

Conservative Soft Power: Liberal soft power bias and the “hidden” attraction of Russia

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Abstract

The study of soft power in international relations has a widespread liberal democratic bias. Throughout the literature, ideas based around liberal culture, concepts, and values, are simply presupposed to be universal in their appeal. Russia, which lacks these qualities relative to Western states, is thus widely considered to be at a disadvantage when it comes to its ability to project soft power internationally. This bias has led scholars to instrumentalize Russian soft power, that is, to see soft power purely as the effect of government-sponsored programs, and to focus solely on the cultural pillar of soft power. This paper argues, alternatively, that conservative values and illiberal governance models have an unrecognized power of attractiveness. It will demonstrate that Russia has conservative soft power, that is, that its values generate admiration and followership, even outside of the traditional post-Soviet sphere of influence. Crucially, this admiration and followership performs the traditional function of soft power: generating support for controversial Russian foreign policy decisions.

Introduction

One month prior to the start of the 2016 US presidential primaries, Republican hopeful Donald Trump received an endorsement from an unlikely source. Russian President Vladimir Putin, during his annual news conference with reporters, stated that Trump was “a bright and talented person without any doubt ... an outstanding and talented personality ... [and] the absolute leader of the presidential race.” Trump, returning the compliment, replied, “It is always a great honor to be so nicely complimented by a man so highly respected within his own country and beyond.”¹ On the face of things, Trump’s statement about the “highly respected” nature of Putin might easily be written off as simple pandering. Indeed, the general perception of Vladimir Putin’s presidency, and Russia more generally, is often put in the opposite way: Russia has little respect among the global public, and this deficit leaves them with only hard power tools to conduct foreign policy. The invasions of both Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014 were as much signs of

¹ Eric Bradner, 'Donald Trump: I'd 'Get Along Very Well with' Vladimir Putin', *CNN* (11 October 2015) <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/10/11/politics/donald-trump-vladimir-putin-2016/>

soft power weakness as they were of military strength, since they were only necessary in the face of Russia’s inability to project attractiveness that might otherwise prevent former Soviet republics from breaking away from the Russian sphere of influence. Russia’s soft power, from this perspective, is exceptionally low.

This paper argues that this perception of Russia’s soft power, which we believe is widespread in both academic and policy circles, undervalues the strength of Russian attractiveness. This occurs not because the sources of Russian soft power are somehow empirically hidden from view. Rather, soft power theory and scholarship has a liberal democratic bias that obscures the possibility of thinking about the conservative and authoritarian nature of Russian soft power. In other words, most considerations of soft power make an implicit and, from our point of view, incorrect assumption that soft power may only be derived from a pool of liberal values. Conversely, the authoritarian practices of governments such as Russia as well as normative conservatism must only be corrosive of soft power capabilities.

As a result of this bias, Russian soft power studies suffer from several major deficiencies. First, the assumption that Russian ideology cannot be attractive leads almost all scholars to understand Russian soft power in a purely instrumental way. Russian soft power is only a product of Kremlin machinations to spread Russian culture to receptive groups or to disrupt Western soft power through increasing the amount of uncertainty in the media sphere. The idea that Russian political and social ideology might be attractive unto itself, absent these direct interventions, is never considered. Second, because Russian conservative values cannot have soft power potential, scholars focus solely on its cultural capacity. Third, the combination of instrumentalization, tied to declining national budgets, and the focus on the cultural potential of Russian soft power artificially limits the geographical scope to the post-Soviet space, since according to these propositions, this is the only likely area where Russia will have soft power capabilities.

We argue, alternatively, that the authoritarian and conservative values create real soft power effects. These effects materialize not only in other authoritarian states, but also among the growing populist and conservative constituencies in liberal democracies. Donald Trump’s

statement about the highly respected nature of Putin’s governance cannot be so easily dismissed as mere talk - it is, in fact, a prime example of the real result of conservative soft power. Ignoring this effect not only undervalues the power resources Russia has on the international stage, it also underestimates Russia’s ability to take controversial actions that are in accordance with and reinforce the ideological foundation of its soft power resources.

In order to support our argument, this paper proceeds in three steps. First, we will show that soft power theory has an implicit liberal democratic bias. Though there is some credence given to the possible plurality of soft power ideological sources, most authors fall back on liberal democratic ideals as the only values that can lead to soft power influence. Second, we demonstrate how these ideas have affected the academic and practitioner debates over Russia’s soft power. Russia’s conservative system is never seen as a potential source of soft power and, when mentioned at all, it is always portrayed as eroding Russian soft power rather than bolstering it. Lastly, we show how the effects of Russia’s conservative soft power can be seen not only in other authoritarian states, but also among populations in liberal democracies.

The Liberal Democratic Bias of Soft Power

Soft power, according to Joseph Nye Jr., is a particular power of attraction to a state based on the appeal of its culture, political values, and foreign policies.² Nye distinguishes soft power from hard power in that the former uses this attraction to help states get what they want, whereas the latter uses either carrots or sticks, payments or coercion, in order to produce political effects.³ The importance of soft power is that it grants state “the ability to influence the behaviour of others to get the outcomes one wants,”⁴ particularly given that “seduction is always more

² Joseph S Nye Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004), 11, ———, ‘Public Diplomacy and Soft Power’, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616, 2008, 96.

³ ———, *Soft Power*, p. x.

⁴ ———, *Soft Power*, p. 2.

effective than coercion.”⁵ In other words, to possess soft power lessens the need to use coercion or bribery to get what you want.

Nye gives several reasons why soft power can lead to political influence. Soft power can grant legitimacy and moral authority to foreign policy objectives. This, in turn, increases the possibility of persuasion and lowers the cost of leadership because others will see themselves as having a duty to ensure the success of these values, particularly when the values are universal.⁶ It can also lead states to emulate this attractiveness, changing their preferences. This can create followership,⁷ or help to set and manipulate the agenda by making opposing preferences of other states seem too unrealistic.⁸

Though soft power comes from a mix of culture, political values, and foreign policies, this paper focusses specifically on the attractiveness of political values and the respective foreign policies that match these political values. The key question is, what type of political values are attractive and can be a source of soft power for states? Nye addresses this, arguing that there are two factors that generate attractiveness. First, the state must have political values that reflect universal values. Second, the state must conduct foreign policies based on these universal values. States that can fulfil both of these criteria are likely to have large soft power resources. Conversely, those states whose values and foreign policies are seen as either narrow or parochial are far less likely to produce soft power.⁹

So which particular values are likely to be the most attractive? Nye does allow for the possibility that soft power resources are contextual.¹⁰ But once this caveat is made, Nye continuously comes back to a particular theme: liberal democratic values are the most attractive ones. He argues that “Many values like democracy, human rights, and individual opportunities

⁵ ———, *Soft Power*, p. x.

⁶ ———, *Soft Power*, p. 2, 6, 7, 11.

⁷ ———, *Soft Power*, p. 5, 14, ———, 'Public Diplomacy', p. 94.

⁸ ———, *Soft Power*, p. 7, ———, 'Public Diplomacy', p. 95.

⁹ ———, *Soft Power*, p. 11.

¹⁰ ———, *Soft Power*, p. 4, 16.

are deeply seductive,”¹¹ and can be “powerful sources of attraction.”¹² This has greatly helped the United States, who “advanced their values by creating a structure of international rules and institutions that were consistent with the liberal and democratic nature of the British and American economic systems.”¹³ This is because liberal democratic values have functional value, since Nye claims, “although modernization and American values can be disruptive, they also bring education, jobs, better health care, and a range of new opportunities.”¹⁴ Nye also argues that liberal democracies can better leverage advances in information technology to spread their message than their authoritarian counterparts.¹⁵

Nye does admit the possibility of non-liberal sources of soft power, for instance, in how hard power can be attractive through myths of invincibility.¹⁶ Liberal democratic values will additionally not be attractive to all. Nye notes that “individualism and liberties are attractive to many people, but repulsive to some, particularly fundamentalists.”¹⁷ Still, Nye does not see non-liberal values as having very much soft power potential and essentially argues for the existence of a “silent majority” of liberal democratic supporters in these countries, who quietly admire Western values despite facing government repression.¹⁸

Given these assumptions, non-liberal states such as China and Russia cannot generate soft power without adopting liberal norms. Nye argues that both China and Russia need to “be self-critical, and unleash the full talents of their civil societies,”¹⁹ to increase their soft power. At best, authoritarian models like the “Beijing consensus” put forward by China, will only be attractive in authoritarian and semi-authoritarian states, and will be damaging to soft power with

¹¹ ———, *Soft Power*, p. x.

¹² ———, *Soft Power*, p. 55.

¹³ ———, *Soft Power*, p. 10. See also ———, ‘Soft Power’, *Foreign Policy* 80, 1990, 168.

¹⁴ ———, ‘The Decline of America’s Soft Power: Why Washington Should Worry’, *Foreign Affairs* 83:3, 2004, 18.

¹⁵ Joseph S Nye Jr. and William A Owens, ‘America’s Information Edge’, *Foreign Affairs* 75:2, 1996, Robert O Keohane and Joseph S Nye Jr., ‘Power and Interdependence in the Information Age’, *Foreign Affairs* 77:5, 1998.

¹⁶ Nye Jr., *Soft Power*, p. 9.

¹⁷ ———, *Soft Power*, p. 55.

¹⁸ ———, *Soft Power*, p. 56.

¹⁹ ———, ‘What China and Russia Don’t Get About Soft Power’, *Foreign Policy* (29 April 2013) <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/04/29/what-china-and-russia-dont-get-about-soft-power/>

the West.²⁰ Importantly, Nye is far from the only scholar to assume that non-democracies need to emulate liberal democratic values in order to gain soft power resources. Almost all subsequent studies of soft power in non-liberal or emerging democracies replicate this argument.²¹

In sum, although Nye technically allows for a wide range of political values to be soft power resources, in practice he comes back time and again to one particular source: liberal democratic values. As Yulia Kiseleva has argued, in his unfettered emphasis on the “universal” attraction of liberal values, Nye seems to see them as self-evident and enduring.²² This assumption is repeated throughout the literature on soft power in non-liberal states: no other set of values can be conceptualized as being attractive; no other set of values could possibly spread beyond its narrow cultural setting. We argue that this uncritical belief in liberal democratic values leads to a particular type of empirical blindness: the inability to see non-liberal political values as potentially attractive.

Limitations of Russian Soft Power Scholarship

Given Russia's aspirations to be regarded as a great power in the international system and the increased tensions between Russia and the West in the past decade, understanding the extent and sources of Russia's soft power has been the subject of considerable scholarly interest. Though

²⁰ ———, 'The Rise of China's Soft Power', *Wall Street Journal Asia* (2005), Joshua Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power Is Transforming the World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 43, Young Nam Cho and Jong Ho Jeong, 'China's Soft Power: Discussions, Resources, and Prospects', *Asian Survey* 48:3, 2008, 466.

²¹ See, for instance, Gill Bates and Yanzhong Huang, 'Sources and Limits of Chinese "Soft Power"', *Survival* 48:2, 2006, 28-29, Meliha Benli Altunışık, 'The Possibilities and Limits of Turkey's Soft Power in the Middle East', *Insight Turkey* 10:2, 2008, Yanzhong Huang and Sheng Ding, 'Dragon's Underbelly: An Analysis of China's Soft Power', *East Asia* 23:4, 2006, 40, Shogo Suzuki, 'Chinese Soft Power, Insecurity Studies, Myopia and Fantasy', *Third World Quarterly* 30:4, 2009, Javier Corrales, 'Using Social Power to Balance Soft Power: Venezuela's Foreign Policy', *The Washington Quarterly* 32:4, 2009, Cho and Jeong, 'China's Soft Power: Discussions, Resources, and Prospects', p. 472, David M Malone, 'Soft Power in Indian Foreign Policy', *Economic & Political Weekly* 46:36, 2011, Rani D Mullen and Sumit Ganguly, 'The Rise of India's Soft Power', *Foreign Policy* (8 May 2012) <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/05/08/the-rise-of-indias-soft-power>, Ibrahim Kalin, 'Soft Power and Public Diplomacy in Turkey', *Perceptions* 16:3, 2011, Aakriti Tandon, 'Transforming the Unbound Elephant to the Lovable Asian Hulk: Why Is Modi Leveraging India's Soft Power?', *The Round Table* 105:1, 2016, Ian Hall and Frank Smith, 'The Struggle for Soft Power in Asia: Public Diplomacy and Regional Competition', *Asian Security* 9:1, 2013, 10-11, Christian Wagner, 'Soft Power and Foreign Policy: Emerging China and Its Impact on India', in Sudhir T Devare, Swaran Singh, and Reena Marwah, eds. *Emerging China: Prospects of Partnership in Asia* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2012).

²² Yulia Kiseleva, 'Russia's Soft Power Discourse: Identity, Status and the Attraction of Power', *Politics* 35:3-4, 2015, 3-4.

this literature is large, we argue that it all has a common problem: an uncritical application of Nye’s soft power concept that presumes that Russia cannot generate soft power from its political values, reflecting the liberal democratic bias we have identified in the literature more broadly.

The dismissal of Russia’s ideological soft power has long roots. Throughout the 1990s and in the early 2000s it was common both among Western and Russian analysts to argue that Russia suffered from an “ideological emptiness”, especially in comparison with the liberal democratic message of the West.²³ Indeed, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the devaluation of communism, the Russian government presented itself as deliberately avoiding any ideological commitments. Russia’s foreign policy was understood to be “pragmatic” and “objective” as opposed to ideologized.²⁴ As a result, normative scholarly discussion centred on the domestic realm, engaging with the question of Russian identity, while foreign policy analysts shunned questions of guiding values and ideas.

This assumption of a statutory de-ideologization continues to this day. Magda Leichtova, for instance, notes that Russia “possesses almost no political “soft power” for its neighbors or partners.”²⁵ Grigas similarly argues that “Russia’s influence does not display the emphasis on legitimacy and moral authority stipulated by Nye.”²⁶ Others have suggested that Russia is out of touch with global values, repeating Nye’s argument that soft power works best when it reflects “universal”, *i.e.* liberal democratic, values. In Kosachev’s words, “there is no doubt that countries where human rights enjoy maximum protection and where democratic institutions are well-developed look the most attractive.” The problem is that “Russia cannot export some model as an alternative ... because it has not developed any such model yet.”²⁷ This is supported by Sergunin,

²³ Stanislav Secrieru, quoted in Nicu Popescu, *Russia's Soft Power Ambitions* (Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies, 2006), 1, Paul Flenley, 'Russia and the EU: The Clash of New Neighbourhoods?', *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 16:2, 2008, 200, Dmitri Trenin, 'Russia Redefines Itself and Its Relations with the West', *Washington Quarterly* 30:2, 2007, 95..

²⁴ Natalia Morozova, 'Geopolitics, Eurasianism and Russian Foreign Policy under Putin', *Geopolitics* 14:4, 2009, 671.

²⁵ Magda Leichtova, *Misunderstanding Russia* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 20.

²⁶ Agnia Grigas, *Legacies, Coercion and Soft Power: Russian Influence in the Baltic States* (London: Chatham House, 2012), 9.

²⁷ Konstantin Kosachev, 'The Specifics of Russian Soft Power', *Russia in Global Affairs* 2012) <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/The-Specifics-of-Russian-Soft-Power-15683>

who argues that “Russia is unable to make its domestic socio-economic and political model attractive and sell it to other nations.”²⁸

For many scholars, the idea that Russia might have political soft power resources is impossible. As a result of this bias, we argue that the literature suffers from two major deficiencies. First, scholars analyse Russian soft power in overly instrumentalist ways, that is, they presume that Russian soft power must be linked to an active strategy about what the Russian government does or plans to do: there is no conceptual space to consider how Russian values might be attractive unto themselves. Second, when the Russian soft power literature does not completely dismiss the possibility of soft Russian power altogether, it exclusively focuses on the culture pillar of soft power.

Instrumentalization of Russian Soft Power

The first problem, that the literature by and large only considers soft power as a centrally-orchestrated tool of Russian foreign policy, is widespread.²⁹ From this perspective, soft power is only generated by Russian policy endorsed by the regime and financed from the state budget. The state is the major architect of soft power, which it approaches in a programmatic way.³⁰

This instrumental approach can also be seen in critiques over the last decade that portray Russian concepts and ideas as devoid of any real content and used primarily to mitigate the influence of the West. For instance, the promotion of “sovereign democracy” by Russia in the early 2000s was understood as a political strategy that provided cover for Putin’s authoritarianism, insulating him from international criticism.³¹ These measures were simply “the new face of “smart authoritarianism” that speaks the language of Western norms and is very

²⁸ Alexander Sergunin and Leonid Karabeshkin, 'Understanding Russia's Soft Power Strategy', *Politics* 35:3-4, 2015, 358.

²⁹ Yulia Kiseleva, who noticed and criticised this specificity of scholarly writing, is a notable exception Kiseleva, 'Russia's Soft Power Discourse', p. 1.

³⁰ Jeanne L Wilson, 'Soft Power: A Comparison of Discourse and Practice in Russia and China', *Europe-Asia Studies* 67:8, 2015, 1175, ———, 'Soft Power: A Comparison of Discourse and Practice in Russia and China', *Europe-Asia Studies* 67:8, 2015, 294, Tomila Lankina and Kinga Niemczyk, 'Russia's Foreign Policy and Soft Power', in David Cadier and Margot Light, eds. *Russia's Foreign Policy. Ideas, Domestic Politics and External Relations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), Natalia Burlinova, 'Russian Soft Power Is Just Like Western Soft Power, but with a Twist', *Russia Direct* (2015).

³¹ Popescu, *Russia's Soft Power Ambitions*, p. 2.

flexible, but has very little to do with the values of democracy, Eastern- or Western-style,”³² Sovereign democracy existed only for “mobilization objectives” to “transform the social and political reality”³³ so that the Russian elites could consolidate their state-building project.³⁴

More recently, Christopher Walker warned against “authoritarian learning,” where non-democratic states such as Russia employ Western techniques to promote their political views, using “government-organized nongovernmental organizations (GONGOs), ... and both traditional- and new-media enterprises” that operate “with the aim of subverting authentic debate, either by spreading regime messages in a nontransparent way or by crowding out authentic voices” and “cynically portraying all systems, whether authoritarian or democratic, as corrupt.”³⁵ The creation of this formidable infrastructure for challenging the liberal democratic values allows states like Russia to project its message into democratic space while censoring ideas coming in the other direction, therein practising “a more malign mirror image of soft power.”³⁶ Other authors coined a phrase “soft coercion” to describe Russia’s practices. These are characterised not by attraction, but by the exploitation of weaknesses in the governance of targeted states. Instead of “leading by example,” Russia employs means akin to Soviet-era coercive techniques.³⁷ This has links to arguments about the imperialist nature of Russian soft power, which is used to galvanise Russia’s sphere of influence.³⁸ Russian ideological soft power is never characterized in the same way as Western liberal soft power, that is, as attractive beyond the post-Soviet and authoritarian space and as based on potentially universal values.

The instrumentalization of Russian soft power means that little attention has been placed on soft power other than that which is organised by means of specific policies and budgets. This

³² ———, *Russia's Soft Power Ambitions*, p. 3.

³³ Andrey Okara, 'Sovereign Democracy: A New Russian Idea or a PR Project?', *Russia in Global Affairs* (8 August 2007) http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/n_9123

³⁴ Derek Averre, "Sovereign Democracy" and Russia's Relations with the European Union', *Demokratizatsiya* 15:2, 2007, 181-82, 85.

³⁵ Christopher Walker, 'The Hijacking of "Soft Power"', *Journal of Democracy* 27:1, 2016, 51.

³⁶ ———, 'The Hijacking of "Soft Power"', *Journal of Democracy* 27:1, 2016, 61.

³⁷ James Sherr, *Hard Diplomacy and Soft Coercion* (Brookings Institution Press, 2013), Bobo Lo, *Russia and the New World Disorder* (London: Chatham House, 2015), loc 329, 1153.

³⁸ Andrei P Tsygankov, 'If Not by Tanks, Then by Banks? The Role of Soft Power in Putin's Foreign Policy', *Europe-Asia Studies* 58:7, 2006, 1085-87, Sherr, *Hard Diplomacy and Soft Coercion*.

cognitively limits the potential global effect of Russian soft power, since it is highly tied into the ability of the Russian state to fund these programs. This limitation is only augmented by the second problem in the Russian soft power literature. Since conservative Russian political values cannot be attractive, scholars analyse the one remaining element that is not automatically eliminated by the liberal democratic bias of soft power studies: cultural soft power.

The Cultural Pillar of Russian Soft Power

Given that soft power literature tends to replicate the impossibility of non-liberal and non-democratic values being attractive, most of the works on Russian soft power focus on Russian cultural resources.³⁹ Authors have identified several key elements underpinning Russia’s cultural attraction: the Russian language, Russia’s ties with existing Russian diasporas, and the Orthodox religion.

The existing studies considers the Russian language as the strongest asset in Russia’s soft power arsenal. The role of language is reinforced by Russia’s revived attempts to strengthen bonds with Russian diasporas and promote Russian language teaching and learning in former Soviet republics.⁴⁰ The Russian World (*Russkii mir*) concept makes use of the Russian language to legitimize Russia’s civilizational aspirations in the post-Soviet world.⁴¹

Russia’s religious attractiveness is attributed to a number of factors, but the institution of the church and “religious diplomacy” have been described as its most potent tools. The Orthodox Church is seen as the soft power arm of the Russian state in regions of the world where orthodox

³⁹ Lankina and Niemczyk’s chapter is a notable exception. These two authors rightly notice that the neglect of Putin’s “authoritarian soft power” stems from the assumption of the unrivalled attraction of Western liberal democracy as a model for emulation Lankina and Niemczyk, 'Russia's Foreign Policy and Soft Power', p. 98. Their analysis, however, follows the instrumentalist path in explaining the components and workings of Russia’s soft power.

⁴⁰ Fiona Hill, 'Moscow Discovers Soft Power', *Current History* 105:693, 2006, 345, Grigas, *Legacies, Coercion and Soft Power*, p. 9, Alexander Bogomolov and Oleksandr Lytvynenko, *A Ghost in the Mirror: Russian Soft Power in Ukraine* (London: Chatham House, 2012), 8, Sergunin and Karabeshkin, 'Understanding Russia's Soft Power Strategy', p. 354, Nicole J Jackson, 'The Role of External Factors in Advancing Nonliberal Democratic Forms of Political Rule: A Case Study of Russia's Influence on Central Asian Regimes', *Contemporary Politics* 16:1, 2010, 110, Eleonora Tafuro, 'Fatal Attraction? Russia's Soft Power in Its Neighbourhood', *FRIDE Policy Brief* (Madrid: FRIDE, 2014).

⁴¹ Andis Kudors, 'Russia's Soft Power Approach to Compatriots Policy', *Russian Analytical Digest* (2010), Marlene Laruelle, 'The "Russian World". Russia's Soft Power and Geopolitical Imagination', (Center for Global Interests, 2015).

religion holds sway.⁴² This type of influence is, according to Russia watchers, used to sway former Soviet republics away from the West.⁴³

Given this cultural soft power focus and the presumption of instrumentality, the literature is largely interested in how Russian cultural attraction can be fostered by government programs. This includes the spreading of Russian mass culture, especially to Russian-speaking regions⁴⁴ and the promotion of high culture to neighbouring states.⁴⁵ Russia has sponsored education for foreign students at Russian universities⁴⁶ and financed Russian-language media to boost pro-Russian sentiments across the post-Soviet space.⁴⁷ RT television channel (formerly *Russia Today*) and *Russia Beyond the Headlines* are the chief English-language vehicles for Russia’s soft power.⁴⁸ Among the other activities debated widely by this strand of literature are the sponsoring of Russian-friendly NGOs in neighbouring states, such as the Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund, and financing Russia-centred debate via such institutions as the Valdai Club, a forum for gathering Russia experts from abroad since 2004.⁴⁹

While we do not object to the inclusion of cultural elements into Russian soft power capabilities, this heavy concentration on the cultural elements cognitively curtails the geographic scope of Russian soft power projection primarily to the post-Soviet space. Moreover, if Russian

⁴² Katarzyna Chawryło, 'The Altar and the Throne Alliance. The Russian Orthodox Church vs. The Government in Russia', (Warszawa: Centre for Eastern Studies, 2015), Nicolai N Petro, 'Russia's Orthodox Soft Power', (23 March 2015)

http://www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/articles_papers_reports/727

⁴³ Andrey Makarychev, 'The Limits to Russian Soft Power in Georgia', (2016).

⁴⁴ Grigas, *Legacies, Coercion and Soft Power*, p. 9, Bogomolov and Lytvynenko, *A Ghost in the Mirror*, p. 8, Dmitri Trenin, 'Russian Foreign Policy: Modernization or Marginalization?', in Anders Åslund, Sergei Guriev, and Andrew C Kuchins, eds. *Russia after the Global Economic Crisis* (Washington, DC: Peter G Peterson institute for International Economics, 2010).

⁴⁵ Grigas, *Legacies, Coercion and Soft Power*, p. 9, Hill, 'Moscow Discovers Soft Power', p. 345, Sergunin and Karabeshkin, 'Understanding Russia's Soft Power Strategy', p. 354.

⁴⁶ ———, 'Understanding Russia's Soft Power Strategy', p. 356.

⁴⁷ Grigas, *Legacies, Coercion and Soft Power*, p. 9, Bogomolov and Lytvynenko, *A Ghost in the Mirror*, p. 8, Trenin, 'Russian Foreign Policy: Modernization or Marginalization?', p. 196, Vasili Rukhadze, 'Russia's Soft Power in Georgia: How Does It Work?', *Eurasia Daily Monitor* (19 February 2016)

http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=45116

⁴⁸ Julia Ioffe, 'What Is Russia Today? The Kremlin's Propaganda Outlet Has an Identity Crisis', *Columbia Journalism Review* (September/October 2010) http://www.cjr.org/feature/what_is_russia_today.ph, Marlene Laruelle, 'Russia's Bedfellowing Policy and the European Far Right', *Russian Analytical Digest* 167, 2015.

⁴⁹ Lankina and Niemczyk, 'Russia's Foreign Policy and Soft Power', p. 107, Popescu, *Russia's Soft Power Ambitions*, p. 2.

soft power is exercised primarily by programs financed through the state, then the economic difficulties that Russia has faced over the last few years create additional limitations to its possible area of effect. Wilson’s conclusion that Russia’s financial resources preclude it from implementing a soft power strategy on a global scale (Wilson 2015a), only reinforces this presumption of soft power regionalism.

Only a few recent academic studies correct this overemphasis on cultural elements by making an explicit link between soft power and the ideological messages stemming from Russia. For instance, Valentina Feklyunina argued that the collective identity of the Russian World has been projected to states such as Ukraine in order to affect the process of its foreign policy-making. This included fostering the idea of the Russian World as a unique civilization possessing a form of politics distinct from Western political models.⁵⁰ Elena Chebankova similarly argued that there is a distinct collection of values in Russian conservatism that seeks to differentiate itself from the West,⁵¹ taking seriously the possibility that Russian conservative values might not be simply an instrumental bulwark against Western criticism. In both cases, however, the focus is quite limited. Chebankova understands Russian conservatism to be bereft of any ideational basis that could claim universal significance. Instead, she sees it as part of a call for pluralism against the Western single vision for the world.⁵² Feklyunina’s focus on Ukraine and the Russian World, while a step in the direction of analyzing Russian ideological pull, lacks an engagement with the broader phenomenon of conservative attraction.

As we have demonstrated in this section, the analysis of Russian soft power suffers from a number of deficiencies. First, the liberal democratic bias within the soft power literature is directly replicated in the Russian soft power literature, where all scholars ignore or openly dismiss the possibility of Russian ideological attractiveness. Second, this analytical setup prioritizes instrumental understandings of Russian soft power, since the possibility that Russian political values might be passively attractive has been eliminated. In other words, it ignores the

⁵⁰ Valentina Feklyunina, 'Soft Power and Identity: Russia, Ukraine and the 'Russian World(s)', *European Journal of International Relations*, 2015, 12.

⁵¹ Elena Chebankova, 'Contemporary Russian Conservatism', *Post-Soviet Affairs* 32:1, 2016.

⁵² ———, 'Contemporary Russian Conservatism', *Post-Soviet Affairs* 32:1, 2016, 44-46.

possibility that “soft power is always at work, shaping the psychological milieu of the relationship.”⁵³ Finally, these assumptions leave scholars with only cultural values as soft power possibilities, which limits the geographic effect that Russian soft power can have.

We wish to demonstrate that Russia possesses underestimated soft power resources. In setting ourselves apart from the mainstream literature on the subject, we seek to show that by identifying and subsequently transcending the liberal democratic bias within soft power research, thus taking the potential for conservative soft power seriously, we can identify a significant amount of empirical evidence that suggests that Russia has soft power resources that cluster around non-liberal ideology. Importantly, unlike the instrumentalist understanding, these soft power resources should not be merely dismissed as Russian propaganda, but as a series of ideas that have independent attractiveness to conservative individuals around the world.

Analysing Russian Soft Power

To distinguish our analysis from the studies overly reliant on the instruments of persuasion at Russia’s disposal, we follow Roselle’s advice to concentrate on the reception side of soft power.⁵⁴ But to do so, we need to have some idea of how to tell if soft power is in effect. Nye is helpful here, since he gives two reasons why soft power increases the possibility of persuasion. First, others see a duty in upholding the soft power values. Second, the ideas are so attractive that they create followership. So in order to make initial claims about Russian soft power, we would need to see some commitment to the ideological values espoused by Russia and/or declarations that Russia is a leader in this regard. Instead of looking for these effects on a state level, following Feklyunina,⁵⁵ we argue that the reception side of soft power is not going to be homogeneous within any state. Different domestic actors will respond differently to Russian political values, and it is not necessary for the state as a whole to respond positively to argue that Russian soft power is having an effect.

⁵³ Feklyunina, 'Soft Power and Identity', p. 6.

⁵⁴ Laura Roselle, Alister Miskimmon, and Ben O’Loughlin, 'Strategic Narrative: A New Means to Understand Soft Power', *Media, War & Conflict* 7:1, 72.

⁵⁵ Feklyunina, 'Soft Power and Identity', p. 8.

According to Nye, one way of gauging the effect of soft power within a population is through polls and focus groups to understand the attractiveness of the other state. However, as Christopher Layne points out, there is a missing causal link between favourable public opinion and favourable foreign policy outcomes, that “public opinion does not make foreign policy, the state’s central decision makers do.”⁵⁶ So while public opinion polls and other mass-articulation of support for Russian values are no doubt part of the picture, we propose that the effects of soft power are also reflected in the articulated beliefs of political actors. The articulated beliefs of political elites, in particular, are a good signal for Russian soft power because the discourse of political elites is not costless, that is, the discursive choices they make can end up helping or hurting them. In supporting positions that are unlikely to be shared by the majority of domestic supporters or might attract international derision, such as admiration for Russian conservative values and/or calls for followership, political elites signal either their personal belief in the ideology, or at least a belief that it will have some domestic political resonance. The argument for Russian soft power is further strengthened if, as Feklyunina suggests, if there is high degree of admiration and/or followership across many different conservative discourses emanating from Russia.⁵⁷ Finally, in accordance with Nye’s theory, if these pro-ideological positions are also accompanied by support for controversial Russian foreign policies, then we have our last piece of evidence that Russian soft power is in play.

Finally, we must come to some conclusion over what constitutes Russian conservative values. We decided not to follow an ideal typology, instead adopting a quasi-inductive approach. We started from a modest but sharp distinction between liberalism and conservatism, contrasting the liberal importance of the individual and the rejection or contestation of hierarchy and authority, with the conservative respect for hierarchy, state-authority, and the superior value of the interests of the group over those of the individual. We then collected data that reflected support for Russian conservative values and analysed which specific elements of the ideational

⁵⁶ Christopher Layne, 'The Unbearable Lightness of Soft Power', in Inderjeet Parmar and Michael Cox, eds. *Soft Power and Us Foreign Policy: Theoretical, Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2010).

⁵⁷ Feklyunina, 'Soft Power and Identity', p. 8.

and governance package resonated with those on the receiving end of Russian soft power. From this, we created four categories that we believe reflect current Russian ideological soft power capabilities: moral conservatism, illiberal governance, strong leadership, and anti-Western foreign policy. We will take each in turn.

Moral Conservatism

The first category, moral conservatism, consists of a cluster of values that are centered on the maintenance of a sexual and religious status quo reflected in conservative Christianity and ethnic nationalism. The Kremlin tends to frame the social conservative agenda under the banner of “traditional family values”. For instance, Vladimir Putin famously asserted Russia's moral superiority over the West in his 2013 annual State of the Nation address:

This destruction of traditional values from above not only leads to negative consequences for society, but is also essentially anti-democratic, since it is carried out on the basis of abstract, speculative ideas, contrary to the will of the majority [...] We know that there are more and more people in the world who support our position on defending traditional values that have made up the spiritual and moral foundation of civilisation in every nation for thousands of years: the values of traditional families, real human life, including religious life, not just material existence but also spirituality, the values of humanism and global diversity.⁵⁸

Putin’s argument promotes a strong social conservative position, speaks to a hidden populism amongst other peoples subjugated by their own government’s more liberal position, and actively positions Russia as a leader in the promotion of these values. This is also reflected in Russia’s 2015 *National Security Strategy*, which emphasizes the revival of traditional Russian moral and spiritual values (*rossiyskiye dukhovno-nravstvennyye tsennosti*), including a respect for family values. It argues that security will be increased by means of protecting Russian society

⁵⁸ Vladimir Putin, 'Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly', 2013.

from foreign “value expansion” and via the creation of a system of spiritual, moral and patriotic education of citizens.⁵⁹

Legally, this discourse has been matched in what Human Rights First termed “Russia's brand of legislative homophobia.”⁶⁰ In June 2013 Vladimir Putin signed a bill outlawing propaganda of “nontraditional sexual relations,” justifying it with the need to protect children from information which would propagate the rejection of “traditional family values”.⁶¹ The Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation upheld this line of thinking, arguing that motherhood, childhood and family are under special protection of the state according to the Russian constitution.⁶²

The conservative family values espoused by Russia have had ripple effects, particularly in Russia’s neighbourhood. Kyrgyzstan is a notable example here. Praised for its liberalisation and democratisation efforts, the country was presented as an example of America’s soft power success. Nevertheless, Kyrgyzstani MPs found direct inspiration in the Russian legislation criminalizing open support for the LGBT community.⁶³ Similar pieces of legislation have been debated in a number of post-Soviet states. Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Moldova began work on banning the promotion of “non-traditional sexual relationships” but ultimately withdrew their legislation.⁶⁴ Belarus has also been considering a similar law since 2013.⁶⁵ Tajikistan’s government, alternatively, ordered imams to condemn non-traditional sexual relations in their speeches.⁶⁶ In Latvia, several organisations promote anti-LGBT values, some citing Russian

⁵⁹ Rossiiskaia Federatsiya, 'Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii Ot 31 Dekabriya 2015 G. N 683 "O Strategii Natsionalnoi Bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii"', 2015, points 3 and 30.

⁶⁰ Human Rights First, 'How to Stop Russia from Exporting Homophobia', (8 December 2014) <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/resource/how-stop-russia-exporting-homophobia>

⁶¹ 'Federalnyi Zakon Rossiiskoi Federatsii Ot 29 Iyuniya 2013 G.N135-F3g', (2013).

⁶² 'Ks Priznal «Antigeiiskii» Zakon Peterburga Ne Protivorechashchim Konstitutsii', *Gazeta.ru* (04 December 2013) http://www.gazeta.ru/social/news/2013/12/04/n_5790693.shtml

⁶³ Franco Galdini, 'Kyrgyzstan's NGO and Lgbt Crackdown', *Foreign Policy* (2016), Theodore P. Gerber and Jane Zavisca, 'We Are Losing Hearts and Minds in the Former Soviet Empire', *Newsweek* (2015).

⁶⁴ Melissa Hooper and Grigory Frolov, *Russia's Bad Example* (Washington, DC: Free Russia Foundation and Human Rights First, 2016), 13.

⁶⁵ Human Rights First, 'How to Stop Russia from Exporting Homophobia'

⁶⁶ HRW, 'Vsemirnyi Doklad 2015: Tadzhiqistan. Sobytiya 2014 G.', 2015) <https://www.hrw.org/ru/world-report/2015/country-chapters/268101>

policy as an inspiration for their work. Their lobbying has led to the introduction of a bill to ban the “promotion” of sex within schools.⁶⁷

There is also evidence that this ideological position has resonance in Western Europe and the US. In Italy, the far-right Fronte Nazionale expressed its support for Putin’s “courageous position against the powerful gay lobby” with a poster campaign launched in 2013 under the title “I agree with Putin!”⁶⁸ Frauke Petry, a spokesperson of a German Eurosceptic party Alternative für Deutschland, and Jürgen Elsässer, chief editor of the far-right Compact magazine, appeared as speakers at a conference “on family issues” co-organised by the Russian Institute of Democracy and Co-operation in Leipzig.⁶⁹ Russia’s anti-gay laws and its crackdown on LGBT citizens have also found fertile ground among American right-wing groups. American Family Association spokesman, Bryan Fischer, declared in turn that Russia’s gay propaganda ban matched exactly the type of “public policy that we’ve been advocating.”⁷⁰

These anti-LGBT preferences are frequently linked to a larger admiration of Russia’s Christian values, seen by many as the “true” European values threatened by encroaching liberalism. The Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church, for instance, expressly looked for salvation from modern European values in Russia, telling Vladimir Putin that “the Church can only count on support from God and from Moscow.”⁷¹ Front Nationale leader Marine Le Pen similarly declared in 2014 that Vladimir Putin and her defend “common values”, which are “the values of the European civilisation”, in particular its “Christian heritage.”⁷² Russia’s leadership in

⁶⁷ Inga Sprinģe, 'Latvia: The ABC of “Traditional” Values Activism', *Eurasianet.org* (2 March 2016) <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/7763>, ———, 'The Rise of Latvia's Moral Guardians', *Re:Baltica* (10 January 2016) http://www.rebaltica.lv/en/investigations/russia_and_family_values/a/1298/the_rise_of_latvias_moral_guardians.html

⁶⁸ Anton Shekhovtsov, 'The Kremlin’s Marriage of Convenience with the European Far Right', *Open Democracy* (28 April 2014) <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/anton-shekhovtsov/kremlin%E2%80%99s-marriage-of-convenience-with-european-far-right>

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Kyle Mantyla, 'Fischer: Russia's Anti-Gay Law Is Exactly the Sort of 'Public Policy That We've Been Advocating'', *Right Wing Watch* (2013).

⁷¹ Marta Szpala, 'Russia in Serbia – Soft Power and Hard Interests', *OSW Commentary* (Warsaw: Centre for Eastern Studies, 2014).

⁷² Francetv Info, 'Marine Le Pen Dit Partager Des "Valeurs Communes" Avec Poutine', (18 May 2014) http://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/europe/marine-le-pen-dit-partager-des-valeurs-communes-avec-poutine_603281.htm, Gabrielle Tétrault-Farber, 'Far-Right Europe Has a Crush on Moscow', *The Moscow*

defending Christian values was echoed by the leader of Hungary’s ultra-nationalist Jobbik party,⁷³ the Italian ultra-Catholic and neo-fascist party Forza Nuova,⁷⁴ Italy’s Northern League, a regionalist political party whose ideology spans the left-right spectrum and, across the Atlantic, by Patrick Buchanan, former Republican presidential candidate and political commentator.⁷⁵ The appeal of a Christian Europe was also reflected in immigration debates in France and Germany, where anti-immigrant protesters made signs calling for Russia’s support against Muslim immigration, chanted “ship Merkel off to Siberia and Putin to Berlin,” and carried Russian flags in some demonstrations.⁷⁶

Several elements of Russian conservative ideology have resonance across Europe and into the United States. Not only have states and parties on the left and right found Russian conservative values to be similar to their own, but have frequently referenced Russia as the source of their inspiration and/or recognized Russia as a defender of these shared values. The support for these values demonstrates Russia’s ability to project conservative soft power outside of the post-Soviet space.

Illiberal Governance

In addition to conservative values, Russia also benefits from an increasingly attractive illiberal governance model, featuring an unrestrained executive, a reduction in the freedoms of civil society groups within the state, and a populist form of government supported by nationalism. Russia has been centralising its decision-making process and narrowing the scope for political activity since the 2000s, introducing reforms that reinforced the position of the president while weakening the parliament and civil society. What emerged is a system criticised by some Western

Times (25 November 2014) <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/far-right-europe-has-a-crush-on-moscow/511827.html>

⁷³ Péter Krekó, Lóránt Győri, and Attila Juhász, 'Russia's Far-Right Friends in Europe-Hungary', *Russian Analytical Digest* (2015).

⁷⁴ Giovanni Savino, 'The Italian Russophile Rightist Parties: A New Love for Moscow?', *Russian Analytical Digest* 167, 2015, Shekhovtsov, 'The Kremlin’s Marriage'

⁷⁵ Savino, 'The Italian Russophile Rightist Parties: A New Love for Moscow?', Miranda Blue, 'Globalizing Homophobia, Part 1: How the American Right Came to Embrace Russia’s Anti-Gay Crackdown', *Right Wing Watch* (2013).

⁷⁶ Vadim Nikitin, 'From Russia with Love – How Putin Is Winning over Hearts and Minds', *The National* (2016), 'In Dresden, Russian Flags of Protest against Islam and Merkel', *Deutsche Welle* (22 November 2015) <http://www.dw.com/en/in-dresden-russian-flags-of-protest-against-islam-and-merkel/a-18865803>

literature as “weak authoritarianism”⁷⁷ but, as we will show, is valued by a number of political actors in the world.

Scholars have previously claimed that Central Asian elites find the Russian model of government appealing.⁷⁸ Russian labels legitimizing this type of governance, such as sovereign democracy, inspired Kazakhstan’s “presidential democracy” and “visionary leadership.”⁷⁹ Central Asian governments, following the example set by Russia, have taken advantage of the terrorist threat to create counterterrorism programs and legislation that entrenched their own power and put pressure on democratic and religious opposition through a process of “coercive transfer.”⁸⁰ This has worked in addition to normative attractiveness, where Russia becomes a reference point in terms of defining security and devising practices to counter the threat.⁸¹

The illiberal governance model has also inspired Hungary. In 2011 Victor Orbán’s government adopted a new constitution which was criticized by the Venice Commission for its weakening of the parliament.⁸² Orbán openly defended his reforms by pointing to successful states that are neither Western and nor liberal, such as Russia. In Orbán’s opinion, “the era of liberal democracies is over,”⁸³ because Western states are becoming less competitive, so Hungary must “break with liberal principles and methods of social organisation, and in general with the liberal understanding of society.”⁸⁴ This narrative of the political competitiveness of non-liberal

⁷⁷ Stephen E Hanson, 'The Uncertain Future of Russia's Weak State Authoritarianism', *East European Politics & Societies* 21:1, 2007.

⁷⁸ Nicole J. Jackson, 'The Role of External Factors in Advancing Non-Liberal Democratic Forms of Political Rule: A Case Study of Russia's Influence on Central Asian Regimes', *Contemporary Politics* 16:1, 2010.

⁷⁹ Rachel Vanderhill and Michael E. Aleprete, *International Dimensions of Authoritarian Persistence : Lessons from Post-Soviet States* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013), 97-8.

⁸⁰ Mariya Y. Omelicheva, 'Combating Terrorism in Central Asia: Explaining Differences in States' Responses to Terror', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 19:3, 2007, 385.

⁸¹ ———, 'Convergence of Counterterrorism Policies: A Case Study of Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32:10, 2009, ———, 'Convergence of Counterterrorism Policies: A Case Study of Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32:10, 2009, 11.

⁸² Venice Commission, 'Opinion on the New Constitution of Hungary. Adopted by the Venice Commission at Its 87th Plenary Session (Venice, 17-18 June 2011)', in European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), ed. (2011), Adam Pickering and John Holm, 'Hungary’s Crackdown on NGOs - Part of Global Trend', *Nonprofit Quarterly* (16 October 2014)

<http://nonprofitquarterly.org/2014/10/16/hungary-s-illiberal-crackdown-on-foreign-funding-of-ngos/>

⁸³ Viktor Orbán, 'Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s Speech at the 25th Bálványos Summer Free University and Student Camp', 2014.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

rule mirrors the discourse used successfully in Russia prior to its economic slowdown of the 2014.⁸⁵ A state’s economic success, its ability to provide for the citizens, and achieve state security, are correlated with strong rule.

Some states have begun to replicate Russia’s preference for eliminating potential sources of domestic opposition, particularly civil society actors. During Putin’s second term, NGOs were increasingly considered to be a threat to state power. In response, Russia passed a 2012 law that requires non-profit organizations that receive foreign donations and engage in “political activity” to register and declare themselves as foreign agents.⁸⁶ This law gives state authorities measures to weaken and even close down NGOs deemed to be too politically engaged. This was followed by similar pieces of legislation inspired by the Russian model in a number of other post-Soviet states, such as the Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan.⁸⁷ In Hungary, Orbán has depicted NGOs as “activists financed from abroad,”⁸⁸ using similar language to the Russian model. The Chinese government has also initiated similar measures, with prominent Maoist websites praising Russia’s crackdown in addition to Chinese efforts.⁸⁹

Finally nationalism constitutes an important element of contemporary Russian normative discourse and it has become a potent governance tool. It helps create a continuity of Russian greatness, but it also results in a particular relationship the outside world: the nation is a *sui generis* protection against the external world and its disturbing effects, and thus requires patriotism and loyalty from its citizens.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Anastasiya Bashkatova, 'Gosudarstvennyi Kapitalizm V Rossii Vstrevozhl Zapad', *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (2013).

⁸⁶ Entitled “On Amendments to Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation regarding the Regulation of the Activities of Non-profit Organisations Performing the Functions of a Foreign Agent”

⁸⁷ Andrew E Kramer, 'Ukrainian Prime Minister Resigns as Parliament Repeals Restrictive Laws', *The New York Times* (2014), Eurasianet.org, 'Kyrgyzstan: Foreign Agent Bill May Be Scrapped', (29 February 2016) <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/7758>, Cholpon Orozobekova, 'Will Kyrgyzstan Go Russian on NGOs?', *The Diplomat* (2015).

⁸⁸ Hooper and Frolov, *Russia's Bad Example*, p. 20.

⁸⁹ Julia Famularo, 'The China-Russia NGO Crackdown', *The Diplomat* (23 February 2015) <http://thediplomat.com/2015/02/the-china-russia-ngo-crackdown/>

⁹⁰ Vladimir Putin, 'Reception to Mark National Unity Day', 2014, ———, 'Gala Reception Marking Heroes of the Fatherland Day', 2015.

Several European political leaders have positively associated Putin with the restoration of a great Russia, a notion combining national pride and a belief in historical destiny that is mimicked in Front National narratives that invoke the “Eternal France.”⁹¹ In the United Kingdom, George Galloway welcomed Putin’s efforts to “restore national pride and dignity,”⁹² while former Scotland First Minister Alex Salmond argued more recently that he admires “certain aspects” of Putin’s politics, particularly the fact that Putin “restored a substantial part of Russian pride and that must be a good thing.”⁹³ We can also see Russia’s stress on ethnic nationalism reaching across established borders in Hungary, where Viktor Orbán has been castigated by neighbouring states for using symbols of ‘Greater Hungary’ that include current Romanian territory.⁹⁴

Additionally, Orbán used the Russian annexation of the Crimea as a pedestal from which to call for “dual citizenship, collective rights and autonomy” of ethnic Hungarians living in Ukraine.⁹⁵

In addition to the attractiveness generated by its promotion of conservative values, the Russian model of illiberal governance that involves the centralization of power in the executive, populist methods interwoven with nationalist discourse, and a crackdown on civil society activities has started to spread outside of Russia itself. This model has found admiration particularly within the Russian neighbourhood, but also in several EU member states and China.

Strong Leadership

While the conservative values and governance models of Russia have had some soft power success, Putin himself is a major source of ideological soft power for Russia due to perceptions of his authoritative style of rule. Interestingly, the attractiveness of Putin’s leadership style is felt on both the right and the left. Putin is perceived as a real leader, particularly when compared with the

⁹¹ Cécile Alduy and Stéphane Wahnich, *Marine Le Pen Prise Aux Mots: Décryptage Du Nouveau Discours Frontiste* (Paris: Seuil, 2015), 132.

⁹² Luke Manning, 'One-on-One with George Galloway', *Moscow News* (2006).

⁹³ Dean Herbert, 'Salmond: Why I Admire Putin', *Scottish Express* (2014).

⁹⁴ 'Hungary PM Rapped by Romania over Territorial 'Revisionism'', *Reuters* (27 July 2015)
<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-romania-hungary-idUSKCN0Q113T20150727>

⁹⁵ 'Orban Renews Autonomy Call for Ethnic Hungarians in Ukraine', *Reuters* (17 May 2014)
<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-hungary-autonomy-idUSBREA4G04520140517>

weak democratic politicians. The Russian strategic narrative has thus been adopted by those political elites interested in aligning themselves to the myth of a saviour.⁹⁶

This type of strong leadership is clearly appealing to autocrats, such as Belarus’ Lukashenka, but also finds favour amongst citizens in states that underwent a successful transition from communism.⁹⁷ For instance, a survey carried out in 2015 by the *New Serbian Political Thought* magazine found that Serbs bestow considerable amount of trust in Vladimir Putin, with a 36.1 percent positive ranking that was 5 times as high as the next most popular foreign leader. A member of the Serbian social democratic party argued that Putin’s high popularity rating is due to Serbs perceiving him as a “cool, collected, and decisive leader.”⁹⁸ A late-2015 Gallup poll additionally showed that citizens of Armenia, Serbia, and Bulgaria all gave Putin double-digit net favorability ratings.⁹⁹

Putin has additionally garnered praise for his decisive leadership style from a number of European political elites.¹⁰⁰ Marine Le Pen finds several important qualities in Putin, including courage and frankness.¹⁰¹ The leader of the Left Party, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, also systematically defends Vladimir Putin for his strength as a leader.¹⁰² Yannick Jaffre, a philosopher with close ties to the Front National, even entitled his biography of Putin, *Vladimir Bonaparte Putin*, drawing a parallelism between Napoleon’s and Putin’s lives.¹⁰³ The leader of the British right-

⁹⁶ Alina Polyakova, 'Strange Bedfellows: Putin and Europe's Far Right', *World Affairs* 177:3, 2014, James Pearce, 'Putin’s Western Popularity Explained', *ReadRussia* (10 November 2015)

<http://readrussia.com/2015/11/10/putins-western-popularity-explained/>

⁹⁷ Lankina and Niemczyk, 'Russia's Foreign Policy and Soft Power', p. 105.

⁹⁸ 'A Question of Trust: Serbia Prefers 'Alpha' Putin over Own Prime Minister', *Sputnik News* (21 November 2015) <http://sputniknews.com/europe/20151123/1030614543/serbia-trust-putin-leader.html>

⁹⁹ Worldwide Independent Network of Market Research and Gallup International, 'Two Global Leaders with Very Different Global Perceptions', (22 December 2015)

http://www.wingia.com/web/files/richeditor/filemanager/Final_WINGIA_GLOBAL_Leaders_release_4.pdf

¹⁰⁰ Polyakova, 'Strange Bedfellows'.

¹⁰¹ 'Marine Le Pen Salue Vladimir Poutine Avec Qui Elle Défend Des « Valeurs Communes »', *Le Monde* (18 May 2014) http://www.lemonde.fr/europeennes-2014/article/2014/05/18/marine-le-pen-salue-vladimir-poutine-avec-qui-elle-defend-des-valeurs-communes_4420810_4350146.html

¹⁰² Fabrice Arfi and Antoine Perraud, 'Jean-Luc Mélenchon Joue À Saute-Cadavre', *Mediapart* (5 March 2015) <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/050315/jean-luc-melenchon-joue-saute-cadavre>

¹⁰³ Yannick Jaffré, *Vladimir Bonaparte Poutine: Essai Sur La Naissance Des Républiques* (Paris: Perspectives Libres, 2014).

wing UK Independence Party, Nigel Farage, has named Vladimir Putin as the world leader he most admired because “If you poke the Russian bear with a stick, he will respond.”¹⁰⁴

Putin’s popularity extends beyond Europe. An online poll conducted in China by the *Global Times* daily in 2014 suggested that 92% of respondents support him.¹⁰⁵ A 2015 Gallup poll similar gave him a 55% net favourability rating.¹⁰⁶ Chinese netizens have fondly nicknamed the Russian leader “Putin the Great”¹⁰⁷ or “Emperor Putin.”¹⁰⁸ Putin is also the central focus of numerous popular books. In 2014 there were more than 60 titles on the Russian leader available on the Chinese book market, including: *Putin's Iron Fist*, *Putin: Perfect Man in Women's Eyes* and *The Charming King Putin*. Zheng Wenyang’s *He Is Born for Russia* sold over 250,000 copies since its 2012 publication. Collections of Putin’s thoughts and speeches are available to interested readers, including a 2008 compilation published by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and “The Collected Works of Putin 2012 – 2014”, published by East China Normal University Press shortly after Vladimir Putin’s visit to China in 2014.¹⁰⁹ Putin’s popularity, as explained by Zheng Yu, a researcher on Russia at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, arises because “Many Chinese think our country's diplomacy is too weak. So Putin's strong stance against Western countries has made him an idol among Chinese.”¹¹⁰ Putin is seen to have brought stability to Russia after the turmoil of the 1990s, so the Chinese regard him positively as a “strong emperor.”¹¹¹

So in addition to the attractiveness of Russia’s moral conservative values and illiberal governance, Putin himself is regarded in many circles as a strong and effective leader that has

¹⁰⁴ Polyakova, 'Strange Bedfellows', p. 38.

¹⁰⁵ GT, 'China's Putin Fever', *Global Times* (2 July 2014) <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/868575.shtml>

¹⁰⁶ Worldwide Independent Network of Market Research and Gallup International, 'Two Global Leaders with Very Different Global Perceptions'

¹⁰⁷ Jeremy Page, 'Why Russia's President Is 'Putin the Great' in China', *Wall Street Journal* (2014).

¹⁰⁸ Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, 'Chinese Netizens Are Cheering Putin’s Syria Campaign', *Foreign Policy* (16 October 2015) <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/10/16/china-syria-putin-russia-isis-america-assad-airstrikes/>

¹⁰⁹ 'Putin’s Collected Works Published in China', *The China Story* (10 June 2014) <https://www.thechinastory.org/dossier/putins-collected-works-published-in-china/>

¹¹⁰ Xing Yi, 'Readers of Leaders', *China Daily USA* (29 October 2014)

http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2014-10/29/content_18821695.htm

¹¹¹ GT, 'China's Putin Fever'

successfully steered his state through crisis to prosperity. This heroic model of leadership has admirers not only in post-Soviet states, but also among the leadership of the far-left and far-right within Europe and in China. Putin’s leadership puts forward a model example that political elites and citizens alike admire and desire to replicate.

Foreign Policy

According to Joseph Nye, soft power is more potent if the ideological component matches the foreign policy of the state. We argue that there are two elements within broader Russian foreign policy that map onto their ideological preferences that have augmented the attraction of their conservative values. First, Russia’s criticism of the US-led liberal international order and the related anti-Westernism maps onto their promotion of conservative values. Second, Russia’s perceived decisiveness in crises situations, particularly with respect to the war in Syria and the fight against the Islamic State, is linked to the character of the state and Putin’s ruling style.

Russia has been overtly critical of the US-led post-Cold War, denouncing most elements of US dominance.¹¹² Putin has advocated, alternatively, a highly pluralist global governance system, arguing that “We are all different, and we should respect that. Nations should not be forced to conform to the same development model that somebody has declared the only appropriate one.”¹¹³ This requires the formation of a new international order¹¹⁴ that reflects the unique place of Russia and is legitimised by Russia’s role in the history and development of human civilisation¹¹⁵ as a “counterbalance in international affairs and the development of global civilization.”¹¹⁶

On the reception side, anti-Americanism couched in pluralist terms has convinced a far greater number of political actors than does the vision of Russian leadership. Anti-Americanism

¹¹² Lo, *Russia and the New World Disorder*.

¹¹³ Vladimir Putin, '70th Session of the Un General Assembly', 2015. See also ———, 'Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly'.

¹¹⁴ ———, 'Rossiya I Meniyayushchiisiya Mir', *Moskovskie Novosti* (2012).

¹¹⁵ Ibid, ———, 'Meeting with Russian Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives in International Organisations', 2012.

¹¹⁶ MFA RF, 'Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation. Approved by President of the Russian Federation V. Putin on 12 February 2013', Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013.

has been on the rise in many corners of the world¹¹⁷ but in post-Soviet states like Kyrgyzstan anti-Americanism has quite abruptly replaced fondness for the US. Bishkek has become increasingly critical of US assistance to Kyrgyzstani civil society and media. It also cancelled a cooperation treaty after the US State Department bestowed a human rights award on an activist jailed there.¹¹⁸ Anti-Americanism in the post-Soviet space is further enhanced by Russia’s representation of NATO as a threat. Regional experts tend to fear that the US may be planning to engage NATO forces in Central Asia under the pretext of fighting the Islamic State.¹¹⁹ Potential NATO engagement would reinforce the EU’s presence in Central Asia, an organisation which is interpreted as an arm of American policy and ideology in the region.¹²⁰

Within Europe, Russian anti-American sentiments appeal to radical forces on two ends of the European political spectrum.¹²¹ They share with Russia a vision of Europe that would distance itself from the US, drop its supranational agenda, and limit the export of European norms and values to the rest of the world.¹²² The European extreme right admires Russia for what it perceives as successful challenging of the international status quo, characterised by the domination of the West and in questioning the global role of the US.¹²³ Scepticism towards the European Union and values underpinning European integration drives pro-Russian attitudes among a number of right-wing parties. In Hungary, Jobbik’s leader described Russia as a “counterbalance against a lopsided Euro-Atlanticism.”¹²⁴ At the other end of the European political spectrum, anti-Americanism can explain positive approach towards Russia among substantial parts of the French and Italian left.¹²⁵ We can also see this in states like Greece, where only 31% of Greeks in a 2014 poll wanting the US to lead in the world, versus 52% who saw

¹¹⁷ Brendon O’Connor and Martin Griffiths, *The Rise of Anti-Americanism* (Routledge, 2007).

¹¹⁸ 'Kyrgyzstan Ditches Key Treaty with U.S.', *Eurasia.Net* (21 July 2015)

<http://www.eurasianet.org/node/74331>

¹¹⁹ 'V Tsentralnoi Azii Rastut Slukhi O Nestabilnosti I Strakh Pered Ig', *Radio Azattyk* (23 October 2014)

<http://rus.azattyq.org/a/smi-ugroza-ig-v-centralnoy-azii/26651513.html>

¹²⁰ Kubatbek Asanov, 'Komu Vygoden Igil V Tsentralnoi Azii?', (21 October 2014)

http://www.vesti.kg/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=30511:komu-vyigoden-igil-v-tsentralnoy-azii?&Itemid=125

¹²¹ Polyakova, 'Strange Bedfellows', p. 37-38.

¹²² Laruelle, 'Russia's Bedfellowing Policy', p. 3.

¹²³ Shekhovtsov, 'The Kremlin's Marriage'

¹²⁴ Krekó, Györi, and Juhász, 'Russia's Far-Right', p. 6.

¹²⁵ Laruelle, 'Russia's Bedfellowing Policy', p. 2.

Russian global leadership as desirable,¹²⁶ reflecting a “subtle disposition towards authoritarianism.”¹²⁷

In addition to the anti-American component of Russian foreign policy, current Russian leadership attaches high value to sovereignty. This concept has become an indispensable element of almost every public speech in Russia and is intended to be heard abroad. This discourse emphasizes Russia’s role as a leader of non-liberal politics and a defender of state sovereignty worldwide.¹²⁸ Despite the annexation of Crimea and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, the Kremlin continues its criticism of the United States for transgressing the sovereignty of other states, even if it is not directly attributed to the US. For instance, Putin has recently argued that, “Ever more frequently today we hear of ultimatums and sanctions. The very notion of state sovereignty is being washed out. Undesirable regimes, countries that conduct an independent policy or that simply stand in the way of somebody’s interests get destabilised.”¹²⁹

This discourse resonates with many politicians in the EU who are sceptical of the European integration project that potentially destabilizes ethnic identity and state sovereignty. The general idea of being independent of others, be it Brussel’s bureaucracy or Germany’s influence in the Eurozone, links Russia’s foreign policy to eurosceptics. Marine Le Pen declared: “we believe in the border which protects, which is a healthy limit between the nation and the rest of the world: an economic, financial, migratory, sanitary and environmental filter.”¹³⁰ The leader of the Spanish political party Podemos equally argued that Spain needed greater sovereignty and separation from the US and Europe.¹³¹ Similarly, Italian Northern League’s warm feelings towards Russia are to a large extent driven by the party’s antipathy towards the European Union.

¹²⁶ Dimitar Bechev, 'Playing the Putin Card', *Foreign Policy* (8 April 2015)

<http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/04/08/playing-the-putin-card-greece-alexis-tsipras-in-moscow/>

¹²⁷ Vassilis Petsinis, 'Putin's 'Useless Idiots' or Signs of a Deeper Pathology? Russophilia and National Populism in Greece', *openDemocracy* (29 January 2015) <https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/vassilis-petsinis/putin%E2%80%99s-useless-idiots-or-signs-of-deeper-pathology-russophil>

¹²⁸ Kiseleva, 'Russia's Soft Power Discourse', p. 325.

¹²⁹ Vladimir Putin, 'Security Council Meeting', 2014.

¹³⁰ Front National, 'UDT 2012 - La Baule : Discours De Marine Le Pen', (26 September 2012)

<http://www.frontnational.com/videos/udt-2012-la-baule-intervention-de-marine-le-pen/>

¹³¹ Giles Tremlett, 'The Podemos Revolution', *The Guardian* (31 March 2015)

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/31/podemos-revolution-radical-academics-changed-european-politics>

Bureaucratic Brussels is what the party critically juxtaposes with their wished for vision of a “Europe of the fatherlands”, an alliance of regions using local currencies.¹³²

Russia’s soft power attraction, finally, does what soft power is supposed to do: grant legitimacy and moral authority to the objectives of the foreign policy. We can see this in two recent and controversial foreign policy decisions: to invade Crimea and to intervene in the Syrian civil war. The European Union’s decision to sanction Russia met with opposition from states who positively identified with Russia. Orban said that the EU was “shooting itself in the foot” with respect to sanctions. Marine Le Pen argued that the European Union had declared a Cold War on Russia with the sanctions, a position similarly taken by left-wing Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain, and other far-right leaders in Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands.¹³³ The Italian Northern League secretary also opposed sanctions and argued that those in Crimea “have chosen freely to remain Russia.”¹³⁴ Even some center-right French politicians visited Crimea to counter Western propaganda on the issue.¹³⁵ In the United States presidential hopeful Donald Trump chose a foreign policy advisor who refers to the “so-called annexation” of Crimea.¹³⁶

Russia’s military intervention in Syria in 2016 also gained broad support from different parts of the world even while it was condemned by major states in the West. It was celebrated across European far right spectrum and presented as a step towards the long expected multipolarity.¹³⁷ Marie le Pen similarly argued that “It’s a relief for us to see Islamic State retreat, and how Russia has succeeded where the EU has totally failed ... Despite harsh criticism of

¹³² Savino, 'The Italian Russophile Rightist Parties: A New Love for Moscow?', p. 9.

¹³³ Alessandra Prentice, 'France's Le Pen, in Moscow, Blames EU for New 'Cold War'', *Reuters* (12 April 2014) <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-le-pen-russia-idUSBREA3B09I2014041>, Melanie Amann and Pavel Lokshin, 'Moscow's Fifth Column: German Populists Forge Ties with Russia', *Spiegel Online* (27 April 2016) <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/german-populists-forge-deeper-ties-with-russia-a-1089562.html> Jones, 2015 #16, Tremlett, 'The Podemos Revolution'

¹³⁴ BBC Monitoring Europe, 'Italian Party Leader Visits Russia, Crimea, Slams Western Sanctions', *Corriere della Sera* (2014).

¹³⁵ Benjamin Haddad, 'How Putin Won French Conservatives', *The Daily Beast* (18 August 2015) <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/08/18/the-inevitable-putin-le-pen-alliance-is-so-on.html>

¹³⁶ Timothy Snyder, 'Trump's Putin Fantasy', *The New York Review of Books* (19 April 2016)

<http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2016/04/19/trumps-putin-fantasy/>

¹³⁷ Shekhovtsov, 'The Kremlin’s Marriage'

Bashar Assad's government, it is the lesser evil in comparison with ISIS.”¹³⁸ She also accused the United States of attempting to undermine Russia’s airstrikes.¹³⁹ Victor Orban also praised Russia for helping to solve the crisis in Syria.¹⁴⁰ China positively evaluated Russia’s support for Bashar Assad and saw Moscow’s bombing campaign, which took place at the invitation of Assad’s government, as a confirmation of Syria’s sovereignty. The general sentiment on the Chinese Internet is that Russia is getting things done and “simply trying to fight terrorists.”¹⁴¹

In sum, we can see that several elements of Russian foreign policy are linked to their conservative values, which according to Joseph Nye should only bolster their soft power. Moreover, those who are attracted to Russian ideological soft power are far more likely to support controversial Russian policies, making it easier for Russia to operate in the world where official governmental critique of the West does not match domestic voices supporting a counternarrative about Moscow’s actions.

Conclusion

In 2013, Joseph Nye admitted that when *Foreign Policy* first published his essay “Soft Power” in 1990, he could not have conceived that a state like Russia would use the term. Still, even if Russia uses soft power in its political discourse, Nye argued that the Russians do not really understand soft power because they see the government, and not liberal civil society, as the main instrument of soft power.¹⁴² This paper argues that Nye’s view is blinded by liberal democratic bias, which causes him and many other Russian soft power scholars to ignore otherwise clear signs of Russia’s ideological soft power influence.

This liberal democratic bias makes conservative soft power a cognitive impossibility, leading to an understanding of Russian soft power hampered by assumptions of instrumentality

¹³⁸ 'Merkel Agreement with Turkish President Erdogan 'Real Treason' – Marine Le Pen', *RT* (13 April 2016) <https://www.rt.com/news/339477-erdogan-treason-le-pen/>

¹³⁹ 'Marine Le Pen Accused Us for Trying to Discredit Actions of Vladimir Putin', *Sputnik International* (01 November 2015) <http://sputniknews.com/politics/20151001/1027871070/france-party-leader-accused-us-anti-russian-propaganda.html>

¹⁴⁰ Andrzej Sadecki, 'Orban in Moscow: It’s Not Only About Energy', *OSW Analysis* (Warsaw: Centre for Eastern Studies, 2016).

¹⁴¹ Allen-Ebrahimian, 'Chinese Netizens'

¹⁴² Joseph S. Nye, 'What China and Russia Don’t Get About Soft Power', *Foreign Policy* (2013).

and focussed solely on cultural attractiveness. This understanding not only greatly limits the potential geographic scope of Russian soft power influence, but in its instrumentalization conflates Russian soft power with Russian public relations. The tendency to focus on attraction by design, rather than by appeal, has diverted scholars’ attention from the reception side of soft power and prevented an engagement with potential attractiveness of conservative ideas and a governance model diverging from a liberal democracy. Instead, those who see Russian conservative values as attractive and/or look towards Moscow for leadership are simply labelled “useful idiots” or puppets of a larger Kremlin program.¹⁴³ While this type of discourse might be useful to temporarily delegitimize these Russophilic actors, it dangerously underestimates the potential for non-liberal ideas to be attractive to an increasing number of individuals in the Russian neighbourhood and the West more generally.

We argue, alternatively, that Russian soft power does not have to be instrumentalized, that it needs to be understood as attractive in its own right, and that the conservative values put forward by Russia are both attractive to others and a source of inspiration that generates followership. Our findings suggest that the concept of soft power, understood as attraction and followership, has to go beyond the familiar and safe world of Western liberal values, democratic governance and presumably responsible foreign policy. While there is no doubt that conservative ideologies existed in many of these states before Moscow embarked on its explicit conservative values narrative, the rise of populist, right-wing parties across Europe has not only given the Russian state potential ideological allies, but has also created the opportunity for these parties to see Russia as a working model for their political projects. Russia gives foreign political elites and groups the possibility of ideological partnership with a great power. The narrative about conservative values pushed forward by Russia can help formerly marginal parties legitimize the normative content of their message by showing that their set of ideas are possible to implement.

¹⁴³ Alina Polyakova, 'Why Europe Is Right to Fear Putin’s Useful Idiots', *Foreign Policy* (23 February 2016) <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/02/23/why-europe-is-right-to-fear-putins-useful-idiots>, Slawomir Sierakowski, 'Putin's Useful Idiots', *The New York Times* (28 April 2014) <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/29/opinion/sierakowski-putins-useful-idiots.html>

Moreover, it sets the stage for the emergence of a sense of comradeship that shields Russia from the political effects of their more controversial foreign policy goals.

Russia’s ideological soft power spans a number of conservative domains. This includes an anti-LGBT defence of “traditional family values”; the promotion of Christianity as a lost European value; the promotion of nationalism, patriotism, and loyalty to the nation-state; the promotion of powerful executives, weak parliaments, and crackdowns against civil society organizations and with it, the promotion of strong and decisive leadership; and a foreign policy that argues for pluralism, sovereignty, nationalism, and a defence of these values against US and Western-backed rules. In each case, the influence of Russian soft power extends beyond their neighbourhood to political parties on both the left and the right in Western Europe as well as individuals across the United States and China.

In terms of policy implications, there are two trends that need to be considered. The first is the growing awareness on the part of the Russian elites that ideological soft power at their disposal is larger than previously perceived, and can be leveraged in order that Russia can “try to become a leader of the nonliberal world”, as head of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy Sergei Karaganov put it.¹⁴⁴ The second is the increasing acclaim for populist and conservative politics in Europe and across the world, from the US to East Asia.¹⁴⁵ Increasing public approval of these conservative politics and Russia’s conservative soft power has the potential to create a “virtuous” cycle, whereby Russia, as a model of conservative governance, helps external elites with conservative values and illiberal to become more mainstream, which then reinforces the capacities of Russian foreign policy.

¹⁴⁴ Jeanne L Wilson, 'Russia and China Respond to Soft Power: Interpretation and Readaptation of a Western Construct', *Politics* 35:3-4, 2015, 295.

¹⁴⁵ Cas Mudde, *On Extremism and Democracy in Europe* (London: Routledge, 2016), xxiii-xxiv, Gabriella Lazaridis, Giovanna Campani, and Annie Benveniste, 'The Rise of the Far Right in Europe: Populist Shifts and 'Othering' ', (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). Tony Barber, 'Illiberalism Takes Root in Europe's Fertile Centre', *The Financial Times* (13 May 2016) <https://next.ft.com/content/7d1aff0e-18f0-11e6-b197-a4af20d5575e>

Rather than analysing instrumental uses of soft power, more attention should be paid to ways in which non-Western actors may appear attractive and generate followership. Even if Russia does not offer a detailed model of political organisation, particular elements of its governance, such as strong leadership, the centralisation of decision-making process, and the perceived boldness during domestic and international crises appeal to a growing number of political actors in the democratic world. It is about time to acknowledge that political actors, whom we would prefer to disregard for the evident mismatch between their values and ours, are growing in number and strength, that their attraction to Russian values is a serious phenomenon, and that the liberal democratic world should not presuppose that its values are automatically and universally attractive.