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**SOFT POWER AND GREAT POWER IDENTITY IN RUSSIAN  
DISCOURSES**

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I have written the Master's thesis independently.

All works and major viewpoints of the other authors, data from other sources of literature and elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is focused on the concept of soft power and great power identity construction in case of Russia. The concept of soft power is widely used by both politicians and academics even though there are still various issues related to the applicability or measurability of this concept to other case than the US. Furthermore, states that have introduced soft power to their foreign policy strategies can be seen as aspiring great powers at least. The aim of this thesis is to analyze what is the relation between the concept of soft power and great power identity construction in Russian discourse. To do that, several questions are answered: how the concept of soft power is constructed in Russian discourse; is it essential to the articulation of Russia's identity as a great power.

The thesis is based on the poststructuralist theory. The concept of soft power is approached as a floating signifier: original definition of Joseph S. Nye Jr. is understood as hegemony and Russian discourses on soft power as attempts to challenge it. Through attempts to challenge hegemony and fix the meaning of this floating signifier the identity of Russia is articulated. The concept of great power is approached in a similar manner. The method of discourse analysis is chosen and official and academic sources are analyzed.

After the analysis, the three separate discourses are distinguished: official, civilizational and conspiracy-military. While they have certain similarities in how the floating signifier of soft power is articulated, such as strong othering of the West, understanding of soft power as being an instrument, there are substantial differences as well. The floating signifier is attempted to be fixed at different meanings in relation to what is the logic of soft power, whether it is limited or not, whether soft power policies of other states are hostile to Russia, etc. Furthermore, while there is no direct link between the floating signifiers of soft power and great power, the discourses of soft power operate in the same categories as previously researched discourses on Russia's great-powerness. Thus, this thesis argues that to a certain degree the floating signifier of soft power displaces the signifier of great power.

This thesis proposes and confirms an idea that soft power can be approached as a floating signifier and not just as a mere academic concept. It means that it is elevated to the position where it starts to represent the whole discourses and through articulations of it identities are

reproduced. It also shows that there is more of a competition than a complementarity between signifier of soft power and great power.

Keywords: soft power, great power, identity, Russia, floating signifier

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## **1. Introduction**

This MA thesis is focused on the analysis of relations between the notion of soft power and great power identity. Currently the term ‘soft power’ has been introduced in foreign policy strategies or concepts of such states as China (Edney, 2012), Russia (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2013) or Brazil (Casanova, Kassum, 2013), and promotion of it has been proclaimed as one of the main foreign policy goals (e.g.: Putin, 2012). It is also worth mentioning the US which is usually considered as the most successful in promoting its soft power and actually being an example, from which the concept emerged (Nye, 1990; Nye, 2004). As one may note, all the states mentioned above can be considered as (at least aspiring) great powers. Thus, one may note a potential relationship emerging between the promotion of soft power or the idea of soft power in general and overall image of being a great power or an important player in the international arena. However, it is necessary to add that such overlap might be just a mere coincidence and thus, requires more detailed research. More than that, this topic has been under-researched (mostly limited to China (Ding, 2010)) and this thesis will focus on the relations between soft power and great power identity using the case of Russia.

According to the definition proposed by Nye (2004, 5-15), soft power is the ability to get others to want the outcomes you want. In other words, other countries who admire one country’s values, emulate its example, and aspire to its level of prosperity and openness thus wanting to follow its lead. It is worth mentioning that while the term soft power is extensively used by both scholars (e.g.: Tsygankov, 2006; Nye, 2013; Huiyun, 2012; etc) and politicians (e.g.: Lavrov, 2012; Kosachev, 2012a; Hu, 2007; etc), it is still considered to be a rather problematic concept due to the issues of its applicability to Russia and other cases, except the United States (Nye, 2013) and, in general, with its conceptualization and/or measurement. Nevertheless, this term is widely used in the Russian foreign policy discourse. The fact that the term ‘soft power’ (‘мягкая сила’ in Russian) was introduced in one of Vladimir Putin’s (2012) election campaign’s articles and later found its way to the Foreign policy concept of the Russian Federation, brings it to a new level of importance. The prioritization of it is even further highlighted by the growing role of

Rossotrudnichestvo (Россотрудничество) (Chernenko, 2013) which is the agency responsible for the promotion of a positive Russian image abroad.

Russian soft power has been also studied by the academic community. Previous research was largely confined to the evaluation of the concrete measures or tools of soft power Russia had been frequently using. The concept itself was usually but not necessarily based on the Joseph Nye's definition (e.g.: Roslycky, 2011; Tsygankov, 2006; Cwieck – Karpowicz, 2012). In addition to that, currently a new trend is emerging where researchers attempt to address a conceptual question related to soft power and its usage in Russia (e.g.: Makarychev, 2013). The growing body of research made by Russian academics emerges in which they try to address characteristics of Russian soft power and to propose strategies on how to use it (e.g.: Kruglyi stol, 2013). However, it can be noted that despite quite substantial research on Russian soft power, there is not enough research done on a more conceptual level. While this is the case, Russia has been often associated with the concept of great power and Russian discourse on self-perception of a great power is quite well-known. (Hopf, 2002; Neumann, 2008) In addition, there is a growing body of literature on great-poweriness which examines new possible features necessary for a state to be accepted as a great power. While Neumann (2008) proposes notion of 'governmentality', it to a certain degree may be extended to the soft power of a state as well. Basically, soft power potentially can be articulated as a necessary feature of being a great power. However, the research on its relation to soft power is lacking.

Before moving to the research aims and questions, it is important to stress that this thesis is not an attempt to evaluate the successes or failures of Russian soft power practices/policy. Neither is it an attempt to engage in a full-fledged discussion on a concept of soft power *per se*. The **main aim** of this thesis is *to understand the relationship between the discourse of soft power and Russia's great power identity - whether through soft power discourse the identity of Russia as a great power are articulated*. Several additional/subsidiary goals are set to reach the main aim:

1. To reframe the concept of soft power by putting it in a different theoretical perspective in order to explore the notion of it in an environment other than from which it was originally



formulated. Instead of referring to it and discussing as an objective and measurable reality, the aim is to study it as a “floating signifier”, meaning of which is partially fixed by competition and attempts to challenge hegemony. Such approach is useful not only to analyze construction of soft power notion in Russian discourse and how it is related to general construction of Russian identity, but it also can contribute to the overall understanding of soft power as a important signifier around which certain discourses are shaped/fixed.

2. To demonstrate what kind of notion of soft power is constructed in Russian discourse and what practices are used for it. It is a worthwhile study subject, as there is an assumption that Russian understanding differs from the other discourses of what soft power is.

3. To understand how the notion of soft power fits in Russia’s identity of a great power. On one hand it is assumed that through articulating notion of soft power, the identity of Russia in general and as a great power more particularly is being constructed and thus, it helps to further explore Russia’s self-identification of being a great power. On the other, it presents the role of soft power in this discourse.

The main **research question** of the thesis is: *What is the significance of the soft power concept for articulation of Russia’s identity as a great power?*

To answer the main question three additional questions are raised:

- How is the notion of soft power constructed in the Russian official discourse?
- Is the concept of soft power essential to the articulations of Russia’s identity?
- Is the concept of soft power essential to the articulations of Russia’s identity as a great power more specifically?

In order to fulfill the aims of this thesis, at first theoretical issues are discussed. It is argued that the concepts of soft power and great power can be approached as floating signifiers. In the first section of the theoretical part, the concept of a *floating signifier* is introduced and discussed. The term floating signifier developed by Laclau (2007a, 2007b, and Mouffe, 2001) basically means that the meanings of the floating signifier are changing depending on the hegemonic discourse, but it usually shifts between several fixed positions in the

discursive field. Hence, it cannot be ‘filled’ by any content whatsoever but only by certain meanings specific to discursive context. Later in the second section, the concept of identity is discussed mostly from the poststructuralist perspective. The third section is dedicated to the concept of soft power and its critique; and it is argued that the concept of soft power can be approached as a floating signifier. Then, the notion of great power is discussed. It is argued that the concept of great power can be approached as a floating signifier as well. Later, the relations between signifiers of soft power, great power and the identity in general are elaborated. It is suggested that through emphasis on soft power in the discourse an identity of a great power more specifically or any other identity can be reproduced. These articulations can be related to the position of Russia in the world system and/or be more projected to the effort to preserve order and identity within the state itself (MacFarlane, 2003, 178-179).

In the second part of the thesis discourse analysis is used, as it is the most suitable method for research on identity construction and meanings ascribed to the concepts. The focus is on the official and academic sources. Other possible sources are not considered due to the fact that soft power is an academic concept, so it is not common in everyday communication. In addition, the Russian blogosphere (which is rather rich on political discussions) does not focus on the soft power as well. Authorities are the main promoters and executors (Kosachev, 2012) of the idea of soft power in Russia. And the great power identity is also mostly promoted in the official discourse.

Although, attributing statements or texts as belonging to particular discourses has been a problem ever since the notion of discourse was introduced by Foucault (2004, 34 - 41); in the thesis all statements containing the signifier ‘soft power’ (‘мягкая сила’) are analyzed and then discourses are distinguished depending on the variations of articulations. Such selection was chosen due to the theoretical specificity of the approach: it is necessary for every text to have exact mentioning of the exact signifier ‘soft power’ as through attempts to fix a meaning of this floating signifier, certain identities are articulated. Every text will be read thoroughly focusing on: which meanings are ascribed to the signifiers of soft power and great power; what linguistic tools (metaphors, comparisons, etc.) are used while talking

about them; what are the dominant articulations, how relation between soft power and great power identity is constructed; what idea of Russia in general is presented through them. The research design is based on the design proposed by Lene Hansen (2006). The timeframe was chosen from the beginning of 2012, when the term soft power was first time explicitly mentioned in official discourse, to the end of 2013. The discourse analysis covers the speeches, interviews, and articles by President Vladimir Putin, Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, head of Rossotrudnichestvo Konstantin Kosachev, foreign affairs minister Sergey Lavrov and other officials (for example, Vyacheslav Nikonov, the head of Russkii Mir, the chairman of the Education Committee in Russian Duma) as well as articles and journals issued by academic and official institutions. In addition to that the official documents mentioning soft power (such as for example current Concept of Foreign Policy of Russia), documents issued by or for Rossotrudnichestvo, and statements and articles issued in Valdai Club and Russian International Affairs Council framework are analyzed as well.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. The concept of floating signifier: development, definition and discussion

The aim of this chapter is to introduce and discuss the concept of *floating signifier* which later is used to approach the concepts of soft power and great power. The logic of the relationship between signifier and signified is rather important basis for the discourse analysis as it allows us to understand how certain terms are determined in the language and which role they play in national identity construction. First, the general idea of what constitutes a signifier is presented. As linguistic theory has been greatly developed over the last century, some of its critique and the inconsistencies of the initial understanding of signifier are examined. Second, the concept of an *empty signifier* is discussed and it is argued that this concept is not always sufficient while analyzing politics-related issues. Third, *floating signifier* logic is introduced and elaborated.

The term *signifier* initially came from an idea of *a sign* which was proposed by the linguistic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure was one of the first linguists who introduced a new approach towards the understanding of language. In this approach, language is understood as a semiotic system and a distinction between language (*langue* in French) as a social and language or speech (*parole* in French) as an individual phenomenon become important. (De Saussure, 199, 21-22) The language, as a social phenomenon, is presented as a social code which organizes and governs speaking (*parole*) activities and can exist only in collective entity. It is uniform to all the members of society as they have to use the language and the system of meaning sedimented in it without the possibility to arbitrary change its meanings. (De Saussure, 22-24) The main concept of Saussurian linguistics – that of a *sign* – is essential to not only understand the initial logic of the concept of signifier, but also how nature of relations between ‘name’ and ‘object’ changes an understanding of the discourse.

For the Saussurian thinking the idea of a *sign* that consists of a *signifier* and a *signified* is of extreme importance. The *signifier* itself is an acoustic image of the *signified* (Laclau, 1991,

432). To put it simply, *the signified* is a referential object of a sign – it can be an object, an action, a phenomenon, etc. *The signifier* is basically a word (or a name, however, in this context they have the same meaning) which is assigned to the signified and which labels that referential object. According to this view, the role in determining or shaping the sign in language is ascribed to both the signified and the signifier. Signifier can change its form or the relations between concrete signifier and signified can shift over the time. (De Saussure, 1999, 77-79) It is also important to mention that it does not mean that ‘objects’ are primary to the names (Slyusareva, 2010, 67) as in pre-Saussurian linguistics where language was understood as mirroring an objective reality (Morozov, 2009, 31). Although, objects can exist independently from language, it is already the language (basically, names ascribed to the objects) which allows to determine and to distinguish ‘essence’ or specificities of an object named (de Saussure, 1999, 77-79).

Language is understood as a system and in this system all elements are related to each other, based on a principle of difference, and cannot be defined independently. Existence of the rules which govern understanding of a sign, based on differences and the general idea that actual signified ‘object’ matters in determination of a sign, lead to the viewpoint that there is a necessary link between signifier and signified. (Laclau, 1991, 432) Thus, one can observe some inconsistency between ideas that the referential object is not primary to the words and that there is a certain necessary link between parts of a sign. This inconsistency was acknowledged by developing structural linguistics in a more formalistic way. The role of rules governing language and relational nature of the relations between elements of the language were emphasized. In addition, one of the most important theoretical postures of structuralism - that social reality is a semantic field, structure of which matches with structure of language – was further developed. This is especially important for the sphere of the political, as nothing political is possible without using a language. Every political action has to be put into words. (Morozov, 2009, 33)

However, this thinking has its own drawbacks. Structure has been understood as limiting any autonomous subject as all statements made are pre-determined by the structure. If structure determines everything, it becomes extremely difficult to conceptualize any

changes that occur. It also means that identities are fixed and not changing. Moving closer to the language-related issues, there are terms which are used widely in various discourses despite discrepancies among their meanings. Such concepts as 'democracy', 'order', 'liberation', etc. (taken from Laclau, 2007a, 44) on one hand, are extremely important for discourses on certain issues, but on the other hand, they sometimes have even almost the opposite meanings in different discourses. For example, the notion of 'sovereign democracy' has been important in Russian discourse, due to attempts to challenge 'Western' understanding of democracy while presenting itself as a part of the democratic/civilized world. Hence, it is noticeable that the link between a signifier and a signified is not as stable as initially proposed by Saussure. What is more, the meanings of a signifier change due to the interactions of the articulation practices when some definitions or meanings become more widely accepted and used than others. Authors representing the poststructuralist view like Derrida, Lacan, Barthes, Laclau and Mouffe emphasized the impossibility of closed structures and fixed identities, importance of antagonism and hegemonic struggle to fix certain discursive points and identities. (Morozov, 2009, 38 - 43)

Analyzing relations between signifiers and the signified, Ernesto Laclau comes up with a notion of an *empty signifier* (2007a, 36-46; 2007b, 69-71,130; and Mouffe, 2001). The focus of this approach shifts to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of signifiers in the discourse. The concept of empty signifier epitomizes the idea that there is no necessary link between the signifier and the signified and theorizes how certain nodal points are fixed in discourses. Empty signifier is a particular signifier which via hegemonic struggle in the discourse is elevated to a position where it refers to the totality (Laclau, 2007b, 70). In other words, different discourses, which are only particularities, struggle to endow empty signifiers with concrete meaning and, thus, to fill the abstract idea of the universal with specific content. From a poststructuralist point of view, hegemony is not just supremacy (and it should not be mistaken for the definition of hegemony proposed by neo-realists (Diez, 2013, 199)), but a political domination, based on the acceptance of a current order by others. Hegemony as well as order maintained are always concrete and particular; however, their particular identity rises to a position where it begins to embody the universal. (Morozov, 2013, 4)

An empty signifier emerges when a certain signifier loses its relation with a particular and differential signified. It becomes frequently used in the discourse, but it does no more refer to any concrete referential object, but to universality which 'is absent'. To rephrase it, although initially, discursive field is non-hierarchical, through articulation practices in competition of discourses, certain signifiers become more important in 'representing' the system as such. As in example proposed by Laclau, one such signifier is 'order'. In the situation of crises 'order' which is lacking becomes an extremely important signifier assuming the representation of the whole system. Hence, various forces through articulation practice try to hegemonize and fix the meaning of 'order'. Basically, they compete in an attempt to fill this empty signifier with their particular meanings (2007a, 42 - 44). Due to the assumed position of referring to universality, it is essential for the system to fill and maintain the meanings these signifiers have. And depending on the hegemonic discourse, an empty signifier (despite having the same *form*) can have completely different meanings which are not stable or fixed (as basically politics is about the struggle for hegemony over these signifiers (Laclau, 2007a, 2007b)).

The concept of empty signifier is useful as an expression of ultimate possibility, but can hardly be applied to real world situation. Thus, it needs to be supplemented with a different concept. Developing his theory of hegemony and empty signifiers, Laclau (2007b, 130 - 133) presents another important circumstance which is necessary for an emergence of an empty signifier – there should be a clear dichotomic frontier between a complete outside discourse/ dominant discourse and other discourses which differ in their particularity, but are equivalent in their opposition to the antagonist. Thus, one of the particularities, as it is discussed above, begins to represent all the discourses and fixes a meaning of an empty signifier. However, usually the dichotomic frontier is blurred between the discourses and the dominant discourse ceases to be a complete opposition against which other discourses are striving among themselves to fix an empty signifier. The dominant discourse enters the struggle for meanings and, thus, the meanings of the signifier now depend on the hegemonic struggle between the dominant discourse(s) and the oppositional ones. Therefore, this signifier is not completely empty, but it is floating or shifting between several possible discursive meanings. (Laclau, 2007b, 130 - 133) Thus, this *floating*

*signifier* cannot be ‘filled’ with any content, but only with meanings, floating between certain discursive points. For example, in the case of this research soft power can be approached as such floating signifier, as its meaning is being fixed at several discursive points while challenging the hegemony of the Western definition. Basically, the floating signifier of soft power cannot be ‘filled’ by any meaning, but shifts between several of them as on the one hand the notion of ‘soft power’ is accepted, but at the same time challenged.

To conclude this chapter, it must be emphasized that the concepts of empty signifier and floating signifier are central to discourse analysis. The developments in linguistics and political philosophy allow the better understanding of the relations (or lack thereof) between the word/name/signifier and practices which are still shaped by language/discourse. While Saussure still presented a signifier and a signified as inseparable parts of a sign, further developments in structuralist approach separated these two notions. Later, Laclau and other authors proposed ideas of hegemony and an empty signifier. Then, the theory was supplemented by the notion of a floating signifier which in contrast to an empty signifier shifts between several discursive nodal points.

## **2.2. Identity in poststructuralist approach**

This section aims to discuss and develop concept of identity as well as relation between floating signifier and articulation of identity. The concept of identity is a rather widely used concept in various fields of political science and international relations. While there is a great deal of conceptual discussions and research done on how one can conceptualize identity, where identity is located in relation to various political actions, etc.; the very beginning of identity related research was dedicated to rather essentialist interpretations of identity, such as attempts to explain certain foreign policies and action in international area via specificities of “national character”, which was based on some pre-given psychological, cultural or other specific features of a certain group (Morozov, 2009, 142-143). However, such approach has been rather strongly contested by various scholars starting with the fact that identity cannot be narrowed down to the differences among cultural features, as certain identifications can be constructed not on “objective” borders but based on ongoing



signification process, when the distinctions are constructed through discursive practices (McSweeney, 1999, 73-76).

When discussing the concept of identity, it has become almost impossible to omit mentioning and reviewing Alexander Wendt's contribution to the development of the concept. His approach presupposes identities as related to intersubjective aspects of realities and argues that the reality is socially constructed (Zehfuss, 2001, 319). Wendt (2005, 240-245) proposes four types of identities: 'corporate', 'type', 'role' and 'collective'. While discussing states identities, Wendt (1994, 385) focuses on the two types: 'corporate' and 'social'. One may say that they basically group previously presented division in two blocks: 'corporate' identity referring to self-organizing qualities that constitute actors individually, and 'social' – set of meanings actor ascribes to itself when taking into consideration perspectives of others. Thus, for 'corporate' identity, interactions and others are not necessary at all, while social identity depends on these interactions and perspectives of others. It is also important to note that identities not only are constructed through interactions but also sustained through them. (Wendt, 1999, 331 in Zehfuss, 320)

However, the distinction between socially constructed and already 'given' identities is far from being satisfying while trying to understand and conceptualize 'identity'. One of the main drawbacks of it is the fact that the 'corporate' identity is presented as a more or less completely unproblematic issue referring to the inner space which somehow produces initial 'we' without any social interaction at all (Morozov, 2009, 151). Thus, distinction between social and corporate identities leaves corporate identity in a somewhat similar position as in the approach discussed in the very beginning of this section – when identity is being perceived as based on some 'objective' and rather stable features which distinguish one group from another.

With further development of the concept of identity, ideas of some 'objective' and necessary features of identity have become more trivial compared to how these distinctions and borders between identities are constructed, maintained or challenged. In constructivist approach, identities are understood as relational, cognitive and social. It means that identities are depended on the Other. Without the Other and relation to the Other, it is

difficult to define one's identity, more to that, they are promoted and articulated through interactions with others. In addition, through identities certain understanding of the world is maintained. (Hopf, 2009, 280) However, one important shift of the focus which is closely related to the relation of the Self and the Other was made by Fredrik Barth, who argued that ethnic groups are reproduced through the maintenance of the boundaries between them and other groups, who are seen as the others due to lack or possession of some feature. (Neumann, 1999, 5) In such perspective, boundary between the Self and the Other becomes necessary for construction and articulation of the Self. And what is more important, the boundary should not be understood as based on some a priori marks or features which could be ascribed constituent meaning. The way how the boundaries are established and maintained should be analyzed through the empirical research of social and political practices. (Morozov, 2009, 156)

Moving to the poststructuralist account of identity, it is worth mentioning that the grounding assumption of the approach is that linguistic and social are commensurable in it. As Lene Hansen (2006, 17) states, language is social and political, an unstable system of signs that reproduces and generates meanings through construction of identity and difference. It implies that discourse can be seen as relying on particular constructions of issues and subjectivities, but, at the same time, these issues and subjectivities are articulated through discourse. To put it even simpler, identities are articulated through discourses and construction of identities is based on such concepts as equivalence and differences. (Morozov, 2009, 165) Basically, it is a relational approach to identity when mechanism of identity construction is presented as establishing of a linkage or differentiation between certain signifiers. However, while some signifiers can be fixed at certain nodal points without being articulated as negations to other signifiers, the whole chain of equivalence through which identities are reproduced, while referring to belonging to some Self, excludes some Others and that brings negation into play (Morozov, 2009, 167). As Laclau and Mouffe (2001, 143-144) put it, only through establishing boundaries/frontiers and through negativity, antagonism and division the Self can be constituted.

The 'centrality' of antagonism to identity articulation and reproduction can be explained through the relation between the universal and the particular. According to Laclau (2007a, 26-35), any particular identity appeals to represent universal in its identity construction. Identity can only be articulated through the contradiction of establishing as universal and thus, cancelling itself as a particularity, but at the same time asserting its differential identity. To put it in other words, identities are simultaneously articulated through a difference with other identities and as an attempt to represent the universal. In addition, identities are constructed not just by mere differences from others, but on the basis of the exclusion or subordination of other identities. Basically, different identities compete with each other in the attempt to establish their particularity as a universal representation through antagonistic exclusion of other identities.

Identities are articulated, reproduced or challenged through the discursive practices. Some of them tend to function in the same discursive area and that strengthens their chains of equivalence and forms prevailing and more stable identities. Such situation applies to national identities as existing articulated boundaries between identities impede articulation of other identities and they become articulated as being 'foreign' ones. (Morozov, 2009, 116-117) It is important to highlight again that boundaries are understood in this as a discursive formations too, separating inner and external for an articulated identity, the Self and the Other. The important role in such identity articulation is ascribed to constitutive Other as through negating it, establishing a border between it and the Self, identity of a groups or a society is established. However, constitutive Other is not entirely external to the articulated identity, as some of the elements of the Self are necessary included into its articulation. (Morozov, 2009, 132-141) For example, the West can be seen as an example of a constitutive Other for Russia. The West is not excluded in the Russian discourse as a completely foreign identity, as there are linkages to it such as Russia's claims of its role in Europe or of its cultural ties to Europe. However, at the same time, the border between these two is articulated through emphasis, that the West is in the moral decay while Russia is not; and can be the savior of true morals (long forgotten by the West) - Putin's (2013) Valdai speech can be presented as an example text for such type of identity articulation.

As identities are articulated through discourse, while analyzing them, it becomes extremely important to see how certain signifiers are being fixed or linked to each other. It was mentioned above, that while some signifiers potentially can be fixed without any particular struggle; floating signifiers differ in this case. Through fixation of floating signifier attempt to structure and represent certain discourse is being made. As discursive practices and articulations of identity are inseparable, it means that through hegemonic struggle to fix floating signifier identities are being articulated.

### **2.3. Russia's identity construction through soft power discourse**

Original definition of soft power (proposed by Nye) is discussed as hegemony and Russian discourse is approached as an attempt to challenge it. It is necessary to mention once again that the aim of this thesis is not to find one best definition for the rather contested term (as the concept of 'power' in general is) and/or start full-fledged discussion whether Nye's definition of soft power is useful. The aim of this study is to deconstruct soft power discourse and to present how Russian great power identity/identities are being articulated through it. Due to that, it is argued that soft power can be approached as a floating signifier which can have different meanings which articulate different identities depending on the discourse. Great power is approached in a similar manner. While there is a short discussion of the concept presented this thesis is not dedicated to providing a new or edited 'objective' conceptualization of the term great power. Great power here is approached as a floating signifier. Not only it presents certain articulation of identity but also through fixation of meanings to it different identities are articulated.

#### **2.3.1. Initial definition of soft power as hegemony**

While working with the concept of soft power, it is almost impossible to avoid a definition proposed by Joseph S. Nye (1990, 2004). It is currently rather widely accepted and acknowledged, at least as starting point, for any discussion on soft power. It is worth to mention, that Nye was not the first to present a new category of power in addition to the prevailing understanding of power being a military power and later supplemented by economic power. The idea of power which is based on ideology or attractive ideas was to larger or lesser extent used by various scholars. For example, Nye himself (2004, 8)

mentions E.H. Carr and his three categories of power: military, economic and power over opinion, which can be seen as similar to current conceptualization of soft power. There have been also various statements of politicians referring to similar type of power or relations between states, such as one made by Eisenhower (1954): “ By leadership we mean the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it.” While being similar in their nature, there was no attempt to finally conceptualize them.

Thus, Nye’s original definition is most frequently used even though idea itself is not extremely new. However, due to the fact that this concept was based on the example of the United States (Nye, 1990; Nye 2004), there lie several problems in its usage. First of them is an applicability problem in a sense, whether it is possible to apply the concept of soft power to any other case except the US, if the concept itself was built along the example of the US. In addition, question rises, whether actions which do not exactly correspond to Nye’s definition can be called soft power or is it already something else. It leads to another even more crucial issue: whether soft power, as a concept, can have one uncontested, ‘objective’ and final definition.

According to Nye (2004) soft power is an ability to get others to want outcomes you want. In other words, other countries, which admire one country’s values, emulate its example and aspire to its level of prosperity and openness, want to follow it. This creates ability to shape preferences of others, but without using coercive measures such as threats or implementation of threats. It is a possibility to make allies by using state’s attractiveness. According to this view, soft power rests on three resources: culture (in place where it is attractive to others), political values (democracy, liberty and how a state is able to live up to them), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority). (Nye, 2004, 15) As one may note, Nye quite clearly emphasizes certain values such as democracy as almost necessary features for success and even possibility of soft power. They are also quite substantially overlapping with the discourse of ‘universal values’. Being so tightly linked to these exact values, the concept of soft power becomes rather difficult to apply to other cases. Public and academic discourses on soft power of such states as China or Russia promote quite different set of ideas such as stability,

sovereignty or multipolarity (e.g., Gill and Yanzhong, 2006; Kosachev, 2012b). The emphasis is put on success of certain policies which should create attractiveness (Rothmann, 2007, 5) without necessarily being democratic or liberal in their nature. Some actors at certain stage can value stability and economic success more compared to liberalization or democracy. Thus, on one hand, broader variety of the main values or/and regimes basically can also be attractive to other. On the other, such possibility of variety has been explicitly rejected by hegemony of original concept. For example, Nye (2013) explicitly rejects any attempts of Russia and China to wield soft power due to the fact that they do not base it on liberal and democratic values.

Another often expressed obstacle to apply the concept of soft power to other cases is the skepticism towards the role of government in the promotion of soft power policies (for example, Nye, 2013; Edney, 2012). It is especially evident when soft power policies in Russia or China are discussed. (Nye, 2013) However, this aspect has certain drawbacks evident even from the original definition. In addition to actors, who are active in the promotion of culture or doing business and who can be perceived as independent from government (again, it depends on the state context) initial conceptualization has been substantially dedicated to public diplomacy which is a part of the governmental sphere (Nye, 2008, 95). Hence, again despite quite noticeable discrepancies in initial theory, only certain aspects (such as non-governmental involvement) are highlighted when the concept of soft power is discussed in relation to Russia or China by Nye and other proponents of the original definition.

Thus, in this thesis, it is argued that the initial theory of soft power proposed by Joseph S. Nye should be analyzed as hegemony, while Russian official discourse and meanings articulated there – as attempts to challenge dominant understanding of soft power. The notion of hegemony is closely related to the notions of empty and floating signifiers discussed above. In the case of ‘soft power’ Nye’s definition is strongly based on such aspects as democracy, promotion of human rights or non-governmental involvement which on one hand are tightly related to the notion of the West, but, at the same time, are being presented as absolutely universal for everyone. Articulations can be regarded as hegemonic

when the antagonistic forces are present and frontiers which separate them are unstable (Laclau, Mouffe, 2001, 136). If the first condition is absent, then only relations of difference are articulated and it becomes impossible to indicate a subject that aspires to represent a 'leader' of such articulation – thus, hegemony is non-existent in this case. If the second condition is lacking and borders stay the same in an antagonistic situation, then it is a situation of total domination and alternative articulations as such become impossible. (Morozov, 2009, 76-77) The hegemonic definition of soft power which is based on some values and ideas strongly related to Western discourse excludes other possible definitions which are articulated as antagonism for soft power. Basically, it is an attempt to present universal definition of soft power which reproduces Western identity while all others are excluded. To put in other words, particular Western identity through discursive practices of fixating definition of soft power attempts to reproduce its hegemony and present its particularity as universal and only possible one. For example, it is worth noting that all the attempts of Russia to promote its ideas or policies of soft power have been quite frequently labeled as having nothing in common with the soft power policies. It means that through negation of other possible definitions of soft power, not only hegemony of the Western discourse on soft power is reproduced, but also identity of the West is articulated.

In addition, the borders are far from being absolute in the case of soft power discourses. While China and Russia are challenging the prevailing definition, they still accept the general idea of soft power or even some parts of the initial definition as can be seen from references to it in some of the texts analyzed later. Such a situation, when on one hand the prevailing discourse is challenged, but on the other, its challenger deeply depends on the formations from discourse challenged, can be seen as an example of hegemony (Morozov, 2010, 188). Generally, exactly this is happening regarding the soft power discourse: Russian discourse attempts to challenge hegemony of the Western definition of soft power but not to produce some completely new framework/concept/approach or just ignore this term at all. Through attempts to challenge definition of soft power, the term soft power (with its strong Western connotations) is being accepted but at the same time challenged to redefine Russian identity as being different from the West. In addition, the notion of Europe and Russia's belonging to it is also prevalent in the official discourse on soft power (which

is analyzed in detail in the empirical part of the thesis) and that makes Russian identity to a certain degree dependent on the West. Through challenging or accepting some articulations of the West and Europe, identity of Russia is articulated.

### **2.3.2. Soft power as a floating signifier**

Hegemonic role played by the Western discourse/Nye's definition and attempts to challenge this definition in Russian political and academic discourses suggest that it is worth approaching soft power as a floating signifier. From the very introduction of the concept of 'soft power' it was rather strongly linked to maintaining of the identity of the US as a 'Western' power. At the same time it was opposed to the hard power which became assumed as out-dated and not sufficient (Nye, 1990). Thus, being part of rather particular identity, discourse fixing this term has started to aspire towards representing totality of more progressive/advanced or even legitimate powers. Thus, while being elaborated as a concept for the specific case, it has been elevated to represent universal discourse on how soft power can be defined and how it is linked to more advanced powers. Through such articulations, it becomes detached from any particular referential object. While unable to come up with any 'project' completely different, but willing to represent similar totality of being progressive or advanced, the alternative articulations use this hegemonic definition as at least their starting point (Morozov, 2010, 189) and then attempt to challenge it. Through these attempts to challenge hegemonic position, definition of soft power shifts among several discursive points and can be temporary fixed at some of them as it is showed by empirical analysis in the thesis. Possible meanings of soft power signifier are rather depended on dominant definition, so it cannot be approached as empty signifier as it cannot be fixed at any meaning but at meanings challenging or related to the hegemonic one. Hence, soft power can be approached as a floating signifier.

Such an approach to the concept of soft power allows us analyze how in different discourses the meaning of soft power has been shaped and fixed. It demonstrates that this term can have potentially different meanings which should not be discarded as being incorrect ones, but as an attempt to challenge hegemony. Russian discourses on soft power present various articulations of this concept. It is a useful and productive approach to



analyze which meanings of soft power are prevailing in discourses, how the notion of soft power is related to the articulation of identity as in a case of this thesis – Russia’s identity as a great power.

### **2.3.3. The concept of great power**

This section is dedicated to the floating signifier of ‘great power’ and its relations to the concept of soft power. However, it is necessary to stress, that ‘appearance’ of this particular signifier is less crucial for this research. While the main focus of the research is on great power identity articulation, there are no attempts to exclude or skip other identities articulated. It is explained as to how these two signifiers by being articulated in the same discourses can be related to each other and to identity reproduction in general. It is worth stressing that this section does not attempt to evaluate whether the case of the thesis – Russia – is a great power or what the ‘correct’ definition of this concept is, and approaches great power as a floating signifier through which certain identities can be promoted.

The concept of great power is in use since the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Brenton, 2013, 543; Rogers, Fiott, Simon, 2014) and up to this day. The discussion over this concept intensified after the collapse of the USSR when system of two super powers collapsed. However, it is important to emphasize that the concepts of great power and super power differ. It was rather widely agreed that only one ‘real’ great/super power remained - the USA, and unipolar world was established. (Coetzee, 2013) However, currently there is an ongoing challenge for such kind of position as new actors are being introduced as potential or even already established great powers such as China (Ding, 2010) or India (Narlikar, 2011), for example. Thus, several issues emerge as it is not only different discourses on who can be ascribed this status but also different meaning of what actually being a great power means.

One may observe that current discourses on being a great power vary in terms of what the necessary features for being a great power are. On one hand, it is still accepted that for a state to be a great power it should have military power and be economically sound (Cai, 2013). On the other, there is a growing struggle on whether the above mentioned features are enough or are there other necessary attributes of being a great power. It was argued that great powers should be recognized by each other and by other states in international

community (Bull, 1995, 196). Later this idea was elaborated further by adding the importance of recognition of certain norms and rules which are central for both great powers themselves and their legalized hegemony within international society (Astrov, 2011, 12-13). In addition, special responsibilities and duties of great powers are also rather frequently emphasized and idea of a responsible great power is presented (Loke, 2013; Narlikar, 2011). What is more, there is an ongoing debate whether being a great power should be based on promotion of concrete values or behavior domestically and abroad. (Terhalle and Depledge, 2013) For example, in his account on Russia as a great power, Neumann (2008, 133) addresses the issue why Russia was never properly accepted as a great power. He stresses the idea that there was and still is continuing hegemony of the Western definition of 'who is civilized' and due to that, who can be called a great power. (Neumann and Sending, 2010, 108) With this, the issue of emphasis of Western values/governance type and attempts to compete with such notion in other discourses comes into play. Thus, one may observe that definitions of the concept of great power are formed based on some initial features such as recognition, responsibilities or values which can be articulated differently in discourses.

#### **2.3.4. Great power as a floating signifier and its relation to soft power**

It is important to emphasize that as in the case of soft power, great power is even more important as one of the most essential concepts in maintaining a state's identity. It is clearly observed in Russian political discourse where the term great power is rather frequently used when talking about Russia and its place in the international arena (e.g. Hopf, 2002; Neumann, 2008; Neumann and Sending).

It is possible to argue, that for a long time and, especially after the collapse of the USSR there was an attempt to fix articulation of the meaning of being a great power on the example of the US and the general linkage between the West and the more advanced and civilized world. Thus, as it was described above while representing only a particular identity, through discursive articulation, this notion was established as a hegemonic one as it became expected from others to follow this definition (Terhalle and Depledge, 2013). Basically, it meant that if a state wanted to be recognized as a great power, it should have

matched the West not only by material criteria but also by normative ones or those related to regime type, as emphasized by Neumann (2008, see also Sending, 2010). However, there are attempts to challenge this view by articulating different meanings of great power identity. Such examples are emphasis on cultural or even 'civilizational' specificities of certain at least aspiring great powers (Loke, 2013, 210) and the idea of multipolarity (Coetzee, 2013) as a sign of acceptance of great powers different from the US. Thus, one can approach the concept of a great power as a floating signifier also as there is a struggle among various discourses on fixation of a certain meaning to this concept.

If we again return to hegemonic discourse on soft power, one may note, that in Nye's conceptualization of soft power an importance of soft power in the information age is emphasized, as politics has become about whose story wins. Furthermore, due to openness and easy access to the information, the role of credibility increases and simple propaganda tools cannot work well. Hence, soft power becomes important for the status and reputation of the state. (Nye, 2004, 106-107) It is possible to argue that such articulation attempts to fix meaning of the status of a state to the hegemonic meaning of soft power based on the Western identity. In addition, it is sensible to assume that one of the statuses can be a status of a great power. Especially, having in mind that certain types of governance (which in hegemonic discourse on soft power are seen as necessary features for soft power) are enunciated as essential for a state to be accepted as a great power. (Neumann, 2008) Hence, although in the hegemonic articulation of soft power explicit relation to great power is absent; in the discourse these two floating signifiers can be fixed in relation to each other. In addition, through attempts to challenge the meaning of one signifier, the meaning of other can be challenged as well, especially if these two signifiers are tightly linked in the discourse. What is more important through different articulations of great power and its linkage to soft power, different identities can be constructed. Floating signifier great power can be fixed at various nodal points where the West is challenged or not. Such fixation establishes different boundaries between the Self and the Other, and thus different identities are articulated.

Approaching great power as a floating signifier is useful while analyzing how the meaning of the concept is fixed by various discourses and how identity of Russia or more specifically identity of Russia as a great power is constructed. It also enables understanding of how the identity of being a great power is related to the idea of soft power or what the place of soft power is in great power identity construction if any at all. Different articulations of these signifiers can present different identities or what kind of Russia as a great power is constructed.

## **2.4. Method of research**

This thesis is built on poststructuralist ontology and epistemology. As it was put by Lene Hansen (2006), poststructuralism's discursive ontology is strongly tangled with understanding of language as constitutive for what is brought into being as social or political. It is impossible to distinguish between an 'objective' reality and language as all the meanings with which we operate are constructed and articulated through language practices. Due to this, the research method used in the thesis is discourse analysis as it gives us an apparatus to analyze the meanings prevalent in Russian soft power discourse and analyze whether a great power or any other type identity is being articulated in this discourse and how it is done.

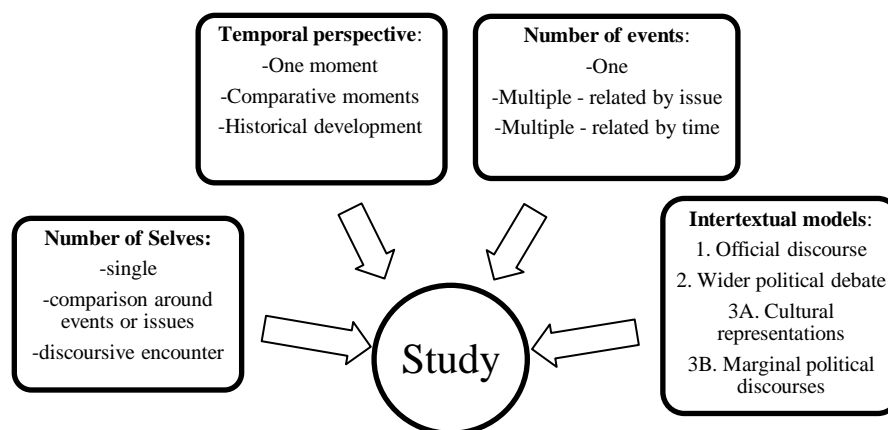
While it is possible to say, that contemporary discourse analysis is rather popular method especially in the realms of identity or/and international relations studies, there are still a lot of misunderstandings or problems related to this method which need to be addressed before moving to concrete presentation on how research is done in this thesis. For example, one of the questions frequently asked is of what use is the studying of political or any other discourses and what can it say to us about 'real' reasons or motivations of political actions. Of course openly stated motivations or reasons are not entirely exhaustive in a sense that they should not be approached as blatantly expressed "truth". However, every statement made should be understood from a broader perception of discourses prevalent in one or other society/state as they can be successful only if they refer to the logic which is accepted or understood in that society. (Morozov, 2009, 177) Basically, in case of discourse on soft power it is not only useful to analyze it to understand what is accepted or perceived under

signifier soft power, but also how through this discourse Russia is constructed. Knowing these two things can be useful for further analysis of Russian soft power policies or even its foreign policy in general.

Another rather similar issue is to what extent discourses constitute the social – completely or they themselves are constructed by the social. As it was rather widely discussed, in poststructuralist approach the discourse articulates the social and due to instability of the language meanings are never permanently fixed and thus, articulated identities are never stable. There are other approaches which state, for example, that discourse can be approached as one among other social practices. (Jorgensen, Phillips, 2002, 3 – 8) However, poststructuralist approach does not differentiate between discursive or non-discursive practices. There is no interaction between discourse and something else as discourse itself is constitutive of political and social. (Jorgensen, Phillips, 2002, 20) Thus, using discourse analysis as a main tool to analyze Russian soft power discourse is the most suitable approach to reach the aims of the thesis through the theoretical approach chosen.

To explain exact research logic of this thesis, the scheme for the research design of Lene Hansen (2006) (the figure 2.4.1 below) is being used.

Figure 2.4.1 Research design according to Lene Hansen (2006, 67)



According to this scheme, researcher has to make several decisions while preparing her research design. First, it is necessary to decide on how many Selves are going to be

analyzed. Basically, it means how many states, nations or any other subjects are chosen to study. Only one Self can be chosen as for example in case of Ted Hopf's book on Russia or it can be multiple Selves in case of the discussion on the EU integration or any other event. (Hansen, 2006, 67-69) In this research single Self approach is chosen analyzing Russia. However, it may not be as 'single' as it looks like as different kinds of Selves can be articulated in Russian discourse on soft power.

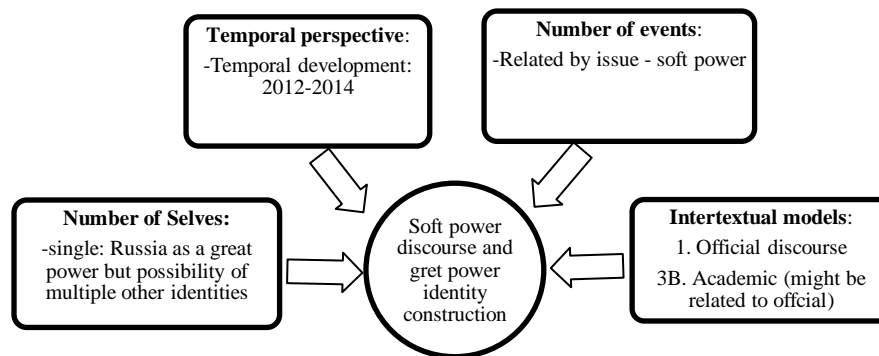
Second, decision should be made on temporal perspective whether it is discourse on some particular event which usually should be some kind of a turning point or milestone, or it is a longer historical analysis. (Hansen, 2006, 69-70) In case of this study, the choice is for synchronic analysis in the sense that the evolution of the floating signifier of soft power is less important than how is it fixed at concrete texts.

Third, according to Hansen (2006, 70-71) there is a need to choose number of events analyzed when 'event' itself should be understood rather broadly – starting from the concrete events like wars to ones having more comprehensive nature such as European integration. As soft power has been used in various contexts in discourses, it is possible to argue that in the case of this thesis multiple events related by issue (in a broad sense) are chosen. However, the events themselves are not crucial for the analysis of this thesis.

The intertextual models as labeled by Hansen (2006, 66-67) mostly refer to what kind of discourse is being analyzed. In this thesis official and academic discourses on Russian soft power are analyzed. It is necessary to mention that, in a case of academic discourse, only texts by Russian scholars are analyzed not including foreign research on it. In addition, it is worth to note that some of texts are in between academic and official sources as their authors are former diplomats or still working in governmental institutions. Official sources are chosen as hegemonic practices are depended on systems of institutions which enable them control discursive areas better. (Morozov, 2009, 144)

After discussing all features of research design, the figure below presents exact research design of this thesis.

**Figure 2.4.2 Research design based on Hansen's (2006) model**



Next important issue which needs to be covered in this section is related to the choice of texts to analyze and how exactly to proceed with discourse analysis of them. To begin with the main requirement for the text to be chosen is that they should be so called key texts made by subjects who are strongly related to the issue analyzed. In addition, it is worth including not only texts related to the event/timeframe analyzed, but also some historical materials to give more of a context. All the key texts should have clear articulations of identities and policies, they should be widely accessible and read, and they should have formal authority to define position. However, it is worth to mention that depending on the research design some of the requirements can be omitted. (Hansen, 2006, 73 - 77) For example, while there are some key texts for soft power discourse such as Vladimir Putin's article where soft power was explicitly mentioned for the first time and which was widely read and accessible, other texts such as Konstantin Kosachev's official blog may be less read but at the same time these texts are necessary to understand what is the prevailing understanding of soft power in Russian official discourse and how identity is articulated through them.

The text for this research are the speeches, interviews, and articles by President Vladimir Putin, Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, head of Rossotrudnichestvo Konstantin

Kosachev, foreign affairs minister Sergey Lavrov and Vyacheslav Nikonov. All of them have formal position to reproduce discourse on soft power. In addition, articles and journals (*Стратегия России, Международная жизнь, Однако*) issued by both official institutions and more academic ones are analyzed too. It is worth to mention that not all of the journals are included. For example, journal *Полис (Polis)* had only one publication on soft power which was mentioned in the introduction. Furthermore, there is a possibility that other academic articles are not covered due to the fact that it is relatively difficult to find and get access to Russian academic databases. In addition to that the documents mentioning soft power (such as for example current Concept of Foreign Policy of Russia), documents issued by or for Rossotrudnichestvo, and statements and articles issued by Valdai Club and Russian International Affairs Council are analyzed as well. The last two are chosen due to the fact that both of them are quite tightly linked to the goal of promotion dialogue about Russia and contribute to a certain degree to Russia's image abroad.

There are 86 texts which are analyzed and all of them are chosen according to the criteria that signifier 'soft power' ('мягкая сила') is explicitly mentioned there. Although, there might be other texts which cover similar issue, due to the focus on soft power and how through it Russian identity is being articulated, it is necessary to have this exact signifier in the text analyzed. Majority of the text analyzed are in Russian language and all translations are made by the author of this thesis. Each text is read thoroughly focusing on what meanings and notions are ascribed to the signifiers of soft power and great power ('великая держава'), what language tools are used while talking about them, what are the dominant meanings, how relation between soft power and great power identity is constructed, what idea of Russia is generally presented through them, who is being articulated as the Other. All these findings then are mapped according to how they are linked between each other (See the appendixes). Then three separate discourses are distinguished based on the differences in articulations.

To mention possible problems of the method, one of the most problematic issues is related to the presentations of findings as then certain quotes representing the dominant meanings/narratives have to be cited. While presenting findings of this research, all the



precautions were taken to include only the quotes producing repetitive narrative are chosen or it is explicitly stated that one or other type of narrative is marginal.

### **3. Three soft power discourses: Russia's identity articulations through the floating signifier of soft power**

This part of the thesis is dedicated to the analysis and the results of the research. It is structured along the research questions which were presented in the introduction:

- How is the notion of soft power constructed in the Russian official discourse?
- Is the concept of soft power essential to the articulations of Russia's identity?
- Is the concept of soft power essential to the articulations of Russia's identity as a great power more specifically?

As it was mentioned above, while doing the discourse analysis, mapping of the most frequently used signifiers and meanings related to soft power, great power and Russian identity in general was done. It became clear that in soft power discourse one may note several different narrative/discourses on how soft power is articulated and what identity of Russia is constructed. Basically, this approach is similar to the one used by Hopf (2002) when he distinguished different Russian identities according to which Others were articulated and how. However, here the main focus of this research is on the floating signifier of soft power - what meanings are ascribed to it and how is it linked to other signifiers. Based on these differences, it is argued that discourse on soft power can be divided in three large groups: 'official' discourse, 'civilizational' discourse and 'conspiracy-militaristic' discourse. Thus, at first each of the discourses is discussed in detailed way explaining how it was discerned from others. Articulations of the floating signifier of soft power are presented and then it is moved to a more complex discussion on how Russia's identity is being articulated in the discourse and whether great power identity is being reproduced through soft power discourse.

#### **3.1. 'Official' discourse on soft power**

The first section is dedicated to the 'official' discourse (discursive map Appendix1). This type of discourse almost fully overlaps with all the texts produced by authorities and also with some from the academia.

It is reasonable to start from short analysis of the Putin's (2012) article. It was the first official statement explicitly mentioning soft power and later other speakers have been referring to it quite frequently. In addition, the subject position of the president enables control of a reproduction of a dominant discourse. To begin with, the wording or attempt to fix the meaning of the floating signifier of soft power strongly resembles the one presented in the Concept of the Foreign Policy.

*Such notion as soft power – complex of instruments and methods for obtaining foreign policy goals without usage of weapons but instead using informational and other leverage – is becoming more frequently used. (Putin, 2012)*

*"Soft power", a comprehensive toolkit for achieving foreign policy objectives building on civil society potential, information, cultural and other methods and technologies alternative to traditional diplomacy, is becoming an indispensable component of modern international relations. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2013)*

It is important to mention that such articulation of soft power as being a 'toolkit' for doing something is common among others representatives of authorities, for example, Nikonov (2013) uses similar expressions as 'instruments of 'soft power' or 'mechanisms of 'soft power'. A rare exception might be Konstantin Kosachev's (2013a) mentioning that 'soft power' is an audience and not an event which basically means that it is important to focus on the reaction of audience to certain attempts to promote soft power than just on the promotion of it per se. However, it was mostly used to contrast meaning with an event but not with an instrumental understanding of soft power in general. In addition, in official discourse the floating signifier of soft power is articulated in relation to such signifiers as propaganda, humanitarian cooperation (Zonova, 2013) and image. These signifiers are also fixed differently. For example, in case of propaganda, it can be articulated negatively if attributed to the actions of others (Lavrov, 2012), but can be articulated rather positively as just one of the instruments of international politics (Kosachev, 2012d) or of creation of positive image of Russia abroad (Petrovskiy, 2013).

While being articulated as an instrument, the negative aspects of soft power are highlighted when it is used by other actors. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation,

2013; Putin, 2012a; Putin, 2012b; Lavrov, 2012; etc.) One can note that the practices ascribed to illicit use of soft power such as “<...> activity of the pseudo NGOs, other structures, aiming at destabilization of situation in some countries with the external assistance<...>” (Putin, 2012a) are usually hints towards practices and actions of the United States or the West in general. What is more, exactly these practices, such as promotion of democratization, are also articulated as not being soft power at all but as a declarative ‘soft power’ directed to achieve certain national goals/interests. (Kosachev, 2013a) At the same time practices of Russia are presented as the open and civilized ones. (Putin, 2012a; Kosachev and Sarymov, 2012) Thus, the construction of us – Russia – and the Other – the West – is observable while analyzing at which meanings the floating signifier of soft power is fixed. It is also important to mention, that the need for promotion of soft power is based exactly on the previously mentioned negative ‘soft power’ or as Kosachev (2012e) put it: soft anti-power. It is argued that image of Russia has been created not by Russia itself but by other actors who usually (purposefully) choose the negative aspects to promote. For example, Putin (2012c) during the meeting with the diplomats stated:

*Currently we need to admit that image of Russia outside is being formed not by us and frequently it is distorted and does not mirror real situation in our country or its input into world civilization.*

Hence, there are forces working against Russia and there is a need to improve the situation and present the truthful and adequate image of the country which is downplayed by attempts of the others to damage it. (Kosachev, 2013b; Kosachev, 2012a) One may note an opposition again: between the real Russia and image of Russia purposefully constructed in a negative way by others.

As it is visible from previous discussion, there is a strong emphasis on instrumental and targeted use of soft power by other states and their governments. More to that, the language used talking about soft power and its wielding is strongly imbedded in language of competition and almost zero-sum game vocabulary when it is either total influence of the West or attractiveness of Russia (Petrovskiy, 2013). Quotes like below cited are rather frequent in official discourse:

*Having in mind the strong competition among main geopolitical rivals in this sphere* [“soft power” – author of the thesis] (Kosachev, 2013c; similar ones in Kosachev, 2013a; Kosachev and Tereshkova, 2012; Kosachev (2013d)). The geopolitical terminology used makes the fixation of the floating signifier of soft power rather complex: on the one hand it should not be about forcing others to follow you (others doing it are presented negatively), but at the same time among actors wielding it - it is still more or less ‘old fashioned’ competition. It is possible to argue that through such understanding of soft power Russia is constructed as one of the powers competing for the influence.

Talking about the ways of how soft power should be promoted, one of the underlying ideas is the creation of so-called Russian world which is based on the knowledge of Russian language (Mukhametshin, 2013; Verbitskaya, 2012) and culture and which would unite compatriots (who are extremely frequently mentioned in official soft power discourse) (Kosachev, 2013e) and also those who are interested in Russia or who sympathize with it (Kosachev, 2012a). The importance of Russian culture and language is also linked to the preservation of a nation itself. (Kosachev, 2013c) At the same time, again theme of rivalry comes into play when it is highlighted that:

*In the middle of 90’s the teaching and learning of Russian language was suspended in the national education systems of many countries, gradually it has lost its positions in many spheres of communication, but – and it is extremely important – its position was taken not by a national language but by English. To say it in other words, this is an indicator that language is neither linguistics, nor ethnopolitics, but geopolitics.* (Kosachev, 2013c)

It also again quite explicitly directs to who is the main rival as the English language can be linked to the West and stresses the geopolitical thinking one more time.

By now, it is rather striking that official soft power discourse reproduces the division between the West and Russia. There is an attempt to fix Russian soft power at three main values: cooperation, security, sovereignty (Kosachev, 2012a; Kosachev, 2012f; Leonova, 2013) in contrast to the values prevalent in a hegemonic soft power discourse in the West:

*<...> “soft power” is frequently imagined as a part of “being advanced” state in the implementation of liberal norms and principles. <...> “Soft power” is way broader and*

*multiform than ideological clichés or internal practices of the states. (Kosachev, 2012f) or <...> 'soft power', which in this kind of understanding is the privilege of the certain group of states. (Kosachev, 2013b)*

There is an attempt to denounce liberal values as the only source of soft power and also challenge the perception that only certain ideas can be presented as necessary for soft power. While denouncing these values, articulation of what Russia is not is made – ideas of free market or democracy have different interpretations and status in Russian society (Leonova, 2013). They are less important than values mentioned above. In addition, Russia is positioned as an example of diverse but harmonious multicultural society (Kosachev, 2012g, Kosachev and Chesnakov, 2012) in contrast to constructing the West as having issues with ethnic minorities. (Kosachev, 2012a) According to mentioned values, the soft power should be based on such principles as accepting others as equal and independent players and Russia is exactly the one who is doing it in contrast how the West is promoting its soft power.

Especially it is being emphasized in the regard of Eurasian Unions which is presented as one of the soft power projections. (Kosachev, 2012c, Petrovskiy, 2013) Actually, post-Soviet area in general is constructed as “*a natural region for active implementation of various instruments of this power [soft power – author] for us, for Russia, is a post-Soviet area*”. (Mukhmetshin, 2013) Post-Soviet area and especially Eurasian integration project are articulated as of great importance for Russia. While being in the same discourse where compatriots and Russian language are emphasized, it is possible to argue that identity of Russia as a center in post-Soviet area is reproduced.

It is in somewhat consistent with rather strong narrative related to the USSR and its soft power. While on one hand accepting certain flaws in actions of the Soviet Union, on the other hand there is a lot of attention paid to highlight certain positive aspects of being a leader in international arena or being able to expose negative practices in the West. (Kosachev, 2013f; Kosachev, 2013b) In addition, even idea of Rossotrudnichestvo is to a certain degree linked to continuity between agencies established during the Soviet period and now. (Kosachev and Tereshkova, 2012; Kosachev, 2013h) Through such normalization

of Soviet practices in soft power discourse, identity of Russia as continuation of the Soviet Union is reproduced.

One may also note that the values linked to the floating signifier of soft power and focus on one post-Soviet area and Soviet past are also prominent in overall domestic and foreign policy discourses. At the same time it is once more a stress that Russia is different from other promoters of soft power (the US and Europe) and in some way – even better as it sees others as equals and is trying to secure importance of sovereignty which is endangered. (Kosachev, 2012) What is even more, Russia is presented as a potential savior of the current world system which is predominantly constructed as the Western. It is done on a several levels. For example, the economic crisis is articulated as an important milestone when it has become clear that the Western system (Leonova, 2013) is in decay and Russia could introduce its own vision - one of possibilities being Eurasian integration project (Kosachev and Lavrov, 2012). Question of values is also prevalent in this kind of narrative emphasizing higher moral or traditional values in contrast to moral decay in the West. (Kosachev and Avdeev, 2013) What is more interesting in relation to identity construction is that in this discourse Europe is reproduced as a part of Russian self while at the same time the relationship with the West is constructed as antagonistic:

*Russia here is not opposing the West in relation to values, but in contrast is presented as a part of its civilization, basically – included to inner Western discussions and, to a certain degree, understands itself in a role of equally competent savior of common European spiritual heritage. If we use technical parallel, then our state offers itself as a kind of ‘backup server’, ‘boot CD’ with all the main programmes (values) in case, when main server or computer is attacked by ‘virus’ and it will be needed to restore it in its initial form. (Kosachev, 2013g)*

While explicitly antagonism is denounced in the statement quoted above, the general opposition between the West and Russia is still present as Russia is constructed as something better and more genuine. However, at the same time it is linked to Europe which is a natural cultural and societal context for Russia. (Kosachev, 2013f) Thus, to a certain degree, Russia is articulated as being included in the West as a part of Europe. Such

articulations highlight dependency on the hegemony of the West in a sense that construction of identity relies on both acception and negation of the West,

Through articulations of the antagonism with the West in soft power discourse, also certain domestic events and groups are excluded as being not ‘real’ or ‘representative’ part of Russia. Pussy Riot or protests in Moscow are linked to the West as Russian point of view is not presented at all when talking about these events or only by marginal groups which are not representative. (Kosachev, 2013i; Lavrov, 2012) Basically, through such discourse groups which do not agree with prevailing articulations of certain events are excluded and identity based on opposition to the West is articulated.

When talking about soft power the notion of being a powerful state is also present:

*Not less important is the mission of Russian ‘soft power’, which should consist exactly of creation of image not only of strong, but also of friendly, not fearsome power state (держава) (Kosachev, 2012c)*

Thus, the floating signifier of soft power is linked to the image of Russia, but not just as of usual state, but as of one of the most powerful. It is especially emphasized by the signifier ‘power state’ (держава) which is rather frequently used in the discourse and potentially can be used in Russian language as a synonym for ‘great power’ in some contexts. Talking about soft power along the power state such words are used as “leading state” (Kosachev, 2012c), its position in the UN Security Council and being a leader in ‘a nuclear club’ (Kosachev, 2012a) or historic functions of Russia of being a great state (великой страной) are emphasized (Kosachev and Avdeev, 2013). Russia is presented as an important player who has been unduly neglected and soft power instruments should assist it in gaining deserved place (Kosachev and Chesnokov, 2012). At the same time it puts itself in the same line with other power states:

*Russia should not sham being “a poor relative” (прикидываться «бедным родственником»), it has all the reasons and resources for its point of view to be heard, respected and supported. All leading powers today are doing everything possible and impossible to secure the support for their position in societies of other states. (Kosachev, 2013b)*



In other words Russia should not try to look less influential than it is. Such kind of behavior and implementation of independent and sovereign domestic and foreign policies is natural and essential for all important players/powers (Kosachev, 2013g) and Russia should not be an exception. However, it is worth to mention that floating signifier of great power is not common in official discourse.

To conclude, official discourse on soft power attempts to fix soft power as an instrumental tool to improve image of Russia. Russian identity, articulated through it, is strongly linked to compatriots, Russian language and culture as soft power is mostly linked to them. With rather visible emphasis on the Eurasian Union, Russia is presented as center of post-Soviet area. In addition, there is an attempt to normalize Soviet period through linking current and Soviet articulations of soft power and presenting them with positive connotations. What is even more important, soft power is being fixed in opposition/antagonism to the West, its activities and values. There is attempt to exclude everything close to the West from the articulation of soft power. However, at the same time, Russia is positioned as European, one of the main powers competing in the field of soft power. Russian identity is not completely excluded from the West and somewhat even related to the West through accepting the concept of soft power itself. And while the floating signifier of great power is not present, the discourse on soft power is articulated through exactly the same categories as discourse on Russia's great-poweriness. In the studies made by Hopf (2002) or Neumann (2008), Russian great-poweriness is articulated through the stance towards the Others such as the West, the USSR (Hopf, 2002) and acceptance of challenging the Western hegemony on governmentality (Neumann, 2008). Thus, it is possible to argue that the floating signifier of soft power to a certain degree displaces the floating signifier of great power in articulations of Russian identity. Furthermore, the fact that they do not appear together indicates that there is more of a competition rather than complementarity between the two of them.

### **3.2. Civilizational discourse**

Another discourse which can be distinguished is called here civilizational (Appendix2). The main difference from the official discourse and this one lies in the strong emphasis on the

civilizational incompatibility between the West and Russia. This section is designed in a manner similar to previous one – at first the floating signifier of soft power is discussed and later it is moved to a broader discussion on Russian identity construction.

The whole discourse is strongly constructed among the idea of the clash of civilizations. (Mikhailov, 2013; Vsemirnyi russkiy narodnyi sobor, 2012; Bogachev, Lagutin, 2013) Soft power is articulated as an instrument; however, it differs from the official articulations of it:

*<...> soft power, which becomes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century a main instrument of expansion for outside forces aspired for world domination. (Vsemirnyi, russkiy narodniy sobor, 2012)*

*<...> “soft power” is based, first of all, not on the arguments of reasoning, but on the power of ‘information and images’, on influence of ‘meanings’. (Bogachev, Lagutin, 2013)*

The instrumental nature of soft power which may sound similar to the official discourse, here has strong negative connotations. The linguistic formation ‘outside forces’ (внешние силы) indicates construction of a border between the Self and the Others/outside forces. Soft power is firmly linked to the adverse actions of the Others. In addition, it is an attempt to fix the floating signifier at the nodal point where it means irrationality and even coercion as through soft power actor enforces decisions upon masses and actions which are beneficial for her. Basically, soft power is equivalent to the instrument of manipulation (Bogachev, Lagutin, 2013) or at least should aspire imposing certain civilization project to be able to control others. (Kulikov, 2013)

What is more soft power is linked to the notion of war:

*<...> main ways of competition among states and nations become not military conflicts, but ‘soft power’ influence – information wars.*

*Under the influence of ‘soft power’ society loses its will to resist and loses its ability to defend itself and its values, losing the war without a single shot. (Vsemirnyi russkiy narodniy sobor, 2012)*

These statements bear extensive use of militaristic language which strengthens construction of a negative meaning of soft power especially when talking of soft power of others. It strongly resembles construction of friend-foe distinction. Basically, values, which are not

ascribed to the Self, are constructed as completely destructive and dangerous for the Self, hence empowering antagonism between the Self and the Other.

It is worth to mention, that there is another fixation which articulates soft power at less negative and coercive meaning and more embeds it in the notion of 'clash of civilizations'. It fixes soft power as an attractive power of ideology and values that are offered by state or civilization in the situation of the clash of civilizations. (Mikhailov, 2013) However, it is reasonable to argue, that the clash of civilization also implies significant antagonizing between different civilizations. So to a certain degree, this articulation of soft power is consistent to the one described above. However, it is worth to mention that 'clash' applies only to relationship between the Western and others civilizations, when traditional ones are articulated as compatible ones. In addition, it is also contrasting to official discourse, where notion of the clash of civilizations is not present but also rather explicitly denied (Kosachev, 2012g).

Russia here is constructed as a separate and unique civilization, different from all others. (Yakunin, 2012; Mikhailov, 2013; Bogachev, Lagutin, 2013) It is constructed as linked to such values or features as collectivism, communality (общинность), collegiality (соборность), work and patriotism. (Bogachev, Lagutin, 2013) In addition, such features as inclination to autocracy or orthodoxy as a main religion but being able to co-exist with other confessions are also rather explicitly mentioned. (Mikhailov, 2013) Again, it may sound similar to the official discourse and its attempts to link soft power and through it Russian identity to multicultural nature of Russia. However, through this discourse Russia is constructed not as a potential part of Europe or savior of the West (which means that to a certain degree it is included in being Europe or the West itself), but as completely different identity in opposition to the Western civilization. If one gives a look to the values that are ascribed to Russian identity, they all are present in the Russian discourse from the debate of Slavophiles and Westernizers and namely Slavophiles advocated them as being distinct specificities of Russian identity.

What is extremely prevalent in this discourse is strong antagonism between the West and Russia. While there are other civilizations presented and discussed, they are not constructed as entirely opposite to Russia:

*In this context BRICS countries are the main representatives of all the traditional civilizations, except of the South African Republic, which has nothing to represent strictly speaking. (Mikhailov, 2013)*

Russia is presented as one of the traditional civilizations together with China, India and Islamic civilization, which is not represented in BRICS, but can be represented by Iran, which is mentioned as another country advocating traditional values. (Bogachev, Lagutin, 2013)

The West is constructed as a total antagonist to traditional civilizations and to Russia in particular in this discourse. It is linked to such notions as exploitation, manipulation, egocentrism, and focus only on material goods, perception of itself as morally superior. (Mikhailov, 2013)

*Western paradigm of future always meant onslaught and conquest in addition to violence (насильственность) and oversimplification. (Bogachev, Lagutin, 2013)*

The West is presented as violent and completely different from Russia even if one compares values ascribed to each of civilizations. The notion of violence and forceful nature of the West (Nikonov, 2012) is linked to the unipolarity and also negative connotations regarding liberal values and market economy which are regarded as destructive. (Bogachev, Lagutin, 2013, Mikhailov, 2013) In contrast to that, traditional civilizations are presented as limited in a sense, that all of them have certain limits in which they act without attempts to conquer more. (Mikhailov, 2013) It rather clearly articulates idea of a multipolarity which should be set against the Western unipolarity.

The influence of the Western values through soft power instruments is constructed as a threat to Russian humanitarian sovereignty. (Vsemirnyi russkiy narodniy sobor, 2012) It resembles securitization of identity as soft power of others is constructed as an existential threat for Russian civilization. It is even more highlighted by unmistakably militaristic language:

*Today exactly here* [in the field of values related to Russian civilization – author] *lines/edges of defense (линии обороны), frontiers of humanitarian space of our country and our civilization lie.* (Vsemirnyi russkiy narodniy sobor, 2012)

Through usage of such concretely war related expressions, the antagonism between Russian identity and actions by others is established. Hence, through the discourse of soft power the West is constructed in almost absolute antagonist relation to Russia. To put it in other way around, Russian identity is everything that the West is not. Even though BRICS, which is articulated as a union of traditional civilizations and could become an opposition to the West, includes Brazil, Brazil is constructed in the way that it is closer to the traditional civilizations than to the West. (Mikhailov, 2013) It once again establishes a border between traditional/Russian identity and the West.

It is rather clear attempt to challenge hegemonic discourse on universality of liberal/Western values and construct Russia as a part of traditional civilizations as a possible opposition to universality of the West. Such challenging of the Western universality is also reproduced by fixing soft power as a restricted phenomenon in a sense that its success is limited by civilization boundaries. (Leonova, 2013; Radikov, Leksyutina, 2012) While such articulation contradicts rather securitized narrative above, it is still strongly embedded in civilizational understanding of soft power. In addition, it is an example, how differently floating signifier of soft power can be attempted to fix.

While Russian identity is explicitly articulated as being part of distinct civilization which is opposite to the West, this discourse is lacking of any explicit relations between floating signifiers soft power and great power. The relationship between soft power discourse and great power identity is mentioned only once when being a leader in post-Soviet area is presented as potential beginning of Russia's restoration as a great power. (Bogachev, Lagutin, 2013) However, construction of Russia as a separate civilization establishes a special position of Russia in relation to other civilizations and main representatives of it. Such articulations of identity reproduce narrative of Russia's distinctiveness from others on the one hand, but of being one among the main civilizations on the other.

To sum up, in civilizational discourse on soft power, the floating signifier of soft power is fixed at several possible meanings: being an instrument of manipulation and conquest against which defense should be established, being a competition between ideologies and values or being actually limited to civilizational boundaries. Russia is articulated as a separate civilization close to other traditional civilizations such as China or India. At the same time the West is constructed as antagonist to Russia and other traditional civilizations. So, through soft power discourse identity of Russia as being completely distinct from the West is articulated. While direct linkage between the floating signifiers of soft power and great power is not frequent in this discourse, constructing Russian identity as of separate civilization gives it certainly a special status among other civilizations/states. It differs from official discourse exactly due to the emphasis of exceptionality as a civilization and not being a part of Europe. In addition, it to a certain extent mirrors the findings of Neumann in a sense that the notion of governmentality (which is a necessary feature for a state to be accepted as a great power) is also strongly embedded in civilization narratives where the Western definition of ‘being civilized’ is the hegemonic one (Neumann and Sending, 2010, 87-91). Basically, in this discourse there is an attempt to challenge this hegemonic discourse on both soft power and great-powerness by introducing Russia’s civilization narrative as being at least an equal civilization.

### **3.3. Conspiracy-military discourse**

Another discourse on soft power, possible to distinguish, is called conspiracy-military (Appendix3) in this thesis. The main difference from the official and civilizational discourses is that it is mostly structured among exceptionally strong antagonism with the West without any alternative articulation of Russia as something different and, in addition, hard or military power as well as militaristic language is way more prevalent in this discourse.

Soft power is articulated as one of the instruments to impose authority over a subject:

*Soft power – is just another form of ‘power’, one of the means of establishing power (governing) (властных (управляющих)) relations between subjects. (Kulikov, 2013)*

Basically, soft power is presented as not something different from more traditional ways of understanding power but just as having the same logic but achieved by different means. It is articulated as being used to defeat or destroy something, hence, not different from so-called hard power. In addition, it is worth to note that soft power is linked in this discourse to such events as the collapse of the USSR, the Arab Spring (Ponomareva, 2013a) or the Color revolutions (Ponomareva, Rudov, 2012) which usually have rather negative connotations in the Russian narrative. Linking the floating signifier of soft power to these events attaches negative connotations to the soft power itself.

Second attempt to fix definition of meaning of soft power in this discourse is a bit different from described above. It is based on the idea that soft power is secondary to hard/military power:

*<...> 'soft power' can be afforded only by one who also has enough of 'hard power in reserve, so addressee would pay enough attention to 'soft' [power-author] as well.* (Martynyuk, 2013)

*We must not to forget that effectiveness of 'soft power' is provided by military and political capabilities of application of 'hard power' in direct (military) or indirect (political) form.* (Salyukov, 2013)

Hard power is articulated as the more important resource of influence on other players. It is possible to argue that through such construction of the primacy of hard power, the idea of an influential and strong state is also constructed. To be more precise, if one wants to succeed in international arena, the military or hard power in general is essential and only then soft power is going to be successful as well. While great power is not mentioned explicitly, such articulations are rather similar to traditional understanding of great power where military might is considered as the main source of great-poweriness.

The negative aspects of soft power are linked to the West in this discourse as well. However, here it is even more focused on the United States specifically:

*<...> the USA during the Cold War decided to take a Solomon solution – in the struggle for establishing itself as a world leader they bided on <...> offensive informational-propagandistic strategy.* (Kosenko, 2013)

Soft power is presented as a rather purposeful solution linked to the conscious choice of the strategy. It is constructed in a negative way by using such words as ‘offensive’ or ‘propagandistic’. Negative articulations are even more strengthened when this strategy is connected to globalization which is also presented as an attempt to conquer the world under this disguise (of globalization). (Kosenko, 2013) Soft power is linked to manipulations and that should bring a total control over the society. (Ponomareva, 2013a) The issue of values is also raised in this discourse as through establishing the American hegemony, ongoing process of unification of cultural preferences of the humanity under the low level mass culture of the US which is associated with the notions of democracy and liberty continues. (Kosenko, 2013) In this case, it is an attempt to expose a wrong connection between liberty, democracy and the American culture prevailing worldwide and to challenge it. Russia should not only find the ways to defend itself from the American soft power, but also present its own version of it. (Ponomareva, 2013b) However, what exactly should be set against is not presented in this discourse.

It is worth to mention that this discourse is thickly filled with conspiracy like observations that go as far as explicitly including author of the soft power concept Nye into the closed club of high ranking politicians who are developing strategies of world order. (Ponomareva, 2013a) On one hand, it again highlights instrumental nature of soft power which should be intentionally used to achieve certain goals of a state (in this case the US), and on the other it articulates a negative image of the idea of soft power and the West, where this idea originated. This discourse also highlights othering of the certain groups inside the Russia. For example, title of the article which discusses the role of the NGO’s in soft power promotion is “Their name is legion” (Имя им – легион) (Ponomareva, 2013b) which almost straightforwardly hints to the Biblical phrase – “My name is Legion: for we are many” that has strong negative connotations as it is related to the demonic possession. In addition, civil society activists, bloggers (Ponomareva, 2013a) and liberals (Salyukov, 2012) are also presented as ones who are a part of the American soft power or who support similar policies which can be damaging for Russia. As their activities are linked to the main Other – the US – they become excluded from what Russia is and are what is foreign for Russia.



It is possible to argue that the floating signifier of soft power in this discourse is also shifting among several discursive points. It is presented as a purposeful instrument for domination but in other texts it is articulated as only secondary to the hard power. The overall focus on hostile actions of others in struggle for dominance resembles realist narrative. While great power is not explicitly mentioned, the idea of an influential state is tightly linked to power in its 'hard' connotations and purposive usage of all the means to achieve the goals. The US is presented as the main Other. At the same time, inner groups of Russia whose actions are linked to the American soft power are also excluded and othered. Thus, Russian identity is articulated through an opposition to everything which is related to the US and through construction of hostile and zero-sum game like international context.

### **3.4. Comparing the three discourses**

The last section of the empirical part is dedicated to the discussion on all of three discourses presented above. However, the broad discourse on soft power in Russia is not limited to three discourse groups already presented. Thus, while discussing and summing them up, some additional articulations are also added to finalize the analysis of Russian discourse on soft power and have a more complete understanding of it.

To begin with, the floating signifier of soft power is articulated as an instrument in all discourses. However, it is important to mention that even in its instrumental understanding it is fixed to a different range of meanings. While in official discourse it can be articulated as a positive or neutral phenomenon, in civilizational and conspiracy-military discourse it is more linked to negative connotations such as manipulations or purposeful strategy for world domination. In addition, in civilizational discourse one may note attempt to fix it as a limited instrument and in conspiracy-military discourse as a secondary to hard power.

Through soft power discourse, identity of Russia is constructed in relatively different ways. The West is articulated as the Other of Russia. In official discourse it is clearly a constitutive Other, as on one hand, the actions or values related to the West are presented as negative and opposite to Russia, but on the other, Russia is still perceived as European. In civilizational and conspiracy-military discourses the West is also the antagonist of Russia, but here the boundary is articulated even clearer – either the West is absolutely different

and even alien civilization or it is acting in a malign way which cannot be tolerated (especially, the behavior of the US is stressed). When antagonism with the West is constructed, values play an important role in it. All the discourses are, at least partially, challenging dominance and universality of the liberal values that are usually associated with the West. However, such articulations are also challenged as traditional/conservative ideas/values are seen as unsuccessful strategy for soft power promotion as Russia is still a specific part of Europe not completely alien to the West. (Lukyanov, 2013) In addition, through construction of the West as the Other, certain groups are excluded as an alien to Russia as well. For example, liberals, opposition or bloggers (usually having in mind bloggers critical towards current Russian authorities) are presented as not representatives of Russia or acting along the Westerns lines.

While the West is the main Other of Russia, other states having soft power policies are not seen as a threat. In the civilizational discourse China or India are presented as traditional civilizations which are alike to Russia and should act together. Thus, in that discourse Russian identity is not only anti-Western but also linked to more Asian civilizations. Two other discourses are as well more focused on wrong-doings of the West than discussing soft power policies of other states. However, one may note a similarity in the way area of Russian soft power is constructed in the civilizational and official discourses. Both are to a certain degree embedded in the idea of Russian world: in official discourse it is linked to compatriots and Eurasian Union, in civilizational – to the borders of Russian civilization.

Moving to the discussion on the linkage between floating signifiers of soft power and great power, neither of discourses was explicitly structured around the floating signifier of great power. However, there are some other texts related to soft power which link these two signifiers. Although soft power is mentioned as a necessary feature of being a great power, there are no explicit articulations on how these two are related. The focus shifts to analysis of Russian self – perception of being a great power and how it changed over the time (Delyukina, 2013) or to the discussions close to civilizational discourse (Radikov, Leksyutina, 2013). There is also an attempt to link soft power to being a great power in a sense that only great powers are able to wield soft power, but then Russia is presented as

almost having lost its great power status and being rather unsuccessful in its soft power policies. (Radzikhovkiy, 2013)

Nevertheless, through analysis of soft power discourse it is notable that Russian identity of a state having a specific status is articulated. Official discourse is based around an idea that Russian position has been downplayed and it should be perceived at the level it deserves. In civilization discourse Russia is constructed as a separate civilization. Through such articulations specific or even unique position of Russia in international arena is highlighted. Conspiracy-militaristic discourse is structured around notions of power and especially hard/coercive power. While Russia is not frequently explicitly discussed there, the idea that status of the state depends on its ability to use power (be it soft or hard one as both of them are presented in a rather coercive manner) constructs the link between soft power and important/powerful state's identity. All these articulations noticeably overlap with the discourses on Russia's great-powerness which have been studied by various authors. As soft power is articulated as being related to special status of the state, it is reasonable to argue that the floating signifier of soft power at least partly substitutes the floating signifier of great power in the discourses of Russia's status and even great-powerness. Thus, while there is no explicit relation between the signifiers of soft power and great power, it is reasonable to argue that through soft power discourse the identity of Russia as having important and special positions in the international arena is articulated.

#### 4. Conclusions

The aim of this thesis was to understand the relationship between the discourse of soft power and Russia's great power identity - whether soft power discourse articulates Russia's identity as a great power. Thus, question was raised: whether the concept of soft power is necessary for the articulations of Russia's identity in general and of Russia's identity as a great power more specifically. It was argued that the concepts of soft power ('мягкая сила') and great power ('великая держава') can be approached as floating signifiers and that Russian identity is articulated through attempts to fix the meanings of these signifiers as well as though linking (or not) them together.

As this thesis has proven, soft power can indeed be analyzed as a floating signifier in Russian discourses. The Nye's original definition can be approached as hegemonic and Russian articulations of soft power as attempts to challenge it. The original definition of soft power is strongly embedded in the articulation and reproduction of the Western identity through emphasis on such necessary features of soft power as democracy or liberal values. Furthermore, the concept itself was based on the example of the US and that even more stresses its connections to the West. Thus, while representing and articulating a particular identity it has been elevated to the position where it attempts to represent a totality. To put it in other words, in the Western discourse soft power is articulated as only possible when all the features of Nye's definition are present. Such articulations successfully exclude any other possible meanings of soft power as being wrong ones.

However, research shows that in Russian soft power discourses there is an attempt to challenge this hegemony. Through discourse analysis of official and academic sources, it was demonstrated that the concept of soft power is elevated to the position where it becomes important to the articulations of Russia's identity and not just an academic concept or the concept understood wrongly by Russian officials. There are three separate discourses distinguished in this thesis – official discourse, civilizational discourse and conspiracy – military one. The floating signifier of soft power is articulated differently in them. For example, while it seems that soft power is understood as an instrument in all three discourses, it is not exactly the case. In the official discourse, soft power is articulated

with more positive connotations and in the civilizational and military ones - it is more negative. In the civilizational discourse it is more associated with manipulations or being limited to the areas of each civilization. In the conspiracy – military discourse soft power is fixed as either being the same as hard power, in a sense that it has the same logic just means differ or as rather secondary compared to hard power at all.

Soft power discourses are strongly structured around the othering of the West. For example, the official discourse challenges hegemony of Nye's definition by denouncing necessity of liberal values or democracy and establishing other possible choices such as stability and equality. At the same time, while challenging the hegemony, the West is accepted - Russia through its culture and values is presented as being a part of Europe. So on one hand, the West is the Other, but on the other hand it is accepted through association of Russia with Europe. However, it is necessary to keep in mind that Russian discourse in general is not flat and articulations of Russia as being not Europe are possible too. Furthermore, in the civilizational and conspiracy-military discourses on soft power, the West (and actually Europe as well) is articulated in a more antagonistic ways. Soft power of the West is alien and hostile to other civilizations. The conspiracy-military discourse is more focused on the US. Soft power is articulated as an attempt of the West/the US to conquer the world and establish domination over it. It is worth to add, that the civilizational discourse establishes opposition between the West and other traditional civilizations. To be more precise, soft power policies of China or India (which are traditional civilizations like Russia) are not articulated as alien to Russia, but as only alien to the West.

Through the attempts to fix the meanings of the floating signifier soft power, different understanding of the area of the soft power is articulated. Both the civilizational and official discourses in a certain way limit this area. In the official discourse it is future Eurasian Union or the so-called Russian World, in the civilizational discourse it is the borders of Russian civilization. Basically, it means that soft power is articulated also through ideas of multipolarity where each important player has its areas of actions. At the same time, the conspiracy-military discourse does not articulate any concrete borders.

Moving to the question of the articulations of Russia's great power identity through soft power discourse, the floating signifier of great power appeared relatively rarely. Thus, it is possible to say, that the assumption that there should be a connection between the floating signifiers of soft power and great power as a manifestation of Russia's great power identity was not proven by this research as there was no explicit mentioning of the floating signifier of great power in the texts that define Russia's soft power. However, this finding is interesting in itself as it is frequently assumed that Russian narratives are rather noticeably filled with great power rhetoric. Furthermore, the broader look at what identities of Russia are articulated through soft power discourse, gives us quite disparate results. In the official discourse, Russia is articulated as aspiring to return to the positions that it deserves but was deprived by others. Through the civilizational discourse Russia is constructed as a separate civilization. Such articulations strongly emphasize exceptionality and uniqueness of Russia. Probably, only the military discourse comes closer to the traditional great power articulations, strongly linking the status of the state to its military might. Even more, the soft power discourses operate with similar categories as great power discourses. Basically, it is reasonable to argue that the floating signifier of soft power has at least partly displaced the floating signifier of great power in reproduction of Russia's identity articulations or even in the articulations of great-poweriness more specifically.

This thesis demonstrates that soft power can be approached as a floating signifier around which discourses can be structured. Thus, it should not be approached as only an academic concept widely used by academics or politicians, but as a floating signifier around which a hegemonic struggle to fix the meaning is going. Analysis of Russian discourse shows it well. Not only is the meaning of the floating signifier shifting among different nodal points in the discourse, but also the hegemony of the Western definition is challenged. Furthermore, through the attempts to fix the meanings of it, the identities of Russia are articulated. And while the great power identity was not explicitly enunciated in the discourses, the identities of Russia as being unique or important player in the international arena were present. Though such articulations, it is possible to argue that soft power plays an important role in construction and reproduction of Russian identities (be it a unique

civilization or one of the important players in the international arena) and to a certain degree replaced the floating signifier of great power in Russian identity articulations.

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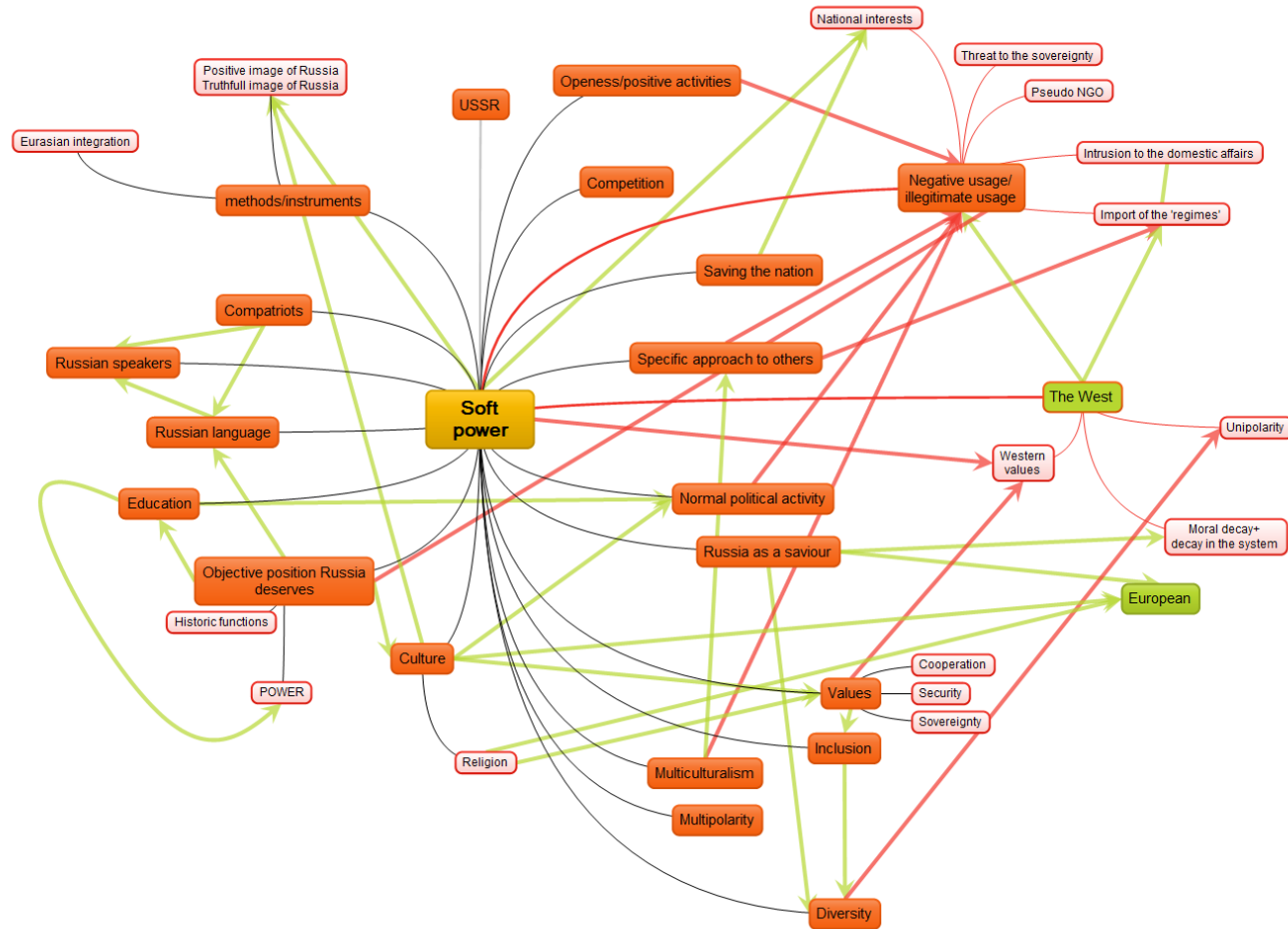
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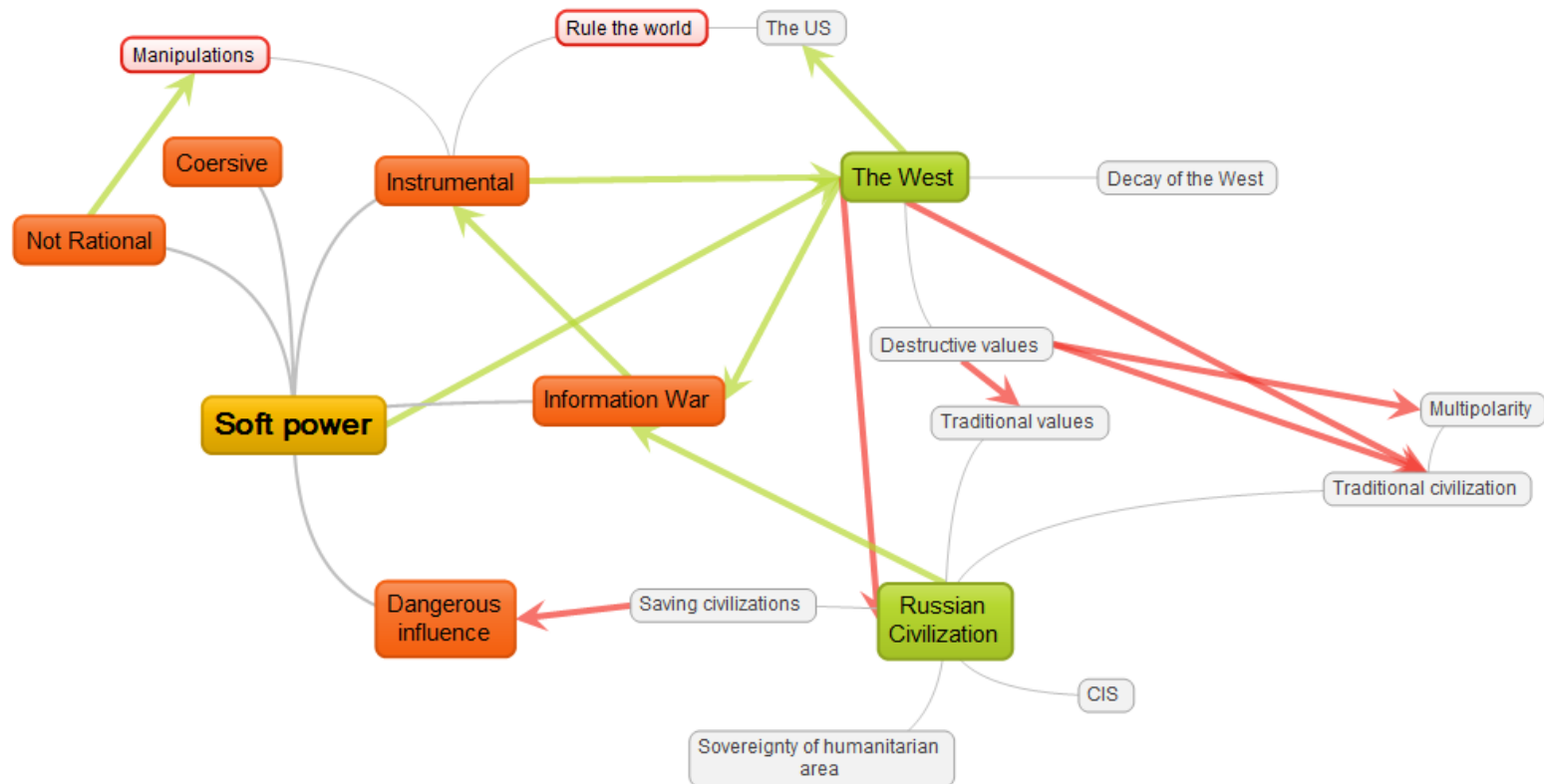
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# Appendixes

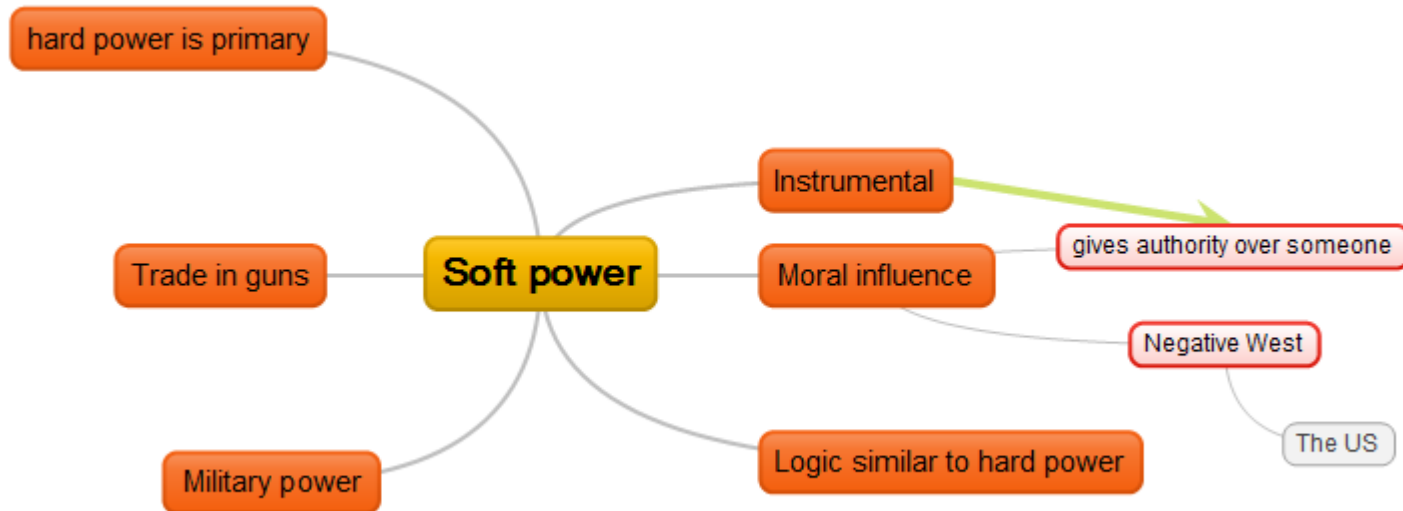
## Appendix1. Official discourse: discursive map



## Appendix2. Civilizational discourse: discursive map



### Appendix3. Conspiracy-military discourse: discursive map



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