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Развитие инструментов спортивной
дипломатии Ватикана в XXI веке

The development of the Vatican's sports
diplomacy tools in the 21st century

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Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются инструменты публичной дипломатии Ватикана, в частности, феномен спортивной дипломатии. Спортивная дипломатия является новым инструментом реализации мягкой силы Ватиканом, приобретшим свою актуальность в период понтификата Франциска I. Данный вид культурной дипломатии, отличается значительной динамичностью, связью с социально-экономическими и политическими трендами, и долгое время находился вне поля зрения Ватикана в силу свойственных этому виду публичной дипломатии морально-этических противоречий, а также нехватки ресурсов на реализацию инициатив в этой сфере. Противоречивая природа спортивной дипломатии для Ватикана обусловлена, с одной стороны, направленностью «идеального» спорта на культивирование одобряемых Римско-католической церковью моральных и нравственных ценностей (сострадание, уважение, любовь, гармония и радость), с другой стороны - политической ангажированностью и бизнес-ориентированностью «реального» профессионального спорта. В силу традиционной роли РКЦ как источника морально-этических и нравственных ориентиров католического общества, спортивная дипломатия для Ватикана сопряжена с значительными репутационными рисками. Эти риски обусловлены многими факторами, среди которых: эксплуатация спортсменов, распространение в спортивных организациях нечестного спортивного поведения (например, употребление допинга), а также несоответствие насаждаемым спортивной индустрией ценностям, среди которых преклонение перед телом, гедонизм, консьюмеризм, накопительство, индивидуализм и одержимость успешностью. Во многом появление этого инструмента оказалось вынужденной мерой, и связано с изменением территориального распространения и национального состава католицизма, обусловивших необходимость находить новые способы для установления диалога с целевой аудиторией Ватикана, преимущественно состоящей из жителей развивающихся стран глобального Юга. Перечисленные обстоятельства привели к снижению популярности РКЦ и ее доктрин, а также снижению привлекательности христианского образа жизни и христианских ценностей среди верующих. Они же стали для РКЦ индикатором, свидетельствующим о необходимости реагировать на произошедшие изменения и искать новые инструменты публичной дипломатии, способные вернуть Церкви внимание целевой аудитории. В статье рассматриваются взгляды Ватикана на ценности спорта и спортивной индустрии, обсуждается их соответствие христианским ценностям, а также приемлемые для Ватикана форматы участия в спортивной жизни общества. Находят обсуждение приоритеты Ватикана, заключающиеся в ее преимущественном внимании к сфере любительского спорта. Вместе с тем выявляются факты, свидетельствующие о намерении Ватикана повысить свое представительство в профессиональном спорте, что выражается в создании специализированных ведомств, включении в спортивные ассоциации и общества, привлечении профессиональных спортсменов. В статье также рассматриваются существующие ограничения спортивной дипломатии Ватикана. Делаются выводы о заинтересованности Ватикана в развитии спортивной дипломатии и его стремлении использовать этот инструмент для достижения стратегических целей.

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Ключевые слова: публичная дипломатия, культурная дипломатия, спортивная дипломатия, мягкая сила, Ватикан, Римско-католическая церковь, папа римский

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Abstract. *The article discusses the Vatican's public diplomacy tools, specifically the phenomenon of sports diplomacy. Sports diplomacy is a new tool for the realization of soft power by the Vatican, which gained its relevance during the pontificate of Francis I. This type of cultural diplomacy is characterized by significant dynamism, connection with socio-economic and political trends, and for a long time was out of the Vatican's sight due to moral and ethical contradictions inherent in this type of public diplomacy, as well as the lack of resources for the implementation of initiatives in this area. The contradictory nature of sports diplomacy for the Vatican is due, on the one hand, to the "ideal" sport's focus on the cultivation of moral and ethical values approved by the Roman Catholic Church (compassion, respect, love, harmony, and joy), and, on the other hand, to the political engagement and business orientation of "real" professional sport. Due to the traditional role of the RCC as a source of moral and ethical guidelines for Catholic society, sports diplomacy for the Vatican involves significant reputational risks. These risks stem from many factors, among them: the exploitation of athletes, the spread of dishonest sporting behavior (e.g., doping) within sports organizations, and the inconsistency with the values imposed by the sports industry, among them body worship, hedonism, consumerism, hoarding, individualism, and the obsession with success. In many ways, the emergence of this tool has been a forced measure and is linked to the changing territorial distribution and national composition of Catholicism, which has necessitated the need to find new ways to establish a dialogue with the Vatican's target audience, which is predominantly made up of people from developing countries in the global South. These circumstances have led to a decline in the popularity of the RCC and its doctrines, as well as a decline in the attractiveness of the Christian way of life and Christian values among believers. They have also become an indicator for the RCC of the need to respond to the changes that have taken place and to seek new tools of public diplomacy that can bring the Church back to the attention of its target audience. The article examines the Vatican's views on the values of sport and the sports industry, discussing their relevance to Christian values, as well as acceptable formats for the Vatican's participation in the sporting life of society. The article discusses the Vatican's priorities, including its predominant focus on amateur sports. At the same time, it reveals evidence of the Vatican's intention to increase its representation in professional sports, which is expressed in the creation of specialized agencies, inclusion in sports associations and societies, and involvement of professional athletes. The current limitations of Vatican sports diplomacy are also examined. Conclusions are drawn about the Vatican's interest in the development of sports diplomacy and its desire to use this tool to achieve strategic goals.*

Keywords: public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, sports diplomacy, soft power, Vatican, Roman Catholic Church, Pope

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Introduction. States pay great attention to building and maintaining peaceful and friendly relations with other countries. High-quality relations in the international arena are fertile ground that allows governments to defend national interests and achieve their strategic goals. This primarily applies to the goals of maintaining collective security, developing political, economic, cultural or scientific ties, complying with international obligations to protect human rights or peacefully resolve disputes.

Materials and research methods. In modern society, public diplomacy has acquired a crucial role in achieving these goals, focused on building a dialogue with the public and allowing achieving goals in a non-violent way - through the implementation of soft power, that is, increasing the attractiveness of the actor [9].

The concept of soft power implies three main aspects: foreign policy, political values and culture [9]. In accordance with the prevailing views on this concept in domestic political science, one of the central distinctive features of soft power is the transfer of the country's humanitarian resources

to the outside world [20], carried out by building a dialogue with the subjects of influence, taking into account their interests [19].

In this context, the Vatican is a unique phenomenon, since this state, due to objective political realities, is not capable of defending its interests other than through diplomacy, including through the implementation of soft power through the tools of public diplomacy. On the one hand, with the help of these tools, the Vatican promotes universal humanitarian and humanistic values in the context of responding to the global challenges of our time, on the other hand, it builds its own image as a defender of Christianity and a peacemaker, aimed at achieving mutual understanding and well-being of people, regardless of their national, cultural or religious affiliation. Therefore, in this work we will consider in detail one of these tools for implementing soft power, which has gained relevance only in the last ten years and, to date, has not been sufficiently studied - sports diplomacy.

Research results and their discussion. Cultural and sports diplomacy. Today, one of the most important and most effective tools for achieving the strategic goals of the state is cultural diplomacy. The term itself was proposed in the 1930s F. Barghorn and initially meant “manipulation of cultural materials and personnel for propaganda purposes” [5]. Somewhat later, by the mid-1970s the meaning of this term has changed and has come to mean “the entire sum of conscious and deliberate actions (or lack of actions) in society aimed at achieving certain cultural goals through the optimal use of all physical and spiritual resources that society has at a given time” [16]. Thus, the original ideological load of the term faded into the background, as a result of which cultural diplomacy ceased to be understood as the actions of states to impose their point of view on others. In scientific literature, cultural diplomacy is understood as ways of building dialogue and communication on a mutually beneficial basis.

It should be noted that cultural diplomacy is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon. This is due to the wide variety of what can be classified as “culture”. In the broadest sense, this concept can include a set of values that create semantic content for society, including both “high” culture (which can, in particular, include literature and art) and mass culture [29]. Mass culture can be interpreted very broadly: this concept includes everything that is in demand among the majority of the population, from pop music to sports. Because of this, sports diplomacy should be considered as an integral part of cultural diplomacy. A feature of sports diplomacy is its great dynamism and exposure to the influence of socio-historical, economic and political trends [13]. As many researchers note, sport globally performs many social and political functions, along with upbringing and education, participating in the formation of a healthy lifestyle, the processes of socialization of youth, the development of patriotism, moral qualities and an active life position [22]. Thus, public diplomacy in the spheres of culture and, in particular, sports is an important element of the export of soft power, allowing to build a dialogue around universal human values, such as life, security and well-being. Vatican public diplomacy in this context is of particular research interest.

Firstly, the original sphere of the Vatican and the Roman Catholic Church was precisely cultural diplomacy, understood in the most classical sense - as efforts aimed at transmitting humanistic values, high culture, traditional family values and Catholicism. Sports and sports diplomacy, in turn, for a long time remained areas of no interest to the Roman Catholic Church (hereinafter referred to as the RCC). The reasons for this are largely related to the Vatican's lack of resources to implement effective public policy in the field of sports - the population of the Vatican, as of 2019, numbers only 895 people, of whom approximately half have only the right of residence, but do not have citizenship [21]. Because of this, the Vatican is not able to represent itself directly on the international sports arena and is forced to resort to other less effective ways of positioning itself in the world of sports.

Secondly, today sport is a powerful industry dominated by values and ideals that often contradict the views of the Church. It can be said that the Roman Catholic Church shares the ideal values of sports, but is opposed to the real values that the sports industry has lived by over the past decades. This imposes significant restrictions on the number of Vatican “entry points” into the world of sports that could be used without reputational losses. The cautious position of the RCC regarding sports is expressed at the highest level, in particular, as Pope Francis I notes, sports can be used for

ideological purposes to promote other cultural values characteristic of Western elites, support existing power structures and inculcate the cult of wealth. Professional sports, from his point of view, should not serve third-party purposes related to glorifying the nation, making money, or asserting the superiority of one political system over others [6]. The RCC strongly opposes the exploitation of athletes: “<...> human rights cannot be arbitrarily subordinated to other interests, athletes cannot be turned into a kind of commodity” [21]; and also against doping, calling it a means of deception that literally pollutes the “beauty of the game” [24]. To summarize, it can be noted that professional sports “as it is” is currently of no interest to the Roman Catholic Church; its focus is primarily on amateur sports, sports education and the promotion of “Christian sports” - areas in which the least degree reflect the negative impact of the sports industry.

Thirdly, for a long time, sports diplomacy was simply not needed by the Vatican due to the characteristics of its target audience. However, in recent decades the situation in this regard has changed significantly. The main reason for this was the change in the image of the “average Catholic” by the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries. If at the beginning of the 20th century. While the share of European and American Catholics dominated and amounted to approximately 85%, by 2000 it had dropped to 34%. Most of the target audience of the RCC currently lives in the so-called countries of the global South [1]. The countries of the global South primarily refer to the countries of Latin America, whose share in the global Catholic community is estimated at approximately 40% [3]. As a second, however, no less important reason, we can consider the reorientation of the RCC from traditional family values to the problems of “caring for the common home” (reflected in the encyclical “*Laudato si*”, published on June 18, 2015), the solution of which implies the protection of the environment, development of human capital, overcoming global social problems - poverty and disadvantage. Together, these two reasons led the RCC to the need to find new, atypical ways for it to establish communication, one of which was sports.

Christian sports. The contradictory values of “big sport” are the reason for the emergence of so-called Christian sport. As researchers note, sport simultaneously has a diagnostic function in relation to tracking the characteristics of the development of society, and a function of countering the negative trends in the life of society: admiration of the body, hedonism, consumerism, hoarding, individualism, obsession with success [7]. These values are false from the point of view of the Roman Catholic Church, and at the same time, they are the ones that have become widespread in the professional sports industry. In this regard, the Vatican’s initiatives in the field of sports are focused on a very specific goal - the refusal to support sport in its usual understanding and the promotion of sport as a “Christian vision of the world”, focused on practices aimed at the harmonious development of the individual and society [7]. Thus, for the RCC, sport is not a platform for demonstrating its superiority, but rather a means of addressing the target audience, building communication to promote values of a higher order.

What are these values? Particularly important for the Roman Catholic Church are such values as cooperation and teamwork, respect and agreement regarding established rules, and the right to live in dignity and freedom [23]. As Pope Francis I notes when discussing the benefits of sports, “...great beauty and power lie in the harmony of decisive action and teamwork. When this is the case, sport goes beyond the level of the physical and takes us to the level of the spirit and even the sacrament” [12]. An accentuated list of sport values was formulated relatively recently in 2016 following the results of the “Sport in the Service of Humanity: The First Global Conference” summit, which was attended by representatives of the UN and the International Olympic Committee. This list includes, among other things, those values that the Vatican is ready to support: compassion, respect, love, harmony and joy [10].

All these values are universal and fully correspond not only to the concept of Catholicism, but also to the humanistic values of society, therefore, from an image point of view, their promotion is a win-win strategy for the Vatican. The Vatican can focus both on supporting sports in the interpretation preferred by the RCC, and on criticizing professional sports, in each case receiving support from society. At the same time, it is worth separately noting the role of the personality of Francis I himself in this process. As researchers note, the successes of the RCC rhetoric are largely explained by the

“Francis effect” - his special charisma and ability to benefit from it [8]. Pope Francis I effectively involves not only the public, but also public figures and potential investors in discussing sports issues. One of the most striking examples of this is the attraction of investors from the Aspire Group (an international marketing company), who expressed agreement with the position of the Vatican and the values it conveys: “Pope Francis and what he stands for, setting out his vision of ways to help those who are in edged and disadvantaged. This is very inspiring. <...> Think about using sport as a means to achieve this goal? In my opinion, this is the best sports marketing project” [11].

At the same time as seeking support, the Vatican criticizes everything that contradicts its values, first of all, the use of doping. In this regard, the Vatican demonstrates the toughest position, calling the sacrifice and rigor inherent in training integral elements of sports, and doping as an action that reduces all this to zero [24]. In other words, doping in sports for the RCC is more than just a dishonest means of victory - its use contradicts the very concept of sport, in particular, the principle of respect (implied: towards the opponent), formulated at the summit in 2016.

At the same time, the Vatican takes an extremely interesting position regarding criticism of the use of doping: not only doping is subject to obstruction, but also secular authorities and industries that are not attentive to this problem: “In order to combat the dangers of physical and mechanical doping and maintain fair play in sports competitions, it is not enough to appeal to the individual morality of athletes. The problem of doping cannot be attributed solely to athletes personally, no matter how much a particular athlete may be accused of doping. The problem is much broader. Sports organizations have a responsibility to create effective rules and organizational frameworks that support and reward athletes for responsible behavior and reduce any incentives to dope.” [24] A similar point of view has already been announced by the Vatican in the post-synodal apostolic address “Amoris Laetitia” regarding family planning issues: “out of love for the dignity of conscience, the Church always, with all her might, rejects coercive state intervention aimed at the spread of contraception, sterilization and, especially, abortion” [2].

It should be noted that earlier RCC rhetoric primarily focused on aspects of individual people's lives and sought to provide them with guidance for overcoming life's difficulties. With the advent of Francis I, one can note the reorientation of the RCC towards issues of regulating the life of society “from above,” that is, from secular governments. This can be seen as a sign of the Vatican's growing ambitions in matters of participation in society and decision-making on the international stage. An additional argument in favor of this conclusion can be considered the growing activity of the Vatican in an extremely atypical area for it - in the field of professional sports.

The Vatican and professional sports. For a long time, the Vatican shunned the sports industry and supported only amateur sports, which was more than once reflected in the rhetoric of the pontiffs. For example, at a meeting with the Genoese water polo team in 2021, Pope Francis supported the players with the words: “Never lose your amateur character. Genuine sport is amateur; at least always keep this in mind: a team and amateur spirit is needed” [25]. Despite the fact that it is amateur sports that best correspond to the value ideals of the RCC, since 2004, even under Pope John Paul II, the Vatican has demonstrated awareness of the importance of professional sports and began to increase its presence in this industry with the establishment of a special section “Church and Sports” [15]. Only in 2019, already under Pope Francis I, this initiative developed into the creation of a full-fledged Ministry of Sports, designed to create conditions for the development of “a culture of sports that would encourage a view of sports activity as a means of full personal growth and as a tool serving peace and brotherhood between nations” [15]. However, the stated motivation for this action is ambiguous.

The Vatican has long been quite successful in promoting the development of sports culture by providing support to amateur sports, as well as international foundations. The most famous examples include those created in the early 2000s. organizations “Fields of Growth”, “PeacePlayers International” and “Peace Pandemic”, focused on disadvantaged developing countries (such as Northern Ireland, Israel, Palestine, Cyprus and others), promoting the values of non-violent communication and friendly dialogue through sports [4]. The Vatican also excels in philanthropic

work, with its most notable impact being the Sport for All foundation, which works to increase access to sports in developing countries and support inclusivity in sports.

By and large, one of the few “bridges” between the Vatican and the sports industry was football. Pope John Paul II played football before he was ordained, Pope Benedict XVI saw it as “a means of promoting honesty, solidarity and fraternity”, and Francis I is a lifelong fan of the San Lorenzo football club. The Vatican actively uses the theme of football to create a positive image. An example is the words of Pope Francis I, where he recalls his childhood: “We didn’t always have a leather ball, so we made it from rags. I wasn’t very good, so they always put me in goal” [28]. This type of commentary invariably receives a positive response from the audience, and is especially popular in the countries of the global South, where the popularity of football is extremely high. However, the Vatican has not become too deeply involved in the topic of football and has generally limited itself to expressing favorable views of the sport, including by holding periodic audiences for select teams (for example, Francis I’s audience with San Lorenzo in 2014 . after their victory in the Copa Libertadores tournament. Moreover, the Vatican even emphasized its distance from the football industry. This, in particular, follows from the answer of the Vatican football director Domenic Ruggerio to a question about the Vatican team’s membership in FIFA: “It is better to remain amateurs”, joining FIFA will be seen as a business move. It is important that sport promotes friendship and love, not business. The spirit of the Vatican football team is at odds with FIFA membership” [18].

However, the Vatican Ministry of Sports, created in 2019, is more focused on increasing the Vatican’s representation in professional sports. Melchor Sanchez de Toca, the Vatican’s sports minister, announced his intention to create his own National Olympic Committee and take part in the parade of nations at the opening ceremony of the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris, as well as join the World Athletics Association [14]. The number of such statements and actions has increased significantly in the past few years: in 2020, the Vatican was admitted to the International Cycling Union, the International Table Tennis Federation and the World Taekwondo Federation, and in the same year, the first athlete appeared at the World Cycling Championships to compete under the flag of the Saint Throne [17]; in 2022, the running society from the Athletica Vaticana club entered into a bilateral agreement with the Italian Olympic Committee and the Italian Athletics Federation, which can be considered as preparation for participation in “serious” competitions [27].

Despite the fact that, according to Vatican officials, “the participation of athletes from the Vatican has more of a symbolic function than a practical one” [17], in practice, the Vatican is actively increasing the number of foreign professional athletes representatives and bilateral contacts with international sports organizations, which can be considered as preparing the ground for the implementation of long-term projects in the field of professional sports. This is also supported by individual statements by Vatican officials, for example, the Minister of Sports of the Vatican, which consist in emphasizing the importance of professional sports as an industry and an important consumer market that not only attracts people with its entertainment, but also touches their deep feelings [26]. The change in the Vatican’s position on professional sports has not gone unnoticed: Pope Francis I shares the position of Pope John Paul II and believes that the introduction of Christian values into sports can ensure the strengthening of universal values and, recognizing the widespread use of sports, wants the Catholic Church to take an active part in development of sports culture, including for its own benefits [7].

Conclusion. At the moment, the Vatican’s efforts are aimed at developing sports diplomacy as a new tool of public diplomacy. Through the efforts of Pope Francis I over the past ten years, the Vatican has managed to significantly expand its representation in the world of sports: enter international sports federations and associations, as well as attract foreign professional athletes to its side. It is important to note that thanks to the charisma of Pope Francis I and his attention to the topic of sports, the Vatican was able to significantly strengthen its image as a defender of humanitarian values and gain the attention of the audience - fans of certain sports.

From our point of view, these actions speak of the growing ambitions of the Vatican and its desire to increase its role in resolving global issues - the so-called “challenges of the time.” By using sports diplomacy, the Vatican is able to more effectively pursue its strategic goals, formulated in the

encyclical “Laudato si’”: caring for the environment and developing human capital, by transmitting a culture of health and a culture of non-violent competition. Thus, the current development of sports diplomacy is an extremely important event that can, in the short term, significantly increase the influence of the Vatican in the international arena.

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