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## Exploiting Political Polarization in Poland

By Jacek Kucharczyk

**INTRODUCTION** The aim of this report is to analyze the influence of Russian and Chinese authoritarian forms of soft power on Polish democracy.<sup>1</sup> Russian and Chinese influence on the quality of democratic governance in both new and established democracies has relatively recently become a subject of research and vigorous public debate. The context of this Polish case study is defined by two closely linked developments in Poland's public life and politics. The first is extreme political polarization and diminishing areas of consensual (domestic and foreign) policymaking. The second development is the alleged decline of democratic standards, which stems from the polarized political environment but has particularly accelerated since the victory of the conservative-nationalist Law and Justice (PiS) party in Poland's 2015 presidential and parliamentary elections.<sup>2</sup>

Most analysts would attribute Poland's political polarization and democratic recession to domestic factors rather than foreign influence from Russia or China.<sup>3</sup> However, the research detailed in this essay reveals many dangerous liaisons between specific political narratives employed by homegrown populists and Russian propaganda, as well as calculated efforts by China to portray itself as an ultramodern, benevolent power featuring an authoritarian political system that offers a better incubator for economic growth than liberal democracy. For this reason one should re-examine the assessment of some earlier studies, which claimed that Poland is relatively less vulnerable to Russian interference than other fragile democracies in Central-Eastern Europe.<sup>4</sup>

Similarities between populist political narratives in Russia and Poland are evident in a number of ideas circulating domestically, such as the need to defend Poland, its traditional family, and Christian values from the cultural influence of "decadent" Europe with its secularism, "moral relativism," and multiculturalism. This narrative mirrors the Kremlin's homophobic

propaganda about “Gayropa,” as well as the political rhetoric of populist and far-right groups elsewhere in the European Union, who are inconvenient bedfellows for Kaczyński’s regime. The same is true about anti-Muslim and anti-migrant narratives, which are a staple of Poland’s right-wing populist propaganda as well as of Putin’s political friends and allies across Europe.<sup>5</sup> This narrative overlap makes it difficult to distinguish propaganda contents originating in and propagated by Russia from material produced by domestic actors. At the same time, the proliferation of populist narratives creates an opportunity for Russian propaganda, as these narratives can be amplified with different propaganda tools, such as online trolling. Whether originating in Poland or not, these narratives make Poland vulnerable to foreign authoritarian influence.

Another factor making the Polish public vulnerable to such propaganda is the toxic polarization of political debate, which more often than not precludes rational debate on even the most important policy issues. The current level of polarization can be traced back to the Smolensk airplane crash on April 10, 2010, in which President Lech Kaczyński and 95 others, including parliamentarians and senior state officials, were killed while traveling to Russia to commemorate the martyrdom of Polish officers murdered on Joseph Stalin’s orders in Katyn in April 1940. The Smolensk air crash has had a powerful impact in Poland, deeply polarizing both the political scene and society at large. Since then many PiS supporters of Poland’s ruling party have levied accusations that their political opponents are Russian agents of influence, or even spies. Such allegations have been made against former president Bronisław Komorowski, whom Poland’s right-wing media have nicknamed “Komoruski,” and former prime minister and current European Council president Donald Tusk. Both men, as well as Radosław Sikorski, who served as foreign minister in Tusk’s administration, are named in conspiracy theories regarding the causes of the aircrash.

The so-called Smolensk conspiracy theories—claims that Lech Kaczyński was assassinated by the Russian secret services with collusion by Komorowski, Sikorski, and Tusk—were skillfully amplified and sustained by the PiS and a veritable industry of right-wing media, conspiracy websites, and social movements such as “Solidarni 2010,” and have been embraced by a significant minority of Poles.<sup>6</sup> As is the case with most conspiracy theories, the lack of evidence for such a terrorist act has been taken as a sign that the evidence has been destroyed, in this case by Russian security services, further “proving” the theories’ veracity.

This toxic polarization of political debate, to which both sides contribute, albeit in different degrees, helps explain why Poland remains vulnerable to Russian propaganda in spite of the fact that most political actors, including the two largest parties, generally agree that Russia remains both a hard and soft threat to Poland’s security. Indeed, one could presume that the suspicion of Russian meddling would make Poland less vulnerable and more resilient to Russian propaganda efforts. This is not the case. On the contrary, the spread of the Smolensk conspiracy theories has led to the trivialization of discourse on Russian interference and information warfare. Mainstream media and some politicians came to dismiss any inquiries on Russian activities in Poland as spinoffs or variations of Smolensk conspiracy theories. In the atmosphere of deep polarization, where both sides often accuse political opponents of acting under Russian influence without sufficient evidence, the public becomes skeptical and, ultimately, rather complacent about such threats.

While possible Russian influence on the state of Polish democracy remains insufficiently investigated and discussed, even less can be said about the possible influence of Chinese soft power on Poland's democratic culture and institutions. There is very weak perception within Poland of any threat from China, and no discussion about a need to contain Chinese influence. On the contrary, the developing economic, political, and cultural relations with

China tend to be viewed favorably by Polish opinion makers and the general public. In recent years, many politicians, experts, and media commentators have regularly spoken of the need for Poland to adopt a different model of development based on a stronger role for the state and for state-owned economic entities, with China and other Asian countries seen as possible role models. At the same time, both previous and current governments have advanced relations with China within bilateral and multilateral frameworks, including the 16+1 forum for cooperation between Central and Eastern European countries and China. Importantly, the 16+1 initiative designates 2017 as a year of people-to-people cooperation, with the planned participation of individuals involved in the arts, media, academia, and think tanks.<sup>7</sup>

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This report explores the extent to which both Russia and China are investing in their own forms of soft power efforts to exert authoritarian influence on Poland's democratic politics and culture, albeit in different ways. While Russian soft power strategies in Poland are aimed at sowing internal discord, with the goal of weakening the country's commitments to the European Union and NATO, the Chinese authorities are also scaling up engagement activities with Poland by facilitating political and cultural exchanges, in addition to building up economic relations. China promotes itself as an "alternative model of governance," mainly in order to legitimize its own authoritarian style of rule. However, by doing so in the context of the deep polarization of the political scene, China helps to popularize the notion, popular among far right circles but also among some supporters

of the current Polish government, that an undemocratic one-party state can deliver economic growth, social security, and development more efficiently than a liberal-democratic polity. At the same time, the report discusses the Russian and Chinese soft power toolboxes in the following two sections, which respectively set out the context of Polish-Russian and Polish-Chinese relations, and then examine in more detail the four areas of research: media, culture, academia, and think tanks.





## RUSSIA

### Polish-Russian Relations in Historical Context

Poland's historical relations with Russia have been adversarial for centuries, and the perception of Russia as an existential threat to Poland is well-grounded in the Polish historical experience. Russia was the key player in the so-called Partitions of Poland toward the end of the eighteenth century, which wiped the country from the world map from 1795 until 1918, following several decades of meddling in Poland's already fragile internal politics.<sup>8</sup> After the twenty-year interbellum period between World Wars I and II, Poland was partitioned yet again by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union under the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. After World War II, Poland found itself under Soviet occupation, and the communist regime installed in Poland survived almost half a century. The country once again regained independence in 1989 after communism eventually collapsed in Poland and in the other so-called People's Republics.<sup>9</sup>

Poland's foreign policy after 1989 was built upon two pillars. The first was European and transatlantic integration into the EU and NATO. The second was support for the independence and democratization of the post-Soviet states of Belarus, Lithuania, and Ukraine. The tensions in Polish-Russian relations in the 1990s were mostly based on Russia's vehement opposition to NATO membership for Poland and other postcommunist countries. Poland joined NATO in 1999 and the EU in 2004.

After it came to power in 2007, the Civic Platform-led (PO) government pushed for the alignment of Poland's foreign policy objectives with key EU partners, especially with Germany.<sup>10</sup> At the same time it declared Poland's ambition to become a significant player within the EU and to have an impact on the agenda of EU external relations. In 2007, together with Sweden, Poland proposed the Eastern Partnership Programme, which was adopted by the EU as

a framework for the relations with post-Soviet countries, most notably Ukraine. The general aim of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) was to bring these countries politically and economically closer to the EU. The EaP was seen in Moscow as Poland's attempt to move these countries away from the Russian sphere of influence.

At the same time, as part of the process of joining the EU policy mainstream, but also to counter-balance the perception (in Moscow as well as in key EU capitals) Poland was pushing an 'anti-Russian' agenda by advancing the EaP, Tusk's government attempted its own version of a "reset policy" towards Russia under President Dmitri Medvedev. Among other things, the reset resulted in the so-called Kaliningrad Triangle meetings between the foreign ministers of Germany, Poland, and Russia, and the opening of visa-free "small border" traffic between two Polish provinces and the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad in 2012. The Center for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding was established in 2011 under the auspices of both governments to enhance a dialogue on difficult issues between the two countries, especially in the area of "historical memory."<sup>11</sup>

PiS-led opposition has consistently criticized both Poland's policy on Russia and the EaP. President Lech Kaczyński attempted to pursue a more assertive Eastern policy in other ways, for example by actively supporting Georgia during the Russian invasion of 2008.

#### **Key Developments in Polish-Russian Relations After 2012**

The past five years have witnessed the resurgence of fears and suspicion in Poland concerning Russian foreign policy. The reset of Polish-Russian relations initiated by Tusk and Sikorski began to stall following the death of President Kaczyński and many other Polish lawmakers and officials in the Smolensk air disaster in April 2010.

Right-wing media and PiS politicians have given voice to conspiracy theories claiming that Tusk and members of his government conspired with Putin in order to hide alleged Russian responsibility for the death of President Lech Kaczyński and many other Polish lawmakers and officials. The claims range from allegations of concealing negligence to claims that a bomb was planted or that the plane was shot down, and have been propagated by a broad coalition of media, politicians, and social activists, with the support of many Catholic officials. This movement was crucial in solidifying the leading position of the PiS as the main opposition to the center-right PO. As previously mentioned, the Smolensk issue, more than any issue in Polish politics, has also contributed to the current toxic polarization of public debate.

However, the Russian annexation of Crimea and the war in eastern Ukraine are the most important events to affect Polish-Russian relations in the past five years. The Polish government has been one of the most outspoken critics of the Kremlin's intrusion into Ukraine. The victory of Andrzej Duda of PiS over the incumbent Komorowski, of PO, in the May 2015 presidential election did not change the Polish approach to the Ukraine issue, nor did the installation of the PiS government following its victory in parliamentary elections held later that year.

The Russian intervention in Ukraine has affected various fields of Polish-Russian cooperation. The Polish cultural year in Russia that was planned for 2015 was cancelled. In addition, the activities of the aforementioned Center for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding all

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but died, mainly because the Russian side refused to participate and defined topics that were clearly unacceptable.<sup>12</sup> The Kaliningrad Triangle meetings were suspended, as was local border traffic between Poland and Kaliningrad.

Economic cooperation between Poland and Russia also suffered as the EU (and U.S.) imposed economic sanctions to deter the Russian government from breaking international law, and Russia reacted with countersanctions. While the countersanctions have had a negative effect on some sectors of the Polish economy, they have not succeeded in softening the Polish position on Ukraine.<sup>13</sup>

The previous and current Polish governments also successfully lobbied Poland's allies to strengthen NATO's presence in Central Europe, which resulted in decisions confirmed during the 2016 NATO summit in Warsaw.<sup>14</sup> Under the PiS government, the tensions between Warsaw and Moscow have increased even more with regard to the 2010 Smolensk plane crash, with Russian officials angered by Polish officials' repeated suggestions that the crash was a result of a deliberate action by the Russian security services.

Meanwhile, the previous and current governments also made efforts to decrease Poland's dependence on energy imports from Russia, primarily by building the liquefied natural gas, or LNG terminal in Świnoujście, on the Baltic Sea next to the German border, which has been operational since December 2015. Another strategy for increasing energy security consists of developing energy integration programs among Central and Eastern European countries, especially the Czech Republic, Lithuania, and Slovakia. And while it remains in its early stages, an Energy Union initially proposed by Tusk in 2014 seeks to enhance cooperation in the EU's energy sector and thereby reduce dependence on external suppliers. Taken together, these activities contribute to Polish resilience toward possible economic pressure from Russia.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Polish Public's Perceptions of Russia**

The Poles tend to have critical views of Russia, and this criticism has been deepening in recent years. According to a Pew Research Center poll, unfavorable opinions of Russia increased from 54 percent in the spring of 2013, to 80 percent in the spring of 2015 and 69 percent in 2017.<sup>16</sup> A separate study by Poland's Institute for Public Affairs (IPA) found that in 2015, 78 percent of Poles viewed Polish-Russian relations negatively.<sup>17</sup> The same study showed that 62 percent of the Polish public held Russia responsible for the war in Ukraine's Donbas region. The IPA study also found broad societal support for sanctions against Russia: 41 percent of Poles believed sanctions should be strengthened, and 35 percent supported maintaining sanctions at the current level.<sup>18</sup> Russia is perceived not only as a primary aggressor in Ukraine, but its foreign policy is believed by many to be a potential danger to other European countries, including Poland. As the results of IPA research show, 71 percent of Poles view Russia as a possible military threat to their country.<sup>19</sup>

In contrast, Polish perceptions of the EU and NATO are generally positive. A survey conducted by Poland's Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS) in April 2017 showed a record 88 percent of respondents expressing support for Poland's membership in the EU.<sup>20</sup> Another study by CBOS from April 2017 put support for Poland's NATO membership at 82 percent, the highest recorded figure since Poland joined the alliance.<sup>21</sup> The same survey showed a strong majority in favor of stationing NATO troops in Poland, as well as a strong belief that in case of aggression, NATO partners would come to Poland's defense.

Each of these studies demonstrates the high levels of societal resilience in Poland to pro-Russian propaganda. However, Russian propaganda in Poland uses a number of narratives that circumvent this resilience by amplifying politically sensitive issues.

### **Instruments of Russian Authoritarian Influence in Poland** **Russian Narratives in Poland**

Given the strong suspicion and fear of Russia in Poland, as well as the consensus of mainstream politicians and the media regarding Poland's place in NATO and the EU, Russian propaganda in Poland focuses on several narratives aimed at the indirect subversion of this consensus, and at encouraging social discord.<sup>22</sup> Some of these narratives are similar to the ones seen in other countries, especially in Central and Eastern Europe.

The first is the reactionary narrative, which stresses the need to reassert so-called traditional values and morality in the face of the perceived moral decline of Western liberal democracies. Political Capital, a Hungarian think tank, found in a 2016 study of the Kremlin's crusade to defend what it refers to as traditional values, that Polish society could be receptive "to the traditionalist, anti-gender and ultra-conservative messages" promoted by Russian propaganda.<sup>23</sup> The report posits that "[c]onservative values are not evidence of Russian influence in Poland, but these are tools that might be used by the Kremlin to achieve its political goals."<sup>24</sup> The Russian-sponsored narrative that Europe (and the West) are morally bankrupt is designed to appeal to some elements of the current traditionalist agenda supported by the Polish Catholic Church—an agenda which has also been adopted as a political program by PiS and other right-wing parties in Poland.<sup>25</sup>



Another Russian propaganda tool is the narrative concerning the so-called refugee crisis, and migration from predominantly Muslim countries in general. While anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric used to be relatively marginal in Polish public discourse, it entered the mainstream in the fall of 2015, when the PO government agreed to accept more than seven thousand Syrian refugees under the EU quota system. This decision was strongly criticized by the then opposition PiS, and backlash against the deal helped the PiS win the forthcoming parliamentary elections. Amid the political debate and media reports that accompanied the PiS's opposition to the quota deal,



the stance of the Polish public towards the refugees toughened, and the percentage of people opposed to accepting refugees grew from 21 percent in May 2015 to 53 percent by December of that year.<sup>26</sup> The current government is adamant in its refusal to accept what it sees as EU *diktats* regarding asylum policy, but this issue is also raised by all anti-EU forces in Poland, especially on the far-right, with the intent to undermine society's support for EU membership. This makes anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim narratives an attractive topic for Russian propaganda in Poland.

While traditional values and migration are typical themes for Russian propaganda to leverage in Europe, the area of Polish-Ukrainian relations is specific to Russian efforts in Poland. The aim of Russian propaganda in this field is to weaken Polish support for pro-Western, democratic changes in Ukraine. This narrative attempts to take advantage of the long history of ethnic and political conflict between Poles and Ukrainians, with a particular focus on the World War II-era Volhynia massacre of ethnic Poles in Nazi-occupied parts of eastern Poland (now part of Ukraine) by Ukrainian nationalists. These attempts fall on fertile ground. According to an IPA survey conducted in Poland and Ukraine in 2013, more than one in five Polish respondents asked for their first associations with the words “Ukraine” and “Ukrainian” mentioned Volhynia and other historical conflicts. In a subsequent question, 73 percent of Polish respondents agreed that Ukrainians have historical guilt vis-à-vis Poland, and should apologize. The study concluded that,

*“The analysis of free associations indicates that Poles pay much more attention to shared history than Ukrainians. Polish-Ukrainian history, and especially conflicts during and after [World War II], including the Volhynia massacre are an important element of the image of Ukraine and Ukrainians in the eyes of Poles.”<sup>27</sup>*

Finally, and perhaps most controversially, the previously mentioned Smolensk conspiracy theories should also be included in the list of Kremlin-sponsored narratives. While it may at first seem odd to believe that Russia fuels the narrative about its own involvement in the death of the Polish president and other prominent Poles, this narrative has a devastating effect on the state of Polish democracy, as it has become a source of deep political polarization. Moreover, it systematically undermined the credibility of then-key Polish leaders—former president Komorowski, former foreign minister Sikorski, and former prime minister Tusk—who represented the idea of a pro-EU, pro-NATO foreign policy, and accompanying support for a free and democratic Ukraine. Their international credibility helped them make the case to their Western partners for the necessity of a strong response to Putin's aggression in Ukraine.

While the Smolensk conspiracy theories most likely originated in Poland rather than Russia, they have all the features of Russian propaganda narratives and should be included in any discussion of Russian authoritarian influence in Poland. Indeed, it is quite compatible with our existing knowledge of the workings of Russian propaganda to think that the Kremlin fuels anti-Russian propaganda in order to make Poland look blinded with Russophobia, and hence not credible in discussions on Russian-European relations. Edward Lucas and Peter Pomerantsev in a report by the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA) reached a similar conclusion when they argued that:

*“Kremlin narratives also seek, paradoxically, to promote extreme Polish nationalism—even anti-Russian nationalism—with the goal of making Poland seem unreliable and “hysterical” to its Western allies. It is important to note that official Russian policy—for example Russia's refusal to return the wreckage to Poland—has helped to feed speculation over the Smolensk air disaster.”<sup>28</sup>*

Thus, all four propaganda narratives—the reactionary, the anti-immigrant, the anti-Ukraine, and the Smolensk conspiracy theories—ultimately aim to undermine the key goals of Poland’s foreign policy and Poles’ self-identification with Western values and institutions. These narratives are deeply embedded in the ideologies of Polish far-right organizations (and to a lesser degree, their far-left counterparts) that are the primary consumers of Russian propaganda, but there is also the strong potential that they may be picked up by more mainstream media and political actors.<sup>29</sup> The choice of such narratives shows the opportunistic and extremely flexible character of Russian information warfare, which explores the vulnerabilities of a given public and identifies the areas of least resistance. The authors of one report on Kremlin information warfare concluded “the main danger is that Russian influence will grow in Poland as a consequence of social objection, historical issues and national animosities.”<sup>30</sup>

## Media

Polish mainstream media are typically critical of Russia and President Putin’s foreign policy, reflecting the existing consensus among the political classes and in public opinion. A notable exception to this rule was the interview with controversial Russian philosopher Alexander Dugin in the conservative *Do Rzeczy*, a popular weekly that supports the current PiS government.<sup>31</sup> *Do Rzeczy*’s publication of the interview, titled “Globalism and Liberalism Represent the Civilization of the Antichrist,” reflects the fact that the Kremlin’s conservative crusade in defense of “traditional values” appeals to Polish ultraconservatives.<sup>32</sup>

Russian state-sponsored media such as the television channel RT and the news agency Sputnik are available in Poland. RT can be accessed through most cable operators, as can one or two channels of Russian public television, but their viewership seems to be minuscule. Sputnik has a Polish-language outfit and its Facebook page has some 12,500 likes, which is relatively small compared to 450,000 likes for *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Poland’s most important liberal daily.

The general public views sources of opinion and information backed by the Russian state with deep suspicion. For this reason alone, such media outlets should not be seen as primary tools of Russian propaganda. The very fact that someone has agreed to talk to these media outlets can be used to discredit that person, so very few recognizable opinion makers or politicians appear there. They are mainly important as sources of (dis)information, which finds its way to other websites that do not reveal their connections to Russia or the Russian government. Those “independent” internet-based media outlets should be seen as the key instrument of Russian information warfare in Poland.

The most successful of such websites is *Kresy*, ostensibly devoted to Polish cultural heritage in the territories east of Poland, which are known as Kresy and in the past were part of the Polish state, but are now integral parts of Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, and Ukraine.<sup>33</sup> Since it was established in 2008, the portal has grown in popularity, particularly after it started to regularly publish information about developments on the 2013–2014 Euromaidan protests in Kiev, and later the Russian annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas. The website has evolved into a news site with considerable readership and almost 100,000 followers on Facebook, and provides news and information on international affairs consistent with the kind of information found on RT and in other Russian media.<sup>34</sup> *Kresy* is financed by Marek Jakubiak, owner of a network of breweries and a member of parliament elected on the Kukiz’15 antiestablishment platform. The party includes a number of extreme-right-wing politicians known for pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian views.

Similar, if less successful, websites to *Kresy* include *Konserwatyzm* and *Antykapitalizm*. They cater to the hard right and hard left, respectively, without many explicit references to Russia but promoting anti-Western and anti-liberal narratives that are very close to content originating from the Kremlin.

*Xportal* is an openly pro-Russian website established by Bartosz Bekier, a leader of Falanga, a Polish ultranationalist organization linked with the Global Revolutionary Alliance.<sup>35</sup> Bekier has visited the occupied territories of Donbas to work as a journalist for *Xportal*, and actively supports the separatists fighting the Ukrainian army.<sup>36</sup> Other examples of fringe media sources fueled by Russian propaganda include the *Novorossiya Today* and *Tragedia Donbasu* (Tragedy of Donbas) websites, and the Facebook page *Noworosja Walczaca*, or Fighting Novorossiya.<sup>37</sup>

A different type of pro-Russian, internet-based media is *Obserwator polityczny*, or Political Observer,<sup>38</sup> which is supported by the Russkiy Mir Foundation, a Russian soft-power project. It is relatively little-known in Poland, but its articles are often presented in Russia as an “alternative” Polish point of view, which seems to be a secondary function of a number of pro-Russian websites.<sup>39</sup>

Alternative media create a dense network of disinformation; they share not just the same narratives, but specific contents often written by the same handful of pro-Russian journalists and commentators.

Individuals sometimes called “lone wolves” also play an important role in Russian propaganda and disinformation activities, and in building pro-Russian influence. Like some “independent” pro-Russian websites, they are not formally tied to any movement, but are very active on behalf of the Kremlin, often disseminating their views to followers via social media. As the Hungarian think tank Political Capital put it:

*“Their role is to impose a certain point of view on recipients, create discussions, [and] ideologically inspire trolls who will then . . . sell these ideas to mainstream forums on their own, strengthening a belief among Poles that such views are common.”*<sup>40</sup>

Trolling is a tool of Russian propaganda that appears in Polish internet-based media and social media. Comments consistent with Russian narratives invariably appear under articles on sensitive topics like the war in Ukraine or, more recently, the destruction of Aleppo. Trolls also post links with information originating from RT or similar sources that contradicts the main article or Facebook entry. The same comments or links appear under many articles, indicating a concerted effort. Some comments contain threats against the author of the article. Sometimes the authors of sensitive articles face even further harassment. In one case, blogger activist Marcin Rey, well-known for his investigations into Russian propaganda, and who maintains a Facebook page called “The Russian Fifth Column in Poland,” became the victim of a smear campaign: leaflets with his sketched portrait, warning of a ‘dangerous pedophile’ were distributed in the village where he and his family live.<sup>41</sup>

The Russian penetration of Polish media reveals a number of general characteristics. Firstly, most direct influence can be traced to internet-based alternative media, which regularly use materials supplied by official Russian outlets such as RT or Sputnik. Secondly, these alternative media create a dense network of disinformation; they share not just the same narratives, but specific contents often written by the same handful of pro-Russian journalists and commentators.

Together with the “lone wolves” and trolls, they create a vast ecosystem of influence (also encompassing think tanks and other organizations). Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, mainstream media outlets in Poland are not immune to influence from these “alternative” and official Russian sources. The reasons for this vulnerability are often ideological, such as with the Dugin interview in *Do Rzeczy*. More likely, they result from weak professional standards and an accompanying failure to scrutinize and verify the sources of information.

## Culture

An enduring aspect of Polish-Russian relations is the intensity of people-to-people contacts. In particular, Russian dissidents and, later, critics of Putin's authoritarian turn, have been welcome, and even celebrated in circles of Polish intelligentsia, artists, and opinion makers. In a similar vein, appreciation of Russian culture has traditionally been distinguished from support for Russian government policies. Adam Michnik, a leading dissident during the communist era and the editor-in-chief of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, used to call himself an “anti-Soviet Russophile,” and later updated this to an “anti-Putin Russophile.” However, some pro-Russian figures are far-right ultranationalists with contempt for Russian culture, who claim to base their political ideas on purely “realist” assessments of Russia.<sup>42</sup> One should keep this distinction in mind while trying to assess the current extent of Russian authoritarian influence in the cultural field.

Given this history of people-to-people ties, many initiatives promoting Russian culture in Poland, such as exchanges between Polish and Russian artists, do reflect genuine expressions of independent arts and culture. Initiatives such as the annual Russian film festival, although sponsored by both the Polish and Russian ministries of culture, can rightly be viewed as a normal type of soft power initiative that any country might engage in. Furthermore, for interested Poles, many contemporary Russian films and books provide a window into “the other Russia,” with all its problems and complexities, beyond Kremlin propaganda.

However, such cultural activities carried out with support from Russian state-sponsored organizations also can serve at the same time as a venue for promoting certain narratives and propaganda. This overlap between genuine cultural expression and propaganda can make it difficult for Polish audiences to distinguish the difference, leaving them potentially vulnerable to the influence of the latter. For example, the scope of the Russian-government-sponsored Russian Center for Science and Culture (RCSC), located in the Russian embassy in Warsaw, includes Russian language courses and various theater, film, music, and art shows that are generally free of direct propaganda.<sup>43</sup> However, historical memory events related mostly to what is referred to in Russia as the “Great Patriotic War” are also part of the center's repertoire. So too is the case with the Russkiy Mir Foundation, which is one of the key actors of the Kremlin's soft power and supports many institutions and organizations whose ostensible aim is to teach the Russian language to Poles.<sup>44</sup> Its programs popularize not only the Russian language, but also the Kremlin-vetted version of Russian culture, history, and art.

In some cases, seemingly innocuous cultural exchanges can be used as venues for Russian influence in that they provide a platform for contacts between persons who might be described as Russian lobbyists, and mainstream Polish politicians and opinion makers. One example is the Anna German Festival, named after a Polish singer who was popular throughout the Soviet Union in 1960s and 1970s. The festival's main organizer is the League of Polish Women, whose current president, Aldona Michalak, was previously a lawmaker with



the Self-Defense of the Republic of Poland (SRP) party. Currently, she is a board member of the Association for Cooperation Poland-East, a pro-Russian lobbying group that has co-organized the event, along with the Center for Russian Science and Culture in Warsaw, and the Association for Cooperation Poland-Russia. The festival's honorary committee has included a deputy prime minister, and the mayors of six Polish cities.<sup>45</sup>

While these more typical venues of soft power, such as cultural exchanges and language teaching programs should not be neglected, the key area of the Kremlin's "weaponization of culture" is its self-proclaimed crusade against Western and liberal values through the promotion of an ultraconservative social agenda.

Needless to say, conservative values within Polish society have not been imported or imposed by Russia. These values are actively promoted by the Catholic Church and a plethora of socially conservative organizations and media, as well as a number of right-wing political parties. Nonetheless, these "traditional values," as well as Polish nationalism, are tools that Russian propaganda may successfully employ, and has employed, in Poland.<sup>46</sup>

One gets insight into how Russia can seize upon Polish culture in order to promote messages that are advantageous to it by reviewing a joint statement by the hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Polish Catholic Church after their historic first meeting in September 2012, and events surrounding it. Many liberals in Poland welcomed the meeting as an opening of a long-needed dialogue between the two denominations, and as a milestone for Polish-Russian dialogue. However, calls for rapprochement and dialogue in the statement gave way to an indictment of the contemporary liberal consensus in Western society, with the hierarchs warning of new challenges by which unnamed forces hiding behind secular ideology worked to dismantle "traditional values," and promote abortion, euthanasia, same-sex marriage, and consumerism.<sup>47</sup> The statement was published on the same day a Moscow court announced the high-profile convictions of three members of the Pussy Riot group on charges of hooliganism and inciting religious hatred; the women earlier in the year had performed a raucous "punk prayer" inside a landmark Moscow cathedral in which they called for Putin's removal from power. Columnist Miroslaw Czech of *Gazeta Wyborcza* declared in the announcement's aftermath that while their sentences of two years in a labor camp were too harsh, in principle the state has an obligation to protect the religious feelings of society, and praised the joint statement of the two churches for its declared aim of fighting secularization.<sup>48</sup> This example demonstrates that the Kremlin's conservative crusade can appeal not just to Polish ultra-conservatives, but also to people who declare themselves to be in the political center.

Ultraconservative groups from Poland and other Central and Eastern European countries have also backed some of the "conservative values" legislation adopted by the Russian Duma that have drawn international criticism. Russia's infamous law against "homosexual propaganda" won the support of a number of well-known conservative Polish organizations, for example.<sup>49</sup>

Another Russian propaganda strategy in the cultural field is to drive a wedge between Poland and Ukraine by supporting demonstrations that amplify anti-Ukrainian propaganda regarding ethnic conflicts between Poles and Ukrainians in Eastern Ukraine, especially during World War II. Polish and Ukrainian media reported that anti-Ukrainian protests in Poland (as well as in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia) were supported by Russian funds, channeled through

Belarusian businessman Aleksandr Usovski and supplied by the Orthodox Christian oligarch Konstantin Malofeev, who also sponsored anti-Ukrainian activities in Donbas.<sup>50</sup>

To counterbalance these state-sponsored initiatives, a group of recent Russian immigrants has started the For a Free Russia association in Warsaw.<sup>51</sup> The foundation aims at uniting the Russian community, sharing democratic values, and promoting informed and unbiased public debate on current events in Russia and relations between Poland and Russia. Their weekend club, Zavarka, hosts Russian language and culture lessons for children as well as other cultural events.

### Think Tanks

Like other Central European countries, most of Poland's think tank community is strongly rooted in the ethos of democratic transformation, and has consistently supported liberal-democratic values and Poland's membership in NATO and the EU. However, there are some Polish think tanks that serve as instruments of Russian authoritarian influence. One such organization is the European Center for Geopolitical Analysis (ECAG), which was established in 2007 by Mateusz Piskorski, a leader of the pro-Russian Zmiana political party. The body presents a controversial pro-Russian narrative known as Eurasianism, which advocates for a conservative Eurasian society with Russia at its center, and which counts Dugin as its most prominent backer. Piskorski and the organization's staff have traveled frequently to Russia and the post-Soviet areas, including Crimea, presenting pro-Russian and anti-Western views.<sup>52</sup> ECAG has also organized election-monitoring missions in the unrecognized, Russian-backed republics of Abkhazia and Transdniestria, as well as in Nagorno-Karabakh, in an apparent move aimed at conferring legitimacy to the territories, and has undertaken research and other projects backed by authoritarian regimes in Belarus, Libya, and Syria.<sup>53</sup> ECAG staffers until recently have been regularly invited to mainstream Polish media to comment on international affairs.

However, in May 2016, Piskorski was detained by Polish prosecutors on suspicions of spying for Russia, and possibly for China. More recently, investigative journalists revealed that ECAG in May 2013 had received a payment of almost €21,000 originating in Russia, but which was laundered through a British company; the payment was for "consulting services," even though ECAG is barred by Polish law from engaging in for-profit activities. The revelations marked one of few cases in which financial support for pro-Kremlin organizations in Poland has been firmly established.<sup>54</sup>

Perhaps more troubling and controversial is the case of the National Center for Security Studies (NCSS), a think tank close to Poland's current defense minister, Antoni Macierewicz. NCSS developed the Territorial Defense (TO) concept, which envisions voluntary military units that support the Polish army in case of a military or terrorist threat. It was revealed that the President of NCSS, Jacek Kotas, a former politician of Law and Justice, had previously worked for a Russian-owned real estate company Radius, controlled by a Swiss citizen, Robert Szustowski, who has been doing business with Russia for 20 years. In Poland, Radius has been active in the real estate market, and the name of the company has come to public attention in relation to a scandal concerning real estate restitution in Warsaw. Other NCSS experts Grzegorz Kwaśniak and Krzysztof Gaj, who were directly involved in the preparation of the Territorial Defense concept, have in the past made anti-NATO and pro-Putin statements, with Gaj offering explicit approval of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.<sup>55</sup> The Territorial Defense has already begun recruiting members from paramilitary groups. It has been reported that some of these members are skeptical of NATO and other Polish alliances with its liberal Western allies, and could easily be infiltrated by Russian special services.<sup>56</sup>

## Macierewicz and His Secrets

A number of the trails analyzed in this report lead to Antoni Macierewicz, vice president of the Law and Justice (PiS) party and current defense minister in the PiS government. Macierewicz is one of the most controversial figures in Polish politics and is distrusted by a significant portion of the population.<sup>57</sup>

As defense minister, Macierewicz has taken a number of controversial decisions that the opposition and a number of security experts have denounced as harmful to national security and Poland's relations with its allies. He purged the army of a large number of senior commanders—including many who were key to Poland's ongoing cooperation with NATO—and on one occasion ordered military services to break into a NATO counterintelligence center on the pretext that an officer who worked there had lost his security clearance. He also cancelled a crucial contract for military helicopters, and put on hold the procurement of other military equipment, thereby interrupting the process of modernization of Poland's armed forces. Instead, he focused the ministry's efforts and resources on the creation of Territorial Defense (TO), an army of volunteers whose aim is ostensibly to protect the country in the face of "hybrid" aggression—or nebulous covert actions carried out to support conventional forces—of the type that Russia used to gain a foothold in Crimea.

Many security experts doubt the usefulness of TO for protecting Poland from external military threats, and point out that its statutes allow the formation to be used in case of domestic disturbances—for example, against anti-government protesters. The fact that Territorial Defense units do not report to the Chief of General Staff, as is the case with all other military units, but instead directly to Macierewicz, has given ground to claims that he has created a kind of private militia.

The story of the inception of the Territorial Defense at the NCSS is one of the many trails of investigation into Macierewicz's connections with Russia summed up in Tomasz Piątek's book, *Macierewicz and his Secrets*. Piątek has been investigating these links for more than a year as a journalist of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Poland's biggest liberal newspaper, where he regularly shares the results with his readers. The book, which has become a nationwide bestseller,<sup>58</sup> offers a detailed analysis of connections between a number of Macierewicz's close collaborators with the Kremlin and pro-Russian groups in Poland; thus far, none of the specific allegations contained in his book or newspapers articles have been investigated or officially denied. On the contrary, Macierewicz ordered military prosecutors to investigate Piątek over claims of insult crimes and making threats against a public official, the latter of which could potentially draw terrorism charges. Macierewicz notably declined to initiate a civil defamation case against Piątek, which would require the defense minister to prove that the allegations are false.<sup>59</sup>

The book describes Macierewicz's contacts as including informers of the communist-era secret police, some of whom maintained links with Russian intelligence agencies long after the fall of the Soviet Union. It suggests a possible Russian connection to the "Waitergate" scandal—in which leaked recordings revealed Civic Platform (PO) politicians making controversial remarks about internal party politics and Poland's foreign relations; the tapes' release in 2014 shook the PO government, and helped pave the way for the PiS victory ▶

in 2015 presidential and parliamentary elections.<sup>60</sup> Among other things, Piątek traced the ownership of the restaurant where some of the recordings took place to the Radius group, a Russian-controlled company.<sup>61</sup>

The book also traces some international contacts of Macierewicz's past and present collaborators. These include Semion Mogilevich, an alleged mobster reportedly linked to both Russian and American organized crime, as well as to Russian counterintelligence services and the Kremlin.<sup>62</sup>

Despite persistent rumors that Macierewicz will be fired from the government, his position remains strong, as he is highly respected by the more radical members of the PiS electorate due to his informal position as the leader of the Smolensk conspiracy "movement," as well as to the support of influential oligarch and Catholic priest Tadeusz Rydzyk.

After the book's publication, it was revealed by a German newspaper that another of Macierewicz's associates, Bartosz Kownacki, a vice minister of national defense, had traveled to Moscow in 2012 as a member of a right-wing, pro-Putin group of election observers together with Mateusz Piskorski of the European Center for Geopolitical Analysis (ECAG).<sup>63</sup> It was also alleged that Kownacki, together with Piskorski, has been involved in the Alliance of European National Movements, which includes a number of far-right and pro-Kremlin parties from the EU. Kownacki has acknowledged his 2012 trip to Moscow, but denied collaboration with Piskorski.<sup>64</sup>

Ordo Iuris is an ultraconservative think tank closely associated with the current Polish government. Its president, Aleksander Stępkowski, a law professor at Warsaw University, served as undersecretary of state in the current government between November 2015 and August 2016, where his duties included leading the dialogue with the Venice Commission, an expert body of the Council of Europe, that investigated controversial, PiS-backed legislation on Poland's Constitutional Tribunal. He was allegedly fired for mismanaging this portfolio, after the Commission issued a very critical assessment of the new legislation. Ordo Iuris came to the attention of the general public when it proposed a law that aimed to radically restrict access to abortions in Poland, and which included jail sentences for women who have abortions and for doctors who perform them. The legislation was ultimately withdrawn in the aftermath of huge protests across Poland.<sup>65</sup>

This defeat notwithstanding, Ordo Iuris remains at the forefront of Poland's conservative revolution. The institute is part of an impressive international network of like-minded organizations, and among other controversial positions has indicated support for the Russian law on so-called homosexual propaganda. Tomasz Piątek of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, who regularly writes about Russian influence in Poland, has described Russian connections of Ordo Iuris,<sup>66</sup> and has revealed that the Peter Skarga Institute, the institutional founder of Ordo Iuris, is an official Polish patron of the World Congress of Families in Moscow, one of the key instruments of Kremlin efforts to promote conservative ideas globally.<sup>67</sup>



## Academia

Polish academics specializing in Russian affairs are generally very critical of Putin's policies and contribute to the broader consensus on this topic in Polish society. However, there are a number of notable exceptions. The Polish Geopolitics Society (PTG)<sup>68</sup> unites a group of academics who either openly propagate Dugin's Eurasianism, or who stage themselves as "realists" that understand the true significance of geopolitical location. They claim that because of its geographical proximity to Russia, Ukraine and other post-Soviet states should remain part of the Russian sphere of influence, and thus they should not seek closer links with the West. Many of them also are closely associated with the far-right Geopolityka web-portal, which is associated with ECAG, and belong to a closed Facebook group—Geopolityka i Geostrategia, or Geopolitics and Geostrategy—that counts more than 900 members.<sup>69</sup> The group of administrators includes a number of high-profile academics including Dr. Andrzej Zapałowski of Rzeszów University, Dr. Michał Siudak of Jagiellonian University, and Dr. Leszek Sykulski. The latter initiated graduate studies in geopolitics at the Higher School of Business and Entrepreneurship in Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski. More importantly, Zapałowski has been a regular lecturer in Polish military academies around the country, not without the permission of the Ministry of Defense.

The previously mentioned Russkiy Mir Foundation, an influential Russian soft-power organization that propagates Kremlin-approved views on history and culture in its Russian-language classes and other programs, has a presence at several Polish universities.<sup>70</sup> It also gives grants to other Russian language centers including the Polish Association of Russian Language Teachers,<sup>71</sup> and organizes various public events as well as visits to Russia for students, academic lecturers, and scientists.

In addition, many Polish universities have bilateral cooperation agreements with Russian universities—many of which facilitate independent academic cooperation in the spirit of international exchange.<sup>72</sup> However, these programs, which include language and culture summer schools and study visits to Russia for Polish students and lecturers, are often exploited as a vehicle for state-sponsored propaganda, in particular regarding historical memory and current political affairs, including the annexation of Crimea and the Russian-sponsored war in Donbas. In some cases, the language centers in Poland organize celebrations of Russian national holidays that provide opportunities to present participants with the official Russian version of historical events that serve to justify current Russian policy in Ukraine and the post-Soviet areas, amongst other places.<sup>73</sup>

According to one expert formerly involved in Polish-Russian dialogue programs, academic cooperation had provided a platform for relatively free exchanges on important Polish-Russian issues at a time when the Russian government was closing down other venues of dialogue, such as independent think tanks and foundations. He posits that in recent years, space that had been created through academic exchanges has too been shrinking, leaving in place only the types of exchanges that are in line with official Kremlin narratives.<sup>74</sup>



## CHINA

### Polish-Chinese Relations in Historical Context

During the Cold War, Poland and China were both part of the communist bloc. The communist-era Polish People's Republic was politically dependent on Moscow, and followed the Kremlin's line in its bilateral relations with China. The Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s led to the deterioration of mutual relations, although this was gradually recovered following Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms in the late 1970s. The end of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union opened new possibilities in Polish-Chinese relations. These were driven by economic considerations along the lines of the so-called Budapest Principles, which were outlined by then Chinese president Jiang Zemin in 1995.<sup>75</sup>

At the end of the Cold War, Poland's strategic priorities were built upon the desire to integrate with the West. Once this aim was achieved through NATO membership in 1999 and EU membership in 2004, priorities shifted in part toward assuring the strength of transatlantic relations and the U.S. commitment to Europe. In this context, both U.S. president Barack Obama's "pivot to Asia" and his "reset" with Russia were widely viewed in Poland as a threat to transatlantic relations and NATO, and hence to Poland's security in the wake of a resurgent Russia.<sup>76</sup> At the same time, close relations between Russia and China have been viewed with suspicion. In both cases, the attention paid to China and Chinese foreign policy, including its soft power in Poland, has been secondary to a preoccupation with implications of Russian resurgence.

### Polish-Chinese Relations from 2012–2015

In recent years, Polish-Chinese relations have been strongly focused on economic cooperation. In this respect, Poland's 2004 accession to the EU was a turning point, especially with regard to Chinese investment in Poland, which grew quickly after the latter gained access to the EU market of 500 million consumers, growing from \$12 million in 2006 to over \$200 million in 2011, and reaching a record \$536 million in 2016.<sup>77</sup> However, this is less impressive when compared to Chinese investment in Germany and the United Kingdom, which in 2016 reached \$12 billion and \$9 billion, respectively.<sup>78</sup> This discrepancy has been pointed out by some Polish media commentators, who note that Chinese investments in Poland are still below expectations and that when they come, they do not always result in job creation.<sup>79</sup>

Nevertheless, China's economic and political presence in Poland and elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe is growing. In 2011, Poland and China established a "strategic partnership" with the intention of boosting economic and political ties.<sup>80</sup> On the 2012 occasion of Prime Minister Wen Jiabao's visit to Warsaw, Wen announced the 16+1 format for dialogue between China and Central and Eastern European countries.<sup>81</sup> The establishment of the 16+1 platform was welcomed as the most significant event for Polish-Chinese relations since the end of the Cold War, and was considered a springboard for Chinese public diplomacy.

Additionally, in 2013, Chinese leader Xi Jinping announced the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), also known variously as the One Belt One Road or Silk Road Initiative, by which China would invest in new and enhanced trade routes between it and dozens of countries, including Poland. The initiative, whose ultimate aim is to create a Chinese-dominated trade network that counters the U.S.-led transatlantic one, is a significant component of Chinese foreign policy. Another important step for the advancement of Polish-Chinese relations was Poland's agreement to join the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

China's motivations for the development of cooperation with Central and Eastern European countries are political and economic. Given that 11 countries in the region are members of the EU and 12 are NATO members, cultivating political and economic ties in the region could be seen as China's attempt to gain a foothold within these organizations in order to increase Beijing's influence on their decision-making processes. These potential motivations did not go unnoticed in Brussels and Berlin. The PO government, which had prioritized Polish-German relations, decided (according to some analysts) to distance itself from the 16+1 initiative by sending a relatively low-level representative to the Belgrade summit in December 2014.<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, Poland's key role in the 16+1 initiative was reflected in the opening of the group's secretariat in Warsaw the following year.<sup>83</sup>

The PiS government, which over time has distanced itself from both the EU and from Germany, has embraced Polish-Chinese relations. During her visit to China in May 2017, Prime Minister Beata Szydło told journalists that her visit marked the point when China "finally started to pay attention to Poland."<sup>84</sup>

This statement, however factually inaccurate, shows that in view of its growing international isolation, the PiS government is willing to invest in Polish-Chinese relations. The statement was also intended to cover a split within Szydło's government over its policy toward China.<sup>85</sup> This came to the public's attention in January 2017, when minister Macierewicz blocked the sale of land in the city of Łódź upon which a Chinese company planned to build a key terminal for the Chengdu-Łódź railway, considered an important element of the Belt and Road Initiative. In 2015, Macierewicz had stated his opposition to China's expansion and the Belt and Road Initiative, saying it was an "agreement of Western Europe with Russia and China aiming at the elimination of U.S. influence from Eurasia, and the liquidation of Poland as an independent actor."<sup>86</sup> Media reported that following Macierewicz's veto, the Chinese cancelled the Łódź terminal project.

### **The Instruments of China's 'Soft Power' in Poland**

China's image in Poland has undergone a significant change in recent years, in parallel with impressive economic growth and the rapidly expanding influence of China in global affairs. However, China's image in Poland still retains elements of its earlier incarnations, namely of

a faraway and rather exotic traditional culture, with all the “orientalist” trappings—alongside the image of totalitarian communism, which can be seen as a kind of common denominator between the Polish and Chinese historical experiences. This latter image has enduring significance, at least for the part of public opinion in Poland that identifies itself with the tradition of democratic opposition to communism. One can say that the different trajectories that Poland and China have taken in recent decades are symbolically expressed in the fact that the Polish parliamentary elections on June 4, 1989, which ended communism in Poland, coincided with the Tiananmen Square massacre, which put an end to pro-Western democracy movements in China. Small groups of Polish activists organize on that day vigils and protests to commemorate the victims of the Tiananmen atrocity. In June 2013, then speaker of parliament Ewa Kopacz came under criticism for traveling to Beijing with other deputies on a trade mission during the week of June 4. In response,

Kopacz promised to address the issue of human rights in China while there.<sup>87</sup> The following year, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the massacre, a group of prominent NGOs wrote an open letter urging the Chinese government to condemn the events.<sup>88</sup> Later, during the 2016 visit of Xi Jinping to Warsaw, a group of activists gathered outside Xi’s hotel to protest human rights abuses in China.<sup>89</sup> In previous years, there were also protests in Poland concerning the occupation of Tibet and repression of the Falun Gong spiritual movement.

Over the past decades, China’s authoritarian system of government and its human rights transgressions have been increasingly overshadowed by a perception of the country as an economic powerhouse likely to displace the U.S. as the world’s leading economy.

However, over the past decades, China’s authoritarian system of government and its human rights transgressions have been increasingly overshadowed by a perception of the country as an economic powerhouse likely to displace the U.S. as the world’s leading economy. This shift has been particularly pronounced since the 2008 financial crisis, which shook the public’s confidence in both American and European models of economic governance. By contrast, many commentators pointed to what they saw as China’s long-term strategic management of its economy, which they believed allowed China to maintain strong economic growth at a time when most of the Western world was plunged into recession. In a parallel development, controversies over the 2003 U.S. intervention in Iraq have led to

skepticism in Poland about the merits of democracy promotion as a viable objective of foreign policy. Thus, the narratives about China in the Polish media have shifted from China’s lack of progress in democratization to its impressive growth and the model of “state-driven” market economy, which has been credited for its success. Meanwhile, the visible presence of Chinese companies and products may also contribute to a more positive view of China in Poland.<sup>90</sup>

The aim of China’s soft power in Poland does not seem to differ from its primary global aim: to present China as an economically successful, friendly power that cooperates with its partners on a win-win basis, and which does not seek to impose its values on its trade partners. A secondary aim is to legitimize the undemocratic Chinese regime as effective in providing economic prosperity for the Chinese people, as well as political stability and predictability in an uncertain world. These aims and narratives became notably available for public consumption during Xi’s visit to Poland in June 2016. On this occasion, copies of the state-run, English-language *China Daily* newspaper were distributed free of charge in central Warsaw, and many newsstands carried large advertisements for Xi’s book, *The Governance of China*. The book has since been permanently available at the Warsaw airport, displayed on a separate case among a number of



books on Chinese culture, which are mostly in Polish and are devoted to topics including tea, the Chinese calendar, and the arts of gardening and embroidery.

However, in the Polish political reality, the promotion of the idea that an undemocratic country can develop as well as, or even better than, a democratic one can have an important demonstration effect, especially during a time when Poland is experiencing a period of democratic backsliding. The section that follows will explore the ways in which the promotion of the Chinese model of government could contribute to a weakening of democratic values in Poland.

## Media

The presentation of China and Polish-Chinese relations in mainstream media is almost entirely focused on economic cooperation. While independent media have pointed out that some Chinese-Polish cooperation initiatives have failed to deliver on bright economic promises, in principle they almost unanimously support such cooperation as an opportunity that Poland should not miss.<sup>91</sup> The government-controlled public media are uniformly enthusiastic about current economic cooperation and future such projects.<sup>92</sup>

The direct presence of Chinese media in Poland is limited, although China Radio International is accessible in the Polish language, and has its own website and Facebook site in Polish. There is also a limited pool in Poland of media commentators and experts on China. However, the few who are active tend to focus on economic issues, and rarely scrutinize the country's authoritarian government or the human rights violations it presides over. On some occasions, the experts who endorse the policies of the Chinese government are confronted by human rights activists, but the latter are in a disadvantaged position as they rarely have detailed knowledge of China. A number of Polish experts endorse the arguments of official Chinese propaganda, namely—that Chinese and European people have different definitions of democracy and human rights—and contend that the West should not seek to impose its “ethnocentric” views on ancient civilizations such as the Chinese. Krzysztof Gawlikowski, a professor at the Institute of Political Studies at the Polish Academy of Sciences, is perhaps the most prominent Polish academic to make this argument. He maintains in his books and opinion articles that democracy is just one of many possible political systems, and should not be promoted as a universal model of governance. He is critical of democracy promotion, framing such efforts in the context of the Iraq War, as well as of the Polish “former dissidents” who became part of the foreign policy establishment after 1989, for making democracy promotion part of Poland's foreign policy agenda.<sup>93</sup>

One of the few critical experts is Krzysztof Łoziński, who authored a number of books on Asia and a number of articles on the subject for *Gazeta Wyborcza*. He cites as his reason for writing a book on the Chinese government's human rights abuses the need to challenge the “fascination of media experts” with the Chinese approach to modernization, which combines authoritarianism and strong economic growth. Łoziński, a democracy activist during the communist era, has recently become more visible to the general public as a cofounder and the current chairperson of the Committee for the Defense of Democracy, a grassroots organization that was established in December 2015 to protest the PiS government's assault on the Constitutional Tribunal, and has become a prominent player in antigovernment protests since then.<sup>94</sup>

A more direct influence of Chinese soft-power efforts on Polish debates on democracy and economic governance can be observed when invited experts promote the Chinese model of

state capitalism as a good example for Poland to follow. Recently, this has been seen in the popularity of Song Hongbing in right-wing pro-government media. He is usually presented as world-class economist, who predicted (so it is claimed) the 2008 world financial crisis. His book, with the English title *Currency Wars*, was translated into Polish and advertised as a bestseller in China.<sup>95</sup> The author is critical of the U.S.-led model of globalization, and of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between the EU and Canada, as well as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the EU and the U.S., and is enthusiastic about China's Belt and Road Initiative. In the US, the book has been criticized as promoting anti-Semitic conspiracy theories.<sup>96</sup> Hongbing shared his views in Polish media and in a recent lecture sponsored by the Confucius Institute at Wrocław University.<sup>97</sup> Hongbing's ideas are in line with the stated PiS priority of changing the Polish model of development from one driven by foreign investment and EU funds, to one driven by internal investment and trade expansion, which helps to explain his popularity in right-wing media.<sup>98</sup> His ideas were also promoted in a conference organized in the Polish parliament, hosted by a lawmaker from the antiestablishment Kukiz'15 party, Jacek Wilk.<sup>99</sup> The media sponsor was a right-wing website *Opcja na prawo* [Right Option] that specializes in antiglobalization and anticapitalist publications.<sup>100</sup> Hongbing's ideas are also warmly received by some pro-Russian websites.<sup>101</sup>

The story of Hongbing's warm reception in Poland connects far-right media, populist politicians, conspiracy theories websites, and official Chinese soft power outlets (Confucius Institutes). Therefore, it is an excellent example of the circulation of the idea that the "Chinese model" is a viable alternative to Western-style capitalism.



## Culture

Among other goals, Chinese soft power aims to amplify existing perceptions of China as an ancient, anodyne culture. This perception aligns with the Chinese government's concept of win-win cooperation, by which China does not threaten anyone's interests, nor would it attempt to "impose" its norms on others (in contrast to how it views Western support for democracy). Thus, the image of a speedily developing economic superpower finds its counterbalance in

cultural events projecting images of tranquility and benevolence. Such initiatives are supported by the Chinese government as well as by private companies, both Chinese and Polish. Among them are the recent cultural programs in the Royal Baths Park in Warsaw, including renovations to Chinese Avenue, a cherished part of Warsaw's historical heritage where some Chinese artifacts were housed in the late eighteenth century. In 2012 Chinese lanterns were placed among one of the key paths in the park, leading up to the Royal Palace. Media reported that the establishment of the Chinese path cost 2 million Polish zlotys (approximately \$500,000 USD) and that the renovations were sponsored by the China Minmetals Corporation and KGHM Polska Miedź SA, through the SINOPOL Foundation for Polish-Chinese Economic and Cultural Cooperation.<sup>102</sup> The Chinese section of the park was expanded in 2016, again with the support of the SINOPOL Foundation. A Chinese lantern festival developed with SINOPOL's support has taken place in the park each year since 2012.

The SINOPOL Foundation also publishes *Bursztyn*, a cultural magazine, and promotes the Chinese city of Chengdu and the Sichuan province as vacation destinations.<sup>103</sup> Although it is not mentioned on SINOPOL's website, Chengdu is the starting point for the aforementioned railway connection to the city of Łódź, reflecting an alignment of culture promotion, business promotion, and the overall political vision of the Belt and Road Initiative.

### Academia

Like many other countries, China promotes its language and cultural traditions abroad, with its Confucius Institutes (CIs) taking the lead role in projecting this kind of soft power. Such institutes exist at five locations in Poland: Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań; Gdańsk University; the University of Wrocław; Jagiellonian University in Kraków, where Poland's first CI was established in 2006; and in Opole. The institutes offer Chinese language courses to both university students and outsiders, including high-school students and businesspeople; host conferences and lectures on China, exhibitions, film screenings, and other cultural events; and offer scholarships and academic exchanges. Some CI lectures and conferences cover potentially sensitive issues, such as Tibet, but most seem rather innocuous to a casual observer.<sup>104</sup> The Confucius Institute in Opole has a less academic and more probusiness focus that falls largely within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, which is also strongly present in the agendas of other institutes. The Belt and Road Initiative seems to give all these academic and cultural activities and institutions a coherence and sense of purpose, which at least in principle, allows them to have a "critical mass" effect by which they may be perceived as much greater than the sum of their parts.

In Warsaw, the plan to establish a Confucius Institute prompted student protests, at which the proposed institute was denounced by a group of protesters as a threat to academic freedom. They mobilized through a Facebook group, which seems inactive but at some point had gathered around 200 supporters.<sup>105</sup> The protesters, who organized via Facebook, expressed concern that Confucius Institutes are a propaganda tool of the Chinese government, claiming that one of the aims of CIs is to block politically sensitive issues, such as the Tiananmen Square massacre, repression in Tibet, or the status of Taiwan, from being discussed in academia. One of the organizers of the protests asked if it would be possible for Warsaw University to host a meeting with the Dalai Lama, as has happened in the past, after the CI is established there.<sup>106</sup> These student protests may have delayed, but not stopped, the establishment of CI in Warsaw, which is due to open in 2017.

Another important development in Poland is the Sino-Polish university consortium, which launched in 2017 and consists of 23 mainly technical academic centers located in both countries. According to the *China Daily*, its goal is to “increase educational cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European countries, in line with the objectives of the Belt and Road Initiative.”<sup>107</sup> It is the first such educational consortium in the world with a specific focus on the development of the BRI. Polish members of the consortium will establish “Confucius classrooms”—CIs—to teach Chinese to their students. The Polish and Chinese centers will also undertake joint research projects under the umbrella of the BRI, and will seek grants to that purpose.<sup>108</sup>

### Think Tanks

Poland’s best-known think tank specializing in research on China is the Center for Poland-Asia Studies (CSPA).<sup>109</sup> The Center was established in 2008 by Radosław Pyffel, who had previously spent time studying in China, where he learned Chinese. Most of its researchers are also graduates of Chinese universities. According to one expert, the center receives some funding from the Chinese government, although this is not acknowledged on its website, where it claims that financial support comes from individual donors.<sup>110</sup> The center’s website offers comments, in Polish, on political developments in Asia, with a special focus on China. The general tone of commentaries about Chinese affairs is seldom critical, and is sometimes laudatory; in a commentary on the 2017 BRI summit in Beijing, a CPSA expert called an address by Xi Jinping “captivating.” On the contrary, U.S. policies toward Asia and U.S. tensions with China are usually framed in a critical light, with the U.S. presented as an antagonist. The center was rather critical of the foreign policy of the previous PO government, while it is more favorably disposed towards the pro-China policies of Beata Szydło’s cabinet. In 2016, the government announced that Pyffel, CPSA’s founder, had been appointed as a deputy director of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and his CPSA colleague Krzysztof Iwanek appointed as the director of the Center for Asian Studies at the National Defense Academy.<sup>111</sup>

As noted previously, part of the 16+1 initiative is the development of people-to-people contacts, including with those at think tanks. Like academics, think tank professionals are invited to join study visits to China. One participant of such a visit, who participated along with two dozen think tank representatives and NGO activists, mostly from Central and Eastern Europe, said the program was well funded and carefully planned. This particular study visit targeted young experts and activists who were actively sought after by organizers who encouraged them to apply. When viewed against the limited exchange and study opportunities for young researchers from Central and Eastern Europe afforded by established democracies, this proactive approach targeting the future generation of activists and scholars may be quite effective in encouraging interest in China, as well as certain Chinese narratives, among such young professionals.<sup>112</sup>

According to this participant, the study visit presented participants with the image of an ultramodern, rapidly developing, and well-governed China, without social conflicts and with peaceful intentions toward the rest of the world. However, the participants had extremely limited opportunities to see anything or talk to anyone not vetted by their hosts, and the group moved around with official police assistance. A farewell presentation delivered by a prominent member of the Chinese Communist Party assured the participants of Chinese benevolence and the benefits of the Belt and Road Initiative, repeatedly contrasting the Chinese model with what he presented as aggressive U.S. policies and an American desire to impose its values on other countries.<sup>113</sup>



## **Conclusions: The Impact of Russian and Chinese Authoritarian Influence on Poland's Democracy**

This report describes in some detail the tools and impact of Russian and Chinese soft power on Poland's democracy, showing that while Chinese soft power is focused on promoting the image of China as an ultramodern, dynamic, and benevolent global power, Russian propaganda consists of mostly negative narratives: anti-American, anti-EU, and anti-Ukrainian. While the Chinese government promotes tranquil visions of traditional Chinese culture, Russian propaganda is focused on promoting a brand of "traditional" "conservative" values offered as an antidote to the "decadence" of Western liberal democracies. This choice of narratives makes Russian propaganda effective in Poland, despite a historical Polish skepticism of anything coming from Russia. These themes align very well with the ideology of the present PiS government, which uses some of the same narratives, despite its ostensibly anti-Putin and anti-Russian stance. In similar fashion, the Chinese narrative on the redundancy of democracy for economic development, prosperity, and effective governance under a one-party system chimes in well with the authoritarian leanings of the government in Warsaw.

While it is impossible to ascertain to what extent democratic setbacks in Poland are linked to the influence of these two authoritarian powers, it is clear that the decline of democratic norms in Poland and its consequent marginalization within the EU—which has repeatedly criticized the PiS government's reforms to the media sector and judiciary, and which has now opened infringement proceedings against Poland over the latter—is very much in line with the interests of Russia.<sup>114</sup> Weakening Poland's ties with its democratic partners is also arguably part of the Chinese agenda. Both have similar aims in the region generally, as a disunited Europe will not be able to defend its interests and values vis-à-vis an autocratic superpower. Even if it cannot be proven that Russian and Chinese soft power is responsible for the decline of trust in liberal democracy in Poland, the current crisis makes Poland open and vulnerable to authoritarian influence from both.<sup>115</sup>

In spite of deep political and ideological divisions in Poland, there is a sort of consensus that the current Russian resurgence, as exemplified by both its hard-power displays in Ukraine and Syria, and its soft-power efforts to undermine the liberal-democratic consensus in the West, poses a threat to Poland. However, there are heated disagreements about how to contain this threat, and even deeper divisions over the effectiveness of the current and previous governments in countering it. There is broad consensus that NATO remains essential to Poland's security. While EU membership remains popular in Poland, there is no consensus as to what the EU's role is with regard to national security. The previous PO government considered multilateralism a crucial framework for the containment of Russia, while the current PiS government seems to have little faith in supranational institutions, and prefers to build regional alliances of like-minded (or similarly threatened) countries, such as The Three Seas Initiative.<sup>116</sup> It also sees the U.S. as a key partner in terms of hard security.

While direct Russian propaganda seems limited to political fringes, some Kremlin-sponsored narratives have been successful in penetrating mainstream political discourse. In spite of the belief that Poland is relatively resilient to Russian propaganda, this report notes several ways in which certain ideas and policies, which were once marginal for Polish politics, have become more and more widespread and how a significant part of the opinion-making elites are eager to discuss alternatives to Poland's pro-European and pro-democratic orientation, which were part of the post-1989 consensus. The current PiS government not only encourages right-wing

extremism—a key entry point of pro-Russian propaganda and disinformation—but also actively undermines democratic standards.<sup>117</sup> Preventing Poland’s democratic backsliding by strengthening societal resilience to authoritarian rhetoric and policies, as well as investing in rebuilding the weakened transatlantic links with Polish civil and political society, should be seen as priorities for the democratic international community concerned about the spread of authoritarian influence in Europe and beyond.

*The views expressed in this paper represent the opinions and analysis of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for Democracy or its staff.*

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Editor’s note: Although the overview essay to this report uses the term “sharp power” to characterize the more malign and manipulative aspects of authoritarian influence, the authors of the individual country reports instead generally use the broader term “soft power.” In the country studies, the authors were asked to inventory and analyze the methods of authoritarian influence applied by China and Russia in democratic settings. The concept of “sharp power” introduced in the overview essay is an outgrowth of their comparative findings.

<sup>2</sup> Freedom House’s 2017 *Nations in Transit* report identifies downward trends in all of the categories it evaluates, with Poland’s overall score changing from 2.18 in the 2014 report to 2.57 in the 2017 report. (The ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 7 the lowest.) The steepest declines were observed in Poland’s judicial framework and independence, “due to the far-reaching reform of the Constitutional Tribunal that curbed its ability to function as an effective oversight body, thereby threatening rule of law in Poland,” and in democratic governance, “due to Poland’s descent into total political polarization and lack of consensual decision-making, as well as passing laws without adequate consultation with civil society or the parliament and informal control over political processes.” Piotr Arak and Andrzej Bobiński, *Nations in Transit 2017: The False Promise of Populism—Poland* (Freedom House, April 2017), <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2017/poland>.

<sup>3</sup> I have tried to elaborate on the causes and consequences of the recent political change in Poland in Joanna Fomina and Jacek Kucharczyk, “The Specter Haunting Europe: Populism and Protest in Poland,” *Journal of Democracy* 27 (October 2016): 58–68. This analysis is further elaborated in Jacek Kucharczyk et al., “When Fear Wins: Causes and Consequences of Poland’s Populist Turn,” in *Nothing to Fear but Fear Itself* (London: Demos, 2017), 305–71, [www.demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/DEM5104\\_nothing\\_to\\_fear\\_report\\_140217\\_WEBv2.pdf](http://www.demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/DEM5104_nothing_to_fear_report_140217_WEBv2.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> See Daniel Milo and Katarína Klingová, *Vulnerability Index: Subversive Russian Influence in Central Europe* (Bratislava: GLOBSEC Policy Institute, 2017), [www.cepolicy.org/publications/vulnerability-index-subversive-russian-influence-central-europe](http://www.cepolicy.org/publications/vulnerability-index-subversive-russian-influence-central-europe).

<sup>5</sup> Milo and Klingová, *Vulnerability Index*.

<sup>6</sup> See Jacek Kucharczyk et al., “When Fear Wins.”

<sup>7</sup> See “The Riga Guidelines for Cooperation Between China and Central and Eastern European Countries,” Ministry of Commerce of the People’s Republic of China, 6 November 2016, <http://english.mofcom.gov.cn/article/newsrelease/counseloroffice/bilateral-exchanges/201611/20161101651046.shtml>.

<sup>8</sup> Poland underwent three territorial divisions (1772, 1793, 1795) perpetrated by Russia, Prussia, and Austria, by which the country’s size progressively diminished until the state of Poland ceased to exist.

<sup>9</sup> One should add that the legacy of the Solidarity movement remains a fiercely contested political issue and contributes to the current deep political polarization. For a broader discussion of the lasting importance of historical relations between Poland and Russia (as well as Ukraine), Jacek Kucharczyk and Aleksander Fuksiewicz, “The Long Shadow of the Kremlin: Polish Domestic Reactions to the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict,” in *Diverging Voices, Converging Policies: The Visegrad States’ Reactions to the Russia-Ukraine Conflict*, eds. Jacek Kucharczyk and Grigorij Mesežnikov (Warsaw: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, 2016), 102–14.

<sup>10</sup> In 2005–2007, Poland was ruled by a PiS-led coalition of three populist and Euroskeptical parties, which strained the country’s relations with Brussels and key EU member states. When the coalition collapsed due to internal conflicts, the PO party defeated PiS. Both in its electoral platform and later on, the PO-led government sought to make European integration central to Poland’s foreign and domestic political agenda.

<sup>11</sup> Agnieszka Łada and Łukasz Wenerski, “Back to Basics? Polish Foreign Policy and the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict,” in *Diverging Voices, Converging Policies: The Visegrad States’ Reactions to the Russia-Ukraine Conflict*, eds. Jacek Kucharczyk and Grigorij Mesežnikov (Warsaw: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, 2016), 155–29.

- <sup>12</sup> It should be noted that the PiS government has continued to fund the Polish office of the Center for Dialogue, which has been transformed into a vibrant think tank dealing with Russian affairs. The Intersection Project is one notable example of their activities. See Intersection: Russia/Europe/World, <http://intersectionproject.eu/>.
- <sup>13</sup> Łukasz Wenerski and Andreas Speiser, "Consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict for the Polish Economy and Energy Sector," in *Diverging Voices, Converging Policies: The Visegrad States' Reactions to the Russia-Ukraine Conflict*, eds. Jacek Kucharczyk and Grigorij Mesežnikov (Warsaw: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, 2016), 130–43.
- <sup>14</sup> "Warsaw Summit Communiqué," NATO, 9 July 2016, [www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_133169.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm).
- <sup>15</sup> Agnieszka Łada et al., *The Energy Union: Views from France, Germany, Poland and the United Kingdom* (Warsaw: Institute of Public Affairs, 2015) [www.isp.org.pl/uploads/pdf/1646937582.pdf](http://www.isp.org.pl/uploads/pdf/1646937582.pdf).
- <sup>16</sup> Katie Simmons, Bruce Stokes, and Jacob Poushter, *NATO Publics Blame Russia for Ukrainian Crisis, but Reluctant to Provide Military Aid* (Pew Research Center, June 2015), [www.pewglobal.org/files/2015/06/Pew-Research-Center-Russia-Ukraine-Report-FINAL-June-10-2015.pdf](http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2015/06/Pew-Research-Center-Russia-Ukraine-Report-FINAL-June-10-2015.pdf); Margaret Vice, "Publics Worldwide Unfavorable Toward Putin, Russia," Pew Research Center, 16 August 2017, [www.pewglobal.org/2017/08/16/publics-worldwide-unfavorable-toward-putin-russia/](http://www.pewglobal.org/2017/08/16/publics-worldwide-unfavorable-toward-putin-russia/).
- <sup>17</sup> Jacek Kucharczyk, Agnieszka Łada, and Łukasz Wenerski, *Close Together or Far Apart? Poles, Germans, and Russians on the Russia-Ukraine Crisis* [in Polish] (Warsaw: Institute of Public Affairs, 2015), [www.isp.org.pl/uploads/pdf/1988281977.pdf](http://www.isp.org.pl/uploads/pdf/1988281977.pdf).
- <sup>18</sup> Jacek Kucharczyk et al., *Close Together or Far Apart?*
- <sup>19</sup> Jacek Kucharczyk et al., *Close Together or Far Apart?*
- <sup>20</sup> *Jakiej Unii chcą Polacy?* [What EU do the Polish people want?] (Warsaw: Center for Public Opinion Research, 2017), [www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2017/K\\_050\\_17.PDF](http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2017/K_050_17.PDF).
- <sup>21</sup> "Attitude to NATO and the Presence of Allied Forces in Poland," CBOS Public Opinion Research Center, 2017, [www.cbos.pl/EN/publications/reports/2017/026\\_17.pdf](http://www.cbos.pl/EN/publications/reports/2017/026_17.pdf).
- <sup>22</sup> Edward Lucas and Peter Pomerantsev, *Winning the Information War: Techniques and Counter-Strategies to Russian Propaganda in Central and Eastern Europe* (Center for European Policy Analysis, August 2016), [https://cepa.ecms.pl/files/?id\\_plik=2773](https://cepa.ecms.pl/files/?id_plik=2773).
- <sup>23</sup> Péter Krekó et al., *The Weaponization of Culture: Kremlin's Traditional Agenda and the Export of Values to Central Europe* (Political Capital Institute, August 2016), 20, [www.politicalcapital.hu/wpcontent/uploads/PC\\_reactionary\\_values\\_CEE\\_20160727.pdf](http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wpcontent/uploads/PC_reactionary_values_CEE_20160727.pdf).
- <sup>24</sup> Péter Krekó et al., *The Weaponization of Culture*, 50.
- <sup>25</sup> The role played by the traditionalist agenda in domestic Polish politics is analyzed in some detail in Jacek Kucharczyk et al., "When Fear Wins: Causes and Consequences of Poland's Populist Turn," 338–45.
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- <sup>27</sup> Joanna Fomina et al., *Poland-Ukraine, Poles-Ukrainians: Look Across the Border* (Warsaw: Institute of Public Affairs, 2013), [www.isp.org.pl/uploads/filemanager/pdf/SpojrzenieprzezgraniceENGsummary.pdf](http://www.isp.org.pl/uploads/filemanager/pdf/SpojrzenieprzezgraniceENGsummary.pdf).
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- <sup>29</sup> For a detailed analysis of the political actors of Russian propaganda and the importance of Polish-Ukrainian relations in this context, see Łukasz Wenerski and Michał Kaciewicz, *Russian Soft Power in Poland: The Kremlin and Pro-Russian Organizations* (Budapest: Political Capital, April 2017), [www.politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/PC\\_NED\\_country\\_study\\_PL\\_20170428.pdf](http://www.politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/PC_NED_country_study_PL_20170428.pdf).
- <sup>30</sup> Péter Krekó et al., *The Weaponization of Culture*, 50.
- <sup>31</sup> Maciej Pieczyński, "Globalizm i liberalizm to cywilizacja Antychrysta" [Globalism and liberalism is the civilization of anti-Christ], *Do Rzeczy*, 29 December 2016, <https://dorzeczy.pl/kraj/18103/Globalizm-i-liberalizm-to-cywilizacja-Antychrysta.html>.
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- <sup>70</sup> Russkiy Mir Foundation, [www.russskiymir.ru/rucenter/catalogue.php](http://www.russskiymir.ru/rucenter/catalogue.php).
- <sup>71</sup> The Polish Association of Russian Language Teachers, [www.rusysty.pl/index.php/homepage](http://www.rusysty.pl/index.php/homepage).
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- <sup>73</sup> This narrative was aptly described by Timothy Snyder: "Exaggerated Russian claims about numbers of deaths treat Belarus and Ukraine as Russia, and Jews, Belarusians, and Ukrainians as Russians: this amounts to an imperialism of martyrdom, implicitly claiming territory by explicitly claiming victims," in "Holocaust: The Ignored Reality," *New York Review of Books*, 16 July 2009, [www.nybooks.com/articles/2009/07/16/holocaust-the-ignored-reality/](http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2009/07/16/holocaust-the-ignored-reality/).
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- <sup>81</sup> Justyna Szczudlik-Tatar, *China's Charm Offensive in Central and Eastern Europe: The Implementation of Its "12 Measures" Strategy*, PISM 106 (October 2013), [www.pism.pl/files/?id\\_plik=14927](http://www.pism.pl/files/?id_plik=14927).
- <sup>82</sup> "Dlaczego Ewy Kopacz nie było w Belgradzie, czyli rzecz o bieżących relacjach polsko-chińskich" [Why Ewa Kopacz missed Belgrade, or the story on current Polish-Chinese relations], *Polska-Chiny blog*, 27 December 2014, <https://polskachines.wordpress.com>.
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- <sup>84</sup> Marcin Makowski, "Marcin Makowski: Nowy Jedwabny Szlak, stare problemy. Premier Beata Szydło z wizytą w Chinach" [New Silk Road, old problems. PM Szydło visits China], *WP Opinie*, 12 May 2017, <http://opinie.wp.pl/marcin-makowski-nowy-jedwabny-szlak-stare-problemy-premier-beata-szydlo-z-wizyta-w-chinach-6121849046488705a>.
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- <sup>97</sup> "WIS TV Hong Songbing we Wrocławiu Wojna o Pieniądz 3 #CurrencyWars," YouTube, 7 December 2016, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=HTWcPBzXVsw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HTWcPBzXVsw).
- <sup>98</sup> "Powinniście budować polską, narodową gospodarkę. Nie ma w historii przykładu, żeby państwo zbudowało swoją potęgę dzięki inwestycjom zagranicznym" [You should build national, Polish economy. There is no country in history that would built its power through foreign investment], *wPolityce*, 29 November 2016, <http://wpolityce.pl/polityka/317416-song-hongbing-powinniscie-budowac-polska-narodowa-gospodarke-nie-ma-w-historii-przykladu-zeby-panstwo-zbudowalo-swoja-potega-dzieki-inwestycjom-zagranicznym-nasz-wywiad>.
- <sup>99</sup> The lineup of speakers is rather remarkable. It includes Janusz Szewczak, a PiS member of parliament who is also the chief economist of SKOK, a network of cooperative banks which over the years has provided financial support to PiS. Other speakers at the conference included a member of the European Parliament from the far-right and pro-Russian New Right Congress party, and Professor Janusz Bożyk, who in the 1970s was the key economist advisor to Edward Gierek, then First Secretary of Poland's Communist Party. See "Wojna walut a światowy kryzys—Song Hongbing, Wojna o pieniądź a Nowy Jedwabny Szlak" [Currency Wars and the Global Crisis—Song Hongbing, The War on Money and the New Silk Road], YouTube, 2 December 2016, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-IBj5PezH4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-IBj5PezH4).
- <sup>100</sup> Opcja na prawo [Right Option], [www.opcjanaprawo.pl/](http://www.opcjanaprawo.pl/).
- <sup>101</sup> "Song Hongbing wezwał bankierów na pojedynek" [Song Hongbing challenges bankers to a duel], *Polski Portal Informacyjny Geopolityka* Robert Brzoza, 28 April 2016, <https://geopolityka.robertbrzoza.pl/finansjera/ekonomia-zachodu-dolar-derywaty-fed-i-banki-oczami-chin/>.
- <sup>102</sup> "Rewitalizacja Alei Chińskiej" [Revitalization of the Chinese path], *Sinopol Foundation*, <http://sinopol.pl/pl/kultura/aleja-chinska>.
- <sup>103</sup> *Sinopol Foundation*, <http://sinopol.pl/>.
- <sup>104</sup> "Najbliższe konferencje w Instytucie Konfucjusza," [Upcoming Conferences at the Confucius Institute], *Confucius Institute at the Jagiellonian University*, [www.instytutkonfucjusza.uj.edu.pl/nauka/konferencje-naukowe](http://www.instytutkonfucjusza.uj.edu.pl/nauka/konferencje-naukowe).
- <sup>105</sup> Hana Umeda, "NIE dla Instytutu Konfucjusza przy UW—piszemy maile do rektora!" [NO to the Confucius Institute at the University of Warsaw—our emails to the rector], Facebook, [www.facebook.com/events/825474787529844/?context=%7B%22ref%22%3A%22106%22%2C%22action\\_history%22%3A%22null%22%7D](https://www.facebook.com/events/825474787529844/?context=%7B%22ref%22%3A%22106%22%2C%22action_history%22%3A%22null%22%7D).
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- <sup>107</sup> Zhao Xinying, "Sino-Polish University Consortium Launches," *China Daily*, 21 March 2017, [www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/cn\\_eu/2017-03/21/content\\_28629073.htm?from=timeline&isappinstalled=0](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/cn_eu/2017-03/21/content_28629073.htm?from=timeline&isappinstalled=0).
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<sup>109</sup> The Center for Poland–Asia Studies, [www.polska-azja.pl/](http://www.polska-azja.pl/).

<sup>110</sup> Interview with an anonymous expert, April 2017.

<sup>111</sup> “Polish Academic Appointed Deputy Head of AIIB,” Radio Poland, 19 July 2016, [www.thenews.pl/1/10/Artykul/262580,Polish-academic-appointed-deputy-head-of-AIIB](http://www.thenews.pl/1/10/Artykul/262580,Polish-academic-appointed-deputy-head-of-AIIB); “CSPA, czyli impossible is nothing—Radosław Pyffel Alternate Director w Azjatyckim Banku Inwestycji Infrastrukturalnych (AIIB)!” [CSPA, impossible is nothing—Radosław Pyffel Alternate Director of the Asian Infrastructure Development Bank] CSPA, 18 July 2016, [www.polska-azja.pl/cspa-czyli-impossible-is-nothing-radoslaw-pyffel-alternate-director-w-azjatyckim-banku-inwestycji-infrastrukturalnych-aiib/](http://www.polska-azja.pl/cspa-czyli-impossible-is-nothing-radoslaw-pyffel-alternate-director-w-azjatyckim-banku-inwestycji-infrastrukturalnych-aiib/).

<sup>112</sup> It is interesting to contrast this initiative with the current limited opportunities for young experts and activists to undertake study visits in the U.S. To the author’s knowledge, the only existing program of this kind available for Polish activists is run by the German Marshall Fund on a highly competitive basis. Some applicants described the recruitment process as “beauty contests,” and said they were discouraged from applying again. The Chinese initiative, on the other hand, invited preselected candidates, which seems to be a much more effective recruitment procedure from the perspective of the applicants.

<sup>113</sup> Interview with an anonymous expert, October 2016.

<sup>114</sup> Quentin Ariès, “Brussels Sets Clock Ticking Again in Showdown with Poland,” *Politico*, 29 July 2017, [www.politico.eu/article/poland-rule-of-law-brussels-sets-clock-ticking-again-in-showdown/](http://www.politico.eu/article/poland-rule-of-law-brussels-sets-clock-ticking-again-in-showdown/).

<sup>115</sup> See Ewa Siedlecka, “PiS chce zrobić z Polski Chiny Europy. Polacy wyżej cenią dobra materialne niż demokrację” [Law and Justice wants to turn Poland into the China of Europe], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 4 November 2017, <http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/7,124059,22602347,pis-chce-zrobic-z-polski-chiny-europy-polacy-blisko.html>.

<sup>116</sup> Agnieszka Łada, *Poland in Europe—Regional Leader or Outlier? Poland’s European Policy in View of the Changes on the Continent* (Warsaw: Institute of Public Affairs, 2017), [www.isp.org.pl/site.php?id=1&pub=935&lang=2](http://www.isp.org.pl/site.php?id=1&pub=935&lang=2).

<sup>117</sup> Tim Hume, “Poland’s Populist Government Let Far-Right Extremism Explode into the Mainstream,” *Vice News*, 9 May 2017, <https://news.vice.com/story/poland-populist-government-far-right-extremism>.