

# **Sputnik V Vaccine as a Soft-Power Instrument of Russia**

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## **Abstract:**

This year governments around the world have faced a new global threat. The importance of bail-out programs and developed channels of international cooperation in order to solve global problems and eliminate the negative consequences of the pandemic has become clear. Indeed, the world order is changing, the environment of the post-covid era is going to differ a lot from the current one. In this context, humanitarian assistance, joint development of vaccines and measures to protect the population by the state will contribute to improving the efficiency and safety of human life. The new approach and mutual programs can be considered as effective soft-power instruments in order to influence global agenda in the future. With Russia being in the lead with the first registered vaccine against coronavirus, the country can become a beneficiary in the post-covid era.

**Keywords:** COVID'19, coronavirus, soft-power, sputnik V, vaccine, vaccination, race, pandemic, cooperation, pandemic outbreak, nation

## **Introduction**

Coronavirus has become a new global threat for the international community since the World Health Organization for the first time described the situation as “pandemic” on 11 March, 2020. [10] The spread of the virus has been accompanied by a very political rhetoric. E.g. the US President, Donald Trump, pointed at China’s responsibility for spreading the virus. [12]

Governments all over the world started to develop possible solutions to the problem. Firstly, the restrictions and social distancing took place. Then, government-backed labs launched researches in order to develop the first vaccine against coronavirus. An international competition began with Russia, China and the USA in the spotlight. [3] Over 200 different COVID-19 vaccines are currently being developed worldwide. [8] The Gamaleya national center became the one in charge of designing the vaccine in Russia. On 11 August 2020 The President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, announced that the first vaccine against COVID'19 had been registered. And again, the issue became a political concern referring to Russia's ambition to be in the lead globally. In this regard, the hypothesis of the article is that the vaccine can be considered an instrument of the Russian soft-power.

### **The soft-power concept**

The concept of “soft-power” was largely described by Joseph S. Nye, Jr. According to his theory, soft power – getting others to want the outcomes that you want – co-opts people rather than coerces them. [5] There is a variety of instruments through which a country can achieve the preferred outcomes. The theory emphasizes the key role of attractiveness of a culture, values, decisions and a set agenda.

Speaking of Russian soft-power, the scholars point out that the concept is relatively new. There are few existing researches on the topic. Mostly, they focus on the historic perspective and link Russian policies with soviet or pre-revolution periods. [7] According to state documents, among soft-power instruments are civil society institutions, information technology and communication, humanitarian outreach and other methods that differ from classical diplomacy. [11] This article suggests that the Russian vaccine called Sputnik V can become a new instrument of Russian soft-power.

## **The vaccine and a global response**

Considering the corona case, it is important to notice that the fast development of the vaccine against COVID'19 will have a great impact on the country-image. The Russian representatives identified the importance of further international cooperation and exchange of opinions. E.g. the current Russia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Vasily Nebenzya highlighted that Russia is ready for international cooperation aimed at vaccine development and production. [6] Thus, close connections and mutual research programs might lead to better economic cooperation and spread of Russian values worldwide. The third phase of testing is about to be conducted in different countries including Belarus, UAE, India, Venezuela, Egypt and Brazil and mass production is about to start in other countries in partnership with local sovereign wealth funds, including India, South Korea and Brazil, as well as, in China, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.[9] The Russian party has also created a website to make the data available for foreigners [sputnikvaccine.com/rus/](https://sputnikvaccine.com/rus/) (the website provides information in Russian, English, Arabian, Spanish, Portuguese and French).

Though Russian leaders have advocated the efficiency of the vaccine. The global society has responded differently to the news about vaccine registration. Some countries are interested in obtaining the vaccine. It's worth mentioning that among them are old partners of the country (India, Brazil etc). In this case, the vaccine would actually work as an instrument of soft-power and strengthen the cooperation in the medical sphere. The results would influence political agenda and mutual economic projects would be launched.

The World Health organization also commented on the achievement of Russian scientists and stressed the importance of any discovery in the fight against the spread of coronavirus.

However, some countries do not seem to be interested in the Russian research. Among them are Western countries claiming that the government did not publish the data regarding the trials, used an unrandomized group of patients etc. E.g. The Guardian points at a number of vaccines that are supposed to be promising but does not mention the Russian vaccine in the list (Moderna by US, Pfizer/ BioNTech by US/Germany, Oxford University/AstraZeneca by UK, Novavax by US, Janssen Pharmaceuticals (part of Johnson&Johnson) by US, Valneva by France, Sinovac by China and Sanofi/GSK by France). [2] The Washington Post indicates a reference in the name "Sputnik V" to the times of the "cold" war and the launch of the first satellite into space in 1957. [4]

Nevertheless, the production and development of the vaccine is a very sensitive issue as it is linked with people's well-being. Openness of the internet and international access to data and researches, poses another challenge regarding people's confidence and level of trust in a new vaccine. [1] The Mass media, social influencers as well as official representatives are in charge of building a strong perspective on vaccination as a possible solution to the relevant problem. If the policy is well-defined on the governmental level, the development of the vaccine against COVID'19 would serve as a useful instrument of soft-power.

## **Conclusion**

Nowadays the world faces new challenges. Almost all the spheres are at stake. Nevertheless, the crisis still provides some opportunities for further development. The vaccine against COVID'19 would become an additional instrument of soft-power for establishing international relations in the post-covid era. Russia being the first country that registered the vaccine might have great chances to spread its influence worldwide and achieve the goals of its foreign policy. Though the competition is likely to be tight as other countries are also interested in developing the vaccine and have better network.

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