritage, for example, especially when it comes to support the less developed states.

The soft power is undoubtedly an important dimension of a state's foreign policy. An effective use of soft power can have a high contribution on a country's future. It can be very useful, from promoting a set of values, to make your voice count on the international scene and, on a long term, to influence decisions in order to follow your national interests. As Henry Kissinger once mentioned, "international order depends not only on the balance of hard power, but also on perceptions of legitimacy, which depends crucially on soft power, and it becomes more important than ever in an information age"[15]. Although foreign policy or international relations analyzes based on concepts like soft or smart power are relatively recent, some states, which are still at the top of the rankings regarding the use of such tools, have long understood their importance. This is what history has taught us and therefore, in the next part of the paper, we will try to give some short examples in this regard.

3. **The importance of soft power in foreign policies: an example in the history of the French Republic**

The soft power concept certainly has numerous examples in the world history and I would like to emphasize one of those aspects also because I consider that "*Historia Magistra Vitae*" / "History is the teacher of life", as Cicero said. The example I will present refers to the French Republic and its former president, Charles de Gaulle. I chose the French Republic because, as we could see, in the last report "The Soft Power 30", published by Portland in 2019, the French Republic occupied the first position at the global level, in terms of using the soft power in its foreign policy. Moreover, we cannot overlook the fact that France stayed at the modern origins of what we define today as cultural diplomacy or even soft power.

Charles de Gaulle, president of the French Republic between 1958 and 1969, and one of the fundamental personalities in the contemporary history, even if he was, first of all, a prestigious and respected military officer, had the wisdom to understand that in the upcoming world dynamic the soft power could be the way to increase the prestige and the role of his country. After his returning to power on May 13, 1958, following the dramatic events in Algeria[16], Charles de Gaulle understood that in a world where the decolonization process was becoming a reality, the separation was the only and the best solution, even if it not easy to manage such a considerable change at the level of both state and society. It is

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[15] Joseph S. Nye Jr.,"American Soft Power After Trump", in „The Soft Power 30. A Global Ranking of Soft Power 2019", Portland, USC Center on Public Diplomacy, p. 49; https://softpower30.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/The-Soft-Power-30-Report-2019-1.pdf, accessed August 22, 2021.

[16] Since 1830, France was occupying the Algerian land as a colony; in 1954 the Algerian locals started a war of independence, which was achieved in 1962 following the Evian Agreements.

very interesting to see and study the actions of the president Charles de Gaulle, who chooses this policy of separation having only the "support of his words". That was one of the events when soft power became a reality, a reality also enhanced by the replacement of a colonial state policy with a new one especially based on the Hexagon's humanist and cultural heritage, a universal one.

Charles de Gaulle realized the power of the new media instruments and those were the methods of his action. For example, in a televised press conference he declared: "In the Second World War I was winning with the microphone. Now I am winning with the television"[17]. The press conferences were very relevant in building Charles de Gaulle's strategy, in order to convince the public opinion, first of all, of the necessity to end the Algerian war and to consent to the probable and after all inevitable independence and sovereignty of the new state.

France was choosing, as I have already mentioned before, the way of replacing its previous role as a colonial state and becoming a promoter of her historical values: "Liberté! Egalité! Fraternité!". Another relevant example illustrating this strategy of a new France based on soft power was the address of president Charles de Gaulle in Pnom Penh, capital of the Kingdom of Cambodia, on September 1, 1966. That speech was delivered in front of almost one hundred thousand persons and the main ideas promoted were those related to the common links between France and Cambodia, like their historic victories and defeats, their exemplary art and culture, their territories' foreign ambitions, etc.[18]. The French president also spoke about the neutrality policies of Cambodia and about the presence and assistance of "the French culture and language" in the territory[19]. In such a turbulent context of Asia, namely the Vietnam war, France positioned itself as a voice that preferred the possibility of excluding a military solution. The political agreement with Cambodia was the only way to conciliate the conflict in progress. Charles de Gaulle was giving the example of the Algerian conflict where France was involved and of its capacity to "deliberately putting an end to a sterile fighting on a ground where its forces unquestionably dominated, on a ground France administered directly for 130 years and where more than a million of its children were settled. But as this fighting engaged neither its happiness nor its independence and in the times we live in right now they could result in nothing but loss, hatred and destruction, France wanted to and knew how to get out of it without suffering but on the contrary, by increasing its prestige, its power and its prosperity"[20].

We have to consider that such a political context together with the public behavior and determination of the president Charles de Gaulle represents a good oportunity to reflect on the acceptance of change, on the power to adapt and to understand that even with painful sacrifices the enhancement of a country and of its economical, cultural and political values has to continue with the same purpose: a relevant presence and a positive image in the world politics. As we could see, soft power approaches can make a difference in these situations.

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[17] Eve Bonnivard, "Allocution du général de Gaulle du 16 septembre 1959 en faveur de l'autodétermination", *fresques.ina.fr*, https://fresques.ina.fr/independances/fiche-media/Indepe00232/ allocution-du-general-de-gaulle-du-16-septembre-1959-en-faveur-de-l-autodetermination.html, accessed August 21, 2021.

[18] Charles de Gaulle, "Discours de Phnom-Penh, 1er septembre 1966", https://www.charles-de-gaulle.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Discours-de-Phnom-Penh.pdf, accessed August 22, 2021.

[19] *Ibidem.*

[20] *Ibidem.*

4. **Conclusions**

The results expected by a country that uses its soft power to promote its national interests do not come immediately, but they are achieved step by step. The international image of a country is very important doesn't matter the foreign policy objectives it aims, and a good international image is most of the time built on economic and technological developments, respect for rule of law, respect for human rights, openness to multiculturalism and diversity; in other words: prosperity, peace and stability. Soft power, especially through its cultural dimension, can contribute to obtain and then promote this "good international image", even in the cases of conflict zones. The words of a Pakistani musician returning from a tour in the USA, as part of a cultural exchange program, fully confirm the above: "back home, and everywhere, art is like water for the fire of fundamentalism" (Ryan, 2016: 32). "Mutual understanding amongs[21]. In the same time, the French example showed us that soft power, through the impact of some words, can be used even in order to obtain the support of your own citizens and civil society for a foreign policy decision.

A country that has built and consolidated its international image for a long period of time, proving that it has all the advantages of a good international partner and respects all the global values, becomes a predictable and a credible actor on the international scene. This can help it to achieve its main foreign policy goals, such as joining an international organization, or becoming an important regional actor and helping to the stabilization of its neighbourhood problems. Using soft power for building reputation can truly be a very useful mean, especially for the small countries, in order to achieve their foreign policy goals.

In this paper, we could see that an international context or a new world order is mainly based on the foreign policies of the states which interfere with other actors' actions. Foreign policy decisions usually reflect a state's power but today the importance of soft or smart power concepts has increased; international relations are influenced by soft power means. For example, through a good soft power instrument like cultural diplomacy, a country can attract foreign investments and develop social integration. In other words, "spiritual and intellectual capacities of a country, reflected in the performance of its institutions and policies, are namely the consequence of a nation's culture"[22].

As we could see, there are different models that can explain a foreign policy decision, but there are also different instruments that could model such a decision and soft power instruments have this potential.

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[21] Hyungseok Kang, "Reframing Cultural Diplomacy: International Cultural Politics of Soft Power and the Creative Economy", King's College London, 2013, p. 9; http://culturaldiplomacy.org/academy/content/pdf/participant-papers/2011-08-loam/Reframing-Cultural-Diplomacy-International-Cultural-Politics-of-Soft-Power-and-the-Creative-Economy-Hyungseok-Kang.pdf, accessed August 22, 2021.

[22] Joseph S. Nye Jr.,"American Soft Power After Trump", in „The Soft Power 30. A Global Ranking of Soft Power 2019", Portland, USC Center on Public Diplomacy, p. 49; https://softpower30.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/The-Soft-Power-30-Report-2019-1.pdf, accessed August 22, 2021.

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