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Žygimantas Juška

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# Soft Power of the European Union

Mastering the Language of Power  
Politics



Springer

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Žygimantas Juška

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Mastering the Language of Power Politics

 Springer

Žygimantas Juška  
Delegation of the European Union to Rwanda  
Kigali, Rwanda

The information and views set out in this book are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the European Commission.

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*I dedicate this book to my extraordinary wife, Tetiana, who has been my source of inspiration throughout this journey. Your unwavering support and love was a driving force behind completion of this book. This work is not only a reflection of a long path, but also tribute to our wonderful family, always ready to face any challenges that come our way. In our perspective, issues should be afraid of us, not the other way around. Let's maintain our optimism and positivity, which would doubtless pave the way for a future filled with joy and countless possibilities: the sky is the limit.*

# Preface

In 1990, the American political scientist Joseph Nye defined power as the ability to influence others in order to obtain a preferable outcome. Within this definition of power, Nye distinguished two types of power: soft and hard power. Soft power rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others and achieve one's objectives through attraction or persuasion and contrasts with hard power, which relies on military strength or economic coercion. However, Nye's approach requires a reassessment in order to adapt to a modern era characterised by global power politics. An information age has enabled aggressive actors to apply information warfare tactics to influence politicians and citizens of foreign countries, especially through the vast potential of internet. These tactics, which resemble those of soft power, have been described as 'sharp power' and are based on distraction and manipulation through propaganda and disinformation campaigns. This book aims to define the EU's stance in relation to this altered global power mechanism, combining soft and hard power, whereas sharp power is positioned between them.

Historically, the European Union as a bloc has had the strongest arsenal of soft power, consisting of extensive trade, a significant development aid budget, and ample investment possibilities. This book aims to assess whether the EU has successfully leveraged its substantial soft power potential to influence the behaviour of partner countries in the most geopolitically important regions for the EU: the Western Balkans, the Eastern Partnership, the Southern Neighbourhood, and Sub-Saharan Africa. However, the current state of global politics puts pressure on the EU to deploy hard power instruments. The latest example is the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, which was undertaken with the aim of occupying a free and democratic European country. This work examines whether the EU, traditionally a hub of soft power, is prepared to deploy hard power measures in response to hard power actors such as Russia. It also identifies the essential preconditions for the EU to remain competitive in global power politics.

Chapter 1 sets the stage for the reader and introduces key themes, challenges, and perspectives. Chapter 2 presents the main soft power pillars of the European Union, which lays the groundwork for Chap. 3's analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of each soft power pillar and their respective capabilities to influence the behaviour

of partner countries. Chapter 4 analyses the effectiveness of the EU's soft power in the four regions of principal importance to the EU and how the Union's soft power is tailored to specific challenges in each region. Chapter 5 analyses the EU's response to Russia's hard power approach. Chapter 6 identifies the crucial prerequisites necessary for the EU to engage in power politics. Chapter 7 concludes by proposing three strategies to enhance the EU's position in global power politics.

Kigali, Rwanda

Žygimantas Juška



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## About the Author

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# List of Abbreviations

2030 Agenda	UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
AA	Association Agreement
ACP	African, Caribbean and Pacific
AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
B3W	Build Back Better World
BRI	Chinese Belt and Road Initiative
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas
EAG	External Action Guarantee
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ECD	European Consensus on Development
EDF	European Development Fund
EEAS	European External Action Service
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EFSD+	European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus
EIB	European Investment Bank
EIP	Economic and Investment Plan
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EPA	Economic Partnership Agreement
FDI	Foreign direct investment
GG	Global Gateway
GNI	Gross national income
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
MAV+	Manufacturing and Access to Vaccines, Medicines, and Health Technologies
NDICI-Global Europe	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument—Global Europe
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PCD	Policy coherence for development

PFM	Public Finance Management
SMEs	Small and medium-sized enterprises
SN	Southern Neighbourhood
SSA	Stabilisation and Association Agreement
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
TEI	Team Europe Initiative
WB	Western Balkans
WTO	World Trade Organisation

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction



We must be realistic and recognise that the current phase in history and global politics requires us to think and act in terms of power (hence, the phrase ‘the language of power’). The war against Ukraine is the latest and most dramatic illustration of this. (Borrell, 2022)

These words of Josep Borrell, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission (HR/VP), have served as a source of inspiration for this book. The European Union (EU) and its member states have long been considered a hub of soft power in global politics. The EU has one of the strongest toolkits of soft power, consisting of extensive trade, a significant development aid budget, and ample investment possibilities. The Union exerts its soft power by adhering to its core values and principles, which include democracy, respect for human rights, the rule of law, and protection of the environment. However, the current phase of global power politics puts pressure on the EU to deploy hard power instruments, such as economic coercion. This work will examine whether the EU, traditionally a stronghold of soft power, is prepared for the challenges of the current political order, particularly in the context of enduring divisions among EU member states.

More specifically, this book will identify and analyse the structure of the EU’s soft power and posit that it consists of six fundamental pillars: (1) development assistance, (2) foreign policy, (3) economic cooperation, (4) communication, (5) culture, and (6) science and education. It discusses the hierarchical structure to define the sequence of pillars from the top to the bottom. This will lay the foundation for further analysis regarding the effectiveness of the pillars in influencing the behaviour of partner countries to achieve the EU’s foreign policy objectives. The scope of this study encompasses the most geopolitically important regions for the EU: the Western Balkans, the Eastern Partnership, the Southern Neighbourhood, and Sub-Saharan Africa. It assesses the EU’s ability to influence the behaviour of partner countries in these regions through the power of attraction and cooperation. Moreover, using the case study of Russia, this work discusses the EU’s capability to

**Table 1.1** Primary objectives and research questions of this book

Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyse the effectiveness of the EU's soft power in the most geopolitically important regions for the Union</li> <li>• Discover the factors that hamper the EU's ability to wield influence</li> <li>• Examine the EU's ability to deploy hard power tools against hard power actors</li> </ul>
Research questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the fundamental pillars of the EU's soft power?</li> <li>• What successes and failures does the EU's soft power encounter in the four pivotal regions?</li> <li>• How successfully has the EU deployed hard power tools to respond to Russia's aggressive policy?</li> <li>• What are the preconditions necessary for the EU to engage in power politics?</li> </ul>

apply hard power tools against a hard power actor. Therefore, this book has three primary objectives and aims to answer four research questions (Table 1.1).

This book will adopt the 'carrot and stick' framework and analyse it from two perspectives. The first perspective considers the carrot as the promise of enhanced economic cooperation or development aid between nations (soft power), while the stick is military force and economic coercion (hard power). Considering that the age of power politics necessitates learning to speak the language of power, the first perspective aims to define the EU's own stance between soft and hard power. The second perspective assesses the EU's ability to apply the 'carrot or stick' approach in its relations with four key regions in development and economic cooperation. More specifically, this work will scrutinise the EU's conditionality mechanism in its relations with partner countries, where inducements (economic cooperation and development aid) are applied in conjunction with punishments (freezing or reducing EU support and cooperation in case of backtracking). The reasons for the structural ineffectiveness of the EU's soft power, resulting from slow decision-making, lack of unity, and ineffective communication will also be analyzed. Furthermore, the question as to whether the war in Ukraine has served as a geopolitical awakening for the EU to solve these shortcomings will be addressed.

The book is divided into seven chapters that correspond to the following outline:

Chapter 1 serves as the introduction, setting the stage for the reader and introducing key themes, challenges and perspectives.

Chapter 2 presents the difference between hard and soft power and explains the EU's role within both power mechanisms. Moreover, it introduces the six pillars of the EU's soft power: development assistance, foreign policy, economic cooperation, communication, culture, and science and education.

Chapter 3 analyses the strengths and weaknesses of each soft power pillar and their respective abilities to shape the behaviour of partner countries. This analysis will enable an understanding of the relative importance of each pillar, which will form the basis of a hierarchical structure, where each pillar in the soft power framework, except one, is subordinate to another.

Chapter 4 analyses the effectiveness of the EU's soft power in the four regions of principal importance to the EU: the Western Balkans, the Eastern Partnership, the Southern Neighbourhood, and Sub-Saharan Africa. It explores how the EU's soft power is tailored to specific challenges in each region.

Section 4.1, dedicated to the Western Balkans, discusses the effectiveness of the EU's soft power through its power of attraction. The section's objective is to assess whether the perspective of EU membership has sufficiently motivated partner countries to embark on political and economic reforms for eventual EU membership. Moreover, the section scrutinises whether the new momentum generated by the Russian invasion of Ukraine has facilitated the commitment of the EU and its Western Balkan partners to take promising actions toward EU accession.

Section 4.2 on the Eastern Partnership explores the divergent political trajectories of two groups of countries: the Associated Trio, consisting of Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, and the Distant Trio, comprised of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus. It also examines the hard power toolkit Russia has deployed in the region to steer these countries away from the EU.

Section 4.3 focuses on the Southern Neighbourhood and examines how the EU's soft power adapts to the region's diversity through three perspectives: conflict resolution, addressing instability, and wielding economic influence. It discusses the reasons behind the EU's reputation as a regional superpower and why this standing is endangered by growing competition from other actors.

Section 4.4 on Sub-Saharan Africa provides a case study illustrating the growing competition between the EU and China. Amid China's growing influence, it argues that the EU has a last opportunity to sustain its position as a leading regional actor, but only if the bloc moves from a donor-recipient relationship to a partnership of equals.

Section 4.5 provides a comparative analysis of the impact of soft power in the four regions studied within the timeframe before and after the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. It argues that the speed at which international politics changed around the EU was faster than the speed at which the Union was able to change itself and presents the reasons for this development.

Chapter 5 analyses the EU's response to Russia's hard power approach. It explores the arsenal of the EU's instruments against Russia, first deployed in 2014 in response to Russia's actions in Crimea and Donbas and subsequently also in 2022 following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. It aims to define the EU's stance between hard and soft power, combining unprecedented sanctions and military support.

Chapter 6 identifies the preconditions necessary for the EU to engage in power politics, including soft and hard power instruments.

Chapter 7 is the concluding chapter of this book and contains three proposals to enhance the EU's position in global power politics.

Two important clarifications need to be made about this book. Firstly, this work presents the state of affairs as of the end of 2023. From that standpoint the geopolitical environment was quickly changing and 2024 also appeared to be highly unpredictable. Secondly, this work examines the soft power of the European Union as a single unit, which significantly differs from the application of soft power by individual countries, whether by a separate EU country—such as France or Germany or as another global power, such as the United States or China. Considering that the EU as a bloc has the strongest arsenal of soft power, this book aims to assess whether