Soft Power: theoretical framework and political foundations

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Abstract

Although 30 years have passed since it was first formulated by the American political scientist Joseph Nye Jr, experts in international relations still debate on the contribution that soft power can give in foreign policy. This article aims to analyse the epistemological framework of soft power since its elaboration over the years till now. The research delves into two essential angles of soft power. The former is the study on the relevance of the concept of soft power in the current political dynamics. The latter is the definition of the idea of soft power with a focus on the evolution of such an idea since it was formulated by Joseph Nye Jr.

The academic debate around the concept of soft power can be summarised mostly around four points: (1) the definition of soft power, (2) the relationship between hard and soft power; (3) resources and behaviours generating soft power; (4) the actors involved, when we speak about soft power.

In the political debate of the last few years, some political scientists and practitioners have raised doubts about relevance and effectiveness of soft power in the current international political dynamics. However, the COVID-19 pandemic, which is reshaping the global order, is demonstrating that deploying effective public diplomacy is still crucial in international relations.

Keywords: Soft power, foreign policy, public diplomacy

„Miękka Siła": ramy teoretyczne i podstawy polityczne

Streszczenie

Choć minęło 30 lat, odkąd koncepcja „miękkiej siły" (ang. *soft power*) została sformułowana przez amerykańskiego politologa Josepha Nye'a Jr, eksperci w stosunkach międzynarodowych nadal debatują na temat wkładu, jaki *soft power* może wnieść w politykę zagraniczną. Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu analizę ram epistemologicznych „miękkiej siły" od opracowania tej koncepcji na przestrzeni lat. Badanie obejmuje dwa zasadnicze aspekty „miękkiej siły". Pierwsze z nich to studium na temat znaczenia koncepcji „miękkiej siły" w obecnej dynamice politycznej. Drugą jest analiza definicji „miękkiej siły" z uwzględnieniem ewolucji tej idei od czasu jej sformułowania przez Josepha Nye'a

Debata akademicka dot. koncepcji „miękkiej siły" ogniskuje się głównie wokół czterech punktów: (1) definicja „miękkiej siły", (2) związek między twardą i miękką siłą; (3) zasoby i zachowania generujące „miękką siłę"; (4) zaangażowani aktorzy, gdy mówimy o „miękkiej sile".

W debacie politycznej ostatnich kilku lat niektórzy politolodzy i praktycy wyrazili wątpliwości co do znaczenia i skuteczności „miękkiej siły" w obecnej międzynarodowej dynamice politycznej. Jednak pandemia COVID-19, która zmienia światowy porządek, pokazuje, że stosowanie skutecznej dyplomacji publicznej jest nadal kluczowe w stosunkach międzynarodowych.

Słowa kluczowe: „miękka siła", polityka zagraniczna, dyplomacja publiczna

Joseph Nye Jr coined the term *soft power* in his book *Bound to Lead…*(1990a), but several authors (Hunter 2009; Vyas 2010; Watanabe, McConnell 2008; Laskai 2013) stressed that looking at history, several practices predate the coining of this term. Nye Jr himself, in the foreword of the book *Soft power superpowers: Cultural and national assets of Japan and the United States* edited by Yasushi Watanabe and David L. McConnell, claims that despite the concept of soft power is recent, "the behaviour it denotes is as old as human history" (Nye Jr 2008a: p. ix). For instance, Alan Hunter (2009: p. 6) underlines that the concept of soft power has been a fundamental part of military thinking in China for over 2000 years. Moreover, he argues that the Chinese concept of *soft power* is characterised by two components: stratagems, mostly used in the military context and associated with Sun Zi and his work *Art of War…*(2007) and moral leadership, which roots are in Confucianism and the moral norms it promotes.

In the last few years, since J. Nye Jr formulated and refined the concept of soft power in his following works, such an idea has evolved and expressed more in detail. This result has been possible thanks to the contributions, analyses, and critics of several scholars, who starting from the works of Nye Jr, further elaborated on the concept of soft power. This article delves into two essential facets of soft power. The first aspect is the study on the relevance of the concept of soft power in the current political dynamics. The second facet is the definition of the idea of soft power with a focus on the evolution of such an idea since it was formulated by J. Nye Jr.

The relevance of the concept of *soft power* in the current political dynamics

Many authors have stressed that the concept of *soft power* has gained considerable popularity both at academic and non-academic level (House of Lords 2014; M. Li 2009: p. 1; Watanabe, McConnell 2008: p. xvii; Lee 2011: p. 11; Parmar, Cox 2010: p. 14; Melissen 2005, 2011). For instance, in the introduction of the book *Soft power superpowers: Cultural and national assets of Japan and the United States*, Yasushi Watanabe and David L. McConnell indicated the dramatic increase in terms of the number of searches on google as a numerical indicator to demonstrate the growing popularity of such subject in the last few years (Watanabe, McConnell 2008: p. xvii).

Why has the concept of *soft power* gained such relevance both among the academic and non-academic milieu? The main goal of this part of article is to explore the main

reasons explaining the growing interest of scholars, politicians, and decision-makers on the concept of *soft power*. Joseph Nye Jr and other authors, who have analysed such subjects, have identified trends and changes characterising current political, social, and economic dynamics, which explain the growing popularity of soft power.

A first change explaining the relevance of the concept of *soft power* is the dramatic change of international relations and, in particular, the different patterns characterising the interaction among international actors. As Joseph Nye Jr indicated in his work *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*, the traditional approach viewing the relations among states as only a balance of power based on their military power is insufficient today (Nye Jr 2004: p. 5). The contemporary world is more complicated than in the past, where more actors are involved and take an active part in the dynamics of international relations. The emergence of new actors in the international arena has been defined first by Alice Amsden, the "rise of the rest", referring to emerging countries in international relations after the Second World War (Amsden 2001). Such a concept has been expanded by Joseph Nye Jr (2015) and other scholars (Riordan 2005: p. 187; House of Lords 2014: p. 25), referring to the growing role of non-state actors in the world governance.

If in the traditional conception of international relations, only states and international organisations were considered the unique actors in the international arena, over the last decades, other players have emerged and are playing a crucial role in the international relations. The new global players are multinationals, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), terrorist groups, and in some instances, only individuals. The emergence of new actors has been facilitated by the progress in science and technology, defined by Nye Jr (2004: p. 22) as "democratizing technology", which reduced the costs of communication, transportation and made technologies (including military instruments) more accessible and cheaper for ordinary people, and now can be used not just by the states. Such facility, as access to powerful weaponry by ordinary people, has been defined by Nye Jr (2004: p. 24) as "privatization of war". Current terrorist threat, which is one of the main issues of the political agenda of states and international organisations, is probably the best example demonstrating such phenomenon.

Another trend, which is closely related to the increase of actors in the international arena, is the growing complexity of interactions among actors in the international relations and dispersion of power. Joseph Nye Jr (2004: p. 4) described such complexity as a "tridimensional chess game", wherein terms of military force, the world is unipolar (the U.S.) is the unique superpower), in economic issues, the distribution of power is multipolar; in transnational topics (climate change, international crime, terrorism, the spread of infectious diseases) power is distributed chaotically. More specifically, if in military disputes one player (the U.S.) is more influential than other nations, in the other dimensions (economics and transnational issues), power is broadly distributed among countries, and no one can prevail on the others.

A third trend explaining the growing role of *soft power* in the current international dynamics is the inadequacy of reliance only on military force in managing international relations. Philip Seib affirmed in the introduction of this book *Toward a New Public Diplomacy…,*

that hard power measures are not enough alone to solve conflicts (Seib 2009: p. viii). To demonstrate this, Nye Jr (2004: p. xi) and other authors (Herring, Rangwala 2006; Baker, Hamilton 2006; Watanabe, McConnell 2008: p. xxii) take as an example the US military campaign in Iraq. On such occasions, the *hard power* dominance of the United States only succeeded in removing Saddam Hussain, but it does not manage in establishing a functioning democracy and in defeating international terrorism. On the opposite, the threat of terrorism has increased in the last few years, and the position mostly oriented to hard power measures of the US had different effects, as demonstrated by in several pools indicating an increasing feeling anti-Americanism in several regions of the world (Watanabe, McConnell 2008: p. xxvii; M.Li 2009: p. 5; Nye Jr 2010a: p. 4). Also, terrorism is still perceived as one of the major threats for many countries.

In contrast to the US *hard power* policy, Ernest J. Wilson (2008: p. 99) affirmed that China, with its doctrine of "Peaceful Rise", consisting in avoiding the use of *hard power* instruments, is becoming more and more attractive to many countries in the world. The same principle has also been supported by Joshua Cooper Ramo (2004), who defined the Chinese rise of influence in the dynamics of the international relations as "Beijing consensus", and which is in antithesis with the unilateral, aggressive, and neoliberal policy of the United States defined as "Washington Consensus."

An important factor, which Nye Jr (2004) describes as an element undermining the utility of coercion in favour of persuasion, is the high costs related to the use of military means in the current world. Nye Jr states that this is post-industrial democratic countries, mostly focused on welfare rather than military glory, and for non-democratic countries, which might face setback embarking in military campaigns, such as the flee of investors from their nations (Nye Jr 2004: p. 20). This phenomenon is one of the reasons, which explains the interest of decision-makers, both democratic and non-democratic countries, in developing their public diplomacy instruments and soft power dimension to strengthening their position in the international arena.

An additional trend in the contemporary world, which makes *soft power* relevant, is the increasing importance of public opinion. The spread of democracy and IT revolution are two key factors, which have substantially contributed to strengthening the role of public opinion both at national and at the international level. As for the first factor, in the last decades, the number of democratic countries had increased as described by the American political scientist Samuel Huntington (1993), when he talked about waves of democratisation. Information in the contemporary world can be transmitted faster and cheaper than in the past, thanks to technological discoveries, which have reduced the costs of communication. In such context, states pay more and more attention to public opinion, both of their countries and other nations. As Nye Jr indicated in his work *Soft Power: The means to success in world politics*, emerging democracies such as Mexico and Chile, now matters in international relations, because they have some influence voting in the UN Security Council (Nye Jr 2004: p. 16). Governments of such countries should take into consideration the opinion of their citizens, when they make decisions, and unpopular policies can harm them.

An additional trend, supported by J. Nye Jr and E.Wilson, is that *soft power* is a crucial element in the contemporary political context to achieve goals more smartly. In such regard, Wilson affirms the world has become "smarter," meaning that goals can be reached more smartly (Wilson 2008: p. 113; compare: Nye Jr 2015). This phenomenon can be seen in different spheres, such as in technology and education. As for technology, hi-tech tools can be more effective than the traditional ones. For instance, if high-technology is applied to the military context, innovation and weapons can reach specific goals more efficiently and effectively than the traditional ones. The transformation from industrial to post-industrial economies implied that power increasingly rests on a nation's capacity to create and manipulate knowledge and information (Wilson 2008). Innovation and creativity are essential to boost all other sectors, including the military one. A final reason for the hunt for *smart power* today is that target populations themselves have become "smarter." Education is more accessible to everybody, also to those living in developing countries. These newly educated populations demand to be treated differently than in the past. The spread of democratic practices has meant that foreign leaders also have less leeway than in the past to act as American surrogates.

The academic debate on the concept of soft power

As Watanabe & McConnell stressed in the introduction of their work *Soft power superpowers: cultural and national assets of Japan and the United States*, the concept of soft power, in contrast with "clash of civilizations" theory of Hungtington or the "end of history" idea of Fukuyama, was less controversial and disputed by the scholars (Watanabe, McConnell 2008: p. xvii). Nevertheless, this does not mean that the formulation of such concept given by Nye Jr was entirely accepted by other authors and that there was not a debate in the scholar community around such subject. On the opposite, as seen in the previous paragraphs, the concept of soft power was not only highly relevant in the global political dynamics, but it has also been widely debated by scholars and practitioners. This part of the article aims to investigate state of the art on the concept of soft power, reviewing the main contributions of researchers, through the prism of aspects of soft power, objects of the academic debate. Such conceptual discussions on the topic of soft power include the next issues:

1) the definition, nature and essence of the concept of soft power (what is precisely soft power?);
2) the relationship between hard and soft power (what is the difference between them? when does soft power finish and hard power begin?);
3) the resources and behaviours generating soft power (what makes soft power?);
4) the actors involved (which actors are involved when we speak about soft power?).

1) The definition of *soft power*

Joseph Nye Jr defines *soft power* in his work *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* as "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than

coercion or payments" (Nye Jr 2004: p. x), or to be more concise, "soft power is attractive power" (Nye Jr 2004: p. 6). Such definition is very similar to the one that he gives in the article *Soft Power* published in 1990 and one of the first work, where Nye explained such concept. In this work, Nye Jr (1990b: p. 166) stated that "when one country gets other countries to want what it wants might be called co-optive or soft power in contrast with the hard or command power of ordering others to do what it wants", and it is characterised by the fact of setting the agenda of other countries, without using coercive means. Joseph Nye Jr does not alter the definition of *soft power* even in the most recent publications, where he adopted the meaning of such concept already given in previous works (Nye Jr 2011).

A consistent portion of the debate around the concept of soft power is its definition. Such difficulty rises from the fact that the idea of power, being something abstract, is something hard to define. As Nye Jr (2002: p. 9; 2004: p. 1) stated, power is like love, easy to feel but difficult to define and measure. According to Geraldo Zahran and Leonardo Ramos (2010: p. 16), "the definition of soft power given by Nye Jr lacks rigour; its use is problematic and uncertain, making a strict definition of the concept hard to obtain". The foremore critic that they move to Joseph Nye Jr is that "Nye simply adopts the term hard power as a synonym for command power behaviour and hard power resources, and the term soft power as a synonym for co-optive power behaviour and soft power resources. In doing so, the author simply dismisses the issue at hand and, at the same time, creates a deeper conceptual problem" (Zahran, Ramos 2010: p. 18).

Several authors (Zahran, Ramos 2010: p. 13; Lock 2010: p. 32) have underlined that Nye's definition of power evolved and changes in the works he published. Geraldo Zahran and Leonardo Ramos, for instance, affirm that Joseph Nye Jr in the first two books (*Bound to Lead* 1990; *The Paradox of the American Power* 2002) is mostly focused on analysing the US foreign policy than soft power itself, intervening in the academic debate regarding the American position in the international arena. It is only in the book *Soft power: The means to success in world politics* published in 2004, Nye Jr focuses his attention on the concept of soft power (Zahran, Ramos 2010: p. 13). The explanation of soft power given by Nye Jr, according to Geraldo & Ramos, is not rigorous and tends to be adapted to the themes and contexts of debate.

The definition of soft power given by Nye Jr has been expanded and refined by several authors (Glaser, Murphy 2009; Hall 2010; Osipova 2014; Smith-Windsor 2000). For instance, the scholar Todd Hall (2010) analyses the concept of soft power through the prism of the distinction between the category of practice and category of analysis. Category of practices refers to the concepts that seem intuitive to social actors. Such type of analysis is only based on observation of the reality and considerations of ordinary people about what they see and perceive as a particular phenomenon. On the contrary, "categories of analysis" are the "experience-distant categories used by social analysts". Such type of analysis is scientifically rigorous, and it is not merely based on intuition.

The fact that many policymakers have adopted the concept of soft power qualifies it as a category of practice. The widespread usage is not sufficient for designating a term

a category of analysis (Hall 2010). Firstly: does the behaviour that actors exhibit towards designated soft power resources signify attraction? Secondly, if the attraction does exist, does it produce favourable foreign policy outcomes for the states that enjoy its benefits?

Todd Hall does not dispute the existence of alternatives to hard power, and he instead stresses that the concept of attraction formulated by J. Nye Jr is presented in a way that makes it a concept of practice instead of the concept of analysis. The critical point of Nye's formulation of soft power is his unclear definition of the concept of attraction. T.Hall formulated the notion of attraction differently, stating that different types of soft powers exist. More specifically, the influence that a state has on other actors derives not from the mere attraction of its culture, political values, or foreign policy, as Nye Jr affirms, but it is generated by other sources of influence that a state can have. Hall attempts to indicate alternative sources of influence can have, such as institutions, reputation, and representation. More specifically, Hall affirms that institutions can be a source of influence (i.e., if a State is a member of specific international institutions and if it has a relevant role there). The second type of source of attraction is reputation power, which is the credibility that a state has gained in the international area for its successes (i.e., economic or cultural ones). The third type of power, which can generate influence according to Hall (2010), is representational power, which is "the ability of states to frame issues, advance their interpretations, and consciously seek to shape the beliefs of others" (i.e., public diplomacy or information control).

2) The relationship between hard and soft power

Another debated topic in the discussion on the concept of soft power is its relation with hard power. Joseph Nye Jr sees the power of a state as including both hard and soft components — the former refers to the economic and military spheres and the latter composed of cultural dimensions or the values that define the identity and practices of a state. In contrast to hard power, which relies on carrots and sticks, soft power, according to Nye Jr, involves attracting others to the agenda in world politics. Also, Nye Jr (2002: p. 109) affirms that soft power entails getting others to want what one's want.

Joseph Nye's vision of power, which is composed of two elements, is not shared by all authors. For instance, Niall Ferguson, who is somewhat sceptical of the formulation that Nye Jr gives of soft power, criticises him affirming that soft power is just a camouflaged version of hard power (Watanabe, McConnell 2008: p. xviii), while Eric Li defines it as "an extension and derivative of hard power" (E.Li 2018a). More specifically, according to Ferguson, what in the end matters in international relations is hard power, not soft power, so the distinction between hard and soft power is superficial. Another author, who disputes Nye's definition of the concepts of hard and soft power is Javier Noya. More specifically, he criticises Nye's "dualistic view" saying that his definition of soft and hard power is too rigid (Watanabe, McConnell 2008: p. xix).

At a closer analysis of Nye's formulation of *soft power*, we can see that in response to the first criticism, he affirms that soft power is not an alternative to hard power. More specifically, according to Nye Jr, soft power is not a substitute for hard power, affirming

that "hard and soft power sometimes reinforce and sometimes interfere with each other" (Nye Jr 2004: p. 25). In the current world, according to Nye Jr, states cannot be indifferent to such a dimension of power if they want to be successful in the international arena.

In response to the critics accusing his point of view as too dualistic, Nye Jr affirms in his works that attraction can be generated both by soft power and hard power resources. As an example, Nye quoted the words of Osama bin Laden, who affirmed in one of his videos, using the metaphor of horses, that by nature, people are attracted by the strongest (Nye Jr 2004: p. 26).

Another critical point of reflection, when analysing the concepts of hard and soft power, is the border between them. In other words, the question is, where does soft power finish and where hard power begins. At the first sight, after the definitions of hard and soft power, it would be natural to classify military power and economic sanctions as hard power measures, while university exchanges or cultural events as soft power instruments. Nevertheless, the reality is more complicated, and in some instances, military intervention functions as a soft power instrument. This state can happen, for example, in a situation of humanitarian help with peacekeeping forces. The same is applicable for economic power, which in some cases can be an instrument of hard power (i.e., economic sanctions) or an element of soft power for a nation-state (i.e., an industrial and prosperous country that is attractive to others for its economic dynamics). According to the author Mingjiang Li, Joseph Nye Jr does not provide an understandable and clear-cut answer to such a question, and the boundary between hard and soft power in his formulation lacks clarity (M.Li 2009: p. 3).

Another debated issue concerning the relation between hard and soft power is the interaction between them. Mingjiang Li also, in this point, is somewhat critical of Nye's formulation, saying that the two "sometimes reinforce and sometimes interfere with each other," without providing a convincing explanation (M.Li 2009: p. 6). According to Nye Jr (2004: p. 9), "soft power does not depend on hard power". Nye Jr presents several examples, such as the Vatican state, which is not endowed of hard power, but has a considerable soft power or the Soviet Union during the cold war, which after the invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia lost a lot of its soft power, but grew in terms of hard power.

3) Resources and behaviours generating *soft power*

Joseph Nye Jr (2004: p. 11) affirms that the soft power of a country is generated by three primary resources: culture, political values, and foreign policies. Culture refers both to high culture (i.e. literature, art, and education) and to popular culture, which is mostly addressed to mass entertainment. Political values refer to domestic values and policies of a country or ideology. The third source of soft power, according to Nye Jr, is the foreign policy of a country, which can generate attraction if perceived as legitimate by other counties.

Mingjiang Li criticises the resource-based approach of Nye Jr, affirming that these sources of soft power do not always produce attraction, persuasion, appeal, and emulation. For instance, not everybody is attracted by American culture or by its values or, in some instances, hard power can produce attraction, appeal, and amity (M.Li 2009: p. 4). According to M.Li (2009: p. 6), social context plays an important role, because it "either

engenders or hampers the growth of soft power". Nevertheless, Nye Jr affirms that an essential element determining attraction is the context, where soft power is manifested. For instance, specific values (such as liberal values), which can generate attraction in a specific context, are perceived negatively in another context.

Another observation of M.Li (2009: p.7) in terms of behaviour and resources is that behavioural approach captures the best the essence of soft power. This approach is mostly focused on resources' use, instead of taking into account the possession of tangible means. Nevertheless, also, J. Nye Jr supports this idea. He affirms that the possession of resources does not automatically enable to obtain the desired outcomes (Nye Jr 2004: p. 3). To support this idea, Nye Jr gave as an example the Vietnam War, in which the stronger and better-equipped US army did not manage to win.

The theoretical analysis of soft power resources is enriched by Shin-Wha Lee's analysis. When evaluating a country's soft-power resources, according to Lee, it is vital to take into account three major dimensions: cognitive, affective, and normative (Lee 2011: p. 15). The cognitive dimension is how a nation is seen by other states in the international arena. The affective dimension refers to the perceptions of other countries of a specific nation-state despite the political, economic, and military strengths or weaknesses characterising such a country. The normative dimension is whether a country's policy and role in the international arena is seen as legitimate and justifiable by other nations. According to Lee, assessing a state's soft-power capacity comprehensively is difficult, and it is crucial considering these dimensions, analysing how they are interconnected. To explain this, Lee gives the following example: somebody can criticise the US for its foreign policy because it is perceived too unilateral (normative dimension), can dislike the US as a whole (affective dimension), but can wish that their children will study in an American university since the US is perceived as the most influential country in the world (cognitive dimension).

4) Actors involved

Another debated issue in analysing *soft power* concerns the actors involved. More specifically, the central questions of discussion are focused on the following issues:

- Who generates soft power?
- Who are the recipients, how do they get benefits, and how are they influenced by soft power?

As mentioned before, international affairs in the last decades have been characterised by the emergence and increasing importance of new actors besides governments and states. Nye Jr was criticised by some authors that he does not pay sufficient attention to the non-state actors (Watanabe, McConnell 2008: p. xix; Zahran, Ramos 2010: p. 19). For instance, according to Alexandre Bohas, Nye's notion of soft power does not stress the shaping of foreign societies by the non-state actors and, thus, their essential role in American predominance (Watanabe, McConnell 2008: p. xix). Nevertheless, a closer analysis of Nye's work demonstrates that he attributes great importance to the non-state actors such as NGOs, businesses, universities, and religious associations (Nye Jr 2004: p. 90–97).

The increase of actors in the international arena has also widened complexities in defining the relation between the actors who produce soft power and those who are affected. For instance, according to G. Zahran and L. Ramos, "Nye's framework does not explain the linkage between civil society sources of soft power and different states". In other words, "when Nye identifies three sources of soft power, it is difficult to assert the level of state control exerted on them" (Zahran, Ramos 2010: p. 19).

The vision of increasing complexity in the international area and the increasing number of actors is shared as well by the scholar Utpal Vyas, who considers constructivism as the most appropriate theory of international relations, which explains the best the concept of soft power. Other international relations theories, according to U. Vyas, are too focused on specific aspects of international relations (i.e., realist and neorealist on the role of the states, neoliberalist theories are too focused on trade, economics, and institutionalism), while constructivism grasps at best the social complexities and the participation not only of states in the international arena (Vyas 2010: p. 36).

In terms of actors and soft power, another critique addressed to Nye Jr is his tendency to assume a general correspondence between "nation-state" and "culture." Nye's discussion of the "state" sometimes gives the impression that governments are singular entities rather than complex sites of competing interest groups and that determining "the national interest" is a relatively simple exercise (Watanabe McConnell 2008: p. xxi). A similar point of view is shared by Ying Fan (2008), who criticises Nye Jr for having a vision too American-oriented in formulating his idea of soft power or Brooke Smith-Windsor (2000), who considers the concept of soft power specific only for the American context, but not applicable for the other countries.

Another debated issue concerning actors and *soft power* regards the relations between them and, more specifically, who exercises soft power and who is affected. For instance, Shin-Wha Lee criticises Nye Jr "agent-focused" concept of power, because it is too much pinpointed from the party employing power missing the "interactive character of persuasion" (Lee 2011: p. 17). Nevertheless, in his work *The powers to lead* (2008), Nye Jr affirms that it is a mistake to think about power only as "power over" somebody, and it is more appropriate to consider "power with" somebody (Nye Jr 2008b: p. 143). Moreover, Nye Jr emphasised that "power is a relational concept, and it makes little sense to describe a relationship without specifying both parties and the context of the relationship" (Nye Jr 2010b: p. 220).

Conclusions

Over the last few years, some authors have raised doubts about the relevance and effectiveness of soft power in the current international political dynamics (E.Li 2018a; E.Li 2018b; Pimenova 2017; Sareen 2018). The facts confirming this trend are considerable and very significant. In the attempt to promote soft power values such as democracy, human rights, Western liberal democracies utilised hard power means in some areas of the world (i.e., Iraq and Libya), and such endeavors were perceived

negatively by the public opinion deteriorating soft power of those liberal democracies. The European Union has a long time benefited from its soft power potential, and now it is facing severe challenges. For instance, the EU is suffering the increasing number of political parties questioning the European integration process. Moreover, if until some years ago the soft power potential of the European Union was enormous, if we consider its enlargement policy and the number of countries interested in joining it, in 2020 the EU faced for the first time in its history the withdrawal of one of its member states. Also, the migration crisis is putting a strain on the European Union's capacity to manage international crises, its ability to offer humanitarian aid, and containing people's rising fears of migrants' invasion.

There is an open debate if coronavirus will reshape the global order, and if we can still speak about *soft power* after 30 years of its formulation (Nye Jr 2020; Fulton 2020; Oğuzlu 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the nation-states' strategies to face the virus have been diverse and under the eyes of the global public opinion. In a big globalised world, the spread of coronavirus in all the corners of the globe was swifted. Also, news circulated very fast, and the measures taken by international actors had a rapid impact on the people and, in some cases, on the financial markets. Some examples are the medical aid offered by China to other countries profoundly affected by the virus, which enhanced its soft power after the harsh critics received in the first phases of the COVID-19 outbreak. Moreover, the position of the European Central Bank, especially at the beginning of the crisis in Europe, and afterwards the debate among EU partners on the measures to be adopted to contain the economic crisis in the European countries most affected by the virus had a substantial impact on the financial markets and European public opinion. Probably the way of understanding soft power today is different from 30 years ago, but using effective public diplomacy is still crucial in international relations.

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Mario De Martino – doktor, adiunkt na Wydziale Ekonomii Uniwersytetu RUDN (Moskwa, Rosja). Jego zainteresowania badawcze obejmują integrację europejską, politykę edukacji międzynarodowej i współpracę transgraniczną. Jest autorem kilku artykułów dotyczących polityki edukacyjnej UE i badań porównawczych między Rosją a Unią Europejską w dziedzinie współpracy uniwersytetów i międzynarodowych programów mobilności akademickiej. Od 2013 roku Mario De Martino jest zaangażowany jako nauczyciel w 2 projektach *Jean Monnet* i 3 modułach *Jean Monnet* na Uniwersytecie Przyjaźni Narodów Rosji (Uniwersytet RUDN).

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