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## COUNTERBALANCING EU AND RUSSIAN SOFT POWER PRACTICES IN GEORGIA

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### ABSTRACT

*This article examines the counterbalance of EU and Russian soft powers in Georgia through identifying the main strategies, frameworks, tools and the domains of operation. The analysis is done on macro and micro levels by exploring the counterbalance within political, economic, cultural and educational spheres and simultaneously scrutinizing the fluctuations of public attitudes towards the EU and Russia in Georgia. Via the detached conceptualization of Soft Power, the study illustrates foreign interest frameworks and consequences of the soft power practices on the two levels of analysis. Cultural domain appears to be the most vulnerable vis-à-vis Russian soft power presence, paving the way to the political influence further illustrated by the alterations in public attitudes. Whereas for the EU, economics and education are the spheres where soft power is best revealed and public attitudes are affected respectively too. Georgian political establishment has been stable in providing legitimization and legal frameworks for the EU presence through the mentioned fields. The influential power of Russian cyber and media tools and anti-Western myths that counterbalance EU soft power on a micro level are closely examined throughout the study.*

### KEYWORDS

- Soft Power
- Russia
- European Union
- Georgian Politics
- Influence; Counterbalance;

### 1. Introduction

Throughout 2017, East Statcom Task Force have identified and altered 66 pro-Kremlin disinformation cases in Georgia through the campaign ‘EU vs Disinformation’, which makes it fourth on the scale for this year following Ukraine, Russia, and the EU.<sup>[1]</sup> This single statistic is a part of a wider picture of the divulged soft power policies becoming increasingly incorporated in the policies of the great powers in the international arena.

Traditionally, the test of a great power was its strength in war. Today the definition of power is moving its emphasis away from military force and conquest that marked earlier eras. The factors of technology, education, and economic growth are becoming more significant in international power, while geography, population, and raw materials are becoming somewhat less important (Nye: 1990, p.153). The attitude

1 EU VS Disinfo Web-page. Main page: <https://euvdisinfo.eu/>

towards hard power has changed, and nowadays soft power is more advantageous for great powers to pursue their interest. Josef Nye offers the definition of soft power, which unlike the use of coercion is the use of inducements, payments, and attraction that “makes others want what you want” (Nye: 2008, p.96). The distinction between hard and soft power is the nature of the behavior and the tangibility of the resources. Non-military expressions and the subtler uses of power are usually manifested in diplomacy – which embodies and expresses much more than power (Malissen: 2005). The phenomenon is especially revealed when speaking about small states, who are seeking their position in the international arena. This paper focuses on post-Soviet Georgia in the sense of explaining the counterbalance of Russian and EU soft powers impacts in the state.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the member republics became sovereign subjects of international law. However, the independent states of the South Caucasus were geopolitically dependent on the Russian Federation, which had a substantial political and economic impact on them. By the early 90s, the West still considered post-Soviet countries as a matter of Moscow’s domestic affairs (Jones et al.: 2013). The Western states reevaluated the importance of the South Caucasus, not only because of its linkage status between central Asia and Europe but mostly because the political shifts within the South Caucasian states seeking European integration. At the same time, the interest of the Russian Federation in maintaining the imperialist political and economic influence on these states never faded away. However, the traditional method of military intervention became less efficient, due to responsive international sanctions. Simultaneously, European Union presence in the region started to expand through the comprehensive partnership programs concentrated on building the political institutions and market economy in the post-Soviet countries throughout Eastern Europe. Such cooperation between the EU and Georgia aims to reduce dependence on Russia. At the same time, Russia formulated a new lever towards the states of South Caucasus: using “Soft Power” in order to restore influence and prevent the processes of European integration.

Since soft power has been declared part of Russian foreign policy (in 2012) several studies have concentrated on different dimensions of this policy. Some have been focused on the theoretical understanding of the phenomenon itself and locating it in the theoretical framework (Troistski: 2011; Pilko: 2012; Makinen: 2013). This literature mostly draws the line between Nye’s conceptualizations of Soft, Hard and Smart power and phenomenon of the Russian soft power. The others paid more attention to the understanding of the Russian soft power strategies towards Baltic States (Kuczyńska-Zonik:2016; Simsons: 2015; Smirnov: 2012) and also towards post-Soviet Eastern Partnership Countries collectively (Kornilov and Makarychev: 2015; Tafuro 2014; Cwiek-Karpowicz: 2011). Almost all of these studies took into consideration the factors of the EU and the West in general when analyzing strategies or interests of the Russian soft power, although none, to my knowledge, have systematically analyzed presence of the both types of soft powers (from the EU and from Russia) through the single case in the context of their counterbalance.

The research paper’s main argument is the following: Russian and EU interests are derived from different historical contexts and aim to fulfill dissimilar interests,

which results in a counterbalance in the politics of the great powers in Georgia. Hence, the research questions are: *why and how do the EU and Russia apply soft power tools in Georgia and how are they counterbalanced on micro and macro levels in the state?*

The paper applies the qualitative strategy of research based on the primary and secondary sources. The paper also employs triangulation in the sense of using several qualitative methods within a single study (Flick: 1992). It should be mentioned that generalization of the findings is not in the aim of this single study. Most frequently, the method of secondary data analysis will be used throughout the analytical part of the paper. In this regard, the following sources will be used: surveys conducted by Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC) Georgia, which have a high quality of accountability and transparency<sup>2</sup>, reports of Georgian nongovernmental research organizations, and reports from the EU institutions, mainly by the European Commission. Publications of National Democratic Institution of Georgia are mainly based on datasets collected by international social surveys. Because of the reasons, these regional sources have been selected for the purposes of this paper.

As for primary sources, the content of the resolutions of the EU institutions referring to the subject and official policy documents from Russia -concerning foreign policy and security strategy (mainly from 2015) - are critically analyzed. The discourse analysis and media analysis methods are applied to the speeches of the politicians (for a time frame of 2007-2017).

At the beginning of the paper, a review of literature locates the soft power phenomenon in the academic discussion. That is important insofar as a deep and comprehensive literature review gives the readers an opportunity to understand soft power by distinguishing its various aspects. For example, the theory by Joseph Nye concerning *Soft Power*, which is the basic and primary work on this issue, is fully concentrated on the political weight of the states. Whereas, other analyses put an emphasis on economics, global informational era and hard power. Considering the role of a theoretical framework in conceptualizing a phenomenon, (Spink,1999:15) a review of the existing literature and debates will serve as the theoretical framework of the research, within which the issue will be explored. The following section indicates and compares the interests of the EU and Russia for applying respective policies of the soft power vis-à-vis Georgia. Through this section, the consequences of the mentioned policies are also revealed through the analysis of the social surveys conducted through the years of 2015-2017. Observing soft power tools through politics, economics, culture and education, the research emphasizes the dissimilar nature of the great powers for procuring influence through soft power policies. Finally, the paper reaches the conclusion that Russian soft power is especially successful through culture insofar as anti-Western myths and propaganda content have room to access Georgian society through traditional informational sources and most importantly, through historical legacies. By contrast, the counterbalance of the EU soft power in these terms is based on educational programs and campaigns, which have an asymmetric impact on awareness throughout the society. However, the latter finds its legitimacy within

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2 CRRC has 10 years of experience providing researchers, governments, donors, NGOs and the private sector with data and analysis of critical trends and expectations in Georgia and across the region. See more at <http://www.crrccenters.org/2015/Brief-History>

economic and especially political spheres, where it counterbalances the traditional Russian presence to a larger extent.

## 2. Soft Power

Traditionally, power was interpreted as the strength of a state in war, which itself was dependent on the following criteria: political stability, military forces, economic size, natural resources, territory, population, etc. However, at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the definition of power lost its previous meaning, and other factors became more significant for international power (Nye: 1990, p.155). During this period the concept of soft power emerged, which was directly connected with the work of Joseph Nye. Accordingly, that became rather dependent on foreign policies, values and culture, than military incentive (Nye: 2004). Later, Nye drew out the concept of the *smart power*, which is, in this sense, a balance of hard and soft power (Nye: 2005, p.75). However, Joseph Nye's view is entirely concentrated on an enhanced meaning of soft power. In the modern era armed conflicts became costly, in other words, applying hard power is related to huge political and economic expenses, while the use of soft power is "free of charge". As a final point, important for the research, Nye describes soft power as the ability to affect others through the co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuading, and eliciting positive attraction, in order to obtain preferred outcomes (Nye: 2011). The logic of this analysis has a notable relevance for the paper, insofar as it departs from the modern tendency of detached understanding of soft power as a political tool in the globalized world.

Nevertheless, popularity as well as the legitimacy of the soft power is probably best revealed in times of widespread media and usage of the internet, but the probability of applying hard power still keeps its role as a basis of other influential political tools. At times, hard and soft powers are used together to strengthen one another. Frequently, soft power depends on hard power and without any support is not able to gain traction. Contrary to this opinion, Cynthia Schneider claims that soft power will be more effective if more money is spent on it (Schneider, 2005). Therefore, a powerful economy is considered as an appropriate source of soft power. Like Schneider, Alan Chong emphasizes the distinguishing source of soft power. He argues that the global information era not only reinforces soft power but also makes it the most influential leverage, which does not need the backing of hard power (Chong: 2007). Finally, we can say that Schneider and Chong supplement Nye's three factors: foreign policy, values and culture, with firm economics and informative sources.

It should be noted that some scholars do not admit soft power as an independent tool of foreign policy and see its function only in concert with hard power. For example, Colin Gray argues that hard power is the state's essential instrument in order to accomplish their interests and it must not be replaced by soft power, which is mostly dependent on the foreign countries' perceptions (Gray: 2011). Niall Ferguson shares Gray's views and examines soft power as modern imperialism, which is dependent on hard power (Ferguson: 2004). Both of these authors criticize the newly appeared and widely recognized soft power, which has already achieved some popularity among the states for different reasons. As we shall see later, this is not quite the case if we

take into account various dimensions of applying soft power. Although the context of Georgia leaves room for taking into consideration the presence of a hard power too, particularly when speaking about the success of Russian policies in the country on a macro level. Here it should be useful to turn to the understanding of soft power phenomenon from 'narrow' and 'broad' senses. The narrow understanding implying policies related to attractiveness and the broad as 'the ability to change the political preferences of others' (Troitski: 2011).

As for outcomes and advantages of soft power, the governments are forced to put a lot at stake when using hard power, which sometimes results in direct and overt confrontations that are subversive. Therefore, many scholars emphasize the advantages of soft power, which are less pernicious for states and governments. Firstly, soft power does not rely on finite resources, like military power, economic power, etc. It does not require any commitment to justify or prove implemented actions (Wagner: 2014). Herewith soft power is an effective way to control not only nations but also non-state actors, which are flexible enough and resistant to hard power (Gallarotti: 2011). Outlining the non-state actors is of significant importance for the case of Georgia, as church institutions, media, and non-governmental sector are the momentous sources of influencing different segments of society in the country.

In conclusion, used as a primary subject of the analysis here, soft power is the means of power which rejects military and aggressive actions. The spread of ideology, information, and generation of public opinion by media, influential public institutions, educational centers or other funds give governments an opportunity to direct their foreign policy without any tensions and prestige problems on the international level. The effectiveness of soft power is dependent on the well-organized scheme, stable economy, sufficient financial resources and political will. By these disguised activities, states using soft power are able to procure or maintain political, economic or cultural influences on their target states. In addition, the only feasible and legitimate tool to be used for opposing the establishment of strong influence, is again soft power. In the case of Georgia, this appears to be EU soft power counterbalancing policies of Russia in the country. Consequences of the later are analyzed throughout the following section.

### **3. Purposes and Consequences of Using Soft Power in Georgia**

Georgia is one of the small states which emerged after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Its status as a small state is mainly ascribed according to the major threats the state has to continuously confront. Summarized by Charles, those are the intimidations related to the territorial integrity, stable economy, political independence and security with social cohesion and environmental sustainability (Charles: 1997, xi). In addition to the fact that small states play a noteworthy role in international peace on the one hand, their decisions concerning foreign policy turns out to be crucial. In the case of Georgia, we could speak about political sovereignty (Rondeli: 2001). However, considering post-Soviet context and geopolitical importance of the state, when analyzing its policy constructions Russian interests should not be taken out of the analysis.

As a successor state of the Soviet Union, Russian Federation prioritizes

maintaining a hegemonic position in the region. As the stronger neighbor, Russia has been powerfully affecting newly independent post-Soviet countries, characterized by weak political institutions and economic stability (Herzig: 1999). One of the noteworthy reasons behind Russia's interest in staying influential power over Georgia has to do with its growing geographical importance for the Western countries to connect Central Asia. The very fact makes Georgia an important energy transit and simultaneously decreases Russian hegemony in the region affecting its monopoly on ways to supply energy to Europe. In general, Russia has been aiming to influence foreign policy decisions of the South Caucasian states (Cornell: 2007). Consequently, it was not unexpected that the firm decision of Georgia towards moving onto a Western vector would contribute in deteriorating relations with Russia, which appeared to be the case throughout the last decade. To start with, Russia imposed an embargo on Georgian wine being exported to Russia, followed by a refusal to allow Georgian mineral water imports in Russia. Besides economic manipulations like blocking money transfer and postal service to Georgia, the Russian government used mass deportations of Georgians as another tool for regaining influence.

The doctrine used by Russia towards the Southern Caucasus is often described as *controlled instability* (Liberal Academy Tbilisi, 2016). In Georgia, the issue of a creeping border is meant to destabilize the political situation and maintain its salience on a social level. Economic manipulations are an important part of this policy too. Significantly, the possibility of applying hard power contributes to creating the situation when the need of dependence on a powerful neighbor becomes unavoidable for the transitioning, post-Soviet, countries.

In the context of soft power, through the official documents from 2013 and 2015 concerning foreign policy and security strategies, Russia has explicitly legitimized the necessity of informational influence outside of the federation. According to the documents, a strengthening of the Russian media on the international level is connected to the sovereignty and security of the Russian Federation (National Security Strategy of Russian Federation, II). Here 'the threat to security' largely implicates European integration of Georgia as the process is perceived as uncontrolled southern border and presence of hostile forces there (Utiashvili: 2014).

On the other hand, EU interests in Georgia mainly implicates the will of the country for further integration with the West. Several authors speak about the strategic importance of the South Caucasus states insofar as their location facilitates the connection between Central Asia and Western Europe through the Black Sea, which in a way influences Russian dominance on the energy route (Herzig: 1999; Rondeli: 2002). Having mentioned the strategic meaning of Georgia above, EU has adopted a strategy that is remarkably dissimilar from Russia in relations with Georgia. In general, the strategy of the EU towards Georgia scripted through firstly EU Neighbor Policy and later under the EU Eastern Partnership Program, aims on the stabilization of the governing institutions; strengthening the rule of law and respect of human rights; improvement of democracy and consolidation of civil society; in general, introducing European Values<sup>[3]</sup>. In other words, the primary interest in the region for EU is

3 Fundamental European Values could be conceptualized as following: 1) Humanity; 2) Rationality; 3) Secularity; 4) Rule of Law; 5) Democracy; 6) Equality. *Source:* [http://europa.eu/scadplus/constitution/objectives\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/scadplus/constitution/objectives_en.htm)

transforming neighboring former Soviet states into stable and peaceful ones. The tools both global powers use underline their relative interests concerning Georgia.

The external vector of Georgia has not changed on an institutional level by firmly declaring an intention for integration with the European and Euro-Atlantic institutions. While this is an established comprehension of foreign policy within the ruling party, attitudes and support of the society towards the foreign vector has been experiencing some fluctuations. Moreover, as we shall see, the soft power policies have been occasionally targeting Georgian population rather than the state institutions. Consequently, the upcoming analysis demonstrate trends in public policy attitudes that could be causally correlated with external informational influence.

Public attitudes in Georgia towards the foreign policy of the country is mainly divided between improving relations with Russia and willing to strive for integration with EU. There is quite a clear line among people prioritizing ties with Russia as the most important national issue and respondents supporting and trusting further integration in EU. In this sense, applying the concept of *counterbalance* becomes especially relevant. However, a minor segment of the representative sample reveals positive attitudes towards both, Western integration and cautious policies towards Russia.

According to the results of countrywide representative sociological polls conducted by CRRC Georgia in 2015, only 18% of Georgian respondents fully support Georgia's membership in EU, while this variable in 2013 was 34%. Simultaneously, the numbers of respondents supporting Georgia's membership in the Eurasian Union have risen from 16% (2014) to 24% in 2015 and 20% in 2016. This situation is caused by two main reasons, which are directly connected to Russian soft power. According to the Russian narratives, if Georgia and Russia establish closer political and economic relations, the problem of territorial integrity will be solved in no time. Furthermore, the number of EU and NATO skeptics increased, because of the long-term and *perceived as* non-beneficial integration processes. Georgia is still outside of the EU and NATO. Although after approving Visa waiver by the European Parliament for Georgian citizens, positive attitudes towards EU have slightly risen, the latest survey indicates that 45% of the respondents still express strong will for "Georgia to have closest political cooperation with Russia" (CRRC: 2017). It is also important to note, that the more skeptical the respondents are about membership prospects, the more they prioritize improving relations with Russia (NDI: 2015). Comparative shifts in the public attitudes since 2015 marks an intensification of spreading disinformation and border provocations by Russia in the annexed region of South Ossetia. In addition to that, the negotiations with EU concerning Visa facilitation were accompanied by Putin's announcement referring to the will to eliminate Visa for Georgian citizens. He pronounced the statement on the closing conference of the year 2015, just the day before EU would announce fourth and final account on the successful accomplishment of Visa liberalization requirements by Georgia (*EU Commission: SPEECH/15/6371*). This indicates the attempt of the Russian politicians to compete with 'Western popularity' in Georgia by maintaining the attractiveness of Russia deeply rooted through some segments of post-Soviet Georgian society.

Consistent with the same research from 2015, a large number of those who express distrust in the EU, see it as a struggle for Georgian culture and traditions. It

is important to underline that fewer people in 2013 would perceive the EU as the striking actor for Georgian traditions that would abolish specific Georgian culture. Even in 2017, this rhetoric is still visible, although among fewer respondents (33%). The apparent explanation lies in a media portrayal by Russia that seeks to present European values in a negative light. Narratives of the disinformation spread among the Georgian population attempt to persuade them that only close relations with the Russian Federation can preserve Georgian culture and individuality. These tales find their legitimacy in the common religion and historical importance of Christian Orthodoxy for the Georgian nation. As for the EU efforts, an increasing number of sources have been implemented in intensifying informational events through urban as well as rural areas. These include enlarged support to pro-EU non-governmental organizations and civil society movements in making the information about the EU work easily accessible. In these terms special attention is paid to the ethnic minorities as skepticism towards European integration has always been higher among these groups.

In regards to media power, an interesting discrepancy in the trust towards the EU is to be seen between the respondents who base their knowledge about EU on newspapers and Russian channels and those who get this kind of information from the internet, international organizations, social networks and EU delegations. Obviously, their trust is based on the information they hold. Slightly below half (46%) of the respondents from the 2015 survey, who support Georgia's membership in the Eurasian Economic Community exclude membership of the country in EU. It is noteworthy that a vast majority of the EEC's supporters, 85%, and 90% have no answer or refuse to reply about Georgia's membership in EU (Caucasus Barometer, 2015). Although the number of EEC supporters have been significantly reduced since 2015, a majority of them base their support on their own economic interests and on the hope to resolve territorial problems, which is again a significant part of Russian propaganda.

One more significant data refers to "the best current support to Georgia", to which those interviewed responded in the following way: EU - 33%, Russia - 24%, while 17% is for the USA (Eurasia Partnership Foundation, 2016-17). The numbers stay immutable through 2017 too. Here we should also take into account results from 2011, when "Approval of Russian Leadership" against U.S leadership was 6% - the lowest in all Eastern Partnership countries<sup>[4]</sup> (Gallup poll :2011). However, while the EU takes a central place in this case, it is still undeniable that Russia remains a desirable assistance for some Georgians. Insofar as division of responses among dissimilar age groups is quite noticeable (people in the group of 56+ age mention Russia more frequently) this could reflect the nostalgic attitude of some Georgians towards the Soviet Union, which is repeatedly revealed and reminded by different political parties or social movements<sup>[5]</sup>. Most of the mentioned political parties appeared to be explicitly affiliated with Russia, either financially or politically.

Noteworthy tendencies are revealed in case of the ethnic minorities. According

4 Armenia 75%; Ukraine 61%; Moldova 56%; Azerbaijan- 54%; Belarus- 40%; Source: Gallup poll (2011) "Russia's Leadership Not Popular Worldwide"

5 By the 2016 elections, there have been several political parties promising to Georgian people either to bring Communism back or to become part of the Russian Federation. Their right to take part in the elections was suspended by Election Administration of Georgia.

to the census release 2014, the biggest ethnic minority group in Georgia is the Azeri people (6.3%), followed by the Armenian minority (4.5%) and Russians (0.7%) (National Statistics Office of Georgia: Census 2014). This segment of Georgian citizens has always been a significant part of the Georgian multicultural society. At the same time, they become the first and foremost target group for external powers to influence. Especially Russian policies toward Georgia normally include provocations targeting different ethnic minorities. In the sense of Soft Power, those policies convert into media tools spreading favorable disinformation according to Russian interests in Georgia. Some other factors like a lack of language proficiency in Georgian prevent them to get information from other alternative sources than Russian ones. Also, the deterioration of effective government policies towards minorities collectively resulted in the increased hopes towards Russian assistance in correspondence with dwindling expectations towards EU. Compared to Georgian-speaking segment, Ethnic minorities show notably less awareness about EU in general and especially in specific issues related to EU-Georgia relations. Apparently, there is a correlation between above-mentioned factors including 'Russian soft power' and knowledge and attitudes of Georgian ethnic minorities towards EU and Russia. In addition, most of the ethnic minority groups are concentrated on the borders of Georgia, which makes them even more vulnerable to the Russian propaganda.

Nonetheless, several authors suggest that the presence of Russian hard power reduces effectiveness of its soft power strategies (Sergunin and Karabeshkin:2015; Tafuro: 2014; Ćwiek-Karpowicz: 2012), in this case, the presence of hard power rather reinforces success of the soft power strategies. In order to provide an adequate explanation of the situation described in the above section, the upcoming sections will include a closer examination and analysis of Russian soft power tools. This time the emphasis will be on the cultural, political and economic influences.

#### 4. Russian Soft Power

In her article concerning the Russia's soft power discourses, Yulia Kiseleva speaks of the 'dual great power identity' of Russia, which is a result of the relationship with the other great power - the West. According to her, Russia's need to gain an influence and status revealed in its soft power strategies are driven from this traditional approach to the Other, meaning the West (Kiseleva,2015). That was revealed in the rhetoric of Putin when he referred to soft power policies coming from the Western context as "unlawful" interference <sup>6]</sup> (Putin: 2012 analyzed in Kornilov et.al, 2014; Kiseleva: 2015). Applying soft power policies by Russia are also analyzed in the context of restoring its international image as a reliable, modern democratic state, which was contrary proved after the 2008 war with Georgia and the internal protests prior to elections of 2011 and 2012, not to mention the international talks concerning Crimea (Sergunin and Karabeshkin: 2015).

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6 "Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation" (2013) Available at: <http://www.mid.ru/ru/home>

#### 4.1. Cultural Influence

Russian propaganda in Georgia mainly involves the following narratives: 1) Orthodox Christianity as a common faith<sup>7</sup> paving the way for 2) The common values and shared history reflected in social discourses on a daily basis and 3) Cultural closeness, in the sense of shared cultural practices and experiences of living together under one regime (Liberal Academy Tbilisi: 2016, p.34; Karpowicz: 2011). Given 70 years of the Soviet rule and the strong myth-producing policies, these narratives have deep roots in the consciousness of the post-communist Georgian society. Speaking about the success of the myth, Christopher Flood emphasizes the importance of a narrative to be correctly interpreting in a way that social group “accepts or subsequently comes to accept as true” (Flood: 2001, p.43). This logic applies to Georgia too, insofar as the mentioned narratives are publicly shared in a way that denial of them causes a feeling of protest in some segments of the society.

Since the very beginning of the Georgia-Russia relations, the factor of common religion played an immense role in maintaining cultural ties. Even during the most challenging periods of Georgia, the *small state* would choose the leadership of Russia rather than that of any other nation, with the declared intention to maintain and preserve Christian Orthodoxy. Despite many people remembering breaches of agreements<sup>8</sup> and “strict lessons” of invasions, the matter of religion still creates a favorable basis for some people to recover and improve relations with Russia. Moreover, those people somewhat or fully trusting of religious institutions reveal the least trust in non-religious and non-political institutions like NGOs (Caucasus Barometer: 2015) or other think-tanks. This very fact creates more opportunity for them to deny different ideas about European as well as Russian values and priorities. This category of Georgians usually intends to perceive the integration with the EU as a negative step for Georgian culture and traditions. Media Development Foundation reported that the biggest part of anti-Western messages (32%) refer to the cultural and identity issues: “the West tries to impose homosexuality, incest, pedophilia, zoophiles and perversion and fights against national identity, traditions, Orthodox Christianity, family as a social institution” (MDF: 2016, p.9). According to the same institution, Russian propaganda gets to the Georgian society through: fake news, demonization of the West and constant reintroduction of the Soviet myths, and digital (photo/video) manipulations (MFA, 2016:10). Needless to mention the role of the media in providing a platform for these messages to spread in the society.

The Russian media or media sources that get financial support from Russia (operating in Georgian) are one of the most influential tools of Russian soft power in Georgia, as some people find them as the sole source of information. Reports from 2015 and 2016 of the Media Development Foundation conducted in partnership with USAID and UNAG, reveal and classify the main sources of Russian propaganda in Georgia. According to the report from 2015, the foremost source of the mentioned

7 Christian Orthodox Russia appears in some nationalists’ narrative as a historical assistance to defend Georgia from “expansionist aims of the Islamic world.” (Leader of the political party “Alliance of Patriots of Georgia”) Source: interview with Netgazeti.ge <http://netgazeti.ge/news/20747/>

8 Most significant examples: Ceasefire Agreement in 2008; Treaty of Georgievsk 1783;

type of information is media, which is followed by particular members of society and political parties. In the report of 2016, the situation is almost the same, with political parties moving closer to media in promoting anti-Western narratives. The clergy and former members of the Georgian government follow those sources through both reports.

The amount and coverage of the mentioned type of media have constantly been increasing since 2014. They agitate disinformation and attempt to create stereotypes based on anti-European rhetoric. For example, the idea that the “Western world is against the Christian Orthodox Church”; “Integration processes with NATO mean giving up on occupied territories”; “NGOs are working not for Georgian but for Western countries’ interests” etc. MDF categorizes the techniques of sending particular messages from the media as *AD NAUSEAM*. The method apparently recalls one of the most effective tools of Soviet Union and therefore stands for “the method of repeating the same idea frequently enough that the audience starts to believe in it.” One more noteworthy technique used by the media is asking doubtful questions about the real “friend” and the real “rival”. Anti-Western propaganda also includes agitating a fake idea of the non-existing dilemma of the Georgian foreign policy direction. This kind of media includes several Georgian TV channels and web portals, namely: “Obiektivi”; “Sakinform”; “Geworld.ge” and “Reportiori”(MDF, 2015).

#### 4.2. *Influence on Politics*

In this section, the article emphasizes the role of political parties, which construct not only domestic and foreign policies but also influence the political views of the population. The states, using soft power, often can influence foreign political parties using financial support, intimidation or blackmail.

Therein, there is no exceptional situation in Georgia on these matters. In 2011, four Georgian parties: Peoples party, Conservative Party, the Republican party of Georgia and Free Democrats were sponsored by Georgian businessmen owning huge capital in Russia. Ivanishvili transferred five million GEL (=around 1.6 Million in Euros) in Georgia<sup>9</sup>. As for political intimidation and blackmail, Georgian parties are persistent enough against Russia’s occupation politics. The latter is not able to manipulate the issues of Abkhazia and South Ossetia because they are not perceived as a matter of “diplomatic trade”.

The issue of the political parties’ backgrounds, as well as their ideological direction, reaches its peak of significance and topicality during the election period in the country. As for the Parliamentary elections in 2016, a wide range of political parties offered “attractive” promises to voters. If in 2012 there were none of the Pro-Russian parties that would obviously express anti-European ideas, in 2016 at least three political parties, out of 29 registered (Election Administration of Georgia, 2016)<sup>10</sup>, agitated at least the possibility of recovering ‘good relations’ with Russia or

9 Netgazeti, “Comments on Ivanishvili’s donations of political parties.”

10 Election Administration of Georgia. <http://cesko.ge/eng/list/show/108519-saarchevno-blokebi-romeltats-mimartes-tseskos-2016-tslis-8-oqtombris-saqartvelos-parlamentis-archevnebshi-monatsileobis-miznit> Information by

even getting back the communist regime. In addition to that, even the party promoting formal Russian governance appeared during the pre-election process. The head of the party, recently returned from Russia, actively promoted ideas about getting internally displaced people back to their houses and improvement of the social situation, in accordance with double, Georgian and Russian, passports for Georgians. As those ideas violated certain chapter from Georgian Constitution about territorial integrity and independence (*Constitution 1995(rev.2013), Art.2, Ch.1*), the party was banned from taking part in the elections. Nevertheless, the stirring up of Russian “soft invasion” during the important democracy-testing process is apparent. However, two other political parties: 1) ‘Democratic Movement-United Georgia’ led by the former parliamentary speaker, Nino Burjanadze, and 2) “Alliance of Patriots” distinguished by its Turkophobic sentiments and antipathy to NATO and EU - are still getting some public support as the latter has 6 representatives in parliament.

It should also be mentioned that Georgian political parties confront each other about the issue of Russian-Georgian future relations. Members of the parliamentary majority, the deputies of Georgian Dream party, are eager to co-operate with Russians in the following fields: power engineering, trade, and social issues. For example, Georgian government’s desire to start negotiation with Gazprom caused interminable discussions among the population and the political groups. The supporters of the mentioned cooperation claim that the entrance of Russian company will have a positive impact on the Georgian energy market. The diversification of natural gas suppliers will create healthy competition, the prices and dependence on Azerbaijan’s economy will be reduced. Contrary to this opinion, most of the Georgian politicians think that any cooperation with Russia is a betrayal of the national interests. The dependence on the Gazprom, gives the traditional political and economic levers to the Kremlin, which might be used in order to restore and strengthen influence on political decisions.

### 4.3. Influence on Economy

Huge labor market and enormous energy resources with cultural proximity and common history are the factors which Karpowicz underlines when speaking about the success of the Russian soft power strategies (Karpowicz: 2011). Once, Russian right-wing politician Anatoly Chubais said: “If Russia buys the strategic economic units in the post-Soviet space and outside it in order to accomplish its national interests, the mentioned policy in the long-term period will be a more effective way to gain political and economic influence than military intervention” (Kakhiashvili, 2013). The main levers for implementation of the Russian soft power are the natural gas and oil resources (Hill: 2006, p.341). Russian capital started inculcation in Georgian business too. Russian businesspersons control most of Georgia’s energy resources (Institute for Development of Freedom of Information, 2016).

Russia possesses huge business capital in Georgia, which includes the following fields: power engineering, water supply, oil market and middle scale business. For example, Inter Rao, which belongs to Russian politicians and powerful businessmen,

owns important parts of Georgian energetics. The latter controls 75% of the energy redistributing company JSC “Telasi,” thermal power plant LTD “Mtkvari Energetic” and the large hydroelectric power stations “Khrameshi 1” and “Khrameshi 2.” In addition to this, the largest hydroelectric power station in the Caucasus “Engurhesi” belongs to Inter Rao (IDFI Report, 2016). Russian companies control Georgian water supply system. Ltd “Georgian Water and Power” is owned by the Offshore Entity “Georgian Global utilities” which is directly connected to the Russian businessmen (Transparency International Georgia: *Report 2016*).

More than 200 petrol stations belong to the Russian oil companies. Billionaires Dmitri Trotsky and Dmitri Korzhev are holders of RMG Gold and RMG Copper, which are precious metals mining companies. “IDS Borjomi Georgia,” which produces Georgian mineral waters: Borjomi, Likani, and Bakuriani, is owned by Russian oligarch Mikhail Fridman. The above-mentioned cases show the effectiveness and influence of Russian economic soft power on Georgia. Furthermore, in 2014, Georgia received \$66 million direct investments from Russia, which captured the eighth position in the list of foreign economic partners (TI: 2016). The interminable discussion about Gazprom, which tried to enter Georgian energy market, exposed lots of pro-Russian groups. It is overt that the doctrine of Chubais works effectively and most of the Georgian strategic economic units are under the control of the Russian businessmen, who have very close relations with Russian politicians. These conditions give the opportunity to the Russian government to control significant sectors of economics and in case of necessity cause a huge financial crisis or more importantly, a fear of the crisis in Georgia.

## 5. EU Soft Power

### 5.1. *Influence on Politics in Georgia*

In this section, the research’s main aim is to examine the phenomenon and tools of European soft power and expose how it works in counterbalance to the Russian respective presence. It is important to mention that Russia has applied not only soft power, but also military interventions in order to pursue its national interests in the neighboring states. At the same time, the EU is strengthening its political position in Georgia without and in contrast to the aggressive military actions. While Russia uses the variety of above-mentioned propaganda and conspiracy tools in order to procure pro-Russian politicians and public policy figures in Georgia, EU soft power operates under the inclination of the Georgian state towards European integration and sets the criteria that a state seeking partnership and integration is supposed to meet. The one amongst many of those conditions is a harmonization of the legislature and political institutions with EU standards. The different approaches of the EU and Russia derive not only from dissimilar interests, but also from the unrelated historical context of relations between Georgia and Russia on the one hand, and Georgia and the EU, on the other hand.

The starting point of EU-Georgia relations is 1992, one year after Georgia declared its sovereignty following the break-up of the Soviet Union. Since then the

relations did not see any notable progress until 2003, when a revolutionary change of government took place. Until the Rose Revolution, EU-Georgia relations were limited to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, under which annual meetings used to take place.

The more intense partnership was launched through the European Neighborhood Policy elaborated in 2003. The program aims to achieve the closest possible political association and the greatest possible degree of economic integration with EU's Southern and Eastern neighbors. The European Neighborhood Policy as a part of the European Union's Foreign policy tries to spread the European values, as follows: democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and social cohesion in the target states. The ENP action plans are the basic documents that define the framework between the sides of agreement<sup>[11]</sup>. In 2005 the EU and Georgia drafted an ENP action plan which was later replaced by the Association Agreement. In the case of Georgia ENP contains several noteworthy aspects that reflect a remarkable example of the scope of EU's political influence in Georgia. The areas of partnership are comprehensive especially in contrast with the suspended and conflicted relations with Russia. For instance, the aims of the ENP partnership includes:<sup>[12]</sup>

- An upgrade in the scope and intensity of political cooperation, through further development of mechanisms for political dialogue
- Enhancing cooperation in the area of Justice, Freedom, and Security, notably in the field of border management and migration.
- Increased possibilities for closer co-operation in the area of foreign and security policy.

In addition to this, in 2009 EU created the special Eastern Partnership program for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine in order to enhance cooperation with them and accelerate the European integration processes. The declaration, signed in Prague, aims to extend EU's relationship with the region, including the cooperation with the member states on the following issues: security, stability, and prosperity.<sup>[13]</sup> The entire involvement in Eastern Partnership program resulted in Association Agreement between Georgia and EU, which opened up the further presence of EU policies in the Georgian political agenda and vice versa.

The Association Agreement's positive continuation was "Visa Liberalization Dialogues" with three Eastern Partnership countries, namely Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia. Following the four positive reports from the European Commission on the Visa Liberalization Action Plan (VLAP) fulfilled by Georgia, by March 2017 European Commission granted visa-free movement to Georgian citizens through the Schengen member states (EUr-Lex, *Doc.N 22011A0225(02)*). The Russian attempt to counterbalance the optimistic nature of the development consisted of the media coverage as well as official statements by Russian politicians such as Karasin, the Russian

11 European Union External Action. "EU Relations with Eastern Partnership" URL: [http://www.eeas.europa.eu/eastern/about/index\\_en.htm](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/eastern/about/index_en.htm) Accessed 15.10.2017

12 European External Action Service, "EU Georgia Action Plan". [https://eeas.europa.eu/enp/pdf/pdf/action\\_plans/georgia\\_enp\\_ap\\_final\\_en.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/enp/pdf/pdf/action_plans/georgia_enp_ap_final_en.pdf) Retrieved on 10.10.2016.

13 European Union External Action, "European Neighborhood Policy (ENP)" [https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/european-neighbourhood-policy-enp/330/european-neighbourhood-policy-enp\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/european-neighbourhood-policy-enp/330/european-neighbourhood-policy-enp_en)

deputy foreign minister. Karasin, who is the only diplomat from Russia involved in negotiations with Georgia through the single format of the 'Abashidze-Karasin', has changed his rhetoric about visa facilitation issue after the agreement mentioned above with EU. Particularly his interview on November 3, 2016, with 'Rossia Segodnya' highlights the influence of Georgia-EU relations' dynamics on waiving visas for Georgian citizens by the Russian Federation: "...In principle, we do not rule out the possibility of a visa-free regime with Georgia. And of course, in dealing with this issue, it is important to take into account the corresponding processes between the EU and Georgia" (*Karasin, November 2016*)<sup>[14]</sup>.

Whereas throughout the interviews given after the March 2017 (Visa waiver with EU), he started to point out issues related to terrorism and security as obstacles for granting visa-free movement to Georgian citizens: "The abolition of visas for Georgian citizens is hampered not only by the absence of diplomatic relations between our countries, which Tbilisi unilaterally canceled in 2008 but also by the lack of security in the region. Military conflicts are underway close to Georgia and terrorists are trying to get into the Russian territory through Georgia. That's why this situation is a matter of serious consideration and needs experts' analysis" (*Karasin, November 2017*)<sup>[15]</sup>.

Apparently, the matter of visa waiver for Georgian citizens 'offered' by the Russian government intended to counterbalance support of Georgians towards EU. The Russian media coverage (*Gazeta.ru, NTV, RT*) referred to the visa waiver approved by EC as an interest of the EU to outsource refugee camps in South Caucasus. The narrative was based on Sebastian Kurz's talk published by the 'Bild am Sonntag' newspaper<sup>[16]</sup>. However, immediate announcements were made denying that plan from the Georgian government<sup>[17]</sup> and from the EU side too<sup>[18]</sup>, although in a short period public concerns and suspicious attitudes were still altered through everyday discourse.

In sum, EU soft power established the firm positive attitudes towards the importance of European integration process among politicians and electorate, against the background of the counterbalancing power of Russia. Although pro-Russian politicians and bribed parties have a pernicious effect on Georgian domestic and foreign affairs, the most of Georgian authorities consider EU as a propitious partner and the European integration as a premise of the political and economic development.

14 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation web-page, interview with Karasin, November 2016. Retrieved on 25.11.2017.

[http://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign\\_policy/news//asset\\_publisher/ckNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2513205](http://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/news//asset_publisher/ckNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2513205)

15 Interview with RIA Novosti. Russia News Today web-page

16 "We need refugee centers outside the European Union, which would be managed jointly with the UNHCR, UN Refugee Agency. Their location is not so important" [http://time.com/collection-post/4684932/sebastian-kurz-next-generation-leaders/?xid=time\\_socialflow\\_twitter](http://time.com/collection-post/4684932/sebastian-kurz-next-generation-leaders/?xid=time_socialflow_twitter).

17 Official Statement of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia. <http://mfa.gov.ge/News/presis-da-informaciiis-departamentis-komentari-avst.aspx?CatID=5&lang=en-US>. Retrieved on 20.11.2017

18 EU Migration Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos's interview with Voice of America's Georgian Service. <https://www.voanews.com/a/european-union-commission-grants-visa-free-travel-for-georgians/3742983.html> Retrieved on 25.11.2017

## 5.2. StatCom

The European Commission declared essential the effective communication and strengthening of the media environment within the member states and Eastern Neighborhood. Lithuanian member of the European Parliament, Petras Auštrevičius stressed the importance of further action towards disinformation in the open letter published in March 2017: “We are still reactive, not pro-active”. Consequently, addressing disinformation activities by external powers was declared as the *raison d’être* of the Action Plan on Strategic Communication in March 2015. In Eastern Partnership countries StatCom works through awareness rising campaigns about EU policies. More importantly, it aims to detect, analyze and correct disinformation, against which these states tend to be quite vulnerable. For these purposes, a team of 12 full member employees is actively engaged in social media and the internet weekly publishing *Disinformation Review* on their web-page: EUvsDisinfo.eu. Furthermore, the StatCom group has already built a network with the local media means and NGOs in order to cooperatively detect fake news.

Although the issue of detecting and altering disinformation has become one of the priorities for EU through recent years, the taken actions do not seem to be enough to guard against the background of Russian systematic and widespread disinformation tools. In the context of Georgia, the above sections reflecting the perceptions and attitudes of the society prove no exception from this claim. Aside from the fact that there is a very limited number of the working staff, there are several other hindering factors too: 1) The work of StatCom published in English and Russian is available through the internet only, which does not reach the segment of the society getting news only from the newspapers and TV (in Georgia this portion is 77%) (NDI Dataset: 2016); 2) The knowledge of existing weekly updates is limited to around 27.000 followers in comparison to the huge popularity of Russian media, for example, an active tool as RT (around 2.5 million followers) or Sputnik (over one million followers).

## 5.3. Young European Ambassadors initiative

Regarding awareness raising campaigns, Young European Ambassadors initiative is a successful project funded by the European Commission through the European Neighborhood Instrument. Launched since November 2016, the YEA initiative already involves almost 200 members from the Eastern Partnership countries and aims to enhance regional cooperation and spreading the information about EU policies through a bottom-up approach<sup>[19]</sup>. Most of the projects conducted through the initiative take place in the schools and universities with the members talking with the younger generation about the EU policies and the opportunities they are given through the partnership with the EU. The initiative is unique in the sense that it implies dialogue driven activities among youngsters. Active promotion of their work by the members through the social networks and TV channels reaches wide specter of society in each of the five countries. Through the initiative several informational projects at Armenian, Azerbaijanian and Moldavian schools have already been conducted in 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Euneighbours.eu Web-page. “EU in Action”. <http://www.euneighbours.eu/en/east/eu-in-action>

The initiative represents a strong presence of EU soft power in the country in the way that it plays an immense role in counterbalancing anti-Western propaganda among Georgian youth and affecting societal attitudes indirectly.

#### 5.4. *Influence on economics*

The EU and Georgia have close economic relations which were defined first by the EU-Georgia Action Plan agreed in 2005 and then by the Association Agreement signed in 2014. At the initial stage of cooperation, the EU strived to deepen trade and economic relations; providing the opportunity for convergence of economic legislation and the continued reduction of non-tariff barriers to trade, which would have stimulated investment and growth<sup>[20]</sup>. The Association Agreement enhanced the mentioned EU-Georgia economic relations and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) came into the force. According to the Association Agreement, Georgia receives significant economic benefits from the unilateral Generalized Scheme of Preferences (GSP). Georgia procures access to the EU market and at the same time, Georgian Business should be fitted to the new preferential trade regime provided by the DCFTA.

The DCFTA establishes close and active economic relations between EU and Georgia, which will be an important prerequisite for European integration. The reforms in trade-related areas are based on the principles of the World Trade Organization. It removes all import duties on goods and provides for broad mutual access to trade in services. The DCFTA is a beneficial chance not only for Georgian but also for EU companies to explore each other's markets, share goods and technologies. EU economic policy in Georgia is concentrated on improving governance, strengthening the rule of law and providing more economic opportunities by expanding the EU market to Georgian goods and services. It will also attract foreign investment to Georgia. All the mentioned activities cause the economic growth and increased involvement in the interdependency, which is one of the most important policies of the EU.

Statistical information shows the effectiveness of EU economic soft power in Georgia. The EU is the most significant trade partner for Georgia. In 2015, EU trade turnover with Georgia was €2.6 billion, which accounted for 0.1% of its total trade, amounting to 35.2% of Georgia's overall trade. As for Georgian exports to the EU, it included mineral products, agricultural products, base metals and chemical products. The EU imported goods to the value of €742 million from Georgia in 2015, although less through 2016 - €551, EU is still the main trade partner for Georgia<sup>[21]</sup>.

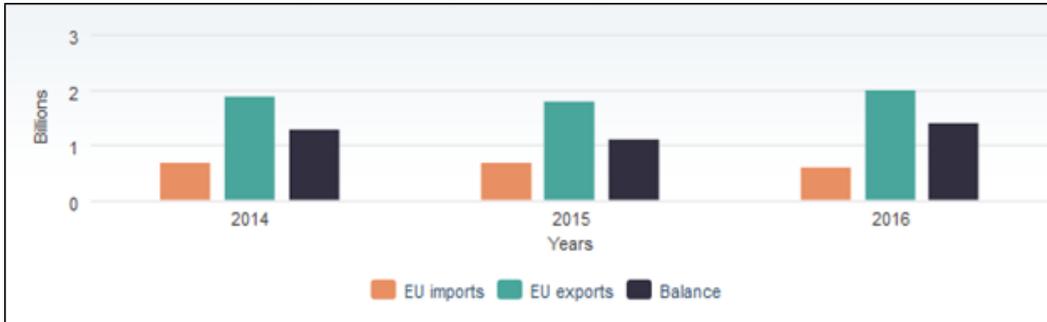
The improvement of economic relations with the EU is a long-term issue, however it is also a significant factor for the state's foreign policy vector. As mentioned above, Russian soft power in Georgia most of the time finds its basis in economics. On the other hand, the stated priorities of the people through the social surveys reveal their economic interests as the foremost aspect when asked about the foreign policy of their country. Needless to mention how causal are the enhancement of the economic

20 European Commission Web-page. <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/georgia/>  
Retrieved on 10.11.2017

21 EC web-page -Trade. <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/georgia/>

relations and support for the EU within the society. Hence, economics is a sphere where the EU's soft power is most effective in the Georgian context.

**Fig.1. EU-Georgia “trade in goods” statistics**



Source: European Commission, “Countries and Regions: Georgia” <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/georgia/>

### 5.5. EU Soft Power in Education

The EU has been cooperating with the partner countries in higher education fields since 1990. Several programs were created for students in order to help them get an education in an international environment. Tempus, Erasmus Mundus, and Erasmus+ are remarkable examples of EU soft power with aims to spread European values among neighboring countries and give an opportunity to the young generations to become parts of the Western education system. In this section, we describe how these programs have been implemented in Georgia.

In 1990, the European Union established the program Tempus, which supports the modernization of higher education in the partner countries of Eastern Europe, Central Asia, the Western Balkans and the Mediterranean region, mainly through university cooperation projects. 30 Georgian higher educational institutions from the different cities were involved in the mentioned program. From 1990 to 2013, seventy projects were sponsored. Tempus had accomplished 22 projects in Georgia by 2016 [22].

The European Union enhanced its influence in the education field in the partner states by the creation of a new Erasmus Mundus program. The latter cooperates in the field of higher education that aims to enhance the quality of European higher education and to promote dialogue and understanding between people and cultures through cooperation with Third-Countries. In addition, it contributes to the development of human resources and the international cooperation capacity of higher education institutions in the third countries by increasing mobility between the European Union and these countries. Georgian Universities participated in 23 sponsored projects during 2007-2013. [23] Unlike Tempus and Erasmus Mundus, the Jean Monnet programme has

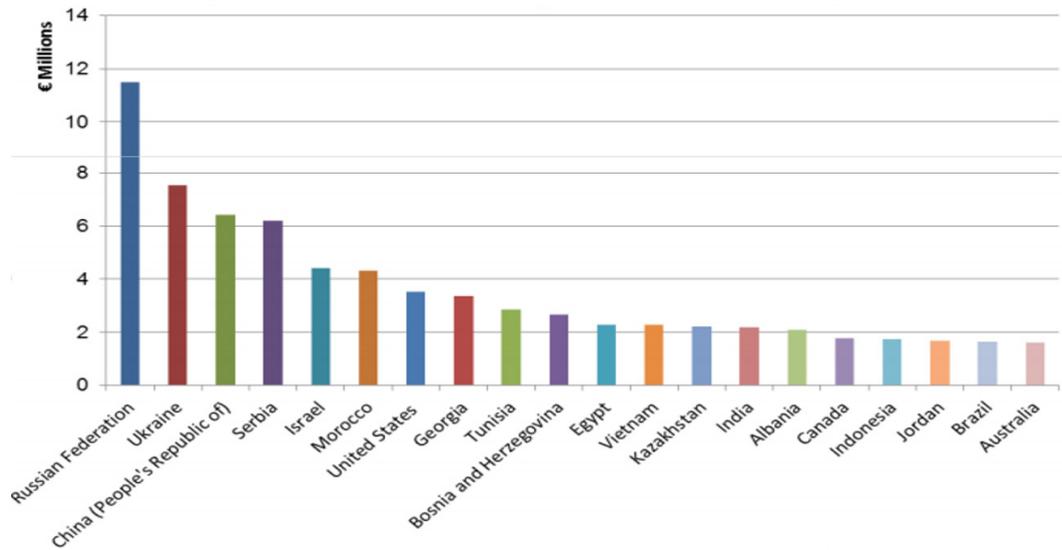
22 National Erasmus+ Office Georgia, “Projects FROM 2014” <http://erasmusplus.org.ge/en/projects/after-2014>

23 EC Web-page. Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency Service tools. [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-mundus/results\\_compendia/statistics\\_en.php](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-mundus/results_compendia/statistics_en.php)

different aims. It is concentrated on stimulating teaching, research and reflection in the field of European integration studies at the level of higher education institutions within and outside the European Community. The mentioned program was launched in 1989, but in Georgia, only five projects were sponsored and implemented. In 2015-2016 six Jean Monnet projects have been founded with the participation of Georgian institutions (*National Erasmus+ Office Georgia*).

The most significant and successful European commission education programme in Georgia is Erasmus Plus. The latter's main aim is to support education, training, youth, and sport in Europe. Its operation period is 2014-2020 and possesses a budget amount of €14.7 billion. The program provides opportunities for over 4 million Europeans to study, train gain experience, and volunteers abroad<sup>[24]</sup>. 25 Georgian higher education institutions are cooperating with 102 universities from 29 countries. Erasmus Plus programme has two directions - credit mobility and degree mobility, which offer different possibilities to the exchange students. Through the 2015 year, 888 students (697 outgoing to Europe + 191 incomings from Europe) won credit mobility scholarships, while this variable in 2016 reached 1,388 students (878 outgoing to Europe + 510 incoming from Europe). Between 2015 and 2016 only 25 students have got scholarships for Erasmus Mundus degree mobility Master Courses. It should be noted that Georgia is in 8<sup>th</sup> position among the top 20 partner countries based on a total share of grants.

Fig. 2. Top 20 Partner Countries based on a share of total grant



Source: European Commission, "Jean Monnet Programme" [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/llp/results\\_projects/statistics\\_en.php](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/llp/results_projects/statistics_en.php)

Hence, the EU invests vast financial recourses in the young Georgian generations in order to create a segment of the population which realizes the importance of European values. This is an indirect result of the educational programs the EU

24 EC Web-page, 'Erasmus+'. [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about_en) Retrieved on 10.10.2016.

have supported, insofar as the educational experience in an international environment not only equips youngster with degree knowledge but to a large extent with informal education, broader perspectives on the world, personal development and practical experience of living in the EU member country. Therefore, supporting education through different programs is another key sphere through which EU counterbalances Russian influence on the country and procures its soft power in Georgia.

## 6. Conclusion

The paper emerged around a research question concerning the reasons, frameworks and tools for applying soft power policies by the EU and Russia, and attempted to analyze their counterbalance on a micro and macro levels in Georgia. Throughout the study, the phenomenon of Soft Power was based on Joseph Nye's conceptualization, although on a detached understanding of the phenomenon as an autonomous policy.

The analysis of the counterbalancing policies primarily underlined the respective interests and relation frameworks of the EU and Russia towards Georgia. The former's presence is understood within the frames of the declared external political vector of Georgia towards European integration, whereas the latter's operation is not politically legitimized by the legal framework and is mainly comprehended through the expression of controlled instability serving an aim to restore the Russian influence on the post-Soviet South Caucasus. Furthermore, reducing Russian economic monopoly on supplying energy from the Middle East to Europe has been an interest factor of the EU for contributing in the transformation of the neighboring former Soviet states into stable and peaceful ones.

As for the fluctuations of public attitudes corresponding the counterbalancing soft power practices, the paper claims that public attitudes in Georgia towards the foreign policy are mainly divided and mutually balanced between improving relations with Russia and supporting further integration with the EU. In short, the more skeptical the respondents get about the membership prospects, the more they prioritize improving relations with Russia. These alterations are connected with increased informational influence of Russia affecting the cultural domains. Thus, even though the EU remains a priority when it comes to the external political inclination, it is still undeniable that Russia somewhat regained an image of a desirable ally for some Georgians, with growing tendency throughout the recent years.

The tools identified as soft power strategies are analyzed within the political, economic, educational and cultural dimensions. Regarding the influence gained through the cultural influences, the Russian (or Russian financed) media sources are the leading influential tools of Russian soft power in Georgia. On a micro level, considerable number of respondents find particular media sources as the sole source of information over the years. In this case, the logic of the success of myths applies, insofar as the Russian narratives are based on perceptions of the history and national identity that are publicly shared among the Georgian society. Through this sphere of influence, Russia has been successfully reaching out the Georgian community. The

qualitative study on these matter from a social-psychological perspective would be a great contribution to comprehend this rather politically paradoxical process.

On the contrary, Russian soft power is mostly counterbalanced by the EU presence in Georgian political establishment, economics and educational domain. The foreign vector of Georgia on a government level is stable and rarely if questioned. Most of the Georgian executives consider EU as a propitious partner and the European integration as a premise of the political and economic development. In addition to that, interaction is limited among the political authorities over the issues of territorial integrity of Georgia as cases of Abkhazia, and South Ossetia are not perceived as a matter of “diplomatic trade.”

The economy is a domain where the counterbalance is most obviously revealed and supposedly tangible for a society too. Russian capital is highly incorporated in Georgian businesses, and Russian businesspersons control most of Georgia’s energy recourses. At the same time, the EU keeps being the foremost trade partner for Georgia throughout the recent years. Russian soft power in economy reduces correspondingly with expanding trade cooperation and increasing number of spheres under the trade agreements with the EU. Considering the causality of the improved economic relations between the EU and Georgia and support of the EU among the society, it is fair to name economics as the sphere where the EU’s soft power is most effective in the process of counterbalancing Russian influence in Georgia. Education is another key domain through which the EU counteracts Russian influence in the country and procures its soft power in a long run.

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