

## CONSIDERATIONS ON THE POLICIES OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION TO ACHIEVE NATIONAL INTERESTS IN ITS NEAR ABROAD

Colonel Sergiu ŞARAMET<sup>514</sup>

**Abstract:** *The policies of the Russian Federation in its near abroad have been constantly changing. Taking into account this consideration, it is important to know what were the determining factors that influenced the policy orientation of the Russian Federation in the pursuit of national interests in those areas. In this context, are analyzed the policies through which the Russian Federation projects national interests in its near abroad such as “hard power”, which include military operations (the involvement of Russian troops as “peacekeeping forces” in the Republic of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan; stationing of large units and units on the territory of the former union republics; economic sanctions, etc.). In tandem with “hard power” policies, the Russian Federation also uses “soft power” policies (promoting the Russian language and culture, strengthening the presence of the Russian Federation in the information space, supporting the Russian diaspora).*

**Keywords:** *policies, national interests, “hard power”, “soft power”, economic sanctions, military operations.*

The declaration of independence by the Soviet republics led to the establishment of 15 new states, located in different areas, with different cultures, different degrees of economic development and different dependencies on the Russian Federation, the real successor of the USSR. Thus, we witnessed the development of a new international “security architecture”, with new state actors, in a new geopolitical space where they will perform their political, economic, and military interests / influences.

The new “security architecture” in the former Soviet space, generated a new compartmentalization of the geographical space. In the style of the “big brother, the Russian people”, in order to define in its international relations, the geographical area of the new ex-soviet states, proclaimed on the territory of the former USSR, the Russian Federation adopted the term “near abroad” to define this geographical area.

The term “near abroad” emerged in the lexicon of Russian diplomats in the early 1990s, yet in the process of solving the personnel issue of the Russian

---

<sup>514</sup> Colonel Sergiu Şaramet is main consultant within the Ministry of National Defence, Republic of Moldova.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs<sup>515</sup> and promptly found its reflection in the scientific environment<sup>516</sup>. Subsequently, this term was taken over by scientific institutions and periodicals that analysed the situation in the countries of the former Soviet space.

Through the perception of “near abroad”, the Russian Federation sent the message that the newly formed ex-soviet states are not really foreign, they have become national minorities and are no longer members of a nation - leader as they were in the Soviet era<sup>517</sup>.

The new actor, Russian Federation, as the dominant power of the USSR was going to influence differently the developments of the former union republics, positioning them in time at different degrees of dependence and interdependence on the policies pursued in its near abroad.

By 1999, due to the lack of coherence in domestic and foreign policies, the Russian Federation suffered a series of geopolitical and geostrategic losses. Due to the change of leadership of the Russian Federation in the early 2000s, the Russian Federation revises the priority of its spheres of influence and its geopolitical and geostrategic objectives, by adopting pragmatic policy documents with clear objectives.

Thereafter, the Russian Federation aggressively starts to use the tools of national policies in its near abroad in *hard* or *soft* forms.

## **1. DECISIVE FACTORS IN THE ORIENTATION OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION’S POLICIES TO ACHIEVE NATIONAL INTERESTS IN ITS NEAR ABROAD**

In our opinion, two decisive factors stay at the foundation of the Russian Federation’s policies to achieve national interests in its near abroad: The consequences of strategic failures to the detriment of the national interests of the Russian Federation made by President Yeltsin during his two terms of office and Ukraine’s Orange Revolution on 22 November 2004.

President Yeltsin’s period is mainly associated with crisis and chaos, with strategic failures to the detriment of national interests of the Russian Federation. For example, his meetings with the former leaders of the Soviet states recalled the Political Bureau meetings of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, where the new leaders of sovereign states showed praise and respect for Yeltsin and received “material benefits” such as gas at prices below European markets, and other diplomatic, economic and military concessions<sup>518</sup>.

---

<sup>515</sup> Ю. В. ДУБИНИН, *Дипломатический марафон. Записки руководителя Государственной делегации Российской Федерации на переговорах с Украиной в 1992 – 1999 гг.* - Москва: Колос. 2009, с. 7.

<sup>516</sup> «Ближнее зарубежье хочет быть дальним», Независимая газета. 1992. 9 июня. № 108 (278).

<sup>517</sup> Охана SHEVEL, *Russia and the Near Abroad*. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274385776>, accessed at 15 March 2021, 15: 40.

<sup>518</sup> Д. ТРЕНИН, *Post-imperium: евразийская история*, Москва: Российская политическая энциклопедия (РОССПЭН), 2012, с. 72, 73.

For example, Boris Yeltsin at the time of signing the so-called Belaya Veja Agreements on 8 December 1991 with the Presidents of Ukraine (Leonid Kravciuk) and Belarus (Stanislav Suschevich), de facto recognized, without prior consultation with representatives from the government/armed forces of the Russian Federation, the current borders of all republics as those at the time of the disintegration of the USSR. This fact generated the issue of Crimea, which was incorporated in Ukraine in 1954, Transnistria, Northern Bukovina, southern Bessarabia, etc.

Also in 1991, Yeltsin decided not to insist on the return of the Crimean Peninsula to the Russian Federation in exchange for Ukraine's renouncement of Soviet nuclear weapons stationed on its territory<sup>519</sup>. In 1993, Russia's Supreme Soviet, which was in conflict with Yeltsin, made complaints to the president about Sevastopol, arguing that due to the city's special administrative status in the Soviet era, it had not been transferred to Ukraine along with Crimea. This time, too, Yeltsin did not take into consideration the recommendations of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation. Tensions were reduced to zero - in October 1993, Yeltsin dissolved the Supreme Soviet, and in December 1994 the military campaign against separatists in Chechnya began<sup>520</sup>.

Disagreements between Ukraine and the Russian Federation over the Crimean Peninsula and the Black Sea Fleet lasted until 1997. In 1997, the Russian Federation signed an agreement with Ukraine on the mutual recognition by the Russian Federation of borders as they existed at the time of the disintegration of the USSR, thus confirming the Crimea Peninsula as part of Ukraine.

The concessions of President Yeltsin have aroused great dissatisfaction in the military circles of the Russian Federation. In this regard, in early 1992, disturbing debates took place in the offices of the General Staff, according to which the decisions taken in December in Belaya Veja were full of serious threats to the security of the Russian Federation, since they were not calculated in advance and in detail the political, economic and military consequences of the "triple alliance" pact initiated by Yeltsin. General Staff assessed the main military-strategic losses for the Russian Federation: Kiev suddenly obtained three military districts with all intangible storages of food, materials and equipment. Almost all strategic transportation and bombing aviation, and tanker aircrafts. Also, they stand to take the entire Black Sea Fleet<sup>521</sup>.

Thus, General Staff concluded that the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (with the exception of the Strategic Missile Forces), previously able to guarantee the protection of the Russian Federation, were practically destroyed by Yeltsin policies and existed as structures only on the paper. This, of course, was

---

<sup>519</sup> S. GREENE, *Engaging History: The Problems and Politics of Memory in Russia and the Post-Soviet Space*, Carnegie Moscow Center, Moscow, 2010. (Working Paper; iss. 2).

<sup>520</sup> *Ibidem*, p.78.

<sup>521</sup> В.Н. БАРАНЕЦ, *Генштаб без тайн*, Москва: Вагриус, 1999, с. 129.

facilitated not only by the violent disintegration of the USSR, but also by the long stay of the Russian Federation in an amorphous state due to the fact that Yeltsin and his entourage did not know what to do, how to use the power, becoming “sovereign” and “independent”. Anarchy and total chaos prevailed throughout the country. Former CIA director R. Gates said at the time that “the United States, of course, sought the collapse of the USSR, but no one could have imagined that it would be such a nightmare”.<sup>522</sup>

Meanwhile, the Russian elites became rich with extraordinary rapidity, its representatives began to strive for an international status corresponding to their political and economic domination in the country. For these people, the damage perceived by surrenders to the West and the former union republics from the dismemberment of the empire became painful. Instead to try to build a completely new state on the agile basis of “Yeltsinist” democracy, the Russian elite chose for it a more reliable objective - a return to the superpower status of the Russian Federation<sup>523</sup>. When V. Putin was invested as President, he carried steps to gain this support from the Russian elite in order to retrieve the status of superpower of the Russian Federation and he succeeded at all levels of power. This joint effort of Putin and Russian elite will determine the way of *Hard Power* policies of Russian Federation in its near abroad.

The second decisive point in changing the course of the Russian Federation’s policy in its near abroad was Ukraine’s Orange Revolution on 22 November 2004. Putin saw the Ukrainian fiasco as his worst defeat in foreign policy. Medvedev spoke ominously about the disastrous consequences of events in Ukraine for the Russian Federation. In his opinion, there was a threat to disintegrate the country as a result of the division of the elite according to the “orange” scenario. The “Orange Revolution” was presented by Russian official propaganda as a special CIA operation using the “export of democracy” doctrine as a pretext to accomplish US geopolitical objectives. These objectives at least wanted to put the Russian Federation out of its near abroad and weaken its influence<sup>524</sup>.

Regarding Ukraine’s desire to join NATO, Russian official circles and influential experts have expressed a number of counter-arguments, from extremely emotional to purely practical, as follows:

- Russia’s “historical space” border will be violated;
- Ukraine will turn against Russia
- Ukraine will break away from the Russian Orthodox Church;

---

<sup>522</sup> В. И. ВАРЕННИКОВ, *Неповторимое, часть IX. Трагедия отечества 1985-2000 гг.*, Москва: Советский писатель, 2001, [http://militera.lib.ru/memo/russian/varennikov\\_vi01/index.html](http://militera.lib.ru/memo/russian/varennikov_vi01/index.html), accessed at 15 April 2021, 18:40.

<sup>523</sup> Е. М. ПРИМАКОВ, *Международные отношения накануне XXI века: проблемы и перспективы*, *Междунар. Жизнь*, 1996, № 10, с. 3-13.

<sup>524</sup> Д. ТРЕНИН, *Post-imperium: евразийская история*, Москва: Российская политическая энциклопедия, 2012, с. 133 -135.

- the Russian-Ukrainian border will turn into a demarcation line similar to that of the “Cold War”
- the Russian Federation will have to stop cooperation with the military-industrial complex of Ukraine;
- the US Armed Forces will expel Russian forces from the Black Sea region<sup>525</sup>.

We can remark that at that time the leadership of the Russian Federation estimated what could be the consequences for Russia the Ukraine’s national desire to join NATO and the US penetration of the Ukrainian space. The Russian Federation also realized that “Ukraine is a geopolitical centre, because its very existence as an independent state helps to transform Russia. Without Ukraine, Russia is prevented to become a Eurasian empire”<sup>526</sup>. After this event, the Russian Federation started the development of *Soft Power* policies according to the US model. The difference is that the USA uses *Soft Power* policies as complementary means to diplomatic, informational, etc., while the Russian Federation will use them as separate diplomatic tools to accomplish its strategic objectives. We would like to mention that geopolitical, economic, ideological and military involvement by the USA, EU and NATO in the post-Soviet space led to open confrontations with the policies of the Russian Federation in its near abroad. In most of the cases, the governments of states from near abroad did not properly manage the situation “between the hammer and the nail”, and as a result they lost to some extent the sovereignty of their states, and the worst, civil societies due to East-West influences were divided into antagonistic camps.

As a result of the non-sanctioning of the Russian Federation by international organizations for the promoted policies in the ex-soviet states, these policies got a major impact on global security architecture by February 2014, changing in this way the security paradigm. Next, we intend to analyse the more prominent methods used to project the national interests of the Russian Federation in its near abroad.

## **2. THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION’S *HARD POWER* POLICIES TOWARD ITS NEAR ABROAD IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE NATIONAL INTERESTS**

In this chapter will be assessed the more important procedures used to project the national interests of the Russian Federation in its near abroad.

After the dissolution of the USSR and the distribution of its economic, military and territorial assets, the Russian Federation, under the influence of the military establishment and nationalist circles, has used *hard power* policies to achieve its strategic objectives throughout the former USSR.

---

<sup>525</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 36.

<sup>526</sup> Збигнев БЖЕЗИНСКИЙ, Великая шахматная доска, Издательский дом: Международные отношения, 1998, с. 61.

The *hard power* policies have been applied since the declaration of independence by the former soviet republics in early 90's, when the USSR was not officially disintegrated. The *hard power* policies were projected in two ways: the involvement of Russian troops as “peacekeeping forces” in conflicts caused by ethnical and territorial disputes in such republics as Moldova, Georgia and the stationary of large Russian military units on the territory of the former Union republics.

The Russian Federation has used and still uses *Hard Power* since 1988 (the generation of separatism on territorial disputes began in 1988 in Nagorno-Karabakh and in 1989 in the Transnistrian region of the MSSR). Since the 1990s, the Russian Federation has deployed its armed forces in the conflicts in Moldova (Transnistria) and Georgia (Abkhazia, South Ossetia) without respecting the OSCE's neutrality mandates or the consent of all parties to the conflict. In this context, the Russian Federation is currently conducting four peacekeeping operations: on the territory of the Republic of Moldova (Transnistrian Region since 1992), Georgia (South Ossetia since 1992 and Abkhazia since 1994) and Tajikistan (since 1993)).

The common pattern of the conflicts in the Republic of Moldova and Georgia is that the Russian Federation overtly supported the separatist forces with military personnel and equipment and had an aggressive involvement in the internal affairs of these states. The Russian Federation has turned these conflicts into “frozen conflicts” in order to maintain a state of stagnation in the initial form that preceded the active phase of hostilities. The development of the situation in the zones of the conflicts proves that behind these conflicts are scenarios deliberately planned by the Russian Federation to activate or deactivate these conflicts, depending on pursued strategic objectives.

Policies in this context have been developed to facilitate the Russian Federation in maintaining its presence in near abroad in the form of “peacekeeping troops” to use additional levers to gain long-term geopolitical advantages, to generate and maintain such eruption of latent tension in order to control the “whole” (sovereign states or areas of strategic interest) or by establishing control over a side which is usually the conflict zone<sup>527</sup>.

In this regard, the Russian Federation is not interested in solving these conflicts, because it uses them as levers of influence over the governments of these states when they make decisions that do not outfit the interests of the Russian Federation, especially when it comes to the pro-European aspirations of those states.

In the same manner, the Russian Federation has operated to gain geopolitical advantages from the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over

---

<sup>527</sup> Cristian BÎZU Gheorghe MATEI, *Conflictele înghețate: instrument de putere al Kremlinului în regiunea extinsă a Mării Neagre*, INFOSFERA, Anul XII nr. 1/2020 Revistă de studii de securitate și informații pentru apărare, p. 52, 53.

the Nagorno-Karabakh region, which was reactivated in September 2020 (prior to the reactivation of the conflict, the Russian Federation sold weapons to both Armenia and Azerbaijan and has always insisted that both countries are its partners). After the end of the active phase of military conflict, Azerbaijan and Armenia signed an agreement under the tutelage of the Russian Federation to end hostilities in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. According to the agreement, the Russian military returns to the area “to protect the 5 km corridor that will remain open and connect Armenia with the area that remained under its control in Nagorno-Karabakh”<sup>528</sup>. Therefore, after the armed conflict that lasted six weeks, the Russian Federation strengthened its position in the area. All the indicators show a war and this time there will be no simple solution.

The shift to a new phase of Russian *hard power* projection in its near abroad was the military intervention in Georgia in August 2008. For the first time since the end of the Cold War, the Russian Federation conducted an interstate war to ensure its claim to regional hegemony and drew the red lines for Western actors. Hence, through this war, the Russian Federation sent to the West and Georgia the message that the former soviet republics were within the sphere of Russian Federation influence. Furthermore, that NATO enlargement in these states is not without risk. *A strong message was sent to Ukraine, as well as to other former soviet republics with Russian minorities on their territory, for which the Russian Federation will take measures to protect them and could use them as a means to expand its influence and control within the region.*

First, in terms of the campaign’s military objectives, the Russian Federation wanted to gain control of the two separatist regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Secondly, the Russian Federation wanted to demonstrate the weak authority of the Georgian Government and Georgia’s economic dependence on Russian cooperation, shaking and humiliating the Georgian Government through a war and demonstrating that the Russian Federation could influence Georgia’s economy at its own convenience<sup>529</sup>.

In our opinion the above-mentioned messages of the Russian Federation concerning the former soviet republics were not taken into account by most of these republics, especially by Ukraine and Moldova and by NATO (USA), which continued the cooperation policies with Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine. As a result of the West and the ex-soviet republics disregarding of the Russian Federation’s messages and the lack of analysis of its strategies/policies in its near abroad, the Russian Federation annexes Crimea in March 2014. It is worth mentioning that the preparation phase for the Crimea’s annexation was initiated long before. The Russian Federation has identified the strategic, political,

---

<sup>528</sup> *Ce animă conflictul din Nagorno-Karabakh?*, <https://www.dw.com/ro/ce-anim%C4%83-conflictul-din-nagorno-karabah/a-55092763>, accessed at 18 April 2021, 21: 40.

<sup>529</sup> George T. DONOVAN, Jr., *Russian Operational Art in the Russo-Georgian War Of 2008*, USAWC CLASS OF 2009, p.14-15.

economic, social and infrastructure vulnerabilities of Ukraine and has established the means to engage them. Those means included identifying organizations loyal to the Russian Federation, gaining economic influence over the media, supporting separatist movements and other anti - government actions to exert pressure on Ukraine. As a preliminary phase to the annexation was the modelling of the pro-Russian population in the eastern districts of Ukraine to trigger separatist movements following the pattern used in Transnistria. With this pattern, the Russian Federation has used the *hard power* policies to support the separatists' operations in the Donbas and Lugansk regions against Ukraine's constitutional forces. During the military campaign, Ukraine received lethal and non-lethal equipment from the United States.

In March 2021, after 7 years of conflict, the situation in the conflict zone aggravated, and by April 1, 2021 the Russian Federation concentrated 100 000 of troops along the western border with Ukraine<sup>530</sup>. The troop disposition along the border enables Russians to conduct offensive operations against Ukrainian army. By 24 April Russia moves back its troops from Ukraine border. Even the Russian Federation declared the troop retreatment, close to 80 000, Russian troops remained near various strips of the country's border with Ukraine, still the biggest force Russia has amassed there since Moscow annexed Crimea in 2014<sup>531</sup>. We will probably witness a renew of the Georgian scenario.

Hence, the annexation of Crimea will have implications for global security: "Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia will become battlefield for influence of the USA and Russia. A number of other countries and territories, including Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, the Russian North Caucasus, Crimea and the Baltic States, may also be affected by this competition<sup>532</sup>.

The second procedure of *hard power* policies is the stationary of large Russian military units on the territory of the former soviet republics. After the collapse of the USSR, many Russian military bases suddenly found themselves on the territory of the new independent countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. Despite the domestic economic problems, the Russian Federation has undertaken efforts to maintain these bases, whether it has had to recourse to renting (in Kazakhstan), military action (in Moldova and Georgia), economic and political pressure (Belarus and Armenia) or territorial annexation (Ukraine). From the ten former Soviet republics in which the Russian Federation had military bases,

---

<sup>530</sup> *Rusia a anunțat retragerea trupelor - ce înseamnă asta pentru Ucraina?*, <https://www.dw.com/ro/rusia-a-anun%C5%A3at-retragerea-trupelor-ce-%C3%AEnseamn%C4%83-asta-pentru-ucraina/a-57322586>, accessed at 06 May 2021, 14: 11.

<sup>531</sup> *80,000 Russian Troops Remain at Ukraine Border as U.S. and NATO Hold Exercises*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/05/us/politics/biden-putin-russia-ukraine.html>, accessed at 06 May 2021, 14: 31.

<sup>532</sup> Dmitrii TRENIN, *The Ukraine crisis and the resumption of great-power rivalry*, Carnegie Moscow Center. 2014, p. 2, [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/ukraine\\_great\\_power\\_rivalry2014.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/ukraine_great_power_rivalry2014.pdf), accessed at 20 April 2021, 22: 17.

Moscow “lost” only two of them, Azerbaijan (Baku and Moscow failed to negotiate the continuation of the lease of the Gabala radar station, which expired at the end of 2012) and Uzbekistan (since 2012, after Uzbekistan left the Collective Security Treaty Organization, Karshi Kanabad Air Base has been used exclusively by the Uzbek army).

Belarus currently hosts two Russian military bases, both of them are technical facilities. Communication Centre number 43 Vileyka (Minsk region) of the Russian Navy has been operating since 1964. It provides the Navy General Staff communications with the strategic nuclear submarines of the Russian Federation in the Atlantic, Indian and partly Pacific Oceans. The Vileyka base also conducts radio electronic warfare and radio technical information. The second military base, the Volga radio unit, is located near Baranavichy (Brest region). It is a missile attack warning system, capable to detect missiles and space objectives up to 4 800 kilometres range and also to track the movements of NATO submarines<sup>533</sup>.

The stationing of troops on the territory of the former Soviet republics considerably increases the capacity of the Russian Federation to project military power in these areas and ensures an important role in influencing relations with these states. The ability to project power will determine the role of the Russian Federation as a regional or global actor.

Another element of *hard power* policy used by the Russian Federation is the economic one, in the form of natural gas and oil. After the fall of the USSR, the Russian Federation sustained to supply the former Soviet republics with cheap energy. The Russian Federation offers advantageous conditions for gas and oil supplies, which allows it to develop a relationship of dependency with the former republics and increase its market share. Once it has established a relationship of reliance, the Russian Federation is able to take economic and political advantages from these states. A preferable manner to do this, is by adjusting the prices of gas contracts. When the interests of a country are contrary to the Russian Federation, prices are revised and can be increased, and vice versa, if the state is loyal to the Russian Federation the prices for natural gas can decrease. The Russian Federation claims that the former soviet republics are in its sphere of influence and use energy resources to make this influence observable. The Russian Federation establish different prices for different countries. Often, these price differences cannot be explained only from an economic perspective, such as the distance and volume of gas delivered<sup>534</sup>. One example of this would be the development of the Russian Federation’s economic relations with Central Asian

---

<sup>533</sup> Vasile ROTARU, *Adapting the military strategy. Russian hard power presence in the former soviet space after 2008*, p.132, 133, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311397039>, accessed at 18 March 2021, 22: 40.

<sup>534</sup> *Energy as a tool of foreign policy of authoritarian states, in particular Russia*, Policy Department for External Relations, Directorate General for External Policies of the Union, PE 603.868 - April 2018, p. 16, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/603868/EXPO\\_STU\(2018\)603868\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/603868/EXPO_STU(2018)603868_EN.pdf), accessed at 18 March 2021, 20: 40.

States. The Russian Federation instead to support the economic development of the region, it controls the economy through domination of export routes. The Russian Federation has been against building new pipelines which bypass its territory. However, there is a strong economic interdependence between the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. These three countries depend on Russian pipelines to export oil and natural gas, and the Russian Federation as their main economic partner, is using imported resources to increase its export to Europe, which it could not be supported from domestic production alone. This was proved by Gazprom's attitude to Turkmenistan's call for re-negotiation of the price of natural gas. After a three-month resistance to the Turkmenistan government's demands, Gazprom suddenly agreed to raise the price from \$65 to \$100 per thousand cubic meters<sup>535</sup>.

The establishment of embargoes are another the *Hard Power* policies that the Russian Federation projects in its near abroad. Since 2006, the Russian Federation has banned the imports of Moldovan and Georgian wines, thus creating a diplomatic conflict between the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, on the one hand, and the Russian Federation on the other<sup>536</sup>. In 2009, we also witnessed the "milk war" with Belarus, sanctions imposed for Belarus which do not recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Prior to the signing by Chisinau of the Association Agreement with the EU and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), the Russian Federation in 2013 established a new embargo against Moldovan wines. As Lithuania held the EU presidency and was one of the most active in the Eastern Partnership (Moldova-EU Association Agreement was signed in Vilnius), the Russian Federation also imposed an embargo on dairy products in Lithuania<sup>537</sup>.

We note that these measures are taken by the Russian Federation in case of non-subordination or attempt of states to promote their national interests without taking into account the policies of the Russian Federation.

### **3. THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION'S *SOFT POWER* POLICIES TOWARD ITS NEAR ABROAD IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE NATIONAL INTERESTS**

For the first time, the term *Soft Power* was legally adopted by the Russian Federation in the Concept of Foreign Policy, approved by the President of the Russian Federation V. Putin on February 12, 2013. In the concept was specified the position of *Soft Power* in the foreign policy, as well as the definition of this

---

<sup>535</sup>Anamaria Elena GHEORGHE, *Politica externă a Rusiei față de republicile din Asia centrală în timpul președinției lui Vladimir Putin*, P.3-10, [https://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/rescito3&div=5&id=&page=\\_](https://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/rescito3&div=5&id=&page=_), accessed at 20 March 2021, 21: 00.

<sup>536</sup> *Russian wine move draws protests*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4860454.stm>, accessed at 20 March 2021, 20: 40.

<sup>537</sup> *Putin, protecționismul și standardele duble*, <https://sic.md/de-cind-a-inceput-sa-i-placa-lui-putin-comertul-liber/>, accessed 18 March 2021, 20: 50.

term. Article 20 has been entirely devoted to this issue. Thus, the *Soft Power* was defined as “an integral part of modern foreign policy” and introduced the official definition of this term – “a comprehensive set of tools for solving foreign policy problems based on the civil society’s capabilities: information – communication, humanitarian and other alternative methods and technologies to the classical diplomacy<sup>538</sup>”. In this regard, the Russian Federation’s government has developed a wide range of public diplomacy institutions whose objective are to coordinate the use of *Soft Power* tools in Russian foreign policy.

The main institution of the Russian *Soft Power* is the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation (Rossotrudnichestvo), which was established by decree of the President of the Russian Federation from 09/06/2008 on the basis of the Russian Foreign Centre (Roszarubezhtsentr). As a result, a number of non - profit organizations have recently been established in the Russian Federation, which have been unofficially called upon to become leaders of Russian *Soft Power*. These are: “The Russian World Foundation” (Russkiy Mir), the movement “World without Nazism”, “The Foundation for the Support and Protection of the Rights of Compatriots Living Abroad” and “The Foundation for Cooperation in the Russian-Language Press”. The main areas of activity of these non-profit organizations are: dissemination and popularization of the Russian language and culture, support for compatriots living abroad, assistance in disseminating objective information about the modern Russian Federation, support for the export of Russian educational services<sup>539</sup>.

In addition, for the expansion of the Russian *Soft Power* work the expert platforms and thinktanks such as: The World Public Forum “Dialogue of Civilizations”, the International Discussion Club “Valdai”, the Fund for Public Diplomacy A.M. Gorchakov, Council for Foreign and Defence Policy, Institute for Democracy and Cooperation, Russian Council on International Affairs. The leadership of the Russian Federation has also performed a great effort to strengthen the presence of the Russian Federation in the global information space: was created the international news channel Russia Today (2005), was activated the international broadcasting of the renewed agencies Russia Segodnya and was launched Sputnik multimedia hub<sup>540</sup>.

The case of Republic of Moldova is one of best example which can prove how the Russian Federation managed to influence the population in its near abroad through the levers of *Soft Power* policies. Thus, Moldavian television audience

---

<sup>538</sup> Концепция внешней политики Российской Федерации от 12.02.2013, [http://archive.mid.ru/brp\\_4.nsf/0/6D84DDEDEDBF7DA644257B160051BF7F](http://archive.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/6D84DDEDEDBF7DA644257B160051BF7F), accessed at 27 March 2021, 20:50.

<sup>539</sup> Вера Дмитриевна АГЕЕВА, Роль инструментов «Мягкой Силы» во внешней политике Российской Федерации в контексте глобализации, Санкт-Петербург, 2016, с.131-133.

<sup>540</sup> Mihai-Cristian STANCU, Războiul informațional. Studiu de caz: Rolul „Russia Today” pentru acoperirea misiunii executate de către Federația Rusă în estul Ucrainei, în perioada mai 2014 - februarie 2015, Buletinul Universității Naționale de Apărare „Carol I”, Decembrie, 2019, p. 52.

mainly watch Russian broadcasts, which have already overwhelmed the popularity of local media. Channel I of the Russian Federation's Central TV had become the most popular TV channel in Moldova and has the highest audience. So, the information domination of the Russian Federation is best demonstrated by the fact that in March 2009 in the opinion polls in the Republic of Moldavia, Putin and Medvedev were the most popular politicians, surpassing the Moldovan politicians<sup>541</sup>.

Through the media, the Russian Federation managed to ensure its presence on the Moldovan political stage, replacing Ukraine as the closest virtual neighbor of Moldova. The Russian Federation was also criticized for seeking in 2000-2008 to use various *Soft Power* levers in the Baltic States. These *Soft Power* levers targeted ethnic Russians living in these republics, carrying out information operations and propaganda, representing the Baltic leadership as neo-fascists and Russophobes, as well as the exercise of political pressure<sup>542</sup>.

Another tool of *Soft Power* is digital diplomacy. Through digital diplomacy Russia is communicating with its near abroad by promoting a state narrative about its foreign policy. Thus, in 2011 was launched an updated, more modern version of the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Also, where established social networks (Vkontakte, Facebook, Twitter) and was activated digital diplomacy of top officials (the account of Deputy Minister G. Gatilov on Twitter, page of the press secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs M. Zakharova on Facebook). As a result, out of 252 institutions of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 143 have Facebook pages, 157 have Twitter accounts, and 24 have YouTube channels, 4 institutions have Instagram accounts<sup>543</sup>.

Of course, his positive dynamics undoubtedly increased the expansion of the Russian presence in the its near abroad information space. In this manner Russia has proven capable of impacting ex-soviet republic politics by exploiting provocative and inflammatory information.

As *Soft Power* policies are used the Russian Federation government's so-called peace initiatives to solve frozen conflicts. Thus, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Kozak is the author of the well-known memorandum of 2003 ("Kozak plan"), which proposed for the settlement of the Transnistrian dispute "federalizing the Republic of Moldova" and "stationing Russian troops until 2023". At that time, Chisinau officials refused to sign this agreement, which resulted in the first economic embargo imposed by Moscow for the export of Moldovan wines (*Hard Power* policy toward Moldova). Many experts said that

---

<sup>541</sup> Juhan Kivirähk, Nerijus Maliukevičius, *The "humanitarian dimension" of Russian Foreign Policy Toward Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and the Baltic States*, Center for East European Policy Studies, The 2nd, supplementary edition, Riga, 2010, p. 239.

<sup>542</sup> Agnia GRIGAS, *Legacies, Coercion and Soft Power: Russian Influence in the Baltic States*, P.5, [https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Russia%20and%20Eurasia/0812bp\\_grigas.pdf](https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Russia%20and%20Eurasia/0812bp_grigas.pdf), accessed at 18 March 2021, 21: 50.

<sup>543</sup> Вера Дмитриевна АГЕЕВА, *Роль инструментов «Мягкой Силы» во внешней политике Российской Федерации в контексте глобализации*, Санкт-Петербург, 2016, с.168-169.

Moldova would have disappeared as a state if in 2003 the authorities had signed the so-called “Kozak plan”<sup>544</sup>. Actually, following the same pattern, the Russian leadership is recommending the federalization of Ukraine as a solution for “Ukrainian problem”<sup>545</sup>.

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) is considered to be one of the effective *Soft Power* tool for spreading Russian interests in countries that Moscow believes would fall within its sphere of influence. In the Republic of Moldova, for example ROC has a great influence, because the majority of the population is Christian-Orthodox, the Metropolitan Church of Moldova is under the canonical jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate, and the Church enjoys a high degree of trust from Moldovans<sup>546</sup>.

It is important to remark that the *Soft Power* policies of the Russian Federation are used jointly with *Hard Power* policies. Thus, for example, in preparation for the annexation of Crimea and the launching of separatist military operations in the eastern regions of Ukraine, these measures included activities such as:

- Encouraging the dissatisfaction of the Russian diaspora with the central authorities by using political, diplomatic and media instruments;
- Reinforcement of local separatist movements and increase of ethnic, religious and social tensions;
- Dynamic use of information measures against the Ukrainian government and state;
- Recruitment of politicians, local administration officials, Armed Forces officers and attracting them on the side of the Russian Federation;
- Establishing contacts with oligarchs and businessmen, submitting them offers from the Russian Federation;
- Establishing contacts with local criminal groups, etc.

After lesson learned from Crimean annexation it become more evident the Russian Federation involvement in internal affairs of its neighbour states. For example, this is proved in the investigation of the centre “Досье” (File): “How the Kremlin interferes in the internal politics of neighboring countries. Kremlin Mamalyga”<sup>547</sup>. Officially, in the Russian president administration is one

---

<sup>544</sup> *Ce prevede așa-numitul plan Kozak. Mai mulți politicieni l-au considerat catastrofal pentru Moldova*, [https://www.publika.md/ce-prevede-asa-numitul-plan-kozak-mai-multi-politicieni-l-au-considerat-catastrofal-pentru-moldova\\_3044580.html](https://www.publika.md/ce-prevede-asa-numitul-plan-kozak-mai-multi-politicieni-l-au-considerat-catastrofal-pentru-moldova_3044580.html), accessed at 05 May 2021, 17: 16.

<sup>545</sup> *Путин назвал условия решения "украинской проблемы"*, <https://tsn.ua/ru/politika/federalizaciya-i-otkaz-ot-nato-putin-nazval-usloviya-resheniya-ukrainskoy-problemy-1166283.html>, accessed at 11 May 2021, 20: 31.

<sup>546</sup> *Evoluția politicii externe a Republicii Moldova (1998-2008)*, Ch.: Cartdidact, 2009, p. 86, [http://www.ape.md/wp-content/uploads/public/publications/987156\\_md\\_studiu\\_\\_\\_politi.pdf](http://www.ape.md/wp-content/uploads/public/publications/987156_md_studiu___politi.pdf), accessed at 05 May 2021, 16: 55.

<sup>547</sup> *Как Кремль вмешивается во внутреннюю политику соседних стран, Часть пятая: «Кремлевская мамалыга»*, <https://dossier.center/mld/?fbclid=IwAR2MChv2s5uvj2s4ELR2oqCMYQdw6GnC66Qw4ext6kjZsSHMhj4La69g-e0>, accessed at 05 May 2021, 14:10.

directorate called “The President’s Office for Interregional and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries”<sup>548</sup>. But it doesn’t smell of any “cultural” connections, and among the employees there are only former people from the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR).<sup>549</sup>

However, working documents of the head of The President’s Office for Interregional and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, suggest the opposite: the Kremlin has not only created an extensive network of agents of influence in the former soviet countries, but also actively intervenes in the parliamentary elections in Georgia, lures the opposition and recruits politicians, public figures and journalists in Armenia, Azerbaijan<sup>550</sup> and in Moldova holds some political circles under the strong influence of the Kremlin, especially when it comes to the foreign policy steps of Chisinau<sup>551</sup>. The same investigations reveals that the Military Academy of the General Staff of the Russian Federation, developed a methodological reference for Moldova titled “Prospects for the use of “soft power” by the Russian Federation in relation to the Republic of Moldova”, specifying that there are broad opportunities for influencing the situation in the country.

Actually, the *Soft Power* of Russian Federation goes behind the definition stated in the Concept of Foreign Policy. Officially, Russian Federation declare that it does not interfere in neighbor countries affairs, but in reality, he Kremlin, obsessed with the fear of the orange revolutions and the struggle against the West, is constantly meddling in the internal affairs of its neighbors. This is not a matter of Russian interests. The Kremlin is trying to influence the internal politics of countries whose independence do not respect and whom it considers as subordinates. For Russia, as a country, such interference is not valuable. As a result, Russia has no allies but enemies.

## CONCLUSIONS

In order to project its national interests in the near abroad, the Russian Federation embrace a broad spectrum of policies: from the use of *Hard* to *Soft* policies.

After the USSR collapse, the Russian Federation continues to keep the inherited military arsenal deployed on the territory of the neighboring States. This

---

<sup>548</sup> Подразделения Администрации Президента, <http://www.kremlin.ru/structure/administration/departments>, accessed at 05 May 2021, ora 14:30.

<sup>549</sup> Михаил Ходорковский, [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=3395352297179595&id=107335412647983](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=3395352297179595&id=107335412647983), accessed at 05 May 2021, 14: 50.

<sup>550</sup> Как Кремль вмешивается во внутреннюю политику соседних стран, Часть пятая: «Кремлевская мамалыга», <https://dossier.center/mld/?fbclid=IwAR2MChv2s5uvj2s4ELR2oqCMyQdw6GnC66Qw4ext6kjZsSHMhj4La69g-e0>, accessed at 05 May 2021, 14: 30.

<sup>551</sup> Центр «Досье» рассказал о кремлевских кураторах президента Молдовы Игоря Додона и «молдавском отделе» АП РФ, <https://cyprus-daily.news/tsentr-dose-rasskazal-o-kremlevskih-kuratorah-prezidenta-moldovy-igorya-dodona-i-moldavskom-otdele-ap-rf/>, accessed at 05 May 2021, 15: 00.

enables the development/promotion of external policies using the *Hard Power* procedures.

The policies of the Russian Federation intent to disintegrate the former Soviet republics, recognized as sovereign at international level (Republic of Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine) by using the *Hard Power* policies violating repeatedly the provisions of international law (and not sanctioned by the UN or International Community).

The Russian Federation also uses the “energy weapon” and economic instruments to promote its foreign policy interests in near abroad.

The influence of the *Soft Power* policies of the Russian Federation is very difficult to be measured. They are associated with intangible resources such as culture, language or ideology, as well as the ability to use them skillfully to win allies by attraction rather than coercion. Although the Russian Federation has influential channels of soft power in former soviet states, such as access to its labor market, language proximity, a common culture and huge energy resources, it has not been able to substantially increase its attractiveness among the neighboring countries.

The *Hard Power* and *Soft Power* policies of the Russian Federation against the former Soviet republics led to chronic economic crises, the partition of civil societies into pro-east and pro-west camps, the antagonistic activation of Russian minorities in these areas.

The Russian Federation adopts *Hard* and *Soft* policies to maintain its military and economic influence in its near abroad and to prevent the influence of the US, NATO and EU in these areas, tagging them as a threat to its own national security.

The main effort of the Russian Federation in this respect is to maintain strategic positions in its near abroad.

The *Hard* and *Soft* power policies of the Russian Federation in its near abroad areas after the annexation of Crimea in February 2014 and recently in April 2021, demonstrate to international community that they have also generated effects outside these areas with an impact on global security.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BÎZU C., MATEI G., *Conflictele înghețate: instrument de putere al Kremlinului în regiunea extinsă a Mării Neagre*, INFOSFERA, Anul XII nr. 1/2020 Revistă de studii de securitate și informații pentru apărare.
- *Ce animă conflictul din Nagorno-Karabah?*, <https://www.dw.com/ro/ce-anim%C4%83-conflictul-din-nagorno-karabah/a-55092763>.
- *Ce prevede așa-numitul plan Kozak. Mai mulți politicieni l-au considerat catastrofal pentru Moldova*, <https://www.publika.md/ce-prevede-asa->

- numitul-plan-kozak-mai-multi-politicieni-l-au-considerat-catastrofal-pentru-moldova\_3044580.html.
- DONOVAN G.T., Jr., *Russian Operational Art in the Russo-Georgian War Of 2008*, USAWC CLASS of 2009.
  - *Energy as a tool of foreign policy of authoritarian states, in particular Russia*, Policy Department for External Relations, Directorate General for External Policies of the Union, PE 603.868 - April 2018, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/603868/EXPO\\_STU\(2018\)603868\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/603868/EXPO_STU(2018)603868_EN.pdf).
  - *Evoluția politicii externe a Republicii Moldova (1998-2008)*, Ch.: Cartdidact, 2009, [http://www.ape.md/wp-content/uploads/public/publications/987156\\_md\\_studiu\\_\\_\\_politi.pdf](http://www.ape.md/wp-content/uploads/public/publications/987156_md_studiu___politi.pdf);
  - GHEORGHE A.E., *Politica externă a Rusiei față de republicile din asia centrală în timpul președinției lui Vladimir Putin*, <https://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/rescito3&div=5&id=&page=>.
  - GREENE S., *Engaging History: The Problems and Politics of Memory in Russia and the Post-Soviet Space*, Carnegie Moscow Center, Moscow, 2010. (Working Paper; iss. 2).
  - GRIGAS A., *Legacies, Coercion and Soft Power: Russian Influence in the Baltic States*, [https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Russia%20and%20Eurasia/0812bp\\_grigas.pdf](https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Russia%20and%20Eurasia/0812bp_grigas.pdf).
  - KIVIRÄHK J., MALIUKEVIČIUS N., *The “humanitarian dimension” of Russian Foreign Policy Toward Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and the Baltic States*, Center for East European Policy Studies, The 2nd, supplementary edition, Riga, 2010;
  - *Putin, protecționismul și standardele duble*, <https://sic.md/de-cind-a-inceput-sa-i-placa-lui-putin-comertul-liber/>.
  - ROTARU V., *Adapting the military strategy. Russian hard power presence in the former soviet space after 2008*, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311397039>.
  - *Rusia a anunțat retragerea trupelor - ce înseamnă asta pentru Ucraina?*, <https://www.dw.com/ro/rusia-a-anun%C5%A3at-retragerea-trupelor-ce-%C3%AEnseamn%C4%83-asta-pentru-ucraina/a-57322586>.
  - *Russian wine move draws protests*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4860454.stm>.
  - *80,000 Russian Troops Remain at Ukraine Border as U.S. and NATO Hold Exercises*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/05/us/politics/biden-putin-russia-ukraine.html>.
  - SHEVEL O., *Russia and the Near Abroad*. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274385776>.

- STANCU M.C., *Războiul informațional. Studiu de caz: Rolul „Russia Today” pentru acoperirea misiunii executate de către Federația Rusă în estul Ucrainei, în perioada mai 2014 - februarie 2015*, Buletinul Universității Naționale de Apărare „Carol I”, Decembrie, 2019.
- TRENIN D., *The Ukraine crisis and the resumption of great-power rivalry*, Carnegie Moscow Center, 2014, [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/ukraine\\_great\\_power\\_rivalry2014.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/ukraine_great_power_rivalry2014.pdf).
- Вера Дмитриевна АГЕЕВА, *Роль инструментов «Мягкой Силы» во внешней политике Российской Федерации в контексте глобализации*, Санкт-Петербург, 2016.
- Ю. В. ДУБИНИН, *Дипломатический марафон. Записки руководителя Государственной делегации Российской Федерации на переговорах с Украиной в 1992 – 1999 гг.* - Москва: Колос. 2009.
- В.Н. БАРАНЕЦ, *Генштаб без тайн*, Москва: Вагриус, 1999.
- Збигнев БЖЕЗИНСКИЙ, *Великая шахматная доска*, Издательский дом: Международные отношения, 1998.
- «Ближнее зарубежье хочет быть дальним», Независимая газета. 1992. 9 июня. № 108 (278).
- Д. ТРЕНИН, *Post-imperium: евразийская история*, Москва: Российская политическая энциклопедия (РОССПЭН), 2012.
- Е. М. ПРИМАКОВ, *Международные отношения накануне XXI века: проблемы и перспективы*, Междунар. Жизнь, 1996, № 10.
- В. И. ВАРЕННИКОВ, *Неповторимое, часть IX. Трагедия отечества 1985-2000 гг.*, Москва: Советский писатель, 2001, [http://militera.lib.ru/memo/russian/varennikov\\_vi01/index.html](http://militera.lib.ru/memo/russian/varennikov_vi01/index.html);
- *Концепция внешней политики Российской Федерации от 12.02.2013*, [http://archive.mid.ru//brp\\_4.nsf/0/6D84DDEDEDBF7DA644257B160051BF7F](http://archive.mid.ru//brp_4.nsf/0/6D84DDEDEDBF7DA644257B160051BF7F).
- *Как Кремль вмешивается во внутреннюю политику соседних стран, Часть пятая: «Кремлевская мамалыга»*, <https://dossier.center/mld/?fbclid=IwAR2MChv2s5uvj2s4ELR2oqCMYQdw6GnC66Qw4ext6kjZsSHMhj4La69g-e0>.
- *Подразделения Администрации Президента*, <http://www.kremlin.ru/structure/administration/departments>.
- *Михаил Ходорковский*, [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=3395352297179595&id=107335412647983](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=3395352297179595&id=107335412647983).
- *Как Кремль вмешивается во внутреннюю политику соседних стран, Часть пятая: «Кремлевская мамалыга»*, <https://dossier.center/mld/?fbclid=IwAR2MChv2s5uvj2s4ELR2oqCMYQdw6GnC66Qw4ext6kjZsSHMhj4La69g-e0>.

- *Центр «Досье» рассказал о кремлевских кураторах президента Молдовы Игоря Додона и «молдавском отделе» АП РФ, <https://cyprus-daily.news/tsentr-dose-rasskazal-o-kremlevskih-kuratorah-prezidenta-moldovy-igorya-dodona-i-moldavskom-otdele-ap-rf/>.*