




## **Using Nowruz Diplomacy for greater connectivity in**

# Eurasia

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**A**s Iranians are going to celebrate the Nowruz Festival, on the eve of the new Persian Year, along with various ethnic groups across Greater Eurasia from Xinjiang to Turkey, it seems that the time has come to reaffirm the significance of Nowruz diplomacy for achieving some foreign policy goals of the country in the 21st century.

Cultural diplomacy is a useful tool that can be employed to realize foreign-policy objectives, and within this context, a special aspect of cultural diplomacy projection, especially leveraging Iran's historical links with Eurasian nations will be examined. Also, it intends to understand why Iran is in a favorable position to utilize the Nowruz heritage in its foreign policy? Finally, which initiatives need to be taken by Iran in the Nowruz diplomacy area within the context of greater connectivity in Eurasia?

It is worth noting that today the cultural diplomacy as a complement to the official diplomacy has found a special place in the strategic calculations of countries, which means the exchange of ideas, information, art, literature and also highlighting the shared historical memories between the nations to strengthen mutual understanding. In other words, cultural diplomacy is an attempt to pursue national interests by utilizing cultural links. Therefore, despite the strategic and geopolitical position of the country being improved in the international system in the past decades, at the same time, it should be borne in mind that issues such as geoculture are similarly important for shaping the foreign policy trajectory.

#### ■ The status of Nowruz diplomacy

Interestingly, the relationship between Nowruz and state diplomacy is not a new one, and dates back to the days of ancient Iran, a matter which has been depicted in a historical monument on the theme of representatives of 29 nations paying tribute to Darius, the King of Iran. Since then, for

centuries, Nowruz has not only remained a focal point for cultural and human connectivity in Eurasia, but also an integral element of Eurasian nations' identity so that some countries in the region have taken the initiative to register this ancient heritage in international forums as their historical values. Nowruz also has been recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, and in 2010, the day of March 21 was declared as the "International Day of Nowruz" by the United Nations General Assembly on. This Resolution welcomes the efforts of Member States which celebrate Nowruz to preserve and develop the culture and traditions related to Nowruz, and encourages Member States to make efforts to raise awareness about Nowruz and to organize annual events in commemoration of this festivity.

#### ■ Nowruz Has Deep Roots in Iran History

As Nowruz is well placed at the core of Iran's identity as a cradle of coexistence and empathy of various ethnic groups, it presents a unique image of a country that in the ups and downs of history has always been able to bond the hearts and minds of various ethnic groups around a cultural heritage like Nowruz so that this festival was welcomed at the courts of the Mongol kings in the Indian subcontinent and beyond in Xinjiang of China. Today similarly, Nowruz can be used to meet foreign policy goals, because Iran, as the origin of Nowruz, is in a position to work with like-minded nations across Eurasia to promote Nowruz diplomacy to expand physical and human connectivity.

#### ■ Nowruz and Eurasian greater connectivity

Today, the established transnational network for celebrating Nowruz festival plays a significant role in the lives of millions across the region, and considering that most nations of the region see Nowruz as an inherent part of their identity and civilizational values, this Eurasian presence of Nowruz makes it ideal



for cultural diplomacy projection.

Certainly, the Nowruz diplomacy could have an impact beyond the realm of cultural diplomacy, an aid in other areas of foreign policy as well. Nowruz also could present a noble image of Iran as an internationally influential entity by realizing the principles and goals of foreign policy of the country.

Therefore, for the current administration, which has adopted an active “neighborhood policy” to lead its foreign policy agenda, the use of Iran’s shared cultural and historical ties with other countries will open up a new horizon for cooperation. Moreover unlike the common belief about soft power which aims to impose certain cultural values, the positive feature of Nowruz is that its promotion has not to be seen as the export of a cultural product, but as a common cultural festival throughout Eurasia that can be considered as a diplomatic and cultural mechanism for strengthening the regional relations. Therefore, Nowruz diplomacy could potentially facilitate the realization of the administration’s grand strategy in the context of the “First Neighborhood” and “Look to East” policies.

#### ■ NOWRUZ in Iran; Persian New Year Traditions

In this regard, some symbolic diplomatic gestures, such as regularly holding the Nowruz Summit can create an appropriate mechanism for regional dialogue. In addition, hosting an International Nowruz festival with various cultural initiatives such as film and music events, holding international sports events with the presence of Nowruz countries

and other guest countries in different cities, and facilitating the visa procedures and trade exchanges will increase the flow of tourists. It should be noted that since most of the countries in the Nowruz geography are full members or observers in the Shanghai Organization, a proposed cultural initiative titled “Nowruz Common Heritage” would be the right step in this direction.

However, despite all the huge benefits that the Nowruz might offer for a successful cultural diplomacy projection, so far, no significant initiative has been taken in this regard. However Nowruz diplomacy provides the relevant catalyst for human connectivity and regional economic integration, and in this regard, we don’t have to do anything to prove anything new, because Nowruz itself remains a more powerful brand than anything else to appeal sufficient global attraction with enormous benefit for the Eurasian nations.

In the conclusion, considering its shared heritage with the Eurasian nations, the Islamic Republic of Iran should speed up the modernization of its connectivity and infrastructure networks to make a thriving trade route and attract a large number of tourists. Iran also, given its geopolitical features as a bridge between Eurasia and the Indian Ocean and coupled with its efforts to invest in its connectivity projects such as the Chabahar port and the north-south corridor, must be able at the same time to understand cultural complexities of the region and take responsibility for strengthening the cultural and human ties with Eurasian society. Therefore, Nowruz can continue to benefit the country for its regional and international outreaches in the 21st century.

