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Polina Khmilevska

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8434-8116>
polinakhmilevska@yahoo.com

Russia's soft and sharp power on the example of policy towards Ukraine

Introduction

The concept of the soft power introduced by Joseph Nye in early 2000s used to be something new and intriguing. States started to learn and implement it into local strategies of the foreign policies, but leaving behind what was not serving and adding in new what was beneficial. Also, it turned out that the Nye's logic initially concerned only the democratic model of a state, whereas applying it to the autocratic or authoritarian models would sum into something different.

With the ongoing full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia, it is important to analyze how Russian propaganda machine penetrates not only in Ukraine, but into the minds of people all over the world. The most obvious example of that is the astonishment of the world community on the full-scale war Russia started. With all the western thinkers and policy makers who assured the masses on impossibility of wars in 21st century, the conclusion would be either the world underestimated Russians, or Russia simply deceived the world, or just both.

This article shall analyze the concepts of soft and sharp power and how it has been used by the Russian state in Ukraine to create informational and political chaos over the last decade. More specifically, the aim would be to indicate how Russians fight against Ukraine not only on the battlefield, but also at the information and cyber space, at the political and cultural levels. The article will try to answer the questions like: Why sharp power is a threat to the global security and democracy? Which consequences of using the sharp power by Russia in its war against Ukraine? Why sharp power became the key instrument for the authoritarian states?

For the research several methodologies have been used, such as legal and institutional, but mainly empirical – observation and description, including analysis, synthesis, classification, induction and deduction. Also, some of the data have been analyzed from the statistical and systematic perspective, the article includes several case studies that illustrate suggested examples. The resources that have been used for this research are mainly academic articles and monographs, as well as formal reports of international organizations, but also some credible political journals and papers.

Concept of soft power and growing popularity of sharp power

Joseph Nye formulated ‘soft power’ as “getting others to want the outcomes that you want”¹, in other words co-opting people rather than coercing them. He further developed that when leaders in authoritarian countries can use ‘hard power’ – coercion and commands, leaders in democratic countries need to rely on inducement and attraction. That ability to form preferences demands the leader to have attractive personality, culture, moral authority, political values and institutions, implementing policies that are seen as legitimate. If a leader represents values that others want to follow, it will cost less to lead.

Means or assets of ‘soft power’ differ from traditional ‘hard power’, as it uses not money or threat, but attraction to the same values and contribution to achieving them. This, of course, demands from political leaders and their electorate to have increased morale and generally appeals to the paradigm in which all human beings tend to peace and security. This is very liberal approach, and mostly associated with Western societies, especially with the United States².

¹ J.S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics*, Public Affairs, New York 2009, p. 20.

² *Ibidem*.

Sharp power is the latest term in international relations, derived from above mentioned soft power, that was firstly introduced by Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig and is described as “the use of manipulative diplomatic policies by one country to influence the political system of a target country”³. The main characteristics is that it uses aggressive and subversive policies by authoritarian governments as a projection of state interests in democratic countries. Walker and Ludwig highlight, that in contrast to soft power, sharp power “pierces, penetrates, or perforates the political and information environments”⁴. Nye himself says, that sharp power is the reality of contemporary hard power and suggests that it includes both voluntarism and coercion in the manipulation of ideas as expressed in hard power⁵. Taking advantage of the open information environment of democracies, the authoritarians’ sharp power efforts are typically difficult to detect, meaning they benefit from a lag time before the targeted democracies realize there is a problem.

Furthermore, Nye points out, that sharp power needs to be differentiated as a separate type of power, as it deceptively may be recognized as a soft power – distinction between them may be very difficult. The main distinction here is that sharp power takes persuasion (which is the choice on how to frame the information) into deliberate deception, which limits the voluntary choices in the targeted society and crosses the line into coercion and form of hard power. The real challenge for democratic societies is how to respond to sharp power, as overreacting with authoritarian measures may damage the civil society (foundations, universities, *etc.*) which is the main source of soft power⁶. So, we may say, that what we have to date understood as ‘soft power’ when speaking of authoritarian regimes might be more properly labeled as ‘sharp power’.

However, when it comes to Russia, according to Nye the Soviet Union also had its own soft power, especially after the World War II communist ideology gained its attractiveness due to its resistance to fascism and idea of decolonization for the post-colonial countries. However, crushing of Hungarian and Prague Spring revealed the real intentions of Kremlin and undermined their reputation. In 21st century Russia’s culture was regarded as attractive, although having little global presence. The concept of soft power was not gaining much interest in Russia in early 2000s, as it completely contradicted

³ C. Walker, J. Ludwig, *The Meaning of Sharp Power*, Foreign Affairs, 16.11.2017, www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2017-11-16/meaning-sharp-power [accessed: 3.08.2024].

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ J. Knight, *Knowledge Diplomacy in International Relations and Higher Education*, Springer International Publishing, Cham 2022, pp. 34–35.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

with Russian tradition and way of thinking – tsarist and later Soviet power was unilateral and authoritarian, almost always relying on harsh violence and repression.

Rather, what is observable, is that Soviet KGB's strategies of disinformation and penetration into the information field transformed into Russia's FSB methodologies that they have been excelling since the collapse of the Soviet Union. They have been distracting and manipulating every country or region that they eventually planned to invade and occupy, namely Chechnya, Transnistria, Georgia, Ukraine. Some countries have not been invaded, but still remain under Russia's influence in information field like Kazakhstan, Belarus and Armenia.

When it comes to sharp power, mainly China and Russia are exposed as an example of states using this instrument. The widespread attention to it has been drawn when these countries started to work on global scale – when Russia's outreach could disrupt the 2016 presidential elections in US, that's when the world took it seriously. However, this is only the result of FSB exercising and excelling the skills of sharp power on smaller scale during 90s and 2000s, now they can alter the public opinions all over the world, does not matter if it is in Europe or Americas. They realized that they could achieve their objectives by making democracy appear to be relatively less attractive. Russian disinformation efforts have since constituted a relentless, multidimensional attack on the prestige of democracies – the United States and leading European Union countries especially – and on the ideas underlying democratic systems⁷.

The effects of the sharp power are multidimensional and can be analyzed in such spheres as media and information, knowledge and academia, technology and commerce and capital. Firstly, in the age of information, local media in weakened democracies may face financial shortages, which gives the authoritarian powers space for bribery and manipulation, creating a vacuum in local reporting that authoritarian state media outlets seek to fill through direct and indirect means. Secondly, knowledge sector initiatives of the authoritarian states aim to compromise the systems that facilitate the exchange of ideas, while appropriating knowledge generating institutions, to the extent that they are permitted to do so, as their own platforms of influence. Thirdly, technological innovations and platforms are being actively developed and implemented by the authoritarians, while also using vulnerable situation of the lack of crafting rules and limitations in democratic countries. Finally,

⁷ National Endowment for Democracy, *Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence: New Forum Report*, 2017, www.ned.org/sharp-power-rising-authoritarian-influence-forum-report [accessed: 3.08.2024].

authoritarian corrosive capital is enabled by a lack of strong legal safeguards and robust accountability and transparency mechanisms⁸.

Sharp power as a preparation for occupation

If we focus on Russia's war against Ukraine, it is observable, that Russia's intention to 'get back Ukraine' appeared right after Ukraine's gaining independence in 1991 and then has been established as a key element of their external policy after Putin took over the power. Speaking at the first World Congress of compatriots on October 11, 2001 he said that from now on, Russia will deal with those who, due to the geopolitical transformations of the 20th century, found themselves 'outside the historical homeland'⁹. The political doctrine of Russia is still imperialistic, and it cannot and will not live without Ukraine, and as we can see nowadays they are ready to throw every resource to keep Ukraine within the empire.

Although in this article the main focus will be on the years before the full-scale invasion and after it, it worth mentioning how Russia cut, razor-like, into the fabric of a society of Ukraine, stoking and amplifying existing divisions long before the full scale invasion. By the example of the sharp power reports made by National Endowment for Democracy, sharp power of Russia targeting Ukraine will be analyzed in four dimensions, however the most paramount are media, knowledge and culture, capital and commerce.

There are three main parts to Russian sharp power strategy in the media sphere. The first is to reach media consumers through the Kremlin's own state media outlets, globally that means newspaper "Russia Beyond", which is inserted into local papers in some 27 countries using 16 languages; external television broadcaster *RT* and the *soi-disant* news agency and external radio broadcaster Sputnik are even more widely available, producing content in dozens of languages. The second part of the Russian media strategy is to use financial and other means to influence mainstream media in target countries. The third part of the strategy is clandestine or indirect pressure. This can take

⁸ National Endowment for Democracy, *A Full-Spectrum Response to Sharp Power: The Strengths and Vulnerabilities of Open Societies*, 2021, www.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/A-Full-Spectrum-Response-to-Sharp-Power-The-Vulnerabilities-and-Strengths-of-Open-Societies-Walker-Ludwig-June-2021.pdf [accessed: 9.08.2024].

⁹ В. Ільницький, В. Старка, М. Галів, *Російська пропаганда як елемент підготовки до збройної агресії проти України* [Russian propaganda as an element of preparation for armed aggression against Ukraine], "Ukrainian Historical Journal" 2022, issue 5, pp. 43–55, doi.org/10.15407/uhj2022.05.043.

the form of secret financing of competitors, disguised mergers and acquisitions, and the bribery of key staff. Or it can involve news outlets that have no overt connection with Russia¹⁰.

When Russia initially started the war against Ukraine in 2014 with seizure of Crimea and the violent insurrection in the Donbas in 2014, it has been already the result of the long-term carefully planned information propaganda campaigns. Researchers say, that Russia's information war against Ukraine is equally violent and horrific as the military one. 'Troll factories' (organizations that employ people who publish comments on the Internet according to the purpose of customers using fake profiles in social networks); 'bots' (programs that automatically send messages, for example, in response to the appearance of a keyword); 'fakes' (false news messages intended to mislead media users), as well as texts, videos, audio, images, memes, *etc.* At the same time, individual political, public and even religious groups can be tools of information warfare. The main task of the Kremlin has become to 'undermine' Ukraine from the inside, to create the belief that Ukraine and Ukrainians are inextricably linked with the image of Russia as a Eurasian state¹¹.

Back in 1990, a famous Russian writer and former dissident Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn published an article where he was discussing that Russia should remain in its sphere of influence only two republics – Belarus and Ukraine. Thus, Revisionist statements of individual leaders of the Russian Federation and many publications of articles with Russian-chauvinistic opinions of public opinion leaders that the collapse of the USSR was the biggest 'geopolitical mistake' and 'tragedy' testified that Russia will begin 'collecting Russian lands' again in a short historical time¹².

After the 2000 elections, Putin's entourage gradually took control of the mass media funds. That is why, a key role in shaping the Russian cultural and informational world has been assigned to television. Just as in the USSR, television created an illusory comfortable world of a happy Soviet society, where everyone enjoys life, the thesis was popularized that Vladimir Putin is the leader who will 'revive the state greatness of Russia'. In 2006, Putin formulated the

¹⁰ National Endowment for Democracy, *Firming Up Democracy's Soft Underbelly: Authoritarian Influence and Media Vulnerability*, 2020, www.ned.org/sharp-power-democratic-resilience-series-firming-up-democracys-soft-underbelly [accessed: 11.08.2024].

¹¹ О.А. Джус, *Ключові показники ведення інформаційної війни Росії проти України* [Key indicators of information warfare Russia against Ukraine], Military Institute of the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, 2023, <https://jpl.donnu.edu.ua/article/view/14103> [accessed: 13.08.2024].

¹² В. Ільницький, В. Старка, М. Галів, *Російська пропаганда..., op. cit.*

doctrine of 'bringing economic opportunities in line with political status'. Its essence can be reduced to the fact, that Russian Federation tried to influence the behavior of other states through different dimensions like cultural and civilizational, educational and scientific, foreign policy, the so-called network system of Public Diplomacy. In practice, the old networks of Russian special services (FSB), following the example of the Soviet KGB, were given the new instructions, and in Europe, instead of communist cells, they have started to sponsor radical political forces¹³.

In 2010s Russian propaganda starts to actively develop the myth of historical victory in the World War II, with glorification of 'victory of grandpas', slogans 'we can repeat', St. George's ribbons and Immortal Regiments. The long living narrative about dividedness of Ukrainian nation between citizens of the West and East of Ukraine acquire aggressive features, more precisely between Ukrainian and Russian speakers.

All these narratives are vocalized through different broadcasting channels, that has been gradually connected directly or indirectly to Russia, or have been acquired by the people that are close to Putin. The example can be Viktor Medvedchuk, who has been arrested by the Security Service of Ukraine in 2022 and then eventually swapped in prisoners exchange between Russia and Ukraine in 2023. Among numerous allegations of Viktor Medvedchuk is involvement in a plot to set up a collaborator government in the wake of a Russian invasion, financing of terrorism in separatists DNR and LNR, illegal exploitation of natural resources in Ukraine's Russian-annexed Crimea, and many more. Most importantly, in February 2021, the president sanctioned Medvedchuk and ordered three Kremlin-linked TV channels that are thought to have been owned by the oligarch off the air for promoting anti-Ukrainian propaganda¹⁴.

Among the channels were 112 Ukraina, NewsOne, ZIK, Nash, which were opened in different times starting from early 2000s, and it worth mentioning that they were functioning mostly in Russian language or always had invited Russian-speaking guests. As Detector of Media suggests these channels created the 'anti-journalism' in Ukraine, meaning:

- artificially constructed reality – from scraps that are beneficial to the customer, distorted and fictional information picture in which any insignificant element can be godlessly exaggerated, but the most important events are absent;

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ Z. Sheftalovich, *Ukraine announces capture of top Putin pal Viktor Medvedchuk*, Politico, 13.04.2022, www.politico.eu/article/ukraine-capture-viktor-medvedchuk-putin-russia [accessed: 14.08.2024].

- fakes that are repeated so confidently, unconditionally and often that they become ‘well-known facts’ – for example, about the ‘artificial origin of the coronavirus’;
- hatred, deliberately fueled and inflated. Not only to the political or ideological opponents of the media owner – its objects can be various groups or images of the enemy, internal or external (to Soros, IMF, LGBT community, *etc.*)¹⁵.

Adding to already mentioned narratives, the channels justified the annexation of Crimea, blamed Ukrainian government for Donbas war or called it civil war, spread hatred to Ukrainian language and culture as well as to the West and NATO, *etc.*¹⁶

Another example of the Russian sharp power but in cultural and scientific sphere is the private project of Russian oligarchs started in 2016 in Babyn Yar near Kyiv – a complex of memorials on the grounds, honoring the victims of a massacre that took place there during World War II. Critics of the Babyn Yar project have cast it as part of this ‘hybrid war’ against Ukraine, a Trojan horse in the form of a Holocaust memorial. The memorial was not about honoring the memory of the victims, but rather manipulating it, by subtly shifting blame for the massacre onto Ukrainians, which was also in turn supported by the media propaganda¹⁷. The worries of the civil society have grown when Russian director Ilya Khrzhanovsky became the artistic director of the project. European historians and scientists that have worked on the project were expressing their concerns on the approach of Khrzhanovsky and eventually were resigning from the project – Austrian historian Dieter Bogner explained that he was shocked by the fact that, according to the artistic director’s plan, visitors were supposed to find themselves in the role of victims, collaborators, Nazis and prisoners of war who were forced to burn corpses. Bogner also

¹⁵ K. Yanchenko, A. Shestopalova, G. von Nordheim, K. Kleinen-von Königslöw, ‘*Repressed Opposition Media*’ or ‘*Tools of Hybrid Warfare*’? *Negotiating the Boundaries of Legitimate Journalism in Ukraine Prior to Russia’s Full-Scale Invasion*, “The International Journal of Press/Politics” 2024, vol. 29, issue 2, pp. 351–370.

¹⁶ Я. Зубченко, *Чому закриття каналів Медведчука — це не наступ на свободу слова* [Why closing Medvedchuk’s channels is not an attack on freedom of speech], Detektor Media, 3.02.2021, <https://detector.media/infospace/article/184529/2021-02-03-chomu-zakryttya-kanaliv-medvedchuka-tse-ne-nastup-na-svobodu-slova> [accessed: 16.08.2024].

¹⁷ S. Shuster, *Is Ukraine’s New Holocaust Memorial Also an Instrument of Kremlin Propaganda?*, Time, 29.09.2021, <https://time.com/6102593/ukraine-holocaust-memorial-kremlin-propaganda> [accessed: 16.08.2024].

left the project because of the idea of gamifying zing death, calling the new concept 'Holocaust-Disney'¹⁸.

One of many examples of Russian sharp power in commercial sphere is energy blackmail and energy terrorism, that Russia has been using since early 2000s. The official document from 2003 'Energy strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020'¹⁹ states: "Russia has significant energy reserves resources and a powerful fuel and energy complex, which is the basis for development of economy, a tool for implementing domestic and foreign policy"²⁰. Russia implemented energy pressure on Ukraine in 2006 and 2009 (the so-called 'gas wars') and in 2013, when, in order to prevent the signing of The Association Agreement with the EU and for Ukraine's accession to the Customs Union, began to discriminate Ukrainian exports to the Russian Federation, causing Ukraine economic damage²¹.

How Sharp Power is used by Russia in its war against Ukraine

With the start of the full scale invasion Ukraine is at the epicenter of the first live information war between Russia and the West. In fact, it is an evolutionary version of the Cold War, which "lasted from 1946 to 1989 and involved an economic, ideological, and political confrontation between the East (USSR) and the West (USA)"²². With the help of psychological pressure on Ukrainian society, the aggressor country is trying to destabilize the internal situation in Ukraine, penetrating in media, politics, social networks, *etc.* Starting from the speech of the president Putin from 21.02.2022, he denies the fact of Ukraine's independence and legitimacy of the current government (after 2014), distorts the historical past, in particular the words "Modern Ukraine is completely cre-

¹⁸ M. Shchur, "The problem is not in Hrzhanovsky, the problem is in Putin" – *Zisels on the Babyn Yar project*, Radio Svoboda, 14.05.2020, www.radiosvoboda.org/a/memorial-babyn-yar-maje-buty-ukrajinsky-projekt-zisels/30611160.html [accessed: 16.08.2024].

¹⁹ Н. Горло, *Енергетичний шантаж і енергетичний тероризм як загрози національній безпеці України* [Energy blackmail and energy terrorism as threats to Ukraine's national security], "National Interests of Ukraine" 2024, vol. 2, no. 2, p. 498, [https://doi.org/10.52058/3041-1793-2024-2\(2\)-494-504](https://doi.org/10.52058/3041-1793-2024-2(2)-494-504).

²⁰ *Ibidem*. Translation – P.K.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² Б. Синчак, *Прямоефірна інформаційна війна та російсько-українська війна 2022-го на медійному плацдармі* [Direct-air information war and the Russian-Ukrainian war of 2022 on the media bridgehead], "Ukrainian Information Space" 2022, vol. 2, no. 10, p. 89, <https://doi.org/10.31866/2616-7948.10.2022.269826>. Translation – P.K.

ated by Russia because of the rejection of part of its historical territories, and no one asked the residents anything”²³, these and other theses are disorienting in nature, direct threats should be attributed to intimidation, including statements about “readiness to show what it means for Ukraine a real decommunization”²⁴, and words about, that “responsibility for the possible continuation of bloodshed is on the conscience of the ruling regime in Ukraine”²⁵.

It is very important to look carefully not only to Russian media or ‘pro-Russian’ media in Ukraine, that mostly have been banned thanks to the active civil society in Ukraine, but it is important to see how Russia uses ‘liberal’ Russian media or so-called ‘opposition’ or ‘independent’ media, that have been repressed in Russia and fled to other countries. They create an image of existence of real opposition in Russia and any ‘democratic’ model of society. With careful research these media resources can turn out to be just another means of sharp power.

The examples can be very popular online journal Meduza and TV broadcasting channel Dozhd (TV Rain). Both of them fled to Latvia after the Russia’s full scale invasion of Ukraine, as they have been certified as foreign agents in Russia and could not carry on with their work there. Interestingly enough, Dozhd have functioned not long, as the authorization has been cancelled by Latvia’s media watchdog after the court’s decision related to threats to national security and public order. Dozhd was airing a map labeling Crimea as Russian territory, calling Russian forces ‘our army’, as well as the journalist spoke about the conditions in which Russian soldiers live, and said that many soldiers could be helped with equipment and basic amenities at the front²⁶.

Meduza admits Russia wages a war in Ukraine and criticizes Putin’s regime from the first day of the full-scale war. However, a study by Detector Media says that 55% of Meduza’s publications on July 1–21 contained Russian propaganda narratives, in particular, that it is ‘not entirely clear’ who is shelling Ukrainian cities and that Ukraine has abandoned residents of the occupied territories. From time to time, Meduza’s publications refer to the DNR and LNR, as if they really exist and are states – not terrorist organizations that control part of the territories occupied by Russia. Meduza also repeats the Russian government’s claims of a ‘preemptive strike against

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 91. Translation – P.K.

²⁴ *Ibidem*. Translation – P.K.

²⁵ *Ibidem*. Translation – P.K.

²⁶ N. Camut, *Latvia shuts down exiled Russian TV channel Dozhd*, Politico, 6.12.2022, www.politico.eu/article/latvia-media-regulator-shut-down-russia-tv-dozhd [accessed: 18.08.2024].

NATO' and the narrative that "not only Putin but also Western politicians are to blame for the war"²⁷. Yet, unfortunately, western media still make references to Meduza and considers it as independent platform, retranslates the information that they publish.

Another sphere of intervention is religion, that is vital topic in Ukraine, especially due to the newly passed law that bans Russian-aligned church. Orthodox Christianity is the most prevalent religion in both Russia and Ukraine, and until the Soviet breakup both belonged to the same hierarchy, under the patriarch in Moscow. The Orthodox Church of Ukraine, that broke from the Russian church in 1990, still had the minority of followers in Ukraine and has not been considered as legitimate, neither it possessed the important holy sites of Ukraine²⁸. Furthermore, in 2019 president Petro Poroshenko initiated the creation of Orthodox Church of Ukraine as the sole legitimate and independent Orthodox church in Ukraine by the Patriarch of Constantinople, *primus inter pares* among Orthodox Church hierarchs worldwide, who granted Poroshenko a church document (*tomos*)²⁹.

With the beginning of war in 2014, Russian Orthodox Church has infused it the conflict from its earliest stirrings – a Russian commando team sheltered in a monastery before igniting the first violence in the conflict as Russia fomented an uprising in eastern Ukraine in 2014. The leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill, blessed the Russian invasion in 2022. And an archimandrite, or top religious official, from the southern Ukrainian region of Kherson attended a Kremlin ceremony when Russia claimed to annex the region. The Ukrainian police have arrested or investigated several dozen priests for espionage or spreading Russian propaganda³⁰. What is more, there were many examples of priests who were helping Russian army or were aggressive and violent to the Ukrainian soldiers who attended the service in churches. Indeed, Russian Orthodox Church poses a uniquely subversive threat – a widely trusted institution that is not only an incubator

²⁷ O. Moroz, *From 'good' to 'helpful': How Russian opposition plays along with Kremlin propaganda – study*, *Ukrainska Pravda*, 9.11.2022, www.pravda.com.ua/eng/articles/2022/11/9/7375505 [accessed: 19.08.2024].

²⁸ A.E. Kramer, *Ukrainian Lawmakers Pass Bill Aiming to Ban Russian-Aligned Church*, *The New York Times*, 20.08.2024, www.nytimes.com/2024/08/20/world/europe/ukraine-orthodox-church-russia.html [accessed: 20.08.2024].

²⁹ N. Petro, *The Gospel According to Poroshenko: Politics, Religion, and the New Church of Ukraine*, *Yale Journal of International Affairs*, 4.04.2019, www.yalejournal.org/publications/the-gospel-according-to-poroshenko-politics-religion-and-the-new-church-of-ukraine [accessed: 20.08.2024].

³⁰ A.E. Kramer, *Ukrainian Lawmakers...*, *op. cit.*

of pro-Russia sentiment but is also infiltrated by priests, monks and nuns who have aided Russia in the war³¹.

It is also important to note, that Russia still uses sharp power to penetrate into Ukrainian politics, some Russian-aligned politicians are still sitting in the Ukrainian parliament, as well as in local structures. Despite the fact, that Ukraine has banned pro-Russian political party Opposition Platform, its former members still play a decisive role in Parliament and have people deputy mandates. Prior to the 2022 invasion, several of them, including Medvedchuk, were arrested and charged with treason. Opposition Platform party's chairman Yuri Boiko told Parliament that February 24th (when Russia invaded Ukraine) divided politicians into two groups and ensured that members who left the country do not exist for the party. Boiko's speech was a striking transformation for a politician who, just hours before the first Russian missiles hit Ukraine, had told Russian media that Ukrainian authorities were escalating the conflict in the Donbas region and failing to implement the Minsk cease-fire and peace agreements³².

Interestingly, Boiko holds status of a 'Hero of Ukraine', the highest national title that can be conferred upon a citizen which he received back in 2004, after rising through the country's oil industry to lead Naftogaz, the giant state-owned oil and gas company, and then becoming deputy energy minister under then-prime minister Viktor Yanukovich. Three years later, Boiko became one of the leaders of Yanukovich's Party of Regions (POR) and held several posts under his presidency. After the Euromaidan Revolution of 2014, when POR was pushed out of government and Yanukovich fled to exile in Russia, Boiko remained in Ukraine and reincarnated the fractured party into 'Opposition Bloc'. Now, during full scale war with Russia MPs from Opposition Platform remain as deputy heads of nine parliamentary committees and still have influence on law-making. Despite the fact, that recent opinion poll showed only 3% of respondents wanted MPs from Opposition Platform (or other pro-Russian parties) to hold on to their seats until the next election, they will remain there until the war is over, according to the Constitution³³.

³¹ *Idem*, *Clergymen or Spies? Churches Become Tools of War in Ukraine*, The New York Times, 31.12.2022, www.nytimes.com/2022/12/31/world/europe/orthodox-church-ukraine-russia.html [accessed: 20.08.2024].

³² I. Burdyga, *These are the men Russia wanted to put in charge of Ukraine*, openDemocracy, 4.03.2023, www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/ukraine-russia-opposition-platform-for-life-medvedchuk-boiko [accessed: 21.08.2024].

³³ *Ibidem*.

Conclusions

The research has clearly shown that concept of the sharp power reflects the contemporary reality. It has been there for quite some time, while the democracies have been building up their free information space, authoritarian regimes were finding the ways to use it. In today's world, when every piece of information can be checked, every event or action can be documented, it becomes extremely difficult to prove right or wrong, especially when there is an aim to manipulate facts and people.

Sharp power is threat not only for targeted societies and countries, but for all democratic countries and for those who support them ideologically. That is due to the fact of highly digitalized world, people can not only reach out to any information, but they can be attacked with information on targeted topics, that authoritarian regimes want to exploit in their strategies. That is why, democratic states should grow the awareness and upskill its societies to resist the growing challenge.

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Abstract

Russian invasion of Ukraine might look like purely military act, however that was already the result of long years of information, cultural and scientific war. These aspects are the elements of broader term 'sharp power' – a 'soft power' that is being exploited by authoritarian states like Russia and China. This mental occupation of Ukraine has been carefully planned by the Russian state, which has been keeping Ukraine from development of its civil society, political system, cultural elites, national memory and many more. Nevertheless, despite all the skepticism, Ukrainian people are fighting for their state and territory the third year, which proves the existence of Ukrainian nation and its maturity.

Key words: soft power, sharp power, Russia, Ukraine, Russo-Ukrainian War, information war

