

## Cultural Diplomacy as a Tool of Soft Power: An Analysis of Russia's Relations with Europe

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### Abstract:

This paper, therefore, entitled "Cultural Diplomacy as a Tool of Soft Power: A Case Analysis of Russia's Relations with Europe," discusses how cultural diplomacy is currently unfolding in framing the dynamics underpinning Russia's relations with European countries. It also highlights how such cultural exchanges are strategically being used as a tool for the purpose of Russia increasing its soft power and influencing perceptions in Europe. It is divided into three parts: the general historical overview of cultural diplomacy, the concrete cultural strategies pursued by Russia in the case of Europe, and, finally, the debate on the current geopolitical context. The Russian government tries to invest in the field of art, education, and public diplomacy as ways to reach mutual understanding and reboot their image in the West, but these processes face political tensions and established negative attitudes. Ultimately, the article portrays the duality of cultural diplomacy both as a tool for engagement and a reflection of the complexities inherent in international relations today.

**Keywords:** Cultural Diplomacy ; Soft Power ; Russia ; Europe.

### 1. Introduction

A growing interest in the functions and effectiveness of cultural diplomacy for shaping international relations has been noted in recent years in state practice, think tanks, and academia. This interest boost occurred due to the diversification of instruments of foreign policy that serve both as means of maintaining bilateral relations and as an instrument of influence on states. We note in many works that culture is increasingly seen as one of the components of state and international politics. The goal of this essay is to examine the

role of cultural exchanges in Russia's relations with Europe. The study is based on an understanding of culture not as static, but fluid.

Russian culture not only attracts a European audience, but also generates a stable and long-standing interest among Europeans in Russia that goes far beyond impersonal curiosity about folk traditions. Works of Russian culture have the potential to affect foreign perception of the nature of their original nation. That is why the Russian state benefits from investing in the promotion of Russian art, providing centers abroad with funding, and shaping the image of a new, modernized, and reformed Russia in Western societies. Inspired by the idea of the exceptional value of Russian culture and considering art as an instrument of state propaganda, the Russian government has long been involved in the promotion of Russia in European societies. This essay somewhat hinges on the idea of 'cultural propaganda.' This essay is divided into three parts and touches upon three main topics: a historical overview of cultural diplomacy, the role and place of culture in international relations, outlined in the first part; the second part elaborates on Russia's cultural strategy in the direction of Europe; and the third section deals with the current situation.

### **1.1. Background and Significance of Cultural Diplomacy**

Implemented in response to developments in world politics, cultural diplomacy can explain and evaluate relations between countries in our era. It is rooted in history, and different phases of international relations offer various forms and examples. Neither the West nor the East can claim ownership. The practices of ancient Greece, Rome, and Egypt predate written history. European city-states maintained relationships with each other as ancient Greece and Rome. During the Middle Ages, the movement of scholars across Europe, or their connections with each other, could be interpreted as a form of international cultural diplomacy. In our times, it has become a more important concept with the acceleration of communications in recent years and has gained currency. This is somewhat of a controversial concept since the word "diplomacy" itself has been strongly related to states and society and is always connected to the public interest<sup>1</sup>.

The significance of enhancing cultural diplomacy is most felt in places where there are hostile relationships or negative public opinion. It is argued that cultural diplomacy can contribute to building a positive national image and sustainable collaborations among

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<sup>1</sup> Seow Ting Lee, Hun Shik Kim, Nation branding in the COVID-19 era: South Korea's pandemic public diplomacy, *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, vol 17, no 04, (2021), in: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7557308/>

nations in the broadest way. The most important feature of cultural diplomacy is that it is voluntary; as the free exchange of information is permissive, it helps in fostering cooperation on the basis of multiculturalism<sup>2</sup>. Mutual respect tends to decrease tensions and conflicts if performed in time and with good intentions. It realizes this very well and constantly exchanges the flow of culture through academic studies, research, seminars, and international conferences. It is also presented through various advanced academic programs. (Lee & Kim, 2020)(Lee, 2023)(Snow, 2020)

## **2. Defining Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy**

### **2.1. Soft Power Theory**

Soft power forms an important part of a comprehensive policy for the improvement of a country's international standing. It is a concept that refers to the use of different means to achieve the goals of governments, such as attractiveness and the shaping of opinions or directing social and economic development of other states. The power of each state consists of three components: psychological, economic, and military. Soft power, however, is much more useful than hard power to promote one's foreign policy objectives. It is emphasized that both these types of power are interlinked and the predominance of one of them is unnatural<sup>3</sup>.

The concept of soft power consists of a number of elements: values, culture, ideology, official policy, the role of government, good leadership, and an efficient state. Indeed, they all generate the ability for a country to persuade others. The concept of soft power was actually introduced in international relations in the early years of the Cold War. Two major points about the nature of a particular power emerged. First, relations between states are not in fact controlled by physical force or economic power alone. Other factors also conduct outcomes. Second, a particular state's soft power is an inherent part of its national power that allows it to influence another country's interests and aims in a more subtle way. Indeed, public diplomacy is the most developed form of soft power. It is stated that when such a situation unfolds, it benefits not merely the influencing state but the entire international community as well. The main argument of the concept is that

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<sup>2</sup> Seow Ting Lee, Vaccine diplomacy: nation branding and China's COVID-19 soft power play, *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, vol 19, no 1, (2023), in: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8259554/>

<sup>3</sup> Sergey Malinovskiy, Maia Chankseliani, *International Student Recruitment in Russia: Heavy-handed Approach and Soft-Power Comeback*, In *International Status Anxiety and Higher Education: The Soviet Legacy in China and Russia*, Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 5-7.

whoever understands this principle will do a better job of understanding what kinds of power it takes to win the direction of countries and people<sup>4</sup>.

## 2.2. Cultural Diplomacy in International Relations

Cultural diplomacy presently occupies a prominent position within the theoretical and doctrinal designs of international relations. As a separate and independent direction of foreign policy, it seeks to activate international relations in the field of culture, education, knowledge, and science. During the 1980s, theorists of international relations diligently began to examine the influence of culture on relations between states. One of the first to come forward with a theoretical analysis of cultural influence as a separate, independent element of international relations was a prominent theorist<sup>5</sup>. However, the term "soft power" achieved widespread recognition and popularity. As opposed to the traditional concept of power, which, by moral, material, and intellectual criteria, is based on direct and open coercion, "the term soft power... means that a state achieves the results it seeks in international, political, economic, and other fields through the attractiveness of its political arrangements, the ability to meet local and international interests, and accomplish the national objectives, through the soft power of attraction rather than through various forms of open or hidden coercion." (Snow, 2020)(McNamara, 2024)(Lee, 2023)

## 3. Russia's Soft Power Strategy

Cultural diplomacy and public diplomacy can be understood as the sphere of soft power. As an actor, Russia strategically strives to harness the potential of soft power, and numerous organizations and institutions operate to this end. Yet in general, the meaning of Russian soft power is understood primarily as having a bilateral character and is aimed at countries that are especially important in Russia's foreign policy planning. Russia's soft power representations regarding Europe in general, or regarding Eastern Europe or the Baltic States, are scarce; these relationships merit a comprehensive discussion. From this perspective, we selected a music-based example with border-crossing appeal: the Mariinsky Theatre and Artistic Director Valery Gergiev partnering with the Baltic Sea Festival. In the early 2000s, these concerts brought into sharp relief how international music can carry a myriad of messages well beyond attuning ears to new musical cultures

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<sup>4</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Soft power: the evolution of a concept, JOURNAL OF POLITICAL POWER, 2021, pp.3-6.

<sup>5</sup> Seow Ting Lee, op.cit.

and value-setting. Concurrent analyses of Russian hard power and foreign policy shifts verify a transformed soft power foundation<sup>6</sup>.

Russia's cultural policy in general has two different strategic levels: internal, or domestic, and external, or foreign. As far as this paper is concerned, however, we look only at the external component of Russia's cultural policy. Over the years, a range of terms has been used to describe these elements, including enticement policy, propaganda strategy, and public image creation. Russia's governmental strategy for cultural persuasion can be dated back to roughly 1990. Attention has been paid to the changes in government spending on theaters and performing arts companies, museums, the film industry, education, and propaganda over the years. During the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles, attention was drawn to the "Soviet Union's semi-hidden cultural diplomacy<sup>7</sup>." (Charap et al.2021)(McGlynn, 2020)(Popovic et al., 2020)(Laruelle, 2021)(Fasola, 2024)

### **3.1. Historical Context of Russia's Soft Power Efforts**

Efforts to conceptualize and evaluate Russia's soft power capabilities in relations with the European Union, not to mention create a model of its effects, must take due account of the shift from the united policy of the historical era to the policy of the Russian Federation. This presupposes an analysis of the assumptions, goals, and other aspects of the soft power conducted by the Soviet Union, which served largely as the ideological and political foundation for the international activities of the Russian Federation (including cultural diplomacy) both in the period of its establishment in the era of transformation. In the 1930s, Stalin's Soviet Union successfully promoted its vision of the class struggle for modernist European cultural intelligentsia and a socialist state without private property, in which so-called socialist legalism replaced markets, the right to protect one's property, and individual freedom<sup>8</sup>.

This vision was materialized through architecture, urban planning, literature, and music. At that time, Russia's turn to the world from the ideology of the international socialist revolution to the ideology of national "defensive socialism" began — in principle, it was declared in the totalitarian epoch of "national leaders" and formally proclaimed in 1947.

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<sup>6</sup> Jade McGlynn, *Reliving the past. How the Russian government and media use history to frame the present*, A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, University of Oxford, Trinity 2020, p.249.

<sup>7</sup> Anna L. Borshchevskaya, *Russia's soft power projection in the Middle East*, *Military Review*, November-December 2021, pp. 33-35.

<sup>8</sup> John Ridpath, *Russian Revolutionary Ideology and We the Living*, pp. 16-17, in: [file:///C:/Users/USER/Downloads/Documents/WtL-005-Final-PDF-Russian-Revolutionary-Ideology-and-We-the-Living\\_2.pdf](file:///C:/Users/USER/Downloads/Documents/WtL-005-Final-PDF-Russian-Revolutionary-Ideology-and-We-the-Living_2.pdf)

The external policy of the USSR was fundamentally reoriented under Stalin, especially during the last five years of his reign. The VI party congress predicated the policy of "world revolution," while the XIX party congress announced a completely different task — the "construction of socialism in one country." The specific value of the Cold War was that it demonstrated to the non-Soviet world that in many cases "defensive socialism" was in fact not aggressive and that this defensive socialism was, in essence, deeply conservative<sup>9</sup>. (Laruelle, 2021)(Ridpath)(Crossman)(Reeve, 2024)

### 3.2. Key Components of Russia's Cultural Diplomacy

Besides the surveys' results, relevant academic, journalistic, and representative sources also allow us to evaluate the scale and prospects of cooperation between Russia and the countries of Europe in the field of cultural diplomacy. As defined in the scientific approach of the work, two countries, particularly Russia and Italy, in accordance with the official government strategies, have already identified and implemented such cooperation.

Is Europe familiar with the "Russian world"? And what does "Russia" mean for average Europeans? From the point of view of Russia's cultural diplomacy<sup>10</sup>, the following components can be distinguished, explicitly aimed at the formation of the country's soft power and directly related to the application of the instruments of traditional cultural diplomacy: • functions of Rosotrudnichestvo, including active work in the field of international educational exchange based on intergovernmental agreements; • organization of interaction with the diverse Russian-speaking diaspora and developing a range of manifestations and forms of cooperation with the expatriate population; • international humanitarian cooperation with foreign cultural, scientific, and epistemological centers, aimed at restoring and preserving cultural heritage; • language and language policy (promotion and introduction of state and executive authorities in other countries to the study of the Russian language and the interaction of the international academic community for the study and discussion of the representation of the Russian language and "culture in the classroom"). Rosotrudnichestvo, charged with exercising state functions associated with the export of the Russian language and culture, organizes and conducts a set of activities in the field of international educational

<sup>9</sup> Boram Shin, Connecting the two Easts: Central Asian cultural diplomats and Soviet Internationalism of the late Stalinist era, 1947–1950, HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES COMMUNICATIONS, 2023, pp. 5-6.

<sup>10</sup> TATYANA GUMENYUK and others, CULTURAL DIPLOMACY IN MODERN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: THE INFLUENCE OF DIGITALIZATION, Journal of Theoretical and Applied Information Technology, vol 99, no 07, (April 2021), pp. 1552-1554.

exchange and programs of the Volunteer Service of Russia, presents cultural and artistic products abroad, and develops intercultural relations. In particular, Rosotrudnichestvo actively collaborates with foreign counterparts in the field of organizing public events, festivals, forums, and commemorative events of intercultural character, carrying out projects to develop intercultural dialogue, and is implementing a comprehensive program of cooperation with foreign partners for project activities between leading social movements. Agency activities are aimed at the formation of a "positive image of Russia abroad" and a "prestigious image of the Russian language" abroad, as well as "resolving the tasks set in the national security strategy of the Russian Federation"<sup>11</sup>. (Popovic et al., 2020)(Jerdén et al., 2021)(Manfredi-Sanchez, 2022)(Gumenyuk et al.2021)

#### **4. Russia's Cultural Diplomacy in Europe**

Russia has been involved in a variety of international cultural programs and events since the early 1990s. The central part of its initiative was directed at the countries of Eastern and Western Europe. The state, as well as major business structures, were actively involved in the promotion of Russian culture. These promotional activities were designed to reshape Russia's image from that of the Soviet Union. The idea of cultural diplomacy relies on the bearing of culture, which involves the spreading of culture over a certain geographic space, also encompassing foreign nations. This indicator should be geographical, as it concerns the address of cultural relationships outside the home state. Therefore, in the realm of cultural diplomacy, we should consequently strive to stimulate, encourage, and further the involvement of foreign citizens in the experience of foreign culture, with a view to fostering mutual understanding and learning, and discussing international issues between societies and people. This notion is explicitly shown in the presentation held by a representative of the Rosotrudnichestvo Agency<sup>12</sup>.

There are close historic ties between Russia and Europe, as well as their common cultural roots, stressing that there are many ties both during formal and informal contacts on national and personal levels in Europe. It is also well known that Russia's efforts towards Europe play a significant role in the content of the country's strategy. Indeed, the main driving forces of this policy are cultural and civilizational interrelations. Moreover, many

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<sup>11</sup> Juan Luis Manfredi-Sánchez, Vaccine (public) diplomacy: legitimacy narratives in the pandemic age, *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, vol 01, no 13, (february 2022), in: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8809069/>

<sup>12</sup> Dina Chimenson and others, The paradox and change of Russian cultural values, *International Business Review*, vol 31, no 14, November 2021, in: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356169939> *The paradox and change of Russian cultural values*

international politicians have emphasized that such a strategy plays a significant role in the security and economic relations of the country. This is noted by the former President of Kazakhstan, who highlights that the mutual cultural activities of the country with its European neighbors and the international community constitute a soft power tool. It should be noted that the soft power effect is that international opinion and attitudes towards another country are more influenced through repeated human services over the years<sup>13</sup>. (Mkhoyan2020)(Popovic et al., 2020)(Chimenson et al.2022)(Stremoukhov, 2022)

#### **4.1. Overview of Russia's Relations with Europe**

The relationship between Russia and Europe is a very complex one, which is not surprising in light of Russia's ambivalent position and its distinctive features. This could be partly explained by Russia's specific historical experience with Europe. Russia had been a part of European politics for centuries, having participated actively in partitioning Poland. There had been clear cultural exchanges and influence prior to the Bolshevik Revolution, and the influence was mutual. However, while showing a certain 'European consciousness' and ambitions, Russia claimed a distinct 'independent greatness' as a self-professed 'Sentinel of Slavdom' and the 'Third Rome' heir to the Byzantine tradition.

This concept of 'separateness' has traditionally been strong in Russian political thinking.

The Bolsheviks, therefore, carried with them both 'hereditary European viewpoints - indeed, if anything these were strengthened by the Revolution' and a deeply rooted 'Euroskepticism' and 'anti-Westernism' supported by those who wanted to build a specifically Russian society. Today, the issue of Russia's place in European politics still remains a crucial one, especially in the wake of the ongoing crisis in Ukraine.

Russia's relations with Europe were constantly under the influence of a number of challenges posed by international politics as well as domestic considerations. As few other regions and countries, the Russian-European story has been interwoven at the same time with cultural, diplomatic, economic, and military dialogues, enmities, detentes, and provocations. Cultural, political, ideological, and historical links have paved the way both for reconciliations and for conflicts<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Paul Stronski , Richard Sokolsky, Multipolarity in Practice: Understanding Russia's Engagement With Regional Institutions, January 2020, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace , in: [file:///C:/Users/USER/Downloads/Documents/Stronski\\_Sokolsky\\_Multipolarity\\_final.pdf](file:///C:/Users/USER/Downloads/Documents/Stronski_Sokolsky_Multipolarity_final.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Jack A. Goldstone, Leonid Grinin, Andrey Korotayev, Conclusion. How Many Revolutions Will

In a Cold War context, popular diplomacy, science, and cultural ties drove a wedge between partners and acted as 'weapons of peace' versus 'cultural offensive' to promote 'social progress' in the 'freed world'. Norms and values were intertwined and acted as a powerful tool in forging alliances and enmities, especially in the era of state-empire counter-empires and the post-colonial world. Since the end of the Cold War, and in the wake of globalization, transnationalism, and cyber-writing, mutual contacts have deepened even further, providing new opportunities for promoters of peace and enmity alike. Whether it is terrorism, the integration of international law and institutional mechanisms of global governance around a liberal or illiberal culture, or the use of rivalry and competition as the spice of our globalized society - in the post-Cold War world, cultural diplomacy in a Europe between dependence and 'post-politics' seems more crucial than it has ever been. In short, to paraphrase a notable figure, the Russia-Europe cultural diplomacy history is not yet at an end. Even if today's policymakers vote with their feet against cultural diplomacy, it is likely that culture will have the last and some say the most enduring final word<sup>15</sup>. (Anderson, 2022)(Kahan, 2021)(Lecky, 1776)(Putin, 2023)

#### 4.2. Case Studies of Russian Cultural Diplomacy Initiatives in Europe

Russia's Cultural Diplomacy Case Files presents case studies of various initiatives undertaken by Russia in the field of cultural diplomacy in Europe, discussing their main goals and the ways these initiatives have been implemented. We will evaluate the impact of these initiatives on the decision-makers, the Russian émigrés, the local elite, and the broader public in the respective European countries, analyzing the responses to these international cultural contacts found in the main newspapers and periodicals. We will also analyze the analysis of these initiatives made by their foreign and Russian participants in their letters and public speeches<sup>16</sup>. The public's response to these cultural activities will also be discussed, reflecting the image of Russia that these respective programs have been helping to project. These case studies will also include an overview of arguably applicable parallels from the time period of the proposed political and cultural cooperation (from the 1920s to the 1940s). In doing so, we intend to assess the extent to which the initiatives already synchronize with the existing trends in Europe. The

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We See in the Twenty-First Century?, pp. 1045-1046, in: [file:///C:/Users/USER/Downloads/Documents/How\\_Many\\_Revolutions\\_Will\\_We\\_See\\_in\\_the.pdf](file:///C:/Users/USER/Downloads/Documents/How_Many_Revolutions_Will_We_See_in_the.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Sune Bechmann Pedersen, Elitza Stanoeva, *Tourism Diplomacy in Cold War Europe: Symbolic Gestures, Cultural Exchange and Human Rights*, Contemporary European History, 2024, pp. 4-6.

<sup>16</sup> Sune Bechmann Pedersen, Elitza Stanoeva, op.cit.

case studies will also discuss the impact that the European response to these initiatives has on the situation inside Russia. The first batch of initiatives proposed are as follows: Academic Exile and the Formation of Intellectual Networks: Sources, Methods, and Implications; and Business in Art: New Approaches to the Study of Icons from the Collection of Mikhail Abramov<sup>17</sup>. (Popovic et al., 2020)(Mkhoyan2020)(Dâmaso, 2021)(Piros and Kooops2020)

## **5. Impact and Effectiveness of Russia's Cultural Diplomacy**

Aside from its immediate aim of attracting foreign publics to Russian culture, language, and way of life, contemporary Russian cultural diplomacy has two notable effects. This is, most directly, the stimulation of various kinds of creative enterprise, such as the promotion of cultural industries and the sponsoring of Russian art in Europe, and, more generally, the projection of a public or international image of the country, based broadly on its "soft power" and attractiveness as a global or "rising" power. Indeed, more frequently than not, these mutually dependent initiatives seek to strengthen Russia's position in competing with European or Western-based constructions of the international order and as a viable counter-identity to a maligned Russia consisting of a gangster state, characterized by a vicious capacity for collective violence, and an intolerant, racist, and homophobic society<sup>18</sup>.

Russian cultural diplomacy has "reverted to mediocrity in recent years" for a number of reasons including a fear of governments of diaspora groups in the West, the use of culture and history for "domestic ideological purposes", "widespread corruption" and the predatory character of the regime. A focus on Russia's historical and cultural links with or "nearness to Europe" represents one of Russia's major attempts to fashion a European "mirror" of Russia, which can reveal and possibly magnify its multiple attractions. Russian officials often refer to the "centuries-old ties of kinship and alliance" between Russia and "the peoples of Europe". Given the memory of the Great Migration and the historical memory of alienation from Europe, it is not surprising that Viazma is little known and its modern memory little explored. Overall, the material on the reception of Viazma reveals considerable ignorance of Russia in Europe. Moreover, negative connotations can and do attach to *Russkii mir*, as it is associated with the suppression of national diversity in the non-Russian republics in the Russian Federation, particularly in

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<sup>17</sup> Mafalda Dâmaso, *Implementing the EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations – Toward a New Paradigm*, Los Angeles, FIGUEROA PRESS, pp. 15-19

<sup>18</sup> OLENA KARAKOZ, *op.cit.*

the North Caucasus<sup>19</sup>. (Gumenyuk et al.2021)(Grincheva, 2024)(Crilley et al.2022)(Chernobrov2022)(Grincheva, 2020)

## **5.1. Assessment of Russia's Soft Power Influence in Europe**

### **5.1 Assessment of Russia's Soft Power Influence in Europe**

Russia's soft power in the European context has been assessed by several analysts, but only a few scholars have applied this approach to investigate bilateral cultural relations between Russia and individual countries in Europe. The measurement of a country's soft power is often based on several key criteria: the attractiveness of the political and social way of life, as well as the culture of a country, non-state initiated projects, large inclusion in international events, and the involvement of third-state international populations through lunches and educational grants, among other things. Three main dimensions are employed by indices and rankings to measure soft power: cultural, social, and political. This paper, given the focus on cultural diplomacy and nation branding by culture, focuses mostly on the cultural and, at some level, the social dimension. It assesses Russia from an outside perspective, as these statistical tools do when approaching this country<sup>20</sup>.

Public opinion trends can indeed provide insights into various nations' soft power and into particular policy domains. Various national attitudes towards the mission of the Russian Center for Science and Culture can shape its success if we extend it to the plans of a wider cultural policy. In order for the cultural project to succeed, the majority of the public, as well as political decision-makers, must be supportive. To better target a particular state, the cultural officer needs to know and feel these national opinions about major national points. Nonetheless, stereotypes appear as a threat, and Russia must therefore counteract and create its own identity in Europe. Usually, counter-narratives in the Western media are silent, marginalized, or not found. Russian minorities are observed in a different light than Russia's state-initiated activities if they feel and are funded by particular public projects. The use of human kindergartens, if combined with qualified messengers, may have a parallel outcome. In the cultural case, the Russian image would give more prestige to those projects. (Trunkos, 2021)(Ageeva, 2021)(Cuppuleri & Ashiku, 2024)(Turcsanyi and Kachlikova2020)(Milosevich, 2021)

## **Conclusion:**

<sup>19</sup> Dina Chimenson and others, op.cit

<sup>20</sup> Judit Trunkos, Comparing Russian, Chinese and American Soft Power Use: A New Approach, Global Society, 2020, pp. 13-15.

In conclusion, the study on cultural diplomacy as a tool of soft power illustrates that it is an essential instrument in developing Russia's relations with Europe. The current study underlines that Russia has used cultural exchange instrumentally as one of the most effective means for creating mutual understanding and improvement of its international image within different activities in the spheres of arts, education, and public diplomacy. On the other hand, investing in cultural diplomacy allows Russia to offset negative perceptions and develop durable links with European states. All these efforts continue to be persistently hampered by continuing geopolitical tensions and historical complexity. The analysis underlines that, on the one hand, cultural diplomacy may serve as a bridge to dialogue and cooperation, yet on the other hand, it is also inextricably linked with the overall political environment. Thus, understanding the dynamics of cultural diplomacy is relevant for understanding the complex nature of international relations in today's world, where culture increasingly crosses with politics and public perception.

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