ATTRACTION UNDERMINED

EXAMINING RUSSIAN SOFT POWER AND LEVERS OF INFLUENCE IN UKRAINE

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Abstract

Following the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine, viewed as the product of western democracy promotion in its neighborhood, Russia placed greater emphasis on the development of its own soft power instruments, both to shield itself from destabilizing foreign influence, and to shape the policies and actions of its neighbors. Russia's interest-centric view of soft power sees influence as a zero-sum game, and has resulted in the opposite of its desired effect. Despite immense potential based on shared identity, language, and history, Moscow's heavy-handed application of soft power has eroded trust among its neighbors, notably Ukraine, making its economic and political model less, rather than more, attractive.

Introduction

The concept of soft power was developed by Harvard political scientist Joseph Nye and elaborated as the ability for a country to – through voluntaristic rather than coercive methods – attract and shape the preferences of other countries. He sees a country's soft power as coming "from three resources: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)."[1]

Following the breakup of the Soviet Union, Russia maintained a great deal of influence, cultural and linguistic linkages, and economic relationships throughout the entirety of the Eastern European and Eurasian spaces. But the Orange Revolution in Ukraine of 2004 was viewed in Moscow as a humiliation of sorts; Moscow's attempts to push Viktor Yanukovych into power were rejected, and civil society groups and NGOs fueled popular pro-democratic protests in Kyiv. For Russian President Vladimir Putin, the events were seen as the "result of democracy promotion by the EU and the US"[2], and demonstrated that Russia lacked a coherent strategy to counter western

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[1] Nye, "Think Again: Soft Power."
[2] "Putin Q&A: Full Transcript - Person of the Year 2007 - TIME."

democracy promotion in the region. But perhaps more importantly, the events in Ukraine highlighted that Russia itself might be vulnerable to "destructive and unlawful use of 'soft power' and human rights concepts to exert political pressure"[3].

Russian foreign policy documents in the post-Orange Revolution years began to stress the ideas of soft power and public diplomacy, both as a defense against its own vulnerabilities, and as the means to achieving foreign policy objectives without resorting to military force. Moscow has drawn upon its cultural assets – including the Russian language, the Orthodox Church, and shared history – to develop a supra-national concept of the Russian World, and as a method for keeping Ukraine within its sphere of influence. It has created, ironically by government decree, non-governmental and media organizations in the image of western counterparts, and turned to political, business, and less formal networks to achieve its foreign policy goals.

In doing so, Russia has sought to insulate itself from any potential weakness to foreign influence, but has missed the mark on generating attractiveness, the key component to Nye's soft power concept. The result of Russia's public diplomacy development and soft power projection since the Orange Revolution has been overall domestic popularity, and waning popularity abroad. Moscow, despite its immense regional soft power potential, has proven a key point of Joseph Nye's to be true, that "soft power can be undercut by illegitimate policies"[4]. Russia's use of military power in Georgia and Ukraine, and continued reliance on coercive and subversive tools, has negated any soft power potential that it has developed and invested in since 2004. In

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[3] Feklyunina, "Soft Power and Identity: Russia, Ukraine and the 'Russian World(s).'"
[4] Cheskin, "Russian Soft Power in Ukraine: A Structural Perspective."

short, Russia has both broadened its definition of soft power to mean a concept closer to "all measures short of war" while simultaneously undercutting any potential attractiveness by its reliance on hard power measures. As Euroatlantic integration for Ukraine remained mostly out of reach in the post-Orange Revolution years, Moscow squandered a vital opportunity to generate true partnership based on mutual interests with a formerly fraternal nation. This soft power will likely take many years to rebuild.

Chapter 1 Cultural and Humanitarian Diplomacy

The purpose of public diplomacy is to create trusting relationships and open dialogue between nations. Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has long viewed the cultural element of public diplomacy as an irreplaceable component of its foreign policy in the former Soviet space owing to shared linguistic and religious heritages[5], and Ukraine has been critical to this message of civilizational unity. A commentator influential in the mainstream patriotic wing of the Kremlin stated "we must get Ukraine back" in a July 2011 interview, referring to its reintegration in the Russian supranational cultural space[6]. To what extent has Ukraine been receptive to the *Russian World* narrative? Is it viewed as attractive, or have Ukrainians contested Moscow's efforts and viewed cultural diplomacy as more imperialist instead?

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, and the subsequent return of religion to the public domain, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has been one of the most prominent and effective of Moscow's soft power tools, the only institution which, after 1991, maintained jurisdiction over the entire Soviet territory[7]. Vladimir Putin's use of the ROC as a soft power instrument predates his own ascent to power – in the final weeks of Boris Yeltsin's presidency "spiritual security" was introduced in the National Security Concept of the Russian Federation. Putin himself had an influence on its inclusion as Secretary to the Russian National Security Council[8]. A standing working group between

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[5] Klyueva and Tsetsura, "Strategic Aspects of Russia's Cultural Diplomacy in Europe: Challenges and Opportunitiis of the 21st Century."

[6] Hudson, "'Forced to Friendship'? Russian (Mis-)Understandings of Soft Power and the Implications for Audience Attraction in Ukraine."

[7] Rotaru, "Forced Attraction?"

[8] van Herpen, *Putin's Propaganda Machine: Soft Power and Russian Foreign Policy*.

the ROC and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has existed since 2003, and

Patriarch (of Moscow and all Rus') Kirill has been influenced by ideologues like Andrey

Kuraev, who threatened Ukraine with civil war should a movement for ecclesiastical

independence from Moscow be established in Ukraine[9].

The ROC sees Orthodoxy as an inseparable component of Russian heritage and

identity and has sought to shield its faithful from disruptive social movements, including

the 2004 Orange Revolution – fearing a situation like the Polish Solidarność movement

in the 1980s, which had been backed by Pope John Paul II[10]. Patriarch Kirill toured

Ukraine proactively in 2009 – beyond simply the Eastern regions, with closest affinities

to the Moscow Patriarchate, speaking of the common heritage and destiny of the

descendants of Kyivan Rus'[11].

The "common spiritual destiny" of Ukrainians, Belarusians, Russians has been

supported by the ideology of the Russian World, or *Russkiy Mir*, as a sort of supra-

national or civilizational level of identity among fraternal nations[12]. But even within the

more pro-Moscow factions of Ukraine's Rada, these quasi-imperialist visions of

belonging in the Russian World were viewed with great suspicion[13], and only found

home in pro-Moscow political movements in Crimea, pre-Maidan[14]. To many, the

connection between the ROC and the Kremlin was obvious, and heavy-handed

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[9] van Herpen.
[10] van Herpen.
[11] van Herpen.
[12] Hudson, "'Forced to Friendship'? Russian (Mis-)Understandings of Soft Power and the Implications for Audience Attraction in Ukraine."
[13] Feklyunina, "Soft Power and Identity: Russia, Ukraine and the 'Russian World(s).'"
[14] Feklyunina.

application of cultural diplomacy effectively "disabled" Russian soft power in Western Ukraine[15].

The Russkiy Mir Foundation, established by presidential decree in 2007, has served as the supporting organization for this grand vision. The organization aims to support and encourage the use of the Russian language while creating a sense of community among Russians – and those who identify with Russia – abroad[16]. Moscow intended the Russkiy Mir Foundation to serve a similar role to that served by the British Council, America House, Goethe-Institut, or Società Dante Alighieri[17].

With a broad civilizational idea as its core ideology, the Russkiy Mir Foundation has taken on a role straddling national identity with traditional Orthodoxy and has developed into an organization supporting the education and proliferation of the Russian language abroad[18]. The mobilization of Russian-speaking populations in the former Soviet republics was crucial to how Moscow envisioned relations with its neighbors[19].

Rossotrudnichestvo, the Federal agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation, was established in 2008 in the wake of the Orange Revolution and the resulting sense of Russia losing soft power advantage in its own neighborhood and Western encroachment on "Russia's strategic interests", according to then President Dmitry Medvedev[20]. The agency's mandate also supports the growth of the Russian language,

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[15] Klyueva and Tsetsura, "Strategic Aspects of Russia's Cultural Diplomacy in Europe: Challenges and Opportunitiis of the 21st Century."
[16] Feklyunina, "Soft Power and Identity: Russia, Ukraine and the 'Russian World(s).'"
[17] Chepurina, "Higher Education Co-Operation in the Toolkit of Russia's Public Diplomacy."
[18] Rotaru, "Forced Attraction?"
[19] Feklyunina, "Soft Power and Identity: Russia, Ukraine and the 'Russian World(s).'"
[20] Feklyunina.

the Orthodox Church, and Russian media and business networks[21]. Rossotrudnichestvo

serves as a sort of analog to USAID, however focused more on the protection of

Russian "compatriots" in the Diaspora than international development. The Russian

Federal Law of 1999 defined compatriots as:

> *Russian citizens permanently residing outside the territory of the Russian Federation; individuals and their descendants who live abroad and are linked to the people historically living in Russia; individuals who make the free choice of a spiritual, cultural, and legal link to the Russian Federation; individuals whose ancestors lived on the territory of Russia, including former Soviet citizens living in countries that were part of the Soviet Union, whether they have received the citizenship of these states or became stateless persons; and individuals who emigrated from the Russian state, the Russian republic, the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, the USSR, or the Russian Federation who became citizens of another state or stateless persons[22]*

This broad definition, which can fit almost anyone in the post-Soviet space, helped

create a framework for interfering, on behalf of compatriots, in the affairs of Russia's

neighbors. Ilia Ponomarev, a former Duma member now living in exile in Ukraine put the

role of Rossotrudnichestvo more succinctly, "across the entire world this organization

carries out propagandistic functions…in the case of Ukraine it acts as a purely

subversive organization"[23] .

Effectiveness in Ukraine:

But exactly what sort of impact have Russia's cultural and historical diplomatic

efforts had on Ukraine? Russians and Ukrainians have many shared cultural, historical,

and societal affinities upon which an attractive soft power base could be built. And

indeed, the importance of Ukraine to Russia's geopolitical and civilizational aspirations

cannot be overstated – with 70% of Ukraine's 45 million inhabitants identifying as

Orthodox Christians, Patriarch Kirill's ambitions to reign as leader of the Orthodox World

and place Moscow as a "Third Rome" would be jeopardized by the loss of Ukraine. One

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[21] Feklyunina.
[22] Rotaru, "Forced Attraction?"
[23] "«Росспівробітництво» та бойовики на Донбасі."

of Putin's closest ideological advisors, Vladislav Surkov, worried grimly about the

viability of Russia as a sovereign entity should Moscow "lose" Kyiv to the West[24].

The status of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine has been a longstanding source of

tension between Kyiv and Moscow since Ukraine's canonical territory was transferred to

the Russian Church in 1686[25], but were ratcheted up after the Orange Revolution

revealed the continued political motivations of the ROC in Ukraine[26]. Research by

Victoria Hudson shows Ukrainians do identify with some of Russia's "common value

[and civilizational] discourses", but maintain a sense of mistrust in Russia's Ukraine

policy, viewing it as arrogant and coercive[27]. The *Russkiy Mir* concept ultimately reflects

an identification with Russia, rather than the common Eastern Slavic civilization

descending from Kyivan Rus' – this difference is critical and reflects a misunderstanding

by Moscow of how its cultural diplomacy might be received. But the concept struggled to

gain momentum in Ukraine even prior to recent events. The Party of Regions, the party

of disgraced former President Viktor Yanukovych and most friendly with Russia, viewed

the *Russkiy Mir* concept with apprehension and sought more inclusive language by

promoting a "Slavic Europe" or an "Alternative Europe"[28].

As crisis unfolded in Ukraine in 2014, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Moscow

Patriarchate (UOC-MP) found itself the only one of four branches of the Orthodox

Church in Ukraine to oppose Maidan[29]. The Church also began taking an active role on

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[24] Hudson, "'Forced to Friendship'? Russian (Mis-)Understandings of Soft Power and the Implications for Audience Attraction in Ukraine."
[25] Sherr, "A Tomos for Ukraine's Orthodox Church."
[26] Bogomolov and Lytvynenko, "A Ghost in the Mirror: Russian Soft Power in Ukraine."
[27] Hudson, "'Forced to Friendship'? Russian (Mis-)Understandings of Soft Power and the Implications for Audience Attraction in Ukraine."
[28] Feklyunina, "Soft Power and Identity: Russia, Ukraine and the 'Russian World(s).'"
[29] Sherr, "A Tomos for Ukraine's Orthodox Church."

the frontlines of the war in Donbas while also sending high profile emissaries to Sevastopol as Crimean annexation was unfolding to deepen relations with Russian law enforcement and armed force personnel[30]. Five years of war with Russia have indelibly affected the Ukrainian psyche, and a Church that has lent its support to a foreign power waging war on Ukrainian soil has lost much of its remaining attractiveness and today is increasingly viewed as an imperialist identity, in spite of shared civilizational history.

In December 2018, Bartholomew, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, issued a declaration of Tomos, or autocephaly, for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Russian media, following the declaration, were quick to blame the cleavage on the political motivations of Petro Poroshenko in his quest for re-election, but the role of the Russian Orthodox Church, represented in Ukraine by the UOC-MP was already significantly in decline prior to Tomos[31] (See Table 1). Similarly, an August 2018 survey by three Ukrainian polling centers found that today, 45.2% of Orthodox Christians in Ukraine identify with the Kyiv Patriarchate, while only 16.9% with the Moscow Patriarchate[32], down from 28% in 2013 and 24% in 2014[33]. The annexation of Crimea and loss of territory in Donbas have helped consolidate Ukrainian parishes further and were the impetus for merger talks between the UOC-KP and the much smaller Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church[34].

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[30] Sherr.
[31] Bogdan, "Religious Self-Identification and Prayer in Ukraine."
[32] Sherr, "A Tomos for Ukraine's Orthodox Church."
[33] Rotaru, "Forced Attraction?"
[34] Rotaru.

To which denomination do you belong? (% of all respondents)	2010	2016	Change
UOC (Kyiv Patriarchate)	34.2%	48.7%	14.5%
UOC (Moscow Patriarchate)	18.2%	12.4%	-5.8%
UAOC	2.4%	0.8%	-1.5%

Table 1 - Source: Kyiv International Institute of Sociology

Tomos for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church represents a significant blow to Russia's present and future soft power potential. Of the 30,000 parishes in the Russian Orthodox Church, 12,000 fall under what is now the official territory of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, marking a major decrease in canonical reach[35]. Within the first three months post-Tomos, over 500 parishes switched allegiances, a trend that will continue long into the future; this generational process will further limit the effectiveness of one of Moscow's most effective soft power tools[36].

The Kremlin stressed the promotion of the Russian language within its Foreign Policy Concepts of 2008 and 2013[37], and has long feared the decline of Russian in the former Soviet Union[38]. This process has been ongoing since prior to 2014 in Ukraine. Volodymyr Kulyk found evidence of this shift in linguistic preferences taking place 2012-2017. In Ukraine, language use tends to be difficult to assess due to use of both Ukrainian and Russian and often in mixed forms as well, but Russian native speakers appear to increasingly be adopting the Ukrainian language as their self-identified native tongue[39]. The use of Russian has been increasingly accepted by local officials in

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[35] Rotaru.
[36] Ostrovsky, "Russia's War in Ukraine Leads to Historic Split in the Orthodox Church."
[37] Szostek, "Russia and the News Media in Ukraine: A Case of 'Soft Power'?"
[38] Rotaru, "Forced Attraction?"
[39] Kulyk, "Shedding Russianness, Recasting Ukrainianness: The Post-Euromaidan Dynamics of Ethnonational Identifications in Ukraine."

predominantly Russian-speaking regions and recognized as separate from national identity[40], while legislation supporting the equal status of Russian alongside Ukrainian today has 14% national support, down from 27% in 2014[41]. Relatedly, Pop-Eleches and Robertson found a significant increase in Ukrainian self-identification and support for the European Union coupled with a major drop in support for closer political and economic ties with the Russian Federation[42]. Russia believed that use of and identification with the Russian language would generate affinities with the Russian state, but in fact ethnonational identifications were much stronger with the Ukrainian language, while Ukrainian self-identification increased over time[43]. The Russkiy Mir project has failed to convert Ukraine into a self-identifying member of the Russian World and has perhaps even had the opposite effect as intended, pushing the two nations apart for years to come.

In a 2012 op-ed, Vladimir Putin wrote,

> *Russia has a chance not only to preserve its culture but to use it as a powerful force for progress in the international markets. This is not about empire, but rather cultural progress. Exporting education and culture will help promote Russian goods, services and ideas; guns and imposing political regimes will not*[44]

Moscow ultimately has undermined its credibility in Ukraine through not only a form of cultural diplomacy viewed as "arrogant" and imperialist in nature[45], but the use of hard power tools including annexation and the thinly-veiled support of militant separatist movements. Its reliance on such tools abandons the core principles of soft power, and

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[40] Kulyk.
[41] "Думки і погляди населення щодо викладання російської мови в українськомовних школах і надання непідконтрольним територіям Донбасу автономії у складі України: Березень 2019 року."
[42] Pop-Eleches and Robertson, "Identity and Political Preferences in Ukraine – before and after the Euromaidan."
[43] Arel, "How Ukraine Has Become More Ukrainian."
[44] Chepurina, "Higher Education Co-Operation in the Toolkit of Russia's Public Diplomacy."
[45] Hudson, "'Forced to Friendship'? Russian (Mis-)Understandings of Soft Power and the Implications for Audience Attraction in Ukraine."

has resulted in the diminishment of shared religious, cultural and linguistic identities in Ukraine.

Chapter 2 Media, Disinformation, GONGOs

The Color Revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine in the early 2000s demonstrated

limitations on Russia's impact in neighboring media spaces, but also made Moscow

apprehensive about its own political stability. Russia's Foreign Policy Concepts of 2008

and 2013 referenced the "risk[s] of destructive and 'unlawful use of 'soft power' and

human rights concepts to exert political pressure on sovereign states"[46], while also

included pledges to 'develop effective means of information influence on public opinion

abroad."[47] Moscow was effectively taking the Nye version of soft power one step further,

by directing suspicion at foreign "pseudo-NGOs" and "agents of influence" operating in

Russia, while creating analogous structures and a state-, rather than civil society-,

driven public diplomacy[48].

Seeing soft power as an element of a zero-sum hard power game, Vladimir Putin

elaborated his views to Moskovskie Novosti in 2012,

> *There is a concept, such a soft power, a complex of instruments and methods to achieve foreign policy objectives without the use of weapons, which include the use of information and other means. Unfortunately, these methods are often used to cultivate and provoke extremism, separatism, nationalism, manipulation of public opinion, and direct intervention in the internal politics of sovereign governments. The distinction must be made clearly between where there is freedom of expression in normal political activity, and where illegal instruments of "soft power" are used… however the activity of pseudo-NGOs and other structures which, with outside support, have in to destabilize the situation in this or that country, is unacceptable.[49]*

The instrumentalization of media for the consolidation of domestic and foreign policy

narratives alike became a key component of the Kremlin's soft power strategy,

elaborated in Moscow's official foreign policy concepts. Joseph Nye wrote that success

in international affairs depends not only on "whose army wins, but whose story wins,"[50]

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[46] Feklyunina, "Soft Power and Identity: Russia, Ukraine and the 'Russian World(s).'"
[47] Szostek, "Russia and the News Media in Ukraine: A Case of 'Soft Power'?"
[48] van Herpen, *Putin's Propaganda Machine: Soft Power and Russian Foreign Policy*.
[49] van Herpen.
[50] Nye, *The Future of Power*, 105–6.

and this zero-sum approach to information has been a constant theme of the past decade and a half.

A media space more closely aligned with Kremlin views has helped entrench the power of the political and media elite, but also serve Russia's foreign policy interests. Russia demonstratively and effectively put media backing behind Viktor Yanukovych in his 2004 and 2010 presidential campaigns but took this to a new level during the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis 2013-15[51]. Russian television relied on falsified news reports, conspiracy theories, and other fear-mongering techniques to promote the image of Ukrainians as pro-Fascist and violently anti-Russian[52] - effectively de-sensitizing the Russian people to its aggressive foreign policy, particularly toward Ukraine, and further polarizing those who already held negative views toward Kyiv. Ukrainian media remains fairly independent of direct Russian ownership and control, however, and so its influence within Ukraine remains a bit more limited in this respect. Unsurprisingly, Ukrainian control over the airwaves was wrested in Crimea and Donbas in short order after separatist movements appeared in 2014.

Sergey Markov, an ideological architect of the ruling United Russia Party, and former member of the defensively-named *Presidential Commission of the Russian Federation to Counter Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia's Interests*, "Russia should repeat what the United States is doing [in Georgia and Ukraine]. We should help [set up] think tanks, roundtables, conferences, supporting media, exchanges[53]." And indeed, Russia began doing so, establishing organizations dubbed

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[51] Rotaru, "Forced Attraction?"
[52] Rotaru.
[53] Popescu and Wilson, "The Limits of Enlargement-Lite: European and Russian Power in the Troubled Neighbourhood."

as GONGOs, or Government Organized NGOs. These organizations were effectively analogues to Western rights-based NGOs, but with much greater government control. Such GONGOs included both the aforementioned Russkiy Mir Foundation and Rossotrudnichestvo, but also the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) and Institute of the CIS Countries as well as the Gorchakov Fund which have helped drive academic discourse and provide legitimization to Russian foreign policy. Conferences such as the Valdai Discussion Club have also been important elements of both Russia's foreign policy discourse as well as soft power projection, though their effect has been more limited directly in Ukraine.

This research aims to answer whether Russian media – which has long been skeptical of Ukrainian political leadership – has had any discernible impact on molding positive opinions towards Russia. And have Moscow-based NGOs and think tanks, modeled after Western counterparts, affected discourse at all in Ukraine, or have they rather been relied upon to shape opinion on Ukraine both domestically and abroad? Can misinformation, a tool both difficult to attribute and effective at muddying discourse, reasonably be viewed as a component of soft power?

Effectiveness in Ukraine:

To the extent that Russian media has a possibility to penetrate the Ukrainian space, its major limitations are that Russian TV is simply not popular in Ukraine. 56% of Ukrainians polled in February 2019 claimed Ukrainian TV was becoming more popular and prevalent, while less than 5% of Ukrainians admitted to watching Russian TV series regularly[54]. As for news, 74% of Ukrainians claim to get their information primarily from

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[54] "Information Sources, Media Literacy and Russian Propaganda: findings of all-Ukrainian public opinion survey."

Ukrainian TV, while only 4.3% do from Russian TV, and 0% from Russian press and
0.7% from Russian internet sites[55]. Furthermore, a paltry 1.4% of Ukrainians trust
Russian TV as a news source[56]. Interestingly, however, 38.5% of Ukrainians, polled by
Kyiv International Institute of Sociology for the Detektor Media NGO, believe that there
are "too many pro-Kremlin propaganda media outlets in Ukraine" that are not treated
harshly enough by society and Ukrainian regulators, but support does not extend as
definitively to banning Russian social media[57]. What these findings suggest is that
Russian television has become associated with propaganda and has lost its ability to
attract new audiences. As Joseph Nye wrote in 2013, "in today's world, information is
not scarce but attention is, and attention depends on credibility. Government
propaganda is rarely credible"[58].

The Ukrainian media market does feature many Russian-language outlets –
however most primary partners and shareholders remain Ukrainians. Media analyses by
Joanna Szostek demonstrated that networks with Russian shareholders did tend to be
more restrained in their Russian coverage, treating it less as a rival or foe and more as
an economic partner or neighbor of general interest[59]. 'Pro-Russian' slants of certain TV
networks were also more likely attributable to Ukrainian domestic political forces than
any foreign interference. However, Szostek notes that "From time to time, Russian TV
channels generate political scandals in Ukraine," but generally, within Moscow's

[55] "Information Sources, Media Literacy and Russian Propaganda: findings of all-Ukrainian public opinion survey."
[56] "Information Sources, Media Literacy and Russian Propaganda: findings of all-Ukrainian public opinion survey."
[57] "Information Sources, Media Literacy and Russian Propaganda: findings of all-Ukrainian public opinion survey."
[58] Nye, "What China and Russia Don't Get About Soft Power."
[59] Szostek, "Russia and the News Media in Ukraine: A Case of 'Soft Power'?"

information strategy "eliciting attraction" has never appeared to be of equal importance as presenting Kyiv and its post-Yanukovych government in a negative light[60].

Russian media has also faced a rejection in Ukraine for its reliance on conspiracy theories and anti-Kyiv narratives. Certainly, many Ukrainians remember Russian media openly backing Viktor Yanukovych in 2004 and 2010, and once again coming to his support during the political crisis which started in 2013[61]. Moscow's media sought to discredit Kyiv's leadership and paint its opposition as pro-Fascist and anti-Russian, while heavily relying on narratives that called Ukraine a failed state with corrupt leaders,[62] while Washington bore responsibility for the "coup d'état" which overthrew the legitimately elected Yanukovych[63]. RT was effectively weaponized to advance anti-Kyiv narratives across its airwaves[64], and successfully, at least domestically. In a Levada Center poll, 82% of Russians believed MH17 had been shot down by the Ukrainian military, even though no investigation had been concluded and evidence overwhelmingly suggested Russia was to blame[65]. Such misinformation campaigns miss the aims of classic soft power, as the results have been counterproductive outside of Russia and Putin's approval rating has been falling among Western countries since the rise of conflict in Ukraine[66].

Russia's media policies seem primarily driven to mobilize audiences who already agree with their worldview within and without Russia. The events of the past five years, bolstered by rampant anti-Kyiv coverage on Russian airwaves, have worsened the

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[60] Szostek.
[61] Rotaru, "Forced Attraction?"
[62] Rotaru.
[63] Yablokov, "Conspiracy Theories as a Russian Public Diplomacy Tool: The Case of Russia Today (RT)."
[64] Pomerantsev, "The Kremlin's Information War."
[65] Rotaru, "Forced Attraction?"
[66] Pomerantsev, "The Kremlin's Information War."

perceptions of Ukrainians by Russians, in effect priming the domestic audience for Moscow's aggressive foreign policy[67]. Considering the Ukrainian media space specifically, a 2018 study by Aruturas Rozenas and Leonid Peisakhin found that Russian television transmitted across border regions had an impact on electoral outcomes and affected support for pro-Russian candidates[68]. However, the findings suggested that Russian media was more polarizing than persuasive – as it served to deepen anti-Kyiv attitudes among those with pro-Russian priors[69]. This assertion was backed up by Sergunin and Karabeshkin, who found Russian Diasporas to be major targets for soft power projection, while Russia's media strategies sought to mobilize those who already agreed with them[70].

While there has been a recent increase in positive sentiments towards Russia in Ukraine, 10 years ago 93% of Ukrainians had positive attitudes of Russia, that figure is presently just 57%[71]. Russians today register only a 34% positive opinion of Ukrainians, down from 55% ten years ago. While 10 years ago, one-fifth of Ukrainians and Russians even supported Ukraine and Russia formally uniting, today this position is only supported by 4% of Ukrainians[72]. Curiously, while this position also fell out of favor in Russia following 2014, it has seen a recent uptick and is now supported by 17% of Russians[73]. This could be explained perhaps by Russian media coverage of Ukraine that has suggested Kyiv's government is illegitimate and that Ukraine is on the verge of

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[67] Paniotto, "Attitudes of the Ukrainian Population to Russia and the Russian Population to Ukraine - Feb 2019."

[68] Peisakhin and Rozenas, "Electoral Effects of Biased Media: Russian Television in Ukraine."

[69] Peisakhin and Rozenas.

[70] Sergunin and Karabeshkin, "Understanding Russia's Soft Power Strategy."

[71] Paniotto, "Attitudes of the Ukrainian Population to Russia and the Russian Population to Ukraine - Feb 2019."

[72] Paniotto.

[73] Paniotto.

becoming a failed state, which has deepened Russian nationalist and imperialist attitudes.

Today, only 13% of Ukrainians have a positive or slightly positive view of Russian leadership[74]. Somewhat surprisingly, Russians hold an even less favorable view of Ukrainian leadership. This suggests two things: that Russia's domestic views have hardened as a result of years of anti-Ukrainian coverage, and that for some in Ukraine, despite Russia's annexation and invasion of Ukrainian territory, Ukrainian political instability has made the Russian model relatively appealing.

Measuring Russian impact on the social media landscape is more difficult, however. The methods used tend to fall outside the traditional understanding of soft power, bearing more similarity to classic Soviet methods of "political technology" instead[75]. Indeed, Russian-speaking minorities in Estonia and Latvia, as well as Ukraine have been targeted[76], but these operations can be viewed as intending to create an atmosphere of confusion, general distrust, and apprehension[77]. Such chaos can be crippling to a healthy political discourse in a fragile, and underdeveloped democracy such as Ukraine.

By Moscow's interpretations of soft power – information and other means can be relied upon to develop a counterbalance to the "information monopoly" of western media, in the words of RT Editor-in-Chief Margarita Simonyan[78]. Simonyan, responding to criticism of her network's coverage of Ukraine, wrote on her blog in 2014,

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[74] Paniotto.
[75] Pomerantsev, "The Kremlin's Information War."
[76] Saari, "Russia's Post-Orange Revolution Strategies to Increase Its Influence in Former Soviet Republics: Public Diplomacy Po Ruskii."
[77] Pomerantsev, "The Kremlin's Information War."
[78] Yablokov, "Conspiracy Theories as a Russian Public Diplomacy Tool: The Case of Russia Today (RT)."

> *Every single day, every single hour the guys who work for us are told, 'You are liars, you are no journalists, you are the Kremlin propaganda mouthpiece, you've sold yourselves to the Russians, it's time you quit your job', and everybody is laughing at you, so change your mind before it's too late. ... I can see very clearly why I continue to work for a channel that stands alone (!) face to face with thousands and tens of thousands of Western news outlets, showing everybody the other side of the story, under daily attacks from the media that it is hardly managing to fight back.[79]*

Russia's media and information objectives seem focused on insulating the country from potentially dangerous counternarratives and using the information space offensively. To meet these objectives, it has resorted to polarization at the expense of persuasion. Despite the attention which Moscow has paid to projecting its point of view, a focus on delegitimization and antinarratives has limited its ability to generate any additional attractiveness. This is especially true in the Ukrainian space, where Russian media is viewed as largely not credible.

Moscow has always defined soft power more broadly than the traditional North American interpretation of the term, which focused on attraction[80]. Owing to its heavyhandedness, reliance on conspiracy theories, and overall a more limited reach in Ukraine, Russian media narratives have not resonated in recent years in Ukraine. Once again, we see a strategy which has largely been effective at polarizing predisposed populations, mostly within Russia, toward anti-Kyiv attitudes while providing little basis for attracting Ukrainians to Russia's political model. Russia's information strategy in the region has focused more on discrediting Kyiv and preventing Ukraine's integration within Euroatlantic structures than creating a persuasive case for Ukraine to seek alliance with Russia and integration with the Eurasian Economic Union – key foreign policy priorities for Moscow.

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[79] Simonyan, "About Abby Martin, Liz Wahl and Media Wars."
[80] Feklyunina, "Soft Power and Identity: Russia, Ukraine and the 'Russian World(s).'"

Chapter 3 Business and Network Diplomacy

Following the Orange Revolution, the mere prospect of the European Union or NATO encroaching on – in the words of former President Dmitry Medvedev – Russia's "sphere of privileged interests", triggered a wide-ranging public diplomacy campaign focused on preventing Ukrainian Euroatlantic integration and ensuring Kyiv's participation in the Eurasian integration project[81]. While these efforts were often packaged within a broader common civilizational discourse, the Russian government treated Ukraine as a necessary participant in the Eurasian Economic Union were Russia to reach its geopolitical ambitions; the size of its economy meant that without Ukraine, the EEU would be unable to compete or cooperate with the European Union effectively[82].

Fiona Hill wrote in 2006 an optimistic scenario that Moscow could use its growing economic position and newfound independence from the burden of sovereign debt to boost the relationships with its near abroad. She did, however, caution that were Putin to fall under the influence of the hardline circles of political elites who favored Putin's Eurasian project only if Russia held the pre-eminent position in this space. "Politically, […] Russia's soft power potential will not be realized if hard power advocates win out and squander Russia's developing economic relations with the CIS by resorting to old strong-arm tactics in pushing Moscow's interests."[83]

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[81] Feklyunina.

[82] Svarin, "The Construction of 'Geopolitical Spaces' in Russian Foreign Policy Discourse before and after the Ukraine Crisis."

[83] Hill, "Moscow Discovers Soft Power."

Konstantin Kosachev, the chair of the Russian Federation Council's Foreign

Affairs Committee and former head of Rossotrudnichestvo outlined the relation between

Russia's foreign policy goals to domestic objectives.

> *Soft power opportunities best meet Russian foreign policy tasks at present. These tasks stem from the needs of domestic development: ensuring a friendly environment, setting up modernization alliances, and stepping up Eurasian integration.*[84]

By 2009, the European Union was beginning to enjoy a trade advantage over Russia in

every Eastern Neighborhood country except Belarus[85], underscoring the geopolitical

and strategic economic importance of the Eurasian integration project envisioned by

Putin. While the balance of trade was beginning to shift westward, true European

integration remained more distant, and Ukrainians on the whole enjoyed much easier

access to Russia, both as tourists and laborers.

At this time, Ukrainians were witnessing the eastward expansion of the European

Union and the economic benefits it was bringing to their neighbors. However,

simultaneously, Lithuania, Poland, and Hungary became more closed off to Ukrainians

due to the EU's restrictive visa policies[86]. In Ukraine, a face-off was occurring between

the EU and its distant accession hopes and Russia and the tangible fraternal benefits it

provided for ordinary Ukrainians. As the European Union faced its own contentious

internal politics regarding its eastern expansion, a key opportunity was missed for

Europe to liberalize its visa regimes and provide real benefits to Ukrainians – while

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[84] Kosachev, "The Specifics of Russian Soft Power."
[85] Popescu and Wilson, "The Limits of Enlargement-Lite: European and Russian Power in the Troubled Neighbourhood."
[86] Popescu and Wilson.

Russia was allowing hundreds of thousands of labor migrants from across the former

USSR to work in Russia without having to give up their home passports[87].

Ukrainians tended to understand that Russians enjoyed higher relative living

standards. While the EU economic model was more attractive, Russia was difficult to

replace economically. Putin understood this fact; his public addresses suggested that

Russia would shed its imperial ambitions and learn to deploy soft power resources in

order to make "relations between CIS states and Russia […] as attractive as possible

not only for us, but also for them"[88]. This softer stance towards its neighbor countries

may have reflected a desire by Moscow to recover status from the 1990s, when

Russia's influence was marginalized in the CIS space by unstable economic conditions.

Putin also stressed the need "to protect national economic interests [and] raise the

investment attractiveness of Russia" while further developing and modernizing Russia

itself[89]. Kosachev, as head of Rossotrudnichestvo, stated that modernizing Russia's

alliances and increasing Eurasian integration were top soft power priorities that would

serve Russia's foreign policy goals[90], while Russia's Foreign Policy Concepts on 2000

and 2008 referred to Russia as the "largest Eurasian power". Despite more moderate

language from president Putin in the early 2000s, the Eurasian Economic Union began

taking on the nature of a zero-sum competition.

Dating back to the Soviet Union, Moscow has actively interfered in regional

politics, often using tactics referred to as "political technology". In 2004, Moscow was

implicated in crude interference on behalf of Viktor Yanukovych's presidential campaign,

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[87] Rotaru, "Forced Attraction?"
[88] Hill, "Moscow Discovers Soft Power."
[89] Hill.
[90] Kosachev, "The Specifics of Russian Soft Power."

using "invented parties, agents provocateurs, voter fraud and ultimately interference with the vote count"[91]. While the outcome was determined to be falsified, Moscow continues to fall back on some of these methods, albeit with a greater understanding of how to employ the more traditional western mechanisms of soft power projection, including the use of NGOs and cultural organizations. Moscow continues to find benefit in supporting political parties and movements whose policies align well with Kremlin preferences.

Viktor Medvedchuk is perhaps the prime example of such an actor. Medvedchuk, a powerful individual in Ukrainian politics with close ties to Kremlin leadership, can act as an effective conduit between the two countries. He even has familial ties with Vladimir Putin himself, as Putin is the godfather of Medvedchuk's daughter, making him one of the most trusted individuals from the Kremlin point of view in Kyiv. He became head of the *Ukrainian Choice* NGO, which was founded in 2012 and began advocating against NATO and EU membership, while pushing Slavic Orthodox values (as the "civilizational choice of Ukraine") and the federalization of Ukraine[92] -- issues all closely aligned with the Kremlin's Ukraine policy. Earlier in his career he was the face of the *Ne Tak* party, formed in response to the *Tak! (Yes!)* slogan of Viktor Yushchenko's political movement which ultimately won the contentious 2004 Presidential elections, whose political platforms mirrored these same positions. Medvedchuk more recently has used his considerable political clout, with Putin's urging, as a peace negotiator for the Donbas conflict, yet his reputation remains so odious that President Poroshenko did not wish to

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[91] Popescu and Wilson, "The Limits of Enlargement-Lite: European and Russian Power in the Troubled Neighbourhood."
[92] Herszenhorn, "Close Friend of Russian Leader Takes Role as a Negotiator for Ukraine."

openly acknowledge his role[93]. His recent acquisition of the populist 112, Newsone, and Zik networks expanded the reach of his platform and were surrounded by accusations of Kremlin financing, but ownership and financing structures remain largely opaque in Ukraine. And most recently, he took leadership of the *For Life* party, part of Ukraine's political opposition which favors normalization of relations with Moscow. Described as "evil" and "sinister" by members of Ukraine's political class[94], and as a "longtime proxy" of Putin by the U.S. State Department[95], the "grey cardinal" remains a powerful, and for better or worse, indispensable force in Ukraine's media and political spheres.

Russia's influence of individuals like Medvedchuk, or broader political movements, to convince Ukraine to take Moscow-friendly positions, can be described more as a "lever of influence" than a form of soft power, by traditional definitions. But within contemporary Russian foreign policy, such approaches fit within its broader soft power strategy.

Effectiveness in Ukraine

The Euromaidan protests of 2013-14 were initiated by a last-minute decision by then-president Viktor Yanukovych's to abandon a promised EU Association Agreement in favor of further economic assistance and integration with Russia. The resulting protests led to Yanukovych's ouster and signaled a rejection of the Eurasian integration project by the Ukrainian people, and a failure by both Russia and Ukraine's leaders to advertise the benefits of the Eurasian Economic Union, which would likely provide more

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[93] Herszenhorn.
[94] Herszenhorn.
[95] Seddon and Olearchyk, "Putin Wants 'Normal' Ukraine after Election, Says Kremlin Ally."

tangible benefits to the average Ukrainian, at least immediately. As Moscow proceeded with Crimean annexation and engagement in Ukraine's Donbas, nearly one year into Ukraine's crisis, Sergey Lavrov reiterated Russia's commitment to Eurasian integration, insisting that Russia and the EU should strive to create a "Greater Europe" and a common economic region "based on a system of indivisible security where no country would strengthen its security at the expense of others. We stand for developing cooperation between the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union. In other words, we stand for convergence of integration processes."[96] While Moscow held these integration goals, the unfolding of the Ukraine crisis ultimately proved to Russian leadership that Moscow could "not be part of the Euroatlantic Region in its current form"[97]. This effect was described by Samuel Charap and Mikhail Troitsky as an "integration dilemma", where "one state perceives as a threat to its own security or prosperity its neighbors' integration into military alliances or economic groupings that are closed to it."[98] But furthermore, a Eurasian economic project without Kyiv marked a blow to Moscow's domestic and regional policy ambitions.

Despite messaging that kept Kyiv at an arms-length distance from acceptance into the European community, the EU still remains overwhelmingly popular as an economic space to average Ukrainians. As of March 2019 – 49% of Ukrainians would choose EU compared to Customs Union (12.9%). Neutrality does still remain popular, 27.3% of Ukrainians support this; it is important to note that despite what appears to be a zero-sum soft power game between the EU and Russia, in which Kyiv's political elite

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[96] Svarin, "The Construction of 'Geopolitical Spaces' in Russian Foreign Policy Discourse before and after the Ukraine Crisis."
[97] Svarin.
[98] Svarin.

are keen to play sides off each other, a significant portion of Ukrainians favor non-alignment in military, political, and economic spheres.[99]

In the abstract, Ukrainians prefer European economic integration, however this remains true when considering labor flows as well. The Russian labor market has traditionally been attractive for Ukrainians, but this situation has been changing. Today, most Ukrainians aspire instead to work in the EU, the UK, or North America over Russia – which appealed to only 6% of those polled. And only 2% of respondents wished for their children to live in Russia (compared to 25% for EU), and at an Oblast level, Donetsk and Luhansk had the highest forces of attraction, with 8 and 6% of respondents wishing for their children to live in Russia, still factoring quite low[100]. In 2012, RU was the destination of choice for 43.2% of all UA labor migrants, while Poland was the choice for 14.3% of Ukrainians[101]. But Russian labor markets have become increasingly less attractive. The Center for Economic Strategy found migration flows to Russia dropped from 11 mm to 8mm between 2014-16. Poland, in contrast saw an increase in Ukrainian visitors from 14 million to 20 million over the same period[102].

And while Russia today is narrowly Ukraine's largest single trade partner (over Poland), as an economic space, the European Union holds significant advantage. 40.4% of Ukraine's exports go to the European Union compared to 9.1% to Russia. European imports constitute a 41% share of all imports compared to 14.6% from

[99] "Суспільно-політичні настрої населення України напередодні першого туру виборів Президента України: Березень 2019 року."
[100] "Life Abroad."
[101] "Ukraine Labour Migration Survey."
[102] Pashkov, "Россия после выборов."

Russia[103]. Current trends reflect a declining Russian economic influence. Vasile Rotaru summarized the countries' business diplomacy thusly

> *Russia's economic relations with the former Soviet republics are not usually guided by the free market mechanisms but rather by political interests. This, however, creates instability and uncertainty in business cooperation and leads to a decrease in attractiveness of the economic resources. An illustrative example in this regard is Russia's instrumentalization of its energy resources […] instead of attracting the former Soviet countries, and convincing their political leaders to want what Moscow wants, Russia, by instrumentalizing its soft power resources, has motivated its neighbors to seek to restrict its influence[104]*

In short, Russia, despite immense soft power capability, failed to capitalize on its recovering economy and EU inertia with respect to Kyiv to generate more genuine economic linkages based off mutually beneficial outcomes. This outcome also demonstrates a lack of awareness by Russia's soft power architects – Konstantin Kosachev opened his oft-cited piece on Russian soft power referencing the core concept of Nye's theory, "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments"[105].

Russia's economic relationship with Ukraine and Europe at large has followed a model of "asymmetric independence", in which its economic partners become reliant on its money and trade – the most obvious example of this being in the energy sector[106]. Russia has been indispensable transiting natural gas, providing massive revenues for Ukraine's coffers but perhaps more importantly the rent-seeking oligarchs with major interests in lucrative natural gas transit. Moscow has used its monopoly status, cheap gas, pipeline shutoffs, and other coercive measures falling outside the bounds of the Nye interpretation of soft power in order to secure its economic and non-economic

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[103] Barber, "Ukraine Reaps Benefits of Trade Deal with EU."
[104] Rotaru, "Forced Attraction?"
[105] Kosachev, "The Specifics of Russian Soft Power."
[106] Pomerantsev, "Authoritarianism Goes Global (II): The Kremlin's Information War."

interests alike[107]. Such measures have pushed Ukraine to seek reverse gas flows from

the EU to bypass Russia, and to generate more diverse economic linkages, ultimately

undermining the attractiveness of Russian markets[108]. Thus, while coercive economic

statecraft does not itself constitute the exercise of soft power, Moscow's attractiveness

is nevertheless negatively affected by its relentless pursuit of its economic and political

interests at the expense of neighborly relations.

The effectiveness of the complex network connections between Russia and

Ukraine, through political parties, movements, organizations, and proxies remains a bit

more difficult to assess. Prior to 2014, Russia's soft power was most effective and

advanced in Crimea, where political activist groups, parties, neo-Cossacks, and naval

and military associations developed deep links with the Russian World. In fact, the only

political party in Ukraine to explicitly reference the "Russian World" idea was the

Crimean "Russian Unity" party[109]. Crimea's integration within Russia may reflect long-

term success creating affinities, but the reach of similar organizations is much more

limited in the Ukrainian mainland. The use of hard power methods to "protect Russians"

and annex Crimea, while perhaps Putin's most popular act as president, undermined

trust and increased the suspicion directed at Russians across the CIS[110].

The illegal annexation of Crimea – if preceded by a legitimate referendum – may

have indeed demonstrated the will of the majority to join Russia. Instead, it resulted in

international isolation and economic sanctions that continue to this day, and an

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[107] Popescu and Wilson, "The Limits of Enlargement-Lite: European and Russian Power in the Troubled Neighbourhood."
[108] Rotaru, "Forced Attraction?"
[109] Pomerantsev, "Authoritarianism Goes Global (II): The Kremlin's Information War."
[110] Rotaru, "Forced Attraction?"

alienation of the rest of Ukraine. By the end of 2014, only 30% of Ukrainians held a positive opinion of Russia, down from 92% just five years prior[111]. Interestingly, there remains a significant disparity between how Ukrainians view Russians versus their political leadership. In February of 2019, only 13% of Ukrainians held a positive or somewhat positive view of Russian leaders, compared to 77% for Russians themselves[112]. This suggests that Moscow has failed to capitalize on the common culture, language and history which has tied Eastern Slavs together for centuries.

Many Ukrainians of the oligarchic class, which has historically been very active in politics, are dogged by suggestions of Kremlin affiliations. Such allegations are ultimately difficult to prove – ownership structures of companies and media empires are typically quite opaque, and political outcomes that may be viewed in the Kremlin's interest may also often be in the interests of their own business empires. Volodymyr Zelenskiy, Ukraine's next president, has faced numerous accusations of being a pro-Kremlin candidate. However, there remains at the time of writing little credible proof of these claims, though a clearer connection can be drawn to Ihor Kolomoisky, one of Ukraine's most powerful oligarchs, whose economic fortune was made in Ukraine's industrial Southeast, not in Russia. Similarly, oligarchs with their own industrial, political, and media empires including Dmytro Firtash, Viktor Pinchuk, and others notably stayed neutral, if not quietly pro-Kyiv, as war in Donbas encroached their economic strongholds.

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[111] Paniotto, "Attitudes of the Ukrainian Population to Russia and the Russian Population to Ukraine - Feb 2019."
[112] Paniotto.

Where Moscow has demonstrated a greater ability to use proxies for its foreign policy aims is with political kingmakers such as Viktor Medvedchuk. Despite a toxic political profile, he remains a figure with whom politicians must negotiate, and holds an outsized role in Ukraine's pro-Russian Opposition Bloc. As the incumbent President Petro Poroshenko fought for his political future, he found himself in April 2019 meeting with Medvedchuk, despite Mr. Medvedchuk being under investigation by the Security Bureau of Ukraine[113]. The visit between the two resulted in favorable coverage on Medvedchuk's news outlets, but the fact remains that despite enmity between the two parties, a nominally pro-Western Poroshenko has realized he cannot make any progress on the war in Donbas, or return any Ukrainian military prisoners, without the assistance of Medvedchuk, who has made no secret of his desire to revive business ties between Moscow and Ukraine[114]. However effective this particular individual is as a proxy for Kremlin interests, such relationships represent levers of influence more than they do a naturally derived attractiveness of political and economic models for Ukraine to emulate. Such relationships fall within the Kremlin's co-option of the soft power label, while deviating markedly from the definition given by Joseph Nye.

Despite frequent accusations that members of Ukrainian political elite are under the influence of Moscow, the case remains that Ukraine's oligarchic structure is independently powerful enough that Russia's influence on Ukrainian politics remains more limited. The annexation of Crimea and banishment of the Communist Party of Ukraine have removed two of Moscow's more effective networks within Ukraine. Economically, as trade grows with the EU, Moscow increasingly has less to offer

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[113] Seddon and Olearchyk, "Putin Wants 'Normal' Ukraine after Election, Says Kremlin Ally."
[114] Seddon and Olearchyk.

Ukraine in terms of economic linkages, and the spurning of the Eurasian Economic Union represents declining influence and attractiveness within Ukraine. Ultimately, the decision to allow Ukrainians visa-free travel to the EU was widely popular, and European labor markets remain preferable to Russia among Ukrainians. Russia today lacks this sort of attractiveness for average Ukrainians that Europe has. The failure of Russia to attract Ukraine into its common economic space demonstrates that its coercive economic relationship with its neighbors – often resorting to blockades, gas shutoffs, and other aggressive measures – is alienating, not driven by the free market, and offers little in the way of optimism and cooperation. Once again, Russia's soft power potential has been undercut by its use of coercive tools outside the traditional realm of soft power.

Conclusion

In 2013, Joseph Nye argued that Russia "does not get soft power"[115]. Indeed, Moscow has tended to place an outsized emphasis on creating counternarratives, generating apprehension, and sowing confusion and mistrust in order to advance its domestic and foreign policy objectives at the expense of the West. While the North American interpretation of soft power is focused on the idea of attractiveness, Moscow has "reframed [the idea] as a euphemism for coercive policy and economic arm-twisting"[116]. Even Konstantin Kosachev, a key architect of Moscow's public diplomacy strategy, admitted that Russia has yet to develop an economic and political model worthy of emulation[117]. The result of Russia's efforts is a soft power approach that is both polarizing and ineffective in the former Soviet space, but particularly in Ukraine. As Moscow continues to undermine any soft power strategy with hard power and coercive instruments, it will find it increasingly harder to generate meaningful partnerships in Ukraine and achieve its own geopolitical and economic aspirations.

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[115] Nye, "What China and Russia Don't Get About Soft Power."
[116] Minzarari, "Soft Power with an Iron Fist: Putin Administration to Change the Face of Russia's Foreign Policy Toward Its Neighbours."
[117] Kosachev, "The Specifics of Russian Soft Power."

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