

## UNDERSTANDING RUSSIAN SMART POWER: PERCEPTIONS AND IDEOLOGY

**Iskren  
IVANOV\*** senior lecturer in Sofia University «St. Kliment Ohridski», Sofia, Bulgaria,  
[iskrenivanov333@gmail.com](mailto:iskrenivanov333@gmail.com)

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**Abstract.** Russian foreign policy today incarnates the double-headed eagle of smart power perceptions and Neo-Eurasian ideology. The main purpose of this article is to examine the emergence and development of Russian smart power by analyzing the foreign policy concepts of the Russian Federation after September 11. In this paper, I will argue that Moscow's smart strategy is much similar to the American concept of smart power, but only in terms of its purpose. The article's assertion rests on the assumption that smart power allowed Washington to sustain its global dominance after the terrorist attacks from September 11, and alternately – could help Russia to consolidate Eurasia. The Coronavirus Pandemic, of course, will have long-term consequences for the international security. Finally, I will conclude that if Moscow wants to maintain the Russia-dominated security system in Eurasia, it should develop its original concept of smart power.

**Keywords:** Russia, Eurasia, smart, power, United States

**JEL codes:** F50, H56, N40, F51, F52

**Аннотация.** Российская внешняя политика сегодня воплощает собой «двуглавого орла», состоящего из представлений о «smart power» и неоевразийской идеологии. Основная цель этой статьи - изучить возникновение и развитие умной силы России путем анализа внешнеполитических концепций Российской Федерации после 11 сентября. Основная гипотеза состоит в том, что внешнеполитическая стратегия Москвы во многом похожа на американскую концепцию умной силы, но только в части ее назначения. Главный тезис основывается на предположении, что умная сила позволила Вашингтону сохранить свое мировое господство после террористических атак 11 сентября и, в свою очередь, могла помочь России в консолидации Евразии. Пандемия коронавируса, безусловно, будет иметь долгосрочные последствия для международной безопасности. В итоге делается вывод, что если Москва хочет сохранить систему безопасности в Евразии, в которой доминирует Россия, ей следует разработать оригинальную концепцию умной силы.

**Ключевые слова:** Россия, Евразия, умный, сила, США.

**JEL codes:** F50, H56, N40, F51, F52

**Аңдатпа.** Ресейдің сыртқы саясаты бүгін «ақылды күш» және неоевразиялық идеология туралы түсініктерден тұратын «екі басты бүркітті» бейнелейді. Осы мақаланың негізгі мақсаты - 11 қыркүйектен кейінгі Ресей Федерациясының сыртқы саяси тұжырымдамаларын талдау арқылы Ресейдің ақылды күштің пайда болуы мен дамуын зерттеу. Негізгі ғылыми болжам - Мәскеудің сыртқы саясатының стратегиясы көп жағдайда американдық ақылды күш тұжырымдамасына ұқсас, бірақ оның мақсаты тұрғысынан ғана. Негізгі тезис - ақылды күш, Вашингтонға, 11 қыркүйекте болған террористік актілерінен кейін әлемдік үстемдігін сақтауға мүмкіндік берді және өз кезегінде Ресейдің Еуразияны шоғырландыруға көмектесе алады деген болжамға негізделген. Коронавирустық пандемия халықаралық қауіпсіздікке ұзақ мерзімді әсер ететіні сөзсіз. Нәтижесінде, егер Мәскеу Ресей үстемдік ететін Еуразиядағы қауіпсіздік жүйесін сақтағысы келсе, онда ақылды күштің өзіндік тұжырымдамасын жасау керек деген қорытындыға келеміз.

**Түйін сөздер:** Ресей, Еуразия, ақылды, күш, АҚШ.

**JEL коды:** F50, H56, N40, F51, F52

### Introduction

The centerpiece of Russian foreign policy in the post-9/11 age is the presumption that consolidating Eurasia would allow Russia to reclaim its status of Great Power. However, the Coronavirus Pandemic tipped the balance of power in international relations, which enabled China to boost

its strategy for a global dominance. United States, on the other hand, seeks to sustain the U.S.-led international liberal order by confronting the Chinese Grand Design. U.S. Foreign Policy under President Donald Trump seriously damaged the U.S.-led system of alliances, which allowed Beijing to seize the opportunity and increase its

\* Corresponding author: I. Ivanov, [iskrenivanov333@gmail.com](mailto:iskrenivanov333@gmail.com)

influence in Europe. Even the European countries abandoned their project for a unified army of the European Union and by relocating more financial resources to fight the Pandemic.

In this article, I argue that if Russia wants to sustain its dominant position in Eurasia in the post-pandemic age, Moscow has to design its own concept of smart power. Moreover, the new Grand Design of Kremlin should rely on two essential pillars: Neo-Eurasianism and multi-dimensional smart power. The Eurasian philosophy would serve as ideological cornerstone of the Russian smart strategy, while the multi-dimensional approach will constitute the geopolitical perceptions of Russian foreign policy. My claim rests on the assertion that Eurasia is central to Russian geopolitics (*Clover, 1999*). However, I assume that the pre-pandemic foreign policy strategy of Moscow is not applicable to the post-pandemic realities. Eurasia will remain the heartland of Russia, but it will also become a hot spot in the Sino – American rivalry. For example, China needs an open access to the Far East in order to deter the Japanese influence in the region. In my article, I also challenge the theory for the incorruptible nature of the Sino – Russian alliance (*Korolev, 2019*).

The research roadmap of this paper has the following sections. The first reviews the basic definitions of smart power. The second examines the strategic perceptions of the Russia smart strategy. In the fourth section, I analyze the ideological implications of Russian smart power. Finally, the study introduces its own smart power approach that would benefit Moscow's foreign policy in Eurasia. The methodological framework of employs two qualitative tools: comparative approach and case study analyzes. Empirical data is collected during my stay as visiting fellow in the United States and through conducting

interviews at the Russian Cultural Institute in Bulgaria.

### **Explaining Smart Power**

There is no single definition of smart power. However, the explanation of this concept provides a logical starting point for the understanding of Russian smart power. Despite following different approaches, all smart strategies challenge hard and soft power on a theoretical level. For example, special operations in support of national security combine use of force and dumb strikes. In my article I assert that there three basic definitions of smart power.

The strategic definition of Joseph Nye explains smart power as a «set of smart strategies that combines both the tools of hard (use of coercion) and soft power (obtaining preferred outcomes through attraction) (2009)». In other words, smart power comes to existence when a state actor uses all its resources to maximize the outcomes of its strategy. For example, Nye stresses the need of enhancing the U.S.-led alliance system through developing public diplomacy and technological innovations (2008). In my paper, I support Nye's assertion because U.S.-led international liberal order rests on a system of global alliances and international organizations that has lasted for almost 60 years. Moreover, U.S. Foreign Policy advocates alliance building as an important precondition for the protection of U.S. National Security. Nye reminds us that America needs friends, not enemies. What is unique in his definition is that he considers smart power the most effective strategy that would allow Washington to sustain its status of a global actor.

Ernest Wilson defines smart power as «the capacity of an actor to combine elements of hard and soft power in ways that are mutually enforcing such that the actor's purposes advance effectively and efficiently (2008)» However, Wilson also argues that no actor in international relations has the capacity to apply smart

power for two reasons. First, no major actor has the capacity to institutionalize smart power. Second, the author asserts that no state or non-state actor can combine hard and soft power mechanically (2008). Some would argue that Wilson's theory is a methodological contradiction because it explains smart power only on a theoretical level. This article does not support such negative claim. However, I do not fully uphold the validity of Wilson's arguments because both America and China, for example, have the economic and institutional potential to combine hard with soft power. In the highly complex and dynamic system of the post-pandemic age, more and more actors such as Russia will continue to develop their smart capacity as part of their strategies.

Leslie Gelb rejects the concept of smart power by assuming that «smart power is a mechanical combining rather than a genuine blending between two ideas (2009)». Moreover, he argues that hard power is the most effective strategy in Great Powers politics. In other words, Gelb's approach integrates the military, diplomatic and economic aspects of U.S. Foreign Policy, emphasizing the use of force as a primary source of power and influence in the international system. For example, the author depicts international relations as pyramid that consists of three layers. United States is alone on the top, having enough resources to lead, but without enough power to dominate (2009). America is "first among equals" and upholds the balance of power in the international system. Russia, China and Europe occupy the second level, struggling to become global actors like Washington or even to overtop the United States as a global leader. Emerging influential actors such as Canada and Saudi Arabia hold the third level, because they do not have the potential to be global actors. However, major powers could turn the scales in favor of Washington or its adversaries. Although Gelb admits

that America should mobilize all its resources to sustain its global leadership, he believes that Washington should focus on hard power.

In the rest of this section, I will try to give my own explanation of smart power. The definitions that I analyzed provide a plausible starting point for my definition. Nye, Wilson and Gelb actually define smart power in the context of U.S. Foreign Policy. Smart strategies still occupy central place in Washington's diplomacy as America successfully deters the counteraction of its adversaries. Smart politics turned out to be quite essential for the U.S.-led system of alliances that is one of the preconditions for the American leadership. However, the Coronavirus Pandemic challenges smart power on a theoretical level by pressing decision-makers to address foreign policy in a less coordinated and rational matter (Ivanov, 2020). Therefore, the pre-pandemic understanding of smart power provides a logical starting point for a post-pandemic smart concept. In this paper, I define smart power as multidimensional strategy that combines the tools of hard and soft power and seeks to achieve a realistic target, at a reasonable cost under conditions that seem to be unavoidable, necessary, and at the same time – attractive. This explanation does not pretend to have a universal validity though it has five basic components that constitute the theoretical core of my concept: hard power, soft power, smart target, smart strategy, and smart face. The first two incorporates the pre-pandemic understanding of smart power while the others represent its post-pandemic implications. To conclude, this article joins the academic debate by giving a post-pandemic explanation of smart power and by rethinking the pre-pandemic definitions that still influence U.S. Foreign Policy.

**Smart Power and Russian Foreign Policy: Strategic Perceptions**

In this section, I will test Russian foreign policy on empirical level by operationalizing my definition of smart power. Thus, this article moves beyond theoretical discussions and assumption to explanation how Russia could design its own concept of smart power. This paper seeks to answer the question by sequentially employing the smart power theories from the first section.

The security dilemma of Russian smart power is quite debatable. Some have argued that Moscow has the potential to develop and apply its original smart approach. For example, Roslycky assumes that Russia uses smart power to deter democratization by anchoring the promotion of pro-Russian separatism in Crimea (2011). Carter asserts that the Russian smart approach involves a set of strategies and actions that are hybrid in terms of containing the Western influence and securing Moscow's influence on Antarctica (2016). Bardy and Pavlov make the claim that the Russian smart strategy has several key aspects: maintaining control over outer space and Polar Regions, increasing Russian influencing on the world markets, and investing in cyber warfare technologies (2016). Finally, Strukov describes Russian smart power as a manipulative strategy, which supplies a combination of hard and soft power tools, on one level, and on another, traverses the binary dynamic of power positive/negative, external/internal, and vertical/horizontal and instead operates as a multi-directional, ambiguous and often contradictory, polyvalent and parasitic system of influence (2016). Strukov's theory indicates the relation between government-led and non-government agents of influence, thus providing a more nuanced, multi-agent consideration of soft power which is a significant diversion from Nye's top-down approach. Theories such of those Rozlycky and Strukov are one-sided and misleading, because they do not

consider the alternative assumption – that hybrid warfare and hybrid strategies are not exclusively a foreign policy trademark of Russia. The assumption of Bardy and Pavlov, on the contrary, provides a balanced understanding of the Russian-inspired smart power's nature. In other words, they explain smart power as cornerstone of Russian foreign policy in regions of key importance to Moscow's strategic influence.

Another group of scholars claims that Russia does not have the potential to develop its own smart strategy. Van Herpen defines Russian smart power as a U.S. copy-based soft power that has three components: mimesis, rollback, invention (2016). Mimesis refers to the fact that Kremlin tries to copy the U.S. approach of values promotion worldwide. Rollback means ideologically opposing and possibly forbidding the activities of Western academic and scientific institutes in Russia. Invention ranges from setting up spy rings, legally financing political parties, and directly buying people. Popescu rejects Van Herpen's theory by assuming that Moscow is rather investing in a new type of soft power. It has two aspects: working on the development of sovereign democracy and investing in new weapons such as media outlets, youth movements, internet websites, expert networks, regular conferences and even publishing houses (2009). Fiona Hill expands Popescu's theory by discussing that Russia's new type of soft power includes not only Kremlin's internal reforms, but also Moscow's attempts to increase its influence in the Eurasian space with the help of the Russian oil, Russian trust and Russian friendship (2006). However, Hill is highly skeptical of calling this approach "smart".

This article joins the debate by arguing that has the capacity to act as smart actor. Moreover, I assume that Moscow has already developed its own

smart approach. In the pages that follow, I will test my assumption by using the theory of Wilson. Wilson assumes that a state or non-state actor must meet four conditions in order to have a smart power potential (2008).

First, any actor who wants to apply smart power needs a smart target. Power cannot be smart if those who wield it are ignorant. Eurasia is the starting point of the Russian Grand Design. Moscow's geopolitical strategy divides this region into several sub-regions that include not only Russia, but also Central Asia, the Far East and other regions from the post-Soviet space. The Eurasian doctrine also has a global dimension – Russia seeks to unite and dominate Eurasia in order to regain its status of superpower. Therefore, Moscow's smart target is the post-soviet space (*Entin, Entina, 2016*).

Second, smart actors need self-knowledge and smart understanding of their goals and capacities. Smart power requires state actors to calculate outcomes and potential modes of failure. Moscow's geopolitical strategy endorses the idea of building a stable multipolar world in which Russia will be one of the poles (*Hill et al., 2017*). However, Kremlin admits that the old Soviet doctrines are inapplicable to the post-Cold War era. Following the events of September 11, Russia focused on designing smart strategies that are cheap, flexible and effective such as promoting common values in former Soviet republics and strengthening economic cooperation in Central Asia.

Finally, smart power incorporates smart mechanism of combining hard and soft power. Wars cost human lives and exhaust economy forcing it into recession. Soft power requires innovation and creativity promote values, diplomacy and dialogue. The face of smart power depicts certain hard power action as inevitable, necessary and attractive (*Ivanov, 2020*). For example, Moscow replaced the Soviet-

inspired nuclear diplomacy by alliance building. Soviet Union used hard nuclear diplomacy to intimidate the West. Russia is using smart power to forge system of alliances that will deter the Western influence in the post-Soviet space.

In conclusion, I assume that the Russian smart approach rests on four basic perceptions that are integral part of Russian foreign policy. The first perception is the Russian smart target that covers the post-soviet space. The second perception embodies Russian smart strategies that shape Russian foreign policy. The final perception depicts the smart face of the Moscow's geopolitical strategies that represents Russian activities as inevitable, necessary and at the same time – attractive to the Russian allies.

#### **Ideological Implications of Russian Smart Power**

In the following section, I will test Russian smart power on a theoretical level by analyzing the Neo-Eurasian philosophy that dominates Russian foreign policy after the end of the Cold War. I argue that Neo-Eurasianism shapes the theoretical core of Russian smart power. My claim rests on the assumption that the Neo-Eurasian theory of globalization moves beyond the post-Soviet space by integrating smart power in the Russian Grand Design.

A central contention in the Neo-Eurasian philosophy is that globalization is a dualistic process that explains the international system. Dugin outlines two scenarios for globalization. Under the multipolar scenario people choose follow their own patterns for political and cultural development while under the unipolar scenario humanity follows universal values. Moreover, Neo-Eurasianism has a dichotomous vision on geopolitics. Dugin assumes there is a natural confrontation that exists between "Land" and "Sea" civilizations (2000). Land civilizations expand by land by establishing control over vast territories

and creating multinational and politically centralized empires. Sea civilizations expand by sea by establishing colonial empires. Dugin argues that unlike Land Empires, Sea entities are far more expansionist. Therefore, the clash between the Russia-dominated Land and U.S.-dominated Sea. The end of the Cold War is far from ending the confrontation between the two countries, as the Sea-Land collision is imminent.

The Neo-Eurasian doctrine considers any threat to Eurasia a threat to Russia (*Dunlop, 2004*). Eurasian culture is unique and belongs neither to Europe nor to Asia. Dugin's assumption rests on the claim that a Russia-dominated Eurasia would have the potential to deter Western influence in the post-soviet space. Dugin's recasting of Western liberalism provides the theoretical foundations for Russian smart power. Moreover, Neo-Eurasianism addresses three dimensions of Russian foreign policy that shape the doctrinal framework of Russian smart strategies.

The European dimension reunites Moscow with Berlin. Neo-Eurasianism advocates the statement that Eurasia and Europe are both Land civilizations. Therefore, Russia and Germany are both Land nations. The United Kingdom, on the contrary, is a Sea nation, and alternately – adversary of Continental Europe. Dugin admits that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is one of the most successfully military alliances in the history, but it favors the United States. The Eastern dimension reunites Moscow with Tokyo. Asia has a historical significance for Russia not only because of the Russo – Japanese War of 1905, but also due to the U.S. – Japanese alliance, established after World War II. Dugin considers India a potential ally for two reasons (*2000*). First, it is former British colony and potential adversary to the West. Besides, Indian culture is a distinctive traditional culture that rejects Western

values as universal. Japan is an American ally, bound to cooperate with Washington under Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution. Therefore, Dugin asserts that resolving the dispute for the Kuril Islands would help Russia to motivate the Japanese emancipation from America. The Middle Eastern dimension unites Moscow with Tehran. Dugin considers the Shia-dominated Islamic Republic a distinctive traditional culture that is totally opposite to liberal democracy. Moreover, Shia Islam incorporates a religious cleavage between Iran and traditional American allies such as Saudi Arabia and Israel. Finally yet importantly, Dugin argues that Moscow should secure Russian military presence in Syria in order to deter the American strategic influence in the region.

To sum up, the Neo-Eurasian geopolitical concept applies a combined approach towards smart power by defining its aspects. For example, Russia is the successor of the highly centralized society of the Golden Horde and the Orthodox Byzantine Empire (*Ivanov, 2018*). Opponents of the Neo-Eurasianism would argue that this philosophy is aggressive and offensive. However, the doctrinal justification of Russian foreign policy does not necessarily include the use of hard power. Moscow's smart strategy advocates the Russian involvement in the world affairs by promoting the Eurasian concept of smart power. Understanding these implications is the final step to the explanation of Russian smart power.

#### **What makes Russian power “smart”?**

In the final section of this paper, I try to explain the nature of Russian smart power. I assume that the Russian smart approach to the Eurasian region has four dimensions: culture, values, economy and military. The assumption that Eurasia is central to Russian geopolitics provides a plausible starting

point for this analysis. Dugin defines Eurasia it as «the region that is separate from all others and combines both Land and Sea elements (2000)». For Dugin, Eurasia is political and cultural entity that gives Russia the power to control its natural resources.

Culture is integral part of soft power (*Otmazgin, 2011*). Dugin argues that Russia generates Eurasian culture that unites the Eurasian peoples. This cultural paradigm has two pillars: Russian Orthodoxy and Neo-Eurasian statehood as Dugin defines Eurasia as the land of spirit (*Dugin, 1997*). The center of this land is Moscow, the Third Rome, which has the transcendent mission to preserve the Eurasian culture. Dugin admits that Russian Orthodoxy is able to unite Eurasia because it is much closer to Islam and Far Eastern cultures than to Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. In other words, it can serve as an ideological basis for the creation of a unified Eurasian culture. Neo-Eurasian statehood is a concept that describes Eurasian political structure as a highly centralized government in contrast to the Western type of liberal democracy (*Clover, 1999*). Within this political system, citizens give their rights and freedoms to the state in order to build a collective Eurasian political consciousness.

Values as part of soft power can win battles that weapon cannot (*Loboda et al., 2017*). Dugin argues that liberalism is right-wing in economic terms, but left-wing in political terms. He also finds liberal ideology aggressive and militant, albeit in a figurative sense – liberalism does not directly deal with physical repression but culturally its opponents. Dugin's concept of "social conservatism" enjoy great support from Kremlin in the face of political officials like Boris Gryzlov. The Eurasian conservatism embodies three aspects of the Russian political culture: the revival of Russian patriotism, the preservation

of national morality and national culture. Patriotism relies on the love for the motherland and the desire to make it great again, as it was in the past.

Economy stands at the boundary between soft and hard power (*Klare, 2005*). Following the failure of the Soviet-type planning, Russia tried to build a functioning market economy. The neo-Eurasian doctrine rejects the planned economy and incorporates the right to property. Unlike Western Capitalism, that advocates free competition and high living standard, the Eurasian economic model gives priority to the political order (*Dugin, 2000*). The Neo-Eurasian doctrine denies both capitalism and Marxism by defining a third path of development. The "Eurasian way" rests on placing economic sectors under state control and promoting social protection to all citizens.

Weapons are the jewels of hard power (*Campbell et al., 2006*). Moscow has always considered hard power essential part of Russian foreign policy. Russian Czars and Soviet leaders have generated enormous resources to sustain Russia's military might. The Neo-Eurasian strategy advocates the adoption of space strategy in order to guarantee Russian national security. At the same time, the Neo-Eurasian project encourages the development of more intercontinental ballistic missiles to offset U.S. air and sea superiority. Unlike the Soviet leadership, Neo-Eurasians include in their strategy another very important aspect – investing in emerging technologies. However, a potential Eurasian military alliance would not mean a new Warsaw Pact, but rather a common format for military cooperation and coordination (*Ivanov, Shalamanov, 2020*).

In conclusion, Russian smart power today has three aspects: promoting Eurasian culture and values, designing a functioning Eurasian economy, enhancing security and

defense cooperation. Each of these aspects corresponds to a different dimension of the Russian smart approach. In this article, I assume that Moscow's smart potential would allow Russia to unite Eurasia but only in economic, cultural and political terms. However, I do not support the assumption that Kremlin should apply smart power to act as global actor. Russian smart power does not have a global nature, it is a soft-dominated approach that revisits the old Soviet strategies and seeks to restore Moscow's influence in the post-soviet space. This approach, in long-term, could evolve in a more developed strategy that would give Russia the opportunity to act as major regional actor in Eurasia.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude is Russian smart power similar to the U.S. smart strategy. In this study, I argue that Russian smart power follows the structure of the American smart approach, but differs in terms of strategic perceptions and ideological implications. It was smart power that allowed Washington promote U.S. global leadership and to build the U.S.-led system of alliances. U.S. smart power has a clear purpose – defending U.S. national interests, protecting U.S. national security, and promoting U.S. values overseas. Russian smart power incorporates Neo-Eurasian philosophy and the post-soviet heritage. Moscow's smart strategy also sets up its purpose: reclaiming the global status of Russia by reuniting Eurasia. Dugin revises the old Soviet doctrines, by designing the Eurasian dream.

In my research, I argue that Russian will have the potential to reunite Eurasia, after Moscow endorses a proper smart face of its foreign policy. Most of the Eurasian countries maintain good contacts with Russia, but few would agree to deteriorate their relations with the West. Therefore, Russia should

generate more resource that will allow Kremlin to its foreign policy strategy and create a common ground in terms of cultural, political and economic integration of Eurasia. However, this strategy does not necessarily includes confrontation with the United States and European Union. Diplomacy and dialogue are essential for Russian foreign policy in sensitive regions such as Central Asia. Otherwise, Russian power will not be smart.

Although it is logically structured, Russian smart power should calculate another important aspect of its Grand Strategy: the multicultural nature of Eurasia. The idea of Russian Orthodoxy as the pivot of Eurasian culture is strategically misleading. It could generate a cultural gap between Russia and its Eurasian allies. Moreover, if Moscow wants to succeed in its smart scenario, it should create strategic preconditions for the creation of a Russian-dominated system of alliances in the region. With regard to the military aspect, with its recent actions, Moscow demonstrates that Russia has a clear vision on its allies and adversaries. However, constructive relations with the United States and Europe remain essential to the foreign policy of the other Eurasian countries. Finally, the Coronavirus pandemic and China's rise will have its impact on the Russian Grand Design. United Eurasia is an attractive smart scenario for Russia, but also a long-term challenge to China, as Beijing needs a better access to the Far East to deter the U.S. – Japanese – South Korean alliance. Thus, Sino-American relations should serve as the next starting point for developing Russian smart power.

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## РЕСЕЙЛІК «АҚЫЛДЫ КҮШІН» ТҮСІНУ: ҚАБЫЛДАУ ЖӘНЕ ИДЕОЛОГИЯ

**Искрен ИВАНОВ**, «Әулие Климент Охридски» атындағы София университетінің аға оқытушысы, София, Болгария, [iskrenivanov333@gmail.com](mailto:iskrenivanov333@gmail.com)

## ПОНИМАНИЕ РОССИЙСКОЙ «УМНОЙ СИЛЫ»: ВОСПРИЯТИЕ И ИДЕОЛОГИЯ

**Искрен ИВАНОВ**, старший преподаватель Софийского университета имени «Святого Климента Охридски», София, Болгария, [iskrenivanov333@gmail.com](mailto:iskrenivanov333@gmail.com)