

NORD STREAM 2 and its Soft Power – an Unfolding Playground for European Union

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“There are two ways of spreading light:
to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it.”²
(Edith Wharton)

Abstract: *This paper focuses on the Nord Stream 2 pipeline in a double reflection (Russia - the candle, Germany - the mirror) handling one particular aspect that influences Russia-EU relations since the Ukrainian factor emerged as a playground for both East and West tectonic plates - namely the energy sector. It is vital for any global power to understand this approach in order to reach people’s minds, in order to emerge as leaders on the world map and to build a strong perception over a political scene. A recently debated subject is Nord Stream 2. The reason why I have chosen to explore this subject is because I am very interested in how Kremlin seeks to have an exclusive control over Eastern Europe, given the full debate in the last three years. In this thesis I will also discuss some important elements of the Russian Soft Power over Europe introducing the plot of South Stream project.*

Keywords: *Energy Security, Soft Power, Russia-EU relations, West potential, South Stream, Nord Stream, Public Diplomacy*

This paper will tackle the issue of the Russian soft power strategy and will develop a double reflection analysis upon Nord Stream 2. Nine countries in Central and Eastern Europe have requested the suspension of the Russian-German project, as it will increase Europe’s dependence on Russian gas and it contradicts the policy of diversification supported by the EU. Apart from the dependence pressure, the economic implications of the project are also to be taken into consideration, as by doubling the capacity of delivery of Russian gas to Germany through the pipeline installed at the bottom of the Baltic Sea will only set aside Eastern European countries within the European energy game. This perspective of a close energy connection between Germany and the Russian Federation bothers these states especially in geopolitical terms.

There are some questions that may arise while reading across this analysis, such as: how aggressively or how softly does Russia manifest its propaganda throughout Central and Eastern Europe?; what solutions do countries in the region have to handle the pressure exerted by

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² Quotes of Edith Wharton, available at <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/e/edithwhart100511.html>, accessed on 13 January 2016, 12:00.

Moscow in the context of Ukraine's conflict and also to cope with this tense relation with the West?; how viable are so far the reactions of Western states as far as facing these pressures?

We will begin this analysis with a specific overview on the new Russian soft power and public diplomacy. It is clear that in geopolitical terms, Russia enjoys a unique position in the world because it is a state positioned on two continents, as part of both Europe and Asia. This privilege dictates a specific geopolitical position, relatively ambiguous, for Russia throughout the history. On one side, Russia serves as a "bridge" between the two "continents", an assessment that would justify the desire to integrate into both directions, and also tend to softly mask its expansion, while on the other hand, it neither belongs to Europe nor Asia, which can be justified as the power of the global trend to gently promote its own interest throughout near or far neighbourhoods. Mainly, natural resources are the third power of the Russian Federation and can be simply attached to four levels of importance: possession, exploiting, control and usage. If an international actor has large amounts of resources, then it has a strong advantage compared to an actor who has fewer or just one. A state should be able to exploit the most of its own resources and this is what Russia does. Eastern Russia has large quantities of ore, which are hard to be exploited because of the unfavourable temperature and location.

In large terms, basically, soft power was meant to be a mind game, a gentle penetration of the ordinary life of people to whom new ideas and even habits are introduced to society so that the state can enjoy a good image and even profit from making this step. "Although Russia is less attractive than the EU in terms of its soft power, the country has significant soft-power potential and is a desirable partner for many post-Soviet states. The source of its attractiveness is related to at least four elements: a huge labour market, cultural proximity, common history and enormous energy resources."³

The element of our concern is the energy potential that Russia has and that it ranks first and eighth, respectively, in terms of reserves of natural gas and crude oil.

"Although the country is the number one energy exporter in the world, the Russian Federation's own gas consumption accounts for two-thirds of domestic production and is much higher than aggregate gas demand in the UK, Germany, France and Italy".⁴ "For many CIS countries whose economies largely depend on cheap energy resources, Russian supplies seem very attractive. [...]The lack of transparency in business deals with Russian energy companies has allowed elites in neighbouring countries to obtain huge personal benefits."⁵

Soft power has already become an important concept for the international relations and Joseph Nye argues that it derives from three factors: culture (that is the superstructure and is profoundly significant for the nation), political values (the political ideal of the nation which has international recognition and legality) and international policy, which is the major component of the soft power and includes concrete measures. Soft power has already become one significant concept which enjoys attention from all over the world. Joseph

³ Cwiek-Karpowicz, Jaroslaw, *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs* 20. 2 (2011): 21-1, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1241323700?accountid=15533>

⁴ <http://www.princeton.edu/jpia/past-issues-1/2009/6.pdf>, Katherine P. Avgerinos: Russia's public diplomacy effort: what the Kremlin is doing and why it's not working, p. 116

⁵ *Ibidem*

Nye summarizes that “soft power is a kind of ability which can realize the goal through the attraction instead of the violence or the temptation. This attraction stems from the culture, political value and international policy. When the policy in one nation is logical and right in the eyes of others, the soft power has already been enhanced.”⁶ Credibility is an important source of soft power and sometimes actions are far more important than words.

First of all, soft power strengthens the legality and the recognition of the state power. The foundation of a country requires the identification of the people and the recognition of other countries. Without the identification of the people it could not carry out political ideas and without the recognition of other countries its survival would be impossible. Hence, the legality of a state lies in the acceptance of the common people and of the other countries. Soft power is about getting the understanding, the recognition and the support through communication, attraction and persuasive methods. As leaders of the state power, they will use the structure and the rule to construct the recognition of the people, reduce and avoid the negative aspects and enhance the legality of the state power. Thus, soft power emphasizes that it is important to improve the recognition of the people towards the national structure and the rule and legality through soft manners. Secondly, soft power can strengthen cohesion and attraction. The main goal of attraction is to get recognition and support from other countries which results in a major reflection of the national soft power. Thirdly, soft power helps a state to set up a national image which is very important for the status of that country in the international arena. A positive image ensures support and the realization of national policies which is beneficial to maintain national interests.⁷ Taking all these aspects into consideration, we can argue that soft power enhances the comprehensive power of a nation and plays a role of utmost importance in the cohesion of a nation and also in achieving the interests and objectives in the international policy.

In the era of information, politics has become a battle for credibility. Since information is power and today a larger part of the population has access to it, the public has become more sensitive about propaganda. According to Nye, “governments compete for credibility not only with other governments, but with a broad range of alternatives including new media, corporations, nongovernmental organizations, intergovernmental organizations, and networks of scientific communities.”⁸ The lack of credibility can be very damaging for a country’s reputation and counterproductive as public diplomacy.

Public diplomacy is a relatively new concept and it was first used in 1965 to explain the foreign policy actions of a state by making contact with foreign audiences in order to achieve its goals. Tuch defines public diplomacy as a government’s process of communicating with foreign public in an attempt to achieve its national goals and policies and to ensure understanding for its nation’s ideas, ideals, institutions and culture.⁹

Joseph Nye states that there are three important dimensions of public diplomacy that are based on long-term cultural relationships and different proportions of direct government information:

⁶ Li Lin Hong, Xiaonan, *Studies in sociology of science* 3. 2 (2012): 44-48., <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1016140623?accountid=15533>

⁷ *Ibidem*

⁸ Joseph Nye, *Soft power. The means to success in world politics*, p. 106

⁹ http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/item/2009/1012/fsl/fsl_tuch.html, Hans Tuch, *Communicating with the World: US Public Diplomacy Overseas* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1990), p. 3

daily communications, strategic communication and developing lasting relationships with key individuals through scholarships, exchanges, training, seminars, conferences etc.¹⁰

The second dimension, strategic communication, is related to a particular government policy, in our case Russia's efforts to improve its image as a reliable partner in the eyes of the Western public alongside with the initiatives of becoming the leading country regarding the reserves and annual production of gas. In this direction, Russia has invested millions of dollars for public diplomacy initiatives which in fact turned out to have quite a negative impact on Russia's reputation.

Some authors argue that this failing was caused by some inconsistencies between Russia's policies in the domestic arena and its claims to Western audiences. Basically, their argument relies on the fact that Russia still struggles with the "us vs. them" mentality and fails to come up with a clear and consistent message. Examples such as gas crises with Ukraine and the Russian-Georgian war support this theory, as Russia oscillated between aggressive and conciliatory behaviour.¹¹ Nevertheless, public diplomacy is not always about competition, it can sometimes be a gain for both sides.

Nye emphasizes that it is important for the governments to explain the domestic decisions not only to internal audiences, but to the external ones as well.¹²

Nevertheless, Russia regained confidence and designed a project of major implications and significance, making use of its energy power and offering an alternative in the energy sector that responds to Europe's necessities in this sector. We can conclude that soft power is not about coercion or constraint, it is a matter of attraction, credibility and consistency between words and actions.

What influences soft power in the South Stream project is energy security, which is today one of the main targets of energy policy. There are a multitude of definitions for energy security, but it can be emphasized that all definitions include the idea of avoiding risks which affect the continuity of the energy commodity supply relative to demand. The distinction consists in the different filters in the form of speed, size, sustention, spread, singularity and sureness of impact and a different scope of impact measures to distinguish between secure and insecure changes that some authors suggest. The scope of the impact measures includes the continuity of service supplies, the continuity of the economy and further impacts on the environment and the society¹³.

Moreover, energy security means "different things to different countries based on their geographical location, their geological endowment, their international relations, their political system and their economic disposition."¹⁴ Energy importers seek security of supply and low prices, whereas energy exporters want security of demand; the energy exporters also face domestic supply problems caused by the economic expansion, population growth or

¹⁰ Joseph Nye, *Soft power. The means to success in world politics*, p. 107-108

¹¹ <http://www.princeton.edu/jpia/past-issues-1/2009/6.pdf>, Katherine P. Avgerinos: Russia's public diplomacy effort: what the Kremlin is doing and why it's not working, p. 117

¹² Joseph Nye, *Soft power. The means to success in world politics*, p. 108

¹³ <http://www.dspace.cam.ac.uk/bitstream/1810/242060/1/cwpe1151.pdf>, Christian Winzer, Conceptualizing energy security

¹⁴ Gal Luft, Anne Korin, Energy security: challenges for the 21st century, p. 5

extremely large subsidies of electricity and transportation fuel prices. There are two main sectors that pose challenges to energy security: electricity and transportation. Russia, for instance, is almost fully energy independent in opposition to the United States that is almost self-sufficient when it comes to electricity supply, but is heavily dependent on foreign oil imports to power its transportation sector¹⁵.

Energy supply can be a very threatening weapon, as exemplified by Russia's gas cut-off to the Ukraine in 2005 that reduced supply to the EU as well. That is one reason for the lack of trust towards Russia's plan.

Once one sees that the land of dreams is framed differently from one side to another, it takes a lot of courage to overlap the interests of both sides, since a new Russian gas project may threaten to reshape the EU map. Taking a trip back in time, when President Vladimir Putin announced that Russia will drop the construction of the South Stream project due to the unbalanced difficulties with the EU¹⁶, there was a complete turmoil that it would diminish Russia-EU relations in the future. First considered to be a great support for Bulgaria, the South Stream project could not be sustained as Bulgaria has not clarified its own national interest, while President Putin made his very clear: "I am surprised about the unclear position of Bulgarian Government, that on certain reflections disregards the national interests. In the construction of this pipeline, there should have been invested around three billions representing jobs, salaries, those incomes that regard the budget at all levels. We even considered this project to support Bulgaria, but if they don't want it, therefore there is no need."¹⁷ Taking into consideration the fact that one year ago the head of the Ataka Party, Mr. Volen Siderov described the South Stream as a hostage of geopolitical interest, rather than economic interests, recently, things have changed as Mr. Siderov urged Bulgaria to be more active and to ask Russia to reconsider the construction of the South Stream project¹⁸. According to him, there are reasons to believe that Moscow has not fully frozen the project, and that the current geopolitical situation reveals that Bulgaria still feels a bitter taste after the South Stream project was abandoned, as this project would have made Bulgaria an important partner of Russia within Europe.

Following this stage, a new Russian gas project has arisen and threatens to disturb European Union family, emphasizing contrasting interests of various states within the EU. The case of Nord Stream 2, a project highly upheld by Germany, is aimed at disarranging the Ukrainian route of Russian gas pipelines, an uncomfortable situation for Romania, Bulgaria and other Eastern European countries that are to lose transit fees and privileges. Nevertheless, the original relevance of this Nord Stream 2 pipeline is a political one, since it can bring Russian gas to Germany bypassing Ukraine and Poland, and magnifying German energy security and geopolitical influence. Originating in the shareholders of the Nord Stream pipeline: OAO Gazprom, E.ON Ruhrgas AG (now E.ON SE), BASF SE/Wintershall Holding GmbH and later

¹⁵ Ibidem

¹⁶ "Putin talks about the impossibility of building South Stream" available at <https://lenta.ru/news/2014/12/01/potok/>, accessed on 13 January 2016, 13:30.

¹⁷ "Putin about South Stream: the project was aiming to support Bulgaria", RIA Novosti, available at <http://ria.ru/world/20151217/1343726397.html> accessed on 13 January, 13:45.

¹⁸ "Volen Siderov: South Stream has been a hostage of geopolitical interests, rather than of economic interests." TASS Russian News Agency, available at <http://tass.ru/opinions/interviews/1659231> accessed on 13 January, 14:00.

on N.V. Nederlandse Gasunie and GDF SUEZ S.A. (now Engie S.A.), the consortium took on the planning and are currently operating a second, twin pipeline that is now an important brick in the long run for the energy partnership between Russia and the West. Therefore, many local disputes are to arise. On one hand, Ukraine submitted to the European Commission a formal complaint related to the construction of the Nord Stream 2, as it was stated by the Prime Minister of Ukraine Arseniy Yatsenyuk at a meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister of Slovakia Miroslav Lajcak: "Ukraine filed a formal complaint to the Committee on Energy concerning the construction of the Nord Stream 2, because it is a political project. We ask the Commission to initiate an investigation and to stop this anti-European, anti-Ukrainian, anti-Slovakian, anti-Polish project. We do not allow the Russians to beat us".¹⁹

Moreover, Yatsenyuk also considered that the project was not only reviewed, but also cancelled and on December 7 he said that the construction of the pipeline Nord Stream 2 is contrary to the interests of the EU and should be abolished²⁰. According to him, the pipeline leaves Ukraine, Poland and Slovakia without billions of dollars in revenue and puts Europe at the mercy of Gazprom. In the same time, one week before, Slovakia stated that construction of the pipeline Nord Stream 2 is a threat to Slovakia and the European Union as a whole²¹. According to him, in the case of this project, the Russian gas no longer would be transported through Ukraine and Slovakia to the West, which contradicts the interests of the EU. It is quite obvious the strategic gaming as the expansion of a gas pipeline under the Baltic Sea will increase the final price of gas for European consumers. In addition to this, there is another factor that reflects criticism over Russia since the Minister of Economy of the Slovak Republic reminded that Slovakia receives an annual budget of about 400 million euros for the transit of Russian gas to Western Europe, stressing that Bratislava informed Berlin about his point of view on the project.²²

On the other hand, in January, the President of Poland, Andrzej Duda, criticized Germany for planning to build this pipeline route evaluating the gas pipeline project more to its political factors and questioning its economic layouts.²³

Given the fact that Nord Stream 2 project provides a laying pipeline of two lines with a total capacity of 55 billion cubic meters of gas per year from Russia to Germany under the Baltic Sea, the project of the pipeline will be implemented by the New European Pipeline AG joint venture and thus the pipeline is scheduled to come into operation for the fourth quarter of 2019.²⁴

¹⁹ "Ukraine complained to the European Commission for the construction of Nord Stream 2", Lenta Russia, available at <https://lenta.ru/news/2016/02/01/nordstream2/>, accessed on 14 January 2016, 12:00.

²⁰ "Yatsenyuk asked the EU to block Nord Stream 2, Lenta Russia, available at <https://lenta.ru/news/2015/12/07/northstream2ban/>, accessed on the 14th of January 2016. 12:00.

²¹ "Slovakia called Nord Stream 2 a threat to the EU", Lenta Russia, available at <https://lenta.ru/news/2015/11/27/gudak/>, accessed on the 14th of January 2016, 12:00

²² "Slovakia called Nord Stream 2 a threat to the EU", Lenta Russia, available at <https://lenta.ru/news/2015/11/27/gudak/>, accessed on the 14th of January 2016, 12:00

²³ "Polish President called Nord Stream 2 a political project", Gazeta Russia, available at http://www.gazeta.ru/business/news/2015/12/15/n_8014469.shtml/, accessed on the 14th of January 2016, 13:00.

²⁴ "About Nord Stream 2", Nord Stream 2 official website, available at <http://www.nord-stream2.com/our-project/pipeline/>, accessed on the 14th of January 2016, 13:00.

Russia is currently playing on more than one stage, leaving more than one option open: Nord Stream 2, Ukraine and even South Stream. This Nord Stream 2 represents the extension of Nord Stream that comes from Russia, passing under the Baltic Sea and arrives in Germany. More than that, the project would double the capacity of Nord Stream and is an obvious plan of Gazprom's unspoken strategy to bring natural gas in Europe bypassing Ukraine. Apart from the fact that Gazprom is the only supplier and a major shareholder in the \$11bn Nord Stream 2 project, announced in September last year, this fresh pipeline extension is being developed by six consortium Russian-European energy groups: Gazprom, Shell (Anglo-Dutch company), BASF (Germany), E.ON (Germany), Engi (France) and OMV (Austria).

Even if Eastern European states say the project contradicts the EU aim of diversifying energy sources, Germany is accused of ignoring that and promoting their own interests, values of a Europe much too addicted to Russian energy.²⁵

Donald Tusk, the Polish President of the European Council warned that Nord Stream 2 does not comply with EU rules on diversification of energy sources and would undermine Ukraine's role as a transit state for Russian gas - one of the strengths of Kiev in economic and political conflict with Moscow. Poland has encouraged Ukraine out of Russia's sphere of influence. While transit fees bring two billion euros per year in the budget of Ukraine, transit fees for gas entering Europe through Ukraine also bring benefits to other countries, such as Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria and 80% of Russian gas sold to Europe would be delivered by Nord Stream 2²⁶.

Highly debated as a clearly political project with little economic significance for the EU, as routes of Russian gas to the EU already exist, it seems Nord Stream 2 will not be used to full capacity, as the purpose of the pipeline would be to remove Ukraine from Russia's geopolitical game.

Other EU states expressed their grief, as for example, Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi who has accused Germany of hypocrisy because of their economic interests²⁷. Italy and other EU countries complain that they had lost common front against Russia with all financial sanctions imposed, taking into consideration the fact that Russia provides 30% of the EU gas demand. Involving Italian giant ENI as one of the largest shareholders of South Stream, Italy feels betrayed by the EC because it did not give the green light to another Russian project, South Stream, which would bring Russian gas to Italy via the Balkans. The route should bring Eastern European states together in favourable contracts for Russian gas and transit fees. As mentioned earlier, the withdrawal of the project was announced last year by Russia, even if the pipeline construction activity continued long after that, in Bulgaria. The Commission found the South Stream pipeline guilty of violating the competition rules as the pipeline marks not only Gazprom's interests.

²⁵ "Germany will support Nord Stream despite Europe's discontent", Russian Today and Der Spiegel, available at <https://russian.rt.com/inotv/2015-12-25/Spiegel-Germaniya-prolozhit-Severnij-potok-2> and https://magazin.spiegel.de/digital/index_SP.html#SP/2015/53/140604196, accessed on 14 January 2016, 14:00.

²⁶ "Bypassing Ukraine will be costly for Russia's Gazprom: analysts", Eurointegration, available at <http://www.eurointegration.com.ua/rus/experts/2016/03/24/7046729/>, accessed on the 15 January, 2016, 12:00

²⁷ "Renzi: German approval "Nord Stream-2" indicates a double standard", RIA Novosti, available at <http://ria.ru/world/20151222/1346907033.html>, accessed on 14 January 2016, 14:00.

As for the EU's unity and security related to Nord Stream 2, I can state that ten Member States, including Romania, demanded discussions about the project during a summit taking place in December last year and claimed that European Union supply through this pipeline would affect not only the EU energy security, but also the stability of the Eastern Europe region. More than that, the European Commission plans to reduce the energy dependence on Russia, a country that provides one third of Europe's gas needs, and half of those supplies pass through Ukraine.

Nord Stream 2 is expected to make the first deliveries in 2019, along with the expiration of the current agreement between Russia and Ukraine. This project is considered to completely neglect the interests of Poland and the European Union, affecting the unity, especially in the context of Russia's actions in Ukraine.

In the end, we should admit that Russia truly complies with the idea of Joseph Nye, which is revolutionary and it has been largely debated whether global super powers should or should not invest more in it. Nye is also convinced that the USA has been in a dominant position after the Cold War and therefore it stopped investing in its cultural spreading, in its voice and image, while emerging countries like China, Turkey and Russia are promoting themselves and take every opportunity they can. Furthermore, the EU is focused more on the need for a soft power in the Balkans where they need to get the nations' support over the pipeline. Therefore, Russia seems to have found an answer in its support of South-Eastern Europe.

To conclude, we can say that Russia's Nord Stream 2 offer is not to be neglected, especially by Germany, mainly because it is proposed by a major power with a significant influence in the energy sector, possessing a large amount of natural resources. This influence on the gas market develops a certain power over the EU. It is vital to line up all the advantages and disadvantages and choose between multiple opinions and make the right decision. Although Gazprom is fully able to sustain production at its current contractual commitments, the giant consortium benefits now and then from agreements to import gas from Turkmenistan and from independent producers, as well. All things concluded, the theoretical framework of soft power along with the practical one in Nord Stream 2 project complete the gas market picture of powerful Russia and of the world's most profitable company Gazprom.

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