

Thumbnail Image:

Image not found or type unknown



Public Diplomacy in the News: Eurovision, USAID, & The Kremlin's Narrative ^[1]

“Public Diplomacy in the News” is a CPD Blog series by Andrew Dubbins that spotlights noteworthy stories on public diplomacy topics such as cultural diplomacy, nation branding, exchange programs, international events and conferences, digital diplomacy, and strategic global communications.

Eurovision as a battleground for soft power. A new feature by [Wall Street Journal's](#) James Hookway explores how Eurovision has evolved far beyond a music competition into a stage where nations project identity, influence, and political values through culture and spectacle, a topic pioneered in our recent CPD Perspective by Jessica Carniel, [Can Fans Be Public Diplomats? Participatory Diplomacy at the Eurovision Song Contest](#). Amid controversy surrounding Israel's participation during the Gaza war, including boycotts by several European broadcasters and protests at performances, the contest once again highlighted its long history of political tensions, rivalries, and diplomatic messaging. Since its founding in 1956, countries have used Eurovision to reshape national images, signal political alignment, and express geopolitical ambitions, from postwar Germany and Cold War rivalries to Ukraine's resistance anthems after Russia's invasion and Eastern European nations signaling their desire to join the Western democratic community. While fans embrace the competition's theatrical politics as part of its appeal, governments increasingly recognize Eurovision as a powerful platform for soft power, cultural branding, and international influence.

[James Hookway / The Wall Street Journal](#)

The dismantling of USAID and American soft power. The Trump administration's dismantling of USAID has sharply reduced American foreign aid programs that for decades provided food, healthcare, and emergency relief to vulnerable populations while also advancing US soft power abroad. In an interview with [Mother Jones's](#) Reveal podcast, ProPublica's Brett Murphy and Anna Maria Barry-Jester report that the cuts are already producing deadly consequences in countries such as South Sudan and Kenya, where communities that depended on USAID-supported programs are struggling to survive and many residents can scarcely believe the United States would abruptly withdraw its support.

[Mother Jones](#)

Russian culture as geopolitical influence. Russia has continued to wield culture as a strategic tool of political influence despite European sanctions imposed after the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. [Kyiv Post's](#) Daryna Pidhorna argues that Russian cultural diplomacy remains deeply embedded across Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America through institutions like Russian Houses, exhibitions, lectures, humanitarian projects, and educational programs that promote Kremlin narratives under the guise of cultural exchange. While some European countries shut down Russian cultural centers, inconsistent enforcement and enduring beliefs that “culture exists outside politics” have allowed many operations to continue, often reframed around “traditional values” and historical memory rather than overt nationalism. Meanwhile,

Russia has aggressively expanded its cultural presence in the Global South, tying cultural programming to political messaging, economic partnerships, and strategic influence campaigns designed to position Russia as an anti-colonial alternative to the West.

Daryna Pidhorna / Kyiv Post

Korea expands cultural diplomacy in Southeast Asia. South Korea is launching the yearlong “2026 Korea Season” campaign to strengthen cultural ties with Thailand and Vietnam through performances, exhibitions, festivals, and interactive programs that blend traditional Korean heritage with contemporary global art forms. Organized by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the initiative coincides with key milestones for Korean cultural centers in both countries and aims to broaden Korea’s cultural influence beyond K-pop and K-dramas. Events include ballet reinterpretations of Korean traditions, collaborative music festivals, orchestral K-pop performances, folklore exhibitions, culinary workshops, K-beauty showcases, and gaming events, all designed to deepen regional partnerships and expand Korea’s cultural presence across Southeast Asia. Meanwhile in California, the superstar group BTS’s sold-out concerts at Stanford Stadium demonstrated how K-pop has become a powerful tool of cultural diplomacy, deepening global interest in Korean language, history, and identity. Professors and students at Stanford described how BTS and the broader Korean Wave have fueled rising enrollment in Korean studies and encouraged cross-cultural curiosity, while the group’s international influence, including its work with the United Nations and UNESCO, illustrates how music and entertainment can strengthen global understanding and reshape perceptions of South Korea worldwide.

Lee Kyung-min / The Korea Times; Jana Katsuyama / Fox KTVU

Indian soft power through culture and commerce. India is increasingly using cultural diplomacy to strengthen international relationships and expand its global influence through shared traditions, food, music, and symbolic exchanges. Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to Italy blended high-level diplomacy with Indian soft power through cultural performances, diaspora engagement, artistic exchanges, and the viral “Melody” toffee gesture with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, while India’s promotion of “mango diplomacy” in Washington used the arrival of prized Kesar mangoes to celebrate cultural heritage and deepen emotional and commercial ties with American audiences and the Indian diaspora.

Shivya Kanojia & Sana Fazili / Hindustan Times; Open
