



# Russia's Soft Power as a Limited Efficiency Tool in Lithuania

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**Summary.** Lithuania has been a target of Russia's soft power efforts for the past two decades. The aim of this article is to analyse Russia's soft power influence possibilities in Lithuania. First, it analyzes how soft power is interpreted in Russia compared to the Western conception. Then, Russia's soft power instruments and their core goals are reviewed, not all of which fall under the category of "soft power instruments" according to the Western understanding. The article proceeds with demographic changes in Lithuania and trends of consumption of Russian culture and information in Lithuania. The main argument is that Russia is not aiming to apply soft power to the general Lithuanian society but to particular groups within the population (Russophone minorities and residents with sentiments for the Soviet Union). It can be assumed that demographic trends and Russia's aggressive actions will increasingly limit its soft power capabilities. However, the greatest setback to Russia's soft power in Lithuania is arguably caused by its continuing reliance on hard power when it comes to countries of the post-Soviet space.

**Keywords:** soft power, Russia, Lithuania, culture, demography.

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## Rusijos švelnioji galia kaip riboto poveikio priemonė Lietuvoje

**Santrauka.** Pastaruosius du dešimtmečius – ypač po 2014 m. Rusijos agresijos prieš Ukrainą – Lietuvos užsienio ir saugumo politikos bendruomenė vis daugiau dėmesio skiria Rusijos švelniosios galios priemonių taikymui Lietuvoje. Vis dėlto Rusijos taikomos prie-

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monės ir jas apibūdinančios sampratos („informacinis karas“, „hibridinės grėsmės“ ir t. t.) neatitinka sąvokos „švelnioji galia“ autoriaus Josepho S. Nye siūlomo klasikinio apibrėžimo. Švelniosios galios samprata vis labiau „iškraipoma“. Atsižvelgiant į šį konceptualų disonansą, straipsnyje nagrinėjama, kokias švelniosios galios priemones ir kaip sėkmingai Rusija taiko Lietuvoje.

Straipsnio tikslas – išnagrinėti Rusijos švelniosios galios įtaką Lietuvoje analizuojant tokios galios priemonių arsenalą, jų taikymo tikslus, demografines bei Rusijos kultūros ir informacijos vartojimo tendencijas Lietuvoje.

Šio straipsnio metodologija pagrįsta Rusijos mokslininkų, kurie pasiūlė taikyti švelniąją galią buvusioje sovietinėje erdvėje (įskaitant Lietuvą), įvardijamų priemonių analize. Analizė apsiriboja tik tomis švelniosios galios priemonėmis, kurios kardinaliai neprieštarauja Josepho S. Nye požiūriui. Šių priemonių veiksmingumas vertinamas remiantis pirmiais demografiniais ir gyventojų apklausų duomenimis.

Konstatuojama, kad Rusija siekia taikyti švelniosios galios, taip kaip ji suprantama Joseph S. Nye, ne visos Lietuvos visuomenės, o tik tam tikrų grupių (rusakalbių mažumos ir gyventojų, teigiamai vertinančių sovietinę Lietuvos praeitį) atžvilgiu. Daroma prielaida, kad demografinės tendencijos ir agresyvūs Rusijos veiksmai vis labiau ribos jos švelniosios galios sklaidą, nepaisant apklausose pastebimo Lietuvos gyventojų noro palaikyti geresnius santykius su kaimyne.

Išvadose teigiama, jog Rusija švelniąją galią dažnai supranta kaip „vienpusį eismą; ji nebando suvokti kitų valstybių patirties ir vertybių, atpažinti abipusių panašumų, o veikiau „primeta“ savo naratyvą; tokia strategija gali tikti tuo atveju, kai nacionalinės istorijos versijos pakankamai sutampa (pavyzdžiui, Baltarusijos atveju), tačiau Lietuvos atveju ta strategija netinka. Svarbiausią vietą Rusijos naratyve užima „penkiolikos broliškų respublikų“ ir „pergalės Didžiajame Tėvynės kare“ elementai, kurie iš principo prieštarauja Lietuvoje įsitvirtinusiame „dviejų okupacijų“ ir „Sovietinės imperijos kalėjimo“ naratyvui ir kėsinasi paneigti lietuviškąją tapatybę.

Lietuvos visuomenės demografinės charakteristikos santykinai palankios Rusijos švelniosios galios veikimui, ypač dėl gausios rusakalbių mažumos ir rudimentinio rusų kalbos mokėjimo Lietuvos visuomenėje. Vis dėlto šios sąlygos nyksta dėl emigracijos (stipriausiai veikiančios būtent etninių mažumų bendruomenės Lietuvoje) ir natūralios kartų kaitos, tad ateityje Rusijos švelniosios galios įtaka potencialiai mažės.

**Raktažodžiai:** švelnioji galia, Rusija, Lietuva, kultūra, demografija.

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## *Introduction*

Since Russia's invasion in Ukraine in 2014, Lithuania's focus has been shifting toward Russia's soft power instruments and discussions of their impact. The perception of Russia's soft power as a core part of hybrid warfare (in the broadest and ill-defined sense), including informational and cyber warfare, brought forward by the Chief of the

General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia, is growing.<sup>1</sup> Having in mind the classical definition of soft power by Joseph S. Nye Jr., it is disturbing that Russia is able to reshape the core definition of soft power, which gradually becomes acceptable to policymakers and even experts. The transformed meaning of soft power might further lead to an increasing distortion of soft power instruments and practices, thus eroding the essence of soft power, replacing it with actions that contradict the phenomenon at its core. Despite these changes, it is worth analyzing how traditional instruments of soft power are being applied by Russia in Lithuania and how efficient they are in swaying the Lithuanian society in favor of Russia's positions.

Russia's soft power capabilities toward Lithuania are significantly determined by the experience of bilateral relations, Russia's domestic policies, and foreign policy activities. Lithuanian-Russian relations have been tense for the most of their duration since 1990, except for the 1990–1991 period, which can be considered an anomaly.<sup>2</sup> Somewhat positive relations were the outcome of the Russian government's (under Boris Yeltsin) struggle with the government of the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup> When the Soviet Union collapsed and Russia inherited its power (or what was left of it) and responsibilities, the tensions started to increase, though until the mid-1990s, Lithuania and Russia signed core bilateral agreements. The geopolitical orientation of Lithuania and its Baltic neighbors (Estonia and Latvia) to NATO and

<sup>1</sup> Герасимов В., “Ценность науки в предвидении: новые вызовы переосмыслить формы и способы ведения боевых действий” [The Value of Science in Foresight: New Challenges to Rethinking Forms and Methods of Warfare], *Военно-промышленный курьер* [Military Industrial Courier], 2013, <<https://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/14632>>, 2019 03 30.

<sup>2</sup> This argument might seem odd, however; the blockade of the 1990s and the atrocities committed in 1991 have been performed by the Soviet Union, while the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, headed by Boris Yeltsin, was in conflict with the leadership of the Soviet Union.

<sup>3</sup> Vitkus G., *Diplomatinė aporija: tarptautinė Lietuvos ir Rusijos santykių normalizacijos perspektyva* [Diplomatic Aporia: An International Perspective on the Normalization of Lithuanian and Russian Relations], Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla, 2006, p. 26–29.

the European Union contradicted Russia's interests. Russia sought to remain the regional hegemon in the ex-Soviet space.<sup>4</sup> After Lithuania became a NATO and EU member, the period of a pro-Western "reach" and an ex-Soviet "drag" was officially over. Tensions in the relations of the two countries increased due to Russia's aggressive energy statecraft and peaked in 2008, when Russia invaded Georgia, as Lithuania supported ex-Soviet states in their pro-Western orientations. Lithuania was caught up in the US president Barack Obama's reset policy toward Russia, and the recently sworn in president Dalia Grybauskaitė sought to rejuvenate relations with Moscow, but expectations to build bridges were futile. When Lithuania started to prepare for the EU Presidency in 2013, bilateral relations became hostile on Russia's side. Lithuania experienced informational attacks, a ban on dairy products, and limitations for carriers to work in Russia.<sup>5</sup> The lowest point in bilateral relations was reached when Russia invaded Ukraine in 2014, annexed Crimea, and fuelled a conflict in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Since then, political relations are stagnating, the countries are talking about each other and not to each other. Tensions of nearly 30 years have a negative effect on Russia's soft power in Lithuania. The original definition of "soft power" is being replaced by a power bearing disruptive rather than engaging nature.

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<sup>4</sup> Tsygankov A., *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Rowman and Littlefield, 2016, p. 116–8; Donaldson R., Nogue J., *Foreign Policy of Russia: Changing Systems, Enduring Interests*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. M. E. Sharpe Inc., 2009, p. 163.

<sup>5</sup> Lietuvos Respublikos Prezidentė, „Geros kaimynystės santykių svarbą šalies vadovė telefonu aptarė su Rusijos prezidentu“ [The Head of State Discussed the Importance of Good Neighborly Relations with the Russian President by Phone], <<https://www.lrp.lt/lt/geros-kaimynystes-santykiu-svarba-salies-vadove-telefonu-aptare-su-rusijos-prezidentu/6717>>, 2018 08 10.

Samoškaitė E., „Politikai: kibernetinės atakos prieš DELFI – atakos prieš valstybę“ [Politicians: Cyber Attacks against Delfi are Attacks against the State], LRT, <<https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/18644/politikai-kibernetines-atakos-pries-delfi-atakos-pries-valstybe>>, 2018 06 20.

Alfa, „Rusija pranešė stabdanti lietuviškos pieno produkcijos įvežimą“ [Russia Announce Halting the Import of Lithuanian Dairy Products], <[https://www.alfa.lt/straipsnis/15157466/Rusija.pranese.stabdanti.lietuviskos.pieno.produkcijos.ivezima=2013-10-07\\_09-27](https://www.alfa.lt/straipsnis/15157466/Rusija.pranese.stabdanti.lietuviskos.pieno.produkcijos.ivezima=2013-10-07_09-27)>, 2018 08 14.

The aim of this article is to analyze Russia's soft power influence possibilities in Lithuania through an analysis of choices of soft power instruments, their core goals, demographic changes in Lithuania, and the trends of the consumption of Russian culture and information in Lithuania. The article begins with an analysis of how soft power is understood in Russia; even though the term "soft power" was borrowed from the West, among all Russian scholars, Olga Leonova has put forth the most elaborate interpretation of this concept and therefore she is referenced at length in the first section. Later – sticking to Nye's original concept of soft power – the article argues that Russia is not aiming to apply soft power to the general Lithuanian society but to particular groups (Russophone minorities and residents with sentiments for the Soviet Union). It can be assumed that demographic trends and Russia's aggressive actions will increasingly limit its soft power capabilities, despite the willingness of the Lithuanian society to maintain better relations.

The methodology of this article is based on an analysis of soft power instruments identified by Russian scholars, who suggested to apply these instruments in the ex-Soviet space (including Lithuania); only those instruments that could be conceptually justified from the position of Nye's approach are included in the analysis, while aggressive and disruptive elements, despite the growing focus on them in the Western political and analytical communities, are dismissed. The focus is given to an analysis of how Russia applies soft power instruments, their main target groups, and goals. The effectiveness of these instruments is not evaluated in any exact measures but rather inferred from various surveys conducted in Lithuania. The causes behind the current workings (or failures) of Russia's soft power and its prospects in Lithuania are derived from comparing the official historical narratives of the two countries and analyzing the sociodemographic data; so, in methodological terms, descriptive statistics are complemented by interpretation.

## ***1. The Multiple Interpretations of Soft Power in Russia***

The concept of soft power was originally coined by American political scientist Joseph S. Nye Jr.; he started using this term back in the late 1990s and early 2000s in order to raise the awareness of the full spectrum of power in world politics among US policymakers who were mesmerized by their country's unipolar moment.<sup>6</sup> Nye suggested that coercion or inducement based on America's immense material resources (i.e., hard power) are not the only way to achieve its foreign policy goals: "a country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries – admiring its values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness – want to follow it."<sup>7</sup> Although the relationship between a country's behavioral pattern – obtaining the outcomes a country wants – and the resources it possesses is never perfect, Nye believes that any state can accumulate soft power from three primary sources: its culture (if it is attractive to others), its political values (when the country lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority).<sup>8</sup> It means that a country attempting to wield soft power is very much constrained in its words and actions (so as to maintain its reputation) compared to a country relying solely on hard power; at the same time, countries influenced by soft power have much more autonomy of action compared to those subjugated by hard power, as they are free to choose whose example to follow in international politics.

Any power, however, is contextual, and the resources that produce certain outcomes in one type of situations are completely useless in

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<sup>6</sup> See: Owens W. A., Nye J. S., "America's Information Edge," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 75, No. 2, 1996, p. 20–36; Nye J. S., "Limits of American Power," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 117, No. 4, 2002, p. 545–559; Nye J. S., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, New York: Public Affairs, 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Nye J. S., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, New York: Public Affairs, 2004, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Nye J. S., *The Future of Power*, New York: Public Affairs, 2011, p. 84.

achieving other goals in other types of settings. According to Nye, “soft power is particularly relevant to the realization of [so-called] ‘milieu goals’ <...> [like] promoting democracy, human rights, and open markets; it is easier to attract people to democracy than to coerce them to be democratic.”<sup>9</sup> Such goals are best defined as long-term interests, first and foremost of the United States, and do not necessarily guarantee the realization of any short-term goals. Nye has been criticized extensively for treating the “Washington consensus” (democracy and market economy) as “naturally” attractive to others,<sup>10</sup> which implies that no active promotion of such values is actually needed. Nye ceded that

in the short term, attraction to the prevalent ideas in any given era can be treated as a given, but these ideas are not necessarily universal or immutable. ‘Democracy’ is a prevalent idea in the current era, but it was not in some past eras. Nor is it the goal of the current violent jihadi terrorists who are struggling to construct alternative ideas that can become a ‘natural’ part of Islamic identity. The outcomes of such struggles are partly [determined] through narratives of reasoned persuasion.<sup>11</sup>

That is why public diplomacy and sustained information campaigns are seen in Western literature as the key to soft power;<sup>12</sup> such policies can help upgrade the “raw” sources of soft power, such as popular culture and values, to actual attraction and alignment on the official political level.

<sup>9</sup> Nye J. S., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, New York: Public Affairs, 2004, p. 17.

<sup>10</sup> For example, see: Bially Mattern J., “Why ‘Soft Power’ Isn’t So Soft: Representational Force and the Sociolinguistic Construction of Attraction in World Politics,” *Milennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 3, 2005, p. 591–596.

<sup>11</sup> Nye J. S., “Notes for a Soft-Power Research Agenda” in Williams M., Berenskoetter F. (eds.), *Power in World Politics*, London: Routledge, 2007, p. 163.

<sup>12</sup> Van Ham P., “Power, Public Diplomacy, and the Pax Americana” in Melissen J. (ed.), *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p. 47–66; Nye J. S., *The Future of Power*, New York: Public Affairs, 2011, p. 100–109.

The contextuality of soft power also implies that even though a given country has to sell its own culture, values, and policies to foreign audiences to be attractive, each and every audience “buys into” them to a different degree and in a very different fashion depending on its own culture and values. That is why, according to J. Nye, an “effective public diplomacy is a two-way street that involves listening as well as talking; soft power rests [primarily] on *shared* values.”<sup>13</sup> Most Western analysts of soft power emphasize the importance of a locally acceptable “frame” when transmitting one’s message internationally,<sup>14</sup> which in turn implies a willingness to familiarize oneself with the target audience, to recognize its identity and moral agency.

The Russian approach to soft power is somewhat different from the Western approach in at least a few respects. Whereas in the West, a “softer” way to influence others and get the (mutually) desired outcomes by co-option is seen as a “moral good,”<sup>15</sup> Russia sees it as yet another field of a great power rivalry and – as it was pioneered by Americans – just another way to undermine Russia’s interests. In a way it is ethically even more sinister, as it is seen as a “concealed” form of aggression and domination. One of the first times when Russian President Vladimir Putin discussed the issue of soft power at some length was in his 2012 article in the “Moscow News”; there he defined soft power as “a complex of tools and methods for achieving foreign policy goals without the use of weapons, but by means of information and other levers of influence <...> [which] are often used to foster and provoke extremism, separatism, nationalism, manipulation of public consciousness, and direct intervention in the internal

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<sup>13</sup> Nye J. S., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, New York: Public Affairs, 2004, p. 11.

<sup>14</sup> Sikkink K., “Restructuring World Politics: The Limits and Asymmetries of Soft Power” in Khagram S., James Riker J., Sikkink K. (eds.), *Restructuring World Politics: Transnational Social Movements, Networks, and Norms*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002, p. 306–312.

<sup>15</sup> Bially Mattern J., “Why ‘Soft Power’ Isn’t So Soft: Representational Force and the Sociolinguistic Construction of Attraction in World Politics”, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 3, 2005, p. 590.



politics of sovereign states.”<sup>16</sup> Russia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs officially adopted this approach in its 2013 Foreign Policy Concept, which reads as follows:

Soft power [is] a comprehensive toolkit for achieving foreign policy objectives building on civil society potential, information, cultural and other methods and technologies alternative to traditional diplomacy. <...> Increasing global competition <...> creates a risk of destructive and unlawful use of ‘soft power’ <...> to exert political pressure on sovereign states, interfere in their internal affairs, destabilize their political situation, manipulate public opinion, including under the pretext of financing cultural and human rights projects.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, soft power is not only seen as a “Western evil” but also as an area of zero-sum competition with the West, which Nye<sup>18</sup> himself considers to be a major misinterpretation of his original idea.

Similar (or in some cases even more radical) conceptions of soft power to those adopted by the Kremlin are also expressed by Russian political scientists and commentators. For example, Pavel Parshin concludes that in the Russian political discourse, “soft power” is either dismissed as not deserving to be called “power” at all or is seen in terms of conspiracy, manipulation, zombification, is demonized and mystified as an instrument of “colored” revolutions.<sup>19</sup> Kira Latukhina and Maxim Glikin argue that soft power, which they dub “silent power,” is “the ability to influence the development of a political situation abroad with the help of specially deployed experts and

<sup>16</sup> Путин В., “Россия и меняющийся мир” [Russia in the Changing World], <<http://www.mn.ru/politics/78738>>, 2018 05 22.

<sup>17</sup> The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation. Approved by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on February 12, 2013.

<sup>18</sup> Nye J. S., “What China and Russia Don’t Get About Soft Power,” *Foreign Policy*, April 29, 2013. Available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/04/29/what-china-and-russia-dont-get-about-soft-power>. Accessed on June 3, 2018.

<sup>19</sup> Паршин П., “Проблематика «мягкой силы» во внешней политике России” [The Problem of “Soft Power” in the Foreign Policy of Russia], Аналитические Доклады, выпуск 1 (36), 2013, p. 31–33.

polit-technologists – a sort of agents of influence.”<sup>20</sup> In other words, the Russian commentators value soft power only *if* and *as much as* it can guarantee direct control over the course of events in other countries; for Western scholars, as it was mentioned above, the strength of soft power lies primarily in creating a favorable social milieu that may help to achieve political goals at a later point but by no means guarantees success in world politics.

Olga Leonova of Moscow State University proposes a bit more nuanced approach to soft power compared to that of most Russian politicians and commentators, which bears at least some resemblance to Nye's original idea. Leonova defines soft power as a

[f]oreign policy resource and specific instrument of the latent management of international processes, which become relevant precisely in the period of globalization. <...> Objects of latent management [control] are international processes and relations, as well as individual countries and regions of the world. <...> Firstly, the influence of the subject in control works through the [inner] motivation of actions of the object of control. Secondly, there are no formal institutions, methods, and leverages of control.<sup>21</sup>

Even though Leonova's definition is somewhat similar to Nye's, eventually it is incorporated into the traditional framework of *realpolitik* still dominating the Russian thinking and deviates significantly from Nye's idealistic approach to world politics. Leonova argues that “[a]s a result of the efficient application of soft power instruments, an *illusion* of mutual interests, trust, respect, and mutual understanding appears, and this creates possibilities for a given country to influence political and humanitarian processes in the world and in a particular state [which succumbs to this illusion].”<sup>22</sup> Western idealists, for their

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<sup>20</sup> Латухина К., Гликин М., “Политические животные” [The Political Animals], *Ladno.ru*, <<https://ladno.ru/opinion/1428.html>>, 2018 05 23.

<sup>21</sup> Леонова О., “Мягкая сила – ресурс внешней политики государства” [Soft Power – A Resource of the Foreign Policy of a State], *Научно-аналитический журнал «Обозреватель – Observer»*, No. 4, 2013, p. 28.

<sup>22</sup> Леонова О., “Мягкая сила – ресурс внешней политики государства” [Soft Power – A Resource of the Foreign Policy of a State], *Научно-аналитический журнал «Обозреватель – Observer»*, No. 4, 2013, p. 30.

part, believe in an *actual* compatibility of interests between states (rather than illusion), which can be revealed by sharing information, and the purpose of public diplomacy is exactly that.

On the other hand, even the idealists of the West understand that the national interests of individual countries coincide only to a degree, and putting soft power at work usually cannot affect the vital interests of any given country; according to Nye, “[e]ven though North Korean dictator Kim Jong-Il watches Hollywood movies, that had little effect on North Korea’s nuclear weapons program.”<sup>23</sup> A similar example is the United States’ image in the Middle East, where Washington has diverted an extensive part of its soft power efforts; however, the societies of the Middle Eastern countries still keep their suspicions about the US.<sup>24</sup> Both Nye and Leonova agree that the success of soft power depends not on the subject exerting soft power but on the object’s willingness to be attracted. In the words of David Marquand, Gandhi’s soft power was not the result of the actions of the Indians but rather the silent acceptance of those actions by the British.<sup>25</sup> However, for Leonova, soft power is an element of deception and illusion for the most part, and for Nye, soft power is based on genuine attraction and co-optation.

Finally, it is necessary to overview the soft power resources and instruments indicated by Russian scholars. For Olga Leonova,<sup>26</sup> soft power is the result of domestic sociocultural factors (ideology; style and quality of life and income; values, including national ideas; the mentality of a nation; national culture – art, literature, cinema, theater, show business; the creative potential of a state – the ability to innovate) and external factors (foreign policy and authority in inter-

<sup>23</sup> Nye J. S., *The Future of Power*, New York: Public Affairs, 2011, p. xiii.

<sup>24</sup> Wike R., “America’s Global Image,” Pew Research Center, <<http://www.pewglobal.org/2017/06/28/americas-global-image/>>, 2018 06 23.

<sup>25</sup> Marquand D., *The End of the West: The Once and Future Europe*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011, p. 155.

<sup>26</sup> Леонова О., “Мягкая сила – ресурс внешней политики государства” [Soft Power – A Resource of the Foreign Policy of a State], *Научно-аналитический журнал «Обозреватель – Observer»*, No. 4, 2013, p. 29.

national relations; position in the global hierarchy and geopolitical status; civilizational status; the political and economic model of the state's development; the development strategy of the state and the ability to implement it in practice; the informational resources of the state, its communicative mobility and positions on the Great Communication Highway). For the most part, the domestic elements are quite similar to Nye's proposed cultural and value elements of soft power. However, Leonova admittedly put a somewhat different spin on the external factors compared to Nye's original writings.

As it was already mentioned, the positions of a state within a global hierarchy and its geopolitical status do not automatically translate into attractiveness, even though other countries may find it necessary to maintain relations with a geopolitical giant. The civilizational aspect suggests that each great power is by definition a cradle of a particular civilization, and for this reason it must find itself in possession of some "natural" soft power resources within the countries that are part of this civilization. As Leonova puts it, "communication can only be comprehensible to the extent that it invokes the pre-existing cultural and historical tradition. Therefore, <...> the natural limit to the effect of soft power is the cultural-historical tradition of the object of influence."<sup>27</sup> Although framing the message according to a local cultural background is a textbook axiom of successful "marketing," nowhere in the original Western conception does it say that the operation of soft power stops at the "borders" of civilization (if different "civilizations" even exist in the age of globalization). While it can be accepted that cultural and religious similarity could allow for greater soft power, the civilizational area does not set its limit (the global reach of Japan's soft power is the best evidence of that).

Leonova also singles out the most important soft power instruments for Russia (or any state for that matter): a flood of information,

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<sup>27</sup> Леонова О., "Мягкая сила – ресурс внешней политики государства" [Soft Power – A Resource of the Foreign Policy of a State], *Научно-аналитический журнал «Обозреватель – Observer»*, No. 4, 2013, p. 31.

political public relations oriented to a foreign audience, global marketing, the positioning of the state high up in the global hierarchy, the promotion of a national language around the world, public diplomacy; tourism, sports, and cultural exchange; a system of education and youth exchange programs; capabilities to wage information warfare; a migration policy; a national diaspora; a dialogue of cultures.<sup>28</sup>

The instruments listed above (at least some of them) also indicate Russia's inclination to manage and control the course of events from within rather than engage with foreign audiences and discover mutual interests. Especially idiosyncratic is the inclusion of information warfare, the essence of which is direct control over information flows (using cyber measures, if necessary) and a deliberate disorientation of the target audience. Even though Western "public diplomacy" and Russian information warfare have the same historical roots in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century propaganda, today's conventional wisdom in the West is that a dialogue-like communication strategy and exchange are much more conducive to generating soft power than sheer propaganda.<sup>29</sup> The "instrumentalizing" of the national diaspora and migrants as "agents" of state power (albeit soft) also bears a specific Russian undertone; it is an old and well-tested soft power strategy for diaspora groups to lobby the governments in their countries of residence for the good of their "motherland," but for the "motherland" itself to use its citizens living abroad as decoys and a pretence to exert pressure on foreign countries falls under the category of hard rather than soft power. In other words, the Russian thinkers find the concept of soft power more comprehensible if they "adapt" it to the reality of Russian foreign policy.

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<sup>28</sup> Леонова О., "Мягкая сила – ресурс внешней политики государства" [Soft Power – A Resource of the Foreign Policy of a State], *Научно-аналитический журнал «Обозреватель – Observer»*, No. 4, 2013, p. 30.

<sup>29</sup> Melissen J., "The New Public Diplomacy: Between Theory and Practice" in Melissen J. (ed.), *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p. 16–19.

## ***2. Russia's Efforts to Shape the Historical Discourse***

The Baltic States continue to be perceived by Russia as the “near abroad,” or a former Soviet Union area where Russia has special interests. Russian researchers like Leonova suggest that the expansion of Russia's soft power should be targeted at countries that are objectively interested in cooperation with Russia and are natural strategic partners, and such countries happen to be in the post-Soviet area and Central Asia.<sup>30</sup> Of course, relations between Lithuania and Russia do not demonstrate any strategic partnership, while the strategic element in Russia's relations with other countries of the ex-Soviet space can be quite easily argued against.

A grave mistake is to assume that the ex-Soviet area is homogeneous in foreign policy approaches and Russia's assessments, let alone historical narratives. The interests and perceptions of the Baltic States significantly differ compared to the interests of Belarus, Kazakhstan, or Armenia. While the former see Russia as the core economic force to benefit from, the later see it as the main security guarantor. The Baltic States have economically pragmatic interests toward Russia, but their strategic partnerships and genuine friendships lie firmly in the EU, NATO, and the US.

Rejecting the aforementioned diversity, Leonova suggests that to expand soft power in the post-Soviet space, Russia should focus on<sup>31</sup>:

- “their [the countries'] common history and common destiny, which united them for centuries;
- the common traditions that developed in the era of their joint single multinational country – the ‘fifteen republics – fifteen sisters’;

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<sup>30</sup> Леонова О., “Мягкая сила – ресурс внешней политики государства” [Soft Power – A Resource of the Foreign Policy of a State], *Научно-аналитический журнал «Обозреватель – Observer»*, No. 4, 2013, p. 39–40.

<sup>31</sup> Леонова О., “Мягкая сила – ресурс внешней политики государства” [Soft Power – A Resource of the Foreign Policy of a State], *Научно-аналитический журнал «Обозреватель – Observer»*, No. 4, 2013, p. 39–40.

- the common spiritual experience and experienced hardship and suffering during the Great Patriotic War.”

Because of the historical experience, especially The Second World War and an almost 50-year-long occupation, it would be more than odd for Lithuania to support the “common destiny” element. “The Constitutional Act of The Republic of Lithuania on the Non-Alignment of the Republic of Lithuania to Post-Soviet Eastern Unions,” adopted as early as June 8, 1992, determines that Lithuania will seek the development of mutually advantageous relations with each state that was formerly a component of the USSR but “will never join, in any form, any new political, military, economic, or other unions or commonwealths of states formed on the basis of the former USSR.”<sup>32</sup> Lithuania does not see its history as common – uniting – with Russia; in fact, Lithuania’s history is constructed for the most part on the fight with Russia and the resistance to its rule.

Since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and later the Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth, competed against and fought a number of wars with the Grand Duchy of Muscovy and the subsequently emerged Russia. In 2005, the 4<sup>th</sup> of November was declared the Russian Day of Peoples’ Unity. This day is commemorating the date when Polish-Lithuanian forces were chased out from Moscow in 1612. This suggests that Russia focuses on the differences rather than common experiences with Lithuania and Poland when defining its national narrative.

As for the three partitions of the Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth that took place in 1772, 1793, and 1795, they are assessed absolutely differently in the histories of the two countries. While partitions are seen in Russia as the expansion of its power, Lithuanians perceive them as a tragedy, as the country was annexed. The period of occupation of the Russian Empire in Lithuania is connected to the armed uprisings of 1831 and 1863 against the Russian government, Russification, the ban on books published in the Lithuanian

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<sup>32</sup> The Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, <<http://www3.lrs.lt/home/Konstitucija/Constitution.htm>>, 2018 08 25.

language, serfdom, the closure of Vilnius University, the confiscation of lands and estates, and deportations to Siberia.

The history of war with the Red Army for Lithuania's independence after its reinstatement in 1918 also adds to the negative context of bilateral relations. The only period where some positive aspects in the relation of the two states – a pragmatic economic and political bilateral cooperation – can be found is the interwar period, which lasted until 1939. However, the signing of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact in 1939 indicated that it was impossible for Lithuania to trust Russia. The annexation of 1940, resembling the annexation of Crimea and the dismemberments of Moldova and Georgia, indicates a certain continuity in Russia's foreign policy, suggesting that Russia is waiting for opportunities to expand its power, influence, and territory at the expense of its neighbors. All in all, there are not many positive events in Lithuanian-Russian history on which the rapprochement discourse could be constructed.

With regards to the “common spiritual experience and experienced hardship and suffering during the Great Patriotic War,” Russia's experience, as well as its assessment, was different from Lithuania's. The Lithuanian experience does not resemble the myth on which Russian identity rests and which omits inconvenient facts. In Russian popular history, the beginning of World War II was the Nazi Germany's attack on the Soviet Union in 1941. Concurrently, the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact (i.e., the division of Europe and the strategic partnership between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union and the attack on Poland in 1939 by the latter), the forced establishment of military bases in the Baltic States, the forged referendums, and the annexation of the Baltic States are also conveniently omitted from the myth of “Great Patriotic War.” After the occupation by the Soviet Union, approximately 150 000 residents of Lithuania (including children) were deported to Siberia.<sup>33</sup> About 50 000 people were

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<sup>33</sup> Anušauskas A. et al., *Lietuva 1940–1990: okupuotos Lietuvos istorija* [Lithuania 1940–1990: The History of the Occupied Lithuania]. Vilnius: Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimų centras, 2005, p. 289.



executed or died from harsh living conditions in Soviet gulags. The experienced loss of residents is an equivalent of the population of the sixth largest city of Lithuania. The “liberation” by the Soviets did not mean freedom for Lithuania, which was truly regained only in 1990. In this context, Leonova’s “spiritual experience” element works against Russia’s interests. It creates cleavages between the two countries, because the period of WWII is connected to Soviet atrocities, the loss of independence, the extermination of the country’s population, and the persecution of its culture and religion – not victory.

Finally, the 50-year-long forced membership in the Soviet Union (“the common traditions that developed in the era of their joint single multinational country – the ‘fifteen republics – fifteen sisters,’” according to Leonova’s suggested soft power instruments) did not create any feelings of unity in the Baltic States, except for the identification of the Soviet period as a time of common suffering and cooperation between the Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian national independence movements. The official ending of World War II in 1945 meant for Lithuania only the prolongation of a war against the occupying forces of the Soviet Union. In the period from 1944 to 1953, more than 20 000 participants of the resistance have been killed.<sup>34</sup> The Policy of Sovietization and Russification was implemented; the intelligentsia were either imprisoned, deported, or deprived of the opportunity to work; freedom of speech was suppressed; limitations on travel outside the Soviet Union were imposed. After the suppression of the armed resistance, non-armed resistance efforts to Soviet rule lasted during the whole period of occupation, starting with the activities of the Roman Catholic Church, underground press materials, and even encompassing the youth’s focus on the elements of Western culture (jeans, rock music, etc.).

Industrialization, the development of infrastructure, non-existent unemployment, low taxes, and some cultural elements (films and TV shows) are perceived in Lithuanian society as positive pictures regarding the Soviet period. However, the patterns of industrialization

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<sup>34</sup> Anušauskas A. et al., *Lietuva 1940–1990: okupuotos Lietuvos istorija* [Lithuania 1940–1990: The History of Occupied Lithuania]. Vilnius: Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimų centras, 2005, p. 357–8.

and infrastructure development, as well as the development of the economy in the countries that have remained independent, suggest that it could have been achieved faster and more efficiently compared to the Soviet model. The comparison of Lithuanian and Finnish development is usually provided as an example. The industrialization based on inefficient, energy-intensive, and wasteful manufacturing technologies led to high levels of pollution. Unemployment was battled with forced labor. In the cultural sphere, there was no diversity, at least officially. Unfortunately, the official cultural narrative achieved a significant level of indoctrination and attitude-building, which is still at work in the society that experienced it.

To sum up, there are no genuinely positive images of the “fifteen republics – fifteen sisters” in Lithuanian perception. For the most part, the Soviet Union is associated with imprisonment. However, Russia does not seem to focus on the differences in perceptions of history. The differences in historical discourse lead to heightened tensions between countries over Victory Day (the 9<sup>th</sup> of May in Russia) celebrations,<sup>35</sup> occupation, and resistance.

Through a unified and unilaterally defined historical discourse, Russia aims to deny opposing historical discourses. According to Sergey Rekeda, national historiography in the Baltic States has adopted the concept of a “triple occupation” (in 1940 by the Soviet Union, in 1941 by Nazi Germany, and in 1944 by the Red Army).<sup>36</sup> He continues by saying that “[t]he historical validity of this position in this case is irrelevant, as it is the political expediency of adhering to the ‘occupation doctrine’ framework that is of foremost importance.”<sup>37</sup> This way Rekeda tries to vindicate Russian positions.

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<sup>35</sup> Janeliūnas T., „Gegužės 9-osios problema saugumizavimo teorijos ir komunikacinio saugumo požiūriu“ [The “9th of May issue” from the Perspectives of Securitization and Communicative Security], *Politologija*, No. 2 (38), 2005, p. 3–30.

<sup>36</sup> Rekeda S., “Historical Mirror-World of Victory Day in the Baltic States,” *RIAC*, <[http://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/historical-mirror-world-or-victory-day-in-the-baltic-states/?sphrase\\_id=11839892](http://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/historical-mirror-world-or-victory-day-in-the-baltic-states/?sphrase_id=11839892)>, 2019 07 15.

<sup>37</sup> Rekeda S., “Historical Mirror-World of Victory Day in the Baltic States,” *RIAC*, <[http://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/historical-mirror-world-or-victory-day-in-the-baltic-states/?sphrase\\_id=11839892](http://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/historical-mirror-world-or-victory-day-in-the-baltic-states/?sphrase_id=11839892)>, 2019 07 15.

The historical discourse, as it has been presented by Leonova, is not a genuine soft power element. First and foremost, such a perception serves the domestic audience because, according to Michael Kimmage, Russia is “unable to deal with its actual past, [so] the state has turned to celebratory myth.”<sup>38</sup> The myth is of crucial significance for the government to keep support of the society and to assure itself of the might. Russia also strives to achieve both a hegemony of the narrative in the ex-Soviet space in the long term as well as to dominate the narrative globally.

The common history element, as well as Russia’s soft power in general, is directed to Russophone minorities and people bearing sentiments for the Soviet period in order to ensure their connections and unity with Russia and to hinder their engagement with general society. As Nerijus Maliukevičius noted, “Russian compatriots in the post-Soviet region shifted from being a Russian foreign policy tool to becoming a target for the new soft power strategy.”<sup>39</sup> At the same time, the soft power approach is directly linked to sharp power. The Kremlin tries to accentuate cultural, linguistic, and ideological connections in order to strengthen ties to Russia while simultaneously to also foster fear about the countries of their residence.<sup>40</sup> The argument is supported with data gathered using surveys.

A special survey focused on national minorities was conducted in 2016, and it showed that Russia’s soft power influence on minorities

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<sup>38</sup> Kimmage M., “The People’s Authoritarian: How Russian Society Created Putin,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 97 (No. 4), 2018.

<sup>39</sup> Maliukevičius N., “(Re)Constructing Russian Soft Power in Post-Soviet Region”, *Baltic Security & Defence Review*, Vol. 15, Issue 2, 2013, p. 74.

<sup>40</sup> Kasčiūnas L., Vaišnys A., Garbačiauskaitė-Budrienė M., Keršanskas V., Kojala L., Legatas Š., „Rusijos propaganda Lietuvoje: situacijos ir proceso analizė“ [Russia’s Propaganda in Lithuania: Situation and Process Analysis], Vaišnys A. et al., *Rusijos propaganda: analizė, įvertinimas, rekomendacijos* [Russian Propaganda: Analysis, Assessment, Recommendations], Vilnius, Rytų Europos studijų centras, 2017, 77; Denisenko V., „Kremliaus propagandinių matricių, taikomų Baltijos šalims ir Ukrainai, panašumai ir skirtumai“ [The Similarities and Differences of the Kremlin Propaganda Matrices Applied in the Baltic States and Ukraine], *Žurnalistikos tyrimai* [Journalism Research], Issue 11, 2016, p. 109–10.

is high, and that the historical and political discourse applied in Russia is also accepted by minorities in Lithuania. The survey showed that 37% of the Russian minority respondents agreed with the statement that people lived better in the Soviet period than now; among the Polish minority respondents, the same answer was chosen by as many as 41%.<sup>41</sup> This, to some extent, puts into question the assumptions made by Kristian Nielsen and Heiko Paabo that “the European integration seems to ensure that even the Russophone minorities look unlikely to ever reorient back to Russia.”<sup>42</sup> The EU did provide Russophone citizens with opportunities to travel and work in any EU country, and these higher living standards limit Russia's soft power influence over minorities. However, economic rationality and national feelings or feelings of connection do not necessarily cancel each other out. Minorities may enjoy opportunities provided by the EU, but this does not mean that they do not support Russia's actions – and this is what the survey of minorities in Lithuania actually showed. The survey indicated that Russian and Polish minorities strongly support Russian President Vladimir Putin; 73% of Russians answered that they like Putin or that they like him a lot, and among the Polish minority, such answers amounted to 64%.<sup>43</sup>

Even though Leonova suggests that “it is desirable to emphasize Russia's respect for the status of [former soviet republics] as sovereign states, respect for their culture and understanding specific fea-

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<sup>41</sup> Saldžiūnas V., „Spec. tyrimas: ką darytų Lietuvos rusai ir lenkai, jei Kremlius pultų Baltijos šalis?“ [Special Investigation: What Would Lithuanian Russians and Poles Do if the Kremlin Attacked the Baltic States?], *Delfi*, <<https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/medijos-karas-propaganda/spec-tyrimas-ka-darytu-lietuvos-rusiai-ir-lenkai-jei-kremlius-pultu-baltijos-salis.d?id=71971382>>, 2018 06 20.

<sup>42</sup> Nielsen K., Paabo H., “How Russian Soft Power Fails in Estonia: Or Why the Russophone Minorities Remain Quiescent,” *Journal of Baltic Security*, Vol. 1, Issue 2, 2015, p. 125–157.

<sup>43</sup> Saldžiūnas V., „Spec. tyrimas: ką darytų Lietuvos rusai ir lenkai, jei Kremlius pultų Baltijos šalis?“ [Special Investigation: What Would Lithuanian Russians and Poles Do if the Kremlin Attacked the Baltic States?], *Delfi*, <<https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/medijos-karas-propaganda/spec-tyrimas-ka-darytu-lietuvos-rusiai-ir-lenkai-jei-kremlius-pultu-baltijos-salis.d?id=71971382>>, 2018 06 20.

tures of the chosen development models,”<sup>44</sup> the Russian government does not seem to take into account Leonova’s recommendations. In 2015, the Russian chief prosecutor’s office planned to examine whether the Soviet Union acted legally when it recognized the independence of the Baltic States in 1991.<sup>45</sup> In 2012, The *Komsomolskaya Pravda* published an article claiming that during the events of January 13, 1991, Lithuanians have been shooting at other Lithuanians, and Soviet troops did no harm and have been falsely accused.<sup>46</sup> In July 2018, the Investigative Committee of Russia initiated a criminal prosecution of Lithuanian judges and prosecutors investigating cases against Russian servicemen involved in the events of the January 13, 1991.<sup>47</sup> Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov, in his famous article reviewing the impact of Russia on the history of international affairs, claims that “[i]f you take an unbiased look at the smaller European countries, which previously were part of the Warsaw Treaty, and are now members of the EU or NATO, it is clear that the issue was not about going from subjugation to freedom, which Western masterminds like to talk about, but rather a change of leadership.”<sup>48</sup> In the article, he basically denies the forceful integration of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union as well as the oppression that the Central and Eastern European countries have endured. Further-

<sup>44</sup> Леонова О., “Мягкая сила – ресурс внешней политики государства” [Soft Power – A Resource of the Foreign Policy of a State], *Научно-аналитический журнал «Обозреватель – Observer»*, No. 4, 2013, p. 40.

<sup>45</sup> BBC, “Russia Examines 1991 Recognition of Baltic Independence,” <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33325842>>, 2018 08 14.

<sup>46</sup> Сапожникова Г., “Неужели в 1991-м в Вильнюсе «свои стреляли в своих»? Часть 1-я” [Could It Be that “They Shot Their Own” in 1991 in Vilnius? Part 1], *Комсомольская правда* [Komsomolskaya Pravda], <<https://www.kompravda.eu/daily/25816.4/2794758/>>, 2018 06 20.

<sup>47</sup> Interfax, “СКР возбудил уголовное дело против литовских судей и прокуроров” [The ICR Initiated a Criminal Case against Lithuanian Judges and Prosecutors], <[http://www.interfax.ru/russia/622083?utm\\_source=top](http://www.interfax.ru/russia/622083?utm_source=top)>, 2018 06 30.

<sup>48</sup> Lavrov S., “Russia’s Foreign Policy in a Historical Perspective,” *Russia in Global Affairs*, March 30, <<https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/Russia-Foreign-Policy-in-a-Historical-Perspective-18067>>, 2018 07 30.

more, those countries are not even considered fully sovereign states capable of having their independent foreign policies.

For the aforementioned reasons and contexts, it is not a surprise that mistrust is the outcome of the historical experience of Lithuanian-Russian relations, which prevents Lithuania from seeking closer cooperation with Russia. Russia lacks credibility in Lithuania, and, in the words of J. Nye, “soft power depends upon credibility and when governments are perceived as manipulative and information is seen as propaganda, credibility is destroyed.”<sup>49</sup> The actions taken by the Russian government toward Lithuania are essentially perceived by the latter as a historical continuation of malevolent policies applied toward it in the past. In order to use history as a soft power instrument in Lithuania, Russia has to respect the different viewpoints toward the same events and recognize its actual role in the sufferings and successes of other countries. However, it cannot do this because of political interests and the need to preserve the national myth for Russians and Russophone minorities, which is of higher importance than soft power in ex-Soviet countries.

### ***3. The Demographic and Cultural Trends of the Lithuanian Society and Their Implications for Russia's Soft Power***

Russia's soft power faces a demographic challenge in Lithuania due to the natural generational change, as the number of people who might have sentiments for the Soviet period is decreasing. The demographic change puts an increasing limitation on Russia's soft power expansion in the cultural field due to the unfavorable trends of knowledge of the Russian language.

According to Ainė Ramonaitė, the nostalgia for the Soviet period in the society, which is directly linked to the social status in the Soviet

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<sup>49</sup> Nye J. S., *The Future of Power*, New York: Public Affairs, 2011, p. 83.

period and its change since the establishment of independence, is the strongest variable allowing to explain the favorable positions of the society toward Russia.<sup>50</sup> At the same time, it makes society more vulnerable to Russia's sharp power. However, generational changes lead to the decreasing positive evaluation of the Soviet period, as the number of people who lived during the Soviet period constantly decreases and the living standards in Lithuania compared to other ex-Soviet republics (except for Estonia and Latvia) significantly improves. In 2004, there were 44.4% of respondents questioned during a national survey who agreed with the statement that life during the Soviet period was better than in independent Lithuania, and by 2016, this number decreased to 25.8%.<sup>51</sup> This trend allows to assume that the Lithuanian society is becoming more resistant to Russia's soft power.

The demographic changes in Lithuania are leading to a decreasing knowledge of the Russian language, which is considered to be one of the most important soft power elements of Russia. According to Russia's Foreign Policy Concept (2013), one of its main foreign policy tasks is "[to] promote and consolidate the position of the Russian language in the world."<sup>52</sup> The data of 2001 and 2011 do show the critical decrease in knowledge of the Russian language among the younger generation. According to the data of 2011, more than 80% of the age group of 15–19-year-old Lithuanian residents could speak English, in comparison to only about 40% who were able to converse in Russian.<sup>53</sup> It is safe to assume that the number of residents who

<sup>50</sup> Ramonaitė A. et al., *Kas eitų ginti Lietuvos? Pilietinio pasipriešinimo prielaidos ir galimybės* [Who Would Go to Defend Lithuania? The Presumptions and Capabilities of Civil Resistance], Vilnius, 2018, p. 155.

<sup>51</sup> Jastramskis M., „Auditorijos reakcija: Rusijos propagandos poveikis Lietuvoje“ [The Reaction of the Audience: The Impact of Russian Propaganda in Lithuania], Vaišnys A. et al., *Rusijos propaganda: analizė, įvertinimas, rekomendacijos* [Russian Propaganda: Analysis, Assessment, Recommendations], Vilnius, Rytų Europos studijų centras, 2017, p. 138.

<sup>52</sup> The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation. Approved by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on November 30, 2016.

<sup>53</sup> Lietuvos statistikos departamentas, „Gyventojai pagal išsilavinimą ir kalbų mokėjimą. Lietuvos Respublikos 2011 metų visuotinio gyventojų ir būstų surašymo rezultatai“

were born during the Soviet period and were forced to learn Russian will decrease and that the English language will substitute Russian as the main second language of the country's residents. The result will be natural decrease of consumption of Russian culture – films, music, books, TV production and Russian internet sources – thus inevitably limiting the reach of Russian soft power. In fact, Russia is already adapting to this situation.

In order to expand Russia's soft power and informational space globally, including the ex-Soviet states, the Russian state invests a lot in English language news sources like RT and Sputnik (which also has a news portal in Lithuanian). The gradual transition toward English language media helps Russia to spread its message to a broader audience as well as to decrease any suspicion about the information that is initially connected to the usage of the Russian language.

Survey data suggest that the average audience of Russian TV channels in Lithuania is decreasing. According to data gathered on TV audiences, the average daily reach of the most watched Russian channels in Lithuania in December 2011 (when there are a lot of shows on Russian TV that play on the cord of Soviet nostalgia for the middle-aged and senior population, who are the main TV viewers) were PBK (12.5%), REN TV Baltija (8.8%), RTR Planeta (10.2%), and NTV Mir (8.2%).<sup>54</sup> The data for December 2017 show that the most popular Russian TV channels according to daily reach were PBK (9.4%), NTV Mir Lietuva (6.6%), and REN Lietuva (4.7%).<sup>55</sup> This would suggest a decreased interest in Russian TV channels, but it has to be noted that the broad-

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[Residents according to Education and Language Skills. Results of the 2011 Population and Housing Census of the Republic of Lithuania], <[https://osp.stat.gov.lt/documents/10180/217110/Gyv+pagal+i%C5%A1silavinima\\_ir\\_kalbu\\_mokejima.pdf/b75c5e7a-e733-48fa-95e4-83d485c6726a](https://osp.stat.gov.lt/documents/10180/217110/Gyv+pagal+i%C5%A1silavinima_ir_kalbu_mokejima.pdf/b75c5e7a-e733-48fa-95e4-83d485c6726a)>, 2018 07 05.

<sup>54</sup> TNS, „TV auditorijos tyrimo rezultatai 2011 m. Gruodis“ [TV Audience Survey Results for 2011 December], <<http://www.tns.lt/lt/news/tv-auditorijos-tyrimo-rezultatai-2011-m-gruodis/>>, 2018 08 16.

<sup>55</sup> TNS, „TV auditorijos tyrimo rezultatai 2017 m. Gruodis“ [TV Audience Survey Results for 2017 December], <<http://www.tns.lt/lt/news/tv-auditorijos-tyrimo-rezultatai-2017-m-gruodis/>>, 2018 08 16.



casting of RTR Planeta and later of REN TV Baltic in Lithuania was suspended by the decision of the Radio and Television Commission of Lithuania, as these channels broadcasted shows that distorted historical facts and spread propaganda.<sup>56</sup> These activities became extremely intensive after Russia's invasion of Crimea. Unfortunately, the real audience of Russian TV channels cannot be determined, as viewers can watch Russian TV channels using satellite dishes and decoders, also receiving free digital television signals from the Kaliningrad area and Belarus in the Southern and Southeastern regions of Lithuania, so the audience of the Russian TV channels can be expected to be higher, and the impact of Russian soft power is greater than it can be measured by TV audience data.

On the other hand, it can be observed that number of hours of TV production in Russian language is constantly increasing in Lithuanian TV channels. Shows produced in the Russian language consisted of 151 weekly hours in 2016, and it was already 212 hours a week in 2019, marking an increase of 40%.<sup>57</sup> However, this production is subtitled and broadcasted on TV channels with a rather small audience. One of the Lithuanian TV channels, Lietuvos rytas TV, broadcasting nearly half of its production in the Russian language (more than 4 days out of 7 a week), had an average audience share of 4.7% (data of December 2018).<sup>58</sup> This shows that TV production in the

<sup>56</sup> LRT, „Stabdomos rusiško „RTR Planeta“ transliacijos, gali uždrausti ir kitus kanalus“ [Russian TV Channel RTR Planeta Broadcasting is Halted, Other Channels May Also Be Banned], <<https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/98295/stabdomos-rusiskotr-planeta-transliacijos-gali-uzdrausti-ir-kitus-kanalus>>, 2018 06 17; LRT, „Stabdomos „Ren TV Baltic“ programų transliacijos“ [The Broadcasting of Ren TV Baltic Is Halted], <<https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/89922/stabdomos-ren-tv-baltic-programu-transliacijos>>, 2018 08 17.

<sup>57</sup> Lėka A., „Lietuviškuose TV kanaluose lietuviybės mažta“ [The Usage of the Lithuanian Language in Lithuanian TV Channels is Decreasing], <[https://www.lzinios.lt/Lietuva/lietuviskuose-tv-kanaluose-lietuviybes-mazta/280470?fbclid=IwAR2pITDtcu5-8Cm3Who\\_Sez7x4IYfW9WeBgIWqZjE3XFN2J9XDh85aW\\_P0M](https://www.lzinios.lt/Lietuva/lietuviskuose-tv-kanaluose-lietuviybes-mazta/280470?fbclid=IwAR2pITDtcu5-8Cm3Who_Sez7x4IYfW9WeBgIWqZjE3XFN2J9XDh85aW_P0M)>, 2019 02 07.

<sup>58</sup> TNS, „TV auditorijos tyrimo rezultatai 2018 m. gruodis“ [TV Audience Survey Results for 2018], <<http://www.tns.lt/lt/news/tv-auditorijos-tyrimo-rezultatai-2018-m-gruodis/>>, 2019 02 07.

Russian language is more accessible when it is translated or subtitled in Lithuanian, but that audiences are not craving for it.

It has to be noted that the Lithuanian government tries to diversify informational channels available to minorities. In May 2018, the broadcasting of five Polish TV channels was introduced. Lithuanian TV service suppliers also broadcast a news channel Current Time, which is in Russian, as a countermeasure to news produced in Russia. This should contribute to the decreasing consumption of Russian information in Lithuania.

The Soviet nostalgia remains the core cultural element in reaching the minorities, as well as the general population, in Lithuania for Russia's soft power. The most popular Russian film screened in Lithuanian cinemas was *The Irony of Fate. Sequel* (2007) and is ranking number 32 in the list of most popular films in Lithuania, as it was seen by 118 669 viewers.<sup>59</sup> The film is based on the classic Soviet film *The Irony of Fate*, which is still screened on TV channels in most of the Russian and ex-Soviet countries during the New Year. The second most viewed Russian film is *The Barber of Siberia* (1999), ranking 62 with 93 334 viewers – an extremely romanticized look on the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia. The third most watched film, *The Very Best Film* (2008), ranks 295 with 38 318 viewers, indicating a decreasing appeal for contemporary Russian cinema and culture, while cinemas in Lithuania are dominated by Hollywood production, which viewers find more relatable.

The impact of Russia's soft power in Lithuania decreases because the community of Russians in Lithuania is getting smaller as well. According to the data of the Department of Statistics of Lithuania, the number of Russians living in Lithuania significantly decreased. In 2001, they made up 6.8% of all residents of the country, and by

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<sup>59</sup> Lietuvos kino centras, „Kino statistika, Lietuvos kino teatruose rodytų filmų top (1993–2017)“ [Cinema Statistics, the Top Films Screened in Lithuanian Cinemas (1993–2017)], <<http://www.lkc.lt/paslaugos/statistiniu-duomeniu-ataskaitos/>>, 2018 08 17.

2017, the number had contracted to 4.6%.<sup>60</sup> The decreasing number of Russian minority residents in Lithuania is related to increasing emigration. Data suggest that emigration from Lithuania was higher among Russians than Lithuanians, but the destinations of these migrants were usually places other than Russia, which also tells of the low socioeconomic attractiveness of Russia for the Russian minority. The average emigration of Lithuanian residents to Russia in 2010–2017 was only about 3.06% of the total emigration. During the period of 2010–2017, the highest rate emigration of Lithuanian residents to Russia was in 2015, when there were 2801 emigrants, while the lowest rate occurred in 2012 with 932 emigrants. The overall emigration of Lithuanian residents to Russia averaged 1443 during the period of 2010–2017. The emigration of Lithuanian citizens to Russia was even lower and averaged 539 emigrants during the period of 2010–2017.<sup>61</sup> This would suggest that the soft power of the EU member states or countries within the European Economic Area is higher over Lithuanian citizens and residents (including the Russian minority) than Russia's soft power.

Another important element of Russia's soft power, especially on the Russian minority, is the Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate). In Russia, the Church and the government are closely interconnected. The government preserves churches outside Russia and strongly supports the Orthodox Church outside Russia in order to create stronger links with communities abroad. According to Maliukevičius, it is a power instrument of Russia, allowing to shape the positions of the religious community on policy issues.<sup>62</sup> The Orthodox Church (Mos-

<sup>60</sup> Lietuvos statistikos departamentas, „2001 m. Surašymas: Romos katalikų daugiausia“ [Census 2001: The Majority Are Roman Catholic], <[https://osp.stat.gov.lt/documents/10180/212826/2002\\_11\\_07.pdf/bf2681a0-21d6-416d-b07e-32d5939ccda1](https://osp.stat.gov.lt/documents/10180/212826/2002_11_07.pdf/bf2681a0-21d6-416d-b07e-32d5939ccda1)>, 2018 07 05; See also: Lietuvos statistikos departamentas, “The Lithuanian 2011 Population Census in Brief,” <[https://osp.stat.gov.lt/documents/10180/217110/Lietuvos\\_gyventojai\\_2011.pdf/8321a3c1-c8b9-4468-825c-52a7b753f281](https://osp.stat.gov.lt/documents/10180/217110/Lietuvos_gyventojai_2011.pdf/8321a3c1-c8b9-4468-825c-52a7b753f281)>, 2018 07 05.

<sup>61</sup> Information provided by the Statistics Department of Lithuania.

<sup>62</sup> Maliukevičius N., “(Re)Constructing Russian Soft Power in Post-Soviet Region,” *Baltic Security & Defence Review*, Vol. 15, Issue 2, 2013, p. 88.

cow Patriarchate) facilitates strong links between its members and Russia. In 2011, there were 125.2 thousand members of the Orthodox Church and 23.3 thousand Old believers.<sup>63</sup> A little more than 51% of all Russians in Lithuania identify themselves as members of the Orthodox Church. The number of Orthodox churches and clergy increased despite that the official congregation decreased by nearly 20 000, from 141.8 thousand members in 2001.<sup>64</sup> The autocephaly of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, in effect since October 2018, has so far not manifested within the Orthodox Church in Lithuania significantly, as the community of ethnic Ukrainians in Lithuania is much smaller than the community of ethnic Russians.

To sum up, the demographic tendencies in Lithuania will continue to limit Russia's soft power in the long term if they will not change significantly – i.e., if there will be no influx of Russophone immigrants who associate themselves with Russia. The decreasing knowledge of the language will affect the consumption of culture. Russia will have to seek other approaches to increase its soft power, mainly by applying English or Lithuanian languages. These changes are already being implemented in the informational space. At the same time, the change of the generations might allow Russia to reconstruct its discourse of the Soviet period, because the number of Lithuanian citizens who lived during the Soviet period, and especially the ones who participated in the resistance, is decreasing. Therefore, the Soviet period can become romanticized – by perpetuating the historical examples or myths regarding, for example, the small taxes, the full employment of the population, and order and equality.

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<sup>63</sup> Lietuvos statistikos departamentas, "The Lithuanian 2011 Population Census in Brief," <[https://osp.stat.gov.lt/documents/10180/217110/Lietuvos\\_gyventojai\\_2011.pdf/8321a3c1-c8b9-4468-825c-52a7b753f281](https://osp.stat.gov.lt/documents/10180/217110/Lietuvos_gyventojai_2011.pdf/8321a3c1-c8b9-4468-825c-52a7b753f281)>, 2018 07 05.

<sup>64</sup> Lietuvos statistikos departamentas, „2001 m. Surašymas: Romos katalikų daugiausia“ [Census 2001: The Majority Are Roman Catholic], <[https://osp.stat.gov.lt/documents/10180/212826/2002\\_11\\_07.pdf/bf2681a0-21d6-416d-b07e-32d5939ccda1](https://osp.stat.gov.lt/documents/10180/212826/2002_11_07.pdf/bf2681a0-21d6-416d-b07e-32d5939ccda1)>, 2018 07 05.

#### ***4. Opportunities for Russia's Soft Power in Lithuania***

Despite the negative historical experience and the increasing limitations for Russia's soft power expansion, Russia has opportunities to increase the impact of its soft power in Lithuania. This argument is based on public polling data showing that Lithuanian residents want better relations with Russia.

The surveys conducted in January 2018 suggest that a fair share of Lithuanians see the need to have more intensive political relations with Russia. The first survey (conducted at the beginning of January) asked whether Lithuania needs to renew political relations with Russia, and 52% of the respondents supported the statement that it does.<sup>65</sup> Later, another survey inquired the following: "should Lithuania develop closer relations with Russia, even if it would harm Lithuania's security?" The statement that it should was supported by 34.4% of the respondents.<sup>66</sup> The third survey, ordered by the Ministry of Defence in December 2018, also asked its respondents if it would be useful for Lithuania to improve relations with Russia: 49% of the respondents supported the idea, while 35% had an opinion that Lithuania's policy toward Russia is too harsh.<sup>67</sup> In the survey conducted in 2010, 47.8% of the respondents supported the idea that the Lithuanian president should attend the commemoration of Victory Day

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<sup>65</sup> Saldžiūnas V., „Dėl santykių su Rusija lietuvių paklausė dar kartą: rezultatus keičia viena sąlyga“ [Lithuanians Have Been Asked Once Again about Relations with Russia: One Condition Changes the Results], <<https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/medijos-karas-propaganda/del-santykiu-su-rusija-lietuviu-paklause-dar-karta-rezultatus-keicia-viena-salyga.d?id=77114831>>, 2018 06 20.

<sup>66</sup> Saldžiūnas V., „Dėl santykių su Rusija lietuvių paklausė dar kartą: rezultatus keičia viena sąlyga“ [Lithuanians Have Been Asked Once Again about Relations with Russia: One Condition Changes the Results ], <<https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/medijos-karas-propaganda/del-santykiu-su-rusija-lietuviu-paklause-dar-karta-rezultatus-keicia-viena-salyga.d?id=77114831>>, 2018 06 20.

<sup>67</sup> Saldžiūnas V., „Prieštaringa apklausa: įvardija didžiausią šalies priešą, nori jį bausti ir draugauti“ [A Controversial Poll: Naming the Biggest Enemy of the State, Wanting to Punish Them and Befriend Them], Delfi, <<https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/medijos-karas-propaganda/priestaringa-apklausa-ivardija-didziausia-salies-priesa-nori-ji-bausti-ir-draugauti.d?id=80055727>>, 2019 01 23.

in Moscow.<sup>68</sup> This shows that there is some strong support for better relations with Russia in the Lithuanian society despite Russia's aggressive actions in the neighboring area and its increasing militarization. The data suggests that Russia's soft power would be accepted by the society. It can also be assumed that the society expects that aggressiveness can be diminished through better relations.

Despite the wish to have better relations, surveys show that respondents are quite realistic about Russia. In a survey conducted in 2010, when Lithuania tried to improve relations with Russia quite intensively, only 2.2% of respondents agreed with the statement that Russian authorities are looking at Lithuania "in friendly way, as if at a strategic partner."<sup>69</sup> This would suggest that even Russophone minorities and other minorities are quite sceptical about Russia's friendliness toward Lithuania. In the same survey, 21.5% of the respondents thought that the Russian government sees Lithuania "rather negatively and tries to harm it occasionally," and 17% of the respondents assumed that the Russian government sees Lithuania "negatively and sees it as the lost part of an empire that it would happily recover."<sup>70</sup> A survey conducted at the end of 2018 indicated that 15% of the respondents assumed that Russia is friendly nation.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Dirgytė E., „Pusė gyventojų būtų laimingi D. Grybauskaitės kelionei į Maskvą“, [Half of the Lithuanian Citizens Would Have Approved for Dalia Grybauskaitė's Trip to Moscow], *Delfi*, <<https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/puse-gyventoju-butu-laimine-dgrybauskaites-kelione-i-maskva.d?id=29079143>>, 2018 08 16.

<sup>69</sup> Dirgytė E., „Pusė gyventojų būtų laimingi D. Grybauskaitės kelionei į Maskvą“, [Half of the Lithuanian Citizens Would Have Approved for Dalia Grybauskaitė's Trip to Moscow ], *Delfi*, <<https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/puse-gyventoju-butu-laimine-dgrybauskaites-kelione-i-maskva.d?id=29079143>>, 2018 08 16.

<sup>70</sup> Dirgytė E., „Pusė gyventojų būtų laimingi D. Grybauskaitės kelionei į Maskvą“, [Half of the Lithuanian Citizens Would Have Approved for Dalia Grybauskaitė's Trip to Moscow ], *Delfi*, <<https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/puse-gyventoju-butu-laimine-dgrybauskaites-kelione-i-maskva.d?id=29079143>>, 2018 08 16.

<sup>71</sup> Saldžiūnas V., „Prieštaringa apklausa: įvardija didžiausią šalies priešą, nori jį bausti ir draugauti“ [A Controversial Poll: Naming the Biggest Enemy of the State, Wanting to Punish Them and Befriend Them], *Delfi*, <<https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/medijos-karas-propaganda/priestaringa-apklausa-ivardija-didziausia-salies-priesa-nori-ji-bausti-ir-draugauti.d?id=80055727>>, 2019 01 23.

The core element undercutting any positive assessment of Russia is its aggressive actions in the neighboring area. Surveys show that respondents and the society overall are afraid of Russia. The survey of 2017 indicates that 43% of the respondents agreed with the statement that Russia's policies pose a direct threat to the Baltic States.<sup>72</sup> The assumptions of any threat decreased comparing to the results of a survey conducted in 2014, which showed that 55.5% of the respondents agreed with the statement that there is a threat from Russia, and that 27.7% believed that Russia might use military force against Lithuania; economic, energy, and information threats were recognized as even more plausible.<sup>73</sup> Even prior to Russia's aggression in Ukraine, the survey conducted by Spinter in 2011 indicated that 78% of the respondents felt threatened by Russia's energy policy, and that 79% expressed support for measures to decrease the energy dependency on Russia.<sup>74</sup>

The threat posed by Russia does not lead to bandwagoning on the part of Lithuania, i.e., there occurs no alignment with the most probable threat; rather, the threat is balanced by integrating closer within the EU and NATO. The history of those states that had aligned with Russia in the ex-Soviet region in order to mediate threats from it and to create strong relationships shows that they were punished or had to make significant concessions. The perception of a threat diminishes Russia's soft power possibilities. However, as long as the target groups of its soft power are Russophone minorities and people with strong sentiments for the Soviet period, aggressiveness does not seem to harm it.

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<sup>72</sup> Ramonaitė A. et al., *Kas eitių ginti Lietuvos? Pilietinio pasipriešinimo prielaidos ir galimybės* [Who Would Go to Defend Lithuania? The Presumptions and Capabilities of Civil Resistance], Vilnius, 2018, p. 140.

<sup>73</sup> Samoškaitė E., „Ką mums gali padaryti Rusija“ [What Can Russia Do to Us], Delfi, <<https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/ka-mums-gali-padaryti-rusija.d?id=66202994>> 2018 07 20.

<sup>74</sup> Spinter, 2011, „Keturi iš penkių Lietuvos gyventojų nuogąstauja dėl Rusijos energetinio spaudimo“ [Four out of Five Lithuanian Residents are Concerned about Russia's Pressure in the Energy Sector], <[http://www.spinter.lt/site/lt/vidinis\\_noslide/menu-top/9/home/publish/MzMOOzk7MDsw](http://www.spinter.lt/site/lt/vidinis_noslide/menu-top/9/home/publish/MzMOOzk7MDsw)>, 2018 07 20.

## *Conclusions*

Soft power has become a crucial currency in the global politics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as with the end of the Cold War's bipolarity, the number of competing ideas, historical narratives, and values grows exponentially. Russia is taking part in this global competition, especially focusing its soft power strategy on the former territory of the Soviet Union. Lithuania has been the target of this strategy for the past two decades but with limited success, as its foreign policy orientation seems to lean ever more westward. The geographical and historical closeness between the two countries does not seem to count for much, as soft power does not come "naturally"; in order to accumulate it, one needs a sustained communicative strategy and years of consistent actions, and yet it can be lost overnight, as the last decade of the Lithuania-Russia relations has illustrated in particular.

The deep-seated roots of Russia's soft power failures in Lithuania can be traced to the very conception of what soft power is and how it can be exerted. Contrary to the Western understanding, Russia views soft power much like a "one-way traffic" that conceptually has been always associated with hard power; rather than trying to understand the experiences and values of others in order to build its strategy on the positive bits shared by both sides, Russia tries to forcefully impose its own discourse onto others; such a strategy can only work if the overlap between the experiences and beliefs is large enough, but as the case of Lithuania shows, it can also fail severely. The focus on "the fifteen sister republics" or the "shared victory in the Great Patriotic War" are typical examples of Russia's misplaced soft power strategy, as those are exactly the points of historical narratives of the two countries that are the furthest apart. The Lithuanian audience can hardly succumb to the Russian version of history as it contradicts the foundations of Lithuania's national identity, and yet Russia sticks to an outright denial of the Lithuanian version.

The demographic characteristics of the Lithuanian society could be summarized as being relatively well-disposed toward the impact



of Russia's soft power, especially because of the significant Russo-phone minority and rudimentary knowledge of the Russian language within the Lithuanian society. The general public seems to be ambiguous at best about their feelings toward Russia: on the one hand, they expresses deep suspicions or even fear toward Russia; at the same time, Lithuanians want the official relations between Vilnius and Moscow to improve despite the odds. So all in all, there is still enough "social fabric" for Russia to work with, especially as its so-called "soft power instruments" primarily target Russian speakers. Yet as those demographic characteristics are diminishing due to emigration and the generational turnover, Russia seems to be losing any opportunity to increase its attractiveness in Lithuania.

However, the greatest setback to Russia's soft power in Lithuania is arguably caused by its continuing (or even increasing) reliance on hard power; when it comes to post-Soviet space, Russia still prioritizes hard rather than soft power through the use of economic, financial, and military measures that materialize as threats, rewards, and punishments. From the theoretical standpoint, a growth in hard power and its practical application does not cancel out the growth of soft power if the former is put to a "moral" and "unselfish" use; on the contrary, coercive actions (such as economic sanctions and military interventions), which are seen as necessary and legitimate by others, can even increase a country's soft power potential. However, Russia has proven to be incapable of performing the role of the impartial "policeman" within the post-Soviet space and has always given (or at least was seen as giving) priority to its own national interests over international obligations.

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