

CHARLES UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
Institute of Political Studies
Geopolitical Studies

Master's Thesis

2023

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**Russian soft power under Putin:
The case of Cyprus**

Master's thesis

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Study programme: Geopolitical Studies

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Year of the defence: 2023

Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on
30/4/2023

Georgios Varnava

References

Varnava, Georgios. *Russian soft power under Putin: The case of Cyprus*. Praha, 2023. 84 pages. Master's thesis (Mgr.). Charles University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Political Studies. Geopolitical Studies. Supervisor PhDr. Michael Romancov, Ph.D.

Length of the thesis: 189 630 characters with spaces

Abstract

This thesis explores Russian soft power in Cyprus and how Russia uses specific techniques and strategies to exert this influence. Divided into eight sections, including a literature review on soft power, key concepts, theoretical framework, research methodology, historical overview and analysis of soft power tools employed by Russia; it reveals that Russia implements diverse methods such as media coverage, religious tactics cultural interventions or economic incentives in order to shape Cyprus' perceptions. Furthermore, the study demonstrates through exploration of domestic politics and societal attitudes towards Russian culture or values that their approach is indeed effective. This thesis, due to its uniqueness, contributes significantly in the academic literature regarding Russian soft power in the Eastern Mediterranean and specifically in Cyprus.

Abstrakt

Tato disertační práce se zabývá ruským měkkým vlivem na Kypru a způsoby, jakými Rusko využívá specifické techniky a strategie k jeho prosazení. Je rozdělena do osm částí, včetně literární rešerše měkkého vlivu, klíčových konceptů, teoretického rámce, výzkumné metodologie, historického přehledu a analýzy nástrojů měkkého vlivu, které Rusko používá. Práce ukazuje, že Rusko implementuje různorodé metody, jako je zpravodajství, náboženské taktiky, kulturní intervence nebo ekonomické pobídky, aby ovlivnilo vnímání sebe sama na Kypru. Navíc studie demonstruje, že jejich přístup je skutečně účinný prostřednictvím průzkumu domácí politiky a společenských postojů k ruské kultuře a hodnotám. Tato disertační práce díky své jedinečnosti významně přispívá do akademické literatury týkající se ruského měkkého vlivu východním Středomoří a konkrétně na Kypru.

Keywords

Russia, Cyprus, foreign policy, soft power, public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, economic influence, Eastern Mediterranean

Klíčová slova

Rusko, Kypr, zahraniční politika, měkká moc, veřejná diplomacie, kulturní diplomacie, ekonomický vliv, Východní Středozeří

Název práce

Ruský měkký vliv za Putina: Případ Kypru

Acknowledgement

Primarily, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Michael Romancov. He provided invaluable guidance during the course of this research project.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to Dr. Martin Riegl, the GPS program coordinator for his helpful responses to all my queries over the past two years. His support have been significant in overcoming any challenges that arose.

I would like to express my appreciation to my colleagues in the GPS program who have made Prague feel like home for the past two years. Their support have made this journey not only intellectually stimulating but also immensely enjoyable.

Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my best friend Tryfonas. Your sudden passing during the writing of this thesis left a void in my heart that can never be filled. This work is dedicated to you in loving memory."

Prague, 30th April 2023

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ACRONYMS

ROC	Russian Orthodox Church
COC	Church of Cyprus
UOC	Ukrainian Orthodox Church
TRNC	Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus
EOKA	Εθνική Οργάνωση Κυπρίων Αγωνιστών / National Movement Cypriot Fighters
AKEL	Ανορθωτικό Κόμμα Εργαζόμενου Λαού/ The Progressive Party of Working People
DISY	Δημοκρατικός Συναγερμός / Democratic Rally
ELAM	Εθνικό Λαϊκό Μέτωπο / National Popular Front
CYSTAT	Cyprus Statistical Service

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Introduction

Cyprus is a sunny island with cloudy past, located in the Eastern Mediterranean. Among other things, Cypriot society has a strong cultural and religious identity as well as an ongoing unresolved conflict on its territory that makes Nicosia, to this day, the last divided capital in the world. After the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974, the island has been divided between the legal entity established in 1960, The Republic of Cyprus and the unrecognized de facto state of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). The invasion changed the demographics of the island. Greek Cypriots who were living in the north left their homes and resettled in the South (Nicosia, Limassol, Paphos, the area of free Famagusta, Larnaca) which is under the effective control of the Republic of Cyprus. Turkish Cypriots who were living in the south left their homes and moved to northern cities (Kyrenia, Morphou, North Nicosia, Famagusta) now controlled by the De Facto state of the TRNC. The new reality forced by the Turkish invasion created two homogeneous societies: the Turks and Turkish Cypriots in the north, who are predominantly Muslim, and the Greek Cypriots in the south, who are primarily Orthodox Christians. Our case study focuses on the realities Republic of Cyprus, thus the realities in the southern part of the island.

The new realities created after 1974 brought to the forefront of the international scene a homogenous state, with a dominant factor of Christian Orthodoxy, that occupies a strategically important position in the Eastern Mediterranean. This is the perfect recipe for Russian involvement. Cypriots' attitudes towards the Russians have always been positive due to historical past, cultural and religious affinity and later, economic ties. After the collapse of the USSR, money from the former Soviet Union flowed into Cyprus, leading to the creation of important economic ties. This pattern continued after Cyprus' accession to the EU in 2004. Additionally, the increasing Russian minority in Cyprus, which is estimated to be over 45.000 – 50.000 (Waring, 2022; Emmanouilidis, 2022), has enhanced this cooperation. This is a significant number in relation to the island's total population which is about 900.000 people (CYSTAT, 2022), which could mean that Russians make up 5-7% of the population. In this context, Putin aims to use its soft power resources to influence Cyprus, a geostrategically important country, part

of the Western structures, holding a veto power in the EU. Soft power is a common strategy employed by Putin and Russia in countries with similar features with Cyprus and, in societies like this, it is common that the guardians of the traditional values and religion are often suspicious about the motives and the goals of the West (U.S.A, EU). To influence Cypriot society and its domestic and foreign policies, Moscow is using various soft power tools that fall under the categories of public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, and economic influence

The term soft power was coined by Joseph Nye (2004a), however Russia filters soft power through its own strategic narratives and historical realities. Joseph Nye characterizes soft power as another type of power, different than hard power which is visible and tangible. Soft power is intangible and is about power over people's minds and it involves shaping others' preferences through attraction, co-optation rather than coercion. This thesis uses the concept of soft power to analyse and discuss the Russian influence in Cyprus. The aim of the present thesis is to give an answer on whether Cyprus is susceptible to soft power or not, to apply soft power in the case of Russian presence in Cyprus, to identify what soft power tools does Moscow uses to effectively wield soft power in Cyprus and to assess, with obvious limitations, the effectiveness of this soft power strategy.

I. Literature Review

Soft power is a popular and well – researched concept. Russian soft power is an even more interesting side of the original concept of soft power. However, Russian Soft power in Cyprus is absent from the literature. There are no other studies discussing the role of Russian soft power in relation to the socioeconomic demographics and realities of Cyprus and examining this specific case through the lens of Russian understanding on soft power. Fortunately, despite the absence of relevant case studies, there is a plethora of books and articles discussing soft power resources in general, and those employed by Russia specifically. In the next lines, the most important of those books and articles are briefly presented.

Books

Nye, Joseph S (2004a). Soft Power: The means to success in world politics

This book serves as the foundation of this study. In this book, Joseph Nye, introduced in detail the concept of soft power, it's most likely resources and its limitations.

Drousiotis, Makarios (2016). The Cyprus Crisis and the Cold War: USSR duplicity versus realpolitik (1974 – 1977)

This book is written by the famous investigative Cypriot journalist, Makarios Drousiotis. The author is particularly known for his works on the history of the Cyprus conflict. In this book he offers an alternative view of the Cyprus problem through his archival research in the U.S and the Great Britain. This book was particularly useful in putting great power's cold war interests in the context of the Cyprus conflict. This further assisted in creating a clearer picture about the USSR's strategy and goal regarding the Cyprus conflict, as well.

Leustean, Lucian N. (2010), Eastern Christianity and the Cold War, 1945 – 1991

Leustean's book served as a great introduction to the affairs of the Eastern Orthodox Church. In the book, chapters 2 and 17 discusses the position of Russian Orthodox Church and the Cyprus Orthodox Church in the context of the Cold War rivalry. It also provides a brief presentation of the religious demographics of each congregation. The

Post-1941 relation between the Cyprus orthodox church with the communist party of Cyprus (AKEL) is also being discussed, shedding light to an important aspect of the modern Cypriot history. Finally, it discusses the position of the Cyprus Church as an institution, throughout this important historical period.

Chitty et al. (2017), Routledge Handbook of Soft Power

In the chapter 28 of this book, Yelena Osipova offers a great discussion about soft power in Russian Discourse. She observes various resources used specifically by Putin discussing the relevant tools employed in detail and offers a useful approach on how Vladimir Putin understands and values soft power.

Tsygankov (2018), Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy

This book provided an interesting approach to Russian foreign policy. More specifically in Chapter 12, Greg Simmons discusses how Russia uses media and public diplomacy. In chapter 13, Nicolai Petro discusses Russian Orthodox Church as a tool for Russian Foreign Policy. These two chapters played a fundamental role in shaping the present thesis.

Articles

Alexander Sergunin & Leonid Karabeshkin (2015), Understanding Russia's Soft Power Strategy

This article was one of the most important foundations of this research. It focuses on Russia's soft power strategies and identifies four main strategies that Russia uses: Cultural Diplomacy, Public Diplomacy, Economic Diplomacy, and Political Diplomacy. This helped the research deepen the discussion and offered a structured approach to analyse the case of Cyprus.

Krasnov et al. (2019), Interstate Relations Between Russia and Cyprus amid Geopolitical Contradictions in a Multipolar World

In this article published as a part of the special issue of the journal Cyprus Review by University of Nicosia, relations between Russia and Cyprus are discussed. The article is particularly important as it brings to the surface a discussion about the political, cultural, economic and military-technical interstate relations between the two actors of

this thesis. The concluded agreements presented contributed significantly to this thesis in assessing Russia's soft power effectiveness in Cyprus.

Hudson, Victoria (2015), 'Forced to Friendship'? Russian (Mis-)Understandings of Soft Power and the Implications for Audience Attraction in Ukraine

In this article, Victoria Hudson, discusses Russian civilizational discourse with specific focus on Russkiy Mir Foundation, Russian Orthodox Church and Kremlin's Foreign Policy. These are vital concepts and terms for the present thesis.

A. Key Concepts

In order to avoid any confusion throughout the reading of this thesis, in this section, some key concepts and actors are being clarified.

Cyprus Orthodox Church (COC), Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and the Eastern Orthodox Church structure

The Eastern Orthodox Church operates under a synodical system, which is fundamentally different from the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church that adheres to papal supremacy. Unlike in the latter, there is no central authority in the former. Despite misconceptions about his role as an authoritative leader due to his title "first among equals," the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople holds a position of honor rather than authority (Meyendorff, 2023; OCA, n.d).

The Church of Cyprus (COC)

The Church of Cyprus is an autocephalous within the structures of the Eastern orthodox church. The term autocephalous means that the Church is independent, appointing its own head and not being subject to the authority of an external archbishop or patriarch.

The Moscow Patriarchate

The Moscow Patriarchate commonly referred to as the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), is an autocephalous Eastern Orthodox Christian church. Its leader is the Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus'.

The Republic of Cyprus and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus

These are two different entities. Following Turkish invasion in 1974, the island was divided between the Republic of Cyprus and the occupational forces of Türkiye. In 1983, the unilateral declaration of the “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” occurred. In the context of this research, we are focusing on the regions under the effective control of the officially recognized entity on the island known as the Republic of Cyprus. As such, any reference made to “Cyprus” denotes specifically “The Republic of Cyprus”.

II. Theoretical Framework

This thesis primarily focuses on the case study of Cyprus and its unique relationship with Russia. While this paper does not aspire to open a theoretical debate, it is still important to briefly explain and present the chosen theoretical framework, how it fits to the specific case study and what are the limitations. The selected framework was chosen taking into account the specific characteristics of the case under examination and the unique relationship between the two main actors: Cyprus and Russia, which is being explained in detail at a later stage. The selected theoretical framework for this paper is the concept of “Soft Power”. The concept of “Soft Power” was initially presented by Nye in his book “Bound to lead” (1990) where he mainly discussed the decline of American power (Nye, 2004a; Preface XI). It was further synthesized and conceptualized by Joseph Nye in his book “Soft power: the means to success in world politics” (2004). To begin with, power is a loosely and vaguely defined term. To open the theoretical discussion about soft power, Joseph Nye used the following phrase:

“Power is like weather. Everyone depends on it and talks about it, but few understand it”
(Nye, 2004a; p.1).

For this reason, the present section aims to clearly define the nature of power and explain how it functions in its “harder” and “softer” forms. However, to understand the branches of soft power, we should first open a discussion about what constitutes “power” in general terms. Power, is a complex concept and for that reason has been placed at the very heart of the academic research for many years and it has been studied across various disciplines such as political science, International Relations, Psychology and sociology. The main idea of power is one’s ability to influence others and achieve the desired outcomes (Nye, 1990; pp. 25-26). Power can be expressed in many different way, including coercion, persuasion, physical force or/and Diplomacy. Physical force includes the use of violence or force to forcefully influence others’ wishes. On the other hand, persuasion includes strategies to convince the other through logic, arguments, discussion and emotional or cultural appeal and commonness. Diplomacy, is a more formal way to persuade and influence the wishes of others’ and it includes the use of negotiation to achieve mutually beneficial agreements and compromises (Nye, 1990). Additionally, Power is not only about individuals or institutional actors but also about the distribution of power within a society or the international system. In that sense, some

individuals or groups may as well hold more power than others (Lukes, 2005). Power can be exercised through various diffusions. Amongst these, are formal institutions such as governments, international organizations, corporations as well as on informal networks. Also, power plays a crucial role in shaping relations within and between nations. Having considered all the above, power is a complex, dynamic and multifaceted concept and it plays a fundamental role in understanding complex economic, political and social relations.

Throughout most of history, the strength of a nation was tested through military achievements and resources, which means that actors and great powers mostly focused on hard power. However, as the world has progressed, the resources needed to secure a solid or hegemonic position have also changed. Many variables have come into play, such as non-state actors, who are often very efficient in shaping public opinion, consequently leading to a broader shaping of modern states' domestic and foreign policies. To accommodate the need to analyze an increasingly complex environment of international relations, Joseph Nye synthesized and conceptualized the concept of "soft power".

Joseph Nye, wasn't the first who spoke about "soft power". Other great thinkers have thought and spoken using the terms and the framework used by soft power, even though the strategy didn't exist as a concept until recently. Thucydides, a founder of classical realism, in "History of the Peloponnesian War" argues that relying solely on coercion for hegemony leads to many dangers and probably, to failure. He argues that a hegemon must, at all costs, maintain its power (economic and military) to avoid people's resistance and ensure its domination. However, this is another "trap" as it leads to expansionist policies with inherent risk. The expansionist foreign policy will most probably bring the empire down. According to Thucydides, Athens' allies were willing to accept their hegemony as long as it was perceived to be in their best interest, otherwise it would be viewed as tyranny (Huseynov, 2019; pp. 51-52). Cicero, a roman politician and political scientist, emphasized on how crucial it is to win the support and respect of others through moral principles and justice rather than solely based on fear. A leadership based solely on fear, is based also on very weak foundations. Galarotti argues that Hobbes, In *Leviathan*, , underscores the significant role of soft power in maintain security and gaining influence in a chaotic and anarchical international system . Gramsci, an Italian communist political theorist, suggests that consent and coercion have a close relationship, thus they're linked and when consent is not enough

to maintain the domination or the order under hegemonic power, coercion becomes the last and the final option to maintain control (Huseynov, 2019; p52). Morgenthau distinguishes three types of imperialism: military, economic and cultural (Huseynov, 2019; p.53). He argues that the latter aims to achieve control over the minds of people to influence domestic dynamics and eventually alter the external alignment (Huseynov, 2019; p.53)

Hard & Soft Power

According to Nye, power means the ability to get the outcomes one wants (Nye, 2004a; p.1). Others' behavior can be influenced or manipulated using various tools and strategies. One can influence other's behaviour by force or, as Nye (2004a) argues, by using attraction. As discussed earlier, understanding the context of power is crucial for analysing its functions and outcomes due to its complex and multifaceted nature. Thus, to understand power is to understand one's motives, preferences, habits, political values, and structural characteristics (Nye, 2004a). In this context, Joseph Nye, has divided power into two forms: Hard and Soft, offering a useful analytical tool in understanding and discussing this notorious concept.

Hard power is the traditional and well - known form of power. It has been used extensively by people, empires, states, and nations. It is well understood and being used since the dawn of human civilization. It is a measurable and tangible form of power and can be characterized by behaviors and strategies using command, threats, and coercion. It refers to the ability of someone to influence others alignment using its militarily and economic strengths (Nye, 2004a). The extent of one's hard power can be measured by assessing military capacities, economic growth, development etc. It's outcomes are most of the times immediately visible and relatively easy to measure. One of the most common instruments, under hard power, to achieve one's goal and influence other's alignment is the "Carrots" (inducements) and "sticks" (threats or punishment) instrument (Nye, 2004a; p.5). The most common resources of Hard Power are economic sanctions, forceful external alignment and bribes complemented by aggressive/defensive alliances, coercive diplomacy, and military action (Nye, 2004a; p.8). Hard power is also referred to as "command power" (Nye, 2004a; p.7)

Soft power, on the other hand, is a different form of power that includes various behaviors, resources, and characteristics. According to Nye's concept, soft power is about having an "attractive personality, culture, political values and institutions and policies that are seen as legitimate or having moral authority", thus, soft power most often can be found in democratic politics and hard power is where the authoritarian leaders and states mainly rely on (Nye, 2004a; p.6). Therefore, soft power can be defined as the power of attraction and seduction, the power to attract someone to follow your lead because one's lifestyle, morals, and values are perceived as superior (Nye, 2004a; p.5). In 1939, E.H Carr identified "power over opinion" as one of the three equally important forms of power, alongside military and economic power (Nye, 2004a; p.8).

When we examine the resources of soft power, we can identify three key components:

(i) *culture*, (ii) *political values*, and (iii) *foreign policy* (Nye, 2004; p.11).

According to Nye, (i) *Culture* is comprised of the values and practices that create meaning for a society (2004; p.11). It can be communicated through trade, interaction, and personal connections, and can be divided into "high culture" (such as art, literature, and philosophy) and "popular culture" (like mass entertainment). By promoting shared interests and values, culture can create attraction and influence the behaviour of other nations. However, the influence of a culture's values is limited by their exclusivity, as seen in the case of the Soviet Union and Rome where, as Josef Joffe argued, the cultural sway of both stopped exactly at their military borders. Popular culture is a powerful tool for soft power, but it is not enough to guarantee success, as evidenced by Kim Jong Il's fondness for American pizza and videos whilst continuing with his nuclear projects. That being said, the effectiveness of soft power resources heavily depends on the context (Nye, 2004; pp.11-13).

(ii) *Political values* are an essential aspect of soft power and are championed by the government in both domestic and international policies. Governments have less control over soft power than they do over hard power. For example, popular culture can sometimes contradict a government's efforts to improve relations with other countries, as seen in the case of the existence of many American movies that criticize Islam, whilst the U.S.A was trying to influence Pakistan's policies (Nye, 2004; p.13).

(iii) *Foreign and domestic policies* are also crucial in effectively exercise soft power. Double standards and hypocritical policies can significantly reduce a country's attractiveness, as seen in the aftermath of the 2003 Iraq War. Some policies can have a long-term impact and may

only begin to influence other countries' policies when the context aligns with them, such as Carter's human rights policies in Argentina (Nye, 2004; pp.13-14).

	HARD POWER	SOFT POWER
Spectrum of Behaviors	Command ← Coercion Inducement →	Agenda setting Attraction → Co - opt
Most Likely Resources	Payment Force Sanctions Bribes	Institutions Values Culture Policies

Figure 1. Types of Power (Nye, 2004a; p.8)

An article written by Olga Leonova, “Soft Power as a state’s foreign policy Resource” (2014), builds on Joseph Nye’s original concept and expands the existing classification of sources of soft power by dividing them into two types of factors: External and Internal. External factors include foreign policy, the geopolitical status of the state, civilization status, political and economic development model of the state, development strategy, country’s information resources, and communicative mobility. Internal factors include ideology, lifestyle, quality, values (incl. national ideas), national mentality, national culture (art, literature, theatre, religion), state’s creative potential, and ability to generate ideas and technologies (Leonova, 2014).

When compared (Figure 1), soft power is often cheaper than coercion because it doesn’t require confrontation or a hard-line approach (Nye, 2003). Additionally, Soft power doesn’t rely on hard power. The Vatican has significant soft power without having military or hard capabilities (Nye, 2004a). Furthermore, the exercise of hard power usually undermines and damages the ability to use soft power. On the other hand, a country that is in a declining situation militarily and economically is likely to also lose its ability to “attract” and therefore its ability to use soft power (Nye, 2004a; p.9). According to Joseph Nye, hard power and soft power can have both supportive and conflicting effects on each other. A country that prioritizes on popularity gains may be reluctant to use its hard power when necessary. However, a country that exerts

its power without considering the impact on its soft power may face obstacles and barriers from others in the implementation of its hard power (Nye, 2004b).

Limitations

Soft power has become a popular theoretical framework for examining international relations as it can provide insights into how countries can exert influence without relying solely on coercion or force. However, like any theory, soft power has its own limitations. Nye acknowledges that some critics of the idea of soft power fail to recognize the link between attraction and imitation as components of soft power. However, he argues that in the majority of cases, these elements contribute to achieving desired political outcomes without resorting to threats or payments (Nye, 2004a; p.15). One of the main limitations of soft power is that it requires a receptive audience. As Joseph Nye points out, "soft power depends more than hard power upon the existence of willing interpreters and receivers" (Nye, 2004b). In other words, soft power is only effective if the audience accepts the narrative or image that a country is projecting. If the audience is not receptive, then the impact of soft power is reduced (Nye, 2004a; p.16). Furthermore, soft power is limited by cultural differences and preconceptions. Olga Leonova (2014) explains these limitations in her article, arguing that cultural differences can reject certain aspects of economic, political, and cultural life from outsiders, while cultural filters are mechanisms for interpreting and adapting exported phenomena (Leonova, 2014). Therefore, it is important to recognize that the effectiveness of soft power can be limited by the audience's cultural background and preconceptions. Another limitation of soft power is that its effects are not always measurable. Unlike hard power, which can be quantitatively measured through military or economic means, the impact of soft power is not always measurable. It can be also open to interpretation which makes it difficult to attribute specific results to soft power actions and strategies. At this point, Joseph Nye argues that "opinion polls are a good first approximation of both how attractive a country appears and the costs that are incurred by unpopular policies" (Nye, 2004a; p.18). Finally, some scholars have questioned the validity of soft power as a distinct form of power. As Kearn argues, soft power is "more an aspect of diplomacy than a distinct form of power" (Kearn, 2011, p. 71). It can be also argued that soft power is just one of the many tools that states use to achieve their goals and cannot be separated from other aspects of foreign policy.

While soft power is a useful framework for understanding how countries shape perceptions of

publics, it also has its limitations which be taken into account. The success of soft power depends on various internal and external factors, such as the audience's willingness to accept the message, cultural barriers and the wider context in which it operates. As a result, it is important to recognize that soft power should not be treated as “panacea” and should be considered alongside other foreign policy tools. However, still is a very valuable analytical framework which, in some cases, can help researchers tackle the inherited complexity of international relations domain when analysing social dynamics and foreign policy strategies and outcomes. This is particularly true in cases where hard power is not visible and yet the foreign influence in domestic and foreign policies, remains.

Theoretical Relevance

When we consider the application of the concept of soft power to the relationship between Cyprus and Russia, it is clear that Russia implements different soft power strategies to influence the perceptions and preferences of the Cyprus population. The influence on the cultural and religious domains is one of the most significant tools of Russian soft power in Cyprus. In Cyprus, the vast majority of the population identify as Orthodox Christians. Russia, as expected, has capitalized on this commonality to present itself as a defender of Orthodox values and a supporter of the Cypriot Orthodox Church. Additionally, Russia has invested in the Cypriot economy, specifically and most importantly in the real estate and tourism sectors. Recently, there's also been activity of significant investment in the sports industry, specifically in football sector. This economic investment is another crucial element of Russian soft power in Cyprus. Russia has also used media and information to present a positive image of itself in Cyprus. Furthermore, it is important to mention that in Cyprus, there's a significant number of expatriate Russians, especially in Limassol. The significant physical and hybrid presence in Cyprus enables Russia to influence public opinion and shape narratives around issues that are essential to the country. Examining these soft power strategies allows for a better understanding of the dynamics of the relationship between Russia and Cyprus. These strategies have enabled Russia to shape perceptions and preferences in Cyprus without relying on military force or coercion. This is important because the relationship between the two countries was never heavily based on traditional hard power factors of military presence and coercion. Economic presence was always there, but it has been used as a complementary tool to achieve goals rather

as the main weapon. Russia's employment of soft power strategies, such as cultivating cultural and religious ties, economic investment, and media presence, are all examples of how it has managed to construct a positive image of itself in Cyprus and impact the country's foreign policy decisions.

In conclusion, the concept of soft power is a relevant theoretical framework for analyzing the relationship between Russia and Cyprus. Analyzing the soft power elements employed by Russia provides insight into how it shapes perceptions and preferences in Cyprus and influences the country's foreign policy decisions. The use of soft power has become increasingly significant in a globalized world where the application of force is often seen as illegitimate and counterproductive. As a result, understanding how countries such as Russia employ soft power can offer valuable insights into the changing nature of international relations and the role of non-coercive means in achieving foreign policy objectives.

III. Research Methodology

The methodology employed in this thesis involves the utilization of qualitative case study analysis. To achieve the research objective of identifying the use of Russian soft power in Cyprus and its political outcomes, the theoretical framework of soft power will be applied. The approach taken will involve the analysis of official sources from the Republic of Cyprus, Russian orthodox church, Church of Cyprus, United Nations, official opinion polls by the Cypriot statistical service as well as the Eurobarometer, official economic data on Russian capital activity in Cyprus, primary and secondary sources, media outlets, official documents, official websites and public statements from high officials.

The researcher will conduct a customized qualitative analysis, focused on identifying instances of soft power manifestations. The analysis will involve the identification and selection of events and statements that align with the essential elements of soft power, including daily communications, strategic communication, and narratives based on culture, religion and other social linkages. The identified events will be quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed within the appropriate context specific to Cyprus. The political outcomes resulting from these events will be traced back to the previously identified strategic goals, which will also be subject to qualitative analysis.

In order to conduct a thorough investigation, the sources utilized in this thesis were selected based on their reliability and relevance to the research questions. The chosen sources include surveys, population censuses, governmental documents (such as legislation and bilateral agreements), official websites, and media platforms. Through the application of this methodology along with the utilization of these resources, the study seeks to shed light on: Cyprus' susceptibility to Soft power, what soft power tools are employed by Russia and the efficacy of this soft power strategy within the Cyprus domain.

The selection of the qualitative case study approach aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the Russian soft power strategies and effectiveness in Cyprus. This methodology is especially useful when examining and complex social and political issues, like soft power, which

require a holistic approach to understand and examine them. The application of diverse sources assures rigorous analysis, and ensures a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. By utilizing this methodology, it becomes possible for the researcher to uncover patterns, themes and correlations amid various aspects relating to the area under investigation, thus contributing to a better understanding of the topic as well. Significantly, this approach acknowledges the importance of economic, cultural and religious factors in exercising soft power. It also takes into account the complex nature of these concepts as they are usually densely interconnected and each of them contributes in its own way to reach to the same final result – effectively wielding soft power.

A. Research Questions

In the initial proposal, the primary focus of the research was focused on Russia's employment of soft power as a means to exert influence on Cyprus' domestic and foreign policies. Nevertheless, through conducting extensive research, it became apparent that this broad question failed to fully capture important aspects related to Russian soft power that were applicable to my investigation. To address this, the research questions were slightly modified to provide a clearer and more cohesive focus. Therefore, the present study aims to answer the following Research Questions (RQ):

RQ-1: To what extent is Cyprus susceptible to Russian soft power?

RQ-2: What specific strategies and tactics does Russia use to exert soft power in Cyprus?

RQ-3: How effective is Russian soft power in influencing attitudes and behaviours in Cyprus?

B. Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into four chapters:

First Chapter: Understanding Russian Soft Power. This chapter will present and discuss how Russia perceives soft power through its own lens. The link between Russian soft power understanding and strategies and Cyprus, will start to take shape.

Second Chapter: Historical Overview: Relations between Cyprus and the USSR (1950s – 1990s). This chapter will serve as a historical overview. It will present the most important aspects of Cyprus – USSR relations throughout a crucial period of difficult times for both parties. This chapter will serve as a strong foundation for the reader to understand the historical background of the relations between both the relevant states and societies.

Third Chapter: Russian Soft Power Tools in Cyprus. This chapter will present in detail the various soft power tools being used by Russia to increase its presence and intensify its linkages with Cyprus to effectively exert soft power.

Fourth Chapter: Russian soft power Effectiveness. This chapter will draw upon data presented in previous chapters and will also present new data, such as opinion polls and surveys to assess the effectiveness of Russian soft power in Cyprus

Fifth Chapter: Discussion. The chapter will link theories, facts, data and information presented and discuss them in a structured way to help the thesis eventually answer each of the research questions set at the beginning.

The thesis will finish with a brief conclusion on everything discussed, including a brief summary and closing remarks by the author.

1. Understanding Russian Soft Power

In this ever-increasing complexity of the environment in the international Relations theatre, states are individual and multifaceted players with inherent complexities while at the same time being influenced by multiple external, as well as internal sources and actors. Each actor understands the concepts of the system in a unique way, filtered through their individual lenses of idiosyncrasies, culture, values, historical and strategic narratives. They interpret the relevant terms, variables, developments and dynamics of the system based on their very own perspectives. Obviously, one crucial factor in filtering the wider international system, is how and where, a nation or a state, place itself within this system.

That being said, Russia has a totally different understanding of itself as an actor on the international stage than that of most European countries (Hudson, 2015). Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia had to face several structural problems, including identity crisis. As Moscow was about to enter a new Post – Soviet regional and global status quo, it had to decide what to represent, which values and narratives to project and what image to build for other nations to see. Despite facing various challenges since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia believed, and still believes, that its natural endowments can maintain the nation's influence as a major global power in world affairs and hold its position as a regional hegemon. These natural endowments refer to its huge – although shrinking – population, nuclear arsenal, vast territory, and natural resources (Hudson, 2015). Nevertheless, according to Okara (2007) raw materials weren't enough, and an alternative idea needed to be in place to project Russia as the epicentre of an alternative pole and civilization, conservative in nature, representing morality and traditional values (Hudson, 2015).

At this crucial juncture of history, soft power re-emerged in the political agendas of Moscow and became a hot topic of discussion. As an emerging state and global actor, Russia has been using soft power tools to achieve geopolitical and other goals since the Russian empire (Tsygankov, 2006). More recently, Russian leaders were determined to learn and counter the techniques of projecting soft power that appeared to work very effectively for the West and especially the U. S (Rutland & Kazantsev, 2016; p.396). Since the 2000s, soft power's significance has grown in Russian foreign policy. Putin acknowledged and interpreted the

concept of soft power as a “*Complex of tools and methods for achieving foreign policy goals without deploying weapons, using information tools and other forms of intervention*” (Meister, 2016; p.7). In order to accomplish this, Russia is utilizing its commonness with specific foreign publics, and at the same time using the vital role of the Orthodox Christianity in every aspect of the nation and the presence of the Russian orthodox church in coreligionist societies (Timuş, 2022). To further enhance its attempt on projecting soft power in foreign publics, Moscow has also created organizations such as Russkiy Mir Foundation and Rossotrudnichestvo. The latter was originally established to advance Russian language and culture in post-soviet countries and currently operates in a wider range of nations. On the other hand, Russkiy Mir Foundation is responsible to maintain the language and culture of Russian speakers who may be residing outside the state and at the same time identifying themselves to be members of the Russian culture and society in the world (Rutland & Kazantsev, 2016; p.402). With the creation of such organizations which were focused on improving the general Russian Nation’s image to the outer world, soft power started to become embodied in Russian Policy papers (Hudson, 2015). The presence of soft power in such policies was seen, for instance, in the launch of “Russia Today” in 2005, an international television broadcaster in which, Moscow spent \$2 Billion by 2013. In 2008, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergei Lavrov, defined soft power as the “*ability to influence the world with the attraction of one’s civilization, culture, foreign policy*” (Kiseleva, 2015). In 2010, a policy document by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs highlighted the importance that the cultural promotion should play as part of the wider Russian Foreign Policy and strategy. In 2011, Sergei Lavrov, again, said: “*Today it is clear that without a skillful use of soft power it is not possible to defend one’s country’s interests*” (Rutland & Kazantsev, 2016; p.396). In 2013, Russia, for the first time, officially embedded “soft power” in its Foreign Policy Doctrine (Timuş, 2022; p.1006). The Prime Minister of Russia, Dmitri Medvedev, mentioned that soft power is a unique tool of global leadership that depends on human potential. He also stated that Russia should create favorable conditions to effectively use this tool (Kiseleva, 2015). Furthermore, the head of Rossotrudnichestvo, Konstantin Kosachev, he endorsed Nye’s conceptualization of Soft Power about the strategy of being attractive in order to win others’ willing support but - interestingly - he distinguishes between soft power and propaganda (Kiseleva, 2015).

In their article for Political studies association, Sergunin and Karabeshkin (2015) offer a more-structured perspective on Russian Soft power by identifying and listing the four main soft power strategies that are being used specifically by Russia: (I) *Cultural Diplomacy*, (II) *Public Diplomacy*, (III) *Economic Diplomacy* and; (IV) *Political Diplomacy*.

(I) *Cultural Diplomacy* which is projected through the use of Russia's rich cultural heritage, including literature, art and religion. Promoting Russian Language and culture through education and media is the most common tool for effectively exercising cultural diplomacy. Another important asset for Moscow, is the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). The ROC has played a crucial role in shaping Russia's soft power strategies. This particular topic will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter of this paper.

(II) *Public Diplomacy* is being used to improve Russia's image and influence abroad. Public Diplomacy initiatives including media outreach, public relations campaigns and educational exchanges.

(III) *Economic Diplomacy* refers to the strategy through which Russia utilizes its economic resources as a means of exerting influence and projecting its soft power. This includes investments in various sectors and, in many cases, its strong presence in the global energy sector.

(IV) *Political Diplomacy* is another tool in Russia's wider strategy for effective soft power projection. This includes alliances with other authoritarian regimes and mainly, challenging the Western liberal values.

Sergunin and Karabeshkin (2015) argue that even though these strategies have been effective for building alliances with other authoritarian regimes and in promoting the Russian culture in foreign publics, they have been undermined by Russia's tendency on using hard power (Military interventions, cyber operations etc) and its systematically confrontational stance against the West and its values. They also highlight the importance of taking into account that there is not coherence and cohesion on how Russia perceives soft power, there are several ideas among Russian IR theorists and politicians. However, all of them agree that Russian soft power includes NGO initiatives, Public Diplomacy, Economic Diplomacy and Cultural Diplomacy.

Another interpretation on Russian Soft power tools can be found in Laruelle's (2021) writings. In her article "*Russia's Niche Soft Power*", the author outlines four niches of soft power that can be found in Russian Foreign Policy. (I) Cultural Diplomacy, (II) Soviet

Legacy, (III) Ideology and Governance, (IV) Status on International Scene.

(I) The cultural diplomacy aspect is identical to Sergunin and Karabeshkin (2015), as discussed above. Laruelle (2021) takes an additional step and argues that Russia is particularly interested in exerting its influence over Orthodox nations and communities by promoting fraternal religious sentiments and this strategy is mainly focused on the Balkans with Greece and **Cyprus** as key players.

(II) Soviet legacy refers to the on-going effort of Moscow to build a powerful nation with strong soft power presence, on the ashes of the former Soviet power. It focuses mainly on re-opening communication with left-wing parties in the West and Pro – Russian movements.

(III) The projection of Russian Governance and ideology is another important tool for Moscow. Russia presents itself as an alternative “pole”, a guardian of the traditional values in an ever changing and increasingly immoral world. In this context, Russia stands against this wave of immoralism, and over-progressiveness promoted by the Western values and liberal policies. This niche also expands to the economic sphere, criticizing globalization and its effects on national economies.

(IV) The fourth niche of Russian Soft Power is about its status on the international scene as a “joker”. This strategy allows Russia to destabilize the west-dominated international system from within, using various instruments like RT, Sputnik to promote its values and devalue the Western societies.

In the book *Routledge Handbook of Soft Power* (Chitty et al., 2017), Yelena Osipova argues that under Putin’s presidency, Russia has set a goal to become an influential global actor with the ultimate ambition to create an opposition front to the American Liberalism and to become equally important (p. 37). This can be seen by the creation and promoting of similar and alternative western projects such as the Eurasian Economic Union or the BRICS. Osipova argues that Russian Soft Power is based on resources such as (I) information and image making; and (II) Cultural Diplomacy. The importance of these resources is profound in the increasing state - allocated budget for this kind of projects and organizations (pp. 348 – 353).

On the (I) information and image sphere, Osipova, highlights the prominent role of public diplomacy tools, such as the RT (Russia Today), Sputnik International, Russia Beyond the Headlines (RBTH), in promoting and upgrading the country’s public image abroad.

On the (II) Cultural Diplomacy aspect, Osipova mentions the key role of organizations, such as Russkiy Mir, Rossotrudnichestvo and the Gorchakov Foundation, for creating an attractive and seductive image of Russia abroad by organizing art exhibits, cultural performances, educational exchanges and Russian Language promotion.

Osipova (2017) also mentions that Russia is trying to wield soft power through international broadcasting, cultural and language promotion and branding in its public relations. Moscow's approach to soft power is focusing on the reestablishment of contacts and mobilization on Russians and Russian speakers around the world, while at the same time promoting "*an alternative cultural, moral and civilizational pole to attract those unhappy with western liberalism*".

This chapter discusses the concept of "Soft Power" in Russian discourse. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia faced many structural problems including an identity crisis. At this point and mainly under the Putin administration, soft power re-emerged as an important strategy for power projection abroad and became a hot topic in Moscow's political discourse. The Chapter outlines the main sources and strategies being used by Russia and the interpretation of Putin 's establishment of the concept of Soft Power. When it comes to the Russian perceptions on Soft Power, it can be extracted that there are different interpretations due to the lack of cohesion and uniformity in the understanding in both academic and political circles. Nevertheless, despite the existence of different interpretations, the resources of soft power mentioned are the same or significantly similar between them. Public Diplomacy, Economic Diplomacy and Cultural Diplomacy are the most common resources in Moscow's realization strategy for soft power projection in academic and political domains. With everything mentioned so far in mind, in the following chapter, our focus is placed on Cyprus and how Russia projects its soft power to exert its influence in that specific case. As the primary focus of this thesis is the on-the-ground analysis of Russian Soft Power in Cyprus, the key tools and concepts relevant to the case study will be discussed in more depth.

2. Historical Overview: Relations between Cyprus and the USSR

Throughout its history, Cyprus has played a crucial role as a geostrategic location due to its position at the crossroads of major trade routes connecting three different continents. Its location, as the furthest point in the east of the Mediterranean basin, makes it an ideal base for carrying out large-scale operations on land, sea, and air in the Middle East (Maslova et al., 2020; p.200). The above-mentioned factors should be taken into account whenever someone attempts to analyze Cyprus' positioning within the framework of the great geopolitical powers rivalries in the region. Additionally, it is important to analyze any given case through the lens of the specific time period and the global power dynamics that existed in the relevant international theater. In this chapter, a historical overview of the relations between Cyprus and the USSR will be presented, starting from the Post – WWII era until the collapse of the USSR. This time – period was crucial in shaping the modern world and has heavily contributed in forming the global power dynamics as we recognize them today. During that period, everything was filtered and influenced by the cold – war environment, the Soviet vs West confrontation – a battle which was fought indirectly in many different battlefields and Cyprus – with such an important Geostrategic location – couldn't have been an exception. Great powers attempted in various situations either to control or influence the political developments of the island by changing or maintaining the relevant status quo. The most important turning points of the island's modern history were the official independence from the British rule on 1st October in 1960 and the Turkish Invasion in 1974. Thus, this chapter is also divided in two sub – sections: the Independence and the Post - Invasion period. In both periods, the Russian presence in Cyprus was strong, especially on a diplomatic level. Russian involvement in Cypriot domestic politics should always be analysed whilst having in mind the subsequent developments in the domestic politics of the key regional actors, namely Greece and Türkiye and their external alignment orientation and/or shifts. As we will see in this chapter, key regional actors' alignment, power dynamics, NATO and the balancing of interests, were the most important factors that pushed Moscow to actively participate in the developments within the Cyprus domain. The primary objective of gaining access to the Mediterranean Sea was considered a driving force behind Soviet foreign policy. At the same

time, the transportation of oil from the Middle East had held great importance for Western economies, which forced the USSR to take action in that region (Maslova et al., 2020; p.200).

2.1 The Post – WWII Era: The Motherlands (1940s – 1950s)

As mentioned above, in order to fully understand Soviet – Cyprus relations, it is necessary to consider them in the broader context of Soviet relationships with other allies, after the Second World War (WWII), like Greece and Türkiye. Soviet historians have a tough time analysing Soviet relations with Greece and Türkiye due to the challenge of document classification, particularly with regards to military documents that are still classified (Nikitina et al., 2020; p.183). In the late 1980s, previously secret archives in the West were opened, leading to a renewed interest in the UK's involvement in Greece and Cyprus after World War II. One report that caught a lot of attention was published by the Joint Intelligence Subcommittee in the UK in December 1944. The report suggested that if the relationship between the UK and USSR remained friendly, the USSR would not interfere with Greece falling under UK's influence after the war. The report also mentioned that the USSR would try to establish regional dominance in the Black Sea area without occupying any territories. It was also predicted that the USSR would make efforts to prevent Türkiye from forming closer ties with the West and to establish Türkiye as a Soviet ally. However, there was a risk of the USSR making territorial claims over the Kars region, which Türkiye had lost after World War I. In March 1945, these assertions were expressed and then repeated at the Potsdam Conference in July-August 1945. During this conference, the USSR declared that the Treaty of Brotherhood, which was signed in 1921, was made at a time when the Soviet Union was still young and fragile. Therefore, the USSR wished to regain the territories that were surrendered to Türkiye under the Treaty of Moscow (Nikitina et al., 2020; pp. 183 – 185). The events that followed proved the report's predictions to be right, as the USSR indeed attempted to deter Türkiye from allying with the West while supporting communist forces in Greece. This only increased anti-Soviet sentiment in Greece, leading both Greece and Türkiye to align with the West. The report's release in the 1980s provided a new perspective on the post – war actions of the UK.

One of the reasons why Greece's Communist Party did not get support from the USSR was possibly that the latter had already made an agreement with the UK in May 1944 to divide the spheres of interest, as mentioned earlier. Under this agreement, the UK was responsible for Greece, while the USSR was responsible for maintaining control over Romania (TNA, n.d; Siracusa, 1981; p.381) The agreement is known as "The Percentages agreement" and it was rather an informal secret agreement. No confirmation has ever been made on whether this agreement was in effect, however, if it was, then Stalin did keep his promise about Greece. Anti-Soviet sentiment in Greece grew after the Paris Peace Conference in 1946, where the Soviet Union supported Albania and Bulgaria against Greek territorial claims. The USSR's diplomatic mission head, Vyacheslav Molotov, labelled Greece an "aggressive non-democratic state." The Soviet Union and Yugoslavia were keen on supporting communist Albania and Bulgaria and using Greek territorial claims in Northern Epirus to gain a military or trade base in the Mediterranean (Dragostinova, 2018; Nikitina et al., 2020; p. 184). However, the Western allies opposed this strategy, which aimed at acquiring a maritime foothold in the Mediterranean (Nikitina et al., 2020; p.184). On the other hand, the relationship with Türkiye was not smooth either. Türkiye's decision to join NATO in 1952 was a response to the USSR's assertive stance after World War II (NATO, n.d; Nikitina et al., 2020; 184). The Soviet Union wanted to reclaim the territories ceded to Türkiye under the Treaty of Moscow, which Türkiye had signed with the USSR in 1921 (Aydoğan, 2021). Despite the Western allies' attempts to resolve the territorial dispute bilaterally, the USSR persisted in its efforts to internationalize the issue. This led to Türkiye and Greece joining NATO simultaneously, with the Western allies uniting against Stalin's claims (Nikitina et al., 2020; p.184).

In summary, the post-World War II period was crucial, as the Soviet Union's assertive diplomacy led Greece and Türkiye to align with the West due to territorial disputes and ideological differences. These strained relationships ultimately resulted in the two countries aligning with the Western bloc

2.2 From Struggle to Independence: A newly founded state in Crisis (1960s)

The relationship between Cyprus and the Soviet Union began in the 1950s. At that time, the island was still under the British colonial rule and the struggle for “Enosis”¹ – which eventually led to independence - was about to erupt. At this point, Turkish Cypriot initially expressed their opposition to “*enosis*”, their desire for the continuation of the British rule and after the guerrilla war began, they created their own paramilitary Organization, named TMT (Turkish Resistance Organization) aiming to achieve the “*Taksim*”² (Papadakis et al., 2006; p. 2). The guerrilla war started in 1955 but the Greek Cypriot orthodox church and the Greek Cypriot nationalists were preparing the ground since the early 1950s, when the very first referendum for the unification of the island with Greece has taken place. The struggle for Independence from the British Rule and eventually “Enosis” with Greece, officially started on the 1st of April 1955 by a paramilitary group named EOKA. The group was militarily led by one of the most important historical figures in the modern history of Cyprus, namely *General Georgios Grivas Digenis* – a nationalist, anti – communist and royalist militarist, who spend his life at the battlefields (Cyprus Mail, 2016b). Amongst others, he also fought against the communists during the Greek – Civil war being the leader of an anti - communist paramilitary organization in Greece, named “Organization X” (Papageorgiou, 2004). The political leader of “EOKA” was Archbishop Makarios, another historical figure who has shaped the past and the future of Cyprus.

¹ In Greek, “Enosis” means “Unification”. “Enosis” is a political concept that emerged in Cypriot social and political life in the early 20th century. This concept was supported by the Greek – Cypriot community in Cyprus, thus the vast majority of the island. Having the same religion, culture, history and language, Greek Cypriots were always seeing themselves as an integral part of the Greek nation. Thus, the political concept and the idea of “Enosis” aimed to unite the island with the Greek state. This concept was the main vehicle used by the Greek – Cypriot nationalists to launch the guerrilla war against the British colonialists in 1955. Additionally, the term heavily influenced the developments in the first years of the life of the Republic of Cyprus and defined the values, the aspirations, and the identity of the Greek Cypriot community

² *Taksim* is a Turkish word literally means “partition” or “Division”. As a concept *Taksim* was used by the paramilitary organization TMT and by some Turkish Cypriot politicians. The main idea was to divide the island into Turkish and Greek portions. *Taksim* as a concept was developed as a response to the “Enosis” concept which was developed by Greek Cypriots in the early 20th century. Both concepts were fuelled either by Greek or Turkish nationalism (Kizilyurek, 2003)

As expected, the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) and the Communist Party of Cyprus (AKEL – The Progressive Party of the Working People) opposed the actions of EOKA. Specifically, on April 24th, 1955, Nicos Zachariades, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Greece, accused EOKA of being a tool created and funded by British and American imperialism. He alleged that the ultimate goal was to allow western imperialists to establish British military bases on the island as part of the final settlement of the Cyprus problem, and to eventually defeat the communist forces in Cyprus (AKEL) (Sakellaropoulos, 2022; p.205). In addition, the Communist parties of Greece and Cyprus, as well as the USSR, shared the same concern: a possible settlement of the problem within a framework determined by NATO. Furthermore, because of the warm and increasing popular support for EOKA by the publics in Greece and Cyprus, the KKE redirected its criticism towards the Greek government's wrongdoings (instead of EOKA), which, in their opinion, put the Cypriot population in a dangerous position (Sakellaropoulos, 2022; pp. 207-208). Apart from the 1955 Cyprus revolt, there was also an attack on Greeks living in Istanbul, otherwise known as “the Istanbul Pogrom” which worsened relations between Greece and Western countries as well as Greek-Turkish relations (Katsoulas, 2021; p.59). This development was beneficial to Soviet interests because the first serious rift inside the NATO emerged. At this point, it became clear that the ongoing unresolved situation in Cyprus could be an opportunity for the Soviet Union to exploit and/or leverage potential future disagreements within NATO. Additionally, the United Nations was where the Soviet Union was active in the 1950s. They strongly supported Greece's efforts to internationalize the Cyprus Question in the UN General Assembly. The main reason behind Moscow’s support for the Greek claims over the Cyprus question, was, again, to prevent the realization of a NATO solution to the problem, as that could strengthen Western influence in the region (Stergiou, 2007; p.88). Other countries in the Warsaw Pact also supported Soviet diplomacy.

The guerrilla war led by EOKA was officially ended in 1959, 4 years after its first military operation took place. Subsequently, Cyprus gained its official independence on October 1st, 1960, following the signing of the London-Zurich agreements and two treaties of alliance and guarantee in 1959. Archbishop Makarios, who was also the political leader of EOKA, signed these agreements which paved the way for the establishment of an independent state (Panayiotides, 2021; UN, n.d). The newly founded state wanted to effectively set foot at the international stage of politics, thus, in just a few months, it became a member of the United Nations and the Commonwealth, which allowed it to maintain an important economic and

diplomatic channel with the United Kingdom and relatively good relations with other former British colonies (Ker-Lindsay, 2010; p. 67). However, due to the Cold War environment, the island had to decide on its future strategic political alignment and orientation on the global theatre of politics. Cyprus decided against joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and chose to pursue a non-aligned stance (Ker-Lindsay, 2010; p. 68).

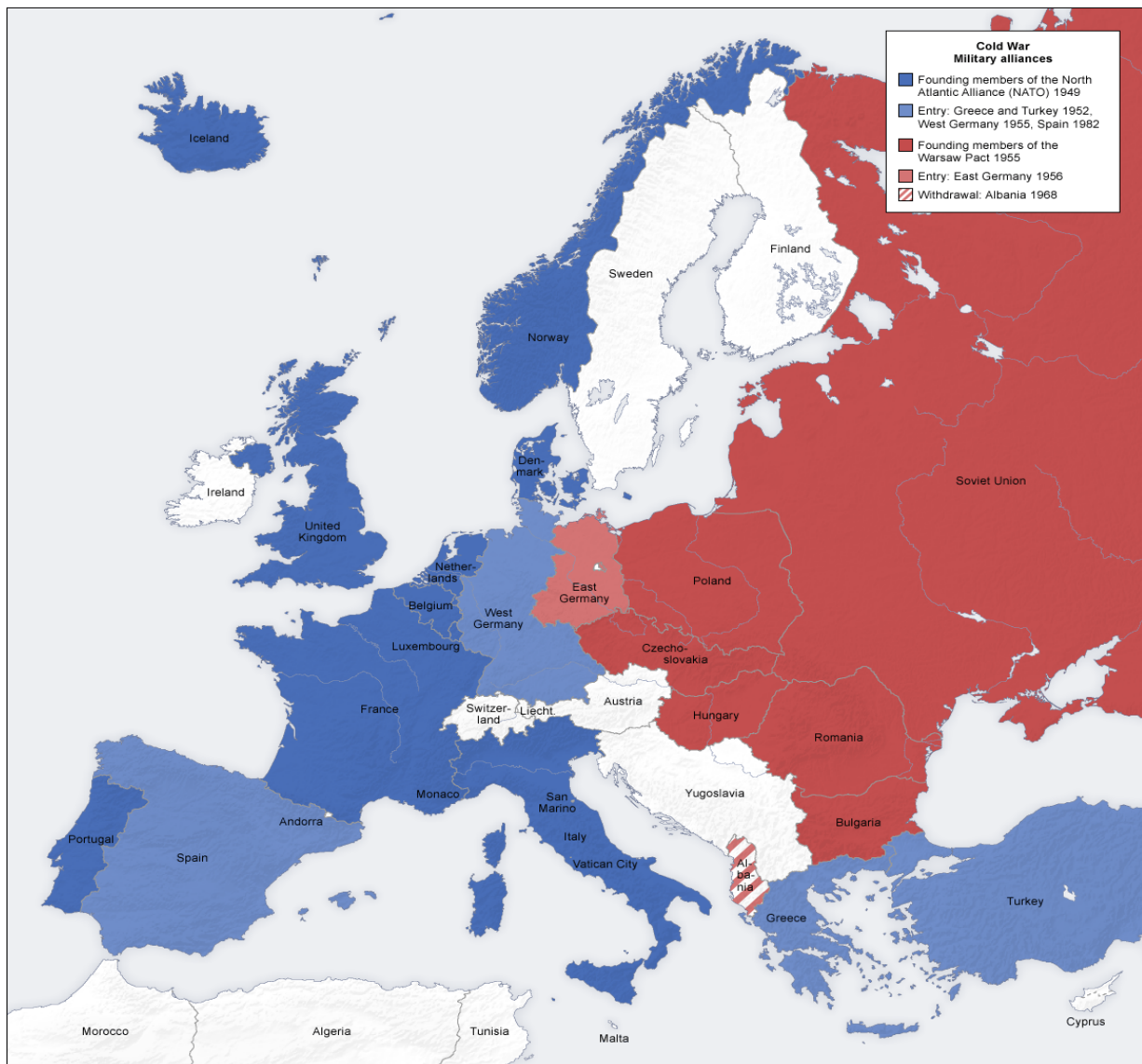


Figure 2. Cold War Europe Military Alliances Map (World History commons, n.d)

Diplomatic relations between the USSR and the Republic of Cyprus were established on 18 August 1960 with the Soviet Union becoming one of the first states recognizing the newly founded Republic (Nikitina et al., 2020; p.186). During the first years of life of the Republic, the Soviet Union tried to increase its influence in domestic politics by leveraging on the ideological background and commonness with the communist party, AKEL. That period,

AKEL was the most organized and strongest political party in the island and always loyal to Moscow without significant ideological splits on the inside (Stergiou, 2007; p.89). During the period 1960 – 1963 the first consequences of the problematic constitution of the newly founded republic became apparent. By 1963, it had become clear that Cyprus inherited all the flaws of a constitution, that was not created freely by the people of Cyprus but imposed by foreign powers instead. The latter led to widespread discontent among Cypriots, as many of the Constitution's provisions were not compatible with the international law. For example, the inability to amend the Constitution meant that the Republic of Cyprus was fully dependent upon the guarantor powers, namely Greece, Türkiye, United Kingdom, and lacked necessary functions and elements that defines statehood, such as internal independence and territorial control. Additionally, certain provisions promoting communal division created sources of conflict between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. For example, Greek Cypriots were feeling discomfort because the Turkish Cypriot community, which was only 18% of the population, had a 30% participation rate in the public service. This provision offended the international accepted principle of the right of equal access for everyone to the public service of his country (PIO Cyprus, n.d). Furthermore, the requirement of separate majorities for passing certain national laws in the House of Representatives caused issues in the normal function of the state. Moreover, the most crucial source of conflict was the right of final veto that was given to the President and Vice-President of the Republic against any decision in both the House of Representatives and the Council of Ministers³. This practically meant that in some cases, the Vice President, representing the Turkish Cypriot community that held 30% of public service positions despite only making up 18% of the population, could veto decisions made by bodies representing the other 70% of the public service and the 82% of the population, including the other 3 constitutionally recognized religious group minorities namely Armenians, Latins and Maronites (Varnava, 2018)⁴.

³The Constitution of Cyprus prevented the Greek majority from shaping the future of their country as they wanted. The Constitution was based on the Consociational Democracy model, which prioritizes communities over individuals, much like how the Ottoman Empire was governed. As a result, Cyprus had a communalist situation where the focus was on the two communities, rather than on individual citizens. Despite the belief that the 1960 Constitution called for a unified state, it actually established a duality of power and an administrative federation. Under this Constitution, only Greeks could elect the President and only Turks could elect the Vice-President, both of whom had veto power. The Parliament consisted of 35 Greek and 15 Turkish representatives, with separate electoral lists being used. Moreover, many laws required the approval of Turkish representatives. The Supreme Court had one Greek, one Turkish, and one foreign judge (Theophanous, 2021)

⁴ Cypriot citizens were classified as belonging to either the Greek Cypriot community or the Turkish Cypriot community. Other religious groups had the option to choose membership in either of the two groups (The European Committee of the Regions, n.d). In 1960, following the island's independence and the establish of the Republic of Cyprus constitution, Maronites, Armenians and Latins decided to join the Greek Cypriot Community (Varnava, 2018)

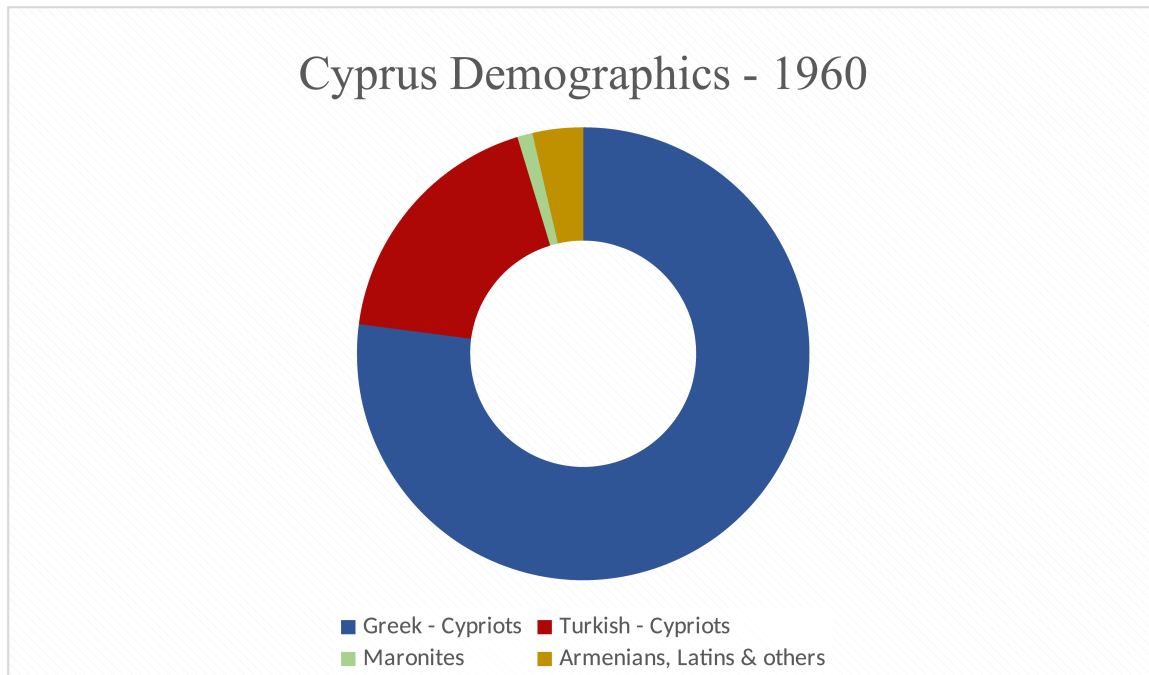


Figure 3. Cyprus Demographics in 1960 (PIO Cyprus, 2012)

To address these problems, on the 16th of November 1963, President Makarios III suggested a series of measures to restore the smooth functioning of the state and reduce intercommunal tensions (PIO Cyprus, n.d). However, these measures, known as “Thirteen Points”, were rejected by the Turkish Cypriot community leading to the increase of the violence and intercommunal tensions (Panayiotides, 2020). The intercommunal violence period began after a murder remembered by the Turkish Cypriots as the “Bloody Christmas” (Bir, 2022). The battle of Tylliria followed by many other armed collisions taking place all over the island (Christou, 2017; New York Times, 1964). The battles were mainly fought between pro – enosis and pro – taksim militias. At that time, Türkiye had prepared its war fleet and fighter jets, which flew over Nicosia. However, the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) prevented Türkiye from getting directly involved in the conflict (United Nations, 1964). Despite the ceasefire agreement in Nicosia, Turkish Cypriots were still under attack, especially in Limassol (Stephen, 2004). Makarios III was worried about a possible Turkish invasion, so he created the "National Guard", a Greek Cypriot army composed of conscripts. The army was commanded by the leader of EOKA, general *Georgios Grivas Digenis* – a persona non grata for Turkish Cypriots - and 20,000 well-equipped officers and men were secretly sent from Greece to Cyprus. Türkiye threatened to intervene again, but American

President Lyndon B. Johnson sent a letter to prevent a conflict between NATO allies namely Greece and Türkiye, during such a crucial period for the future of the Cold War.

Turkish Cypriots established an important position in Tylliria Region and more specifically at Kokkina⁵, receiving weapons, volunteers, and supplies from Türkiye and other countries. The Cypriot government viewed this as a major threat and invited George Grivas, a Greek commander, to return from Greece and lead an attack on the bridgehead. Türkiye responded by bombing Greek positions with fighter jets, prompting Makarios to threaten an attack on every Turkish Cypriot village if the bombings did not stop (BBC, 1964). Both Greece and Türkiye began to concentrate troops on their borders, and mediation efforts by Dean Acheson and UN-appointed mediator Galo Plaza were unsuccessful (Brands, 1987; p.356). The division between the two communities became increasingly apparent and the status quo was starting to be taking shape and becoming concrete.

During the crisis period,

During the crisis in Cyprus, Makarios had requested the involvement of the Soviet military in case of a Turkish intervention. This caused concern among officials from the US, who began to perceive Cyprus as a similar situation to 'the Mediterranean Cuba' (Guney, 2004; p.30). However, an analysis of the statements made by the Soviet Government in the early stages of the crisis shows that Cyprus was not a top priority for them. In the subsequent months, Moscow's approach towards the crisis was hesitant and unclear (Stergiou, 2007; p.93). In addition, the Soviet Union intervened, many times, on a diplomatic level in regard to the Cyprus problem. More specifically, Nikita Khrushchev criticized Türkiye and the Western world and accused NATO of trying to gain influence over the island at the expense of the people of Cyprus (Nikitina et al., 2020; p.187). The Soviet Union also criticized the outcomes of the London Conference which proposed NATO being actively involved in the crisis to resolve the crisis, as it would be a defeat for Soviet diplomacy in the eastern Mediterranean. The USSR condemned the Acheson Plan⁶, a plan created and devised by the US to divide the

⁵ During the 1963-1964 inter-communal conflict, Tylliria region, where Kokkina is located, was a place where Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities often clashed. The Republic of Cyprus government believed that Kokkina was a point where Turkish paramilitaries and weapons could enter Cyprus. As a result of the fighting, thousands of Turkish Cypriots had gathered in enclaves since December 1963. Kokkina was one of the last port areas under Turkish Cypriot control and an important supply route to Türkiye for the fighters.

⁶ The Acheson Plan: scheme proposed by the US in 1964 to resolve the Cyprus crisis. Under that plan, a buffer zone would be established dividing the island into Greek and Turkish territories and each side would be responsible for its own administration, enjoying local autonomy on crucial matters. In addition, Cyprus would have united with Greece, Türkiye would have been given military bases on the Karpasia Peninsula and British military bases would have remained.. Soviet Union considered this plan as an attempt by the U.S to undermine Soviet influence and gain a foothold in the region through its NATO allies (Kanli, 2016).

island into portions between Greece and Türkiye otherwise known as “Double Enosis” and instead, Moscow called for a peaceful resolution under the supervision of the UN Security Council (Sakkas & Zhukova, 2013; Cyprus Mail, 2016a). Moscow’s support led to the adoption of a UN Security council resolution in March 1964 that called for an end to the violence and the deployment of UN Peacekeeping forces for up to three months. These forces remain on the island until today. The resolution adopted by the UN security council with Moscow’s blessings, was in line with the principles of territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Cyprus, as well as the International Law (Nikitina et al., 2020; p.188). Nonetheless, Moscow's influence and presence in domestic affairs, extended beyond that. In the midst of the Cyprus Crisis from 1963 to 1964, Moscow demonstrated its willingness to increase collaboration with Cyprus by concluding bilateral arrangements, such as an air traffic treaty. Furthermore, in September 1964, Nicosia and Moscow concluded a Military and Economic cooperation agreement (Stergiou, 2007; p.96). The Republic of Cyprus received over 70 million USD worth of weaponry and relevant equipment from the countries of the Warsaw Pact mainly to upgrade the country’s forces. The Soviet Union also provided arms to assist Makarios III with to protect himself from the assassination attempts that were being orchestrated from individuals and paramilitary groups within the Greek – Cypriot community (Nikitina et al., 2020; p.188). Moscow additionally worked to improve its image in Cyprus without upsetting its relationship with Ankara by providing humanitarian assistance through other socialist countries (Stergiou, 2007; p.93); and at the same time working on multimillion worth infrastructure projects in Türkiye (Stergiou, 2007; p.95). The German Democratic Republic provided support to the Makarios government during the bicomunal riots, condemning intervention plans by NATO and West Germany and expressing solidarity with the Cypriot people for self-determination (Stergiou, 2007; p.94).

Summing up this period, the relationship between Cyprus and the Soviet Union began in the 1950s during the struggle for "Enosis" and independence from British colonial rule. The Soviet Union saw the ongoing Cyprus crisis as an opportunity to exploit and/or leverage potential future disagreements within NATO. Moscow strongly supported Greece's efforts to internationalize the Cyprus question in the UN General Assembly, mainly to prevent the realization of a NATO solution to the problem, which could strengthen Western influence in the region. Cyprus gained its official independence on October 1st, 1960 and chose to pursue a non-aligned stance. Additionally, Moscow was seeing the Cyprus crisis as NATO's excuse

to occupy the island, which highlights the complexity and challenges of international relations and diplomacy, especially during the Cold War Era. By the end of the challenging decade of the 1960s, the Soviet Union established strong connections with Cyprus especially in diplomacy, trade, and culture. The outcomes of these established connections were the creation of a soviet cultural centre in Nicosia, the increased number of the staff stationed in the Soviet Embassy in Cyprus and the ever-increasing number of Cypriot students admitted at Universities in the Soviet Union (Sakkas & Zhukova, 2013).

2.3 From Crisis to Invasion: The suddenness of a storm (1970s)

The situation in Cyprus became worse at the early 70s. The general Georgios Grivas Digenis (former EOKA leader) secretly returned to Cyprus after being in exile since the mid - 60s and created EOKA B⁷. The creation of the paramilitary group of EOKA B' was followed by a new cycle of crisis and bloodshed. However, this time, the violence wasn't just intercommunal but expanded into the Greek – Cypriot community itself (Fitchett, 1977b). EOKA B's sole aim was to achieve “enosis” with Greece and to oppose any plan or scheme suggested as a part of the peaceful resolution of the Cyprus issue. In that way, EOKA B' was also fighting against the president, Makarios III who they attempted to assassinate many times (Theodoulou, 2016). Members of EOKA – B were also responsible for kidnaps, violent attacks, and the assassination of U.S ambassador, Roger Davies (Fitchett, 1977a). After the death of its leader, Georgios Grivas Digenis in January 1974, it was believed that EOKA B was passed completely under the control of the Greek Junta, which came into power in Greece with a coup d'état on 21st of April 1967 (Sakkas & Zhukova, 2013).

⁷ EOKA B was a Greek Cypriot paramilitary organization that operated in Cyprus in the 1970s. The group emerged as a “successor” group from the original EOKA organization, which had fought against British colonial rule in the late 1950s and early 1960s. EOKA B was formed in 1971, and its goal was to overthrow the government of Cyprus and establish the immediate union with Greece. The organization's leader was Georgios Grivas, a former general in the Greek Army was also the leader of the original EOKA movement. EOKA B carried out a campaign of violence and terrorism in Cyprus, targeting both Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot individuals. The group was responsible for several high-profile attacks. The group was eventually disbanded in the late 1970s, following a series of crackdowns by the Cypriot government and international pressure. Despite its short lifespan, EOKA B remains a controversial and divisive topic in Cyprus, and its legacy continues to be felt in the ongoing conflict between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities on the island (Anadolu Agency, 2022).

Amid this storm, the soviet influence in the region was increasing. Türkiye's reproachment with the Soviet Union was an important political development which, especially in the sphere of the Cold War Era, couldn't go unnoticed. From 1945 to 1960, Türkiye's foreign policy was solely dependent on the West. But the period from 1960 to 1970 saw Türkiye become more distant with the West and seek closer ties with the Eastern bloc and Third World (Aslim, 2016; pp. 252 – 254). President Johnson's intervention against Türkiye's plan to invade Cyprus in 1964 forced Türkiye to re-evaluate its foreign policy (see page 8). Turkish leaders soon realized that their pro-Western alignment left the country unexpectedly isolated (Sakkas & Zhukova, 2013). The Cyprus issue led Türkiye to consider rapprochement with the Soviet Union. Türkiye hoped that the rapprochement with the Soviet Union would win positive Soviet support for its position on Cyprus and secure the support of the Communist bloc in the United Nations. Economic considerations also played a crucial role in Türkiye's foreign policy shift. American economic and military aid to Türkiye declined in the early 1960s. Türkiye's shift in foreign policy was also influenced by systemic factors, including the principle of "flexible response" replacing the NATO policy of "massive retaliation" (Sakkas & Zhukova, 2013). This prompted Türkiye to improve and expand its relations with the countries of Eastern Europe and the Third World to take advantage of its economic and political potential (Sakkas & Zhukova, 2013).

When it comes to Cyprus, in 1971, president Makarios III, had an official visit to the Soviet Union and stayed not only in Moscow but also in Kiev, Volgograd, Leningrad (St. Petersburg), and even Zagorsk (now known as Sergiev Posad, the center of Russian Orthodoxy). During his visit, Makarios attended the enthronement ceremony of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus' Pimen. The invitation extended to Makarios to attend the ceremony demonstrated the Soviet Union's recognition of the important relationship with Cyprus (Sakkas & Zhukova, 2013). Furthermore, according to Russian archives, the Soviet Union played a vital role in organizing Cyprus' state security through AKEL and in safeguarding Makarios from assassination attempts, as mentioned above. In 1973, AKEL received \$140,000 from the Soviet Union through the international fund of help for left-wing working organizations. At the beginning of July 1974, the Soviet Union secretly sent 100 guns and 2,500 cartridges to Cyprus at AKEL's request to protect party leaders from provocations and terror by the nationalist organization EOKA-B (Sakkas & Zhukova, 2013).

The situation in Greece wasn't good either. The dictatorship established in 1967 remained in power until the Turkish Invasion (with some changes in the leadership). The relations between Makarios III and The Soviet Union with Greek Junta were strained. Greek – Junta's pro-western and anti-communist stance worsened the relations between Greece and the USSR. Makarios III was convinced that Greek Junta was undermining his authority and Greek Junta was seeing Makarios III as an obstacle to the eventual achievement of the big dream of "enosis" (Financial Mirror, 2020). To achieve this plan, the only way was to overthrow Makarios III from power. At this point, Greek Junta utilized its influence in the Cyprus military (National Guard of Cyprus), the Special Forces and obviously, the EOKA B' which as mentioned earlier, after the death of its general Georgios Grivas Digenis, was under their effective control. On the 15th of July 1974, a coup d'état occurred in Cyprus, orchestrated jointly by Greek Junta and EOKA-B, to achieve the immediate enosis, which resulted in the toppling of the legitimate Makarios III government and the appointment of Nikos Sampson as the so – called president (PIO Türkiye, 2015; Lewis, 2001). After the Coup, Makarios III, called the guarantor powers to intervene to restore the constitutional order in the island. He directly invoked the article IV of the Treaty of Guarantee labelling the coup as a "Greek Invasion" which also has affected Turkish Cypriots as well. Using this statement as an ethical and legal justification, Türkiye invaded Cyprus on the 20th July 1974 (New York Times, 1974; Koumoullis, 2020). This statement by Makarios III at the United Nations Security Council was made based on Moscow's guidance and consultation (Drousiotis, 2014). The war ended with a ceasefire and the establishment of a UN-controlled buffer zone between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities. The Turkish military rapidly advanced, and by August 16, 1974, they had captured around a third of the island, including the northern part of Nicosia, the capital. The ceasefire was declared on August 16, and the Turkish forces established a de facto state in the north, which they called the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. The Greek Cypriot government retained control of the southern part of the island (PIO Cyprus, 2018; UNFICYP, n.d).

During the Cyprus crisis in 1974, the Soviet Union adopted a contradictory policy of appearing to support the Republic of Cyprus while remaining an observer. Despite knowing about Turkish preparations for invasion, the Soviets did not take any action to stop it, and even signalled non-opposition to intervention (Nicolet, 2001; p.443). Moscow also carefully avoided condemning the Turkish invasion, in order to maintain good relations with Türkiye

(Stergiou, 2007; p.98). There are researchers who interpret this lack of action as part of the Soviet-American détente⁸ and a gesture of acceptance of each superpower's sphere of vital interests (Coufoudakis, 2006; p.86). Others argue that the decision taken by Moscow not to intervene was ultimately influenced by the belief that a military collision between Greece and Türkiye would damage and significantly weaken NATO (Stergiou, 2007; p.98). The Soviets tried to keep all sides satisfied. As a result of the invasion, Greece withdrew from NATO military command. This decision came as a reaction move from Greece to express dissatisfaction for NATO allies' stance on the Turkish Invasion in Cyprus. The decision was taken on the 14th of August 1974 (6 years later Greece re-joined the NATO military command), the day which marked the second wave of the Turkish Invasion in Cyprus – despite there was a ceasefire in place agreed between the actors (Euronews, 2022a). In the withdrawal statement published by the Greek Government, amongst other things, President Karamanlis stated that:

“NATO has proven incapable of preventing Turkey from launching a new barbaric and unprovoked attack against Cyprus... NATO therefore has no reason to exist and cannot fulfil the purpose for which it was established, since it cannot prevent war between two of its members.” (ikathimerini, 2009)

Furthermore, the US Congress imposed an embargo on arms sales to Türkiye in 1974⁹ citing the invasion in Cyprus (Omirou, 2022). In 1987, they also banned arms sales to Cyprus¹⁰ saying that this decision was made to aid the peace process between the two communities (France24, 2020). Ankara reacted to the embargo by closing all US telecommunications facilities used to monitor the Soviet nuclear arsenal (Drousiotis 2014). The Cyprus crisis created a major rift in NATO during the Cold War. Moscow used the Cyprus crisis to undermine the coherence of NATO and to gain favor with Türkiye, which was considered of great strategic importance.

To sum all of the above-mentioned up, in the early 1970s, the situation in Cyprus became worse due to the dividing factors which became even more exaggerated due to the creation of

⁸ Détente was the period between 1967 – 1979 where the tensions between the US and the Soviet Union were decreased. During this time there was a rise in trade and cooperation between the two Nations and the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks were also signed. Relations between the two countries became tensed again after the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1979.

⁹ U.S embargo on arm sales to Türkiye was lifted in 1978.

¹⁰ U.S embargo on arm sales to Cyprus was partially lifted in 2020 and completely lifted in 2022 (Cyprus MFA, 2022)

the paramilitary group EOKA B' led by former EOKA leader Georgios Grivas Digenis. EOKA B' aimed to achieve immediate enosis with Greece and opposed any plan to resolve the Cyprus issue peacefully, leading to violence and bloodshed in the Greek-Cypriot community. After Georgios Grivas Digenis' death, EOKA B' came under the control of the Greek Junta in power in Greece since a coup in 1967. Meanwhile, Türkiye's foreign policy shifted towards closer ties with the Eastern bloc and Third World due to the decline in US economic and military aid, and the Cyprus issue made Türkiye consider rapprochement with the Soviet Union to secure support in the United Nations. In 1971, President Makarios III visited the Soviet Union, where he attended the enthronement ceremony of the Patriarch of Moscow and received recognition of the important relationship with Cyprus. The Soviet Union also played a vital role in organizing Cyprus' state security through AKEL, safeguarding Makarios from assassination attempts, and sending weapons to protect party leaders from EOKA B'. The Greek Junta utilized its influence in the Cyprus military, the Special Forces, and EOKA B' to overthrow Makarios III from power and achieve enosis, resulting in a coup d'état. Makarios III called the guarantor powers to intervene to restore constitutional order, leading to Türkiye's invasion of Cyprus which favoured Soviet's interests as it created a rift within NATO members.

2.4 From the Aftermath of the Invasion to the USSR Collapse (1974 – 1990)

The aftermath of the Turkish invasion in Cyprus found Greece out of NATO and Türkiye embargoed by the western powers. On the 15th of November 1983, the unilateral declaration of the so – called “Turkish Republic of the Northern Cyprus” (TRNC) occurred by Türkiye and the Turkish Cypriot leadership. This new development left Moscow in a dangerous position worrying about the existence of two different states on the island and both being aligned or leaning towards the west and more specifically, NATO.

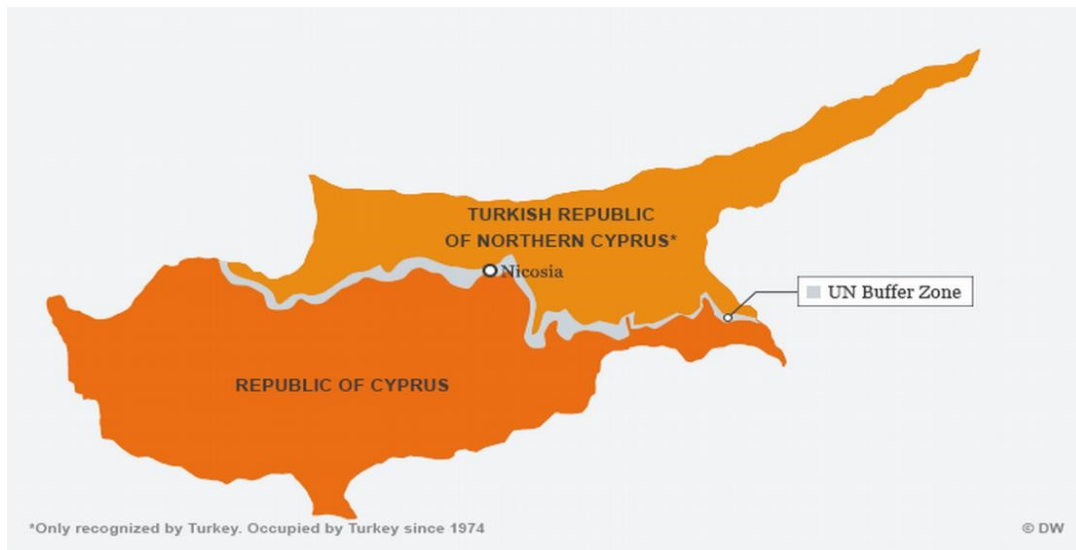


Figure 4. Divided Cyprus map (Winter, 2016)

In the years that followed the TRNC unilateral declaration, the Soviet – Turkish relations became worse and on the other side, Greek – Turkish relations, were significantly improved. Therefore, nearing the USSR collapse, Moscow’s foreign policy was mainly in favour of Nicosia. In January 1986 Gorbachev reiterated the old Soviet proposal for an international conference and demilitarisation of the island, and this time the document was internationally released. In April 1986 Gromyko and Shevardnadze received a Cypriot Foreign Minister (Iakovou) for the first time in the Kremlin (Stergiou, 2007; p.100). In the years following, various high officials from the Soviet Union, Hungary and Czechoslovakia visited Cyprus and ‘paid attention to promoting the idea of an international conference’. In 1984, the Cypriot Foreign Minister (Iakovou) made a diplomatic trip to Cuba not only to talk about the Cyprus question, but also to discuss the implementation of a cultural, scientific and educational cooperation between the two countries and to sign an agreement for the abolition of visas for those possessing diplomatic and official passports of the two countries (Cyprus Mail, 1984). In February 1988 the AKEL-supported Cypriot President Kyprianou made his country’s first state visit to Cuba (Stergiou, 2007; p. 100); a strong gesture which sent the appropriate signals for the country’s external leanings and alignment during the late 80s. Nevertheless, at that point, the USSR was gradually coming to an end, and a new, equally complex era in the relations of Moscow and Nicosia, was about to begin.

As a conclusion of this historical overview, it is worth mentioning that in Cyprus, throughout this period (1960 – 1990) the political left displayed a notable and unique characteristic. Despite its ideological affinity with communism, AKEL did not oppose religion and orthodoxy. Instead, it officially supported a religious figure as a potential candidate for the presidency of the Cypriot republic (Nikola, 2018). This differs significantly from the approach taken by leftist movements in several countries of the Former Soviet bloc where Christianity and Orthodoxy was oppressed (Fraser, 2017). By adopting this position, AKEL prevented left-leaning individuals on deeply religious Cyprus from having to make an either-or choice between supporting either the Soviet Union or Orthodoxy. While sharing similar ideology with USSR's government, AKEL nonetheless remained distinctively aligned with Cyprus' own unique circumstances

3. Russian Soft Power Tools in Cyprus

As we've seen in the previous chapter, since the very first day of the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus, the relations between Moscow and Nicosia have been close and warm. Nonetheless, these relations were unavoidably defined by the complex Cold War environment existed during that period. Thus, Cyprus was positioned amidst cold-war geopolitical rivalries which made balancing between those actors a difficult act for a small state located in a crucial geostrategic position, at the intersection of important civilizations in Asia, Europe, and Africa. At the same time, Cyprus was having on the one hand, close and friendly ties with Greece, a NATO ally; and on the other hand, intense and hostile ties with another NATO member, namely Türkiye. The strong linkages between Greece and Cyprus and the Turkish Invasion of Cyprus in 1974, have significantly worsened the already tensed relations between two important NATO allies since the 1960s, creating a major rift at the heart of the Alliance.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and during Putin's administration, Cyprus gained, again, a prominent role in Russian foreign policy agenda. As discussed in Chapter 1, Putin's government and Russian elites' understanding of soft power implied Cyprus as a possible target for Soft Power projection due to cultural commonness as well as an already existing economic and military cooperation. Additionally, looking through Moscow's lens, Cyprus is a coreligionist society and as it has been already mentioned, coreligionist societies are seen by Moscow as a great opportunity with fertile ground for soft power projection. Moreover, in Cyprus, there is a significant Russian minority residing. Based on the latest preliminary data published by the Cyprus Statistical Service – CYSTAT (2022), the Cypriot population in 2021 was estimated to be 918,000, which represents a 9.2% increase over the past 10 years. Although there is currently no official dataset available on the number of Russian nationals or Russian-speaking population in Cyprus, it is estimated that the population of the Russian-speaking expatriate community is approximately 50,000 (Waring, 2022; Emmanouilidis, 2022). Since Putin came to power, cooperation between Cyprus and Russia has been steadily increasing in various domains. This cooperation is being built upon the religious and cultural commonalities between the two countries and is utilizing the already existing Russian community in Cyprus with the ultimate goal to effectively project soft power. Most

importantly, this cooperation is apparent in key sectors such as the media, economy, religion, education and diplomacy. To deepen the discussion, the tools that are being used by Russia to influence state and non-state actors are presented in the following sections.

3.1 Public Diplomacy

When it comes to the projection of Soft Power, Public Diplomacy is one of Russia's most common resources. The effectiveness of soft power, defined as the ability to influence others through non-coercive means such as persuasion and agenda-setting in order to achieve desired outcomes, is reliant on effective public diplomacy (Nye, 2011; p.21). Public diplomacy, coined by Edmund Gullion in 1965, entails direct engagement with individuals from other nations by both state and non-state actors for the purpose of promoting the interests and values of those being represented. Successful communication through public diplomacy ensures that a target population finds ideals, policies and behaviors attractive (Rawnsley, 2015). According to Cull (2008), Public Diplomacy includes *Cultural Diplomacy* and *International Broadcasting*, which are also relevant to the case of Cyprus. However, for the scope of this thesis, cultural diplomacy will be discussed as a standalone section. Thus, in this section, the Russian presence in Cyprus media and broadcasting is being presented.

3.1.1 Media Influence

Russia has invested a lot of money on soft power tools falling under the umbrella of international broadcasting and media influence. Specifically, as already mentioned, since 2005, Moscow has invested more than \$2 Billion dollars on RT (Russia Today) – the international television broadcaster of Russia. The main goal of RT and similar projects is to improve the relevant state's image in foreign publics. However, according to Kazantsev and Rutland (2016), the RT wasn't designed only to improve the face of Moscow abroad but mainly to challenge the dynamics and breaking the monopoly of a market which is dominated by western organizations such as BBC, CNN and in the case of Cyprus, the Euronews agency. RT had a multi-faceted objective that extended beyond enhancing Moscow's reputation and challenging market dynamics. It also aimed to propagate anti – western and

pro – Russian emotions among Western audiences by invoking fear and apprehension (Paul, 2023). A concrete example of this is evident in RT’s dissemination of a dark Christmas video in December 2022, the first winter following the Russian invasion in Ukraine. The videoclip showed a European Family consuming hamster instead of normal food while “silent night played in the background, concluding with a surreal Christmas wish: Merry anti – Russian Christmas (Daily Mail, 2022). During the past few years, many similar Russian television channels have arrived in Cyprus including the RT itself. The state-funded RT, as well as RT Documentary and RT Arabic, were broadcasting in Cyprus both through public and private platforms (Cablenet, 2020). In 2010 another Russian channel arrived in Cyprus under the name “RTCY – Russian Television Cyprus”, the first Russian – language TV channel. This initiative was encouraged by the then minister of Energy, Commerce and Tourism, Antonis Pachalidis, who also made the speech during the opening ceremony of welcoming the first Russian TV channels in Cyprus (Stockwatch, 2010). In the same year, another Russian channel was registered in Cyprus, the Cyprus Travel Guide. The Cyprus travel guide is a Russian Satellite channel which promotes Cyprus as an ideal tourist and investment destination in many countries, including Russia. Again, the former Minister, Antonis Paschalidis, during his speech mentioned that this initiative was important and a crucial milestone in the process to open and further promote Cyprus market to Russian Tourists and investors. As we will see in the following sections, this has proven to be very effective, given the increasing number of tourists and investors coming from Russia, since 2010 when was officially launched (Stockwatch, 2010). Around the same period, the VGTRK - also referred to as "The Russian Television and Broadcasting Company" - launched two new channels in Cyprus: "Vesti" and "RTR Planeta". This move expanded the number of state-funded Russian television channels available in Cyprus (Cytavision, 2013). In 2019, the Russian Federal channel THT was officially registered in Cyprus under the name “THT Cyprus” and started broadcasting through all the available platforms such as Cytavision, Vellister, Primetel, Cablenet (Offsite News, 2019). THT is one of the most famous television channels in Russia and it is owned by the Gazprom Media, a subsidiary of the state – controlled energy company, Gazprom (Politis News, 2019; Jack, 2022). The arrival of THT in Cyprus didn’t go unnoticed. In fact, *Politis* – a leading newspaper in Cyprus – commented on this development and expressed its concern and scepticism. More specifically, *Politis* highlighted that:

“Essentially, it is used [THT Channel] by the government of Russia to indirectly or directly disseminate messages with propaganda purposes to various countries around the world. No

country in the world would seek to open a channel in Cyprus, given that it is a very small market, so the channel's profit would be minimal. Even more so for a foreign language channel, which would simply relay Russian programming and only part of it with subtitles. This practically means that it would have foreign programming, without Cypriot productions, while our information indicates that a large part of the Cyprus market, has not been informed of its launch. [...] In 2017, Gazprom Media attempted to broadcast several of its networks in Georgia, which were however closed down due to concerns that, given the network's close ties to the Kremlin, the channels would be used to transmit Russian messages to the Russian-speaking population of the country.” (Politis News, 2019).

In addition to the TV channels, a Russian – language newspaper, the “*Vestnik Kipra*” also exists in Cyprus aiming mostly to serve the Russian increasing minority of the island. *Vestnik Kipra* comments on Business, social, economic and political matters. It is owned by the VK communications group which is a well – known group in the sectors of PR, Consulting, and business development.

In conclusion, it is evident that Russia has a strong presence in the media market of Cyprus. As discussed, Moscow has invested billions of dollars in international broadcasting and media projects with the intent of increasing its influence and impact over foreign publics. Russia perceives public diplomacy as an indispensable tool in its quest for soft power projection. This projection strategy is exemplified by several state-funded media outlets such as RT, RT Documentary and RT Arabic that are broadcasted in Cyprus through both public and private platforms. Additionally, Cyprus has seen the arrival of two more state-funded channels under *VGTRK*, namely *Vesti* and *RTR Planeta*. Furthermore, the latest arrival of *THT Cyprus* has raised concerns among Cypriots about its propaganda proposes and its ties with Kremlin. Moreover, the Russian – language newspaper owned by the established *VK communications group*, serves the increasing Russian minority in Cyprus covering thematic in business, society, economics and politics while trying to act as a bridge between Russians and the broader Cypriot population. All these initiatives demonstrate Russia’s efforts to promote its image and expand its influence in the wider Cypriot society while propagate anti – western emotions and apprehension (as evident from the advertisement aired by the RT) among the population, when necessary for national interests.

3.2 Cultural Diplomacy

The world stage has become more crowded with non-governmental actors in recent decades, according to Rosenau (2003), who notes that these actors interact with each other through communication networks, sometimes contradicting government-defined goals. Rosenau suggests that states used to dominate global affairs, but now their influence has decreased relative to the numerous organizations that operate across borders. This has led to a decline in national governments' ability to have the final say at home or to speak exclusively for their country abroad. Following Rosenau arguments, Ang et al. (2015) highlight that, countries are participants in a global cultural arena, and trying to shape international cultural relations through cultural diplomacy. Thus, as Holden (2013) observed, cultural diplomacy initiatives have increased and this is particularly true for newly emerging nations like the BRICS countries, including Russia (Holden, 2013). These nations are using cultural diplomacy activities to raise their international profile (Ang et al., 2015). Therefore, cultural diplomacy can be defined as “the deployment of a state’s culture in support of its foreign policy goals or diplomacy” (Clarke, 2014). Furthermore, cultural diplomacy goes hand in hand with soft power, as soft power practically explains the propose of cultural diplomacy (Clarke, 2020; p.18). Cultural diplomacy includes various resources such as films, sports, art, music, literature, educational exchanges, language education (Clarke 2014 & 2020). However, it can include additional resources depending on the target audience. For the purposes of our case study, the most important are mainly the religion and language aspects.

3.2.1 Religion

Throughout history, Russian diplomacy has been impacted by the "Orthodox factor" (Timuş, 2022; p.1013). Both the Kremlin elites and Orthodox Church, view Russia as a "katechon"¹¹ state - continuing the legacy of Byzantine Empire's role - acting as a guardian of Orthodox Christians from evil entities globally (Engström, 2014). Since 2000, when Putin became president of Russia, he has tried to restore its imperial power through the use of various tools,

¹¹ from the Greek “ὁ Κατέχων” meaning: ‘the withholding’ (Engström, 2014)

including the Russian Orthodox Church. In his public speeches he emphasizes the importance of traditional western – Christian values and highlights the moral decay within western culture. In this context, the Russian Orthodox Church aspire to safeguard orthodox societies from this moral decay caused by the liberal values of the west (Mrachek & McCrum, 2019). Clearly, this serves national interests as ROC, under circumstances, can be used as a tool for soft power projection. Kotoulas (2022) and Laruelle (2020) argue that Russia uses religion in its foreign policy to gain influence in orthodox societies and orthodoxy – dominated regions like Serbia, Greece and **Cyprus**. Also, as mentioned in an earlier chapter (1), Russia is most likely to effectively use its soft power in coreligionist societies, where the soil for soft power projection is fertile. To determine the feasibility of projecting soft power through religion, it is important to take into account the societal demographics with a particular focus on religion identity and traditional values of the society under study.

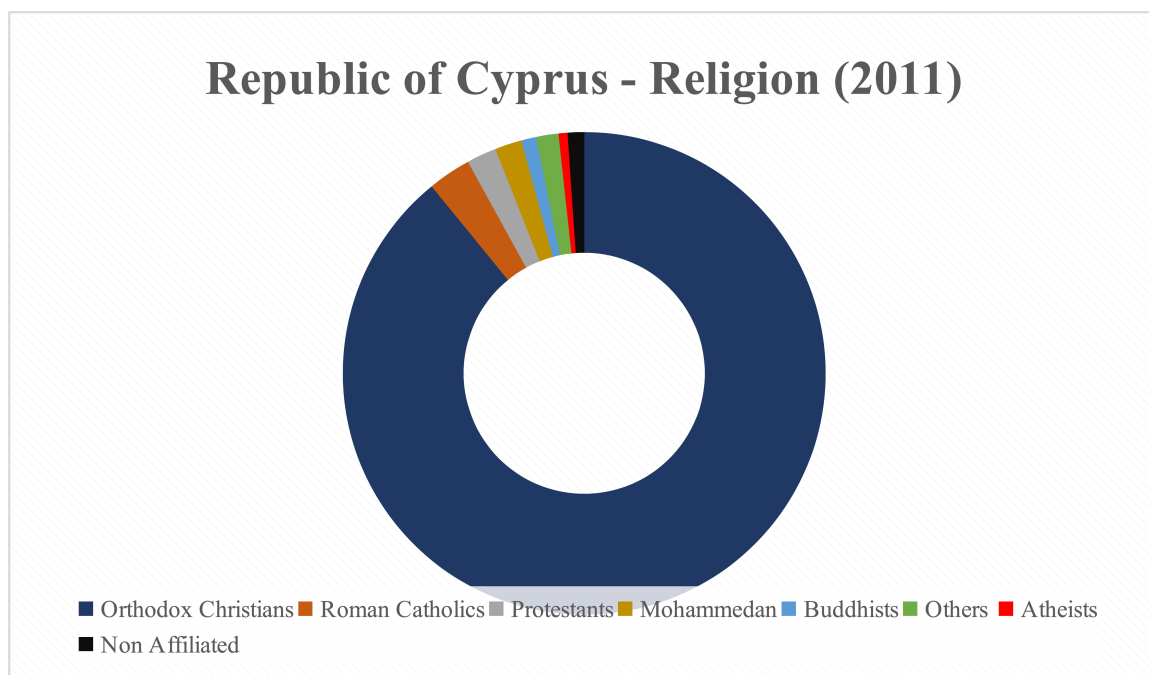


Figure 5. Religion in the Republic of Cyprus in 2011 (CYSTAT, 2015)

According to the data released by CYSTAT in 2011 (see *figure 5.*), a significant proportion of the population is made up of Orthodox Christians, accounting for 89.1% followed by Roman Catholics at 2.9%, Protestants at 2%, Mohammedans at 1.8%, Buddhists at 1%, other religious affiliations totaling up to approximately 1.5% and atheists constituting only about 0.6%. The dominance of Christian Orthodox religion is evident and therefore it is safe to argue that Cyprus is a Christian Orthodox society. Additionally, the EU has released data from the Eurobarometer (2021) regarding Cypriot attitudes towards religion, including their levels of emotional attachment to this concept. The data shows that Cypriots' attachment to their religion is significantly high (Figure 6). In fact, the importance of the religion in Cyprus is the highest amongst all the EU-member states. The 80% of the Cypriot Christian Orthodox population perceives religion as very important, which makes the Cypriot society a highly religious one. This is also true for other Christian Orthodox societies in the EU.

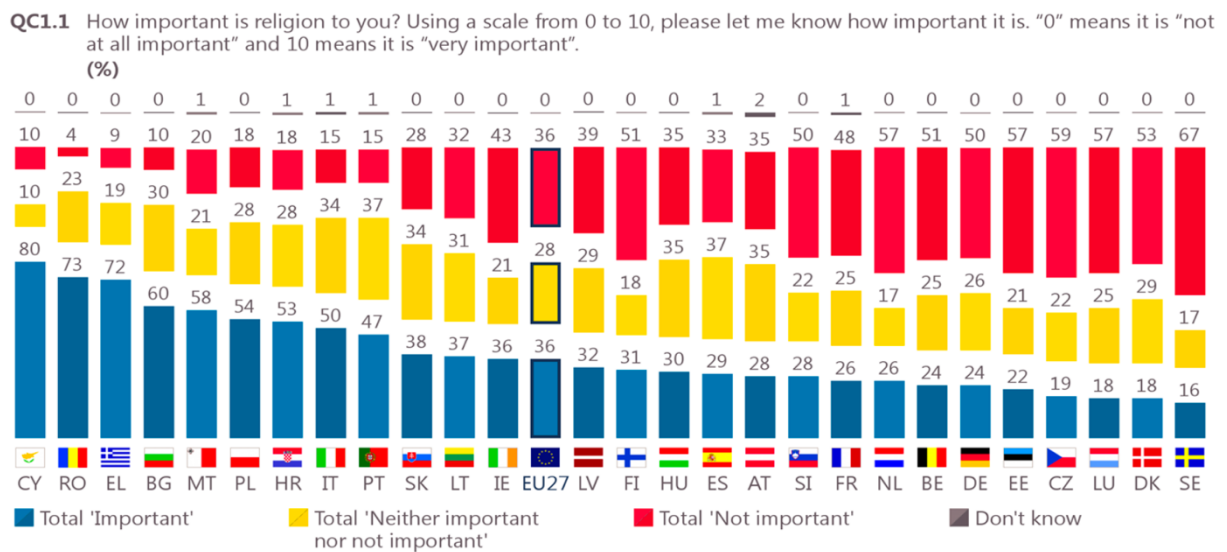


Figure 6. Importance of Religion in EU countries (Eurobarometer, 2021; p.126)

These findings hold significant academic value and contribute in advancing this discussion. Another important information provided by the Eurobarometer is how Cypriots prioritize their religious affiliation. According to the Eurobarometer (2021), more than seven in ten respondents in Cyprus identify with their religion or beliefs. This means that the vast majority of the population view religion and beliefs as the most important aspect of their identity. Again, this is the highest percentage amongst EU-member states.

QC4.3 In general, how much do you identify yourself with each of the following? Please answer using a scale from "0" to "10", where "0" means "not at all" and "10" means "a lot".

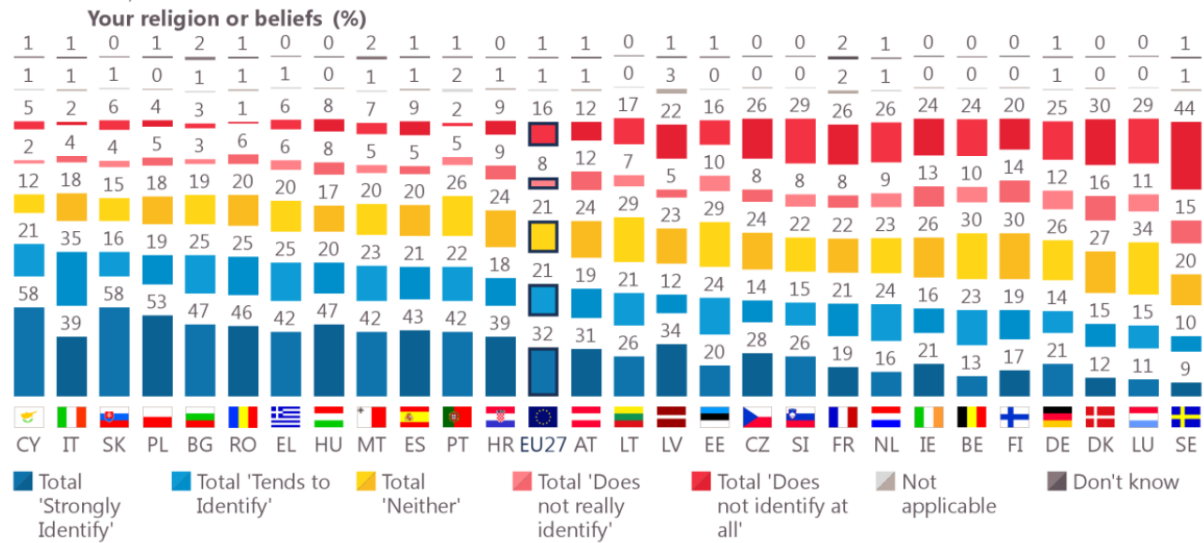


Figure 7. Identification with Religion or Beliefs (Eurobarometer, 2021; p.66)

As evidenced by the Eurobarometer (2021), Cyprus is also a highly conservative society as it perceives racial and ethnic identification important to their identity (p.54). Furthermore, Cypriots value tradition. Based on the same data, 94% of Cypriots believe that maintaining traditional values and ways of thinking is important or important to some extent. Cyprus ranks 3rd on this list, slightly behind two other Christian Orthodox nations, namely Greece and Bulgaria (Figure 8).

QC2ab.10 Now we will briefly describe some different people. Using a scale from 1 to 6, please tell me how much these people are or are not like you. '1' means a person is "not like you at all" and "6" means this person is "very much like you".

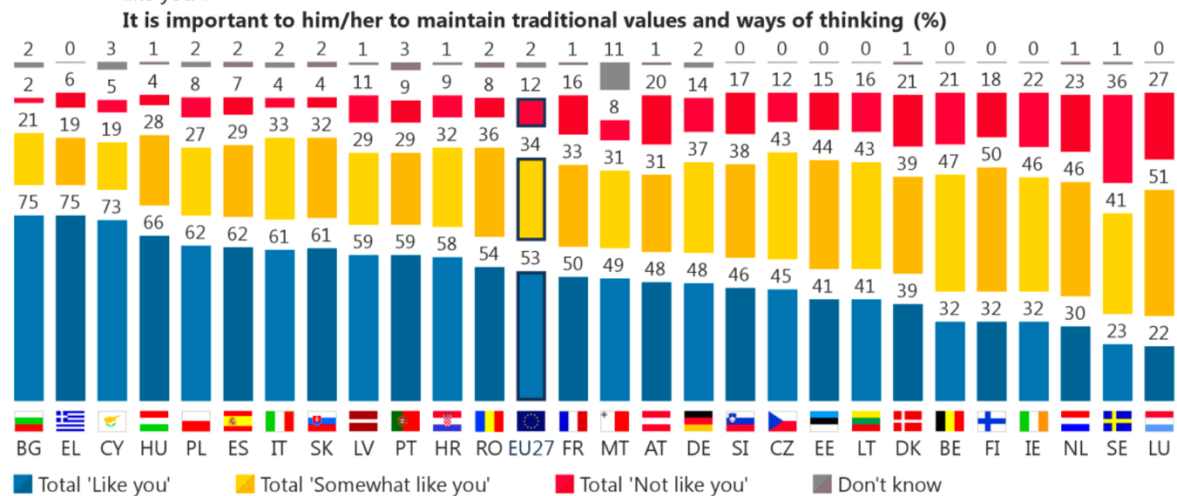


Figure 8. Importance of traditional values and ways of thinking in EU countries (Eurobarometer, 2021; p.20)

Linking the abovementioned data to Russia's soft power - by opposing homosexuality, penalizing divorce and promoting the concept of "traditional family", Putin has positioned himself as an advocate for traditional moral values, including religion and Christian orthodoxy (Anishchuk & Gutterman, 2013; Mrachek & McCrum, 2019). In this context, he frequently appears in photos with Russian Patriarch Kirill to showcase his support for Christianity and has even released calendars showing himself at religious celebrations (Meixler, 2018). However, the 2014 tensions between Russia and Ukraine suggest that Putin's public display of Christian faith is more driven by geopolitical interests rather than genuine religious beliefs (Mrachek & McCrum, 2019). After the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Putin tried to justify his actions by highlighting the shared religious and cultural history (Mrachek & McCrum, 2019):

“Everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride. This is the location of ancient Khersones, where Prince Vladimir was baptised. His spiritual feat of adopting Orthodoxy predetermined the overall basis of the culture, civilisation and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus” (Putin, 2018).

The dataset presented provides a clear answer to our earlier question, whether Cyprus is conducive to Russian Soft power in terms of religion in the context of cultural diplomacy or not. Putin's public image promotion as a guardian of the traditional values and ways of thinking along with the utilization of religion as a soft power tool, fit perfectly with the social demographics of Cyprus as presented above. The Cypriot society is (I) *highly religious*, (II) *highly conservative* and (III) *value traditions and traditional way of thinking*. This makes our case study the ideal target audience for Russia in exercising cultural diplomacy and exerting soft power. When it comes to the most important aspect, *Religion*, the key actors for soft power projection are the *Russian Orthodox Church* (ROC) and the *Church of Cyprus* (COC). Thus, in the following paragraphs, ROC and COC relations are being discussed with a particular focus on the recent developments within the COC, its economic and social influence in Cypriot society as well as ROC's presence in Cyprus.

The Church of Cyprus

As expected, The COC, is highly regarded in the Cypriot society. It is the older institution operating on the island and it was established much earlier than the state itself. It is also one of the older autocephalous churches. In A.D. 45, apostles Paul and Barnabas founded the COC during their visit in the island (Fischer, 2013). The early Christian Council of Ephesus in 431 granted the COC its independent status, otherwise known as “Autocephalous” (Mitsidis, 2019). As a result, the COC became one of the Autocephalous Greek Churches that remain communion with the Eastern Orthodox Church. The COC is not only a religious institution but also a strong economic force in the island. Throughout the years, the COC maintained its strong position no matter the hardships and this was mainly due to special arrangements with foreign rulers. For example, as Orthodox expert Georgios Trantas mentioned in Deutsche Welle, during the Ottoman rule, the COC was acting as a tax collector (Fischer, 2013). Therefore, the COC utilized the influence it had in the Cypriot society to perform tasks that otherwise would have found opposition by the people, if performed by the occupying forces. In return, the Church was keeping a strong position and increasing influence within the Cypriot society. During the period of Greek War of Independence (1821-1832), the bishops and some abbots emerged as leaders of national resistance. However, their leadership resulted in execution by Turks on the island (Koumoulides, 1996). Similarly, during British control between 1878 to 1958, bishops played a crucial role in leading movement for union with Greece or “enosis” among Greek Cypriots. Consequently, Archbishop Makarios along with Bishop Kyrenia were exiled by British in 1956 (Lamprou, 2017). Following Cyprus' independence from Britain in 1960, the church remained autocephalous and independent, keeping its old position as a Greek Orthodox Church. Archbishop Makarios III was elected as first president of the new republic reflecting the influence of the religion's leadership within Cypriot society and specifically, among the Orthodox Community, who were the vast majority of the population (Lamprou, 2017). Archbishop Makarios III was re-elected for three consecutive terms, achieving an overwhelming percentage of 96.26% in the voting results of 1968. Although there were numerous assertions regarding the voting oppression, intimidation, and unfair handling of the opposition, the COC's increasing grip on power and influence within the Cypriot society was, again, evident (Iacovides, 2023; Cyprus Ministry of the Interior, n.d).

The COC also kept growing economically throughout the years, especially under the governance of Archbishop Chrysostomos II of Cyprus (2006 – 2022), who passed away on

the 7th November, 2022 (Euronews, 2022b). According to the official balance sheets published by the COC in 2007, the non-current assets of the Church amounted to 669 million Cypriot Pounds¹². This included fixed assets, stock investments and hotel property investments. As Archbishop Chrysostomos said, the calculation of the value of the assets was based on an older evaluation and the actual value of the assets was much higher and might reaching a worth of a “*couple of billions Cyprus Pounds*” (Efthymiou, 2008). As Hasapopoulos (2009) mentioned in his article in the newspaper “*To Vima*”, the Autocephalous church of Cyprus could be included in Forbes' list of the richest in the world, if such a list existed. In recent years, the COC invested in various projects including hospital developments, investments in photovoltaic parks, student residences in Limassol where rent prices are very high, as well as leasing the building for the relocation purposes of the Architecture Department of the University of Cyprus (InBusiness, 2022; Church of Cyprus, 2023). Additionally, because of its great financial power and influence within the Cypriot society, the COC often criticising and confidently advocating its opinion on various hot topics such as the LGBTQ rights, COVID vaccinations and, of course, the Cyprus problem (Kathimerini, 2014; Philenews, 2017a; Cyprus Times, 2021). When it comes to the Cyprus problem, they have a hardliner approach and the stance of the COC often aligns with those expressed by conservative cycles and ultranationalists movements, such as the “National Popular Front” also known as “ELAM”¹³ (ELAM, 2017).

Russian Orthodox Church and the Church of Cyprus relations

It is obvious that having such a financially and socially strong partner acting and influencing the domestic politics of a target country, is a huge asset for every regional and great power. The ties between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Church of Cyprus have been friendly, close, and warm. In the last decade, as the number of Russian citizens residing in Cyprus increased, the ROC has intensified its presence as well. Several churches dedicated to Russian saints have been built, with Russian funds, across the island including the chapel of St. John the Russian in the village of Kouklia in Limassol, the church of Panagia Semistrelia

¹² In 2008, 1 Cyprus Pound was equal to 1.7 euros (Orphanides, 2007).

¹³ The National Popular Front or ELAM is a far-right, ultranationalist movement – and later – political party, founded in 2008 in the Republic of Cyprus. According to the party’s 2011 manifesto, they advocate for anti-federalist solution to the Cyprus conflict. They also support fierce anti – immigration policies with zero – tolerance. ELAM also strongly supports Greek – Centric education to counteract what they view as “enslavement” caused by globalization (ELAM, 2011). ELAM was being accused of having close ties and being the Cypriot Branch of the Greek Neo – Nazi organization of “Golden Dawn” (Smith, 2021).

in Alethriko village near Larnaca and the most famous of all, the church of Saint Andrew and All Russian saints in Episkopeio, in Nicosia District (Poullados, 2022). These monuments attract a significant number of Russian and other orthodox tourists. Additionally, close ties between the two churches are also reflected in several official meetings such as the pilgrimage of the Cypriot Hierarch to St. Petersburg, official visits of the COC delegation to the theological academy in St. Petersburg, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk and Metropolitan Antony of Korsun visits to Cyprus (Moscow Patriarchate. 2018 & 2019a & 2019b & 2019c). Since 2019, the Ukrainian autocephalous¹⁴ has become a burning issue causing division between the two churches. This rift is mainly between the church leaders and not necessarily reflective of their congregations. Since the recognition of the Ukrainian Autocephalous by the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I, a lot of pressure has been put on the shoulders of the COC. In 2018, Archbishop Chrysostomos II of Cyprus, in a letter sent to the Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, highlighted his stance on the issue by saying that:

“[...] the Church of Cyprus will never deviate from her position, which we have set forth for you on many occasions, that is to say, we will use all our resources to support the position of the Russian Orthodox Church on the issue of the so-called autocephaly in Ukraine. [...] In this issue, we as Cypriots understand you in a special way, looking at the tomb and monastery of St. Barnabas, the founder of our Church, which are inaccessible for us because of the Turkish invasion. The main reason for which we have hastened to respond to your invitation to attend these events was to assure you again of the invariability of our position.” (Moscow Patriarchate, 2020a)

Despite expressing his official support to the ROC on the Ukrainian Autocephaly issue, on October 24, 2020, Archbishop Chrysostomos II of Cyprus, during a liturgy, commemorated for the first time the name of Metropolitan Epifaniy of Kyiv and all Ukraine (Orthodox Times, 2020a). The commemoration was amounted to an act of recognition on behalf of the Archbishop Chrysostomos II of Cyprus. This has led several ecclesiastical voices to be raised against the Archbishop Chrysostomos II as according to the constitution of the COC, Archbishop should act as the representative of the Church, an institution which is governed

¹⁴ The Ukrainian autocephaly issue is about to the aspiration of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church for autonomy from the Russian Orthodox Church. In 2018, the establishment of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine led to its recognition as an autocephalous entity by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. Nevertheless, this development met with resistance from the Russian Orthodox Church.

by the decisions of the Holy Synod, and the Holy Synod hadn't concluded to any decision on this matter yet (Brief, 2020). Several important figures of the COC, opposed to the recognition of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church autocephaly. Metropolitan Athanasios of Limassol, Metropolitan Nikephoros of Kykkos, Metropolitan Isaiah of Tamassus and Bishop Nicholas of Amathounta, expressed their opposition to the recognition of the Ukrainian Church autocephaly and argued that this act was a violation of the rules govern the normal functioning of the COC (Moscow Patriarchate, 2020b). After the opposition expressed by the four Hierarchs, the Holy Synod put the matter of the recognition of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church autocephalous to vote. After a secret ballot, the Holy Synod, with ten votes in favor and seven against, decided "not to go against the archbishop's decision regarding the recognition of the autocephalous (Orthodox Times, 2020b). As evident by the results of the secret ballot, the division between the Hierarchs of the Holy Synod was apparent and the decision for recognition was in no way unanimous. Even after the Holy Synod, the "dissidents" continued opposing recognition. For instance, Metropolitan Nikephoros of Kykkos¹⁵ speaking on a Television Channel in Cyprus, mentioned that "*we refuse to accept this decision because affects our faith*" (Moscow Patriarchate, 2020c). In another statement he highlighted that Cypriots, "*as orthodox people we always have our eyes on Russia*" (Orthodox Times, 2020c). As expected, the ROC reacted to the recognition of the UOC by the COC. More specifically, the ROC condemned the COC's decision. Russian Patriarch Kirill of Moscow announced the decision reached by the Holy Synod that the ROC ended the commemoration of Archbishop Chrysostomos II of Cyprus. As the COC's stance hasn't changed yet, the decision also applies for the newly enthroned Archbishop of Cyprus, Georgios III of Cyprus (Former Bishop of Paphos). In a symbolic move, at the enthronement ceremony of the new Archbishop Georgios III of Cyprus, no Russian clerics attended (Ekathimerini, 2023).

At this point, it is worth to be noted that Archbishop Georgios III of Cyprus was not directly elected by the people. Under the rules of the COC, the people vote for new Archbishop and the new Archbishop is being chosen by the Holy Synod as one of the top three contenders – as voted by the people. In fact, Bishop Athanasios of Limassol received 35,68% of the votes, Bishop Georgios of Paphos the 18.39% and Bishop Isaiah of Tamassus 18.1%. Despite not being elected by the people, Bishop Georgios of Paphos was picked by the Holy Synod as the new Archbishop. An important fact of the elections was that Russian nationals of Cyprus

¹⁵ Kykkos is one of the oldest, most historic and richest Metropolis of the Church of Cyprus (Simerini, 2020)

were excluded from voting, after a decision made by the Holy Synod. The interesting sidenote of this story is that the new Archbishop Georgios III of Cyprus, is considered to be a pro-western cleric (Kathimerini, 2022). On the other hand, the other two top contenders, have been characterized as pro – Russian. This is also justified by their objections, as mentioned above, on the recognition of the UOC autocephalous. Therefore, it could be argued that the majority of the people, voted for a pro-Russian Archbishop or at least, the contenders' stance on the Ukrainian Church autocephalous, didn't determine or influence people's vote. In either way, the outcome of the Archbishop elections demonstrates that public sentiment towards the ROC, or the UOC autocephalous, is not necessarily influenced or determined by the official position held by church leaders. This phenomenon can be attributed to a lack of combative or hostile rhetoric due to the interconnectedness between churches' congregations.

As we've seen Cypriot society is highly religious. At the same time, the Church of Cyprus is a highly regarded institution in Cypriot society. It is an Autocephalous Greek Church, remaining in communion with the Eastern Orthodox Church. The church maintained its strong position during hardships and played an important role in shaping a Greek National identity and values. It is also a strong economic force, with assets amounting to billions of euros. Throughout the years, the church invested in various projects, including hospital developments, photovoltaic parks, and student residences. Because of this economic strength and social influence, the COC easily advocating its opinion on various hot topics such as LGBTQ rights, COVID vaccinations, and the Cyprus problem. The Russian Orthodox Church always had close ties with the Church of Cyprus and has increased its presence in Cyprus, with several churches dedicated to Russian saints built across the island. However, since 2019, the Ukrainian autocephalous has caused division between the two churches and within the COC itself. Despite this division, it is evident by the voting behaviour of Cypriots that the people didn't hesitate to vote for pro-Russian candidates in the recent Archbishop elections (2023). It is also evident that even the Holy Synod voted for the recognition of the UOC autocephalous, was heavily divided and the result, with ten votes in favor and seven against, wasn't in any way unanimous leading to a further rift within the COC. Thus, Russian influence is clear through its ability to cause a division at the heart of the oldest and one of the strongest institutions on the island, the Church. Cypriots' significant affiliation with Orthodox Christianity and the importance they put on the religion aspect is another tool for Russia in enhancing its soft power strategy.

3.2.2 *Culture, Language & Education*

In addition to its notable presence and influence within the religious domain, Moscow employs a range of cultural initiatives in order to improve its image amongst the broader Cypriot community. These carefully created projects and activities are intended not only to showcase Russian heritage and traditions but also to bring the two cultures, Cyprus and Russia, closer, through educational and cultural experiences.

In recent years, various related cultural projects have been launched by Russia in Cyprus. In 2018, Russkiy Mir Foundation opened its first center in Cyprus. In Russian language, Russkiy Mir means “Russian World”. The Russkiy Mir foundation was created in 2007 by decree signed by Vladimir Putin to promote Russian culture, language and education system abroad (Sergunin & Karabeshkin, 2015). It is a state – funded cultural diplomacy institution and it is a joint project of the Ministry of Education and Science and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia (Hudson, 2015). Regarding the Russkiy Mir Foundation, Meister (2016) argues that it is one of Putin’s main tools for cultural diplomacy and wielding soft power abroad (Meister, 2016; pp. 7-11). The center was opened in Limassol and during the opening ceremony, the Deputy Director of the Russkiy Mir Foundation mentioned that:

"There is a vast Russian-speaking community in Cyprus counting dozens of thousands people. The Russian-language newspapers and magazines circulate on the Island; TV channels in the Russian language work; there is an information website for the Russian-speaking audience of Cyprus. Thus, we can say that the Russian language and culture have lately strengthened their positions on the Island."

This statement was reflective of the significant Russian presence in various domains within the Cyprus society. The ceremony was attended by the Russian Ambassador to Cyprus, Stanislav Osadchiy and the Mayor of Limassol, Nikos Nikolaidis, who expressed his support to such initiatives and his readiness to take part in events promoting Russian – Cyprus collaboration (Russkiy Mir Foundation, 2018). In addition to the Russkiy Mir foundation in Limassol, the Russian Cultural Centre operates in Nicosia. The Cultural Centre is involved in various kind of activities such as offering Language, ballet, acting, music and art lessons. It also operates as book and film club, always focusing on Russian culture (Nicosia Municipality, n.d). Moreover, in 2021, the Centre launched the first Olympiad in Russian

language, with the top contenders being offered financial rewards (PIO Cyprus, 2021). Furthermore, on an annual basis, the Russian Cultural Centre provides approximately ten scholarships for students to Cyprus to pursue a degree at Universities in Russia (Cyprus Ministry of Education).

When it comes to the Higher education, Cyprus and Russia have a mutual recognition agreement in place since 2016 (Russkiy Mir Foundation, 2016). Additionally, there are multiple bilateral agreements between Russian and Cypriot Universities such as the agreement for strategic alliance between the European University of Cyprus and the Moscow State Open University for exchange of academic staff, students, and cooperation in research (European University Cyprus, 2019). In 2014, a memorandum of cooperation was signed between the Patriarchate of Moscow and the Neapolis University Paphos, Cyprus for partnership in educational programs (Neapolis University Pafos, 2014). Moreover, in 2017, The Cyprus Institute and Skolkovo Institute of Science and Technology signed a memorandum of understanding which covers collaboration in research, joint degrees, student exchanges and joint summer schools (The Cyprus Institute, 2017). Likewise, the University of Nicosia and MGIMO in Moscow signed an agreement for the creation of a joint master's degree in international relations (MGIMO, 2018). However, this agreement was suspended due to the ongoing war in Ukraine. Apart from the agreements that have already been concluded, various discussions have recently taken place to enhance cooperation between Russian and Cypriot universities and institutions, including the Higher School of Economics (HSE) and St. Petersburg University (HSE University, 2023; St Petersburg University).

A crucial part of Russia's strategy for promoting its image in Cyprus, is the Russian Language. Russian is already being taught as an optional subject in secondary education, and lessons are also being offered by the State Institutes of Further Education, under the Cyprus Ministry of Education (n.d). Currently, the Russian language is the third most popular language chosen by students in Cypriot Vocational Secondary Education, after English and French.

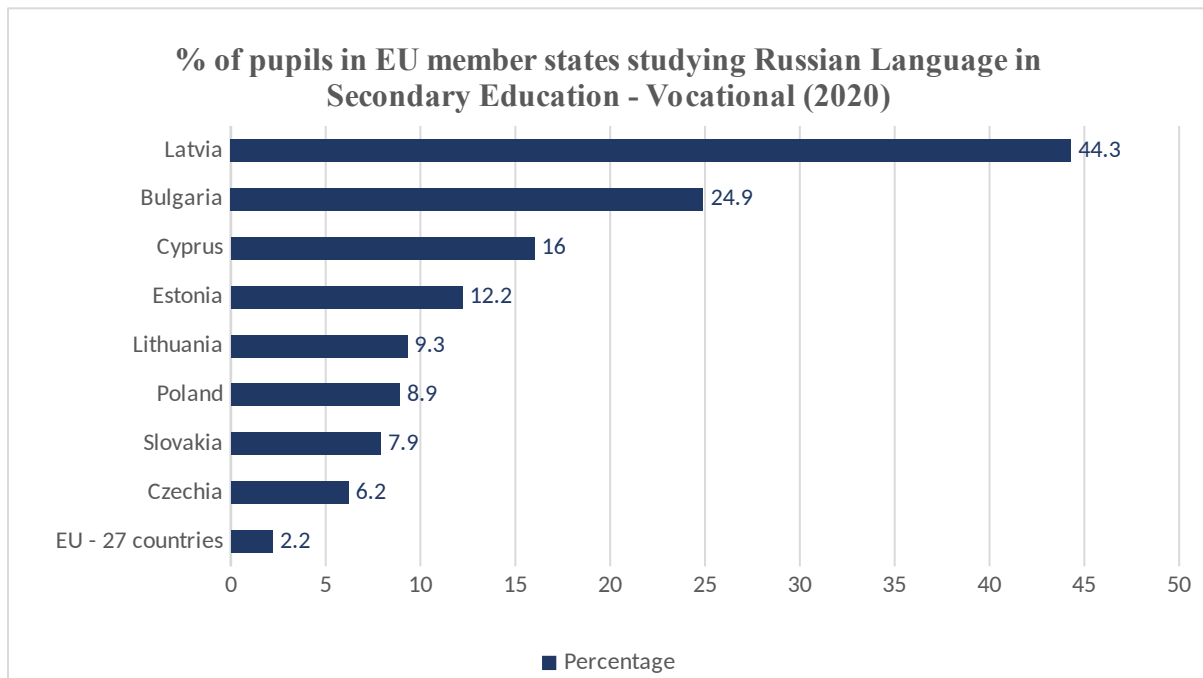


Figure 9. Russian Language study in Secondary Vocational Education in 2020, in EU countries (Eurostat, 2022)

According to Eurostat (2020) the highest percentages of students learning Russian per EU member state in Secondary Vocational Education, were recorded in Latvia (44%), Bulgaria (25%) and **Cyprus** (16%). In 2015, during a meeting between former Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades and the Russian Ambassador to Cyprus, Stanislav Osadchiy, the Russian Ambassador raised the possibility of introducing the Russian language as a mandatory subject in Cyprus high schools (Philenews, 2017b). However, since then, the situation has remained unchanged.

Summing up this section, through a series of initiatives and projects, Russia has actively engaged in the promotion of its language, culture, and education system within Cyprus. This effort is reflected through the establishment of institutions such as the Russkiy Mir Foundation and Russian Cultural Centre in Limassol and Nicosia respectively. These centres offering various services and cultural experiences to learners. Furthermore, multiple agreements have been signed between Russian universities and Cypriot educational institutions aiming to promote student exchanges as well as joint research programmes and degrees to the students of both nations. The teaching of Russian is available in secondary schools across as an optional subject following and it's also a popular choice. These measures taken by both nations contribute in fostering stronger relationships while at the same time

promoting mutual understanding between their respective cultures. Finally, the Russian Ambassador's proposal to the Cypriot President to make the Russian language in Cyprus high schools a mandatory subject, demonstrates the close relationship and familiarity between Russian and Cypriot high officials which is a result of the significant Russian influence in the Cypriot domestic affairs.

3.3 Economic Influence

In the realm of soft power, economic influence holds significant importance. It is often regarded as a crucial element of a nation's soft power strategy (Dogra & Woo, 2014). It enables a country to exert power through non-coercive means over foreign publics and governments, enhancing its ability to achieve its foreign policy objectives. The strength of an economy can be employed effectively in building relationships between different countries by providing foreign aid or investment opportunities for mutual benefit. Given the increasing importance of globalization today, it's clear that economic influence has emerged as crucial element that contribute significantly towards shaping soft power. As discussed in Chapter 1, Russia perceives economic influence as an important asset for soft power projection in its toolkit. Sergunin and Karabeshkin (2015) also making this argument and highlight particularly the investments in the target country. Cyprus, as a small state and an island, has limited options when it comes to the economic model chosen. Like other small states, Cyprus economy it is heavily based on providing services. For this reason, its economy is built on the idea of being an attractive investment and financial hub by providing opportunities such as citizenship, low taxes, light regulation, and favourable legal framework for moving money, utilizing the advantages provided by its EU membership (Peel, 2020). The attractiveness of the Cyprus legal and economic framework offered a great opportunity for Russian companies and businessmen to start doing business in the island. This has led to the creation of a "Russian heaven" for investors in the Mediterranean, after the collapse of the USSR (Vahtra & Liuhto, 2004). In this context, in the following sections, the economic influence of Russia on the Cyprus economy is being presented, putting a particular focus on Russian *investments* and *tourism*.

3.3.1 *Cyprus Financial Crisis*

The financial crisis which began in the U.S in 2007 - 2008, spilled over to the global financial system. Cyprus, as a country with an economy heavily based on real estate, tourism, banking and investments, was severely affected. As a result of the global crisis, the Cyprus financial crisis in 2012-2013 occurred. The financial crisis that occurred in Cyprus during 2012 can be attributed to the coexistence of different factors. The inability of the government to implement reforms within the financial sector along with overleveraging by local banks towards real estate firms and their related connections, were significant contributors (Clerides, 2014). Furthermore, Cyprus' exposure to Greece's financial system added another layer of complexity and further degraded the status of the economy. As a result, the country was degraded into "junk status" (BBC, 2012a & 2012b). Due to the significantly worsened condition of the economy, a year earlier, the Cyprus Government led by President Demetris Christofias – General secretary of the left-wing AKEL - was looking for access to instant money. Thus, in 2011 Cyprus turned to one of its then closest allies, Russia, to secure an emergency loan. The emergency loan was massive in relation to the size of Cyprus' economy, amounted to 2.5 billion euros (Weeks & Rose, 2011). The interest rate of the loan was set at 4.5% with no repayment required until after 4.5 years and no penalty for delayed payment. The loan was re-negotiated a year later, under the government of the newly elected centre-right president, Nicos Anastasiades. The interest rate was reduced to 2.5%, including additional favourable terms for the Cypriot-side, such as extension of the repayment period and gradual repayment schedule in instalments with start date in 2018, instead fully repayment in 2016 as it was the original deal. The loan was taken despite the warning signs that Cyprus was facing serious financial trouble and that accepting a huge loan from Russia plus interest could instead have negative consequences for the economy (The Economic Times, 2012). Obviously, Russia had its own interests to protect in providing assistance to the Cypriot Financial system. Moscow was eager to support Cyprus due to its business ties and the large number of Russian deposits in Cypriot Banks. These important facts are also being discussed in following sections.

All in all, Cyprus, an economy greatly dependent on real estate, tourism, banking and foreign investments, was hit hard by the global financial crisis of 2007-2008 and experienced its own crisis financial crisis in 2012-2013. When the hardships come, the first country that Cyprus

officially turned to for help, despite warnings, was Russia. This demonstrates how Cyprus was viewing Russia back then: a reliable partner and ally, capable of providing a solution when the problems from west, started heading to the east.

3.3.2 *Legal Framework & Investments*

Before joining the EU, Cyprus was considered a crucial hub for Russian capital that aimed to reach countries in Central and Eastern Europe (Vahtra & Liuhto, 2004). Post – accession, Cyprus might not immediately retain its ranking on the list, however during the past decade, Russian presence has been significantly increased and Russians are now involved in various investment activities in Cyprus. What caused this increase in Russian business arrivals in Cyprus, was the *Double Taxation agreement*. The economic relationship between Russia and Cyprus is founded on an agreement signed on 5 December 1998 by the Governments of both countries, which aimed to prevent double taxation regarding income and capital taxes. However, issues arose due to incomplete information provided to Russian tax authorities. As a result, negotiations were initiated concerning the Double Taxation Treaty (DTT) between Russia and Cyprus in April 2009. The outcome was a protocol amending the original agreement that was signed during the visit of the President of Russia to Cyprus in October 2010. This amended DTT received approval from all necessary parties; It was approved by Federation Council on February 22nd and ratified by President Dmitry Medvedev on February 29th of the same year (Zavyalova et al., 2020). The agreement eliminating double taxation, resulting in an increase of Russian funds flowing into Cyprus (Talukdar, 2015). This sudden influx of money, additionally, reflected Russians’ lack of faith in their own economy, banking sector, and judicial system (Roy, 2013). Additionally, it demonstrated the future plans of Russian businessmen and entrepreneurs. In post-DTT era, Cyprus became an attractive financial and business hub due to its low-tax policies and English-based legal system, which provides more flexibility in creating business contracts (Worstell, 2013). The DTT was amended on the 8th of September 2020 with effect from 1st of January 2021. The amendment of the original treaty was made on request of Vladimir Putin, as part of his wider economic policy to increase withholding tax rates on dividends and interest paid from Russia to foreign jurisdictions (Cyprus Ministry of Finance, 2020). After the amendment, many predicted a mass exodus of Russian companies from Cyprus, however, as the director of Tax

at Baker Tilly Cyprus, Savvas Klitou, mentioned:

“[...] But nothing of the sort has happened. The advantages that Russian, or other foreign companies, are offered in Cyprus go well beyond the rates paid on dividends and interest income. Tax rates are more than competitive here, the straightforward legal system and the ability to do business in the EU far more important to foreign companies” (Cyprus Mail, 2021).

Having a favourable legal framework to operate with, Russian investments started to spread throughout the island creating denser economic linkages between the two countries. According to Zavyalova et al. (2020) findings published in the “Cyprus Review”, which were based on data provided by the Central Bank of the Russian Federation, Cyprus accounted for a significant portion of direct foreign investment into Russia between 2010 and 2018. The share ranged from 28% to 37%, with accumulated investments totalling \$173 billion. These investments focused on various sectors such as manufacturing, mining, real estate, construction, wholesale and retail trade, transportation and communication. Additionally, during the same period, Russia's cumulative foreign investment in Cyprus amounted to \$187 billion - accounting for 31% to 41% of total volume invested abroad by Russians (Zavyalova et al., 2020). These amounts have slightly changed in recently. Cyprus foreign investment into Russia dropped from \$173 billion to \$167 billion whilst Russian cumulative foreign investment in Cyprus increased from \$187 billion to \$193 billion (figure 10).

The countries that Russia invests the most in

Top ten countries by outward direct investment positions (\$bn), June 2021

Country	\$bn
Cyprus 🇨🇵	\$193.50B
Netherlands 🇳🇱	\$32.58B
Austria 🇦🇹	\$28.84B
UK 🇬🇧	\$27.04B
Switzerland 🇨🇭	\$25.01B
Luxembourg 🇱🇺	\$21.71B
Ireland 🇮🇪	\$11.34B
Singapore 🇸🇬	\$11.13B
Germany 🇩🇪	\$10.97B
US 🇺🇸	\$7.47B

Figure 10. The countries that Russia invests the most in (Shehadi, 2022)

An important sector where Russian presence is significant, is the real estate. Pavlenko (2015) highlights that Russians tend to invest in their favourite holiday destinations, including Cyprus. According to a survey conducted amongst sector’s professionals in 2019, it was confirmed that Russians were the main actors in Cyprus real estate sector.

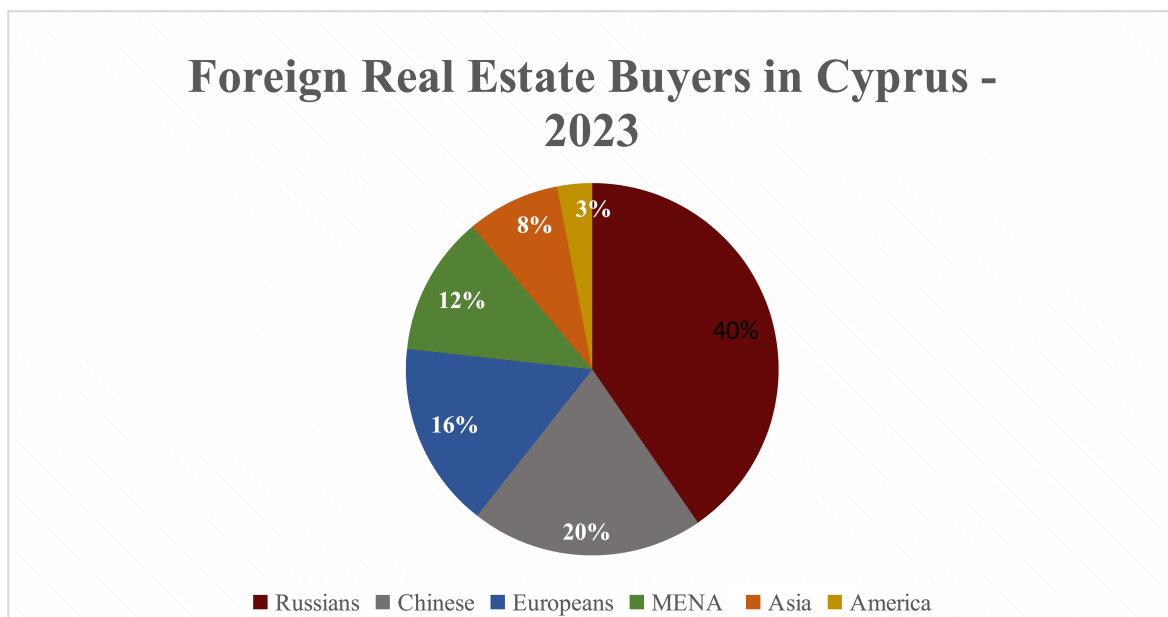


Figure 11. Foreign Real Estate Buyers in Cyprus - 2023 (Danos & Associates, 2021; Charalambous, 2020)

Based on the same survey, Russians were the largest group of foreign investors in Cyprus's real estate sector at 40%, followed by Chinese at 20%. Europeans constitute for 16% while Middle Eastern and North African citizens’ share amounted to 12%. Investors from Asia and America represented a smaller portion with an estimated share of 8% and 3%, respectively (Charalambous, 2020). Real estate sector in Cyprus follows the same pattern in the first months of 2023. According to the Director of the Land Registry, during the first two months of 2023, Russians constitute the majority of the foreign investors in Cyprus’ real estate (Financial Mirror, 2023). In addition to the low – tax and flexible jurisdiction, what gave a boost in the real estate industry by Russian investors, was the “Cyprus Investment Program” – CIP (2007-2020), known as the “Golden Passport Scheme”. The Golden Passport scheme, which granted non-citizens access to Cypriot citizenship (consequently an EU citizenship) in exchange for an investment of at least 2 million euros into the nation's economy, attracted many Russian investors and oligarchs. The program was investigated by Al Jazeera (2020) and the first documents were leaked in August 2020. In October of the same year, a video

released by Al Jazeera caught on hidden cameras the President of the House of Representatives¹⁶, Demetris Syllouris and a member of the opposition communist party AKEL, MP Christakis Giovanis – who also owns a developer company - attempting to assist a Chinese fugitive investor with criminal record to gain Cypriot citizenship against the Cypriot law and CIP regulations, by utilizing their political network¹⁷ (France 24, 2022). The leaked documents and video caused public unrest which led to protests in Nicosia, with protestors demanding transparent investigation into the matter and the immediate resignation of Demetris Syllouris and Christakis Giovannis. The EU, who has warned Cyprus many times about the loopholes in its investment program, reacted fiercely and warned the Government that if no proper action taken in two months' time, EU would take a legal action against Cyprus at the Court of Justice (Reuters, 2020). Public demonstrations, political upheaval and EU's reaction, forced Cyprus Government to abolish the CIP from November 2020 (Al Jazeera, 2020). The program generated controversy regarding Cyprus' pro-Russian stance and its role as a potential channel for illegal activities like money laundering (Onaran & Silver, 2017). More recently, Cyprus started a process of revoking passports given to investors (and their families) as part of the CIP without proper justification (France 24, 2021). As revealed recently, amongst the retracted passports, more than 20 belonged to Russian oligarchs sanctioned by the EU in the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Towey, 2022).

Finally, another sector where Russian investments are apparent, it is the sports industry and specifically, football. Football industry is rather small in Cyprus in relation to other EU countries, however, is important to Cypriots. During the British rule, Football was introduced to Cyprus and began from the English School in Nicosia in the late 1800s and the early 1900s (Norman, 2023). Football was always politicized in Cyprus and teams were the creation of right-wing or left-wing fans, representing relevant ideological streams. For example, in the 50s, during the struggle for “enosis”, right-wing teams taken an active role in the guerrilla war with many of their players and leading figures to be at the same time members of EOKA organization. Until today, football teams in Cyprus representing a specific ideological

¹⁶ Based on Cyprus' constitution, the position of the President of the House of Representatives (The Parliament) is the most senior political position in the Republic, after the President.

¹⁷ In the video, it is evident that Demetris Syllouris has a meeting with undercover journalists from Al Jazeera. The journalists are posing as representatives of a non-existent Chinese businessman who also happens to be a convicted money launderer and desires to obtain citizenship in Cyprus through CIP. During the recorded session, Syllouris assures his support for the individual's cause despite knowing that granting citizenship to criminals is against both Cypriot law and CIP regulations. (Al Jazeera, 2020)

alignment and this is also reflected in the political stance of the fans of each team (Stylianou & Theodoropoulou, 2018). Regarding the importance of Football in Cyprus, in their research article “*Cyprus: a football crazy nation*”, Kartakoullis et al. (2009) commented on the findings of their research by mentioning that:

“[...] statistics and figures are indeed impressive, and clearly demonstrate that football in Cyprus (in the wider European context) is the biggest social phenomenon, and as such it permeates to all levels of Cypriot society” (Kartakoullis et al., 2009)

Thus, it can be argued that football is a key part of Cypriot identity. Russian investments in football began in 2017, when Russians founded Pafos FC. The team is located at the city of Paphos. By 2017, Paphos was the only city which didn't ever have a competitive team in the first division, rather small teams representing Paphos' villages in lower divisions. Russian billionaire, Sergey Lomakin took the opportunity and created a team using the motto “one city, one team, One love”¹⁸. With a huge budget in relation to other teams in Cyprus, Pafos FC started successfully and quickly became the main team of all Paphians, a symbol of the city and it is now established in the top-6 of the Cyprus league. The team logo bears the figure of Evagoras Pallikarides, the youngest EOKA insurgent executed by the British army. He was sentenced to death by hanging and he is one of the most popular heroes in Cyprus' modern history. Currently, Pafos FC plays in the state-owned stadium “Stelios Kyriakidis – Paphiako” and in 2022, the Club's president along with other Russian businessmen, submitted a proposal to the state to use the stadium for 90 years and in return to spent millions of euros on upgrading the existing facilities. The proposal was initially accepted and if implemented, will create by far the most modern and impressive stadium in Cyprus (Christodoulou, 2022). It is worth mentioning that Paphos has the second biggest Russian community on the island, after Limassol and the team aspires to create a bridge between Russians and Cypriots of Paphos through various social events (Alphanews, 2017). Pafos FC president, has become a very respected and famous man in Cyprus, making public appearances in various social events and even posing while voting in the presidential elections of Cyprus, as he holds Cypriot citizenship (Alphanews, 2023). Following Pafos FC acquisition by Russian investors, more and more Russians began to involve in the industry, following similar patterns. This hub of Cypriot teams owned by Russian billionaires, includes FC Geroskipou, Karmiotissa FC, Ypsonas FC, Akritas Chlorakas FC (Kerkidanet 2022a &

¹⁸ <https://pafosfc.com.cy>

2022b; Alphanews, 2022). Another team owned by foreign investor, is Aris Limassol. This is one of the most successful projects as Aris Limassol, a team in the lower divisions, at the time that this thesis is being written, is at the top of the Cypriot first division championship. The owner of Aris Limassol is not Russian though, in fact he is Belarusian. However, he made public multiple statements about his dream being to attract Russian football fans under Aris Limassol FC and unite them with the existing (rather small) Cypriot fan base of the team (Kerkidanet, 2021).

In summary, there has been a notable increase in Russian capital invested in Cyprus following the implementation the Double Taxation Treaty (DTT) in 2010. The DTT serves as an effective measure for preventing double taxation on income and capital taxes, thereby establishing Cyprus as a desirable destination for Russian investors. Despite recent amendments made to the DTT in 2020, many Russian businesses still prefer to invest their money in Cyprus due to favourable and flexible legal regulations within Cyprus that feature low-tax policies along with European Union membership. One industry which particularly benefits from this investment is real estate; where Russians represent the largest group of foreign investors. The "Golden Passport Scheme," which granted non-citizens access to Cypriot citizenship, attracted many Russian investors and oligarchs. However, the scheme has faced criticism for its lack of transparency and alleged violations of both Cypriot law and EU regulations. As a result of this program, Cyprus has been heavily criticized as a pro – Russian and a Russian money – laundering destination. Moreover, the sports sector in Cyprus, particularly football, holds significant importance for Cypriot cultural identity and has a long history of political involvement. Beginning in 2017, Russian investors have taken an interest in the football industry of Cyprus and have since become shareholders in several teams respected by local communities with aspirations to create stronger ties between Russian and Cypriot fan bases. This trend was intensified after the acquisition of Pafos FC as more Russian investors have taken the ownership of multiple Cypriot teams. The owners - billionaires from Russia, understanding the significance of football in Cyprus society, repeatedly expressed their desire to build bridges between these two nations through common values created by the shared team spirit. Lastly, Russia's strong economic influence on various sectors including finance, real estate development and sports underscores both the close relationship between Cyprus and Russia while highlighting certain industries' dependence on capital movements from Moscow.

3.3.3 Tourism

The tourism industry serves as the primary contributor to Cyprus' economy, accounting for a substantial portion of its gross domestic product. Specifically, in 2019, tourism accounted for 22.7% of GDP according to Knoema (n.d), while the International Monetary Fund (2021) estimated it constituted an average of around 14% of national GDP (IMF, 2021). According to the same case report and publication from the International Monetary Fund about Cyprus it is mentioned that Cypriot economy heavily relies on tourism. In 2019, more than 18% of Cyprus's total exports were attributed to tourism receipts while approximately 8% of GDP was spent on inbound and outbound tourist activities. Furthermore, IMF (2021) highlights that spillover effects from this industry have significant implications for peripheral sectors such as food services, retail trade, transportation networks, construction firms and other service providers outside hotels. The report continues by mentioning that there is a remarkably high dependence between Cyprus' economic growth and its travel-related industries which contribute almost 14% percent direct or indirect contributions towards GDP in contrast with several other European countries. Finally, based on the data provided, Tourism and related facilities contributed around 13% to Cyprus' total employment rate. When it comes to Tourism, Russia and the UK were the main contributors throughout the years.

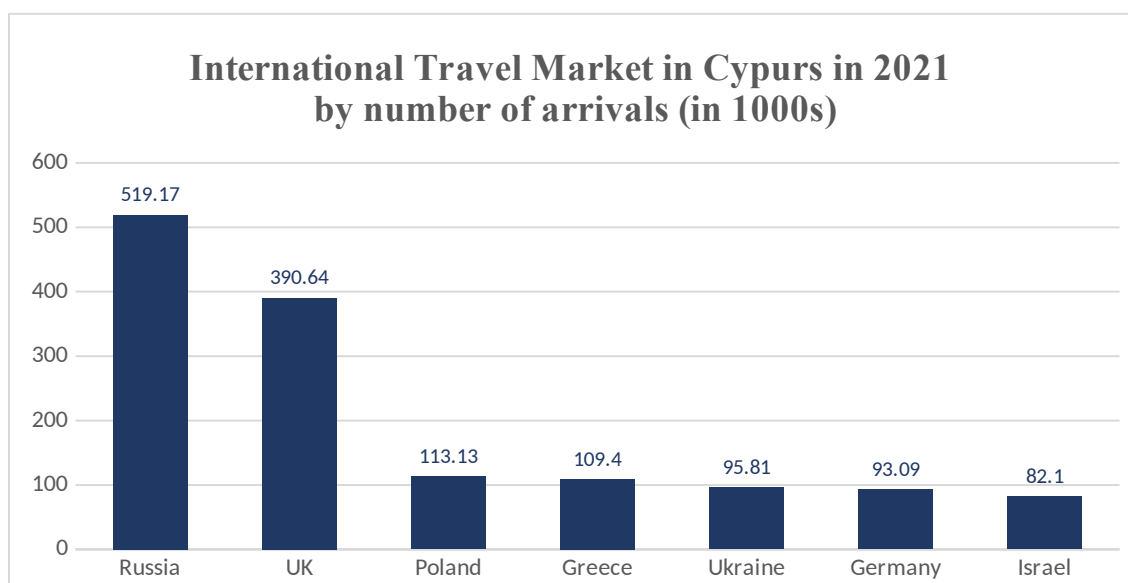


Figure 12. International Travel Market in Cyprus in 2021 (Statista, 2022a)

In 2021, Russian tourists constituted the majority group of foreign visitors in Cyprus reaching 520 thousand visitors, followed by the UK with 390 thousand tourists and Poland with 113 thousand tourists. However, Russians weren't the major contributors only in 2021, but they've contributed significantly during the past decade. In fact, in 2021 Russians ranked first in tourist arrivals even though the absolute number of Russian tourists was reduced in relation to previous years.

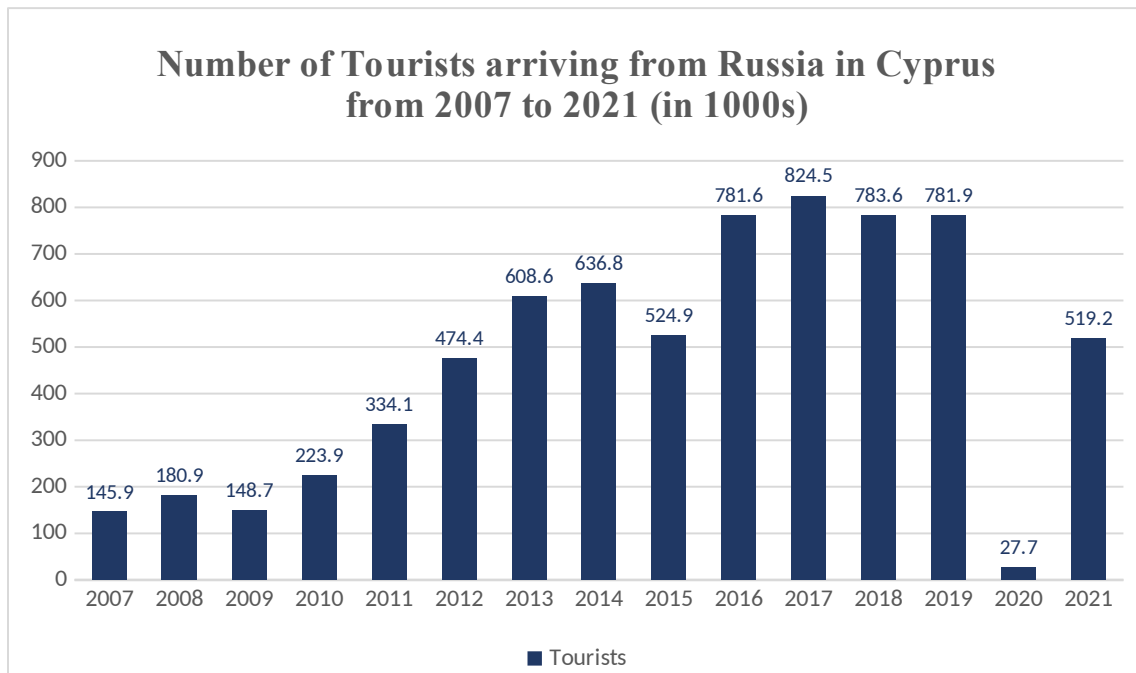


Figure 13. Number of Tourists arriving from Russia in Cyprus from 2007 to 2021 (Statista, 2022b)

As data published by Statista (2022b) revealed, especially from 2012 onwards, Russian tourist arrivals in Cyprus were significantly high, with 2020 being the exception because of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the situation has dramatically changed. From 2022, Russians weren't the top contributor in Cyprus tourist market anymore. In October 2022, during the conference of the Pancyprian Hoteliers Association, the then Deputy Minister of Tourism, Savvas Perdios said that in 2023 Russian tourists will be absent from the Cyprus travel market. He also highlighted that tourism from EU-countries has significantly increased to fill the huge gap created by the absence of Russians and Ukrainian visitors due to the war (Eracleous, 2022).

To conclude this section, tourism industry is a key component of Cypriot economy as it constitutes about 14% of the national GDP. It provides substantial employment opportunities

for the Cypriot population as well. Russian visitors have been important in sustaining the sector's growth throughout the years. However, due to geopolitical conflicts such as Russia's invasion in Ukraine, there is an anticipated decline in visitor arrivals from that region which will create significant changes to the inner dynamics of the tourism industry. In response to these changes, Cyprus has already focused its efforts on boosting EU-country tourism to fill the gap created by the dramatic decrease of Russian tourists. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that Russians have been the pillar of the most important sector of Cyprus' economy. This past importance shows at the same time the potential to become a significant contributor again in the future - and that alone, is an important asset for Moscow. This highlights the potential for soft power dynamics to influence economic relationships between countries, as the interests and actions of individuals can have a significant impact on the wider economy.

4. Soft Power Effectiveness

Despite the popularity that soft power has enjoyed in the recent years still, there isn't a universal approach or a concrete way to measure countries' soft power (Trunkos, 2022). The reason is that soft power is hard to measure as it involves assessing a country's intangible assets such as culture, values and institutions. However, scholars proposed various methods for measuring soft power and introduced various tools. A tool which has become popular in recent years, is the "*Soft Power 30*" index. This index assesses the resources of countries by combining objective and subjective data drawn from six categories: Education, enterprise, government, culture, digital and engagement¹⁹. The problem with this tool lies in the possible shortage of contextual data, therefore a qualitative analysis focused on opinion polls could provide deeper understanding. Additionally, the index provides results on the global reach of the specific nation and its international outlook in the given year. Instead, our study has a focused approach, aspiring to understand the dynamics created by Russian influence in the unique and specific case of Cyprus. This is not always apparent by only focusing on individual events and actions. On the contrary, a holistic approach should be employed taking into account variables such as people's opinion about Russia as well as domestic and foreign policy decisions linked to Russia that are probably influenced by the already existing context as created by social and economic dynamics. Therefore, for this study, given the available resources, the author believes that the most useful tool to measure the effectiveness of soft power is through opinion polls. This is also the measurement tool recommended by Joseph Nye (2004). According to Joseph Nye, the quantification of soft power can be achieved by means of opinion polls and focus groups. This approach enables researchers to understand and analyse people's views on soft power within a specific timeframe and geographical area. The existing cultural, economic, and public diplomacy tools employed by Russia in Cyprus as part of its soft power strategy, were discussed in the previous chapter. In this context, to assess the effectiveness of soft power, we are discussing political decisions taken by Cyprus that may have been influenced by Russia. We are also analysing Cypriots' views on Russia's war in, as illustrated in the Eurobarometer (2022). By analysing and comparing Cypriots' views on the war in Ukraine, with that of other EU-Member states, serves as a practical

¹⁹ USC Center on Public Diplomacy, The Soft Power 30, <https://softpower30.com/>

example of Russian “Power over people’s minds”, thus demonstrating soft power²⁰. To serve as an answer to Research Question 2 of the Thesis, this chapter is therefore divided in two sections: (1) *Power over people’s minds* and (2) *power over politics*.

4.1 Power over domestic politics

The existing influence of Russia in Cyprus through the soft power tools employed on the island, as presented, and discussed in chapter 3, takes shape in the multiple agreements concluded by the two countries. The most important of which are: (I) Double Taxation Treaty Amendment, (II) Joint Action Plan for 2010-2013, (III) Joint Statement of the Russian and Cypriot Presidents, (IV) Programme of Cooperation for 2009 – 2012, (V) Joint Action Plain 2018 – 2019 and the Joint Declaration and; (VI) Military agreement in 2015 (Krasnov et al., 2019)

(I) The Double Taxation Treaty (DTT) discussed in chapter 3.3.2 was an agreement eliminating double taxation regarding income and capital taxes between the respective countries originally signed in 1998 but was amended in 2010. It was amended again in 2021 on Putin’s request to increase withholding tax of Russian capital in foreign jurisdictions (Cyprus Ministry of Finance, 2020).

(II) The Joint Action Plan, for 2010 to 2013, constituted a political instrument that sought to promote cooperation between Russia and Cyprus. This plan encompassed multiple sectors, including politics, international affairs, commerce-related issues, as well as military ties. Furthermore, this program prioritized cooperation in fields such as internal governance, the medical sector, science, education, culture, and tourism initiatives (Krasnov et al., 2019).

(III) The Joint Statement of the Russian and Cypriot Presidents issued in the occasion of commemorating the 65th anniversary of Victory in the Second World War. It was highlighting Russia’s and other USSR-countries decisive contribution in defeating fascism. The statement also signified the willingness of both nations to share their experiences in preserving the memory of those killed or missing from both countries during WWII and the Turkish Invasion in Cyprus 1974 (Krasnov et al., 2019; p. 244).

²⁰ The survey results are considered "significantly representative" because they provide a broad and reliable overview of public opinion in Cyprus and other EU countries, which can be used as evidence to support the argument that Russia's soft power has an impact on people's perceptions and attitudes.

(IV) The Program of Cooperation from 2009-2012 was a program signed by Russian Federation and The Republic of Cyprus. The program draw upon a previous agreement made by the USSR and Cyprus in 1972. The new program signed aimed in the further strengthening of friendship and cooperation between the two countries in the field of science, education and culture for 2009-2012 (Krasnov et al., 2019).

(V) The 2018 – 2020 Joint Action Plan and Declaration was aiming on modernizing the economies of Russia and Cyprus and to promote bilateral relations through cooperation in areas such as politics, economy and culture (Krasnov et al., 2019).

(VI) The Military agreement was an agreement between Russia and Cyprus signed by Cypriot president Nicos Anastasiades and Russian president, Vladimir Putin, in 2015. Under the agreement, Cyprus was providing access in its ports to the Russian navy (BBC, 2015).

Nonetheless, Russian influence is not only visible on concluded agreements. It is also evident on foreign policy decisions. Cyprus' stance (and initial responses) on various hot topics regarding Russia, justify the significant influence that Russia has in Cyprus. An example of this was Cyprus stance on the EU sanctions imposed on Russia as a reaction of the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation (Rettman, 2014). Cyprus didn't use its veto power, instead, abstained from the vote, along with other four countries (Greece, Austria, Hungary, Slovakia). Eventually, the EU sanctions were fully implemented by Cyprus (Menesian, 2020). In 2016 though, Cyprus Parliament called for an end to EU sanctions on Russia and adopted a resolution on the 7th of July 2016 calling the government to lift EU-imposed sanctions. The resolution was submitted by the left-wing party (AKEL) and passed with 33 votes in favour and 17 abstentions from the ruling right-wing party – DISY (Maurice, 2016). Cyprus' stance was criticized by other EU – members and official, characterizing this act as a product of Russian lobbying in a Russian-friendly country (Rettman, 2014). The passage of the resolution by the Cyprus Parliament was investigated further by the *Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP)*²¹ to uncover its background story. Their investigation was focused on leaked emails and documents and as a part of this investigation, they interviewed the Russian Businessman Dimitry Kozlov who holds Cypriot citizenship under the former Cyprus Investment Program (Golden Passport). Kozlov said that he had connected Russian circles with “sympathetic” Cypriot politicians to pass the resolution

²¹ The Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) is a worldwide consortium of investigative journalists with personnel situated on six continents. Established in 2006, it concentrates its efforts on the subjects of organized crime and corruption. OCCRP distributes its journalistic works via regional media outlets, while also making available English and Russian versions through its online platform.

(Tkachenko & Laine, 2023). Another interesting fact extracted by the OCCPR report, is that Kozlov also donated 15,000 euros to the left-wing AKEL in 2016. The donation is evident in an official document published by AKEL (2017). Regarding this matter, he stated that he donated funds to all political parties for charity purposes in the past 25 years (Tkachenko & Laine, 2023). Nevertheless, this is a strong example on how Moscow uses its soft power which has been created through social dynamics and economic influence on the island to pass resolutions in Cyprus' legislature body, the Parliament. On this specific situation, it seems that Moscow effectively targeted AKEL, playing on the card of ideological and historical commonness deriving from the Soviet Legacy – which fits perfectly with Laruelle's (2021) Soviet Legacy-use as a resource for soft power projection by Russia, as discussed in chapter 1. In addition, the influence of business circles, donations and possible lobbying on Cypriot political parties shows how soft power can be exercised effectively using economic resources – especially in a small, concentrated and socially interlinked society, like Cyprus'.

A similar pattern of behaviour was followed by Cyprus in April 2022 after the invasion of Russia in Ukraine (2021), when Cyprus exercised its veto power and blocked sanction that aimed to ban the access to EU ports for Russian – owned ships (Michalopoulos, 2022). On another occasion in May 2022, Politico commenting on some EU-members' reluctance to vote for Russian sanctions, mentioned that: “[...] *arguments about blocking Russia's access to international oil markets clash with domestic interests.*” Cyprus has also been accused, again, of hijacking the EU's sanctions against Russia in 2020. The 2020 sanctions were about blacklisting officials in Crimea following its annexation by Russia (Baczynska, 2020). The same strategy was followed when sanctions against Belarus, the closest ally of Russia, were brought to vote during the Foreign Affairs Council with Cyprus, again, vetoing the proposal. Nonetheless, in both situations, Cyprus was forced to vote the sanctions due to political pressures from the West. For Cyprus, the support from the West is crucial, especially when it comes to the Cyprus problem, as the occupational force which controls than 35% of the island, Türkiye, militarily belongs to the West, and NATO specifically. Thus, Cyprus has always perceived the diplomatic support of the West as crucial regarding the Cyprus Issue while at the same time, has always understood the significance of Russian economic presence in Cyprus. However, as the world becomes more complex, especially after the Russian invasion in Ukraine, balancing acts by smaller states are becoming less and less possible.

4.2 Power over people’s minds

As both E.H Carr and Joseph Nye highlighted, “Power Over Opinion” is an important form of power. One of the most effective ways in measuring people’s opinion is opinion polls about hotly debated topics of general interest. The Eurobarometer of 2022 titled “EU’s response to the war in Ukraine” serves this purpose perfectly. Based on the Dataset published by the EU, Russian influence over people’s opinions is significant and the results are dramatically different from some EU-Member states.

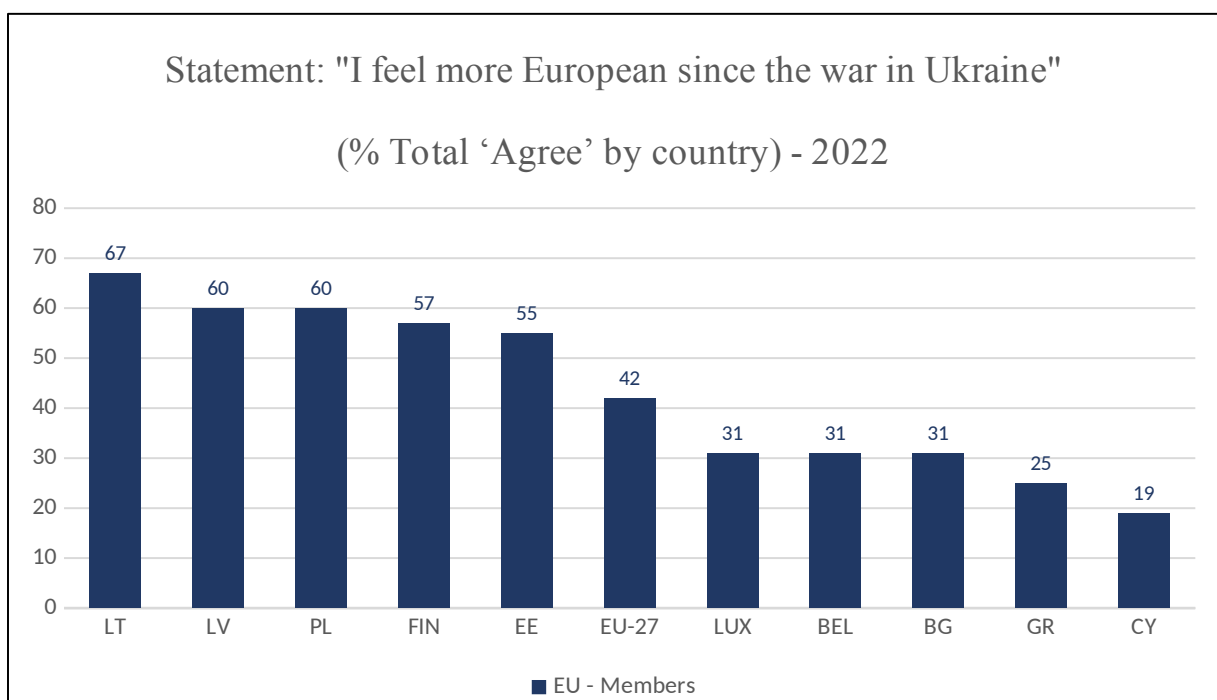


Figure 14. "I feel more European Since the war in Ukraine" - % Total Agree (Eurobarometer, 2022)

Created using Data published by EU as part of the Eurobarometer (2022). The table shows only the highest and the lowest ranking amongst EU-Member states as well as the EU – average.

As observed in figure 14., Cypriots, with 19%, occupy the lowest position on the list showing the percentage of people who share the opinion that the war in Ukraine made them feel more “European”. Greece is following with slightly higher share of 25% whilst Lithuania – 67% Latvia – 60% and Poland 60% are the highest-ranking countries on this list.

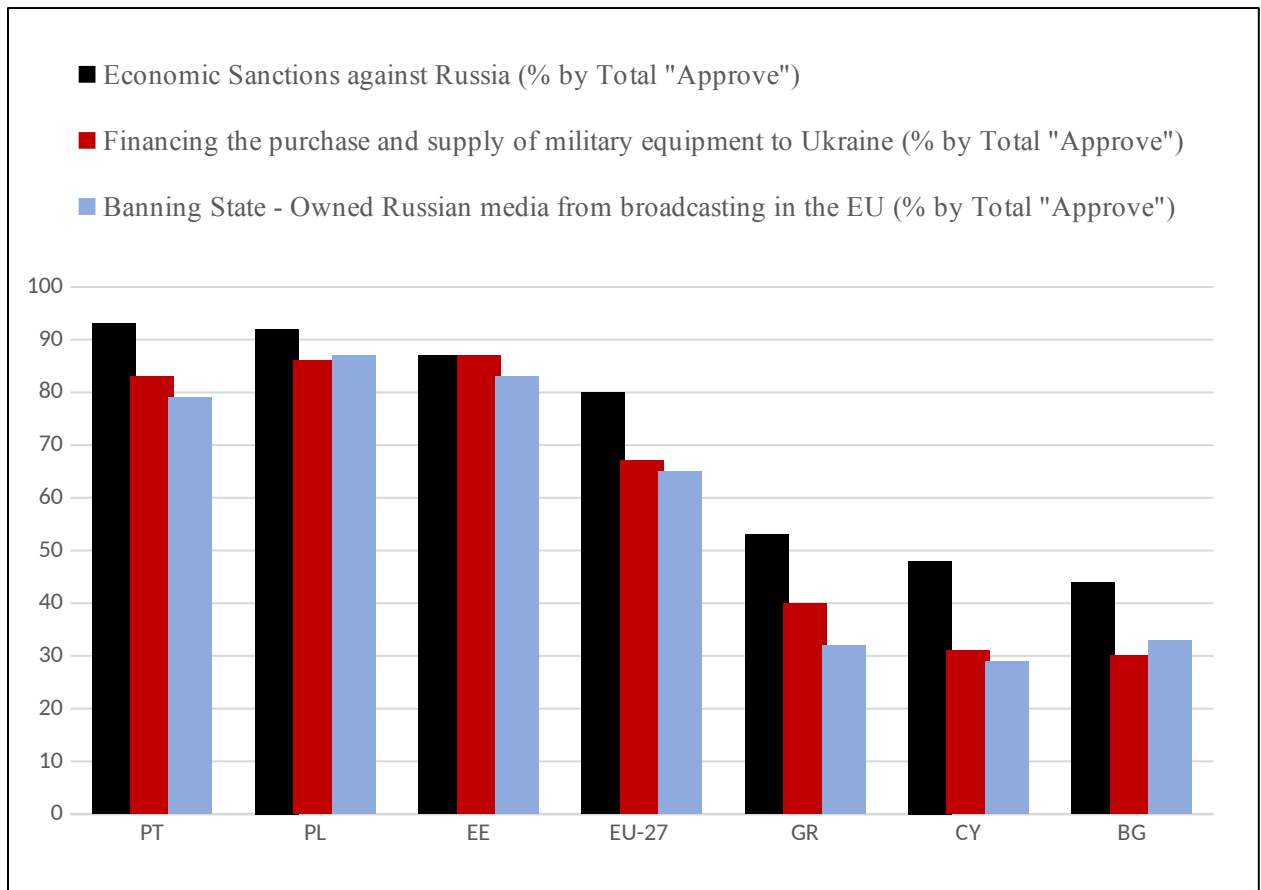


Figure 15. EU's actions against Russia in the context of the War in Ukraine - % Total Approve (Eurobarometer, 2022)

Created using Data published by EU as part of the Eurobarometer (2022). The table some of the higher and lower ranking EU-Member states as well as the EU – average, & by total “Approve”

In Figure 15., it can be observed that Cypriots rank second from the bottom in terms of their approval of the EU sanctions against Russia. When it comes to “financing the purchase and supply of military equipment to Ukraine” Cyprus, along with Bulgaria, occupies the lowest place on the list with the vast majority oppose the financing and supply of military equipment to the Ukrainians. Moreover, Cypriots don’t approve the banning of state-control Russian media from broadcasting in the EU. In fact, only the 29% approve this decision, making Cyprus occupying the last place on this list. Bulgaria follows with 33% of approval and Greece with 32%. Finally, all this discussion, leads us to the most important figure of the dataset, which is about the perception of Cypriot people whether Russia is to blame for the current situation in Ukraine or not.

Q3 How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?
Russian authorities are responsible first and foremost for the current situation
 (% by country)

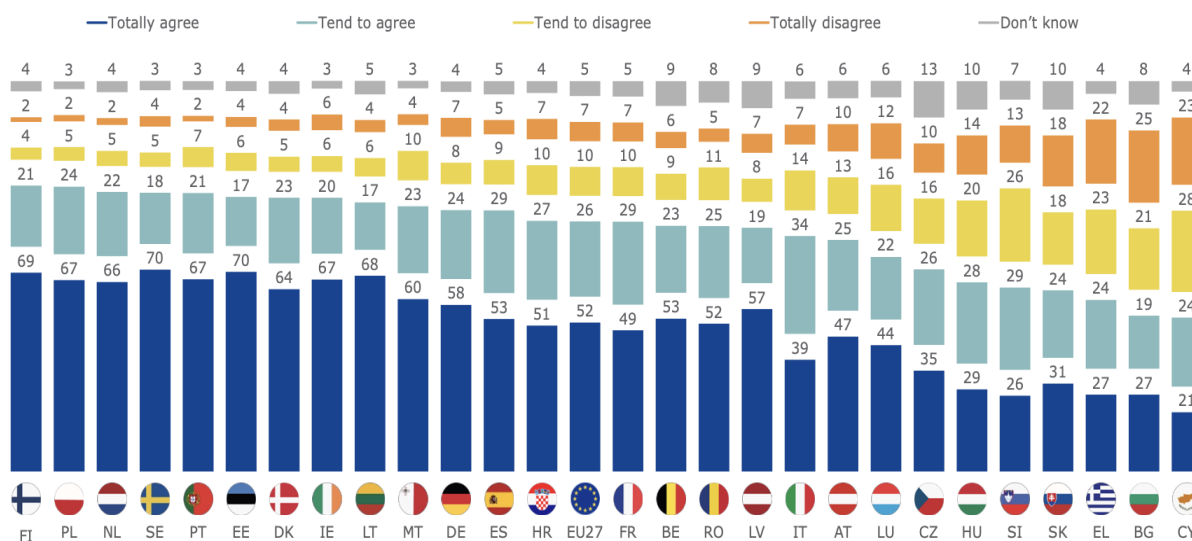


Figure 16. "Are Russian Authorities responsible for the current situation in Ukraine?" % Agreement in EU countries (Eurobarometer, 2022; p.14)

As evident by figure 16, Cyprus is the only country in the EU where the majority of the people disagree that the Russian authorities are responsible first and foremost for the current situation in Ukraine. These findings conclude the section perfectly, showing in numbers how Russian “power over people’s minds” is significant. Despite the hostile rhetoric being used on daily basis from the EU about the war in Ukraine, Cypriots seem to adopt a more pro – Russian stance than any other EU member state. The presented data in the figure 16 suggests that Russia's employment of soft power in Cyprus through various tools (chapter 3), have proven to be effective. A tangible outcome of this strategy is illustrated in Cypriots' attitudes towards the conflict in Ukraine.

4.3 Recent Geopolitical Developments

As expected, since Russian invasion in Ukraine, the situation has changed dramatically, and Cyprus is one of the most affected countries. Despite initial hesitations and pretexts to buy more time regarding the voting the EU-imposed Russian actions, Cyprus couldn’t resist much and was eventually forced to vote in favour of the sanctions. During that time, Nicosia was

feeling the pressure both from the West and the East. On the one hand, EU-member states, allies and even local media accusing Nicosia of balancing between the West and the East in times when balancing is not considered an option, especially given the fact that Nicosia supposedly belongs to the west, as stated many times in the past (Marathovouniotis, 2022). This has led high-ranking officials to make public statements to re-confirm Cyprus external alignment. In 2018, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs and the now recently elected President of Cyprus, Nicos Christodoulides, mentioned that:

“The dilemma of whether Cyprus belongs to the West, or the East was clearly answered after Cyprus' accession to the EU. [...] The future of Cyprus is clearly through the EU” (Cyprus Times, 2018).

In 2022, in his speech during an event for the anniversary of the independence declaration of Cyprus organized by the Federation of Cypriot Organisations of America, he said:

“[...] we welcome the latest resounding decision of the American government to finally lift a long-standing injustice and discrimination against the Republic of Cyprus. [...] (lifting the embargo) is a vindication for the stability of the positions of the Government of President Anastasiades, which has clearly demonstrated with its policies that Cyprus belongs to the West and does not waver when it comes to our political allies.” (Minister of the Interior; (Marathovouniotis, 2022)

On the other hand, Russia, knowing that its contribution is crucial to the national economy, put pressure on the government to veto sanctions imposed by the EU and to keep its doors open for Russian oligarchs. Shortly after the invasion of Russia in Ukraine and following the first spasmodic reactions by EU, in a demonstration of power and influence, Russian Ambassador to Cyprus, Stanislav Osadchiy, warned Cypriot government that if Cyprus followed the path that the EU was about to pave, then Russian tourists would go to Türkiye instead of Cyprus (Philenews, 2022). The Russian ambassador mentioned the above during an interview with Sigma TV, one of the most popular TV channels in Cyprus and his statement was criticized, especially in other media outlets (Tomaras, 2022). Osadchiy made this statement, obviously, knowing very well the significant contribution of the tourism sector in national GDP and Russia's crucial contribution in Tourism. Indeed, the absence of Russian tourists is also expected by Cypriot Government and authorities and as the Deputy Minister of Tourism mentioned in 2023, Russian Tourists will be absent from the Cyprus travel market

(Eracleous, 2022). The impact of the War is significant and the Cyprus Ministry of Foreign affairs, in a special report published in June 2022 titled “*Economic Impact of Russia’s Invasion in Ukraine*”, highlighted that the National GDP would suffer for various reasons. To begin with, Cyprus could lose up to 2% of its GDP because of the ban on Russian flights, 14% from the absence of Russian tourists who along with Belarusian and Ukrainians constituted around 800.000 visitors. According to the special report, Moscow imposed a ban on Nicosia’s food exports leading to massive losses for the island. Additionally, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) which constituted about 8,1% of GDP on average from 2018 to 2020 now operates in an uncertain investment framework which creates further concerns. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs closes its report by suggesting opening Cyprus to other tourist markets and to utilize as much funds as possible from the EU stability mechanism (Skaliotou, 2022). Given the recent geopolitical developments that heavily affected mainly the economic life of the country, Cyprus - as Politico wrote - must redefine its Russianness (Stamouli, 2022). Currently, the ties between Russia and Cyprus, at least on a governmental level, are not in their best form. Due to the ongoing war, a number of agreements and memorandums of cooperation have been put on hold. This has led Cyprus to make choices regarding its alliances. As an example, Cyprus scrapped the military agreement (VI) in exchange for the U.S to lift the arms embargo imposed to Cyprus since 1987 (Kathimerini, 2022). These actions reflect how Cyprus is now positioned within a geopolitical environment characterized by tensions which creates strategic dilemmas similar to those during Cold War era.

5. Discussion

Soft power has been an important asset for Russia in challenging the dominance of the West in some specific regions. This research aimed to answer the three research questions set at the beginning of this thesis.

5.1 RQ-1: To what extent is Cyprus susceptible to Russian soft power?

To answer the first research question, this thesis initiating the discussion by examining how Russia perceives soft power and what are its most possible resources in exercising it, an essential step in order to justify its existence. Russia understands soft power through its own lens, filtering it through its own strategic narratives. The most common resources that Moscow uses to exercise soft power is cultural, public and economic diplomacy. According to the arguments of Sergunin and Karabeshkin (2015), Laruelle (2021) and Osipova (2017), these strategies are being realized through various means such as educational exchanges, religion and religious institutions, promotion of Russia's image and language abroad, international broadcasting media and; economic influence. Osipova (2017) additionally argues that these strategies are important to Putin in its quest for becoming an influential global actor with the ultimate ambition to create an opposition front to the Western and American liberalism. When it comes to Cyprus, the present research argues that it is a great example of a country that is susceptible to Russian soft power.

Firstly, Russia maintains the advantage not to be afraid to talk about the traumatic historical past in Cyprus. As illustrated in the chapter 2, the USSR began its diplomatic relation with the Republic of Cyprus early, as it was one of the first states to recognize the newly founded republic. During the troublesome period of 1963 – 1974, the USSR helped the Greek Cypriot president, Archbishop Makarios III, many times providing military equipment and humanitarian assistance and worked on improving its image by providing humanitarian assistance too. The USSR, officially, always stands by the side of the Greek Cypriots and thus, the Republic of Cyprus, as they always condemned Turkish invasion and the illegal declaration of the creation of the “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus”. USSR's non –

involvement stance in the traumatic – for Cypriots - events of 1963-1974, kept Moscow in a “safe distance” from the developments that followed. On the other hand, the West is often seen as the sole responsible for the status quo currently existing in Cyprus because the war was started by a NATO – member country and the guarantor powers, who could have prevented the invasion or at least the continuous Turkish occupation, have not used the powers that the “Guarantor treaty” provided them with and react accordingly. In this context, USSR’s non – involvement and the West active involvement in the conflict, pave the way for Moscow to build on the inherent suspicion of the younger generations about the West and utilize its unchanged historical position that was in favour of the Republic of Cyprus and against the new status quo created after the Turkish invasion in 1974.

Secondly, as per data presented, Cypriot society values tradition and traditional ways of thinking. This sociodemographic reality serves perfectly the purpose of Russia and fits with Russia’s strategy which perceives coreligionist societies as possible targets for effectively exerting soft power. Additionally, Putin’s strategy in portraying Russia as an alternative pole which opposes the unholy modern values and the moral decay of the West, fits, again perfectly with Cypriots’ attitudes of valuing traditions, traditional values, traditional ways of thinking, the most. Moreover, Cypriots identify first and foremost with their religious affiliation. Given the strong presence of ROC in Cyprus and the common faith between Russians and Cypriots, this, enhances Moscow’s credibility and attractiveness. Furthermore, the economic and social strength of the COC, contributing to maintaining religion high on the agenda of Cypriot society. Additionally, linking the dataset and the information provided in chapter 3.2.1, the recent tensions in the relations between ROC and COC haven’t changed COC’s congregation opinion about pro – Russian bishops and this is justified by the official results of the 2022 archiepiscopal elections²² in Cyprus, where the majority of the Cypriots (who were eligible to vote), voted for bishops advocating against the autocephaly of UOC and in favor of ROC.

Thirdly, the significant Russian minority of about 50.000 that exist in the island and its involvement in the domestic affairs, is crucial. The economic resources held by Russians who belong to this community further enhance their presence and standing within the Cypriot society. This is particularly true in cities where Russian economic and social life has been intensified during the past decade, such as Limassol and Paphos.

²² Elections to elect the new Archbishop of Cyprus

The aforementioned facts and realities position Cyprus as an ideal audience for Russian strategic narratives, making it susceptible to Russian soft power

5.2 RQ-2: What specific strategies and tactics does Russia use to exert soft power in Cyprus?

Russia uses various tools to effectively exert soft power in Cyprus. To achieve the best possible structure and readability of the content, in the chapter 3, tools have been presented under three broader terms: (1) Public Diplomacy, (2) Cultural Diplomacy, (3) Economic influence. This thesis argues that Moscow utilizes Cyprus' susceptibility to Russian soft power as resulted from the sociodemographic realities (sub-section 5.1, RQ-1) and uses tools, which fall under the umbrella of these three concepts, to effectively wield soft power.

To begin with, the most important aspect of Moscow's Public Diplomacy is Media Influence and international broadcasting. To influence the media landscape of Cyprus, Russia uses various tools such as the state funded channels of RT (Russia Today), RT Documentary, RT Arabic, *Vesti*, *RTR Planeta*, THT Cyprus. Additionally, another Russian broadcasting channel arrived in Cyprus in the past decade, namely RTCY (Russian Television Cyprus). In addition to these TV channels, there is also a popular Russian-language newspaper, *Vestnik Kipra* – commenting on social, business, economic and political affairs. All these media outlets aiming to improve Russia's public image in Cyprus, to help the integration process of the Russian population in the Cypriot domestic affairs by keeping them informed in their native language, create a bridge between the local Cypriot population and the Russian community while at the same time propagating anti-western emotions and apprehension among the population, when deemed necessary for national interests.

Secondly, as discussed above in sub-section 5.1 (RQ-1), Moscow takes advantage of the favourable sociodemographic reality of Cyprus to utilize cultural diplomacy resources extensively. As expected, religion is the main field where Moscow plays its game. To achieve this, Moscow uses various narratives such as the "orthodox brotherhood" and the belief that Russia view is the continuation of the Byzantine Empire as the "Katechon" state. Kotoulas (2022) and Laruelle (2020) argued that this is a common strategy employed by Russia, using religion to gain influence in coreligionist societies where Orthodox factor is dominant, such

as Serbia, Greece and Cyprus. As discussed, for Cypriots, religion and traditional values are significant and data were presented in chapter 3.2.1 (religion) to further support thesis' final argument. The COC is the oldest and one of the strongest institutions operating in Cyprus, contributing in keeping the role of religion and religious initiatives high on the agenda of domestic affairs. The COC and the ROC always maintained close and warm ties until recently when a disagreement about the UOC autocephaly created a significant damage to their relations. However, this conflict did not seem to have a significant impact on people's opinion about the ROC. The rhetoric used by COC was not hostile, and the matter was mainly discussed within the inner circles of the church rather in public. Moreover, as part of its Cultural Diplomacy, Russia promotes cultural and language through various tools such as the state funded Russkiy Mir foundation. A similar project is the Russian Cultural Centre operates in Nicosia, organizing several initiatives aimed at promoting Russian culture and language. There is also an extensive network of cooperation in the Higher Education sector, with many strategic cooperation agreements between Russian and Cypriot universities, as well as relevant laws passed for mutual degree recognition between the two educational systems. It is worth to mention that, according to data gathered from the Eurobarometer (2020), Russian language is the third most popular language chosen by students in the vocational secondary education in Cyprus. Cyprus, having 16% of students learning Russian language in vocational secondary education, ranks 3rd on the relevant list amongst the EU-member states.

Finally, Moscow uses its economic resources to achieve a strong presence and consequently to increase its influence. Russia offered Cyprus a massive emergency loan in 2011 to support Cyprus in an economically disastrous period, following the global economic crisis of 2007-2008. The government of Cyprus turned to Russia for help, before turning to anyone else. This suggested the closeness and warmth of Russia – Cyprus relations at that time. Apart from this, Russia has been active more directly in Cypriot economic affairs. The amended Double Taxation Treaty in 2010 and the flexible jurisdiction led to an increased inflow of Russian money in Cyprus. More specifically, in 2021, Cyprus was the country in which Russia invested more, with the Real estate sector holding an important share of the investments. The interest of Russian investors in the real estate sector was also reinforced by the Cyprus Investment Program (2007 – 2020) otherwise known as the Golden Passport scheme. The scheme was shut down after political scandals which shown how foreign investors, including Russian oligarchs, have taken advantage of the program and acquired

Cyprus Citizenship using their network and influence. Nevertheless, in the recent years, Russians have also invested a significant amount of money in the sports sector and specifically in Football. Football in Cyprus is a social phenomenon, it is politicized, and it is high on Cypriots' priorities, thus it is considered to be a part of their own identity. Russian investors often mentioned that one of their goals amongst others, is to unite and bring closer Russian and Cypriot population under the banner of a team and build a bridge between the communities.

Again, these findings answer the second Research Question (RQ-2) giving a clear focus on how Russia uses Public Diplomacy, cultural diplomacy and economic influence as part of its soft power strategy. Three concepts which are relevant to Russian strategy in exerting soft power, as argued by Kotoulas (2020), Laruelle (2021), Sergunin and Karabeshkin (2015), Osipova (2017).

5.3 RQ-3: How effective is Russian soft power in influencing attitudes and behaviours in Cyprus?

To assess soft power is not an easy task. This can be done through the analysis of domestic and foreign policy decisions of the target country. In addition, as suggested by Joseph Nye, to assess whether “power over people’s mind is apparent opinion polls can be useful. In the chapter 4 (soft power effectiveness) the data and dynamics were analysed. It can be inferred that Russia’s soft power is effective in Cyprus. The relevant chapter is divided in two sub-sections: (1) *Power over Politics* and (2) *Power over people’s minds*.

Power over politics can be justified by the number of bilateral agreements concluded between the two countries to increase cooperation and forge stronger ties. The legal framework further increased Russian presence. The legal framework included the Double Taxation Treaty. The number of bilateral agreements included the Joint Action Plan, the Joint Statement of the Russian and Cypriot Presidents, the Program of Cooperation, the 2018-2020 Joint Action Plan, and the Military agreement for Russian access to the Cypriot ports. Nevertheless, Russian influence is not only visible in the concluded agreements but also in foreign policy decisions. Cyprus' foreign policy decisions regarding EU sanctions on Belarus and Russia, in response to the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022,

illustrate the significant influence Russia holds in Cyprus. As discussed, these decisions were often made despite EUs public opposition and the West.

The recent geopolitical developments and the hostile rhetoric that is being deployed by most of the West (where Cyprus supposedly belongs) against Russia are used as a key factor in assessing Russian *power over people's minds*. This is a vital component for this thesis as it contributes to answering the present research question. This is done by analysing Cypriots' opinions and attitudes towards the war in Ukraine and Russia and placing them in the wider context of the increasing West – Russia confrontation. As observed by the data gathered from the Eurobarometer (2022), Cypriots' opinions about the war differ greatly from other EU publics. In comparison with other EU-member states, Cypriots can be characterized as pro-Russian, as they do not approve: (I) economic sanctions against wealthy Russians, (II) financing the purchase and supply of military equipment to Ukraine and, the banning of state-owned media from broadcasting into the EU. Most importantly, Cyprus is the only EU country where the majority disagrees that the Russian is the sole responsible for the current situation in Ukraine.

To conclude this discussion, Russian influence is apparent both over politics and over peoples' minds. Cyprus made a lot of foreign policy decisions in contradiction with its allies, to keep its relations and ties with Moscow alive. In addition, in a period where the EU seems to be united against Russia and the majority of the people in EU-member states are following this signal, Cypriots seem to be heavily influenced by Russia, and this is reflected in their opinion about the war in Ukraine and related matters. As a conclusion, it can be argued that Russian influence in Cyprus is significant. The existing sociodemographic realities of the Cyprus domain make it *susceptible to Russian soft power*, and this susceptibility is what makes *Russian soft power tools* effective.

Conclusion

Soft power, as conceptualized by Joseph Nye, attracted a lot of attention in the international relations literature. However, there are inherent complexities in this concept since it involves the assessment and analysis of various intangible branches of foreign policy. Soft power also deals with various social dynamics, which, by default, creates a very challenging situation for researchers due to its multifaceted nature. In addition, soft power projection differs from case to case and firstly, it is important to understand how the projector state understands soft power, in order to further analyse its tools and effectiveness in the projecting state. For this reason, following a discussion on soft power (theoretical framework section – III), this study discussed also the how Russia understands soft power, viewing it through its own lens and projecting it to achieve its own strategic goals imposed by the Soviet legacy, the historical position of the empire and the modern challenges of the international system.

Relations between states are complex and the increasing globalization created further linkages. This has made this environment even more complex. For a social scientist to analyse these linkages, it requires an in – depth understanding of the inherent dynamics, structural characteristics, and strategic narratives of the specific case study. For that reason, this thesis began with a Historical overview. In this chapter, the historical background of Cyprus was presented, having at the same time an eye on the USSR’s involvement. The crucial periods of Post-World War II era, 1960s, and 1970s were discussed in some detail. This helped the reader gain a basic understanding on how relations between the key actors of this study, namely Russia and Cyprus, have been evolved over time and specifically, amidst the Cold War era rivalries. It also highlighted the historical trauma of Cyprus in 1974 and how the Turkish Invasion changed the dynamics on the island. In addition, in this chapter, the thesis argues that the Turkish invasion in 1974, offered a favourable environment for the USSR as it created a major rift within the NATO. One of the most important contributions of this chapter is the discussion on various important actors, such as the Church, Archbishop Makarios III, the communist party – AKEL, which also appear in later chapters.

Drawing on the insights from the scholarly analysis of Russian soft power perception and its associated resources, this research proceeded to examine the specific tools that Russia employs in Cyprus as part of its soft power strategy. This chapter delved into the theoretical

foundations previously discussed and presented a thorough analysis of the various means and tools Moscow uses to exert its influence over political and social outcomes in Cyprus. Of particular importance is the comprehensive examination of the key actors operating within the Cyprus social and economic domain. Overall, these findings contribute significantly to our understanding of the complex dynamics underlying Russo-Cypriot relations.

The subsequent chapter (effectiveness) examined the efficacy of the examined tools, by connecting foreign policy decision and concluded bilateral agreements with data gathered from opinion surveys (Eurobarometer) regarding Cypriot attitudes towards Russia amidst the heightened phase of the war in Ukraine. The final chapter (Discussion) established a correlation between theoretical discourse and soft power mechanisms along with the data presented on its effectiveness. By providing a clear structure, this chapter addressed the research questions set at the beginning of this thesis while also providing arguments clearly and cohesively.

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