



RUSSIA`S SOFT POWER IN 'NEAR ABROAD' IN THE POLISH OFFICIAL AND EXPERT DISCOURSES*

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The article deals with Russia`s soft power in the Polish official and expert discourses. Poland is of particular interest given her active part in the EU policies towards many countries of the post-Soviet space, the historically embedded perception of a danger from the east and the trend of the Russian-Polish rapprochement in the recent years. The author comes to conclusion that Russia`s most fruitful investments into her soft power potential are likely to be in the area which escaped securitization – people-to-people contacts in education and research.

Keywords: Russia, soft power, 'near abroad', 'common neighbourhood', Poland, European Union.

The objective of this paper is to reveal how Russia`s soft power is framed in the Polish official and expert discourses. Debates around the term, as well as relevance of the “context in which the relationship exists,”¹ that prominent U. S. scholar and statesman Joseph Nye who coined the term ‘soft power’ a couple decades ago particularly insists on, and articulated problems to pin down this kind of power² make me consider the subject-matter within a broader context of Russia`s foreign policy in her ‘near abroad’ / Russia-EU ‘common neighbourhood’.

Why Poland? This country was often considered as a Russian rival in the space currently termed as ‘near abroad’, ‘the region of CIS’ or ‘common neighbourhood’³ – this thinking dates back to the times of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. As an EU member-state, Poland stresses her role of a policy-maker in regard to the EU Eastern neighbours and she, many scholars rightly point out, is quite successful in it. At the same time Poland has been, probably, the most active among the EU member-states of Central and Eastern Europe in raising awareness in the European Union, and also across the Atlantic, about different aspects of insecurity/danger connected with Russia. So her active position on region-making and the historically embedded perception of a danger from the east make her scrutinize closely the developments in the Eastern neighbourhood and come up with her take on policy solutions.

In my opinion, it is fruitful to look at the Polish understanding of Russia`s soft power and its assessment (e. g. how the structure of Russia`s soft power arsenal, particular mechanisms of her influence and attraction are seen), as well as her role in the region, because this kind of research might:

- help understand the peculiarities of Russia`s soft power and how it works, if it does;
- given the recent trend of the Russian-Polish reconciliation, reveal whether the Polish authorities and experts see a room for more trust and cooperation in the neighbourhood;

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The Editor: the article was written in early autumn 2013, therefore, the political crisis in Ukraine which started in November 2013 is not covered in the paper. It is worth noting that the variant of how the European Union and Russia should constructively develop their relations in regard to the situation in Ukraine and, broader, the clashed integration projects which is now (January 2014) being discussed by the EU authorities (and especially promoted by Germany) was, according to the author, among the solutions suggested by Polish experts in September 2013.

¹ Nye, Joseph. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York, 2004. P. 2.

² For an outline of problems with soft power measurement see, for example: Radikov I., Leksyutina Ya. “Miagkaia sila” kak sovremenniy atribut velikoi derzhavy // *Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia*. No. 2. February 2012. Pp. 19-26.

³ I shall employ primarily the term ‘near abroad’ originated in Russia, as it highlights the peculiarity of Russia`s approach and is widely used in policy analyses and public narrative, though the term has been removed from the Russian official discourse (see details in: Shishkina O. V. *Vneshnepoliticheskie resursy: Rossiya i ES na prostranstve “obshchego sosedstva”*. Moscow, 2013. P. 19). The ‘region of CIS’ is mainly characteristic of the academic discourse. At the same time I shall use ‘near abroad’, region/area of CIS’ and ‘common neighbourhood’ coined in the EU as interchangeable (when the context allows). Besides, I use the term ‘soft power’ without quotation marks in English following the established practice.



– highlight what the Polish officials and experts think about Russia and her prospects and also about some other key countries in the post-Soviet space (e. g. Ukraine).

In terms of methodology I draw on adaptations of the discourse analysis to foreign policy and Europeanization studies by the Danish scholars Henrik Larsen and Kennet Lyngaard. Thus, discourses create a certain ‘space of possibility’ for decision-makers which is both constraining and enabling, this is the basis on which policy preferences, interests and goals are constructed⁴. The ideas of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe who stress incomplete character of any social totality (including identity) are also relevant⁵.

The chronological period for analysis – the years of 2009-2013. To be more precise, from inaugurating the Eastern Partnership (EaP), then the first significant Poland`s say in the EU neighbourhood policy (together with Sweden), in May 2009 to the present (September 2013), when the “milestone” Vilnius EaP summit is due in late November and the renewed infrastructure of the Russian-Polish relations started to work, including the Centers for Dialogue and Understanding in both countries.

Primary texts: Poland`s official documentation related to foreign policy; on-line open-access analytic material of the Polish Institute of International Relations – a think tank which closely cooperates with Poland`s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at the same time opinions expressed by its experts might also give a broader picture of possibilities.

1. *A note on Russia`s soft power*

Much has already been said about Russia`s potential in developing soft power by both domestic and foreign experts, and here I would like to highlight a few points in the discussions.

It has become a commonplace to argue that Russia does not possess proper resources to become a successful player in this field, primarily because her socio-political model can hardly be called attractive – in fact, a key prerequisite according to the well-known definition by Joseph Nye⁶. It is worth noting that Nye himself clearly joined the debate with his 2013 article in “Foreign Policy” stressing that this was what Russia, as well as China, “don`t get about soft power”⁷. However, it does not seem to hamper Russia`s (and China`s) endeavors on this way. They rather tend to come up with their adapted definitions of the term, which also imply that developing soft power capabilities is considered as a certain response to a “Western intervention”⁸.

From the second half of 2000s there have been visible efforts of the state to increase Russia`s institutional capacities in this sphere: e. g. NGO “Russkii Mir,” aimed primarily at the support of compatriots who live abroad, and the Institute of Democracy and Cooperation with offices in New York and Paris were established in 2007⁹; agency “Rossotrudnichestvo” was founded in 2008, new public diplomacy institutions, the A. M. Gorchakov Foundation and the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC), were created a couple of years later, etc.¹⁰ Finally, the commitment to develop Russia`s soft power potential came to the programmatic documents, as the 2013 edition of Russia`s Foreign Policy Concept clearly indicates. One might regard it as a certain success of the Russian conduct in this field that recently, while some scholars

⁴ See, for example: Larsen H. British and Danish European Policy in the 1990s: A Discourse Approach // European Journal of International Relations. 1999. No. 4. P. 453.

⁵ Torfing, Jacob. New Theories of Discourse. Oxford, 1999. Pp. 6-7.

⁶ “Soft power is not merely the same as influence ... It is also the ability to attract...”. “The soft power of the country rests primarily on three resources: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (where it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)”. See: Nye, Joseph. Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics. P. 6, 11.

⁷ Nye, Joseph. What Russia and China Don`t Get about Soft Power // Foreign Policy. 29 April 2013. Available at: http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/04/29/what_china_and_russia_don_t_get_about_soft_power; Simons, Greg. Russian Public Diplomacy in the 21st Century: Structure, Means and Message. Paper prepared for the conference “Russia and the World” (Helsinki, 23-24 October 2013). P. 6. I am grateful to the author for sharing the paper with me.

⁸ Kosachev, Konstantin. The Specifics of Russian Soft Power // Russia in Global Affairs. 7 October 2012. Available at: <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/The-Specifics-of-Russian-Soft-Power-15683>; Makarychev, Andrey. Hard Questions about Soft Power: A Normative Outlook at Russia`s Foreign Policy. DGAPanalyse kompakt. Nr 7. October 2011. P. 3.

⁹ IDC`s main objective is to monitor the situation with human rights in Western Europe and the U. S.; its branches` web-sites: <http://www.indemco.org/>; <http://www.idc-europe.org/>

¹⁰ See in more detail in: Lebedeva M. M. Sotsial`no-gumanitarnoe izmerenie mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii v ATR // Mezhdunarodnye protsessy. 2013. No. 1. Pp. 6-7.



keep avoiding application of the term 'soft power' to Russia,¹¹ quite a few researchers tend to define as soft power a pretty wide range of Russia's policies, not exactly in line with its classical understanding¹². It certainly should also be attributed to the concept's spreading all over the world, but what is important is that Russia has become a legitimate player in this field.

Russia's efforts and the definition of 'soft power' in the 2013 Concept highlight that Russia borrowed a part of Nye's concept combining it with reasonable Soviet practices, as the Russian expert, Editor in Chief of "Russia in Global Affairs" journal, Fedor Lukyanov stresses¹³. At the same time he and some other scholars point to Russia's accentuated pragmatism and, of course, less resources available which make it difficult to extract the fruits the Soviet Union was able to ripe.

While there are definitely different addressees of this country's soft power policy, these activities are first of all aimed at her diverse 'near abroad'¹⁴. The underlying assumption of Russia's various policies, including that of soft power, in CIS area is well rendered by Igor Torbakov: "according to the Kremlin's geopolitical outlook, Russia can successfully compete globally with the United States, China or the European Union only if it acts as a leader of the regional bloc"¹⁵. Here it is also relevant that Russia's pragmatic understanding of soft power, with the stress on its understanding as power, is highlighted by the specified negative effects (e. g. in the 2013 Foreign Policy Concept) when it is employed by other actors. This approach cannot be very operational for the Russian authorities in persuading CIS neighbours about the intended common good with no harm to their sovereignty and at the same time does not imply particular care about how Russia's activities in her 'near abroad' might be seen by the other, external, actors in the region – the reason is likely to be this country's position of the insider in the post-Soviet area giving her some kind of monopoly¹⁶. Yet, it is worth noting that 'near abroad' countries attach much importance to balancing between different actors as a way of maintaining their independence.

Over her soft power channels, Russia is keen to deliver her CIS neighbours a message that she does not have imperial designs, and the promoted integration schemes do serve the purpose of modernization of all the parties involved which is far from easy against this backdrop¹⁷. At the same time the latest integration project, the Customs Union of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia in effect from 2010 (and the associated project of the Common Economic Space was launched in 2012),¹⁸ definitely demonstrates that Russia is able to learn – with all its drawbacks it is a forward-looking initiative with efforts to establish real integration, that is, a qualitatively new policy. As such, it has become a challenge for the EU in its Eastern neighbourhood policies.

2. *Russia's 'near abroad' or 'common neighbourhood': regionalization of the space*

To get a better understanding of Poland's policies and approaches in 'common neighbourhood', it is worth looking first at how this space is regionalized.

Except 'common neighbourhood', the region is conceptualized as a part of 'New Eastern Europe' with Russia being the other part of it. The name is identical to the proto-region concept which came up as a result of the Group on Difficult Matters Resulting from History of the Russian-Polish Relations's work¹⁹. Peculiarity of the latter is that both Russia and Poland are integral parts of it. Former PISM director, Stanislaw Debski, is a member of the team promoting the

¹¹ As, for instance, a British scholar James Sherr in his book "Hard Diplomacy and Soft Coercion: Russia's Influence Abroad" published in 2013. Information about the book is available at: <http://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/books/archive/view/191955>

¹² See, for instance: Dragneva, Rilka and Wolezuck, Kataryna. Russia, the Eurasian Customs Union and the EU: Cooperation, Stagnation or Rivalry? Russia and Eurasia Programme policy brief. August 2012. P. 2.

¹³ Lukyanov, Fedor. *Depardieu protiv progressa*. January 2013. Available at: <http://www.gazeta.ru/column/lukyanov/4929549.shtml>

¹⁴ Makarychev, Andrey. *Hard Questions about Soft Power: A Normative Outlook at Russia's Foreign Policy*. DGAPanalyse kompakt. Nr 7. October 2011. P. 5.

¹⁵ Torbakov, Igor. *The "Eurasian" Orientation and its Discontents: A Note on the Debates over Russia's International Identity and National Interest*. Paper prepared for the conference "Russia and the World" (Helsinki, 23-24 October 2013). P. 8. I am grateful to the author for sharing the paper with me.

¹⁶ Makarychev, Andrey. *Regionalism and Identities in the Common Neighbourhood: European and Russian Discourses*. CEURUS EU-Russia Papers. No. 10. October 2013.

¹⁷ See, for example: Kosachev, Kostantin. *The Specifics of Russian Soft Power*.

¹⁸ I shall talk about the Customs Union of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia, as most debates in the neighbourhood (first of all Ukraine's choice) develop around it, and hereinafter shall mention it as the Customs Union.

¹⁹ It is being studied by the Russian scholars based at MGIMO-University, which is especially involved into the Group's activities, in cooperation mostly with Polish, Ukrainian and Byelorussian researchers.



research project based on this concept and its results²⁰. Meanwhile, it is unlikely that this understanding might soon become a part of the Polish domestic discourses. Poland's authorities and experts consider 'New Eastern Europe' as the countries on the eastern border of Poland and, broader, of the post-Soviet space, except the Baltic states, – in fact, the target audience of the transformation experience from 'old' Eastern Europe which nowadays strives to identify itself as Central Europe. This meaning is implied in the official and expert discourses and is represented, for example, by a relatively new and dynamic journal project bearing the same name, 'New Eastern Europe,' which is based in Krakow. The journal is funded *inter alia* by Poland's Ministry of International Affairs and serves also as a venue for PISM experts²¹.

With the intensified EU-Russia integration projects' competition in 'near abroad'/'common neighbourhood' the region is increasingly perceived as uneven. One can see two logics present – transformational and pragmatic (geopolitics-, security- and economy-centered). The first one has become especially relevant on the eve of the Vilnius EaP summit to be held in late November 2013 – not only viability of Poland's role in EU policy, but also that of the EU as a normative power is considered to be at stake there. Its significance can also be highlighted, for example, by the Polish experts' talk about the EU double standards in Moldova, the critical country in terms of the European Union's normative power success, in order to support the EU-sponsored modernization path²². So for Poland it is pivotal to set the priorities right. Non-EU Eastern Europe is on the top of the agenda: different opinions about what country is the most significant – Moldova as the most successful in transformation or more strategically important Ukraine making an important choice. Interestingly, Belarus has been receiving more attention in this discourse with the implication that she is the one prone to the transformation influence due to the urgent necessity of structural reforms²³. South Caucasus as such is given less priority, only Georgia is put forward as an exceptional case – she is mostly being rated second in her transformation efforts among EaP²⁴. Probably, the reasons are Poland's limited possibilities to make a difference here, as well as overall admittance of little EU leverage in this area (with disappointing Armenia's choice and rather indifferent Azerbaijan). PISM experts conclude that it does make sense to distinguish among their neighbours, and, therefore, to develop a two-speed Partnership²⁵. At the same time Central Asia, not included in EaP, is definitely getting more attention as an important sub-region, or region-in-the-making, on the post-Soviet space. Transformation logics here give way to geopolitical, security and economic considerations with particular stress on Kazakhstan which is seen as a valuable potential economic partner. One can also reveal a look at possibilities of the more EU political engagement with attention to Kazakhstan's (as well as Belarus's in other sub-region) moves aimed at her increasing independence from Russia²⁶.

While in previous years one can discern Poland's disappointment in the Visegrad Group (V4) format both within the EU and in her Eastern policy, in the last two years this regional forum, borrowing Andrey Makarychev's term, reactualized²⁷. With a few V4 successes in the EU politics (energy security, EU funding, distinct contribution to hard security), Poland, now its recognized leader, increased her reliance on this regional group. She strives to unite her Visegrad Group partners over the Eastern policy for V4 to become truly an EU bridge to the Eastern neighbourhood, to

²⁰ Here I mean 'Vostochnaya Evropa. Perspektivy' journal's editorial board (web-site: www.newprospects.ru) and, after the journal ceased functioning in 2012, the RIAC projects dealing with the proto-region in question.

²¹ See, for example: Sasztowt K. Russia's Policy towards Armenia: Big Stick and Small Carrot // *New Eastern Europe*. 5 Sept. 2013. www.neweasterneuropa.eu

²² Sobjak, Anita. Is Moldova Tired of Being the Success Story of the Eastern Partnership? Policy paper No. 20 (68). July 2013. P. 2.

²³ See, for example: Dwyer, Anna Maria, Ryabova, Natalia. Belarus in the CES: Advantages and Disadvantages of Economic Integration. Policy paper No. 24 (72). August 2013.

²⁴ Kaca, Elzbieta, Dudzinska, Kinga, Zubel, Karolina. A Competitive Two-Speed Policy: The Eastern Partnership beyond 2013. Policy paper No. 27 (75). September 2013. Pp. 3-4.

²⁵ Kaca, Elzbieta et al. A Competitive Two-Speed Policy: The Eastern Partnership beyond 2013.

²⁶ See, for example: Zasztowt, Konrad. The Consequences of the Eurasian Integration of Kazakhstan for Its Economic Relations with the EU. Bulletin No. 27 (360). 15 March 2012; Wnukowski, Damian. Poland's Export and Investment Opportunities in Kazakhstan. Bulletin No. 95 (548). 13 September 2013; Dwyer, Anna Maria, Kosciński, Piotr. The Presidential Election in Venezuela: Will Russia and Belarus Lose an Ally? Bulletin No. 36 (489). 5 April 2013.

²⁷ Makarychev, Andrey. Regionalism and Identities in the Common Neighbourhood: European and Russian Discourses. CEURUS EU-Russia Papers. No. 10. October 2013. P. 4.



be more precise, the EaP vanguard, which is able to contribute to its transformation, creating the Visegrad Group's own political identity ("Central European mission") and thus increasing their influence in the EU. Yet, Russia is seen as a constraint in the V4 eastern policy potential, though as such not easy to instrumentalize, due to her "smart bilateralism"²⁸.

3. *Conceptual approach to Russia's role in world politics and in 'near abroad'/'common neighbourhood'*

The key document which highlights the fundamentals of Poland's policy towards Russia is, of course, 'Poland's Foreign Policy Priorities' adopted in spring 2012²⁹. Here there are basically two aspects in Poland's policy towards Russia: as towards a great power and, separately, a player in 'common neighbourhood'. When looking at the first one, one can reveal that Russia's role is presented as both destabilizing (increase in defence spending, while "Europe is going in the other direction"³⁰), and opening up more space for Poland at the level of great powers and key international institutions' dialogue ("participation in mutual confidence building measures between the West and Russia,"³¹ including e. g. "Warsaw's stressing its vision of EU Partnership for Modernization"³² and at the same time contributing to EU-Russia visa regime liberalization). In regard to the second aspect there appears less room for maneuver in relations with the Russian Federation – there is only one way: cooperation with modernizing Russia while the EU accession prospect (and significant EU development assistance) is available for most of the 'neighbours', first of all Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia³³. Ukraine here is specified as a "strategic partner"³⁴ – it resembles the term "priority partner" about this neighbouring country in the recent edition of the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation³⁵.

PISM experts definitely seek to address both aspects of their neighbour's policies. There is a growing trend in their activities and analyses to frame Russia's role in the international system as an "emerging power," along with China and other BRIC countries, with the stress to develop a trilateral cooperation format Germany – Russia – Poland³⁶. This is one of the ways to deal with the increasing multipolarity which, a widely shared assumption, is seen as a dangerous tendency. In regard to Russia's role in the neighbourhood the expert discourse has been developing approximately along the above mentioned lines, however, giving more nuanced picture and sometimes a hint to new solutions.

4. *'Near abroad'/'common neighbourhood' as a security concern*

The 'common neighbourhood' matter has an accentuated security dimension, especially visible in 2009-2011 – then it was directly connected with Poland's anxieties about new NATO Strategic Concept³⁷ and Russia-Ukraine gas supply crises. Here, how PISM experts put it, Poland attempts "to build a secure environment for the EU"³⁸.

One can see two models of argument present – 'common neighbourhood' as a space divided between EU and Russian spheres (or zones) of influence and as a space of positive-sum-game cooperation. The former makes justified the Russian analysts' opinion voiced, for example, by INSOR experts about a threat of "military power vacuum" on the post-Soviet space³⁹.

²⁸ Kalan, Dariusz. East of Center: Can the Visegrad Group Speak in One Voice on Eastern Policy? Policy paper No. 5 (53). February 2013. Pp. 1,7,8; Sobjak, Anita. Conclusions of the Polish V4 Presidency and the Challenges Beyond It. Bulletin No. 71 (524). 2 July 2013.

²⁹ Polish Foreign Policy Priorities 2012-2016. March 2012. Available at: www.msz.gov.pl

³⁰ Ibid. P. 4.

³¹ Ibid. P. 6.

³² Ibid. P. 18.

³³ See, for example: Ibid. P. 12.

³⁴ Ibid. P. 18.

³⁵ Kontsepsiya vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii. 12. 02. 2013. Available at: www.mid.ru

³⁶ Gradzuik, Artur, Kugiel, Patryk (red.). Polska w wielobiegunowym swiece. Szanse i perspektywy rozwoju stosunkow Polski z glownymi mocarstwami wschodzancymi. Raport. Lipec 2012; Trialog project Deutschland-Polska-Rossija launched in 2013. Available at: www.pism.org.pl

³⁷ See, for example: NATO Member States and the New Strategic Concept: An Overview. Report. May 2010. P. 5.

³⁸ Eastern Partnership: A Strategy for 2011 and Beyond. Report. Warsaw, 2010. P. 5.

³⁹ See, for example: Arkhitektura evroatlanticheskoi bezopasnosti / Ed. by I. Yu. Yurgens, A. A. Dynkin, V. G. Baranovsky. Moscow, 2009. P. 109; Sikorski, Tomasz. Strategic Vacuum in Central Asia – a Case for European Engagement? Strategic File No. 15. April 2011.



Poland, together with the Baltic states and some V4 countries, has been quite successful in instrumentalizing Russia's military moves and cooperation in the neighbourhood in promoting in NATO her vision of security⁴⁰. The latter focuses on Russia's involvement in cooperation in the neighbourhood; it is mostly developed in joint analyses with participation of the Russian experts. For instance, in 2011 the Polish and Russian experts⁴¹ highlighted the room for cooperation between the two countries in Russia's joining EaP projects. The report includes some ideas of the Russian expert discourse: economic cooperation on the lines of the European Economic Area with the stress on Russia's comprehensive modernization. These are linked to a more security-oriented component comprising every country's "right to decide freely about joining alliances" and "rejection of the idea of spheres of influence"⁴². In 2012 an international group of experts pointed to the need to overcome "emerging institutional divide" on the OSCE space calling for positive involvement of the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Customs Union in multilateral cooperation⁴³.

By and large, one can see less attention and anxiety about Russia in the neighbourhood in late 2011-2013 with a direct connection to security. This, in my opinion, is determined by four factors (in order of relevance) – consolidation of the EU energy market with a few EaP countries joining the Energy Community, EU financial crisis, good results in promoting the Polish 'hard security' concerns in NATO and EU and a trend of the Russian-Polish rapprochement. The first one relieves, to a certain extent, Polish energy security-related concerns, though recently it is coupled with disappointment in Ukraine's and Moldova's performance in the Energy Community. The crisis in the European Union, on the one hand, made the Poles more inward-looking, concentrating on the successful EU reform,⁴⁴ on the other – the Polish economic 'wonder' attributed the country a higher profile among EU member-states. This, in turn, gives the Poles more confidence about their role in the European Union. The new, constructive, trend in the Russian-Polish relations after the tragic event of April 2010 adds to the positive dynamics, however, its impact is limited – the centuries-old mistrust and stereotypes and the pragmatic interest in 'othering' Russia in hard security and energy matters do not facilitate in achieving a substantial progress. At the same time the success in this area is perceived as an important Poland's asset also contributing to improvement of her image in Europe⁴⁵. Yet, this is the area where Russia seems to be losing a possibility of developing her soft power. Even a cursory comparison of the Centers of Dialogue and Understanding projects is not to Russia's advantage: the Polish Center has a definite and well thought-out research and educational exchange programme and a clear set of the research foci, unlike the Russian one demonstrating rather a broad interest in events promoting cooperation in the old-fashioned manner lacking the engaging component which was, for example, successfully applied along the lines of "new public diplomacy" in case of RIAC⁴⁶.

5. *The Eastern Partnership and Russia's soft power in 'near abroad'*

The Eastern Partnership is central in PISM experts' analyses, as well as official rhetoric concerning EU's, and Poland's, role in the Eastern neighbourhood.

At first the Polish experts tended to consider EaP – which, as is known, originated from the Polish-Swedish initiative – as the most promising instrument for the EU cooperation with Russia. Prospects of the 'Partnership for Modernization' initiated by the European Commission did not receive positive assessment⁴⁷ and soon slipped from the analyses, though there are references to it in the official discourse. To my mind, main reasons for this kind of approach are

⁴⁰ See e. g.: Dwyer, Anna Maria. The Russian-Belorussian "West 2013" Military Exercise: An Alliance against External Enemy? Bulletin No. 102 (555). 27 September 2013.

⁴¹ Mostly from MGIMO-University.

⁴² Eastern Partnership – A New Momentum for the EU-Russia Relations. Report. Warsaw, 2010.

⁴³ Towards a Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian Security Community. From Vision to Reality. IDEAS report. July 2012. IDEAS – Initiative for the Development of a Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian Security Community.

⁴⁴ See a much resonated Poland's Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski's speech "Poland and the Future of the European Union". Berlin, 28 November 2011. Available at: https://dgap.org/sites/default/files/event_downloads/radoslaw_sikorski_poland_and_the_future_of_the_eu_o.pdf

⁴⁵ Gradziuk, Artur, Kugiel, Patryk (red.). Polska w wielobiegowym swiecie. S. 29.

⁴⁶ Simons, Greg. Russian Public Diplomacy in the 21st Century: Structure, Means and Message. P. 19.

⁴⁷ Cwiek-Karpowicz, Jaroslaw. EU-Russia Relations One Year After the Partnership for Modernization. Bulletin No 61 (278). 7 June 2011; Idem and Formuszewicz, Ryszarda. Partnership on Modernization: the EU's New Initiative Towards Russia. Bulletin No. 43 (119). 18 March 2010.



that in such a format there is little room for special status for Russia (highlighted by such forms of cooperation as 'common spaces' or 'partnership for modernization') and at the same time much room for Poland's transformation experience which is considered her primary soft power instrument in 'common neighbourhood'. Russia's projects were not considered successful, while her influence in the neighbourhood was rather framed as illegitimate due to her inclination to direct control. Russia's different policies were scrutinized in terms of her various foreign policy tools what lead to their certain securitization (e. g. civic nuclear capacities, the Russian Orthodox Church's activities on the post-Soviet space⁴⁸).

With development of the Customs Union and EaP there appeared a more complex picture comprising now a number of elements of which it is important to highlight the two. On the one hand, the Polish experts keep appropriating the Western discourse picturing Russia as an extra-regional actor taking advantage of the EU weakness in terms of traditional power in order to control the region and continue the status quo which implies that Russia is unattractive to her neighbours⁴⁹. On the other hand, in 2013, Russia appears at times as an actor more powerful than EU in the area which can best be defined as soft power, which means that the European Union is outplayed in the domain perceived as its own with such instruments, as free-movement-of-people regime, language, cultural and religious ties⁵⁰.

As I see it, this is clearly the example when the context is especially relevant. In recent years 'near abroad' / 'common neighbourhood' countries have been experiencing influences and projects of both Russia and the EU. While at the outset it seemed to many that the choice is, in fact, obvious for EaP states (except Belarus) – the EU-sponsored modernization path which opened up many important possibilities, now there are quite a few reservations about that. The feeling of at least most of the Eastern Partnership countries is best described by the British scholar Philip Hanson: they face the two rather unattractive options⁵¹. The 2012 and 2013 PISM analyses, primarily authored by Igor Lyubashenko who looks at EaP Eastern European states' internal affairs, render an important message: the countries at first deemed as the most promising, Ukraine and Moldova, do not demonstrate particular success in their approaching to the EU in terms of norms and legislature mainly due to the logics of their economic and political (first of all Ukraine's) post-Soviet development, and little here could be attributed to Russia's traditional power influence. Among such conditions one can name energy-intensive economies, outdated infrastructure in many areas which makes its renovation according to the EU standards very costly and also socially painful, oligarchic structures in Ukraine, unstable political process, etc. ⁵² Besides, the EU policy did not meet people's expectations about its anticipated positive results⁵³. Against this background, integration with Russia looks less consuming and more understandable with the visa-free regime that proved its significance.

One can see that the two projects of region-building in CIS area – promoted by Russia and the EU – are based on a zero-sum-game principle, despite this country's distant future-oriented designs of the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union creating one space, as well as the European Union's talk that the Association Agreements (including DCFTAs) can hardly hamper the Customs Union's activities and can bring only positive results. PISM analyses confirm this point, while also arguing that Russia's project in fact opens up more room for the EU influence – in promoting modernization which the European Union, and Poland in particular, can more effectively deal with⁵⁴.

⁴⁸ Cwiek-Karpowicz, Jaroslaw. Role of the Orthodox Church in Russian Foreign Policy. Bulletin No. 109 (185). 9 August 2010.

⁴⁹ Makarychev, Andrey. Soft Power, Regionalism and Common Neighbourhoods: Russia's Potential in a Competitive Environment // Bilge Strateji. Cilt 5. Sayı 8. Bahar 2013. Ss. 48-49.

⁵⁰ See, for instance: Kaca, Elzbieta et al. A Competitive Two-Speed Policy: The Eastern Partnership beyond 2013. P. 2.

⁵¹ Contribution of Philip Hanson, associate fellow of the Russia and Eurasia Programme at Chatham House, to the seminar "EU's Relations with Eastern Neighbourhood". The Uppsala Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, 15 October 2013.

⁵² See, for instance: Lyubashenko, Igor. Start of Negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement between the European Union and Moldova. Bulletin No. 10 (343). 1 February 2012; Sobjak, Anita. Is Moldova Tired of Being the Success Story of the Eastern Partnership? Policy paper No. 20 (68). July 2013; Lyubashenko, Igor. Ukraine's first Year in the Energy Community: Restart Needed. Policy paper No. 28. April 2012.

⁵³ Lyubashenko, Igor. Perception of European Integration in Ukraine. Bulletin 42 (375). 25 April 2012.

⁵⁴ Dynier A. M., Ryabova N. Belarus in the CES: Advantages and Disadvantages of Economic Integration. Policy paper. August 2013.



Russia's policies in 'near abroad' are not often defined as 'soft power' in the policy analyses in question – in 2012-2013 there appeared a few mentions, however, there is a special study prepared for an influential German think-tank; earlier though they were also termed 'public diplomacy'. In Polish experts' view, Russia has a wide range of soft power tools: visa-free regime and CIS nationals' access to her labour market, language, cultural and religious (now with more positive interpretation) ties, debates about Eurasian integration and even vast energy resources⁵⁵. Jaroslaw Cwiek-Karpowicz, a leading PISM expert on Russia, argues that there is a problem in their implementation, as they can only bring attraction and, therefore, results if Russia introduces serious internal reform making her model of political and socio-economic transformation appealing to her neighbours⁵⁶.

Here the image of Russia as a "real soft power in the post-Soviet area" and the one of "modernizing Russia," with which large-scale EU cooperation is possible, indeed coincide. One can reveal that such a scenario is not seen as a matter of the near future: there given no consideration to what is to be done with the two integration projects in the neighbourhood in this case – it is somehow implied that all the disputes will be automatically resolved.

Yet, there has recently been voiced a practical present-oriented solution, obviously, prompted by the Russian trade restrictions towards Ukraine in August 2013. PISM expert, Ievgen Borobiev, suggested that the EU part in eventual similar cases should be an institutional arrangement dealing with DCFTA-related disputes with the countries of the Common Economic Space. This, in turn, would result in "closer engagement with the Eurasian Economic Commission, until now shunned by the EU"⁵⁷. Thus, it would mean that both projects come into contact – it includes also that Russia recognizes the EU as a region-building player in the CIS area.

Conclusions

This analysis confirms the argument voiced by a few scholars that competing region-building projects influence one another, and there is a correlation in their development. On the example of Russia's and EU's projects in the CIS area, to my mind, it makes sense to talk about their co-building the region. And it is only logical to acknowledge this situation by, to a certain extent, connecting them e. g. on the lines suggested by the PISM expert. It would mean, of course, that both actors, Russia and the EU, would recognize the legitimacy of each other's projects in 'near abroad/ 'common neighbourhood'. Russia does not have the monopoly in the CIS region not only because of the EU's and other actors' activities there, but also because her neighbours are not willing her to have it. But it is also important that most of them are not willing that Russia goes away completely. This makes the Russian soft power politics in the region more successful than such a classical player in this field, as the EU would expect.

The Polish discourses about Russia's role in the neighbourhood develop rather in the framework of (neo)realist thinking – quite expectedly given the historical context of bilateral relations. They deal a lot with a significant 'hard power' on the border inclined to domination with her different foreign policy tools being applied to support her capabilities in this domain – it means, therefore, less sovereignty/security for her neighbours both in 'common neighbourhood' and the EU. There is a certain demand for such Russia's role in Poland. At the same time one can see a trend of less securitization of particular factors and more look at possibilities of cooperation in recent years.

It is significant that 'common neighbourhood' and the EU success here is very important in terms of Poland's EU identity and, consequently, a possibility to have a say in the EU politics. Russia can rather hamper this. However, it might mean that Poland, in fact, would be more realistic than the EU as a whole and come up with more practical initiatives to have a solution that might be called a success.

In my opinion, it is advisable, also in connection with the previous points, for Russia to take into account how her actions in the CIS could be interpreted in Poland and also invest

⁵⁵ Cwiek-Karpowicz, Jaroslaw. Limits to Russian Soft Power in the Post-Soviet Area. DGAPanalyse No. 8. July 2012; Kaca, Elzbieta et al. A Competitive Two-Speed Policy: The Eastern Partnership beyond 2013; Sobjak, Anita. Is Moldova Tired of Being the Success Story of the Eastern Partnership?

⁵⁶ Cwiek-Karpowicz, Jaroslaw. Limits to Russian Soft Power in the Post-Soviet Area.

⁵⁷ Borobiev, Ievgen. The Embargo that Never Was: How Should the EU Respond to Russia's "Message" to Ukraine? Bulletin No. 97 (550). 19 September 2013.



more in developing her potential in the area that escaped securitization in regard to the neighbourhood – people-to-people contacts in education and research. This will contribute to both Russia`s modernization and improvement of her image on the international arena.

МЯГКАЯ СИЛА РОССИИ В «БЛИЖНЕМ ЗАРУБЕЖЬЕ» В ПОЛЬСКИХ ОФИЦИАЛЬНОМ И ЭКСПЕРТНОМ ДИСКУРСАХ

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В статье рассматривается «мягкая сила» России в польских официальном и экспертном дискурсах. В фокусе внимания – Польша в связи с активным участием руководства этой страны в разработке политики ЕС в отношении ряда государств постсоветского пространства, исторически сложившегося восприятия опасности с востока, а также тенденции российско-польского сближения последних лет. Автор приходит к выводу, что инвестиции России в развитие потенциала «мягкой силы» будут наиболее плодотворны в области, которая избежала секьюритизации – контакты между людьми в сфере образования и исследований.

Ключевые слова: Россия, «мягкая сила», ближнее зарубежье, общее соседство, Польша, Европейский союз.