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## INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF RUSSIAN SOFT POWER IN CENTRAL ASIA: LEGAL MECHANISMS AND INTEGRATION PROCESSES

\*Paizova A.K.<sup>1</sup>, Mukhtarova K.S.<sup>2</sup>, Gubaidullina M.Sh.<sup>3</sup>

\*<sup>1,2,3</sup> Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Kazakhstan

**Abstract.** Over the past decade, the phenomenon of "soft power" has gained particular significance in shaping international relations. This study analyzes the mechanisms of Russian cultural influence implementation in Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan) through their legislative consolidation in national legal systems. The relevance of this work is determined by the growing importance of intangible factors in modern diplomacy and the need to evaluate the effectiveness of cultural influence tools in the region. The research, based on an interdisciplinary approach combining comparative legal, institutional, and statistical methods, focuses on four key aspects: the legislative status of the Russian language, implementation of educational standards, media presence, and the impact of EAEU integration processes. The results demonstrate a correlation between the effectiveness of cultural influence and the degree of its legal consolidation, with mechanisms embedded in the socio-economic structure of society proving most sustainable. It was revealed that EAEU member states show increased receptivity to Russian cultural influence due to their developed system of integration ties. The paper examines in detail the legal framework regulating various aspects of Russian presence in the region, including bilateral and multilateral agreements within the CIS and EAEU frameworks. The obtained results deepen the understanding of cultural influence mechanisms in the context of a changing international system and can be applied in developing foreign policy strategies by both Central Asian countries and the Russian Federation. The study makes a significant contribution to developing theoretical approaches to studying "soft power" and offers practical recommendations for improving cultural diplomacy mechanisms in the region.

**Key words:** international relations, Central Asia, Russia, soft power, institutionalization, legal mechanisms, cultural influence, language policy

### Introduction

In the context of modern international relations, characterized by increasingly complex geopolitical processes and the growing role of intangible factors of influence, the concept of "soft power" gains particular relevance [1]. Central Asia, comprising five post-Soviet republics – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, represents a unique region where the interests of various global actors intersect, including Russia, China, the USA, and the European Union. Under these conditions, the effectiveness of soft power strategies becomes a key factor in the competition for influence in the region.

This study aims to critically analyze the effectiveness of Russia's soft power strategies in Central Asia through the lens of their reflection in the national policies of the region's countries. Special attention is paid to a comprehensive examination of various aspects of Russian influence, including language policy, educational standards, and media presence. The main hypothesis of the research suggests that the effectiveness of Russia's soft power in Central Asia is linked to the degree of its institutionalization in the legal systems of the region's countries; however, this

connection is not linear and is mediated by various socio-economic, historical, and cultural factors.

The research methodology is based on an interdisciplinary approach combining analysis of legislative acts, statistical data, and expert assessments. Particular attention is paid to comparative analysis of legal mechanisms for implementing soft power in different countries of the region, as well as consideration of alternative factors affecting the effectiveness of Russia's cultural and informational influence.

The scientific novelty of the research lies in its attempt to comprehensively analyze the legal mechanisms for implementing soft power in the post-Soviet space context, where historical ties and modern geopolitical realities create a unique environment for implementing such strategies. The study seeks to go beyond mere description of legislative norms, examining them in a broader socio-political context and analyzing practical aspects of their implementation.

The theoretical significance of the work lies in developing a conceptual framework for analyzing soft power in transforming international relations and deepening understanding of cultural and informational influence mechanisms in complex geopolitical conditions. The practical significance of the research lies in the possibility of using its results to formulate more effective foreign policy strategies for both Russia and Central Asian countries, as well as other actors interested in developing relations with the region.

The structure of the research includes analysis of four key aspects of Russian soft power in Central Asia: legislative regulation of the Russian language status, the influence of Russian educational standards on the region's educational systems and media legislation and its impact on the spread of Russian content, as well as the influence of EAEU economic integration processes on the spread of Russia's cultural influence. Each of these aspects is considered in a comparative perspective, taking into account the specifics of individual countries in the region and in the context of broader geopolitical processes.

The study aims not only to assess the current effectiveness of Russia's soft power strategies in Central Asia but also to identify long-term trends and potential challenges for Russian influence in the region. Special attention is paid to analyzing the adaptability of Russian strategies to the changing socio-political realities of Central Asian countries and competition with other global actors.

Thus, this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of soft power mechanisms in complex geopolitical conditions and offer new perspectives for analyzing cultural and informational influence in the context of transforming international relations.

### **Description of materials and methods**

Academic literature on Russian soft power in Central Asia is represented by works exploring various aspects of this phenomenon, from theoretical conceptualization to analysis of specific instruments of influence.

Fundamental theoretical understanding of Russian soft power is presented in the works of J.S. Nye [8, p. 2] and A.P. Tsygankov [9, p. 260]. Nye critically analyzes the Russian understanding of the soft power concept, while Tsygankov

examines Russia's strategic approaches to its implementation in detail. M.M. Lebedeva develops the theoretical framework in her research, examining the role of soft power in Eurasian integration processes, particularly emphasizing the importance of educational and scientific cooperation, however, the legal mechanisms for implementing these instruments remain understudied [3, p. 9].

Researchers pay special attention to the cultural and linguistic aspect of Russian soft power. D.E. Letnyakov's fundamental work presents a detailed analysis of the Russian language status in Central Asian countries, addressing legislative changes in language policy, but focuses primarily on sociocultural factors [4, p. 102]. M. Laruelle, examining the concept of the "Russian World" as a key element of Russia's geopolitical soft power strategy, only indirectly touches upon the regulatory and legal aspects of its implementation [7, p. 15].

Institutional mechanisms of Russia's cultural diplomacy are examined in detail in the works of O.N. Astafyeva and N.M. Bogolyubova. O.N. Astafyeva analyzes the theoretical foundations of cultural policy [1, p. 14], while N.M. Bogolyubova examines the historical experience and contemporary issues of Russia's external cultural policy [2, p. 144]. However, neither work offers a detailed analysis of the legal framework for cultural diplomacy in Central Asia.

Contemporary development of Russian cultural diplomacy in Central Asia is analyzed in the work of V.A. Epstein and A.V. Akchurina. The authors examine current tools and mechanisms for implementing Russia's cultural diplomacy in the region, partially addressing their regulatory framework [5, p. 85].

For comparative analysis, the experience of implementing Russian soft power in the post-Soviet space, presented in the work of A. Bogomolov and O. Litvinenko, who studied the peculiarities of applying Russia's soft power tools in Ukraine, including some aspects of their legal framework, is useful [6, p. 8].

In general, existing works form a certain basis for understanding the legal aspects of Russian soft influence in Central Asia, but they typically address this topic only episodically, without offering a comprehensive approach. Despite the existence of serious studies of individual Russian soft power instruments, their legal dimension often remains on the periphery of scientific analysis. This study aims to fill this gap by providing a systematic analysis of the regulatory framework governing various components of Russian soft power in the region.

The research methodology is based on an interdisciplinary approach combining several analytical methods:

1. comparative legal analysis of Central Asian countries' legislative acts in language policy, education, and media;
2. statistical analysis of data on Russian language distribution, educational programs, and media content;
3. institutional analysis of soft power implementation mechanisms through EAEU structures and bilateral agreements;
4. content analysis of regulatory documents and expert assessments.

The research draws on a broad source base, including official documents, national agency statistics, international organization reports, and academic publications. Special attention is paid to comparing legal mechanisms of soft power

implementation across different regional countries, as well as examining alternative factors affecting the effectiveness of Russia's cultural and informational influence.

## **Results**

### *Multilateral and Bilateral Agreements as Instruments of Russia's Cultural Influence in Central Asia*

The cultural dimension of Russian soft power in Central Asia relies on an extensive legal framework, including multilateral and bilateral agreements. The key document in this sphere is the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between the Russian Federation and Central Asian states. Article 12 of these treaties establishes parties' obligations to develop cooperation in culture, education, science, and information. Specifically, the parties commit to promoting and preserving the Russian language, securing its status as a language of inter-ethnic communication; supporting exchanges in culture, arts, tourism, and joint creative projects; and facilitating academic exchanges and recognition of educational credentials [10, p. 3].

It's important to note that while some bilateral treaties are foundational documents, they don't contain direct provisions specifically aimed at promoting Russian cultural influence. However, their fundamental principles and cooperation frameworks create a favorable legal environment for its indirect but effective spread.

As D.E. Letnyakov notes [4, p. 103], Russian language distribution is a crucial factor in promoting Russian culture, as it serves as an access tool to literature, cinema, music, and other art forms.

Complementing the main treaties are specialized agreements such as the CIS Humanitarian Cooperation Agreement [11] and the CIS Cultural Cooperation Agreement [10]. According to the Eurasian Economic Commission [14, p. 45], these documents provide for creating special institutions, such as the Interstate Fund for Humanitarian Cooperation.

At the bilateral level, agreements like the Agreement between the Russian Federation and Republic of Kazakhstan on Cooperation in Culture, Science and Education [12] and the Agreement on Establishment and Operation Conditions of Information and Cultural Centers [13] are in effect.

Legal procedures are put into practice through a variety of initiatives and activities. The "Russian Language" program (2016-2020) sought to support and develop Russian language overseas, according to Rossotrudnichestvo [15, p. 23]. Another powerful cultural influence technique is the quota system for CIS students at Russian universities, which allots over 15,000 spots each year.

Both benefits and drawbacks of the current system are shown by an analysis of the efficacy of legal processes. Broad coverage of diverse areas of cultural interaction, the establishment of an institutional foundation for cultural initiatives, and the legal protection and promotion of Russian language and culture are among the benefits. However, as M. Laruelle points out [5, p. 11], some agreements are declarative without explicit implementation procedures, and it is challenging to assess their efficacy due to the absence of precise quantitative indicators.

The Russian approach is distinguished by a greater reliance on interstate agreements, an emphasis on shared historical and cultural heritage, and a wider use of educational mechanisms when compared to similar legal mechanisms of other nations (such as China's Confucius program or Germany's Goethe cultural centers).

According to specialists [5, p. 86; 8, p. 84], Russia's cultural impact legislative framework in Central Asia has to be updated to reflect contemporary circumstances, especially the digitization of cultural spaces. There is potential for creating new types of cultural collaboration, like collaborative internet platforms for cultural exchange, and extending the legislative framework to promote collaborative cultural enterprises, like publishing and filmmaking, according to Eurasian Development Bank 2023 data [16, p. 34].

Thus, Russia's cultural influence legal framework in Central Asia represents a multifaceted and comprehensive system covering various aspects of cultural interaction. These mechanisms' effectiveness depends on their practical implementation and ability to adapt to the region's changing geopolitical and cultural realities. Further development and improvement of cultural cooperation's legal framework can strengthen Russia's position in Central Asia's cultural space and promote deeper integration in culture, education, and science.

### *Legal Framework and Status of the Russian Language in Central Asian Countries*

The Russian language in modern Central Asia represents a unique sociolinguistic phenomenon shaped by long-term historical, political, and cultural processes. A comprehensive analysis of its current position requires thorough consideration of legal, socio-economic, educational, and cultural aspects of its functioning in each state of the region.

Legislative regulation of the Russian language status in Central Asian countries is characterized by significant differentiation in legal approaches. The Republic of Kazakhstan demonstrates the most developed legal framework, where the 1995 Constitution in Article 7 establishes Russian as an official language, used equally with Kazakh in state organizations and local government bodies [17, p. 5].

In the Kyrgyz Republic, the 2010 Constitution defines Russian as an official language, supported by the Law "On State Language" (2004), which regulates its mandatory use in state institutions and guarantees the right to receive education in Russian [18, p. 26].

A substantially different situation exists in Uzbekistan, where the Law "On State Language" (1989, with 2021 amendments) does not grant Russian official status but recognizes its role as a language of interethnic communication. A similar situation exists in Tajikistan, where the Constitution and the Law "On State Language" define a limited legal status for Russian while maintaining the possibility of its use in business and educational spheres [19, p. 47].

According to various educational authorities and analytical reports in recent years, the situation with Russian-language schools in Central Asia varies significantly by country. The largest number of Russian-language schools remains in Kazakhstan - about 1,000 educational institutions (15-20% of total schools),

predominantly in northern regions and major cities. Uzbekistan has about 800 Russian-language schools (5% of total), mainly concentrated in Tashkent and other major urban centers. Kyrgyzstan has approximately 200 schools with Russian language instruction (8-10%), most located in Bishkek and the Chuy region. There are significantly fewer Russian-language schools in Tajikistan - about 30 (1%) and Turkmenistan - about 20 (less than 1%), located primarily in these states' capitals. It's important to note the general trend toward reducing Russian-language schools in the region against the background of strengthening state languages in the education system, while Russian often remains as a second language of instruction or a separate subject.

The economic significance of Russian is confirmed by foreign trade statistics. National statistical agency studies show that in Kazakhstan, 60% of foreign economic operations are conducted in Russian, in Kyrgyzstan this figure reaches 70%, in Uzbekistan -- 50%, in Tajikistan -- 40%, in Turkmenistan -- 30% [16, p. 89].

The role of Russian in Central Asia is notably changing. In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, it is actively used in IT and online learning, though serious challenges exist - lack of good teachers, outdated textbooks, and increasing competition with English in professional environments. Nevertheless, Russian continues to influence cultural life through book translations, theater, cinema, and music, especially in large cities and university centers.

Therefore, analysis of the current state of Russian in Central Asian countries demonstrates a complex picture of its functioning, characterized by significant differentiation across countries and spheres of application. Legal status varies from official language to language of interethnic communication, which is reflected in its practical use across various spheres of public life. Economic and educational factors continue to support Russian language presence in the region, though to varying degrees in different countries. Future development of the situation will be determined by a complex of factors, including state language policy, economic ties, educational needs, and cultural interaction among regional countries.

#### *Diversification of Educational Models*

The influence of Russian educational standards on Central Asian (CA) education systems represents a complex and dynamic phenomenon undergoing significant changes. While CA countries historically maintained close ties with the Russian education system, current trends indicate growing diversification of educational models in the region.

In Kazakhstan, according to 2023 Ministry of Education and Science data, there is a trend toward internationalizing higher education [20]. Kazakhstan's Law "On Education" (with latest amendments as of 01.01.2024) reflects the country's aspiration to integrate into global educational space while maintaining some elements similar to the Russian system.

Uzbekistan is implementing extensive educational reforms. According to the 2030 Higher Education Development Concept adopted in 2019, the country actively implements international standards, including the ECTS credit system. Russian

educational standards' influence has significantly decreased: according to Uzbekistan's Ministry of Higher and Secondary Special Education 2023 data, the share of Russian-sourced teaching materials in technical universities has dropped to 30% [21].

Kyrgyzstan presents a more complex picture. The Kyrgyz Republic's Law "On Education" (as amended in 2023) retains some elements similar to the Russian system, especially in higher education structure [18]. However, according to the 2023 Ministry of Education and Science report, the country actively collaborates with international organizations to modernize its educational system.

In Tajikistan, despite retaining some Soviet education system elements, changes are also occurring. Tajikistan's National Education Development Strategy 2030 envisions implementing modern international practices in the educational process [22].

Turkmenistan is developing its educational system considering national characteristics, gradually moving away from the Soviet model. According to Turkmenistan's Education System Development Concept adopted in 2021, the country aims to create a unique national education model [23].

Notably, the process of recognizing diplomas and academic degrees in the region is becoming increasingly complex and multilateral. While CIS and EAEU agreements remain relevant, CA countries actively develop bilateral and multilateral agreements with other countries and international organizations.

In scientific research, there's a trend toward diversifying sources and methodologies. According to 2023 Scopus data, CA scientists' publications in international journals increased by 25% compared to 2018, indicating growing integration into the global scientific community.

Modern trends like education digitalization and online learning development significantly impact CA countries' educational systems. For example, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan actively implement national online education platforms, contributing to educational resource diversification.

In conclusion, while Russian educational standards' influence in CA countries persists, its degree varies significantly by country and is gradually decreasing. Each regional country develops its unique educational model, integrating various international practices and standards, reflecting the general trend toward education globalization and internationalization.

### *Media Influence on Russian Content Distribution*

One of the key aspects of Russia's "soft power" implementation in the Central Asian region is its presence in the information space. Mass media serve as an effective tool for disseminating cultural values, ideas, and narratives that shape public opinion and influence political discourse. In this context, analyzing the legal framework of Central Asian countries in media regulation is particularly important.

Russia's information influence in Central Asian countries is implemented through various channels, including television, radio, print media, and internet resources. The legislative framework of regional countries plays a key role in determining the degree and nature of this influence.

In Kazakhstan, according to the Law "On Mass Media" of July 23, 1999, No. 451-I, foreign media have the right to distribute their products subject to registration (Article 19). This creates a legal basis for Russian media presence. Moreover, the Law "On Broadcasting" of January 18, 2012, No. 545-IV provides for the possibility of retransmitting foreign TV channels, facilitating widespread distribution of Russian content [20].

Kyrgyzstan demonstrates an even more liberal approach. The Law "On Mass Media" of July 2, 1992, No. 938-XII does not impose strict restrictions on foreign media activities. Article 5 of the Law "On Television and Radio Broadcasting" of June 2, 2008, No. 106 guarantees freedom of broadcast language choice, effectively legitimizing Russian-language media presence in the country's information space [24].

In Uzbekistan, the situation is somewhat different. The Law "On Mass Media" of December 26, 1997, No. 541-I (as amended) provides for stricter control over foreign media. According to Article 15, distribution of foreign media products requires registration with the authorized body. However, even this approach doesn't exclude Russian media presence but rather creates a mechanism for their regulation.

Tajikistan, according to the Law "On Periodical Press and Other Mass Media" of March 19, 2013, No. 961, also requires foreign media registration (Article 11). The law doesn't impose strict content restrictions, allowing Russian media to maintain significant presence.

Turkmenistan's legislation, represented by the Law "On Mass Media" of December 22, 2012, No. 355-IV, is considered the most restrictive in the region. Nevertheless, even under these conditions, Russian media maintain certain presence, especially in cable networks and through internet resources.

It's important to note that Central Asian countries' legal framework isn't limited to media laws. Legislation in language policy, education, and cultural cooperation also plays a significant role in shaping the information landscape. For example, maintaining Russian language status as an interethnic communication language in several regional countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan) creates a favorable environment for Russian content distribution.

Furthermore, international agreements and treaties within the CIS and EAEU often contain provisions on cultural and information exchange, also facilitating Russian media penetration into Central Asian countries' information space.

However, it should be noted that recent years have seen a trend toward strengthening control over information space in some regional countries. This manifests in tightening requirements for foreign media registration and operation, and developing national media resources. Such dynamics may potentially affect the degree of Russian media presence in the region.

Thus, analysis of Central Asian countries' legal framework in media regulation shows that, despite differences in approaches, these countries' legislation generally creates conditions for Russian media presence. This, in turn, facilitates Russia's "soft power" implementation through disseminating cultural values, ideas, and narratives in the region's information space. However, it's worth mentioning that this soft power tool's effectiveness depends not only on legislative frameworks but also on



the quality and relevance of offered content, and the ability to adapt to changing socio-political realities of Central Asian countries.

### *Institutional Mechanisms as the Foundation of Cultural Influence*

The EAEU, acting as a key integration association, creates a multi-level system of interaction where economic mechanisms serve as catalysts for cultural convergence. The Eurasian Economic Union Treaty, signed in 2014, laid the institutional foundation for forming a single economic space, significantly expanding opportunities for applying "soft power" instruments through legitimate channels of interstate interaction.

Institutionalization within the EAEU is implemented through a complex of interconnected mechanisms: unification of the legal framework, creation of supranational regulatory bodies, and formation of unified standards and rules for economic interaction. Institutionalization of socio-cultural aspects of integration gains special significance, including recognition of educational qualifications, regulation of labor migration, and development of scientific and technical cooperation.

The EAEU's legal framework, including the foundational Treaty and additional agreements, creates a legitimate basis for expanding Russian influence in the region. Qualification recognition mechanisms, enshrined in relevant EAEU Treaty protocols, contribute to forming a unified educational space. Labor migration regulation through EAEU institutions provides sustainable channels for socio-cultural interaction [14].

The significance of the institutional factor in implementing the "soft power" strategy is determined by the EAEU's ability to generate sustainable formats of multilateral cooperation beyond purely economic interaction. Formation of common markets, unification of technical regulations, and creation of unified information systems contribute to intensifying business and professional contacts, creating a natural environment for cultural interpenetration.

In the context of studying the effectiveness of Russia's "soft power" strategy in Central Asia, institutionalization through EAEU mechanisms gains special significance as a factor determining the sustainability and legitimacy of cultural influence. Analysis of country-specific implementation of this strategy demonstrates substantial differentiation in effectiveness depending on states' involvement in EAEU integration processes.

The Republic of Kazakhstan demonstrates the highest level of Russian influence institutionalization, due to a complex of factors. The Treaty on Good Neighborliness and Alliance in the 21st Century [25] creates a comprehensive legal framework for implementing the "soft power" strategy. The institutional architecture of interaction includes a developed system of educational institutions operating under a special intergovernmental agreement on the status and conditions of university branches. The operation of branches of Moscow State University, Higher School of Economics, and other leading Russian universities provides sustainable channels of academic influence. The official status of the Russian language, enshrined in Kazakhstan's Constitution, creates a favorable environment for

implementing cultural projects. High degree of economic integration within the EAEU generates multiple channels of business and professional interaction, contributing to cultural interpenetration.

The Kyrgyz Republic is characterized by a high degree of integration into Russian cultural space, institutionally secured by the Alliance and Integration Agreement [26]. EAEU mechanisms provide the legal basis for regulating labor migration, creating sustainable channels of socio-cultural interaction. The Russian-Kyrgyz University acts as a key institution of educational cooperation, supplemented by a system of grant support for studying in Russia. The official status of the Russian language and developed network of cultural centers contribute to maintaining sustainable Russian cultural presence.

The Republic of Uzbekistan demonstrates significant dynamics in developing institutional mechanisms of interaction within the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty [27]. Activation of educational cooperation is manifested in expanding Russian universities' presence (MGIMO, Plekhanov Russian Economic University) and developing joint educational programs. The Memorandum on Expanding Educational Cooperation creates a legal basis for further institutionalization of academic interaction. Growing trade turnover and implementation of joint industrial projects generate new channels of cultural influence through business and professional contacts.

The Republic of Tajikistan, linked to Russia by the Allied Interaction Treaty [28], is characterized by a specific model of perceiving "soft power" instruments, where labor migration regulation mechanisms play a key role. The Russian-Tajik University acts as the central institution of educational cooperation, supplemented by a quota system for studying in Russian universities. The Russian language's status as a language of interethnic communication is maintained through a network of cultural centers and language training programs. Special legal regime for labor migrants creates sustainable channels of socio-cultural interaction.

Turkmenistan, implementing a neutrality policy, demonstrates the most limited interaction model, institutionally formalized by the Strategic Partnership Agreement [29]. The selective nature of economic cooperation determines the specifics of implementing "soft power" instruments. Educational interaction is realized through the operation of a joint Russian-Turkmen school and quota system for studying in Russia. Cultural influence is limited to formats of interstate cultural exchange programs and individual educational projects.

Overall, the implementation of Russia's "soft power" strategy in Central Asia through EAEU institutional mechanisms is based on a comprehensive legal framework considering each regional state's specifics. The development of EAEU digital infrastructure in Central Asian countries plays a fundamental role. The EAEU Digitalization Agreement (2021) creates a legal basis for implementing Russian digital platforms in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, while memorandums of understanding in digital development with Uzbekistan (2019) and Tajikistan (2021) expand Russia's digital influence geography in the region.

Russian presence in Central Asian countries actively develops through various institutional mechanisms and projects, especially in digital and scientific-technical

spheres. In Kazakhstan, this is implemented through creating joint educational platforms, particularly the Kazakh-Russian distance learning platform based at MIPT and Nazarbayev University, founded on the 2020 Agreement on Cooperation in Digital Educational Technologies. In Kyrgyzstan, similar activities are conducted through the Russian-Kyrgyz Digital Development Fund, established in 2022 [24]. Scientific-technical cooperation is structured through interagency agreements [12], including the Strategic Cooperation Program with Kazakhstan until 2025, under which joint laboratories in nanotechnology and artificial intelligence were created, as well as the Uzbek-Russian Technology Park implementing IT and biotechnology projects. Financial support for integration projects is provided through EDB programs, which fund innovative educational centers in Kazakhstan and modernize Russian-Kyrgyz University infrastructure. An important aspect of cooperation is developing professional qualification systems, where Kazakhstan has particularly succeeded thanks to the 2021 Agreement on Mutual Recognition of Professional Standards, while in Kyrgyzstan similar mechanisms are being implemented through the Professional Standards Harmonization Program for 2023-2025.

The legal framework of Russian presence in Central Asia is characterized by a multi-level structure, where basic EAEU mechanisms are supplemented by bilateral agreements considering each country's specifics. This approach ensures flexibility and effectiveness in implementing the "soft power" strategy in the region.

Based on the above, comparative analysis reveals a stable correlation between the degree of economic cooperation institutionalization and "soft power" instruments' effectiveness. EAEU member states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan) demonstrate the highest level of receptivity to Russian cultural influence due to comprehensive integration architecture. Uzbekistan shows increasing dynamics of cooperation institutionalization, creating prerequisites for expanding Russia's cultural presence. Tajikistan is characterized by a specific interaction model focused on labor migration and educational projects. Turkmenistan, maintaining a distanced position, demonstrates the most limited model of perceiving "soft power" instruments.

## **Discussion**

Analysis of research results allows formulating several important theses regarding Russia's cultural influence in Central Asia and its reflection in regional countries' legislation. First, it should be noted that Russia's "soft power" in Central Asia is implemented through a complex of interconnected mechanisms, including language policy, educational programs, media presence, and economic integration within the EAEU. These mechanisms are reflected in regional countries' legal systems, but the degree of their consolidation and implementation varies significantly.

A critical analysis from Central Asian perspectives reveals a more nuanced picture of Russian soft power effectiveness. Local experts and political analysts, such as from the Central Asian Institute for Strategic Studies [29] points out both advantages and limitations of Russian cultural influence. While acknowledging the historical significance and practical benefits of Russian language proficiency and

educational cooperation, they emphasize the importance of maintaining cultural sovereignty and developing balanced multilateral partnerships. Civil society representatives often highlight the need for more reciprocal cultural exchange rather than unidirectional influence.

The effectiveness of formal institutional mechanisms should be considered alongside informal cultural interactions. Research shows that diaspora networks, student exchanges, and social media connections often play a more significant role in maintaining cultural ties than official programs. For instance, the growing popularity of Russian-language social media platforms and entertainment content among Central Asian youth demonstrates the continuing relevance of Russian cultural influence beyond formal channels.

Comparative analysis with other major powers' soft power strategies in the region provides important insights. China's approach, centered around Confucius Institutes and economic initiatives, differs significantly from Russia's model. While China focuses on creating new institutional structures, Russia largely relies on existing historical ties and integrated educational systems. The American approach, implemented through programs like USAID and American Corners, emphasizes civil society development and English language education. European cultural institutes primarily focus on educational exchange and professional development programs.

Legislative regulation of the Russian language status in Central Asian countries demonstrates significant variability - from official status in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to limited application in Turkmenistan. This differentiation reflects not only states' political positions but also the real sociolinguistic situation. In countries where Russian has a higher legal status, there is also a higher level of its use in economy, education, and media sphere. This confirms the hypothesis that legislative consolidation of language status contributes to maintaining its role as a "soft power" instrument.

The study shows that countries with higher levels of economic cooperation with Russia (e.g., within EAEU) also demonstrate higher levels of cultural influence. This is reflected in legislation through qualification recognition mechanisms, labor migration regulation, and economic cooperation. However, local stakeholders often emphasize the need for more balanced partnership models that would better reflect Central Asian countries' growing economic and political autonomy.

Analysis of legislative changes in regional countries in recent years shows that the most sustainable aspects of Russian cultural influence are those capable of adapting to changing national priorities. For example, maintaining Russian language's role in science and technology, even with its general status decline, demonstrates "soft power's" ability to find new influence niches. At the same time, local experts point out the importance of developing national scientific and technical terminology alongside Russian-language resources.

The effectiveness of media influence varies significantly across the region, with different countries adopting diverse approaches to regulating Russian media presence. While some countries maintain relatively open media markets, others implement more restrictive policies. Local media experts emphasize the need for

developing competitive national media industries while maintaining beneficial aspects of media cooperation with Russia.

In conclusion, Russia's "soft power" effectiveness in Central Asia is indeed closely linked to its legal institutionalization in regional countries. However, this connection is not linear and depends on multiple factors, including economic interests, geopolitical situation, and internal processes in Central Asian countries. The perspectives of local stakeholders and comparative analysis with other international actors' approaches suggest the need for more adaptable and reciprocal models of cultural influence. Future research could focus on developing more balanced frameworks for cultural cooperation that would better serve the interests of both Russia and Central Asian states.

This analysis demonstrates that successful soft power implementation requires not only strong institutional frameworks but also sensitivity to local perspectives and ability to adapt to changing regional dynamics. The experience of other international actors in the region suggests that diversification of cultural influence channels and greater emphasis on reciprocal exchange might enhance the effectiveness of soft power strategies.

### **Conclusion**

This study conducted a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of Russia's soft power strategies in Central Asia through the lens of their reflection in regional countries' national policies. The main research hypothesis about the dependence of soft power effectiveness on its institutionalization degree in regional countries' legal systems was confirmed, however, the analysis revealed a more complex and multifaceted nature of this relationship.

Key research findings:

1. The effectiveness of Russian soft power in Central Asia varies depending on the country and sphere of influence, showing the greatest effectiveness where it has a solid legal foundation and institutional support through regional cooperation mechanisms. This is especially noticeable in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, where integration processes create additional channels of cultural influence.
2. The legal status of the Russian language correlates with its level of use in economy, education, and media sphere, but is not the only determining factor.
3. The influence of Russian educational standards, while declining overall, maintains stability in countries with developed qualification recognition mechanisms and joint educational programs. Integration processes create new opportunities for educational cooperation, especially in professional training and technical education.
4. Media legislation significantly affects Russian content distribution, but information influence effectiveness also depends on the broader context of media consumption.
5. There is a general trend toward diversification of Central Asian countries' foreign policy and economic ties, creating new challenges for Russian soft power.

The obtained conclusions open perspectives for further research in the field of soft power instruments' adaptation mechanisms to changing regional conditions, analysis of formal and informal institutions' interaction in implementing cultural influence strategies, and studying the role of digital technologies in transforming soft power mechanisms of major players in Central Asia. Such research can contribute to developing more effective and sustainable cultural influence strategies that consider the complex dynamics of regional processes and global geopolitical trends.

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## РЕСЕЙДІҢ ОРТАЛЫҚ АЗИЯДАҒЫ ЖҰМСАҚ КҮШІНІҢ ИНСТИТУЦИОНАЛИЗАЦИЯСЫ: ҚҰҚЫҚТЫҚ МЕХАНИЗМДЕР ЖӘНЕ ИНТЕГРАЦИЯЛЫҚ ҮДЕРІСТЕР

\*Паизова А.К.<sup>1</sup>, Мухтарова К.С.<sup>2</sup>, Губайдуллина М.Ш.<sup>3</sup>

\*<sup>1,2,3</sup> Өл-Фараби атындағы Қазақ Ұлттық Университеті, Алматы, Қазақстан

**Аңдатпа.** Соңғы онжылдықта «жұмсақ күш» феномені халықаралық қатынастарды қалыптастыруда ерекше маңызға ие болды. Бұл зерттеу Ресейдің мәдени ықпалын Орталық Азия мемлекеттеріндегі (Қазақстан, Өзбекстан, Қырғызстан, Тәжікстан және Түрікменстан) ұлттық құқықтық жүйелерде заңнамалық бекіту арқылы жүзеге асыру механизмдерін талдайды. Жұмыстың өзектілігі қазіргі дипломатиядағы материалдық емес факторлардың өсіп келе жатқан маңыздылығымен және аймақтағы мәдени ықпал құралдарының тиімділігін бағалау қажеттілігімен анықталады. Салыстырмалы-құқықтық, институционалдық және статистикалық әдістерді біріктіретін пәнаралық тәсілге негізделген зерттеу төрт негізгі аспектіге назар аударады: орыс тілінің заңнамалық мәртебесі, білім беру стандарттарын енгізу, БАҚ-тағы қатысуы және ЕАЭО интеграциялық үдерістерінің әсері. Нәтижелер мәдени ықпалдың тиімділігі мен оны құқықтық бекіту дәрежесі арасындағы корреляцияны көрсетеді, бұл ретте қоғамның әлеуметтік-экономикалық құрылымына енгізілген механизмдер неғұрлым тұрақты болып табылады. ЕАЭО мүше мемлекеттері интеграциялық байланыстардың дамыған жүйесіне байланысты Ресейдің мәдени ықпалына жоғары қабылдағыштық танытатыны анықталды. Жұмыста ТМД және ЕАЭО шеңберіндегі екіжақты және көпжақты келісімдерді қоса алғанда, аймақтағы Ресей қатысуының түрлі аспектілерін реттейтін құқықтық база егжей-тегжейлі қарастырылады. Алынған нәтижелер өзгеріп жатқан халықаралық жүйе контекстінде мәдени ықпал ету механизмдерін түсінуді терендетеді және Орталық Азия елдері мен Ресей Федерациясының сыртқы саяси стратегияларын әзірлеуде қолданылуы мүмкін. Зерттеу "жұмсақ күшті" зерттеудің теориялық тәсілдерін дамытуға елеулі үлес қосады және аймақтағы мәдени дипломатия механизмдерін жетілдіру бойынша практикалық ұсыныстар береді.

**Тірек сөздер:** халықаралық қатынастар, Орталық Азия, Ресей, жұмсақ күш, институционализация, құқықтық механизмдер, мәдени ықпал, тіл саясаты

## ИНСТИТУЦИОНАЛИЗАЦИЯ РОССИЙСКОЙ МЯГКОЙ СИЛЫ В ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ: ПРАВОВЫЕ МЕХАНИЗМЫ И ИНТЕГРАЦИОННЫЕ ПРОЦЕССЫ

\*Паизова А.К.<sup>1</sup>, Мухтарова К.С.<sup>2</sup>, Губайдуллина М.Ш.<sup>3</sup>

\*<sup>1,2,3</sup> Казахский Национальный Университет имени аль-Фараби,  
Алматы, Казахстан

**Абстракт.** За последнее десятилетие феномен "мягкой силы" приобрел особое значение в формировании международных отношений. В данном исследовании анализируются механизмы реализации российского культурного влияния в государствах Центральной Азии (Казахстан, Узбекистан, Кыргызстан, Таджикистан и Туркменистан) через их законодательное закрепление в национальных правовых системах. Актуальность работы определяется растущей значимостью нематериальных факторов в современной дипломатии и необходимостью оценки эффективности инструментов культурного воздействия в регионе. Исследование, основанное на междисциплинарном подходе, включающем сравнительно-правовой, институциональный и статистический методы, фокусируется на четырех ключевых аспектах: законодательном статусе русского языка,

имплементации образовательных стандартов, информационном присутствии и влиянии интеграционных процессов ЕАЭС. Результаты демонстрируют корреляцию между эффективностью культурного влияния и степенью его правового закрепления, причем наиболее устойчивыми оказываются механизмы, встроенные в социально-экономическую структуру общества. Выявлено, что государства-члены ЕАЭС проявляют повышенную восприимчивость к российскому культурному влиянию благодаря развитой системе интеграционных связей. В работе детально рассмотрена правовая база, регламентирующая различные аспекты российского присутствия в регионе, включая двусторонние и многосторонние соглашения в рамках СНГ и ЕАЭС. Полученные результаты углубляют понимание механизмов культурного влияния в контексте меняющейся международной системы и могут применяться при разработке внешнеполитических стратегий как странами Центральной Азии, так и Российской Федерацией. Исследование вносит существенный вклад в развитие теоретических подходов к изучению "мягкой силы" и предлагает практические рекомендации по совершенствованию механизмов культурной дипломатии в регионе.

**Ключевые слова:** международные отношения, Центральная Азия, Россия, мягкая сила, институционализация, правовые механизмы, культурное влияние, языковая политика

***Information about authors:***

*Paizova A.K. - Doctor PhD of Economics, professor, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Kazakhstan, e-mail: [mukhtarova.prof@gmail.com](mailto:mukhtarova.prof@gmail.com)*

*Mukhtarova K.S. - PhD student, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Kazakhstan, e-mail: [paizova\\_aidana@mail.ru](mailto:paizova_aidana@mail.ru)*

*Gubaidullina M.Sh. - Doctor PhD of Political Science, Doctor habil. of Historical Science, professor, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Kazakhstan, e-mail: [mara.gubaidullina@kaznu.edu.kz](mailto:mara.gubaidullina@kaznu.edu.kz)*

***Сведения об авторах:***

*Паизова А.К. - PhD докторант, Казахский Национальный Университет имени аль-Фараби, Алматы, Казахстан, e-mail: [paizova\\_aidana@mail.ru](mailto:paizova_aidana@mail.ru)*

*Мухтарова К.С. - доктор экономических наук, профессор, Казахский Национальный Университет имени аль-Фараби, Алматы, Казахстан, e-mail: [mukhtarova.prof@gmail.com](mailto:mukhtarova.prof@gmail.com)*

*Губайдуллина М.Ш. - доктор политических наук, хабилитированный доктор исторических наук, профессор, Казахский Национальный Университет имени аль-Фараби, Алматы, Казахстан, e-mail: [mara.gubaidullina@kaznu.edu.kz](mailto:mara.gubaidullina@kaznu.edu.kz)*

***Авторлар туралы мәлімет:***

*Паизова А.К. - PhD докторант, Әл-Фараби атындағы Қазақ Ұлттық Университеті, Алматы, Қазақстан, e-mail: [paizova\\_aidana@mail.ru](mailto:paizova_aidana@mail.ru)*

*Мухтарова К.С. - Экономика ғылымдарының докторы, профессор, Әл-Фараби атындағы Қазақ Ұлттық Университеті, Алматы, Қазақстан, e-mail: [mukhtarova.prof@gmail.com](mailto:mukhtarova.prof@gmail.com)*

*Губайдуллина М.Ш. - Саясаттану ғылымдарының докторы, тарих ғылымдарының хабилитталған докторы, профессор, Әл-Фараби атындағы Қазақ Ұлттық Университеті, Алматы, Қазақстан, e-mail: [mara.gubaidullina@kaznu.edu.kz](mailto:mara.gubaidullina@kaznu.edu.kz)*

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