The images of the EU framed by Russian officials in social media

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Abstract
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Abstract: The contemporary crisis between Russia and the EU, reflects, among other things, in the identity construction in both European and Russian domestic discourses. In view of the current conflict between Russia and Europe, it is crucial to comprehend how both actors perceive each other and the reality(ies) of the current status of their bilateral relations. According to the post-structuralists, foreign policies are dependent on the representations of “us” and “them”, articulated in national discourses. Such constructs are often represented through mass media, and given the growing adaptation of IT technologies, social media specifically become a suitable platform for the distribution of the images of “us” and “them” for both domestic and foreign audiences. The study seeks to identify which images of the EU are framed by Russian officials in social media and whether such frames correlate with some aspects of Russian domestic and foreign agendas.

The thesis focuses on the images of the EU framed by Russian officials in the period between March 2019 and December 2019, a drastic period of EU-Russia relations, triggered by the Ukrainian crisis. Social media posts of 10 Russian officials on matters related to the EU are examined with post-structuralist discourse approach. The adopted methodology allows to explore, identify and explain images of the EU framed by Russian officials in online dimension. In addition, the method sheds light not only on the way Russian officials perceive the EU but also on the way they construct Russia itself, as a political, social and values antithesis of Europe, through the framing of the EU.

The identified images, framed by Russian officials, constitute mainly negative framing of the EU, albeit seldom neutral and positive framings appear as well. The analysis determines the central aspects of the EU’s domestic and foreign policies, reflected by the officials. Besides, the results of the study demonstrate how Russian officials implicitly perceive the political and social situation in Russia as well as Russia’s foreign policy status, by comparing these aspects with Europe.

The framing, which Russian officials discursively construct in social media, exhibits a comprehensive political and normative split between Russia and the EU. This process had been gradually evolving until 2014, and then sharply accelerated. At this point, the current situation appears to be the lowest point for bilateral relations between Moscow and Brussels. Even though Russian officials regularly appeal to Moscow’s
determination to cooperate with the EU and the West in general, such a peacekeeping message had no considerable effect on EU-Russia relations.
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1. Introduction

1.1 Entrée

In the 2010s, the European Union (EU) and Russia have undergone a comprehensive crisis of bilateral relations. It resulted in the decline of economic cooperation, freezing political and diplomatic communication, mutually imposed political and economic sanctions, and considered by many, unprecedented level of distrust between the two entities. Despite a widespread assumption that this crisis was a consequence of the Russian involvement in the political turmoil in Ukraine in 2013-2014, the degradation of the relations between Moscow and Brussels had begun much earlier. The events of the first several years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union established the basis for the contemporary status of EU-Russia relations and on that basis itself contradictions have begun to arise.

In view of such a considerable strain between the EU and Russia, public political discourse in Russia has intensified, specifically with regard to the foreign policy agenda. The geographical, political, cultural, and normative distinctions between “us” and “them” became more substantial and dividing. Such divisions were intensified by a new reality of European politics in which the confrontation between Russia and most European countries aggravated. Russian public discourse, as one of the crucial sources of new constructs of this reality, fostered the framing of the opposite pictures of “us”, that is Russians, and “them”, that is the West. The latter concept represents an abstract identity construct, comprised usually the United States (the US), NATO and the EU. Domestic discourse also intensified the articulation of existential questions on the role(s) of Europe in Russian history, Russian culture and system of values, and Russia’s foreign policy agenda. The circulation of probable solutions to these questions, representing the pro- and anti-European sentiments in Russian society, shapes national discourse and generates, among other things, the images of the EU.

Russian political elites¹ happen to be the central vendor of foreign policy narratives and images that saturate national discourse on the matters of global politics. In the case of Russia, where

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¹ In this thesis, “Russian political elites” refers to the classification, adopted in the Survey of Russian Elites of Zimmerman, Rivera and Kalinin. They divided Russian elites into seven sub-groups: 1) media; 2)
the influence of the civic society on national foreign policy agenda seems to be limited, and
the state control of mass media seems to be quite strict\(^2\), albeit the control is not comprehensive
each to achieve and to sustain a full control of the media environment in the country, Russian
officials’ articulations of a particular foreign political matter have become a fountainhead of
the concepts and narratives that presumably present a considerably accurate demonstration of
the Russian elites’ picture of the world. Together with the state-controlled mass media, which
propagate the officials’ statements to the citizens, these views contribute to national discourse
to a large extent.

In this context, mass media play the role of a platform of communication between the political
elites and the citizens, creating public space for political national discourse. For the last couple
of decades, a new form of communication, social/online media, joined the list of such
communication platforms and it has been affecting public policy, among others, in a way
facilitating the transfer of information between different levels of society. For Russian officials
and political elites in general, online instruments of communication, such as Facebook or
Twitter, provide an opportunity to communicate directly with the citizens, and in some cases
to express own personal or professional opinion on certain domestic or foreign matters.
However, the opinion would be within the state-approved narratives, given the narrowness of
the pluralism of opinions at the level of Russian officials to express publicly. Russian officials’
posts in social media regarding EU-Russia relations are an example of involvement in online
political communication with the citizens. By publishing posts on personal social media
accounts on a certain matter of bilateral relations or the EU in general, the officials frame the
images of “us” and “them” for their online audience, and thereby contribute to the public
discourse in Russia on foreign policy issues.

The thesis aims to research how the current status of EU-Russia relations is represented by top-
ranking Russian officials in social media platforms of online communication. Officials’ posts
from their social media accounts may presumably provide researchers with articulated
meanings or framed images, which Russian officials assign to the EU, as an important element

\(^2\) M. Boulba and E. Andrianova, “The Law Reviews - The Technology, Media and Telecommunications Review”,
Thelawreviews.co.uk, 2021, https://thelawreviews.co.uk/title/the-technology-media-and-telecommunications-
of Russian public discourse on foreign policy agenda. By applying the post-structuralist approach of discourse analysis to social media posts of the selected group of Russian officials from five online platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Vkontakte, and Telegram), in the period between March 18, 2014, and December 31, 2019, it is intended to explore what images of the EU are framed in online discourse of Russian officials, how these images mirror the comprehensive diplomatic and value/normative crisis between Russia and the EU and contemporary Russian politics. The timeline represents almost a six-year period between the referendum in Crimea and the beginning of this research.

1.2 Previous research

The thesis involves a vast of the spheres of academic research, such as International Relations, European and Russian Studies, mass media studies, among others. Nevertheless, this paper primarily focuses on the identity framing by Russian officials through social media communication and its correlation with Russian public discourse. Hence, the previous research on mass media, specifically social media with the focus on Russia, therefore, appeared to be the most relevant for this paper. Other academic fields serve as supplementary components to establish a proper angle of the research.

Several subgroups of previous research emerge to present a more informative and understandable picture of the pertinent status of academic research on the aforementioned domains: a) mediatisation of politics, b) social media in politics, c) social media in Russia.

Mediatisation of Politics

The phenomenon of mediatisation has received its development and elaboration in a vast amount of research. Jesper Strömbäck dedicated a series of his studies to the influence of the mass media on contemporary political systems, in which he examined the concept of mediatization, defined as a social change and dynamic process of the increasing role of the media in contemporary societies. Strömbäck determined four phases of mediatization

4 J. Strömbäck, "Four Phases of Mediatization: An Analysis of the Mediatization of Politics", The International Journal of Press/Politics, vol. 13, 2008, p. 228–246. According to Strömbäck, four phases are: 1) media constitute the most important source of information and channel of political communication; 2) media became more independent of governmental or other political bodies; 3) media’s independence increased to the degree when
resulting in increasingly mediatized politics and the growing dependence of the society, politicians in general, on the mass media. He also presented the findings that had demonstrated that politicians and journalists themselves perceived the mass media to be influential instrument to impact a political agenda. Strömbäck likewise focused on the processes of the digitalization of media. Together with Adam Shehata, Strömbäck examined how citizens learn politics from traditional mass media, including their online formats, and they concluded that social media, as the source of the knowledge of politics, provided a worse quality of such knowledge, by comparison with learning from traditional media. Such an issue arising from the mediatization of politics, as a potential challenge for political landscape and democracy in general, appeared in the cooperative paper of other prominent scholars, Gianpietro Mazzoleni, and Winfried Schulz, in which they discarded an apocalyptic assumption of the political institutions being trapped by powerful media, albeit they admitted a certain institutions’ dependency on mass media. With regard to social media, Schulz claimed that the online dimension not only increased the number of options to receive information, but it also enriched the ways by which an individual could participate in public discourse, and it underlined the issue of reliability of information from the Internet sources.

**Social media in Politics**

The scholars comprehensively examined the real-life cases of a social media application in politics. For instance, the 2008 presidential election in the USA appeared to be one of the most prominent cases of intensive applying social media in an election campaign. According to Frederic Solop, Obama’s election team managed to benefit from the growing popularity of Twitter, Facebook, and other online tools of communication, by distributing as widely as possible Obama’s central campaign messages to the American electorate. Sven Engesser, Nicole Ernst, and other authors also examined the issues related to populist activities in social

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media, by analysing the cases of four countries and two social networks. The authors adopted the qualitative text analysis and concluded that social media provided more freedom for populists, and politicians in general, to express extreme ideas and to attack discursively their opponents\(^{10}\). Online platforms facilitated communication with the populist’s audience and thereby social media have become a well-suited instrument for populists\(^{11}\). One more real-life case of application of social media in politics, to be more specific, enhancing and guiding a public protest, has received much academic attention in the 2010s, after the Arab Spring. For instance, Sara Salem’s paper on the role of social media in the uprising in Egypt in 2011. She presumed that social media has become a threat to the authoritarian regimes with regard to controlling public and private spaces, and they contributed to public mobilisation and coordination of activists’ actions. Nevertheless, Salem supposed that the role of social media in revolution processes seems to be limited due to the low relevance of social media to contribute to post-revolutionary state reformation\(^{12}\).

**Social media in Russia**

Since this thesis represents a study of Russian politics, it is worth reviewing previous research on social media in Russia itself. Nicole Bode and Andrey Makarychev in their research on new media in Russia presumed that the proliferation of new means of communication eroded Russian political elites’ options to frame public discourse and to formulate national political agenda\(^{13}\). Ora John Reuter and David Szakonyi examined how social media could influence public awareness of electoral frauds in authoritarian regimes. They uncovered that the application of the social networks, politicized by the opposition, certainly increased public awareness of state violation of the election procedures\(^{14}\). Nevertheless, the role of social media in the anti-regime competition was ambiguous. Yet, the proliferation of anti-regime information among the users of social media may have damaged the authoritarian regime, the severity of such costs would be not considerable\(^{15}\). In turn, some academics investigated how

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\(^{11}\) Ibid.


\(^{15}\) Ibid.
the Russian governments responded to these challenges in the online dimension. For instance, Sergey Sanovich researched the computational propaganda in Russia, i.e., the digital tools Russian officials adopted to counteract their foreign and domestic counterparts. He claimed that so-called bots and trolls were developed to deal with opposition in cyberspace, by engaging them in online disputes and basically curb opposition activists\textsuperscript{16}. Sanovich also affirmed that the Russian government developed the digital tools to promote its online propaganda and counterpropaganda, invested in the hacking capabilities, which, according to his opinion, could threatened electoral campaigns in other countries or particular political entities\textsuperscript{17}.

The review of the previous research represents a brief, step-by-step familiarization with the role of mass media in politics in general, and practical cases of a social media application in policy-making both in the world and Russia. Such a theory-practice approach allows one to demonstrate the vastness of the theoretical and action-orientated research in the field of mass media, conducted with different qualitative and quantitative methods. With regard to Russian politics, however, academic literature in English seems to be fairly scarce, specifically related to social media as a comparatively new phenomenon in social sciences. Yet, the interest in social media and cyberspace in Russian politics emerges more tangible, especially concerning the matters of Russia’s alleged cyber-attacks against its foreign opponents, there is a lack of research on the online communication of Russian officials, in particular, how they picture other actors of global politics. Besides, there a lack of research written from the Russian perspective. Hence, this paper aims to fill the gap in research on social media in Russian politics by analysing how Russian officials construct online “them” frames, in this case, images of the EU, and how such a picturing correlates with Russian domestic discourse.

1.3 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this paper represents a two-level construction with grand theory, that is discourse theory, as a basis of the research and with middle-range theory, that is Yuri Lotman’s concept of “dualistic” nature of Russian culture, history and worldview, as a second brick of the framework. Such a theoretical framework built upon two blocks emerges to guide


\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p.41.
the researcher from broad and fairly multifarious theory of discourse, that, however, defines the initial theoretical scope for this paper, to a more narrowed and definite theoretical concept, from which, in turn, the hypothesis of the research emerges.

**Discourse theory**

The pioneer of the discourse theory, Michel Foucault, defined the concept of discourse as a sort of system of thoughts, constructed through the relation of beliefs, ideas, attitudes, systematic course of action and so on, and these systems, in turn, construct the subjects and the world in general. Foucault considered in the discourse not a simple system of the construction of knowledge on a particular subject, but also an instrument with which society may maintain a certain approved truth, and what is also a central element of his reflections, to demonstrate the distribution of the power within and between the constructed truths.

Nevertheless, since the focus of the paper is rather in the domain of international relations and Russian foreign policy, it is worth considering the concept of discourse from this perspective. Discourse analysis in studying foreign policy has been developed by scholars favoured the post-structuralist approach in IR. Sharing many of the realist traditions of IR, the post-structuralists however defined its central concept of power not as a combination of materialistic military and economic resources, what the realists define as compulsory power, but as the language. Through linguistically constructed discourse, individuals framed various objects, subjects, identities, values, and the like. Similar processes could be mirrored at the global level. Theorists of the post-structuralist approach considered foreign policy as a discursive practice, by studying of which one may critically examine how actors of global politics determine their foreign policy realities, and how these actors through such realities frame the “us” and “them” identities. According to post-structuralists, these representations of the others, which are built on the combination of values, norms, and identities as well as their own historical experience, became the factors shaping the foreign policy agenda of any country.

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Thus, post-structuralists consider language as a power to create values, norms, or identities, which altogether construct reality or realities in which actors of global politics implement national foreign policies. In other words, the way the officials and politicians perceive “us” and “them” could explain the motives of foreign policies they assisted or deterred.

Yuri Lotman’s dualism
The concept of discourse found its reflection in many works of Yuri Lotman, an influential Soviet semiotician and cultural historian. During his academic work at the University of Tartu from 1954-1993, he published a vast number of theoretical papers on the issues of structuralism, the functions of the literature, semiotics, typologies of cultures, communication, history and so on. For this paper, however, Lotman’s two particular works seem to be the most relevant such as “One the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture” and “Culture and Explosion”. In these papers, Lotman elaborated primarily on the matters of reality and its representations in semiotic codes, and the dynamics of culture. With regard to this paper, Lotman’s idea of the dualistic character of Russian history may be mirrored in Russia’s general worldview23, which is also generally built on dualistic patterns, for instance, “friend-enemy”. To be more specific, by the dualism of Russia, Lotman meant the explosive processes of cultural transformation in Russia, or what he defined as “binary system”, comparing it with the “ternary system” of the West, which was, in turn, more gradual and less destructive24. To demonstrate historical examples of Lotman’s dualism of Russia, one may consider that the transformations of the political system in Russia, for instance at the beginning of the 20th century and in the late 1980s appeared not like a gradual process of transformation, but as a total destruction of all spheres of the society. This, according to Lotman, was uncharacteristically for the West. Based on the concept of a binary perspective on Russian history and culture, and presumably similar binary logic of Russian elites on bilateral relations, the following hypothesis emerges:

\[H1: \text{The Russian officials articulate the EU’s images in the binary logic, as strictly negative or strictly positive.}\]

\[H1a: \text{The Russian officials articulate strictly negative images of the EU}\]

23 By writing “Russia’s worldview”, it is obviously implying to the elites, but not to the whole society.

One may consider that a contradiction emerges between the theoretical framework and the method applied in the research. While Lotman is commonly considered as a structuralist, and his concept applied in the thesis represents binary logic, while the epistemology of post-structuralism, and consequently, the post-structuralist discourse analysis, rejects such a dualism. Nevertheless, Lotman has adopted a less strict structuralist approach in his late papers, admitting a more complex construction of the reality than binary logic. Besides, the instruments the adopted methodology provides are actually highly relevant and appropriate for the thesis, since they potentially allow to explore the reality construction by Russian officials beyond the binary system, in the case if Russian officials do frame the EU’s images beyond the binary logic.

1.4 Research question and definition of the concepts

Which are the images of the European Union framed by the Russian officials in their social media posts?

In addition to the central research question, two supplementary questions are included to broaden the scope of this research:

- Which themes of European domestic and foreign policies are reflected by Russian officials in the context of picturing the EU in social media?
- How the EU’s images constructed by the officials may reflect contemporary or past themes of Russian domestic and foreign politics?

The relevance of the aforementioned questions addresses the contemporary crisis in EU-Russian relations. While a simple explanation would be limited to the involvement of Russia in the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, it is more relevant to consider other factors affecting the bilateral relations between the actors. In this regard, the analysis of the views Russian officials generally share towards the EU may contribute to a better awareness of Russia’s perspective on European integration, albeit such a perspective may be more antagonistic given the current crisis in EU-Russian relations, than, for instance, a decade ago. Besides, through the framing of the EU, Russian officials simultaneously frame Russia itself, and consequently, this paper provides an insight into Russian contemporary politics as well.
**Definition of the concepts**

Since social media and officials represent the central concepts in this research, it is worth clarifying them to avoid any misleading, in particular, in the case of “officials”.

**Social media.** Even though the technological progress in the field of Information Technology (IT) has been ongoing for many decades, a clear definition of social media seems to be abstract\(^\text{25}\). By social media, this thesis referred to online communication platforms that provide its users with the instruments to create, read and share visual or audio content. Overall, five platforms of online communication are domains to research in the thesis: Facebook, Twitter, Vkontakte, Telegram, and Instagram.

**Officials.** In the case of this paper, “officials” represent a social group of individuals who hold a public post in the legislative, executive or judicial institutions of the Russian Federation. Such a definition excludes the representatives of non-systemic opposition (i.e., non-parliamentary opposition) since they hardly can hold an office within Russian state institutions\(^\text{26}\), and the journalists of state-controlled mass media. Even though these two groups also frame the EU in Russian public discourse, the focus of the thesis rather on those who are involved or supposed to be involved in the decision-making process in the Russian foreign policy agenda, remove them from the scope.

### 1.5 Methodology

Considering the research question and supplementary questions of this paper, discourse analysis (DA) seems to be an appropriate method to adopt. While the previous academic research of numerous scholars on discourse resulted in the evolution of the various methodological approaches, drawing on the discourse theory and other relevant theories, the focus of this thesis on IR encourages one to adopt a post-structuralist approach, i.e., post-structuralist discourse analysis.


Nevertheless, there is space for discussion with regard to the methodology of the research. One may consider content analysis (CA) to be another alternative relevant method to answer the research question of the thesis. Given ontological and epistemological differences between two methods, albeit CA and DA may be applied together in one research as well, several distinctions, in particular, appear to be the crucial factors to opt for the most appropriate method for this paper, which is DA. First of all, it is common to define a list of pre-chosen categories for CA upon which a researcher analyses texts, which on the one hand would facilitate the gathering of data in this research, but at the same time, it would likely lead to missing of some online posts since the framing of the EU’s images may occur hiddenly, without clearly articulated categories. With this regard, for comparison with CA, discourse methodology specifically highlights linguistic anomalies and absences. As a result, by applying DA, one increases the chances to detect more EU images, articulated both explicitly and implicitly. Besides, DA is more attentive to the fluidity of the meanings and dynamism of reality. It is often necessary to manually extend the time frame of the research to demonstrate the origins and evolution of particular images and meanings, as well as to avoid the unnecessary static attitude that is more specific for CA. In other words, DA helps to ask not only what images are, but also why they emerged and how they evolved, which provides a researcher with a more comprehensive insight, albeit in the case of this paper the evolution of the images in the defined timeline is beyond of the thesis’ scope. Finally, the concept of power as a fundamental element of DA emerges in this research, in the form of language, according to the post-structuralist approach, while for CA the concept of power is commonly beyond the scope, even though this exclusiveness of power as a DA element may be questioned by some scholars$^{27}$.

Based on the papers of Lene Hansen on discourses and the politics of representation, post-structuralist discourse analysis in foreign policy consists of the following steps. One first identifies a word or a group of words in a text that clearly or hiddenly indicates the construction of “us” and “them”$^{28}$. These constructions might represent an individual or any social group, specific state institutes, or even a country. Then such constructions should be carefully analysed on the presence of a web of signs articulated in the examined text. When a link between a particular construction and its signs is identified, one discovers a meaning, generated by the language in the analysed text. Hansen provides an example of George W. Bush’s speech

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on Sadam Hussein when Bush’s discursive construction of “them” by articulating to Hussein such signs as “devil”, “dictator” and “evil” resulted in a negative and antagonist meaning of “them”, while positive signs, “good” and “civilized” were assigned to an opposite meaning of “us”.29

Concerning this thesis, the methodology includes two central stages: selection and analysis itself. First of all, an official’s social media account was reviewed on the posts dedicated to the EU. During this process, it was crucial to identify the European thematic of the subject’s post, taking into consideration a conceivable misunderstanding of various concepts, articulating in Russian officials’ and public discourses on the matters of relations with Brussels. The EU may be not always referred to as the EU itself, but also as “Europe” and “the West”, which could complicate and obfuscate the selection of the posts. These concepts, derived from Russian public discourse, may denote fairly different political entities, where “the West” includes not only the EU, but also the US, Canada, and other developed countries, while the meaning of “Europe” consolidates the EU member states, and in some cases, the geographically European countries out of the EU, for instance, Serbia. To avoid any misleading from the fluidity of the identity concepts circulating in Russian discourse, strictly the posts with direct references to the EU and its particular member state have been selected for poststructuralist discourse analysis. Nevertheless, the posts in which an official refers to the concept of “Europe” are also reviewed and selected for the analysis, if it is clear that the subject’s articulation of Europe implies the EU. For instance, the following post from one of the Russian officials’ Twitter account, published one day after November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, where he writes about “Europe” but obviously implying to the EU:

“The world without ISIS is possible only with Russia, Russian forces and thanks to the unity of Russia and Europe. There is not another way and the US must accept it”30

14.11.15, L. Slutsky

In the aftermath of the scrupulous selection of the relevant posts, they have been examined with poststructuralist discourse analysis. It is worth noting that it will not be possible to analyse every post on the EU themes published by a Russian official. Alternatively, the selected posts

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29 Ibid. p.37
were grouped according to the issue that the subject brought in. For instance, a Russian official published 40 posts on EU-Russian relations in a Facebook account. The matters of bilateral relations, reflected in the posts, mainly covered the supposed dependency of the EU on the US and about terrorism, and presumably, the subject devoted 20 posts to each thematic. Since the identified signs related to the EU on the issues of terrorism and dependency on the US would likely be quite identical, all the subject’s posts were clustered based on the meanings these signs articulated within a particular issue of the EU’s domestic or foreign political agendas. Some quotations from the posts would subsequently be presented to demonstrate the framing processes of an EU’s image and supplemented by the illustrations from the academic literature or the relevant cases that emerged in the Russian public sphere, to substantiate the framing of a particular picture of the EU in a subject’s social media account.

Once clustering of the posts is completed, they are subjected to post-structuralist discourse analysis itself, conducted in pursuance of Hansen’s aforementioned approach. This illustrative example serves as a demonstration of the application of the method to examine the post, published in 2016 by Russian Prime Minister, Dmitry Medvedev. First, in a previously selected post, a word or a group of words that define dichotomous “us” and “them” are identified (highlighted in bold), which are the US and the EU on one side, and Russia on the other side (appears in the post by “we”). Second, the signs, articulated by Medvedev to describe a particular actor, are determined and underlined. Then, once the connections between “us”, “them” and corresponding signs are established, it is necessary to define the meanings articulated from such connections. In the case of the illustrative post, it was fairly clear to define a dichotomy between two sides as well as the implied meanings; Russia, willing and open to cooperate, and to advance relations, deals with the EU (and the US), who both oppose better relations. Since DA considers not solely the language itself, as CA does, but the reality in which the language is operating, additional references to every frame may be presented as a final stage of the methodology. These references are supplementary information on Russian domestic and foreign political agendas, which could demonstrate or clarify the reasons for the circulation of particular meanings in Russian public discourse. In the case of this illustrated post, the references would include media discourse in Russia on the picturing of Russia as an actor, open for dialogue and cooperation in EU-Russian relations.
“We want sound, advanced relations with the US and the EU. But they should want it, too”
14.02.2016, D. Medvedev

Limitations of post-structuralist discourse analysis

It is important to consider the limitations that are typical for post-structuralist discourse analysis and qualitative research methods in general. According to Hansen, post-structuralist discourse analysis may be adopted and applied successfully if a researcher has gained deep and comprehensive knowledge of the objects of research\(^{32}\). Quite frequently, the meanings the researcher is aiming to identify may be not expressed explicitly, but rather disguised in the form of a joke, proverb, metaphor, or other linguistic forms. It requires an understanding of the discursive and political agendas of examined entities as well as remarkable linguistical fluency in the language of the studied materials. In addition to that, the causality complication may appear. Rationally one can understand that even though the discourse appears to be an important element of setting a foreign policy agenda, it is still one of the elements and the causality cannot be based solely on this factor, since one should also consider, for instance, behavioural factors that could impact on a foreign policy of a particular country.

Certain limitations appear to be considered due to the nature of the qualitative research itself, and consequently, they are relevant to post-structuralist discourse analysis and thus supposed to be considered by a researcher. According to Bryman, the academic criticism towards qualitative research includes among others the following four issues: the challenge of subjectivity, problem of replication, generalizations issues, and lack of transparency\(^{33}\). First, a qualitative study is significantly affected by the researcher’s views, values, and experience. In turn, the problem of replication derives from this subjectivity and a researcher’s personality, since it is challenging to replicate all the procedures adopted by a researcher of the examined study. Generalizing on the findings of a conducted qualitative research is also problematic, albeit some scholars consider it feasible and even inevitable; for instance, in M. Williams’ concept of *moderatum generalizations*\(^{34}\). Finally, if it is not clear enough what was done by a researcher in his/her study and in which way, a lack of transparency may appear.

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31 Dmitry Medvedev (@MedvedevRussiaE), “We want sound, advanced relations with the US and the EU. But they should want it, too,” Twitter, 14 February 2016, twitter.com/MedvedevRussiaE/status/698923942938071041, (accessed March 4 2021)


Concerning this thesis specifically, it is necessary to consider a probable factor of personal views of the researcher. Nevertheless, fluent knowledge of Russian and personal experience of being involved in Russian public discourse due to residing in Russia for many years facilitate the understanding of linguistic specifics of the Russian language and potential references to Russian history, presented by Russian officials.

### 1.6 Ethical considerations

The research was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles in social research. The University of Helsinki’s and the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity’s (TENK) guidelines constitute the ethical framework of this research.

Among the numerous matters of the research ethics, the issue of data gathering seems to be the most relevant with regard to this thesis, to be more precise, such areas as subjects’ informed consent and invasion of their privacy. While many researchers debate the concept of informed consent and its relevance in some particular research projects, in the case of this paper the need to request consent is questionable. None of the analysed individuals directly participated in the research, since the focus of the research concentrates on their social media engagement in the 2014-2019 period. Given the specific characteristics of social media, the user’s activity is supposed to be open and visible to other users, unless the owner of the account did not intentionally close his/her account from the general public. If the account is open for a broad audience, one may conclude that the user has already given consent for his/her information to be viewed. The same principle applies to the privacy of the user. Nevertheless, at least one matter requires specific attention. Some of the reviewed officials had social media profiles within the timeline of this paper, but later for some reason, they deleted it. Albeit the contemporary Internet tools provide the users with capabilities to reveal the content of even a deleted social media account, it is presumed that it will be a violation of the individual’s privacy, since he/she has decided to delete own social media profile.

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1.7 Structure of the paper

The structure of the thesis includes five chapters, the list of references and the list of appendices. The first chapter represents an introduction, that in turn, includes entrée, previous research, theoretical framework, research questions and definition of the concepts, methodology and ethical considerations. The second chapter aims to briefly explore the evolution of EU-Russian relations with the emphasis on the Russian perspective. The third chapter provides a detailed explanation of the data gathering, especially, the selection of the relevant officials, and presents the list of 10 officials, subjected to analysis. The fourth chapter demonstrates the research itself and summarizes the findings. The last chapter includes the discussion of the results and conclusion, which centralizes the answers to the research questions and additional questions. Lastly, the list of references presents the sources used for the paper and the appendix consolidates the applied materials.
2 Historical evolution of EU-Russia relations, 1991-2014

The history of EU-Russia relations is worth presenting due to its role as a sort of clarification of the contemporary Russian framing of the EU. If one is aware of the evolution of relations between these two actors, their representations of each other may be understood more clearly and comprehensively. In other words, to understand the reason for a particular image of the EU and its origins, it is necessary to obtain a piece of certain knowledge about Russia, and this knowledge primarily implies the evolution of Russia’s foreign policy approaches towards the EU, and, to some extent, history of Russia. Thus, the essence of this chapter is the familiarization of the evolution of EU-Russia relations from 1991 until 2014 for facilitating the understanding of the images constructed by Russian officials.

The starting point to present the dynamic of EU-Russia relations is the late 1991 and early 1992. These are the years when the contemporary political “models” of Russia and the EU emerged (Russia) and were established (the EU). The Russian Federation, as a politically new entity established by explosive events, required a new foreign policy approach from the EU. For the new Russian elites, in turn, it was necessary to determine its foreign policy agenda towards Europe as well. Yet, the timeline limited to a 22-year period of co-existence of Russia and the EU excludes centuries of mutual identity construction in Russian and European history, this particular period is more relevant for the examination of the current images of the EU, framed by Russian officials, as this period of relations between Russia and the EU have influenced most of all the attitude(s) of contemporary Russian elites towards European integration. Thus, this chapter covers Yeltsin’s period (1991-1999), the first and the second Putin’s presidency (2000-2008), Medvedev’s presidential term (2008-2012), and the third Putin’s presidency (2012 to 2014).

2.1 Yeltsin’s period, 1991-1999

The comprehensive crisis of the Soviet Union in the 1980s, complicated by unsuccessful reforms and foreign policy challenges, resulted in a complete collapse of the Union and a so-called “parade of sovereignties”. The Russian Federation, as a sovereign political entity,
entered into world politics by the end of 1991, looking for its new place in the global system. A couple of months later, the Maastricht Treaty was signed by 12 states, which transformed the European Community into the EU. These new actors of global politics, established by revolution and evolution respectively, initiated a new chapter in the history of the relationship between old neighbours, Russia and Europe. Contemporary EU-Russian relations were legally based on the EU documents regarding the foreign policy of the community; Title V of the Treaty on European Union, ‘external action’, Articles 206-207, 216-219 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, as well as agreements on bilateral relations, among which Partnership and Cooperation Agreement 1997 was the reference point.

After the establishment of the Russian Federation, the administration of Boris Yeltsin experienced significant political, economic and social challenges. The new position of the Russian Federation in the world did not anticipate a bright future and it was challenged by many unresolved issues regarding the borders, nuclear weapon, partition of the Soviet state debt and properties abroad, and so on. In this respect, Yeltsin’s administration during the first several years after the collapse of the Soviet Union intended to promote cooperation with the former adversaries from the Cold War. This was motivated by both the need to receive financial and technological aid from the West and to find a new place in the world, free of the old ideological confrontation. The anticipations of the Russian political elites were generally associated with the complete and successful realization of transformation of the state and society from a state-controlled economy to a market-based economy and democratic community, in other words, to become a democratic country, which presumably would be welcomed by the West. Nevertheless, Western assistance did not correspond to the relevant needs of Russia, as they were determined by Yeltsin’s administration. The growing frustration of the West’s reluctance to perceive Russia not even as an ally, but at least as a partner, and to support financially new elites in their reformation actions, the mounting criticism from left- and right-wing opposition, contributed to reconsideration of the foreign policy agenda of the Russian Federation. Yeltsin himself in one of his statements emphasized that “effective communication mechanism between the West and Russia remained missing, in particular

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38 All the basic documents on the EU-Russian relations can be found at https://russiaeu.ru/en/basic-documents
concerning Russian interests”39. One of the symbolic steps towards the reconsideration of the foreign policy priorities was the resignation of Yeltsin’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Andrey Kozyrev who was labelled “Mr Yes”40 and the following appointment of Evgenii Primakov for this office, the appointment welcomed by the opposition as a symbolic end of humiliating pro-West foreign policy41. Russian foreign policy from that moment has become more diversified and more considering of national interests. The simultaneously deteriorating crisis in the Balkans also challenged Russian-West relations and contributed to the growing dissatisfaction of the Russian government of the Western partners.

Even though it would be difficult to distinguish frustration with Europe from frustration with the West in general, it is worth noting separately that the attitudes that the EU applied to the Russian Federation were also discouraging for Yeltsin’s team. The ex-communist European countries were divided into two categories, based on the EU’s policy towards each group. Brussels aimed to provide financial aid and to assist to integrational processes for the first group and to provide financial aid and promote cooperation for the second group, in which Russia happened to be. The EU placed Russia as an outsider with regard to possible membership, while the partnership was declared as the key dimension of the EU’s foreign policy towards Russia. Even though the partnership with the EU was one of the purposes of Yeltsin’s administration, the European decision to prioritize Russia less than the ex-communist states of Eastern Europe caused a certain frustration among elites. The instruments adopted by the EU to determine the foreign policy towards Russia, such as the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement 1994 or Common Strategy 1999, did not respond comprehensively enough to the relevant needs of the Russian government or even the interests of some of the EU members states. The Common Strategy 1999 itself was generally a declaratory document.

2.2 Putin’s period, 2000-2008

Russian moving in the new millennium happened quite symbolically. In the new century Russia entered with a new president, Vladimir Putin, appointed by Yeltsin after he announced his resignation on December 31, 1999. In the following months, Putin won the presidential election and began setting new foreign and domestic policy agendas. In a nutshell, regarding the domestic political actions of Putin’s administration, they were characterised by economic growth, political centralisation, and securing social stability, in other words, everything that the Russians had been missing during Yeltsin’s presidency in the 1990s. The successful ending of the war in Chechnya contributed to Putin’s public image of the guardian of Russian prosperity and stability; this kept his approval rating fairly high for many years.\(^{42}\)

For the Russian foreign policy, Putin’s inauguration at first resulted in a positive view of the relations with the EU and the West in general. The removal of the Chechen factor from the agenda and Putin’s numerous declarations on the importance of EU-Russian relations and the European future of Russia resulted in the growing optimism on the future of bilateral relations.\(^{43}\) By analogy with the European Common Strategy on Russia 1999, the Russian government developed and adopted its strategy on the relations with the EU,\(^{44}\) albeit there were clear differences between the attitudes expressed by the EU and Russia.\(^{45}\) The EU-Russia cooperation was intensified after two EU-Russia Summits in 2003 and 2005, with the creation of four Common Spaces and agreement on corresponding road maps to implement the Common Spaces. Russia even experienced a rare moment of forging a common front with France and Germany against the US’ plans to invade Iraq in 2003.\(^{46}\)

Nevertheless, the atmosphere of EU-Russian relations began to deteriorate after the first presidential term of Putin (2000-2004). One of the reasons for that was a normative character of the relations, promoted by the EU. Common values, to which the EU referred in the

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agreements with the Russian Federation, contradicted the domestic political agenda, established by Russian elites. On the wave of the counter-terrorism agenda and economic growth, the steady process of centralization and denial of human rights has been growing. In addition to the domestic political landscape, the revolutionary events in neighbouring countries (so-called “Colour Revolutions”) increased Putin’s administration concern for the West’s policies towards the ex-USSR countries which were perceived by the Russian Federation as within the sphere of its strategic influence. A symbolic step that showed Russia’s altered attitude towards the relations with the West was Putin’s speech during the Munich Security Conference in 2007. Even though the speech was primarily addressed to the US and the West in general, the expressed acquisitions and reproaches reached the EU as well. The split between “us” and “them” has become more antagonistically

2.3 Medvedev’s period, 2008-2012

In 2008, Dmitry Medvedev succeeded the highest post in Russia. There were speculations on the relationship between Putin and Medvedev (so-called “tandem”), the actual distribution of political power and obligations, and Medvedev’s independence in implementation of his political programme of the influence of Putin, who has assumed the post of prime minister. Nevertheless, according to the Russian Constitution, the President represents the state at the international level and determines the foreign policy agenda, and consequently, it is legally reasonable to consider the period of 2008-2012 as Medvedev’s foreign policy.

Medvedev’s first year of the presidency overlapped with a difficult period of EU-Russian relations brought to him by the predecessor. The relations have escalated due to the conflict with Georgia in August 2008. The questions of greater importance for Russia, such as lifting visa regime for the Russian citizens, or the conclusion of a new agreement to replace the PCA, or common security and defence policy between the EU and Russia, happened to be unresolved in a way that would comply with the Moscow’s anticipations or interests. Especially, the

50 Haukkala, “From Cooperative to Contested Europe? the Conflict in Ukraine as a Culmination of a Long-Term Crisis in EU-Russia Relations”.
security issues were crucial for the Russian government. The enlargement of NATO and EU eastward and the American missile defence system in Europe caused a headache for Moscow, but at the same time, Russian proposals to establish a common security system, from Vancouver/Lisbon to Vladivostok were too explicitly aimed to replace NATO or the Transatlanticism itself, which were seen by Russian officials as a relic of Cold War. Besides, the question of the so-called “common neighbourhood” affected on EU-Russian relations since Moscow considered this European project as an attempt to push Russia’s influence from the region of strategic importance for Moscow.

Nonetheless, certain attempts have been made to overcome the diplomatic stalemate between the EU and Russia and to enhance cooperation. As a part of the limited improvement of relations between Russia and the West, which happened to be partially feasible due to a shared political will in Moscow and Washington to take the relations forward, the Medvedev administration together with some of the EU-member states presented some political instruments to enhance the scale of EU-Russia relations, for instance, the Meseberg Memorandum of 2010. The Memorandum happened to be a bright illustration of EU-Russia relations. While there was a publicly expressed commitment to negotiate and cooperate, it was ambiguous for both sides the ways and dimensions in which the cooperation could be enhanced or at least initiated. The Meseberg Memorandum, as a product of cooperation between Berlin and Moscow, resulted in nothing.

Thus, by 2012 EU-Russian relations were at their crossroads, albeit a certain “warming period” between Moscow and Brussels, or Moscow and the West took place during Medvedev’s presidency. Different views on the way the relations were supposed to develop, normative and value contradictions, in particular, Russia’s discrepancy to the European common values in perception of the European officials, and diplomatic uncertainty regarding the common neighbourhood, all these factors, inter alia, served the role of strong brakes for development of

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52 I. Busygina, Russia-EU Relations and the Common Neighborhood: Coercion Vs. Authority, Post-Soviet Politics, Taylor and Francis, 2017, p.107
the bilateral relations between the EU and Russia. The personality of Dmitry Medvedev perceived domestically and internationally, as a young liberal politician, alleviated the crisis of the EU-Russian relations, but it did not cure the fundamental misunderstanding between the two parts.

2.4 The second Putin’s period from 2012 till present

The third presidential term of Vladimir Putin affected negatively the dynamic of EU-Russia relations. The Russian legislative elections 2011, that preceded the Presidential elections 2012 came amid considerable public discontent, caused by the suspicion the elections were conducted with significant falsifications in favour of the ruling party, United Russia, and its unofficial leader, Vladimir Putin. The Western politicians criticized the elections. Western criticism assured Russian elites that Western-sponsored “colour revolution” may happen in Russia itself. Among the other factors of the Russian political landscape that deteriorated relations of Moscow and Brussels were the issues of human rights in Russia, especially after the controversial legislative acts were adopted by the State Duma, for instance, the so-called “Gay propaganda law”. Besides, the contradictions between Russia and the West, such as the EU’s policy towards “common neighbourhood” or war in Syria, increased the tensions between the actors. The rapid development of the Eurasian Customs Union, which was established in 2010 and initially included Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, could be interpreted as an attempt to compete with the EU for influence in the ex-Soviet countries and as Moscow’s signal of not being interested to integrate itself in the EU institutions or agreements, instead of developing a separate integrational entity.

Thus, EU-Russian relations seemed to be far from the ideal for both sides long before the conflict in Ukraine erupted. Despite the numerous attempts to enhance cooperation, Russia and the EU fell prey to the absence of mutual understanding. Russia under three different presidents

57 As the officials stated, the purpose of the law is to secure children of the context claiming that homosexuality is a norm in society. Critics of the law consider it as a restriction of human freedom and an attempt of Russia officials to strengthen national ideology of traditional values.
58 Haukkala, “From Cooperative to Contested Europe? the Conflict in Ukraine as a Culmination of a Long-Term Crisis in EU-Russia Relations”.
attempted to establish a basis for comprehensive cooperation, to sustain and enhance the collaboration on many aspects of bilateral relations, but inadmissibility most of the Russian proposals for the EU, in particular in the security and defence dimension, significantly reduced a scale of cooperation. A certain fragmentation inside the EU due to different historical experience of neighbouring Russia also complicated the elaboration of consolidated policy towards Moscow. The EU’s efforts to use the democratic values and ideals as one of the bases for cooperation with Russia did play well for the bilateral relations due to the different perceptions of the role of the norms and values in global politics and their different interpretation by both sides. Thus, Russia’s initial efforts to become a partner or even ally of the West resulted in the frustration of the Russian political elites due to a restricted and restrained western reaction to Moscow’s wills. The events in Ukraine, among all, revealed such a frustration more explicitly and antagonistically.
3 Collection of data and selection of officials

3.1 Narrowing of Russian bureaucratic apparatus

The task to limit the entire group of Russian officials and politicians to a narrowed list of the individuals actively engaged in online communication and framing of the EU’s image seems to be complicated due to the lack of comprehensive and reliable statistics on the degree of media rating of particular Russian officials. The media rating is important for this thesis, since it is relevant to research online communication of those officials, who have considerable media coverage by national media, so their framing would be more influential to the public. The prominent non-governmental organizations of the social research in Russia, such as Levada-Center\(^59\) and Center for Independent Social Research\(^60\) or state-owned Russian Public Opinion Research Center\(^61\) have not conducted comprehensive research on the citation score of the whole group of Russian officials in mass media, results of which could be easily summarized. The other organization, which is analysing the mass media statistics, including from social media, the Medialogia Agency\(^62\), publishes periodically the media ratings of Russian politicians, such as governors, deputies of the upper and lower houses of the Russian Parliament\(^63\), and the ministries of the state departments. Nevertheless, there is no comprehensive list of Russian officials’ citation rating, that would cover the whole group of Russian politicians and officials. One more option to form such a list is to collect and summarize the findings of separate media ratings of separate groups of Russian officials, but it may be not reliable due to the discrepancy in the methodologies employed there.

The following procedure has been implemented to resolve this issue. First, the range of Russian politicians has been limited to the group of civic service officials. The first step excludes so-called non-systemic opposition, due to the specific focus of the thesis on Russian officials,

\(^{63}\) The Russian Parliament includes two chambers. The State Duma, as the lower house of the Parliament, and the Federation Council as the upper house.
while given the specifics of the Russian political system, the non-systemic opposition politicians cannot hold an official civic service post. Second, since this thesis deals with foreign policy framing, and it is at the state level the foreign policy is defined and handled according to Article 71 of the Russian Constitution of 1993, the officials of the federal level become the subjects for the analysis. Even though some of the regional officials in Russia are involved in international relations actions in a limited way, their influence on the setting of the Russian foreign policy agenda is ambiguous and needs to be researched more thoroughly in other studies, thus they are not included in this thesis.

The group of federal officials, however, should be defined more specifically. For instance, according to the Federal Law of the System of State Service of the Russian Federation of 2003, the system of state service includes state civic service, divided into federal-state civil service and state civic service of Russia’s administrative districts, and military service. To limit the list of the officials of the federal level, the Presidential Decree 32 of 11 January 1995 is applied as a pillar on which the following list is drawn. This Decree formalizes the key public posts of the Russian Federation.

The Presidential Decree 32 contributes to the selection of the officials for analysis by defining the core public positions from the entire group of federal officials from the Federal Law. Nevertheless, based on the calculations of the number of incumbents of the public posts, the following table illustrates the difficulty to determine an appropriate number of officials whose social media activities are relevant to be researched. First of all, the seemingly simple task to count an exact number of the officials within the Presidential Decree 32 happens to be more complicated by a possibility for an official to occupy concurrently two public posts, for instance in the State Duma or by constantly changing list of Chairs, deputies, or judges of the numerous federal courts. Besides, within the adopted timeline of the current research, a particular public post may be occupied by different officials, which results in a greater number of potential individuals to examine. Given the purposes of this study, solely the posts at the

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68 See Table 1.1., p.
level of the executive (ministers, chairs and so on) are selected as the ones supposed to be the most crucial for the decision-making process in Russia and consequently, those whose framing of an image of the EU might be more influential and noticeable in Russian public sphere. These positions are highlighted with grey in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1. Summary of the public posts of Russia from the Presidential Decree 32 by 2021

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public post</th>
<th>Number of incumbents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President of the Russian Federation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Deputy Prime Minister</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Prime Minister – Presidential Plenipotentiary Envoys to the Far Eastern Federal District</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Prime Minister</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Prime Minister, Chief of the Government Stuff</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister – Presidential Plenipotentiary Envoys to a Federal District</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Minister</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent Representative</td>
<td>&gt;200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the Federation Council (the Upper House of the Russian Parliament)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Deputy Chair, Deputy Chair</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair and his/her Deputy of the Federation Council Committee and Commission</td>
<td>&gt;60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of the Federation Council Committee and Commission</td>
<td>&gt;100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the State Duma (the Lower house of the Russian Parliament)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Deputy Chair</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Chair</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader of the faction of the State Duma</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair and his/her Deputy of the State Duma Committee and Commission</td>
<td>&gt;100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of the State Duma Committee and Commissions</td>
<td>&gt;200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the Constitutional Court</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Chair</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judge of the Constitutional Court</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Justice of the Supreme Court</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Chief Justice</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judge of the Supreme Court</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosecutor General</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the Investigative Committee</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Chair of the Security Council</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary of the Security Council</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissioner for Human Rights</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissioner for Entrepreneurs’ Rights</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest official of the subject of the Russian Federation</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the Accounts Chamber</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Chair</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of Board</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governor of the Bank of Russia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thus, those individuals, who had held a highlighted post in the period between 2014 and 2019, will form the list for the next round of selection.

### 3.2 Examination of social media presence

The incumbents of the selected public posts were examined on the presence in social media in the five most cited communication platforms of the Russian-language Web according to the data of the Medialogia Agency from August 2019\(^{70}\). It includes Instagram, VK, Telegram, Facebook, and Twitter. Albeit the most cited social media platform is YouTube, it is not covered due to the research’s focus on written material, but not video-recorded material. Below a brief description of the selected social media is presented.

Instagram is an American free photo and video sharing online platform. Users can upload photos and videos and share them with other followers or within a particular group of friends. The content can be viewed, shared, commented on by their friends on Instagram.\(^{71}\)

Vkontakte (VK) is a Russian online social media and social networking service providing its users with the tools to send messages, create and share the content, organize groups based on the user’s interests and the like.\(^{72}\) The platform was developed by prominent Russian IT developer, Pavel Durov.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chair of the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Chair</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary of the Central Election Commission</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of the Central Election Commission</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the Federal Court, Deputies, and Judges</td>
<td>&gt;100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>46 positions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>&gt;1000</strong>(^{69})</td>
<td><strong>&gt;1000</strong>(^{69})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^{69}\) In some cases, to count the precise number of incumbents happens to be an irresolvable challenge due to the lack of verified information regarding officials holding an office between 2014 and 2019, and reconciliation of two or more public posts’ responsibilities by one official concurrently. In the case the number of incumbents cannot be counted precisely, the sign “>” attached. The list of the website of the Russian state institutions, from which the relevant information for Table 1.1 was gathered, is located in the Appendix 1.


\(^{72}\) About Us, VK [website], https://vk.com/about, (accessed 10 March 2021).
Telegram is a messaging online platform for communication, created by Pavel Durov as well. It provides the instruments to send messages, photos, videos, files as well as to create groups and channels for broadcasting to unlimited audiences. In comparison with other platforms, this one is rather for communication than for social networking.

Facebook is an American online social networking service, providing its users with the tools to communicate, create and share content. This is the largest social network in the world.

Twitter is an American online communication service to communicate through the exchange of quick, frequent messages. People post “tweets”, which may contain photos, videos, links, and text.

It is worth noting that Russian authorities have been adopting a vast number of laws to increase their control over the information flow in social media. As a part of a large campaign to ensure and sustain state’s censorship in mass media in general, Russian officials, based on the enacted legislation, may force social media administrations to delete different kinds of information, such as drugs or suicide, and, to some extent, political manifestations, primarily from the non-systemic opposition. Since VK is located in Russia, this platform more often complies with federal laws on censorship, while the four others represent a more reluctance with regard to the requests of Russian authorities to delete illegal content. Due to this factor, Facebook and Twitter appear to be more popular among the opposition.

It is also necessary to determine which accounts of Russian officials are relevant for the analysis. To conduct a reliable overview of an official’s social media account, the following criteria have been enforced:

1. A social media account must be verified either by the corresponding social media administration by attaching a special sign to the owner’s account or by tracing the links from mass media materials or official websites of the deputies or their political parties.

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to a particular social media account. Depending on the results of the verification process a profile is labelled with the word “verified” or “not verified”.

2. The bottom line of the number of followers to consider a profile to be an object of research is one thousand. The profiles with fewer followers or without clear information regarding the number of followers were marked with the word “unknown”. The number of followers is rounded up to the nearest thousand.

3. If a particular official uses more than one of the five online communication platforms, the verified account with the biggest number of followers will be selected for the analysis.

Below is the case of Leonid Slutsky, Chair of the State Duma Committee on International Affairs in 2016-2019. He held the office within the timeframe of the research, and he had verified profiles in Telegram, Facebook, and Twitter, the last one followed by the biggest number of followers, thus his Twitter’s account posts between 2016 and 2019 were examined on the framing of the image of the EU.

Before coming to the above-mentioned conclusion, the following procedure was performed:

1. To search in Russian “Леонид Слуцкий” or English “Leonid Slutsky” on the Web. In the case of Slutsky, the State Duma’s official website is shown in the results of the search as one of the first links. The State Duma is the state institution at which he serves.
2. From the “Members” section of the State Duma’s website, the relevant information regarding Slutsky’s occupation and the term is presented.
3. Then he is investigated for personal accounts on the five social media platforms. There is also a personal website of Slutsky with three links to Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram77. While his Twitter account is verified by the administration of this social media, the links to his Instagram, Facebook, and Telegram accounts may be also found from different reports of mass media78 or state institution’s websites.79 The search of the information concerning his VK account does not lead to any results, as well as searching for his account in this social media itself. Consequently, four of five social media accounts are verified by the selected criteria, and since the biggest number of

followers emerges in Slutsky’s Twitter profile, this account becomes the object of analysis.

The results of this verification are in Table 2.1. The same procedure based on the aforementioned criteria was applied to all officials who held a highlighted public post from the Presidential Decree 32. Due to the massiveness of data, the results are summarized in Table 2.2 and placed in Appendix 2.

Table 2.1. Leonid Slutsky’s social media profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public post</th>
<th>Incumbent (2014-2019)</th>
<th>Instagram</th>
<th>VK</th>
<th>Telegram</th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>Twitter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the SD Committee on International Affairs</td>
<td>Leonid Slutsky (2016-2019)</td>
<td>Yes 16.000 Verified</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes 7.000 Verified</td>
<td>Yes 8.000 Verified</td>
<td>Yes 40.000 Verified</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the examination of the online presence of the relevant officials (Table 2.2.), and the verification of social media profiles, 36 officials formed the preliminary list of individuals whose texts will be analysed with post-structuralist discourse analysis. The list is formed in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3. The list of 36 officials who match the criteria for the selection of relevant social media account

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Post</th>
<th>Incumbent</th>
<th>Social media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
<td>Dmitry Medvedev (2012-2019)</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Minister of Construction, Housing, and Utilities</td>
<td>Mikhail Men (2013-2018)</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister of Culture</td>
<td>Vladimir Medinsky (2012-2019)</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister of Sport</td>
<td>Vitaly Mutko (2012-2016)</td>
<td>Instagram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister of Economic Development</td>
<td>Maxim Öreshkin (2016-2019)</td>
<td>Instagram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister of Digital Development, Communications and Mass Media</td>
<td>Nikolay Nikiforov (2012-2018)</td>
<td>VK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the FC Committee on Federal Structure, Regional Policy, Local Government and Northern Affairs</td>
<td>Dmitry Azarov (2014-2017)</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the FC Committee on Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>Konstantin Kosachev</td>
<td>2014-2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the FC Commission on Mass Media Interaction / Chair of the SD Committee on International Affairs</td>
<td>Alexey Pushkov</td>
<td>2016-2019 / (2011-2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the State Duma</td>
<td>Vyacheslav Volodin</td>
<td>2016-2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader of Faction of the SD (United Russia)</td>
<td>Sergey Neverov</td>
<td>2017-2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader of Faction of the SD (Communist Party of the Russian Federation)</td>
<td>Gennady Zyuganov</td>
<td>1993-2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader of Faction of the SD (Liberal Democratic Party of Russia)</td>
<td>Vladimir Zhirinovsky</td>
<td>2011-2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader of Faction of the SD (A Just Russia)</td>
<td>Sergey Mironov</td>
<td>2011-2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the SD Committee on Control and Regulations</td>
<td>Viktor Pinskii</td>
<td>2015-2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the SD Committee on Ecology and Environment Protection</td>
<td>Vladimir Burmatov</td>
<td>2017-2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the SD Committee on Economic Policy, Industry, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship</td>
<td>Anatoly Aksakov</td>
<td>2015-2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the SD Committee on Education and Science</td>
<td>Vyacheslav Nikonov</td>
<td>2013-2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the SD Committee on Natural Resources, Property and Land</td>
<td>Nikolai Nikolaev</td>
<td>2016-2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the SD Committee on Agrarian Issues</td>
<td>Nikolai Pankov</td>
<td>2011-2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the SD Committee on Health Protection</td>
<td>Sergei Furgal</td>
<td>2015-2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the SD Committee on International Affairs</td>
<td>Leonid Slutsky</td>
<td>2016-2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the SD Committee on Issues of Family, Women, and Children</td>
<td>Olga Yepifanova</td>
<td>2015-2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the SD Committee on Issues of Nationalities</td>
<td>Ildar Gilmudtinov</td>
<td>2016-2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the SD Committee on Issues of Nationalities</td>
<td>Gadzhimet Safaraliev</td>
<td>(2011-2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the SD Committee on Land Relations and Construction</td>
<td>Alexey Russkikh</td>
<td>(2011-2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the SD Committee on Labor, Social Policy and Veterans’ Affairs</td>
<td>Olga Batalina</td>
<td>(2014-2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the SD Committee on Labor, Social Policy and Veterans’ Affairs</td>
<td>Andrey Isaev</td>
<td>(2011-2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the SD Committee on Physical Culture, Sport and Youth Affairs</td>
<td>Mikhail Degtyaev</td>
<td>(2016-2019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the SD Committee on Security and Corruption Control</td>
<td>Irina Yarovaya</td>
<td>(2011-2015)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nevertheless, this list of 36 officials seems to be a redundant set of data for the analysis. Given the adopted criteria for the first stage of the selection procedure, some officials who happened to be on the list, may have the profiles with the content focused on the regional agenda of the constituency where he/she elected. Besides, some of the 36 officials obviously abandoned their profiles on social media. In order to analyse the most reliable and relevant data, additional criteria for the last stage of the selection procedure emerged:

1. Reference to the EU or its member-state. The appropriate for analysis profile should have at least one direct reference to the EU or its member-states in the period of 2014-2019. The posts with reference to “Europe” are likewise appropriate.
2. The accounts of regional dimension are not on the list (even though some politicians work at the federal level, his/her media account may be dedicated to the issues of his/her constituency).
3. “Survival” criterion. The examined profile is not supposed to be abandoned.

The results of the last stage of the selection are presented in Table 2.4. The table represents 10 Russian top-ranking officials whose texts in their social media profiles will be analysed.

Table 2.4. The final list of the Russian officials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Official Name</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Social Media Platform</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the SD Commission on Issues of Control over Income, Property and Property Obligations of the SD Deputies, Mandate Issues and Deputy Ethics</td>
<td>Natalia Poklonskaya (2016-2018)</td>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissioner for Human Rights</td>
<td>Tatyana Moskalova (2016-2019)</td>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissioner for Entrepreneurs’ Rights</td>
<td>Boris Titov (2012-2019)</td>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the Accounts Chamber</td>
<td>Alexei Kudrin (2018-2019)</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To sum up, the central elements of this chapter represent a step-by-step approach to define the relevant list of the officials and their social media accounts to research. First of all, it was necessary to limit the entire bureaucratic system of the Russian Federation to a small, but representative group of officials, with the appropriate amount of data to collect. The procedure of selection was primarily based on the Russian legislation with regard to the regulation of the state service, and on the determined criteria. The results of the collection of the data provided the list of 10 officials, summarized in Table 2.4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Post</th>
<th>Incumbent</th>
<th>Social media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
<td>Dmitry Medvedev (2012-2019)</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister of Economic Development</td>
<td>Maxim Oreshkin (2016-2019)</td>
<td>Instagram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the FC Committee on Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>Konstantin Kosachev (2014-2019)</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the FC Commission on Mass Media Interaction / Chair of the SD Committee on International Affairs</td>
<td>Alexey Pushkov (2016-2019) / (2011-2016)</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader of Faction of the SD (Liberal Democratic Party of Russia)</td>
<td>Vladimir Zhirinovsky (2011-2019)</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader of Faction of the SD (A Just Russia)</td>
<td>Sergey Mironov (2011-2019)</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the SD Committee on Education and Science</td>
<td>Vyacheslav Nikonov (2013-2019)</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the SD Committee on International Affairs</td>
<td>Leonid Slutsky (2016-2019)</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of the SD Committee on Security and Corruption Control</td>
<td>Irina Yarovaya (2011-2015)</td>
<td>VK</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4 Analysis of social media communication

The list of the selected officials, with the exception of Dmitry Medvedev, is divided into two groups. The first group represents the members of the governing party of the Russian Federation, that is United Russia. The second group consists of the members of the parliamentary opposition. Dmitry Medvedev appears, but is examined separately due to the greater importance of the public post he has held between 2014 and 2019. His account is analysed first.

4.1 Dmitry Medvedev

Dmitry Medvedev has been an active user of social media for years. He has verified accounts in the four online communication platforms of the list applied in this thesis. Between 2014 and 2019, Medvedev had held the office of the Prime Minister, being the head of two governments, formed in 2012 and 2018. Due to the wide spectrum of his responsibilities, as a head of the government, he has been in charge of numerous issues of Russian domestic and foreign policies, which are reflected in his social media posts. Medvedev represents, to a certain extent, a unique case within the framework of this paper, as he has two verified English and Russian languages Twitter accounts. At least with regard to foreign policy, the posts from both accounts are identical. Given this factor, the English language Twitter account is the one to be examined.

Medvedev’s Twitter posts regarding the EU’s images have first begun with the issues of sanctions, imposed by the EU in March 2014, after the referendum in Crimea and following integration of this region into the Russian Federation, which has been condemned by most of the members of the United Nations Security Council80 (UNSC) and General Assembly81 (UNGA). He characterized the sanctions as “illegitimate”82 and underlined that “they will
achieve nothing to help Ukraine”\textsuperscript{83}. The legislative basis, as well as the efficiency of the sanctions against Russia, has been systematically questioned by the Russian officials\textsuperscript{84,85}. In his other post, Medvedev highlighted that “the EU bears collective responsibility for the sanctions”\textsuperscript{86} and that Russia will “respond symmetrically”\textsuperscript{87}. Russia indeed imposed countersanctions, in particular, specific economic measures in 2014\textsuperscript{88}, that were thought to be as a sort of demonstration, primarily to the national audience, of Moscow’s potential to counteract in a manner causing financial costs for the EU member states. According to the data of the Levada-Center, at the time of imposing sanctions, 76% of the Russian respondents expressed positive or rather positive perception of the Russian counteractions\textsuperscript{89}. Thus, Medvedev has framed the EU as the organization that imposes illegitimate and ineffective sanctions, forcing Russia to respond.

Following Medvedev’s Twitter, the issue of refugees in the EU appears as one of the central matters in his messages. The first and the last Medvedev’s comments regarding the “Europe’s refugee crisis”\textsuperscript{90} were published in 2016, one of the most drastic years in the period of mass refugee migration in Europe, according to Eurostat statistics\textsuperscript{91}. He framed this event as a major challenge for the EU, labelling it as an “all-around fiasco resulting from the EU’s immigration policy”\textsuperscript{92}. To underline its severity, Medvedev even defined the camps, where the refugees

\textsuperscript{83} D. Medvedev (@MedvedevRussiaE), “Not only are #sanctions against #Russia illegitimate, but they will achieve nothing to help #Ukraine http://on.fb.me/1jTkvM8”, Twitter, 17 July 2014, twitter.com/MedvedevRussiaE/status/489760643076329472, (accessed 13 March 2021).


\textsuperscript{86} D. Medvedev (@MedvedevRussiaE), “The EU bears collective responsibility for the sanctions. We will respond symmetrically to any new decisions,” Twitter, 2 June 2015, twitter.com/MedvedevRussiaE/status/605774382347132928, (accessed 13 March 2021)

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.


were temporarily settled by local authorities, as “colonies in the heart of Europe”\textsuperscript{93}, thereby creating the image of Europe being colonized, i.e., conquered by refugees what underlined “a real danger to a common economic space, cultural space and even European identity proper.”\textsuperscript{94} Medvedev, therefore, has framed the image of the EU, suffered from uncontrolled immigration flows, caused by failed migration policy, and resulted in the so-called colonization of Europe. The image itself corresponds well with Russian public discourse on the refugee crisis in Europe\textsuperscript{95}.

The growing popularity and electoral successes of the populist organizations in the EU have received Medvedev’s attention and he ascribed this phenomenon to “the growing discontent with declining living standards, growing inequality, the destruction of traditional lifestyles, and most importantly from dissatisfaction with government action”\textsuperscript{96}. According to Medvedev, among the reasons for the rise of populism and radical forces in Europe, appears to be the destruction of traditional lifestyle. This Medvedev’s perspective is crucial for the identity construction of the EU since it refers to something that one could define as the value conflict. The dichotomy between traditional, conservative, and to some extent, orthodox values and the European values, or Western system of norms and values, has become an essential part of the Russian state propaganda for the last decade\textsuperscript{97}. Moreover, according to the statements of top-ranking Russian officials, the dimension of national values and traditions has become a sort of cultural battlefield between Russia and the West, and consequently, the values of “them” were considered to be inimical to Russian society\textsuperscript{98}. According to the predominant perspective in the Russian public sphere, the fallaciousness of European values and norms aggravated the crisis in which the EU has been brought in. Hence, there is one more image, that represents the EU to be built on morally erroneous values.

\textsuperscript{93} D. Medvedev (@MedvedevRussiaE), “We know all too well what happens when refugees from troubled regions create colonies in the heart of Europe”, Twitter, 15 February 2016, https://twitter.com/MedvedevRussiaE/status/699175204048793600, (accessed 15 March 2021).


Despite the ongoing crisis in EU-Russian relations, Medvedev systematically underlined that “we want sound, advanced relations with the US and the EU”\textsuperscript{99} and “there no objective obstacles to constructive cooperation between Russia and the EU”\textsuperscript{100}. In this dimension, two antithetical images were constrained. The image of Russia, as an actor that is open for negotiations and constructive cooperation, and the image of the EU, as the one opposed to a meaningful partnership between two actors. Interestingly, such relatively peace-making statements were first published at the beginning of 2016, after almost two years since the annexation of Crimea. This relatively neutral and open attitude towards the EU correlated with Russian public opinion on Europe, which became more positive by 2016. Nevertheless, concerning the framing of the EU’s image, the focus would be on the EU’s reluctance for an open dialogue with Russia, i.e., the Russian officials shifted responsibility for the resolution of the EU-Russia crisis onto European politicians.

Against the background of the framing of relatively negative images of the EU, Medvedev’s posts on bilateral relations are written in a more constructive and non-judgmental manner. The variety of the posts concerning bilateral relations ranges from brief and neutral announcement of official meetings, for instance, “Meeting with the speaker of Parliament of Finland Paula Risikko”\textsuperscript{101}, or more positive and informative expression of position on, for instance, “Russian-French ties continue to develop [despite Russia and the EU have been experiencing a difficult period in their relations]”\textsuperscript{102}. This priority on the bilateral relations with particular member states over the EU itself has been expressed not only in Medvedev’s social media accounts but also in the Russian foreign policy agenda itself. Considering the fact that EU-Russian relations are turbulent at present, the bilateral format of communication with European countries became more preferable for Russian diplomacy. Such a picturing, when relations with the EU emerged less prioritized than with its members, may represent an additional element of refocusing of


\textsuperscript{100} D. Medvedev (@MedvedevRussiaE), “The EU has been our important trade and economic partner. Despite the recent difficulties…”, Twitter, 5 March 2019, https://twitter.com/MedvedevRussiaE/status/1102830262461915137, (accessed 17 March 2021).


\textsuperscript{102} D. Medvedev (@MedvedevRussiaE), “Russia and the European Union are experiencing a difficult period in their relations. It is important…”, Twitter, 24 June 2019, https://twitter.com/MedvedevRussiaE/status/1143205013373804544, (accessed 17 March 2021).
public attention on those aspects of Russian foreign policy where it demonstrates more achievements. With regard to the construction of images, this focus on bilateral relations may be considered an attempt to picture the EU as a more second-rate partner than some European countries separately.

To summarize the findings from Medvedev’s Twitter account, the following list of the central images of the EU emerges:

- The EU imposes illegitimate and ineffective sanctions against us;
- The EU has been experiencing a drastic internal crisis, caused by the destruction of traditional lifestyle and inequality resulted in the rise of radicalism and massive refugee flows;
- The EU is built on erroneous moral values;
- The EU is not open to cooperation with us, while we demonstrate our openness to cooperate.

### 4.2 United Russia’s officials

The list of the officials from the ruling party of the Russian Federation includes 5 individuals who represent legislative and executive branches of Russian politics. Maxim Oreshkin, Russian Minister of Economic Development, Konstantin Kosachev, Chair of the FC Committee on Foreign Affairs, Alexey Pushkov, Chair of the FC Committee on Mass Media Interaction, Vyacheslav Nikonov, Chair of the SD Committee on Education and Science, and finally, Irina Yarovaya, Chair of the SD Committee on Security and Corruption Control. The analysis of the EU’s images that the five Russian officials have been framing will present the perspective of the ruling party, which is de facto headed by Putin.

**Maxim Oreshkin**

The post-structuralist discourse analysis is first applied to the most top-ranking official from the aforementioned group, Maxim Oreshkin. He had been Minister of Economic Development in Medvedev’s administration between 2016 and 2019. His experience in foreign policy, however, includes only several years of being the Special Representative of the Russian

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President on the issues of trade and economic cooperation with Japan. Some Russian media described him as a liberal\textsuperscript{104}, however, there is no verified information on Oreshkin’s political views.

Oreshkin’s Instagram account with approximately 23,000 followers poorly represents his attitude to the EU. Nevertheless, Oreshkin’s account is worth researching because it demonstrates explicitly one of the Kremlin’s attitudes to the cooperation with the EU, which may be formulated as “a priority to bilateral relations with particular EU member states over the EU itself”. Oreshkin regularly comments on the negotiations with national delegations from the EU. In most cases, they represent short, neutrally-formulated remarks, for instance, “\textit{With Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Economic of Luxemburg}”\textsuperscript{105}. He has also mentioned that “[\textbf{Russians}] continue our work to repair relations with the EU”\textsuperscript{106}, which emphasizes one more time the “self” image of Russia as the actor that endeavours to cooperate with the EU. Even though Oreshkin published some statements on bilateral meeting with delegations from Europe in a slightly more evaluative manner, for instance, “\textit{Positive discussions with [German] Minister Altmaier and German business community}”\textsuperscript{107}, it does not practically change the central purpose of his Instagram’s account, which seems to be limited to a simple demonstration of work-related issues of being Minister of Economic Development and some aspects of personal life. Nevertheless, his account reflects the preferences of Russian officials to deal with EU member-states separately.

\textbf{Konstantin Kosachev}

Even though the Facebook account of Konstantin Kosachev encompasses only 9,000 followers, the smallest audience among all selected officials, its relevance for the research question is unquestionable, due to Kosachev’s diplomatic career and high media rating, according to the data of Medialogia\textsuperscript{108}. Kosachev had held numerous positions in the Soviet and Russian

\begin{flushright}
Ministries of Foreign Affairs before 1999 when he became a deputy in the State Duma. In the State Duma, he has held posts related to the sphere of foreign policy. In 2014, he was appointed to the Federal Council109.

Kosachev systematically questions the sovereignty status of EU member states in respect of Brussels and the independence of the EU itself from the US. Presenting his comment on the contradictions between the EU and Hungary, he claims that Hungary’s manifestation of its independence is “Unusual for “new liberal order. “In the barracks of Transatlanticism, this is not the way things are done”110, which among other things, creates an explicit articulation of the EU as a military camp or barrack with strict discipline and hierarchy. With regard to European dependence on the US, Kosachev claims that Europeans saw “the “go” code”111 in American threat to impose sanctions on Turkey for purchasing Russian anti-air system and impose their own sanctions on Turkey by themselves. Elaborating on EU-US relations, Kosachev provides a historical example when a stalemate between the West and the East at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s has been transcended once “particular countries, including Germany and local social-democrats led by Willy Brandt, dared to disobey transatlantic ‘Big Brother’”112. Kosachev attempts to demonstrate that in the cases when European countries implement independent foreign policies, relations between Europe and Russia might overcome through any misunderstandings. Hence, Kosachev articulates the image of the EU both as the US’ puppet and as a barrack of not sovereign countries with strict hierarchy and obedience to Brussels.

Kosachev also comments on the issues of politics of history in the EU, specifically European history of the 1930s-1940s. He has published a relatively extensive statement on the European

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Parliament Resolution on Importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe\textsuperscript{113}, which claims that “this is a clearly disgraceful page of the history of most European states, which needs to be immediately corrected to please current myth construction in some countries, as well as with the context of anti-Russian attitudes in Europe, above all, in Eastern Europe”\textsuperscript{114}. He thinks that adopted date of the beginning of WWII (September 1, 1939) in the Resolution, “allow neglecting everything that preceded the war, including the agreements of European countries with Hitler, Czechoslovakia, dismembered by Germany and Poland...”\textsuperscript{115}. Even though Kosachev agrees with the message of the title of the Resolution, he underlines that “European memory is crucial for the future of the continent, but only true memory”\textsuperscript{116}. By presenting such a point, Kosachev creates a perception that history in Europe has fallen victim to politics and anti-Russian sentiments, especially in Eastern Europe. He mentions more regional examples of similar cases of politics of history in Estonia and Poland, which, according to him, prove that European countries fight with true history. The question of World War II, or the Great Patriotic War 1941-1945 in Soviet and Russian historiography, and the way the role of the Soviet Union in defeating Nazi Germany is presented in the West, represents one of the central and most emotional narratives in Russian public discourse. For contemporary Russian identity construction, the victory in WWII has become almost sacral and, consequently, any statement from the EU or its member states about the controversial role of the USSR during the war usually trigger a negative response from Russian politicians, media, or pro-state civic organizations\textsuperscript{117}.

The EU as a centre of anti-Russian sentiments may be considered as one more image, framed by Kosachev in social media. Kosachev presumes that during the European Parliament election in 2019 “there was no moaning about Russian interfering from the capitals [of European


\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.

states] because the [European] ruling elites did not fail, based on the election results\textsuperscript{118}.”

According to Kosachev, the severity and aggressiveness of accusations against Russia depend on the domestic situation either in the US or Europe\textsuperscript{119}. Russia seems to be a boogieman, articulated by European politicians to consolidate divided European society. He reflects on “professional Russophobes in the European Parliament”\textsuperscript{120} referring to a deputy from Latvia, Sandra Kalniete. Commenting on the poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal in 2018, Kosachev confidently states that “guilty in all past and future incidents have been already “appointed””\textsuperscript{121}, implying that Russia is automatically condemned by Western countries. This perspective of the EU which blames Russia for everything without solid justification due to considerable anti-Russian sentiments reflects a common perspective of Russian elites and serves as a sort of argument for Russian officials in the situations they have to defend themselves, for instance, in the case of the Skripals\textsuperscript{122}.

Nevertheless, in the context of widespread anti-Russian sentiments in the EU, Kosachev likewise attempts to present to its audience the non-consensus nature of such sentiments, especially, with regard to anti-Russian sanctions. Yet his rhetoric towards European countries is primarily harsh, Kosachev may presume that in some cases, some of the European countries might have a more relevant and adequate point on foreign policy matters. For instance, presenting his statement on the upcoming Normandy Format meeting on 9 December 2019, Kosachev stated that despite the US’ opposition “Paris and Berlin, apparently, have a more nuanced point of view [on the Ukrainian Conflict], so the summit may end with some results”\textsuperscript{123}.


\textsuperscript{119} Ibid


Kosachev claims that during his conversations and meetings with European officials or representatives of local business communities, they “mostly agree [with Kosachev]” and “almost all of them [representatives of German political parties] judge the effect of sanctions [against Russia] similarly.” A regular for Russian officials reference to suffered European business, which, however, have been trying to continue working with Russian business communities, finds its place in Kosachev’s Facebook as well, as he says that “German business, in comparison with politicians, continue to perform under these difficult circumstances in the Russian market.” Thereby, one may observe the image of some abstract politicians or businessmen from the EU, who still want to cooperate with Russia.

**Alexey Pushkov**

Alexey Pushkov represents another highly-cited Russian senator in the adopted list of this thesis. Align his previously examined colleague from the Federal Council, Pushkov’s political career is primarily related to foreign policy activity. He had held a vast number of positions in Russian political institutions and mass media, specialised on the issues of the foreign policy agenda. At present, he serves as the Chair of the FC Commission on mass media Interaction and even though this particular public post seems to be unrelated to the Russian foreign policy agenda, Pushkov regularly comments online and offline on different matters of Russian foreign policy or world politics in general, which makes his case fairly relevant and interesting.

In his Twitter account with 340,000 followers, Pushkov actively refers to the crisis that the EU has been experiencing. Pushkov explains the causes of such a crisis by both domestic and foreign challenges. For instance, he claims that “the split is typical for the EU. The unity is putative.” To support this argument, he also quite often writes about so-called “internal

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rifts” in the EU, referring to Euro sceptic sentiments in member-states or the (non)consensus on anti-Russian sanctions. Pushkov likewise refers to the refugee factor of the EU’s crisis, claiming that “potential millions of refugees loomed over the EU, as a sword of Damocles” or “Migrants were costly for Europe.” Thus, Pushkov, as some of the other examined officials, frames the image of the EU in a deep and fragmenting crisis, which is, as Pushkov considers, “the result of the long-lasting rule of liberal elites”.

The aforementioned split within the EU leads to the next image articulated by Pushkov, that is the non-consensual approach in the EU towards Russia, specifically with regards to anti-Russian sanctions. For instance, Pushkov pictures Emmanuel Macron, the President of France, elected in 2017, in a fairly positive manner, claiming that “Macron is looking to the future, while Merkel holds the past...hence the attitude to Russia is different.” Pushkov quotes Macron’s statement on the necessity for Europe “to build new rules of trust and security with Russia”, which is according to Pushkov, “the right message.” It is interesting how differently Pushkov pictures Merkel, who, according to him, stands in the way of Germany’s political shift in respect to Russia. Probably, it may be explained by Macron’s attitude to EU-Russian relations, which may be considered relatively favourable towards Russia.

Pushkov also quite frequently informs his online audience on numerous consultations, conversations, and meetings between Russian officials and European (more regularly national)

135 Ibid.
representatives, for instance, with the deputies of Finnish Parliament, “Parliamentary liaisons with Finland reached a new level...Given difficult relations with the EU, this is a good sign”137.

The question of the EU’s dependence on the diktat from Washington is also discussed by Pushkov. After Trump won the presidential elections in 2016, the relations between the US and the EU went through turbulent waters. One of the manifestations of such a turbulence, American sanctions against Nord Stream 2 and the EU’s reaction on them, finds its reflection in Pushkov’s Twitter. For instance, he explicitly characterizes Europe as a “hostage of the USA”138, claiming this situation will keep continuing until the EU develops effective mechanisms to respond to American sanctions. Pushkov questions the call for a more consolidated Europe which would be capable to influence world politics without guidance from other countries, expressed during Munich Security Conference 2019139, by asking “But how Europe will speak for itself if every time looks back at the US? “140.

Vyacheslav Nikonov

For comparison with the three previously analysed United Russia’s members, Vyacheslav Nikonov’s political career has been less focused on foreign policy. At the same time, his education and academic career in History and IR, numerous academic publications in these fields, active participation in academic conferences, TV- and academic debates on the issues of Russian foreign policy and global politics in general, as well as his kinship with the famous Soviet official, Vyacheslav Molotov141, all these factors contributed to the image of Nikonov as a politician in the field of foreign policy.

The image of the EU in the context of the terrorist threat that Nikonov pictures in his Facebook account with 14,000, is forged by focusing on two statements. According to Nikonov, the EU not only fails to counteract such a threat and its authorities “de facto lost control of the
security issues” but it is also resulted from the Brussels’ and particular EU member-states’ reluctance to promote international cooperation to fight transnational terrorism. Here Nikonov implies Russia the other side of potential anti-terrorism cooperation with the EU and the West in general. The idea of such a cooperation saturated Russian public discourse, and especially heavily in 2014-2015 years due to decreasing options to cooperate in other spheres with the West, Russian military operation in Syria, and increased risks of terrorist attacks as a result of the rise of Islamic State in the Middle East. The willingness of Russian elites to cooperate on this matter emerged explicitly in September 2015, when Putin called for an international coalition to fight ISIS. Even though it would be a mistake to claim that Putin’s call has led completely nowhere, the West and more specifically, the EU’s unwillingness to join such a coalition have been framed negatively by Russian officials for both external and domestic audiences. Moreover, they often criticize the West for inefficient measures against terrorism, even claiming that Western countries are to blame for the growing terrorist threats. For instance, Nikonov claims that “The US and Europe grant political asylum to terrorists that our special forces chase down.” Thus, Nikonov attempts to support the EU’s image in Russian discourse as the organization that fails to deal with terrorists and hampers Russia from counteracting this threat.

It is worth noting that Nikonov speculates on a so-called “systemic political crisis” that the EU has been experiencing. By referring to the systemic political crisis, Nikonov understands the three “subcrises” that he defines as “crisis of European idea, identity crisis and crisis of leadership.” He elucidates on the reasons for the first two crises by suggesting that “European people were robbed of [national narratives]” and have become “citizens of a

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148 Ibid.
149 Ibid.
faceless bureaucratic machine”. The crisis of leadership receives much attention from Nikonov as well. He states that “European democracy does not bring outstanding confident leaders” and, elaborating upon this, Nikonov mentions that top-ranking European leaders, such as Jean-Claude Juncker and Donald Tusk, “lost elections in Luxemburg” and “appeared in strong opposition in the home country” respectively. Nikonov elaborates in the same statement that “to vote for those who have no power and not to vote for those who have power has become the central principle of European democracy”. It seems that Nikonov mainly refers to the issue of sovereignty, while he is discussing such a systemic political crisis in Europe. Here one may observe not only the picturing of the image of the EU as not a sovereign organization, and specifically with regard to dependence of member-states of Brussels, but also European lack of strong leadership. Presumably, such a framing could be considered in the context of parallel comparison with strong and confident leadership in Russia, given simultaneous picturing of “us” through the framing of “them”. The point that may emerge by this elaboration concerns a sort of comparison between turbulent Europe with weak leaders and stable Russia with a confident and experienced president.

Irina Yarovaya

Although Irina Yarovaya represents an official far from foreign policy agenda, her radical legislative proposals on the issues of Russian sovereignty made her a name of an ultraconservative deputy of the Russian parliament in the eyes of the domestic audience. Yarovaya’s career has begun in a regional Russian prosecutor’s office, it has gained a political perspective once she joined the Russian United Democratic Party “Yabloko”, and then left “Yabloko”, and joined “United Russia” in 2007. Despite her past membership in an opposition party, nowadays Yarovaya is a well-known pro-Putin politician and the author of laws,

150 Ibid.
153 Ibid.
154 Ibid.
considered by some, to be repressive\textsuperscript{156}. Due to the criteria applied to the selection process of relevant officials, the timeline of Yarovaya’s online activity in VK has been limited to a two-year period, 2015-2016. Nevertheless, exactly in this period, Yarovaya has begun to receive considerable media attention due to her increased political activity.

One of the central images Yarovaya frames in her VK account refers to European values, an issue widely debated in Russian public discourse. Elaborating on a concept Yarovaya defines as a “humanitarian weapon”\textsuperscript{157} she claims that, “Europe’s recognition of the third gender … is a loss of moral sense and complete devaluation of themselves…destruction of moral values”\textsuperscript{158}. The question of the Western, including European, values and norms and their irreconcilability with widely-perceived more traditional values of Russia plays an important role for Russian authorities which is reflected in domestic state regulations\textsuperscript{159}. The great importance Russian authorities attach to the traditional values may represent an attempt to construct a new state ideology to replace the value vacuum of Russia as it emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, as during Cold War, the ideological sets of both sides of the conflict are built on mutual unacceptance. To a certain extent, the issue of European values for Russian officials represents a popular belief in Russian public discourse about increasing Nazi and fascists sentiments in the EU\textsuperscript{160}. Yarovaya comments on the case of Latvia, where “in Riga, the march of the Waffen-SS troops\textsuperscript{161} happened”, questioning how such an event could take place in a European state. Yet, this particular post of Yarovaya is formulated relatively neutrally without strict criticism towards the EU and represents rather an appeal, addressed to the EU, by publishing similar posts Yarovaya still contributes to the image constriction of the EU, and, in this case, it is the image of the organization in which, allegedly, Nazism comes back.


\textsuperscript{158}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{159}Основы государственной культурной политики, The President of Russia [Website], http://kremlin.ru/events/administration/21027, (accessed 22 March 2021).


\textsuperscript{161}Yarovaya implies the troops of the Latvian Legion, a military unit of the German Waffen-SS, created in 1943.

To summarize the images of the EU that the officials from the ruling party framed, the following list emerges:

- Cooperation with the EU is less prioritized than with its member-states separately;
- The EU is not only dependent on the US, but it also represents barracks of suppressed nations, obedient to Brussels;
- The EU attempts to rewrite European history in favour of anti-Russian sentiments;
- The EU is a centre of anti-Russian sentiments, albeit some European politicians, as well as business organizations, attempts to cooperate with Russia;
- The EU is in a systemic crisis. Brussels is unable to counteract internal and external challenges. European values are distorted, Nazi sentiments are increasing;
- The EU refuses to cooperate with Russia with regard to anti-terrorist cooperation.

4.3 Opposition perspective

In the list of the selected officials, the group of Russian parliamentary opposition includes 4 people: Gennady Zyuganov, the leader of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Zhirinovsky, the leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of the Russian Federation, Sergey Mironov, the leader of A Just Russia, and Leonid Slutsky, a member of Liberal Democratic Party. The group represents all three Russian parliamentary opposition parties, and it is examined on the construction of the EU’s images as a single entity, which may help to distinguish an opposition perspective on the Russian foreign policy agenda to the EU. The aim of the analysis of social media posts of the parliamentary opposition figures lies in an attempt to understand whether their articulation of the EU coincides with the officials from the ruling party.

**Gennady Zyuganov**

To begin with the leader of the biggest opposition faction in the State Duma, the Communist Party, and a long-term politician of Russia’s political landscape since its independence in 1991, Gennady Zyuganov, it is necessary to briefly explore his personality. Beginning his career in the Soviet Union in the 1960s, Zyuganov had gone through numerous posts of the

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163 Not to confuse with other left-wing Russian political party, Communists of Russia, legally registered in 2012 and led by Maxim Suraykin. For additional information, see: http://komros.info/english/
Soviet bureaucratic apparatus, and by the end of the 1980s, he became deputy head of the Propaganda Department of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and publicly emerged as a critic of the Gorbachev’s policy of Perestroika and Gorbachev itself164. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the foundation of a new political party, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, Zyuganov continued to criticise Yeltsin’s political and economic reforms, as well as Pro-western foreign policy. As an anti-liberal and anti-reformist conservative Zyuganov’s attitude on internal policy issues has predictably reflected his views on Russian foreign policy agendas. Zyuganov has favoured the adoption of more hostile foreign policies to the West, in particular, NATO, appealing to the explicit imperative of protecting Russia’s sovereignty and restoration of the former glory165. To some extent, his picture of the world with explicit anti-Americanism and political realism corresponds with ideological stands that date back to the Cold War.

The aforementioned foreign policy perspective of Zyuganov, however, appears to be out of the focus of his social media activities. Among the online communication services he employs, Zyuganov’s Twitter account covers the biggest audience with approximately 242000 followers as of December 2019. The leader of the Communists predominantly concentrates in his tweets on numerous issues of the Russian domestic policy agenda. Presumably, this concentration on domestic issues mirrors the growing concern of Russian citizens on domestic social issues, while foreign policy and international matters became secondary166. Nevertheless, he states that “Europeans are under the thumb/beneath the heel of Americans”167, thereby explicitly picturing the EU as an American puppet. This image, however, is not supplemented by any other posts in his Twitter profile, since Zyuganov concentrates on the domestic political agenda. The seldom posts on global politics or Russian foreign policies are dedicated to the West with a particular focus on the US and articulated in explicit Soviet narrative articulations

from the period of Cold War confrontation of socialism and capitalism. Overall, the EU is beyond Zyuganov’s online rhetoric.

**Vladimir Zhirinovsky**

The leader of the second parliamentary opposition faction in the State Duma, Vladimir Zhirinovsky, by contrast, comments foreign policy matters more substantially. Zhirinovsky, along with Zyuganov, the founder and permanent leader of one of the biggest opposition parties in the Russian Federation. He is considered by many scholars, politicians, and political journalists as an extreme far-right politician or even fascist, the image Zhirinovsky created himself in public debates, interviews, and his publications. Even though Zhirinovsky’s performances in Russian politics appear to receive much public and academic attention, it is his foreign policy views, however, that are more relevant to this thesis. As his top-ranking communist competitor in the Russian parliament, Zhirinovsky also promotes an expansionist, imperial attitude to Russian foreign policy, frequently referring to the territorial expansion of the Russian Empire as a foreign policy model to be followed.

The militaristic and offensive/defensive attitude of the leader of LDPR found its expression in his Twitter account with more than 1,400,000 followers, which is the biggest number of followers among all opposition leaders’ social media accounts. He represents the EU, both as a separate actor and as a part of the West, a belligerent rival of Russia, but which according to Zhirinovsky, is incapable of competition with Russia in terms of military resources and military expertise. Zhirinovsky’s aggressive and militaristic rhetoric reflects not only his views, but also mirrors a contemporary process of militarization of Russian society and securitization of domestic and foreign political agendas. As he writes while commenting on the beginning of the Russian direct military involvement in Syria, “Europe and the US are not able to fight”. Zhirinovsky underlines that the EU is afraid of Russia, publishing a post on the 9th of May.

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171 A. Borshchevskaya, “The Role of the Military in Russian Politics and Foreign Policy Over the Past 20 Years”, *Orbis (Philadelphia)*, vol. 64(3), pp. 434-446.
173 Victory day is a holiday in Russia and some post-Soviet countries to commemorate victory over Nazi Germany in 1945.
“...London – stroke, Paris – epilepsy...Berlin – no comments”174, thereby alluding to the probable reactions of European countries on the military parade in Moscow. The EU’s inability to fight relates not only to foreign policy issues but also to domestic threats, which are terrorism and uncontrolled flows of refugees, according to Zhirinovsky. However, with regard to the terrorist threat in Europe, Zhirinovsky expresses empathy rather than criticism. He appeals to cooperation with Russia to combat this threat together and even suggests the Europeans “to invite Russian special force units”175, underlining the anti-terrorist experience of Russian special forces. With regard to the refugee crisis in Europe, his attitude appears as fatalism and he predicts that “probably, we [Russians] will soon welcome European refugees at the railway stations of Moscow”176 because, as Zhirinovsky presumes Muslims will migrate to Europe and drive out “native-born Europeans”177.

One more image of the EU, articulated by the LDPR’s leader, occurs seldom, but it does not diminish its importance for examination of Russian public discourse on the EU. He states that “nowadays Europe is obedient and on a leash of the USA”178 or presumes that the riots in France, known as the yellow vests movement, are “organized by the USA”179. Another case is Poland’s decision to purchase American arms. Zhirinovsky explains such an agreement by Poland’s anticipation that “American master will like them for that”180. Such rhetoric may be interpreted as a demonstration of the widespread perception in Russian discourse of the EU as an American puppet181.

177 Ibid.
**Sergei Mironov**

The final in the list of Russian parliamentary opposition factions, A Just Russia, has been led by Sergei Mironov, who is a quite experienced Russian politician. He has been in Russian politics since 1994 and has achieved the probable peak of his political career in December 2001, when he was appointed by the Russian President as the Chair of the upper house of the Russian parliament. In 201, Mironov lost his post and became the leader of the parliamentary faction of A Just Russia in the State Duma. It is worth mentioning that Mironov’s first initiative as the chairman was to increase the presidential term from 4 to 7 years\(^{182}\). He also famously (within the scope of Russian politics) announced during the presidential election campaign in 2004, while also being among the registered candidates, that he would like to see Putin as the next president\(^ {183}\). Presenting an example of his loyalty to Putin from recent events of Russian politics, Mironov favoured the amendments in the Russian constitution, initiated by Putin in 2019, in particular the one that granted to the Russian constitution priority over international law\(^ {184}\). His foreign policy agenda represents a less expansionist attitude than Zyuganov’s and Zhirinovsky’s ones. He stands for promoting cooperation with other countries, including the EU and the USA, but on an equal basis, and focusing on the neighbouring countries, specifically, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Nevertheless, he has also mentioned the idea of a confederation of Slavic countries in the post-Soviet space, as well as the establishment of the Eurasian Union\(^ {185}\).

The EU appears to be scarcely presented in Mironov’s Twitter account with 272,000 followers. He focuses, above all, on the topics of the Russian domestic political landscape, especially the social issues of Russian citizens. Nevertheless, two distinctive frames emerged in his posts. First, he states that European sanctions against Russia are “against their economic interests”\(^ {186}\). Second, in the post in which he writes that “Germany wants the USA to exempt German


business community of anti-Russian sanctions”187, he underlines that “The central word is the USA. Cannot see any point to comment”188, thereby, implying to the unequal basis of the US-EU relations. Thus, two images may be defined more or less distinctively; the EU imposes sanctions against its economic interests and the EU as an American puppet.

Leonid Slutsky
Leonid Slutsky’s Twitter account with 38,000 finishes the list of parliamentary oppositionists. He has published the most considerable number of posts related to the EU and Russian foreign policy in general. This may be easily explained by the specifics of his political career with a clear focus on Russian foreign policy. Being LDPR’s member since 2000, he had been the deputy head of the Russian delegation in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), and the head of the SD Committee on Issues of CIS (2011-2016), and he has been the head of the SD Committee on International Affairs since 2016189.

Among the frames that Slutsky shares with his party leader are the European dependence on the USA, that is the EU as an American puppet. He explicitly claims that the German Chancellor Merkel “does not have enough political will and independence from the US”190 to admit “absurdity of anti-Russian sanctions”191. Commenting on the November 2015 Paris attacks, Slutsky published that “while Europe has been dancing to American tune, considering Russia “aggressor”, the true enemy, ISIS, struck in the heart”192. These remarks are only two examples among numerous others with a similar point – the EU is dependent on the US and fails to implement independent foreign policy.

Russian officials also attempt to represent the EU as a politically fragmented organization on the questions of necessity and efficiency of anti-Russian sanctions. Given his networking with European politicians and officials, Slutsky regularly expresses his confidence in the

188 Ibid.
191 Ibid.
existence of a certain group of European politicians who would rather agree with Russia’s perspective on the crisis in Ukraine, on sanctions, and on EU-Russian relations in general. For instance, Slutsky comments on the signing of the Minsk II agreement in 2015, by underlining that “Western myth of “Russia is the aggressor” is falling apart...European politicians are seeing things clearly”\(^193\). If a European politician expresses a neutral or even positive remark on Russia or visits the country itself, Slutsky may publish a post on these matters to demonstrate to his audience some examples of more favourable towards Russia approaches from Europe. Former French president Nicolas Sarkozy’s statement on the inevitability of the EU-Russian cooperation\(^194\), Merkel’s remark on the necessity to build security in Europe together with Russia\(^195\), Marine Le Pen’s\(^196\), Thierry Mariani’s\(^197\) and Karlheinz Kopf’s\(^198\) visits to Russia, all these relatively minor events in the framework of contemporary EU-Russians relations find their reference in Slutsky’s Twitter. These posts appear to demonstrate that Europe is struggling to keep consensus on its attitude towards Russia, whether it is sanctions or other matters of bilateral relations. In this regard, Slutsky’s reference to “adequate powerful groups of Europe”, who understand inefficacy and foulness of sanctions against Russians, according to Slutsky, represents a common element of Russian public discourse to demonstrate a failure of Obama’s policy to isolate Russia, adopted immediately after referendum in Crimea in 2014\(^199\).

Last but not least, the normative or value-orientated EU’s image appears in Slutsky’s Twitter. He constructs the image of the EU as the actor, who applies double standards to other actors of global politics, in particular to Russia. Slutsky states that “...we cannot hear objections from Europe and the US. Oh, yes, they specialize only on Russia”\(^200\), implying the EU and the US allegedly neglected Ukraine’s decision to halt human rights protection in the Donbass region, 


because such objections are aimed solely at Russia. This comment mirrors an important element of Russian public discourse on the EU and the West in general, as *actors adopted double standards approach in their foreign policies to Russia or other countries*. One of the explicit examples from Russian public discourse on this matter occurs amid debates on the West’s rejection to admit the referendum results in Crimea in 2014, while at the same time, the majority of Western countries have been recognizing the independence of Kosovo\textsuperscript{201}.

Hence, by summarising the central images of the EU that the representatives of Russian parliamentary opposition have framed, the following list emerges.

- The EU is an American puppet and cannot implement independent foreign policy, based on its national interests;
- European anti-Russian consensus is fiction. Sanctions against Russia, by more and more European politicians considered, appear to be inefficient and counterproductive;
- The EU’s foreign policy is based on double standards;
- The EU’s capabilities to fight (primarily, against terrorism) and to resolve internal issues (refugee crisis) are limited;
- The EU is afraid of Russia.

5 Conclusion

5.1 Discussion of the results

The findings resulted from the application of post-structuralist discourse analysis to social media activities of the 10 selected officials represent quite a wide spectrum of issues of European internal and foreign politics. Russian officials seem to be primarily focusing on the domestic agenda of the EU, emphasizing the challenges the Union has been experiencing lately. With regard to the foreign policy agenda of the EU, the selected officials predictably concentrate on relations with Russia and the degree of the EU’s political independence of the US. Interestingly, the EU’s images that Russian officials framed mirror the contemporary and former issues of Russian domestic and foreign politics. This chapter summarizes the central images of the EU, demonstrates their correlation with Russian politics, and provide answers to the research question and subquestions.

To begin with the image of the **EU as an organization undergoing a comprehensive crisis**, it is worth emphasizing that the analysed officials focused on different aspects of the European crisis. They presume that such a crisis affected the EU in many dimensions. They picture the crisis as political, emphasizing the rise of radicalism, populism, and even Nazism, as well as weak leadership, as social, caused by growing inequality, as value-normative, due to destruction of traditional lifestyle, and as a security crisis, resulted in massive refugee flows and increased terrorist threat. By exploring the topic of the EU’s crisis, Russian officials intentionally or inadvertently frame an opposite picture of relatively stable Russia, governed by strong and confident leadership by Vladimir Putin. Stability in general, as a national value, has become a sort of political asset for Putin, and the origins of the evolution of stability in a political asset may be traced back to the 1990s and 2000s. That period of Russian history is presented in more detail in the historical context chapter. Concerning the stability as a Putin’s political asset and its correlation with the instability of the EU, it is necessary to understand that the majority of Russians\textsuperscript{202} value social and political stability and largely associate it with

\textsuperscript{202} It is important to consider that the ratio of the Russian citizens who value Putin’s stability is depending on many factors, such as age, education, religion, sex, urban and rural areas and other factors.
Putin, according to the data of public surveys\textsuperscript{203}. Russian officials periodically emphasize the value of stability, for instance, by referring to this concept to justify voting for constitutional amendments\textsuperscript{204}.

From the aforementioned constructed image of comprehensive instability of Europe, one more image of the EU may be derived, which is likewise present in online communication of the selected officials, that is \textit{inability of the EU to resolve their domestic security issues, in particular, terrorism and the refugee crisis}. While the factor of refugees seems to recede from the attention of Russian officials once its peak of severity had moderated for Europe in 2015-2016, the problem of the terrorist threat in Europe did not lose its relevance. Such a focus of Russian officials on the terrorist threat in the EU and on Europe’s powerlessness in the light of such a danger to sustain domestic security mirrors not only Russian discourse on terrorism but also the foreign policy agenda of the Russian Federation. The period of the 1990s in Russia is characterised, among all, by numerous terrorist attacks against civilians and the military, and of course, by the First Chechen War. However, since the 2000s, the number of terrorist attacks has been decreasing\textsuperscript{205}, the Chechen region was pacified and more and more Russians have become confident in the authorities’ ability to protect them from such a threat, albeit with a two-year decline of trust in the government with regard to this in 2010-2011\textsuperscript{206}. Additionally, by framing the EU’s inability to counteract terrorists, Russian officials, may be considered as simultaneously praising the successes of the Russian authorities in this dimension. Besides, the criticisms of Russian officials on European difficulties in combatting the terrorist threat are usually accompanied by condemnation for the EU’s reluctance to cooperate with Russia in the area of anti-terrorist operations. This refers, above all, to one of the central elements of the Russian foreign policy agenda, that it stresses international cooperation against terrorism, the concept Russian officials have been promoting even before the Ukrainian Crisis in 2014\textsuperscript{207}.


\textsuperscript{207} Hedenskog, “Russia and international cooperation on counterterrorism”, p.24
The European reluctance to cooperate with Russia on the matters of anti-terrorism, at least to the extent Russian officials consider adequate, leads to the next image, as determined during the research. While Russian officials systematically claim their determination to cooperate with the EU, Europe itself refuses to reciprocate. At least this is the way it is presented by the examined officials in their social media. European officials, in turn, regularly declare their determination to overcome the contemporary crisis between the EU and Russia and to cooperate with Moscow in general, but they often connect such a determination with the appeal to Russia to implement the provisions of the Minsk agreement. Russian officials, for their part, disagree with such an approach since they deny being involved in the conflict in Eastern Ukraine and refuse to consider themselves as a part of the Minsk agreement. Consequently, the responsibility for the current diplomatic stalemate is assigned to the EU and this point of view is predominantly presented in the Russian public sphere.

Following the theme of cooperation between the two actors, Russian officials also claim on the priority of bilateral cooperation with the EU member-states separately, only then with the union itself. Yet, for some politicians and academics, such a perspective seems to be aimed at the splitting of the EU, a sort of divide et impera principle of Russian diplomacy, it may probably be explained by a simple hands-on approach. Russia obviously has a different history of cooperation and co-existence with the EU member states, as well as different volumes of bilateral trade. The attitudes to Russia also vary in European countries. While the EU unanimously extend the sanctions against Russia every six months since 2014 and generally represents a united stand with regard to Russia’s status in the Ukrainian conflict, Russia still may encounter a more favourable perspective from some European countries. When such a perspective from Europe emerges, it is usually actively covered by Russian Media or Russian

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213 Ibid., p.40.
officials’ statements to demonstrate to Russian citizens that Russia still has some “friends” in the EU\textsuperscript{214}.

Picturing a hypothetical group of Russia’s “friends” in the EU member states and institutions leads to other image articulated by Russian officials. Yet, by claiming that some people in Europe share a more constructive approach towards Russia and consider anti-Russian sanctions to be an ineffective instrument, Russian officials simultaneously represent the EU as a \textbf{Russophobic organization}. While the latter image may be considered as an explicit example of binary logic of Russian officials, since they tend to label any foreign actor who is relatively rival to Russia with a “Russophobe” mark\textsuperscript{215}, this attempt to demonstrate that some abstract people within the EU are either pro-Russian or at least less critical towards Russia seems to be aimed to alleviate such an adamant negative image of Russophobic Europe. Hence, for Russian domestic discourse, it creates an image of hostile Europe, where, however, \textbf{unanimity on the matters of relationship with Russia is lacking}, the image which is extensively promoting by Media and officials\textsuperscript{216}.

According to Russian officials, widespread anti-Russian sentiments in the EU is one of the reasons why \textbf{Europe attempts to rewrite European history}. Some of the analysed officials dedicate quite extensive comments on certain decisions of the EU member states concerning, for instance, the role of the Soviet Union at the beginning of WWII. In such comments, they underline that the fight with history, which the EU has been engaged in, aims to trivialize the decisive role of the Soviet army in the defeat of Nazi Germany and to satisfy so-called Russophobic elements in Europe, especially in Eastern European countries. The theme of the Soviet role in the Second World War represents a crucial element of contemporary Russian state propaganda to consolidate the society\textsuperscript{217} and, in general, seems to be a sacral issue for the Russians\textsuperscript{218}. Hence, the claims from Russian officials or from mass media about another case

of rewriting European history by Europe towards a more negative perception of the USSR’s contribution to the beginning of the conflict may obviously result in the strengthening of a negative image of the EU in Russian society.

The aforementioned images of the Russophobic EU and European “rewriters” of the history may be also considered through the prism of picturing of the EU being afraid of Russia, the image appeared explicitly in Zhirinovsky’s Twitter. Even though such a frame has been identified in a Twitter account of the official who has quite nationalist and expansionist views, this image is worth underlining since it presumably demonstrates an important element of self-perception of a greater part of contemporary Russian society. It is rather not about to be a country that causes fear, but a country whose place in global politics as a great power is admitted and respected by other actors. Even though contemporary Russia probably incomparable with the Soviet Union and Russian Empire in terms of political, economic or military influence, the elites and the society in general still consider themselves as citizens of great power. In this context as well as the current deterioration of relations with the West, the picturing of foreign opponents to be afraid of “us” and active media coverage of Russian achievements in global politics and demonstrations of military units and technologies might correlate with Russian domestic discourse on military glory of Russia.

The EU’s independence, or more precisely, the alleged dependence on the US has become a popular subject to discuss for Russian officials in their online communication. Summarizing numerous online messages of the selected officials concerning this issue, the central point is that the EU fails to obtain sovereignty from Washington and therefore the Union implements its policy strictly in line with the US national interests. Such a statement happens to be both a disappointment and rebuke of the EU. Disappointment is primarily related to the fact that Russia would prefer to see Europe as a more independent actor from the US as well as NATO. Russian elites probably consider that in that case, it would be relatively simple to deal with the EU, since Russia has more experience of peaceful and productive cooperation with European countries than the US. For instance, even under current circumstances of the deterioration of relations with the West, the relations with some European countries are

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relatively more satisfactory for Russia, then with the US\textsuperscript{221}. As for the rebuke, it is probably related to the demonstration to domestic and foreign audiences of comparison of sovereign and independent “\textit{us}” and non-sovereign and dependent “\textit{them}”. Interestingly, that such a comparison is partially reflected by Russian officials through the 1990s period of Russian history. In Russian domestic discourse, the 1990s is labelled not only as social, political and economic chaos but also as the period of neglecting of national interest in the favour of the West. Financial and humanitarian aid from the West as well as Western recommendations and advice with regard to the reformation of the state institutions to democratize the state and society are nowadays generally considered as humiliating events of national history. Subsequent Putin’s presidencies, by contrast, are perceived as a certain restoration of national sovereignty in Russian discourse\textsuperscript{222}. Thus, by demonstration of “\textit{them}”, i.e., Europe being a non-sovereign actor of global politics, Russian officials simultaneously emphasize the sovereignty of “\textit{us}”.

The European values, concerning primarily family and gender issues, are framed very negatively by Russian officials. Medvedev’s statement on the destruction of traditional lifestyle in Europe, or Yarovaya’s remark on the destruction of moral values represent \textbf{the EU as an organization with erroneous, immoral values}. With regard to this image of the EU, the question is whether such criticism of European values may be explained by an attempt to represent an antagonistic “\textit{them}” in a negative manner to the foreign public or is this articulation primarily aimed at the domestic audience? The so-called “distorted” European values have become a regular topic of debate for Russian officials, politicians, and journalists. Amid such debates, regular appeals are announced by the officials to protect traditional values in Russia\textsuperscript{223}. It might be difficult to understand the reasons that have led Russian officials to adopt and to promote traditional values on the Russian domestic agenda, but one may consider that such focus on values represents an attempt to build an ideological basis for consolidating Russian society and promoting a Russian ideological set abroad. Such a basis built among other things on the antagonism with Western values correlates with a gradual growth of the number


\textsuperscript{223}“Putin calls for tighter control over propaganda promoting non-traditional values in Russia”, \textit{TASS}, 3 July 2020, https://tass.com/society/1174575, (accessed 7 April 2021).
of Russians who refuse to consider themselves as Europeans\textsuperscript{224}. With this regard, Lotman’s concept of Russia’s dualism is highly relevant, since such a normative and value antagonism with the West, which Russian officials construct discursively and legally, represents an explicit binary logic of worldview, where there are traditional and correct values of “us” and distorted and even hostile values of “them”. To some extent, it may refer to the ideological confrontation between the West and the USSR during the Cold War. Presumably, it may be also explained by the personal values of Russian elites, but this factor is difficult to explore, and it would require separate research. Nevertheless, the criticism of European values, expressed by Russian officials in their social media accounts, correlates with the general picture of Russian public discourse on traditional values at home. And finally, double standards of European diplomacy may be also considered as an element of this criticism of European values and norms, as it is presented by Russian officials, among all, by comparing reactions of some European countries on the referendum in Kosovo and Crimea.

To summarize the discussion of the images, identified during the research, it is important to note that Russian officials seem to comment on the issues the EU domestic and foreign agendas fairly uniformly, within a narrow scope of variation. It is even rather different focus some politicians may choose to describe a particular issue, while the general perspective is quite monolithic but with explicitly negative framing. Such a finding might be fairly self-evident for the majority of individuals, who familiarized with the current development of Russian domestic and foreign politics and considering the narrowness of political pluralism within the state institutions in Russia. This, however, does not mean for sure that Russian officials are forbidden to publicly claim positive evaluations of the EU and its domestic or foreign policies. It is rather correlated with the current status of EU-Russia relations, which are widely considered to be at their lowest point since the end of the Cold War, which consequently, contribute to the negative framing of the EU by Russian officials, focusing on different negative aspects of the EU’s internal and external agendas. It would probably be more reasonable to explain the officials’ negative and monolithic framing not by a restrictive decree from Kremlin, albeit this factor cannot be ignored completely, but rather by a modern normative mainstream within Russian elites. An official who frames primarily negative images

of the EU or any other foreign or domestic opponent might have more opportunities to be covered by national media, and potentially, she/he might obtain political and electoral capital.

As one may observe from the discussion of the images above, the negative framing of the EU prevailed in online communication of the 10 selected officials. Russian officials have been picturing the EU, focusing on the foreign and domestic challenges the Union has been experiencing lately. They have mentioned the rise of radicalism in Europe, rewriting European history, distorted values and norms, internal tensions between the EU member-states, the refugee crisis, and terrorist threat. Russian officials have often claimed about the EU’s inability to resolve internal issues and to adequately respond to terroristic attacks. With regard to the EU’s foreign policy, the selected officials primarily focused on EU-US relations and EU-Russia relations. The former issue was mainly related to the non-sovereignty of Europe of the US, while the latter concerned anti-Russian sentiments within the Union and the EU’s reluctance to cooperate with Russia.

Nevertheless, some of the examined online comments of the officials may be considered neutral or even, to some extent, positive. Russian officials systematically stated that some European officials or representatives of civil society supported Russia’s perspective on EU-Russia relations or even on the conflict in Ukraine. Some of the posts published by the researched subjects covered various aspects of bilateral cooperation with the EU and, especially, the EU member-states, such as meetings, conferences or negotiations on particular matters, and how they have written such posts may be considered quite neutral. Positive remarks from Russian officials towards Europe emerged in the cases when a particular European official shared a positive perspective towards Russia or a negative one towards the EU or the US. For instance, Emmanuel Macron has received cautious acclaim from Alexey Pushkov, due to the attempts of the French president to build relations with Russia less antagonistically than before, or his comments on “the brain death of NATO”. Nevertheless, this neutral or relatively positive framing of the EU or its particular members happened to be a rare case compared to predominant negative framing.

The research revealed concurrent framing of Russia in online communication of the selected officials. The images of the EU, which Russian officials pictured, mirrored to some extent, different aspects of Russian foreign and domestic politics. By stressing the negative aspects of the EU’s internal and foreign politics, they had been simultaneously emphasising a drastic difference with Russia, of course, to the credit of the latter. For instance, European instability against Russian stability, or the EU dependence on the US against Russia’s sovereignty. Based on the results of the examination of the correlation between the EU’s frames and Russian domestic discourse, it seems that most of the presented strengths of Russia compared to the pictured weaknesses of the EU were linked by the selected officials to the consequences of strong leadership in the person of Vladimir Putin. Thus, the construction of “them” happened in parallel with the construction of “us”.

To conclude this chapter, it is also necessary to present the results of testing the hypothesis of the research:

**H1**: The Russian officials articulate the EU’s images in the binary logic, as strictly negative or strictly positive

**H1a**: The Russian officials articulate strictly negative images of the EU

The assumptions that Russian officials frame the EU in a binary manner, as it could be determined based on Lotman’s dualism of Russia, and that it will be strictly negative framing have been disproved. Yet, the negative framing of the EU prevailed, some of the selected officials published neutral or relatively positive comments towards the EU, its member-states or particular politicians. Even though neutral or positive picturing were primarily aimed at those who questioned European integration or Transatlanticism, it is still an element of the construction of “them”, which should be considered. And of course, the presence of negative, neutral and positive framing of the EU and its member-states proves the non-dualistic nature of Russian officials’ view of the EU.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that a certain dualism is present in the Russian officials’ framing of the EU. The findings demonstrate quite an antagonistical character of the articulations, which are assigned explicitly to the EU and implicitly to Russia. The emphasis on significant differences between Russia and the EU contributes to the discursive splitting between the two entities, as it is presented by Russian officials and generally correlates with
prevailing narratives in Russian domestic discourse on Russia being different of Europe culturally and politically. Such a phenomenon corresponds to a certain extent with Lotman’s concept of Russia’s dualism.

5.2 Final remarks and further research

Two actors of global politics, the EU and Russia, have been experiencing a drastic deterioration of bilateral relations since the crisis in Ukraine erupted in 2014. Such a deterioration, however, became drastic exactly in 2014, while its relatively gradual development could be traced back to the very beginning of the establishment of bilateral relations between two “newcomers” of global politics, considering their legal basis. The year 2014 represents a sort of trigger, which revealed accumulating for many years mutual contradictions between Europe and Russia. The linguistic representation of such contradictions appeared, among all, in the mass media. In addition to the traditional mass media means of communication between the citizens and officials, social media became a popular instrument to distribute information on various matters of domestic and foreign politics, in particular, on the current status of EU-Russia relations. Using their social media accounts, politicians from both sides have been commenting on various aspects of bilateral relations between Russia and the EU, which in turn, contributed to the identity construction of these actors in corresponding domestic discourses. With regard to the Russian public sphere, the comments or remarks on Europe which local officials present in mass media, including online platforms of communication, may provide academic communities and politicians with valuable insight into the predominant worldview of Russian elites on the relations with the EU. The potential value of such an insight lies in, above all, in familiarisation of the ways that Russian decision-makers may perceive the EU. If their perceptions, at least their public appearance, are clear enough, it may contribute to a better understanding of Russia’s perspective of relations with the EU and the West in general. In this paper, some predominant images of the EU are revealed to demonstrate how Russian officials view the EU and how they construct its image for the domestic audience. The online communication of the selected officials on the EU and the West, in general, demonstrates a prevailing negative framing of Europe, albeit with some rare cases of neutral and positive framing. It is also revealed that Russian framing of the EU mirrors to some extent the aspects of Russian domestic politics, constructing “us” through the picturing of “them”. The identified images of the EU contribute to familiarisation with the prevailing views on Europe among
Russian elites, as well as their evaluation of Russia’s advantages in the context of the conflict with Europe. These results may broaden the scope of the research on the various matters of EU-Russia relations, and to a lesser extent, on the issues of Russian politics.

The issues, left beyond the scope of this research, may be explored in further research. It would be interesting to compare if there is a difference in the manner officials comment on various aspects of foreign and domestic politics online and in traditional mass media. Does online communication tend to be more emotional, critical and public than through the traditional means of communication with the citizens? Besides, it would be valuable for the research of Russian politics to explore how relations with Europe is pictured by journalists both from state-owned and independent mass media. Further research could also elaborate on the evolution of Russia’s framing of the EU and the distribution of negative, neutral or positive framing among member-states. Finally, since the picturing of foreign opponents from the Russian perceptive is researched, one could analyse how European officials, in turn, frame Russia or other actors of global politics. Hence, there is a wide spectrum of potential academic research, partially due to the overlap of different academic fields in this paper.

Given the diplomatic crisis between Russia and the West, the role of identity construction of “us” and “them” has gained greater importance for Russian and Western politicians. Such a process aims both at domestic and foreign audiences and could be considered as an element of propaganda wars between the sides of the conflict. Nevertheless, framing of the opponent should not be perceived simply as another weapon the countries obtain to counteract each other, because this process represents a multidimensional phenomenon and, for instance, it may also reveal domestic issues of a particular country. Russian officials reflected various aspects of Russian politics and Russian history through the picturing of the EU with online instruments. An insight in identity construction in a particular country may result in many findings for academics, politicians and journalists in addition to familiarisation with the views the elites of such a state could share with respect to other actors of global politics. This thesis explores only a part of potential dimensions related to identity construction through online communication, while broader research may be undertaken with more resources that exceed a master’s paper.
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Appendix 1. The list of the sources used to gather data for Table 1.1.


Appendix 2. Complete Table 2.2.

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<td>Chair of the FC Committee on Economic Policy</td>
<td>Dmitry Mezentsev (2017-2019)</td>
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<td>Chair of the FC Committee on Agriculture and Food Policy and Environmental Management</td>
<td>Alexey Mayorov (2019-2019)</td>
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<td>Chair of the FC Committee on Social Policy</td>
<td>Valery Ryazansky (2011-2019)</td>
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<td>Lilia Gumerova (2019-2019)</td>
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<td>Dragunkina Zinaida (2011-2019)</td>
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<td>Chair of the FC Committee on the Rules of Procedure and Parliamentary Governance</td>
<td>Vyacheslav Timchenko (2019-2019)</td>
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<td>Vadim Tulpanov (2012-2017)</td>
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<td>Chair of the FC Commission on Control over the Reliability of Information of Income and Property, submitted by the Deputies</td>
<td>Yury Vorobiev (2012-2019)</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>Chair of the FC Commission on Protection of State Sovereignty and Prevention of Interference in the Internal Affairs of Russia</td>
<td>Andrei Klimov (2017-2019)</td>
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<td>Chair of the FC Commission on Legislation Support for the Development of Mechanical</td>
<td>Sergey Mitin (2017-2019)</td>
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<td>Chairperson/Commission</td>
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<td>Engineer for Agriculture and Processing Industry</td>
<td>Alexey Pushkov</td>
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<td>Chair of the FC Commission on Mass Media Interaction</td>
<td>Vyacheslav Timchenko</td>
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<td>Chair of the FC Commission on Improving Legal Regulation of State Control and Municipal Control in the Russian Federation</td>
<td>Vladimir Kozhin</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>Chair of the FC Commission on the Legislation Regulation of Cybersecurity Issues and Development of Digital Technologies</td>
<td>Alexander Babakov</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>Chair of the FC Commission to Exercise Parliamentary Control over the Implementation of a Comprehensive Plan for the Modernization and Expansion of the Main Transport Infrastructure by 2024</td>
<td>Lyudmila Bokova</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>Chairperson of the FC Commission on the Development of Digital Society</td>
<td>Iliyas Umakhanov</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>Chairperson of the FC Commission on Monitoring the Participation of the Russian Federation in the World Trade Organization and the Customs Union</td>
<td>Vyacheslav Volodin</td>
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<td>Name</td>
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<td>(2016-2019)</td>
<td>Sergey Neverov (2017-2019)</td>
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<td>Gennady Zyuganov (1993-2019)</td>
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<td>Chairman of the SD Committee on Control and Regulations</td>
<td>(2016-2019)</td>
<td>Olga Savastianova (2016-2019)</td>
<td>Yes Unknown Not verified</td>
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<td>Viktor Pinskii (2015-2016)</td>
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<td>Vladimir Burmatov (2017-2019)</td>
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<td>Anatoly Aksakov (2015-2016)</td>
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<td>Nikolai Nikolaev (2016-2019)</td>
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<td>Pavel Krasheninnikov (2016-2019)</td>
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<td>Vladimir Pligin (2003-2016)</td>
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<td>Yevgeny Moskvichev (2011-2019)</td>
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<td>Iampolskaya Elena (2018-2019)</td>
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<td>Vladimir Shamanov (2016-2019)</td>
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<td>Pavel Zavalny (2015-2019)</td>
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<td>Alexey Didenko (2016-2019)</td>
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<td>Nikolai Gonchar (2015-2016)</td>
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<td>Dmitry Morozov (2016-2019)</td>
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<td>Chairperson of the SD Committee on Housing Policy and Municipal Services</td>
<td>Sergei Furgal (2015-2016)</td>
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<td>Chairperson of the SD Committee on Informational Policy, Technologies and Communications</td>
<td>Sergei Kalachnikov (2011-2015)</td>
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<td>Chairperson of the SD Committee on International Affairs</td>
<td>Galina Khovanskaya (2011-2019)</td>
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<td>Chairperson of the SD Committee on International Affairs</td>
<td>Leonid Levin (2014-2019)</td>
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<td>Chairperson of the SD Committee on Issues of Family, Women and Children</td>
<td>Leonid Slutsky (2016-2019)</td>
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<td>Chairperson of the SD Committee on International Affairs</td>
<td>Tamara Pletnyova (2016-2019)</td>
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<td>Olga Yepifanova (2015-2016)</td>
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<td>Ildar Gilmudinov (2016-2019)</td>
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<td>Sergei Gavrilov (2016-2019)</td>
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<td>Sergey Sobko (2010-2016)</td>
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<td>Chair of the SD Committee on Land Relations and Construction</td>
<td>Alexey Russkikh (2011-2016)</td>
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<td>Chair of the SD Committee on Science and Technologies</td>
<td>Valery Chereshnev (2007-2016)</td>
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<td>Chairperson of the SD Committee on Issues of the Commonwealth of Independent States and Contacts with Fellow Countrymen</td>
<td>Leonid Kalashnikov (2016-2019)</td>
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<td>Chairperson of the SD Committee on Labor, Social Policy and Veterans’ Affairs</td>
<td>Yaroslav Nilov (2016-2019)</td>
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<td>Chairperson of the SD Committee on Physical Culture, Sport and Youth Affairs</td>
<td>Mikhail Degtyaev (2016-2019)</td>
<td>Yes 82.000 Verified</td>
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<td>Chairperson of the SD Committee on Regional Policy and Problems of North and Far East</td>
<td>Nikolay Kharitonov (2011-2019)</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>Chairperson of the SD Committee on Security and Corruption Control</td>
<td>Vasily Piskarev (2015-2019)</td>
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<td>Irina Yarovaya (2011-2015)</td>
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<td>Chairperson of the SD Committee on Counting</td>
<td>Alexander Ageev (2011-2016)</td>
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<td>Ildar Gilmudtinov (2016-2019)</td>
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<td>Chairperson of the SD Commission on Review of the Federal Budget Expenditures for National Defense, National Security and Law-Enforcement Activity</td>
<td>Andrey Makarov (2012-2019)</td>
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<td>Vladimir Shamanov (2016-2019)</td>
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<td>Chairperson of the SD Commission on Issues of Control over Income, Property and Property Obligations of the SD Deputies, Mandate Issues and Deputy Ethics</td>
<td>Otari Arshba (2018-2019)</td>
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<td>Natalia Poklonskaya (2016-2018)</td>
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<td>Vladimir Resin (2011-2016)</td>
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<td>Chairperson of the Constitutional Court</td>
<td>Valery Zorkin (2003-2019)</td>
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<td>Chief Justice of the Supreme Court</td>
<td>Vyacheslav Lebedev (1991-2019)</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>Prosecutor General</td>
<td>Yury Chaika (2006-2019)</td>
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<td>Chairperson of the Investigative Committee</td>
<td>Alexander Bastrykin (2011-2019)</td>
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<td>Secretary of the Security Council</td>
<td>Nikolai Patrushev (2008-2019)</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>Commissioner for Human Rights</td>
<td>Tatyana Moskalova (2016-2019)</td>
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<td>Commissioner for Entrepreneurs’ Rights</td>
<td>Ella Pamfilova (2014-2016)</td>
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<td>Commissioner for Entrepreneurs’ Rights</td>
<td>Vladimir Lukin (2004-2014)</td>
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<td>Chairperson of the Accounts Chamber</td>
<td>Alexei Kudrin (2018-2019)</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>Yes 795.000 Verified</td>
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<td>Tatyana Golikova (2013-2018)</td>
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<td>Governor of the Bank of Russia</td>
<td>Elvira Nabiullina (2013-2019)</td>
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<td>Chairperson of the Central Election of Commission of the Russian Federation</td>
<td>Ella Pamfilova (2016-2019)</td>
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<td>Chairperson of the Central Election of Commission of the Russian Federation</td>
<td>Vladimir Churov (2007-2016)</td>
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**Appendix 3. The analysed social media posts.**

**Dmitry Medvedev’s posts**

Not only are #sanctions against #Russia illegitimate, but they will achieve nothing to help #Ukraine
17.07.2014

The EU bears collective responsibility for the sanctions. We will respond symmetrically to any new decisions
02.06.2015
Europe's refugee crisis is an all-round fiasco resulting from the EU's immigration policy  
11.02.2016

The refugee problem poses a real danger to common economic space, cultural space and even 
European identity proper  
13.02.2016

We want sound, advanced relations with the US and the EU. But they should want it, too 
14.02.2016

We know all too well what happens when refugees from troubled regions create colonies in 
the heart of Europe  
15.02.2016

Meeting with Speaker of the Parliament of Finland Paula Risikko  
15.01.2019

The rise of radical political forces in Europe over the last decade results from the growing 
discontent with declining living standards, growing inequality, the destruction of traditional 
lifestyles, and most importantly from dissatisfaction with government action  
11.06.2019

The EU has been our important trade and economic partner. Despite the recent difficulties 
and persistent attempts by the US to hinder the development of our relations, I am confident 
there are no objective obstacles to constructive cooperation between Russia and the EU 
05.03.2019

Russia and the European Union are experiencing a difficult period in their relations. It is 
important that even under these conditions Russian-French ties continue to develop. Today, 
my colleague, French Prime Minister @EPhilippePM, and I held talks in Le Havre 
24.06.2019

Maxim Oreshkin’s posts

Сегодня в Берлине. Позитивные дискуссии с министром Альтмаером и немецким 
бизнесом.  
21.02.2019

Сегодня в Цукубе (Япония) проходит встреча министров торговли стран двадцатки. 
Очень непростой разговор и отсутствие консенсуса. 
На полях удается проводить двусторонние встречи. В том числе с министром торговли 
Голландии, Сигрид Кааг. Продолжаем активную работу по восстановлению отношений 
с Европейским Союзом. 
09.06.2019

С вице-премьером, министром экономики Люксембурга 
05.09.2019
Konstantin Kosachev’s posts

…Необычно для «нового либерального порядка». В евроатлантических казармах так не принято…
30.10.2019

…Но очень подозрительно санкции Евросоюза совпали с моментом разногласий Анкары с Вашингтоном по поводу поставок российских систем противовоздушной обороны С-400. Белый дом уже предупредил Анкару о возможности санкций в случае, если сделка все же состоится. И в Брюсселе явно усмотрели в этом команду «фас!». То есть – Турцию можно «pressãoовать». В этом контексте санкции выставляют еврочиновников еще в менее выгодном свете.
16.07.19

…Преодолеть похожий тупик в отношениях между Западом и Востоком в конце 70-х – начале 80-х годов удалось именно тогда, когда отдельные страны, партии и политики, в частности – та же Германия, и те же социал-демократы во главе с Вилли Брандтом – посмели ослушаться заокеанского «Старшего брата» и сделали ставку не на конфронтацию, а на сотрудничество и эпохальный проект «газ-трубы». Что и стало началом «разрядки» и заметного потепления климата в Европе. Что ж, ждем нового Вилли Брандта?
25.10.19

…Почему взят именно период непосредственно перед Второй мировой войной, который тесно увязывается с послевоенными событиями (война, мол, «привела к беспрецедентным человеческим страданиям и оккупации стран Европы на несколько десятилетий» - то есть Освенцим приравняли к существованию соцлагеря), догадаться нетрудно. Ведь это откровенно позорная страничка в истории большинства европейских государств, которую необходимо срочно подкорректировать в угоду нынешнему мифотворчеству в ряде государств, а также в контексте новых антироссийских трендов в Европе, прежде всего – в Восточной…
23.09.19

Любопытное наблюдение - по итогам выборов в Европарламент пока из столиц не слышно стенаний на тему российского вмешательства... Что это вдруг? Мой ответ - правопопулисты и евроскептики, хоть и усилившись, не потрясли основ и не изменили расклада сил. А потому правящим элитам нет на этот раз нужны объяснять собственные поражения и провалы рукой Москвы, являя миру «факты» кибервзломов и фейковых вбросов...
28.05.19

…Резолюция основывается на докладе, подготовленном латвийским еврорепардепутатом Сандруй Калниете, одним из «профессиональных» русофобов в Европарламенте...
12.03.19

…А еще я посоветовал бы западным политикам теперь всерьез оценить слова о распаде СССР как о крупнейшей геополитической катастрофе XX века. Ибо с уходом национальных республик могли «уйти» и арсеналы оружия массового поражения, которое, при этом, не уничтожалось так же тщательно, как в России, и сегодня вполне
может «всплыть» в неожиданных местах. Что крайне удобно Западу, ибо виновный во всех бывших и будущих инцидентах уже «назначен».
15.03.18

…Это и есть суть американской позиции - «не нужно». Циничной и деструктивной. Любой ценой оторвать от России Украину, привязав ее к себе. Пусть и ценой продолжающегося конфликта в Донбассе. Судя по всему, у Парижа и Берлина все же более ноансированный взгляд на вещи. Саммит может получиться результативным…
28.11.19

…Но отмечу два обстоятельства, которые неизменно коробят меня в позициях европейских политиков, оппонирующих в публичных спорах (но большей частью соглашающихся в спорах непубличных)…
31.12.19

Германия уже несколько лет как уступила Китаю первенство во внешнеторговых отношениях России. Вот они, санкции. Но германский бизнес, в отличие от политиков, продолжает и в этих непростых условиях мощно работать на российском направлении. К взаимному удовлетворению, разумеется
13.09.19

Alexey Pushkov’s posts

В правящей коалиции ФРГ серьезный раскол: министр финансов критикует главу МИД из-за России. Этот раскол характерен для ЕС. Единство мнимое.
02.07.16

Раскрытый в ФРГ заговор военных - серьезный сигнал о подлинном состоянии дел в этой стране. Внутренние трещины, пока ещё неочевидные для всех, скрытые привычным образом благополучия в ЕС, разрывают социальный фундамент Европы. Таковы итоги длительного правления либеральной элиты.
11.11.18

Трамп: "Если бы не проблема иммиграции, о распаде ЕС не было бы и речи". Потенциальные миллионы беженцев, как дамоклов меч, нависли над ЕС.
27.06.18

Правит.кризис в ФРГ, шаткость позиций Меркель - это удар и по ЕС. Германии сегодня не до развития Евросоюза. Мигранты дорого обошлись Европе.
26.11.17

Макрон смотрит в будущее - Меркель удерживает прошлое. Макрон думает о Европе завтрашнего дня, Меркель ближе Европа дня уходящего. Отсюда разное отношение к России. В этом отличие между лидерами двух ведущих стран Европы. Но законсервировать ее в привычном виде уже не получится.
08.11.19

Парламентские контакты с Финляндией вышли на новый уровень. В ноябре делегацию молодых членов Совфеда приняла в Хельсинки спикер парламента Финляндии Паула
Рисикко. 14.01 она прибывает в Москву. Пройдут переговоры в СФ и ГД. С учетом сложных отношений с ЕС - это хороший признак.
11.01.19

У санкций США против Сев.потока-2 есть предыдущий: амер. санкции против европейских компаний, которые вели дела с Ираном. ЕС возражал, как и Париж, и Берлин. Но слов недостаточно. Европа так и будет заложницей США, если не создаст эффективных механизмов ответа на подобные санкции.
21.12.19

Европа должна говорить сама за себя, говорить одним голосом и быть способной влиять на мировые дела, а не быть объектом политики других держав. Такой призыв прозвучал на открытии Мюнхенской конференции. Но как Европа будет говорить за себя, если она всякий раз оглядывается на США?
15.02.19

Vyacheslav Nikonov’s posts

...Вместе с тем, нельзя умолчать о том, что в настоящий момент европейское руководство фактически потеряло контроль над ситуацией в вопросах безопасности...
15.07.16

терроризмом. Специальный гость программы - Президент Чеченской Республики Рамзан Ахматович Кадыров.
В современном обществе терроризм является общей угрозой, преодоление которой могло бы стать пространством сотрудничества России и Запада. К сожалению, на практике он зачастую используется как инструмент глобальной конкуренции. США и Европа предоставляют политическое убежище террористам, которых разыскивают специальные службы нашей страны.
Возможно ли победить терроризм?
16.04.19

О чем нам говорит пылающий Париж?
О кризисе европейской идеи, кризисе идентичности, кризисе лидерства.
Европа переживает системный политический кризис, и он, на мой взгляд, вызван тем, что там запретили употреблять слово "Родина".
Людей оторвали от корней, попытались сделать гражданами безликой европейской бюрократической машины. И это людям не понравилось.
10.12.18

Нурсултан Назарбаев, заявивший о сложении полномочий президента, остается более сильным лидером, чем любой действующий европейский политик.
Потому что лидерство возможно только в условиях суверенитета. А Казахстан сейчас более суверенен, чем Германия, Франция или Великобритания, отдавшие значительную часть полномочий Вашингтону и Брюсселю.
Почему европейская демократия не приводит к власти ярких уверенных лидеров?
Нужен ли Европе такой тип политиков?
19.03.19

105
…Эти результаты еще раз показали, что демократия в Европе - фикция. Что нужно сделать, чтобы возглавить Европейский союз? Президент ЕС Жан-Клод Юнкер проиграл выборы в Люксембурге. Что дальше? Дальше он оказался во главе Европейского союза. Европейскую комиссию возглавляет Дональд Туск, известный польский политик, партия которого находится в своей стране в глухой оппозиции. В Европе выбирают Европарламент, народ голосует, но этот парламент ничего не решает. То есть, те органы власти, за которые голосуют, ничего не решают, а за тех, кто решает, никто не голосует. Это сейчас и стало главным принципом европейской демократии…

17.05.16

Irina Yarovaya’s posts

…Мы видим на примере других стран, а ярче всего это проявляется на примере Украины, когда утрата нравственного смысла обнажает нищету желания. И не случайно самым изощренным и жестоким является именно гуманитарное оружие, направленное на сознание, на уничтожение истины, нравственных идеалов. Признание просвещенной Европой «нейтрального пола», заявления о том, что им понятия «кощунство» не ведомо, что это если не утрата нравственного смысла и полная девальвация самих себя?!

11.11.15

…Сегодня в столице европейского государства Латвии - Риге проходит свободное шествие легионеров Ваффен-СС. Свобода, подаренная миру советским солдатом, добытая в кровопролитной борьбе с фашистами, сегодня растоптана и унижена, обращена на прославление преступников и возрождение нацизма…

16.03.16

Gennady Zyuganov’s posts

Мое выступление в ПАСЕ: Мы выступаем за нормальный диалог, хотя европейцы оказались под пятой американцев

25.01.15

Vladimir Zhirinovsky’s posts

Вашингтон - инфаркт, Лондон - инсульт, Париж - эпилепсия, Киев - белая горячка. О Берлине даже говорить неудобно.

09.05.14

США и Европа воевать не умеют. Мы идем на помощь Сирии, чтобы уничтожить головорезов ИГИЛ, из-за которых Ближний Восток весь в крови

20.09.15

Если европейцы сами не могут справиться - пусть приглашают русский спецназ, наших спецов. Мы знаем как бороться с этой заразой

22.03.16
Расстрел в Новой Зеландии может стать сигналом для мусульман: против них возможны новые теракты. Мусульмане начнут мигрировать в безопасную для себя Европу, вытесняя коренных европейцев на восток, в Россию. Возможно, скоро мы будем принимать европейских беженцев на вокзалах Москвы.
18.03.19

Человек старой закалки. Ле Пен ценит дух прежней русско-французской дружбы. Это редкость — сейчас Европа послушная, на поводке у США.
24.10.14

Во Франции баррикады, сотни задержанных. Почему происходят беспорядки? Все организовано США. Макрон хочет создать единую европейскую армию, теперь его будут убирать. Так было с де Голлем в 1968 после попытки отказа от доллара. Америка не первый раз вмешивается в политику Франции.
04.12.18

Поляки будут платить огромные деньги за американское оружие. Варшава закупает у США газ на 8 млрд. $ — хотя русский газ того же объёма стоил бы 4 млрд. Выполняя требования США, Польша готова стать нищей. Думают, что американский хозяин будет любить их. Но эта любовь временная.
17.06.19

**Sergey Mironov’s posts**

Страны ЕС вновь планируют санкции против России. Ничуть не удивлён. Всегда говорил, что в условиях санкций нам жить ещё долго. Если что и удивляет слегка, так это решимость Запада вводить санкции даже в ущерб собственным экономическим интересам.
29.06.18

Германия хочет, чтобы США освободили немецкий бизнес от антироссийских санкций. Ключевое слово - США. Даже не вижу смысла комментировать.
19.04.18

**Sergey Slutsky’s posts**

Меркель недостаточно оснований для отмены антироссийских санкций. Скорее, недостаточно полит.воли и независимости от США для признания их абсурдности. Именно #Меркель допускала ревизию #Минска-2. Очевидно, #санкции - наказание РФ за отказ от взлома соглашений. #Слуцкий
13.12.19

О терактах в Париже: пока Европа плясала под американскую дудку, считая Россию "агрессором", истинный враг, ИГ, нанес удар в сердце. Скорбим
14.11.15

Западный миф о "России-агрессоре" терпит фиаско. Начало было положено в Минске, и сегодня мы видим, как прозревают европейские политики.
20.02.15
Меркель: безопасность в Европе необходимо строить вместе с Россией, а не против России. Вот и мы о том же!
02.07.15

Марин Ле Пен в Государственной Думе.
24.03.17

Во время прогулки по набережной Севастополя с главой Госсовета Крыма Владимиром Константиновым и кандидатом в Европарламент Тьерри Мариани @ThierryMARIANI . Бескозырки нам подарили жители, которые пришли встретиться с французской делегацией. Добрый у нас в России народ!
16.03.19

Сегодня в Госдуме побывал Карлхайнц Копф - известный австрийский политик, выступающий за укрепление отношений с Россией и отмену санкций.
16.06.17

Украина отказалась защищать права человека в Донбассе. Протестов из Европы и США мы не слышим. Ах, да - там же только по России «работают»
25.05.15