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# UNDERSTANDING RUSSIA'S SOFT POWER BEHAVIOR IN GEORGIA AFTER THE RUSSO-GEORGIAN WAR

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### **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to explore Russia's soft power behavior, specifically the explicit or implicit nature of its soft power strategy and actions toward Georgia after the Russo-Georgian War of 2008. To analyze this issue the research tends to focus on the insight proposed by Craig Hayden and discuss it according to three kinds of soft power behavior presented by Joseph S. Nye. Based on the primary and secondary sources the article establishes the context of the modern Georgian foreign policy in which Russia's soft power is on the rise. Using qualitative and quantitative research methods the paper discusses Russia's soft power agenda, its principal means and primary goal in Georgia. Overall, research results suggest that in the first decade after the Russo-Georgian War of 2008 Russia's soft power strategy conceptualization toward Georgia has an implicit nature, but its actions through the anti-Western propaganda narrative in media are explicitly implemented.

**Key words:** *Soft Power, Russia, Georgia, Russo-Georgian War*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Specific power form, i.e. hard, soft, smart or sharp, is a relatively new topic in an academic field. But, practically, each of them has almost always been an indispensable foreign policy tool for states acting to defend national security interests and to strengthen foreign policy domain. Nowadays a much debated issue in the practical and academic realm of international relations is soft power and its complicated transformative nature. In the modern world of foreign affairs, based on the regional and global contexts of strategic and geopolitical situations, soft power becomes one of the most predominantly wielded forms of power. Numerous studies

have been carried out in the field of international relations focusing on the definition of soft power, its nature and sources [See Nye 1990; Nye 2002; Nye 2004; Nye 2004; Nye 2008; Nye 2011].

The concept of soft power can be most easily defined in contrast with the concept of hard power, which is the ability to get the desired outcomes by coercion or inducement [Nye 2004: 7]. In this paper the term “Soft Power” is used in its narrowest terms provided by Joseph S. Nye that refers to “the ability to get preferred outcomes through the co-optive means of agenda-setting, persuasion, and attraction” [Nye 2011: 16]. Although there might not be much terminological confusion about this term, its meaning has been broadened in terms of the theoretical interpretation. Furthermore, particular attention has been drawn to the historical, practical and contemporary dimensions of soft power, mostly in the context of U.S. foreign policy [See Parmar and Cox 2010; Cowan and Cull 2008; Chitti and Ji 2016; Berenskoetter and Williams 2007]. Only during the past few years has there been an increasing interest in Russia’s soft power and have there been studies of soft power directly addressed Russia’s planning, formulation and implementation of this particular face of power [See C’wiek-Karpowicz 2012; Kosachev 2012; Pilko 2012; Monaghan 2013; Simons 2013; Sergunin and Karabeshkin 2015]. One of the most methodical works regarding Russian soft power in the context of the post-Soviet era, mainly focusing on Russia’s intervention in Ukraine, is “Putin's Propaganda Machine: Soft Power and Russian Foreign Policy” by Marcel H. Van Herpen that examines Russia’s soft power instruments and their transformation [See Herpen 2015].

The past ten years in Russian-Georgian relations after the Russo-Georgian War of 2008 have also led to increased interest in Russia’s soft power actions toward the post-Soviet republics. To date, some studies highlight the importance soft power has for Russia to “delineate a sphere of responsibility in the post-Soviet space” [Sergunin et al. 2015: 349] and “rebuild its external attractiveness” [C’wiek-Karpowicz 2012: 5]. There is a relatively small body of academic literature that is specifically concerned with the theoretical issues of Russia’s wielding of soft power in the post-Soviet space, particularly, in Georgia. What we know about Russia’s soft power in Georgia is largely based upon policy-focused papers [See Makarychev 2016; Panchulidze 2017] and news publications [See Rimple 2015], rather than historical, theoretical aspects and functional or regional perspectives with deeper academic analysis. Existing publications describe the threats of Russia’s hard and soft power in Georgia [See Tughushi 2016], past achievements, limitations and future threats of Russia’s soft power from the Georgian perspective [See Kanashvili 2017], Russia’s soft power actions in Georgia [See Rukhadze 2016; Avaliani 2016], specifically, the Kremlin’s information war and propaganda in Georgia [See Lomtadze 2017, Avalishvili 2016]. However, many of these studies up to now have been descriptive in nature. Such approaches have failed to address the theoretical assessment of Russia’s soft power behavior in Georgia.

Recent developments in the field of soft power as deployed by Russia toward Georgia have made it necessary to reevaluate Russia’s soft power behavior. Based on the major foreign policy-related primary sources of Georgia and Russia, such as the Foreign Policy Strategy and National Security Concepts, this paper examines Russia’s soft power behavior in Georgia after the Russo-Georgian War of 2008 built upon the insight introduced by Craig Hayden in his book “The Rhetoric of Soft Power: Public Diplomacy in Global Contexts” (2012). In the framework of this

standpoint the specific objective of this article is to evaluate Russia's understanding of soft power by discussing it according to three kinds of soft power behaviors – agenda-setting, persuasion and attraction, presented by Joseph S. Nye in the book "The Future of Power" (2011). A full discussion of Russia's soft power lies beyond the scope of this study, but the two primary objectives of this research are to determine how Russia understands the soft power concept and how Russia makes use of soft power in Georgia, explicitly or implicitly in its strategy or action. "Explicitly" in this context means clear, detailed formulation of soft power strategy and implementation of its activities. "Implicitly" refers to the unclear, indirect manner of soft power formulation and implementation. Based on the primary and secondary sources this study seeks to obtain data which will help to address research gaps. The methodological approach taken in this study is a mixed methodology based on the case study and quantitative and qualitative research methods, including data analysis and document analysis. The importance and originality of this study is that it aims to contribute to soft power research by exploring Russia's soft power in Georgia. It is hoped that this research will contribute to the theoretical and practical aspects of international relations, specifically, the debates about the role of soft power in Russia's foreign policy. It might also provide the value-added information to advance theoretical and academic discussion about Russia's soft power behavior in post-Soviet space, particularly in Georgia. From the policy perspective, this study will contribute to better understanding of Russia's soft power. This paper is likely to be beneficial for country leaders, foreign policy scholars and practitioners, and experts and representatives of non-governmental organizations in improving their working practices, thus contributing to the societal relevance of the research.

This paper consists of three themed sections. To establish the context of the research the main issues addressed in the first section are Georgia's national interests, national security environment and foreign policy priorities after the Russo-Georgian War. The second section is concerned with the conceptual framework used in this study. Some of the main research questions in this section are to find out how the concept of soft power is defined in the Russian foreign policy mainstream and the purpose behind Russia's soft power agenda framing toward Georgia. The following section describes the principal means of Russia's soft power in Georgia and analyzes its persuasive and attractive nature after the Russo-Georgian War. Therefore, this section seeks to answer one of the main research questions regarding explicit or implicit nature of Russia's soft power strategy and actions toward Georgia.

## **1. GEORGIA'S FOREIGN POLICY REALITY AFTER THE RUSSO-GEORGIAN WAR RELATED TO RUSSIA'S SOFT AND HARD POWER USE**

Georgia's modern foreign policy reality and multidimensional national security environment, in which Russia's soft power is on the rise, face political and diplomatic challenges. These challenges are caused by the various geopolitical and policy factors. It is a widely held view that Russo-Georgian War of 2008 and its aftermath not only challenged Georgia's national security and foreign policy environment, but imposed threats from Russia that are soft and hard power by nature. It has commonly assumed that Russia repeatedly used hard power instruments in the post-Soviet space [Sergunin et al. 2015: 347], that the Russo-

Georgian War of 2008 was the first case in the post-Soviet era where the Russian Federation deployed military power across international borders [Rutland at al. 2016: 407] and therefore by illustrating its own willingness to use the hard power again [Wieclawski 2011: 15] this war was Russia's public return to great power status [Friedman 2008]. According to Nye, in 2008, after invading Georgia, Russian military power dominated, but Russia was not as adept in wielding soft power to consolidate its military victory [Nye 2011: 99]. Considering all of this, generally the course of Georgia's modern foreign policy strategy was shaped by the Russia's hard power moves in 2008 and has been transformed since then due to the Russia's continual use of soft power and the interplay of these two forms of power as well.

The Russo-Georgian War of 2008, which is considered military aggression by the Georgian Government [Georgia's Foreign Policy Strategy 2015-2018; Threat Assessment for 2010-2013], radically changed [Strategic Defense Review 2017-2020: 49] and considerably worsened [Strategic Defense Review 2017-2020: 53] Georgia's security environment. In the aftermath of the 2008 conflict, Georgia continuously stated its Western-oriented aspirations. EU-Atlantic integration became one of its main national interests [National Security Concept of Georgia 2011], foreign policy objectives [Panjikidze 2013] and key strategic goals [Georgia's Foreign Policy Strategy 2015-2018]. But the further Georgia steps toward the EU family, the more Russia seems intent on wielding soft power in Georgia. Hence Georgia's national interests, national security environment and foreign policy priorities seem to have been structurally changed vis-à-vis Russia's soft and hard power actions on the local, regional and global level.

As mentioned in the document "Threat Assessment for 2010-2013 of Georgia," "The primary goal of the Russian Federation is to hinder realization of the Euro-Atlantic choice of Georgia and to forcefully bring Georgia back into the Russian sphere of influence" [Threat Assessment for 2010-2013]. Highlighted in the Strategic Defense Review 2017-2020 of Georgia, Russia's aggressive foreign policy agenda represents a major threat to Georgia's national security [Strategic Defense Review 2017-2020: 48]. Moreover the use of elements of "soft power" and economic tools (a form of hard power) by the Kremlin against Georgia's national security represents the challenge for its security environment [Strategic Defense Review 2017-2020: 53]. As stated in this same document, "The Kremlin will particularly focus on reinforcing the elements of its soft power to ensure the weakening of state institutions, strengthening of pro-Russian civil and political movements and discredit pro-Western foreign policy agenda. Using political, economic and information tools, Russia continues its attempt to limit international political support for Georgia and weaken cooperation directed at strengthening Georgia's defense capabilities" [Strategic Defense Review 2017-2020: 54]. Considering all of this evidence, it seems that Russia's soft-power-focused foreign policy agenda does not represent an indirect or uncomplicated factor affecting Georgia's national security policy. Rather, it directly affects Georgia's multidimensional national security environment as its objectives, nature and means are addressed in some of the major foreign policy documents of Georgia.

Ensuring sovereignty and territorial integrity remains the primary national interest, and so is one of the major foreign policy strategic goals of the Georgian government [Georgia's Foreign Policy Strategy 2015-2018; National Security Concept of Georgia 2011]. Russia's hard power effort - military presence of Russian troops in the occupied territories of Georgia - and its soft power capabilities - the increasing

propaganda and disinformation activities - are likely to jeopardize Georgia's foreign policy prerogatives by challenging its additional foreign policy objective of European and EU-Atlantic integration.

Nowadays Georgia's relations with Russia undergo a difficult period because of the active use of soft power from the latter [Official Web Site of the President of Georgia 02.03.2016]. This particular notion, including the negative impact of Russia's hybrid war, cyber-attacks and propaganda on regional security environment is intensified in the public and political discourse of Georgia, specifically in some of Georgia's presidential rhetoric [See Official Web Site of the President of Georgia 04.11.2017; Official Web Site of the President of Georgia 05.14.2018]. Moreover as President of Georgia Giorgi Margvelashvili highlights in some of his speeches, Russia's soft power and propaganda challenge the Western choice of Georgia's society [Official Web Site of the President of Georgia 26.03.2015; Official Web Site of the President of Georgia 09.12.2017].

The evidence reviewed here seems to suggest that this is the post Russo-Georgian War environment in which Georgia's modern foreign policy objectives, national interests and national security environment interact to determine and shape the future of Georgia's EU-Atlantic integration. However, another significant issue emerging here can be whether soft power can be the flexible and effective tool for Russia to wield in Georgia, particularly when formal diplomatic relations are absent between these two countries. In addition to Russia's hard power actions, its soft power remains the prevalent challenge for modern Georgian foreign policy. The outcomes Russia seeks in Georgia through its use of soft power measures are irreconcilable with Georgia's national interests and foreign policy priorities.

## **2. RUSSIA'S SOFT POWER AGENDA FRAMING TOWARD GEORGIA**

The foreign policy context in which Georgia's foreign policy objectives, national interests and national security environment interact has been described in the previous section. A more detailed account of Russia's soft power agenda framing toward Georgia is presented here.

From the global perspective, the past decade has seen the stunning and rapid transformation of Russia's soft power strategy. From the regional point of view this process can be easily observed in case of Georgia. To better analyze the research topic this particular paper is based on the conceptual insight proposed by Craig Hayden in his book "The Rhetoric of Soft Power: Public Diplomacy in Global Contexts" (2012). According to Hayden "a crucial step toward understanding soft power is to ascertain how international actors understand the concept and make use of it, explicitly or implicitly, in their strategies and actions" [Hayden 2012: 37]. However, the advantage of this insight is that it provides the basis to better explore the soft power of an actor state. Building on this viewpoint this section seeks to examine how Russia understands soft power and how its soft power strategy toward Georgia is framed. In order to address the theoretical aspect of Russia's soft power strategy related to Georgia, it must be discussed according to one of the soft power behaviors - agenda-setting.

Incorporating soft power into a government strategy is more difficult than may first appear [Nye 2011: 83]. Its theoretical conceptualization in order to practically exercise and examine soft power in international relations requires a well-designed approach to the framing of foreign policy-related documents, i.e. foreign policy strategies or national security concepts. In case of Russia, primary formulation of

the idea of soft power can be viewed in the Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation issued in 2013 and 2016. Russia's traditional diplomacy was strongly tied to such hard power resources as gas, oil and military might [Maliukevičius 2013: 6]. Soft power, resource of non-traditional diplomacy, is considered to have the essential part in Russian foreign policy in today's world. In the fundamental foreign policy documents of the Russian Federation soft power is formulated as a comprehensive toolkit [Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation 2013] and an integral part of efforts to achieve foreign policy objectives [Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation 2016].

In addition to these foreign policy related primary sources, the concept of soft power and its importance in the sphere of foreign affairs have also been articulated in the Russian foreign policy mainstream. Specifically, soft power is not only considered to play an increasing role in foreign policy [The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 21.01.2017] or to be one of the main components of the international influence of states [The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 01.12.2012], but it is intended to be used broadly and effectively [The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 14.10.2015]. From the broad perspective, Russian foreign policy discourse measures soft power tools as integral parts of efforts to achieve foreign policy objectives, defines this form of power as including a practically unlimited set of possibilities [The Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation 2016] and considers the greater use of its capabilities as a means to increase the effectiveness of Russia's foreign policy activities [The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 30.01.2013]. Further, Russian policymakers see soft power as a means of strengthening Russia's authority, as well as promoting a positive, balanced and unifying international agenda [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 26.03.2018].

The past decade was momentous not only for the theoretical evolution of Russia's understanding of soft power, but also for its practical use. It is considered that the "Color Revolutions" in post-Soviet space - the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia and the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine - stirred Russia's interest in the concept of soft power [Herpen 2015: 34]. Over the past few years, especially after the Russo-Georgian War of 2008, upgrading the instruments of soft power [The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 29.12.2014] and mastering the use of its mechanisms [The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 25.02.2013] became one of the priorities of modern Russian diplomacy. Furthermore, the greater reliance on soft power was regarded by Russia as a way to promote the radical improvement in the efficiency of Russia's foreign policy [The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 23.01.2013].

In addition to the soft power concept of framing, development and implementation of soft and hard power elements, such as the interrelated political, diplomatic, military, economic and informational measures, are considered useful in ensuring strategic deterrence, preventing armed conflicts and protecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Russian Federation [National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation to 2020]. In addition to this, the constructive soft power component - public diplomacy - has been seen to be one of the non-military ways to ensure national defense of the Russian Federation [Action Plan of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation to the period of 2018]. On the other hand, Action Plan of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation to the period of 2018 issued in 2013 endorses the theoretical and practical advancement of

Russia's soft power as part of building up Russia's cultural and educational presence in the world.

The way Russia understands soft power should be discussed with scrutiny in accordance with the classical definition of this term provided by Joseph S. Nye. Future research might deeply explore Russia's theoretical understanding of soft power. But it could be relevant now briefly to analyze the question. A descriptive study shows that there can be an important difference between the Russian and traditional perceptions of influence in soft power. Soft power, as stated by Nye, is not merely the same as influence; it is the ability to attract [Nye 2004: 6]. In contrast, from the Russian foreign policy viewpoint, soft power is "the ability to influence the surrounding world through civilizational, humanitarian-cultural, foreign policy and other attractiveness" [The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 07.07.2008]. On the other hand, it has been reported that Russian elites are drawn to soft power as a means to attain status and influence in the international system [See Kiseleva 2015], and that Russia's present-day influence is based upon 'soft-coercion' - "influence that is indirectly coercive, resting on covert methods (penetration, bribery, blackmail) and on new forms of power, such as energy supply, which are difficult to define as hard or soft" [See Sherr 2013]. Hence, it can be observed that both wielding and gaining influence simultaneously might be seen as Russia's soft power instrument and goal.

However, contrary to the observed difference regarding the sense of influence, Russian and traditional awareness of soft power resources are seem to be similar. The three basic soft power sources, specified by Nye, that are culture, political values and foreign policy [Nye 2011: 84], are also shared by the Russian conception of soft power. The concept itself is regarded as an ability to promote a positive international agenda [The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 27.03.2007]. Furthermore, it is also believed that the Kremlin was seeking to exploit the Western concept of soft power and reframing it as a euphemism for coercive policy and economic arm-twisting [Minzarari 2012].

In addition, a reasonable approach to examine Russia's soft power can be found in the article "Russia and the Changing World" by Vladimir Putin published in 2012. It sets the further stage for the ideological understanding of Russia's soft power. Soft power, as highlighted in this article, is a set of tools and methods for achieving foreign policy goals without the use of weapons. These methods are often used to nurture and provoke extremism, separatism, nationalism, manipulation of public consciousness, direct interference in the internal politics of sovereign states [Moskovskiy Novosti 27.02.2012].

Having examined how the concept of soft power is comprehended in the Russian foreign policy mainstream, it is important to discuss the purpose behind Russia's soft power agenda framing toward Georgia. As indicated previously, a specific power form, i.e. hard, soft, smart or sharp, has almost always been the indispensable foreign policy tool for states acting to defend national security interests and strengthen foreign policy domain. In other words, soft power helps states to advance foreign policy strategy by defending fundamental national interests anchored in national security policy. Hence, in order to explore purpose behind Russia's soft power strategy toward Georgia, national interests of Russia and Georgia should be compared. As was mentioned in the previous section, ensuring sovereignty and territorial integrity and the European and Euro-Atlantic integration are some of the major national interests of Georgia. Turning now to the Russia's

national interests, it might be observed that sovereignty and state and territorial integrity is one of its key national interests as well. The Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation 2013 and 2016 outline a negative perspective towards NATO's expansion. These documents view NATO's growing military activity in regions neighboring Russia as a violation of the principle of equal and indivisible security and leading to the deepening of old dividing lines in Europe and to the emergence of new ones.

A closer look at the findings from this evidence appears to suggest that there is not a correlation between national interests of Georgia and the Russian Federation, and that the strategic national priorities of these two countries are irreconcilable with each other. Here, it is possible to propose the idea that those national interests determine not only the soft power agenda setting, but the outcomes the wielder state pursues. In general, this observation may support the hypothesis that the mutually beneficial nature of the national interests between the soft power actor state and its target state may determine soft power strategies and actions. The additional point to be stressed here is that mutually beneficial national interests may directly affect the credibility upon which soft power depends.

As indicated previously, there is not a correlation between national interests of Georgia and the Russian Federation. Hence, it is possible that the further Russia mixes soft and hard power tactics towards Georgia, the slower it attains its desired consequences. This enables Georgia to progress along the road to its priorities related to EU-Atlantic integration.

These findings suggest that in general the concept of soft power is comprehended in a relatively detailed manner in the Russian foreign policy mainstream. Overall, the nature of national interests plays an essential role in Russia's soft power agenda framing toward Georgia. This study raises important questions about the role of national interests - conflicting or compatible - between the soft power actor and target states that might directly affect the quality of the outcome the actor state wishes. In summary, these results show that Russia's present soft power agenda framing toward Georgia is conceptualized in Russian terms. Moreover, it seems possible that in terms of the role of influence Russia's soft power represents the counterfeit of the classical soft power definition.

### **3. ATTRACTIVE AND PERSUASIVE NATURE OF RUSSIA'S SOFT POWER IN GEORGIA**

As explained earlier, according to Hayden (2012) to understand the soft power of an international actor its concept and actions should be identified. This is evident that understanding soft power requires its inspection in theory and practice. The previous section illustrated Russia's soft power strategy framing toward Georgia as specified by one aspect of soft power – agenda-setting.

It is now necessary to explain the nature of Russia's soft power actions in Georgia according to other soft power behavior – persuasion and attraction. In this context, key issues of the research are the principal type of Russia's soft power means in Georgia, the manner and extent of attraction Russia draws in Georgia and the kinds of argument Russia uses to influence the beliefs and actions of Georgians. Discussing these issues might eventually lead this research to evaluate the explicit or implicit nature of Russia's soft power in Georgia.



Up to this point, this section is based on the surveys conducted in recent years among Georgians to study their attitudes toward major foreign policy issues, including Georgia's aspiration to EU-Atlantic integration, Russian propaganda, etc. Primarily based on the results from these surveys, this section discusses the tendency that is depicted in the willingness the Georgian community has to pursue EU-Atlantic integration and to explore if Russia's soft power in Georgia is welcome, unwelcome, negative or positive. Next the section focuses on the degree of argument Russia uses to influence the beliefs and actions of Georgians. A key aspect of this is to explore if the beliefs and actions of Georgians are influenced with or without the threat of force from the Russian side. In general, data retrieved from the quantitative methods can be more useful here for identifying and characterizing attractive and persuasive nature of Russia's soft power in Georgia after the Russo-Georgian War of 2008. But before analyzing Russia's soft power actions, it is important to specify Russia's principal soft power means in Georgia.

Discrepancy between the national interests of these two countries can not only affect the manner and extent of attraction Russia exerts in Georgia, but the arguments Russia uses to influence the beliefs and actions of Georgians. A probable explanation of this is that Russia combines soft and hard power in its policy toward Georgia. In other words Russia tries to influence the beliefs of Georgians through the threat of creeping occupation. In general Russia's combining soft and hard power in its foreign policy toward Georgia, when the national interests of an actor and a target state are not corresponding, might produce unwelcome sentiment among Georgians regarding Russia's soft power behavior.

According to recent surveys and reports, media outlets are regarded as the main pillar of Kremlin propaganda [IDFI 2016: 9] and the main source of anti-Western propaganda in Georgia [Media Monitoring Report 2014-2015: 9; Anti-Western Propaganda 2016: 19; Anti-Western Propaganda 2017: 19]. One explanation of how Russia's soft power actions generate anti-Western sentiment in Georgian population can be seen in the case of anti-Western Russian propaganda narrative in some of the Georgian media outlets, including in TV, online and print media. On the other hand, Anti-Western Propaganda Media Monitoring Reports conducted by Media Development Foundation (the MDF) in recent years (2014-2015; 2016; 2017) classify the primary group of pro-Russian Georgian media outlets [Anti-Western Propaganda 2017: 18-19; Media Monitoring Report 2014-2015: 9]. These reports outline the main objectives of the Kremlin narrative in Georgian discourse: creating threats; sowing distrust towards partners and Western institutions; ingraining a belief that Russia is the only option in fighting against the threats; and that authoritative/Soviet-style governance is necessary [Anti-Western Propaganda 2017: 26]. Moreover, it is a widely held view that Kremlin propaganda aims to incite anti-Western sentiments, disrupt Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspiration, popularize the Kremlin's global policy and instill confusion, fear and hatred among the Georgian population [IDFI 2016: 8]. The data reported here appear to support the assumption that media is the principal mainstay of Russia's soft power actions in Georgia and that Russian propaganda is used to undermine one of the major national interests of Georgia, which is EU-Atlantic integration.

Russia's anti-Western narratives regarding NATO and the EU [See MDF Reports 2014-2015, 2016, 2017] include the opinion that EU-Atlantic integration is associated with the expansion of Turkey and loss of Georgian territories [MDF Report 2014-2015: 12], NATO does not need Georgia and the country's aspiration

towards the North-Atlantic Alliance is utopian [MDF Report 2016: 14], Georgia would fail to either achieve visa free travel with or integration into the EU because the EU would disintegrate [MDF Report 2016: 17], Georgia's NATO membership is unrealistic and that Alliance is in crisis itself and requires reformation [MDF Report 2018: 11]. Overall, these trends strengthen the idea that these narratives have been aimed to stir Georgians' skepticism about the EU and NATO.

Media has almost always been regarded as a factor in shaping the perceptions and attitudes of population, while persuasion is a significant determinant in changing one's attitudes. According to R. Lance Holbert and John M. Tchernev media influence and all its complexities can be understood as persuasion [See Holbert and Tchernev in SAGE 2013: 37]. Moreover, as James Price Dillard suggests, persuasion is "the use of symbols (sometimes accompanied by images) by one social actor for the purpose of changing or maintaining another social actor's opinion or behavior" [Dillard 2010: 203]. However, caution must be exercised, as the findings provided here might not rule out the impact of other factors on the changes of attitudes and beliefs of the Georgian population; i.e. influence of the other types of Russia's propaganda on them.

Due to practical constraints, this paper cannot provide a comprehensive review of all the means and goals of Russia's soft power in Georgia. But this research specifically addresses Russia's primary goal of inciting anti-Western sentiment and explores this through the lens of cognitive impact of media on society.

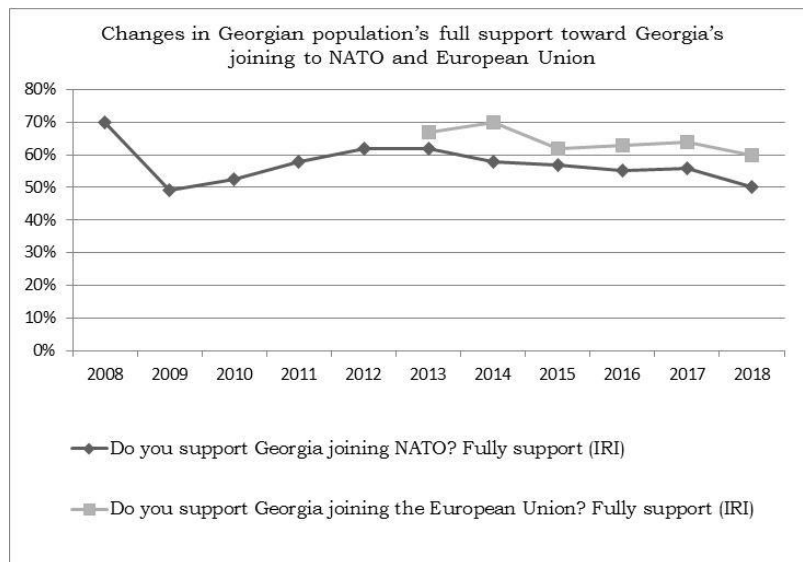
The idea explored by applying proposed theories to the research question is that Russia's anti-Western propaganda tries to change Georgians' opinions and attitudes.

Traditionally, there are two major nationwide surveys that explore the Georgian population's attitudes. These surveys are carried out for National Democratic Institute Georgia (NDI Georgia) and International Republican Institute (IRI). However, observations have indicated that questions in NDI polls do not have the methodically arranged structure, are interpretative in nature regarding Georgia's membership to NATO and tend to focus on the issue in two different directions: firstly, quantitative analysis of NDI's six waves of survey-based data from 2008 to 2011 [NDI 2011: q76] deals with the issue regarding the extent Georgians support Georgia's membership to NATO. Secondly, NDI polls in 2012-2018 investigate if population approve or disapprove of the Georgian government's stated goal to join NATO [See NDI Polls 2012-2018]. Such formulations seem to be unsatisfactory because they fail to methodically address the research content of this particular paper. In contrast, IRI polls [IRI 2018: 30] obtain data by relying on a consistent question over years, i.e. they seek to illustrate the degree of support of Georgians for joining NATO. Also, since 2013 IRI polls examine Georgians' support for joining the European Union [IRI 2018: 32]. Therefore data for this study regarding Georgia's NATO and EU membership were collected from the IRI polls. Such approach is important to directly address this research topic to find out the tendency of Georgian population's full support toward Georgia's EU-Atlantic integration.

Based on IRI surveys, Georgians' support of Georgia's EU-Atlantic integration in 2008-2018 is illustrated in the chart below. This data show that Georgian population's full support of Georgia's EU-Atlantic integration does not vary much over the years since the Russo-Georgian War of 2008. In general, the statistical differences in the population's attitudes toward Georgia joining NATO and EU are evident. The chart reveals that respondents' will is variable and has been declining

inconsequentially since 2008 Russo-Georgian War. There might be several direct and indirect causes for the deficiency of these attitudes. But, if we take media cognitive effects into account, Russian anti-Western propaganda may have been one of the contributory determinants.

**Fig. 1. Changes in Georgian population’s full support toward Georgia’s joining to NATO and European Union.**



Source: IRI 2018: 30. Note: Own figure.

Since one of the major issues in Georgia in recent years is Russian propaganda and disinformation, questions about these topics were added in the NDI surveys in 2017. Compared to EU and U.S. propaganda, a majority of respondents (53%) agree that there is Russian propaganda in Georgia [NDI Polls from December 2017: q.11, q.13, q.15]. Analyzing NDI attitudes’ surveys from December 2017 shows that respondents think the Georgian TV channels are the major disseminators (53%) of Russian propaganda [NDI Polls from December 2017: q.11, q.13, q.15] and 60% of them agree that Georgian TV stations are often spreading disinformation. Moreover, the NDI public attitudes survey from March 2018 illustrates that 48% of Georgian population agrees that Russia spreads lies and false information in Georgia when promoting its image and interests, while 25% of those surveyed agree that EU and 26% of the respondents agree that the U.S. spreads lies and false information in Georgia when promoting their image and interest [NDI Polls from March 2018: q41, q44, q46].

The most interesting aspect of the closer inspection of the data is that while there is diminishing support from the Georgian public regarding Georgia’s EU-Atlantic integration, their perception of Russia’s disinformation efforts remains high. This result might not be counterintuitive, but describes the tendency of Georgians to recognize that prospective EU-Atlantic integration is being discredited by anti-Western Russian propaganda through media outlets. Together these results indicate that on a macro-level anti-Western Russian propaganda in Georgia has an effect, but the Russians’ efforts are almost certainly oriented to producing long-term results.

This study set out with the aim of assessing the explicit or implicit nature of Russia’s soft power in Georgia. The results of this study might not comprehensively

show the nature of Russia's soft power in Georgia, but, what was found is that through the anti-Western propaganda narrative in media its actions are explicitly implemented. This combination of findings provides some support for the conceptual premise that, through the lens of cognitive impact of media, Russia's use of media as a source of propaganda in Georgia impacts attitudes of Georgian population toward EU-Atlantic integration. Despite these results, questions might still remain. The aim of this paper is not to develop a full picture of Russia's soft power behavior in Georgia, but to explore the issue by taking into account media, the main pillar of Russia's propaganda and its primary tool for inciting anti-Western sentiment in Georgian society. Therefore, further research should be undertaken to investigate the explicit or implicit nature of Russia's soft power by exploring its other soft power actions regarding their different goals. But it is important to note that present work provides one of the first investigations into Russia's soft power behavior in Georgia and it is hoped that this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the issue in various contexts.

## **CONCLUSION**

Although the scope of this study was limited in terms of Russia's soft power actions in Georgia and included only its principal means and the primary goal, the following findings of this study might have a number of important implications for future practice. Particularly, it is hoped that these findings should contribute to the current literature regarding Russia's soft power theory and practice in post-Soviet space, specifically in Georgia. Another valuable practical implication of this study might be that this will also probably provide a basis for further research to expand the topic in various contexts.

In this present investigation, to establish the context of the research one of the aims was to assess Georgia's foreign policy reality after the Russo-Georgian War related to Russia's soft and hard power use. This study has identified that the post Russo-Georgian War environment in which Georgia's modern foreign policy objectives, national interests and national security environment related to EU-Atlantic integration is challenged by Russia's soft power actions. The research has also shown that the outcomes Russia seeks to get in Georgia through its use of soft power are irreconcilable with Georgia's national interests and foreign policy priorities.

The present study was designed upon the conceptual insight proposed by Craig Hayden, according to whom a crucial step toward understanding soft power is to ascertain how international actors understand the concept and make use of it, explicitly or implicitly in their strategies and actions. Based on this insight in order to find out the nature of Russia's soft power strategy and actions, soft power behaviors presented by Joseph S. Nye – agenda-setting, persuasion and attraction – were considered. Therefore primary source analysis regarding Russia's understanding of the concept of soft power illustrated that theoretically this concept is comprehended in a relatively detailed manner in the Russian foreign policy mainstream. In addition this paper has discussed that the nature of national interests plays an essential role in Russia's soft power agenda framing toward Georgia.

The research addresses the principal means and primary goal of Russia's soft power in Georgia. The results have shown that media is the mainstay of Russia's soft power actions in Georgia and that Russian propaganda is against one of the major

national interests of Georgia -- EU-Atlantic integration. Moreover, quantitative data analysis has found that though no significant increase was detected among Georgian population's full support regarding Georgia's EU-Atlantic integration since 2008 Russo-Georgian War, their perception of Russia's disinformation and its principal means is high.

Taken together, these findings suggest that in general in the first decade after the Russo-Georgian War of 2008 Russia's soft power represents a clear challenge to Georgia's goal of EU-Atlantic integration. The present results show that Russia's soft power strategy conceptualization toward Georgia has an implicit nature, but its actions through the anti-Western propaganda narrative in media are explicitly implemented. On the other hand, the research indicates that the past decade was momentous not only for the theoretical evolution of Russia's understanding of soft power, but for its practical application. Moreover, this decade has shown the necessity for Georgia to strengthen its own soft power and public diplomacy in order to tackle soft power and propaganda challenges coming from the Russian side. This whole process is still in progress. The long-term structure of Georgia's foreign policy reality in the upcoming years will likely be influenced by this past and current experience regarding Russia's soft power behavior.

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