



The Role of Cultural Diplomacy and Friendship Associations in International Relations

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Received: 07.07.2025

Accepted: 06.08.2025

Published: 14.08.2025

Abstract: The role of non-governmental organizations is currently considered to be the manifestation of the formal and organized presence of the people of a country in foreign relations and the interaction process of the world community; therefore, friendship associations are considered one of the influential players in the field of public diplomacy.

The developments of recent decades in the international arena indicate that the role of friendship associations, public institutions, and informal organizations in global dynamics is expanding, and in parallel, the role of states in this relationship is decreasing.

Since associations play a role in two key areas, namely relations between nations and the international environment, their scope of activity and activism is very broad and widely recognized.

Today, relying solely on classical methods is in no way sufficient to meet the needs of modern diplomacy.

The increasing ability to access vast amounts of information and the speed of its transmission to audiences in the far corners of the world has challenged the management of foreign policy by states.

Traditional hierarchical models, in the shadow of communication technology, have inadvertently given way to complex networks without central control, and diplomacy can now be interpreted as an interwoven mechanism of government, media, and public opinion.

On the other hand, there is no doubt that the era of domination and the hegemony of hard power has passed, and in the modern and post-modern world, what determines the direction and process of affairs in relations between states and especially nations more than any other factor is the power of thought, dialogue, the pen, mutual understanding, and human relations.

Achieving political, security, and economic goals has always been one of the most important aims of countries in formulating and implementing their foreign policies. To achieve these goals, countries have traditionally pursued a type of diplomacy based on political, military, and economic approaches and tools; however, in the early years of the third millennium, relatively new approaches to diplomacy have been proposed that recommend greater attention and emphasis on cultural approaches and tools for foreign policymakers and planners. This article aims to explain cultural diplomacy, the role of friendship associations in international relations, the impact of cultural factors on diplomacy, and how to effectively use “soft power” to advance countries’ diplomacy.

Keywords: Cultural Diplomacy, Friendship Associations, International Relations.

Cite this Article

Prof. Dr. M. Ekram. YAWAR, Dr. Mehmet. U, The Role of Cultural Diplomacy and Friendship Associations in International Relations (2025) *GRS Journal of Arts and Educational Sciences* , Vol-1(Iss-2).34-43

Introduction

In the era of cultural relations, the opening of new areas in cultural interactions between nations and the approach to creative methods and innovations have become particularly important. The formation of cultural diplomacy is a continuation of this trend and has led to its use as an effective and powerful tool in the global arena, providing opportunities for the improvement and development of relations between states, the growth of understanding between nations, and the strengthening of regional and global ties.

Today, cultural diplomacy holds great importance in ensuring the long-term interests and national security of every country and has led to the improvement of national image, influence in public opinion, and the expansion of cultural exchanges and contacts between countries. On the other hand, cultural diplomacy has played a decisive role in strengthening the global position, national power, and reducing security threats of every country.

Therefore, establishing relationships with friendship associations, non-governmental organizations, networks, and civil society actors

in other countries and recognizing their role in cultural diplomacy as analytical agents and creators of cultural soft power for greater influence and impact is a vital strategy in the field of international relations.

The three characteristics of being voluntary, non-profit, and non-political have enabled these associations and organizations to be present in the field of international cultural relations with spontaneity, participation, legitimacy, and responsibility, and with greater flexibility to operationalize their goals, reduce vulnerability, achieve easier influence in the target society, and attain the desired and more dignified effectiveness.

In this way, the emergence and rise of friendship associations and non-governmental organizations have transformed the scene of global and international relations. These institutions have now become inevitable elements of human social life in both domestic and global societies; especially since the cultural activities of such institutions can provide many possibilities, opportunities, and capacities to cultural relations institutions and decision-makers, thus enabling a transformation in cultural relations to achieve lofty ideals and religious and human values through the creation of new tools and methods. Therefore, under the new conditions prevailing in world cultural relations, friendship associations will play a role as symbols of non-governmental organizations and a reflection of the interest of human groups in the common destiny of humanity.

The main question of the article is: What is the position and major role of friendship associations in the development of cultural diplomacy and international relations? The hypothesis is thus put forward that the main role of friendship associations is to understand the cultural policies of the countries of origin and destination, gain international visibility among peoples and nations, influence their behavior, and create scientific institutions and a new culture in order to establish more peaceful relations between different societies.

Theoretical Foundations: Cultural Diplomacy

Diplomacy is often defined as the **art of managing a state's interactions with the external world**. Traditionally, diplomacy has operated within three core domains of foreign policy: **politics, economics, and security**. These areas have long constituted the foundation upon which states design and implement their foreign policies, all in pursuit of securing national interests.

However, a growing body of international relations theory highlights the importance of a **fourth dimension: culture**. Cultural elements not only complement but often underpin the political, economic, and security dimensions of foreign policy. Culture shapes values, identities, and perceptions—factors that can significantly influence diplomatic success or failure.

A key question in this area is whether the design of a dynamic, successful diplomacy depends on cultural depth and originality. Does a country's ancient, rich, and influential culture provide the necessary institutional foundation for progressive diplomacy? To what extent does culture contribute to the education of skilled diplomats and the shaping of international engagements?

Scholars and theorists have offered various definitions of cultural diplomacy that emphasize its communicative and cooperative nature. **Frank Ninkovich** describes cultural diplomacy as an

effort to enhance communication and interaction between nations with the aim of fostering mutual understanding and establishing agreements grounded in shared values (Ninkovich, 1996, p. 3).

Similarly, **Gifford Malone** defines cultural diplomacy as a **two-way communication process that creates channels for both introducing a nation's true image and values to the world, and simultaneously gaining an accurate understanding of other nations' cultures and perspectives** (Malone, 1988, p. 12).

Milton Cummings expands this further, defining cultural diplomacy as **the exchange of ideas, information, art, lifestyles, value systems, traditions, and beliefs in order to foster mutual understanding and strengthen relationships between nations** (Cummings, 2003, p. 1).

Building on these definitions, **Seyed Reza Salehi Amiri** and **Saeed Mohammadi** view cultural diplomacy as **an active effort to engage with and influence public opinion, institutions, and governments in other countries**. Through this process, a nation presents its culture to the global community, while also participating in bilateral and multilateral exchanges of cultural characteristics. Accordingly, one of the most delicate challenges in strategic cultural management lies in leveraging cultural tools and capacities to shape perceptions, build influence, and ultimately impact both foreign publics and policymakers.

The field of **public cultural diplomacy** plays a crucial role in ensuring that the cultural identity and ideological foundations of a nation—reflected in its theoretical frameworks, policy-making processes, decision-making models, and behavioral patterns—are accurately conveyed to global public opinion. Through cultural diplomacy, a nation's true image can find its rightful place within the international system.

Without such efforts, there is a risk that distorted or inaccurate representations of a nation's cultural system may dominate the global narrative. This misrepresentation can pave the way for international misunderstandings, and in some cases, may even foster a global consensus or bias against a nation's rich cultural heritage and civilizational values.

Given the **long-term impact and enduring relevance** of cultural diplomacy, it is essential for scholars, policymakers, and cultural strategists to deeply understand the **sensitivity of this field**, and to prioritize **investment, education, and strategic policy-making**. One of the most pressing needs in this area is the training and development of a skilled, culturally literate human resource—professionals who are deeply familiar with both the cultural foundations of their own society and the global trends that shape international public opinion. They must also be proficient in intercultural communication and diplomacy within the world system (Salehi Amiri & Mohammadi, 2016, p. 14).

By drawing on the shared themes in various definitions, cultural diplomacy can be broadly understood as **the narration of a civilization's story to the people of other civilizations, using tools and methods that resonate with them**. In this sense, cultural diplomacy finds its true meaning when a country employs **appropriate and familiar mechanisms** to introduce and transmit the **hidden treasures of its culture and civilization** to foreign audiences. Crucially, this must also be reflected and integrated within the country's broader foreign policy agenda.

Goals and Principles of Cultural Diplomacy

The main goals and guiding principles of cultural diplomacy include:

1. **Gaining international respect** among nations and peoples, and influencing their behavior through cultural engagement.
2. **Establishing scientific and cultural institutions** and promoting new cultural frameworks to support more inclusive and constructive relations between societies.
3. **Developing a deep and accurate understanding** of the cultural principles of other nations, and exploring the social and cultural roots of foreign societies to enhance mutual understanding.
4. **Understanding the cultural policies of the country of origin**, in order to accurately represent and transmit its values abroad.
5. **Understanding the cultural policies of the host or destination country**, in order to align efforts with the local cultural context.
6. **Recognizing and leveraging culture as a form of soft power**, capable of shaping international behavior and perception (Haqiqi, 2007, pp. 76–77).

Cultural Diplomacy and the Concept of Soft Power

According to many international relations theorists, **cultural diplomacy is one of the clearest and most effective manifestations of soft power**. Unlike hard power—which relies on coercion or economic leverage—soft power enables countries to **influence, attract, and build cooperation** through the projection of culture, values, ideas, and shared identities.

Through cultural diplomacy, states are able to **shape international perceptions** and encourage collaboration by appealing to shared human values, historical bonds, and mutual interests. This approach not only fosters peaceful international relations but also enhances a country's long-term strategic position in the global community.

According to Joseph Nye, one of the most prominent thinkers in this field, such an approach stands in stark contrast to hard power, which emphasizes “military force and coercive power.” He believes that soft power is “the ability of a state to achieve its desired goals through attraction rather than through the use of coercive force.” Nye sees soft power as being facilitated through means such as expanding and deepening ties with allies and promoting cultural exchange.

From his point of view, such a policy ultimately leads to increased popularity among the public opinion of the target country and earns states greater status, credibility, and international respect (Nye, 2003, p. 15).

In general, what can be understood from the views of scholars in defining soft power is that it is the product of creating a positive image, presenting an appealing national identity, and gaining credibility in the minds of both domestic and global audiences. It is the ability to influence others indirectly, through consent rather than force.

Today, this interpretation of power stands in contrast to hard power—military strength and coercion—which relies on pressure and physical force. Soft power, by contrast, is the ability to shape the preferences of others through persuasion. In *The Use of Soft Power*, Nye states that soft power focuses specifically on occupying the mental space of another country through attraction. When a country possesses soft power, it can use information and knowledge to resolve disputes and reframe conflicts in ways that serve its interests (Nye, 2003, p. 10).

Soft power also includes rational dialogue and public values. Its primary target is foreign public opinion, and secondarily domestic audiences.

Therefore, it can be said that soft power is a type of behavior that combines visibility with intangible attractiveness. In both soft and cultural power, the investment is made in mindsets, and attraction is used to create common ground among values and aspirations.

From this perspective, soft power refers to those abilities and capacities that, by using tools such as culture, ideals, and moral values, influence the behavior or resources of other countries indirectly.

Thus, according to Nye, “*soft power (cultural power) is exercised when a country gets other countries to want what it wants.*” This ability is tied to intangible assets such as culture, ideology, and institutions (Schiller, 1998, p. 100).

Some of the factors that generate or enhance soft power include: the promotion of language and literature, the propagation of ideals and values, ideological positioning, extensive diplomatic relations, cultural exchange, projecting a desirable national image, using information and culture for diplomatic purposes, developing sound strategies and policies, correcting negative historical perceptions, gaining international status, scientific and technological advancement, economic strength, shaping and influencing public opinion, affecting beliefs and attitudes, operating global media networks, producing and distributing media content internationally, and maintaining a strong presence in international media (Nye, 2003, p. 45).

In addition, appropriate conduct in international affairs, unified positions during global crises, humanitarian assistance, adherence to international standards and human rights, support for environmental movements, participation in peace initiatives and peacekeeping forces, forming friendship associations with other countries, and active participation in cultural organizations and consultations all play a key role in generating and strengthening cultural power (Milson, 2009, p. 56).

Some scholars have also pointed to other factors that influence both soft and hard power, including: geographical advantages (access to water and air routes, land area, geopolitical position), population and human resources, industrial capacity, communication networks, scientific talent, innovation, administrative competence, ideology and ethics, public awareness, leadership capacity, and national spirit (Kazemi, 1990, p. 138).

In general, the defining characteristics of soft power are its **people-centered** and **informal** nature. Unlike hard power, soft power can generate narratives and discourse that align with public opinion, without requiring coercion. It creates space for local, regional, and global narratives to be developed and communicated freely to global audiences (Kharazi & Mohammadvand, 2009, pp. 117–118).

It is important to note that soft power should not be confused with populism or superficial public discourse. Rather, cultural power (soft power) involves **specializing, intellectualizing, and rationalizing the concept of power** across all fields (Mushfiq, 2007, p. 4).

Therefore, the use of culture and cultural tools in diplomacy offers many advantages over traditional instruments and mechanisms in international relations. The most important of these advantages can be described as follows:

Advantages of Cultural Diplomacy

1. Lower Resistance in Target Societies

One of the key advantages of cultural diplomacy is its ability to encounter less resistance in target countries. A major reason states often fail to achieve their foreign policy goals abroad is the resistance that emerges from within the target societies. Because culture and cultural tools often engage the subconscious and influence deeper layers of individual and collective thought, cultural diplomacy tends to penetrate more subtly and persistently. As a result, it often achieves deeper and more lasting influence compared to traditional diplomatic tools.

2. Absence of Hostility and Domination

Another strength of cultural diplomacy lies in its **non-hostile, non-impositional tone**. Its inherent attractiveness and the "non-threatening nature" of its actions enable it to connect with audiences more effectively. Diplomacy aimed at winning minds and hearts must avoid evoking perceptions of hostility, negativity, or domination. When a nation addresses others—whether at the governmental or societal level—in a confrontational or authoritarian manner, it usually faces resistance, diminished acceptance, and increased costs, regardless of the diplomatic guarantees in place.

3. Greater Role for Civil Society and Informal Actors

Cultural diplomacy allows greater space for **non-state actors, civil society institutions, and informal contributors** to participate. These actors, including NGOs, cultural associations, and grassroots organizations, can engage in ways that traditional diplomacy cannot. Their participation significantly broadens the reach, flexibility, and influence of cultural diplomacy in comparison to classical diplomacy.

4. Promotion of Shared and Universal Values

Cultural diplomacy aims to identify, define, and promote **shared values and common interests** across nations. Within that framework, it works to secure national interests in alignment with these shared principles, fostering a more cooperative and constructive international environment.

5. Facilitating Deeper Understanding and Long-Term Relations

Cultural diplomacy contributes to the development of **mutual understanding** between countries, which, over time, can lead to **deep and lasting cultural ties**. These ties often extend beyond culture into political and security domains, helping establish stable and peaceful bilateral or multilateral relationships.

6. Creative and Flexible Implementation

Unlike traditional diplomacy, cultural diplomacy offers greater room for **creativity, flexibility, and strategic opportunism**. It can serve as a powerful platform for showcasing a nation's historical legacy, scientific achievements, artistic talents, and cultural expressions—such as literature, poetry, cinema, and music. This creative potential makes cultural diplomacy an essential instrument for building soft power and national identity on the global stage.

Cultural Diplomacy in Practice: Global Case Studies

Countries such as the **United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Austria, Australia, Canada, and Japan** have integrated cultural diplomacy as a **central component of their foreign policy strategies**.

- **France** has long committed itself to promoting French culture as a cornerstone of its foreign policy. Cultural exchange and dialogue—especially with European nations and beyond—are viewed as key pillars of French diplomatic outreach.
- **The United Kingdom and Australia** prioritize what they term "**international cultural relations**" as a fundamental goal of foreign policy. These countries aim to project a **positive global image** through strengthening cultural exchanges and promoting the export of cultural products and values.
- For **Canada**, foreign policy rests on three foundational pillars: politics, economy, and culture. A cooperative partnership with other global cultures is seen as a strategic direction and core principle within Canadian diplomacy.
- The **Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs** also views international cultural policy as an **integral element of foreign policy**, based on sustained **cultural dialogue** with other nations.
- **Japan**, too, defines cultural diplomacy—referred to as "**cultural interactions and exchanges**"—as a vital part of its foreign policy. It views cultural engagement as a means to **foster mutual understanding, promote trust, and encourage tolerance and dialogue** among civilizations, while also recognizing **cultural diversity and pluralism** as fundamental global values (Khani, 2005, pp. 144–146).

Friendship Associations

Friendship associations are a special type of non-governmental organization that is often formed by the elites of a country with the aim of developing and strengthening friendly relations with other countries. The structure of these associations is similar to other NGOs that operate in various fields in line with national interests (Rezaei and Nejadlatfi, 2012, p. 47).

Non-governmental organizations, or people's organizations, currently play an active role in the global community and are considered a suitable cultural presence in terms of nations' participation in world affairs. These organizations operate at both national and subnational levels.

Modern forms of these organizations have existed since the first half of the twentieth century. Over time, their real and practical roles—especially in scientific, cultural, environmental, and humanitarian fields—have grown significantly and reached a peak.

Friendship associations were formally established in 1965 with the support of UNESCO. Since then, their decisive role in international interactions has steadily increased.

These institutions can act as valuable advisors to governmental bodies as well as other non-governmental and international organizations. They also have the necessary potential and capacity to expand scientific and cultural ties, develop friendly relations between different societies, and strengthen national and global peace and friendship.

This is why friendship associations are increasingly growing and developing both quantitatively and qualitatively.

With the expansion of new communication networks and media, which have created a new public space, new actors have entered the arena of global civil society. These include formal social organizations independent of governments, whose goals are to pursue shared values and objectives across social, cultural, technical, and economic fields.

These actors, using tools such as online political platforms, media influence, information dissemination, public mobilization, and organizing capabilities, are working to increase their impact on the policymaking and decision-making processes of governments and the international system.

States cannot afford to ignore these organizations, especially in light of their diplomatic responsibilities. In response to the growing role of these actors in shaping norms, rules, and global governance, the concept of **new public diplomacy** has emerged.

Friendship associations are important for two main reasons. First, they are specialized and effective institutions in the realm of informal and public diplomacy. Their purpose is to develop friendly, people-to-people relations. Second, they have a clear mission in the cultural sphere. One of their main organizational goals, based on both international practice and their internal statutes, is to develop cultural relations between two countries.

Since friendship associations operate in two key domains—relations between nations and engagement in the international environment—their field of activity is broad and diverse.

In other words, in addition to the political relations and formal interactions that fall under the sovereignty of states, these associations are able to work in other fields, especially **culture, society, science, academia, economics, health, humanitarian work, and environmental protection**.

Naturally, with their strong structures, friendship associations can be active participants in the process of engaging with the global community. They represent an important cultural force for nations in today's world, participating in a wide range of matters at both national and international levels.

These associations reflect the efforts of nations to **deepen solidarity, brotherhood, and friendship**, and to benefit from the accumulated experiences of human societies. They contribute to institutionalizing various kinds of international cooperation.

Friendship associations can also serve as **valuable advisors** to both governmental and non-governmental organizations. With their appropriate capacity and capabilities, they help **expand scientific**

and cultural ties, develop friendly international relations, and strengthen national and global peace and friendship.

Friendship Associations as Public Organizations in the International System

Friendship Associations are public organizations in the international system that are not directly considered as part of the state structure, but play a very important role as intermediaries between individual people and the ruling powers and even society itself.

Many humanitarian organizations are non-profit and independent of the state, and their budgets are financed through public donations and, in some cases, with the help of governmental organizations, the state, or a combination of these methods. A non-governmental organization is a group of individuals or legal entities that are established voluntarily in accordance with relevant regulations and have non-profit and non-political goals. The organization's activities include some of the following: scientific, cultural, social, sports, artistic, charitable, humanitarian, charitable, social welfare, support, health and medicine, rehabilitation, environment, urban development, and the like, or a combination of them.

Three stages or periods of the evolution of NGOs were identified by Courton in 1990 in his paper “Three Periods of the Formation of Voluntary Activities.”

In the first stage, a specific type of humanitarian organization took shape, focusing on education and welfare, and providing relief services directly to the beneficiaries. Food distribution, shelter provision, and health services were examples of such humanitarian organizations.

In fact, the NGOs at this stage identified the daily needs of the people and worked to meet them. In the second stage of development, the NGOs became smaller in size and scope and transformed into independent and self-sufficient local groups. At this stage of development, the NGOs expanded the capabilities of local communities to meet their needs through “independent local action”. Korten calls the third stage of the evolution and formation of NGOs “the development of systems of governance.” In this stage, NGOs attempt to bring about changes in policies and institutions at the domestic, national, and international levels; they move away from their previous role of providing operational services and assume a catalytic role. Gradually, this organization changed its nature from “Public Relief Organization” to “Public Development and Civilization Organization.”

Although voluntary associations of citizens have existed throughout history, non-governmental organizations, most of which are seen today, especially at the international level, have developed in the last two centuries. The basic structure of non-governmental organizations emerged in the nineteenth century. In 1924, the International Federation of Associations (IFAs) began to classify NGOs. However, before that, the first activities related to the formation of international NGOs began in 1839. For example, the International Law Institute (Nobel Peace Prize laureate (1904)) was founded in 1873 in Ghent, Belgium. The International Parliamentary Union was founded in 1889, and the International Labour Office (Nobel Peace Prize laureate (1910)) was founded in 1892 in Bern, Switzerland. Of course, voluntary associations of citizens have existed throughout history, one of the first such organizations being the International Red Cross, which was founded in 1863. Established.

The term “non-governmental organizations” came into existence with the establishment of the United Nations in 1945, as set out in Article 71 of Chapter 10 of the Charter of the United Nations.

The **first** definition of “international non-governmental organizations” is related to ECOSOC Resolution 288 of February 27, 1950, which states that “any international organization not established by international treaty or agreement is a non-governmental organization” (Musfa, 398, 2007). The process of globalization in the 20th century led to the rise of public organizations. Many problems could not be solved within a country. International treaties and international organizations such as the World Trade Organization were too focused on the interests of large financial institutions.

In an effort to balance this trend, non-governmental organizations were established with an emphasis on humanitarian issues, development assistance, and human development, a prime example of which is the World Social Forum, held every year in January in Davos and considered a rival to the World Economic Forum. According to a 1995 report by the United Nations on world governance, there were approximately 29,000 international NGOs at that time. The number of domestic NGOs is even higher, with about two million NGOs operating in the United States, most of which were formed in the past few decades. Russia also has 4,000 NGOs. There are also two million NGOs in India.

The reasons for the formation of NGOs can be traced to humanitarian goals, personal experience in dealing with social problems, or the instructions and recommendations of great people in charity and humanitarian movements. In order to continue their activities and fulfill their duties, non-governmental organizations need characteristics that guarantee their survival and success, including spontaneity, natural need, common goals of members, legality, a written program and activity, participation, and independence. It is obvious that each non-governmental institution or foundation pursues a specific activity topic according to the needs of its members—issues such as religion, education, health, environment, employment, culture, art, youth, children, women, the elderly, or specialized and scientific issues. Therefore, non-governmental organizations are formed and established with an emphasis on the three principles of volunteerism, non-profit, and non-political.

Non-governmental organizations work to achieve various goals and are usually active in advancing their goals. The number of such organizations is very large, and their goals cover a wide range of political and philosophical positions. For example, the following can be mentioned:

- Improving the environment and tourism in the country.
- Providing medical assistance to special patients in the field of health.
- Encouraging groups and people to respect human rights and animal rights in society.
- Raising the level of welfare of the deprived and vulnerable sections of society by proposing joint programs and collective groups and raising awareness among different sections of society.
- Supporting patients suffering from addiction in the field of social vulnerabilities in the country.

Non-governmental organizations operate at both domestic and international levels. Since the understanding and nature of the activities of non-governmental organizations are different, it may be difficult to achieve a consensus definition. A review of the literature on NGOs bears witness to this claim (Ebrahim Beykzadeh, 2000:124-14).

The United Nations Economic and Social Council, in its resolution of 1950, defines these informal actors as any organization whose founding document does not result from an international agreement.

Therefore, NGOs are a part of civil society, and three main criteria can be proposed for their definition:

1. Having a public interest objective.
2. Its statutes must not be interstate.
3. Carrying out effective activities in more than two countries.

Considering the importance of these organizations in promoting human interests, the United Nations took steps in the 1990s to expand its relations with non-governmental organizations. The then Secretary-General of the United Nations, in a report entitled *Strengthening the United Nations*, presented a roadmap for changing the UN's approaches to using non-governmental organizations, which speaks to the growing importance of these organizations. In this regard, in 2003, the Secretary-General appointed a mission, chaired by the former President of Brazil, to enhance the United Nations' engagement with civil society, with the mandate to prepare a report after examining the following areas:

- Increasing the participation of NGOs in intergovernmental bodies.
- Establishing a fund to increase the participation of NGOs from developing countries.
- Granting them accreditation in the United Nations system.
- Promoting dialogue between the Organization's Secretariat and NGOs.
- Strengthening the communication of NGOs at the country level.

This process was also followed in UNESCO, as Article 11, paragraph 4, of UNESCO's Statute on relations with other organizations and institutions states: “The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization may establish appropriate arrangements for consultation and cooperation with non-governmental organizations on matters within its competence and may invite them to undertake specific tasks.”

This cooperation could also include the appropriate participation of representatives of these organizations in advisory committees established by the General Conference” (Ebrahim Beykzadeh, 2004:543).

In implementing this provision, UNESCO has for many years sought to establish a valuable network of contacts with non-governmental organizations in the context of the consolidation of global civil society. Therefore, given the importance of non-governmental organizations and their increasing growth, UNESCO felt it necessary to review its relations with them. For example, the role of non-governmental organizations was enhanced in the 2005

Convention on Intercultural Diversity, recognizing that all sectors of civil society can be active in shaping public policies to promote and support cultural diversity. As stated in Article 15, in the manner of cooperation, Member States shall encourage partnerships between the public-private sectors and non-profit organizations with a view to cooperating with developing countries to improve their capacities to preserve and promote the diversity of cultural expressions. This partnership should emphasize the further development of economic infrastructure, human resources, policies, as well as the exchange of cultural activities, goods, and services, in accordance with the practical needs of developing countries. Such approaches at the level of the international system have pushed civil societies of countries towards greater participation beyond national borders and foreign policy-making, which has revealed the significant importance of friendship associations in the world community. With the decline of the role of nation-states as the main players in the international system and the debates related to globalization and increasing human awareness, the assignment of roles to non-state actors such as friendship associations has become increasingly common. With an emphasis on intercultural and international cultural relations in different countries, friendship associations have become informal communication bridges between nations within countries.

- **Intercultural Communication and Friendship Associations**

- The global system of intercultural communication has undergone several transformations over the past centuries. “Until the 13th century AD, the world was in a multipolar state centered on China, India, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, and Italy, and each of the cultures associated with these lands had exchanges centered on one of eight intersecting ellipses on the globe,” writes Indiana University researcher Harmit Sawani. In fact, the global communication system has been decentralized. But then the aforementioned multipolar system became a unipolar system (Sawhney, 2002: 35). What is important here is that the intercultural systems of the past centuries were based on coercion, while current communication systems are based on choice. On the other hand, previous communication systems were mostly based on the exchange of goods, while today the exchange of messages prevails. Such a transformation was completed with the formation of the global village because, according to McLuhan, the world has entered the electronic age and a nervous system has enveloped the population of the planet. With the instantaneous and continuous movement of information throughout the planet, the phenomenon of the information leap is taking place. In such circumstances, the world has become smaller, and global communication, especially of the cultural kind, has increased unprecedentedly (McLuhan: 1998, 169-175). This is while thinkers like Larry Samovar consider intercultural communication to be achieved when a message is processed in another culture (Samovar, 1994: 7). In such a space and with such an approach, friendship associations as non-state actors play a role in developments between countries, finding both a conducive space for activity and appropriate

tools to reach out to the civil societies of target countries.

- **Approaches of Friendship Associations in Intergovernmental Cooperation**

- In the third millennium, the existing countries of the world have undergone extensive changes, both domestically and internationally. Increasing urbanization, a significant number of graduates, the expansion of public culture, and broad awareness of domestic and international events are examples of the tensions within societies. Amid these great domestic changes and the importance of the international, it seems necessary to introduce the logic of expanding the level of communication to learn from the global environment in improving the quality of ideas and programs. It is natural that states face a multitude of tasks, responsibilities, and priorities and in the process of interacting with the international environment may not be able to achieve what is needed. In this regard, the emergence of the phenomenon of civil society over the past half-century, both in industrialized and developing societies, has created a new and effective factor not only in the internal relations of countries but also in the relations between nations and states to increase interaction, positive impact, and create a platform for learning and collective activities. From this perspective, the logic and necessity of formations called “friendship associations” among nations can be understood. Friendship associations are civil and non-governmental institutions whose aim is to establish a link of cultural, scientific, commercial, productive, artistic, and sports activities conceivable between individuals and similar organizations in different societies. Although the great and helpful view of governments in establishing this connection is facilitative, concern, determination, gradual positive activities, and performance expressed in changing the image can bring interested individuals and organizations between two countries towards understanding. The existing “images” of each other and the “tradition of cooperation” between the two countries are two determining factors in the gradual and evolutionary success of friendship associations (Moussouy, 2003/2/2), which we will explain below:
 - ❖ In the first stage, friendship associations can contribute significantly to the production and reproduction of intercultural knowledge of the countries (Wentt, 2006:63). Given that structures influence the behavior of social and political actors—both individuals and countries—friendship associations can be effective in producing and modifying normative or belief structures of players towards each other. The above normative structures can also determine the identity of players and be the basis for their recognition of themselves and others, and in this way become factors in the identity formation of the parties.

From this perspective, friendship associations arise because the player choosing to cooperate in a social puzzle situation implicitly assumes a collective identity and acts as if one cares about the other. If the other reciprocates, one's tentative identity is reinforced, and over time, the collective identity of both parties is internalized. In other words, this action leads to friendships; each actor acts as if they have a new identity and teaches the other what to do to maintain it. Identity is helped; one learns to see oneself in another mirror and to change their perception of their identity. This is complex learning, which does not only mean creating regulatory norms for established identities but also creating formative norms for new identities. If complex learning takes place in interaction, the effect of interdependence becomes deeper (Kobriai-Zadeh, 17, 2011).

- ❖ In this regard, the organizers argue that to establish peace and international cooperation, the established norms regulating the international system must be changed so that states stop thinking and acting based on realism. To achieve such a peaceful system, the identity and interests of states must be changed. In other words, they must change how they think and perceive themselves and their relationships with other states. Since in this theory international perceptions and expectations determine the behavior of countries, to establish peace, countries must abandon the idea of themselves as selfish players and define themselves as part of a single community with common interests.

In these circumstances, the role of non-governmental institutions such as friendship associations becomes significant. These institutions can also influence the process of shaping the expectations of the two actors towards each other. This process does not simply involve creating external constraints on the behavior of actors cast in bronze but is a process of internalizing new understandings of self and other and acquiring new identity roles. In other words, the process by which states learn to cooperate and the interests of states are reconstructed in terms of shared commitments to social norms. Over time, this process will tend to transform the positive interdependence of outcomes into an interdependence of benefits or collective interests that have been found in relation to the norms of the organization.

Thus, Alexander Wente argues, identities, interests, and institutions are all the result of interactive social processes on which we rely to direct our behavior, and only after interaction can we speak of cooperation or opposition.

- ❖ Regarding the role of cultural factors, he writes in his book *The Social Theory of International Politics* that most scholarly works on international relations assume there is no relationship between shared

ideals or culture in a system and the degree of cooperation. Therefore, culture can lead to either opposition or cooperation (Went, 2005: 366). Norms both establish games and create intersubjective meanings that allow actors to communicate with each other. As a result, continuous communication in international relations leads to the formation of international cooperation. If different understandings of reality cannot be resolved through consensual action, cooperation under the rule of rules becomes impossible. This indicates that cooperation in the international system has its fragility and limits. At the same time, cooperation is not the only form of interaction within the community of states. Among some actors, cooperation has become the dominant form of interaction, and among others, a sense of interdependence and common identity can be traced.

In some cases, it can also be seen that the element of conflict and confrontation prevails. On the other hand, friendship circles can be determinants of identity and otherness for both players because they see identity as something constructed by shaping artificial boundaries. Beyond these boundaries, otherness is suppressed. Since self-identity is shaped through the actions of others, friendship circles can be effective in shaping identity by creating a language understandable to both players. Representation and what can be called the "representative policy arena" in the discourse created by friendship associations between the two countries are other functions of these non-governmental institutions in the framework of image-making (Kobriai-Zadeh, 18, 2011).

- ❖ In the second stage, many thinkers emphasize the role of institutions, norms, and rules in the international system and believe these institutions are of great importance in reducing conflicts and increasing cooperation. Therefore, friendship associations are a manifestation of the element of cooperation between states in carrying out political functions and, at the same time, a tool for sustaining that cooperation. Thus, these institutional forms can be a type of cooperation towards the goals of states and on the path to world peace. For Haas, cooperation begins in the realm of soft politics, but unlike Mithraney, he does not separate economics and politics and acknowledges the political importance of economic issues. One of Haas's concepts is "contagion" or "spillover." His assumption is that the different dimensions of economic life are interdependent. As a result, any action taken to cooperate in one area requires cooperation in other areas, and cooperation spills over from one area to another. The opposite is also true; that is, a problem in one area can disrupt cooperation in other areas. Friendship associations with such an approach can facilitate cooperation in areas known as soft politics, such as economics and culture, and in this way,

solid steps can be taken to develop cooperation and spread it to hard politics between countries (Haas, 2006:165).

Through the communication approach, friendship associations pay attention to inter-state interactions and the benefits and harms associated with them for actors, the mutual communication of elites, the mutual responsiveness of elites, and the suitability of institutions to take action in the case of interactive and communication pressure, and in this way, they act like pressure groups in the broader policy of states (Kobriai-Zadeh, 2011, 19).

- **Functions of Friendship Associations and Obstacles to Progress**

- Friendship associations, as part of non-governmental organizations or people's organizations, carry out important activities in various social fields within the framework of national laws and in response to the urgent and special needs of their communities. It is unrealistic to expect that all societal problems will be solved solely by the state. Most long-term solutions to major challenges have emerged—albeit in small steps—from citizens themselves. Therefore, civil societies play a crucial role in ensuring the enjoyment of freedoms guaranteed by international treaties, national constitutions, and the laws and regulations established by the United Nations.

In some cases, civil society organizations are established specifically to influence national laws and, with popular support, pressure governments to change or amend existing legislation. Additionally, the important role of civil society associations in providing services and information to citizens should not be overlooked. When citizens have access to necessary information in various fields, they are better able to influence the policymaking process through dialogue and contact with their representatives in Congress or Parliament. As an example, the activities and influence of European and American civil society organizations in the 1980s played a key role in pushing for the abolition of the apartheid regime in South Africa. Perhaps without the pressure exerted by these groups, international pressure and sanctions on the South African government would not have increased to such an extent.

- Another point deserving attention is the independence of friendship associations and their lack of dependence on states. This independence can turn these institutions into effective pillars for strengthening relations between nations. However, the power of these associations is somewhat limited—they derive their real influence from the loyalty and support of citizens (Kobriyai-Zadeh, 15-16, 2011).

- **Obstacles Facing Friendship Associations**

One of the most significant challenges is the fragmented and insular functioning of friendship associations. Various organizations and institutions do not interact with friendship associations in an appropriate manner and tend to operate according to their internal organizational mandates. This issue

largely stems from a lack of a comprehensive strategy and plan. Therefore, it seems necessary to first conduct a documented study by professors and specialists so that the results can be delivered to friendship associations and related institutions in the form of an actionable plan. In this regard, the experiences of countries such as China can be instructive. After China, South Korea, Russia, England, and Australia are among the most active.

- Another obstacle is the lack of proper identification of the target audience. It is certainly not effective to send the same message to all foreign audiences in the same way. A message emphasized within a country may not be understandable abroad, and simply translating a message into foreign languages does not guarantee the desired effect. Thus, identifying the audience and planning engagement through public diplomacy is essential.
- The limited presence of the private sector is another obstacle to flourishing public diplomacy in any country. Non-governmental organizations and private institutions should be more active in international arenas. The private sector is responsible for a wider range of a country's activities in the form of public diplomacy and can have a greater impact on foreign audiences with its initiatives. This situation calls for some level of coordination between the public and private sectors.
- The involvement of cultural, artistic, sports, and academic figures from each country in various foreign circles, and their cooperation with friendship associations, can provide better opportunities to introduce nations to each other.
- Other ways to strengthen friendship associations—and subsequently public diplomacy—include increasing media capacity, especially with private sector participation, and expanding academic and cultural exchanges (Goljan, 4, 2013).

Conclusion

Cultural diplomacy is a form of communication that extends beyond official state relations, aiming to exchange ideas, foster mutual understanding, and share cultural values. All segments of society—especially elites—can serve as cultural ambassadors, introducing the richness and civilization of their country to others.

Public cultural diplomacy enables a nation's culture and thought, reflected in its policies and behaviors, to be conveyed to global public opinion, securing its rightful place in the international system. Without accurate cultural representation, misunderstandings and negative stereotypes can take hold, leading to global consensus against a country's cultural heritage.

Countries worldwide recognize the importance of cultural diplomacy to varying degrees and have adopted it within their capabilities. Many international relations scholars agree that success in foreign policy—particularly in reshaping a country's image abroad—depends heavily on cultural diplomacy tools.

Negative perceptions about a country or government can only be corrected through sustained cultural diplomacy efforts. Beyond traditional diplomatic channels, attention must be paid to cultural diplomacy dimensions—through education, art, and culture—to promote national values and safeguard national interests.

Key tools of cultural diplomacy include public organizations, cultural institutions, and friendship associations, which foster

connections across cultural, scientific, commercial, artistic, and sports fields. While government support helps facilitate these links, the determination and consistent positive actions of individuals and organizations are crucial in improving mutual understanding.

Cultural diplomacy not only achieves cultural goals but also supports political, security, and even military objectives. In today's interconnected virtual world, friendship associations and non-governmental organizations are powerful resources for advancing nations' goals, often exerting significant influence on international relations.

Friendship associations offer informal or citizen diplomacy, complementing official diplomacy by building broader and deeper relationships. They act as vital institutions to strengthen ties between nations, generating ideas and expanding contacts with elites, youth, and social and cultural actors worldwide.

Recent international developments show that friendship associations' roles in global affairs are growing, while state-centric influence is comparatively declining. Since these associations operate at the intersection of relations between peoples and the international system, their influence and activism continue to expand. Foreign policy officials should recognize that, in the modern and post-modern world, the power of ideas, dialogue, mutual understanding, and human connections often shapes international relations more than traditional state power.

The very philosophy behind friendship associations is the promotion of friendly and humanitarian relations. As specialized and effective actors in informal and public diplomacy, they can serve as valuable advisors to governments and international organizations. Their capacity to expand scientific and cultural ties helps develop friendly relations among societies, fostering national and global peace and friendship.

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