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What Makes Autocracies' Soft Power Strategies Special? Evidence from Russia and China

Artem Patalakh

The paper problematizes the national soft power strategies of authoritarian states arguing that many of their features stem from those countries' political regime. In particular, the author focuses on such features as actors involved in soft power policies, the public media's international and domestic rhetoric, the presence or absence of ideological commitments, strategies' proactiveness/reactiveness as well as their long- and short-termness. The author presents his argumentation in a fashion similar to what is called theory-building process tracing: first, he shows causal links between an autocratic political regime and each of those features, and then illustrates them with relevant examples taken from case studies and media publications on the soft power strategies of contemporary Russia and China.

Key Words: autocracy, democracy, foreign policy, political regime, soft power, soft power strategy

Since Joseph Nye coined the concept of soft power in 1990, political scientists have generated two different assumptions regarding its applicability to national foreign policies. The proponents of the first one argue that soft power - the ability of a country's good image to 'endear' it to other nations and cause them to follow its ideas and policies - is primarily peculiar to democratic states, since, according to them, soft power is based on democracy, freedom, pluralism, tolerance, which they deem as *universal* principles (Gallarotti 2011, 30). Consequently, countries that oppose such principles have very little potential to be internationally attractive and, hence, their soft power is somewhat doomed to fail (Nye 2004, 73-75; Nye 2013). Such a view, albeit sometimes expressed nowadays as well, was still more widespread in the 1990s and early 2000s,

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since it is in tune with the general spirit of that time. The democratic euphoria, that dominated intellectual debates following the long-awaited end of the Cold War, generated a widespread belief (and hope) that geopolitics in the classical sense of the term was gone, and in the future *realpolitik* would be replaced by *idealpolitik* - the idea that was reflected in the then dominant IR theories, such as the democratic peace theory.

However, later, as that euphoria gradually vanished, most scholars started taking more sober looks at the use of soft power in foreign policies. On the one hand, it was due to the fact that the changing realities of international politics put in doubt the idea of democracies' peacefulness. Indeed, the 1990-2000s witnessed an increasing adoption of coercive measures by the world's leading democratic states: economic sanctions, diplomatic pressure - let alone military operations - became commonplace. Yet, most importantly, that change in academic interest was triggered by the fact that autocracies eventually came to understand the power of a good image in world politics and started to increasingly develop their soft power strategies. The main reason behind it most probably lies in the "diffusion of power" in international politics in general, which, according to Nye (1990, 160), is caused by "economic interdependence, transnational actors, nationalism in weak states, the spread of technology, and changing political issues." Such a power diffusion makes it practically impossible for any state, no matter authoritarian or democratic, to maintain its international influence any longer without active soft power policies. As a result, most contemporary researchers have to admit that soft power has been, as Christopher Walker (2016) puts it, "hijacked" by autocracies with leading IR academic journals being full of case studies on autocracies' soft power strategies. It is now getting increasingly popular to study regional powers like Turkey (Oguzlu 2007), Iran (Wastnidge 2015) and even Saudi Arabia (Gallarotti and Al-Filali 2014), let alone the fact that papers on global authoritarian powers - Russia and China - have become commonplace. Perhaps the most prominent attempt "to 'de-Westernise' the concept of soft power" (Barr et al. 2015, 13) was made in May 2014 at a conference at the University of Newcastle. Based on the papers presented there, *Politics*' special issue 'The Soft Power of Hard States' is made of country-focused case studies on Russia, China and Iran.

However, though such case studies abound, it appears that little attempt has been undertaken to appropriately theorize and generalize on the impact of a country's political regime (in particular, authoritarian) on its soft power strategy. What is more, some case studies seem to completely disregard such an impact: instead, they explain the peculiarities of autocracies' soft power strategies by reference to other factors, such as national character, culture, history, religion,

material capabilities etc (Altinay 2008; Parshin 2013). While such explanations are certainly reasonable, they still appear somewhat incomplete, especially given that the idea, that a political regime affects a foreign policy strategy in general, finds rather strong support in the academic literature. For instance, it is contended that, as distinct from autocracies, democracies are unlikely to make war on one another (Maoz and Russett 1993; Owen 1994), democracies' foreign policy is more likely to take account of public opinion (Jacobs and Shapiro 2000; Katz 2000), democracies are more likely to win at wars (Reiter and Stam 2002), their foreign policies are strongly affected by the election cycle (Smith 2004) etc.

In this essay, I attempt to go from country-focused case studies to a more general level of analysis arguing that certain features of autocracies' soft power strategies stem from their political regime. The actual list of such features in my paper is suggestive rather than exhaustive and rests upon the preliminary review of country-focused case studies and the selection of only those features that, first, are repeatedly found across multiple studies and, second, appear to be logically dependent on a country's political regime rather than other factors. In particular, I focus on such features as actors involved in a soft power strategy, the state-owned media's international and domestic rhetoric, the presence or absence of ideological commitments, strategies' proactiveness/reactiveness as well as their long- and short-termness. With regard to each of these variables, I present my argumentation in a fashion similar to what methodologists call "theory-building process tracing" (see Beach and Pedersen 2013): first, I show a causal link between an autocratic political regime and each of these variables, and then exemplify my arguments empirically with references to country-focused case studies and, to a lesser extent, media publications on Russia and China. My choice of these two countries is determined by the fact that, first, their soft power strategies seem to have been studied in a more detailed way than those of other autocracies and, second, these countries' soft power policies appear to be most comprehensive to date (they both possess state-owned media that broadcast internationally as well as state-funded agencies that specifically focus on promoting their image abroad etc.), which is especially relevant for my study. The last chapter, Conclusions, summarizes my key arguments and discusses possible topics for further research.

DEFINITIONS

Before proceeding, it seems necessary to clarify all the concepts used throughout the paper. Following Joseph Nye, I refer to *soft power* as a form of social power that consists in "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payment" (Nye 2004). Soft power works through "a positive image in

world affairs that endears nations to other nations in the world polity" (Gallarotti 2011, 27-28). More precisely (Ibid., 28),

> [t]his positive image generates respect and admiration, which in turn render nations that have soft power more endearing in the eyes of other nations. The endearment can be so strong that other nations may even attempt to emulate the policies and/or actions of soft power nations, domestic and/or foreign.

Accordingly, *soft power strategy* can be defined as a coherent and purposeful set of actions aimed to improve an IR actor's (usually, a country's) image abroad (Patalakh 2016, 89).[1]

Whereas soft power strategies encompass a wide range of behaviours aiming to make a country attractive both among foreign governments and publics, one of their key components is *public diplomacy,* which is defined as "the process by which direct relations with people in a country are pursued to advance the interests and extend the values of those being represented" (Sharp 2005, 106). In this article, the next two sections primarily deal with public diplomacy in particular, while the three subsequent ones - with soft power strategies in broader terms, including public diplomacy.

SOFT POWER STRATEGIES' CHARACTERISTICS DEPENDENT ON A POLITICAL REGIME

ROLE OF THE STATE, THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND CIVIL SOCIETY

By definition,[2] authoritarian rule presupposes that the state places various barriers that hinder the independence of civil society institutions, which autocracies view, first, as obstacles to consolidating their power and institutions and, second, as supporters of democracy promotion from abroad (Rutzen 2015,

[1] Such a definition may appear too vague and general, but it allows taking account of the fact that soft power strategies may engage various *scopes* of power, i.e. the aspects of the targets' behaviour that the strategizer attempts to influence (Baldwin 2016, 51). Depending on a case, soft power strategies may involve both political (getting others to accept one's foreign and domestic policies) and non-political goals (e.g. attracting foreign tourists and entrepreneurs). Since, as a political scientist, I am primarily interested in the political goals of soft power strategies, this study proceeds from Gallarotti's above-given understanding of soft power, which respectively affects the relevance of its findings.

[2] Authoritarianism is commonly defined as "a form of government that monopolizes authority over the state without guaranteeing political pluralism or defense of civil liberties and with little or no accountability to the population" (Vaillant 2012).

28-29). With regard to independent non-governmental organizations (NGOs), authoritarian governments normally use of one the following pretexts to enact such barriers: "1) protecting state sovereignty; 2) promoting transparency and accountability in the civil society sector; 3) enhancing aid effectiveness and coordination; and 4) pursuing national security, counterterrorism, and anti–money laundering objectives" (Ibid., 31). According to empirical studies, the barriers at hand can take up to ten different forms (for details, see Ibid., 30-31), the variations of which happen to be particularly original in some states. For instance, a recent Russian law has obliged all the NGOs that receive foreign donations to register as "foreign agents" - a collocation that in Russian means "spies" - and all those that refused to re-register have been closed (Flikke 2016). China widely practices putting NGOs' leaders under house arrest or encouraging them to leave the country, especially when it hosts important international events, like the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the 2010 Shanghai EXPO etc (Tai 2015, 23). In such circumstances, when the very existence of independent NGOs is endangered and they have to struggle for survival, civil society often finds itself disorganized, weak and discouraged from taking actions. Due to the scarcity of resources, independent NGOs tend to find it unaffordable to participate in expensive initiatives and hardly possible to attract smart and talented people to work for them. Naturally, in such conditions, civil society can barely be engaged in any activities that have a significant impact on a country's international image: for instance, most of the activities of Chinese NGOs are local or, at best, nationwide, since "most Chinese NGOs lack the resources, experience, networks, and knowledge of foreign policy-making and contemporary international relations to engage effectively outside of China's borders" (Brenner 2012, 136).

In limited cases, however, the authoritarian state can support those independent NGOs whose activities do not contradict government views (Ye 2003), but such happens rarely against the backdrop of mutual distrust between the authoritarian state and civil society. What the government is likelier to do is imitate civil society institutions by creating government-organized NGOs (GONGOs) which are financed by the state and hence, remain fully loyal to it (Foster 2001). As case studies show, Chinese GONGOs reportedly enjoy better funding and hence, have better potential for employing more professional staff than independent NGOs; however, a strict governmental control turns out to be eventually counter-productive: a very limited capacity to conduct independent projects engenders a situation in which "many GONGOs consequently become inactive and lack initiative" (Jin 2007, 82). This notwithstanding, both China and Russia are increasingly using GONGOs in their public diplomacies. The Chinese government does it first, to get access to Western developmental

aid which is granted only to NGOs and not to state agencies and second, "to access the growing private charitable donations of Chinese citizens and firms to humanitarian and development projects worldwide" (Brenner 2012, 135-136). Likewise, an active use of GONGOs in public diplomacy helps the Kremlin imitate a civil society: to date, the Kremlin "has established several organisations, notably the Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund and the Russian Council on International Affairs, which seek to engage civil society institutions in humanitarian and cultural ventures abroad" (Wilson 2015b, 1189).

A similar logic applies to the private sector as well: as a rule, modern autocracies encourage private entrepreneurship, but treat it suspiciously if it becomes too strong and hence, presents a potential challenge to the regime. Moreover, whereas businessmen normally have a free hand in the economic sphere, in the political and social life they are bound to go hand in hand with the government and its initiatives; otherwise, they risk being punished, at worst, as heavily as up to losing their business. Russian authorities, for instance, widely invite the private sector to sponsor state-supported big international events like the 2014 Sochi Olympics and the 2018 World Cup. However, Russian entrepreneurs get punished if they are involved in politics not on Putin's side: to exemplify, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, chairman of "Yukos" oil company, got imprisoned when he started to finance pro-Western liberal political parties (Amsterdam and Peroff 2007, 36-39); another businessman, Dmitry Zimin, had to close his "Dynasty" foundation reportedly for financing seminars and lectures on promoting liberalism in Russia (*The Moscow Times* 2015).

Such an inability of the private sector and civil society to have an independent role in social life in authoritarian states leaves the state to be to a great extent the primary actor that may have a substantial impact on a country's international image. By contrast, in democracies, the private sector and civil society are free to be engaged in political and social life either by supporting some existent forces or acting as an independent actor. It would not even be an overstatement to say that democratic states' soft power is to a great extent developed "from below," reflecting the needs of a country's private sector and civil society, for whom a country's good image opens additional opportunities for new investments, customers, projects etc. Therefore, democracies' soft power strategy is a complicated system of private-public partnership, while the soft power of an authoritarian state is, to paraphrase Abraham Lincoln, is a strategy *of* the state, carried out *by* the state and *for* the state.

Moreover, to speak about soft power in terms of coherent *strategies* is often possible merely as far as authoritarian countries are concerned, since only such states are in a position to elaborate, adopt and fully coordinate

the implementation of policies aiming to enhance their countries' image. In democracies, the state is in a position either only to direct public diplomacy in very general terms (e.g. it issues recommendations and advises, brings together representatives of different sectors for discussions etc.), or supplement civil society's activities in order to fill in the gaps where the private sector does not desire or is not able to work. As Nye argues (2008, 105), must of US international broadcasting is done by private TV channels and radio stations; however, "[i]f there is no market for broadcasting in Serbo-Croatian or Pashtu, companies will not broadcast in those languages," which makes the US government invest in the media like the Voice of America. When civil society is advanced and the rule of law works for real, the state's comprehensive control over public diplomacy appears to be not only impossible from a legal perspective, but also unnecessary in terms of efficiency, since private initiatives are believed to have, as a rule, better chances to be viewed as independent and hence, more credible.

For what concern concrete examples, perhaps one of the most indicative examples of the role of the state in democracies and authoritarian countries' soft power is how China and Russia on the one hand and the UK on the other approached hosting the Olympic Games in terms of public diplomacy. One empirical study (Li 2013) revealed that the organisation of the 2008 Beijing Olympics was done in a highly centralized manner under a strong control of the government with public diplomacy being barely different from propaganda: it aimed to sell China internationally in a positive way, show its economic reforms and social system from a favourable perspective and avoid discussing socially sensitive issues like the Tibet. The same logic equally applies to the 2014 Sochi Olympics which the Russian political elite used "to validate Russia's claims for the re-establishment of national greatness and underscore the continuity of its indispensability in world affairs" (Grix and Kramareva 2015, 4) with the official messages sent to the outer world focusing on 'promoting a dynamic image of the Russian nation' and countering the international media's 'campaign against Russia's human rights record' (Hutchings et al. 2015, 641). On the other hand, the British authorities had neither wish, nor capacity to direct the organisation of the 2012 London Olympics in a centralized way: rather, they coordinated and facilitated the activities of a broad range of actors engaged in the organisation of the Olympics with public diplomacy being centred not on the British culture and society, but more on global social issues (e.g. the protection of the environment, the welfare of children, women and disabled people) as well as the British involvement in their solution (Li 2013).

DOMESTIC VERSUS INTERNATIONAL RHETORIC

The aforesaid suppression of human rights in authoritarian states concerns, *inter alia,* freedom of speech, which in practice means the monopolization of domestic media space by the government with the tone of messages being frequently strong and aiming to play on feeling and emotions (e.g. patriotism, nationalism) rather than provide rational argumentation. Such applies, for instance, to news coverage by the state-owned media as well as opinion shows on public TV and radio channels. However, should such a one-sided presentation of news appear in a democratic state, it is likely to be deemed non-credible and debunked as propaganda (Nye 2008, 100-101), since democratic citizens are used to the pluralism of ideas in the media. Consequently, to sell their messages to democratic citizens, the international versions of the state-owned media of authoritarian states have to "customize" them in a special way, which democracies' state-owned media do not need to do in identical cases. As a result, the gap between the messages of domestic and international public media in authoritarian states is, first, wider than an analogous gap in democratic states' public media and, second, is of a different character.

Naturally, any international media have to adjust their messages to various target audiences if they want to succeed. However, in the case of democratic states' media, such an adjustment mostly concerns their *agendas*: for example, BBC's international versions primarily accentuate the news from the countries where they broadcast, while its British version covers mostly UK news (*BBC* 2016). Evidence shows that when it comes to framing, the international versions of democratic states' public media tend to be equally or even somewhat less critical about those countries' governments initiatives compared to the domestic media: for instance, one case study that analysed news framing by CNN and CNN International found that the latter "framed coverage of American initiatives and individuals in a less explicitly violent and hence, less critical manner" (Groshek 2008, 65). Authoritarian states' public media pursue the opposite logic: domestically, they tend to firmly, aggressively promote the official view of the government, often going as far as to ridiculing all different opinions and labelling them as a hoax. Internationally, an inability to use the same style as at home pushes those media into promoting their views in a "softer" and a more sophisticated way, being somewhat *more* critical about their governments, providing a broader range of opinions and imitating the style of presentation and discussion peculiar to the country where they broadcast.

For instance, the tone of news coverage on the US version of Russia's publicly owned international TV channel RT is said to be different from that of Russia's domestic public TV channels. Considering, for instance, the coverage of the Ukrainian crisis when it was in its 'hottest' phase in 2014, both RT and the

Russian domestic TV channels presented a pro-Russian version of events; however, unlike Russia's domestic channels, RT generally refrained from most categorical expressions, e.g. calling the Ukrainian government "junta" and "fascists." Neither was RT caught on any blatant lie, similar to Channel One's story about a young boy who reportedly was crucified by the Ukrainian military in the town of Slovyansk and Rossiya 1's demonstration of a fake Nazi documents that used to be reportedly given to Ukrainian nationalists in World War II (Ennis 2015). Finally, unlike opinion shows on Russian domestic channels, the ones on RT are arguably more independent and often present views critical of Russia. Also, for its opinion shows, RT widely uses the formats of discussion popular in the US, but not in Russia (McClennen 2016). In the end, such a rhetorical adjustment substantially affects the very character of public diplomacy: as American journalist Jill Dougherty (2015) notices,

> [f]or Putin, controlling the means of mass communication domestically is crucial in establishing a single, unchallenged narrative to unite the nation. Internationally, however, the Kremlin has taken a different approach: RT doesn't need to monopolize its version of the truth. It simply has to undermine the viewer's faith in the Western media and inundate them with a tidal wave of "alternative" information.

Similar observations can be made regarding China's publicly owned international media: for example, Rawnsley (2015b, 282) argues that "foreign language broadcasts intended for audiences outside China are often allowed to be more critical and liberal in tone and content than their Chinese-language counterparts," although there are obvious limitations to such a criticism. The difference between China's domestic and international media's tone is especially sound with regard to foreign policy issues: as Wilson puts it (2015a, 290),

> [a]lthough China has largely selected to pursue a deliberately non-assertive foreign policy that assiduously avoids challenging US hegemony, the message it broadcasts in internal communications has a markedly different tone. Chinese domestic rhetoric . . . resorts to the traditional vocabulary of Marxist-Leninist analysis in describing China's relationship with the West as a life and death struggle.

Interestingly, when it comes to politicians' speeches, the same difference between democratic and authoritarian states can hardly be noticed. Of course, authoritarian leaders are occasionally noticed to 'soften' the rhetoric when

speaking abroad, especially when it comes to sensitive issues like human rights violations. For instance, one case study, that analysed the then President of Russia Dmitry Medvedev's rhetoric in 2008, found that the Kremlin had to "alternate between a highly nationalistic rhetoric that is traditionally for domestic consumption and a more conciliatory, progressive rhetoric that positions Russia as a cooperative partner" (Avgerinos 2009, 123). However, as empirical and theoretical research shows, the same kind of rhetoric adjustment is often used by democratic politicians as well: for instance, they are noted to express different opinions before and after elections (Tetlock 1981), publicly and privately (Marfleet 2000; Renshon 2009). Likewise, they may strongly criticize autocrats at home, but choose far softer words in personal meetings with them. Perhaps the most exemplary of this point is how in 2014 the then Prime Minister of Australia Tony Abbott told journalists that he would "shirtfront" Vladimir Putin at the upcoming APEC summit, but eventually behaved far more diplomatically while meeting him personally, which allowed his opponents to blame him for cowardice (Griffiths 2014).

It is noteworthy that adjusting media rhetoric in the aforementioned way seems to be getting gradually harder for the media in the age of the Internet and globalisation, when the gap between the "internal" and the "external" is blurring due to all information being available to everyone (Rawnsley 2013, 154). A question that logically arises is if such a 'customisation' of messages has a negative impact on soft power strategies' outcome or not. Indeed, according to Nye (2008, 99-101), soft power's success heavily depends on the *credibility* and, if messages at home and abroad become too different, such a country can be barely regarded as credible. However, this appears to be not a big problem for policymakers. First, psychological research shows that people tend to overlook inconsistency under certain circumstances, for instance, when the source of propaganda provides for peripheral cues that strengthen the credibility and trustworthiness of the message (Paul and Matthews 2016, 8). Moreover, for some reasons that I specify below, authoritarian leaders tend to in the first place care about their credibility *at home* and, to a lesser extent, among *like-minded* foreigners (for China, see Callahan 2015; Edney 2015; for Russia, see Grix and Kramareva 2015). Since they treat foreign policy mostly as a way to gain domestic legitimacy, being seen as non-credible abroad can be regarded as a relatively small problem for autocrats as long as they are popular at home.

SHORT-TERM REALISM VERSUS LONG-TERM IDEALISM

Since the 19th century, the idea of democracy has had a universalistic character (Rosanvallon 2009), its advocates have constantly been formulating its

universal criteria and calling for its promotion worldwide. The universalism of the democratic idea implies that, consciously or subconsciously, democrats see the world's future in the victory of democracy all over the world and, possibly, the creation a single global state based on democratic principles, which will epitomize Fukuyama's "end of history." Theorists have proposed various logics behind the formation of such a state. Some world system scholars, for instance, argue that its future origin is possible due the currently growing North-South imbalances that require a more legitimate and democratic global governance. Such will be possible in the future thanks to a growing pressure from transnational social movements that are getting gradually empowered due to increasing technological development (Chase-Dunn and Inoue 2012). IR constructivist scholars provide a more elaborate explanation deriving the formation of a global state from security needs: wars which occur between sovereign states are highly unwelcome for individuals who do not want to risk their lives, which could result in a growing solidarity between individuals from different states and, in effect, the formation of a *world society* that will constrain state leaders from taking decisions to initiate wars. This can at first lead to a global system of *collective security* under which collective identity and solidarity will gradually develop at the level of states, and later - to a *world state* which can emerge as great powers' compromise to small and middle powers' demands that their needs be recognized in the international system (Wendt 2003). At the current stage, "the transnational convergence of domestic values" (Wendt 1994, 390) contributes to a collective identity between democrats as individuals and democracies as states; in other words, when a certain state gets recognized as democratic by other democracies, it means that it enters a sort of "club" of democratic states. Belonging to this club is considered to be prestigious, for it signifies a country's commitment to the arguably best possible universally accepted system of values. For national image-handling, membership in this club creates both opportunities and limitations. First, an increase or decrease in the popularity of the idea of democracy in general invariably entails an improvement or decline in the popularity of its adherents. Second, outsiders from this club regard democracies' image as one integer thing, at least to a certain extent - i.e. the success/failure of one democratic country is often seen as the success/failure of the system as a whole; so, a democratic state has to be especially careful whenever it does anything that may have a substantial impact on its image, otherwise it risks to harm the image of its fellow states.

Unlike democracy, authoritarianism as such is not universalistic; rather, 'authoritarian regime' is an umbrella term that includes various types of regimes with diverse institutional models: to paraphrase Leo Tolstoy, all democratic

regimes 'resemble each other,' while every non-democratic regime is non-democratic 'in its own way'. Naturally, this does not mean that all democracies are absolutely identical: their peculiarities can vary, but, as Peter Burnell (2010, 9) puts it, they "all still operate within the bounds of a broad consensus on democracy's most essential defining features. These resemble very closely western-style liberal democracy, sometimes called polyarchy, and incorporate ideas about universal human rights that receive United Nations backing." Hence, one can figure out certain criteria by which to judge whether a certain country is democratic, as it is done, for example, by the Economist Intelligent Unit which annually publishes its *Democracy Index* (for its latest version, see EIU 2016). In contrast to democracies, "leading authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes are so diverse, ranging from one-party states and military-backed personal rule to theocracy and, even, cases of what has come to called competitive authoritarianism: regimes that resemble some of democracy's ideas" (Burnell 2010, 10).

Consequently, authoritarianism *per se* hardly generates a collective identity - at least, to the extent that belonging to the democratic "club" does - though certain variations of authoritarianism, like the 19th century's absolute monarchs or the 20th century's communist regimes, used to have common global intentions and a sense of collective identity. The reason behind is that common ideologies generate resemblances in the culture of mutual interaction; therefore, like-minded states are more likely to become friends with each other than states with different ideologies (such is a common explanation of the idea of democratic peace, see Owen 1994). Nevertheless, authoritarianism as such is not an ideology, so autocracies do not form the same sort of "club" as do democracies and, accordingly, their national images are not affected by the images of each other like it happens in the case of democracies. It is no surprise that we have nothing like an "authoritarian peace" theory: one can expect democratic states to better understand each other, but one can hardly expect two autocracies to be friends, since their concrete ideas and values can be totally different (e.g. a communist regime and an absolute monarchy). Such a limited ability to engender a common identity as well as the non-universality of the idea of authoritarianism make any global strategic plans for the future practically impossible for autocracies. As a result, autocracies normally have friendly relations just to the extent that their foreign policy goals coincide in *realpolitik* terms, which can usually be defined in short- or mid-term perspectives. To exemplify, scholars often argue that the origin of Russo-Chinese cooperation is in both countries' desire to balance the US and the West in general in geopolitics and geoeconomics, while in most of the other spheres the two countries seem to mistrust each other and want to take

advantage of each other's weakness to their own favour (Carlsson et al. 2015; Kaczmarski 2013). A similar logic also applies to Sino-Iranian and Russo-Iranian relationships: whereas those countries' official statements may describe mutual relationships as warm friendships and even strategic unions, on close inspection, it seems that the "warmness" is actually determined on case-by-case basis and highly depends on those states' relations with the West at each particular period (Harold and Nader 2012; Kozhanov 2012). All in all, it is far from certain if those countries were friends but for their aim to counter the Western influence - in contrast to, for instance, the US and the EU that are more likely to be expected to be friends due to ideological convergence even if they did not have common rivals.

For soft power strategies, this discussion has two major implications. First, democracies' soft power is strongly embedded in their values with ideology being treated seriously, which, as was argued above, not only provides opportunities for, but also poses significant limitations on how they can position themselves internationally. Autocracies' soft power is determined mostly in *realpolitik* terms: the way they promote themselves is more dependent on the current situation in world affairs and at home rather than on any ideological commitments. Their tendency not to treat ideology seriously clearly manifests itself in the way they constantly match their domestic environment with the ideological underpinnings of soft power strategies. For instance, in 2000, Russia's regime created the concept of "managed," or "guided democracy" to justify its regime's deviations from the universally accepted model of democratic governance. Later, in 2006, as the regime got tougher and the West's accusations of human rights violations became more frequent, 'managed democracy' was transformed into 'sovereign democracy'. Finally, when Putin's administration firmly decided to position Russia as a self-sufficient civilisation, which is based on conservative values different from the West, the very concept of democracy was dropped and gradually disappeared from the official Russian discourse (Sontag 2013). Similarly, China's ruling Communist Party has adopted the concepts of 'deliberate democracy' and 'consultative democracy' aiming to pursue regime legitimacy at the local and party members' levels respectively (Halper 2012; Tang 2014, 116-118). It remains to be seen if these concepts will be long-lasting; however, the overall logic of the adjustment of the term 'democracy' to the needs of authoritarian regimes so far shows that such invented concepts are usually rather transient.

Another illustration of exercising soft power in *realpolitik* terms is an international aid. For instance, with a few exceptions (e.g. concerning countries suffering from natural disasters), the most part of the Russian aid, first, goes to

the countries where Russia has strong geopolitical interests and, second, unlike Western states' aid, is given to the recipient countries' governments rather than NGOs (Brezhneva and Ukhova 2013, 13-14; Ćweik-Karpowicz 2012, 9). A similar logic applies to Chinese foreign aid as well: unlike the aid of Western democracies, first, it is hardly ever coordinated with other donors, second, it is not usually linked to conditions, except for supporting China's investments, and third, is oriented toward economic rather than social goals, thus engaging governments and not NGOs (Trinidad 2013). In general, when autocracies provide foreign aid, they pursue *economic* (breaking into new markets), *political* (creating a strategic diplomacy), to a lesser extent *ideological* goals (spreading national values) (see Lengauer 2011, 44 for China), while democracies, in accordance with their *ideological* commitments, normally provide *socially* oriented foreign aid.

It, however, would be too naive to assume that democracies are guided solely by their ideologies and not economic or political interests: many realist scholars, for example, tend to regard democracy and human rights rhetoric as a cheap talk arguing that democratic powers simply disguise their national interests under those labels (Hyde-Price 2008). Rather, my argument is that, to handle their image, democracies have to justify every step by referring to its usefulness for democracy, liberalism and human rights, while for autocracies it suffices to say that they solely want to protect their 'national interests,' the term which in practice usually means the interests of their ruling elites.

The second implication is that democratic soft power aims at *long-term strategic goals,* while autocracies are guided by *short-term tactical* considerations. The systemic view of the world causes democratic states to work on the reputation of responsible actors who take care of themselves, the world and future generations. Autocratic leaders, by contrast, are not certain if the legacy of their regimes will be long-lasting after their death,[3] so it is more rational for them to try to take as much benefit as possible from the present day. For this end, they prefer focusing on the issues that are likely to give them immediate gains in reputation; for autocracies, having an image of responsible powers is, although often desirable, not as indispensable as for democracies. Thanks to the absence of ideological limitations and a sense of collective responsibility, autocracies feel generally freer than democracies when it comes to resorting to

[3] Sometimes they admit having such a fear openly. Belarus' President Alexander Lukashenko, for instance, known for his opposition to the privatization of state-owned factories, once claimed: 'I am horrified at the thought that the Belarusian wealth that I have toiled so hard to create and preserve would be auctioned off' (RT 2013).

a populist rhetoric to gain easy popularity today even if it may seem harmful for the future.

An apt illustration of this point is the place of global issues in the soft power strategies of democracies and autocracies. For instance, unlike the European Union and the United States, Russia has been noted for being silent and passive on climate change issues (Charap 2010), occasionally going as far as overtly mocking the international community on this issue: in 2003, for instance, Putin famously said at an international climate conference that global warming is good, since it would enable Russian people to "spend less on fur coats," after which he added that "agricultural specialists say our grain production will increase, and thank God for that" (Bastasch 2015). However, sometimes Russian leaders suddenly employ the opposite rhetoric on climate change, which is largely interpreted in tactical terms: for example, at his speech before the UN General Assembly in December 2015, Putin raised the problem of climate change seriousness, which most experts considered an attempt to break Russia's international isolation (Davenport 2015). Likewise, until recently, China's authorities were traditionally reluctant to take global warming seriously claiming that it is the West that should take the major responsibility for it (Heggelund 2007, 175-179), and only the geopolitical desire to build an image of a responsible global power so as to counter the popular-in-the-West China-threat theory as well as an unprecedentedly high level of pollution have recently driven the country's government to gradually change their initial standpoint (Hung and Tsai 2012).

PROMOTING DEMOCRACY VERSUS PROMOTING AUTHORITARIANISM

Since the end of World War II, democracy has been widely recognized as a universal value, universal commitment and the most progressive form of governance. Authoritarian regimes, by this logic, are regarded as inferior and less advanced; therefore, it is not in the least coincidental that even the world's most violent dictatorships are constantly trying to show their commitment to democracy by imitating democratic institutions (e.g. elections), using democratic narrative in public discourse and official names (e.g. "People's *Democratic* Republic of Korea") etc. In the recent years, however, the global popularity of democracy has reportedly declined against the background of democratic dysfunction in solving certain social problems (Foa and Mounk 2015), but, as surveys show, most people across the globe still find democratic values important (Wike and Simmons 2015). For democratic states, the ideationally

dominant position of their ideology poses good opportunities to use it in their image-enhancing policies and ensures a favourable climate for its promotion abroad. Democratic countries can proudly call themselves democratic, blame other countries for not meeting the criteria of a democratic state, set up organisations that promote democratic institutions.

Authoritarian countries, by contrast, have to tolerate being dominated, which results in a so-called "victim mentality" peculiar to such states: they tend to conceive of themselves as victims of others' (in their case, democracies') negative behaviour and act accordingly (for China, see Medeiros 2009, 10-11; for Russia, see Coicaud 2015, 174).[4] They have to adjust the tactics of the promotion of their values making it somehow hidden, since, under the conditions of democracy's dominance, overtly claiming that authoritarianism is better than democracy would be equal to arguing that economic decline is preferable to economic growth. Consequently, unlike democracies, modern autocracies would rather skip placing a special emphasis on a political regime when furthering their international image. Moreover, they frequently masquerade their soft power policies as democracy promotion: for instance, despite its name, the Institute for Democracy and Cooperation, funded by the Russian government and located in Paris, "cultivates an image of itself as critical of NATO and the EU and supportive of a traditional set of values in line with the political elite of Russia" - the activities that are hardly compatible with 'democracy' and 'cooperation' (Demesmay 2016, 2).

Another factor that impedes autocracy promotion is that, as I stated above, unlike democracy, authoritarianism *per se* is far from universalistic and hence, does not have any single criteria. Therefore, in promoting their image abroad, authoritarian regimes would rather resort to their *national* values, *national* identities, patriotism etc., which have little to do with universalism. Moreover, due to its aforementioned limited ability to engender a collective identity between states, promoting authoritarianism would actually give little benefit for autocracies in terms of mutual interaction. This all results in modern autocracies not really being interested in furthering authoritarianism as such; rather, they usually try to promote "their own countries' more narrow economic and geopolitical interests" (Way 2016, see also Way 2015, Tansey 2016). An ample illustration of this point is international organisations led by non-democratic

[4] In many cases, victim mentality originates in a country's past, which can be a lost war, a colonial status etc. My argument is that a situation, in which a country finds itself ideologically different from or even opposite to most other states, deepens its victim mentality, due to which politicians and people develop an idea of their country being "besieged," "encircled," "surrounded".

countries. For instance, while joining the EU requires meeting its standards of democracy and human rights, Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union does not adduce any political criteria of accession, inviting new states irrespective of their political regime.

So, despite that the term 'autocracy promotion' exists in academic literature, in fact, it appears more accurate to speak of 'democracy prevention' or 'authoritarian collaboration,' like do some other scholars (Soest 2015). Cooperation between authoritarian regimes seems to be directed not against democracy as such, but mostly against democracy *promotion*, since autocratic leaders fear losing their domestic power at home and influence in the countries where they have a favourable image. With pragmatically oriented democratic states that do not intend to actively export their values, authoritarian regimes tend to have good relations. Among such countries is, for example, Italy, which used to have good relations with Libya's Qadhafi regime and actively lobby the removal of anti-Russian sanctions in the EU council in 2014-2015 (Tocci 2014; Varvelli 2010). As Italian political scientist Arturo Varvelli rightly puts it (2010, 130), "[i]n the classic 'stability or democracy dilemma,' Italy has always chosen the former, contributing more than any other country to strengthening Qadhafi's regime."

PROACTIVENESS VERSUS REACTIVENESS

Falling short of a universalistic idea, modern autocracies have difficulties in finding a constructive agenda to offer global audiences. National ideologies and political values may at best be attractive in certain like-minded states mostly at the regional level, but are unlikely to appeal to global civil society. In the case of Russia, for instance, the "Russian world" concept coupled with the conservative values' narrative aim to endear the country merely to the Russian-speaking world, the post-Soviet states and, to a lesser extent, a few "fellow travellers" of Russia (Laruelle 2015, 23). In such circumstances, autocracies have to accept the dominance of democratic ideas and elaborate their soft power strategies proceeding from the popularity of democracy in this or that region. In other words, autocracies' soft power strategies are *reactive* rather than *proactive*: their content and intensity highly depend on the intensity of their competitors' soft power strategies and the popularity of their ideas in the recipient countries.

How does a strategy's pro- and reactiveness affect its features? Some insight can be taken from theories of Marketing-oriented Public Relations. First, proactive strategies are *offensive*, while reactive ones are *defensive*: while the former aim to communicate the actor's *merits*, the latter attempt to cope with *negative consequences* brought by the external environment (Shimp 2010, 537). With regard to autocracies' soft power strategies, such negative

consequences flow not only from the objective factors that I mentioned above (e.g. technological progress), but also democracies' soft power. To illustrate, Russia first came to the idea of an active public diplomacy campaign after Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution which the Kremlin viewed as its geopolitical loss and thus felt the need to curb the growth of pro-Western mindsets on the post-Soviet space (Saari 2014; Ćwiek-Karpowicz 2012, 6). In a similar vein, the primarily negative depiction of Russian policies in the international media during the 2008 Russo-Georgian war later made the Kremlin intensify its international broadcasting and politicise the RT Channel which had initially aimed to promote Russian culture (Yablokov 2015, 305). Likewise, China realized the importance of soft power in the mid-2000s to a large extent as a need to counter the aforementioned China-threat theory (Glaser and Murphy 2009). In particular (Rawnsley 2015a, 466),

> [i]t is possible to argue that the expansion of China's international broadcasting capacity has not been designed around a primary aim of boosting the country's soft power potential, but rather is a reactive and defensive strategy to meet a supposed cultural threat and is intended to remedy a defect in how China is reported by international news media.

Autocracies' defensive strategies are mostly based on finding flaws in democratic states and criticising them rather than praising domestic political values and ideas; otherwise stated, autocracies widely employ *against-* rather than *in favour of-* narratives, since they aim to *correct* the existent dominant agenda rather than *set* a new one. For cautiousness, that criticism is normally directed not against democracy as such, but, rather, against the concrete actions of democratic states. Due to the shortage of potentially attractive political ideas related to the present, autocracies widely exploit a historical narrative aiming to evoke the recipient audience' emotions related to the sense of national pride. What can, for instance, be accentuated is historically good relations between the two countries. For instance, to gain support of conservative people on the post-Soviet space, Russia resorts to highlighting the common origin of East Slavs and promoting the Russian official version of the history of World War II, which is coupled with labelling every attempt to provide any different perspective, especially in Ukraine and the Baltics, as the "falsification" and "distortion" of history (Lutsevych 2016, 16-18). Another way to play on emotions is to exploit the above-mentioned 'victim mentality' - but this time of the recipient countries. Autocracies tend to make use of people's resentment by pointing out either the West's unequal treatment of its former colonies in the past, or the flaws of

the West-dominated international order in the present. China, for instance, is known for widely applying a so-called 'negative' soft power based on "othering" the West (Callahan 2015), for which it often falls back on anti-colonial rhetoric when it comes to African states (Huang and Ding 2006, 38).

The second implication of pro- and reactiveness is that proactive strategies are *opportunity seeking* while reactive ones are *problem solving* (Shimp 2010, 537). It manifests itself in the fact that the democratic states' perception of soft power's ultimate goal - turning rivals into friends - is hardly shared by authoritarian states in practice: for example, case study show that China's image-enhancing activities primarily aim to strengthen regime legitimacy and national identity domestically rather than "win hearts and minds" in the competing states (Callahan 2015, 225-226; Wilson 2015a, 291-292). In a similar fashion, Russia is noted for "misinterpretation" of soft power, since "instead of winning people over who do not share Russia's foreign principles and goals, the country seeks to mobilize those who already agree with them" (Ćweik-Karpowicz 2012, 9). What is more, autocracies often go as far as rejecting Nye's conception of soft power as changing people's minds as too aggressive and contradictory to the principle of national sovereignty. Such can be seen in China, where soft power is deemed not only as a foreign policy opportunity, but, importantly, as the West's weapon which may be applied "in the fomenting of Colour Revolutions as a means to change China" (Wilson 2015a, 290). Russia goes even further, explicitly stating in its Foreign Policy Concept (MFA of Russia 2013) that:

> "[s]oft power," a comprehensive toolkit for achieving foreign policy objectives building on civil society potential, information, cultural and other methods and technologies alternative to traditional diplomacy, is becoming an indispensable component of modern international relations. At the same time, increasing global competition and the growing crisis potential sometimes creates a risk of destructive and unlawful use of "soft power" and human rights concepts to exert political pressure on sovereign states, interfere in their internal affairs, destabilize their political situation, manipulate public opinion, including under the pretext of financing cultural and human rights projects abroad.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, I have endeavoured to show that the way a country handles its image abroad is at least partially dependent on its political regime (see Table 1).

Naturally, it does not in the least mean that other factors such as a country's size, its geographical location, economic capacities, history, culture, current political priorities etc do not impact on the characteristics of its soft power strategy. Importantly, such characteristics determine the main differences between the Russian and Chinese soft power strategies. For instance, compared to China, Russia possesses far less material resources to conduct a coherent soft power strategy at a global level. Furthermore, whereas China is attempting to create an image of a peaceful country that avoids clashes, Russia is currently involved in a strong ideological confrontation with the West: therefore, while China primarily accentuates its 5,000-year-old culture and philosophy, Russia seeks to attract critics of liberalism worldwide placing a higher emphasis on traditional family values, "enlightened conservatism," anti-LGBTI rhetoric etc (Wilson 2015b, 1190-1191).

Table 1. Soft Power Strategies' Characteristics Dependent on a Political Regime

Criteria	Democratic States	Authoritarian States
Actors Involved and their Roles	A soft power strategy is mainly conducted by and serves the goals of the private sector and a civil society. The state's function is mostly advisory and coordinating; the state also fills the gaps left by the first two actors.	The state elaborates and decides on the goals of a soft power strategy as well as controls its implementation. The state is also its main participant; a civil society and the private sector participate in soft power strategies only where and to the extent that they are allowed to by the state.
Domestic and International Messages	Domestic and international versions of the public media have no or almost no difference in the content and manner of reporting.	The public media show more partiality, emotionally stronger rhetoric and narrower range of opinions when broadcasting at home than abroad.
Temporal Frames	A soft power strategy primarily aims to fulfill long-term strategic goals.	A soft power strategy is mainly used as a combination of short-term tactical moves.
Reference to Regime in the Discourse	The political regime is accentuated and promoted with a sense of pride as a country's high achievement.	The political regime is not specially highlighted or even sold as democracy.

Ideological Goals	A soft power strategy's ideological component is stable, taken relatively seriously by the authorities and treated by them as one of the strategic goals.	The ideological component of a soft power strategy is treated as a means rather than a goal; it is unstable and often get adjusted depending on a situation at home and in the recipient country.
Relation to Competitors' Strategies	A soft power strategy emerges from below by itself, irrespective of competitors' activities.	A soft power strategy emerges as a governmental reaction to the activities of democratic states.

Moreover, some researchers argue that the political regime has a more specific impact on soft power strategies when it is considered in a combination with other factors: for instance, according to Wilson (2015a, 295), it is important that Russia and China "are not simply authoritarian states, but rather authoritarian regimes that have been deeply imprinted with the values and attitudes of their Marxist-Leninist heritage, which constitutes an important element of their national identity." In either case, it appears that the democracy/authoritarianism dichotomy should be always taken into account as a variable by case study researchers when they describe the specificities of certain countries' soft power strategies. The main issue that still remains unclear is to what extent all autocracies' peculiarities impact on the *efficiency* of soft power strategies. As I stated in the Introduction, the traditional liberal view championed by Nye is that the absence of universalistic ideas as well as the lack of consistency and coherence undermine credibility and, hence, limit the capability of a soft power strategy to produce a good image. However, some other publications seem to question the usefulness of universalism: for instance, the growth of anti-Americanism in the world in the 2000s is believed to have partially originated in the perceived ubiquity of American culture and "over-success" of US soft power in the world (Fan 2008, 154). Similarly, as I argued above, a shortage of coherence and consistency often does not sap a message's credibility for certain psychological reasons. Yet, two main problems seem to hinder doing proper research on democracies' and autocracies' soft power efficiency. First, such would require a profound analysis of psychological, marketing and PR theories and their subsequent integration into the IR field. Second, it appears hard (albeit not impossible) to disentangle the impact of country A's soft power on country B's elite and public opinion from the impact of other forces.

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