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## Avrupa Birliği'nin Yumuşak Güce Yönelik Son Yaklaşımı: Dijital Diplomasi

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**Öz:** Dijital dönüşüm hem sürdürülebilir kalkınmanın bir hedefi hem de sürdürülebilir kalkınma çerçevesinde ek hedeflere ulaşmada önemli bir katkıdır. Ancak dijital dönüşüm süreci sürdürülebilir kalkınma üzerinde hem yararlı hem de zararlı sonuçlar üreterek ikili bir etkiye sahiptir. Uluslararası ilişkilerdeki temel kavramlardan biri yumuşak güçtür. Küreselleşme çağında, dil, kültür ve yardım gibi çeşitli sosyal ve insani yönlerden toplumları etkilemek ve kontrol etmek için önemli bir politik araç olarak hizmet eder. Küreselleşmenin şekillenmesinde ve ilerlemesinde önemli bir rol oynayan dijitalleşme, diplomasiden ekonomiye kadar toplumsal yaşamın her alanına hızla nüfuz etmektedir. Bu bağlamda dijital diplomasi, yumuşak gücü dijital alana aktarmanın bir yolu olarak ortaya çıkmakta ve bu alandaki güç dinamiklerinin ve dengelerinin yeniden yapılandırılmasını gerektirmektedir. Avrupa Birliği, küresel değişim ve dönüşümlere hızla uyum sağlayarak dijitalleşme manzarasında kendini başarıyla konumlandırmıştır. Sonuç olarak dijital diplomasi, Avrupa Birliği'nin dijital geleceği için aktif olarak örgütlendiği ve stratejiler geliştirdiği bir alandır. Dijital Avrupa terimi yaygın olarak referans alınmakta ve dijital diplomasi, AB üye devletleri, komşu ülkeler ve uluslararası örgütler arasında politika geliştirmede etkili bir şekilde kullanılmaktadır. Bu çalışma, dijital diplomasi'nin küresel sahnede dijital üstünlük kurma çabasında yumuşak gücün bir bileşeni olarak hizmet ettiği iddiasını, bir vaka çalışması olarak Avrupa Birliği'ne odaklanarak değerlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Değerlendirme, içerik analizi ve mevcut literatür kullanılarak Avrupa Birliği'nden resmi belgelerin analizini içerir. Güç ve diplomasi yönlerini birleştirerek, bu araştırma, uluslararası ilişkiler ve siyaset bilimi alanlarında dijitalleşmeyi çevreleyen devam eden söylemi Avrupa Birliği perspektifinden ilerletmeyi amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Avrupa Birliği, Yumuşak Güç, Dijital Diplomasi

## The European Union's Latest Approach to Soft Power: Digital Diplomacy

**Abstract:** Digital transformation is both a goal of sustainable development and an important contribution to achieving additional goals within the framework of sustainable development. However, the digital transformation process has a dual effect on sustainable development, producing both beneficial and harmful results. One of the fundamental concepts in international relations is soft power. In the age of globalization, it serves as an important political tool to influence and control societies in various social and humanitarian aspects such as language, culture and aid. Digitalization, which plays an important role in the shaping and progress of globalization, is rapidly penetrating all areas of social life, from diplomacy to economy. In this context, digital diplomacy emerges as a way to transfer soft power to the digital sphere and requires the restructuring of power dynamics and balances in this area. The European Union has successfully positioned itself in the digitalization landscape by rapidly adapting to global changes and transformations. As a result, digital diplomacy is an area where the European Union actively organizes and develops strategies for its digital future. The term Digital Europe is widely referenced and digital diplomacy is effectively used in policy development among EU member states, neighboring countries and international organizations. This study aims to assess the claim that digital diplomacy serves as a component of soft power in the effort to establish digital supremacy on the global stage, focusing on the European Union as a case study. The assessment involves the analysis of official documents from the European Union using content analysis and existing literature. By

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combining aspects of power and diplomacy, this research aims to advance the ongoing discourse surrounding digitalization in the fields of international relations and political science from the perspective of the European Union.

**Keywords:** European Union, Soft Power, Digital Diplomacy

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## **Introduction**

In international relations studies, power is considered as an important concept that determines and affects the international system. Although the concept, which is frequently emphasized and given importance by realists, is often mentioned together with hard power elements, it has a transformative effect on the international system together with soft power tools today.

Transformations in the digital field have changed traditional diplomacy practices. Daily life, which now fits into our mobile phones, provides the opportunity to get to know and learn about other peoples, different countries' policies, different perceptions and beliefs beyond the borders of the nation-state in our own locality. With formation of the digital field into an important part of individual life with technological devices, individuals and societies are becoming more open to external influences. Diplomacy is also an area open to these influences and has the potential to create a significant security and sovereignty gap with the involvement of non-state actors in the diplomatic process. Hard power tools based on coercion and pressure are not preferable today. At this point, digital diplomacy is a soft power application that is frequently resorted to with the aim of influencing, persuading, and transforming foreign societies in terms of their own values, thoughts and beliefs. For this reason, nation-states are making serious investments in the digital field and are pursuing institutionalization in technical, legal and administrative terms, with the aim of strengthening their sovereignty in the digital field, becoming the main actor regulating international norms and freely disseminating their own values in the global environment.

The aim of this study is to define digital diplomacy from a soft power perspective and to discuss digital diplomacy in the context of the European Union. In the first part of the study, the concept of power and its elements are included, and in the second part, digital diplomacy is defined within the development line of diplomacy. In the last part, in the light of official documents published by the European Union, what digital diplomacy means for the European Union and what kind of goals and programs it has developed are explained in order to realize digital diplomacy. The main argument of this study is that the European Union is an important global actor in the digital field and actively uses digital diplomacy. The European Union, which is trying to maintain its place in digital competition, exhibits a safe and consistent global performance in line with its Digital Europe goals.

## **Methodology**

This research adopts a qualitative approach to explore the usage of digital diplomacy in EU. The study focuses on EU countries. By analyzing cases from leading EU countries, the research aims to identify common strategies and their effectiveness in digital diplomacy usage.

## **Data Collection**

The data for this research was gathered through case studies of several prominent applications from the selected EU countries. Publicly available data on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube were reviewed to assess the digital marketing campaigns of EU digital diplomacy usage. Information from EU websites and social media analytics reports were also incorporated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the digital diplomacy reach, user engagement, and overall success. Furthermore, additional data was sourced from industry reports and academic studies related to digital diplomacy practices in EU.

## **Analysis**

The research analyzed a variety of digital diplomacy strategies employed by EU, focusing on key performance indicators such as follower growth, engagement rates, and the volume of user-generated content. The campaigns were examined for their creativity, targeting methods, and use of interactive features to foster interaction. The analysis also considered how well these digital diplomacy strategies aligned with the people's broader goals and the extent to which they succeeded in driving citizenship engagement.

## **Clarifying the Concept of Soft Power**

The concept of soft power, introduced by the distinguished scholar Joseph Nye, represents a transformative force in today's diplomacy and international relations. In essence, soft power is defined as a country's or an actor's capacity to sway the actions and preferences of others through non-coercive methods, including cultural values and ideology. In contrast to hard power, which is based on coercion, soft power utilizes attraction and persuasion to fulfill its goals, making it an essential component of contemporary diplomatic efforts. Nye outlines three main sources of soft power: culture, political values, and foreign policies (Nye, 1990).

The first aspect of soft power pertains to a nation's capability to share its cultural offerings, including music, films, literature, and art with other countries (Antonova, et al., 2020). Utilizing cultural influence serves as an effective form of soft power, allowing a nation to advocate for its identity and values while fostering a favorable perception among global audiences (Scott-Smith, et al., 2021).

The second aspect of soft power involves a nation's dedication to democratic ideals, human rights, and the rule of law. Nations that champion these principles are more inclined to earn the respect and admiration of others, thereby wielding greater influence internationally. The other aspect is a nation's ability to collaborate with other countries in tackling shared issues like terrorism, poverty, inequality, and climate change (Chishti, 2021). Through such cooperation, nations can bolster their reputation and credibility while establishing enduring partnerships (Winkler, 2020).

The third aspect of soft power, foreign policy, pertains to how a nation interacts with and behaves towards other countries within the global community (Gallarotti, 2022a; Bell, 2022). According to Nye, the foreign policy of a nation can greatly influence its soft power. Nations that are perceived as fostering peace, collaboration, and international stability through their foreign policies generally possess greater soft power compared to those regarded as aggressive or antagonistic towards others.

### **The Importance of Soft Power in Digital Diplomacy**

Soft power denotes a country's capacity to sway the perceptions and sentiments of individuals in foreign nations through non-coercive avenues, including culture, values, and policies. The significance of digital diplomacy is paramount in amplifying a nation's soft power, as it facilitates engagement with global audiences while projecting its values and policies.

The concept of soft power pertains to a nation or organization's capacity to sway others and accomplish its objectives through attraction and persuasion, rather than through force or coercion. It encompasses the ability to influence the preferences and behaviors of others by leveraging culture, values, policies, and other non-coercive methods. In contrast to hard power, which employs military or economic coercion to fulfill political aims, soft power is regarded as a more effective and sustainable approach to influence in today's world. This is due to its foundation on fostering relationships, encouraging cooperation, and winning the hearts and minds of individuals.

Examples of soft power include the following:

**Cultural exports:** A nation can cultivate a favorable perception of its culture and values by exporting its films, music, literature, and various other forms of cultural expression to different countries, thereby fostering interest and respect for its populace and lifestyle. A pertinent illustration of this is the global popularity of Korean pop music (K-pop) and Korean dramas (K-dramas), which have contributed significantly to the dissemination of Korean culture and the augmentation of South Korea's soft power.

**Social Events:** Social events play a crucial role in utilizing diplomatic avenues to advance a nation's image and interests. For instance, a country may dispatch its artists, scholars, or athletes to participate

in cultural exchange initiatives or sponsor international events that highlight its cultural heritage and accomplishments. Such actions can foster goodwill and strengthen relationships with other nations.

**Education:** In terms of education, offering educational opportunities to international students allows a country to promote its culture and values while cultivating a favorable perception of its educational system. A prime example is the United States, which hosts a significant number of foreign students in its universities, thereby enhancing its soft power and influence.

**Foreign aid:** Furthermore, foreign aid serves as another avenue for establishing goodwill and building relationships while promoting a nation's values and interests. For example, China's Belt and Road Initiative, which focuses on facilitating economic development and infrastructures projects in various countries, has contributed to the enhancement of China's soft power and influence.

**Corporate social responsibility:** Companies that participate in socially responsible initiatives, including environmental sustainability, community development, or advocacy for human rights, have the potential to improve their brand reputation and foster a favorable perception of their country of origin. A pertinent example is, the Japanese electronics firm, Sony, recognized for its dedication to environmental sustainability, which has contributed to bolstering Japan's soft power and influence.

Nevertheless, diplomacy has come to the realization that neither hard power alone is sufficient to address emerging challenges, nor can the tools of soft power—despite their extensive range of application—effectively confront these new difficulties. It is now time to acknowledge that, in most, if not all, forthcoming challenges, a combination of both approaches may yield greater success, as reliance on either hard power or soft power in isolation may result in failure. In essence, the concept of smart power emphasizes the significance of both hard and soft power, aiming to integrate them in a strategic and deliberate manner to fulfill those foreign policy objectives:

**Transition to soft power in International Relations (IR):** The transition to soft power in international relations marks a notable change from the conventional dependence on hard power strategies, including military force and economic pressure. In contrast, soft power focuses on leveraging attraction, persuasion, and cultural impact to fulfill foreign policy goals. This transition has been partly fueled by the growing interconnectedness of the globe, making it more challenging for nations to reach their aims solely through traditional hard power approaches (Ohnesorge, 2019).

The transition to soft power in international relations signifies a crucial acknowledgment of how values, ideas, and culture influence global politics. By prioritizing attraction and persuasion rather than coercion and force, soft power can foster enhanced understanding and collaboration among countries, contributing to a more stable and peaceful international framework. Nonetheless, it is essential to understand that soft power alone is not a cure-all; a balanced strategy that blends both

hard and soft power methods is vital for meeting foreign policy goals in a complex and interconnected environment.

**The Role of Soft Power in Diplomacy:** In traditional diplomacy, soft power has emerged as a vital instrument, as nations increasingly acknowledge the significance of fostering relationships and encouraging collaboration with others. By focusing on cultural and social values, soft power can contribute to a more favorable perception of a nation and improve its standing in the international arena. A notable benefit of utilizing soft power in diplomatic efforts is its capacity to facilitate cooperation and joint action on shared concerns. By highlighting common values and objectives, soft power can help establish trust and motivate countries to collaborate on matters such as climate change, human rights, and economic growth. This approach can be particularly advantageous during multilateral discussions, where relying on hard power strategies might hinder communication and cooperation (Tran, 2023).

In addition, soft power has the potential to foster consensus on challenging matters and enhance understanding among nations with varying perspectives and ideologies. By prioritizing cultural exchange and dialogue, soft power can serve to close the gaps that frequently arise between countries with differing political frameworks and social values, promoting increased understanding and empathy (Nelaeva, 2018). However, it is crucial to acknowledge the limitations associated with employing soft power in diplomatic efforts. Relying solely on soft power may not be adequate for fulfilling a nation's foreign policy goals, especially in scenarios where other nations are unresponsive to that country's cultural or social values. Furthermore, the success of soft power in diplomacy is influenced by several factors, such as the degree of trust and collaboration between nations, the specifics of the issues at hand, and the broader geopolitical landscape (Goldsmith et al., 2021).

The role of soft power in diplomacy is a significant focus within the field of international relations. By fostering collaboration and cooperation on shared concerns, as well as creating consensus and understanding around challenging topics, soft power can improve a nation's standing globally and encourage increased trust and collaboration among countries. Nevertheless, achieving favorable results in diplomatic discussions typically requires a balanced strategy that integrates both soft and hard power methods.

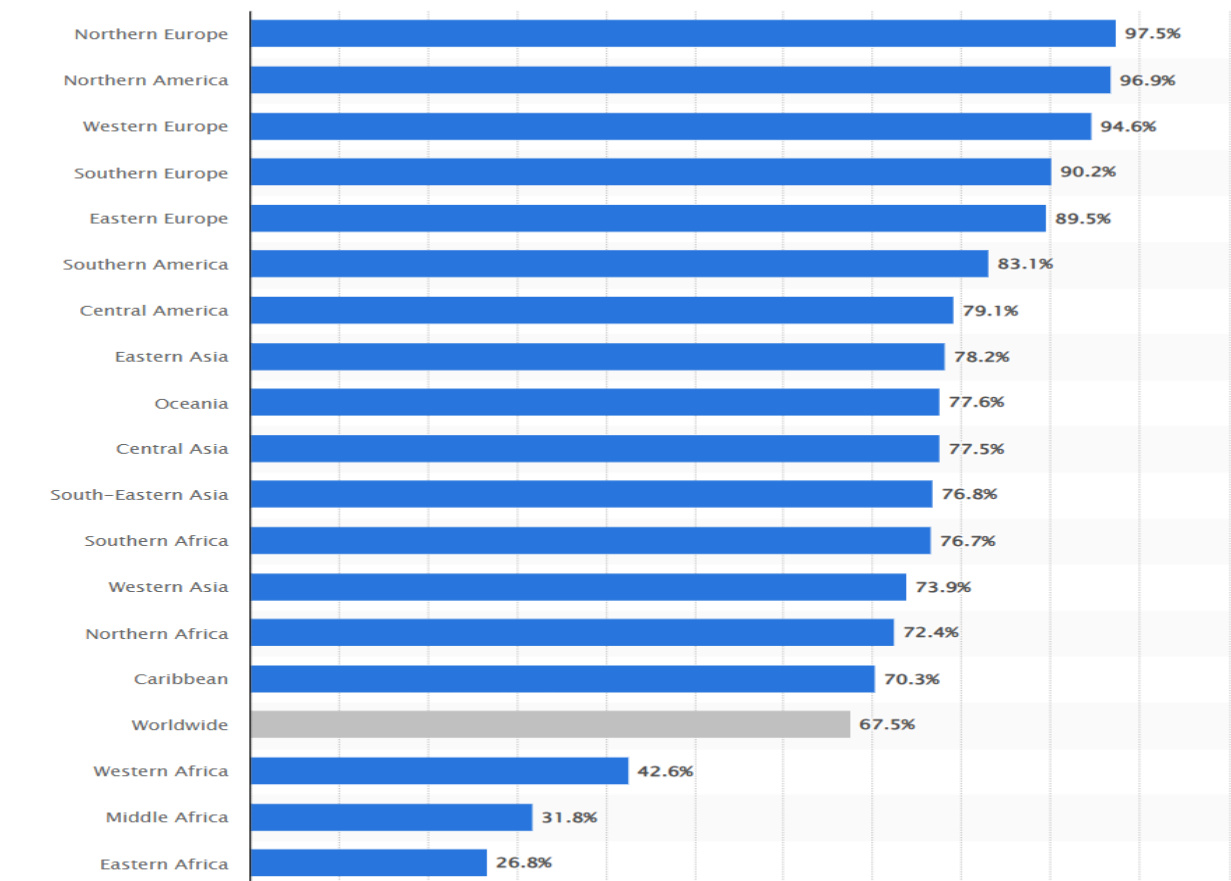
## **Digital Diplomacy as a Soft Power**

### **Internet and Soft Power**

In today's internet age, access to information has become quite important. Today, states that can direct, create or manipulate information can also gain a solid place as leading actors in digital transformation. Nye (1990) has listed some examples as criteria for soft power. Accordingly, the

number of foreign immigrants, tourists, Nobel Prize winners, long life expectancy, and the prevalence of internet use, which also concerns digital life, are included in this list. In other words, countries that actively use the internet will also play an active role in the creation and direction of information. States that use and direct information will also be able to retain the persuasive and attractive qualities of soft power. Therefore, the internet emerges as a leading soft power element in the digital age. Table 1 lists the internet penetration rates in the world as of 2024 (Statista, 2024):

**Table 1.** Internet penetration rates in the world as of 2024 (Source: Statista, (2024))



The data published via Statista compares the geographical regions in more detail. However, instead of presenting all the data in this study, the regions with the highest and lowest rates of internet use were selected and the table was restricted. As seen in Table 1, European countries are far above the world average in terms of internet penetration. While the world average is 67%, this rate is quite high in the north, south, east and west of the European geography. The closest rate to European countries is North America with 97%. In order for the leadership of Europe and North America in the digital field, the spread of qualities such as liberalism, democracy, freedom and the rule of law, which have taken their place as Western values in both geographies, and the economic development in these regions, Western digital partnerships and digital capitalism are on the agenda, especially in the European Union and the United States (Wheeler, 2021). On the official website of the United States Bureau of Cyberspace and Digital Policy, a mission statement was made under the title of Mission:

ensuring responsible state behavior in cyberspace, ensuring the integrity and security of the internet infrastructure, promoting competitiveness, and maintaining democratic values (Bureau of Cyberspace and Digital Policy, 2022). As explained in the next section, the protection and dissemination of values are essential for both the United States and the European Union. From this perspective, internet ownership and digital leadership unite Western digital partnerships within the framework of similar goals, and the internet is preferred as an important soft power tool for the dissemination, protection, and maintenance of Western values.

### **Digital Transformation and Digital Diplomacy**

The prevalence of internet use is also putting societies and states through a great change filter in the digital field. We are in a period where modern patterns are breaking down and individuals are becoming active actors in the international system. When it comes to diplomacy, it is possible to say that great changes have occurred with the influence of the digital era.

Diplomatic institutions and behaviors have changed throughout history according to the requirements of the international system. In terms of diplomatic history, it is possible to divide these developments into two as old and new diplomacy in terms of public participation. The main characteristics of the period called old diplomacy are that it takes place behind closed doors, the interests of the state and the interests of the ruler are considered the same, the diplomatic talks are held secretly due to the distrust of the rulers towards the public and the public's disinterest in foreign policy. Undoubtedly, the most important development that shaped today's diplomacy is the period after the First World War, when the public was tried to be placed at the center of diplomatic activities and the concept of public relations began to rise. This period, which symbolizes the transition from old diplomacy to new diplomacy, began to take shape with the proposal of open agreements to be negotiated openly, as expressed by Woodrow Wilson in his speech to the Senate in 1917 (İskit, 2020). Thus, the public began to be accepted as the new element of diplomacy. In this new period, where individuals are also actors in the international system, it is possible to say that diplomacy was previously defined as the profession of diplomats whereas citizen diplomats have emerged today (Yücel, 2016). The transformation of diplomacy has gained momentum in a completely different dimension with the digital era. To summarize, there has been a transition from classical diplomacy, called Diplomacy 1.0, to public diplomacy with Diplomacy 2.0, where state-public relations are at the center. Diplomacy 3.0, or digital diplomacy, is on the agenda with the digital era. In other words, it is a diplomacy period that completely reverses all components of diplomacy such as method, actor, process and rule, which is done everywhere, for everyone and at all times. (Aslan and Göksu, 2016; Yücel, 2021). Diplomacy 4.0 is called über diplomacy or post-digital diplomacy. In other words, it is envisioned as a diplomacy model that provides communication between objects, eliminates the



boundaries of public diplomacy, and is based on cyber-physical systems and algorithms (Aslan and Göksu, 2016; Yücel, 2021).

So, what is digital diplomacy, called Diplomacy 3.0? In different sources today, it is expressed with various concepts such as diplomacy, iDiplomacy, Virtual Diplomacy, Cyber diplomacy, techno-diplomacy, media diplomacy, Twitter diplomacy, network or network diplomacy (Kurt, 2018). The common feature of these concepts is that they include new generation concepts belonging to the digital era.

There are many definitions of digital diplomacy. When the common expressions in these definitions are combined, the following features of digital diplomacy emerge (Aslan and Göksu, 2016):

- It is the solution to foreign policy problems via the internet.
- It is used to win the minds and hearts of social networks.
- It is the application of classical diplomacy in a digital environment.
- It is an interactive process that aims to inform and communicate with foreign societies by using digital tools.
- It appeals to target individuals, not target audiences.
- It is shaped according to geographical regions within the framework of political objectives.

As seen in the examples of the United States and Europe, digital diplomacy aims to protect and maintain Western values and to spread these values outside the Western geography. In non-Western countries, the aim is different. For example, China uses digital diplomacy to persuade its own citizens to suppress China's peaceful rise in the balance of power and its authoritarian rule. In the case of Iran, it is seen that they use the digital sphere to restrict information coming from Western countries and to present a non-Western alternative. For Russia, digital diplomacy is to create a positive image and expand Russia's sphere of influence around the world (Tsvetkova and Rushchin, 2021).

The 2023 Digital Diplomacy Index lists countries that actively use digital diplomacy in the world according to various categories. It processes the effects of G20 countries on international relations using online platforms with data obtained from these countries.

The top 5 countries ranked in the above-mentioned categories as of 2023 are as follows (Digital Diplomacy Index, 2023).

**Table 2.** 5 countries ranked in the above-mentioned categories as of 2023 (Source: Digital Diplomacy Index (2023))

Last updated: 11.08.2023		DIPLOMATIC NETWORK REACH	DIPLOMATIC WEIGHT	VOCALITY	MESSAGE EFFICIENCY	GLOBAL COUNTRY VISIBILITY	FORMAT PROFICIENCY	MOMENTUM	DIPLOMATIC CENTRALITY	LANGUAGE DIVERSITY	DIGITAL DIPLOMACY INDEX
<b>1</b>	<b>United States</b>	9.55	8.07	9.27	8.25	9.14	8.32	9.28	7.73	9.65	<b>8.61</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Russia ▲ +1</b>	8.13	10	10	5.72	9.31	9.91	7.38	5.58	10	<b>8.37</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>India ▼ -1</b>	10	6.4	7.77	8.78	9.43	7.94	10	7.3	7.83	<b>8.21</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Indonesia ▲ +3</b>	9.16	9.13	5.43	8.01	8.54	10	8.13	3.53	4.42	<b>7.87</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>France ▼ -1</b>	8.88	4.04	9.38	5.68	9.3	9.04	7.69	10	10	<b>7.66</b>

For all these reasons, digital diplomacy is considered a soft power element. The fact that digital diplomacy is a soft power element is accepted in various ways. First of all, in digital diplomacy, methods such as threats and deterrence are not used in order to win the hearts of societies and peoples. On the contrary, the goal of influencing societies and institutions is achieved through tools such as education, culture, science, art, and tourism (Yücel, 2021). This situation shows us that, as discussed in the title above, soft tools such as culture and language are preferred over social media platforms instead of military and economic tools.

When the transformation process of diplomacy is considered, it is generally accepted that the point reached is a public diplomacy and therefore includes soft power. Public diplomacy is an interactive form of diplomacy that includes multiple actors and networks. With the end of the Cold War, the concept began to be considered and discussed within the scope of the effects of the communication revolution on foreign policy actions due to the increasing interest in new communication technologies. Today, social media tools are not limited to individuals who make up society, but are also actively used by heads of state, opinion leaders and even brands. Therefore, social media can affect many people at the same time through mutual interaction in the context of digital diplomacy and provides the opportunity for the values, cultures and beliefs that form the basis of public diplomacy to be recognized by different societies (Yıldırım, 2015).

As discussed in previous sections, although soft power was defined by Nye, its theoretical framework is seen as insufficient and cannot go beyond public diplomacy discussions. In this form, digital diplomacy is considered as a component of public diplomacy as an element of soft power on new digital framework.

Another contribution is that “digital diplomacy is a diplomacy used in the construction of soft power”. Accordingly, if soft power includes the elements of consent and persuasion, technology and innovation affecting soft power should also be included in the concept of diplomacy. In this context,

the concept of “soft power” has been brought to the agenda. It can also be defined as a new framework consisting of the words soft (soft power) and software (Yücel, 2021).

## **Digital Europe: The European Union’s Approach to Digital Diplomacy**

### **The Process towards Digital Europe**

The global transformations in the digital field are undoubtedly a development that includes the European Union in the process. The European Union has developed various strategies for adapting to the digital field to maintain its global competition, sustain its leading role in the international system and adapt to the new order. In short, the European Union must learn global technology politics, direct this process and determine digital strategies (Ringhof and Torreblanca, 2022).

The main developments that have dragged the European Union into global competition in the digital field are Russia’s allegedly meddled in US Presidential Elections and Brexit Referendum , the Cambridge Analytica scandal, Russia’s influence in the 2019 European Parliament elections, the continuation of critical infrastructure attacks in conflicts to which the European Union is a party, and the increase in state-backed attacks on Union institutions (Moret and Pawlak, 2017; Ringhof and Torreblanca, 2022). All these external processes have made the Union more sensitive to technological vulnerabilities and have been the driving factors that have strengthened the Union in the digital field.

One of the important steps taken by the Union is the publication of the one-page Decision for a More Dynamic, Flexible and Competitive European Industry by the Council of the European Union, dated 16 November 2020. The Decision includes provisions on how the Covid-19 pandemic will be used as a leverage to make Europe more competitive, flexible and dynamic. Accordingly, it has been stated that there should be a sustainable, attractive and competitive business environment for stronger European integration and cooperation, and in this context, the technological leadership of the European Union has been described as an important factor in the formation of this environment (Council of The European Union, 2022a).

Another development can be considered as the publication of the Digital Compass by the European Commission on March 9, 2021. The Digital Compass (2030 Digital Compass) aims to provide a vision and environment for Europe’s digital transformation by 2030. The priorities presented within the scope of the 2030 Digital Compass Goals are listed under four headings as talents, government, infrastructure and business (European Commission, 2022). In the Digital Compass and the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, the European Union established a goal that by 2030, at least 80% of the population should possess fundamental digital skills, while the number of ICT professionals is expected to reach 20 million. The operationalization of digital competencies has commenced in accordance with the 2006 Council Recommendation.

On July 18, 2022, the Council of the European Union adopted a Decision on “The EU Digital Diplomacy” (Council of The European Union, 2022a). Within the scope of this decision, the technological age we are in has been defined as an opportunity and risk for all individuals on a global scale, including Union citizens. It has been emphasized that the European Union should take its place in the growing world of technology in the face of this new order that may affect not only individuals but also the geopolitical balance of power (Council of The European Union, 2022a). For this reason, the European Union;

- Forming digital alliances with various countries and institutions in the world.
- Investing more in digital infrastructure.
- Developing a human-centered approach to technology (Council of The European Union, 2022a).

The objectives of Digital Diplomacy were listed in Article 6 of the Decision dated 18 July 2022. These titles can be summarized as strengthening the global role of the European Union, actively promoting the values of the European Union in the digital field, developing a human rights-based approach in the digital field, supporting a multi-stakeholder and global secure internet, influencing the shaping of international technology standards, supporting flexible and reliable digital infrastructures, developing democratic digital societies and increasing the effects of the Union within the framework of competition in the global market (Council of The European Union, 2022b).

When we look at the aims of digital diplomacy for the European Union, it is possible to see that targets are determined under many headings from politics to economy. These aims include spreading democracy and Union values to third countries, developing and making digital infrastructure flexible within the Union, establishing global partnerships, adhering to international agreements and strengthening the global role of the Union. In short, the European Union is taking digital diplomacy far beyond a mere diplomatic activity and expanding it to many areas of activity, including a functional foreign policy beyond its own borders.

### **The Digital Diplomacy Approach of the European Union’s Soft Power Strategy**

The soft power strategy of the European Union in digital diplomacy has played a vital role in shaping its foreign policy goals and has contributed significantly to its global standing and reputation. By advocating for its principles of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, the EU has successfully cultivated a favorable image and established trust with nations across the globe (Duarte and Ferreira-Pereira, 2021).

The soft power strategy of the EU in digital diplomacy has encountered several challenges and limitations. One significant issue has been the growing polarization across Europe, which has

weakened the EU's capacity to present a cohesive front and effectively advocate for its values. Furthermore, criticisms have arisen regarding the EU's soft power initiatives, often deemed overly focused on moralism and idealism instead of addressing urgent global problems with pragmatic solutions (Arifon, 2018). Additionally, internal constraints, such as budgetary restrictions and bureaucratic inefficiencies, have also limited the EU's soft power strategy. These factors have at times diminished the effectiveness of its development aid programs and other efforts designed to enhance its soft power (Van Langenhove, 2017).

Despite these limitations and challenges, the soft power strategy of the EU in digital diplomacy has proven to be quite effective in fostering cooperation and collaboration among European nations as well as with countries globally. The EU has successfully established robust partnerships and alliances, especially in trade and development, and has managed to wield considerable influence over global matters like climate change and migration (Ferreira-Pereira and Pinto, 2021).

An essential element of the European Union's foreign policy goals has been its soft power strategy, which has contributed to boosting its global influence and reputation. Despite encountering various challenges and limitations, the EU's soft power initiatives have generally succeeded in fostering cooperation and collaboration both among European nations and with countries worldwide.

## **Conclusion**

One of the most important results of globalization is the rapid development of technology and the changes and transformations experienced in the digital field. These changes in the digital field affect many points from science to economy and social life. Another field that benefits from this transformation is diplomacy. The limited diplomacy practices that took place behind closed doors for centuries have been replaced by open diplomacy over time. With the increase in public interest and the focus on public influence orientations, diplomacy has undergone a significant transformation on the basis of state-people and in the field of public diplomacy. Today, the dizzying changes in the field of technology have ensured that diplomacy is reflected in the digital field, and digital diplomacy practices that can extend to the inner world of individuals and aim to create an impact on the culture, beliefs and values of foreign societies and enable this impact to be achieved through digital channels have come to the fore.

Diplomacy is undoubtedly one of the soft power tools. When examined, especially in terms of public diplomacy, the aim of influencing and directing societies comes to the fore as a soft power argument. Therefore, digital diplomacy is an important soft power argument in terms of the reflection of public diplomacy practices in the digital field. Dominance achieved in the digital field has the potential to change the international balance of power. For this reason, states are investing in the digital field and technologies and determining strategies and roadmaps to strengthen in the digital field.

Within such a structure, the European Union has aimed for digital sovereignty; for this purpose, it strives to establish global collaborations, takes an active part in determining international standards in the digital field, and spreads values such as respect for human rights, democracy, freedom, competitiveness and the rule of law, which are the Union values, outside the European geography. In the race for digital dominance, each country uses digital diplomacy tools to impose its own values. Countries that fall behind in this race may be trapped in living under the dominant values of developed countries in the digital order. In order not to fall behind in digital competition and for the Union to achieve its digital goals, it is essential to use digital diplomacy effectively, and to ensure internet security and liberalize internet access. In short, the European Union is trying to consolidate its digital sovereignty through digital diplomacy, to maintain the balance of power in the global digital power competition, and to develop itself in the digital field so as to create a sustainable ecosystem for the Union. The European Union has managed to become one of the effective, reliable and powerful global actors in the field of digital diplomacy thanks to the projects, strategies and programs, it has implemented in the digital field.

The pressure created by the economic crisis has brought new political steps towards the integration process for the EU. While the digitalization process is presented as a new solution to the problems and needs of the 21st century, the proposed political approaches carry question marks in terms of providing a common prescription for EU countries and citizens with heterogeneous characteristics. In this context, there are questions that European citizens have submitted to the European Parliament (EP) regarding digitalization, combating poverty and strengthening the digital skills of individuals. What measures will the Commission take to support Member States in improving their digital literacy rates and encouraging the adoption of digital skills among EU citizens in a process where only 59% of citizens will have basic digital skills by 2030? (European Parliament, 2023b). How can Member States support European citizens in providing the necessary education and training to acquire digital skills? (European Parliament, 2022). What is the Commission's strategy for improving digital skills among adults, especially in less developed regions, and what actions are planned for 2021-2027? (European Parliament, 2021b). How will it promote the protection of workers' rights in the labour market and ensure that digital transformation is carried out fairly and effectively, ensuring that all workers benefit from new opportunities? (European Parliament, 2023a).

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## **Extended Abstract**

One of the most important results of globalization is the rapid development of technology and the changes and transformations experienced in the digital field. These changes in the digital field affect many points from science to economy and social life. Another field that benefits from this transformation is diplomacy. The limited diplomacy practices that took place behind closed doors for centuries have been replaced by open diplomacy and the style of diplomacy has been diversified. With the increase in public interest and the focus on public influence orientations, diplomacy has undergone a significant transformation on the basis of state-people and in the field of public diplomacy. Today, the dizzying changes experienced in the field of technology have ensured that diplomacy is reflected in the digital field, and digital diplomacy practices that can reach the inner world of individuals, aim to create an impact on the culture, beliefs and values of foreign societies and enable this impact to be realized through digital channels have come to the fore.

Especially when examined in terms of public diplomacy, the aim of influencing and directing societies comes to the fore as a soft power argument. With globalization, instead of a coercive language, a new diplomatic language that is persuasive and encouraging has been developed. Therefore, digital diplomacy is an important soft power argument in terms of the reflection of public diplomacy practices in the digital field. Dominance achieved in the digital field has the potential to change the international balance of power. For this reason, states are investing in the digital field and technologies and determining strategies and roadmaps for strengthening in the digital field.

Within such a structure, the European Union has aimed for digital sovereignty; for this purpose, it strives to establish global collaborations, take an active part in determining international standards in the digital field, and spread values such as respect for human rights, democracy, freedom, competitiveness and the rule of law, which are Union values, outside the European geography. In the digital dominance race, each country uses digital diplomacy tools to impose its own values. Countries that fall behind in this race may be trapped in living under the dominant values of developed countries in the digital order. In order not to fall behind in digital competition and for the Union to achieve its digital goals, it is essential to use digital diplomacy effectively, and to ensure internet security and liberalize internet access. In short, the European Union is trying to consolidate its digital sovereignty through digital diplomacy, to maintain the balance of power in the global digital power competition and to develop itself in the digital field in order to create a sustainable ecosystem for the Union. The European Union has managed to become one of the effective, reliable and powerful global actors in the field of digital diplomacy thanks to the projects, strategies and programs it has implemented in the digital field.

Soft power is one of the prominent concepts in interstate relations. With the impact of globalization, it is the most important political perception tool used to influence and control other societies in social and humanitarian areas such as language, culture and humanitarian aid. Digitalization, which contributes to and transforms the globalization process, is rapidly gaining ground in every layer of social life from diplomacy to economy. In this context, digital diplomacy manifests itself in the context of transferring soft power to the digital field; it requires the redesign of power relations and balance in the digital field. The European Union has effectively taken its place in the digitalization process with its ability to quickly adapt to global change and transformations. In this context, digital diplomacy is one of the areas that the European Union is rapidly organizing and planning its digital future. The concept of Digital Europe is frequently expressed and digital diplomacy is effectively used in the context of policy development among the member states of the European Union, with neighboring countries and international organizations. The aim of this study is to evaluate the claim that digital diplomacy is used as a soft power element in the process of consolidating digital dominance in the international arena, using the example of the European Union. In this evaluation, the official documents presented by the European Union will be examined and the content analysis method will be used together with the literature. This study aims to contribute to the digitalization process, which is frequently discussed in international relations and political science literature, with the power and diplomacy dimension from the perspective of the European Union.