

The Effectiveness of Erasmus+ and UGRAD Soft Power on Armenia during Hard Times (Nagorno-Karabakh War 2020)

Abstract

The thesis focuses on soft power and public diplomacy through exchange study programs of the European Union and the United States. Precisely, the thesis studies the influence of the educational exchange programs (Erasmus+ and UGRAD) on the Armenian exchange students in the scope of soft power. After establishing the influence of the exchange programs on the formation of the perceptions about the host countries, the thesis further focuses on the sustainability of the perception taking into consideration the Nagorno-Karabakh Second war which is a ‘critical juncture’ as it was a dramatic event in the life of the Armenian youth and could have influenced their views of the EU and the US. It is important to note that the academic literature on the exchange students’ perceptions does not provide any studies through the lenses of the political events in the participants’ home country.

Thirty-nine semi-structured interviews have been conducted among the Erasmus+ and UGRAD participants from Armenia alongside the content analysis of the documents that the EU and the US released during the Nagorno-Karabakh Second war in order to understand what was the politics of the host countries and what was the impact of the EU and the US reactions to the conflict on the Armenian exchange students. While most of the participants preserved the positive image that was formed thanks to the respective exchange program, largely they stated that they have detached their personal experience from the political beliefs after the war, or have changed their worldview due to ‘cognitive dissonance’.