

Interview – Joseph Nye – *Le Grand Continent*

English

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French translation:

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1. THE EUROPEAN UNION AND NATIONAL SOFT POWERS

Don't you think one of the obstacles to the European Union's soft power is that the soft power is monopolized by nations, and not by "Europe"? If Washington benefits from the successes of the Silicon Valley or Hollywood, it is mainly because they are considered as equally "American". Do you think a political entity with no strong feeling of attachment can benefit from its soft power?

Yes, I really think it can. Soft power is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payment. It co-opts people rather than coerces them. And in Europe, each component has its own soft power, and frequently European nations are at the top of the soft power index you mentioned.

But we should consider that the European Union and the European Commission has a soft power of its own, as an institution representative of liberal and democratic values. It was obvious at the end of the Cold War, when countries were of course attracted by NATO, as an organization, but also by the European Commission as a framework and protector of European values.

This sense of attraction is perhaps less strong in some countries of the European Union nowadays, as in Hungary, but the European soft power remains strong on the whole. Today, with all this messy debate in United Kingdom, it is possible that the United Kingdom loses some of its soft power by leaving the EU, because of the gain of soft power it receives from its appartenance to the EU, as other forms of regional integrations may benefit to its components.

2. BREXIT AND EUROPEAN SOFT POWER

How do you think Brexit will affect European soft power? Will the European Union compensate for the loss of soft power it will represent? Will United Kingdom still be ranked 1st on the "soft power index" once out of E.U?

The United Kingdom, of course, has a lot of soft power. In this respect, it is quite telling to see how the monarchy in the UK evolved in order to adapt itself to the mutations of the way one can exert its influence and enhance its soft power. Everybody is speaking or commenting the birth of royal babies. Even if it has an

archaic dimension to it, it works, and those things, that are not linked with the European Union whatsoever, will continue. However, other dimensions of Soft Power, such as economy and attractiveness, will be weakened by Brexit, because the United Kingdom has also soft power toward developing countries in particular, because of its belonging to the E.U.

On the other hand, will it have a negative impact on the European Union's soft power? When Brexit was voted, it had a negative effect on the soft power of the EU, because it was a sign of dissension. Today, this negative effect affects more the UK than the E.U. People feared a domino effect, and a series of countries leaving the E.U, while the opposite happened.

What should the European commission do?

In the short term, I think the European Commission should adopt quite a tough stance on several issues concerning the Brexit, in order to maintain their unity. In the longer term, in five or ten years, I think the European Union should be attentive to respond to the attraction it could exercise on United Kingdom, to preserve a good relationship. We already see that Brexit also brought closer the public opinion in continental countries and in UK: now the national debate in UK is widely known in other countries in Europe, which was not the case before.

3. NEONATIONALISM AND EUROPEAN SOFT POWER

More generally speaking, what is the effect of "neo-nationalists", that is to say, nationalists which consider Europe as the pertinent scale of their political actions (Viktor Orban, Matteo Salvini for instance) on European soft power?

We should not overestimate their impact on the EU. Hungary is an exception in a general picture where parties opposed to the European construction are facing electoral defeats almost everywhere in Europe: in Italy, in Austria... And those who are becoming major parties are also progressively qualifying their stance by dropping out the idea of leaving the EU, like in France, or Sweden, where the Swedish Democrats explained before the European Election that they won't advocate anymore for leaving the E.U. Perhaps, in Poland, the dissatisfaction with the politics of European Union and the authoritarian turn of the government could be a more profound sign of the disaffection towards the EU.

4. EUROPE AS A HARD POWER.

You said [in an interview](#) for Le Temps that "you do not imagine European countries defending themselves against Russia, that has been very aggressive recently" (20th of June, 2017). How do you see the situation today, as Ursula Von Der Leyen set building a European army as one of her top priorities as Head of the European Commission? Especially, if soft power coupled with hard power is a force multiplier, doesn't the absence of a European defense condemns any attempt of Europe to become an important power, however strong its soft power may be?

I must firstly say what is my preference. My personal preference would be that Europe develop its military dimension, more military cooperation, and would then be able to confront from a military point of view Russia, in the territories now contested, such as Ukrainian. But as an analyst, I do not see the development of military cooperation in Europe.

5. SHARP POWER IN EUROPE.

Other countries use "illegal" or at least "aggressive" means to enhance their influence, such as Russian media in France. You said in [Foreign Affairs](#) "By reducing themselves to the level of their adversaries, democracies would squander their key advantage". In France, we assist to the apparition of a leitmotiv, according to which, "we are too mild, we are too weak, we should do like Vladimir Putin" (I am exaggerating on purpose). What could you say, which evidences could you show to those who advocate for such ideas in order to prove them wrong?

As democracies respond to the sharp power of foreign actors, we must not undercut our own soft power by imitating the authoritarian model, and become all of a sudden a Machiavellian state. We should rather maintain openness, which is the ultimate defense of liberal societies. Otherwise, we could squander our key advantages – our standards, our values. I recently argued [in a paper](#) that we should clearly distinguish between soft power of other countries, that we must allow, and sharp power, against which we can fight. For example, the state-owned Russian media Russia Today has been registered by the Congress as a foreign entity, but we should not ban its broadcasts. The difficulty, nowadays, lies in being able to define precisely the moment when a tool of soft power crosses the line to become a form of sharp power. The difference could lie in the openness of soft power, which stands in stark contrast with the opacity and deceptiveness required by sharp power.

6. DOES TRUMP BENEFIT TO EUROPEAN SOFT POWER?

According to Gallup Poll, since 2016, global confidence in the US leadership has fallen from 48% (under Obama), to 30% (January 2018). Could Europe use this unprecedented situation to increase its soft power?

It can and it will. Trump's administration has repeatedly admitted that soft power does not matter, and Mick Mulvaney, Trump's budget director, proclaimed a "[hard power budget](#)". And in all areas of soft power: culture, political values and policy, Trump has injured the attractiveness of America. Today, the US comes first in the Low Institute's ranking of nations by number of embassies, consulates and missions, and Washington has more than 60 treaty allies. By promoting unilateralism, he is diminishing this influence progressively built during the twentieth century, and USA's levers to influence the world politics.

7. TRUMP'S INFLUENCE ON EUROPEAN POPULISTS

On the other hand, Donald Trump also have influence on political movements in Europe that are opposed to the European Union. So even though his presidency seems to impact negatively the USA soft power, it is also impacting European cohesion.

I think these movements hostile to the European union as a political entity existed before president Trump, and will last after him. For instance, Viktor Orban's ideology does not come from Donald Trump, but rather from the ideology of traditionalism, state sovereignty and national exclusivity Russia developed after the Cold War, in order to response to the attraction exerted by NATO and European construction.

8. EUROPE AS A NORMATIVE POWER.

Do you think that Europe could be defined as a normative power that sets standards (environmental, digital, social)? By creating advanced legislations on the protection of Data, for instance, that are used everywhere in the world.

I think that the European Union is one step forward on all these subjects and should try to keep its advance.

Some countries in Europe appear as models to the Democrats, but if Donald Trump is elected again in 2020, and the results of the elections are impossible to foresee, it will considerably delay this possible reciprocal influence between European social-democrats and Democrats in the US. But in the long term, their ideas will probably prevail.

9. EUROPE AS A POTENTIAL LEADER.

If the E.U was to have an army, since it already is an economic superpower and a soft power giant, could it assume a form of leadership in the international affairs? Could other countries, especially developing countries (Brazil, China, India, Turkey, for example) accept that?

I think Europe could play a greater role as the one it plays. And concerning the developing countries, it depends. Brazil is currently having troubles with its new president, but ten years ago European ideals were a model to Lula presidency, and it could very well be the same ten years from now. In India, there is also a strong attachment to European values, that are undermined by the authoritarian turn of Modi, but remain strong inside the society.

On the other hand, China could see the defense of European values as a direct threat. For instance, if European Union was to criticize more openly China for its treatment of Uighurs, Europe would then appear as an antagonistic power, which could harm deeply their relationship. On the whole, it would mean reconsidering an

old adage of the European union, and, instead on putting economy before values, putting values before economy. And this could be useful, because soft power is one of the weak points of contemporary China, however huge their financial investments in soft power can be, simply because spending does not hide the fact that ethnic minorities are repressed, human-rights are in jail, citizens are scrutinized, and artists are alienated (such as Ai Weiwei). All the more so as the authoritarian dimension of the regime is not anymore counterbalanced by a revolutionary dimension, as it was the case under Mao's leadership.

10. SOFT POWER AND SYMBOLS

Most countries in Europe have developed have a strong national narrative: literature, history, arts have been put to contribution to produce symbols and create a "national identity". European construction has not used such symbols to build a political entity: on Euro banknotes, there are no Georges Washington, no Abraham Lincoln, but abstract representations of architectural styles. Do you think E.U. can become a soft power without producing symbols?

I do not think Europe would gain something from printing symbols on banknotes. European culture is essentially a transnational culture: Mozart belongs to different countries, to Austria and Germany, as Bizet belongs to several countries. The soft power of the European union should not rely on creating a new culture but rather on reassessing the existing transnational quality to the European culture