

Cultural Diplomacy of Kosovo after the Declaration of Independence

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Abstract. The article analyzes a segment of the cultural diplomacy of non-state actors of Kosovo who have communicated with foreign audiences through the international media in the period after the country's declaration of independence in 2008. Analyzing the content of media coverage for non-state actors, the article examines the given messages of these actors in some powerful international media, which relate to the possibility of increasing the international image of the new country. The article finds that Kosovar non-state actors have continuously communicated with the global and regional public because it has been impossible for state actors to convey any positive message to the latter. The article, moreover, shows that Kosovar famous athletes and artists or world champions represent the soft power of Kosovo, because they have found enough space to be exposed in the international media. A significant feature of cultural diplomacy in the case of Kosovo is that the presence of hundreds and thousands of foreign peacekeepers in a country with as much security as other Balkan countries is also seen as an opportunity to influence the country's international image.

Keywords: public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, soft power, image of country, Kosovo.

Kosovo kultūrinė diplomatija po Nepriklausomybės paskelbimo

Santrauka. Straipsnyje analizuojamas Kosovo nevalstybinių veikėjų, kurie bendravo su užsienio auditorija per tarptautinę žiniasklaidą laikotarpiu po šalies Nepriklausomybės paskelbimo 2008 m., kultūrinės diplomatijos segmentas. Analizuojant žiniasklaidos turinį nevalstybiniais veikėjams, straipsnyje nagrinėjami šių veikėjų pateikti pranešimai kai kuriose galingose tarptautinėse žiniasklaidos priemonėse, susiję su galimybe padidinti naujosios šalies tarptautinį įvaizdį. Straipsnyje atskleidžiama, kad Kosovo nevalstybiniai subjektai nuolat bendravo su pasauline ir regionine visuomene, nes valstybės veikėjai negalėjo perduoti jokios teigiamos žinios pastarajai. Be to, šis straipsnis rodo, kad garsūs Kosovo sportininkai, menininkai ar pasaulio čempionai atstovauja Kosovo minkštajai galiai, nes jie atrado pakankamai vietas, kur būtų matomi tarptautinėje žiniasklaidoje. Svarbus kultūrinės diplomatijos bruožas Kosovo atveju yra tas, kad šimtų ir tūkstančių užsienio taikdarių buvimas šalyje, kurioje yra tiek pat saugumo, kiek ir kitose Balkanų šalyse, taip pat vertinamas kaip galimybė daryti įtaką šalies tarptautiniam įvaizdžiui.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: viešoji diplomatija; kultūrinė diplomatija; švelnioji galia; šalies įvaizdis; Kosovas.

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Introduction

Each state aims to enhance its international image because it brings economic, political, cultural, security, and other benefits. Image enhancement means sending as many positive messages as possible to foreign and external audiences through embracing their hearts and respect. Trade exchanges, tourism, but also political alliances, become easier to achieve when having a good image in the world (Buhmann, 2016). There are even scholars who estimate that the image often brings greater benefits than the possession or not of any territorial part itself, any access to raw materials, traditionally obtained through military and economic measures (Gilboa, 2008, p. 56). Especially for a small country that cannot rely so much on political and economic power to defend national interests in a global context, the country's image effects on people's behavior can make a critical difference to political, economic and cultural success (Buhmann, 2016, p. 17).

But new countries find it quite difficult to create a positive international image, especially when they do not have abundant resources that are attractive to foreign audiences. After the declaration of independence in 2008, Kosovo found it difficult to send positive messages to foreign audiences. This is due to the fact that at that time Kosovo was perceived as a troubled country, emerging from the war in the then province of the former Yugoslav federation.

Until then, Kosovo was not a widely recognized entity by foreign audiences and was conceived only as a geographical notion within a federal-Yugoslav state entity where human rights were violated. This came as a result of the great media coverage that Kosovo had in 1999 as a result of NATO bombing of the former Yugoslavia. After 1999, the country was perceived as a vulnerable area administered by the UN. But despite this, immediately after the declaration of independence in 2008, at a time when it was still difficult for state and non-state actors to break through and influence the growth of the country's international image, it was the representatives of culture who nevertheless entered European scenes. Famous female singers were quite present on the screens of well-known television stations, including the BBC, while the Anglo-American press also had media coverage for successful artists from Kosovo to Europe. This is very important because the construction of certain country images and identities is traditionally studied in relation to public diplomacy of state and non-state actors (Dolea, Ingenhoff & Beju, 2020).

This article addresses precisely the international image of Kosovo immediately after the declaration of independence (2008) through non-state actors, or rather, through cultural diplomacy. The question here is how the cultural diplomacy of non-state actors has been able to enter foreign audiences at a time when state actors found such a reach quite impossible. The paper identifies and analyzes the content of the messages Kosovo cultural actors gave to some of the most important international media coverage within the 5-year period after the declaration of independence (2008-2013). Powerful international media have been selected, some because of the frequency they had in the media coverage of Kosovar cultural actors, while some media were only mentioned, because Kosovo's state actors found it difficult to communicate with countries such as: Spain, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and some other countries due to the non-recognition of Kosovo.

Image and soft power

Dictionaries define the word ‘image’ as a figure or effigy of a person, an object, a phenomenon, etc., which is reproduced in the human mind on the basis of previous perceptions and impressions, without being the person himself/herself, thing, or phenomenon, etc. In other words, it means a faithful or approximate imagination or reproduction of someone or something. According to Kotler, the image of a country is “the set of beliefs, ideas, and impression that a person holds regarding an object” (Kotler, 2002, p. 141). The image represents the simplification of a large number of associations and parts of information related to a place (Kotler, 2002, p. 141). The image often refers to the national brand, associated with public diplomacy, international perception and international relations (Zhang and Meadows III, 2012, p. 77). He links the trust that the population of one country has for another one, the affection of that population towards the population of the other country and the desire to interact with that country, which builds appreciation and trust in a product, policy or culture of the latter (Laroche, 2005, p. 100–101). In other words, if we were to define the national images as “foreign publics’ perception of a nation” (Fjällhed (2021, p. 230), and rate it with different qualifications and attributes, then shaping of the same, be that positive or negative, is a very complex, long-term process that encompasses a wide range of different sources of communication and interactive actors (Saliu, 2017, 2020a). The process begins with some experience in early human life; in school, in children’s books, fairy tales and leisure literature, theater and it may include accounts made by relatives, acquaintances and friends (Kunczick, 1997, p. 1). For these reasons, “national image is also a social construction based on personal experiences, the experiences of personal connections and mediated messages” (Fjällhed, 2021, p. 230). Here, the media play a key role in transmitting information to the public, information which is relevant to the development process in a given country. Successful individuals also play an important role when they have international media coverage and talk about their country of origin. Nevertheless, today, international communication is realized by civil society organizations, including influential individuals, too, who do not represent a particular state, organization, or corporation (Bjola and Kornprobst, 2018, p. 4). All these ways of communication may affect public perceptions of a particular country. In order to boost the international image, states also use different strategies depending on the resources they have. These strategies are manageable, but often the international image is first created by the internal developments of a country. If a country faces negative internal developments and foreign media express interest and convey to the world information about these developments, then this also affects the international perception of that country. Winning *hearts and minds* is required to be achieved through being tempting, attractive to foreign audiences, thus through values, known as soft power.

Joseph Nye, the scholar from Harvard School of Government, coined and developed this concept. He defines *soft power* as “the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or payment” (Nye, 2004, p. x). “A country’s soft power rests on its resources of culture, values and policies” (Nye, 2019, p. 7). *Soft power* is not simply synonymous with influence. Influence can also be based on *hard power* in the form of coercion or payment, while *soft power* is beyond

persuasion or the ability to persuade through argument, although this is a very important component. But soft power, when seen in terms of behavior, shows the ability to be attractive, it's the power of attraction (Nye, 2004). Being attractive, Nye (2004) points out, means being attractive to others, to get the outcomes one wants. Soft power is also a set of democratic policies that are practiced day by day, with attractive personalities, with culture, institutional values of politics and policies which are considered rich in moral authority. Nye emphasizes that having values, then through public diplomacy activities you may succeed in increasing the international image of the country.

Understanding public diplomacy

The discipline which, in addition to the state interest in general, aims to increase the international image of that state is public diplomacy (Leonard, 2002). It involves the communication of state and non-state actors with foreign audiences in order to inform, influence and realize the general interests that a state has (Malone, 1985; Leonard, 2002; Cull, 2008; Nye 2019, Saliu, 2020b). Public diplomacy means the instrument used by states, state associations and some sub-state and non-state actors, to understand culture, attitudes, and behaviors; to establish and manage relationships, to influence opinions as well as to mobilize actions to advance their interests and values (Gregory, 2011, p. 353). This definition in the metaphorical sense speaks of the democratization of public diplomacy nowadays (Melissen, 2011, p. 2). It involves broad engagement of external audiences, especially young people using technology and the internet, either through learning, student exchanges, art, sports, science, and/or networking which offers young professionals to open up for the opportunities of dialogue and open debates (Leonard, 2002, p. 48). Nowadays, non-state actors from different countries communicate without the need for exchange programs or visit the place to communicate with foreign individuals or audiences. This is achieved with the advancement of communication technology, which enables people of different countries of the world to make contacts in real time, staying in their countries, or communicating with foreign audiences through the media. Researcher Nicholas J. Cull (2012), who defines public diplomacy as an attempt of international actors to conduct foreign policy by dealing with other international actors (p. 10), does not mention that many actors are part of the internet age. Others emphasize the new media and new communication channels. While face-to-face contacts in society are limited, the Internet enables such contacts without the need for physical relocation to another country, and this makes a timely benefit. "Social media can play an important role in almost any country if it is developed and cultivated properly" (Kiehl, 2012, p. 6). In fact, a message from a political actor who directs it to an internal audience, causes the same message to reach several external audiences, foreign chancelleries, decision centers, etc. (Saliu, 2018).

Researchers of this discipline focus mainly on three dimensions accepted as measures of public diplomacy (Leonard, 2002; Nye, 2004; Melissen, 2005; Gilboa, 2008; Zaharna, 2012, 2013; Pamment, 2013):

- Daily news management, providing information to foreign audiences. These activities tend to take place on a daily basis, through the media;

- strategic communication, as well as activities through the media, which take place several times during the year;
- Cultural diplomacy, which aims to establish long-term relationships.

Cultural diplomacy – establishing long-term relationships

The most important dimension of public diplomacy is that of cultural diplomacy, which means strengthening long-term friendly relations with foreign audiences as well as increasing the image of the country. Special attention is paid to exchange programs, intercultural dialogue, as well as the use of international televisions and technology as an opportunity to increase communication with the world of different cultures, etc. Recorded since the Bronze Age, cultural diplomacy has become a norm for humanity within civilizations (Arndt, 2006, p. 1). Later, it was possible to collaborate between large groups of people through various rituals and ceremonies, songs, dances and languages. While evil forces can still destroy civilization, diplomacy seeks to preserve it by linking one culture to another (Arndt, 2006).

The meaning of the word “culture” has changed a lot in different periods. It is related to major historical, democratic, industrial changes and has an impact on the political, economic and social nature (Williams, 1960). While art means literature, music, painting, sculpture and theater, by culture we would understand what we think of ourselves; the general mental state associated with the idea and perfection; material, intellectual and spiritual lifestyle (Williams, 1960). “It became, as we know, a word which has often provoked hostility or embarrassment” (Williams, 1960, p. xv). Cultural studies show that our minds and lives are shaped by our full experience. As Raymond Williams has argued, culture also includes the exchange of aesthetic experience, religious ideas, rituals, personal values, and feelings (cited in Carey, 2009, p. 28), or simply a lifestyle.

Music is also an important component of cultural diplomacy, a kind of communication with the culture and tradition of foreign countries (Carey, 2009, p. 2-6). This cultural dimension of music means both, transmission through audiovisual means as well as direct communication with the organization of concerts in foreign countries. A Russian listener describes listening to American music as an element of denied freedom and jazz has played the role of cultural ambassador. “Every night, we would close doors and windows, turn on Willis Conover and have two hours of our freedom” (Schneider, 2004, p. 8). The same words are heard everywhere in Albania when they talk about listening to Italian music during the socialist dictatorship. For the treatment of music as a force of social life, Adorno, one of the main exponents of this type of treatment, says that music trains the subconscious to condition reflexes (cited in DeNora, 2000, p. 1).

Among the most comprehensive definitions is that of the researcher Cummings, according to whom, cultural diplomacy represents the exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture between states and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding (Cummings, 2003, p. 1). Cultural diplomacy establishes lasting long-term relationships, instead of purely political motives that propaganda had, or commercial motives that the national brand has. The cultural scope should be much broader, not only with art, but also with popular culture, politics, science and academic departments

(Leonard, 2002). Scholars of public diplomacy consider cultural diplomacy as the most important dimension through which long-term friendships are established with foreign audiences and this increases the image of the country in order to realize foreign policy and state interest. Cultural diplomacy should be an important element of a comprehensive program and adapt to foreign policy in search of increasing reputation (Rosendorf, 2009, p. 173). It is born as a government activity, but also implemented by non-state actors to design a favorable state image in the eyes of foreign audiences of foreign countries. Often the cultural diplomacy of non-state actors can be more effective than that of state actors. In presenting a national image abroad, cultural diplomacy can overcome the audience's suspicion of official messages and serve to provide a better content of national reputation (Mark, 2009, p. 1). Its main purpose is to provide the state with various alliances and to influence through culture, promoting its cultural life. Cultural diplomacy is increasingly becoming an instrument of dialogue and strengthening relations with cultural contexts. It now applies to pretty much any practice that is related to purposeful cultural cooperation between nations or groups of nations (Ang, Isar and Mar, 2015).

Alongside with culture, student exchanges, tourism, etc., sports also play a very important role. Performing arts and sports diplomacy go back to prehistoric times (Arndt, 2006, p. 402). It sometimes happens that states may not be present at important events, such as multilateral talks, summits, or for various reasons may not have a representative of their own. But the country can be represented in these events by an athlete, artist, and scientist. They will represent the interest of their own country (George et al., 2017). Sports diplomacy is used as a political tool of empowerment, but it can sometimes ruin relations between the two countries (Padhi, 2011). This has often happened with Kosovo due to the impossibility of government actors to be present, examples of which will be seen below.

The International Image of Kosovo through Cultural Diplomacy

Artists who succeed and address the foreign public, play an important role for the image of their country or origin, but only if they do not hide their identity of origin and are willing to mention it. Rita Ora, the most popular Kosovar singer in the world who even constantly talks and exposes her background, is very present in Britain and beyond. The British media, such as the *BBC* and the *Daily Mail*, have often turned their attention to her and her origin. Born in Kosovo, she arrived in Britain when she was just one year old. During her statements and interviews in foreign media, Ora constantly mentions, that she is from Kosovo. These media often put her identity in the headlines of their stories. The singer, who lives between London, Paris, New York and is often in Pristina, does not hesitate to mention her origins even when no one asks.

“Rita Ora goes back to her roots as she films new music video in her Kosovan birth town”, is the headline in *Daily Mail* in London on September 9th, 2012 (Cooper, 2012). The article explains her spot on the streets of her hometown. “I think Kosovo as a nation – we’re very proud of where we’re from because it’s such a small place, so anyone that succeeds from there is just a big deal”, *Daily Mail* cited Ora (Cooper, 2012). She has often argued with pop star Rihanna, which is also an element for Ora to be in the media spotlight.

Daily Mail has often written about her fame, engagements in the fashion world, her outfits, her pronunciations, quarrels with world stars, friendships, as with pop star Madonna, comparisons with other stars, etc. In June 2013 alone, the *Daily Mail* published 30 articles about Rita Ora, and almost all of the articles bore her name and surname in the title of the article. This means that every day there is an article about this singer from Kosovo, while it happened that the daily tabloid published an article per day¹. It is similar in the later period. Today, if a *Daily Mail* web search is done, thousands of articles about Rita Ora turn out.

Even the *BBC* has often interviewed her, where she does not hesitate to talk about her hometown. She dedicates a song to her hometown, Pristina, making the video spot of the song in this city, while the song has also become a worldwide hit in the music genre she cultivates.

The *Daily Mail* has compared another actress from Kosovo to Marilyn Monroe. Due to her fame, Kosovar actress Arta Dobroschi has been in the spotlight by photographers in Cannes, while the international media have written about her. During the promotion of the movie *Trois Mondes* on May 25, 2012, the *Daily Mail* published nine photos of her, with the title: *Arta Dobroschi has a Marilyn Monroe moment as her skirt flies up to bare her cheeks at Cannes photocall* because by the time she was walking on Cannes red carpet, a light breeze had lifted her skirt (Dads, 2012).

Dobroschi has won several prestigious awards, including *Shooting Stars* 2013², and has received international media coverage. The German public is also informed about it. The German newspaper *Der Tagesspiegel*, writing about the prizes awarded in the 63rd edition of the Berlin ale, focuses only on Dobroschi, writing that “Kosovo Albanian Arta Dobroschi grabs ‘Shooting Star Award 2013’” (*Der Tagesspiegel*, 2013). *Huffington Post*, on the other hand, published a long article on a Kosovo Albanian actress on May 27, 2012. At the time, the paper published two other articles about the successful actress (*Huffingtonpost*, 2012).

The Balkan media also wrote about Dobroschi. Well-known Croatian newspaper, *Slobodna Dalmacija* (2012), writes that the *Pula Film Festival* is honored to have Arta Dobroschi as a guest, who starred in the film *Le silence de Lorna* directed by the Dardennea brothers and which deals with the life of Albanian emigrants to Belgium.

So, an actress from Kosovo has communicated through the press, with several different public, global, but also national audiences of different countries, thanks to the media that have written about her.

In 2012 at the *Eurovision Song Contest* held in Baku, Azerbaijan, Kosovo had interesting media coverage, although the country not only did not participate in this festival, but even today has no right to participate. Albania participating in the festival was represented by a singer from Kosovo. The voice of Kosovo-Albanian, Nora Nishliu, has been the topic of media discussion. The Italian daily *Corriere della Sera*, in an article entitled *Eurovision, in vetrina la musica dei Balcani*, writes that the surprise comes from the Balkans: Rona Nishliu presents Albania in Baku (Natale, 2012). “Rona represents Tirana, becoming the

¹ <http://goo.gl/Qyd6jO>, accessed 16 January 2020.

² <http://www.shooting-stars.eu/en/shooting/22245/>, accessed 17 March 2015.

singer from Kosovo (an ex-Serb Albanian-majority province that declared independence in 2008) competing in Eurovision. They compared them to vocal potency with Chaka Khan and Aretha Franklin...” (Natale, 2012). Meanwhile, the Spanish Radio and Television (RTVE) also gave considerable space to the singer from Kosovo who represented Albania at Eurovision; in addition to the short biography of the singer, they even give the entire lyrics in the native language of the singer (RTVE, 2012), including comparisons with the famous Aretha Franklin.

On the other hand, the communication of Kosovar actors, especially with the public in the region of the former Yugoslavia, has been difficult in the first 5 years after the declaration of independence. But Ilir Tafa, an actor from Pristina, at the time practiced cultural diplomacy with countries with which Kosovo had no official communication, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, which did not recognize Kosovo. Through the Bosnian television series *Lud, zbunjen, normalan*³, Tafa acted the character of a young man from Kosovo, who works as a producer in Bosnia. In the character of Mentor Kosova, Tafa communicated with the public of the countries of the former Yugoslavia, as this series was broadcast on the Federal Television of Bosnia, *Nova TV* of Croatia, *Television A1* and *Channel 5* of North Macedonia, on the Public Television of Serbia *RTS* and in Montenegro on *RTV Vijesti*. For four years in a row, in several episodes, the character of Tafa speaks Albanian, discusses music of Kosovo, the degree of tolerance that the Albanian society of Kosovo has towards frustrated categories, such as homosexuals, etc. So, it was not just an interpreted character, but a role where the script also makes an intercultural communication with the audiences who generally did not have a very friendly attitude towards Kosovo. Tafa’s communication with the Serbian and Bosnian public, and others, is important because since the 1990s, Kosovo’s communication and cooperation with Serbs and Bosniaks has been severed, and as Mark Leonard, one of the most quoted scholars of public diplomacy points out, “public diplomacy should be focused on the countries which are most relevant to our interests - not those which are easiest to influence” (Leonard, 2002, p. 7). And Kosovo’s neighboring countries are indeed an indisputable interest.

Sports Diplomacy of Kosovo

Sports diplomacy is also an important dimension of a country’s public and cultural diplomacy. Successful people, talents, champions, are the main target of sports media, but also of generalist media. When such a talent is successful, the media further spreads his/her success to the audience, while the sportsperson is identified as a representative of a country.

The sports diplomacy of the world champion, Majlinda Kelmendi

This also happened to Majlinda Kelmendi (1991), the judoka who has won several titles in the world. Kelmendi won the gold medal at the 2009 World Junior Championships in Paris; she finished fifth at the Junior World Championships in Morocco in 2010, the

³ Translated from Bosnian: Stupid, confused, normal.

ninth in the world at the Judo World Championships in Tokyo in the 52 kg category. In 2012, Kelmendi chose the Albanian national team at the Olympic Games in London, after being refused to compete as Kosovo's representative. In 2013 she was ranked second in the world by the International Judo Federation in the category up to 52 kg (IJF, 2012).

Some international media seem to have been very fond of the young judoka Kelmendi. *Euronews* on October 13, 2012 starts the news of the sport with the champion of Kosovo in the sport of judo. "Majlinda Kelmendi from Kosovo retains the Grand Prix title in Abu Dhabi in the 52 kg category" (Euronews, 2012). On February 24, 2013, *Euronews* headlined the sports news "Majlinda Kelmendi shines in Germany". This television which broadcasts in some languages starts the report on judo from Germany, also with Kelmendi. "Majlinda Kelmendi from Kosovo was an excellent figure in the claim for the gold medal for the Grand Prix in Düsseldorf in the women's category under 52 kg" (Euronews, 2013).

The *BBC*, on the other hand, has been dealing with Kelmendi very often. Various correspondents have visited her at her home in Peja, making headlines for her and through her for Kosovo. *BBC* correspondent David Eades, on March 13, 2012, makes a lengthy *BBC* report on the judoka Kelmendi. In the chronicle entitled *Kosovan Majlinda Kelmendi fights for the right to fight* (Eades, 2012), he also interviews her in Peja, her hometown, while the chronicle was also covered with pictures from her competitions in different parts of the world. The *BBC* seems to be clearly positioned, in support of Kelmendi, while doing a long presentation on the state of Kosovo. The same television returns to Majlinda two weeks later, on April 2 with a long report on the website, giving many facts about Majlinda, her participation in every competition from her young age to the London Olympics (BBC, 2012a).

One month later, on May 23, 2012, *BBC* correspondent Ellie Crisell broadcasted a report from Peja. She visits the home of the judoka, interviews her and follows the preparations of her and the rest of Kosovo Olympic athletes for the London Olympics that year (Crisell, 2012). "Politics prevents these young people from competing in London", is the message of the *BBC* chronicle from Kosovo. Another correspondent, Paul Harris, also visited and interviewed shooting athletes in Prishtina on the same day and published a long written report on the *BBC* website (Crisell and Harris, 2012). Just two days later, the *BBC* has another long written article about Kelmendi on its website. She may return from the London Olympics because the International Olympic Committee does not allow Kelmendi to represent Kosovo, writes the *BBC* (2012b).

Chronicles about Kelmendi on the *BBC*, date from early times. On June 21, 2011, the *BBC* correspondent visited Peja, conducted an interview with Kelmendi during her preparation in her hometown, starting the chronicle with the description of the Rugova Mountains, but then recalling that "Peja, the city of the champion Majlinda was burned by Serbian forces" (BBC, 2011). On September 16, 2010, the *BBC*, with a 3-minute chronicle, conducted an interview with the chairman of the Kosovo Olympic Committee, Besim Hasani. From that interview comes the message that "Kosovo wants to participate in the Olympic Games in London for both sports and political reasons, to be recognized in the world as an independent state" (BBC, 2011).

On December 30, 2010, the *BBC* also published a report on Kelmendi. "Political hurdle for Kosova judo champion", is the title of the chronicle, where, among other things, young

Albanians living in London are interviewed, for the case of the judoka Kelmendi (BBC, 2010a). A few months earlier, on June 26, 2010, the *BBC* conducted another interview with Kelmendi, asking the question: Judoka Majlinda Kelmendi is determined to win a first Olympic gold at the London Olympics for Kosovo or Albania? (BBC,2010b). In these interviews, Kelmendi constantly talks about Kosovo and Albania.

Meanwhile, the London newspaper *The Guardian* on July 29, 2012 with the title “Judo’s Majlinda Kelmendi still fighting for recognition”, writes that the 21-year-old has been denied competition for Kosovo, because the president of the International Olympic Committee has refused this, but she has chosen her second homeland, Albania, defending the colors of this country (Jackson, 2012). “After all, we are all Albanians. It is good that I can at least compete for Albania”, *The Guardian* quotes judoka Kelmendi, concluding the long article with the words: “The fight for recognition continues” (Jackson, 2012).

Public diplomacy of footballers

Kosovo has some talents who have been successful in football teams across Europe. The special thing about footballers is that they not only do not hide their Albanian identity from Kosovo, but constantly seek to show it, to talk about Kosovo, as is the case of footballer Gjerdan Shaqiri, born in Kosovo (1991), who immigrated to Switzerland. In the finals of the European Champions Cup, on May 25, 2013, worldwide television stations focused on Gjerdan Shaqiri who raises the cup won by Bayern covered with a flag that showed the flag of Switzerland and Kosovo sewn jointly. Immediately after the match, he went on the field with the flag of Kosovo (and Switzerland) at the Wembley Stadium in London, where the final match took place (Blick, 2013).

Footballer Gjerdan Shaqiri (of Bayern), extends the flag of Kosovo and Switzerland with the winning Bayern Cup, in London, on May 25, 2013, after the end of the Champions League final between Bayern Munich and Borussia Dortmund in the Wembley stadium in London. In 2013, in addition to Shaqiri, there were dozens of other footballers from Kosovo who played in respectful European teams, while the most distinguished are: Lorik Cana in Lazio, Rome (and the Albanian national team), Valon Behrami and Blerim Xhemajli in the team of Napoli and both at the time also played for the Swiss national team, Adnan Januzaj at Manchester United, Hamdi Salihi in China (and the Albanian national team), Besart Berisha in the Australian league (and the Albanian national team), etc.

There are also many other talented footballers and athletes who were successful outside Kosovo, while there are dozens of Albanian teams in the diaspora competing in host countries in the second and third series, especially in Switzerland, which represent a channel of communication with other athletes, but also with the public in the stadium and the general public through the media that follow football matches.

Kosovo’s cultural diplomacy through KFOR soldiers

Soldiers can play an important role in creating a soft power, the image of their country, through exchanges, training in other countries, assistance programs with other countries in peacetime (Nye, 2004, p. 116). Soldiers usually have uncertainty and risk expectations

when they go on a peacekeeping mission. But the service in Kosovo, where the crime rate is the same as in other Balkan countries, exceeds the initial negative expectations of soldiers. For this reason, after returning to their country, soldiers can play a role in the image of a country they have stayed in, talking about the place where they served. In this sense, Kosovo has been fortunate to benefit from this level of dimension of public diplomacy since the conflict, because hundreds of thousands of soldiers have stayed in it during the years of KFOR in Kosovo. NATO entered Kosovo on June 12, 1999, two days after the adoption of Resolution 1244 by the UN Security Council. The international peacekeeping force known as KFOR, in addition to soldiers from Alliance member states, has also had troops from non-member countries. Initially, 50,000 soldiers entered, of which the largest number were from: Britain with 19,000, Germany with 8,500, 7,000 were from the United States and France, Italy was present with 5,000 troops. Russia had 4,000 troops, the Netherlands 3,600, Spain 1,712, Canada 1,470, Ukraine 1,300, India 800; some other European countries have had hundreds of troops, such as Romania, Croatia, and distant countries such as: Argentina, Mongolia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Morocco, etc. were also present⁴. As a rule, soldiers would stay normally for six months and then exchanged with other soldiers, and this number of them remained constant for several years, which means that only in the first year of KFOR's stay in Kosovo, about 100 thousand soldiers - foreign nationals have stayed for about 6 months. The number of soldiers began to decline based on the assessment of stability and security in Kosovo. In 2013, KFOR had only 5,565 troops in Kosovo⁵ out of a total of 31 countries in the world, 23 of which are NATO members and eight partner countries⁶. Today there are about 4,000 troops from 28 countries⁷.

Soldiers might often face difficulties in peacekeeping operations in the first weeks⁸; yet again, most of them have gone through quite comfortable peacekeeping operations compared to such peacekeeping missions in other parts of the world. This means that most soldiers from different parts of the world who have stayed in Kosovo, have returned to their country with a better impression than the initial expectations when they set out to serve in a peacekeeping mission. They spent several months in Kosovo, saw the country, moved around, contacted, and were hosted and treated by the locals as liberators.

Conclusions

A country with a lack of international media, cannot exercise the management of information to convey messages to the world to the extent that it balances the non-positive messages of other foreign media that receive their source of information from internal developments. So without improving the internal situation, the strategies which might be undertaken to improve the image are destined not to achieve the desired effects. This means that when

⁴ http://www.nato.int/kfor/structur/nations/placemap/kfor_placemat.pdf. accessed 18 February 2018.

⁵ http://www.nato.int/kfor/structur/nations/placemap/kfor_placemat.pdf. accessed 18 February 2018.

⁶ http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_48818.htm accessed 18 February 2018.

⁷ <https://shape.nato.int/ongoingoperations/nato-mission-in-kosovo-kfor-> accessed 23 February 2020.

⁸ NATO confirmed on October 19, 2004 that 115 soldiers had been killed during the operation, while 50 others had died accidentally.

implementing strategic management as the second dimension of public diplomacy, the expectations cannot be effective if the country has negative developments. In a country with underdeveloped domestic progress and growth, it is not surprising that investments in information management or strategic management, no matter how large, are not very useful. But Kosovo seems to be lucky in the third dimension of public diplomacy, i.e. in cultural diplomacy. Although Kosovo's state actors, due to limited opportunities or skills, do not pay attention to cultural diplomacy because they lack organized exchanges, non-state actors such as artists and athletes have managed to communicate with millions of people through international media for years. This proves that successful individuals in the world manage to contribute more to the image of Kosovo than state institutions. Even though state actors have failed to be present at least physically, as in some countries in the region and beyond, Kosovar cultural diplomacy through artists has been represented for years and quite massively, due to the extensive media coverage that successful individuals have had. From the above-given examples, it should also be noted that not all successful non-state actors from Kosovo in the world have been counted. We may say that there are many others who are involved in cultural institutions in the countries where they live, such as conductors, actors, musicians, and more who play a role in raising the good image of the country of origin. Also, there are many national and local media of different countries that give space to successful individuals as mentioned above, but here the focus was mainly global media within a limited period of time, i.e. in the first years after the declaration of independence.

Despite the limited capacity of soft power, it can be said that Kosovo has been lucky because of the international presence in terms of the large number of visits and stays by foreign nationals. Although the largest number of these visitors (who have stayed for at least six months) were soldiers, it would still be impossible for Kosovo to claim, with its capacity, to enable such a large number of visits in these years; in the first two years (1999-2000) over 100 thousand soldiers were stationed. Moreover, to this day, NATO troops, counting 4,000 soldiers in Kosovo and situated every six months, are an opportunity to get acquainted with the reality here. Even the representatives of the UN mission, UNMIK, whose officials appointed to Kosovo, remained in offices until after the declaration of its independence, counted thousands of people from all over the world. Other special missions in this post-conflict country, missions such as the EU, and other international organizations and agencies, still have a number of representatives in Kosovo compared to regular missions in other countries. It is important that all these visits can be taken as exchanges, and although they are one-way visits but with bilateral communication, they are very useful for the dimension of cultural diplomacy which has to do with the establishment of long-term relationships. In these relationships, of course, friendships have happened and even marriages between couples have taken place. Although not all of these visitors who stayed in Kosovo for a few months have left with best impressions of Kosovo, yet staying and getting to know the country may have removed rather than added any possible stereotypes present in them, depending on where they come from or the information they have previously had.

All this, including sport diplomacy created by young talents, happened without the commitment and contribution of Kosovo's state actors even though foreign visits are declining day by day. For this reason, state actors must design communication strategies,

cultural interaction and exchanges with foreign audiences, with those parties where the country's interest is highest.

So, the introduction of non-state actors in communication with foreign opinion and the loss of the monopoly of governments to communicate massively with the outside world in the new public diplomacy, made public diplomacy detach from conveying the merely influential message. This marks another dimension in the direction of the message: from the information provided by state actors as a one-way activity of disseminating the message to foreign audiences into reciprocal message exchange. The massive communication of non-state actors with the outside world fostered the dialogue of individuals of different peoples.

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