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Sharp power – introduction to the issue

Since the development of the first Greek polis, political communities have sought effective tools to influence both their enemies and allies. The result of this centuries-old experience is the emergence of many models of state power in relation with other entities on the international arena. This article focuses on presenting a new kind of state power, namely *sharp power*. An attempt was made to define this phenomenon, present its characteristic manifestations. Moreover, methods to mitigate its negative effects on the security of the Republic of Poland were proposed.

The authors' analysis of the issue related to the state power and its various forms leads to a hypothesis that we are currently witnessing the formation of another type of influence of political regimes on entities of international relations, combining elements of coercion and manipulation. Such a policy defies classification into the categories known so far namely hard, soft and smart power.

There are many different definitions of a state power.¹ The one by John G. Stoessinger is considered classic. According to the American researcher, this term means "(...) the ability of a state to use its resources(...) in a way that will influence the behaviour of other states"² This way of understanding, despite being generic, indicates the need for political elites to have an economic, ideological or cultural base that will constitute the foundation for effective influence on other states. At the same time, the author of the aforementioned definition assumes the need for decision-makers to have in-depth knowledge of the possibilities of influencing the activity of other entities

¹ The authors of the article do not analyse the works to date in the theory of state power and its various forms. They only present the most representative theories.

² J.G. Stoessinger, *The Might of Nations. World Politics in Our Times*, New York 1969, pp. 26–27.

of international relations. It is worth noting that Stoessinger did not specify what exactly do “resources influencing other states” imply. This lack of precision resulted in the widespread use of the terms soft power and hard power in the literature on the subject. These terms were coined by the American Joseph S. Nye, author of numerous publications on security and international politics. The concept of soft power was to be a response of Western countries to the military threat posed by the USSR. The American scientist came to the conclusion, modifying the earlier idea of Zbigniew Brzeziński, who compared the international policy to the game of chess,³ that international competition is currently conducted on three planes simultaneously. Namely, military power, economic power and soft power, i.e. the ability to shape the preferences of other entities of international relations.⁴ The deployment of soft power is identified mainly with democratic states. Simply put, it is about encouraging - by means of persuasion - the participants in international relations to accept the actions of a given country. According to Nye, a country's soft power rests on three types of resources: its culture, its political values and the foreign policies it implements.⁵

The cultural factor is linked in this case with the attractiveness of the culture of a given country, which is manifested, inter alia, in the held onto and promoted universal values. This does not mean, however, that one can equate soft power with mass culture, which is one of the possible ways of transmitting ideas. For this reason, this aspect of impact should be considered more broadly and include, for example, scientific exchange or business cooperation.⁶ Regarding the other two elements of soft power, Nye wrote: “(...) domestic or foreign policies that appear hypocritical, arrogant, indifferent to others' views, or based on a narrow conception of national interests can undermine soft power (...) Government can attract or repel by the influence of its example.”⁷ Yet it should be emphasized that any attempts by the political regime to take full control of soft power will face serious obstacles - especially in the liberal democracy. This is due to the fact that a large part of soft power is dispersed among various types of social entities (media, NGOs, entertainment industry, artistic environment, etc.) which remain beyond the reach of the authorities.⁸

The opposite of soft power strategy is hard power. Nye defined hard power as the potential resulting from geopolitical and economic factors.⁹ It focuses on incentives and threats to use force in international relations. Thus, in this strategy there is no question of an indirect influence through culture or values, but rather of exerting an

³ See Z. Brzeziński, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, New York 1997.

⁴ J.S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power. Jak osiągnąć sukces w polityce światowej*, Warszawa 2007, pp. 33–34.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 43–44.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

actual influence on others. For this reason, hard power remains mainly the domain of authoritarian regimes whose institutional and legal solutions as well as the values promoted are not attractive to other countries. It should also be noted that soft power and hard power sometimes enhance each other, but sometimes they collide with each other. However, it cannot be clearly indicated which of the above-mentioned approaches is more effective. Analysing these issues, Nye advanced the thesis that it is possible to combine the effectiveness of actions on the international scene with the ability to benefit from both strategies. Such an approach resulted in the development of the concept of smart power.

Smart power should be understood as the effective integration of soft and hard power elements.¹⁰ This strategy requires the decision-makers to be skilful in using the available foreign policy instruments, adapted both to the existing international situation and the possessed potential for action. This applies in particular to the ability to adapt to current events, coordination of activities between individual state institutions (including a clear demarcation of their competences), the existence of an efficient information flow and appropriate procedures for reacting to potential problems.¹¹

What is sharp power?

The end of the Cold War and, above all, the Ukrainian conflict that started in 2014 revealed a new trend in the methods and measures used by countries to pursue their interests in the international community. These activities defy traditional classification into hard power and soft power strategies. American researchers Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig were the first to notice this in 2017 in the article “The meaning of sharp power. How authoritarian states project influence.”¹² In their publication, they indicated the growing activity of authoritarian countries on the international scene, which differs from the activities hitherto described by Western countries as elements of soft power. Its aim is not to increase the attractiveness of one’s own image, but to manipulate public moods - especially in terms of perceiving the values characteristic of a democratic state of law. American researchers coined the term sharp power, which means penetrating the information and political environment of a selected country in order to discredit it in the eyes of the national and foreign public opinion. (The original quote reads: “Authoritarian influence efforts are ‘sharp’ in the sense that they pierce, penetrate, or perforate the political and information environments in the targeted

¹⁰ CSIS Commission on smart power: a smarter, more secure America, R.L. Armitage, J.S. Nye Jr. (ed.), Washington 2007, p. 7.

¹¹ J. Sadłocha, “Pomiędzy miękką a twardą siłą: smart power”, *Wrocławskie Studia Politologiczne* 2012, vol. 13, pp. 38–40.

¹² Ch. Walker, J. Ludwig, “The meaning of sharp power. How authoritarian states project influence”, *Foreign Affairs*, 16 XI 2017, foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2017-11-16/meaning-sharp-power [access: 14 VI 2021].

countries.”)¹³ In the opinion of the authors of the discussed article, examples of authoritarian regimes using sharp power are the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China. The purpose of their activity is not to “win the hearts and minds” but to induce or fuel animosity among the citizens of Western countries. At the same time, Walker and Ludwig draw attention to the lack of adequate defence mechanisms of the West against the actions taken by authoritarian regimes. The researchers postulate, first of all, to expose hostile information operations and to raise public awareness of this.¹⁴ An important contribution to the sharp power discourse is another article by Nye, namely “How sharp power threatens soft power. The right and wrong ways to respond to authoritarian influence.”¹⁵ It was a response to a publication by Walker and Ludwig. In the opinion of the American scientist, sharp power is not a previously unknown phenomenon. In his opinion, it is a new term for information warfare. Nye additionally observes that sharp power is not an activity that is unique to authoritarian regimes. This strategy is also used by democratic countries, an example of which was the US policy towards the USSR during the Cold War. Moreover, the American political scientist warns the West against trying to use sharp power against authoritarian regimes. It puts Western democracies at risk of losing their credibility and lowering their own soft power potential. Therefore, according to Nye, the most important thing in counteracting sharp power is that liberal democracies maintain relative openness in their contacts with autocratic states. In this context, primarily civil society institutions have an important role to play (including the mass media, academia, non-governmental organizations), which should disseminate knowledge about information warfare techniques.

There are also critical opinions in the debate devoted to sharp power. The author of one of them is Xin Liu, who in the article “What sharp power? It’s nothing but ‘unsmart’ power” disagrees with Walker and Nye’s viewpoint that it is a completely qualitatively new phenomenon.¹⁶ In her mind, sharp power is the result of unsuccessful implementation of smart power, i.e. unskilled combination of soft and hard power elements.

Summarizing the perceptions on sharp power so far, it should be stated that the view according to which this is purely a new term, defining an already recognised threat, which is information warfare, may raise serious doubts. It is true that information manipulation is the main component of sharp power, but it is not the only tool used in this strategy. Later in the article, other methods of this concept will be discussed, which are not only limited to moves made in the information space.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ J.S. Nye Jr., “How sharp power threatens soft power. The right and wrong ways to respond to authoritarian influence”, *Foreign Affairs*, 24 I 2018, foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-01-24/how-sharp-power-threatens-soft-power [access: 14 VI 2021].

¹⁶ Xin Liu, “What sharp power? It’s nothing but ‘unsmart’ power”, *USC Center on Public Diplomacy*, 15 XI 2018, uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/what-sharp-power-it-s-nothing-unsmart-power [access: 10 V 2021].

One should agree with Nye's stance that sharp power is not the exclusive domain of authoritarian regimes. As the American scientist rightly pointed out, this strategy is also used by the democratic authorities. However, it is worth considering why countries with authoritarian tendencies decide more on this strategy. According to the authors of this article the nature of the liberal socio-political system bears the greatest significance. Its openness is used by authoritarian regimes to carry out sharp power intrusions. Openness should be understood as such features of liberal democracy as: freedom of speech, free media market, political pluralism, meaning the possibility of establishing political parties not under the influence of authorities, the existence of an independent sector of non-governmental organizations, etc. Due to the lack of these elements or their strict supervision in autocratic regimes, governments in democratic countries have significantly limited opportunities to undertake similar sharp power initiatives. An additional factor preventing liberal democracies from applying this strategy is the fear of sparking off a serious political crisis. Supposing the mass media discloses such activities carried out by a democratic government it could cause strong public criticism of the authorities and in an extreme case even necessitate snap elections.

To sum up, sharp power can therefore be defined as **aggressive actions of the state carried out with the use of methods imitating soft power elements in order to manipulate the image of a given country (or other entities of international relations) or to destabilize its socio-political system, or to force certain actions by its authorities.**¹⁷

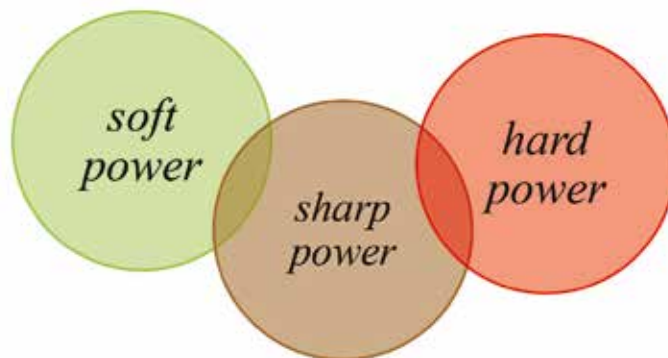


Fig. 1. The position of sharp power with regard to soft power and hard power.

Source: Own elaboration.

¹⁷ Extracts in bold have been highlighted by the authors (ed.).

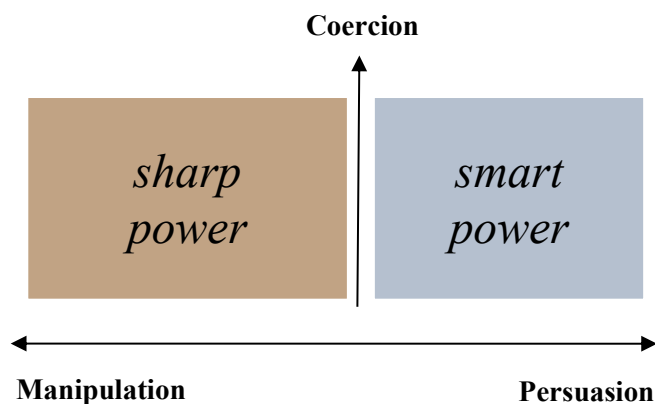


Fig. 2. The position of sharp power with regard to smart power.

Source: Own elaboration.

Methods of exercising sharp power

Countries use various economic, political, military and diplomatic instruments characteristic of soft and hard power to pursue sharp power strategy. The list presented below is not a complete catalogue. However, these methods are currently predominantly chosen by countries that decide to undertake this type of action.

Information warfare

The basic method used within sharp power is information warfare. Its major significance is connected with the global revolution of information and communication technology and the development of network societies. The result of these processes is a rapid increase in the role of the Internet in gaining information and in interpersonal communication. Information warfare makes it possible to reach a large audience with a specific message (e.g. via social media, online television and message board). At the same time, the aggressor remains anonymous (due to the multitude of entities operating in the information space, it is difficult to indicate the true author). Moreover, it allows to conceal the real intentions of the sender under the guise of providing reliable data or a different point of view on a specific topic. An important feature of information warfare is also the relatively low cost of its waging (this is related, inter alia, to the fact that currently the main area of information warfare is the Internet). Additionally, it constitutes the main backing for other activities used within sharp power, significantly increasing their effectiveness.

In this article, the authors adopt the definition of information warfare formulated by Robert Rajczyk, as a long-term, multistranded communication process, the purpose of which is to gain an information advantage over the opponent, e.g. by influencing national and foreign public opinion, lowering morale and cultivating conformism among a hostile society, as well as exercising public diplomacy.¹⁸

The term “information warfare” should be understood broadly. It does not mean generating propaganda and disinformation only during an armed conflict, but may also include aggressive informational undertakings carried out during peace time.¹⁹ Information warfare might involve:

- making public (e.g. via WikiLeaks copycat websites) sensitive information, captured from private PCs and mobile phones belonging to politicians, government or military officials, and officers of uniformed services;
- conducting disinformation activities on the Internet, e.g. on social networking sites by fictitious groups of users (so-called trolls);
- using agents of influence to manipulate the views of political decision-makers, pressure groups and opinion-makers;
- creating media (radio, television, newspapers, web portals) friendly to the manipulating country;
- projecting a negative image of a given country by the mass media of the manipulating country (including the mass media of neighbouring countries for the purpose of hostile information activities);
- blocking state websites or replacing published content;
- discrediting the ideology, social values or system of governing solutions functioning in a given country;
- destroying optical-fiber or telecommunications networks in order to prevent the transmission of information.

Since the Ukrainian crisis which began in 2014, the information warfare waged by the Russian Federation towards the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland, has been escalating. Russia’s main goals include creating a negative image of the region and inflaming tensions in its relations with partners from the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance. Poland, as a close ally of the USA and an important member of the EU and NATO, is perceived by the Kremlin as one of the key masterminds of international initiatives aimed against the interests of the Russian Federation. Moscow may engage pro-Russian Polish journalists, scientists, politicians and social activists in information campaigns directed against the Republic of Poland. In addition, Moscow benefits from the support of entities responsible for promoting Russia’s interests abroad, as well as representing the Russian minority.

¹⁸ See R. Rajczyk, *Nowoczesne wojny informacyjne*, Warszawa 2016, p. 29.

¹⁹ For more on the differences in defining information warfare by NATO and by the Russian side, see K. Giles, *Handbook of Russia information warfare*, Rome 2016, pp. 3–13.

Providing support to political entities and social organizations that fit into the sharp power strategy of the manipulator-state

Another important sharp power objective is to support the activity of political organizations and social environments that lobby for the manipulator-state or that may destabilize the situation in a given country. The most frequently used methods include:

- **multidirectional pressure** - consisting in exerting political, economic, military or diplomatic pressure on the authorities of a given country in order to force them to make concessions to entities acting in the interest of the manipulator-state (this may include introducing legal solutions favourable to the activity of such organizations, e.g. entry in the register of political parties);
- **economic aid** - including both legal and bound by law possibilities of supporting such entities (e.g. donations, research grants, real estate rental), as well as illegal methods used by the manipulator-state. Most often - as in the case of money laundering crime - they involve the use of straw persons, i.e. natural or legal persons who are to cover the real origin of financial resources. In order to make it impossible to trace the sources of financing, accounts are also often created in banks operating in the territory of the manipulator-state, in which money is transferred to a given entity and then paid by its representatives;
- **propaganda and disinformation activity** - i.e. all information activities carried out by the manipulator-state in order to create positive opinions about the supported entity or discredit the image of the authorities of the country in which it operates (e.g. information campaigns on the Internet, black PR, maintaining official contacts by diplomatic representatives of the manipulator-state with the given entity).

An example of a type of sharp power discussed above could be the information indicating that Russia and China might have been supporting Catalan separatists. According to media reports, the Spanish police were to investigate the involvement of Russian intelligence in inspiring Catalan nationalists to protest and resist the central government in Madrid. An officer of the Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (GU) was to contact Victor Terradellas in 2017, who, as an advisor to the then Prime Minister of Catalonia, Carles Puigdemont, exerted pressure on him to proclaim independence by this region. On the basis of digital correspondence, the Spanish law enforcement agencies were to establish that Terradellas assured the Catalan politician of Vladimir Putin's support and of the possibility of granting financial aid allegedly promised by China.²⁰ The aim of Russia's actions might have been an attempt to destabilize the situation inside the EU, which would indirectly weaken its position in relations with Russia.

²⁰ M. Kucharczyk, "Czy Rosja wspierała katalońskich niepodległościowców?", *Euractiv*, 28 XI 2011, euractiv.pl/section/demokracja/news/czy-rosja-wspierała-katalońskich-niepodleglosciowcow [access: 15 V 2021].

History politics

Sharp power strategy employs more and more often history politics. Yet, it is not solely about the promotion of a certain vision of history by the authorities of a given country, as historical issues have always been used for political games on the international arena. In the case of sharp power, politics of history does not involve popularization of a specific interpretation of history, but its deliberate falsification and denial of facts that are commonly accepted in historiography.

An example of this type of activity is the present history politics of the Russian Federation concerning the outbreak and the events of World War II. One of its elements is the so-called “monument war” waged against Poland. The pretext for starting it by Moscow was the introduction of the so-called decommunization act by the Polish parliament on 1 April 2016, especially its amendment from June 2017. As a consequence of these resolutions, Russia accuses Poland of destroying the cemeteries of Soviet soldiers who fought with Nazi Germany during World War II. The Kremlin’s goal is to slander the image of the Republic of Poland in the eyes of international opinion, which results in the loss of credibility of the authorities in Warsaw and the weakening of the unity of NATO and the EU. It is also about increasing hostility towards Poland among the Russian society. The reason for this animosity is the alleged lack of gratitude of the Polish nation for the sacrifices made by the Russians during the liberation of our country from German occupation.

Another priority of the Russian politics of history is the attempt to attribute the responsibility for the outbreak of World War II to Poland. In this context, the Russian side points to the allegedly pugnacious policy of the Republic of Poland between 1918 and 1939 and the refusal of the Polish authorities to cooperate with the USSR. Simultaneously, it diminishes the role of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact in defining the Soviet and Nazi spheres of influence in Central and Eastern Europe. Moreover, the Kremlin holds Poland responsible for the Holocaust. The Russian side considers an argument which supports the later stance is the fact that the German extermination camps were built in the occupied territory of the Polish Republic by the Third Reich. All these examples serve to whitewash the history of the USSR and at the same time create a negative image of Poland as a Nazi and anti-Semitic country.²¹

Manipulation of the conduct and outcome of elections in a given country

An important tool of the sharp power strategy is to convince the citizens of a given country that the political regime in power is deprived of adequate social legitimacy.

²¹ For more on the topic of Russian politics of history, see J. Darczewska, “‘Wojny pamięci’: historia, polityka i służby specjalne Federacji Rosyjskiej”, *Przegląd Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego* 2019, no. 11, pp. 13–41.

The most effective method of achieving this goal is to undermine the credibility of the election process itself and to convince people that its outcomes were fabricated. Such activities may include, inter alia, mass dissemination of fake news regarding the interference of a foreign country in the election process, anomalies in the vote count, etc. The manipulator state may also, for example, inspire social protests denying the results of the presidential or parliamentary elections.

Direct influence on the outcome of elections, is also possible e.g. by means of actions targeted at specific candidates or political parties. These may include:

- cyberattacks targeting election infrastructure with the aim of tampering with the number of votes cast;
- using the so-called proxies (e.g. NGOs) which disseminate critical opinions about specific candidates or political parties;
- spreading fake news on the Internet (social media, message board, news portals);
- media attacks carried out by the mass media of the manipulator-state.

The presidential campaign in the USA in 2016 might be an example of interference in the election process, which is an element of the sharp power strategy. There are indications that Russia was trying to create a negative media coverage about the American political system, undermining the credibility of Hillary Clinton - the Democratic party presidential candidate and to support Donald Trump in achieving victory.²²

Scientific cooperation

Scientific cooperation is another tool used by countries to pursue sharp power strategy. Most often it will be used to perform influence operations in the academic environment of a given country. The strategic goal is to create an expert lobby which will promote the interests of the manipulator-state, e.g. among representatives of the political elite, or to publicly criticize the actions taken by state authorities. The implementation of this plan may consist in organizing study trips to the manipulator-state or awarding scholarships for young people and university employees. In this way, future agents of influence can be selected who after having achieved social and professional position can be used to manipulate the views of opinion-leading environments.

Another example of such pursuit might be the invitation of representatives of academia to participate in cultural and scientific events with undertones of propaganda. They can be organized by the manipulator-state both abroad and in the territory of the country being the target of foreign sharp power. The invited guests include politicians, scientists and social activists who make provocative speeches. These types of events are then used as part of the information warfare. It should be noted that

²² Cf.: R.S. Mueller, III, "Report on the investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election", *U.S. Department of Justice*, vol. 1-2, Washington 2019.

the representatives of the scientific community invited to such events are often unaware of their real purpose.

The manipulator-state may also invite scientists of a given country to participate in controversial scientific projects, concerning, for example, history, the political situation in the world, membership in international organizations. In exchange for the attendance scholars might be offered attractive compensation or assistance in conducting research (including access to archives of documents located in the territory of the manipulator-state). The aim of this type of initiatives is to question the foreign and internal policy of a selected country or increase tensions in its relations with neighbouring countries.

The system of research grants might be another objective of sharp power strategy. Entities (e.g. state-owned foundations and enterprises, private donors) associated with the manipulator-state may obtain, in return for financial support, the possibility of locating their representatives, e.g. on supervisory boards and boards of universities or research institutes in a given country. In this way, they gain the opportunity to decide, for example, on the research projects carried out by them. In order to prevent the loss of funding, the scientific institutions subsidized in this way might intend to avoid taking initiatives incompatible with the interests of the manipulator-state or engaging in undertakings that are unfavourable for.²³

International economic undertakings

Sharp power also involves international initiatives which - under the guise of ensuring economic benefits to the participating countries - destabilize the political situation in a given region and subordinate its economy to the manipulator-state. Examples of such activities include the Russian Nord Stream 2 and the Chinese New Silk Road.

The aim of the gas investment implemented by the Kremlin is, apart from bypassing the territory of transit countries (including Poland, Ukraine, the Baltic states), to undermine the EU's energy policy in the field of solidarity and cooperation between EU countries, and to increase tension in relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. It should be noted that, in the opinion of many economists, the construction of one more gas connection to Germany is unprofitable for Gazprom and its shareholders.²⁴

The New Silk Road project promoted by Beijing, i.e. a network of transport infrastructure enabling relatively fast trade between China and Europe, is of a similar

²³ For more examples of using scientific cooperation as a sharp power tool, see: A. Foxall, "Russian sharp power in European academia", in: *The Art of Deceit: How China and Russia Use Sharp Power to Subvert the West*, A. Foxall, J. Hemmings (ed.), London 2019, pp. 31–35.

²⁴ See A. Becker, "Nord Stream 2 w oczach niemieckich ekspertów: 'Zbędny, szkodliwy, nierentowny'", *Deutsche Welle*, 10 IX 2020, [dw.com/pl/nord-stream-2-w-oczach-niemieckich-ekspertow-zbedny-szkodliwy-nierentowny/a-54870406](https://www.dw.com/pl/nord-stream-2-w-oczach-niemieckich-ekspertow-zbedny-szkodliwy-nierentowny/a-54870406) [access: 23 VI 2021]; J. Rutkowski, "Nord Stram 2 – wszystko przemawia przeciw temu projektowi", *Forsal*, 27 II 2021, forsal.pl/gospodarka/artykuly/8106480,nord-stream-2-wszystko-przemawia-przeciw-temu-projektowi.html [access: 23 VI 2021].

nature. The aim of this initiative is to strengthen China's geopolitical position in the world, as well as to create a pro-China lobby among EU members, which will have the task of influencing the politics of Brussels in line with Beijing's expectations in return for the possible benefits of this venture. As early as in 2012, China made the first attempt to create a group of favourable states in the Central European region under the format of the "16 + 1 Initiative" (now "17 + 1", since Greece joined in 2019). However, the attempt turned out to be ineffective due to, inter alia, absence of serious economic offers from Beijing for its participants.

Hybrid conflict

The last and, at the same time, the most aggressive method the state may decide to use within the sharp power strategy, is the hybrid conflict. This concept denotes a crisis situation in which one of the parties (the state or non-state actors) refrains from using the armed forces directly and undertakes other means of influencing the opponent, i.e. economic, political, diplomatic, or military. Moreover, a characteristic feature of a hybrid conflict is the inability to identify the aggressor precisely, thus declaring a formal state of war (the so-called aggression below the threshold of war).²⁵

The ability to conduct a hybrid conflict effectively is the highest form of exercising sharp power, which means that a given country achieves the maximum potential in this area. The hybrid conflict is the result of the synergy effect, obtained through the skilful use of particular methods of sharp power, appropriate coordination of the activities of state institutions, and the ability to adapt to the dynamically changing international environment. An example of this type of threat is Russia's policy towards Ukraine that has been pursued since 2014 which through territorial destabilization and disintegration keeps Ukraine under Russian influence and prevents its integration with NATO and the EU.

How to counter sharp power?

An important issue related to the problem of sharp power is the development by the state authorities of an appropriate strategy that would effectively prevent the negative effects of such actions. This is especially important in the case of liberal democracies, including Poland, which - as mentioned earlier - are particularly susceptible to this type of activity on the part of authoritarian states.

Increasing public awareness of the risks related to information manipulation on the Internet should be first priority of the protection strategy. The efforts of

²⁵ See Ł. Skoneczny, "Wojna hybrydowa – wyzwanie przyszłości? Wybrane zagadnienia", *Przegląd Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego* 2015, special edition, pp. 39–50.

private individuals or public benefit organizations to disseminate knowledge about disinformation and unmask fake information should be viewed positively. An example from Poland worth mentioning is the initiative called “Rosyjska V kolumna w Polsce” (Russian fifth column in Poland)²⁶ or the activity of the Center for Propaganda Analysis and Disinformation. These are, however, insufficient actions, and the magnitude of the problem requires the involvement of the state. This means the need to establish an entity responsible for programming, supervising, analysing, and coordinating the activities of state institutions in the field of counteracting hostile information operations aimed at discrediting the image and international position of the Republic of Poland. Currently, these tasks are scattered among various state authorities, which has a negative impact on the effectiveness of their undertaking. It also gives rise to the hazard of power disputes and duplication of tasks.

The possibility of introducing legislative solutions modelled on the American law from 1938 on the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) should also be considered. It regulates the activity of entities operating under the authority of a foreign principal, which may involve, including:

- participation in various initiatives of a political nature;
- acting as a political advisor, PR consultant, information services employee;
- granting financial loans or other types of material resources;
- representing a foreign principal in front of US government institutions.

The primary goal of FARA is to identify foreign influences in the United States and the resulting threats to the national security. The act is also intended to provide the American authorities with a possibility to determine whether the given information does not constitute an attempt to influence American public opinion by other countries. It is worth mentioning that, on the basis of the provisions of this legal act, the Russian television RT and the Sputnik news agency were entered into the register of foreign agents in November 2017. These entities were also obliged, inter alia, to inform recipients that they are operating as foreign agents, and to provide the US Department of Justice with data on their funding sources.

It is also important that democratic states adopt effective measures against autocratic regimes that use sharp power. On the one hand, liberal democracies must intensify their influence on the societies of these countries by means of soft power (e.g. by organizing mass programs of scientific and cultural exchange, facilitating travel, promoting democratic values, etc.). On the other hand, they should limit the possibility of spreading fake news and undermining trust in a democratic state of law. In this context, perhaps it is worth considering the solution adopted by the Latvian authorities, which in February 2021 decided to ban Russia- RTR television for one year due to inciting hatred. Participants in a current affairs program aired on RTR

²⁶ *Rosyjska V kolumna w Polsce* is a Facebook profile administered by a blogger Marcin Rey where he presents the activities of pro-Russian environments in Poland (ed.).

channel described Ukraine as a terrorist state and called for the Russian troops to enter its territory.²⁷

To sum up, the problem of counteracting sharp power efficiently will become increasingly vital, especially in the globalizing world. This means, as indicated above, the necessity for the state authorities to undertake, above all, appropriate educational and legislative measures. At the same time, the governments of democratic countries cannot passively observe attempts to destabilize their socio-political systems, but must launch initiatives aimed at counteracting this type of aggression.

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Abstract

The aim of the article is an attempt to define the sharp power strategy, present characteristic ways of its employment and propose methods of minimizing its negative consequences for the security of the Republic of Poland. The analysis of the issues related to the types of state power (soft power, hard power, smart power) is followed by a coherent definition of sharp power formulated by the authors of the publication. The consecutive section of the article describes examples of methods of implementing the aforementioned strategy of influencing participants of international relations. Finally, the authors presented proposals for institutional and legal solutions, which are to counteract potential sharp power moves aimed at undermining the security and international position of the Republic of Poland.

Keywords: state power, sharp power, soft power, hard power, smart power, information warfare, hybrid conflict