



## Soft Power of Serbia: Implications for Croatia

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### Abstract:

This abstract discusses the concept of Serbian soft power and its perceived implications for Croatia. It identifies Serbian turbo folk music, the Serbian Orthodox Church, and Serbian cultural centers as instruments of this soft power. The abstract also mentions the use of the Serbian minority in Croatia for promoting Serbian soft power and expresses concern about the concept of "Srpski svet" ("Serb World"), which is described as a term for Serbia's soft power. The Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts is presented as an ideologue of propaganda. The "Srpski svet" is perceived in some Croatian circles as an attempt to expand Serbian influence, weaken national identities, and destabilize other states, potentially hindering Croatian interests and contributing to distrust between the two countries.

**Keywords:** Serbian soft power, destabilization of neighboring states, Croatia.

### Original Research

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The theoretical aspects of state soft power are based on a concept popularized by political scientist Joseph Nye Jr.. Soft power is defined as the ability of a state to influence other actors in international relations through attraction and persuasion, rather than coercion (hard power, military force, or economic sanctions) or payments. The goal is to make other countries want the outcome you want. Nye identifies three main resources of soft power (Joseph Nye, 2008):

1. **Culture:** A set of practices and values that are attractive to others. This includes "high culture" (art, literature, educational systems) that appeals to elites, as well as "low" or popular culture (films, music, sports) that appeals to the masses.
2. **Political values:** The values of a nation's political system and traditions (such as democracy, human rights and openness) when lived consistently at home and promoted abroad.
3. **Foreign policy:** When others perceive a country's foreign policy as legitimate, moral and authoritative

Key theoretical aspects (Gallarotti, G. M. (2022):

**Attraction versus coercion:** A fundamental difference from hard power. Soft power works through influencing the preferences of others, while hard power changes behavior through threats or incentives.

**Intangible nature:** Soft power resources are often intangible (intangible assets, ideas, reputation), unlike tangible military equipment or economic reserves.

**Multiple actors:** Soft power does not only arise from government. It also arises from non-governmental actors (media, educational institutions, businesses, diaspora) that operate globally and spread the values and image of a country.

**Contextual dependency:** The effectiveness of soft power depends on the receptivity of the target audience. What is attractive in one culture may not be so in another.

**"Smart Power":** Contemporary theories emphasize the need to combine both hard and soft power ("smart power") to achieve optimal results in international politics.

The theoretical framework of soft power explains how a state can achieve desired foreign policy goals by using the influence of its culture, values, and policies to create admiration and cooperation, rather than relying solely on force (<https://softpower30.com/what-is-soft-power/> 24.11.2025).

## 2. THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF SERBIAN SOFT POWER

Every serious state has its own state doctrine. It is always interesting for an analyst or observer to find out who designs, plans and implements the soft power of a state. In our work, we analyze the role of SANU, the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, in designing the Serbian state strategy, including the design of Serbian soft power. "

Memorandum 1. of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU) from 1986 was a working version, or rather a draft document, that was never formally adopted as the official position of the Academy, but it was leaked to the public and caused great controversy. The document analyzed the deep economic and political crisis in the then Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) and, according to critics, became the ideological basis for Serbian nationalism and the subsequent wars in Yugoslavia. The paper dealt with economic analysis, the position of the Serbian people in the SFRY, and the constitutional order. After "Memorandum 1" was published in the media, it provoked sharp reactions throughout Yugoslavia. In other republics (especially in Croatia, Slovenia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina), it was considered a manifesto of Greater Serbian nationalism and "dynamite under the foundations of Yugoslavia." In Serbia, on the other hand, it mobilized nationalist circles and served as an ideological justification for Slobodan Milošević's policies that led to the collapse of the state and the wars of the 1990s. Activities of the SANU in preparation war and war propaganda in Yugoslavia is not a matter of free belief but a historical fact (<https://www.yuhistorija.com/serbian/doc/memorandum.pdf#:~:text=la%20slu%C4%8Daja%20Memorandum%2C%20a%20SANU%20jo%C5%A1%20%C5%BEivi,li%20Memorandum%20naj%2D%2>

Ove% C4% 87i% 20teret% 20akademije% 2C% 20i. 26.11.2025).

After the Greater Serbian aggression against Croatia ended in 1998, with the reintegration of the Croatian counties in the east of the country, a period of stability continued until the emergence of a new memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU).

Memorandum 2" (or "Memorandum II") of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU) is not a single, official, publicly published document in the way that the first draft of the Memorandum from 1986 was. but appeared in public in 2011 and 2012 (Artuković, Mato., 2021)

Instead, the term "Memorandum 2" is used in the media and the public, especially in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a metaphor or colloquial name for the continuous, long-term strategy of the Serbian political and intellectual elite, which persistently continues the goals of the first Memorandum with more modern, peacetime methods.

What is "Memorandum 2"?

The idea of "Memorandum 2" refers to a new strategy adapted to the new geopolitical conditions after the breakup of Yugoslavia and the wars of the 1990s. The goals remain similar to those of the first document (dominance of Serbian politics and protection of the rights of Serbs in the region), but the methods change. Serbia's soft power plays a special role in these methods:

1. **Integration of Serbs in the region:** Emphasis on the cultural, political and, ultimately, territorial integration of the entire Serbian people regardless of republican borders.
2. **Destabilization of neighboring countries:** Using political, media, and diplomatic means to destabilize Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Croatia, with the goal of achieving long-term Serbian national interests.
3. **Creating a "Serbian world":** Promoting the idea of a single cultural and political space that encompasses all Serbs in the region, often interpreted as a modern version of the idea of a "Greater Serbia."
4. **Denial of genocide and revision of history:** Attempts to revise the history of the wars of the 1990s, minimize Serbian crimes, and change the international community's perception of the nature of the conflict.

5. **Economic and political influence:** Using economic ties and political influence within the region and towards the European Union to achieve national goals

The concept of a "Serbian world" (which is often associated in critical circles in Croatia and the region with the idea of "Memorandum 2" as a permanent strategy for destabilizing the wider region) in Croatia functions, according to these interpretations, through a combination of political influence, cultural connections, diplomatic pressure and hybrid warfare, and not through direct military aggression as in the 1990s. The way this strategy is manifested in Croatia includes the following elements (Barić, N. (2004) .

### 1. Political and institutional presence

Representatives of Serbs in government: Through parties such as the Independent Democratic Serbian Party (SDSS) and the Serbian National Council (SNV), Serbs participate in the Croatian government, which allows them to influence the adoption of laws and policies concerning minority rights. Critics of these parties accuse them of being an extension of official Belgrade politics and of being used to achieve the goals of the "Serbian world" within the Croatian system.

Emphasis on rights and discrimination: The focus is placed on the alleged discrimination of Serbs in Croatia (in employment, the exercise of pension rights, legal insecurity) in order to maintain the cohesion of the Serbian community and ensure constant political pressure on Croatian institutions, and among sent a picture of the Serbs as vulnerable to the national community and discredited Croatian state independence.

### 2. Cultural and identity policy

Preserving Serbian identity: Promoting Serbian culture, language, and the Cyrillic alphabet and establishing Serbian cultural centers in Croatia serve to maintain a strong national identity. Critics argue that these centers can potentially serve as intelligence and propaganda outlets.

"Ethnic mimicry" and "collective guilt": Part of the strategy, according to some interpretations, includes combating "ethnic mimicry" (when Serbs in Croatia declare themselves as Croats out of fear of discrimination)

and rejecting collective guilt for the events of the war, thereby seeking to change the dominant narrative about the Homeland War.

### 3. Media and information influence

Media propaganda: Media controlled by Serbian capital or close to the Serbian political elite in the region are used to spread narratives that are in line with the goals of the "Serbian world", which includes revising history and minimizing Serbian war crimes and equating the guilt of Croatia and Serbia in the Greater Serbia aggression against Croatia.

Hybrid warfare: Through various channels, including social networks and certain media platforms, a hybrid war is being waged with the aim of destabilizing Croatian society and disrupting interethnic relations.

### 4. Diplomatic and regional pressure

Blocking the European path: Although Croatia is a member of the EU, Serbia uses its diplomatic influence to potentially hinder Croatian interests or, conversely, uses Croats in Serbia as a "bargaining token" in relations with Croatia.

Regional cooperation (or obstruction): Belgrade's policy often involves coordinated action with Serbian political representatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Republika Srpska) and Montenegro, creating a united front that affects the stability of the entire region, which indirectly affects Croatia.

"Memorandum 2", the "Serbian World" in Croatia does not function as a formal plan, but as a description of a comprehensive strategy that uses all available non-military means to achieve permanent Serbian political and cultural influence and secure a special status for the Serbian community, which critics see as a threat to the sovereignty and stability of Croatia (<https://narod.hr/eu-svijet/svijet/projekt-velika-srbija-srpski-svet-zasto-je-vucic-opasniji-od-milosevica#:~:text=Analiza:%20Projekt%20Velika%20Srbija/Srpski%20svet'%20E2%80%93%20za%C5%A1to%20je%20Vu%C4%8Di%C4%87%20opasniji%20od%20Milo%C5%A1evi%C4%87a?> 23.11.2025).

## 2. SOFT POWER OF SERBIA AND SERBIAN INSTITUTIONS IN CROATIA

Serbia's soft power in Croatia is manifested primarily through cultural influence, media and support for the Serbian national minority in exercising its rights, with Serbian institutions in Croatia playing a key role. The main institutions are:

- a) Serbian National Council (SNV): The central body of the Serbian national minority in Croatia that coordinates the work of other organizations, represents the political interests of Serbs and deals with the protection of human and minority rights.
- b) Serbian Cultural Society "Prosvjeta": A central cultural, scientific and educational institution that focuses on the preservation of the Serbian language, script, culture and education. It has branches in many cities and publishes publications such as the magazine "Tragovi".
- c) Serbian Economic Society "Privrednik": The oldest active Serbian organization in Croatia (founded at the end of the 19th century) that deals with economic empowerment and scholarships for students of Serbian nationality.
- d) Media: An important role is played by media in the Serbian language or those that cover topics important to the Serbian community, such as the weekly "Novosti" (published by the SNV) and the portal "Srbi.hr", which serve as platforms for informing and expressing the views of the minority.
- e) Establishment of Serbian cultural centers, as many as 40, on the territory of the Republic of Croatia ALTHOUGH SERBS IN Croatia constitute only 3.1 percent according to the 2021 census. Many analysts point to the disproportion between the number of centers and the total population.

Serbia's soft power is particularly aggressive, exclusive and extremist through the Serbian minority weekly Novosti. "Novosti" (published by the Serbian National Council), refers to a critical narrative that questions the dominant Croatian interpretation of the Homeland War ([https://narod.hr/hrvatska/analiza-sadrzaja-tjednika-novosti-u-2023-godini-izrazito-negativan-stav-o-domovinskom-ratu#google\\_vignette](https://narod.hr/hrvatska/analiza-sadrzaja-tjednika-novosti-u-2023-godini-izrazito-negativan-stav-o-domovinskom-ratu#google_vignette) 15.11.2025).

Serbian soft power is focused on the direct delegitimization of the Croatian Homeland War in

terms of denying the fact of the war, challenging Croatian state independence and Croatian national identity, criticism focuses on the following aspects:

1. The portrayal of Croatian defenders and commanders: The weekly has been accused of portraying Croatian defenders, HV commanders (such as Dr. Franjo Tuđman, Gojko Šušak and Janko Bobetko) and units (such as the HOS) in an extremely negative light. Associations that emerged from the Homeland War and independent media often highlight articles that, in their opinion, downplay the significance of the war and portray the defenders as looters or criminals, which causes resentment in a part of the public.
2. Analysis of war events from the perspective of the Serbian minority, which does not want to admit defeat in the imposed war, which they themselves caused with the help of the then Yugoslav army: Although "Novosti" provides space for a narrative that includes Serbian victims, which is legitimate, it at the same time deprives the Croatian state of the right to liberate internationally recognized territory.
3. Critical review of "Oluja" (<https://www.portalnovosti.com/oluja/> 25.11.2025): According to the text "What we really celebrate" by author Viktor Ivančić from 2015, published in "Novosti", the author challenged Croatia to celebrate its most important national holiday, the day of victory and patriotic gratitude. Serbian news, as an extended arm of Serbia's soft power, delegitimizes August 5 as a holiday and foregrounds the exodus of 250,000 Serbian civilians, soldiers, policemen and intelligence officers. Although the doctrine of the defense of the so-called Krajina was based on the principle of an armed people, where all the inhabitants had weapons, the author of the text is not interested in that. Likewise, the author of the text is not interested in how the occupation of 33 percent of the Croatian territory came about, nor is his focus on the 15,970 dead Croatian soldiers and civilians.

### 2.1. SERBIAN CULTURAL CENTERS IN CROATIA AND THE SOFT POWER OF SERBIA

Cultural centers are key instruments of so-called soft power, and Serbia, directly or indirectly, uses them to preserve and promote

Serbian cultural identity in the diaspora, including in Croatia. These centers have a dual role: on the one hand, they serve as a platform for the cultural activities of the Serbian community, and on the other hand, as an extended arm of Serbian politics and a tool for achieving political influence, potentially making it more difficult to realize Croatian interests. Serbian cultural centers (40 centers are planned) have become a political weapon directed against the Republic of Croatia, which is the target of the Serbian World project, the main instrument of Serbian soft power. Parliament member and university professor Josip Jurčević (NZ, Most) defined the so-called "Serbian cultural centers, 40 of them", as hostile, identity strongholds that will destabilize security in Croatia and serve as strongholds if security or military destabilization occurs. (<https://vijesti.hrt.hr/hrvatska/jurcevic-nz-tzv-srpski-kulturni-centri-su-neprijateljske-identitetske-utvrde-12059767>. 25.11.2025)

The opening of the exhibition dedicated to the academician Dejan Medaković at the Serbian Cultural Center (SKC) in Zagreb in November 2025 caused sharp divisions and incidents, with part of the Croatian public and politicians evaluating it as a provocation, while the organizers and part of the cultural community emphasized his artistic and cultural contribution. The perception of provocation stems from the political activities of Dejan Medaković ([https://www.hina.hr/news/12102951#:~:text=ZA GREB%2C%2010%20Nov%20\(Hina\)%20%2D%20Prime%20Minister,of%20a%20Serb%20exhibition%20but%20he%20also](https://www.hina.hr/news/12102951#:~:text=ZA GREB%2C%2010%20Nov%20(Hina)%20%2D%20Prime%20Minister,of%20a%20Serb%20exhibition%20but%20he%20also) 25.11.2025.:

SANU Memorandum (described in Chapter 2): Medaković was a member of the working group that participated in the preparation of the famous Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU) from 1986. This document is considered in Croatia, but also in the wider region, as the ideological foundation of Greater Serbia policy and aggression against Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

**Political views:** Critics point out that Medaković was a fierce critic of the Catholic Church and its officials (such as Cardinals Štepinac and Kuharić) and supported Milošević's political engagement in Serbian nationalist policy, subjugation and eventual destruction of the Republic of Croatia. Because of these views, part

of the Croatian public believes that giving space to a person associated with the ideology that led to war and suffering in Croatia is unacceptable and provocative.

The opening of the exhibition at the Serbian Cultural Center (SKC) in Vukovar was also perceived as a provocation. The context of the "provocation" in Vukovar is an exhibition called "Serbian Woman" (which deals with the role of Serbian women in World War I) scheduled for November 11, 2025, on the eve of the Day of Remembrance of the Victims of the Homeland War and the Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Vukovar and Škabrnja (November 18). Vukovar Mayor Marijan Pavliček (Croatian Sovereignists) and part of the Croatian public have requested the postponement of the exhibition, believing that the choice of date is inappropriate and that it is a deliberate provocation ([https://narod.hr/hrvatska/izlozba-skc-vukovar-o-srpskoj-pobedi-najavljena-uz-simbol-koji-je-nosio-i-ratko-mladic#google\\_vignette](https://narod.hr/hrvatska/izlozba-skc-vukovar-o-srpskoj-pobedi-najavljena-uz-simbol-koji-je-nosio-i-ratko-mladic#google_vignette), 25.11.2025):

1. **Time of reverence:** Mid-November in Vukovar is a time of special reverence and remembrance of the most difficult days of the siege of the city in 1991 and the victims, and holding any cultural events of the Serbian community, regardless of their content, during that period is considered extremely insensitive.
2. **Political tensions:** Vukovar is a city with deep ethnic divisions and a sensitive post-conflict situation. Such events further increase tensions and bring unrest.

It is particularly provocative that the Serbian Cultural Center in Vukovar, on the poster announcing the exhibition, clearly highlighted the flower of Natalia's ramonda. It was also worn in The Hague by Serbian General Ratko Mladić, a war criminal, commander of the 9th Knin Corps of the criminal Yugoslav People's Army, who sowed death in the southern Croatian counties (Šibenik and Zadar). The world remembers him as the perpetrator of the genocide in Srebrenica in July 1995.

### 3. THE SOFT POWER OF SERBIA IN CROATIA AND THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

The Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) is perceived in Croatia as one of the most important, but also the most controversial, instruments of Serbian soft power. Its role goes beyond mere

spiritual activity and is often interpreted as a political factor that affects the Serbian minority and bilateral relations between the two countries. The role of the SPC in the context of soft power:

1. **Preservation of national identity:** SPC plays a key role in preserving the religious, cultural and national identity of Serbs in Croatia. Through parishes, monasteries (such as Krka) and religious ceremonies, the Church maintains ties with the mother country of Serbia and prevents the assimilation of the Serbian minority.
2. **Political influence:** The SPC is often perceived as the "backbone" of Serbian nationalism, and its dignitaries throughout history, and even today, made statements that had a strong political connotation. Many in Croatia believe that the Serbian Orthodox Church does not fully recognize the Croatian state in its full borders and that it is the bearer of the idea of a "Serbian world". There is an evident example in congratulating Orthodox believers in Croatia on Orthodox holidays when Serbian priests deliberately skip mentioning the Orthodox believers in Croatia, but instead mention Croatian regional terms (Slavonia, Dalmatia, Kordun, etc.), producing connotations about the territorial integrity of the Republic of Croatia.
3. **Historical narratives:** The Church promotes certain historical narratives that contradict dominant Croatian interpretations. For example, presenting the Krka Monastery as an "ancient Serbian monastery" without taking into account other historical facts is interpreted by the Croatian public as spreading "Greater Serbian mythology".
4. **Financing and status:** The Serbian Orthodox Church in Croatia operates on the basis of an agreement with the Croatian Government from 2002, which regulates rights and financing. However, claims occasionally appear in the public that the SPC is not even legally registered in Croatia and that money from Croatia goes to finance the central Church in Serbia, which contributes to the perception of non-transparent influence and misuse of the Croatian budget.

In Croatia, there is a strong perception that the SPC, especially during the 90s, played a significant role in encouraging Greater Serbian aggression. Even today, the statements of individual bishops and clergy, which concern

political issues, the status of Serbs in Croatia or relations with the Catholic Church, provoke strong reactions and are interpreted as interference in Croatia's internal affairs and prolonging aggressive politics by other means (<https://hrvatskiratnik.hr/uloga-srpske-pravoslavne-crkve-u-domovinskom-ratu/> 25.11.2025) There have been cases in which certain bishops in Srpska of the Orthodox Church (SPC) made statements that were interpreted by the Croatian public as claims that there is an "Ustasha government" in power in Croatia or that the government is flirting with the Ustasha. The most prominent example includes the statements of the bishop of Pakrac-Slavon Jovan Ćulibrko and, earlier, Patriarch Irinej.

**Bishop Jovan Ćulibrk:** In interviews and public appearances, he criticized the rehabilitation of the Ustasha in Croatia. Although he may not have directly used the term "Ustasha government", his statements suggested that the current government was not doing enough to combat historical revisionism and Ustasha symbols, which was perceived by some in the public as an accusation that the government tolerated or supported Ustashism.

**Patriarch Irinej (deceased):** Over the years, Patriarch Irinej has repeatedly made harsh statements about the position of Serbs and the Serbian Orthodox Church in Croatia, accusing the Croatian authorities of discrimination, and on one occasion, responding to criticism from Croatian bishops, indirectly said that they should prove that they were "not Ustashes" (<https://www.sd.rs/vesti/drustvo/spc-odgovorilana-uvrede-hrvata-upucene-patrijarhu-nek-biskupidokazu-da-nisu-ustase-2019-02-09#:~:text=Nakon%20otvorenog%20napada%20hrvatskih%20biskupa%20na%20patrijarha,isti%20biskupi%20trebalo%20da%20doka%C5%BEu%20da%20nisu> 25.11.2025.)

### 3.1. The context of Bishop Nikanor's case

The case of Bishop Nikanor, which caused the biggest storm among the public in the region, including Croatia, happened in August 2022, and concerned his opposition to holding EuroPride in Belgrade.

**Call to violence and curses:** In his sermon, Nikanor publicly "cursed" the participants and organizers of EuroPride, calling the event a

"desecration" of Belgrade. He stated that if he had a weapon, he would use it against them.

Accusations against the Serbian Prime Minister: In the context of criticism, Nikanor also attacked Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabić (who is openly gay and of Croatian nationality), saying that she "is not of our blood" and that her ancestors "slaughtered Serbs", which was interpreted as spreading hatred based on national and ethnic origin.

Reactions in Serbia: His statements have drawn harsh condemnation in Serbia, including from President Aleksandar Vučić and the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, and criminal charges have been filed against him.

### 3.2. Perception in Croatia

Although Nikanor's statements were not primarily about the Croatian government, they have been used in the Croatian media and public as.

#### Evidence of radicalism within the Serbian Orthodox Church:

His words were taken as confirmation of the thesis that within the Serbian Orthodox Church there are radical circles that spread hatred, exclusivity and that they are the bearers of the Greater Serbian ideology.

Connection with war rhetoric: The media in Croatia recalled Nikanor's earlier statements, including those from the 1990s when he was the bishop of Gornjo-Karlovac, which were interpreted as inflammatory speech that preceded the killing of Croats in Glina and the surrounding area.

Nikanor's case further strengthened the perception in Croatia that the Serbian Orthodox Church is the bearer of brutal soft power and an ideology that is incompatible with coexistence and reconciliation.

### 4. TURBO FOLK MUSIC AND SERBIAN SOFT POWER IN CROATIA

Critics and some Croatian media see cajka or Serbian turbo-folk as a means of exerting Serbian influence on Croatia, with the following aspects being emphasized ([https://actualitica.com/en/culture-and-](https://actualitica.com/en/culture-and-entertainment/why-turbo-folk-should-be-banned-in-croatia-at-all-costs-part-ii/)

[entertainment/why-turbo-folk-should-be-banned-in-croatia-at-all-costs-part-ii/](https://actualitica.com/en/culture-and-entertainment/why-turbo-folk-should-be-banned-in-croatia-at-all-costs-part-ii/) 15.11.2025):

- a) Cultural "domination": Despite Croatia winning the war, critics claim that Serbia is "culturally conquering" part of the Croatian population through cajka. The popularity of this music is perceived as a victory of Serbian culture over Croatian, especially among young people.
- b) Spreading ideology: It is claimed that along with music, certain values or narratives associated with Serbian nationalism are also accepted, often unconsciously. Some turbo folk singers supported Serbian paramilitaries during the war, so consuming their music is interpreted as accepting that wartime past, or at least insensitivity to it.
- c) Alleged deliberate propaganda: Some analysts claim that cajka was deliberately propagated in Croatia as part of a strategy by Serbian intelligence services to increase influence in the region under the guise of "the region".

On the other hand, sociologists, cultural analysts, and some young people who listen to this music offer a different interpretation:

- a) Market success: The popularity of cajka, or Serbian turbo folk, is explained primarily as a market phenomenon. The music appeals to a wide audience, clubs are full, and concerts (like those by Aleksandra Prijović) are sold out, indicating a high demand that is not necessarily related to politics.
- b) Youth subculture: For many young people in Croatia, cajka is part of their subculture, not a political choice. The phenomenon is seen as a generational trend, often associated with an escape from "mainstream" culture or as part of a broader global trend of popularizing trap and folk music.
- c) Censorship and freedom of choice: Attempts to ban cajka in some cities (e.g. Pula) have been condemned as censorship and limiting freedom of choice, indicating that many perceive this music as apolitical.

Cajka or Serbian turbo-folk is undoubtedly a cultural influence from Serbia, which is the definition of soft power. However, whether this influence is "brutal" or a natural market phenomenon depends on the perspective. For a part of the Croatian public, it is an unacceptable, aggressive power that undermines national identity, while for others it is just popular music that does not necessarily have political implications.

## 5. CONCLUSION

When we consider the elements we have previously listed (Serbian cultural centers, Serbian Orthodox Church and turbo folk/cajke), the perception of Serbian soft power as a combination of the aforementioned elements represents a coordinated and aggressive strategy, as follows:

### **Cultural centers as political tools:**

The cultural centers of the Serbian National Council are a front for the expansion of the "Serbian World" project and, instead of pure culture, promote a political narrative that relativizes the war and accuses Croats of crimes.

**The Serbian Orthodox Church as a political player:** The Serbian Orthodox Church is often perceived as one of the key institutions in preserving the Greater Serbian ideology, and not exclusively as a religious community. Serbian bishops (such as the recent case of Bishop Nikanor who spoke about the "Ustasha government") make statements that are interpreted by the Croatian public as spreading national intolerance and do not want to distance themselves from the war past.

**Intense cultural influence,** which is perceived by some in the public as an imposition of Serbian cultural hegemony, the so-called cajka or turbo folk.: This genre of music and the associated culture (often associated with Serbian singers who supported the paramilitaries during the war) is perceived as a deliberate, cynical "spiritual rape" of the Croatian space. It is claimed that the youth, by

consuming this music, unconsciously accept and spread Serbian cultural and political influence and forget the war history.

Serbian soft power is very active in Croatia, but also in the wider Western Balkans. The conclusion about Serbian "soft power" in Croatia is that it is a topic that provokes significant media and political debate, with uneven perceptions in the public. While some see an influence in areas such as culture and media, others point out that this influence is limited due to political tensions and historical burdens. However, the exhibition about Dejan Medaković in Zagreb, the exhibition "Serbian Woman" in Vukovar touch on painful historical issues and are often perceived as politically motivated provocations, which ultimately limits, rather than strengthens, the overall reach of Serbian "soft power". Financial flows from Serbia to the SPC and minority institutions are not neutral "help from the motherland", but strategic resources of soft power. These flows are a fundamental element for the argument that Serbia, using apparently "soft" means (culture, religion, minority rights), is actually implementing a long-term, post-war strategy (connected with the ideas of "Memorandum 2" and the "Serbian world") with the aim of expanding its influence and hindering Croatian national interests.

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