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PUBLIC DIPLOMACY OF UKRAINE IN KUWAIT: THINKING OUT OF THE BOX

Abstract. The paper considers Ukrainian public diplomacy events carried out by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine in cooperation with Ukrainian embassies overseas to strengthen the positive image of Ukraine in the international arena. The research has revealed that the modern concept of Ukrainian public diplomacy, which has replaced the outdated principle of cultural and humanitarian cooperation, is in need of new methods and ways of its implementation. In particular, what is implied here is harnessing the potential of digital diplomacy and crafting comprehensive multilateral projects involving both public and private actors. Such an approach will obviously require enhanced coordination among state bodies, public organisations and foundations as well as embracing modern digital technologies in the diplomatic agenda. Given the unprecedented nature of such initiatives in Ukraine's diplomatic service, one of the main aspects of this research was to model the perspectives of holding large-scale image events, especially in the field of digital diplomacy, by Ukrainian diplomatic missions abroad. Considering the multifaceted concept of public diplomacy, it is stated that none of the existing algorithms can ensure the success of practices in the realm of public diplomacy. On the other hand, numerous indices, such as *The Soft Power 30*, *Global Go To Think Tank Index*, and *Future Brand Country Index 2019*, evaluate country profiles in the field of public diplomacy by using mathematical methods. Based on the *Week of Ukraine in Kuwait 2020* and online projects initiated by the Embassy of Ukraine in the State of Kuwait, the article analyses the effectiveness of alternative approaches to the implementation of Ukrainian public diplomacy in Kuwait.

Keywords: public diplomacy, image-making projects, digital diplomacy, international image.

In the 21st century, the position of pieces on the chessboard of world politics is unstable along with the recipe for the state's success in the foreign policy arena. It has a new ingredient now – the so-called 'soft power'. Today, the notion of soft power, introduced into political parlance by J. Nye as early as the late 1980s, is associated with public diplomacy. Brilliant examples of the United States, the United Kingdom, France, the UAE, and Kuwait (which have been developing rapidly in recent decades) demonstrate the efficiency of cultural and education-

al projects harnessed to the service of the country's national interests. It is quite difficult to come up with a simple definition of such a multifaceted phenomenon as public diplomacy. However, it is safe to say that it is not an action but a long process encompassing a starry firmament of actors – diplomats, public figures and activists, representatives of various fields of science, media, NGOs, etc. Diplomats are rightfully considered to be the driving force of public diplomacy policies, although in volatile conditions of the modern world, the tools for implementing such policies cannot remain unchanged.

Certain aspects of this topic are covered by works of such authors as O. Rozumna, M. Protsiuk, O. Tyshchenko-Tyshkovets, and O. Opanasiuk. The problems of institutionalisation and modernisation of such practice are considered in scientific articles by O. Detsyk and N. Pipchenko. Practical issues of implementing public diplomacy policies are considered in articles of S. Korsunskyi and Ye. Haber. However, the question of the capacity for unorthodox solutions with regard to the mentioned context considered in this article remains unsolved.

The purpose of this article is to find out the effectiveness of alternative approaches to the implementation of public diplomacy of Ukraine in Kuwait, whose ultimate goal is to promote the national interests of the state. Proceeding from the aforementioned purpose, it is advisable to set the following tasks: to trace the key trends in Ukraine's public diplomacy through the lens of activities carried out by foreign diplomatic missions; to analyse creative projects implemented by the Embassy of Ukraine in the State of Kuwait in this realm; identify the advantages and disadvantages of unorthodox approaches with respect to achieving the goals of public diplomacy of Ukraine.

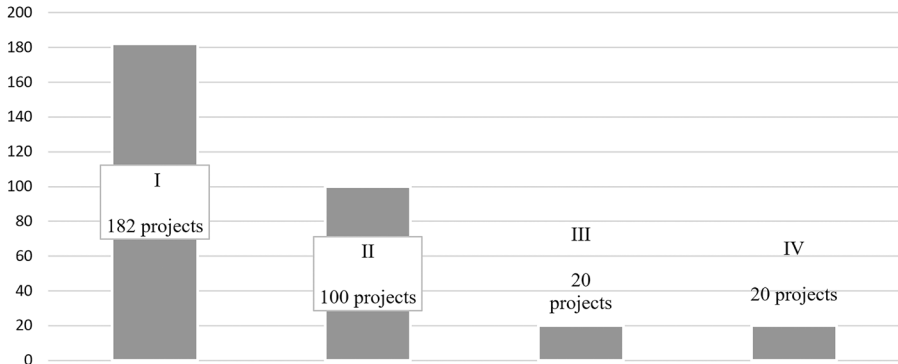
Public diplomacy can be internal (i.e. aimed at consolidating the society within its country and involving an active part of concerned citizens in national projects) and external. Export-oriented measures are designed to induce a non-coercive change in the political behaviour of foreign target audiences in favour of the influencing country. Thus, in the modern world, public diplomacy echoes the state's foreign policy interests, which illustrates its ambitions on the international arena. Basically, that a strategy of public diplomacy should be enshrined at the state level because it is the top-down approach that most effectively coordinates efforts and promotes the unification of different actors, both public and private, to achieve a common goal. If such a goal is to transform the target country into a political ally, then the process of public diplomacy as one of the mechanisms for achieving the intended goal has a number of stages. First of all, it is about disseminating high-quality and comprehensive information about one's country, building a long-term dialogue by translating the state's values, culture, and traditions. In this context, it is worth to highlight the role of foreign diplomatic missions in the policy of public diplomacy because it is diplomats who are the mediators between the two societies. Diplomatic officers are agents of understanding work-

ing at the border of two cultural codes as a connecting mechanism. However, there is no single and proven algorithm of action that would ensure the success. Each actor must find his or her own unique features and peculiarities to build a bridge of understanding and find common ground. Instead, there are a lot of mechanisms for determining the results of public diplomacy, which can be used to describe a certain country's success in implementing such policy. For example, the developers of the world rating *The Soft Power 30* emphasise that in today's world the palm of supremacy in the field of public diplomacy goes to those who know how to build thematic partner networks and attract new influential actors to join them. Based on the analysis of six indicators (government, culture, education, global engagement, entrepreneurship, and digitalisation) as well as an international opinion poll, this ranking compares the soft power potential of 61 countries in each geopolitical region. The stability of political institutions and the quality of diplomacy, the reputation of educational institutions, the attractiveness of the economic model, and other important factors have kept France and England high on the list over the last few years (McClory, 2019). Another index, the *Global Go To Think Tank Index Report*, assesses trends and challenges for think tanks around the world to determine their role in building or modernising political institutions. The analysis is based on a study of 6,500 think tanks around the world and shows the activity of individual actors in a global network of topical issues. In 2019, several Ukrainian organisations (O. Razumkov Ukrainian Centre for Economic and Political Studies, I. Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives, Dnipro Centre for Social Research, etc.) were included in the *Global Go To Think Tank Index Report*, which testifies to the revitalisation of Ukrainian civil society in the processes of development of their state (McGann, 2020). The *2019 Future Brand Country Index* reflects the country's attractiveness in terms of its investment and tourism potential, living comfort, and the quality of its national products. The pillars on which the country's brand rests – value system, quality of life, business opportunities, industry, and cultural heritage – formed the basis of this index, where Ukraine ranked 74th globally (Future Brand Country Index, 2019).

The foreign and domestic political situation in Ukraine has now evolved to the point where neglecting the opportunity and the need to assert itself in the international arena with a clear, long-term, and strategically-balanced policy of public diplomacy objectively leads to the erosion of Ukraine's positive international image in the world by filling information gaps with many myths and stereotypes (Protsiuk, 2016). It was with a view to consolidating the positive perception of Ukraine abroad that the budget programme 1401110 'Financial support for the international positive image of Ukraine, ensuring the activities of the Ukrainian Institute, measures to maintain ties with Ukrainians living outside Ukraine' was developed, according to which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in cooperation with foreign diplomatic missions of Ukraine annually plans and implements image-making

projects. In 2020, in terms of promoting the positive international image, Ukraine’s foreign ministry has planned more than 300 events in various fields. These projects reveal the potential of cultural, educational, sports, and expert diplomacy, aiming to create a positive information background about Ukraine and attract the attention of foreign target audiences to our country (MFA, 2020).

Picture 1. The distribution of image-making projects of the MFA of Ukraine by area, 2020



- I. Fairs, festivals, conferences, art evenings, expos, and presentations.
- II. Expert diplomacy: study visits and press tours to Ukraine for foreign experts.
- III. Coverage of Ukraine in foreign media.
- IV. Creation of audio-visual, digital, and printed content about Ukraine.

Compiled by the authors based on budget programme 1401110

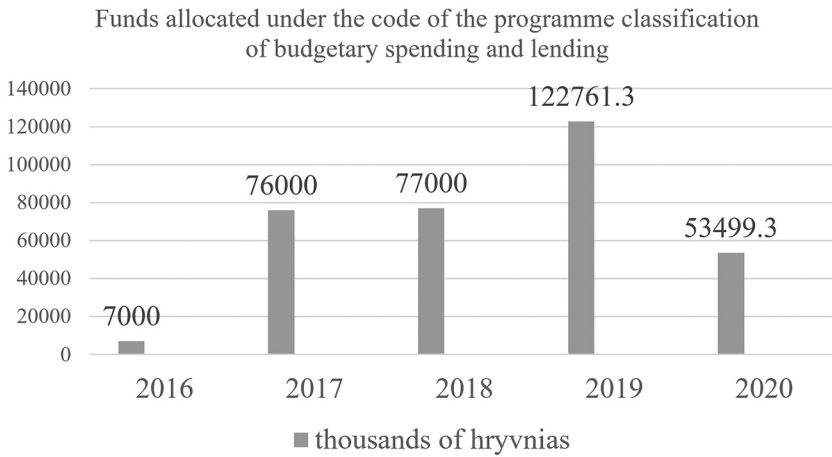
Quite a few of the projects planned are aimed at promoting contemporary Ukrainian art. Such pioneering initiatives as collective street art, murals, and Ukrainian-language audiobooks are intended to raise the interest of a wide foreign audience. The tendency to modernise the tools of Ukraine’s public diplomacy echoes the ambitious plans of the Ukrainian Institute, which include sociological research on the perception of Ukraine among foreign audiences, enrichment of Ukrainian-language Wikipedia, staging Ukrainian plays in foreign theatres, launching Ukraine’s culinary diplomacy, inventing the concept of the modern Ukrainian souvenir, and much more.

Over quite a short history of its development, Ukraine’s public diplomacy has made a qualitative leap towards the best world practices. From the outdated concept of ‘cultural and humanitarian cooperation’, which mostly provided only for situational projects to mark anniversaries, Ukraine’s public diplomacy has moved to the level of proactive planning and strategy development. Not the least role in this process was played by the institutionalisation of such practices. Thus, in the structure of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, a relevant unit for public diplomacy was established accompanied by a number of state-level documents regulating this area. What is meant is, first of all, the

Strategy for Sustainable Development Ukraine – 2020 and the Concept of Promoting Ukraine in the World and Promoting the Interests of Ukraine in the Global Information Space. In addition, specialised organisations, such as the GDIP SE, play an important role in promulgating the achievements of bilateral relations between states and creating a favourable ambience for like-minded professionals, particularly in researched field.

However, long-term issues related to funding and staffing may slow down the further development of public diplomacy in Ukraine, as many initiatives in this area exhibit untapped potential due to the abovementioned factors.

Picture 2. The allocation of funds of Ukraine's state budget to image-making projects



Compiled by the authors based on the Law of Ukraine on the State Budget of Ukraine for the period from 2016 to 2020

In the face of the globally deteriorating epidemiological situation, the beaten track of public diplomacy events, providing for mass gatherings, remains inadequately available. Besides, one more encouraging factor for alternative solutions is a serious cutback in expenditures for cultural and artistic projects.

In the light of the aforesaid, quite a few relevant initiatives of Ukraine in Kuwait have proved to be effective. In general, over the recent years Ukraine has stepped up its public diplomacy efforts in Kuwait, as confirmed by a number of successfully implemented projects. The range of Ukraine's such events includes a decent presentation of Ukrainian culture, medicine, education, sports, science, tourism, etc. Within certain projects, a powerful potential of digital diplomacy was also unleashed (Embassy of Ukraine in Kuwait, 2020).

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Ukraine and Kuwait, the Days of Ukrainian Culture in the State of Kuwait were held twice, in 2012 and 2015. The attention of Kuwaiti audience was called to the best artistic and

folk ensembles of Ukraine and specimens of traditional art and modern filmmaking. The flashy presentation of Ukrainian culture in Kuwait gave rise to other joint projects, to wit: translation of Ukrainian fiction into Arabic, further visits of Ukrainian artists and musicians to Kuwait, etc.

In the present study, we are going to focus on two comprehensive projects, namely the *Week of Ukraine in the State of Kuwait 2020* and events of digital diplomacy, as precisely these pioneering frameworks are characterised by the unorthodox approach to implementing policies in the field of public diplomacy.

The *Week of Ukraine in the State of Kuwait 2020* is a large-scale image-making event encompassing trade and economic, cultural and artistic, and educational and sporting events aimed at strengthening the attention of Kuwaitis to our state and encouraging bilateral cooperation. Every day of the Week was devoted to separate domains of Kuwaiti-Ukrainian relations, including economy, culture, sports, art, and education. The unifying element of the whole project was a common motto *Business, Culture, Education, Art, Sports – Events that Unite Ukraine and Present It to the World (Embassy of Ukraine in Kuwait, 2020)*.

The starting day of the Week was devoted to sporting events, the first of which was artistic gymnastics training for children in a Kuwaiti school. The same day also featured a sports conference with the participation of subject-matter experts from Ukraine and Kuwait, followed by an evening friendly football match between Dynamo-Dubai-Kuwait FC (Ukraine) and Striker Academy FC (Kuwait).

The second day of the *Week of Ukraine in the State of Kuwait 2020* was opened by the Ukrainian pianist and composer Yevhen Khmara, who delivered a solo piano concert at Kuwait Higher Institute of Musical Arts. The concert hall of the institute featured a photo exhibition devoted to Ukrainian Unity Day and the children's art exhibition *Happy Child – Prosperous Ukraine* prepared by the Ukrainian Yelysavethrad gallery from Kropyvnytskyi. It bears mentioning that exactly after Yevhen Khmara's performance, the management of the institute expressed an interest in Ukrainian music conservatories with studying, internship, and competence building opportunities for Kuwaiti students.

The central event of the Week was a two-day Kuwaiti-Ukrainian business forum, which brought together nearly 25 companies from Ukraine to present progressive achievements in the field of smart technologies, light and food industry, healthcare, fashion, investment opportunities, etc.

An artistic show of Ukrainian fashion houses and a concert of the Ukrainian Kyiv Classic symphony orchestra under the guidance of Herman Makarenko, during which the Kuwaiti audience listened to the finest examples of Ukrainian and Arabic music, made an indelible impression on the guests, as Middle Eastern motifs in the works of Ukrainian artists made it clear that art industry can uncover commonalities even in glaringly different cultural codes.

The penultimate day of the Week was marked by a range of educational events at Kuwaiti University with the participation of Ukrainian and Kuwaiti pedagogues, experts, and student youth. Lectures were followed by planting trees in the university's inner yard as a token of friendship and cooperation between Ukrainian and Kuwaiti students. On the same day, the Embassy of Ukraine in the State of Kuwait held a diplomatic reception on the occasion of Ukrainian Unity Day, where prominent Ukrainian artists Yevhen Khmara and Kateryna Vovchuk performed original music and vocal compositions.

In conclusion of the *Week of Ukraine in Kuwait 2020*, the premises of the embassy hosted a masterclass on pysanka art and painting for pupils of the Sunday school at the embassy, after which the children received souvenirs with Ukrainian symbols (Embassy of Ukraine in Kuwait, 2020).

Especially brilliant was a five-day illuminating action at Kuwait Towers, the state's major tourist attraction, with blue and yellow lights flashing on the buildings. It was the first time the colours of the Ukrainian flag adorned Kuwaiti starry firmament throughout the *Week of Ukraine in Kuwait 2020* (Embassy of Ukraine in Kuwait, 2020).

The unprecedented density of public diplomacy events during the entire Week resulted in the project's overall success, as every event announced the next one, thus drawing the attention of an ever greater audience comprising Kuwaiti high-profile officials, representatives of the diplomatic corps and business of Kuwait, journalists as well as the Ukrainian expatriate community. The Week's media coverage surpassed all expectations, with the events of these image-making projects being broadcast in 13 video features of Kuwaiti TV channels along with three television interviews with the Ambassador of Ukraine to Kuwait, and 23 publications in English and Arabic newspapers of Kuwait. The series of events carried out within the *Week of Ukraine in Kuwait 2020* has secured a network of positive feedback, assessments, and publications about Ukraine in Kuwaiti and foreign media.

With respect to covering the topic of Ukraine in overseas media outlets, it is worth mentioning the role of social networks, as it is this virtual fora that opinion leaders and bloggers use as an information platform. Based on the example of the *Week of Ukraine in Kuwait 2020*, which covered an audience of 30,000 people on the embassy's Facebook page, it is safe to say that digital diplomacy is a highly promising development path for public diplomacy.

The embassy's online projects were launched in September 2019, when followers of the embassy's page in Facebook were invited to participate in an intellectual brain ring on the occasion of International Literacy Day.

On 22 December 2019, the Day of Ukrainian Diplomatic Service, there was held an online contest for the best lyrics about Ukrainian diplomats entitled *Diplomat's Hymn, or Diplomacy is a Vocation*. Initiated by O. Balanutsa, Ambassador

of Ukraine to the State of Kuwait, the project brought together authors, including several members of the National Writers' Union of Ukraine, prizewinners of various literature awards, teachers, journalists, professors, students, etc. The jury was composed of members coming from all over Ukraine: Vinnytsia, Zhytomyr, Kyiv, Kropyvnytskyi as well as places in Zaporizhzhia, Lviv, and Odesa regions. Ukrainians living abroad also sent their poems from the United Arab Emirates and Tunisia. The winners and runners-up were awarded certificates and prizes, with the other participants receiving certificates of participation and the best poems published on the website of the Embassy of Ukraine in Kuwait and in social networks. The essence and results of the contest were also sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine with a prospect of continuing such practices in the future.

There have also been held quite a few education, sporting, and art events via Skype conferences and video statements. Online projects like the first ever bilateral video link between two schools from Ukraine and Kuwait have proved to be an effective analogue to offline events due to a number of reasons. First and foremost, in the digital era, the role of civil figures among the actors of public diplomacy has significantly grown, thus making social networks a convenient forum for launching ambitious projects. Advertising and announcing events initiated as well as collecting relevant analytics have become generally available precisely because of social networks uniting around themselves a record-breaking audience: 4.54 billion out of 7.75 billion people in the world are Internet users, of which 3.8 billion are active users of social networks. By appealing to the sphere of emotions and empathy, social networks enable interpersonal interaction and assessment of reactions to the message transmitted. Finally, image-making projects in virtual form are quite reasonably priced due to cost reduction for premises rental and maintenance. After all, an information opportunity may be created by only engaging internal intellectual and creative resources.

The listed advantages of comprehensive public diplomacy events like the *Week of Ukraine in Kuwait 2020* or digital projects can be supplemented by another important factor, namely a rapidly growing activities in a foreign information area, which improve the perception of a state by nationals, politicians, and business people of the receiving state, whilst also fostering a decent positioning of national cultural products on the world arena.

Still, planning and holding such an ambitious event as the *Week of Ukraine in Kuwait 2020* requires an exceptional mobilisation of available resources and continuous preparatory work. Organising an endless array of events over a short period of time also requires management skills and engaging a wide range of partners and sponsors. As for digital diplomacy projects, integration of new technologies into the diplomat's current work is a difficult and quite a long process, which has to begin with a comprehensive and substantial training. Any novelty in

a conservative environment always faces misunderstanding before becoming an accepted norm. Besides, inevitable openness and increased transparency coming together with social networks do not always correlate with the established work mode of most representatives of the diplomatic corps.

Conclusion. The brief overview of public diplomacy events initiated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine in cooperation with foreign diplomatic missions allowed us to find out that Ukraine is rapidly developing this policy based on the example of world's leaders in the field. This is confirmed by the declared departure from obsolescent norms of 'cultural and humanitarian cooperation' in favour of proactive planning and strategic practices of public diplomacy. Recent tendencies in regard to new modes of communication and promotion of Ukraine's modern achievements in all fields continue in projects of Ukrainian embassies successfully implementing various projects backed by specialised budget programmes.

It is justified that in the face of a limited staff and financial resources there is a demand for unorthodox approaches to realising public diplomacy. The main advantages and disadvantages of alternative approaches have been defined basing on the example of creative projects carried out by the Embassy of Ukraine in the State of Kuwait in this field.

Proceeding from the aforesaid, it is assumed that such unorthodox decisions in the domain of public diplomacy as holding comprehensive ambitious image-making projects with a substantial number of cross-sectional events as well as pioneering projects of digital diplomacy have proved their high effectiveness and measurable productivity. Nonetheless, these areas have not yet lived up to their full potential. It is for this reason that research in this field, particularly the interaction of public and private actors with a view to implementing multilateral public diplomacy projects has to become a subject of further scientific discussions.