Abstract: This article is devoted to the analysis of Russian search for its soft power vision in the post-Soviet region from 1990 till 2010. It starts by presenting Russian interest in contemporary concept of soft power; its interpretations in political and academic discourses. It is argued that soft power for Russia is an alien and hostile term, but, paradoxically, at the same time Russian leaders and experts try to master this conceptually Western foreign policy language. The article specifies the “power to attract” potential of the Soviet Union and its gradual disintegration after the end of the Cold War. It is concluded that the Soviet foreign policy experience is too often underestimated in contemporary Russia. The decade of B.Yeltsin is represented by the absence of integrating ideology behind foreign policy practices in the post-Soviet region. This problem is tackled by the intellectuals and foreign policy experts after ideological separation of the Russian political elite from the West, which happened after 1996, when Y.Primakov changed the course of A.Kozyrev. The article presents initial competing ideas about the ‘Russian world’ – the concept, which later – with the help of political support and sympathies of the Orthodox Church – became the central foreign policy theme in the region. By the end of the V.Putin’s decade (already by 2007) one can observe a political consolidation under one general soft power vision, the ideological core of which is represented by the Russian World concept.

Keywords: Russian foreign policy; soft power; Russian world; ideology; Soviet; B.Yeltsin; V.Putin

*** This research was funded by a grant (No. MIP013/2011) from the Research Council of Lithuania
“Russia and the Russian world should be vivid and compelling. Knowing Russian should be fashionable and useful. Russia and the Russian world should represent a plan for the future, not a memory of the past.”

- Vyacheslav Nikonov, Executive Director, Russkiy Mir Foundation (Mir means Community, Peace, World.)

Contemporary Russian intellectuals and political leaders have been chasing the dream of a great nation from the very collapse of the Soviet Union (Tsygankov, 2007). This collapse was described by President Vladimir Putin as a major geopolitical disaster of the century, and in his Presidential Annual Address Putin explained why he considers this to be a disaster of such an importance: [...] for the Russian nation, it became a genuine drama [...], because [...] the epidemic of disintegration infected Russia [...] (Address, 2005). For decades of the Cold War Russia had represented itself as the center of gravity of the communist ideology in the bipolar world, but all integrating forces of this communist world order evaporated together with the implosion of the Soviet Union. Not only was the new state of Russian Federation deprived of the Soviet Union’s – what Joseph Nye (1990) would call – soft power potential, it had to face disintegration from within. When in 2000 Vladimir Putin took office, his primary task was to take control of the political situation in the country and, with the help of authoritarian methods, he managed to do so quite effectively in very limited time. This strengthened Russia not just from within, it gave confidence to its traditional diplomacy which was strongly tied to such hard power resources as gas, oil and military might. From the realpolitik point of view, Russia under Vladimir Putin managed to get control of the situation in most of the post-Soviet region, and the outcome of 2008 Russian-Georgian War is just a good illustration of that. But the Kremlin is still haunted by the dream of a great nation, a dream which should be shared not just by the Russian society but by the neighbors in the post-Soviet region as well. Since the concept of soft power entered the Russian political discourse, it could be called a dream to finally find an effective soft power vision, one that would make contemporary Russia attractive to the world. This strong yearning is represented in the recent speech of Vladimir Putin during his meeting with the Russian ambassadors working abroad:

“our diplomats are well versed in the traditional and familiar methods of international relations, if not masters in this field, but as far as using new methods goes, ‘soft power’ methods, for example, there is still much to reflect on” (Speech, 2012).
The focus of this article is the Russian quest for a soft power vision in the post-Soviet region in the past two decades (1990-2010). Russia's (re)construction of this power will be analyzed at several perspectives: first, different competing strategies of Russian soft power will be presented and compared; second, the activities of different governmental and non-governmental institutions engaged in implementing it in the region will be analyzed; third, documents dealing with Russian soft power will be looked at. This will help better understand the past, present and future thinking of the Russian government about how Russian soft power should be employed in the post-Soviet region. This research combines the discourse and policy analyses. Such approach helps to reveal the dominating Russian view towards soft power policy in the region and its competitive alternatives; to disclose the struggles between expert and policy/decision-making groups which propagate different visions of this power for Russia; to demonstrate the Russian institutional potential for such policies and to what extent this administrative resource is used, and how it is reformed by the Russian government. Finally, this allows us to speak about the potential consequences of such Russian soft power policies for the post-Soviet region. It gives a critical context for better understanding new foreign policy initiatives of Vladimir Putin.

Russia's search for its soft power vision can be divided into two distinct time periods. During the first decade, democratic processes, although facing enormous obstacles and setbacks, slowly took place in Russia and encouraged Western sympathies. But at the same time, one must stress that enormous Soviet administrative public diplomacy resource was slowly degrading, once quite effective institutions froze their activities. It was an objective reality due to a paradigm shift in the Russian foreign policy thinking: from the center of attraction for Communist ideology sympathizers into something new. The decade is marked by the quest of Russian experts and politicians for this “something new”. The intellectual debate about the future of Russian integration strategies which took place during Yeltsin's rule is especially important because this is when the ideas about the Russian World were formulated first and the concept was molded for later practical political implementation.

The second time period, year 2000-2010, could be described as the decade of Putin's reign (including Medvedev's presidency). This is when Joseph Nye's concept of soft power enters the Russian academic and political discourse. During this period practical implementation of sometimes conflicting strategies for the new Russian soft power vision took place. This was due to competition between different political and intellectual groups, governmental institutions and personalities (M.Kolerov vs. V.Nikonov). But
by the end of the second decade one can observe a political consolidation under one general soft power vision, the core of which is represented by the Russian World concept. This especially is evident after two policy documents were drafted: Russian Foreign Policy Review (2007) and Russian Foreign Policy Concept (2008) which incorporated the notion of humanitarian tools into the Russian foreign policy discourse.

This article will examine in greater detail the competing Russian soft power visions: from the geo-economical concept of “Russian World” presented by the Piotr Schedrovicki and Efim Ostrovski group to the idea of “transnational corporation Russia” put forward by the duo of Gleb Pavlovski and Sergey Chernishov; the concepts of antifascism and sovereign democracy. This will help to put the contemporary idea of the Russian World which nowadays dominates the Russian establishment’s thinking about soft power into a critical perspective.

The article follows the evolution of different institutions that deal with soft power issues. Special attention is given to the fact that the modern Russian Federation inherited vast public diplomacy resources which could be described as the institutional soft power resource of the Soviet Union. A lot of its potential was lost during the Yeltsin years, but now more and more former “old” institutions are being reformed and a lot is borrowed from the past experiences of the All-Soviet Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS) and the Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (SSOD). This is especially interesting because the implementation of new ideas about Russian soft power is sometimes delegated to institutions and people with a strong legacy of Soviet Union’s foreign policy experience. This link with the past is especially evident in the activities of Roszarubezcentr which was (re)established in 1994 and later reorganized into Rossotrudichestvo. Additionally, the article will focus on the establishment and activities of two important institutions that were given the task of increasing the Russian soft power influence in the post-Soviet region: the Presidential Administration’s Department for Interregional and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries and the Russian World Foundation. Special attention will be focused on the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in developing and spreading the Russian World concept as the spiritual center of integration for the region. The article also deals with how the soft power dimension of Russian foreign policy in the post-Soviet region is represented in official documents and strategies. Specific attention will be given to the concept of humanitarian tools of Russian foreign policy in the region as a way to turn the new soft power vision into practice.
Golden age of Soviet soft power

Ever since Joseph Nye (1990) coined the concept of soft power it attracted the attention of academic community and foreign policy practitioners. In the West it soon became a norm (and a fashion trend) to use (and misuse) this idea in academic and foreign policy discussions:

“In the ensuing years, I have been pleased to see the concept enter the public discourse, used by the American Secretary of State, the British Foreign Minister, political leaders, and editorial writers as well as academics around the world” (2004, p. XI)

However it is important to note that during Yeltsin’s presidency this trend did not enter the Russian academic and policy discourse. Only in 2004, when Joseph Nye developed his concept further in the book Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics experts on Russia – working in the West, not in the Russian academia – started to speak about the potential of soft power in Russia. First by Fiona Hill (2004) and later considerable research on Russian soft power was done by Andrei P. Tsygankov (2006). Both authors started to consider the benefits of the recently developed idea of soft power in understanding Russian contemporary foreign policy. They saw the Russian energy and economic policies through the prism of Joseph Nye’s concept. They presented a very broad interpretation and included means of economic pressure – which under traditional thinking would be part of hard power – as an example of Russian soft power. At the same time social-political changes that swept across Georgia in 2003 and Ukraine in 2004 made Russian experts and politicians consider the idea of soft power even more seriously. This Western concept got quite a negative publicity in the Russian media and academic environment, but at the same time it was stressed that Russia had to catch up with such Western power strategies in the post-Soviet region and use them effectively to counter foreign influences (see Кара-Мурза, 2005).

The late arrival of Joseph Nye’s idea to Russian academic and public discussions and the general negative reaction to the Rose and Orange revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine, which were considered to be inspired by Western soft power practices, made the concept of soft power somewhat alien and hostile in the Russian discourse. Alien, because it had American origins and was viewed as benefiting American interests (see Павловский, 2009). Hostile because, at worst, it was seen as targeting the Russian society and, at best, as competing with Russia for influence in the post-Soviet region (see Кара-Мурза, 2005). Therefore it is paradoxical when Russian
politicians and experts say that Russia is lagging behind in the use of soft power, which they see in a negative light, and stress the need to catch up and include this new tool in its foreign policy toolbox.

But is this really a new foreign policy tool that Russian politicians have yet to master and experts have yet to comprehend? Does this mean that during Yeltsin’s presidency there were no attempts by the Russian government to “get what it wants through attraction rather than coercion and payments” (Nye, 2004, p. X)? Even more, those well versed in foreign policy practices of the Soviet Union could say that such contemporary Russian discussions about the importance of soft power is like redefining a wheel because the Soviet Union was a soft superpower in the Cold War. Joseph Nye himself pointed to the fact that the Soviet Union had an enormous potential to attract and was America’s primary competitor in the realm of soft power (2004, p. 73) because of the appeal of Communist ideology and the legacy of fighting fascism in Europe, because the Soviet Union positioned itself in opposition to Capitalism, Imperialism, Colonialism and to many other negatively perceived Isms and, one should add, because it created an enormous institutional machine to spread its ideology. At the time such policy was not defined by Joseph Nye’s terms, instead it had other names: ideological struggle (идеологическая борьба) or propaganda and agitation (пропаганда и агитация):

_Ideological struggle for the hearts and minds of billions of people around the planet is taking place. And the future of mankind depends on the outcome of this ideological struggle._ (Стукалин, 1983, p.7)

From the very beginning the leaders of the Soviet Union paid special attention to Soviet ideological attractiveness abroad. This was an enormous important tool in the foreign policy toolbox even amongst competing Soviet ideological trends: Lev Trotsky encouraged it for the benefit of spreading “permanent revolution” throughout the world, and Nikolai Bukharin held it important for showing the world the benefits of Stalin’s socialism in one country. This was done by using propaganda and agitation. Frederick C. Barghoorn draws parallels between Communist propaganda and agitation and the religious propaganda of the Catholic Church: few intelligent and dedicated individuals could be converted to “correct” Marxist-Leninist ideology and later they could do agitation work amongst the masses (1964, p. 12). When Pope Gregory XV established Sacra congregatio christiano nomini propaganda – a congregation for evangelization and to counter the spread of reformation – he specifically saw it as a two-step process. First, missionaries had to be prepared in _Collegium Urbanum_,

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**Agora • Politinių komunikacijų studijos**
and only later they could go abroad for the evangelization of the unconverted. In the Soviet Union, Communist ideology became a substitute of religion to which the unconverted could be drawn to. This process of ideological conversion through propaganda was especially important for the Soviet Union because, as Frederick C. Barghoorn puts it, it produced revolutionaries that were determined to change their respected social and political environment to suit Soviet interests (1964, p. 16). The existence of strong ideology that would suggest common future, specific social, political or economic project – even such a utopian one as Communist society – is enormously important for success. For more than a decade after the collapse of Soviet Union, contemporary Russia specifically lacked such an ideological base for its soft power vision, until it started concentrating on the idea of the Russian World.

Gintautas Mažeikis (2010, p. 247) summarizes the structure of Soviet propaganda and agitation in this way: first, long term ideological work which consisted of fixed elements (Marx’s, Lenin’s, Stalin’s works) and flexible elements (based on the decisions of the Communist Party congresses); second, thematic propaganda campaigns which continued for several years or decades and were tied to a specific political, social or economic context (e.g. ban the bomb, no to apartheid, yes to peace movement, etc.); and finally, specific practical “micropropaganda” work by specialists on ground taking into account the local environment. The importance of ideology for the success of propaganda and agitation is evident. The other important assets are institutional capacities and human resources.

Throughout the Cold War, the Soviet Union was a global power because it was able to control the political environment and the behavior of others not just with the help of military or economic pressure, but also by employing an enormous institutional propaganda machine to spread the Soviet values and propagate the Soviet worldview. First of all, Soviet leaders used the network of Communist parties and movements around the world under the flagship of Comintern which was established in 1919. Later, it was succeeded by Cominform which existed until 1956. This experience of international Communist organizations and popular front movements was transformed in 1958 into the Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (SSOD), created as a successor to the All-Soviet Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS). The work done by the network of friendship and cultural organizations had a fixed ideological agenda, but was flexible on specific topics and themes: during the Comintern years it was mainly “the union of international proletariat and the spread of socialism”; before and after WWII the topics focused on the fight against “fascists and warmongers”;

(RE)CONSTRUCTING RUSSIAN SOFT POWER IN POST-SOVIET REGION
later, on the Soviet struggle against “colonialism and discrimination” and on “peace, democracy and socialism”. Experts on the Soviet Union defined this as semantic adaptiveness (Barghoorn, 1964, p. 29): the “proletariat and working class” in later propaganda messages was turned into the “people masses or peace-loving people” and still later into a simple and catch-all “the people”. Such semantic adaptiveness can be found even through the Gorbachev’s policies of “perestroika” and “glasnost”. This entire ideological struggle against the Capitalist block was orchestrated by experienced specialists from the International Section of Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party.

Soviet experience shows how important the ideological base and the effective network of institutions are for a country’s ability to attract. The collapse of the Soviet Union came together with the collapse of Communist ideology. Russia lost its global soft power reach and since then is searching for such an integrating ideology not just on the global, but even on the regional – post-Soviet – scale.

**Yeltsin’s decade: the ideology vacuum in Russian foreign policy in post-Soviet region**

In the beginning of nineties, Russia not only lost the integrating ideology of the Communist utopia, but the institutional potential of the Soviet Union’s public diplomacy was slowly degrading as well. This was due to the objective reality of lack of funds and the pressing problems that Russian leaders had to face internally as the first priority. Only several years later it became evident to the Russian government that the country was losing the competitive advantage of the Soviet Union’s soft power experiences and practices. In 1993 President Yeltsin signed a decree on Russian centers of science and culture abroad, which specifically stated the need to “preserve the system of Soviet cultural centers and Soviet houses of science and culture abroad and on this basis to develop a unified Russian policy of humanitarian, cultural, scientific and informational relationships with the foreign countries” (Order, 1993). A year later this task was given to Roszarubezcentr which in 1994 became a successor to the SSOD and VOKS. However, it is important to note that such humanitarian relations of Roszarubezcentr with foreign countries excluded the countries of the post-Soviet region.

During the Soviet era, Russia became a global power with global ideological aspirations and with institutions and human resources to implement this. The geopolitical drama for Russia during Yeltsin’s presidency was that the country not only lost its global reach, but had to find its
regional identity with an attractive ideology and foreign policy capabilities. Therefore in order for such political projects as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) or foreign policy concepts as the “near abroad” and the “compatriots policy” to be attractive to post-Soviet societies in the long term, they first of all had to be based on an attractive ideology and supported by effective institutional capabilities. One has to admit that this was a Sisyphean task for the Yeltsin administration, not just because it concentrated on internal, not external, political and economic challenges, but because at the time it was following the Western path of democratization. In other words, the Russian political elite in the beginning of the nineties did not need an alternative ideology for the post-Soviet region because they themselves were attracted by Western soft power – the vision of a liberal democratic Russia being part of the Western community. The first half of that decade was a period of westernizers in Russian foreign policy; this trend is represented by Andrey Kozyrev as foreign minister up until 1996. As Andrey P. Tsygankov puts it “[this school of thought] argues for the “natural” affinity of their country with the West based on such shared values as democracy, human rights, and a free market, [...] vision of “integration” and “strategic partnership with the West” assumed that Russia would develop liberal democratic institutions and build a market economy after the manner of the West” (2007, p. 380).

This initial alliance with the West did not mean that realpolitik thinking was gone from the contemporary Russian foreign policy discourse. In such an analytical establishment as the Council for Foreign and Defence Policy (SVOP), which was created in 1992 by prominent Russian political scientists, security and foreign policy experts, there were discussions about how to maintain Russia’s influence in the post-Soviet region. In 1992 the Diplomaticheskii Vestnik (magazine of the Russian MFA) put forward an article by Sergey Karaganov – one of the founders and a longtime chairman of SVOP – in which he encouraged to use Russian compatriots who after the collapse of the Soviet Union ended up in the near abroad and to turn them into a foreign policy tool in the post-Soviet region. This idea later became known as the Karaganov Doctrine. It is important to stress that this doctrine was not based on integrating the soft power idea, but instead on the pure interest of keeping Russian influence in the near abroad. It had to be done not by promoting the return of Russian speakers to Russia, but by facilitating through all means their stay in the near abroad with the hope of using them as a tool for implementing Russia’s interests in the post-Soviet region. Even more, the Russian government saw itself as legal heir to the USSR and began a policy of advocating the rights of compatriots. This mimicked the tactics of the Soviet Union when its leaders would reply to any
Western criticism with a “What about...” the apartheid in South Africa; or jailed trade-unionists; or the Contras in Nicaragua, etc. This kind of Soviet policy was labelled as “whataboutism” by Edward Lucas (2008). Contemporary Russian “whataboutism” made a semantic adaptation of such Soviet tactics and, when faced with criticism, started focusing on the rights of Russian speakers, for example in the Baltic States.

Although without a distinct integrating ideology, the idea of using compatriots in the near abroad was borrowed from the Soviet experience of network organizations, such as VOKS or SSOD. It was all about talent spotting and the creation and support of a new NGO network.

Gregory Feifer stated that SVOP “was instrumental in the ouster of pro-Western former Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev in 1996 and the installation of Primakov in his place, ending a brief diplomatic honeymoon with the West” (2002). On the other hand, as Andrey P. Tsygankov said, new foreign minister Yevgeni Primakov made an ideological U-turn: “He thought of Russia as part of Eurasian, rather than European, continent [...]; his civilizational priorities included the restoration of Russia’s great power status and dominance in the former Soviet region, more restrained relations with the West, and strengthening of ties with non-Western nations” (2007, p. 377). Such geopolitical ambition needed an ideology that would be an alternative to the Western one for the post-Soviet region. Apart from the change of leadership in the Russian foreign policy establishment, two important events happened, which significantly pushed Russian political experts towards a search of an alternative ideology. First, in 1998 Russia had to face a serious financial crisis which became a final blow to the confidence of society and the political elite in liberal economic and social reforms. Second, the NATO led military campaign in Kosovo targeted a historical Russian ally, Serbia, and was perceived as unilateral action against the Russian interests in the very heart of Europe. It put under question Russia’s affinity with the West. Kiril Rogov’s interview about the people behind the media project Polit.ru is a good illustration of the disillusionment of the intellectuals during the Kosovo crisis. He speaks about how Modest Kolerov – who later went to work for the Putin administration – came to Polit.ru as a liberal, then gradually shifted towards the right, and during the Kosovo crisis became a vocal anti-American Slavophile (Рогов, 2012).

The change of direction under Yevgeni Primakov, the financial crisis of 1998, and the NATO led operation in Kosovo created a favorable situation for discussions on alternative ideas and foreign policy strategies in the post-Soviet region. There were many think tanks and expert communities which started to rethink Russian Western orientation, but amongst those
were two significant groups (politechnologists and public relations practitioners) which chose to concentrate on the vague idea of “Russianness” or the “Russian World” and its applicability to the Russian foreign policy in the post-Soviet region. This idea became the central soft power theme during Putin's presidency, therefore it is important to understand its sources.

The first group of experts was related to the magazine “So-obshenye”\(^1\) which specializes on politechnological and PR topics. Later they established the project “Russian Archipelago”\(^2\) which by its name represents the core ideas of those authors: archipelago is an interconnected chain of islands which can be united not just geographically, but politically, socially and culturally as well. The initiators of the “Russian Archipelago” called it the social networking project of the “Russian World”. The most prominent in this group are Piotr Shchedrovitsky and Efim Ostrovsky. At the end of the nineties, these authors described their vision of an integrating Russian World, which could be summarized in this way:

1. there is equal number of “Russians” outside and inside the borders of modern Russia;
2. the core of the Russian World concept is the Russian language;
3. “to speak Russian” is “to think Russian”, and this means “to act Russian”;
4. humanitarian tools should be used to facilitate the Russian World concept.

In his article “Humanitarian tools and real politics” Piotr Shchedrovitsky (2000) propagated for a constructivist approach. He said that integrating political concepts could be created with the help of humanitarian tools, the media and public relations, and in the end they would have real political consequences. He, together with Efim Ostrovsky, saw the Russian World as a geo-economical political concept that could be an attractive alternative for the post-Soviet region. As the Russian Archipelago declares:

“The Russian World became an environment for humanitarian-technological projects of Piotr Shchedrovitsky’s cultural school and the Ostrovsky Group” (Павлов, 2004)

The other group of intellectuals that influenced the concept of the Russian World worked together on publishing a book series of Russian philosophy and political thought called “Inoye”. Later they established

\(^{1}\) See <http://soob.ru/magazine/> [2012-10-12]
\(^{2}\) See <http://www.archipelag.ru/about_project> [2012-10-12]
the internet project “Russian Journal”\(^3\). This group is best represented by the duo of Gleb Pavlovski and Sergey Chernishov. They supplemented the Russian World concept of the above mentioned intellectual group by putting forward an idea of “transnational Russia”. For Gleb Pavlovski and Sergey Chernishov the most important aspect of the Russian World was its networkness and interconnectivity, and the Russian language together with internet technologies became a basis for that. The input to the Russian World concept of this duo could be summarized as follows:

They presented the idea of „New Transnational Russian“ borrowing it from the concept of transnational corporations which spread their activities throughout the world but were closely interconnected at the same time;

They viewed the Russian World as a very modern concept that should be based on internet technologies and social networking projects.

Probably for the first time during this decade, Russian compatriots were no longer viewed as a mere tool of Russian pressure in the post-Soviet region. Experts started to think how to curry favor with members of the Russian diasporas and how to make them Russia’s soft power emissaries. The next Russian leader had to think how the Russian World could be effectively put into practice using NGO’s, embassies, websites, and a network of organizations promoting Russian language and culture.

**Putin’s decade: Russian world – a new soft power vision for post-Soviet region**

During the decade of Vladimir Putin’s reign (including Dmitry Medvedev’s presidential term), as Andrey P. Tsygankov puts it, “the Kremlin has overcome many of its weaknesses of the 1990s and reached consensus on some principal objectives of Russia’s foreign policy, such as the preservation of Russia’s global influence and its status as a regional great power” (2010, p. 44). After 2000 Russian leadership managed to consolidate the internal political situation and started to orientate its attention outwards – to foreign policy strategies in the post-Soviet region. Some think that this comeback had nothing to do with soft power strategy:

> „As the West turned to climate and hunger, as it celebrated “soft power” and the cracking of sovereignty under the hammer blows of humanitarianism, Putin went back to “hard” power, using gas to cow his neighbors from the Baltics via Belarus to the Ukraine, and tanks to reconquer what he claims is rightfully his.” (Newsweek, 2008)

\(^3\) See <http://www.russ.ru/about> [2012-10-12]
Anders Aslund adds to this: “in the former Soviet Union, almost all countries are seeking trade and security with anyone but Russia, because Putin is using all sticks and no carrots” (2012). But this is an extreme point of view, which represents part of the reality. Even accepting that Vladimir Putin is most effective in the use of hard power in the post-Soviet region, one has to recall that Joseph Nye once said that some “may be attracted to other by hard power, by the myth of invincibility and inevitability” (2004, p. 9). This is especially true for the post-Soviet countries that have a legacy of authoritarian leadership, where significant parts of society feel nostalgia for the “Soviet greatness” – which now they associate with Russia – and long for a strong authoritarian leader – which now they associate with Vladimir Putin. In other words, hard power can be attractive for some as well. The Soviet hard power myth of invincibility and inevitability can be associated with Putin’s Russia and can be used in foreign policy.

The above mentioned authors are only partly right in evaluating the Russian comeback because Russia under Vladimir Putin strengthened its position not only with the help of hard power, but by reconsidering its soft power strategies in the post-Soviet region as well. Joseph Nye stated that soft power is difficult to master because the resources are outside the government control and in the end it has indirect impact (2004, p. 17), but after Vladimir Putin started to implement the “power vertical” concept in practice, the question of control became secondary for the soft power strategy. The prime question became the question of ideology. Vladimir Putin brought in the ideology behind the Russian soft power and this is specifically what foreign policy practices in the post-Soviet region lacked during the Yeltsin years. Already in 2001 Vladimir Putin stated:

“The notion Russian World has from time immemorial extended far beyond the geographical boundaries of Russia and even far beyond the boundaries of the Russian ethnos. [...] Tens of millions of people speaking, thinking and, perhaps, more important - feeling Russian live outside the Russian Federation.” (Speech, 2001)

It is clear that Vladimir Putin’s idea of the Russian World borrows significantly from Piotr Schedrovicki’s, Efim Ostrovski and Gleb Pavlovski’s, Sergey Chernishov’s understanding of this concept.

After it became clear that there is an urgent need for ideology behind the Russian soft power, the other important question was whether it was possible to use the institutions, organizations and the concepts that were created or emerged naturally during Yeltsin’s decade for implementing this new soft power vision. Gleb Pavlovski, who under Vladimir Putin
became one of the most influential politenechnologists in the Kremlin, when taking up his job said that

„Russia is doing a revision of its foreign policy in the post-Soviet region and of its foreign policy tools. The concept of the “near abroad” is left behind and is totally dead; one cannot expect any attempts to revive it. The concept of the “near abroad” was the very reason [...] behind the primitivization of Russian politics in the post-Soviet region. [...] Today the topic of the “near abroad” is not valid.” (Павловский, 2005)

The primitive – in Pavlovski’s terms – use of the “near abroad” and the “compatriots” concepts during the previous decade could have corrupted Russia’s soft power prospects for years to come. As Joseph Nye puts it, the effectiveness of soft power is affected in positive or negative ways by a host of non-state actors within and outside the country (2004, p. 98). For many years a network of compatriot organizations acted in the post-Soviet region without any clear unified ideology and vision, and in this way could have contributed in creating a disabling environment for future Russian soft power policies. Based on Enri-East research (project funded by the European Commission and in Lithuania implemented by the Lithuanian Social Research Center, Vilnius), Vadim Smirnov concluded (2012) that Russians in the post-Soviet region, especially in the Baltic States, sometimes identify themselves more with Europe than with motherland Russia. Baltic Russians are more mobile in the direction of Europe than in the Eastern direction. The legacy of Karaganov’s doctrine, the ideological disorganization of compatriot organizations and the lack of a unified integrating vision, particularly for Baltic Russians, has made the European soft power an attractive option. In other words, after the Yeltsin decade, Russian compatriots in the post-Soviet region shifted from being a Russian foreign policy tool to becoming a target for the new soft power strategy. Before concentrating on the ideology of the Russian World, it is important to follow the steps the Kremlin took that led to this new soft power strategy.

After Vladimir Putin came to power he first had to fill the internal ideological vacuum. Gleb Pavlovski says (2005) that his first task was to reconstruct Russia itself, its identity, and later to work on Russia’s external ideology and its future soft power vision. On this external dimension Andrey P. Tsygankov associates Vladimir Putin, and Gleb Pavlovski, with the Euro-East ideological trend in foreign policy (2007). On the ideological spectrum, he places Putin between Kozirev’s Westernizers and Primakov’s Eurasianists. It means that Putin’s foreign policy had to represent European and Eastern ideas at the same time.
Gleb Pavlovski, when discussing Russian future foreign policy with Stanislav Belkovski, labeled the ideological dimension representing Europeaness simply as antifascism:

“Russia really is an empire, but I would like to remind that since the 20th century it has been an antifascist empire. And this is enormously important to us. We want to preserve this antifascist, in essence, European quality” (2005).

Such an ideology helps modern Russia, under Vladimir Putin, to present itself as the “true Europe” (in contrast to the “false Europe”, which is represented by the new EU member states accused by the Kremlin of past collaborations with the fascist regime and revisions of WWII history) and relate to the core European values. Antifascism becomes not only the center of the internal Russian identity building strategies, but also an essentially European part of its foreign policy ideology. This theme becomes a central issue around 2004-2005 (during the celebration of the 60th anniversary of Victory Day) in domestic politics as well as in Russian foreign policy in the post-Soviet region and has stayed on top of the agenda until now. However, such approach is like a dual edge sword because it balances on the same dividing lines as the concept of “new vs. old Europe”: this ideology may be attractive to Western Europe, but it alienates Eastern Europe, which in the Russian foreign policy discourse becomes the “other” to the community of “true antifascist Europeans”.

The idea of “sovereign democracy”, on the other hand, fits in the Eastern spectrum of the Euro-East ideological trend. This idea allows defining countries which are attracted by the European soft power and strive for Western integration as “guided democracies” – the same label given by Andrei Okara to the Yeltsin period:

“Sources of our legitimacy are found in Russia, not in the West, like it was during the ‘guided democracy’ of the Yeltsin era.” (2007)

“Sovereign democracy” becomes an attractive concept for authoritarian leaders throughout the world, trying to neutralize external influences (as well as internal civil pressure for change). In Russia this idea became very important during and after the Rose and Orange revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine. The paradox is that today contemporary Russia, with its concept of “sovereign democracy”, connects itself to such leaders as Syria’s Bashar al-Assad and finds allies amongst the autocrats in the Asian part of the post-Soviet region. This fits the Eastern trend because it represents
Eastern autocratic political culture. That is why “sovereign democracy” as ideological base behind Putin’s soft power attracts some political elites, but alienates the post-Soviet societies facing autocratic regimes.

Antifascism and sovereign democracy had a duel use: they helped Kremlin in its internal identity building strategies and became the ideological base behind the new soft power vision. However, for Vladimir Putin the most promising ideology for soft power in the post-Soviet region became the Russian World concept. The Russian President declared his support for the idea of the Russian World during the congress of Russian compatriots in 2001. The previous intellectual debates about the Russian World got a new inspiration. Gleb Pavlovski’s group developed the idea further, this time from the Kremlin’s insider position. The Russian World over several years became a more coherent concept.

There are different ways to define it, but in the context of soft power it is important to point out the following three aspects of this idea: (1) the geography of the Russian World; (2) the language of the Russian World (3) the religion of the Russian World. First of all, the term geography is very conditional because the whole idea of the Russian World is about transcending geographical barriers. The Russian World could be interpreted globally referring to all Russians scattered around the world, but that is only partly true. The center of the Russian World is the three Slavic nations of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. It could be called the integrating core of the Russian World. The “union of the three” historically is even referred to as the Holy Union:

“The core of the Russian World today is Russia, Ukraine and Belarus,” as Saint Lawrence from Chernihiv said. “Russia, Ukraine and Belarus – it is all Holy Rus” (Kirill, 2009).

The language and the religion of the Russian World have become the factors that make it possible to enlarge the territory of this concept and stretch it to the maximum. The role of the language can be described in the words of famous Russian etymologist Oleg Trubachiov from his 1992 book “In search of unity” published just after the collapse of Soviet Union:

“It is time to remind us all, who are dulled by the economic difficulties of our time, that material collapse of Soviet Union does not imply that the collapse is total and irreversible, because, I dare to say, it did not touch the best and the strongest link of this union – to which I relate professionally – this is the union of language” (Масленникова, 2007).
The metaphor of “the union of Russian language” has an especially strong soft power potential because it attracts all Russian speakers to the Russian World despite their nationality. The Russian language becomes the glue for contemporary politechnologists which allows take the pieces of the post-Soviet region and stick them together. The third important aspect of the Russian World is the role of the Orthodox Church. When the idea of the Russian World was debated just amongst intellectuals and experts at the end of the Yeltsin decade, it did not show much prospects for the future. Things changed when Vladimir Putin decided to use this concept in the public and political discourse during his presidency. However, it is important to stress that the idea of the Russian World got an enormously strong boost when the Russian Orthodox Church decided to join in. Patriarch Kirill in the Third Assembly of the Russian World proposed to use the term “Russian world country” (страна русского мира):

“The term ‘a Russian world country’ could be introduced into usage. It would mean that a country sees itself as part of the Russian world, if it uses Russian as the language of international communication, promotes the Russian culture, and preserves the general historical memory.” (2009)

In his speech at the Assembly, the Patriarch suggested to add Moldova to the list of the countries of the Russian World. One of the strongest religious and spiritual interpretations of the Russian World by Patriarch Kirill came in 2010. During his meeting with a journalist from Ukraine, he said that the spiritual union and common culture is “the main criteria for distinguishing good from evil” (Kirill, 2010). Such emotional and spiritual description by the head of the Orthodox Church concluded the formation of the Russian World as an ideology for Russia’s soft power in the post-Soviet region.

Another important factor for the success of Putin’s new soft power vision is the resources behind the new ideology, which include institutions and specific foreign policy tools. It was clear to Kremlin’s politechnologists that compatriot organizations and their Moscow-based umbrella institutions from the Yeltsin era needed a considerable reshuffle. Therefore in 2005 Vladimir Putin appointed Modest Kolerov – who came to Kremlin from Gleb Pavlovski’s environment of politechnologists – to head a newly formed Department for Interregional and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries at the Administration of the President of the Russian Federation. Surprisingly under the guidance of Modest Kolerov the Russian foreign policy in the post-Soviet region stood in total contradiction.
to the Western idea of soft power. Up until 2007, when Vladimir Putin sacked Modest Kolerov from his post, the Kremlin’s policy in the region can be defined as battles of information wars. This may be partly due to the personal character of the first head of this presidential department and, partly, because Modest Kolerov chose to implement policies based on the ideology of antifascism rather than the Russian World. Therefore, in 2007 came another important institutional reshuffle when the Russian World Foundation, headed by Viacheslav Nikonov, was established. Viacheslav Nikonov, who comes from the intellectual and politechnological background of SVOP which was especially active during the Yeltsin era, chose a softer strategy corresponding to the Western understanding of soft power, but – what is even more important – his foundation devoted its activities entirely to the practical implementation of the Russian World ideology. To add to the institutional soft power capacities, Roszarubezcenter was reorganized into Rossotrudnichistvo in 2008 and in 2012 it got Konstantin Kosachev – a vocal supporter of soft power strategies – as a new head of the institution which proudly relates its history to the activities of Soviet VOKS and SSOD.

Apart from institutional reforms, Vladimir Putin signed new directives that outlined foreign policy tools to be used for the implementation of this new soft power strategy. The new means to implement the strategy can be described as humanitarian tools of Russian foreign policy. The official outline of such humanitarian tools can be found in The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (2008) and The Russian Foreign Policy Review (2007). The Concept, drafted in 2008, states that Russia sees its goals in “protecting the rights and legitimate interests of the Russian citizens and compatriots living abroad; [...] expanding and strengthening the space of the Russian language and culture; [...] consolidating the organizations of compatriots; [...] contributing to learning and spreading the Russian language; [...] firmly countering manifestations of neo-fascism, [...] attempts to rewrite the history [...] and revise the outcome of World War Two; [...] building up interaction with international and non-governmental human rights organizations to strengthen universal norms in the area of human rights without double standards”. The Review elaborates more on the arsenal of specific humanitarian tools and divides them into distinct parts: (1) human rights, (2) defense of compatriots’ interests, (3) consular activities, (4) cooperation in the sphere of culture and education, (5) and informational or media support.

Some may wonder about Dmitry Medvedev’s input into the Russian search for a new soft power vision. It may be briefly concluded – with one significant remark – that during his presidency he simply implemented
Vladimir Putin’s vision into practice and continued the planned reform of the institutions in charge of the Russian soft power. However, there is a significant remark relating to the political agenda of modernization which became Dmitry Medvedev’s political program for action. In Joseph Nye’s terms, one of the ways to success in soft or smart power is a strategy of “starting at home” (CSIS, 2007). Therefore we may conclude that if Medvedev’s modernization project had been successful, it could have been turned into a very effective soft power for the post-Soviet region. Unfortunately, the modernization program is gradually taken off the political agenda during Vladimir Putin’s third presidency; therefore Medvedev’s legacy may be described as the lost opportunity for Russian soft power in the region.

In conclusion

Nowadays soft power has become a trendy term in the Russian political and academic discourse: President Putin writes about it in his pre-election article in the Moscow News (2012), he speaks about it with Russian ambassadors working abroad (2012), Prime Minister Medvedev discusses the concept during his meeting with the representatives of Rossotrudnichestvo (2012), and the new head of this agency, Konstantin Kosachev, declares it to be his priority for action in the new post (2012). However, the Kremlin and its politechnologists have a way of transforming Western concepts and making them suit Russian realities. In his article “Russia and the Changing World” Vladimir Putin specifically mentions “illegal instruments of soft power” (2012). As soon as the legislation on foreign NGO activities is passed, such Western organizations of soft power as USAID are forced to end their activities in Russia. While some of the Russian officials are trying to master the new language of soft power, others at the same time semantically adapt old Soviet anti-Western rhetoric that suits their daily political needs. The institutional reform which is taking place (e.g. Rossotrudnichestvo) revives the Soviet tradition of ideological struggle. The most recent illustration of this is the decision to reestablish the SSOD in its new form – the RSOD (Russian Union of Friendship Organizations)4.

The analysis of the Russian quest for a soft power vision during the two decades shows that the Kremlin has come a long way to reach such a distinctive realization of this concept and its possible uses in the post-Soviet sphere: from the collapse of the Soviet potential to attract and the loss of ideology behind the Russian foreign policy in this region during Yeltsin’s years to a competition of ideologies and gradual mobilization of support

4 See <http://rs.gov.ru/taxonomy/term/210> [2012-10-12]
behind the idea of the Russian World as the future soft power vision during Putin’s years. The Russian World as an ideology for Russian soft power has a huge potential because of its positive integrating capacity as opposed to the traditional anti-Western rhetoric. Minister of the RF MFA Sergey Lavrov recently declared that such an understanding of soft power will be included into Russia’s new foreign policy concept, which is now being drafted (2012).

This analysis covered a time period up to 2010, but as a concluding remark it is important to stress that since then a new foreign policy idea has emerged on Vladimir Putin’s political agenda – the idea of a Eurasian union. This idea creates new competitive environment for the Russian World concept and brings new uncertainty to the Russian soft power vision in the post-Soviet region. This recent developments partly supports the skepticism of some of the experts (Menon, Motyl, 2007) about the ability of Russia’s leadership to design a coherent long-term plan with appropriate institutional, material and intellectual support, and this is in part because the Kremlin is fundamentally weakened by the competition of rival factions with their short-term mercantile goals.

Santrauka


Šio straipsnio tikslas – ištirti Rusijos švelniosios galios vizijos paieškas posovietiniame regione per pastaruosius du dešimtmėčius (1990–2010 m.). Šios galios (re)konstrukcija Rusijoje analizuota keliais požiūriais: pirma, pateiktos ir palygintos įvairios Rusijos švelniosios galios konkuruojančios strategijos; antra, išanalizuoti įvairių vyriausybinių ir nevyriausybinių institucijų, įgyvendinančių švelniąją galią regione, veiksmai; trečia, apžvelgti dokumentai, susiję su Rusijos švelniją galia. Tai padėjo geriau
suprasti ankstesnius, dabartinius ir būsimus Rusijos valdžios žingsnius, kaip Rusijos švelnioji galia turėtų būti panaudota posovietiniame regio- ne. Šis tyrimas remiasi diskurso ir užsienio politikos analize. Toks būdas padeda atskleisti vyraujantį Rusijos požiūrį į švelniosios galios politiką regione ir konkuruojančias jos alternatyvas; parodė Kremliui artimų intelektualų ir vyriausybinių grupių, propaguojančių skirtingas šios galios vizijas Rusijoje, kovą; demonstruoja Rusijos institucinį potencialą šiai politikai įgyvendinti ir tai, kaip šis administracinis išteklius yra naudojamas bei kaip jį reformuoją Rusijos valdžia. Pagaliau tai leidžia mums kalbėti apie Rusijos švelniosios galios politikos potencialias pasekmes posovie- tiniam regionui. Tai suteikia pagrindą geriau suprasti naujas Vladimiro Putino užsienio politikos iniciatyvas.


kuriuose į Rusijos užsienio politiką buvo įtraukta humanitarinių priemonių, skirtų įgyvendinti švelniją galią, sąvoka.


Apibendrinant galima teigti, kad šiuo metu „švelnioji galia“ tapo madinga sąvoka Rusijos politikos ir mokslo diskurse: prezidentas Pu-

(RE)CONSTRUCTING RUSSIAN SOFT POWER IN POST-SOVIET REGION


8 Путин, Владимир. Россия и меняющийся мир. Московские новости, 2012-02-27. [žiūrėta 2012-10-12]
9 Meeting with Russian ambassadors and permanent representatives in international organizations. 2012-07-09. [žiūrėta 2012-10-12]
10 Chernenko, Yelena. Employing soft power in the West. Kommersant, 2012-09-06. [žiūrėta 2012-10-12]
11 Путин, Владимир. Россия и меняющийся мир. Московские новости.
12 Žr. apie <http://rs.gov.ru/taxonomy/term/210> [žiūrėta 2012-10-12]
13 “Перезагрузка” не может продолжаться вечно. Коммерсантъ-Online, 2012-10-03. [žiūrėta 2012-10-12]
Ši analizė apima laikotarpį iki 2010 m., tačiau pabaigai reikėtų atkreipti dėmesį į naują Putino politinėje darbotvarkėje atsiradusią idėją – Eurazijos sąjungą. Ši idėja sukuria papildomą konkurencinę erdvę Rusijos pasaulio ideologijai ir įneša neapibrėžtumo į Rusijos švieniosios galios viziją posovietiniame regione. Tokia įvykių seka iš dalies patvirtina dalies ekspertų skepticizmą dėl Rusijos lyderių gebėjimo sukurti nuoseklų ilgalaikį užsienio politikos planą su reikiamu institucine, materialine parama bei, svarbiausia, pozityvia integruojančia ideogija, o tai iš dalies atsitiko dėl to, kad Kremlį iš patamų silpnina tarpusavyje besivaržančios frakcijos su savo trumpalaikiais merkantiliniais tikslais ir juos tenkinančiomis užsienio politikos posovietiniame regione vizijomis.

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