

## Methodology of Russian soft and hard power impact in Estonia

### Original article

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### Abstract

**Objectives:** Soft power elements can be the so-called persuasive means of political influence (culture, propaganda, diplomacy).

The Russian Federation, with its historical legacy, by some historians referred to as the "siege complex", still seems to prefer changes in the distribution of power at the global level, while being aware of the benefits of cooperation with the wider West. Nevertheless, the position regarding some former USSR Republics, which it would most likely see directly in its sphere of influence, seems to remain the same, hence the actions taken and the methodology of conduct have their own characteristic features.

**Methods:** In accordance reference to the typology established by Nye - the methodology of the so-called hard influence generally implies the use of military means, compulsory diplomacy and economic sanctions to influence on the behavior or interests of other political bodies (Wilson, 2008, p. 114).

**Results:** Russia seems to use the hard combination in its own specific way and soft impact. However, the soft impact is primarily based on propaganda activities implementing the clear strategy of the Federation.

As argued by Alexander et al. (2005, p. 31): "the theory of the image at the international level shows a clear relationship between the image of another nation and the choice of a strategic policy towards that nation."

**Conclusions:** In this sense, Russia will apply a shifting strategy in line with the old Latin principle: divide et impera. For this purpose, it will use a combination of soft and hard impact depending on Estonia's internal and international situation.

## Introduction

The SOFT POWER 30 index is created annually. In 2017, the Russian Federation was ranked 27th in it. The analysis showed that although Russia's position in this ranking may be surprising, it is a diplomatic power with exceptional opportunities. The aforementioned J.Nye predicts that Russia's ability to attract others will continue to decline. As political analyst Sergei Karaganov noted in 2009 (*Main global trends and the current European crisis*, 2014), Russia's lack of soft power is precisely what drives it to behave aggressively - for example, during the war with Georgia in 2008. For decades Russia has enjoyed become a considerable soft force, and its culture made a significant contribution to arts, music and literature. Moreover, immediately after World War II, the Soviet Union, thanks to its leadership in the fight against fascism, was attractive to many people in Western Europe, but according to the author, the Soviets squandered these gains of soft power by attacking Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968.

By 1989, there was little of this kind of impact left. Currently, the president of the Russian Federation is making the same mistake as his predecessors: despite the declaration of 2013, in the background of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia launched a partially secret military intervention in Ukraine, which, together with the nationalist context, caused serious concern, especially among the countries of the former Soviet Union. These actions undermined the stated aim of establishing a Russia-led Eurasian Union to compete with the European Union. According to this interpretation, Russia currently has few opportunities to regain its attractiveness, therefore the activities of the Russian Federation are characterized by an increase in propaganda activities, ranging from the reorganization of the RIA Novosti news agency (40% of the staff were laid off) to the creation of the "Sputnik" network of information centers, a government-funded network in 34 countries, including: radio, social media and news in local languages (agencies: Regnum, ITAR TASS, RIA Nowosti, TV channels ORTRTR, Zvezda, REN, Tv and Petersburg 5, social networks odnoklassniki.ru and vkontakte.ru).

### **1. Examples of soft and hard power impacts on Estonia via Russia**

The indicated actions - or direct impact attempts were noted by the Special Services of Estonia. Concrete examples of actions are presented in the Estonian Internal Security Service Annual Review (2018). On his way to the Report, the Director of KAPO indicated, inter alia, an example of an attempt to bribe a board member of an Estonian state-owned company.

According to the Director, the greatest threat posed by this is at best: importing a corrupt Russian business culture to Estonia and, worst of all, involving Estonia's strategic decision-makers in reprehensible actions, from which there is no way out - being in the hands of Russia, which may use them for any further operations. Another example is the so-called interpretation of history. The Soviet and contemporary Russian propaganda machine tries to create the image of Estonians as informants or associates acting against their own countrymen. The Estonian authorities are constantly trying to commemorate and present actual historical events. Above all, Russian historiography has been trying for years to diminish the importance of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and denies that this treaty between the Soviet Union and Germany paved the way for the annexation and occupation of sovereign states and essentially set the stage for World War II. Russia's tactical maneuver in this regard is an attempt to draw public attention to the Munich Agreement of 1938.

Another example of an attempt at impact that is worth mentioning is the State Program for Voluntary Resettlement in Russia with a simplified procedure, which, however, was not popular in Estonia. Although the Russian minority accounts for approx. 30% of Estonia's population, however, more than 15% of them do not have citizenship. Despite the lack of success in this area, it is in Russia's interest to continue to use the vague concept of the apparent repatriation and protection of minority compatriots to justify its interference in the internal affairs of other countries, the best example of which was the actions taken in Crimea.

At the same time, the Federation is trying to force Estonia to recognize citizenship of the Russian-speaking population in a simplified procedure. It is worth pointing out here the adoption of the new migration concept of the Russian Federation, the main assumption of which is to define, for humanitarian purposes, various categories of foreign citizens and stateless persons who may become citizens of the Russian Federation in accordance with the simplified procedure. These assumptions - apart from propaganda - require a "new opening" of Russia to immigrants for economic and demographic reasons.

However, the problem is primarily the change in the attitude of Russians, because - especially in nationalist circles, the idea of increasing the number of immigrants is controversial and is not in the interest of some of the administration and the sector of migration services, which profit from controlling illegal migration procedures. It is pointed out that in Russia there is an extensive network of companies issuing fictitious registration documents (e.g. by registering several hundred people in one apartment in the so-called rubber apartments), and the law enforcement authorities derive financial benefits from controlling immigrants who do not have a registration or other necessary documents.

It is worth noting that since 2011 there has been an increase in the involvement of the Russian minority in Estonia's political issues - thus the political parties representing this minority [in particular the Center Party] are gaining power. Another example of "soft tools" for introducing "social disturbances" is the joint program of the Russian Embassy in Estonia and the local Pushkin Institute, giving young people living in Estonia the opportunity to study at Russian universities financed by the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation and an agency of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia). The report said the program was designed specifically for young Russian-speaking people living in expatriate communities and was viewed by the Kremlin as future promoters of the 'Russian world' idea in their home countries. As a continuation of activities that use the young generation to implement pro-Russian policy, events and projects implemented on the basis of already existing networks were also indicated - namely, in November 2018, the Russian-Estonian youth forum in Moscow was organized as a "continuation" of the World Youth and Student Festival in Sochi ( 2017).

These activities were assessed as serving only the Kremlin's influence, the aim of which was to try to use active youth to positively perceive Russia by EU members and to influence the breaking of the adopted sanctions. In addition, the indicated activities would serve in the long term as a database that could be used in the future in the interest of Russia. Further Russian efforts by the Estonian secret services in 2018 to legitimize the annexation of Crimea by creating divisions in the West, in the form of individual cases of people from Estonia (with various motives, e.g. the need for personal recognition), locally supporting the policy of division at the international level. A peculiar case is the finding of a scenario (a complex family history) for the production of a material intended to show the President of Estonia as equating communism with fascism, and the alleged collaboration of his father with the German occupier, by the Russian reportage team of the Channel 5, detained on the border of Estonia. The scenario also included the need to find people on site who would be ready to comment on the above appropriately by asking the following questions: why do Estonians like Hitler so much? Don't they have other "heroes"?

The report also points to the intensive use of cultural tools, i.e. : media, exhibitions, academic connections, but also symposia and conferences to impart a historical Russian narrative, exposing the international community to misinterpretation of historical events, with the desire to accept them. In this sense, the invitation of the President of Poland remains unprecedented, without the possibility of taking the floor to the celebration of the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau at Yad Vashem in 2020. It is also not without

significance that Russia, through its secret services, also provides support to extremist minority organizations, such as the Night Watch operating in Estonia (Żurawski Vel Grajewski P., 2011) or the Young Word (<http://www.molodoe-slovo.ru/about/>). Together with the pro-government Nashi and Young Guard (*Embargo in Russian trade policy - tactic without strategy*, 2009) youth organizations active in Russia, they are used when necessary to provoke and incite conflicts in Estonia, which are then used for propaganda and politics by Moscow (*Magaziny Petrozavodska ob "yavili boykot estonskim tovarom, "Ленна.Рy"*).

Historical signs, monuments, monuments, etc. are also part of the propaganda and operational activities to this day in most countries of the world. One of these, the events that took place in Estonia in 2007, when the authorities decided to dismantle the monument to Soviet soldiers in Tallinn, were recognized. On the night of April 26-27, 2007. Cyberattacks aimed at completely paralyzing the state began. The importance of the problem is illustrated by the degree of computerization of Estonia, which is considered to be a leader in this field.

The first action was when hackers broke into the Estonian Reform Party and placing on it a forged letter from Estonian Prime Minister Andrus Ansip, in which he allegedly apologized for the decision to remove the monument. At the same time, the e-mail server of the Estonian parliament was blocked by a wave of spam. The first fights of this kind lasted more than a week, but the main (proper) attack took place only on May 9 (Russian Victory Day holiday).

On that day, an increase in traffic was noted since the morning in the Estonian network by several thousand times. Careful calculations showed that up to a million computers were involved in the massive attack, and despite Estonia's good preparation for what was going on, it was not possible to save, among others, service of Estonia's largest bank, which stopped operating for over an hour, calculating its losses as a result of this event at over a million dollars. The country's cyber defense also involved blocking a large part of "foreign" Internet traffic.

It wasn't until May 18 that the attacks finally subsided. Most of them were carried out using the DoS technique. Although the circumstantial evidence pointed to one possible source (e.g. computer connections from the IP of the Russian government to the server of the Estonian president's office, instructions for the attack on Russian forums - what targets should be attacked exactly and in what way) - due to the lack of direct evidence, it was difficult to make a specific accusation (connections were made, among others, from Peru and China). Thus, it was not possible to trace the guilty parties (despite the help of the secret services of Finland, Germany and Slovenia).

The indicated example shows that the use of historical problems can only be a source of aggressive actions with the use of new tools, techniques and the field of attack, but it can also be performed just as easily by third actors who, taking advantage of the tense historical situation, may direct their suspicions to a non-real - aggressor. It is worth emphasizing that, due to the events that go back many centuries, it will not be easy to gain the trust of the Russian Federation by countries that have been joined by force [by annexation or occupation] by their difficult history. The main reason for the distrust of these countries is and will most likely remain the attitude of Russia, its lack of historical reflection and settling accounts with the past. Russia's perception of itself does not allow this to happen. The rhetoric of "proud and powerful Russia" is a blockage to the normalization and development of relations at the international level. In this line of thought, successive generations of Russians are growing, unaware of the possibility of global cooperation based on a positive message.

Concluding the analysis of the soft impact as a phenomenon, it is worth emphasizing that that the indices indicated at the beginning of the discussion indicate the impact potential rather than the impact force in individual countries. Soft force is more of an evolutionary nature, determined, for example, by cultural penetration. Such processes take place informally, leaving no official documents behind, and may remain unnoticed by the public. For this reason, it is possible that, as Till Geiger (Geiger, 2010) pointed out, Professor Nye has repeatedly admitted that it is difficult for policy makers to convince about the importance and effectiveness of soft power because there is no convincing argument, that spending on soft power would be more effective than spending on the military.

In Russia, not only politicians, but also leading scientists argue that soft power or intelligent power has little importance in international affairs. The aforementioned prof. Sergey Karaganov clearly states that the current situation forces Russia to use tough force and that most of the countries of the modern world cannot follow the example of Germany, to play on economic power and soft power (*Main global trends and the current European crisis*, 2014). Despite the problems with the validation of indicators, quantitative assessment and assessment of the impact of soft power, it is impossible to deny the existence of intangible resources of power with the tools of soft influence, which are confirmed by the examples identified by Estonian institutions.

Summarizing the above analysis, it can be stated that Russia's soft-impact strategy is based primarily on broad propaganda activities, including the leading idea of a protectorate over the entire Russian-speaking population (the rule defined by the Estonian secret services with the abbreviation CCCP (Communication, Coordination, Consolidation, Protection), disinformation

in the mass media, attempts to antagonize social groups - especially national minorities, attempts at corruption, lobbying and making political entities dependent on business groups - constituting significant elements of politics in the Baltic countries, albeit to the least extent in Estonia. Organizational and regulatory measures taken by Estonia. - primarily in the area of counterintelligence - they are primarily effective, which allows minimizing the influence of the Russian Federation inside the country.

## **2. Methodology of Russian soft and hard power impact**

In accordance reference to the typology established by Nye - the methodology of the so-called hard influence generally implies the use of military means, compulsory diplomacy and economic sanctions to influence on the behavior or interests of other political bodies (Wilson, 2008, p. 114). This form of political power is often aggressive (coercion) and most immediately effective when imposed by one country on another with less military and/or economic power. It is worth emphasizing, however, that it is not only the issues of bilateral international relations that shape the politics of states that can use the tools of hard influence. The best example is Article 41 of the Charter of the United Nations, which provides for non-military measures that can be used for the effective conduct of Security Council decisions.

The Council may also invite members of the United Nations to take such measures. These measures may include the total or partial disruption of economic relations and communications: rail, sea, air, postal, telegraph, radio and other, as well as a breakdown of diplomatic relations. An example of the use of hard power tools are, for example, the UN economic sanctions imposed on Iraq in 1991.

Some theorists believe that hard force contrasts with the soft force that comes from in diplomacy, culture and history. According to Joseph Nye, hard power lies in the ability to use the incentives and threats of economic and military power. Incentives can pose e.g. reducing trade barriers, alliance offers or promises of military protection. Threats in this sense may include, for example, a military intervention or the introduction of economic sanctions. Ernest Wilson (Wilson, 2008) describes hard force as ability to force "another to act in a way that he or she would not like to act" (*Estoniskiye turopertory otmenili tury v Rossiyu*, 2007). A small part is of the opinion that the two forces of influence - hard and soft - should at least balance each other. It is also emphasized that the boundaries between hard and soft force are blurred (Smith-Windsor, 1998). the possibility of using the armed forces, e.g. to participate in humanitarian aid peace operations. Then the use of armed forces should not be seen at the pole of hard-soft-power continuity.

## Economy - economic relations

The possibilities of a strong impact in the form of the use of economic sanctions by the Russian Federation towards Estonia, its potential will be determined by the type of and extent of existing trade between these countries, including the sourcing of raw materials and energy.

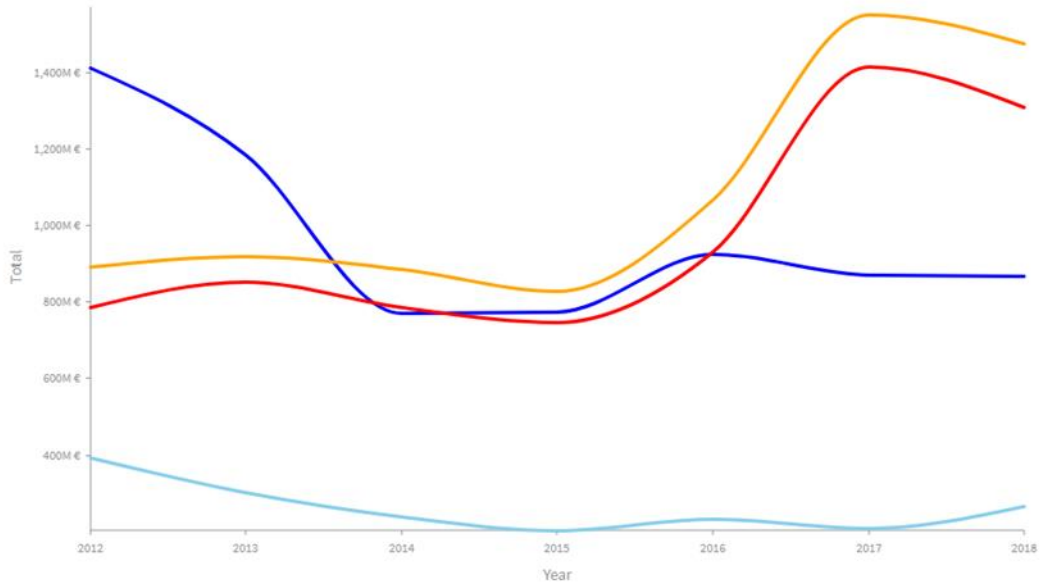


Fig 1. Estonia's trade balance with the Russian Federation (2013-2019)  
Source: <https://data.stat.ee/>

The trend of the last two years indicates a decline in Estonia's trade balance with the Russian Federation. In terms of imports, Russia currently ranks 6th on the Estonian list of countries supplying various types of goods and raw materials.

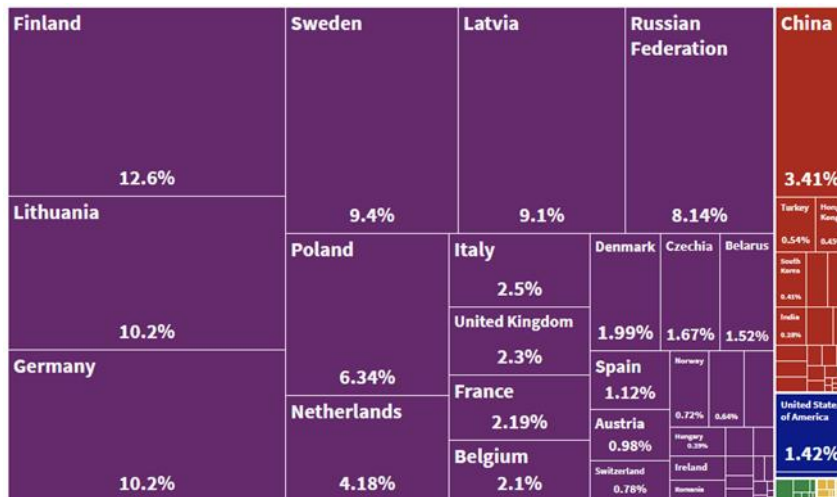


Fig. 2. Import in Estonia (2019)  
Source: <https://data.stat.ee/>

The types of the most commonly imported goods and raw materials include: refined petroleum products, hydrocarbon gases and derivatives, oils, lubricants, nitrogen fertilizers,



wood. Energy, although not as significant today in terms of imports, has for many years been used as a tool of geopolitical influence in many countries of the former Soviet Union especially in the early 90's. Under Vladimir Putin's leadership, energy has become a coherent means of achieving foreign policy goals.

Between 2000 and 2006, Russia cut off energy exports around 40 times [1], most often to the Commonwealth of Independent States and Central and Eastern Europe. The incidents in the Baltic states included: stoppage of oil supplies to the Latvian port operator Ventspils Nafta (VN) since 2003, to the Lithuanian oil refinery Možeiki Nafta (MN) since 2006, as well as breaks in oil deliveries by rail to Estonia in May 2007 (according to the official version, Russian railways started the scheduled renovation of the line and the railway bridge over the Narva River was blocked for this reason).

A kind of economic pressure similar to the embargo was inspired by the government propaganda boycott of goods from Estonia in 2007 in connection with the dispute over the Bronze Soldier monument (commemorating the Soviet soldiers who died during the "liberation of Tallinn from the hands of the Nazis," according to the Kremlin) - . Russia's deputy prime minister, Sergei Ivanov, and the then mayor of Moscow, Yuri Luzhkov, called on the public to boycott Estonian products (*Rossiyskiy biznes-otkhod ot estonskikh konfet i shokolada*, 2007). [4]. The boycott was announced by the Russian supermarket chain: Seventh Continent, Kopiejka and Samochwał, and shops in Pietrozawodzko (*Estonskiye turoperatory otmenili tury v Rossiyu*, 2007). The products of the largest Estonian confectionery company Kalev - Olivier Kruuda (*Foreign Ministry summons Russian Ambassador*, 2007) were effectively boycotted.

Estonian tourist companies, unable to ensure the safety of their clients during trips to Russia, also suffered losses. In addition, it was accompanied by a blockade of pedestrian and vehicle traffic at the main border crossing point on the bridge over the Narva River between the city of Narva and Ivanogrod (Jaanilinnem). The blockade, introduced under the pretext of maintenance work, violated the agreement between the two countries, in accordance with which they must inform each other about the restriction or suspension of traffic at such points ninety days in advance.

The immediate reasons for these actions stemmed from Moscow's attempts to punish the Baltic states for pursuing a policy that was contrary to Russia's interests. It is worth noting, however, that a few months after the 2007 crisis, not only deliveries resumed, but also the trade balance increased to the level it was before its induction. As a result of the events indicated, Estonia, in turn, gained significant support from its allies, an example of which may be, among others, the creation of the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence in Tallinn,

or the placement of the so-called blacklist of members - Nashi activists banned from entering the Schengen area.

It is worth noticing, that Russia's policy and actions to move away from the old transmission routes through the Baltic States in favor of new gas pipelines and ports directly from its territory (Baltic Pipeline System (BPS) in 2001 and two Primorsk oil terminals in 2006 and 2008) additional justification: elimination of the potential risk of blocking supplies by intermediary countries in the transfer of raw materials, strengthening the possibility of limiting supplies to these countries in the future. In turn, Estonia is gradually diversifying its supplies, an example of which is the commissioning of the Balticconnector gas pipeline in December 2019.



Fig. 3. Balticconnector gas pipeline in December 2019.  
Source: <http://balticconnector.fi/en/the-project/>

Crude oil is a raw material that is also less important in the possibility of using under the hard impact. The reason lies in the possibility of importing oil from virtually anywhere in the world, but also in the fact that Estonia does not act as an intermediary in the distribution of gas to other countries. This means that interruptions in deliveries would not mean interruptions in deliveries to other European countries. Russia has made efforts to secure its interests in the region by purchasing control stakes from Gazprom in gas companies (including Eesti Gaas 37%), trying to create a powerful network of local interests with Gazprom, but since 2015 it changed its strategy, successively selling its shares in the Baltic states.

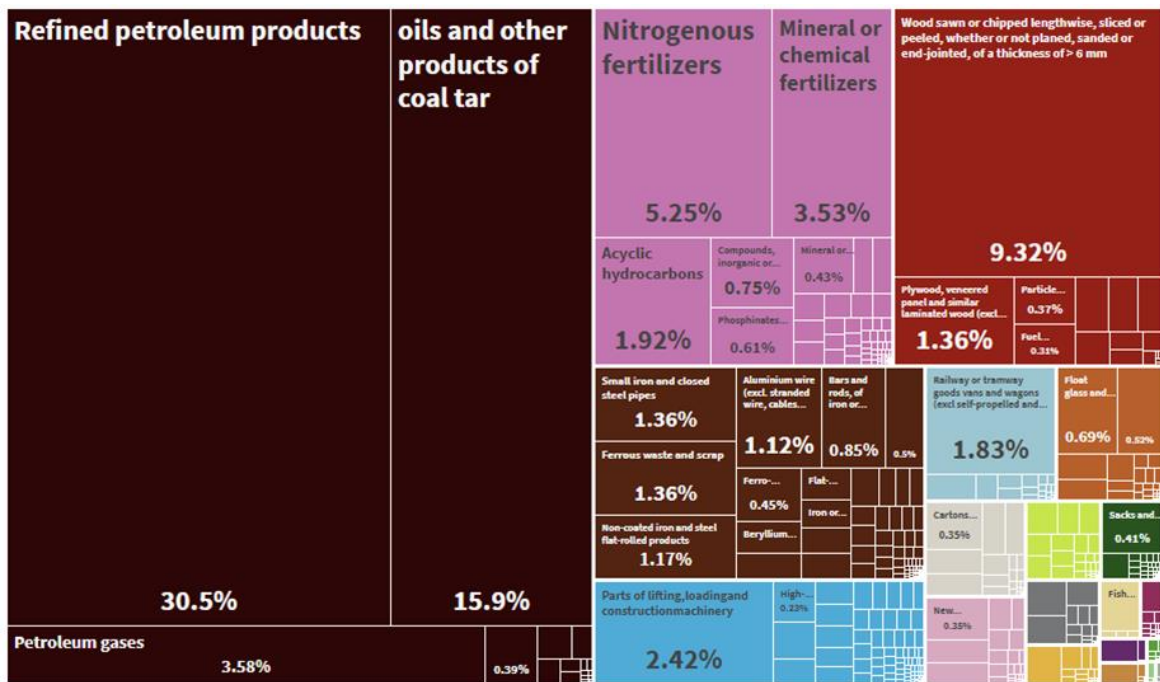


Fig. 4. Import from the Russian Federation to Estonia [2019]  
Source: <https://data.stat.ee/>

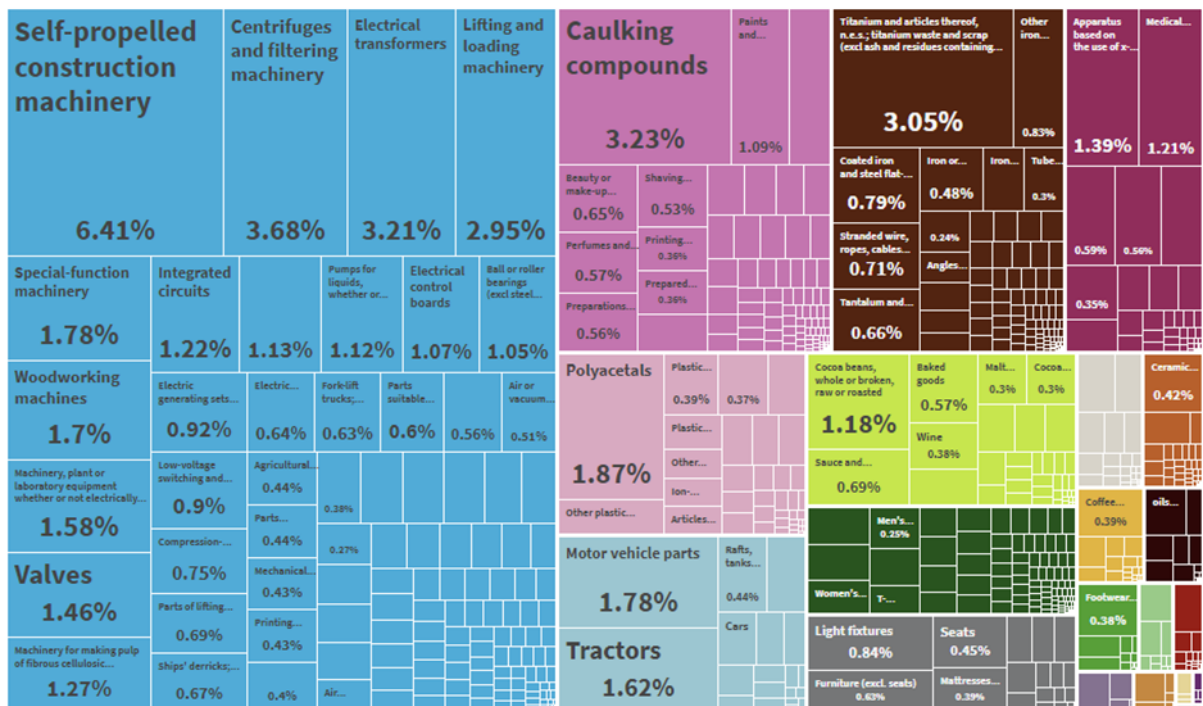


Fig. 5. Export from Estonia to the Russian Federation [2019]  
Source: <https://data.stat.ee/>

It is worth noting that the Russian Federation imposed an embargo in the form of a ban on the import of selected groups of agri-food goods and raw materials from EU countries as retaliation against EU economic sanctions on Russian natural and legal persons applied after the annexation of Crimea and the aggression in the eastern part of Ukraine in 2014. The ban

covered imports from EU countries, the USA, Canada, Australia and Norway - it is interesting, however, that the ban did not apply to Japan and Switzerland, which also joined the sanctions against Russia. Rapid retaliation turned out to be partially effective, as evidenced by the attitude of some politicians in the EU Member States seeking to ease sanctions on the grounds of on negative consequences for the economies of their countries (Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Finland). In March 2015, EU leaders made the lifting of the existing sanctions conditional on the full implementation of the Minsk agreements, but in the absence of this, the EU Council extended sectoral economic sanctions until 31 July 2020. In response to Russia, the Russian president issued a decree extending the embargo on food products from the European Union until December 31, 2020. The balance of bilateral sanctions showed, on the one hand, a very rapid EU compensation for losses on the Russian market through increased exports of agri-food products to other markets - on the other hand, an increase in inflation in Russia as a result of rising food prices, which started the sixth-year decline in real incomes of the population. The Russian Federation, trying to become independent from external supplies by supporting the local agri-food sector (including concessions, subsidies, preferential loan rates), at the same time shifted the main burden of producers' budget financing to Russian consumers who - for objective reasons, are opposed to the continuation of sanctions on the import of products. As J. Rutkowski stated: It is not the first time that the tangible message flowing from the economic calculation is losing to the geopolitical interest less and less understood by the Russians (Rutkowski, 2019).

### **Diplomacy:**

The methodology of Russia's influence still consists of both subtle and overt coercive attempts in the Baltic states to keep them within their sphere of influence (political, economic and energy). An example of indirect actions is, inter alia, non-ratification of border agreements (land and sea) signed between Russia and Estonia in 2014 (a contentious point was, inter alia, the text of the Estonian preamble, referring to the declaration of the Estonian parliament from 1992, referring to the "illegal annexation" of Estonia by the USSR. Estonia's strength in relations with the Russian Federation results primarily from its membership and influence in the EU and NATO. In addition, the EU sanctions imposed on Russia mean that it is gradually trying to "break" the unity and determination of the EU countries, using, inter alia, bilateral relations with governments favorable to the Kremlin. It can be presumed that Russia's prolonged situation has led to a change in strategy. The shift towards attempts to normalize relations may be defined as the resumption of the work of the intergovernmental transport commission in 2019, but most of all - the visit of the Estonian president to Moscow in the same

year. It is worth emphasizing that Kersti Kaljulaid's visit to Moscow was the first meeting of the presidents of Russia and Estonia since 2008. Officially, the purpose of the one-day visit was to open the Estonian Embassy in Moscow after renovation. The Russian president assessed that the two countries had "objectively common interests in the Baltic Sea region, including security, environmental, transport and transit issues" and noted that "the lack of contacts between official persons and bodies, between neighbors, is obviously abnormal ", but in the materials announcing the visit, the opinion that in Estonia was "observed there are relapses of heroising Nazism ", he also accused the Estonian authorities of taking actions with the aim of "ousting the Russian language and narrowing down the Russian-speaking educational sphere".

A peculiar, but also very telling, type of impact is the violation of the airspace in the form of incursions and provocative flights (near or over the territory). In 2014 alone, Russia violated Estonian airspace five times (seven times in total in the preceding years). This problem also concerned other EU Member States, including Lithuania, Latvia, Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands, Great Britain, Bulgaria and Romania (Milne, R., Jones, S. & Hille, K. 2014).

## **Conclusion**

At present, some foreign policy strategies can be seen as effective combinations of two poles in the form of smart power. This idea was accepted and presented by Nossel (Nossel, 2004) and Nye (Nye, 2004). Armitage and Nye (2007) found that intelligent power draws from both hard and soft resources, describing the concept as "an approach that emphasizes the need for a strong army but also invests heavily in alliances, partnerships and institutions." According to Wilson, intelligent power is "the ability (...) for joining hard and soft force elements in a mutually reinforcing way "(Wilson, 2008).

Russia seems to use the hard combination in its own specific way and soft impact. However, the soft impact is primarily based on propaganda activities implementing the clear strategy of the Federation. An example is the controversial gift from the Russian embassy to the Estonian president (December 2019), which included - in addition to flowers and sweets, sparkling wine with a label containing the information about production in Crimea and additional description: "Crimea - Russian Federation". This item of the gift has been returned, but actions of this kind confirm that there is no change in terms of mentality and methodology, they constitute a barrier to the normalization of international relations, and the need to remain vigilant - an inherent feature of cooperation with the Russian Federation. These actions correspond to Jervis' assumptions about perception and misunderstandings in international

politics (Jervis 1976) and Breuning (2011, p. 26), combining perceptions with the structural preconditions of the international system: and the possibilities of the state in the international system”.

As argued by Alexander et al. (2005, p. 31): "the theory of the image at the international level shows a clear relationship between the image of another nation and the choice of a strategic policy towards that nation." In this sense, Russia will apply a shifting strategy, but most of all it will continue to promote a multipolar international order, in line with the old Latin principle: divide et impera. For this purpose, it will use a combination of soft and hard impact depending on Estonia's internal and international situation. Possibilities for other actions may take place in the event of an economic threat to EU countries caused by e.g. the COVID-19 pandemic) or redirection of attention and NATO members to the crisis outside the zone of the Baltic states.

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