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Russian Soft Power in the Baltics: In the Framework of Neoliberalism

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Soft power, an international relations concept coined by Joseph Nye, has been used by the Russian Federation to change the political behavior of the Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. To accomplish this goal, Russia uses public diplomacy, which is used to attract the public and influence another state's policies. Russia's soft power strategy seeks to mobilize a single population rather than the general public. The Compatriot policy is a crucial component of Russia's soft power policy. It seeks to create a Russia-oriented supranational identity within the ethnic Russian population of the Baltic States. Russia seeks to mobilize its audience to change the political and social orientation of the Baltic States and to foster cooperation that is favorable towards Russia's foreign policy objectives.

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Introduction

To Russia, the integration of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania into NATO and the European Union is a potential security threat because these countries border Russia at strategically important points (Stratfor, 2012). Consequentially, it is in Russia's best interest to foster favorable cooperation with the Baltic States (Stratfor, 2012; Winnerstig, 2014). Soft power, a neoliberal concept coined by Joseph Nye, in its original context is attributed with attraction, public diplomacy, and cooperation. In short, soft power allows one state to manipulate others into desiring the same end goals (Nye, 2008). However, Russia's interpretation of soft power seems to take on a different approach in certain aspects.

Currently, the Baltic States generally follow the lines of the EU and NATO in many policy areas, particularly security. Under the current political conditions, Russia would need to coerce the Baltic States to make them do otherwise. However, it is possible to use soft power to mobilize the public to make the Baltic States align with Russian policies (Nye, 2008; Gomichon, 2013). To make this possible, Russia has created an identity within the ethnic Russian population of the Baltic States. This population is the main audience for Russia's soft power strategies (Hudson, 2015). Russia's soft power strategy is created to mobilize this population and to create favorable political conditions that would foster cooperation.

The purpose of this report is to analyze Russia's interpretation of soft power and its strategy towards the Baltic States. To accomplish this, the report will utilize existing open source literature from a wide range of fields. The scope of the report will be limited to the aspects of soft power outlined by Nye (2008), which are culture, language, and political values. The Russian soft power strategy towards the Baltic States uses neoliberalism as its theoretical framework. First, Russia seeks to consolidate a supranational Russia oriented identity within the Baltic States' ethnic Russian populations, who are the main audience of its soft power strategies. It hopes to use this newly attracted audience to create the ideal political conditions that are favorable towards Russia. In the end, Russia hopes to change the social and political behavior of the Baltic States by mobilizing the public, in a neoliberal manner, and to foster cooperation that is favorable towards Russia's foreign policy objectives.

Core Concepts

Soft Power

According to Nye (2008), soft power is the ability of a state to gain a desired outcome through attraction without coercion, payment, or inducement. The objective of soft power is to convince the other state to want the same outcome (Nye, 2008). In this neoliberal concept of soft power, the state is still the primary actor, which pursues its own self-interests (Gomichon, 2013). States can attract other states through personality, high and popular culture, values, institutions, policies, and political values (Nye, 2008). For example, the value of Western democracy could be used to compel the public in an authoritarian African country to desire reform. In contrast, the threat of military force to obtain a desired outcome would be hard power rather than soft power. States can employ certain measures to attract and to enhance the effects of soft power.

Public Diplomacy

Public diplomacy is a tool used by many states to obtain foreign policy objectives in the information age. In public diplomacy, states take diplomatic measures through various methods to influence the public attitude on the state's foreign policy (Nye, 2008; Saari, 2014). One of the most important aspects of public diplomacy is the active communication with the public of other states. According to Nye (2008), there are three distinct stages of public diplomacy. First, there should

be daily communication to explain domestic and foreign policies; this is often done through the foreign press. For instance, a state may invite the foreign and domestic press to a press conference to explain a particular foreign policy. Next, the state should create and promote main themes and symbols that are consistent with their values and foreign policy objectives. For example, the United States uses the theme of democracy to justify its policies. Finally, the state should promote its values and culture to develop long term relationships with individuals and institutions. These relationships would include cultural exchanges, scholarships abroad, and training events (Nye, 2008).

Public Diplomacy and Propaganda

Often public diplomacy and propaganda are confused. Nye (2008) mentioned that propaganda is the “twisting of the mind.” Public diplomacy has a wider audience and a more neutral message, and soft power is intended to attract (Nye, 2008; Saari, 2014). According to the literature in the security and intelligence field, propaganda is intended to covertly divide, undermine, and demonize opposing institutions rather than attracting support (Johnson, 2012). Unlike public diplomacy, propaganda usually has negative connotations, a narrow target audience, and often lacks credibility (Nye, 2008; Saari, 2014).

Soft Power According to the Russian Federation

In 2012, Putin ordered that non-traditional foreign policy tools be made, and it is widely acknowledged in diplomatic and academic circles that this tool was soft power (Sergunin & Karabeshkin, 2015). The Russian Foreign Policy Concept of 2013 states, “[s]oft power has become an indispensable component of contemporary international politics, which is a complex set of instruments for resolving foreign policy tasks backed by potential of civil society, information and communication, humanitarian and other methods and technologies, alternative to a classical diplomacy” (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2013). This indicates that Russia’s soft power strategy involves attracting the public. However, Russia’s soft power strategies ignore the general public. Instead, Russian soft power strategies target a specific audience.

A Supranational Identity

Russia’s soft power strategy includes constructing the “Russian World,” a supranational identity that emphasizes the Russian language, culture, historical memory, and the Orthodox Church (Hudson, 2015). According to the Russian Federation, tens of millions of those who identify with the Russian World had been left behind with the fall of the Soviet Union in the Post-Soviet States, or the “near abroad” (Kudors, 2015). The 2007 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation has referred to these stranded individuals as compatriots (Saari, 2014). Russia implemented various programs and policies to utilize these compatriots.

The Foreign Policy Concept of 2007 also stated that it was the moral obligation of the Russian Federation to help their compatriots, and implemented the State Program to Work with Compatriots Living Abroad (Saari, 2014). As a result, the program was framed as a “humanitarian cooperation” to prevent the disappearance of the Russian identity in the near abroad (Saari, 2014; Kudors, 2014; Hudson, 2015). These programs are aimed to consolidate compatriot organizations, to provide information to compatriots, to maintain cultural and linguistic ties with Russia, and to develop compatriot communities socially and financially (Persson, 2014). The main objective of these programs is to consolidate a Russian identity within the compatriots abroad in the various Baltic States, which would be the basis of Russian soft power policies (Persson, 2014). After constructing the identity, Russia uses soft power policies to achieve its own foreign policy

objectives in a neoliberal fashion, by attracting and mobilizing the compatriots (Persson, 2014; Winnerstig, 2014; Saari, 2014; Sergunin, 2015).

Main Actors of the Russian Soft Power Strategy

The main actor implementing Russian soft power policies is the Russian Federation itself, which is characteristic of neoliberalism. According to the literature, the main structure of Russian soft power today is a continuation of the Soviet era structure (Persson, 2014; Winnerstig, 2014; Saari, 2014; Sergunin, 2015). During the Soviet era, the primary actor was the Union of Soviet Friendship Societies and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, also known as the SSOD (Saari, 2014). After the fall of the Soviet Union, the Russian Center for International Science and Cultural Cooperation under the Russian Foreign Ministry became the main actor (Saari, 2014). Additionally, Rossotrudnichestvo was created under the foreign ministry to promote public diplomacy by forming friends of Russia abroad (Saari, 2014). Although public diplomacy is centralized by the Russian State, a variety of actors help implement the policies.

NGO Diplomacy

Russia funds many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to attract the Russian-minorities in the Baltic States. One of the most prominent NGOs is the Russki Mir Foundation, which translates to the Russian World in English. According to the Russki Mir's website, their mission is "to promote understanding and peace in the world by supporting, enhancing, and encouraging the appreciation of Russian language, heritage and culture and to reconnect the Russian community abroad with their homeland" (Saari, 2014, p. 60). Although the Russki Mir Foundation is designated as an NGO, it is linked with the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Science, and it receives more than \$20 million from Russia annually while working in close conjunction with Rossotrudnichestvo (Saari, 2014). Some of the other NGOs that are known to world with the Russian State are the World Peace Council, World Federation of Trade Unions, World Federation of Democratic Youth, International Union of Students, and the Christian Peace Conference (Saari, 2014). Although NGOs contribute to diplomatic missions, the Russian State itself is still the dominant actor.

Actions of Russian Soft Power Policies

The government and affiliated NGOs work together toward several goals, which include creating a broad range of actors, supporting NGO diplomacy, controlling Russian media abroad, and promoting cultural and linguistic cooperation (Sergunin, 2015; Bulakh et al., 2014; Kudors, 2014; Grigas, 2012, Persson, 2014; Winnerstig, 2014). However, the security community believes that Russia's soft power strategies can be potentially used to destabilize the Baltic States (Saari, 2014; Winnerstig, 2014; Persson, 2014). Saari (2014) states that Russia has implemented active measures, in which it actively strives to influence politics of other governments to undermine self-confidence and disrupt relationships.

Cultural and Language Cooperation

Russia uses culture, language, and policy preferences to mobilize the Russian minority to reach out to the Baltic States and influence their policies (Persson, 2014; Sergunin, 2015; Saari, 2014; Grigas, 2015). The Russian State and its affiliated NGOs have implemented various policies and programs to promote and support Russian culture and language in the Baltic States. Some of these organizations include: Gorchakov Foundation for Public Diplomacy, Andrei Pervozvanny Fund, International Foundations for Working with Diasporas Abroad 'Rossiyane', International

Council of Russian Compatriots, Library 'Russian-language Literature Abroad' and International Association of Twin Cities (Sergunin, 2015; Bulakh, et al., 2014; Kudors, 2014; Winnerstig, 2014; Perrson, 2014). Many of these organizations promote several goals, such as facilitating cultural exchange programs, organizing cultural events, offering scholarships and training in the Russian language (Sergunin, 2015; Bulakh et al., 2014; Kudors, 2014; Grigas, 2012; Winnerstig, 2014). For example, the Russian Ministry of Culture coordinated with the Latvian counterpart to host theater festivals (Sergunin, 2015; Kudors, 2014). Additionally the Russian Embassies in the Baltic States offer scholarships to prestigious Russian universities, such as Moscow State University and Higher School of Economics, to compatriots (Sergunin, 2015; Bulakh et al., 2014; Kudors, 2014; Grigas, 2012). Additionally, NGOs, such as the Russian Language Council and the Pushkin Institute, offer training programs to preserve the Russian language in the near abroad (Bulakh et al., 2014). Russian cultural and language cooperation for the most part seems to be characteristic of public diplomacy; however, the literature indicates that there may be destabilizing elements of these policies.

The study *Tools of Destabilization: Russian Soft Power and Non-military Influence in the Baltic States*, directed by Mike Winnerstig (2014), concluded that Russian cultural and language cooperation is intended to develop a positive connotation on Russian soft policy, and the study admits that the cultural and language cooperation by themselves are not the main strategy of the destabilization operations. This strongly indicates that Russian public diplomacy is not intended to destabilize the Baltic States. However, Russia's approach does deviate slightly from traditional public diplomacy. The literature indicates that one of the goal of Russian public diplomacy in the Baltics is to mobilize the Russian-speaking minority, rather than attracting the entire public (Nye, 2008; Winnerstig, 2014; Perrson, 2014; Kudors, 2015; Sergunin; 2015). Some of the networks that are created through the cultural and language cooperation programs have been utilized to covertly divide and undermine the domestic government and bring Baltic policies to be more in line with Russia.

Division of over language

Significant portions of the Estonian and Latvian population are Russian-speaking minorities. Around 26.2 % of the Latvian and 24.8 % of the Estonian population are part of the Russian-speaking minority (Bulakh et al., 2014; Kudors, 2014). Estonia and Latvia have implemented language policies, which Russia perceives as being hostile towards the Russian minorities. The literature indicates that there is a perception within the European Union that language soft power strategies of Russia risk undermining the position of Estonian and Latvian as the official languages, which could possibly weaken the legitimacy of Latvia and Estonia domestically and internationally (Sergunin, 2015; Bulakh et al., 2014; Kudors, 2014; Grigas, 2012).

Russia has perceived Estonia and Latvia's education policies as hostile. As a result, these policies have been the target of Russia's soft power strategy. Estonia has implemented schooling policies to transition Russian-speaking schools into Estonian-speaking schools (Bulakh et al., 2014). However, the Russian Schooling in Estonia, a Russian funded NGO, was founded in 2010 to counter this trend and to gather signature against the schooling transition policies (Bulakh et al., 2014). In Latvia, the Association for the Support of Russian Language Schools in Latvia has received support from the Russian Embassy in Riga to maintain Russian-speaking schools (Kudors, 2014) The Russian language strategy in Lithuania has not been widely employed, since the Russian-speaking population in Lithuania only makes up 5% of the population (Maliukevičius, 2014).

Another example of the Russian language soft power strategy was the 2012 referendum in Latvia to make Russia an official language. Although the referendum failed, it succeeded in mobilizing the Russian-speaking minority (Kudors, 2014). There is broad consensus among Latvian agencies and officials that Russia helped initiate the referendum (Kudors, 2014). The Minister of Interior Kozlovshis stated that investigations concluded that the referendum organizers, such as

the NGO Mother Tongue, received money from Moscow (Kudors, 2014). Additionally, the Pervoi Baltiski Kannel (PBK), a channel owned by Russian citizens, devoted airtime to support gather signature (Kudors, 2014).

The Media

Russian media channels have been the medium of Russian culture and entertainment in the Baltic States. The most popular channels are PBK, NTV Mir, RTR Planeta, and REN TV Baltic (Bulakh et al., 2014; Kudors, 2014; Maliukevičius, 2014). Russian media in the Baltic States has been a medium for the dissemination of Russian popular culture. The channels usually feature content intended for Russians, and most of the content feature Russian popular media, such as movies and music videos (Bulakh et al., 2014; Kudors, 2014; Maliukevičius, 2014).

However, the narratives of the news programs featured in these channels deviate from traditional public diplomacy. These news programs are characteristic of propaganda. Rather than objectively explaining policies and creating positive themes, the programming seeks to undermine the self-confidence of the Baltic States by falsely highlighting the fascist past of the Baltic States, creating an us-them division, and changing historical narratives (Saari, 2014; Persson, 2014; Winnerstig, 2014). The lack of transparency of in the management, funding, and ownership of some of these media outlets further indicates that the media has been used to promote propaganda. For example, Ren TV Baltic and NTV Mir are broadcasted in the Baltics, but they are registered in the United Kingdom to avoid certain regulations (Kudors, 2014).

Political Influence

Russian soft power strategies have been successful in mobilizing Russian minorities and changing the political landscape. Several political parties in Estonia and Latvia gained significant political support from the Russian minorities. These parties are the Center Party in Estonia and the Harmony Party in Latvia (Winnerstig, 2014). These parties have supported improving the status of the Russian language in the state and have pushed for cooperation with Russia, which is characteristic of neoliberalism (Winnerstig, 2014). Lithuania's ethnic Russian population is only about 5%; therefore, the Russia oriented parties have failed to reach the threshold of votes to be represented in parliament (Maliukevičius, 2014).

Discussion

In conclusion, Russia's soft power strategy seeks to change the political position of the Baltic States to one that is easier to cooperate with (Persson, 2014; Winnerstig, 2014; Saari, 2014). The Compatriot Policy has been instrumental in Russia's soft power strategy. Russia has made efforts to consolidate a compatriot identity among the Russian-minorities in the "near abroad" by promoting the Russian language and culture (Saari, 2014). Russia has employed a wide range of actors including state agencies and semi-governmental NGOs. However, Russia remains the central actor (Saari, 2014; Winnerstig, 2014). These policies have resulted in linguistic, educational, and cultural cooperation (Winnerstig, 2014; Persson, 2014).

This report has several limitations, and future research should be done to address them. There are some discrepancies between the literature and reality. For instance, the literature on Russian soft power does not take into consideration the hybridization of identities. Literature using constructivism as the theoretical framework indicate that Russian minorities maintain linguistic ties with Russia but civically identify with the European Union and their respective states (Cheskin, 2015; Winnerstig, 2014). Additionally, this report has been written under the assumption of the literature on this topic that Russia's endgame in its soft power strategy is to shape their political behavior and policy preferences of the Baltics States. This assumption comes from the fact that

this report relied on open source documents, primarily from academic circles, which might limit the scope of this report because it spans several sensitive topics. Sources inaccessible through open source research may reveal that Russia's intentions are different, potentially changing the theoretical framework. For example, if Russia's endgame is to use hybrid warfare as highlighted by Kažociņš (2015) to regain the Baltic States, the theoretical framework would be realism. Nye stated that hard power and soft power can be combined and that neoliberalism and realism are not mutually exclusive (Gomichon, 2013). This implies that there is a possibility that Russia's soft power strategies in the Baltic States are just a part of the overarching military goals of Russia.

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