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Public diplomacy in the dynamics of relations between the Russian Federation and Ukraine. Case study: conflict generated by the annexation of Crimea, 2014-2015

PHD THESIS SUMMARY

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Introduction

In the current period, we are witnessing significant changes in global politics and in the way international relations are structured. Classical diplomacy has not coped with how the security system has changed rapidly in the context of globalization and the fact that more and more new actors are involved in international relations. This is because states cannot manage new problems, such as terrorism, transnational crime, drugs, the environment and sustainable development, which would go beyond the realm of traditional diplomacy. Therefore, the role of the state has changed lately in response to the rapid changes in the international environment and the involvement of new actors. Consequently, diplomacy faces new challenges, including: the use of advanced information technology in modern communication; an increase in the number of actors involved in diplomacy; influencing diplomacy through the use of social media and other online platforms; and how relations between states, governments and other actors influence diplomacy's ability to act legitimately and effectively.

In addition, the formation of a positive image of the state as an effective tool for achieving national interests is becoming increasingly important in the context of a changing world. In this respect, public diplomacy has become an important tool of states' foreign policy. In particular, public diplomacy helps promote the interests of the country by studying the opinions of foreign audiences, informing them and influencing those who form this opinion.

Motivation for choosing the theme

The choice of research topic is justified by at least two reasons. One is personal, the reason for choosing the theme derives from the desire to document and to conduct a study on this subject and to correctly understand how to apply public diplomacy. Studying the field of international relations, I understood the importance of the subject both nationally and worldwide. Secondly, the motivation for the choice is determined by the topicality of the topic and the potential of this instrument in the foreign policy of the Russian Federation in relation to Ukraine. Public diplomacy is a new field of study, and changes in international relations have led to an increase in importance of its activity; thus, international relations register a resizing process, in which different non-state actors influence the image of a country abroad, benefiting from various communication mechanisms due to information technologies.

Research relevance

The relevance of studying this topic comes from the fact that for many centuries international relations have been dominated by military power, but with the intensification of the globalization process and the changes taking place in the international arena, the elements of power in international relations have shifted from the political-military space to the economic and cultural one.Thus, the relevance of studying public diplomacy is based on the changes taking place on the international arena, changes that have led to the increase in importance of public diplomacy activities in international relations. Also, the proposed research is one of interest and current, which addresses an important topic in the context of international relations. The conflict in Ukraine in 2014 had a significant impact on the entire region and raised concerns about global stability and security. This theme provides an opportunity to analyse the dynamics of international relations and the ways in which the media can influence public perception in conflict situations.

Novelty and originality of research

The originality of the research consists in the elaboration of a paper that brings into discussion the role of public diplomacy in the relationship between the Russian Federation and Ukraine in the context of the conflict in Ukraine in 2014. The research contributes to the development of the conceptual foundations of public diplomacy, the particularities of the relationship between the concepts of public diplomacy and classical diplomacy and other concepts, such as soft power, public diplomacy, public relations, propaganda. In this respect, this study aims to clarify some elements of the conceptual apparatus of public diplomacy and soft power and how to implement these concepts.

Purpose of research

The purpose of this research is to analyze the role of public diplomacy as a foreign policy instrument in relations between states and to present the concept and practical application as a soft power tool in the relationship between the Russian Federation and Ukraine in the context of the conflict in Ukraine in 2014

Research objectives

The research focuses on examining the relationship between the Russian Federation and Ukraine through the prism of communication and public diplomacy practices, with emphasis on analyzing ways of action and highlighting the narrative promoted by the Russian Federation

through the media and identifying strategies used to support their views on the conflict in Ukraine in 2014. Thus, we identified two main objectives and several secondary objectives:

1. Analysis of the concept of public diplomacy;
   a. Analysis of how public diplomacy is implemented in the foreign policy of the Russian Federation in relation to Ukraine in the context of the conflict in Ukraine;
   b. examination of instruments used by the Russian Federation in the conflict in Ukraine;
2. Analysis of the concept of soft power;
   a. understanding how two countries, which shared a common history in the past and opted for different strategic paths today, use soft power nowadays;
   b. analyzing the message of the Russian Federation to the West.

Research hypothesis

Starting from the research objectives, we formulated two research hypotheses. The first hypothesis underlying this research is that public diplomacy, being seen as an instrument of soft power, is a necessary condition for influencing public opinion and state and non-state actors. The second research hypothesis starts from the fact that the Russian Federation uses the media as a tool to convey its messages to both the West and the Russian-speaking population.

Research questions

The Russian Federation used a number of methods to support its interests in Ukraine and influence public opinion during the 2014 conflict in Ukraine, and public diplomacy involved various messages and propaganda. Thus, we formulated two research questions in order to provide an overview of Russian public diplomacy in the context of the conflict in Ukraine:

1. What is its importance as a means of political communication?
2. What are the factors that influenced the adoption of public diplomacy as a soft power instrument in the relations between the Russian Federation and Ukraine?

The limits of research

Given that research addresses a complex topic involving a variety of aspects of study and thus ongoing developments, limits are inherent. Both methodologically and empirically, one of the limits lies in the absence of quantitative research, through interviews or focus groups and the relatively small number of scientific papers on this research topic. The research period is another limit. The approach to the conflict in Ukraine is limited to the period from 2014 to 2015. In terms

of spatial delimitation, the paper analyzes the relationship between the Russian Federation and Ukraine. The scope will be limited to aspects of soft power highlighted by Joseph Nye and media analysis, specifically, speeches by President Vladimir Putin and articles in the Russia Today news agency. Available resources are another limit; access to resources being a major barrier to research. Although there are many sources of information, such as public documents, official speeches, news, research articles, and books, some documents may be inaccessible, which restricts the approach to the topic. There are also problems with language barriers, which also limit access to data. Research may include examination of documents in several languages (Russian, Ukrainian, English), which makes it difficult to access and analyze all resources. The impact of subsequent events is another limitation. The conflict in Ukraine has had an impact on subsequent events and relations between the two countries.

Research methodology

The research methods used in this academic endeavor were directed towards identifying the most appropriate answers to research objectives and working hypotheses, while aiming to highlight the limitations that such a study may have due to interdisciplinary complexity, addressing issues related to international relations, communication, media, public diplomacy, while using several concepts. Research will be built around the analysis of existing data, using case study and content analysis, as qualitative research methods. This approach was chosen to gain a detailed and contextualized understanding of how Russian public diplomacy was conducted in the context of the 2014 conflict in Ukraine. The chosen data collection technique consists of identifying sources based on an analysis grid. In this regard, we selected the corpus (speeches, interviews, press statements, news) by searching for keywords. In terms of sources, we analyzed legislative acts, books, articles, news, internet publications, press releases, media sources, official reports, speeches, interviews of key Russian political figures (Vladimir Putin, Dmitry Medvedev, Sergey Lavrov), coming from Western, Russian and Ukrainian sources and available in at least one of the two languages (English, Russian).

The subject of the research is public diplomacy as an instrument of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation, and the object of study is the foreign policy of the Russian Federation . In this regard, the research focuses on the study of the concept of public diplomacy as part of the evolution of relations between the Russian Federation and Ukraine in the context of the conflict in Ukraine in 2014.

Chapter summary

This paper is divided into six (6) chapters.

Chapter 1 entitled - *Public diplomacy: definition and theoretical foundation* presents the historical context and existing literature regarding public diplomacy, defines the concept, examines the evolution of scientific ideas about the concept and the actors of public diplomacy; defines the main forms of implementation of public diplomacy activity and examines the role and importance of public diplomacy in international relations. The analysis of public diplomacy will allow us to better understand how various state and non-state structures are involved in shaping world perceptions, what is the role of public diplomacy in international relations and what is its importance as a means of political communication, and will also help us identify best practices and contexts in which public diplomacy appears and/or takes place.

Public diplomacy has become one of the most discussed topics in world politics. Public diplomacy is becoming an integral part of world politics and an indispensable component of states' foreign policy. The term was first introduced into the academic sphere in 1965 by American diplomat Edmund Guillon, dean of the Fletcher School at Tufts University, to describe the process by which international actors achieved their foreign policy objectives by interacting with audiences in different countries. Therefore, Edmund Gullion stated that: "Public diplomacy deals with influencing public attitudes in the formation and execution of foreign policies. It includes dimensions of international relations, beyond classical diplomacy: the formation by governments of public opinion in other countries; interaction between private interest groups in different countries; informing the population about international affairs and their influence on domestic politics; communication between those whose function is communication, such as foreign diplomats and journalists; (and) the process of intercultural communication'[1].

The term public diplomacy starts from the premise that the attitudes of people in a certain country could affect the implementation of foreign policy by influencing public opinion in that country; an activity that goes beyond classical diplomacy due to the fact that it is carried out by private groups and the media and not only by governments. This premise is based on Joseph Nye's statement – "public diplomacy is a soft power tool that governments use to mobilize their soft

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[1] USC Center on Public Diplomacy, "Public diplomacy before Gullion: The evolution of a phrase", 2006, available online https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/public-diplomacy-gullion-evolution-phrase access the data of 23.05.2023.

power resources (culture, values, policies) to communicate and attract audiences from other countries, rather than just their governments." [2] Paul Sharp, a political science professor at the University of Minnesota Duluth, defines public diplomacy as "the process by which direct relationships with people in a country are cultivated to advance one's own interests and expand one's own values."[3] Nicholas Cull argues that public diplomacy is an attempt by an international actor to conduct his foreign policy by involving foreign audiences "conduct foreign policy by engaging with foreign audiences" and [4] points out that it is considered a contact between governments and people.

Based on the above definitions, it can be stated that there are different approaches to defining the concept of public diplomacy and that public diplomacy is a state-led activity and its implementation channels can be both through officials (e.g. a representative of a state department) and through non-state actors (non-governmental organizations). The main focus is often on non-state actors. Thus, in the twenty-first century, not only has the number of non-state actors increased significantly, but their interaction with states has also increased. Social resources are increasingly used by states to influence foreign audiences. Public diplomacy remains a diplomatic means of implementing foreign policy, with which the state is consistent with its goals, thus trying to influence the international environment.

Public diplomacy is different from classical diplomacy because it goes beyond the narrow government-to-government interpretation of diplomacy. Compared to classical diplomacy, the subjects and objects of public diplomacy are more extensive, the specific diplomatic forms more diverse, and the implementation period is longer. What differentiates it is that public diplomacy has a transparent character and is widespread, while classical diplomacy has a narrower dissemination. Classical diplomacy is transmitted by governments to other governments, while public diplomacy deals not only with governments, but also with individuals and non-governmental organizations. Classical diplomacy focuses on governments' strategies, while public diplomacy is concerned with public behaviors, which makes it much more effective[5].

[2] Joseph Nye, „Public Diplomacy and Soft Power", *op.cit.*, pp. 94-109.
[3] Paul Sharp, *op.cit.,* pp. 106-123.
[4] Nicholas Cull, „The Long Road to Public Diplomacy 2.0: The Internet in US Public Diplomacy" în *International Studies Review*, nr. 15, 2013, pp. 123-139.
[5] Ion Guceac, Sergiu Porcescu, "Public diplomacy – indispensable component of the external discourse in conditions of globalization*",* in *Journal of Science, Innovation, Culture and Art "Akademos",* vol. 1, no. 1, 2010, pp. 6-10.

Public diplomacy and classical diplomacy contain both similarities and differences. The similarities revolve around their common goals. Both require the realization of foreign policy and the protection of the political and economic interests of the state. Both classical and public diplomacy use the media to send messages to foreign audiences. Public diplomacy differs from classical diplomacy by its communicating parts, mode of communication, areas of communication and effects of this communication. As for the communicating parties, classical diplomacy is the communication of one government with another government, and public diplomacy involves communication with the citizens of another country. State and non-state actors of one country communicate with citizens of other countries, either directly or through media channels. In other words, public diplomacy goes beyond relations between governments and their contacts, communicates with non-governmental structures, organizations, associations.

Research in public diplomacy serves as a meeting point for various academic disciplines, including public relations, communication, international relations, strategic studies, and diplomatic studies. Public diplomacy is a subfield of international relations that involves the study of the process and practice by which states and other actors engage global audiences to serve their interests. Public diplomacy as a tool for implementing foreign policy originally appeared in the US and dates back to the mid-twentieth century, with the task of presenting a favorable image of the state abroad.

Chapter 2 entitled - *Public diplomacy and contemporary challenges to internal and international security* aims to present an overview of the concept of soft power, to analyze the differences between public diplomacy and different similar concepts, such as cultural diplomacy, foreign policy, public relations, propaganda, strategic communication, which are often seen as synonymous and to analyze the link between public diplomacy and these instruments for promoting the foreign policy of states (mentioned concepts).

The concept of power was defined by Joseph Nye as "the ability of a state to change the behavior of other states through attraction and persuasion, and not only through its military and economic resources", thus introducing the concept of soft power, which he describes as "the ability to attract and persuade in order to shape the preferences of others and obtain the benefit sought by the one who resorts to it".[6] The ability to attract another is the ability to change the other's preferences towards their choices so that one's preferred outcome becomes the other's preferred

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[6] Joseph Nye, *Bound to Lead: the Changing Nature of American Power*, *op.cit.,* pp. 334-336.

outcome. Joseph Nye describes soft power as an actor's ability to get what you want through attraction, not because of his military or economic power; More specifically, it stems from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals and policies. Soft power and public diplomacy are concepts that are related to each other. Public diplomacy is one of the key tools of soft power.

An essential aspect analyzed in this chapter is the interaction of soft power within a state's foreign policy strategy. Soft power theory is a theoretical construction that has become an important tool in foreign policy discussions. Several researchers see public diplomacy as an "instrument of soft power; tool that national governments use to mobilize intangible resources and attract the masses of another country, and not just representatives of their state.[7] More specifically, they carry out educational and cultural exchange programs, public information and political actions. Joseph Nye describes public diplomacy as a "political expression of soft power". More specifically, public diplomacy can be seen as one of the mechanisms for using soft power by promoting the values of a state actor and as a tool for implementing a state's foreign policy, in order to shape the image of a country abroad.

Public diplomacy has developed in the context of changes in world politics and under the influence of these changes. At the same time, together with public diplomacy, other instruments related to social and humanitarian impact are widely used around the world. Thus, we can say that public diplomacy interferes with instruments to promote states' foreign policy, including: soft power, propaganda, strategic communication, public relations, mass-media, cultural diplomacy, digital diplomacy, language, religion.

Although they are two different concepts, propaganda and public diplomacy often have similar goals in international relations. There is an overlap between the two concepts, as both involve the use of communication to influence public opinion and promote national interests. Public diplomacy usually focuses on promoting dialogue, while propaganda can be manipulative in nature. From the point of view of the goals pursued, public diplomacy and propaganda intersect, but differ by the techniques and means by which they are achieved.

Compared to public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy is a product of soft power, and cultural diplomacy is only an integral part of public diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy is seen as a field of public diplomacy meant to promote state policies and national interests through the use of culture.

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[7] Rosaleen Smyth, „Mapping US Public Diplomacy in the 21st Century" în *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 55, nr. 3, 2001, p. 424.

A key area of differentiation between public relations and public diplomacy can be identified in its ultimate purpose. While public relations between any organization and foreign audiences can focus on mutually beneficial long-term relationships, the ultimate goal of public diplomacy is to gather international support for a state actor's foreign policy.

Public diplomacy and mass media are two different but interconnected concepts. Public diplomacy is strategic communication in which the media is used as a channel in order to communicate and transmit information to foreign audiences and which, through the media, aims to improve the image of a country at international level, while the media tries to obtain an international agreement by using public means. The difference between public diplomacy and mass media is given by communication channels and actors. In terms of media, state actors use the media to send messages and information to state officials in another country, while in public diplomacy, political actors, including state and non-state actors, use the media to influence the public opinion of foreign audiences.

Chapter 3 entitled - *Russian Public Diplomacy* analyzes the role of public diplomacy in achieving the foreign policy objectives of the Russian Federation and how public diplomacy of the Russian Federation has evolved throughout history and changes that have occurred in international relations. This analysis begins with the imperial legacy and presents the origin of Russian public diplomacy and its impact on the Soviet era. The research continues with the analysis of contemporary Russian public diplomacy and how it adapts to the challenges and opportunities brought by the new environment. In addition, they discuss the Russian approach to the concept of soft power, the changes that occurred as a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the main objectives of Russian public diplomacy.

The Soviet Union, as one of the two main belligerent powers of the Cold War, provides a significant case study in the practice of public diplomacy. Similarly, as the main successor to the Soviet Union and as one of the most influential actors in the international arena, the Russian Federation also provides an important case study on the practice of public diplomacy. An important part of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation is public diplomacy, which involves continuous efforts to promote its interests, principles and image before the international community and aims to shape opinions and influence global audiences. Russian public diplomacy has undergone significant changes throughout its history. Russian public diplomacy has its roots in the imperial era, when propaganda and cultural diplomacy were used to increase the country's influence and

prestige. During the Soviet era, public diplomacy focused on propagating communist ideology and supporting revolutionary movements around the world. Using new communication technologies and media platforms, the Russian Federation modernized its public diplomacy in the post-Soviet period.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, public diplomacy became a familiar attribute of international life and an essential component of foreign policy. Thus, in a changing world, states use all possible resources to strengthen their positions on the world stage by building economic and military potential and creating a positive international image. The use of the term soft power is also relatively new in Russian political circles, becoming a priority in the early 2000s. It is described as "a comprehensive toolkit for achieving foreign policy objectives based on the potential of civil society, intelligence, cultural methods and other methods and technologies alternative to traditional diplomacy".[8]

The term public diplomacy was largely absent from the official discourse of Russian foreign policy. The concern of the Russian Federation about the intangible aspects of its international activity was framed as a need to improve its image abroad and establish stronger ties with Russian compatriots in other countries. The Russian Federation wants to use soft power in order to project a favorable image in Western societies. Russian political factors fear that "stereotypes that maintain an inertia of negative perception negatively affect the West's perception of the Russian Federation."[9] In this regard, they try to remedy the situation by justifying their position on various international and domestic issues and stressing that the Russian Federation is "a completely different country from the Soviet Union, which embraced democratic principles and universal values."[10]

The term public diplomacy first appeared in the "Russian Foreign Policy Concept" in 2008. Public diplomacy was understood as an instrument of informational support for foreign policy. The document emphasizes that the Russian Federation seeks to achieve a favorable perception

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[8] Vladimir Putin, "Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation", 2013, available online https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/2542248 access the data of 15.06.2023.
[9] Kommersant „They act consciously and purposefully against Russia, but you can't be offended by this", 2012, disponibil online https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1911330 accesat la data de 04.06.2023.
[10] Konstantin Kosachev, „Russia is all of us and how others see us", 2013, disponibil online, https://www.rg.ru/2013/09/06/kosachev.html access the data from 05.06.2023.

abroad and develop its own effective means of influence on public opinion abroad[11]. Many scholars also attribute the interest of public diplomacy and soft power by the Russian Federation to President Vladimir Putin's February 2012 presidential campaign. Vladimir Putin made remarks on the concept of soft power, which shows how the Russian Federation sees diplomacy publicly, respectively "as a political tool and a dangerous weapon for Western power".[12]

Chapter 4 entitled - *Research methodology* presents the stages of research (preparation of research, its conduct and completion), fundamental principles of research methodology and discusses in detail the methodological choice and design of research. The choice of the explanatory case study, as a research method, is due to the desire to understand the key aspects of public diplomacy, to analyze how the Russian Federation manages the challenges of public diplomacy (image of the country, communication with foreign public, cultural diversity, disinformation in the media, management of international conflicts, adaptation to technological changes) in relation to Ukraine, in the context of the conflict in Ukraine in 2014 and examine the different methods or approaches used by the Russian Federation. It also analyzes public diplomacy initiatives, soft power tools used in the relationship between the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

The case study, conducted by identifying sources based on a grid analysis as a data collection technique, focuses on how Russian media framed the conflict in Ukraine in 2014. The research examines how the Russian Federation has used the media to promote and support its foreign policy goals during the conflict in Ukraine, through analysis of Russia Today news agency and speeches and interviews by Russian President Vladimir Putin. The study is limited to the period from 2014 to 2015.

Thus, with the help of qualitative content analysis, in the first part of the analysis, we identified the justifications that the Russian president used for the actions of the Russian Federation in Ukraine in order to have a deeper understanding of the geopolitical dynamics in the region. In this regard, we have selected a total of 50 sources containing speeches, interviews, press statements of President Vladimir Putin on the conflict in Ukraine, from 2014-2015, respectively from January 28, 2014 to December 17, 2015. The sources were selected according to several criteria: the

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[11] "THE FOREIGN POLICY CONCEPT OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION", 2008, available online https://russiaeu.ru/userfiles/file/foreign_policy_concept_english.pdf accesat the data of 02.06.2023.
[12] Vasile Rotaru, *Instrumentalizing the Sources of Attraction: How Russia Undermines Its Own Soft Power,* 2015, pp. 1-2.

subject, the date of the source, the rhetoric of President Vladimir Putin and the credibility of the source.

The second part of the analysis focuses on examining the articles of the Russia Today news agency as public diplomacy tools of the Russian Federation in the context of the conflict in Ukraine. The selection of articles was made using the following keywords: "protesters", "Euromaidan", "referendum", "annexation" and "Crimea". The analyzed period was between November 30, 2013 and May 8, 2014 and, at the same time, when selecting sources, news analysis was taken into account in connection with two significant events, respectively, the Euromaidan protests and the referendum on the status of Crimea and its annexation by the Russian Federation.

The conflict in Ukraine has had a significant impact on public diplomacy activities and soft power tools of several international actors (Russian Federation and Ukraine). Before the conflict in Ukraine in 2014, the tools of public diplomacy and soft power were seen as essential tools in the foreign policy of many states. Public diplomacy focused on building a favorable image among foreign audiences through cultural exchanges, dialogue, media and promotion of democratic values, and soft power tools included humanitarian aid, economic assistance, cooperation in education, promotion of democratic values and institutions. The conflict in Ukraine has thus led to a shift in priorities. More specifically, relations between the Russian Federation and the West have become significantly tense, and public diplomacy has been considerably affected, meaning that both the US and the EU have revised their approaches and changed their priorities, moving from public diplomacy and soft power instruments to hard power measures, such as strengthening military alliances, increasing defense spending and imposing sanctions against the Russian Federation. Western policy towards the Russian Federation has seen a decrease in attention paid to public diplomacy and has placed greater emphasis on the importance of national security, by shifting from promoting dialogue and cooperation to economic sanctions and political pressure. Efforts that until then were directed towards image promotion were redirected to security measures and countering threats.

Chapter 5 entitled - *Russian Public Diplomacy in the Context of the 2014 Ukraine Conflict presents the context of the 2014* conflict in Ukraine, highlighting the importance of public diplomacy as a soft power tool. The context of the conflict focuses on the history of relations between the actors involved, namely the Russian Federation and Ukraine and its impact on the international community, in order to provide an in-depth study of Russian public diplomacy.

The conflict was a period of political, social tensions and violent conflicts following important events such as the Euromaidan protests, the ouster of President Viktor Yanukovych, the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, the violent conflict in eastern Ukraine and the reactions of international actors. The conflict had significant consequences on international relations and security in the Eastern European region, caused a deterioration of relations between the Russian Federation and the West, undermined regional security in Europe, had an impact on the economy of the two actors (Ukraine and the Russian Federation) and generated changes in geopolitical dynamics, demonstrating the geopolitical complexity of the Eastern European region.

The situation in Ukraine has captured the attention of the international community, and the Russian Federation has played a significant role in destabilizing the political and military situation in the region. While instruments of hard power, such as military intervention and direct threats, were visible, the Russian Federation's strategy was also based on the use of soft power tools. Through these instruments, the Russian Federation tried to influence public opinion and create an environment conducive to its interests in Ukraine

The conflict in Ukraine has become a complex geopolitical battleground. The Russian Federation, considering Ukraine as an area of strategic importance, promoted its own interests in an attempt to get closer to the EU. As for the international community, in particular the US and the EU, they supported Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, condemned the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and engaged in supporting diplomatic efforts for a peaceful settlement of the conflict. While imposing economic sanctions against the Russian Federation, the United States has diplomatically and militarily supported Ukraine by providing financial support and military equipment, and has participated in negotiations aimed at stopping hostilities and rebuilding conflict-affected areas. The EU has also imposed economic sanctions against the Russian Federation, provided financial support to Ukraine and humanitarian assistance to help the population affected by the conflict.

The relations between the Russian Federation and Ukraine were and are marked by a geopolitical rivalry that generated consequences on the understanding of ways to solve the conflict between the two countries. In the years immediately following the conflict, public diplomacy efforts focused on finding a peaceful resolution of the conflict in eastern Ukraine and restoring relations between the Russian Federation and Ukraine. However, relations between the two countries still remained strained.

Chapter 6 entitled - *the 2014 conflict in Ukraine in Russian media* focuses on the role that media play in international conflicts and how they relate to public diplomacy. Analysis of the role of media in the 2014 conflict in Ukraine is essential to understand how narratives and information are used to shape public opinion and influence the evolution and outcomes of the international conflict. Understanding the complexity of the relationship between media and international conflicts can help develop appropriate strategies and policies for managing and resolving these conflicts.

This research focuses on how the media, in particular, the RT (Russia Today) news agency and President Vladimir Putin, through his speeches and interviews, frame the conflict in Ukraine in 2014. The research examines how the Russian Federation has used the media to promote and support its foreign policy objectives during the conflict in Ukraine, as well as how these actors have influenced perceptions and interpretations of the geopolitical crisis. Through the analysis of narratives, themes and speeches, the role of the media and speeches of the Russian leader in promoting points of view will be highlighted. The study will also provide an overview of the role of the media in shaping public opinion in a complex international conflict.

Russian media largely covered the conflict in Ukraine in a way that supported the position of the Russian Federation and accused the West of involvement in destabilizing the situation. Specifically, he supported the idea that pro-Russian separatists supported regional autonomy and were fighting an illegitimate Ukrainian government. Civilian casualties in the region have been in the spotlight, suggesting that the suffering of the population was caused by the actions of the Ukrainian army. In addition, he supported the actions taken by the Russian Federation in Crimea, claiming that the annexation of the peninsula would be a necessary "reunification" to protect the interests and Russian-speaking population in the area[13]. This role has often been criticized for its lack of objectivity and manipulation of information for political purposes, for the way it spread information, and for propagating controversial messages or disinformation.

The Russian Federation's message to the West focused on several important aspects and included the use of tools and strategies to support its point of view. Thus, the main message conveyed by the Russian Federation is that its actions in Ukraine are justified by the need to protect the rights and interests of Russian minorities, as well as to maintain stability in the area. The

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[13] Vladimir Putin, „Transcript: Putin says Russia will protect the rights of Russians abroad", The Washington Post, 2014, disponibil online https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/transcript-putin-says-russia-will-protect-the-rights-of-russians-abroad/2014/03/18/432a1e60-ae99-11e3-a49e-76adc9210f19_story.html accesat la data de 10.08.2023.

Russian Federation claims that the military intervention was an "action of self-defense against an alleged threat to its citizens" and that it intervened to prevent a "genocide" of Russians in Ukraine, criticizing the Ukrainian government, which it considers illegitimate and made up of nationalist and extremist forces[14]. The Russian Federation also claims that Western interference in Ukraine's internal affairs is the cause of events in Ukraine. This involves accusations against the EU and the United States, which they accuse of supporting and encouraging protests against the pro-Russian government in Ukraine, leading to instability and escalation of the conflict.

In the first part of the analysis - *President Vladimir Putin's speech on the conflict in Ukraine*, qualitative content analysis is used to identify the categories of narratives used by Vladimir Putin in his rhetoric. In this part of the research, I will examine how Vladimir Putin framed the conflict in Ukraine by analyzing his speeches and statements, and I will identify the arguments and justification that the president used for the actions of the Russian Federation in the region.

The study analyzes 50 speeches, interviews, transcripts from interviews and press statements by President Vladimir Putin on the conflict in Ukraine from 2014 to 2015 (from January 28, 2014 to December 17, 2015). During this period, events occurred that significantly affected the development of the conflict and relations between the Russian Federation, Ukraine and the international community (USA and EU). The period also marks the transformation of the protests into a geopolitical and military crisis between Ukraine and the Russian Federation. In particular, Euromaidan protests increased in intensity in January 2014 and clashes between demonstrators and security forces turned extremely violent and caused numerous casualties. This led to the resignation of Viktor Yanukovych as President on 22 February 2014. In the latter part of 2015 (September), the Minsk peace agreements encountered difficulties, which had a negative impact on the economy in the region. The Minsk agreements were designed to end the conflict in eastern Ukraine, but were implemented with difficulty, causing further confrontations and tensions. The events that followed, such as the growing influence of separatists in eastern Ukraine, the persistence of the conflict and diplomatic efforts to find a peaceful solution, affected European security and international relations, including through economic sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation by the West.

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[14] Heather Ashby, „How the Kremlin Distorts the 'Responsibility to Protect' Principle", The United States Institute of Peace, 2022, disponibil online https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/04/how-kremlin-distorts-responsibility-protect-principle accesat la data de 10.08.2023.

The study aims to identify the main themes and narratives that Vladimir Putin has used in the media to cover the conflict in Ukraine. In this regard, the 50 sources chosen in the study provide an almost complete list of President Vladimir Putin's rhetoric. The following criteria have been used to determine the sources that are relevant for this analysis:

1. The subject – all sources examined focus on the conflict in Ukraine and include President Vladimir Putin's rhetoric about the Euromaidan protests, the overthrow of President Viktor Yanukovych and the annexation of Crimea;

2. Source date – the analysis focuses on the time period beginning January 28, 2014 and extending until December 17, 2015;

3. President Vladimir Putin's rhetoric – all sources used contain his own interviews, speeches, press statements and transcripts from Vladimir Putin's speeches; 38 sources are direct transcripts from the official website of the President of the Russian Federation; the remaining 12 sources are transcripts from various news sources containing Vladimir Putin's rhetoric on the subject (BBC News, The Washington Post, RT News, RIA Novosti, Aljazeera, Russian Mission,);

4. Credibility of the source – sources contain official Kremlin communiqués and prominent international news stations; The primary sources used were official transcripts of interviews and Kremlin press releases.

In this regard, I managed to identify 5 categories of justifications that were used in President Vladimir Putin's rhetoric. These categories are as follows:

1. protecting the Ukrainian people;
2. the common history of the two countries;
3. protection of the interests of the Russian Federation;
4. the Minsk agreements;
5. NATO enlargement.

Framing the conflict in President Vladimir Putin's rhetoric has been an essential tool for influencing public perception. It presented the conflict in Ukraine as a civil war and as an effort by the Russian Federation to protect its ethnic relatives from the Ukrainian fascist government and Western interference (US and EU). By restricting public media, news, television channels, radio stations and Internet sources, Vladimir Putin has tried to control the opinions of the Russian population and even the foreign public.

An analysis of President Vladimir Putin's messages and narratives in relation to the 2014 conflict in Ukraine indicates the use of several categories of relevant narratives in his rhetoric. The most prominent narrative (justification) frames the actions of the Russian Federation in Ukraine as necessary and legitimate. President Vladimir Putin's main narrative lies in the obligation to act on behalf of Ukrainians in conflict, who are under pressure and threats from the illegitimate new government. Vladimir Putin refers not only to his ethnic relatives, but to all Ukrainians, as one people with the Russian Federation[15]. Vladimir Putin's rhetoric shows a sense of disapproval of the lack of legitimacy of the new leadership, leadership under Petro Poroshenko, who was elected president in the presidential elections of May 25, 2014.

Another significant justification is the mention of the common history of relations between the Russian Federation and Ukraine. The Russian president constantly defends the language, culture and rights of his co-ethnics living outside the borders of the Russian Federation. In Ukraine, there were some key moments that Vladimir Putin highlighted in an effort to get involved on behalf of these co-ethnics. In the discursive strategy, Vladimir Putin framed the conflict to make it seem that his ethnic relatives needed immediate protection, and it was his duty to provide them.

Although President Vladimir Putin talks about NATO expansion, it is last on his list of justifications. While he mentions NATO expansion as a potential threat, his rhetoric focuses primarily on protecting Ukrainians and Russians in Ukraine. He noted that the involvement of the Russian Federation in Ukraine was a reaction to NATO's expansion in its near region and that the attraction of Ukraine by the West into its sphere of influence created a significant concern for the security of the Russian Federation and posed a strategic threat. The fate of Ukraine hinders the internal stability of the Russian Federation. The biggest problem facing Ukraine is corruption within its own government[16].

The findings of this analysis present a unique perspective on President Vladimir Putin's involvement in Ukraine. Regarding this conflict, Vladimir Putin adopted a speech that was largely constant, claiming that the Russian Federation intervened to protect the rights of its ethnic relatives in Ukraine and to defend the interests of the Russian Federation in the region. This narrative justifies all previous incursions by the Kremlin into the region.

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[15] Vladimir Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation", 2014, available online http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603 access to the data of 23.08.2023.
[16] Robert Barrington, „Corruption and Ukraine: the causes and consequences of war", Centre for the Study of Corruption, University of Sussex, 2022, disponibil online https://study-online.sussex.ac.uk/news-and-events/corruption-and-ukraine-causes-and-consequences-of-war/ accesat la data de 24.08.2023.

Finally, President Vladimir Putin used in his rhetoric several arguments to support the Russian Federation's incursion into Ukraine and to influence public opinion and justify his actions in the eyes of the international community. The way the Kremlin communicated about the conflict in Ukraine was criticized and contested by the international community (US and EU), and many of the arguments were considered rhetorical strategies by which the Russian president concealed the military aggression of the Russian Federation in Ukraine. In summary, the narratives that build Vladimir Putin's speech on events in Ukraine are: protecting the Ukrainian people and Russians in Ukraine (Russian-speaking population), by invoking the right to protect Russian communities outside the borders of the Russian Federation; invoking the common history by mentioning the cultural and historical ties between the Russian Federation and Ukraine; protecting the interests of the Russian Federation – argument used to explain the military involvement of the Russian Federation in Ukraine and to support the annexation of Crimea in the context of instability created by political changes and events during the Euromaidan protests, reminding each time of the illegitimacy of the Ukrainian government; compliance with the Minsk agreements, which were cited as evidence of the Russian Federation's efforts to resolve the conflict; and, last but not least, NATO's expansion towards Eastern Europe, which posed a threat to the security of the Russian Federation and its strategic interests. Overall, President Vladimir Putin has consistently used this rhetoric to support the position and actions of the Russian Federation during the conflict.

The second part of the analysis - *RT and the conflict in Ukraine: media approaches and perspectives* aims to analyze the role of RT news agency as a public diplomacy tool of the Russian Federation in the context of the conflict in Ukraine. The study examines how the growing tension between the Russian Federation and the West is reported and framed by RT news agency and its relevance to Russian public diplomacy. Therefore, through this study I want to contribute to the understanding of the strategies and themes predominantly used by RT in the context of the conflict in Ukraine and to the analysis of the relationship between Russian public diplomacy and the media. The research also aims to provide insight into how RT approached the 2014 conflict, with a focus on how the media framed the conflict. Since there are a large number of articles on the conflict, we have limited the scope of research by selecting two significant events of the conflict. Thus, the empirical part of the study is organized around the analysis of news related to the Euromaidan protests and the referendum on the status of Crimea and its annexation by the Russian Federation.

Russia Today is an international news agency based in Moscow. RT was founded on December 10, 2005 at the initiative of the Russian government with the aim of conveying its views and news from its perspective to foreign audiences. RT offered a perspective on the conflict in Ukraine similar to the position of the Russian government. In this regard, by the way it reported the events and opinions expressed, RT claimed that the West (US and EU) planned a coup d'état in Ukraine in February 2014, which led to the resignation of President Viktor Yanukovych. RT criticized the West for its negative involvement in Ukraine and for supporting the Ukrainian government. RT supported the Russian Federation's decision to annex Crimea in March 2014 and presented the move as a response to the "coup" that took place in Ukraine. However, the international community criticised this referendum for lacking legitimacy[17]. RT serves as a means of disseminating propaganda for the Kremlin by influencing international public opinion and foreign policy in favor of the Kremlin's political goals in order to promote its views in the context of the conflict in Ukraine[18]. Instead, international news agencies have presented the conflict in Ukraine from a different perspective, highlighting elements related to Ukraine's sovereignty and supporting the Ukrainian government in its efforts to preserve its territory.

Therefore, in order to have a better understanding of how RT presented the conflict in Ukraine and its perspective on it, we analyzed the narratives and themes most frequently addressed by RT in connection with the Euromaidan protests and the referendum on the status of Crimea and its annexation by the Russian Federation. Both events are relevant in the evolution of the conflict and have generated reactions at international level. For data collection, we extracted both news and opinion articles for analysis. While news articles are those that report current information, opinion articles are published articles that either express the opinion of a person unaffiliated with the editorial board or publish an interview with a public figure. Therefore, the research material consists of news and opinion articles published on the RT website. A careful selection of articles is critical at this point in the research, given the multitude of articles uploaded to the RT website during that period. To access the news, we used the words that define the events under consideration: "protesters", "Euromaidan", "referendum", "annexation" and "Crimea". The time period used was from November 30, 2013 to May 8, 2014, and the material is taken from RT's

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[17] *Ibidem*, pp. 1255-1297.
[18] U.S. Departament of State, „GEC's Special Report: Pillars of Russia's Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem for more information about the ecosystem", 2020, pp. 7-10, disponibil online https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Pillars-of-Russia%E2%80%99s-Disinformation-and-Propaganda-Ecosystem_08-04-20.pdf accesat la data de 06.09.2023.

English-language website (www.rt.com). In order to ensure accuracy and relevance, only articles covering the conflict in Ukraine and containing these tags were selected for analysis, i.e.23 articles.

A qualitative analysis of 23 articles published by RT presented a narrative built in favor of the Russian Federation. In order to convince the public of the correctness of the Russian position and to convince people to support the Kremlin's statements, several strategies were used. Ultimately, RT's goal is to stop denigrating President Vladimir Putin and his administration, as well as stop the West's influence in its sphere of interest. After analyzing the news about the two events, we identified the narratives most frequently discussed in the analyzed articles, as well as the techniques/strategies used to build a pro-Russian narrative. Conflict and global security are the two main themes. One of the main sources of conflict between the Russian Federation and the West is the impact of the 2014 conflict in Ukraine on global security. President Vladimir Putin's decision to annex Crimea and support ethnic Russians in eastern and southern Ukraine, and his claim that NATO is trying to establish a new order in the region where it would have a more influential presence, has raised key questions for the West about Eastern Europe's security. RT presents the Russian Federation both as a victim of Western aggression. and as an actor defending its legitimate interests. And, as for the strategies RT uses to create a narrative that is pro-Russian, they emphasize highlighting perspectives/opinions that support the interests of the Russian Federation, highlighting the negative aspects of the West's actions, using positive language and image of the Russian Federation.

The conflict is viewed from the perspective of the illegitimate government in Kiev, which seized power in a coup. EU and US politicians have violated Ukraine's sovereignty and overthrown the democratically elected government of President Viktor Yanukovych, backing the opposition Euromaidan. It refers to the military actions that led to the takeover of Crimea and protests in the eastern regions of Ukraine in support of the secession of Ukraine and the Russian language.

On the topic of global security, RT focuses on highlighting global instability, claiming that the Euromaidan protests and sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation by the West result in increased global instability and security threats. Regarding the conflict, RT argues that the Russian Federation acts defensively to protect its interests and that these actions are justified in response to threats from the West, thus being necessary to counter its influence in the region. RT also describes the events as a bilateral conflict between the Russian Federation and the West, highlighting tensions between both sides. In this regard, RT argues that the events in Ukraine in

2014 resulted primarily from the support that the EU and the United States gave to the Euromaidan opposition. This support led to the overthrow of the democratically elected government of Viktor Yanukovych and the establishment of an "illegitimate government in Kiev".

RT Agency thus becomes a soft power tool used by the Russian Federation to fulfill its public diplomacy objectives, especially trying to demonstrate the legitimacy of the Russian Federation's actions. The two themes (global security and conflict), highlighted by RT, built a discourse that supports the idea of Western intervention in Ukraine's affairs that have always been in the Russian sphere of influence, and also supports the idea that emerging nations will have a significant role in the future global multipolar system. In this context, the Russian Federation intends to open up to the BRICS and, mainly, to promote Eurasian integration through the Eurasian Economic Union. At the same time, the Russian Federation seeks to promote both this organization and cooperation with other BRICS members to counterbalance the influence of the EU, NATO and other international organizations. To this end, one can understand why Moscow risked so much to secure the participation of neighboring nations in these projects. In the short term, the most obvious proof that the Russian Federation has started a disinformation "war" against Western information aggression is the very strategy of using multiple media outlets (Sputnik, Rossiya 24, NTV) in connection with coverage of events in Ukraine.

The analysis shows that RT paid enough attention to news about Ukraine, focusing on the "West versus Russia" narrative. The most prominent narratives on RT's website have characterized the West (US government and EU officials) as biased and responsible for the political and economic turmoil in Ukraine, as well as for worsening relations between the Russian Federation and Ukraine. RT's narratives also supported President Vladimir Putin's position in the context of this conflict. These features were maintained throughout the two selected events. Also, the news analyzed omitted some topics, while following others. For example, the religious factor has not been addressed, nor has it been seen as a problem in the context of the conflict in Ukraine, which proves the political character of the conflict.

The material we reviewed comes entirely from a single platform (RT). This means that it is impossible to draw general conclusions for framing it as a means of exercising public diplomacy in the sense that, for example, it could offer a comparative study or an extended study to other media platforms. We can also say that all RT news analyzed contains a convergent presentation of the conflict in Ukraine in 2014. This is primarily because RT is funded by the Russian government

and is considered a propaganda tool for the Kremlin; and the fact that most sources are vague may call into question the transparency and legitimacy of the information presented by RT.

Conclusions

Public diplomacy is an essential component of international relations that involves direct communication and interaction with foreign audiences to promote national interests, influence public opinion and promote a favorable image of the country on the international stage. In this sense, to answer the first research question, we can say that public diplomacy is a tool of political communication that is based on open dialogue, exchanges of ideas and development of relations with foreign publics. Its purpose is to influence public opinion and perception of a state or non-state actor. This process involves the use of various methods of communication, cultural and educational exchanges, public events and other means of promoting a favorable image of the country and supporting its cultural, economic and political interests. Approaching public diplomacy as a method of political communication is essential for promoting the country's interests, managing international crises, countering propaganda, and especially gaining international support. Also, public diplomacy plays an important role in shaping and influencing public opinion both domestically and internationally because states can promote their interests and values, combat disinformation, influence policies and strategies, attract investment, strengthen soft power and gain the trust of the foreign public. This includes a variety of actions and methods that state and non-state actors implement, such as education, cultural exchanges, partnerships, promotion of mutual understanding, communication with the media. Governments and non-governmental organizations can influence public opinion in a way that aligns with their objectives and increases their influence on the global stage through effective use of public diplomacy.

Regarding the second research question, there are a number of factors that contributed to the use of public diplomacy as a tool of soft power in relations between the Russian Federation and Ukraine. These include the context of historical, political and social relations between the two countries. The relationships between them are greatly influenced by historical and cultural elements. Although the population of these two countries shared a common history and many cultural ties, they also had historical conflicts related to their identity. Due to its connection to Ukraine and its geopolitical importance to the Russian Federation, it has used public diplomacy to justify its actions and try to influence Ukrainian policy.

Public diplomacy has become an essential tool in the conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine after it annexed Crimea. Public diplomacy has also been used to gain support from other states and build strategic alliances. The Russian Federation claimed that it would maintain stability and security in the region by using soft power tools, especially to combat regional (Eurasian) influence. Both the Russian Federation and Ukraine needed international support to promote their problems and obtain diplomatic, economic and military support from other countries or international organizations. The Russian Federation has increasingly used media and propaganda to promote its views and influence public opinion. This included controlling media channels, manipulating information, and conveying messages to meet foreign policy objectives.

Finally, all these factors determined the use of public diplomacy as a soft power tool in relations between the Russian Federation and Ukraine in the context of the conflict in Ukraine. These circumstances include the history of relations, geopolitical interests, armed conflict, media and regional influence. These factors have determined public diplomacy to be used as a means of political communication and influence in the context of tensions between the two countries.

President Vladimir Putin has made several speeches and statements on the conflict in Ukraine. After analyzing the 50 speeches selected for the case study, we concluded that President Vladimir Putin used several arguments to justify his actions in Ukraine. He justified the military intervention of the Russian Federation in Crimea and the support of separatists in eastern Ukraine, stating that they are necessary to protect Russian minorities and the Russian-speaking population in those areas. The argument was used to suggest that the Russian Federation protects these ethnic and linguistic groups. Another argument is that Russian President Vladimir Putin has argued that the political and economic situation in Ukraine is unstable and that it is necessary for the Russian Federation to intervene to prevent the collapse of the country. Through this narrative, the Russian president is trying to justify the involvement of the Russian Federation in the region and weaken confidence in the Ukrainian government in Kiev. Vladimir Putin has also used cultural and historical factors. He emphasized the historical and cultural connection between Ukraine and the Russian Federation, characterizing them as brotherly nations. Similarly, the argument was used to justify the involvement of the Russian Federation in the internal affairs of Ukraine, as well as to demonstrate that the Russian Federation wants to protect the Russian-speaking population living in Ukraine. Finally, through his speeches during the conflict, President Vladimir Putin used a variety of arguments to justify the actions of the Russian Federation and to manipulate international

public opinion. These speeches reflected the Russian Federation's perspective on the conflict in Ukraine, but were also criticized by the international community, which considered this intervention as a violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The media was used by both sides to promote their perspective on events. The Russian Federation developed state-controlled or politically affiliated media that promoted the country's official narratives. Social networks have become an essential tool for information campaigns and other online activities, such as gathering information for propaganda and disinformation purposes. In this regard, RT news agency played an important role in trying to convince the foreign public to support the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea. While Vladimir Putin and other government leaders have denied the Russian military presence in Ukraine, RT has supported the Kremlin's position by spreading false, misleading and biased information. When Vladimir Putin admitted that there were Russian troops in Crimea, RT presented its statements without any context[19] and repeatedly called the Russian military presence "self-defense forces".[20]

Disinformation is an important component of the Russian Federation's strategy in terms of influencing public opinion and manipulating perceptions. The Russian government has used media such as state media, social media, websites and other platforms to spread disinformation. This may include spreading fake news and creating narratives that weaken Ukraine's credibility and legitimize its intervention in Crimea and support for separatists in eastern Ukraine. Finally, the spread of disinformation can also have an impact on elections, as it influences citizens' perceptions, which can influence political decision-making. All these tactics demonstrate how disinformation can be used to support foreign policy objectives (political and military).

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