

The image of a country, communication actors in educational exchanges

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Abstract

The main theoretical emphasis of this paper will be concentrated in explaining concepts, which today are present in the discourse for increasing the image of a country, such as public diplomacy, massive diplomacy, soft-power, international public relations etc. Whereas, empirical emphasis aims to identify and describe a segment of main communication actors which participate in communications with foreign public, in order to analyze the commitment that country's institutions have about this dimension of communication with foreign public and the improvement of the country's image. The hypothesis raised here is whether small countries, such as Kosovo, may influence the increasing of its image in the world, concrete opportunities and difficulties and to whom Kosovo's campaigns should be directed in order to inform and influence foreign public in student exchanges area. Because of faint activities in this course and the presence of other educational institutions in Kosovo, it is proved that the country is mainly a consumer of foreign public and cultural diplomacy without a strategy for spreading in foreign countries with the aim of increasing its image and reputation.

Keywords: country's external image, soft-power, education, foreign students, educational policy, Kosovo.

Introduction

The image of a country worldwide is quite important because by having a good image the country manages to achieve its foreign policies. Public diplomacy researchers¹ note that if a country has a

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positive image throughout foreign opinion, then they can indirectly influence their governments toward a friendly policy, while there may be benefits on tourism and foreign investments as well.

"The image of a nation can be comprehended as a **fringe prejudice** and it does not happen suddenly, but is often created in long historical processes"². The process begins by any experience from the early stages of a human life; in school, in children's books, fairytales and leisure literature, theater, it may also include accounts made by relatives, acquaintances and friends.³ Kunczik estimates that mass media, such as radio and international television broadcasting programs, newspapers and magazines, exchanging cultural programs, sports, books, news services etc, are probably the biggest image creating factors, including education and traveling as personal experiences, which play an important role in image building. Ellul emphasized the fact that the image of a country can be seriously damaged by the statements of government officials of a country who speak to their public about another country. "...When there is a national antipathy, then the facts are unbelievable ...People believe their government more than foreign governments".⁴ And this is exactly where exchanges happen to be more successful for creating long-term relationships, first of all student exchanges, intercultural communications, etc.

The rising of image, according to Joseph Nye, who has created today's well known notion in relationships among states "soft power" which includes lots of elements that foreign policy should use in order to build a good reputation for a country, and which requires a series

²Michael Kunczik, "Globalization: News media, images of nations and the flow of international capital with special reference to the role of rating agencies", Deutsches Übersee-Institut Forschungsgruppe: *Internationale Medien und politische Kommunikation*, Februar, 2001, pp. 9. (available in: http://www.giga-hamburg.de/content/publikationen/archiv/duel_arbeitspapiere/ap_04_01_02.pdf (visited: May, 15 2013))

³Michael Kunczik, *Images of Nations and International Public Relations*, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates-Publishers Mahwah, 1997, pp. 1.

⁴Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, Vintage Books Edition, Random House Inc, News York, 1973, pp. 242-243.

of activities to make the foreign opinions to desire the same thing as we desire. According to him, soft power is born by the cultural enchantment, ideals and good political practices of a country. "When our policies seem to be good in other people's eyes, then the soft power is reinforced...⁵. Within the cultural dimension he includes education, academic and student exchanges, etc. The same categories are distinct by the most quoted European researcher of public diplomacy, Jan Melissen. He says that: "art, culture, education have always been means of achieving political aims, which have mainly influenced the softening of relationships among states"⁶.

Whereas, the most quoted researcher of international public communications, Eytan Gilboa, notes that "today a good image and reputation worldwide achieved through attraction and conviction, has become more important than territory, access and raw materials, traditionally won through economic and military masses"⁷.

Education, student exchanges, as means for image reinforcement

Years ago, different countries have paid a great importance of wide spreading their culture in order to influence other country policies through it. Shortly after French-Prussian war in 1883 French Government created French Alliance through which aimed to rise its prestige in the world by spreading French Literature and Language, whereas later British did the same with the British Council, Germans with Gete Institute, Italians with Dante Alighieri etc.⁸. Thus student exchanges and the practice of foreign students studying in different

⁵Joseph Nye Jr S. *Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs, 2004 pp. X; 10.

⁶Jan Melissen, *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan: 2005, pp. 4-5

⁷Eytan Gilboa, "Searching for a Theory of Public Diplomacy", in: *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Sage, March, 2008. pp. 56

⁸Cynthia P. Schneider "Culture Communicates: US Diplomacy That Works" in: *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*.ed. Jan Melissen. New York: Palgrave Macmillan: 2005, pp. 157

countries is a right investment to influence the foreign opinion and make friends worldwide. Nye notes that about 86 thousand foreign students stayed in American Education Institutions in 2002, whereas, “millions of people who have studied in USA throughout years, thus this makes a significant reservoir of benevolent for our country”⁹. Foreign students go back to their homes with a more positive image for the values and institutions of a country. Many of them may get powerful positions in their country from where they are able to influence important political developments. Nye, remembers a soviet student Aleksander Yakovles, who had studied at Colombia University in 1958. After he returned to his country, Yakovlev was appointed director of an important institute, a member of a party and the counselor with a marked liberal influence of the leader Mikhail Gorbacov while his other colleague, Oleg Kalugin, becomes a high official of soviet-KGB. “ I don’t believe there can be more valuable resources for our country than the friendship of future leaders who have studied in our country”¹⁰.

Meanwhile, presenting American diplomacy masses in American Senate, after the terrorist attacks, vice secretary of public diplomacy, Charlotte Beers, notes that, “we have invited teachers from Afghanistan to broaden their skills and to train them, so they can later train other teachers in their country”¹¹. Two years latter, another strategy of American public diplomacy was presented in the Congress, which was dedicated to Muslim world. The document is known as “Change your mind, gain the peace” and is considered to be a new leading strategy for the USA public diplomacy in Arab and Muslim world, and predicts measures which ought to be undertaken in this area, in order to convince the Arab and Muslim world to have a

⁹Op. cit. nye, pp. 45.

¹⁰Ibid, Nye, 44.

¹¹Beers, Charlotte. *Public Diplomacy Plans for the Future* (raport në Komitetin e Senatit amerikan për marrëdhënie të jashtme, 11 qershor 2002). Raporti gjendet në web faqen e Senatit: <http://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/BeersTestimony030227.pdf> pp. 6. (visited: May, 24, 2013)

different attitude toward American interest, American people and strategy.¹²

In September 2003, Governmental Office for public diplomacy, GAO¹³, introduced a study-report to the House of Representatives with detailed analyses and recommendations for the American Government about the strategy which should be applied in public diplomacy toward the Middle East, Asia, Africa, thus, on 4th of February 2009, Robert M. Hathaway, the director of Asian Program of International Studies Center Woodrow Wilson, gives to the President Obama the study of American public diplomacy toward Pakistan, one of the six largest countries by population in the world, a nuclear power and a non stabile state.

All these studies and reports pay special attention to the importance of educational exchanges and coming of foreign students in America, as a long-term manner of image rising because when those students return to their countries they speak with admiration for the country where they have been educated in. Moreover, as mentioned above, there are cases when they get powerful positions in their societies.

Kosovo and implementation of the communication strategy for image rising through education

But, how Kosovo can use education to settle friendship and raise its image in the world? Is Kosovo only a consumer of public diplomacy applied by other countries through education institutions they own in Kosovo, or is there a possibility for a long-term influence through students' exchanges?

¹²*Changing Minds, Winning Peace* (A new strategic direction for U.S. Public Diplomacy in the Arab & Muslim World), Report of the Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, October 1, 2003. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/24882.pdf> (visited: March, 6, 2012).

¹³*U.S. Public Diplomacy: State Department Expands Efforts but Faces Significant Challenges*, (2003) GAO Report to the Committee on International, September 2003. www.gao.gov/new.items/d03951.pdf (visited, March, 7, 2011)

Interactive actors in this sector need to be analyzed in order to get an answer on these questions: are there foreign students in Kosovo, are they provided by special quotas, are there scholarships available to students of countries where Kosovo aims to have its influence and raise its image?

Only this summer United States offered scholarships as a part of an agreement between the American Ambassador in Kosovo and the Prime Minister of the State, which was signed on 20th of July 2012, and thus predicting the education of 500 youths in American Colleges. Additionally, the Embassy has five or six other sponsoring programs for various exchange programs including students, science researchers and professionals¹⁴. There are also studying and sponsoring programs provided by Germany, Italy and France for Kosovo citizens. Countries such as Russia and China, since they have not recognized the new state, do not provide such offers, except for the Albanian students from Albania. China offered scholarships for Albania students in Peking, only in 2009; Russia has offered 30 scholarships to Albanians for university and Post University studies in Moscow¹⁵.

In Kosovo students with foreign citizenship are Albanians who come from neighboring countries inhabited by Albanians. The Ministry of Education does not provide a list or data about foreign students, it's considered that this number is uncountable and it is useless. Last year, at AAB-Riinvest University, three colored students from Maldives were attending their studies on the franchise program. Within the Ministry of Education of Kosovo, there is a department for international cooperation. However, it mainly deals with the coordination of development programs and European integrations.

Meanwhile, the University of Prishtina continuously organizes summer schools, gathering mainly foreign students and the only communicative language is English. This year, the 12th conference of "Prishtina International Summer University" was held and the

¹⁴http://pristina.usembassy.gov/culture_edu_xchnng.html

¹⁵Shqip - Newspaper, RussiaprovidesscholarshipsforAlbanians, Tirana, April, 23 2009, pp. 22. <http://www.gazeta-shqip.com/artikull.php?id=62924>

attendees were those studying on Masters and Doctoral level programs. This summer school has become annual, which during three weeks gathers many foreign professors and hundreds of students from Europe and wider, where the lectures are only in English, and cover various fields such as: law, social and natural sciences, engineering, etc.¹⁶.

This event, which is supported by Kosovo Ministry of Education, gives a chance to foreign students to spend some time in Kosovo and be able to learn about life, people, culture, customs as well as historical and cultural monuments through organized tours around Kosovo. Apart from this, there is The International Seminar of Albanian Language, Literature and Culture, that this year held its 31st conference.

Summer University and the Language Seminar are some events with quite limited participation expecting the same effect in countries where Kosovo aims to develop its public diplomacy since as a large number of foreign students could contribute after they finish their studies in Kosovo. The benefit of public diplomacy in building a better image should not only be enquired from countries qualified as Kosovo friends, but also where this friendship is missing. "The focus should be in countries which are more important for our concerns, not in those countries where it's easier to influence".¹⁷ The offer for raising the image of a country toward a foreign opinion, according to Anholt, should be wide and should include attributes, goods and the most important or motivated offers for the market. "...The reputation of a country should be directed carefully toward 'real' countries, regions, cities or demographic groups, commercial sectors or political decision makers... The image increases with the most precise, important and distinguishing qualities".¹⁸

¹⁶<http://www.uni-pr.edu/Studentet/Studentet-nderkombetare.aspx>
(visited: May, 22, 2013)

¹⁷Mark Leonard, *Public Diplomacy*, London, The Foreign Policy Centre, 2002, pp. 7.

¹⁸Simon Anholt, *Places, Identity, image and reputation*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp.. 67, 68.

However, it seems that Anholt's quotes, the founder of the notion "competitive identity", are being applied by countries which aim a greater influence in areas with a joined historical past, or when the efforts are used to influence in culture and religion, through well known activities such as cultural diplomacy. Although, there is no accurate data about the number and location of Islamic cultural foundations, some of them operate in Kosovo. Moreover, they help Kosovo Albanians in teaching or religious education. Turkey is developing and spreading cultural diplomacy through education. It has the largest number of students in its primary and secondary private schools in Prishtina, Lipjan, Prizren and Gjakova. This network of schools is present in all Albanian areas, shortly after 90s in Gostivar, Struge, as well as in Albania and Bosnia. These schools, which are known for quality and seriousness, one quarter of their teaching staff is Turkish. Whereas there are Turkish researchers in this area where Turkish colleges operate who consider it as a "Turkish essential artery of geopolitics and geo-culture in Balkans"¹⁹. In addition, there are high schools with religious names and clerics in Kosovo, such as, "Don Bosko" in the capital city, which is a professional vocational education school, the "Loyola" gymnasium in Prizren, etc.

Conclusion

According to research data it can be concluded that there is a presence of foreign education institutions in Kosovo with a slight cultural and religious backgrounds. However, on the contrary, these schools have proved a high quality working and teaching conditions. On the other side, there are no concrete efforts to bring foreign students in Kosovo, which would present a positive activity about the image of Kosovo assuming that when they return to their countries Kosovo would reinforce the friendship with foreign individuals - former students. While other countries offer scholarships for foreign students, this is

¹⁹Ahmet Davutoglu, *Thellësia strategjik: Pozita ndërkombëtare e Turqisë*, Shkup: Logos-A, 2010. pp.. 382.

not the case with Kosovo institutions. Even the presence of other education institutions in Kosovo prove that the country is mainly a consumer of foreign public and cultural diplomacy without a strategy to widespread this in foreign countries with the main intention to raise its image and reputation.

However, this rise should not be enquired in global level. It should be directed toward public where the interest is greater, not where the influence is indisputable, as often "foreign students" are considered Albanians with various citizenships from countries in the region. A global campaign in raising the image, such as the one with the sport for "Kosovars, the young Europeans" or other similar strategy, without a clear focus, is an effort which would hardly help reach the desired effects.

Therefore, the recommendation for Kosovo institutions would be to create a special fond from which quotas would be determined for countries and students who would be willing to come and study in Kosovo.

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