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Russian smart power in Georgia

Abstract: Russia has always been active militarily; however, the current regime attempts to combine hard power with soft power tools. Russian-Georgian relations are wrought with tensions and clashes. The Western-oriented foreign policy of the latter causes worries in the Kremlin. Although the Russian federation has a strong standing in the Caucasus region, prominently due to its military presence there, the smart power policy is enacted to gain long lasting legitimacy. The mediums, such as pro-Russian non-governmental organizations, cultural intelligentsia and the Church clergy, promote the notion of a common culture and shared values. This promotion is usually accompanied by negative narratives directed towards the liberal West.

Key words: Russia, Georgia, Smart Power, Soft Power, Orthodox Church, Neo-Eurasianism

Introduction

In 1783, the King of the East Georgia (Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti), Erekle II, signed the Treaty of Georgievsk. Under the most important pillar of the treaty, Georgia declared loyalty to the Russian king. In exchange, Russia needed to guarantee security in the region and to provide necessary military assistance when requested. Before deciding on signing the document, King Erekle II needed to consider proposals from two competing powers: Muslim Persia, where he grew up and Orthodox Christian Russia. Both countries were attempting to obtain Georgian loyalty. The decision was made in favor of Russia due to the shared religious beliefs. Signing the treaty was a pure value decision.

The partnership was poor for Georgians. Russia never sent any military aid to help the declared partners in wars. On the contrary, after Erekle II's death, Russia initiated a long lasting military occupation. Georgians did not tolerate this situation; regular uprisings made the occupants consider alternative means of managing the region. To do so, Mikhail Semyonovich Vorontsov was appointed as a commander-in-chief and as viceroy of the Caucasus. Vorontsov knew that Georgia was a key to the entire Caucasus region. He changed the approach of rigid control by introducing new mechanisms for influencing the people.

Vorontsov ordered a re-launch of the theatre in Tbilisi, opened new libraries, and sent the children of the aristocracy to study in Russia. This new means of addressing the locals was very effective. Once the Georgian elite learned of the modern manner of living, began talking Russian and became familiar with the newest literature and salon life, most ceased opposing the Russian authorities. These two fragments from history describe two different theoretical notions of power usage. To persuade Erekle II into

friendship, Russia did not use military threats, economic sanctions, or bribes. Stressing common values was sufficient to achieve an agreement. Russia had utilized a soft power. In the second episode, Vorontsov was apparently using soft power tools as well. However, we should remember that the commander's activities were backed by rigid military power. The combination of military presence with the soft policies can be described as smart power.

The current state of Georgia-Russian relations is similar to the latter episode. The Russian federation continues the illegal military occupation of Georgian regions. Simultaneously, particular public clusters attempt to spread pro-Russian ideas by using cultural means. Non-governmental organizations, Church officials and other well-structured entities continue addressing value-sensitive issues to shift the sympathy of Georgian citizens from the liberal West to Neo-Eurasian Russia.

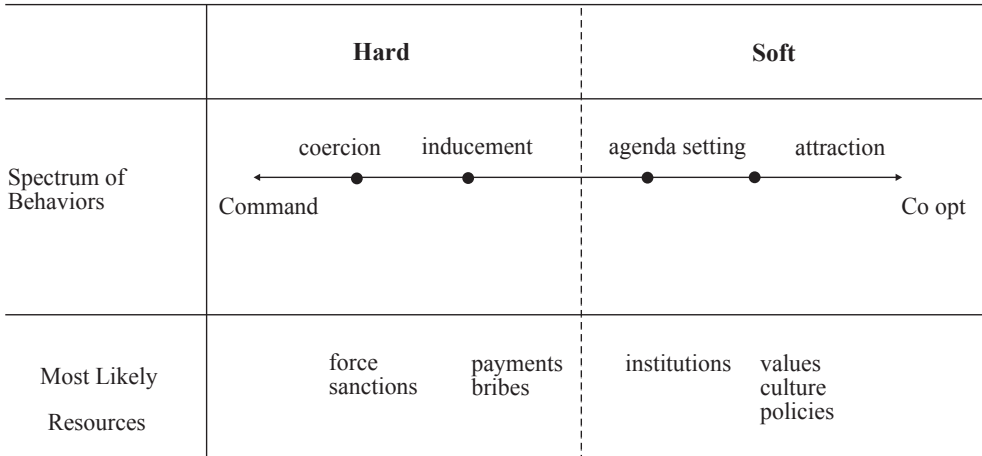
In this article, we attempt to present the main mediums of the Russian soft power in Georgia. However, as a starting point, we argue that, due to the presence of Russian troops in nearby Tbilisi, the Kremlin's influence can be analyzed solely in the context of *smart power*. We do not address the broadly researched issue of the military conflict; instead, we propose it as a background condition, which dictates the context of soft power usage as well.

The article is divided into sections. The first section provides a short introduction of the concepts: hard power, soft power, and smart power. The second section addresses the economic involvement of Russia in Georgia; it will be argued that economic dependencies may create vulnerable zones where Russian soft power can penetrate. The third section introduces the basic picture of the distribution of soft power mediums. The fourth and fifth section consequently addresses the main actors separately.

Power – Hard, Soft, Smart

“A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do” (Dahl, 1957, p. 202). Power is a capacity to produce the intended effects (Russell, 2004, p. 23); however, power is also an activity, which can be exercised by different means. As Haugaard argues, “power covers a cluster of concepts and phenomena, which includes both domination and agency” (2010, p. 1051). As traditionally understood, states that have power over others are able to practice it by means of military action; however, recent developments have shown a significant shift from coercive deeds to persuasive actions. Joseph Nye coined the term *soft power* to demonstrate this shift. Soft power occurs when “one country gets other countries to want what it wants” (Nye, 1990, p. 166). Nye suggests that the Machiavellian advice: “It is better to be feared than loved,” is no longer a perfect solution for agent-principal relations (Nye, 2004, p. 1). Those countries, which are able to obtain desired outcomes without military actions are more efficient than those who are not able to do so. Some states have intrinsic soft power capabilities (e.g., Western democracies are often considered as role models to follow by those who cherish democratic values), whereas others must work “to shape the preferences of others.” A suitable example of the latter are Soviet attempts to attract comrades worldwide with the communist ideology (Nye, 1990, p. 167).

Figure 1. Power



Source: Nye, 2004, p. 8.

“Soft power uses a different type of currency (not force, not money) to engender cooperation—an attraction to shared values and the justness and duty of contributing to the achievement of those values.” (Nye, 2004, p. 7)

Figure one shows the differences between soft and hard powers. In addition, it is argued that, for the practitioners of the soft power, legitimacy is a basic precondition, whereas hard power agents have no need to seek further legitimization (Armitage, Nye, 2007, p. 6). After its first appearance, the concept of soft power has been frequently used to describe the non-military activities of the states. Nevertheless, it is not often articulated how governments utilize soft power, or what are the conditions “under which soft power campaigns will be most likely to succeed” (Kroenig, McAdam, Weber, 2010, p. 412). Kroenig and others identify prerequisites that must be in place to use soft power as a foreign policy tool:

- States must be able to communicate to the intended target in something approximating a functioning marketplace of ideas;
- The attitudes of the relevant target must be subject to influence and change;
- The attitudes of the target must have causal impact on an outcome in international politics that promotes the interests of the state attempting to wield soft power (Kroenig et al., 2010, p. 414).

In 2003, Nye has proposed a new formulation of power: a smart power. The author proposed soft power to “to counter the misperception that soft power alone can produce effective foreign policy” (Nye, 2009). Smart power is a combination of contextual soft and hard strategies. Smart power begins with exploring the strengths and weaknesses of the actor and provides case relevant direction to the actions. The combination of soft and hard approaches may be effective in the cases in which military interventions require justification or legitimacy. The strongest armies require a certain level of stability in the public of the target states. Modern interventions can not last forever in the form of rigid control. The military phase must be followed by peace building operations, otherwise

political and material costs can be very high. Smart power is a useful means to approach the problem, if the hard power capabilities are accompanied by some value-support in the target communities, for example, threatening the unwanted incumbents and supporting the opposition with shared political views.

Russian Soft Power

Russian influence worldwide nearly entirely depends on hard power resources. “Despite the attractiveness of traditional Russian culture,” its global soft power capabilities are limited (Nye, 2010). Nye’s argument is noted by the soft power index research. In the ranking of Institute of Government, Russia’s persuasive capability was positioned at 26th place (McClory, 2010, p. 25). In the *Soft Power 30* index, Russia was not in the top twenty (Portland, 2017).

The disappearance of Russia’s cultural charm is largely due to the foreign policy strategy the government has been pursuing for the past two decades. Sergey Karaganov argues that, in the domain of soft power, Russia could not compete with the West. Therefore, the Kremlin needed to compensate for this disadvantage with constant displays of hard power (Karaganov, 2009).

This strategy has an ideological dimension as well. Neo-Eurasianism is a primary set of ideas cherished by the Kremlin. The doctrine is promoted by the philosopher *Alexandr Dugin*. The core argument of the theory opposes the universalization of Western values (Anglo-Saxon). The approach supports cultural-ethnic pluralism, and accordingly, states that only those values, which have been produced in a traditional domestic context of an individual nation, should be appreciated and preserved. To safeguard the diversity of Eurasian people (against the West), *Dugin* has voiced a need to create the Eurasian Empire with Russian leadership. “The will of any people is sacred. The will of Russian people is sacred a hundredfold” (Shekhovtsov, 2009, p. 707). The pathos of this statement shows the whole idea behind the dominant political belief in Russia.

Alienation of the West as a value system intrinsically excludes the liberal space as a soft power target; nevertheless, Russia actively uses media propaganda tools to affect the public in Europe and the United States. These tools include not only well-funded media stations such as Russia Today, Sputnik and Russia Beyond the Headlines (RBTH), but also a so-called “troll factory”; pro-Russian “comments, posts, pictures, videos” in social networks and forums are posted by hired workers, with false E-identities (Hermant, 2015). Nye argues, that “one of the paradoxes of soft power is that propaganda is often counterproductive, owing to its lack of credibility” (Nye, 2014).

Neo-Eurasian Empire covers the same space as the Soviet Union once did. Russian policy towards the post-Soviet countries has more soft power potential for several reasons: first, communist attempts to create a *homo sovieticus* have its cultural consequences. Post-soviet people relate to each other more than to others. Second, in most of the post-Soviet countries, people still have at least passive knowledge of the Russian language. Third, the largest former Soviet republics represent the Slavic culture; therefore, people may share the notion of ethnic unity. Fourth, the Russian state attempts to guide others to a new empire with the Orthodox Christian Ideology, to which some people strongly relate.

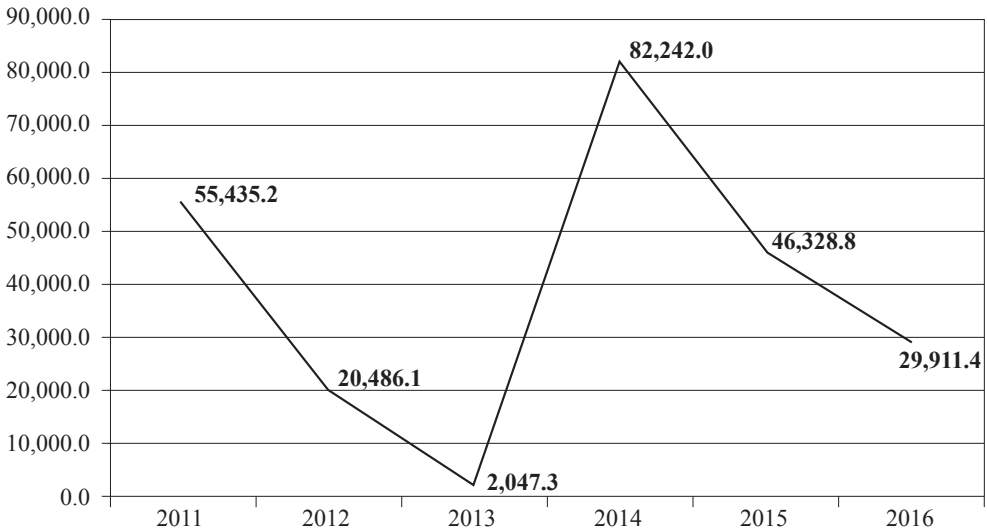
Russian Capital in Georgia

Georgian economic sector shows some dependencies on Russia. This dependence creates vulnerabilities in several areas. Authors often understand strong economy as the ultimate soft power resource. Nevertheless, this it is not entirely correct. Nye refers to Walter Russell Mead who argued that “economic power is sticky power; it seduces as much as it compels” (Nye, 2006). Russia can be an attractive economic partner for Georgia; however, experience has shown that the soft attraction can be easily converted to hard economic blackmail (Socor, 2006).¹

According to the Institute of Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), the Russian shared capital in Georgian business is significant. The research shows that Russian investments in energy, the water supply, oil products and communication spheres are considerably high (IDFI, 2015b). The nature of doing business in Russia implies that major companies must behave according to the state dominated political views. Therefore, we must acknowledge that the possibility of Russian investors deploying Kremlin’s interests in Georgia is high.

The adjusted data (2011–2016), published by the National Statistics Office of Georgia, shows the unstable dynamics of the Foreign Direct Investments distribution (GeoStat, 2017):

Figure 2. FDI from Russia (USD Million)



Source: National Statistics Office of Georgia (GeoStat).

Of a total 1,117 million USD FDI in 2011, the Russian proportion was 55.4 million USD (5%), which positioned it in 6th place among major investors. Russian investments declined in 2012. In the second and third quarters of 2013, FDI from Russia became negative (minus –2.7 \$ million and –11.2 \$ million). Significant growth

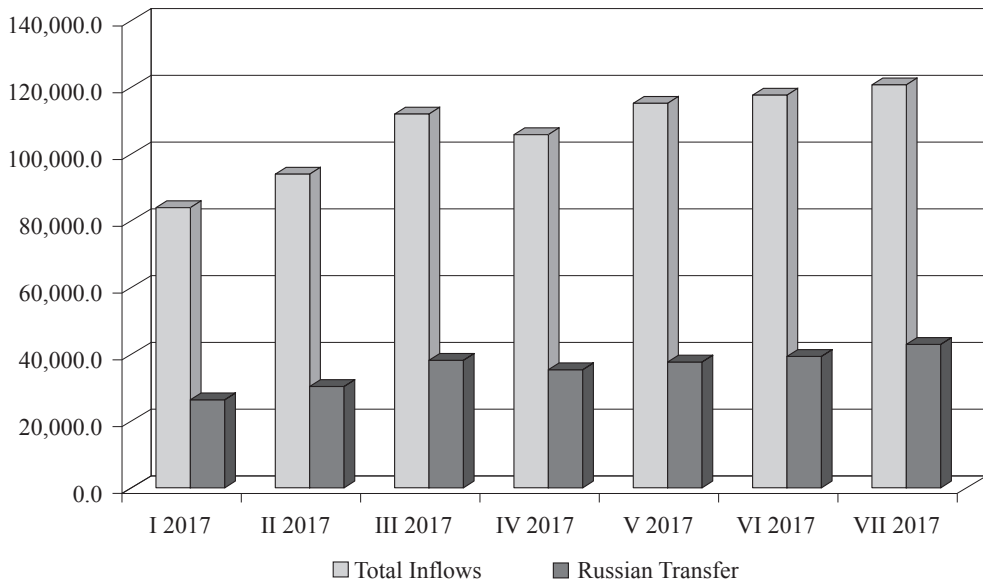
¹ For instance, Russia banned Georgian wines and other products in 2006.

occurred in 2014, when, from the total FDI – 1,758 million USD, Russia invested 82.2 million (5%, 7th position). The investments were mainly directed at large industrial companies.

The disappearance of Russia from the major investors list in 2012–2013 could be explained by the political tensions (parliamentary election and change of the long served ruling party), embargo outcomes, and unfavorable economic conditions for investors. In reality, the withdrawal of the Russian FDI did not pose an overwhelming threat to Georgia. However, if Russia’s role increases dramatically and Western DFI inflows decrease, this could provide the Kremlin with a new degree of leverage to manipulate (Kapanadze, 2014, p. 2).

As the World Bank’s Chief Economics and Senior Vice President of Development Economics, *Kaushik Basu* states that migration and remittance play a major role in an economy’s take-off; however, they are also a source of political contention and for that very reason, they deserve unbiased analysis (WorldBank, 2013). The Economic Policy Research Center based in Tbilisi emphasizes the increase of the remittance proportion in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Georgia and concludes the high dependence of the state economy on the international money transfers by the migrants (EPRC, 2013). The most recent data by the National Bank of Georgia shows that from January 2017 to July 2017, 33.45% of the total money inflow to Georgia came from Russian Federation (NationalBank, 2017):

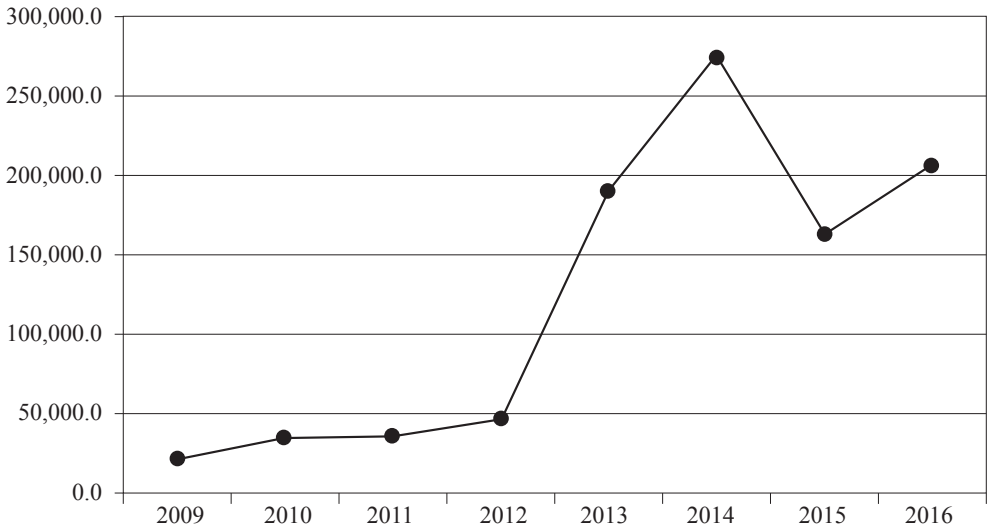
Figure 3. Total money inflow from Russian Federation to Georgia



Source: National Bank (2017), period January–July, Money Transfers by Countries 2010–2017*

The trade statistic shows that, after lifting the Russian embargo, Georgia’s export to Russia has quadrupled from 46,806.0 (2012) to 190,653.4 (2013) million USD (GeoStat, 2013).

Figure 4. Georgia's Export to Russia (USD)



Source: National Statistics Office of Georgia, External Trade, Georgia's Export by Countries.

In 2016, exports to Russia increased by 26% (206,366.40 USD million) compared to 2015, which is 9.765% of the total exports of Georgia (ibid. 2017).

Regardless of having open trade relations with the EU countries and the rest of the world, the expansion of exports to Russia may have made the Georgian economic sector insecure and vulnerable. In the energy sector, the Georgian companies with Russian citizens have been managing a large proportion of the state's energy market. For instance, a company, "Inter Rao", which is affiliated with Russian officials (members of the supervisory board), is the largest player in Georgia's energy market; it holds shares in the energy distribution company "JSC Telasi" and the largest electro station "Engurhesi" in the Caucasus region (IDFI, 2015a). From October 2015, it has become known that the Georgian government has already participated in a second round of negotiations with the Russian-state company "Gazprom" to import an additional volume of gas. As Energy Minister states, the consumption of the energy resources increased by 35–38% during the last three years, and the partnership with Gazprom is essential to avoid an energy deficit. Currently, Georgia has had a reliable energy supplier, Azerbaijan, and it nearly completely meets Georgia's the needs (Tsurkov, 2015). After the completion of the BP-led Shah Deniz Stage II project in late 2018, the capacity of the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP) will be upgraded and Georgia side will obtain 400–700 USD million FDI and 5% of the transported gas under the preferential price (Civil, 2013). Considering the EU's energy diversification intentions, Georgia's national security emphasis and its aspiration to Euro-Atlantic integration, there is no need to cooperate with Kremlin-run Gazprom. Due to the previous experience, Russia often uses energy resources for its geopolitics of expansion. In addition, the Russian capital is largely represented in the bank sector, mineral water, and special metals businesses in Georgia.

Market of ideas in Georgia

After the Rose Revolution in 2003, Georgia has been actively moving towards the West. Although the state practices did not always correspond to Western liberal values, the official governmental rhetoric constantly attempted to portray the European Union and NATO as attractive political destinations for state development. The Soviet Union and its socio-cultural heritage were condemned. The dichotomy of enemy/friend became equal to Russia/West. The authoritarian practices were often justified with an urgent need to neutralize the Russian threats. Some opposition leaders were accused and arrested for conspiracy and cooperation with Russian intelligence agencies. The five-day war in 2008 sharpened the negative attitudes towards Russia. Russian news agencies and TV channels were suppressed. Listening to the Russian songs in public places was banned. The Georgian public could still have information regarding the attitudes of ideologists in Moscow. For example, *Alexandr Dugin's* famous exhort was frequently broadcasted, to illustrate the real intentions of Russian elites: "Tanks to Tbilisi!"— this is a voice of our national history'. Those, who do not second the "Tanks to Tbilisi!", are not Russians. [...] Tanks to Tbilisi!" – that's what should be written on every Russian's forehead" (Shekhovtsov, 2009, p. 698).

The recent polls on public attitudes in Georgia (INFRUSGEF, April, 2017) demonstrate that Russia has influence in determining Georgia's future. The frequency distribution shows that 45% of the respondents marked "a lot influence" and 27% highlighted "some influence" (CRRC, 2017b). Moreover, among the respondents who think that Russia has at least some influence on Georgia's future, 36% evaluated this influence as negative. 41% evaluates Russian influence on the national security (since 2012) as "negative impact" (RUIMPSEC) (CRRC, 2017c). And, 57% considers Russia as a major military threat to the neighbouring countries. Regarding the Russian propaganda, 47% agrees that there is a Russian propaganda in Georgia (CRRC, 2017a). 34% mentioned political parties and 14% marked civil society as channels of Russian propaganda (PROPPLPRT, PROPCVLST).

The world market intrinsically involves various actors who sell their products to the public. On the Georgian market of ideas, the EU and NATO have an official governmental endorsement to spread their ideas. Cultural projects with the EU include generous student exchanges schemes such as Erasmus Mundus (Erasmus plus), to promote the European values in the neighborhood. EM graduates have indicated in polls that the greatest impact of the project was an increase of their intercultural competences (Markozashvili, Al-Weshah, 2014, p. 117). NATO is in active military cooperation with Georgia. However, friendship with the alliance entirely depends on common values. A list of minimum requirements for membership starts with the statement: "New members must uphold democracy, including tolerating diversity" (BECA, 1997). Accordingly, integrating with NATO necessarily includes domesticizing common Western values.

In a given condition, Russia does not have a tangible chance to be more attractive than the West. However, it can effectively attempt to sharpen those problems, which may appear on Georgia's path towards European and North Atlantic integration. The United National Movement of Georgia² often accuses the current state Government to

² Former governmental party.

be pro-Kremlin. There is no real evidence of a shift in preferences in the foreign policy; however, since the *Georgian Dream Coalition* came to power in 2012, for the sake of the renewed political dialogue with Russia, the above-mentioned harsh restrictions on Russian-associated activities have been abolished.

Russian soft power activities can be observed in two main spheres: societal and cultural. The societal sphere includes organizations, which are connected to Russian funds, or are in some relations with Russian governmental officials. These organizations do not have direct public influence. Their openly 'Putinist' stance marginalizes their political positions as well. Studies have shown that interested parties are less likely to succeed in spreading the soft messages, than those who do not have a direct political interest (Kroenig et al., 2010, p. 415). Their niche on the market of ideas implies the negative campaigns against the liberal values. They can gain some relevance only if the public has major disappointments from the Western partners.

The cultural sphere is developed around the Georgian Orthodox Church. According to *Dugin*, the sole hope of Georgia's Eurasianization lies in the orthodox culture of the state (Dugin, 2004). The role of the church will be addressed in detail in the next section. Here we need to note that a group of former Soviet Intelligentsia still maintains ties with their Russian colleagues. The theatres exchange performances on Russian and Georgian stages, writers participate in common workshops, and artists visit exhibitions across the borders. Those activities often obtain blessings from the patriarchates of both countries. If the value position was low for societal organizations, the Church and its affiliates in the cultural sphere enjoy a high level of public trust.

And finally, we need to mention the regions with large Russian-speaking minorities. Samtskhe-Javakheti with ethnic Armenian population is closely connected to Russia. Due to high rate of unemployment, the local labor seeks jobs in Russian Federation. For these people the Russian law on granting citizenship to those Russian-speaking citizens living within the borders of the former USSR is quite attractive. There were cases reported by the Georgia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the mass distribution of the Russian passports to the population of Samtskhe-Javakheti (Eka Janashia, 2014). Although the problem has not taken more complicated forms, a Russian soft policy can find the means to attract people who live in poor social conditions and are less integrated into the Georgian community.

The Orthodox Church of Georgia

The extreme popularity of the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) is an outcome of developments held in the 90s. The corrupted government left people hopeless.³ GOC was the only well-organized functioning institution, which could give the services it stood for. The attachment of the public to the church made them religiously active and politically passive. This condition was favorable for the government officials who preferred stagnant status quo with low public participation in political processes. The concordat signed between the state and the patriarchate gives the religious institution full freedom

³ We mean the period of Eduard Shevardnadze's presidency.

and significant material benefits (Markozashvili, 2014, p. 197). As a result, it took less than twenty years to convert an atheistic Georgian society into a hardcore Christian one. Although politicians constantly delegitimized themselves, GOC clergy successfully adopted the roles of political preachers.

GOC is first on the list of most trusted institutions of the country (IRI, 2011, p. 34). Patriarch Ilia II accordingly, is the most trusted public figure. This situation dictates that one who obtains the patriarchate's endorsement receives a powerful tool to affect public opinion. It is a well-known fact that, under Soviet rule, the church and the state closely cooperated. In Russia, as many observers argue, patriarchate is a useful addition to the federal government (Bennetts, 2012). However, it is difficult to claim that Russian agencies have direct connections with GOC as well. As time passes, the discussions regarding the need for lustration law, which would unveil the priests who cooperated with former KGB, loses its relevance. However, without open cooperation with the FSB,⁴ often the clergy of the GOC shares and promotes the values cherished by Russian officials. Vladimir Putin has voiced the role of the Russia as being the fortress of Orthodoxy in the world. It is not surprising that Georgian priests who participate in raids against LGBT activists sympathize with those who claim to be a defender of their cause (BBC, 2013).

Primarily less-educated clerics often serve Russian interests without acknowledging it. These clerics attack the European Union because of the "gay agenda" of Brussels. These clerics argue that westernization will necessarily cause the breakdown of the traditional value system. The clerical perception of reality is based on an ultra-conservative ideology, whereas everything, which supposedly is against the traditional understanding of morality, should be banned. We should remember that the process of European Integration does not yet provide significant material benefits to Georgians. Western allies failed to defend Ukraine in war, and NATO cannot decide whether to accept Georgia as a member. These are the problem that open the misleading question, is the political path to the West worth sacrificing values? Answering this question becomes more confusing if we follow the speeches and actions of the clergy.

In 2013, Patriarch Ilia II visited Russia and met President Putin. He stated that friendly ties among people should be maintained. Putin thanked the guest and emphasized his important role in maintaining "the human, spiritual and cultural ties between the two brotherly peoples" (DFWatch, 2013). **Ilia II has a special approach in relations with Russia; he often speaks regarding the importance of Georgian territorial unity and asks both Russian and Georgian authorities to negotiate peace. His confusing statements do not usually provide clear-cut reasons for the problems. The Patriarch stresses the mistakes committed by individuals on both sides. Misunderstandings among peoples for him are not consequences of the planned political processes but rather outcomes of miscommunication. His Holiness often makes interesting statements regarding the importance of Russia and the Russian church for the entire civilization. He calls president *Putin*, with whom he shares an admiration of Joseph Stalin, a wise man. The patriarch recalled the moment when he was a young man and cried for Stalin's death and praised him as a great leader: "Stalin was an out-**

⁴ Federal Security Service.

standing person. Such people are quite rare. He understood the worldwide significance of Russia” (Kevorkova, 2013).

Pro-Russian Organizations

A recent research project prepared by the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI) has indicated the main pro-Russian trends and actors in Georgian NGO and media sectors. The varieties of the activities are primarily organized around two key institutions based in Tbilisi. The Eurasian Institute (EI) and the Eurasian Choice (EC) report to be actively engaged with others to reconcile the Georgian and Russian public and re-develop the friendship among the people.

The founders of EI have unveiled themselves through the creation of an internet platform *Politforum*. A main task of the group was to put the blame for the war in 2008 on the Georgian government (Dzvelishvili, Kupreishvili, 2015, p. 6). The retrospective analysis shows that the majority of anti-Western organizations were established in a timely sequence after 2009, to diminish Russian aggression among people. Although there are an abundant number of Eurasianist organizations, the founders of those are often the same personalities. For instance, a founder of the EI-partner NGO *Historical Heritage* is also an owner of media agencies,⁵ commonly known for their pro-Russian news coverage (ibid., pp. 11–15).

The Eurasian Institute has a large network of partners. Notably, many of these partners are registered in the Russian Federation. The background ideology of the network is the earlier noted Neo-Eurasianism. The apologists of the Eurasian model of development in Russia and Georgia focus on integrating the people who think alike. These people attempt to bring together scientists, artists and others, by increasing the face-to-face communications among them. The basic strategy of the Eurasian Institute is to maintain a negative campaign vis-à-vis the Euro-Atlantic structures. For example, the organization had performed the screening of a documentary to expose NATO’s unilateral bombing of Serbia. The session was followed by an anti-Western rally (DFWatch, 2014). To exhaust Georgian enthusiasm for joining NATO and the EU, the EI associates attempt to sharpen the problems connected with the process of integration. The EI emphasizes the importance of Russia in the Caucasus region. By appealing to the attractiveness of the northern market and the functional interconnections between the Georgian and Russian businesses, the EI attempts to show that political relations among the countries must be rejuvenated.

The discourse regarding political/economic relevance of Russia is enriched with the constant reminders regarding the shared Orthodox Christian values. According to the EI networks, in exchange for political integration, the liberal West demands that Georgians accept perverted lifestyles and forget traditional family values.⁶ Most propagandist narratives are directed to promote the idea that Orthodox Russia is the sole defender of the Georgian culture (Eka Janashia, 2014).

The events organized by the *Eurasian Institute* involve a wide range of actors. They intend to describe their activities as grass root initiatives. For example, the project en-

⁵ Georgia and the World, Saqinform.

⁶ As we have mentioned earlier, this view is shared by the GOC.

titled, *People's Movement for the Russian & Georgian Dialogue and Cooperation*, was launched in 2013 (georus.org); this claims to represent a popular demand to find solutions for the Georgian-Russian conflict. The official statement published on the web page clarifies that the national interests of Georgia, its territorial integrity and economic growth are only achievable in close cooperation with Russia (Georus, 2013). Celebrating the day of Victory against Nazi Germany on May 9th is a chance for the EI and associates to emphasize how successful Georgians and Russians were in fighting wars against common enemies. The meetings devoted to this historical day often involve presentations, which admire the wisdom and courage of *Joseph Stalin* (Iverioni, 2015).

The Eurasian Institute and its partners have published several texts. Notably, the book presented by the *Historical Heritage* entitled "*Unknown Putin.*" The volume combines the articles and other materials that describe the details of the President's political and private life (Saqinform, 2013). The edition is intended to portray *Putin* as a powerful political leader who had to make difficult choices to achieve greater goods.

The Maidan of Kiev: Lessons for the South Caucasus was the name of the conference organized by the *Historical Heritage*. The objective of the event was to use the Ukrainian revolution as an exemplary case to show the destructive influence of the West. The message was very clear: the EU and NATO encourage people to adopt their values and political practices; however, they do not care about the poor political consequences (GeWorld, 2014). The contributions of individuals who represent the EI network are acknowledged and honored by the Russian Federation. For instance, a public board member of the *Historical Heritage* received a personal award from *Vladimir Putin* for his tireless effort to deepen the cultural relations between the Russians and Georgians (PirveliRadio, 2014). For a similar contribution, a leader of *Eurasian Choice* received an honorary award from the high ranking Russian politicians, *Vladimir Zhirinovskiy* and *Genady Ziuganov*.

The Eurasian Institute incorporates the youth organization with few active members. However, if we examine their general efforts, we may notice that the organizations are not very active in social media. The same is the case for the Eurasian Choice. This finding may mean that the groups focus on an older population.⁷

The Eurasian Choice (EC) was founded in 2013. As the name indicates, the movement obtains inspiration from Alexandr Dugin's views. The EC founder is not a new face in the pro-Russian spectrum. His activities date to 2008, when he proudly introduced a Society of *Erekle the Second* (SES)⁸ (Dzvelishvili, Kupreishvili, 2015, p. 6). Since its launching, the SES has undertaken several important projects. Among those was a free Russian language course for Georgians. The initiative was supported by the foundation Russian World.

The SES publishes a bilingual newspaper (Georgian-Russian).⁹ The edition is dedicated to mainstream pro-Russian narratives. Those narratives include demands for the political neutrality of Georgia. Several events were organized to argue against the coun-

⁷ People who remember the Soviet Union may have some positive memories regarding living with Russians.

⁸ Erekle II, the King of east Georgian kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti on July 24, 1783 signed a treaty with Russia known as treaty of Georgievsk (Georgievskiy traktat).

⁹ "The Road of Erekle," Geo, *Erekles gza – Rus, puts iraklia*.

try's involvement in military alliances with the West (SputnikGeorgia, 2015). The group of independent experts criticized the idea as futile and dangerous for the future development of Georgia (Lomtadze, 2015).

The Eurasian Choice has several important partners, including: Russian and Georgian People's Unity, Russian Georgian Public Foundation, Sputnik Georgia. These organizations have close ties with the Russian Federation. For instance, The Russian-Georgian Public Foundation is a partner of the Gorchakov Fund, which was established by the decree of the former Russian president Medvedev (Dzvelishvili, Kupreishvili, 2015, p. 42). Among other activities, this network has organized several exchange tours for Georgian and Russian professionals, including the recent visit of Georgian journalists to Moscow (Reginfo, 2014).

There are no records that indicate the Kremlin's direct involvement in NGO funding. However, members of the opposition often suggest that the Russian government is able to finance anti-Western political groups in Georgia (Giorgi Menabde, 2014). The activists of the Russia-backed NGOs frequently raise their voice regarding international politics. For instance, a small group of the EC organized street demonstrations regarding the takeover of Crimea and justified Russia's action as wise and expedient (Kommersant, 2014). The activities of the Russia-backed organizations in Georgia are not consistent. The small numbers of followers include veterans, former members of the Communist party and those who share nostalgia for Soviet times.

Overall, the variety of pro-Russian organizations does not include influential public-backed actors. However, the larger NGOs such as EI and EC can certainly affect the processes via affiliated news agencies. People do not always check the credibility of the source from which they read the information. Although the people do so, it is difficult to argue against the non-refutable theories the neo-Eurasianists propose.

Conclusion

In this article, we present a basic picture of the distribution of Russian soft power in Georgia. We argue that the official policy of the Russian federation is based on a smart approach, which implies military-backed soft activities enacted via local mediums.

This work presents the basic pattern of economic dependencies, which may make Georgia vulnerable in relations with its northern neighbor. However, we observe that those dependencies are not of critical importance in, so far as the state maintains ties with other trade partners. The key argument of the work was developed around two dimensional distributions of Russian soft power in Georgia. Societal distribution, which includes organizations with a low level of popularity, focuses on creating a negative discourse on the West, whereas cultural actors such as GOC promote the notion of shared values among the people. We argue that the soft power capabilities of Russia are limited due to the negative political attitudes of the Georgian public. It was indicated that the Georgian government is not willing to change the path towards its integration with Western institutions. However, a high level of public trust in the Georgian Orthodox Church and the complex nature of relations with the West may cause shifts in the future.

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Rosyjska smart power w Gruzji

Streszczenie

Rosja zawsze była aktywna militarnie; jednak obecny reżim próbuje połączyć instrumenty siły twardej i miękkiej. Stosunki rosyjsko-gruzińskie charakteryzują napięcia i starcia. Prozachodnia polityka zagraniczna Gruzji powoduje zaniepokojenie Kremla. Pomimo że Federacja Rosyjska ma silną pozycję na Kaukazie, z uwagi na jej obecność wojskową w regionie, polityka stosowania siły inteligentnej uzyskała długotrwałą legitymizację. Takie środowiska jak pro-rosyjskie organizacje pozarządowe, inteligencja kulturowa i duchowieństwo promują pojęcia wspólnej kultury i wspólnych wartości. Podobne promowanie zazwyczaj towarzyszy negatywnej narracji skierowanej ku liberalnemu Zachodowi.

Słowa kluczowe: Rosja, Gruzja, smart power, siła miękka, Cerkiew prawosławna, neo-eurazjatyzm