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# YOU SHALL NOT PASS: THE STRATEGIC NARRATIVES DEFINING RUSSIA'S SOFT POWER IN LITHUANIA

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**ABSTRACT**

The article argues that states' narratives about themselves and each other, shaped by the foreign policy decision-makers, create filters for the achievement of soft power goals. A state agent can shape narratives that can be rejected by the state's target's society because they would undermine dominating biographical and strategic narratives of the state target. The empirical analysis of the narratives of the president, minister of foreign affairs, and spokesperson of the MFA of Russia illustrates how Russia prevents itself from soft power expansion by "othering" Lithuania. At the same time, analysis of the narratives of presidents and the minister of the foreign affairs of Lithuania illustrates how they shield society from Russia's narratives and, thus, soft power while searching for "sameness" with the Euro-Atlantic partners.

**KEYWORDS**

Strategic narrative, soft power, othering, Russia, Lithuania, foreign policy

## INTRODUCTION

The soft power concept introduced by Joseph S. Nye [1] attracted much attention from the research community, which criticized the theory for over-simplification and lack of focus on elements defining the success of soft power. It was suggested to provide further attention to the dynamics of soft power relations – interactions between the actors (the agent and the target),[2] rather than focus purely on the soft power instruments. Building on the writings of constructivist Alexander Wendt[3] and social anthropologists Iver B. Neumann,[4] critics suggested that narratives and not only soft power instruments define the results.[5]

This article builds on the already outlined discussion suggesting that narratives between states, shaped by top decision-makers, aimed at their own countries and other countries, are the core elements impacting soft power outcomes. On the one hand, strategic narratives become important filters of how the state's population perceives the world. On the other hand, they also become filters of how other states perceive the state (agent), shaping narratives for their populations about it. Thus, strategic narratives become important filters supporting or limiting the spread of soft power from the agent to the target in general. This article argues that strategic narratives shaped by the decision-makers of the states have a significant impact on soft power success, i.e., possibilities for the agent to

[1] Joseph S. Nye, *Bound To Lead – The Changing Nature Of American Power* (Basic Books, 1990); Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power. The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004); Joseph S. Nye, "Smart Power. In search of the balance between hard and soft power," *Democracy Journal* (2006) // https://democracyjournal.org/magazine/2/smart-power/; Joseph S. Nye, "What China and Russia Don't Get about Soft Power," *Foreign Policy* (April 2013) // http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/04/29/what_china_and_russia_don_t_get_about_soft_power.

[2] Kondo Seiichi, "Wielding Soft Power: The Key Stages of Transmission and Reception"; in: Yasushi Watanabe and David L. McConnell, eds., *Soft Power Superpowers: Cultural and National Assets of Japan and the United States* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2008); Edward Lock, "Soft power and strategy: Developing a 'strategic' concept of power"; in: Inderjeet Parmar and Michael Cox, eds., *Soft Power and US Foreign Policy: Theoretical, Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Hosam Matar, "Limits of US soft power in the Arab world (2003–15)," *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 9, No. 3 (2016) // DOI: 10.1080/17550912.2016.1191786.

[3] Alexander Wendt, "Collective Identity Formation and the International State," *The American Political Science Review* 88, No. 2 (1994).

[4] Iver B. Neumann, *Uses of the Other. 'The East' in European Identity Formation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

[5] Catarina Kinnvall, "Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security," *Political Psychology* 25(5) (2004); Will K. Delehanty and Brent J. Steele, "Engaging the narrative in ontological (in)security theory: insights from feminist IR," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 22(3) (2009); Brent J. Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations. Self-identity and the IR state* (New York: Routledge: 2008); Thomas Diez, "Europe's others and the return of geopolitics," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 17(2) (2010); Thomas Risse, "Identity Matters: Exploring the Ambivalence of EU Foreign Policy," *Global Policy* 3(1) (2012); Valentina Feklyunina, "Soft power and identity: Russia, Ukraine and the 'Russian world(s)'," *European Journal of International Relations* 22(4) (2016); Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin, and Laura Roselle, *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2013); Olivier Schmitt, "When are strategic narratives effective? The shaping of political discourse through the interaction between political myths and strategic narratives," *Contemporary Security Policy* 39, No. 4 (2018).

impact the society of the target. This suggests that the analysis of strategic narratives is essential in assessing soft power outcomes.

By framing strategic narratives, foreign policy institutions signal reciprocity or opposition to other states and the society of their state. Narratives are messaging elements of "sameness," signalling an agent's wish to engage. If the target signals "sameness" with appropriate narratives externally and domestically, it shows its willingness to engage and share soft power. In such a case sending and receiving soft power becomes acceptable for societies.

Contrary to that, a process of "othering" – assigning properties that are alternative to the properties of self (i.e. what I am not), or creating an alter ego through exclusion[6] – can occur in relations between an agent and a target. By "othering" the target, the agent, while presenting diametrically different narratives from the target's narratives, aims to achieve the hegemony of its narrative (by suppressing alternative narratives). Additionally, by "othering" the agent, the target can shield society from the agent's narratives and soft power (not allowing alternative narratives to be accepted). Also, it is necessary to bear in mind that with particular narratives the agent and the target are primarily concerned with achieving their domestic policy outcomes, which are of higher priority than foreign policy ones.

For the empirical analysis of the outlined framework, Russia's soft power approach and its framing of the narratives towards Lithuania have been selected. The case analysis exposes how opposing narratives between Russia and Lithuania prevent the achievement of soft power objectives for Russia. This case contributes to the existing literature on Russia's soft power in the ex-Soviet states[7] and the broader literature on Russia's soft power.[8]

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[6] Iver B. Neumann, *supra* note 4, 17, 37.

[7] Joanna Szostek, "The Power and Limits of Russia's Strategic Narrative in Ukraine: The Role of Linkage," *Perspectives on Politics* 15, No. 2 (2017); Giedrius Česnakas and Vytautas Isoda, "Russia's Soft Power as a Limited Efficiency Tool in Lithuania," *Politologija* 93 (2019); Jarosław Ćwiek-Karpowicz, *Limits to Russian Soft Power in the Post-Soviet Area* (DGAPanalyse, 2012); Anna Matveeva, "Russia's Power Projection after the Ukraine Crisis," *Europe-Asia Studies* 70, No. 5 (2018); Ammon Cheskin, "Russian soft power in Ukraine: A structural perspective," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 50, No. 4 (2017); Vladislav Vorotnikov, "Twenty Years of Russo-Lithuanian Dialogue: Results and the Outlook for the Future"; in: I. Timofeev, T. Makmutov, I. Sorokina, M. Smekalova, and R. Mayka, eds., *Evolution of Post-Soviet Space: Past Present and Future* (Moscow: RIAC, 2017).

[8] Ivan A. Chikharev, and Oleg V. Stoletov, "Современная динамика властных отношений в мировой политике: от «мягкой силы» к «разумной силе»" [Modern Dynamics of Power Pelations in World Politics: from 'Soft Power' to 'Smart power'; in: Andrey V. Budaev, Andrey V. Demidov, Andrey V.Manoijlo, Oleg V. Stoletov, Ivan A.Chikharev, eds., *«Мягкая сила» в мировой политической динамике ['Soft Power' in World Political Dynamics]* (Известия, 2015); Vladimir Petrovsky, "«Мягкая сила» по-русски в поисках точки опоры" ['Soft power' in Russian in search of a fulcrum], *Международная жизнь [International Life]* No. 7 (2013); Mark A. Neijmark, "«Мягкая сила» в мировой политике. К уточнению проблемного поля. Часть 1" ['Soft power' in World Politics. Clarifying the Problem Field. Part 1], *Обозреватель / Observer* 312, No. 1 (2016); Alexander Ganoshchenko, "«Мягкая сила»: добровольное взаимодействие и доступ к ресурсам" ['Soft Power': Voluntary Interaction and Access to Resources], *Международная жизнь [International Life]* No. 8 (2017); Marcel van Herpen, *Putin's Propaganda Machine: Soft Power and Russian Foreign Policy* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015); Christopher Walker, "The Authoritarian Threat: The Hijacking of 'Soft Power'," 

The first section of the article outlines the methodology of the empirical analysis. The second explains the importance of biographical and strategic narratives in soft power. The third section briefly analyses Lithuania's position in Russia's soft power policy. Finally, the fourth and fifth sections analyze the intensity of the messages and their contexts with selected keywords for 2014-2019. Such an approach explains why Russian soft power, filtered through Lithuanian strategic and biographic narratives, loses its appeal for the majority of Lithuanian society.

## 1. METHODOLOGY

The methodology of the empirical analysis blends quantitative and qualitative approaches. The research was divided into four stages. Firstly, keywords, sources and time frames were identified, and then material for analysis was collected. The study focuses on the public speeches and messages of the core foreign policy decision-making institutions in the Russian Federation and the Republic of Lithuania. The speeches and messages of Russian President Vladimir Putin provided on the official website of the president (www.kremlin.ru) for 2014 – 2019 (including only January of 2020) with the keywords "Lithuania" (Литва) and "Baltic states" ("Приба́лтика" and "страны Балтии") were selected. The keyword "Baltic states" was considered because the keyword "Lithuania" alone was mentioned sparsely. Russia uses the term Baltic states when referring to Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. The Kremlin, in general, views the three Baltic states as a single space. Also, Putin's speech of January 2020, where he mentioned the keyword "Lithuania," was included to increase the precision of framing.

Additionally, the analysis of the rhetoric (statements and briefings) of Russia's Foreign Affairs Minister Sergey Lavrov and the Ministry's (MFA) director of the Information and Press Department has been included. The same keywords for the data gathering from the official MFA website (www.mid.ru) were applied.

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*Journal of Democracy* 27, No. 1 (2016); Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig, "Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence," *International Forum for Democratic Studies,* (2017) // https://www.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Introduction-Sharp-Power-Rising-Authoritarian-Influence.pdf; Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig, "The Meaning of Sharp Power How Authoritarian States Project Influence" (November 16, 2017) // https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2017-11-16/meaning-sharp-power; Peter Rutland and Andrei Kazantsev "The limits of Russia's 'soft power'," *Journal of Political Power* 9, No. 3 (2016); Alexander Sergunin and Leonid Karabeshkin, "Understanding Russia's Soft Power Strategy," *Politics* 35, No. 3-4 (2015); Elena Sidorova, "EU – Russia Cultural Relations," *International Organisations Research Journal* 9, No. 3 (2014); Olga Leonova, "Мягкая сила – ресурс внешней политики государства" [Soft Power – A Resource of the Foreign Policy of a State], *Obozrevatel - Observer* (2013); Irina V. Kazarinova, "Россия и Европейский союз: культурная дипломатия и противоречия стратегического партнерства" [Russia and the European Union: Cultural Diplomacy and Contradictions of Strategic Partnership]; in: Andrey V. Lavrov, ed., *Россия в современном диалоге цивилизаций [Russia in the Modern Dialogue of Civilizations]* (Культурная революция, 2008); Nicolai N. Petro, "Russia's Orthodox Soft Power," *Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs* (March 23, 2015) // https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/articles_papers_reports/727#_ftn1; Ilya Yablokov, "Conspiracy Theories as a Russian Public Diplomacy Tool: The Case of Russia Today (RT)," *Politics* 35, No. 3-4 (2015); Olivier Schmitt, *supra* note 5.

For the analysis of framing of Russia by the Lithuanian foreign policy decision-makers, the speeches, messages, and articles in Lithuanian of Lithuanian Presidents Dalia Grybauskaitė (2009-2019) and Gitanas Nausėda (2019- onwards) and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Linas Linkevičius with the keyword "Russia" (Rusija) for the comparable period were selected from the official websites (www.lrp.lt and www.urm.lt).[9] Though Lithuanian MFA has the director of the Communication Department, it is worth noting that s/he does not usually comment on events and decisions.

Secondly, the first order of the coding of framing categories were assigned for the paragraphs with the mentioned keywords according to the identified framing themes as they were determined by qualitative expert assessment. Then, one or more categories were assigned to the same paragraph. Finally, to increase the rigorousness of the results, objective professional feedback was sought from faculty members to assist in the coding process in multiple consultations for fine-tuning.

Thirdly, second order coding was conducted, distilling categories and labelling them. As a result, five categories of framing by Putin remained, 13 categories of framing by Sergey Lavrov and spokesperson of MFA were distilled, and 14 categories remained in which presidents and the foreign affairs minister of Lithuania framed Russia.

Lastly, a quantitative analysis of the intensity of the framing was conducted, assuming that intensity suggested the importance of a particular narrative. The quantitative analysis results were integrated into the theoretical framework and broader context of Russian–Lithuanian relations.

## 2. SOFT POWER'S DEPENDENCE ON NARRATIVES

Soft power results are said to depend on the agent's resources, instruments, and target.[10] For this reason, when seeking success in soft power application, we must understand the target's audience and its cultural filters.[11] Simultaneously, soft power is exercised in the context of relationships where the target is also an agent capable of its own action.[12] It is more appropriate to conceptualize soft power as a relationship between two or more actors instead of seeing it as a property of one actor.[13] Also, it is more important to note how targets will perceive

[9] Only messages with the direct speech elements and the original articles by the decision-makers were analyzed.
[10] Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power. The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004): 99; Joseph S. Nye, *The Future of Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), 83.
[11] Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power. The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004): 111.
[12] Edward Lock, *supra* note 2: 46.
[13] Valentina Feklyunina, *supra* note 5: 777.

soft power rather than soft power instruments themselves.[14] Unfortunately, little attention was provided to what defines the context of relationships, which is a filter of perception influencing soft power results.

The perception between the agent and the target of one another and themselves, their values, norms, and interests through narratives determine the acceptance of the soft power. In other words, soft power's results depend on the agent's and the target's narratives based on their biographical narratives at a particular time.[15] National biographical narrative entails selection, interpretation, and fusion of memory and stories, depending on the parameters of the purpose of the narrative to provide "self" with a sense of orientation.[16] The biographical narrative also defines "self" and "other," who "we" are or are not, and where "we" are or are not heading. As the main targets of soft power, societies cannot be impacted directly because biographical narratives shape their worldview. Biographical narratives are filters produced by the leadership, in this case of the states (the state agent and state target), through which soft power has to flow.

Decision-makers define the interests of the states and are capable of defining strategic narratives for domestic and foreign audiences. The narrative is strategic when it integrates its communicator's interests and goals, suggesting the desired end state and how it can be achieved by giving meaning to the past, present, and future.[17][18] Therefore, strategic narratives are defined in official statements and state-funded media content,[19] and the effectiveness of strategic narratives depends on their reception among elites and the broader public.[20] Such narratives may span any number of stories and issues but always emphasize certain aspects of reality while omitting others, directing the audience towards the narrator's vision.[21] Strategic narratives allow shaping of domestic and foreign audiences simultaneously, generating support among the audiences most important for political actors.

Interestingly, though the strategic narrative is an element of soft power, it also determines the acceptance of other soft power elements as it becomes their primary filter. It shapes how other soft power elements (culture, values, policies, etc.) are perceived and interpreted, whether they are met with suspicion or

[14] Hosam Matar, *supra* note 2: 430.
[15] Felix Berenskoetter, "Parameters of a national biography," *European Journal of International Relations* 20, No. 1 (2014): 282-3.
[16] *Ibid*.: 269.
[17] Joanna Szostek, "Defence and Promotion of Desired State Identity in Russia's Strategic Narrative," *Geopolitics* 22, No. 3 (2016): 571-5.
[18] Laura Roselle, Alister Miskimmon, and Ben O'Loughlin, "Strategic narrative: A new means to understand soft power," *Media, War & Conflict* 7, No. 1 (2014): 73, 77; Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin, and Laura Roselle, *supra* note 5, 5.
[19] Joanna Szostek, *supra* note 7: 383.
[20] Joanna Szostek, "News media repertoires and strategic narrative reception: A paradox of disbelief in authoritarian Russia," *New media & society* (2016): 6.
[21] *Ibid*: 5.

credence. All the activities of the state, including those of culture and values, are put in a "story," and strategic narrative defines "story" or "stories" of the state. Naturally, the activities and symbols contradicting the story have a significant challenge in terms of achieving results.

Strategic narratives of state agent and state target can either complement or oppose one another, depending on their interests. In other words, strategic narratives heavily depend on the self–other duality in the interaction between agent and target. "Self" can be extended to accept others and form a collective identity by creating "sameness," which represents civilized and superior, while "otherness" is threatening and inferior.[22] On the one hand, if visions and narratives between agent and target are similar and shared, they create "sameness" and allow achieving foreign policy goals, including soft power. Feklyunina suggests that soft power is more likely to be present in a relationship between actors who broadly see themselves as part of the same socially constructed reality.[23] On the other hand, when agent and target are "othering" one another, the achievement of foreign policy objectives through soft power instruments becomes challenging. An agent's soft power is met with suspicion and/or outright rejection by the target.

The agent might reject or suppress the target's narratives. By doing that, it might achieve the hegemony of its narrative at the expense of the target's narrative. Interestingly, the hegemony of the narrative would allow opening possibilities for soft power instruments because the target would accept the agent's narrative. Alternatively, the target might challenge the agent's narrative by "othering" the agent and enhancing its own narrative. In such a way, decision-makers of the state target try to shield domestic society from the agent's (who is perceived as "other") narrative to keep the integrity and ensure ontological security for its society. Such shielding prevents the exchange of soft power and from possibilities to achieve foreign policy goals through it.

Biographical and strategic narratives change or are changed over time. Seiichi argues that "recipient [target], influenced by the continuous flow of transmission, changes its degree of acceptance in accordance with the subject's [agent's] revisions."[24] This argument is supported by Lock, who states that "[o]ne is seeking to exercise power over another through the conditioning of one's own behaviour based on one's expectations about how that other interprets attractiveness."[25] Changes can happen in agent and target or only in one of them. Even narrative changes made by one of them can redefine interactions, and thus the results of soft

[22] Gabriel Popescu, "Diaspora Geopolitics: Romanian-Americans and NATO Expansion," *Geopolitics* 10, No. 3 (2005): 458.
[23] Valentina Feklyunina, *supra* note 5: 778.
[24] Kondo Seiichi, *supra* note 2: 197.
[25] Edward Lock, *supra* note 2: 42.

power. On the one hand, the agent might change its narrative, making its soft power more acceptable. On the other hand, the target's decision-makers might unilaterally redefine narrative and provide the narrative favouring agent's, meaning that the agent's narrative becomes hegemonic. The hegemony over narrative makes the soft power of the agent acceptable. The strategic narrative changes primarily depend on domestic and foreign policy interests.

Usually, countries seek the stability of biographical narratives as this provides continuity and "substance" to a state's self-identity.[26] States have routine foreign policies, and changes happen over a longer period of time because otherwise they would not reproduce self-identity.[27] Because domestic policy interests usually have priority over foreign, therefore, the strategic narrative can be readjusted only slightly and gradually when searching for a similar narrative between agent and target. There are cases when biographical narratives change drastically, but usually after dramatic events.

In sum – the focus on the agent's and the target's strategic narratives is essential for soft power analysis. Soft power results depend on the context in which it is applied. The more agent and target are "othering" one another, the lower is the success of soft power. The agent also limits its soft power by aiming to achieve the hegemony of the narrative without considering the target's narratives. If the target's narratives are not considered, the target is likely to reject the agent's narratives and protect its own narratives. Strategic narratives of agent and target can be changed unilaterally, favouring agent, or target, thus, potentially increasing perspectives to achieve results using soft power. The proper assumption would be that "othering," in turn, can lead to even greater "othering." As a result, the discussion suggests that strategic narratives and framing of "self" and "other" are essential variables defining soft power results.

## 3. LITHUANIA'S POSITION WITHIN RUSSIA'S SOFT POWER APPROACH

Lithuania and two other Baltic states have an ambiguous position in Russia's foreign policy, including the soft power policy. Lithuania is positioned in two geopolitical spaces. On the one hand, it is a state which was part of the Soviet Union. This allows to define it as the Former Soviet Union (FSU) country, together with the other 14 ex-Soviet states. On the other hand, the Baltic states are members of the European Union and NATO. This places the Baltic states in a

[26] Will K. Delehanty and Brent J. Steele, *supra* note 5: 524.
[27] *Ibid*.: 525.

peculiar position in the Russian geopolitical imagination as a double periphery.[28] They are part of the experienced space (part of the biographical narrative) and external actors simultaneously. Such uniqueness is seen in bilateral relations between the Baltic states and Russia that follow their own dynamics being at the same time connected to, and, also different from both Russia's relations with the EU and other post-Soviet states.[29]

Russia sees the three Baltic states as part of FSU after thirty years of the disintegration of the Soviet Union. "Russian leaders still seem to believe that the Baltic countries are a part of Russia's sphere of influence," making them appear closer to FSU countries than the EU countries.[30] Furthermore, the national champion gas company "Gazprom" continues to consider Baltic states as a part of the FSU market and not a part of the "far abroad" market.[31] Russia does not perceive the Baltic or Central and Eastern European countries, which are members of the EU and NATO, the way it perceives the Western European countries.[32] Ex-Soviet and ex-Warsaw Pact states are seen as "different" from other European countries. Therefore, it can be assumed that Russia thinks soft power policies used towards the other FSU states can also be applied to Lithuania, at least to some extent.

Unfortunately, the objectives outlined in Russia's strategic documents do not tell much about Russia's strategic narrative towards the Baltic states and its soft power objectives towards them.[33] The identities of nation-states of Europe are usually constructed with references to particular historical and national memories.[34] For Russia, such a particular period is essentially the Soviet era which is seen as the most outstanding achievement and is put at the centre of Russian national myths biographical and strategic narratives. Russia associates the Soviet period with industrialization, global influence, space program, and most importantly, the victory over Nazism, which is sacralised and is a central element of the politics of

[28] Alexander Nosovich, "The Baltics in 2020. Frontline States and the Double Periphery" (January 20, 2020) // https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/the-baltics-in-2020-frontline-states-and-the-double-periphery/?sphrase_id=39215517; Andriy Tyushka, "Russian geopolitical narratives from "geopolitics 101" to postmodern revisionism: Implications for the Baltic-Pontic Region," *Global Affairs* (2018): 491.
[29] Kristi Raik, "Liberalism and geopolitics in EU–Russia relations: rereading the 'Baltic factor'," *European Security* 25, No. 2 (2016): 242-3.
[30] Pranas Ciziunas, "Russia and the Baltic States: Is Russian Imperialism Dead?," *Comparative Strategy* 27, No. 3 (2008): 287-8.
[31] "PJSC Gazprom Annual Report 2019," *Gazprom* (2019) // https://www.gazprom.com/f/posts/72/802627/gazprom-annual-report-2019-en.pdf.
[32] Sergey Lavrov, "Russia's Foreign Policy in a Historical Perspective" (March 30, 2016) // https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/russias-foreign-policy-in-a-historical-perspective/.
[33] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, "Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation" (November 30, 2016) // https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/2542248.
[34] Thomas Risse, *supra* note 5: 88; Felix Berenskoetter, *supra* note 15: 262-288.

memory.[35] Such an approach could be explained by the fact that countries aim to focus on chosen comforting stories (traumas or glories) in times of increased ontological insecurity and existential anxiety.[36] For example, Putin claimed that the greatest geopolitical catastrophe was the collapse of the Soviet Union.[37] Therefore, Russia tries to construct a comforting story about the glorious Soviet past to compensate for its trauma after the collapse of the Soviet Union, trying to reinstate the Soviet Union's heroic narrative, provide ontological security, and use it for the policy visions of the future.

The approach above falls in line with Leonova's suggestions for Russia to focus on shared history and destiny, the former experience of the multinational country (the Soviet Union), and experience of World War II (common hardship) in its narratives and soft power approach in the FSU.[38] Such biographical and strategic narratives transcend Russia's borders and should provide a sense of inclusiveness to all members of the Soviet Union. It allows Russia to attract individuals who are nostalgic about the Soviet past and reach minorities that prefer Russian language media, who make up 13.1% of the population of Lithuania, such as Poles, Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians. The representative survey in 2020 showed that 21% of the respondents thought that life during the Soviet period was better than it is nowadays in Lithuania.[39] It was a steep decline from 37% in 2012. Unfortunately for Russia, the number of people who find such narratives attractive is shrinking due to demographic change.[40] The narratives also fail to attract larger segments of societies in the Baltic states.

In the case of Lithuania, Russia has very limited soft power resources. On the one hand, Russia has many elements of high culture, but it is challenging to instrumentalize high culture for practical purposes.[41] On the other hand, because of its imperial and colonialist past, Russia is mainly perceived negatively in Lithuania by the political elites and society. It is perceived as the "other" in the Lithuanian biographical narrative. The Russian empire is associated with aggressive imperialism and forced Russification. The Soviet period in the Lithuanian

[35] Maria Domańska, "The myth of the Great Patriotic War as a tool of the Kremlin's great power policy" (December 31, 2019) // https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2019-12-31/myth-great-patriotic-war-a-tool-kremlins-great-power-policy.
[36] Catarina Kinnvall, *supra* note 5: 755; Will K. Delehanty and Brent J. Steele, *supra* note 5: 524.
[37] Vladimir Putin, "Address to the Federal Assembly" (April 25, 2005) // http://archive.kremlin.ru/appears/2005/04/25/1223_type63372type63374type82634_87049.shtml.
[38] Olga Leonova, *supra* note 8: 39-40.
[39] Rytų Europos Studijų Centras [Eastern European Studies Centre], "Geopolitikos ir tarptautinės politikos bei grėsmių suvokimo tyrimas remiantis reprezentatyviu Lietuvos visuomenės nuomonės tyrimu" [Survey of geopolitics and international politics and perception of threats based on a representative survey] (July 2020) // https://www.eesc.lt/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/RESC-tyrimas.pdf.
[40] Vadim Smirnov, "Russia's 'soft power' in the Baltic" (May 4, 2012) // https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/russia-s-soft-power-in-the-baltic/?sphrase_id=39221415; Giedrius Česnakas and Vytautas Isoda, *supra* note 7: 81-7.
[41] Alexander Sergunin and Leonid Karabeshkin, *supra* note8: 357.

biographical narrative is highlighted as the period of forced deportations, Sovietization, totalitarianism, collectivization, expropriation, and gulags. Even Russia's post-Soviet image is perceived negatively, a period of economic hardship, organized crime, corruption, and increasing authoritarianism.[42] As it can be observed, Russia and Lithuania have two opposing biographical narratives. Russia does not aim to attract people who do not share its narratives and foreign policy objectives by modifying a strategic narrative, but rather to mobilize those who already agree with them.[43] Russia's soft power quite successfully attracts Russophone society and people who are nostalgic about the Soviet period. However, there are calls for Lithuania to change its strategic narrative and accept Russia's narrative, making it a hegemonic one. Smirnov suggests that the Lithuanian political elite should be pragmatic in bilateral relations and not focus on ideological differences and different historical agendas.[44] In essence, he offers the Lithuanian political elite to remain open to Russia's narratives at the expense of its biographical and strategic narratives. If Lithuania accepted the Russian biographic and strategic narratives, it would also signal acceptance of Russia's soft power. The approach to enforce its narratives seems self-defeating, putting Russia at odds with Lithuania.

## 4. THE FRAMING OF LITHUANIA IN THE STRATEGIC NARRATIVE OF THE AGENT

The analysis of Lithuania in the rhetoric of Russia's President Vladimir Putin, Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov, and the official spokesperson of the Ministry allows for the identification of how Lithuania was framed in Russia's strategic narrative, and what images of Lithuania were constructed for domestic and international audiences. This further explains how the Russian narrative prevents the achieving of soft power.

Vladimir Putin mentioned Lithuania on only two occasions in the period of 2014 to January 2021. The first was in 2015 when he suggested developing stronger bilateral cooperation. He argued that for Baltic states it is more important to have good relations with Russia than for Russia. According to Putin, due to broken ties with Russia, primarily in economics, the Lithuanian population decreased by half – to 1.4 million.[45] Such a claim contradicts the statistical data.[46]

[42] Peter Rutland and Andrei Kazantsev, *supra* note 8: 398-400; Giedrius Česnakas and Vytautas Isoda, *supra* note 7: 74-7.
[43] Jarosław Ćwiek-Karpowicz, *supra* note 7, 9.
[44] Vadim Smirnov, *supra* note 40.
[45] President of Russia, "Interview to American TV channel CBS and PBS" (September 29, 2015) // http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/interviews/50380.

Putin mildly suggested that the decrease in population was related to Lithuania's anti-Russian positions. Therefore, he further suggested abandoning phobias and establishing good-neighbourly relations, ignoring the context of Russia's activities in Ukraine and FSU which pushed Lithuania to anti-Kremlin positions.

The second time Putin mentioned Lithuania was in January 2020 at the Remembering the Holocaust: Fighting Antisemitism forum. He stated that 220,000 Jews were killed by anti-Semite criminals in Lithuania and referred to Lithuania merely as the Nazi-occupied territory of the Soviet Union.[47] Putin mentioned only Ukraine, Lithuania, and Latvia – the states with significant political differences concerning Russia's contemporary foreign policy and strategic or biographical narratives. Though he directly did not accuse populations of these states of the Holocaust, he hinted at such an idea. Prior to that, Putin attributed a pro-Nazi image to Lithuania when he referred indirectly, stating that "[r]egrettably, in some European countries the Nazi virus 'vaccine' created at the Nuremberg Tribunal is losing its effect. This is clearly demonstrated by open manifestations of neo-Nazism that have already become commonplace in Latvia and other Baltic states."[48]

In the context of Baltic states Lithuania was indirectly mentioned three times. The one already discussed and referred to neo-Nazi support – a common theme attributed by Russia to the states with anti-Kremlin positions. In two other cases Putin accentuated the restrictions of rights of compatriots living in the Baltic states, primarily referring to Latvia and the issue of non-citizens. In another statement, he ensured that the Baltic states should not fear Russia and there are no threats from it because war with NATO is unthinkable. At the same time, he questioned the need to expand NATO infrastructure in the Baltic states. These states were referred to only as objects in the relations of greater powers.

Overall, Lithuania was not an important subject in Putin's speeches. It was "othered" by Putin. He stressed elements that are considered different from Russia's or had negative connotations, even when discussing possible cooperation. "Othering" prevents accepting strategic narrative, and the narratives of Putin are met with opposition.

Sergey's Lavrov's statements and briefings by the MFA's official representative define Lithuania's framing much more accurately because the number of keywords mentioned is higher. The keywords "Lithuania" and "Baltic states" were used in 97 statements and briefings. Lithuania was framed as a Russophobic country in nearly

[46] Putin states that Lithuanian population declined from 3.4 million to 1.4 million, while it was 2.9 million in 2015 according to the Statistics Lithuania.
[47] President of Russia, "Remembering the Holocaust: Fighting Antisemitism forum" (January 23, 2020) // http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62646.
[48] President of Russia, "Interview to Politika newspaper" (October 15, 2014) // http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/interviews/46806.

one-third of the cases (29 times in total). Such framing increased in 2016 and remained of similar intensity. It usually came in the context of Lithuania's support for Ukraine against the Russian invasion and annexation of Crimea and Russia's supported war in Donbas. Russophobic framing was also related to Lithuania's decision to prevent children from travelling to camps in Russia, which had pro-military orientation after Lithuanian news portals published such activities and connected them to hybrid and asymmetric warfare. Framing Lithuania as a Russophobic country is easily attributed to any actions which contradict Russia's interests and serves as an instrument to blame Lithuania and delegitimize its position.

Lithuania was intensively portrayed as a country that falsifies history (20 times) – i.e., a country with a different historical narrative from Russia. This framing was at its highest intensity in 2018, which was a reaction to Lithuania's focus on its history of resistance and finding and re-burying the remains of the Lithuanian freedom fighters who fought the Soviets. Other accusations about falsification and history rewriting were connected to interpretation of World War II events and 13th January 1991, when Soviet troops killed 14 peaceful protestors and the Lithuanian removal of Soviet monuments.

The third meaningful framing discourse portrays Lithuania as a suppressor of free speech (16 times), referring to Lithuania's decisions to ban Russian television channels, which spread disinformation, propaganda, and skewed historical facts, as part of information warfare.[49] Russia was "othering" Lithuania by presenting itself as a defender of free speech. Lithuania was also framed as a country persecuting Russian citizens (14 times) and spreading disinformation (12 times). The accusations of the persecution of individuals (especially in 2018-2019) were connected to Lithuania's judicial persecution and trials of individuals who participated in the January events of 1991.

In 2014 Russia intensively blamed Lithuania for its purposeful activities and intentions against Russia (10 times). Such accusations were related to Lithuania's positions at the United Nations Security Council when it was a non-permanent member in 2014-2015 and maintained a solid pro-Ukrainian position. Accusations also pertained to Lithuanian opposition towards the "NordStream-2" pipeline project, where Russia had political and economic interests.

The neutral framing was in less than 10% of messages (10 times), while possibilities for cooperation were mentioned only in 7% of messages (beginning in 2017). Positive imaging of Lithuania was presented in the context of Lithuania's Soviet past and the preservation of the cemeteries of World War II Soviet soldiers.

[49] Giedrius Česnakas and Vytautas Isoda, *supra* note 7: 83-4.

Such imaging supports the approach suggested by Olga Leonova – namely, to focus on common Soviet history and the experience of World War II, which is perceived as an inclusive biographical narrative.

Russia's strategic narrative towards Lithuania was self-defeating for Russia's soft power in Lithuania because it provided different narratives to Lithuania's biographical and strategic narratives. This approach can be explained by understanding that framing for foreign and domestic audiences happens simultaneously, and there is no clear division between them in the framing process.[50] According to Nye, "the same words and images that are successful in communicating to a domestic audience may have negative effects on a foreign audience."[51] By prioritizing domestic audience, decision-makers in some cases create opposition in the target countries.

For Russia, domestic political aims are more critical when seeking to legitimize the ruling regime.[52] The negative framing of Lithuania strengthens the discourse shaping Russian society's perceptions about neighbours. According to the Levada Center survey, 27% of Russians believed Lithuania was an enemy of Russia.[53] This number has been relatively stable since 2014. In 2015, 48% of Russians believed that Lithuania violated the rights of Russians and Russian speakers.[54] In 2016, 34% of Russians thought that the inclusion of the Baltic states in the Soviet Union in 1940 was the result of "the free will of the people of these countries" (highest since 2007), while 30% assumed it was because of the pressure from the Soviet Union and only 10% as a result of the secret agreement between Stalin and Hitler (lowest score recorded).[55] As a result, the agent's (Russian) society becomes discouraged from engagement with the target's (Lithuanian) society.

In summary, the analysis shows that Putin and Lavrov did not give much attention to Lithuania, indicating that it is not something that Russia's top decision-makers deeply care about in their discourse. The strategic narratives related to Lithuania have negative connotations and are concentrated on "othering." It was

[50] Tor Bukkvoll, "Putin's Strategic Partnership with the West: The Domestic Politics of Russian Foreign Policy," *Comparative Strategy* 22, No. 3 (2003); Robert D. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization* 42, No. 3 (1988); Christopher Hill, *The Changin Politics of Foreign Policy* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).
[51] Joseph S. Nye, *supra* note 11: 112.
[52] Anna Matveeva, *supra* note 7: 714; Andrei Kolesnikov, "Putin Welcomes Stalin Back to the Pantheon. A New Russian Patriotism Embraces the Soviet Past" (October 1, 2019) // https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/2019-10-01/putin-welcomes-stalin-back-pantheon; Nikita Petrov, "Don't Speak, Memory. How Russia Represses Its Past," *Foreign Affairs* 97, No. 1 (January/February 2018); Michael Kimmage, "The People's Authoritarian: How Russian Society Created Putin," *Foreign Affairs* (2018) // https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/review-essay/2018-06-14/peoples-authoritarian.
[53] Levada Center, "'Союзники' и 'враги' среди стран" ['Allies' and 'enemies' among countries] (June 14, 2019) // https://www.levada.ru/2019/06/14/soyuzniki-i-vragi-sredi-stran/.
[54] Levada Center, "Russian Discrimination in the Post-Soviet Space" (April 29, 2015) // https://www.levada.ru/en/2015/04/29/russian-discrimination-in-the-post-soviet-space/.
[55] Levada Center, "World War II" (July 12, 2016) // https://www.levada.ru/en/2016/07/12/world-war-ii-2/.

intensively portrayed as Russophobic – the "other" to everything Russia stands for, especially on historical discourse. In addition, Lithuania is portrayed as a country that limits free speech when it decides to limit the spread of Russia's disinformation. On one hand, Russia's narratives could appeal to Russophones in Lithuania and those who idealize the Soviet Union and felt unjustly suppressed. On the other hand, diametrically opposed framing of the target limits the soft power effect. The mobilization of domestic society was the focus of Russia's strategic narratives, serving domestic politics. From the Kremlin's perspective, Lithuania must change its biographical narrative and adopt the Russian one, which is to say: Russia strives for hegemony of the narrative.

## 5. THE FRAMING OF RUSSIA IN THE STRATEGIC NARRATIVE OF THE TARGET

The analysis of the strategic narrative of the target shows whether the target is willing to accept narratives and soft power of the agent or reject them – shielding society by providing diametrically opposing narratives. The analysis of Russia in the rhetoric of Lithuania's Presidents' Dalia Grybauskaitė (2009 – July 2019) and Gitanas Nausėda (since July 2019) (51 messages) and Minister of Foreign Affairs Linas Linkevičius illustrates the framing of Russia from the perspective of the target. A point to consider is that the core variable defining narratives towards Russia from 2014 to 2020 was Russia's aggression in Ukraine.

In the rhetoric of President Grybauskaitė, Russia was portrayed as an aggressor (24 times). At the same time, Russia was framed as a threat to Lithuania and the Euro-Atlantic community (17 times). Its disruptive activities (8 times) and violations of international law and agreements (6 times) were also frequently mentioned. The president five times outlined that Russia has different values from those of the West. Grybauskaitė stated that "a strong and focused EU is very important for Lithuania's security and can counter Russia's imperial ambitions. The EU's original political mission – to build peace and stability – is more relevant today than ever."[56] This statement parallels the statement of the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who stated that Russia chooses to conquer territories, and thus it chooses 19th- and 20th-century solutions in the 21st century.[57] Russia is "othered" and portrayed as less civilized because only states as such still go to war to conquer territories. Such approaches fall in line with Neumann's analysis of Russia's

[56] President of the Republic of Lithuania, "Narystė ES – vienas geriausių Lietuvos istorijoje sprendimų" [EU membership is one of the best decisions in the history of Lithuania]" (April 30, 2014) // https://www.lrp.lt/lt/ziniasklaidos-centras/naujienos/19212.
[57] Angela Merkel, "Policy statement by Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel on the situation in Ukraine" (March 13, 2014) // https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/bkin-en/news/policy-statement-by-federal-chancellor-angela-merkel-on-the-situation-in-ukraine-443796.

perceptions in Europe, where he states that "[it] stands out for its five hundred-year history of always just having been tamed, civil, civilized …, just having become part of Europe."[58]

The intensive discourse of "othering" leads to the strategic narrative advocating for unity and closer cooperation with partners against Russia. This idea was mentioned in 27% of messages. Russia is framed as the "other" that threatens "similar," aiming to create the "sameness" discourse among the EU and NATO member states. It is worth noting that Russia is "othered" from the perspective of the security complex theory, arguing that "a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another."[59] According to Andrew Cottey, the European security community defined by NATO and the EU embodies a pattern of demilitarized relations between its members – European states do not consider each other to be military adversaries anymore.[60] From this perspective, Russia is perceived as the "other" from which the "similar" has to defend. The President's approach signals that Russia's soft power is rejected, and the president's narrative becomes a "shield" against the Russian narrative.

President Nausėda mentioned Russia in 12 messages. Similarly, he predominantly associated Russia with aggression and threat. He called for unity and cooperation with partners, which was the third most frequently mentioned topic. As a result, there were no significant differences observed in the framing of Russia in the strategic narratives between the two presidents.

Minister Linas Linkevičius mentioned the keyword "Russia" in 207 messages. In more than half of those messages (119 cases), Russia was portrayed as an aggressive country implementing aggressive policies towards its neighbours, predominantly Ukraine. Linkevičius framed Russia as an aggressor particularly intensely in comparison to other framings. Such framing was persistent in 2015, with lower frequency in 2014 and 2016 and decreasing frequency later. The Minister's second most frequent message was calling for sanctions against Russia (48 times), primarily through 2014-2015 and 2018, followed by Russia's portrayal as a violator of international law and treaties (40 times), especially in 2015.

The Kremlin was presented as having different values from the EU and NATO (24 times) through 2014-2016 and 2018. Russia was portrayed as the "other" – non-democratic, aggressive, respecting power, implementing aggressive foreign policy – a country that cannot be trusted. Russia is "othered" from the normative

[58] Iver B. Neumann, *supra* note 4, 110.
[59] Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear. An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 190.
[60] Andrew Cottey, *Security in the new Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

perspective. When discussing the NATO-Russia Founding act of 1997, Linkevičius (2014a) stated:

> Russia has violated all possible obligations, all possible treaties. Therefore, I do not think that this aspect needs to be taken into account, as it has been discussed in a completely different context. Its aim was to establish partnerships and relationships based on certain values, principles and national commitments. Now it is all ruined.[61]

Reacting to Putin's statements about the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of 1939, Linkevičius, in an article for "The Guardian," argued for the need to counter the Russian narrative endorsing aggression and skewing facts and cautioned partners about deals with Russia.[62] In this way the minister contributed to the us–them strategic narrative, trying to create "sameness" and to some extent shield foreign partners from the Russian narrative.

According to Christopher S. Browning, "Russia <…> often continues to occupy negative positions in the underlying discourses of region-building projects that serve to re-inscribe Russia's difference from the 'West' European 'us' in negative terms."[63] The narrative that Russia is "other" to the Euro-Atlantic community is nothing new in the Lithuanian strategic narrative. Such framing intensified with worsening relations in the last 30 years, following the Russian-Georgian war and especially after Russia invaded Ukraine. Lithuania intensively "othering" Russia aims to achieve "sameness" with NATO and the EU. The promoted narrative could be identified as a "common other," which was defined by Wendt.[64] Lithuania tries to reinforce a collective identity of the Euro-Atlantic community against Russia, legitimizing itself as part of the West.

There is also a narrative of "alternative Russia" – Russia's civil society in the minister's rhetoric. Such "alternative Russia" was mentioned 25 times, more than 12% of all messages with a stable intensity of 5 to 6 times in 2015-2018. The narrative was connected to the Free Russia Forum in Lithuania. In this forum, Linkevičius stated that "[i]t is good to see Russian democrats in Vilnius, who

[61] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, "Linas Linkevičius vokiečių transliuotojui: 'Rusija sulaužė visas įmanomas sutartis'" [Linas Linkevičius to the German broadcaster: 'Russia has broken all possible contracts'], *15min.lt* (May 24, 2014) // http://urm.lt/default/lt/naujienos/linas-linkevicius-vokieciu-transliuotojui-rusija-sulauze-visas-imanomas-sutartis-15minlt-2014-m-geguzes-24-d.

[62] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, "Linas Linkevičius: Putinas pateisino sovietų-nacių paktą. Metas vakarams pabusti. theguardian.com, 2014 m. spalio 7 d." [Linas Linkevičius: Putin has defended the Nazi-Soviet pact. Time for the west to wake up. theguardian.com, October 7, 2014] (November 11, 2014) // http://urm.lt/default/lt/naujienos/linas-linkevicius-putinas-pateisino-sovietu-naciu-pakta-metas-vakarams-pabusti-theguardiancom-2014-m-spalio-7-d.

[63] Christopher S. Browning, "The Region-Building Approach Revisited: The Continued Othering of Russia in Discourses of Region-Building in the European North," *Geopolitics* 8, No. 1 (2003): 48.

[64] Alexander Wendt, *supra* note 3: 389.

sincerely care about the future of Russia, living in peace with its neighbours."[65] Lithuania is prepared for the "what if" moment in Russia in case of regime change. Russian civic society was framed as "us," assuming it is capable of a shared narrative building. The focus on the "sameness" with Russian opposition creates prospects to change the strategic narrative towards Russia and abandon shielding leading to soft power exchange prospects.

In summary, the analysis of the top institutions responsible for Lithuania's foreign policy suggests that the framing of Russia was consistent. It was framed as a "significant other." Lithuania's strategic narrative was constructed by focusing on Russia as a threat. With such a narrative, decision-makers shielded society from Russia's narratives and soft power. When a target's narratives are ignored, the target becomes more defensive and rejects the soft power of the agent. The surveys illustrate the impact of framing on society. The survey of 2020 showed that Russia was perceived as the most unfriendly state. As such, it was indicated by 68% of respondents, relatively stable result compared to 72% in 2016, and the state which poses the greatest threat – 64%.[66] Survey also showed growing objection to lifting EU economic and political sanctions against Russia. 43% of respondents had such a position, while only 34% in 2018.

Lithuanian decision-makers tried to shield Lithuanian society and the Euro-Atlantic partners from Russian narratives with their strategic narrative. They sought to strengthen "sameness" with partners. The "sameness" with Russia was found only in the messages mentioning Russia's political opposition and civil society, thus suggesting that strategic narrative framing can change in the case of changes in Russia, possibly leading to acceptance of Russia's soft power.

## CONCLUSIONS

The research demonstrated that strategic narratives are essential objects of the analysis when investigating the effectiveness of soft power instruments. Soft power instruments are not independent of the context framed by the core foreign policy decision-makers – strategic and biographical narratives - stories about states themselves and other states. The strategic narratives become filters that decrease or increase the effectiveness of soft power instruments. They can produce "otherness" and "sameness," affecting rejection or acceptance of soft power instruments and practices. The result of the dependent variable (the impact of soft

[65] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, "Užsienio reikalų ministras L. Linkevičius susitiko su Laisvosios Rusijos forumo dalyviais" [Minister of Foreign Affairs L. Linkevičius met with the participants of the Free Russia Forum] (October 14, 2016) // http://urm.lt/default/lt/naujienos/uzsienio-reikalu-ministras-l-linkevicius-susitiko-su-laisvosios-rusijos-forumo-dalyviais.
[66] Rytų Europos Studijų Centras [Eastern European Studies Centre], *supra* note 39.

power on the society of a particular state) depends on the intervening variable of strategic narrative. The state agent and state target decision-makers can adjust strategic narrative according to their interests, at least to some extent. Of course, in some cases, the state agent can achieve strategic narrative hegemony – i.e. acceptance of its strategic narrative by the state target, increasing the effectiveness of achieving soft power objectives. At the same time, "othering" in the strategic narrative serves to mobilize society of the state and becomes an instrument of shielding from narratives and soft power of the states that are "othered."

The analysis of Russian and Lithuanian strategic narratives towards each other illustrates their importance for soft power effectiveness. Because both states are "othering" each other in their strategic narratives, Russia's soft power has significant challenges to impacting Lithuanian society, which becomes increasingly suspicious of Russia. The focus on the Soviet past in Russia's soft power remains attractive primarily for Russophone communities and people who are nostalgic about the Soviet past. Russia is not aiming to engage with the majority of the Lithuanian population. Instead, Russia unsuccessfully seeks to achieve the hegemony of strategic narrative at the expense of the Lithuanian narrative. Interestingly, Lithuania tried to create "sameness" with the EU, NATO, and Russian opposition by "othering" Russia in its strategic narrative.

Russian–Lithuanian strategic narratives are diametrically opposed, thus limiting soft power effectiveness. Additionally, current strategic narratives become entrenched among societies and internationally, making them harder to change, setting significant limitations for soft power exchange in the future.

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