

RUSSIA'S FOOTPRINT IN THE NORDIC - BALTIC INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT

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RUSSIA'S COMPATRIOT POLICY IN THE NB8 REGION

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SUMMARY

This volume presents the first results of the project ‘Russia’s (Dis)Information Activities Against the Nordic-Baltic Region’, which was initiated in 2016 as an ongoing project for monitoring and analysing Russia’s information influence in the Nordic-Baltic region (NB8), which includes Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Latvia, Lithuania, and Sweden. In the period of 2016–2017 four pilot studies were conducted to answer questions about the aims of Russia’s information activities in the region; the use of the ‘compatriot’ policy as a tool of influence; the narratives Russia is using to advance its aims in the NB8 region; how the information provided by Russian state-funded media in some of the NB8 countries is used and how much it is trusted; and about public opinion regarding the narratives Russia promotes in some countries in the region. The main findings are structured around these research questions:

What are the aims of Russia’s information activities in the NB8 region?

- In the **political dimension** Russia aims to become one of the great powers in the new

polycentric world order, to become an equal player in the international system, to challenge the unipolar world order, to counter the post-Cold War interventions of the West, to counter Western liberal democracy as a universal value, to call for the revival of Westphalian sovereignty, and to subvert the unity of the Western states.

- In the **military dimension** Russia aims to counter NATO expansion towards Russia’s borders and to combine military force with other instruments of power.
- In the **economic dimension** the Arctic as a region is a priority for Russia, as well as economic interdependence with the other countries in the region.
- In the **informational dimension** Russia aims to develop its own global media system for the promotion of its worldview, to position itself as a distinct civilization, to support Russian ‘compatriots abroad’, and to develop the concept of the ‘Russian World’—an ideological space that exceeds the territorial boundaries of Russia, as well as

to promote its own perspective on Russian and world history.

- The **main tools** for advancing Russia's aims are identified as: Russia's domestic and international media system; the Internet and social media; government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs); Russia's compatriot policy; pipeline diplomacy; economic interdependency; the encouragement of political radicalization and polarization of Western societies; intelligence operations; and demonstrations of military force.

How is Russia's compatriot policy being used as a tool of influence in the NB8 region?

- The concept of Russia's 'compatriots abroad' is rather ambiguous and widely interpretable, which gives Russia an opportunity to use the idea of protecting compatriots' rights as a moral justification for interfering in the internal matters of the sovereign states, for using military force, and for violating the territorial integrity of its neighbouring states.
- However, the number of people who identify themselves as Russia's compatriots may be at least three times smaller than officially estimated by Moscow. Due to the vagueness of the concept the actual number of compatriots is difficult to verify.
- There is a gap between the scope of Russia's compatriot policy as it is officially declared and organized and the strength of Russia's actual relationship with its compatriots abroad. The organization of Russia's compatriot activities abroad is rather formal, not well known among or representative of Russian speaking communities abroad, and characterized by internal conflicts. As a result, there is no genuine link between Russia and its compatriots abroad, despite an active state policy.
- However, from the perspective of the national security of the NB8 countries, the main concern is not the actual interactions between Russia and its compatriots in the region, but the fact that the narrative of 'discrimination' may be used as a political excuse for intervention, as evidenced by the five-day war with Georgia and the crisis in Eastern Ukraine. It may be assumed that Russia exaggerates both the number of its compatriots and the effects of activities to 'engage' with them, so that Russia can intervene (if expedient) to 'protect' them in a military or non-military manner.
- Latvia and Estonia are the countries most vulnerable to the application of the narrative regarding the violation of the rights of Russia's compatriots, due to their large minority populations of ethnic Russian and speakers of the Russian language as their first language, and to the phenomenon of

'non-citizens'—people who immigrated to Latvia or Estonia during the Soviet occupation and could have applied for citizenship through naturalization once these countries regained their independence, but have chosen not to do so.¹ If Russia chooses to use this narrative as a basis for violations of sovereignty it will be determined by its strategic interests rather than by any perceived discrimination against Russia's compatriots, because it is a tool and not a strategic goal.

- The regional coordination of Russia's compatriot policy began in 2015, when the Regional Coordination Council of the Northern Europe and the Baltic Sea countries was established. From the perspective of coordinating Russia's compatriot policy, the Baltic States belong to Northern Europe instead of the 'Near Abroad'.
- The most intensely promoted of Russia's compatriot activities in the NB8 region is the propagation of Russia's historical narratives, which are mainly related to the victory of the Soviet Union in World War II. These activities take place in all NB8 countries.
- Marginalizing Russia's compatriot organizations and activists in the Baltic States reduces the possibility of Russia using them as a 'soft power tool'. Russia's opportunities for using soft power have been diminished by the Ukrainian crisis because of the

increased wariness towards such activities.

What narratives is Russia using to advance its goals in the NB8 region?

- There were regional differences in terms of the application of certain narratives in relation to the NB8 countries by *RT*, *Sputnik*, and *Perviy kanal* in 2016. Regarding the Baltic States, Russian media have been most concerned with military issues—the two most used narratives were that *NATO is a threat to Russia* and that *the idea of a Russian threat to the West is ridiculous*. The analysed Russian media were more concerned with NATO and the activities of the alliance close to its borders, rather than specific issues within the Baltic States.
- The most common narratives in relation to the Nordic countries were that *refugees and migrants are a destabilising factor*, and such related narratives as *radical Islam is a destabilising factor* and *far-right nationalism is on the rise*, which provide evidence that Russia is attempting to amplify the destructive processes caused by the refugee crisis within Europe.
- Another common narrative that emerged in the context of the Nordic countries was that *the Arctic is a territory of dialogue*, which is, that the interests of Russia and

the Nordic countries overlap in this region and Russia's intention is to solve these issues by peaceful negotiation, as stated in Russia's Foreign Policy Concept.

- Apart from these common regional trends, there were also some country-specific narratives. In the case of Latvia, the second most common narrative was *discrimination against minorities*. Estonia and Latvia have similar issues with their ethnic Russian minorities; nevertheless, in the case of Estonia the discrimination narrative was observed only three times, whereas there were more than 20 discrimination-related articles about Latvia. These data show that Latvia is the main target for the application of the *discrimination against minorities* narrative.
- Norway and Iceland were used as role models in the context of the Brexit referendum, suggesting that these countries may do better without the EU and thus strengthening the narrative of *diminishing unity in the EU*.
- The second most common narrative in relation to Finland was that *Finland and Russia are good partners, no matter what*. This is indicative of Russia's attempt to build and strengthen bilateral relations with European countries.
- Sweden stood out with the narrative *Sweden is part of an unjust persecution of Julian*

Assange, showing how important the issues related to the WikiLeaks founder are for Russia.

How useful and how trusted is the information provided by Russian state-funded media in the Baltic States, Finland, and Sweden?

- In the states surveyed, the use of Russia's global media outlets *RT* and *Sputnik* is limited. The general trend is that the majority of communities in the Baltic States are aware of these Russian media outlets, but do not use them (more than 60%), whereas most communities in Finland and Sweden are not aware of these media at all (more than 50%).
- Of the Russian media included in the survey, *Perviy kanal* is the most influential in terms of the audience numbers reached, albeit there are regional differences. An average of 38% of respondents in the Baltic States reported watching *Perviy kanal*, whereas the majority of respondents in Finland (83%) and Sweden (67%) were not aware of the media outlet.
- The demographic profile of the Russian media users surveyed gives evidence that the use of *RT* and *Perviy kanal* (the use of *Sputnik* is so small that it is impossible to make any analysis of the demographic profile of

its users within this survey) is linked to the use of the Russian language, thus making these Russian media outlets an integral part of the so called 'Russian World'.

- The results of the survey also give evidence that Russia is not a trusted source of information in the Baltic States, Finland, and Sweden, except among a part of Russian speaking audiences in the Baltic States.

What is the public opinion about the narratives promoted by Russia in the Baltic States, Finland, and Sweden?

- The main finding in relation to public opinion is that if the views of the respondents overlap with the narratives promoted by the Kremlin, this overlap is not correlated with the use *RT*, *Sputnik*, and *Perviy kanal*. It is necessary to understand that due to methodological constraints and the existence of other determinants for public opinion that were not researched in this study, the overlap between reported opinions and the Kremlin's narratives may not be interpreted as the result of Russia's influence.
- The narrative *refugees and immigrants are a destabilising factor for Europe* gained the most support in Estonia (77% fully agree & agree somewhat) and Latvia (72% fully agree &

agree somewhat). In Lithuania and Finland support for the statement was somewhat smaller, albeit still high—69% and 63% of those who agree fully and somewhat, but in Sweden this statement gained the least support—only 46% of respondents agreed fully and somewhat.

- The highest support for the narrative that *a rebirth of neo-Nazism is taking place in Europe* was identified in Sweden (74% fully agree & agree somewhat) and Finland (65% fully agree & agree somewhat)—the countries where consumption of *RT*, *Sputnik*, and *Perviy kanal* was the smallest.
- The answers given by respondents about the narrative *Russian speaking people in Latvia experience discrimination* indicate that there is little interest regarding this issue in the neighbouring countries—29% of respondents in Lithuania, 30% in Finland, 41% in Estonia, and 60% in Sweden answered that they have no opinion about it. Respondents in Latvia have a strong resistance to this narrative—54% fully disagreed with the statement and 20% disagreed somewhat (74% of all respondents disagreed).
- The response to the question regarding the narrative that *Sweden is part of the unjust persecution of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange* suggests that some of the narratives Russia is promoting are not at all

important for the people of the surveyed countries, as 70% of respondents in Latvia, 69% in Lithuania, 63% in Estonia, 41% in Sweden, and 22% in Finland have no opinion about this issue.

- NATO is one topic that polarizes opinion in the Baltic States between those who use Russian as their first language and the titular nationalities. The general trend is that titular nationalities are more supportive of a NATO presence in their countries. Therefore the most surprising results in relation to the narrative *NATO is a threat to Russia* are found in Latvia, because 45% of respondents fully disagree and 23% disagree somewhat (in total—68%) with the statement, despite the demographics and the high consumption of Russian media in the country.

INTRODUCTION

The project 'Russia's (Dis)Information Activities Against the Nordic-Baltic Region' was initiated in 2016 as a reaction to the intensification of Russia's influence activities against the West on the backdrop of the information campaign against Ukraine and the conflict in the southeast Ukraine. Previous studies conducted by the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (NATO StratCom COE) led to conclusion that Russia is employing a multi-level and multi-direction system of influence to advance its political and military goals. However these studies did not provide in-depth answers about the origins of the various information flows, their actual goals, and their ultimate effect on the social and political processes in Western countries. As pointed out by prominent British journalist Edward Lucas: 'Even in the narrow question of the effectiveness of Russia's overtly published propaganda, we have limited information about who consumes it, in what quantity, when, where and why. So before getting too excited about the lies and hatred spewed out by, say, *Sputnik* or *RT*, we need to know where it is landing. The answers may vary sharply by country, and across the demographic and social spectrums. But finding them requires quantitative and qualitative research.'²

The project was based around the assumption that Russian influence activities are targeted at the Nordic-Baltic (NB8) countries (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Latvia, Lithuania, and Sweden) as a region, as well as singling out certain countries or groups of countries depending on the aims that it wishes to achieve. The project aimed to bring together subject matter experts (SMEs) from these states to undertake an ongoing measurement-based assessment of Russia's influence in the information environment of the region. The NB8 region is frequently referred to as NATO's 'eastern flank', which 'is of rising importance in the context of Europe's changing security order'.³ Thus monitoring developments in the information environment in this region is one of the important building blocks in the overall effort to strengthen security in the current turbulent geopolitical circumstances. The project was intended as a platform for networking and research. Regular meetings among the representatives of the SMEs, were an invaluable contribution to the project and provided an opportunity to share experiences, discuss research results, and develop a common understanding at the executive level. Another area where this project has contributed to the overall effort to

assess the effectiveness of Russia's activities on the information environment is collection of data that lays a foundation for reasoned judgements.

The specific aims of this project are:

- To identify, describe, and compare the strategies and tactics employed by Russia in the information environment of the NB8 region.
- To identify the vulnerabilities in the information environment on both regional and national levels in the NB8 countries.
- To develop recommendations for the policy makers of the NB8 countries regarding how to frame a comprehensive approach to challenges in information environment.

The research questions asked were formulated on the basis of four assumptions:

- Russia has a strategic approach to its activities in the Nordic-Baltic region and is implementing an ongoing (dis-)information campaign against the governments of region, or of particular countries in the region.
- The narratives of these campaigns are developed and maintained in the information space for a long time and amplified during particular phases of the (dis-)information campaign, supporting certain political/military objectives.
- These (dis-)information campaigns are implemented

through a network of influence that was set up long ago and is continuously maintained in the target countries.

- Russia's goal is to weaken Nordic-Baltic unity on a societal level and to intimidate, mislead, or provoke particular countries in order to gain informational, political, and military superiority.

To test these assumptions, six research questions were formulated at the initial stage of the project:

- What are the aims of Russia's information activities in particular countries and in the NB region as a whole?
- What tools has Russia been using to advance its aims in the NB8 region?
- What narratives is Russia using to advance its aims in the NB8 region?
- What is the impact of Russia's information activities in the NB8 region?
- What is the level of perceived threat from Russia in the NB8 countries?
- What are the best practices for threat and risk mitigation?

The scope of the project is very broad; it covers eight countries with different histories, cultures, values, ethnic structures, levels of economic development, political issues, and strategies regarding Russia, the media etc. Therefore it is impossible to

get comprehensive and well-grounded answers to all of the research questions within a limited time frame and with limited resources. The project organizers decided to take a step-by-step approach. Regular SME workshops and four pilot-studies were conducted in 2016–2017 to make a preliminary analysis of Russia's influence in the information environment in the NB8 region and to highlight future research directions.

The pilot studies do not meet all of the aims of the project and do not answer all of the research questions; however the project is ongoing. The questions about various tools Russia is using in the NB8 region apart from Russian state-funded media and its compatriot policy, the impact of Russia's activities in the information environment and the level of perceived threats in the NB8 region, and the best practices for threat and risk mitigation, are left for the next stages of the project. The information obtained thus far is also insufficient for developing well-grounded recommendations on risk mitigation for NB8 policy makers, but it does provide a basis for further work.

The first study 'Russia's Grand Strategy and Its Implications in the Information Environment of the NB8 Region' (Chapter 1) aims to answer research questions about the goals of Russia's information activities and the tools Russia is using to achieving these goals. The study uses the concept of 'grand strategy' to structure Russia's interests around four dimensions of analysis: political, military, economic, and informational. The identification of Russia's interests was based on an analysis of Russia's strategic documents and

the rhetoric of its top officials. The authors also attempt to assess how these interests might be related to the NB8 region, and what the main tools of influence Russia uses in the NB8 region are. This chapter also includes a list of narratives used by Russia to further its goals as they were identified by the participants of the project. This study identifies the overall research field and the areas to be studied in further detail.

The second study, 'Russia's Compatriot Policy in the NB8 region' (Chapter 2) takes an in-depth look at how one of the influence tools, namely, 'protection of compatriots as justification for violations of sovereignty' was applied in the NB8 region in 2016. Addressing this question regionally confirmed the insight that Russia indeed consolidates its so-called compatriot policy in different countries and uses it as a concerted channel for the global promotion of Russia's worldview. One of the most interesting discoveries was that within the area of compatriot policy, Russia had been most active in promoting its historical narratives through its official compatriot organisations, rather than in protecting the allegedly violated rights of its compatriots as one might assume. The study also found that a significant amount of activity took place not only in the Baltic States, but also in Sweden and Finland, confirming that a regional perspective on Russia's activities in the information environment does indeed make sense.

The study, 'Narratives about the NB8 countries promoted by Russia' (Chapter 3), answers the third research question about Russian narratives. This pilot study narrows the question

to narratives that appeared in *RT*, *Sputnik*, and *Perviy kanal* concerning the NB8 countries in 2016. Content analysis of these media outlets did not confirm the use of all narratives that were initially identified by the SMEs during the workshops (which might be partially explained by the limited time frame and sources of the analysis), but it complemented the initial list with 16 additional narratives. The comparative perspective also provides some indication that in terms of the quantity of the outgoing information during 2016, the NB8 region was not a priority for Russia in comparison with Syria, the US, or Ukraine, but the countries of highest importance within the region are Sweden and Finland, and not the Baltic States, as one might assume.

Finally, the fourth study, 'Russia's Narratives and Public Opinion in the Baltic States, Finland and Sweden' (Chapter 4), was an attempt to assess the impact of Russia's information activities on public perception in the societies of the NB8 countries in terms of their agreement or disagreement with ideas that support the worldview promoted by Russia. This was a short quantitative survey that tested the views of various communities in the Baltic States, Finland, and Sweden in relation to some of the narratives most exploited by Russia that were identified in the earlier studies. The public opinion poll also measured the use of *RT*, *Sputnik*, and *Perviy kanal*—the media outlets studied through content analysis. The survey resulted in more questions than answers, since the general trend that emerged was that the agreement with the ideas promoted by Russia was higher in Finland and Sweden than in the Baltic States,

where a considerably greater audience consumes Russian media. This is in no way an indication that Russia's activities in Finland and Sweden have been more effective than in the Baltic States, but it is definitely an indication that measuring Russia's influence on the information environment is a very complicated task, and further research is necessary to make sense of the obtained data.

01

RUSSIA'S GRAND STRATEGY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON THE INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT OF THE NORDIC-BALTIC REGION

Ieva Bērziņa, Māris Cepurītis

INTRODUCTION

The general task of the project 'Russia's (Dis)Information Activities Against the Nordic-Baltic Region' is to provide an assessment of Russia's influence on the information environment of the Nordic-Baltic countries (NB8). An analysis of the information environment requires a comprehensive understanding of the major elements of Russia's grand strategy and their impact on the region, because the information environment reflects all major spheres of interaction between the NB8 countries and Russia. For the purpose of this study, the grand strategy is defined as the integrated use of all military and non-military means to pursue the interests of the state in the international system.⁴ What are Russia's interests, and what implications do they have for the NB8 region in general—and for its information environment in particular? How do these interests translate into narratives promoted by Russia? To answer these questions, an analysis of the following documents has been conducted: Russia's Concept of Foreign Policy (2016), Russia's Military Doctrine (2014), Russia's National Security Strategy (2015), and Russia's Information Security Doctrine (2016). To understand the meaning of the documents, they are viewed in the context of actual events, research data, and the rhetoric of Russia's top officials. The study is structured around four dimensions of analysis: political, military, economic, and informational. These dimensions cover all major power instruments that states use to advance their national interests. The political dimension includes such areas of influence as diplomacy,

geopolitics, and involvement in the domestic policies of foreign states.

THE POLITICAL DIMENSION

- *Russia as one of the great powers in polycentric world order*

According to its National Security Strategy, one of Russia's long-term national interests is 'to strengthen the status of the Russian Federation as one of the leading world powers, a power that aims to maintain strategic stability and mutually beneficial partnerships in the circumstances of a polycentric world order'.⁵ This goal is consistent with the view of Russia's foreign minister Sergei Lavrov that 'competition over shaping the world order'⁶ is now taking place in this post-Cold War era. It is a competition between two visions—one of a world dominated by the US and the moral universalism of the principles of Western liberal democracy, and the other of a multi-polar world with several power centres representing different models of political and economic development. Russia sees itself as one of the major power centres in the multi-polar world. Due to these contradictory perspectives on the future development of the world, Russian President Vladimir Putin is blaming the US for the current instability in the international system, since it does not want to adapt to 'the new realities in the system of international relations', therefore 'instead of establishing a new balance

of power, essential for maintaining order and stability, they [the US] took steps that threw the system into sharp and deep imbalance'.⁷ These differences of opinion are foundational for the current war of ideas between Russia and the West.

The NB8 countries are part of the West, owing to their commitment to liberal democracy and a free market economy as the most advanced models for political and economic development, as well as through their membership in the EU and/or NATO. The clash of worldviews between Russia and the US—the centre of gravity of the West—involves the countries of the NB8 region in this information war, as they are an integral part of the Western world. Russia's efforts to become one of the world's power centres necessitate its struggle for influence in the region, which it borders. Therefore stronger integration of the NB8 region in political, economic, military, and informational dimensions is an important precondition to countering the potential growth of Russia's influence in Europe in the circumstances of a polycentric world order.

- *Russia as equal player in the international system*

To become one of the leading powers in a polycentric world order, Russia aims at becoming a political player equal to the other great powers, which means that no important decision can be made without

Russia. According to Russia's National Security Strategy, one of its main objectives is the acquisition of as many equal partners as possible the world over.⁸ Russia is ready to build a relationship with NATO on the basis of equality, to ensure the overall security of the Euro-Atlantic region⁹, and to participate in an equal dialogue with the EU and NATO in relation to European security.¹⁰ In order to provide alternatives to the West in setting the global agenda, Russia is increasing its ties with the BRICS countries, engaging in trilateral cooperation with China and India, and investing effort in the Eurasian-based Shanghai Cooperation Organization and others.¹¹ Russia's state armament program, its investments in international media systems, its involvement in the conflicts in Ukraine and Syria, and other activities in the international system are generally aimed at forcing to rest of the world to take Russia's views and interests into consideration.

Russia's primary aim is equality with the US in terms of political dominance, but the achievement of this goal may have implications for less powerful states, which Russia can use to construct situations that can only be solved through dialogue with Russia. The Ukraine crisis and Russia's involvement in the Syrian conflict are examples of this. From this perspective the NB8 countries must assess the risks and eliminate

any vulnerabilities that Russia might potentially exploit using the military and non-military means at its disposal.

- *A critique of the unipolar world order and post-Cold War interventions*

To justify the emergence of a polycentric world order, Russia is focusing attention to the current security issues and framing them as a result of the global dominance of the US. During the Munich Security Conference in 2007, Putin stated that the unipolar model of world order has failed because of the lack of sufficient military, political, and economic resources, and most importantly the lack of a moral foundation.¹² Russia's political and military leaders often refer to the current conflicts as examples of the failed policies of the West. Putin has mentioned Egypt as a state that cannot function according to the universal template of American and European democracy, to the military actions in Libya that were inspired by noble motives but have led to disastrous consequences, and to the Iraq operations as a mistake that is now also acknowledged by American society.¹³ Likewise, Russia's National Security Strategy states that the US and the EU supporting an unconstitutional coup caused the Ukrainian crisis, but the emergence of the 'Islamic State' was the result of the 'double standard' policies of 'certain states'.¹⁴

To some extent Russia's critique of the global role of the West, especially its post-Cold War military interventions, is consistent with the views of Western societies, including those of the NB8 region. For example, according to the EOS-Gallup 2003 survey 83% of the Danish population, 89% of the Finnish population, and 85% of the Swedish population thought that the participation of their countries in the military invasion in Iraq without a UN mandate is not justified.¹⁵ Still, it remains to be seen how and if Russia can use this coincidence of views to further its interests.

- *Countering Western liberal democracy as a universal value*

The US grand strategy of global hegemony is rooted in the idea that 'the United States is a model for the world and that its values and institutions are superior to those of everyone else'.¹⁶ Belief in the global dominance of the US arose at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union. As was then stated by Francis Fukuyama, the end of the Cold War brought 'the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government'.¹⁷ To counter the global dominance of the US, Russia is challenging the moral superiority of Western liberal democracy. Russia's Foreign Policy Concept pays tribute to democracy as a universal value, but at the same time it stresses that

a global competition between various values and models of development is taking place.¹⁸ To adjust its growing domestic authoritarianism to democracy as universal value, the Russian power elite promotes the idea that Russia has its own specific model of democracy that should not be measured by Western standards. Vladislav Surkov's 'sovereign democracy'¹⁹ concept is a salient manifestation of this approach.

Russian officials also point to problems in Western democracies to discredit their moral supremacy. The main target is the US as the dominant power, and Putin has used the argument that democracy in the US is not representative because of the growing expenses of election campaigns and the electoral college system, which has allowed some presidents to be elected with a minority of votes: 'It [democracy] is the power of the people. Where is the people's power here? There is none. Meanwhile, you are trying to convince us that we don't have it'.²⁰

The tensions between Russia and the West can be viewed as a competition between authoritarian and democratic political systems. On the one hand Russia is using the options provided by open societies, but on the other hand it also may use cases when these freedoms are being restricted in relation to Russia due to national security considerations when they are in its interests (see

page 58 for the indications of the restrictions of democratic rights and freedoms in the Baltic States according to the Kremlin's perspective). Russia uses these cases to argue that the Western states are not democratic, consequently they have no grounds for their moral superiority.

- *The revival of the Westphalian sovereignty*

'Sovereignty' is an important concept in the public discourse of Russia's officials. It is also very much aimed at countering the post-Cold War interventions of the West, which were based on the belief of its moral superiority. Russia's officials put an emphasis on the need to return to Westphalian sovereignty, which emerged historically as a counterweight to moral universalism and established the principle *cuius regio, eius religio*. Lavrov stated it bluntly: '[...] the Westphalian system of international relations, whose principles, primarily respect for state sovereignty, are of importance even today'.²¹ Russia's understanding of sovereignty is closely related to the principle of non-intervention. 'The inadmissibility of any attempts to influence internal political processes from the outside'²² was set as one of Russia's foreign policy goals by Putin in 2014.

However, to fully understand Russia's perspective on sovereignty as a norm in international relations, it is important to take a look at its attitude towards the

sovereignty of its neighbouring and militarily weaker countries. After a thorough analysis of the works of Russia's international law scholars, Lauri Mälkso came to the conclusion that in the Russian debates on sovereignty, the concept is not always used in its abstract, general sense, but as Russia's sovereignty, which is the sovereignty of a great power.²³ As such it may 'ideologically question the sovereignty of smaller neighbouring states'.²⁴

The claim for the return to the principles of Westphalian sovereignty and non-intervention in international relations is primarily targeted at protecting Russia's regime from initiatives to promote democracy undertaken by the US and its Western allies. The sovereignty discourse also complements Russia's critical perspective on post-Cold War interventions. For the NB8 states it is important to understand that Russian officials most likely use the concept 'sovereignty' in the sense of 'great power sovereignty' which implies a sphere of interests outside its borders. An important strategic question arises from this—what does Russia consider to be its sphere of interests in the NB8 region?

- *Subverting the unity of the Western states*

The sovereignty discourse is also aimed at undermining the unity of Western democracies. From the Kremlin's perspective, a unipolar world order is seen as one that is, *per se*,

unfavourable to the sovereignty of states. 'Vassals' is the word that Putin and the Russian state-funded media (see page 70) use widely to stress the point that the US is not respecting the sovereignty of other states, including its European allies: 'Such a unipolar, standardised world does not require sovereign states; it requires vassals.'²⁵ In this aspect, sovereignty is being used in the sense of independence of foreign policy decision-making. Such rhetoric is directed against the 'bloc approach' that, from Russia's perspective, is ineffective in the context of the security challenges of the 21st century. Its National Security Strategy mentions the refugee crisis as an example of the inability of NATO and EU to solve global security problems.²⁶ From this, it follows that Russia sees that its strategic goals can be achieved more effectively by strengthening bilateral relations with different NATO and EU countries. Weakening the unity of the Western states also diminishes their global dominance, thus leading to the emergence of a polycentric world order.

For the NB8 countries, it means that whenever they make a geopolitical choice in favour of partnership with the West rather than with Russia, Russia may use arrogant communication that frames them as servants of the US, contrary to their national interests. For example, the renewal of the American military base in Keflavik was



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followed by messages in the Russian media that Iceland had become one of the ‘vassals’ of the US.²⁷

THE MILITARY DIMENSION

- *Countering NATO expansion towards Russia’s borders*

Russia’s National Security Strategy states that ‘the growth of NATO force potential and its empowerment with global functions that are being executed by violation of the norms of international law; increasing military activity of the states of the bloc; enlargement of the alliance; the placement of

its military infrastructure closer to Russia’s borders create a threat to [Russian] national security’.²⁸ A similar formulation of one of the main external military risks (that has the potential ‘to lead to a military threat under certain conditions’)²⁹ can be also found in Russia’s Military Doctrine.³⁰ This is one of the tensest issues in Russia’s relations with the West. In this regard, the development of the NATO ballistic missile defence system is a particular long-term problem. From Russia’s perspective, the two sides could not come to agreement because there were no reliable guarantees that this system would not be directed

against Russia's strategic nuclear forces.³¹ Already in 2007, Putin declared that the NATO anti-missile defence system was disturbing Russia, and Russia would react by developing an asymmetrical answer with weapons that could easily overcome it.³² The Ukraine crisis can be mentioned as an example of Russia's asymmetrical response to potential NATO enlargement.

Perhaps the most important issue related to NATO expansion is the possible NATO membership of Finland and Sweden, which Russia would like to prevent. The increase of NATO military potential in the Baltic States is another hot topic. Growing tensions in the Baltic Sea region have resulted in an increasing military build-up on both sides, and in exacerbated rhetoric in the information environment. NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence troops in the Baltic States are one example in which Russia's reaction in the information environment can be seen.³³ However, the results of the public opinion survey indicate that Russia's narrative about NATO being a threat to Russia does not receive much support in the Baltic States (see page 102). Nevertheless, military force will continue to be an important element in the relations between Russia and the NB8 states, unless tensions can be deescalated. Military drills and airspace violations also fit into this pattern of force demonstration as a form of strategic communication.

- *Military force to be combined with other instruments of power*

According to Russia's Military Doctrine, one characteristic feature of contemporary warfare is the 'integrated use of military force and political, economic, informational, and other non-military measures that are being implemented with a wide use of the potential of protest by the population [of the potential enemy state], and with special-operations forces'.³⁴ This formulation is very much in line with Russia's understanding of 'colour revolutions' as a type of warfare. The Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia, Gen. Valery Gerasimov defines them as a 'form of non-violent change of power in a country by outside manipulation of the protest potential of the population in conjunction with political, economic, humanitarian, and other non-military means'³⁵ From Gerasimov's perspective, a 'colour revolution' is an adaptive use of force, because if a change of power in the interests of foreign states is not successful it may lead to the use of military force.³⁶

The concept of 'colour revolution' warfare is being developed as a critique of the initiatives of the Western countries to promote democracy, which from Russia's perspective is nothing but a tool of foreign intervention. For example, Putin has been clear about the promotion of democracy by foreign-funded NGOs: '[...] there

is no democracy here, there is simply one state exerting influence on another'.³⁷ Russia's view of contemporary warfare is that the lines between domestic and foreign policies are blurring, as are those separating war and peace, and any internal tensions may be potentially used by adversary. However, it may be assumed that what Russia's politicians and military experts present as a critique of the West, to a great extent represent a description of Russia's own approach to foreign policy and warfare. In this context, the question to answer is can Russia mobilize protest potential in the NB8 countries to achieve its goals? In what other ways can Russia indirectly influence political decisions in the region?

THE ECONOMIC DIMENSION

- *The Arctic—a regional priority*

In light of the increasing competition for strategic resources, the Arctic has become one of Russia's regional priorities. According to its Foreign Policy Concept, Russia's activities in the Arctic are aimed at 'preserving peace, stability and constructive international cooperation' and 'Russia will firmly oppose any attempts to bring elements of political and military confrontation to the Arctic, and the politicization of international cooperation in the region as a whole'.³⁸ At the same time the Military Doctrine of 2014 mentions protecting

Russia's national interests in the Arctic as one of the tasks of Russia's Armed Forces during peacetime.³⁹

The document 'Foundations of Russian Federation State Policy in the Arctic through 2020 and beyond' defines Russia's national interests in the Arctic as: 1) the use of the Russian Federation's Arctic zone as a strategic resources base for the Russian Federation, in this way providing a solution to the social and economic development problems of the country; 2) the preservation of the Arctic as a zone of peace and cooperation; 3) the conservation of the unique ecosystems of the Arctic; 4) the use of the Northern Sea Route as a national integrated transport communication route for the Russian Federation in the Arctic.⁴⁰ Thus, Russia's key areas of interest in the Arctic are natural resource extraction, international cooperation, ecology, and logistics.

Of the NB8 countries, it is the Scandinavian countries that are concerned with Russia's Arctic (see page 73). Currently Denmark has the tensest relations with Russia in relation to Arctic, because 'there is a 550,000 square km overlapping area' in the territorial claims of both countries, including the North Pole.⁴¹

- *Economic interdependence with Russia*

Russia is experiencing economic difficulties due to the

drop in oil prices and also the sanctions that were imposed after its annexation of Crimea in 2014. Russia introduced counter-sanctions with the aim of abolishing the anti-Russian sanctions, which Putin clearly indicated in his statement: 'We would be happy to lift these measures if our partners, including in Europe, lift the anti-Russian sanctions [...]'.⁴² Of the NB8 countries the Russian counter-sanctions after Crimea have negatively affected the economies of the Baltic States, Finland, and Sweden,⁴³ especially certain economic sectors in the Baltic States.⁴⁴ Russia uses these problems as leverage to encourage the opinion that, regardless of the annexation of Crimea, the sanctions against Russia must be lifted in order to enhance the economic growth of European countries. This is achieved by promoting the misleading picture that economic cooperation with Russia is of crucial importance for the economic development of the countries in the region, especially for the Baltic States. In fact the companies based in the region tend to find other export markets, thus diminishing their economic dependency on Russia.⁴⁵

The public opinion survey conducted for this project measured public support for the idea that economic sanctions against Russia must be cancelled, regardless of the annexation of Crimea, in the Baltic States, Finland, and Sweden (see page XX [Attiecīgā

lappuse daļā par aptaujas datiem]). The highest level of support for this idea was identified in Latvia, Estonia, and Finland—more than 40% of respondents responded affirmatively, which indicates that there is a certain amount of support for this idea within some communities in the NB8 countries. Consequently, the governments of these states must put extra effort into arguing for the necessity of continuing the economic sanctions against Russia.

THE INFORMATION DIMENSION

- *Russia's media system*

The importance of influencing the information environment is clearly stated in Russian strategic documents. Russia's Military Doctrine says that there is a trend of displacing military risks and threats to the information environment and Russia's internal sphere.⁴⁶ Among the main external military risks for Russia is the use of information and communication technologies for achieving military and political goals.⁴⁷ Among the main internal military risks is 'the informational impact on Russia's population, particularly on Russian youth, with the purpose of undermining the historical, spiritual, and patriotic traditions of the protection of the Fatherland'.⁴⁸

From the Russian point of view, the information war is primarily being carried out by the West,



To resist ‘the information warfare against Russia’, Russia is developing its own global media system to promote and strengthen Russia’s worldview, which is often diametrically opposed to the one in the West.

but Russia has been forced to react and defend itself. Russia’s Information Security Doctrine says that a number of prejudicial materials regarding the state policies of the Russian Federation are increasing in foreign media, and that Russian media face discrimination.⁴⁹ Russia’s defensive position can also be seen in Putin’s words that ‘the so-called winners of the Cold War have total control over global media, which makes it possible for them to present white as black and vice versa’.⁵⁰ To resist ‘the information warfare against Russia’, Russia is developing its own global media system to promote and strengthen Russia’s worldview, which is often diametrically opposed to the one in the West.

So far the project has identified the extent of the use of such Russian state-funded media

outlets as *RT*, *Sputnik* and *Per-viy kanal* in the Baltic States, Finland, and Sweden, and support for some of the narratives Russia promotes regarding these states (Chapter 4). The pilot project revealed that formulating a data-based assessment of Russia’s influence in the information environment is a very complicated task and requires further research (Chapter 5).

- *Russia as a distinct civilization*

After the collapse of the USSR, the issue of Russia’s identity has risen to the fore, and in recent years there is a strong tendency to distance Russia from the Western culture. The principal differentiation between the Russian and Western value systems is the question of the primacy of the interests of society over individual. According to Russian information

warfare theorist Sergey Ras-torguyev, the Western value system, with its emphasis on individualism, leads humanity towards destruction, while the idea that an individual is subordinated to the public and to the divine, can stop this process.⁵¹ Russia's National Security Strategy defines the country's traditional spiritual and moral values as: 'the primacy of the spiritual over the material; the protection of human life, rights and freedoms; family; creative work; service to the Fatherland; moral norms; mercy; justice; mutual assistance; collectivism; the historical unity of Russian peoples; historical continuity of the homeland; Russia's freedom and independence; humanism; international peace and harmony; the unity of Russia's multinational culture; respect for the family and religious traditions; and patriotism.'⁵²

By attempting to define 'traditional Russian values', the Kremlin aims to develop an ideology in opposition to the Western liberalism. This is articulated more clearly in Putin's view: 'We can see how many of the Euro-Atlantic countries are actually rejecting their roots, including the Christian values that constitute the basis of Western civilisation. They are denying moral principles and all traditional identities: national, cultural, religious and even sexual. They are implementing policies that equate large families with same-sex partnerships, belief in God with the

belief in Satan.'⁵³ The principles that society's interests are superior to those of the individual and that the spiritual is superior to the material, leads to the idea that the dominant ideology emerging in Russia is a form of authoritarianism based on Russian orthodoxy.

Russia's isolation from the liberal values of the West can be appealing to people living outside of Russia who are disappointed and frustrated with the Western political and economic models and certain liberal policies that override conservative values. The measurement of societal value systems in the NB8 countries might also be used as an indication of the level of predisposition in various communities to the worldview promoted by Russia. This has been identified as another area for further research.

- *Support for compatriots abroad and the development of the Russian World*

Russia's Foreign Policy Concept indicates that apart from internationally recognized fundamental human rights, Russia places special emphasis on the protection of the rights and interests of its citizens and compatriots living abroad.⁵⁴ Russia's concern for its compatriots covers a wide range of areas, such as the protection of their legal rights and the promotion of Russian language and culture; special emphasis is also placed on the interests of children. The violation of the



Russia's isolation from the liberal values of the West can be appealing to people living outside of Russia who are disappointed and frustrated with the Western political and economic models and certain liberal policies that override conservative values.

human rights of Russia's compatriots abroad may be used as justification for the violation of sovereignty, as was the case during the war with Georgia and crisis in Eastern Ukraine. Thus, the expanding definition of people that can be considered Russia's compatriots abroad is one indicator that marks Russia's sphere of interests outside its borders. It is important to note that the concept of Russia's compatriots abroad is ambiguous, facilitating Russia's ability to make use of this argument to further its geopolitical interests if it is necessary.

One of the pilot studies of this project was the assessment of the activities of Russia's compatriot policy in the NB8 countries (Chapter 2). It was discovered that the Regional Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots

of the Nordic countries and the Baltic Sea was established in 2015, showing that Russia is targeting the NB8 as a region in implementing its compatriot policy abroad. The preliminary study provides evidence that the most intensely promoted of Russia's compatriot activities in the NB8 region is the propagation of Russia's historical narratives.

- *Promotion of Russia's perspective on history*

Russia's National Security Strategy states that one of the threats in the field of culture is the falsification of Russian and world history.⁵⁵ Under the current circumstances of information warfare, history has become a tool for Russia in constructing its national identity and enhancing the self-esteem

of its population, instead of being a scientific approach to understanding the events of the past. The glorification of Victory Day on May 9th is one of the most salient trends in the strategy of using history as ideology (see pages 46-48). This focus on history is largely due to the lack of any considerable contemporary achievements that could be a source of national pride. As the NB8 countries have different perspective on history, the battle of historical narratives will continue to be significant and will require considerable resources for the promotion of alternatives to the Russian perspective.

CONCLUSION—RUSSIA'S INFLUENCE TOOLS IN THE NB8 COUNTRIES

The overview of Russia's grand strategy and its potential impact on the NB8 region enables us to summarize main tools of influence that it can use to achieve its political and military goals in the region. Relations between Russia and the NB8 countries are interactions between a highly centralized authoritarian state and eight democracies. In this interaction both sides have their advantages and disadvantages. The authoritarian nature of the Russian state provides advantages in its capacity to mobilize and apply different tools of influence. These tools used by Russia are constantly evolving and being adapted to specific aims in specific contexts. However, it is possible to define certain distinct areas where Russia invests resources to achieve its national interests.

1. Russia's domestic and international media system

Russia seeks to gain influence on foreign states by using both direct and indirect approaches. The indirect approach is to make Russian state attractive. References to soft power have become an integral part of the latest Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, but the way in which Russia seeks to enhance its attractiveness differs from the methods of other states. Maintaining control over media and other information channels enables the Kremlin to create an image of Russia that is attractive to target audiences, but differs from reality. So attractiveness Russia cultivates is not towards the real country, but to the purposefully created image of it. Media is one of the main instruments used to construct Russia's image. The Kremlin has a high degree of control over domestic media, a control that is sustained by regular meetings between representative of the Presidential Administration and the editors of the largest TV channels,⁵⁶ and by entrusting media companies to persons who are close to Putin. Russia has also developed media tools to access foreign audiences—*RT* and *Sputnik* being two most outstanding of Russia's global media brands.

2. The promotion of narratives on the Internet and social media

Russia has also become actively involved in internet-based and social media. Its web-based information

channel *Sputnik* with localized versions is one of the most visible products officially funded by the state. Currently in the NB8 region *Sputnik* has a service in Estonian and Latvian. The so called 'troll farms' and robotrolling⁵⁷ are used to support Russia's narratives and messages in the social media, and to counter messages of other actors that are negative towards Russia. This system of information helps to implement Russian foreign policy by creating discourse that supports Russia's position and presents it in attractive manner.

3. Government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs)

Another tool at the Kremlin's disposal are the compatriots living outside Russia. Here Russia uses compatriots as a reason for involving itself in the affairs of other countries, even including the annexation of territory. Through organizations and funds, such as the Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund and many others, Russia supports its compatriots' organizations that are further used to lobby Russia's interests in specific states.⁵⁸

4. Protection of compatriots as justification for violations of sovereignty

Compatriots are used also for more radical objectives—the protection of compatriots was used as a reason

for Russia's attack on Georgia in august 2008 (see page 35) and in annexation of Crimea in 2014. In the NB8 region, the largest concentrations of Russian compatriots reside in Latvia and Estonia. But other cases, like the case of Irina Bergset,⁵⁹ show that small numbers of Russian compatriots and even individual cases can be used to promote Russia's policy goals.

5. Pipeline diplomacy

In the years since the collapse of USSR, economic tools have become an integral part of Russia's foreign policy. This is most visible in those sectors where other countries depend on Russian supply or demand. Here energy resources (primarily natural gas) are used to support the interests of Russia. One example being the 'gas disputes' with Ukraine that started after the Orange revolution in 2004. Dependence on deliveries of natural gas is a very significant vulnerability for the Baltic States and Finland, although some improvements have been made with the liberalization of the gas market and the building of alternative delivery routes, such as LNG (liquid natural gas) terminals in Lithuania and Finland. In this regard the controversial project Nord Stream 2 should be mentioned as a programme aimed at strengthening Russia's positions in the European gas market and limiting the diversification of energy suppliers of European countries.⁶⁰

6. Economic interdependence

On the one hand the Russian political leadership claims that economic interdependence is a 'restraining and stabilising factor',⁶¹ while on the other it can also be used as a tool for political pressure. For example, one way of exerting pressure is by limiting the Russian market's access to specific foodstuffs or other products by arguing that these products are not compatible with Russian product quality standards. This way the economies of the NB8 states may be negatively affected, which in turn may lead the public to think that it is better to have good relations with Russia. Russia's imposition of counter-sanctions after Crimea implies the same logic.

7. Encouragement of political radicalisation and polarisation

Other Russian tools of influence include support for radical political parties that pursue nationalistic and/or euro-sceptic policies. In the case of the National Front in France, Russian support came as an indirect loan in the amount of 9.4 million EUR.⁶² In exchange for this backing, parties support Putin and advocate policies that benefit Russia. The same pattern of influence may be applied in the case of the NB8 countries. The influx of refugees to the Scandinavian states should be mentioned as a particular vulnerability; it exacerbates right-wing radicalism in certain social groups that eventually can be used in the interests of Russia. Its support for alt-right parties

ideologically contradicts the Kremlin's position as battling neo-Nazism and defending human rights. In the short-term, Russia may benefit from this double game in which it simultaneously supports and condemns similar trends in Western societies. However, in the long-term this may further discredit Russia's international image, making it look double-faced and opportunistic.

8. Intelligence operations

The security services of Russia's neighbouring countries have reported an increase of Russian intelligence activities seeking to gain information about political, economic, security, and social processes in these countries.⁶³ Operations in Crimea and in East of Ukraine have also shown other capabilities of the Russian intelligence services—covert operations and active measures—activities that focus on influencing foreign actors. The covert aspect of these activities limits our ability fully to evaluate their scope, yet they must be taken into consideration.

9. Military force demonstration

Russia's military exercises near its Western borders, together with rising intensity of flights of military aircraft near the airspace of countries of NB8 (and sometimes violating their airspace) and manoeuvres of naval vessels near maritime borders are another way to send signals to the decision makers of these countries. This is especially important in the case of Sweden and Finland—countries that have started discussions on closer cooperation with NATO.

02

RUSSIA'S COMPATRIOT POLICY IN THE NORDIC- BALTIC REGION

Ieva Bērziņa

INTRODUCTION

The overview of Russia's grand strategy in relation to the NB8 region (Chapter 1) identified the 'compatriot policy' as one tool for achieving its political and military goals in the international arena. Russia, as the legal successor of the Soviet Union, claimed responsibility for compatriots of the former Soviet Union (not only ethnic Russians), many of whom became citizens (or non-citizens)⁶⁴ of countries that regained their independence or were established as sovereign states after the collapse of the Soviet Union. These specific historical circumstances created a situation in which a large number of people that Russia considers compatriots reside outside its territorial borders. From the Kremlin's perspective this gives it the moral and legal grounds to intervene in the internal matters of other sovereign states when justified by the need to protect and defend the rights of Russia's (ex-Soviet) compatriots. Among the reasons given to justify the five day war with Georgia in 2008 and the annexation of the Crimea in 2014 was the need to protect compatriots, thus setting a precedent for Russia's violating the territorial integrity and sovereignty of its neighbouring states on the principle of defending compatriots.

This chapter provides some insight into how Russia is using its compatriot policy as a tool of influence in the NB8 region, with an outline of the Russian perspective regarding the protection of compatriots. We assess the possibility of using the compatriot policy as a justification for sovereignty violations in the NB8 region, as was done in Georgia and the

Crimea. We used a comparative overview of the compatriots' main activities in 2016 to answer the research questions. The main conclusion is that due to their ethnic structure, the Baltic States, and Estonia and Latvia in particular, are most vulnerable to the application of narrative of a violation of compatriots' rights. However, the mere existence of the narrative is not itself an indication of hostile action, because the protection of compatriots' rights is a means rather than an end. Another conclusion is that Russia consolidates compatriots' activities in different countries and uses this as a concerted channel for the global promotion of Russia's worldview. In other words, over time Russia's compatriot policy has exceeded the 'Near Abroad' (a specific term used in Russia's political language to signify countries that once formed the Soviet Union, where Russia claims to have special interests). For the NB8 region, this means that some of the issues salient in the Baltic States for over two decades have gradually spread to other countries as well.

RUSSIA'S COMPATRIOT POLICY AND SOVEREIGNTY VIOLATION

The use of the term 'compatriot abroad' has changed over the course of the legislative history of the Russian Federation since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The definition of a 'compatriot abroad' has been gradually broadened to come to the current understanding, which is rather vague and allows a lot of room for interpretation. According to the federal law 'On the State Policy of the Russian Federation Regarding



The fact that protection of compatriots' rights is being used as a moral justification for Russia's involvement in the internal matters of neighbouring states is evident in the rhetoric of Russia's presidents in relation to the war with Georgia and the annexation of the Crimea.

Compatriots Living Abroad', enacted in 1999, Russian compatriots are not only Russian citizens, but also 'persons who were citizens of the USSR, who are living in the states that were part of the Soviet Union, acquired the citizenship of those states or become stateless persons, as well as emigrants from the Russian state, the Russian republic, the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, the USSR and the Russian Federation, having proper citizenship and having become foreign nationals or stateless persons'.⁶⁵ Likewise the identification of Russian compatriots abroad is rather uncertain, because the law recognizes not only its citizens as Russian compatriots abroad, but also people who self-identify as being Russian compatriots (this is explained in more detailed further in the text). Such a definition opens the door for Russia to manipulate the number of persons it claims to be under its protection. It may be assumed that such ambiguity is built into the law on purpose, to

use it in geopolitical interests when necessary. The fact that protection of compatriots' rights is being used as a moral justification for Russia's involvement in the internal matters of neighbouring states is evident in the rhetoric of Russia's presidents in relation to the war with Georgia and the annexation of the Crimea.

Following the 2008 war with Georgia, the then President of the Russian Federation Dmitry Medvedev announced that Russia, like any other major geopolitical player, has its own sphere of interests, and used the protection of compatriots as a moral foundation for implementing its interests in international arena: 'I have said before and I say again now, there are regions in which Russia has interests. It would be foolish, and in some cases even damaging, to deny this. Our partners in the international community speak in these terms with regard to their own interests, and we also need to state this out loud. If we keep quiet, as if

ashamed of it, we will end up with situations like the crisis in August [the war with Georgia]. Of course we will defend our interests, but most important of all, we will protect our citizens [residing in these regions].⁶⁶ In the same speech he reiterated the importance of the protection of Russia's compatriots: 'I have specifically said and I reiterate it for my audience here: protecting the lives and the dignity of Russian citizens, wherever they are, is the *raison d'être* of the Russian state.'⁶⁷ Thus in case of Georgia, the protection of Russian citizens was used to justify overt military intervention.

The compatriot policy was also used as an excuse for violating Ukraine's territorial integrity. It was clearly formulated in President Putin's Crimea annexation speech: 'Millions of Russian people and Russian-speaking citizens have lived and will live in Ukraine, and Russia will always protect their interests with political, diplomatic, and legal means'.⁶⁸ According to this speech, the legal rights of Russia's compatriots in Ukraine were violated by attempts to deprive them of historical memory and in some cases, their mother tongue. Other reasons cited were forced assimilation and Ukraine's 'permanent political and government crisis'. This position is evident also in Putin's interview in the German newspaper *Bild* in 2016. In it, he rejects the journalists' point that one cannot simply challenge European state borders: 'For me, it is not borders and state territories that matter, but people's fortunes.'⁶⁹ The cases of Georgia and Ukraine are important for the NB8 countries because they are now being targeted using the same policy, as this chapter will demonstrate.

The possibility of using an alleged violation of Russia's compatriots' rights as an instrument in international relations is embedded in Russian legislation. Article 14 of the law 'On the State Policy Regarding Compatriots' of 1999 mentioned above states that 'discrimination against Russian citizens living abroad may be grounds for a review of the policy of the Russian Federation against a foreign state in which such discrimination takes place' and 'failure of a foreign country to comply with generally recognized principles and norms of international law in the field of fundamental rights and freedoms of individuals and citizens in relation to compatriots is the basis for the public authorities of the Russian Federation to take action for the protection of interests of compatriots in accordance with international law'.⁷⁰ The National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation of 2015 acknowledges that Russia has already demonstrated its capabilities in protection of the rights of its compatriots abroad.⁷¹

At the same time, it must be stressed that the mere existence of the discrimination against Russia's compatriots in the perception of Russia and its compatriots does not necessarily cause a violation of sovereignty. Russia's relations with the Baltic States, mainly Latvia and Estonia, confirm this assertion, because the issue of perceived discrimination of Russia's compatriots in these countries has been one of the problems in their relations with Russia for more than two decades. For example, in his 2012 pre-election article 'Russia and the changing world' Putin clearly stated that Russia will seek to force the authorities of Latvia and Estonia



The protection of rights and legitimate interests may not be an end in itself, but is rather a tool for achieving different strategic objectives

to respect universally recognized rights of national minorities, because the 'non-citizens' of these countries are deprived of fundamental political, electoral, social, and economic rights, and the possibility of free use of the Russian language.⁷² Annex 2 of this chapter (see page 58) sums up the main issues from the perspective of the Regional Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots of the Nordic Countries and the Baltic Sea Region, and they are in line with Putin's stated perspective.

Nevertheless, these problems have never caused incidents like the five-day war with Georgia or the crisis in Eastern Ukraine, despite many similarities in the discourse of violations of compatriots' rights in the Baltic States and the Crimea annexation narrative. This leads to the conclusion that the protection of rights and legitimate interests may not be an end in itself, but is rather a tool for achieving different strategic objectives. As Marlene Laruelle concludes

after a thorough analysis of how the concept 'Russia as a divided nation' has been used since the collapse of the Soviet Union: 'Russia may use a nationalist post hoc explanation but does not advance a nationalist agenda.'⁷³

In other words, just because many ethnic Russians and others use the Russian language at home and are living in a country that has strained relations with Russia because of perceived discrimination against compatriots, one cannot conclude that 'Latvia or Estonia will be the next after Ukraine' to undergo violation of its sovereignty. We must first understand Russia's strategic goals and interests in Ukraine, Latvia, or any other state in order to make reasonable predictions. However, the risk for Estonia and Latvia is high, therefore the governments of these countries must put every effort into eliminating the possibility of Russia's use of the 'compatriots' protection' narrative to justify potential aggression.

RUSSIA'S COMPATRIOTS WORLDWIDE AND IN THE NB8 REGION

Russia indeed has one of the largest diasporas in the world, a result of the complex history of this country. Pavel Polyan has distinguished four waves of Russian emigration in the 20th century: 1) 1918–1922, those who fled from the Revolution; 2) 1941–1944, persons who were displaced from the USSR during the

Second World War and renounced repatriation; 3) 1948–1989/1990, Cold War emigration; and 4) from 1990, post-Cold War emigration.⁷⁴ The largest increase of Russian diaspora occurred after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and Putin's much-quoted statement about the collapse of the Soviet Union as a geopolitical disaster was said in the context of the compatriots' policy in his annual address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation in 2005: 'Above all, we should

Table 1. The Kremlin's estimated numbers of compatriots living abroad.

| Country | Approximate number of Russia's compatriots |
|------------------|--|
| Ukraine | 7 000 000 |
| Kazakhstan | 5 000 000 |
| Germany | 4 000 000 |
| USA | 3 000 000 |
| Israel | 1 500 000 |
| Belarus | 1 000 000 |
| Uzbekistan | 1 000 000 |
| Latvia | 750 000 |
| Estonia | 400 000 |
| Canada | 400 000 |
| Greece | 350 000 |
| Argentina | 300 000 |
| Lithuania | 220 000 |
| Australia | 200 000 |
| Great Britain | 200 000 |
| Jordan | 120 000 |

Source: *President of Russia, the concept of 'Russian School Abroad', 2015.*

acknowledge that the collapse of the Soviet Union was a major geopolitical disaster for the century. As for the Russian nation, it became a genuine drama. Tens of millions of our co-citizens and compatriots found themselves outside of Russian territory.⁷⁵

According to the UN Population Division, Russia's diaspora in 2015 numbered 10.6 million people, making it the country with the third largest diaspora in the world after India (15.6 million) and Mexico (12.3 million).⁷⁶ However, the Kremlin gives a figure almost three times larger. According to data provided in the 2015 concept of 'Russian School Abroad',⁷⁷ the Russian Foreign Ministry estimates that around 17 million compatriots live in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, but in the rest of the world—more than 12.5 million, 29.5 million people in total. Table 1 shows the countries

with the largest numbers of compatriots according to the Kremlin's data.

Who are Russia's compatriots living abroad from the Russian perspective? Russia's Federal Law defines the concept of 'compatriot' rather broadly: 'They are persons born in one country, who live or have lived in this country and share a common language, history, heritage, traditions, and customs, as well as descendants of these persons in the direct line of descent. Russia's compatriots are: Russian citizens permanently residing outside the territory of the Russian Federation and persons and their descendants living outside the territory of the Russian Federation and related to the peoples historically living in the Russian Federation, and who have made a free choice in favour of spiritual, cultural, and legal ties with the Russian Federation, and whose relatives in the

Table 2. Attempt to calculate the number of compatriots in the NB8 region according to the Kremlin's proposed criteria

| Country | Approximate number of compatriots | Approximate percentage of the total population |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|--|
| Latvia | 770 000 | 37.286 |
| Estonia | 383 000 | 29.187 |
| Lithuania | 177 000 | 5.888 |
| Finland | 72 000 | 1.389 |
| Norway | 25 000 | 0.4790 |
| Iceland | 770 | 0.2391 |
| Sweden | 17 000 | 0.1792 |
| Denmark | 7 000 | 0.1293 |

Sources: Statistical Bureaus of the NB8 countries

direct ascending line previously resided on the territory of the Russian Federation'.⁷⁸

From this formulation it follows that Russia considers not only citizens of the Russian Federation and Russian ethnic minorities as its compatriots abroad, but also persons who are living in the states that once were part of the Soviet Union and immigrants from the former Soviet Union in other countries. For example, the Embassy of the Russian Federation to the Republic of Iceland, in its report on work with compatriots in Iceland, states that 300 citizens of Russia and 1000 immigrants from Ukraine, Estonia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Latvia fall under the category of 'compatriots'.⁷⁹ Likewise, it can be assumed that the 750 000 compatriots in Latvia, as estimated by the Russian Foreign Ministry, includes not only all ethnic Russians living in Latvia, that, according to the 2011 census, constituted 26.9% of the Latvian population (approximately 557 000 people), but all people who use the Russian language at home, which constitutes 37.2% of the population (approximately 770 000 people).⁸⁰ The number of Russian citizens in Latvia in 2011 was only 34 091,⁸¹ but in 2016, according to the Russian Embassy in Latvia, 53 333 Russian citizens were residing in Latvia.⁸²

The process of identifying compatriots is also relatively loose. According to Russian Federal Law there are two ways to recognise and acknowledge compatriots. Citizens of the Russian Federation living abroad are compatriots by reason of citizenship, but for other groups, recognition as a compatriot is an act of self-identification. Compatriots have rights

but are not obliged to publically register as compatriots.⁸³ As the act of self-identification is unverifiable, the question remains open—how many of those estimated by the Russian Foreign Ministry to be compatriots really regard themselves as such? For example, in 2015 only 12.7% (approximately 263 000 people) of the Latvian population reported feeling a sense of belonging to Russia,⁸⁴ which is almost three times less than the number of compatriots estimated by Moscow. Likewise, only 13.6% of Estonian-Russians in 2015 considered Russia as their homeland, but 18.1% of Estonian-Russians considered Estonia as well as Russia their homeland.⁸⁵

Due to the uncertainty of the definition of the concept 'Russian compatriot', it is almost impossible to estimate the size of the potential target audience of Russia's compatriot policy in the NB8 region. Table 2 is an attempt to get a comparative perspective on the spread of Russia's compatriots in the NB8 region, although it is only an approximation. The data about immigrants from Russia were used in the cases of Denmark, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. In the case of Estonia, Finland, and Latvia the number of persons using the Russian language in their household is given, but for Lithuania the number of ethnic Russians has been used. This methodological difficulty indicates that for the purpose of the monitoring Russia's compatriot activities in the NB8 region, a new metric should be introduced. The measurement of the number of people who identify themselves as Russia's compatriots in each country would be one way to solve this problem.

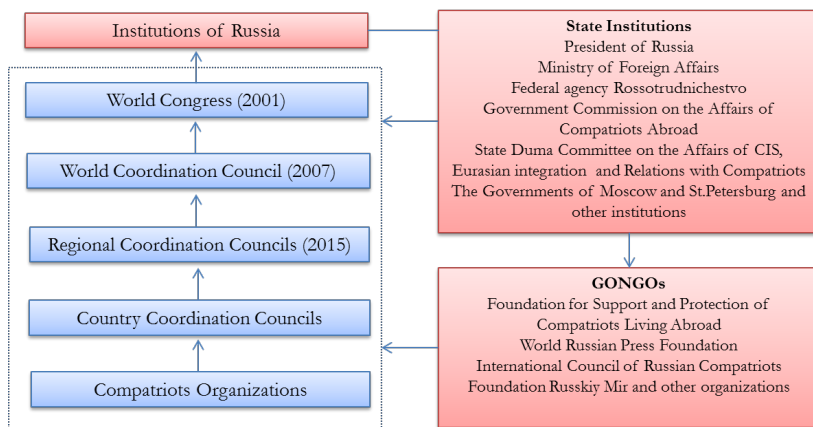
The available data in Table 2 shows that the distribution of people whom the Russian Federation could claim to be its compatriots in the NB8 region is uneven. In Denmark, Sweden, Iceland, and Norway it is less than one per cent of the total population, in Finland it exceeds one per cent, in Lithuania it is around six per cent, but in Estonia and Latvia, the numbers are 29 and 37 per cent, respectively. These numbers could put Latvia and Estonia in more disadvantageous position should it be possible to prove that all of these people identify themselves as Russia's compatriots. Leaving aside Russia's ambitions for its compatriot claims, one should also note that the ethnic proportions and the history of their formation in Estonia and Latvia laid the foundation for the development of divided societies, which has had a significant impact on political processes and creates the possibility for external

influence as well. Nevertheless, as Russia puts efforts into the consolidation of its compatriots abroad, the regional perspective allows us to develop a greater understanding of the global role of Russia's compatriot policy.

THE COORDINATION OF RUSSIA'S COMPATRIOT POLICY IN THE NB8 REGION

The Federal Law 'On State Policy of the Russian Federation Regarding Compatriots Living Abroad' determines the order of how the interests of Russia's compatriots are represented in the state institutions of the Russian Federation.⁹⁴ The highest representative body is the World Congress of Compatriots, which is held at least once every three years. In total, there have already been five

Figure 1. Coordination of the activities of Russia's compatriots living abroad



Source: Author's conceptualization of the institutional network of Russia's compatriot policy within



Closer integration between the Baltic and Nordic states may further strengthen the perception that the Baltic States belong to Northern Europe rather than to the former Soviet Union, even from the perspective of Russia

congresses since the first was held in 2001. In the period between the congresses, the World Coordination Council executes the functions of coordinating and representing compatriots. Thus, the World Coordination Council is the supreme body that facilitates the interaction between public associations of compatriots and state institutions of the Russian Federation and its subjects in the period between congresses.⁹⁵ The first meeting of the World Coordination Council took place in 2007.⁹⁶ There are also Coordination Councils of compatriots in the states where they live. In Sweden, the Coordination Council of Russia's Compatriots was established in 2003, in Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia and Norway in 2007, and later in Lithuania and Denmark.⁹⁷ The establishment of the Coordination Councils is not an indication of the beginning of compatriots' activities in the country, but it is a stage in the development of coordination and interaction with Russia (Figure 1).

Six Regional Coordination Councils were established in 2015: in 1) the Near Abroad; 2) Northern Europe and the Baltic Sea countries; 3) Europe; 4) the Middle East and Africa; 5) America; and 6) the Asia-Pacific region.⁹⁸ In relation to the coordination of compatriots' activities in the Baltic States, it is important to pay attention to the idea of the 'Near Abroad', which emerged after the breakdown of the Soviet Union and was used in Russia's first Foreign Policy Concept of 1993.⁹⁹ The concept stated that one of the most important foreign policy tasks was 'strict enforcement of the human rights and the rights of ethnic minorities, especially ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking populations, in the near abroad'.¹⁰⁰ The term 'Near Abroad' is used to refer to all Soviet successor states except for Russia.¹⁰¹ However, the organization of Regional Coordination Councils in 2015 marks a shift in this mindset, because the Baltic States are no longer included in the 'Near Abroad'. They are part of the

'Northern Europe and the Baltic Sea' states. It means that closer integration between the Baltic and Nordic states may further strengthen the perception that the Baltic States belong to Northern Europe rather than to the former Soviet Union, even from the perspective of Russia. On the other hand, the regional coordination of Russia's compatriot policy also indicates that over the span of two decades it has moved beyond the boundaries of the 'Near Abroad' to become a global tool of influence.

The Regional Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots of the Nordic Countries and the Baltic Sea includes representatives of Russia's compatriots from Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, and Sweden.¹⁰² Like all of the activities of Russia's compatriots abroad (Figure 1), the work of this council is also coordinated with the official Russian state policy. The chairman of this council is Tatiana Dahle from Norway.¹⁰³ According to her, the problems of the compatriots in the Baltic States—human rights, statelessness, and manifestations of neo-Nazism—are specific in comparison with other countries of the region, but there are also common topics such as the preservation of the Russian language, the work of Russian schools, the protection of compatriots' rights, social issues, and others. She believes that the regional format of the compatriots' work allows for the exchange of experiences and the promotion of the most interesting projects.¹⁰⁴ By 2016, two regional conferences had taken place the Nordic countries and the Baltic Sea. The first was organized in Warsaw in 2015; the second was held in Stockholm in 2016. During

both conferences, resolutions were adopted¹⁰⁵ which provide some insight into Russia's compatriot policy priorities in the NB8 region. Analysis of these documents makes it possible to distinguish eight policy areas in the region (listed in the Annex 1 and analysed below). Hereafter, these resolutions are referred to as the Resolution of 2015 and the Resolution of 2016.

- *Protection of the rights and legitimate interests of compatriots*

The resolutions of both regional compatriots' conferences prioritize the protection of the rights and legitimate interests of compatriots. The Resolution of 2016 expresses support for the policy of the Russian Federation in this area and recommends reviewing the effectiveness of activities and analysing problems for improvements on a regular basis. It is possible to outline two directions in the protection of compatriots' rights for the NB8 region. The first relates to long-term disagreements between Russia and the Baltic States regarding citizenship, language, and other policies after the breakdown of the Soviet Union. The second is the provision of legal assistance to Russia's compatriots in all countries. For example, the International Association of Russian-speaking Lawyers, established in 2015, aims to provide professional legal assistance to Russian-speaking people in any country of the world.¹⁰⁶ Such services generally do not create tensions in

bilateral relations with Russia. However, as the 'Lisa case' in Germany shows, Russia may escalate even isolated issues concerning Russian-speaking people to the highest political level in any country.¹⁰⁷

The protection of the rights and legitimate interests of compatriots in the Baltic States is a topic of particular importance for the Regional Coordination Council. The Resolution of 2016 expresses serious concern about policies of the governments of several countries in the region, and has three Annexes: 1) 'Information about strengthening of totalitarian tendencies and manifestations of neo-Nazism in the policy of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia';¹⁰⁸ 2) 'Information about the situation with Russian schools in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia';¹⁰⁹ 3) 'Elections and referendums in Latvia and Estonia do not meet standards of democracy. Open letter.'¹¹⁰ These documents are in line with and expand the 2014 Statement by the World Coordination Council on the situation of compatriots in the Baltic States, which calls for the elimination of mass statelessness and a return to general elections, genuine respect for national minority rights, freedom of speech, and freedom of assembly.¹¹¹ The Annexes to the Resolution of 2016 make it possible to summarize what is considered a violation of Russia's compatriots' rights in the Baltic States (Annex 2).

The concerns about Russia's compatriots in the Baltic States can be grouped around three main themes: neo-Nazism, the restriction of democratic rights and freedoms, and education in the Russian language. Neo-Nazism in Russia's compatriots' discourse is a concept with a very broad interpretation. It is not only related to historical issues in connection with World War II such as the Remembrance Day of the Latvian Legionnaires, but covers general developmental processes in the Baltic States. Latvia is also accused of politically rehabilitating former Nazi collaborators and forcing the assimilation or expulsion of ethnic minorities. In Lithuania, a criminal case against participants in the events on the night of 12–13 January 1991¹¹² has been used as an indicator of neo-Nazism. Measures by national authorities limiting celebrations of Victory Day are also interpreted as an expression of neo-Nazism.¹¹³

All measures taken by the governments of the Baltic States to limit Russia's tools of influence are represented as restrictions of democratic rights and freedoms, including prohibiting certain Russian activists from entering these countries, public reports of national security services that define Russian-supported compatriot organizations as hostile, research and journalistic reports about Russia's compatriot policy, restrictions on Russian state-funded media. From

the perspective of Russia's compatriot policy, the status of 'non-citizens' is a reason to question the legitimacy of all elections in Estonia and Latvia since 1991 because there was no universal suffrage.

Education in the Russian language is also a specific issue for the Baltic States because education in the Russian language is a Soviet-era remnant that these countries want to deconstruct, but Russia and its compatriots want to keep. For the Baltic States as nation-states one of the fundamental values is to maintain and develop the language and culture of their titular nationalities. As these are very small nations, bilingualism at the state level is totally unacceptable for them; therefore knowledge of the state language is seen as a fundamental precondition for ethnic integration and equality of all social groups, irrespective of their ethnic origin. All measures taken by the governments of the Baltic States for the improvement of the knowledge of the state language is made with the purpose to provide equal opportunities for all inhabitants, including ethnic minorities.¹¹⁴

- *Cooperation with the Russian Federation*

The resolutions of the regional conferences indicate how closely the activities of the organizations of Russia's compatriots abroad are intertwined with various institutions and

organizations of Russia. The documents highlight the need to cooperate with the authorities of the Russian Federation, Russian entrepreneurs, and non-governmental organizations. The institutions mentioned in the Resolutions of 2015 and 2016 are: 1) the State Duma Committee on the Affairs of Compatriots; 2) the Government Commission on the Affairs of Compatriots Abroad; 3) the Department on Work with Compatriots Abroad of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; 4) Rossotrudnichestvo [The Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation]; 5) the Foundation for the Support and Protection of the Rights of Compatriots Living Abroad; 6) the Foundation for the Support of the Russian Press Abroad; 7) the governments of the cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg; and 8) the leadership of the Kaliningrad region.

The activities that must be carried out in cooperation with the Russian Federation according to the Resolutions of 2015 and 2016 are: 1) humanitarian projects; 2) forming an objective image of Russia in the countries of residence; 3) identification of Russia's priority regions for partnership and requesting the leadership of the Kaliningrad region to consider developing a program of work with compatriots of the Northern Europe and the Baltic Sea region;

4) financing regional media for compatriots; 5) increasing the support of Rosstrudnichestvo for the Country Coordination Council's activities; 6) making requests to the Department on Work with Compatriots Abroad of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to participate in compatriots' regional conferences and develop a strategy for working with compatriots; 7) making a proposal to hold hearings in the State Duma Committee of the Russian Federation on the Affairs of Compatriots on the issue of respect for human rights and minority rights in the Baltic Sea and the Nordic countries; 8) providing support to Russia's diplomatic activities in South East Ukraine and humanitarian aid to the peaceful population in Donbas; 9) providing support to Russian cultural and educational centers; and 10) paying special attention to working with children and young people abroad.

However, despite the wide network of compatriots' support institutions and organizations in Russia and in the countries of residence of compatriots, there is a reason to doubt if these policies form a genuine link between Russia and its compatriots abroad. Kristina Kallas writes that regardless of the large number of compatriots' organizations in Estonia, the number of persons actually participating in these activities is relatively low; the movement is also characterized by local scandals and strong Russian control that suppresses

internal processes.¹¹⁵ Kallas' findings are in line with the reflections of the compatriot Igor Kalakauskas in Estonia that 'official Moscow has no idea how it would be necessary to organize the work with Russian-speaking inhabitants of the planet' and 'Moscow often acts on their behalf by making loud statements [...] but often they are not legally agreed or are based on common conjecture and false conclusions'.¹¹⁶ Likewise Latvian pro-Russian activist Yevgeny Osipov is of the opinion that 'due to the absence of long-term coherent and effective policy towards compatriots, there are no serious pro-Russian forces in Latvia capable of risking the mobilization of a sufficient number of people for serious protest'.¹¹⁷ This gives a competitive advantage to the Russian compatriots' countries of residence and the opportunity to implement better strategies for building relations with these diverse groups within their societies.

- *History*

The promotion of historical narratives is a very important dimension of Russia's compatriot policy. According to Russia's National Security Strategy, the 'falsification of history' is one of the tools of confrontation in the global information space.¹¹⁸ The Resolution of 2015 is in line with this strategic document; it includes a responsibility 'to continue countering the falsification of the



History is being used by Russia as one of the front lines in the information war and as an instrument for constructing national identity and self-esteem

history of World War II and the belittling of the decisive contribution of the Soviet Union in the victory over Nazism'. As, according to the Kremlin, the 'falsification of history' takes place mainly outside Russia, Russia's compatriots living abroad are used as agents for promoting Russia's history narratives outside Russia.

History is being used by Russia as one of the front lines in the information war and as an instrument for constructing national identity and self-esteem. For example, Russia's Minister of Education Olga Vasilyeva holds the opinion that historical myths are necessary, because people need ideals for which to strive, and history in general is a subjective thing because different people can interpret it in different ways.¹¹⁹ The mindset that certain historical events are a source of

national pride and a political tool is present also in the activities of the compatriots of the NB8 region. The Resolution of 2015 states that 'the 70th anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War is a solid basis for the unification of our compatriots', but the Resolution of 2016 includes the commitment 'to continue the positive role played by the organizations of compatriots in the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Great Victory by conducting ongoing activities aimed at preserving the memory of the heroic events in the country's history'.

Two important building blocks in the activities of the Victory Day celebration are the campaigns 'George Ribbon' and 'Immortal Regiment'. The campaign 'George Ribbon' was launched in 2005 and according to the official version



In the third assembly of the ‘Russkiy Mir Foundation’, Patriarch Kirill named three fundamentals of this concept: the Orthodox faith; Russian culture and language; and common historical memory and common views on social development.

it aims to preserve and transmit to future generations the memory of World War II and to draw public attention to the problems of veterans. In 2009 the campaign took place in more than 60 countries and ribbons were distributed in the majority of Russian embassies abroad.¹²⁰ The campaign ‘Immortal Regiment’ was initiated in 2012; its stated main aim is preserving a personal memory in every family about the generation that fought in World War II.¹²¹ The campaign consists of a website where people can register and search for Soviet soldiers of World War II,¹²² and the Victory Day march, where people take to the streets with the pictures of these soldiers.¹²³ The Resolution of 2016 sets the goal of expanding the number of countries participating in ‘Immortal Regiment’. Both campaigns are long-term, massive, consistent,

and easily perceptible communication tools that promote Russia’s historic narratives and spread them globally. These campaigns are staged as grassroots movements, although it is clear that they are promoted by the Russian state both within and outside Russia. In countries with a large ethnic Russian minority, a significant number of residents with Russian as their first language, and complex historic relations with Russia, such activities contribute to the division of the society, as the historic events glorified by Russia remind many representatives of the titular nationalities of the Soviet occupation of their countries and the purges that followed.

- *Russian language, culture, and education*

This area of compatriots’ activities is most closely related

to Russia's 'soft power' and the concept of the 'Russian world'. During the first World Congress of Compatriots in 2001, Putin stated that 'the concept "Russian World" from time immemorial went far beyond Russia's geographic boundaries and the Russian ethnos'.¹²⁴ This is yet another statement that, in the smaller countries neighbouring Russia that were once part of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, may cause concern and sense of insecurity, since it may be interpreted as disrespect for existing boundaries. In the third assembly of the 'Ruskiy Mir Foundation', Patriarch Kirill named three fundamentals of this concept: the Orthodox faith; Russian culture and language; and common historical memory and common views on social development. He also stated that a consolidated 'Russian world' could become a strong global entity in international politics.¹²⁵ The Resolution of 2016 expresses support for Russia in its attempts to consolidate the 'Russian World' and to preserve and expand Russian ethno-cultural space abroad. However, the crisis in Eastern Ukraine is an indication of the ineffectiveness of Russia's 'soft power'¹²⁶ and it has contributed even more to 'the hostile attitude of the Baltic States to Moscow's efforts to develop cooperation with compatriots'.¹²⁷

Promotion of the Russian language and culture is the issue that delineates contradictions in the policies of Russia and

Latvia, where according to the 2011 census almost 40% of the population indicated the Russian language as their household language. The Resolution of 2016 sets the task of creating an expert group for the implementation of the concept 'Russian Language Abroad'.¹²⁸ This concept states that the Russian language is one of the basic instruments for implementing Russia's strategic foreign policy interests, because the spread of the Russian language across borders strengthens and expands Russia's presence in the international arena. This is not a sensitive issue for countries where the Russian ethnic minority is around one per cent, as is the case in the Nordic countries, but in a country where the titular nationality is just 60% of the population it is a problem. In 2014, a preamble was added to the Constitution of the Latvian Republic, which states that the aim of the Latvian state is to guarantee the existence of the Latvian nation, its language, and culture.¹²⁹ Thus, in relation to language and culture within Latvian society, Latvia and Russia have conflicting national interests.

From the point of view of Russia's interests, the promotion of the Russian language indeed makes sense, especially in the context of the global information warfare that escalated along with the crisis in Eastern Ukraine. As different parties promote different and often contradictory narratives



As different parties promote different and often contradictory narratives about conflicts and controversial political events such as the wars in Ukraine and Syria, Brexit, elections in the US and elsewhere, for Russia it is easier to promote its worldview in the Russian language space.

about conflicts and controversial political events such as the wars in Ukraine and Syria, Brexit, elections in the US and elsewhere, for Russia it is easier to promote its worldview in the Russian language space. This is evident in Latvia, where the forty per cent of the population that identifies Russian as their first language receives information from media solely in the Russian language.¹³⁰ As a result, the views of Russian speakers in Latvia about Euro-aidan and the Crimea annexation tend to be in line with the narratives that are promoted in Russian media, while those for whom Latvian is the first language represent the worldview of Latvian media.¹³¹ This contributes to the polarization of Latvian society on global issues.

The Resolution of 2016 also welcomes the adoption of

the concept 'Russian School Abroad' that aims to ensure general education in the Russian language for Russia's compatriots abroad.¹³² The Resolution of 2016 asks the Regional Coordination Council and World Coordination Council to work out concrete forms and methods for the implementation of this concept by taking into account the experience of the work done in the region. The Annex of the Resolution of 2016 'Information about the situation of Russian schools in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia'¹³³ specifies compatriots' concerns about the plans of the governments of the Baltic States to eliminate publicly funded education in Russian and other minority languages. The Resolution of 2015 also includes the intent to ask the Government Commission on the Affairs of Compatriots Abroad to strengthen support

for cultural and educational centers of Russian compatriots' communities in the Nordic and the Baltic Sea countries.

- *Information activities*

The resolutions of both regional compatriots' conferences stress the importance of the information component in supporting Russia's compatriots abroad. The Resolution of 2015 welcomed the establishment of the World Russian Press Foundation in 2014, which aims 'to support the Russian language media abroad so that Russian compatriots could receive not only anti-Russian propaganda but also a different view'.¹³⁴ Another way in which Russia helps to bring its worldview to its compatriots is by providing assistance in subscribing to the Russian language press. For example, the Russian Embassy in Estonia in 2017 paid for the subscription of the weekly 'MK-Estonia' and 'KP in Northern Europe' for Soviet veterans and Russia's compatriots' organizations.¹³⁵

The resolutions of 2015 and 2016 also support the development of the magazine *Baltiiskiy mir* (The Baltic World) as regional compatriots' media and recognize its positive experience, although, in reality, this magazine had serious problems. There were several scandals in relation to the financial expenditures of the magazine,¹³⁶ and magazine ceased publication in the beginning of 2016 due to a lack of financial

resources.¹³⁷ This is just more evidence of the gap between the official statements of Russia's compatriot policy and its effectiveness in reality. To improve the funding of compatriots' media, the Resolution of 2016 asks the Government Commission on the Affairs of Compatriots Abroad to consider the possibility of financing regional compatriots' media as a separate item of expenditure.

The resolutions also pay attention to communication on the Internet. The Resolution of 2015 calls for the intensification of information activities, including the work of the website of the World Coordination Council. The Resolution of 2016 emphasizes a more active use of social networks, websites of compatriots' organizations and Country Coordination Councils, and the development of compatriots' digital media, to promote an 'objective image of Russia' in the countries of residence. The competition organised for the websites of the Coordination Councils is one of the tools they use to improve their information activities. Country Coordination Councils are also asked to continue work on the preparation of a calendar of memorable dates of the Russian diaspora in the 2016-2018 year.

- *Priority target groups*

The resolutions identify youth as a main target group of Russia's compatriot

policy activities in the region. The Resolution of 2015 asks the Government Commission on the Affairs of Compatriots Abroad to pay special attention to work with children and young people abroad by means of the excursion and the education program 'Hello, Russia!', and to expand the practice of holding youth camps, seminars, and short-term training courses on the Russian language and Russian history and culture for Russian-speaking youth from the Nordic and the Baltic Sea countries. The Resolution of 2016 aims to continue the practice of holding youth festivals and gatherings in Russia and abroad, as well as training and educational trips to Russia's historical places. It also sets the engagement of young compatriots in the activities of Country Coordination Councils as a key task. The Resolution of 2016 also aims to create a youth expert group in the Northern Europe and the Baltic Sea region, the purposes of which include preparing for the XIX World Festival of Youth and Students in 2017 and studying the possibility of compatriots from the region participating in the festival.

Russian entrepreneurs are another priority target group, as the Resolution of 2016 also foresees the creation of an expert group for interaction with Russian entrepreneurs in the Nordic and Baltic countries. Veterans should also be mentioned as an important target group; although this was not

highlighted in the resolutions, a review of the activities of Russia's compatriots in the NB8 countries gives evidence that support for Soviet veterans is a significant element in the agenda of the compatriots, especially in the Baltic States.

In addition to the described areas of compatriot policy, two more can be pointed out that were not widely discussed in the Resolutions but are important analytical categories for structuring the identified activities. First, the Resolution of 2016 also welcomes the significant contribution of *the Russian Orthodox Church* and other traditional confessions of the Russian Diaspora in strengthening the spiritual unity of compatriots and their humanitarian and cultural ties with their historical homeland. Compatriots of the region should fully support the work of the parish cultural and spiritual centres. And second, both resolutions also pay attention to *the organisational work* of coordinating Russia's compatriots' activities.

COMPATRIOTS' ACTIVITIES IN THE NB8 REGION IN 2016

In order to obtain a comparative perspective on the scope and intensity of the activities of Russia's official compatriot organisations in each of the NB8 countries, we used the information published on the website of the World Coordination Council. It has a section 'News' where reports

Figure 2. Russia's compatriots' activities in the NB8, 2016



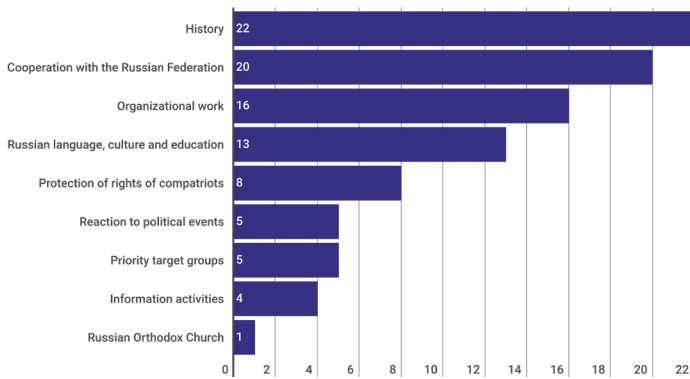
Source: Author's estimation based on the news section of the World Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots Living Abroad, vksrs.com

on Russia's official compatriot organisations' activities all over the world are published. Most likely this site does not cover all activities, but it can be used as a unified, authoritative, and comparative reference system, which gives an idea of the most important events in each country. Although this study can not give a complete picture of all activities of Russia's compatriots' organizations that took place in the NB8 countries during 2016, it does provide a comparative perspective of the most important events from the perspective of the Coordination Councils of Russia's compatriot organizations. For the research purpose of this paper, the activities in the NB8 countries in 2016 were identified and analysed. In total, 94 Russian compatriots' activities were identified in the NB8 region in 2016 (several entries in the news section that were related to the same event were counted as one activity; therefore, the number of activities as identified in this study is less than the number of entries per country in the news section of the vksrs.com).

As can be seen in Figure 2, the largest number of activities took place in Latvia and Estonia, which can be explained by the fact that these are the countries with the largest share of Russian-speaking communities in the NB8 region. But along with the two Baltic States, intense work with Russia's compatriots was also done in Sweden. A number of compatriots' activities in other countries of the region was below the mean. This indicates that in terms of activity intensity Estonia, Latvia, Sweden, and Finland should be grouped together as the countries with most intense activity, rather than making a division between the three Baltic States and the Nordic countries. This confirms that it is indeed reasonable to address the problem of the influence of Russia's compatriot policy in the regional breakdown of the NB8 countries because the geopolitical landscape is changing.

The analysis of compatriots' activities in the NB8 region as reported on the website of the World

Figure 3. Intensity of activity of Russia's compatriots' in the NB8, by category, 2016



Source: Author's estimation based on the news section of the World Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots Living Abroad, vkrs.com

Coordination Council also gives insight into which areas are the most active (Figure 3). Compatriots' activities in the NB8 region were grouped according to the analysis of the resolutions of the Regional Coordination Council (Annex 1). Although it cannot be distinguished as a specific area of activity, the category 'Reaction to political events' was added because in certain exceptional cases Russia's compatriots expressed their views on specific political events in their countries of residence, and this is important to note. For example, the response of Russian compatriot organizations in Estonia to the statement of newly elected President Kaljulaid that she would speak with inhabitants of Ida-Virumaa region in their native language was coded as a reaction to political event, as was the view of Russian compatriot organizations in Latvia about the resolution of the National Alliance, which aims to strengthen Latvia as a national state.

The estimates of the number of activities in each category are approximate, because some of the activities could be related to several categories, but each activity was included in only one category according to the themes in the news headlines. Nevertheless, it is possible to get an idea of which areas of activity are most intense among Russia's compatriots in the NB8 region.

The greatest number of activities were related to history—the celebration of Victory Day, the 'George Ribbon' and 'Immortal Regiment' campaigns, as well as conferences and lectures on historical themes. A large share of events was related to the activities of Russian embassies, Russia's support programs, compatriots' participation in events organized by Russia, cooperation with Russian officials and institutions, participation in the State Duma elections, and support for Russia's activities in Ukraine.

The website also provided information about the organizational work of country coordination councils, such as their annual meetings, which constitute the third largest area of activity. Events related to the promotion of the Russian language, culture and education, and protection of the rights and legitimate interests of compatriots are also of importance. Some activities were related to compatriots' reactions to political events in their countries of residence and Russia. There were also a number of events targeted at youth and veterans and some news items related to informational activities, but the involvement of the Russian Orthodox Church was mentioned only in one case.

CONCLUSIONS

The concept of Russia's compatriots abroad is rather ambiguous and widely interpretable, which gives an opportunity for Russia to use the idea of the protection of compatriots' rights as a moral justification for interference in internal matters of the sovereign states, for the use of military force, and for violations of the territorial integrity of neighbouring states. The promotion of this concept is taking place through a wide and formalized network of organizations largely controlled by Russia, but attempts are made to create a perception that they are grassroots movements, thus legitimizing the compatriot policy abroad. However, the actual number of those in the NB8 who identify themselves as Russia's compatriots might be at least three times smaller than the official estimates by Moscow. Due to the vagueness of the concept, the actual number of Russia's compatriots is difficult to verify.

There is a gap between the scope of Russia's compatriot policy as it is officially declared and organized and the strength of Russia's actual relations with compatriots abroad. The organization of Russia's compatriot activities abroad is rather formal, not well known among or representative of Russian speaking communities abroad, and characterized by internal conflicts. As a result, there is no genuine link between Russia and its compatriots abroad, despite active state policy. This gives opportunities for the NB8 countries, especially Estonia and Latvia, to build stronger relations with their Russian minorities.

However, from the perspective of national security in the NB8 countries, the main concern is not the actual interaction of Russia with its compatriots in the region, but the fact that the narrative of 'discrimination' may be used as a political excuse for intervention, as exemplified by the five-day war with Georgia and the crisis in Eastern Ukraine. It may be assumed that Russia exaggerates the numbers of its compatriots in the region and its activities done to 'engage' with them mainly to establish a readily available reason to 'protect' them in a military or non-military manner, should it find such intervention expedient.

Latvia and Estonia are the countries most vulnerable to an application of the 'violation of compatriots' rights' narrative, because of the large number of ethnic Russians and speakers of Russian as their first language, and of the status of a number of them as 'non-citizens'. At the same time, the possibility that Russia might use this as a basis for sovereignty violations is determined by

its strategic interests rather than by any perceived discrimination against Russia's compatriots, because compatriot policy is a tool, not a strategic goal. Nevertheless, to improve the security of Estonia and Latvia, these countries should work to lessen any factual basis for the arguments that Russia might use against them.

A regional approach to analysing Russia's compatriot policy analysis is justified because it provides a better understanding of how Russia organizes its compatriots' activities on a global scale and how the geopolitical landscape is changing. The regional coordination of Russia's compatriot policy began in 2015, when the Regional Coordination Council of the Northern European and the Baltic Sea countries was established. From the perspective of coordinating Russia's compatriot policy, the Baltic States belong to Northern Europe instead of the Near Abroad. In terms of the intensity of Russia's compatriot activities in the NB8 region, the dividing line between the Baltic States and the Nordic countries is not relevant any more, because the activities of Russia's compatriots are being consolidated in the region.

The most intense area of Russia's compatriot activities in the NB8 region is the promotion of Russia's historical narratives, which are mainly related to the victory of the Soviet Union in World War II. The intense Victory Day celebrations on 9 May are being supplemented by adding other commemorative dates, such as the liberation of individual cities from Nazi invaders, the beginning of the World War II, and Soviet Army Day. Long-term, massive, and easy-to-perceive global campaigns such

as 'George Ribbon' and 'Immortal Regiment' ceremonies are organized for the promotion of Russia's historical narratives. These events take place in all NB8 countries.

Marginalization of Russia's compatriot organizations and of Russian activists in the Baltic States reduces the opportunities for Russia's to use them as a 'soft power' tool. Russia's possibilities to use 'soft power' have been diminished by the Ukrainian crisis, because it has increased wariness towards Russia's compatriot activities. However, the restriction of Russia's compatriot policy is a double-edged sword, because with such restrictions the governments of the Baltic States may alienate a certain part of the population, namely the many for whom such Russian-supported events as the Victory Day celebration are personally important. This means that necessary restrictions to Russia's compatriot policy must be accompanied by improving the dialogue with the Russian-speaking population.

The spread of the Russian language across Russia's borders helps to promote its worldview and its interpretation of important global events, which is different from the Western perspective. Speakers of Russian as their first language are more open to Russia's narratives; therefore, in countries with such large Russian-speaking populations as reside in Latvia and Estonia, global information warfare leads to polarization and further divisions in these societies.

Annex 1. Russia's compatriot policy areas and the main tools in the NB8 countries

| Compatriots' policy activities areas | The main tools in the NB8 region | Countries where the application of the tools was identified |
|---|---|---|
| History | 'Victory in the Great Patriotic War' as a basis for consolidation of compatriots Campaign 'George Ribbon' Campaign 'Immortal Regiment' Countering the falsification of the history of World War II |  |
| Protection of the rights and legitimate interests of compatriots | Neo-Nazism Restriction of democratic rights and freedoms Education in the Russian language Legal advice in the Russian language |  |
| Reaction to political events | Media in the Russian language Communication with Russian compatriots in the Russian language Relations with Russian-speaking population Events in Russia and Ukraine |  |
| Priority target groups | Youth Russian entrepreneurs in the NB8 region Veterans |  |
| Information activities | World Russian Press Foundation The magazine 'The Baltic World' The magazine 'The Rights of Compatriots of the Northern Europe' Social networks, websites, and digital media Calendars of memorable data Paid subscription to Russian media |  |
| Russian Orthodox Church | The parish cultural and spiritual centers |  |

Annex 2. Kremlin's perspective on the violation of the rights and legal interests of Russia's compatriots in the Baltic States.

Allegations on Neo-Nazism

- Manifestations of neo-Nazism and sympathy for the Nazi past.
- Prosecution of Soviet veterans.
- Politically motivated criminal cases against participants in the events on the night of 12 to 13 January 1991 at the Vilnius TV tower and "Myadininkyayskom customs post" July 31, 1991.
- Measures by the authorities to limit compatriots' publicly celebrated events, especially those connected with the victory over fascism, statements by officials of the "occupational nature" of these celebrations.
- The statements of some politicians about the need to demolish the Monument to the Liberators of Riga and Latvia in Riga.
- Creation of the status of "non-citizens" in Latvia and Estonia became the basis for the policies or forced assimilation of ethnic minorities or forced expulsion from their countries of residence.
- The status of 'non-citizens' has led to the implementation of the policy of revising the results of World War II and the

political rehabilitation of former Nazi collaborators.

Allegations on the restriction of democratic rights and freedoms

- Creating obstacles for representatives of anti-fascist and human rights organizations to cross the border and carry out anti-fascist activities.
- Latvian NGOs active in protecting the rights of compatriots are mentioned as hostile intelligence services in official records.
- Restriction of contacts with compatriots in Russia, the expulsion of many Russian journalists and representatives of the scientific community and human rights organizations from all three Baltic countries.
- Targeted information campaign aimed at the condemnation of Russian policy towards compatriots living abroad.
- The restriction of the activities of Russian media in the territory of the Baltic countries.
- There is no universal suffrage in Latvia and Estonia since 1991. 'Mass statelessness' is contrary to democratic standards and calls into question the democratic nature and legitimacy of the results of all elections and referendums in those countries.

Allegations concerning education in the Russian language

- Plans to eliminate all forms of publicly funded education in Russian and other minority languages in Latvia and Estonia.
- The plans of the Government of Lithuania with respect to schools with instruction in the languages of national minorities.
- The reduction in the number of Russian schools is taking place in all three countries at a faster rate than would be warranted by demographic changes.
- The actual loss of educational opportunities in Russian in most rural areas in Latvia.

Source: Annexes 1, 2 and 3 to the Resolution II of the Regional Conference of Russian compatriots of the Nordic Countries and the Baltic States

03

NARRATIVES ABOUT THE NORDIC-BALTIC COUNTRIES PROMOTED BY RUSSIA

Diana Kaljula, Ivo Juurvee

INTRODUCTION

Since the Ukrainian conflict in 2014 and Russia's interference in the Brexit referendum in 2016 and elections in the United States, France, and Germany in 2017, the Western public has begun to accept the possibility that the Russian Federation is actively and aggressively interfering with sovereign countries via the information environment. One of the aims of the project 'Russia's (Dis)Information Activities Against the Nordic-Baltic Region' was to collect systematic information about the main narratives, themes, and messages that Russia employs regarding Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, and Sweden.

METHOD

The method used for this study was qualitative content analysis of three Russian news media—*Sputnik* (the study researched only the English version: sputniknews.com),¹³⁸ *RT*, and *Perviy kanal* during 2016. Only textual information was analysed. The selection of media was based on the fact that *RT* and *Sputnik* were developed primarily for the purpose of promoting Russia's worldview to global audiences, whereas *Perviy kanal* is the most popular TV channel within Russia, and is also one of the most popular media in the Baltic States. As the project is in its initial stages, a decision was made to limit the focus of the study to these three media for a preliminary insight into Russia's narratives regarding the NB8 countries. However, it must be emphasised that much of the news published in the above-mentioned channels is referred to by other media outlets.

A systematic sampling method was used involving the selection of particular elements from an ordered sampling frame. Because *Sputnik* produces such a large amount of content, news from the website was sampled once every four days throughout the year, starting from the 4th of January. *RT* search results for the NB8 countries were much smaller and cannot be compared with *Sputnik*; *RT* published articles about specific countries several times per week; for the purposes of the study articles were sampled every other day through the year, starting from the 2nd of January. Slightly different methods were applied to data collection of the news reporting on *Perviy kanal*.

There were two major differences. First, since the number of news stories was much lower compared to *Sputnik* and *RT*, it was possible to analyse all news stories regarding the NB8 countries from 2016 (not only those from every second or fourth day). Second, the *Perviy kanal* website has a sophisticated and (according to random testing) reliable search engine,¹³⁹ which was used for data collection. The names of the NB8 countries were inserted in the 'search' field for dates from 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2016. The results were mostly news items that had a video with them (only a few results to documentaries and talk shows outside news program appeared); there could be several results for the same news in one day as the story was evolving during the day. As the results for the NB8 countries were small, they were compared with all NATO and/or EU member states, several international organisations (the UN, the EU, and NATO),

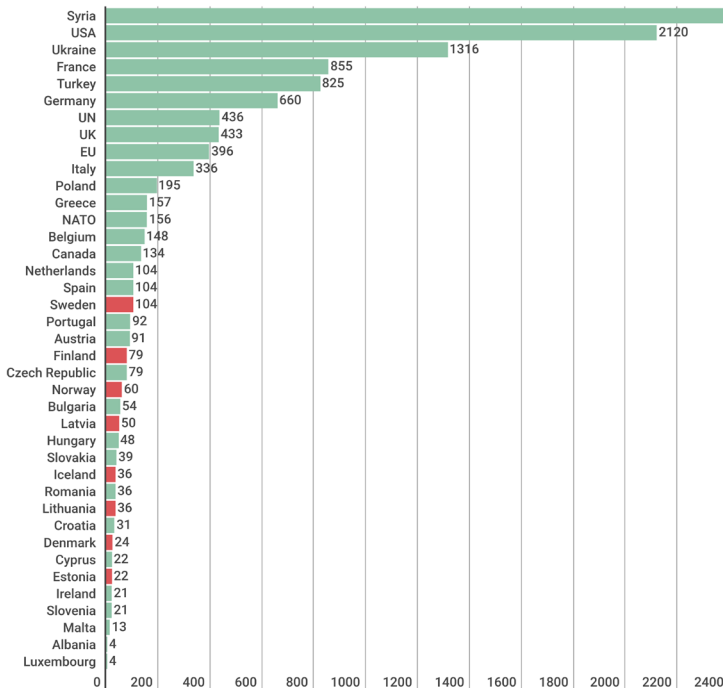
and the two countries where Russia is currently involved in military action—Ukraine and Syria (see Figure 4). The data shows that the NB8 states were not a priority for *Perviy kanal* in 2016.

Table 3 shows all search results for *Sputnik*, *RT*, and *Perviy kanal* and the number of articles that were chosen through the sampling process. Initial results often resulted in non-relevant articles in which one or more of the NB8 countries was tagged but not mentioned in the news piece. The reason for this is unknown—it was possibly a result of human error when tagging articles, or perhaps it was deliberate,

intended to draw attention to particular news articles. Some of the articles sampled were not considered for analysis. In several cases, our search results showed an article about, for example, Denmark, but which was really about another country. Denmark was mentioned briefly in a non-relevant list, or the page had news or a commercial link about Denmark. The same applies for every country under study.

The analysis showed that a large number of these news items were about sports or culture, and so were not suitable for identifying the narratives that are the focus of this study. Therefore,

Figure 4. Comparative coverage of NATO and/or EU member states, Ukraine, Syria UN, EU, NATO in Perviy kanal in 2016.











all articles about sports or culture were coded under random, unless a narrative emerged. For the database, each of these news items was given a unique ID number, a code indicating the main narrative present in the article, the date was noted, and a link to the full text/video was also inserted.

The study results for *Sputnik*, *RT*, and *Perviy kanal* are presented and analysed in an integrated manner, in order to provide a more comprehensive overview. It is important to note that all three channels are part of the Russian state-funded media network, which is why all three are presented together. The analysis begins with a description of the narratives that were identified during the study, and continues by analysing the narratives in relation to each country of the region.

NARRATIVES RELATED TO THE NB8 COUNTRIES

The first aim of this study was to identify and analyse the narratives promoted by Russia in regard to the NB8 countries. Initially a coding manual for content analysis was prepared with 32 codes, plus one code for random news and articles. The random articles comprise stories about weather, landscape, an occasional announcement of some politician, etc. Those articles were without any comment or elaboration. Initially the narratives used were derived from the findings of the second NB8 workshop, which took place in October 2016. More narratives were added after a pilot study on *Sputnik* had been completed. However, not all of the initial narratives were identified

Table 3. Articles from initial search results and after sampling.

| |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| <i>Sputnik International</i> | 704 | 873 | 689 | 1348 | 276 | 455 | 495 | 492 |
| | / | / | / | / | / | / | / | / |
| All stories / sample | 111 | 105 | 101 | 225 | 28 | 100 | 99 | 114 |
| <i>RT</i> | 136 | 184 | 222 | 127 | 110 | 114 | 97 | 1231 |
| | / | / | / | / | / | / | / | / |
| All stories / sample | 64 | 66 | 10 | 61 | 30 | 25 | 21 | 16 |
| <i>Perviy kanal</i> | 24 | 60 | 81 | 104 | 36 | 50 | 36 | 22 |
| | / | / | / | / | / | / | / | / |
| All stories / sample | 2 | 14 | 40 | 28 | 2 | 33 | 26 | 12 |
| All analysed stories | 177 | 185 | 151 | 314 | 60 | 158 | 146 | 142 |

in the articles sampled, and so have been left out of the final list. Presented below is the final list of narratives identified in the news items sampled from all three news outlets:

1. Refugees and migrants as a destabilising factor.
2. Radical Islam as a destabilising factor. *
3. Islamic culture as a destabilising factor. *
4. Rise of far-right nationalists.
5. NATO is a threat to Russia. *
6. Specific country is a vassal of NATO and/or the European Union.
7. NATO is luring Finland and Sweden into joining. *
8. If Finland and Sweden join NATO, Russia must react. *
9. Finland and Russia are good partners, no matter what. *
10. Finland does not see Russia as threat. *
11. Fear of Russia is being used for the increase of defence budgets.
12. Questioning the rearmament policies of the NB8 states.
13. Sanctions against Russia hurt the European Union, incl. Nordic-Baltic countries more than Russia.*
14. Sweden is part of an unjust persecution of Julian Assange. *
15. European Union unity is diminishing. *
16. Ridiculing the idea of a Russian threat.*
17. The Arctic is a territory of dialogue.
18. The Nord-Stream 2 project will not fail. *
19. Russia does not violate borders. *
20. The 9th of May is commemorated all over the world.*
21. Discriminating against minorities.
22. Glorification in certain countries of Nazi collaborators.
23. Russia does not agree that there was a Soviet occupation.*
24. Child welfare issues.
25. The West conspires to make Russia the scapegoat on everything.*
26. The Baltics are an ideological playground for Soros and the Washington elite.*
27. The West does not take Ukraine as fully sovereign country.
28. Spy scandals.
29. Random.

Narratives that are marked with an asterisk were not listed in the collected narratives list from the NB8 workshop in October 2016. They were added either from the pilot study (e.g. Narrative 18), from previous knowledge (e.g. Narrative 23), or because they occurred multiple times (e.g. Narrative 14). There were other narratives on the coding list, but as they occurred only once, they were not included in the final report. Narratives 27–28 were found only in the news items from *Perviy kanal*. The narratives have been categorised into four dimensions—societal, military, political, and economic. The authors have subjectively interpreted messages of these narratives.

The societal dimension

This dimension combines social and cultural stories. These stories take advantage of sensitive issues and present them in an unbalanced manner. They include the following narratives: *refugees and migrants as a destabilising factor; radical Islam as a destabilising factor; Islamic culture as a destabilising factor; the rise of far-right nationalists; child welfare issues; the Baltics are an ideological playground for Soros and the Washington elite; the 9th of May is commemorated all over the world.*

The narrative *refugees and migrants as a destabilising factor* was present in multiple articles concerning all NB8 countries. It derives from the European migrant crisis that began in the year 2015. As the Nordic countries have generously helped refugees in need, they have themselves become a target of information flow from the Russian state-funded media. This narrative has been projected in different ways. Some of the articles relate stories about refugees and migrants being welcomed with open arms by one or another country, which then finds that crime rates have risen because the newcomers. The opposite sentiment is also expressed—some countries are aggressively opposed to immigration and to EU-imposed quotas that require relocating migrants from the various refugee camps. The majority of stories carried the message that the Nordic countries are not able to handle the refugee and migrant flow, but are forced to accept it because of their soft liberal values, which make their societies too weak. As a result their own ethnic groups are beginning to collapse both culturally and

societally. When the Baltics are mentioned, the stories emphasise that these societies are not showing any solidarity with their European partners. This narrative also provides a good opportunity to show the Baltics as xenophobic and to verify their leniency towards a fascist mindset.

The narrative *radical Islam as a destabilising factor* was identified in stories concerning the following countries: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Lithuania, Norway, and Sweden. It was portrayed separately from the narrative about refugees and migrants. These stories describe Western countries struggling to maintain control of the threat caused by refugees and migrants, and aim to portray weak, liberal societies, such as those of the Nordic countries, making themselves vulnerable to the threat of asymmetrical terrorist attacks.

The narrative *Islamic culture as a destabilising factor* was identified in stories concerning Denmark, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. This narrative was kept separate from the one about radical Islam. A variety of stories were published depicting Islamic migrants and refugees as pressuring their host country to adjust its own ethnic and cultural values to accommodate them. Again, the main message is that, because of their liberalism, the Nordic countries have become so soft and weak that they bow down before another culture. This weakness gives people who represent Islamic culture an opportunity to demand rights for their non-Western values. The assumption that lies behind this narrative is that multiculturalism is not possible when one party holds Western values, and

the other Islamic values. The West is liberal and individualist, and Islamic culture represents collectivism—collectivism excludes any individualism.

The narrative of the *rise of far-right nationalists* was identified in stories concerning Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Norway, and Sweden. Such stories follow stories about the destabilising effects of refugees and migrants, and Islam with its radical forms. They show how some actors from the above-named countries have risen in reaction to Muslim immigration. This is a good example of a convenience narrative. While the previously discussed narratives mostly portrayed immigration and Islam as negative and destabilizing factors, this narrative portrays the same phenomenon positively and the reaction to it as negative. For *Sputnik* and *RT*, both sides of the liberal–conservative spectrum provide opportunities to depict those countries in a negative light.

The narrative about *child welfare issues* was identified in stories concerning Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. In previous years, the question about children's welfare in the Nordic countries has been portrayed through the aspect of Russian minorities. Many stories about child molesters and problems with refugee children were identified. The latter were about how refugee centres cannot provide safety for their underage inhabitants, or how child brides are not separated from their partners in the asylum centres.¹⁴⁰ This narrative depicts the Nordic countries as incapable of protecting the weakest inhabitants of their societies. If stories about dramatic abuse of children in the Nordic countries appear year after year, it

becomes difficult for the audience to have unbiased attitudes towards them. It opens the door to creating associations between predatory acts against children and these societies as a whole—instead of responding positively, these countries must actively deal with their own deviants.

The narrative *the Baltics are a playground for Soros and the Washington elite* was identified in stories concerning Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. In a way this narrative is a derivation of the narrative *X is a vassal-state of NATO or other European Union countries*, only the idea is more narrowly constrained—it is that the three Baltic States are like laboratories, where the West, specifically George Soros and the Washington elite, dictate all key questions concerning these societies and their politics. George Soros has also been blamed for financing the Colour Revolutions, which, in Russia's understanding, are meant to end in a coup d'état in Russia. The ultimate purpose is for Western corporate oligarchs to devour Russia and take over all its natural resources. The message of this narrative is that the Baltic countries are not governed independently and therefore should not be taken seriously by the international community.

The narrative *the 9th of May is commemorated all over the world* was identified in stories concerning Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. For Russia, the 9th of May is Victory Day, celebrating the end of World War II. In 2015 and 2016, the Kremlin has sponsored the 'Immortal Regiment' procession, where thousands of people carry pictures of their dead relatives who fought Nazi Germany in World War II. The message of this

narrative is that countries all over the world, specifically the Baltics in this study, commemorate Soviet Russia's great sacrifice in liberating the world from the Nazis. All of the articles analysed for this study failed to mention that these processions are attended mostly by ethnic minorities, and that the majority of the populations in the Baltic countries regard the Russian victory as the beginning of five decades of occupation and repression. It is also important to note that these processions are not spontaneous movements organised at the grassroots level. They are organised by the Russian Compatriot organisations, and are part of the Russian state strategy in the region (see pages 47-48). In Latvia, for example, one of the key organisers of the Procession is Bronislavs Zelcermans,¹⁴¹ who has close ties to and cooperates with openly pro-Kremlin activists and political forces. It is a tradition introduced from the Russian Federation, where it has become part of the campaign to create a historical memory that suits the current political elite. It is also part of the compatriot policy to make people whose first language is Russian to feel their belonging to 'Mother Russia'.

The military dimension

The narratives under this theme have a military aspect. All of them promote an understanding that NATO is an actively aggressive, double-dealing organization that seeks to expand to Russia's borders in peacetime, even though after the collapse of the Soviet Union it was agreed that NATO would not accept members along Russia's borders. This dimension includes the following narratives:

NATO is a threat to Russia; fear of Russia is ridiculous; NATO is luring Finland and Sweden into joining; if Finland and Sweden join NATO, Russia must react; Finland does not see Russia as a threat; fear of Russia is being used to increase defence budgets; the rearmament policies of the NB8 states must be questioned.

The narrative *NATO is a threat to Russia* was identified in stories concerning each of the NB8 countries. It depicts Russia as a peaceful country that must put up with continual aggression from NATO. Its message is that Russia is only reacting to NATO's aggressive moves behind 'Russia's gates'. NATO, which is controlled by the United States, is depicted as a warmongering organization, which is taking all the necessary steps to prepare for war with Russia. This narrative also often includes assurances that although NATO is strong, Russia is very capable defending itself.

The narrative that *fear of Russia is ridiculous* was identified in stories concerning Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, and Sweden. This narrative is conceptually connected to the previous narrative, where NATO is a threat to Russia. Fear of Russia is depicted as paranoia. Russia's recent military actions in Georgia and Crimea are presented as necessary, justified, and legitimate. All other countries in Europe, including the Nordic and Baltic countries, have nothing to be afraid of. The message of this narrative is that Russia is systematically being wrongfully portrayed, that in reality Russia is calling its neighbouring countries to gather for military consultations, so they could together 'address mutual concerns related

to military activities in the border areas'.¹⁴² Russia wants to have constructive relations with its neighbouring countries, while the latter have no such wish.

The narrative *NATO lures Finland and Sweden into joining* was identified in stories concerning Finland and Sweden. It portrays NATO as trying to find all possible ways to get non-aligned Finland and Sweden to join the military organization. As one article put it: 'There has been a strategy over the last 20 years to bring Sweden and Finland closer to NATO.'¹⁴³ This narrative may be intended to signal to Sweden and Finland that they ought to reject any approaches by NATO seeking an alliance. Both countries have good relations with Russia. Therefore, there is no need for them to become members of NATO. By persuading these countries that NATO will simply use them as puppets, the narrative encourages them to stay non-aligned.

The narrative *if Finland and Sweden join NATO, Russia must react* was identified in stories concerning Finland and Sweden. It is an expansion of the previous narrative. It elaborates the idea that Sweden and Finland do not understand that they would be pulled into NATO for not the purpose of defending themselves, but because of NATO's broader plan to start a war with Russia. If this happens, Russia would no other recourse than to act in self-defence. This narrative sends Finland and Sweden a harsher negative signal. If Finland and Sweden join NATO, the alliance will dictate to them to provide all strategic assets that will weaken Russia's military positions in

its own area of interest. Sweden and Finland will surely not have any independence in decision-making, and they will be used as a bridgehead in attacking Russia.

The narrative *Finland does not see Russia as a threat* was identified in stories concerning Finland. It emphasizes the positive relationship these countries have with each other. The message here might be to present Finland as an example to other Western countries, which should follow Finland's lead and not consider Russia as a threat. Peaceful, constructive, and beneficial relations with Russia are possible.

The narrative *fear of Russia is being used to increase defence spending* was identified in stories about Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, and Sweden. It represents Russia as unfairly portrayed as being aggressive, a lopsided view that is then used by military corporations to sell equipment to almost all of the Nordic-Baltic countries, military equipment that for which they will have no use. Russia's Deputy Defence Minister himself called on the media to stop scaring the Baltics, as Russia has no intention of invading them.¹⁴⁴ The same article also claims that the promotion of fear of a Russian invasion is a systematic strategy by the United States to increase military spending. The message here is that fear of Russia is ungrounded and merely being used by the United States to increase their profits from selling military equipment. The European countries are naïve and paranoid to believe such lies.

The narrative that *the rearmament policies of the NB8 states' budgets should be questioned* was identified in stories concerning Denmark, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, and Sweden. While the previous narratives have emphasized that there is no need for any European country to be afraid of Russia and asserted that such fears were only whipped up to increase defence budgets, the articles categorized under the rearmament narrative were mainly about the purchase of military or defence items. For example, one article asks why Norway would buy F-35 fighter jets and why Sweden would permanently station troops on an island strategically close to Russia. The message here is similar to those of the previous narratives. Why are the Nordic-Baltic countries rearming themselves when Russia does not pose any threat? The only reason can be that European powers are preparing for an offensive against Russia.

The political dimension

The narratives under the political theme mostly consider the actions of the NB8 countries individually and include following: *Finland and Russia are good partners, no matter what; Russia does not violate borders; European Union unity is diminishing; small European countries are vassals to NATO and the European Union; Sweden is part of an unjust persecution against Julian Assange; the West conspires to make Russia a scapegoat for everything; the Baltic countries glorify Nazi collaborators; Russia does not agree with Soviet occupation; discriminating minorities.*

The narrative *Finland and Russia are good partners, no matter what* was identified in stories about Finland. It depicts a special relationship between Finland and Russia: these countries have good economic ties; in Finland, more people are learning Russian, while interest in other European languages is declining;¹⁴⁵ there has also been a proposal in Finland to form a military alliance with Russia, as it would be the best security guarantee.¹⁴⁶ *Sputnik* and *RT* are published for the international community, so the message here might be that Finland should be considered a role model for the other Western countries. Finland is portrayed as an independent country that dares to make its own decisions. This narrative shows that it is possible to have a respectful and positive relationship with Russia.

The narrative *Russia does not violate borders* was found in stories about Estonia, Finland, and Lithuania. It asserts that Russia rejects any accusations of its naval ships or aircraft violating national borders. It denies violations of Finnish airspace and the fact that NATO aircraft have escorted Russian warplanes flying over the Baltic states.¹⁴⁷ The aim here is to assure to the international community that Russia does not violate international laws and agreements. The articles contain such statements as that Russian aircraft were 'allegedly escorted' and 'Russian aircraft were not identified'.¹⁴⁸

The narrative *European unity is diminishing* was identified in stories concerning Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Norway, and Sweden. The articles identified describe certain segments (societal or political)

of the populations of these countries as having a positive attitude towards Brexit and as attempting to achieve similar outcomes in their respective countries. Other stories state, for example, that Finland 'has suffered greatly from its membership in the Eurozone' and for this reason its national debt has grown enormously.¹⁴⁹ The message here is one of encouragement for the various anti-EU parties to push to leave the alliance. Such articles systematically portray the European Union as harmful to the economies of its member states.

The narrative *small European countries are vassals to NATO and the European Union* was identified in stories about Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, and Lithuania. It describes the small countries as dictated to by their more powerful Western allies. They are not independent in their decisions and are manipulated by the bigger powers. If Iceland decided to host a US military base, it was said to have lost its political neutrality.¹⁵⁰ The message of this narrative could be understood in various ways. First, it might be intended to show that small European countries should not be taken seriously and are not credible partners in the international community because they are dependent and easily manipulated. Second, if the message that the smaller countries are being used as pawns is systematically repeated, then perhaps they might, at some point, refuse to let themselves be used by the more influential NATO countries. This would be an example of reflexive control—the method of conveying to an opponent specifically prepared information in order to put him in a position where he makes a predetermined decision 'voluntarily'. This is a recognised

Soviet Russian technique with deep roots in Russian military strategy that is experiencing a renaissance in modern hybrid warfare.¹⁵¹

The narrative *Sweden is part of an unjust persecution of Julian Assange* was identified in stories concerning Sweden. Most stories about Julian Assange contained this narrative. Although many of the stories were not specifically about Sweden, the articles mentioned how Sweden is party to the injustice done to Assange and that it is pandering to the United States because if Assange were to go to Sweden he would be extradited immediately to the US. He would then be charged with espionage because of publishing once-secret files on WikiLeaks. The message of this narrative is to garner sympathy for Julian Assange. The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention declared that Sweden and the UK have arbitrarily detained Assange.¹⁵² This means that Sweden is not behaving lawfully and most likely is just another puppet of the United States.

The narrative that *the West conspires to make Russia a scapegoat for just about everything* was identified in stories about Latvia. It states that the West is treating Russia unfairly. Russia is falsely accused of the refugee crisis. It is said to have weaponised 'migration to overwhelm European structures'.¹⁵³ The latter was a story about an interview with Jānis Sārts, Director of NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence in Latvia, but as Latvia established this Centre, it is presumably complicit in fomenting anti-Russian sentiment. The West is also creating propaganda that 'demonizes' Russia.¹⁵⁴ The

purpose of this narrative is to highlight Western hypocrisy. Random international catastrophes and events are all blamed on Russia. It also implies that everything it blames on Russia, the West is doing itself—military actions and propaganda, breaking international law and denying having done so.

The narrative *glorification of Nazi collaborators* was identified in stories about Estonia and Latvia. In Russia's perspective, all soldiers from Estonia and Latvia who fought in World War II against the Soviet Union in Waffen SS uniform are regrettably held in honour. Therefore, all commemoration with those soldiers should be labelled as glorifying Nazism. The message of this narrative is directed toward Europe, claiming that Estonia and Latvia do not share European values and, therefore, should not be accepted as proper European countries. From the perspective of Estonia and Latvia, occupying Nazi Germany illegally conscripted most of the soldiers fighting against the Soviet Union in the Waffen SS auxiliary. However, there were also volunteers who joined. In the perception of largest part of Estonian and Latvian societies all of these legionnaires are considered freedom fighters—even though they fought in the uniform of Waffen SS, the absolute majority did so with the hope of regaining independence for their own countries. One must bear in mind that both Latvia and Estonia suffered greatly from the purges of the 'Year of Horror' or the 'Red Terror' during 1940–1941 and the June deportations in 1941, conducted by the Soviet Union. There was great suffering for people in both countries, which

was a strong motivator for Estonians and Latvians to fight alongside the Waffen SS in order not to allow for new mass executions in case of Soviet Occupation.

The narrative *Russia does not agree that there was a Soviet occupation* was identified in stories about Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. It is very clearly stated in *Sputnik*: 'Russia, the Soviet Union's successor state, disputes the Baltic republics' classification of the Soviet period as "occupation" and maintains that their inclusion in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) adhered to the international norms of the time. The Russian Foreign Ministry argues that the term "occupation" does not apply because there has been no military action between the USSR and the Baltics, while troops have been deployed based on mutual agreements and with the explicit consent of national leadership. Moscow further maintains that national authorities continued to operate in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, except for the period of German occupation during World War II.¹⁵⁵ The message of this narrative is that everything that happened in the 20th century to the Baltic states in relation to the Soviet Union was voluntary. The Baltic states, which claim now otherwise, either do not know international law or are ignorant of their history. Either way, these countries should not be taken seriously, especially when they also glorify Nazism.

The narrative about *discrimination against minorities* was identified in stories about Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. This narrative includes all forms of discrimination, and it is in line with the Kremlin's promoted

perception of the violation of the rights and legal interests of Russia's compatriots in the Baltic States as identified in Chapter 2 (see page 58). Minorities, usually ethnic Russians, are discriminated against in questions concerning citizenship and voting. However, from the point of view of the Baltic states, there has been enough time for their Russian-speaking residents to integrate and accept them as independent and sovereign countries. There is also a problem with language, as Russian should be made an official state language. Schools should be able to provide education only in Russian. From the point of view of the Baltic states, knowing national language is a precondition for equal rights and successful integration, whereas Russia aims to promote Russian language, culture and education outside its borders (see page 48), which hardens integration processes within these countries as it strengthens the perception that knowing national language is not important as was the case during the Soviet occupation. According to this narrative, it is also common for Russian minorities in Latvia not to receive medical help for 'nationalistic reasons', and they are not allowed to give Russian names to their children.¹⁵⁶ This narrative also alleges violations of free speech by the Baltic countries, including closing *Sputnik-Latvia* as part of Latvia's anti-Russian sanctions, expelling Russian journalists from Lithuania, and denying to members of a Russian bikers' club entry into Lithuania. Although the latter questions might look like diplomatic issues, they can also be understood as discrimination, and are presented in such a way as to imply that the negative

decisions are based strictly on anti-Russian sentiment. The message of this narrative is similar to that of the previous ones: the Baltic States are petty and narrow-minded.

The Narrative *the West does not take Ukraine to be a fully sovereign country* was identified in stories about Sweden, Lithuania, and Norway. These include articles about showing the anti-Ukraine documentary 'Ukraine: Masks of the Revolution' on Swedish TV despite Ukrainian protest, problems with working in Ukraine, the Norwegian-German delegation to Crimea, and diverting truck traffic from Ukraine. One way to interpret the message here is that it is intended to persuade the Western audience that Russian pursuits in Ukraine are justified. Ukraine is not a sovereign country in comparison to the Western sovereignties. That is why there should be no need to for the international sanctions against Russia, which also hurt the Western economies.

The narrative *spy scandals* is present in the news concerning Finland, Lithuania, and Estonia. It was present only on *Perviy kanal*. These stories deal with catching alleged Estonian and Lithuanian spies in St. Petersburg and Kaliningrad, as well as alleged eavesdropping on behalf of the US in Finland. Seen in the context of Russian spies caught elsewhere, the narrative demonstrates that even if Russia is not completely innocent in this regard, the other countries spy on each other and do a great deal of spying on Russia as well.

The economic dimension

The narratives under this theme show that Russia is a beneficial and respectful economic partner. All parties would gain from having good relations with Russia. The narratives include: *economic sanctions against Russia hurt the European Union, including the Nordic-Baltic countries, more than they hurt Russia; the Arctic is a territory of dialogue; the Nord-Stream 2 project will not fail.*

The narrative *economic sanctions against Russia hurt the European Union, including the Nordic-Baltic countries, more than they hurt Russia* were identified in stories about Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Sweden. It describes the economic sanctions against Russia as having little effect. All the pressure and economic loss is actually more harmful to the European countries themselves. This is often achieved by taking numbers and statistics out of context to claim that, for example, Lithuania is one of the main losers from Moscow's trade ban¹⁵⁷ and that the sanctions have also crushed the dairy industries in Sweden and Finland.¹⁵⁸ The message of this narrative is to show how useless the sanctions are. In the long run, it will destroy the sanctioning countries' own economies, while Russia has no problems in finding other economic partners outside of Europe.

The narrative *the Arctic is a territory of dialogue* was identified in stories about Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. It maintains that all territorial questions concerning the Arctic are still debatable, but solvable within the Arctic

Council. Russia has shown itself to be a peaceful and cooperative partner in various discussions concerning the Arctic. The message of this narrative is to show that even though Russia has a legitimate claim on some parts of Arctic, including some areas that overlap with e.g. Denmark, it continues to negotiate and cooperate respectfully. To Russia's home audience, the Arctic is presented as belonging only to Russia.

The narrative *the Nord-Stream 2 project will not fail* was identified in stories about Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, and Sweden. Such stories constantly reassure their readers that none of the significant European countries are opposed to the pipeline. Sweden, Denmark, and Finland do not oppose the project, as it is beneficial to all the parties.¹⁵⁹ The Baltics are considered to be 'actors working against Russia. They have nothing to gain or lose from a new pipeline being laid in the Baltic Sea, since they are not transit countries for Russian gas.'¹⁶⁰ The message of this narrative is that this project is agreeable to the countries directly involved, and that it is a useful and beneficial project for everyone.

THE USE OF IDENTIFIED NARRATIVES IN THE NB8 COUNTRIES

This subsection gives answers in relation to narratives about the NB8 countries exploited by Russia. The analysis gives an indication that there are different approaches in relation the Baltic (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) and the Nordic (Denmark,

Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden) countries. Many narratives used about the Baltic States are overlapping, the top two being: *NATO is a threat to Russia* and a *Russian threat is ridiculous*. This is because most of the articles cover the Baltic countries a single region. The most common narrative about the Nordic countries was *refugees and migrants as a destabilising factor*. Apart from the general trend in relation to the Baltic and the Nordic country groups, each country had its own specific set of narratives.

Estonia

The most common narratives in relation to Estonia in *Sputnik*, *RT*, and *Perviy kanal* were *NATO is a threat to Russia* and a *Russian threat is ridiculous*. Most of the stories were unconnected, covering military exercises such as 'Spring Storm' in Estonia,

the deployment of Danish soldiers to Estonia, or the Baltic states being in need of patriot missile system.¹⁶¹ The NATO Warsaw Summit took place on 8–9 July and throughout the month, there were articles covering decisions that were made there. In May there were many stories about NATO expansion, which also resulted in a discussion about NATO preparing to attack Russia.¹⁶²

The third most common narrative was *the 9th of May is commemorated all over the world*. Estonia was listed as one of the countries that took part in a worldwide 'Immortal Regiment' procession. Articles about this were composed as announcements, where most of them were ended with a copy-paste paragraph in several *Sputnik* articles: 'The "Immortal Regiment" is a patriotic initiative that commemorates WWII soldiers in marches held across Russia and other countries in early May. During the

Figure 5. TOP 5 narratives used by RT, Sputnik, Perviy kanal about Estonia.

| | |
|---|--|
| 1 | NATO is a threat to Russia |
| 2 | Ridiculing the idea of a Russian threat |
| 3 | The 9th of May is commemorated all over the world |
| 4 | Fear of Russia is being used for the increase of defence budgets |
| 5 | Refugees and migrants as a destabilising factor |

Other narratives: Sanctions against Russia hurt the European Union, incl. Nordic-Baltic countries more than Russia; Discriminating against minorities; Glorification in certain countries of Nazi collaborators, The Nord-Stream 2 project will not fail, Specific country is a vassal of NATO and/or the European Union, The Baltics are an ideological playground for Soros and the Washington elite, Russia does not agree that there was a Soviet occupation, The West does not take Ukraine as fully sovereign country, Radical Islam as a destabilising factor, Rise of far-right nationalists, European Union unity is diminishing, Finland and Russia are good partners, no matter what, Finland does not see Russia as threat.

Source: Authors' calculations.

marches, people carry photographs of their ancestors who participated in the war. Some 12 million people participated in the 2015 Immortal Regiment march through Russia. This year, commemorative marches are planned in the United States, Canada, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Spain, Switzerland, Estonia, Latvia, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, and many other countries.¹⁶³ On 9 May, similar articles ended this copy-paste paragraph.¹⁶⁴ This implies that certain articles are produced on command. The spectrum of narratives used about Estonia is wide, although most were used just two or three times (Figure 5).

Latvia

Sputnik, *RT*, and *Perviy kanal* published few articles about Latvia. The three most common narratives in relation to Latvia were: *NATO is a threat*

to Russia, discrimination against minorities and a Russian threat is ridiculous (Figure 6). Latvia was also mentioned during the NATO Warsaw Summit. In July there were several articles about the decision to deploy battalions in the Baltics and Poland. The large number of stories about minority discrimination is specific to Latvia. Most of them are about certain activities being interpreted as discrimination of freedom of speech. Latvia had a court case, in which the registration of the news agency *Rossiia Segodnya* was under discussion. The country initially refused to register the agency.¹⁶⁵ There were also stories about banning a private Russian school, because it was seen as 'being disloyal to the country'.¹⁶⁶ Russian media also reported on the commemoration of 9 May in Latvia.

Figure 6. TOP 5 narratives used by RT, Sputnik, Perviy kanal about Latvia.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | NATO is a threat to Russia |
| 2 | Discriminating against minorities |
| 3 | Ridiculing the idea of a Russian threat |
| 4 | The 9th of May is commemorated all over the world |
| 5 | The Nord-Stream 2 project will not fail |

Other narratives: Fear of Russia is being used for the increase of defence budgets, Sanctions against Russia hurt the European Union, incl. Nordic-Baltic countries more than Russia, Refugees and migrants as a destabilising factor, Questioning the rearmament policies of the NB8 states, Rise of far-right nationalists, European Union unity is diminishing, Specific country is a vassal of NATO and/or the European Union, Glorification in certain countries of Nazi collaborators, The West conspires to make Russia the scapegoat on everything, The Baltics are an ideological playground for Soros and the Washington elite, Russia does not agree that there was a Soviet occupation.

Source: Authors' calculations.

Lithuania

The most common narratives in relation to Lithuania were similar: *NATO is a threat to Russia* and *a Russian threat is ridiculous* (Figure 7). For example, *RT* covered the military exercise 'Iron Wolf', which was held in Lithuania and it was presented as a NATO drill.¹⁶⁷ This provided a reason for the elaboration of the topic of NATO's aggression. The message directed at the Russian audience was that the Baltics have no reason to feel threatened, and so there is no reason to increase the foreign military presence in the Baltic territory.¹⁶⁸ Some of the stories ridiculed fear of Russia and emphasised the idea that Russia does not violate borders and, more specifically, that Lithuania is making false accusations about Russian aircraft violating Baltic airspace.¹⁶⁹

Denmark

Denmark was covered modestly by all three media outlets. The main narratives in relation to Denmark were: *Refugees and migrants as a destabilising factor*, *Radical Islam as a destabilising factor* and *the Arctic is a territory of dialogue* (Figure 8). Some stories reported on Denmark taking a stand against radical Islam and the European migrant crisis, others were about refugees and migrants, radical Islam, and far-right nationalists that are against the refugees and radical Islam.¹⁷⁰

Finland

The most common narratives about Finland were: *Refugees and migrants as destabilising factor* and *Finland and Russia are good partners no*

Figure 7. TOP 5 narratives used by RT, Sputnik, Perviy kanal about Lithuania.

| | |
|---|--|
| 1 | NATO is a threat to Russia |
| 2 | Ridiculing the idea of a Russian threat |
| 3 | Sanctions against Russia hurt the European Union, incl. Nordic-Baltic countries more than Russia |
| 4 | Discriminating against minorities |
| 5 | The 9th of May is commemorated all over the world |

Other narratives: The West does not take Ukraine as fully sovereign country, Refugees and migrants as a destabilising factor, The Nord-Stream 2 project will not fail, Russia does not violate borders, Questioning the rearmament policies of the NB8 states, Fear of Russia is being used for the increase of defence budgets, European Union unity is diminishing, The Baltics are an ideological playground for Soros and the Washington elite, Russia does not agree that there was a Soviet occupation, Radical Islam as a destabilising factor, Specific country is a vassal of NATO and/or the European Union, If Finland and Sweden join NATO, Russia must react, Glorification in certain countries of Nazi collaborators, The West conspires to make Russia the scapegoat on everything

Source: Authors' calculations.

Figure 8. TOP 5 narratives used by RT, Sputnik, Perviy kanal about Denmark.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Refugees and migrants as a destabilising factor |
| 2 | Radical Islam as a destabilising factor |
| 3 | The Arctic is a territory of dialogue |
| 4 | Rise of far-right nationalists |
| 5 | European Union unity is diminishing |

Other narratives: Ridiculing the idea of a Russian threat, Questioning the rearmament policies of the NB8 states, Fear of Russia is being used for the increase of defence budgets, Islamic culture as a destabilising factor, NATO is a threat to Russia, The Nord-Stream 2 project will not fail, Child welfare issues, Sanctions against Russia hurt the European Union, incl. Nordic-Baltic countries more than Russia, NATO is luring Finland and Sweden into joining.

Source: Authors' calculations.

Figure 9. TOP 5 narratives used by RT, Sputnik, Perviy kanal about Finland.

| | |
|---|--|
| 1 | Refugees and migrants as a destabilising factor |
| 2 | Finland and Russia are good partners, no matter what |
| 3 | Ridiculing the idea of a Russian threat |
| 4 | Sanctions against Russia hurt the European Union, incl. Nordic-Baltic countries more than Russia |
| 5 | NATO is a threat to Russia |

Other narratives: European Union unity is diminishing, Child welfare issues, Radical Islam as a destabilising factor, Rise of far-right nationalists, NATO is luring Finland and Sweden into joining, Spy scandals, The Nord-Stream 2 project will not fail, If Finland and Sweden join NATO, Russia must react, Finland does not see Russia as threat, The Arctic is a territory of dialogue, The West does not take Ukraine as fully sovereign country, Russia does not violate borders.

Source: Authors' calculations.

matter what (Figure 9). The stories about refugees and migrants followed a similar pattern to those about the other Nordic countries, but it was somewhat unexpected that more than 20 stories about good relations between Finland and Russia were identified. There were also a number

of stories commenting that Finland does not see Russia as a threat, and that the two countries enjoy a positive and beneficial relationship.¹⁷¹ At the same time some stories reported that neutral Finland is suddenly starting to consider Russia to be threat and is considering joining NATO.¹⁷²

Perviy kanal also paid some attention to child welfare issues and problems caused by refugees.¹⁷³

Iceland

Both *Sputnik* and *RT* covered Iceland very modestly, and *Perviy kanal* had just two articles. The most common narratives in relation to Iceland were: *Refugees and migrants as destabilising factor* and *European Union unity is diminishing*. The vast majority of the stories were random, some of the articles could be categorised under any narratives typical to the other Nordic countries related refugees, radical Islam, the Arctic, and NATO. The narrative *European Union unity is diminishing* was used in a context of the Brexit referendum, where Iceland was shown as a good example for the UK. The general trend of the analysed Russian media content in relation to Iceland is that it seen as

a puppet of the West, a vassal, and naïve to think of Russia as a threat.

Norway

The most common narratives in relation to Norway were the same as in the case of Iceland: *Refugees and migrants as destabilising factor* and *European Union unity is diminishing* (Figure 11). Narratives used about Norway were once again typical of all the Nordic countries. All three media outlets showed, in various ways, how Norway has problems dealing with the refugee crisis. Many of the narratives are connected, such as those about refugees, radical Islam, Islamic culture, and rise of far-right nationalists. Other groups of connected narratives concern the military dimension—Russia is shown as a non-aggressive country that is constantly being threatened by NATO. An example of this is the rearmament

Figure 10. TOP narratives used by RT, Sputnik, Perviy kanal about Iceland.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Refugees and migrants as a destabilising factor European Union unity is diminishing |
| 2 | The Arctic is a territory of dialogue Country is a vassal of NATO and/or the European Union |
| 3 | NATO is luring Finland and Sweden into joining NATO is a threat to Russia Radical Islam as a destabilising factor Islamic culture as a destabilising factor Fear of Russia is being used for the increase of defence budgets Questioning the rearmament policies of the NB8 states Sanctions against Russia hurt the European Union, incl. Nordic-Baltic countries more than Russia |

Source: Authors' calculations.

Figure 11. TOP 5 narratives used by RT, Sputnik, Perviy kanal about Norway.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Refugees and migrants as a destabilising factor |
| 2 | Ridiculing the idea of a Russian threat |
| 3 | European Union unity is diminishing |
| 4 | The Arctic is a territory of dialogue |
| 5 | Rise of far-right nationalists |

Other narratives: NATO is a threat to Russia, Questioning the rearmament policies of the NB8 states, Radical Islam as a destabilising factor, Islamic culture as a destabilising factor, Child welfare issues, The Nord-Stream 2 project will not fail, Fear of Russia is being used for the increase of defence budgets, NATO is luring Finland and Sweden into joining.

Source: Authors' calculations.

policies, which are portrayed as unnecessary.

Norway also was depicted as a good role model for the UK in the context of the Brexit referendum, as it manages well without the European Union. One article pointed out that the UK should follow Norway, as it is part of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), but not a member of the EU.¹⁷⁴ There were also stories about the Arctic region, where Russia was presented as a good partner. Many stories about refugees and migrants, or about NATO being a threat to Russia were identified.¹⁷⁵ As for the other countries, there were a number of stories about ridiculing the idea that Russia is a threat.¹⁷⁶

Sweden

As for the other Nordic countries, the most common narrative in relation to Sweden was about *Refugees and migrants as a destabilising factor*, but the second common narrative

was specific to Sweden, namely that *Sweden is part of an unjust Julian Assange hunt*. For example, on 5 February, there were disproportionately many articles about Assange—a total of 24. The main topic of the day was that the UN Human Rights Panel found the governments of Sweden and the United Kingdom had detained Julian Assange arbitrarily.¹⁷⁷ All other stories on that day were a follow up for this announcement. This implies that Assange is of crucial importance for Russia.

Another group of narratives were related to the refugee crisis, which is usually presented in the same context in stories about radical Islam or Islamic culture. EU unity diminishing also arises from the same problem, as the member states cannot find a united solution for it. The second group of narratives were mostly about the military—about Sweden joining the NATO alliance or an increase in its defence budget.

Figure 12. TOP 5 narratives used by RT, Sputnik, Perviy kanal about Sweden.

| | |
|---|--|
| 1 | Refugees and migrants as a destabilising factor |
| 2 | Sweden is part of an unjust persecution of Julian Assange |
| 3 | Radical Islam as a destabilising factor |
| 4 | Rise of far-right nationalists |
| 5 | European Union unity is diminishing Islamic culture as a destabilising factor |

Other narratives: Ridiculing the idea of a Russian threat, If Finland and Sweden join NATO, Russia must react, NATO is a threat to Russia, Fear of Russia is being used for the increase of defence budgets, The Arctic is a territory of dialogue, The Nord-Stream 2 project will not fail, Child welfare issues, Questioning the rearmament policies of the NB8 states, Sanctions against Russia hurt the European Union, incl. Nordic-Baltic countries more than Russia, Finland does not see Russia as threat, NATO is luring Finland and Sweden into joining, Russia does not violate borders.

Source: Authors' calculations.

CONCLUSIONS

This analysis of the news items published about NATO and/or EU member states, Ukraine, Syria, the UN, the EU and NATO on *Perviy kanal* (Figure 4) shows that the NB8 countries were not a priority for Russia in 2016 in terms of the quantity of articles published. The most commonly covered topics on *Perviy kanal* were Syria, the US, and Ukraine. Within the NB8 region, *Perviy kanal* focused more on the Nordic countries—mainly Sweden and Finland—than on the Baltic States.

It was possible to identify regional differences in terms of the application of certain narratives in relation to the NB8 countries in *RT*, *Sputnik*, and *Perviy kanal*. Regarding the Baltic States, Russian media was most concerned with military issues—the two most commonly appearing narratives were *NATO is a threat to Russia* and *a Russian threat is ridiculous*.

Thus it may be concluded that the analysed Russian media were more concerned with NATO and the activities of the alliance close to its borders, rather than with specific issues regarding the Baltic States.

The most common narratives in relation to the Nordic countries was *refugees and migrants as a destabilising factor* and other narratives that are related to this problem, such as *radical Islam as a destabilising factor* and *rise of far-right nationalists*. This shows that Russia is attempting to amplify the destructive processes caused by the refugee crisis within Europe. Another common narrative that emerged in the context of the Nordic countries was *the Arctic is a territory of dialogue*. This indicates that the interests of Russia and the Nordic countries overlap in this region and Russia's intentions are to solve these issues by peaceful negotiation, as stated in Russia's Foreign Policy Concept.

Apart from the common regional trends, there were also some country-specific narratives. The second most commonly used narrative in case of Latvia was about *discrimination against minorities*. Estonia and Latvia have similar issues with Russian ethnic minorities, nevertheless, the discrimination narrative in the case of Estonia was identified only three times, whereas there were more than 20 minority discrimination-related articles published about Latvia. An analysis of the ethnic integration policies in Estonia and Latvia are beyond the scope of this paper, therefore it is impossible to say if this difference in the application of the discrimination narrative has some objective grounds or if Russian media has cherry-picked Latvia as a target for an informational attack. Still, the data show that Latvia is the main target for the application of this narrative.

Norway and Iceland were portrayed as role models in the context of the Brexit referendum to show that countries may do better without the EU, thus strengthening the narrative *European Union unity is diminishing*. The second most common narrative in relation to Finland was that *Finland and Russia are good partners, no matter what*, which is indicative of Russia's attempt to build and strengthen bilateral relations with European countries. Whereas Sweden stood out with the narrative *Sweden is part of unjust persecution of Julian Assange*, showing how important for Russia are the issues related to the WikiLeaks founder.

04

RUSSIA'S NARRATIVES AND PUBLIC OPINION IN THE BALTIC STATES, FINLAND, AND SWEDEN

Ieva Bērziņa

INTRODUCTION

The study of Russian narratives regarding the NB8 countries identified the most common ‘outgoing’ narratives used in 2016. However, mere content analysis is not a sufficient metric to assess Russia’s influence in the information environment, because media is just an instrument for reaching the ultimate target—the cognitive dimension of the communities that reside in the NB8 countries. Therefore the final ingredient in this study of Russia’s activities in the information environment of the NB8 region for the period 2016–2017 was a comparative public opinion survey that aimed to discover to what extent the narratives promoted by Russia correspond with the views of the societies in the region.

It should be emphasized that measuring Russia’s influence in information environment is a complicated task. Four issues limit the possibility of arriving at comprehensive and unambiguous answers by means of a limited quantitative survey: 1) there are no strict divisions between the narratives promoted by Russia and the views of opinion leaders and societies outside Russia—they may coincide without any specific connection to Russia; 2) without qualitative research methods it is impossible to know how the respondents understand such concepts as ‘neo-Nazism’, ‘threat’, ‘destabilization’, etc., and if their understanding differs from the interpretation assumed in the Russian narratives; 3) without additional research it is also impossible to draw any conclusions about the factors influencing of the opinions of respondents, therefore coincidence in views can not

necessarily be interpreted as due to Russia’s influence or, indeed, as the absence of it; 4) additional research is necessary to determine how Russia seeks to match its narratives to the attitudes present in the NB8 societies to advance its strategic goals, and, indeed, if this is possible.

Nevertheless, an initial attempt was made to measure the spread of the narratives promoted by Russia in the NB8 region in terms of public agreement or disagreement with the ideas that are in line with the content produced by Russian state-funded media and Russia’s strategic goals. Although the survey data should primarily be taken as a basis for further research, the results provide a valuable comparative perspective on public opinion in the NB8 region and the extent of the use of the three Russian state funded media outlets surveyed. The data obtained in this pilot study supports a more sceptical view regarding Russia’s informational influence on Western societies as expressed by prominent Russian expert M. Galeotti: ‘Too much is often made of the alleged influence of the English-language *Sputnik* news agency and *RT* television channel, or even of the online trolling and disinformation campaign. Evidence that they actually changed minds—rather than just pandered to existing prejudices—is still lacking.’¹⁷⁸

METHOD

This quantitative survey was intended as a pilot project for measuring public opinion in the context of Russia’s influence in information environment. It was conducted in July and August 2017. Research was






limited to the Baltic States, Finland, and Sweden, because the analysis of Russia's compatriot policy in Chapter 2 and Russian media content in Chapter 3 have identified these as the most targeted countries in the region. Due to financial constraints, the scope of the survey also was limited—we asked only nine questions in relation to Russia's narratives, strategic goals, and trust in national media, and three questions related to the use of *Sputnik*, *RT*, and *Perviy kanal*—the research objects of the content analysis. This public opinion survey is a continuation of the study of the narratives promoted by Russia about the NB8 countries.

The survey was conducted by the research and marketing centre *Latvijas Fakti* and its local partners in the countries surveyed. The survey was based on nationally representative samples according to available statistics on each population for age, gender, nationality, region, and settlement type (urban/rural). The target group for the survey were those 18

years of age and older. The ESOMAR codex and standards for market and social research were followed. Technical data of the survey are presented in Figure 13.

The development of the questionnaire was based on four dimensions of analysis as defined in Chapter 1 of this study: political, military, economic, and informational. Four of the survey questions were concerned with the political dimension. Two of the tested statements were based on the results of the content analysis described in Chapter 3, namely, 'Refugees and immigrants are a destabilising factor for Europe' and 'Sweden shares responsibility for the illegal persecution of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange'. The statement 'Russian speaking people in Latvia are being discriminated' was grounded in the study of Russia's compatriot policy and the content analysis. The fourth statement in the political dimension 'A rebirth of neo-Nazism is taking place in Europe' was chosen due to the fact that the Concept of

Figure 13. Technical data of the survey

| |  |  |  |  |  |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Reached sample | N=1008 | N=1033 | N=1006 | N=1000 | N=1000 |
| Fieldwork methodology | Face-to-face interviews at respondents' place of residence | Face-to-face interviews at respondents' place of residence | Face-to-face interviews at respondents' place of residence | CATI interviews (computer assisted telephone interviews) | CATI interviews (computer assisted telephone interviews) |
| Fieldwork period | July 7 - 20, 2017 | July 1 - 14, 2017 | August 8-22, 2017 | July 20 - August 4, 2017 | July 13-31, 2017 |

Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation sets as one of the tasks for Russia 'to counteract any manifestations on neo-Nazism',¹⁷⁹ and, in 2015, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs prepared an extensive report about neo-Nazism trends in the world,¹⁸⁰ which describes the signs of the rise of neo-Nazism in detail, according to Kremlin's perspective, in European countries, USA, and Canada, but not in Russia. Neo-Nazism also emerged as one of the themes in the study of Russia's compatriot policy and content analysis. The questions regarding Latvia and Sweden was also chosen with a purpose of testing how issues related to one country are perceived in other countries of the region to get an idea if Russia's activities in information environment are able to weaken unity in the region as assumed in the project description.

The military dimension was covered by two questions: The statement 'NATO is a threat to Russia' was derived from the content analysis (Chapter 3). The other question aimed to test the level of threat perception, but due to its limited scope, one formulation, often used in Russian media to stress that Russia is not aggressive and the West rather should focus on terrorism, was included in the survey.¹⁸¹ A more comprehensive survey would be needed to fully assess threat perception, nevertheless, the survey made it possible to test support for this idea, which is expressed not only by Russian officials and opinion leaders, but also by some Swedish diplomats,¹⁸² for example. This is an example of how narratives promoted by Russia may coincide with content published in the local national media. Such cases would benefit from further

investigation to determine whether the narratives coincide arbitrarily or if this is the result of Russian influence activities.

The economic dimension was represented by a question regarding the cancellation of the sanctions against Russia. And the information dimension was covered by questions about trust in national and Russian media and the use of Russian media outlets, which were also discussed in the content analysis. To arrive at reasoned conclusions, the survey data were analysed and validated by means of secondary data from other studies with similar questions.

USE OF AND TRUST IN RUSSIAN STATE-FUNDED MEDIA

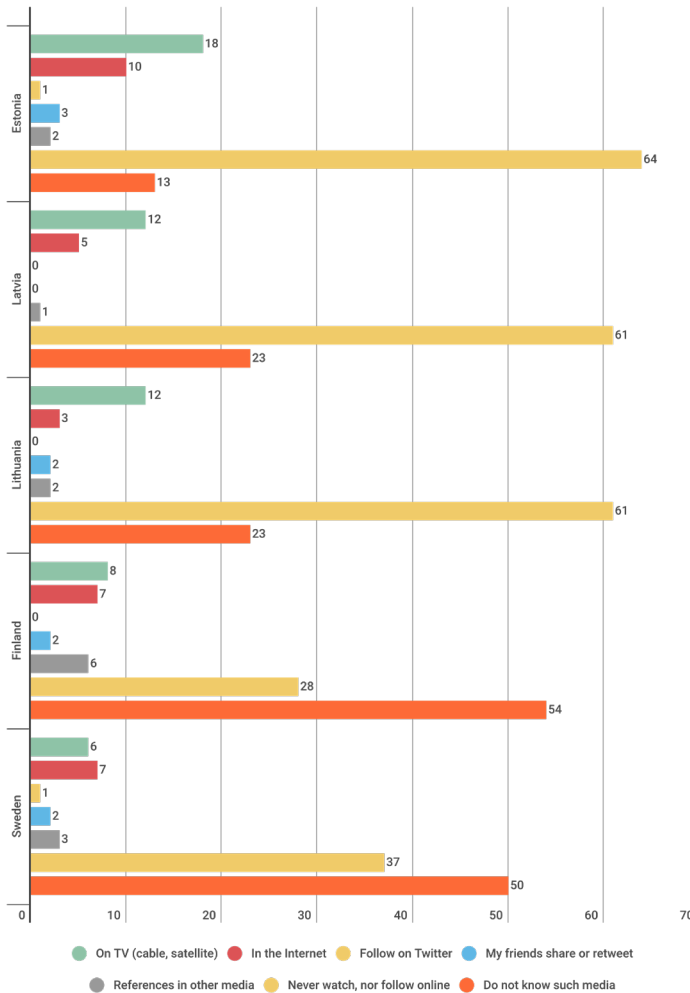
This section aims discover how influential the Russian state-funded media *Sputnik*, *RT*, and *Perviy kanal* are—how much they are trusted in the Baltic States, Finland and Sweden?

The use of Sputnik, RT, and Perviy kanal

The project 'Russia's (Dis)Information Activities Against the Nordic-Baltic Region' has contributed to the overall effort to assess the effectiveness of the so-called Russian propaganda machine in terms of the size of audience it is able to reach in the NB8 region.

The opinion poll data reveal that, irrespective of the language, the use of *RT* and *Sputnik* in the surveyed countries is limited (Figure 14 and

Figure 14. The use of RT



Source: *Latvijas Fakti, Public Opinion Poll in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Finland and Sweden, 2017.*
 Base – All Respondents, N=5047

Figure 15). The data show a common trend that the majority of societies in the Baltic States are aware of these Russian media outlets, but do not use them (more than 60%), whereas societies in Finland and Sweden do not know these media at all (more than 50%).

The survey allowed us to measure the use of *RT* on different media platforms. According to the data obtained, *RT* is mostly consumed through TV. The largest number of those who consume *RT* on television were identified in Estonia—18%,

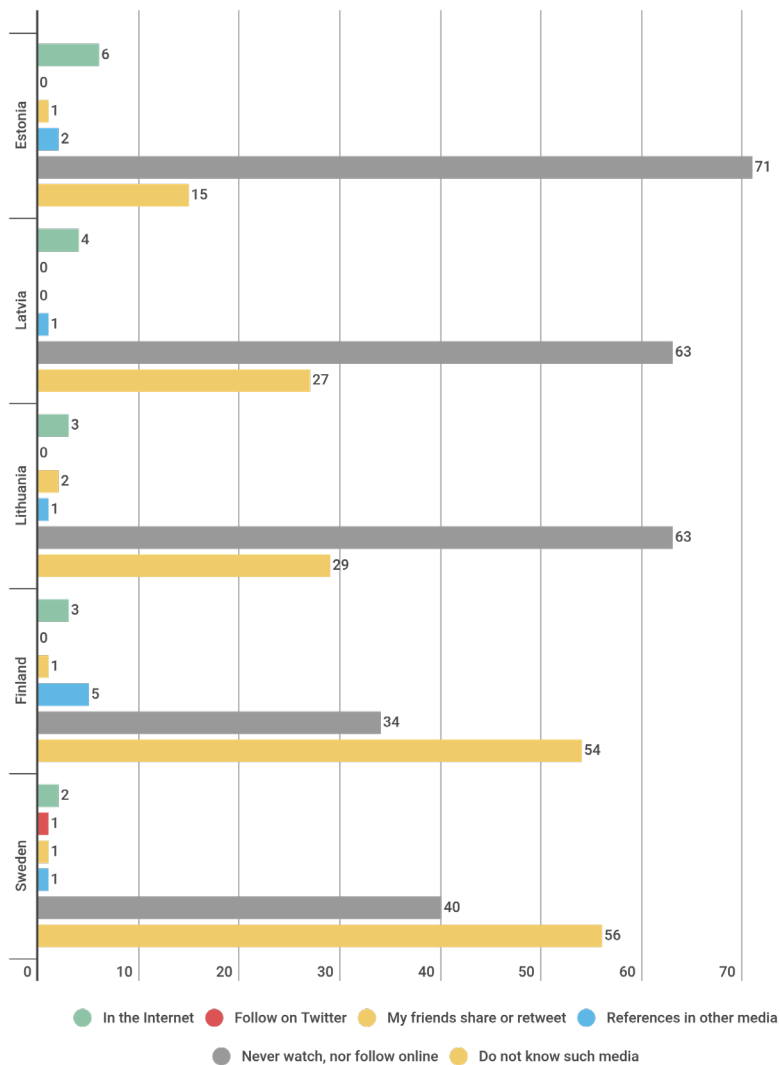
followed by Latvia and Lithuania with 12%. In Finland and Sweden the consumption of *RT* on any media platform, measured separately, did not exceed 10%. The total number of *RT* users is largest in Estonia—23%, followed by Finland—18%, Latvia—16%, Lithuania—15%, and Sweden—13%

As Estonia and Finland have the highest numbers of *RT* users, we identified the salient characteristics of the demographic profiles of these groups (Table 4). The survey reveals that interest in this media in Estonia is mainly among those

Table 4. The percentage of respondents within demographic groups using *RT* in Estonia and Finland

| Region | | Language used in family | | Russian language skills | |
|------------------|-----|-------------------------|-----|-------------------------|-----|
| <i>ESTONIA</i> | | | | | |
| East-Virumaa | 38% | Russian | 41% | Native | 40% |
| North-Estonia | 29% | Estonian | 17% | Fluent | 37% |
| Tallinn | 25% | | | Good | 22% |
| South-Estonia | 19% | | | Average | 12% |
| West-Estonia | 14% | | | Poor | 10% |
| Middle-Estonia | 10% | | | None | 3% |
| <i>FINLAND</i> | | | | | |
| Helsinki-Uusimaa | 21% | Russian | 33% | Native | 33% |
| South+Åland | 19% | Other | 23% | Fluent | 43% |
| North+East | 16% | Finnish | 18% | Good | 37% |
| Western | 16% | | | Average | 40% |
| | | | | Poor | 21% |
| | | | | None | 16% |

Source: *Latvijas Fakti, Public Opinion Poll in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Finland and Sweden, 2017.*

Figure 15. The use of *Sputnik*

Source: Latvijas Fakti, Public Opinion Poll in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Finland and Sweden, 2017.
Base – All Respondents, N=5047

who use Russian in the family and have good Russian language skills. Although the number of Russian language users in Finland accounts only for 1.3% of the total population, the data for *RT* users in Finland indicates that greater interest in this media is among those who have higher Russian language skills.

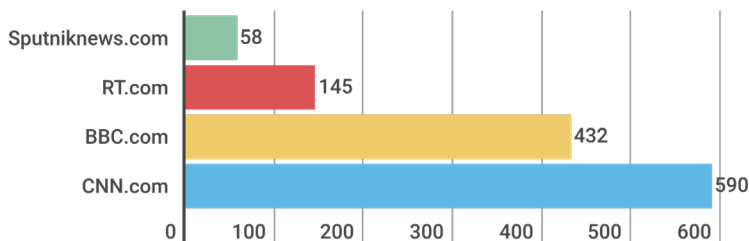
The use of *Sputnik* is even more limited than the use of *RT*. In all five countries an average of 4% of respondents reported using *Sputnik* via the Internet. The number of the respondents is so small that it is impossible to draw any reasonable conclusions in relation to the demographic profile of *Sputnik* users in the region.

The fact that *RT* and *Sputnik* are only able to reach limited audiences is confirmed by a comparison with audiences of global Western media (Figure 16). In September 2017 BBC.com was able to generate almost three times more monthly visits than RT.com and almost eight times more than Sputniknews.com, whereas CNN.com outperformed monthly visits to RT.com by four times and Sputniknews.com—by ten. Thus, there is

a degree of truth in what Putin was saying in the 2016 Valdai Club discussion: ‘Friends and colleagues, I would like to have such a propaganda machine here in Russia, but regrettably, this is not the case. We have not even global mass media outlets of the likes of CNN, BBC and others. We simply do not have this kind of capability yet.’¹⁸³ However, the question regarding Russia’s opportunities for influencing media audiences in the NB8 remains open; how far is it possible for Russia to covertly spread its narratives in media which are not directly associated with Russia?

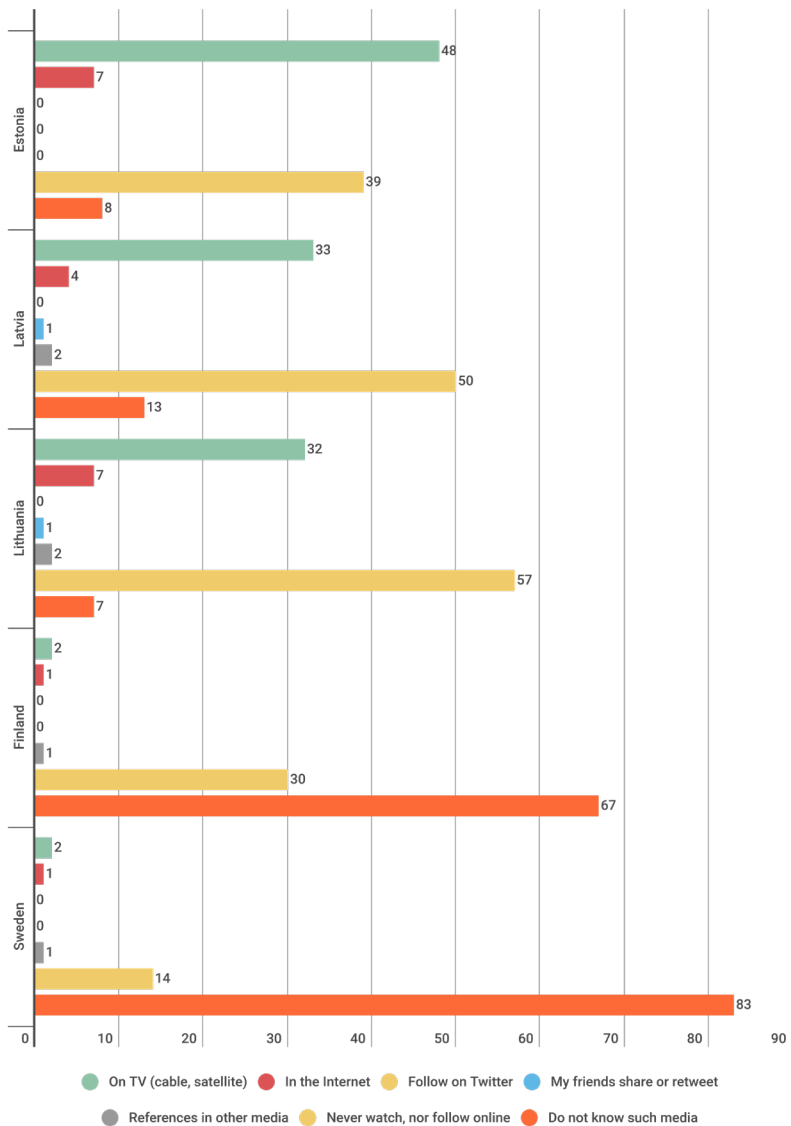
Of the Russian media included in the survey, *Perviy kanal* is the most influential in terms of audience numbers reach in the region, (Figure 17), although in this case there are visible regional differences between the Baltic states and the Nordic countries. The majority of respondents in Finland (83%) and Sweden (67%) are not aware of such a media outlet, whereas an average of 38% of the respondents in the Baltic states in reported using this media via TV. This can be explained by the large number

Figure 16. Monthly visits (millions), September 2017



Source: Similarweb.com

Figure 17. The use of *Perviy kanal*



Source: *Latvijas Fakti, Public Opinion Poll in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Finland and Sweden, 2017.*
 Base: All Respondents, N=5047

of Russian speakers residing in the Baltic states, as *Perviy kanal* is transmitted only in the Russian language. The largest usage of *Perviy kanal* vis TV was identified in Latvia (48%),

followed by Lithuania (33%) and Estonia (32%). The data obtained in this survey are in line with other studies. According to the market research company TNS Latvia, *Perviy Baltiiskiy*

Table 5. The percentage of respondents within demographic groups using *Perviy kanal* via TV in the Baltic States

| Region | | Language used in family | | Russian language skills | |
|-------------------------|-----|-------------------------|-----|-------------------------|-----|
| LATVIA | | | | | |
| Latgale | 65% | Russian | 63% | Native | 66% |
| Zemgale | 57% | Latvian | 40% | Fluent | 45% |
| Vidzeme | 48% | | | Good | 40% |
| Kurzeme | 48% | | | Average | 32% |
| Rīga | 43% | | | Poor | 30% |
| Pierīga | 38% | | | None | 17% |
| LITHUANIA | | | | | |
| Klaipeda region | 45% | Russian | 70% | Native | 71% |
| Vilnius region | 40% | Polish | 66% | Fluent | 45% |
| Kaunas region | 26% | Lithuanian | 30% | Good | 41% |
| Sialuiai region | 25% | | | Average | 20% |
| Panevezys region | 25% | | | None | 7% |
| ESTONIA | | | | | |
| East-Virumaa | 73% | Russian | 73% | Native | 68% |
| Tallinn | 40% | Estonian | 17% | Fluent | 50% |
| North-Estonia | 26% | | | Good | 27% |
| South-Estonia | 22% | | | Average | 11% |
| West-Estonia | 15% | | | Poor | 5% |
| Middle-Estonia | 13% | | | None | 3% |

Source: *Latvijas Fakti, Public Opinion Poll in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Finland and Sweden, 2017.*

kanal184 had 7.5% share of TV viewers in Latvia in September 2017, making it the fourth most popular TV channel in the country.¹⁸⁵

According to a study done in 2014, ethnic minorities residing in Latvia used *Perviy Baltiiskiy kanal* as their main source of information about Latvia (47.9% of respondents named this source of information).¹⁸⁶ Survey data from the NATO StratCom COE study also confirm that *Perviy kanal* is the most popular media source among the ethnic minorities of the Baltic States (Figure 18).

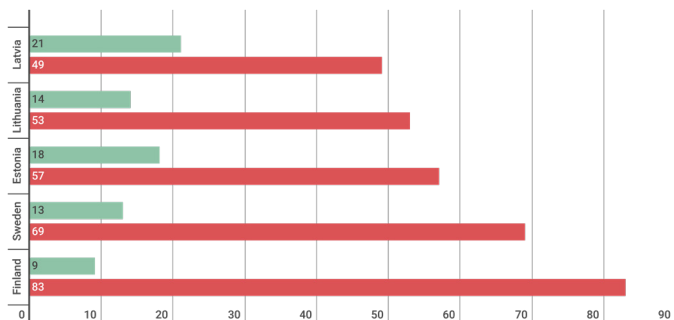
The demographic profile of Russian media users created by this survey suggests that the use of *RT* and *Perviy kanal* is linked with the spread of the Russian language, thus making these Russian media outlets an integral part of the so called 'Russian World' (see page 27). Measuring the effects of *RT* and *Sputnik* in the Western societies remains a puzzle,

because they are primarily aimed at influencing global audiences. One of the next research steps might be to find out if Russia is using different and more sophisticated influence methods outside the 'Russian World', because the data regarding consumption of these media are in contrast with the discourse in the West about Russia's overwhelming influence in information environment.

Trust in media

The study also aimed to find out if Russian state-funded media are a trusted information source in the NB8 region in comparison with the perceived trustworthiness of the information provided by national media (Figure 18). The data obtained is validated by the 2016 Eurobarometer survey 'Media Pluralism and Democracy', which also included the question '(NATIONALITY) media provide trustworthy information'.¹⁸⁷ The

Figure 18. Trust in media (percentage of respondents giving answers 'fully + rather agree')



- Russian state media (*Perviy kanal*, *Rossiya 24*, *RT*, *Sputnik*, etc.) provide trustworthy information)
- (NATIONALITY) media provide trustworthy information

Source: *Latvijas Fakti*, Public Opinion Poll in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Finland and Sweden, 2017.

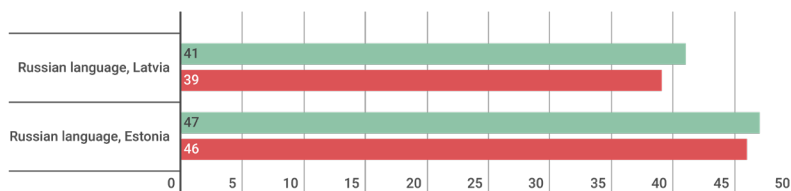
differences between the 2016 Eurobarometer survey and the 2017 NATO StratCom Centre survey are within the acceptable range for statistical error. The percentage of respondents who agree that national media provide trustworthy information are: Latvia—47% (2016) and 49% (2017); Lithuania—54% (2016) and 53% (2017); Estonia—64% (2016) and 57% (2017); Sweden—77% (2016) and 69% (2017); and Finland—88% (2016) and 83% (2017).¹⁸⁸ The survey conducted by the NATO StratCom Centre shows that national media in the surveyed countries is perceived as a more trustworthy information source than the Russian media outlets.

The largest difference in trust in national and Russian media was identified in Finland, where 83% of respondents trust the information provided by their national media, but only 9% trust information from the Russian media sources. However, it is worth noting the data from Latvia, where trust in national media is more than two times higher than trust in Russian media sources, despite the

large Russian-speaking community (around 40% of total population, see page 52) and the wide consumption of Russian media (for example, in addition to *Perviy Baltiiskiy kanal*, three other Russian TV channels also had high shares of TV viewers in Latvia in September 2017: *RTR Planeta Baltiya*—7.1%, *NTV Mir Baltic*—6.8%, and *REN TV Baltic*—2.8%).¹⁸⁹ This indicates that Russia's influence in information environment has limits even in countries where it can easily promote its worldview due to the widespread knowledge of the Russian language and the availability of its internal media.

It must also be noted, that due to the specifics of *Perviy Baltiiskiy kanal* it remains unknown if respondents in the Baltic States perceive it as Russian or national media, because it is registered in Latvia and produces local news about Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, even though most of the time it broadcasts content from Russia's *Perviy kanal*. To solve this methodological difficulty, additional questions in relation to *Perviy*

Figure 19. Trust in media among Russian speakers in Latvia and Estonia (percentage of respondents giving the answers 'fully agree & agree somewhat')



- Russian state media (*Perviy kanal*, *Rossiya 24*, *RT*, *Sputnik*, etc.) provide trustworthy information)
- (NATIONALITY) media provide trustworthy information

Source: *Latvijas Fakti, Public Opinion Poll in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Finland and Sweden, 2017*. Respondents using Russian language in family, Latvia N=399, Estonia N=290

Baltiyskiy kanal should be asked, but it was not possible here due to the limited scope of this survey. Nevertheless, this survey succeeds in giving some indication of the perception of Russia as an information source, and shows that even within the Baltic States, the majority of respondents do not trust it.

However, the data regarding Russian speakers trust in media Latvia and Estonia, show that their trust in Russian media is roughly equivalent with their trust in local national media (Figure 19). Within this demographic group the trust in information provided by Russian media is much higher (more than 40%) than the average in the other five countries (15%) providing still more evidence that Russian media are most effective within the 'Russian World'. It also remains to be seen to what extent Latvian and Estonian national media produced in Russian is saturated with Kremlin-promoted narratives and how this affects trust in media in these societies in general and specifically among Russian speakers.

PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR NARRATIVES PROMOTED BY RUSSIA

This section aims to discover to what extent the societies of the Baltic States, Finland, and Sweden agree or disagree with some of the most salient narratives promoted by Russia as they were identified in previous chapters of this study.

'Refugees and immigrants are a destabilising factor for Europe'

The statement about refugees and immigrants as a destabilising factor for Europe, derived from Russian media content analysis (Figure 20), gained the largest share of support in Estonia (77% fully agree & agree somewhat) and Latvia (72% fully agree & agree somewhat). In Lithuania and Finland support for the statement was somewhat smaller, albeit still high—69% and 63% of those who fully agree & agree somewhat, but in Sweden this statement gained the least support—only 46% of respondents fully agree & agree somewhat. In relation to Sweden it should also be noted that the opinion poll results suggest polarization of opinions on this issue, because 32% of respondents fully disagreed with the statement, which stands out from the results in other four countries.

The answers to this question showed a positive correlation between the use of *RT*, *Sputnik*, and *Perviy kanal* and agreement with narrative present in these media, nevertheless an explanation is more likely to be sought in other areas, rather than in the influence of Russian media, because the views about other tested narratives correlate negatively or do not correlate at all with the use of Russian media.

One of the possible explanations could be the shared values of these societies. Using data from the World Values Survey, Wave 6 2000–2014, we compared the societies of Estonia and Sweden in terms of their attitudes to specific social groups.¹⁹⁰ The data show that Swedish society

Figure 20. How much do you agree or disagree with the statement ‘Refugees and immigrants are a destabilising factor for Europe’?



Source: *Latvijas Fakti, Public Opinion Poll in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Finland and Sweden, 2017.*
 Base: All Respondents, N=5047

is more open to being neighbours with people with different backgrounds than Estonian society (Table 6). Thus, in terms of this particular set of values, which also includes attitudes towards immigrants, there are important differences between Estonian and Swedish societies. This is one of the possible explanations why Estonian society is more concerned with the influx of refugees and immigrants in Europe. Still, in the context of Russia's influence in the information environment, the key question is how and if Russia can

use this coincidence in worldviews between the societies of the Baltic States and Finland in its interests.

'A rebirth of neo-Nazism is taking place in Europe'

The highest support for this narrative was identified in Sweden (74% fully agree fully agree & agree somewhat) and Finland (65% fully agree fully agree & agree somewhat)—both countries where the use of RT,

Sputnik, and *Perviy kanal* was the smallest. Therefore it remains to be discovered what other information sources or real-life experiences have influenced the views of the societies of Finland and Sweden so that they correspond with the Russian narrative to such an extent.

Data about the rebirth of neo-Nazism in Europe (Figure 21) may also be compared with the results of the 2015–2016 study of societal destabilisation in Latvia, which included the question ‘Restoration of fascism is taking place in Latvia’—31% of Latvian society gave positive answer to this question in 2015.¹⁹¹ Data from the 2017 the NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence show the same tendency—36% of Latvian respondents fully agree & agree somewhat that there is a rebirth of neo-Nazism in Europe (the reason the concepts ‘neo-Nazism’ and ‘fascism’ are used interchangeably in the context of Russian

narratives is explained below). When data about Latvia were viewed without providing context, they seemed to indicate the considerable effectiveness of Russian information activities. But if the data are viewed in comparison with other countries of the region, it can be seen that Latvian society is the least supportive to the idea about the rebirth of neo-Nazism in Europe.

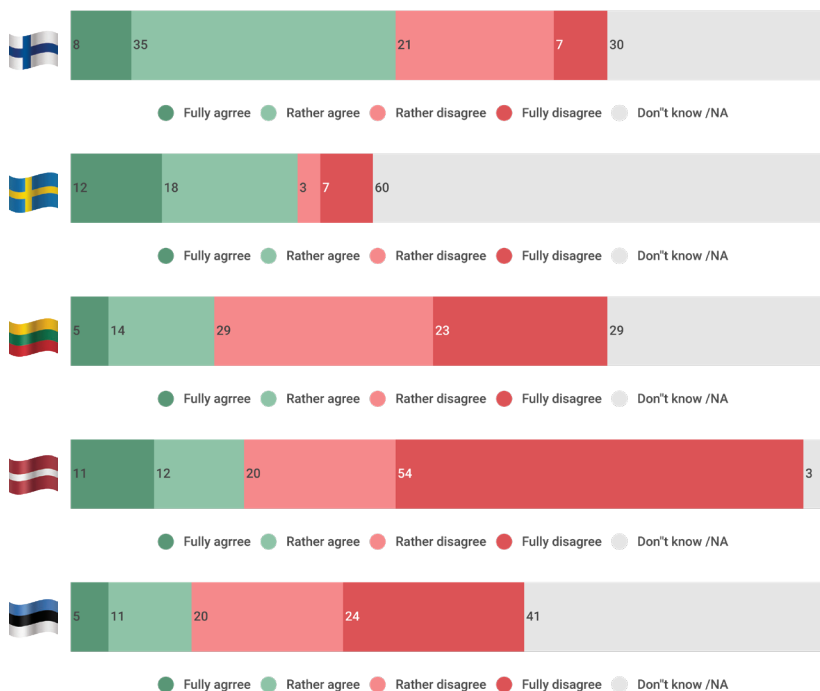
A qualitative study should be carried out to make sense of the data obtained, because at this point it is impossible to know how the respondents understood the concept ‘neo-Nazism’ and what indications they used to make judgment that the ‘rebirth of neo-Nazism is taking place in Europe’. The understanding of respondents is very important, because there may be different interpretations of a single concept, and the Kremlin uses the idea of ‘neo-Nazism’ rather broadly. For example,

Table 6. Differences in values—Estonia and Sweden

| Would not like to have as neighbours: | Estonia, mentioned | Sweden, mentioned |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| People who speak a different language | 17% | 3% |
| People of a different race | 25% | 3% |
| People of a different religion | 21% | 4% |
| Immigrants/foreign workers | 38% | 4% |
| Homosexuals | 47% | 4% |
| People who have AIDS | 49% | 6% |
| Heavy drinkers | 79% | 51% |
| Drug addicts | 87% | 75% |

Source: World Values Survey Wave 6: 2000-2014

Figure 21. How much do you agree or disagree with the statement ‘Rebirth of neo-Nazism is taking place in Europe’?



Source: *Latvijas Fakti, Public Opinion Poll in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Finland and Sweden, 2017.*
 Base: All respondents, N=5047

a report from the Russian Foreign Ministry names the following as indications of neo-Nazism in Latvia: the falsification of history and historical research that contradicts Russia's perspective on history; remembrance of the Latvian legionnaires; lack of state social benefits for the veterans of the World War II and former prisoners of fascist-camps; pandering to neo-Nazism and inciting xenophobia in the actions of the political party 'National Union'; the installation of a monument for national partisans

(the so-called forest brothers) who fought against the Soviet Army during World War II; the production of a musical about controversial aviator H. Cukurs, who was accused but not convicted of WW II crimes against humanity; the limits set by Latvian authorities to the activities of Russia-supported anti-fascist movements considering them a threat to national security; equating the crimes against humanity committed by the Nazi and Soviet regimes¹⁹².

This list can be supplemented by the indications of neo-Nazism in the Baltic States defined by the Regional Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots of the Nordic Countries and the Baltic Sea (see page 58): measures by authorities to limit compatriot's publicly celebrated events, especially those connected with the victory over fascism; the status of 'non-citizen' still used in Latvia and Estonia, etc. As can be seen from these examples, the Kremlin's discourse is saturated with both concepts—'neo-Nazism' and 'fascism', and it applies these concepts rather loosely in the contemporary context.

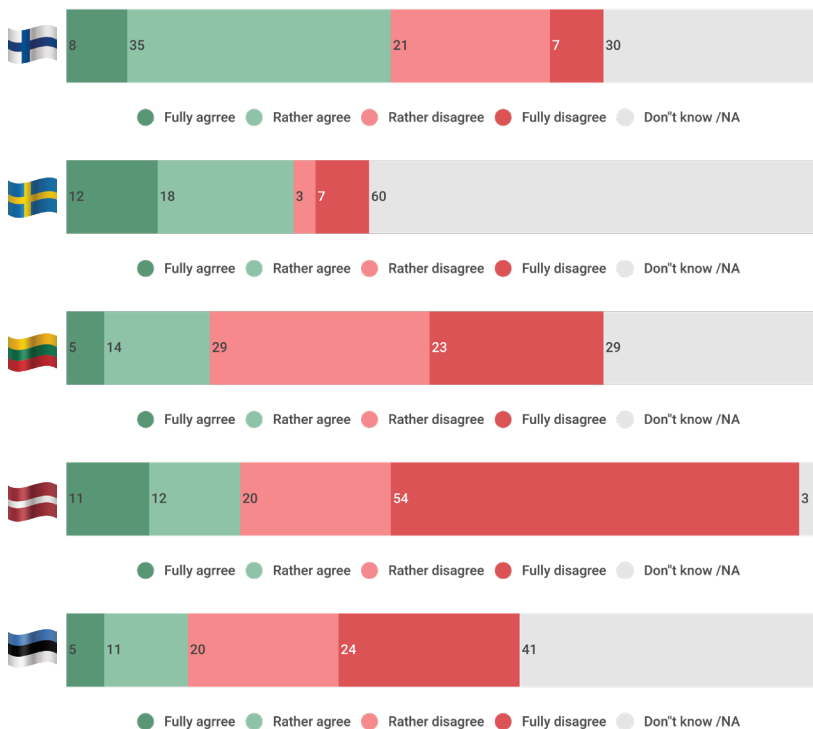
At this stage of the research, it is impossible to say if the mood of the societies in the region is in line with the ideas promoted by the Kremlin's discourse. Nevertheless, the study gives an indication that there is a high degree of concern in relation to 'neo-Nazism' in some of the surveyed states, but it is unclear if this means that Russia is successful in promoting its worldview in the region. Taking into consideration the fact that internationally Russia is active on both extremes of ideological spectrum,¹⁹³ including the provision of support for far-right political forces, it may be assumed that in the long-term such hypocrisy means that Russia risks discrediting its international image, especially in those societies that are highly concerned with manifestations of 'neo-Nazism'. Thus one of the recommendations for countering Russia's activities in the information environment would be to raise awareness of the societies of the NB8 region that Russia is supporting far-right political movements in the West, which is an ideological contradiction to its anti-Nazi image.

'Russian speaking people in Latvia are being discriminated against'

Answers given by respondents to the question about the discrimination of Russian-speaking people in Latvia (Figure 22) indicates that there is little interest about this issue in neighbouring countries—29% in Lithuania, 30% in Finland, 41% in Estonia, and 60% of respondents in Sweden answered that they have no opinion about it. Therefore it may be assumed that the negative information that Russia spreads about one country, has limited effects on societies in other countries of the region. Nevertheless, it still remains to be a puzzle why 43% (fully agree & agree somewhat) of respondents in Finland and 30% (fully agree & agree somewhat) of respondents in Sweden agree with the statement, which is a relatively high indicator. Without additional research we cannot be sure if this is because of Russia's activities in the information environment or due to some other factors.

It is important to emphasize, that the total number of respondents surveyed in Latvia strongly resist this narrative promoted by Russia, because 54% fully disagreed with the statement, and 20% disagreed somewhat (a total of 74% of responses to this question were negative). Figure 23 shows the answers of respondents in Latvia who use Russian as their primary family language: 51% disagree that there is discrimination in Latvia, while 44% agree. This shows that Russia's narrative is not fully persuasive, even among Russian-speakers in Latvia, who are a primary target audience.

Figure 22. How much do you agree or disagree with the statement ‘Russian speaking people in Latvia are being discriminated’?



Source: *Latvijas Fakti, Public Opinion Poll in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Finland and Sweden, 2017. Base: All Respondents, N=5047*

‘Sweden shares responsibility for the illegal persecution of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange’

The question about the persecution of Julian Assange shows that some of the narratives promoted by Russia are not at all important for the societies of the countries surveyed (Figure

24). 70% of respondents in Latvia, 69% in Lithuania, 63% in Estonia, 41% in Sweden, and 22% in Finland have no opinion about this issue. 36% of respondents in Sweden disagreed (fully agree & agree somewhat), and only 24% agreed (fully agree & agree somewhat). In Finland 48% of respondents disagreed (fully disagree & disagree somewhat), and only 29% agreed (fully agree & agree somewhat) with the statement. Similar to the question about discrimination

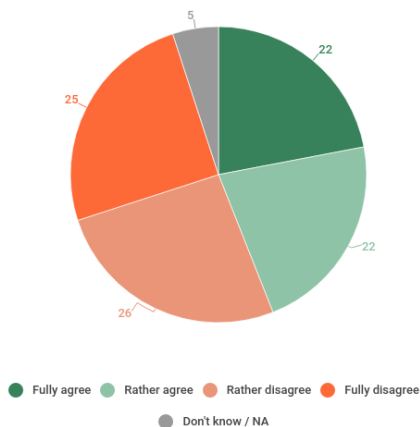
of Russian speakers in Latvia, the answers to this question also show that negative information about one country in the Russian media do not necessarily have a big impact on the opinion of societies in neighbouring countries.

'NATO is a threat to Russia'

One of the areas where a striking polarization of opinions between Russian speakers and titular nationalities in the Baltic States can be detected is their view on NATO. The general trend is that titular nationalities are more supportive to the NATO presence in their countries.¹⁹⁴ Therefore, the most surprising results in relation to the idea that NATO is a threat to Russia were found in Latvia: 45% of respondents fully disagree and 23% disagree

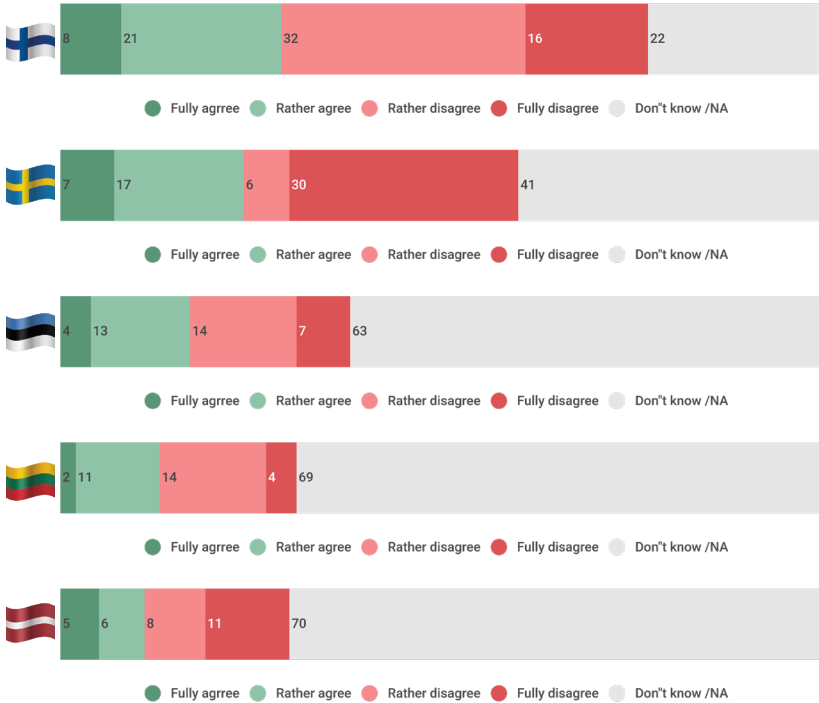
somewhat with the statement (68% in total), despite the high consumption of Russian media in the country. Although, it remains to be discovered if this is because the respondents from Latvia based their answers on the opinion that NATO is weak or is focussed on keeping the peace (there are at least two different explanations why NATO is not a threat to Russia), it is clear that their judgment differs from the narrative presented in the Russian media. This indicates that people do not simply replicate media content, but make their own judgments based on all available information and their own daily experience. The majority of respondents in Lithuania and Estonia also reject this narrative—59% and 53% of respondents respectively fully disagree and disagree somewhat.

Figure 23. How much do you agree or disagree with the statement 'Russian speaking people in Latvia are being discriminated'?



Source: *Latvijas Fakti, Public Opinion Poll in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Finland and Sweden, 2017. Base: Respondents using Russian language in family, Latvia N=399*

Figure 24. How much do you agree or disagree with the statement ‘Sweden shares responsibility for the illegal persecution of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange?’

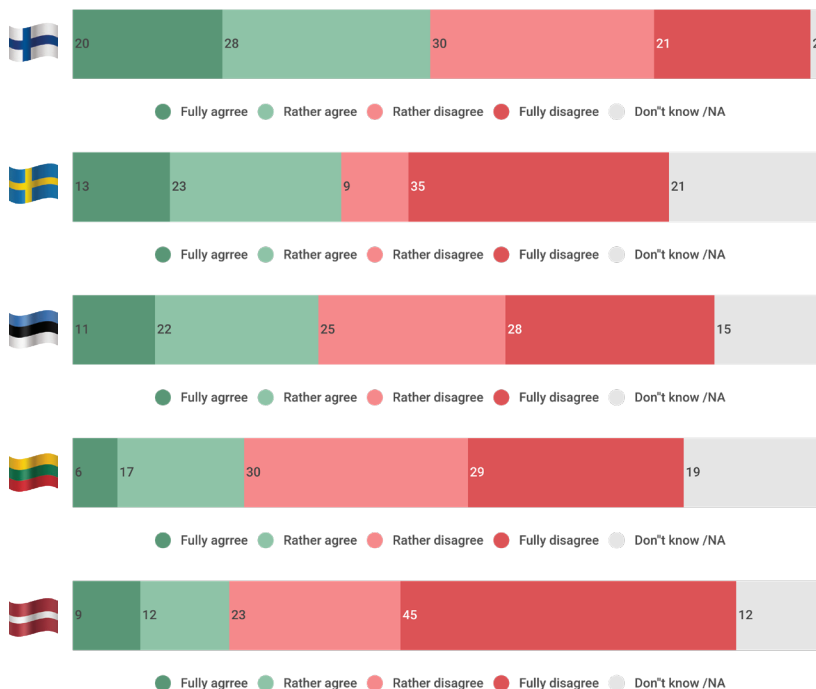


Source: *Latvijas Fakti, Public Opinion Poll in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Finland and Sweden, 2017. Base: All Respondents, N=5047*

In Sweden there is also a polarization of opinions on this issue—44% of respondents disagree (fully disagree + disagree somewhat), but 36% agree (fully agree & agree somewhat). In Finland there are also differences in opinions, as 48% of respondents agree with the statement (fully agree & agree somewhat), while 51% disagree (fully disagree & disagree somewhat). However, differences of opinion in Sweden and Finland are

more likely to arise from internal debates about the foreign policies of these states, namely, the possibility of joining NATO, which would require reviewing Swedish non-alignment and Finland's special relationship with Russia.¹⁹⁵ But this is surely a concern for Russia as well. For example, Russian military expert Igor Korotchenko¹⁹⁶ called for 'an active public diplomacy to stop the campaign to draw neutral Sweden and

Figure 25. How much do you agree or disagree with the statement ‘NATO is a threat to Russia’?



Source: *Latvijas Fakti, Public Opinion Poll in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Finland and Sweden, 2017. Base: All Respondents, N=5047*

Finland into NATO'.¹⁹⁷ Thus, in the context of NATO Russia's influence on public opinion in Finland and Sweden must be viewed not only through the prism of Russian media content, but as due to other tools of influence, as well.

Finally, we also tested two statements regarding the perception of Russia as a threat in the Baltic States, Finland, and Sweden and support for Russia's strategic goal of cancelling economic sanctions against Russia

despite its annexation of Crimea. On average 65% of respondents in the surveyed states agreed (fully agree & agree somewhat) with the idea that international terrorism poses a greater risk to security than Russia. The most support for this idea was identified in Finland—73% fully agree & agree somewhat, but the least support was found in Sweden—56%. The findings of this study are in line with Pew Research Center data that states that globally people consider ISIS and climate change to be the top

threats.¹⁹⁸ This study also includes data about Sweden, where 54% of respondents named ISIS as a major threat to Sweden, but Russia was mentioned as a major threat by only 39% of respondents,¹⁹⁹ thus confirming the conclusion that terrorism is perceived as more dangerous threat than Russia.

The idea that the West should cancel economic sanctions against Russia, despite the annexation of Crimea received the highest level of support in Latvia—43% (fully agree & agree somewhat), Estonia—41% (fully agree & agree somewhat), and Finland—40% (fully agree & agree somewhat). The least support for the cancellation of economic sanctions against Russia was found among Swedish respondents—only 23% (fully agree & agree somewhat), and also respondents from Lithuania—29% (fully agree & agree somewhat). One of the interesting findings is that, with the exception of Finland, a large number of respondents did not express their opinion on this issue—29% in Sweden, 26% in Lithuania, 18% in Latvia, and 17% in Estonia. There may be different explanations for this, beginning with the desire to hide the fact that respondents' views contradict the official discourse and ending with a lack of interest in the matter. However, as this narrative is actively promoted by the Kremlin, not only through mass media but also via diplomatic and other means, additional research is required in order to determine if these views are a result of Russia's activities in information environment. In any case the governments of the countries surveyed should note that their societies exhibit a certain amount of support

for Russia's goal to renew economic cooperation with the West, without changing the status of Crimea.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the public opinion survey leave us with more questions than answers, nevertheless this pilot project serves to clarify the need for further research. One of the findings that may be used as starting point for further research is that the use of Russian media outlets *RT* and *Sputnik* is limited in the states surveyed. Another finding for further consideration is that the overlap in the views of respondents with narratives promoted by the Kremlin is not necessarily correlated with their consumption of *RT*, *Sputnik*, and *Perviy kanal*. The results of the survey also show that Russia is not a trusted source of information in the Baltic States, Finland, and Sweden, except among Russian-speaking audiences in the Baltic States. These three aspects help define the next area of research, namely, the spread of narratives promoted by Russia beyond the three Russian state-funded media outlets considered here. If Russian media enjoys only limited use (with the exception of Russian internal media in the Baltic States) and audiences outside of Russia perceive Russian media with suspicion, perhaps, Russia is successful in promoting its worldview in media and other information sources that have no direct or open association with Russia? It is possible to formulate at least three research questions, based on this assumption: Which media and other information sources reproduce narratives promoted by the Kremlin? What are Russia's ties with non-Russian

media and other information sources that reproduce narratives promoted by the Kremlin in terms of media ownership, personal ties of journalists and opinion leaders, or the use of Russian information sources without sufficient fact-checking? And what is the impact of the network spreading narratives promoted by the Kremlin in terms audience reach and persuasion?

Another area of further research is related to the in-depth study of societies in the NB8 region. What causes people to hold opinions similar to those promoted by Russia is of particular interest. For example, what factors determine the perception in the Baltic States that refugees and immigrants are a destabilising factor for Europe? What factors determine the perception in Finland and Sweden that the rebirth of neo-Nazism is taking place in Europe? What factors determine the views in Latvia, Estonia, and Finland that economic sanctions against Russia must be cancelled, despite the annexation of Crimea? Perhaps, the root cause of public opinion is not Russia's activities in the information environment, but actual developments in these societies that Russia is able to amplify using other tools of influence it has at its disposal. If that is the case, further research should be aimed at defining the policies needed to reduce vulnerabilities within the NB8 societies and to close windows of opportunity for Russia to use our own weaknesses to advance its political and military goals.

The third area identified for further research is related to assessing the influence of media usage on public opinion. This study would aim to

determine how public opinion changes over time in relation to narratives promoted by Russia through a comparison of the narratives present in the media most commonly consumed by respondents. This study should include all media that have the potential to create public opinion so that we can accurately evaluate media impact on public opinion in the context of Russia's information activities.

05

FURTHER RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The results of the subject matter expert workshops and the first pilot studies show that measuring Russia's influence in the information environment of the NB8 region is not a trivial task. The effects are spread through various dimensions of public life and interact with existing social, economic, political and cultural circumstances in eight separate countries. However, the complexity of the task is no reason to shy away from the goal. The lessons identified only reinforce the idea that more time and a greater research capacity are necessary for obtaining comprehensive and unambiguous answers. Based on the work done, it is possible to highlight several further research directions within each dimension of analysis.

THE INFORMATION DIMENSION

- *What is the spread of Russia's promoted narratives outside Russian state-funded media?*

The public opinion survey could not provide evidence that there is a correlation between the use of *RT*, *Sputnik* and *Per-viy kanal* with public opinion in the countries of the NB8 region. The next step should be an investigation of domestic media, including social media, to see if the identified narratives have penetrated other information sources. This points to the need for research on the presence of Russian narratives in the most-consumed media in the NB8 countries. Cases of 'information laundering' where propaganda or disinformation released by an obscure source

of minor importance makes its way through different media sources into the mainstream media should also be investigated. We should also identify examples when (social) media have involuntarily become platforms for potentially hostile Russian state narratives (due to insufficient fact- or background-checking, striving for more revenue from clicks, etc.).

- *What are the links between the Kremlin, non-Russian media, and other information sources in the NB8 countries?*

This research question is based on the assumption that Russia might be more effective in spreading its worldview covertly by using information sources not associated with Russia. This assumption emerged from the finding that generally Russia is a less trusted information source than national media. Possible links with Russia could be identified by such criteria as media ownership; the personal ties of journalists and opinion leaders in the NB8 countries with Russia; the activities of individuals and organisations in the public information space.

- *What is the impact of the network of the spread of the Kremlin's promoted narratives?*

When the network of the spread of Russia's worldview will be identified, the next important step would be to measure its actual influence in terms of the

size of the audience it is able to reach and persuade. It is also important to understand whether such persuasion results in behavioural outcomes.

- *What is the correlation between the use of the media being most saturated with Kremlin's promoted narratives and public opinion in the NB8 countries?*

This area of research would attempt to measure how public opinion changes over the time. This task would require combining ongoing monitoring of media content and recurring public opinion surveys and focus groups. It is important to be able to establish the causality between exposure to particular information sources and formation of views resonating with the Russian state narrative.

POLITICAL DIMENSION

- *What factors apart from media usage determine public opinion in the NB8 countries in relation to the issues that are salient in Kremlin's promoted worldview?*

This research direction addresses the question why people think the way they do? It is very important to focus on all possible determinants of public opinion, focusing not only on media but also taking an anthropological approach. That will allow clarifying when Russia's information influence is cause and when it is an effect. The differences of

values among the NB8 countries emerged as one of the possible explanations for the coincidence of views during the pilot study. This could be studied in-depth to find out if certain views in the NB8 countries correspond with those of Russia's not so much because of media influence, but coincidence in values, which not necessarily means predisposition to Russia's policies. Another puzzle that emerged during the pilot studies was the question—to what extent the coincidence in the worldviews with those promoted by Kremlin, might be interpreted as an advantage for Russia in the achievement of its strategic aims? Perhaps of higher importance is the identification of the groups in the NB8 countries that are predisposed to Russia's international policies, rather than focusing on agreement or disagreement with Russia's promoted narratives?

- *What are Kremlin's influence networks within the NB8 countries?*

This research area would expand on the activities of the organisations of the so-called Russia's compatriots abroad by focusing on the identification of organizations and individuals that are being active in promoting Kremlin's narratives within the NB8 region. This study would focus on how these influence agents are involved in the creation and spread of narratives (for example, production of history

books), how these narratives penetrate media and other information sources, what is the profile of activities of these influence agents, and how they are interconnected within the region.

- *What activities do Russia's official compatriots' organizations engage in?*

The monitoring of the activities of Russia's official compatriots organizations and structuring them according to the main areas of activities as identified in the pilot study would give a more complete picture on how Russia is using this tool of influence. The measurement of the participants in these organizations and the level of interest in relation to organized events in terms of participants, as well as measurement of the size of Russia's compatriots within each country might be used as some of the metrics for the assessment of the effectiveness of these activities.

THE ECONOMIC DIMENSION

- *How large is Russia's presence in the economies of the NB8 countries?*

As the NB8 countries have close economic ties with Russia, this is one of the instruments and arguments that Russia might use in its interests, therefore a comparative analysis of such macroeconomic data as the trade balance with Russia, Russia's share of

investments in each country, and other forms of economic ties are further areas research. For example, economic interdependency with Russia is one of the possible explanations for the support of certain groups for cancelling the economic sanctions against Russia, despite its annexation of Crimea.

- *How do entrepreneurs in the NB8 countries regard relations with Russia?*

Entrepreneurs are one of the influential groups that have the potential to influence political decisions in the NB8 countries, therefore understanding their views on relations with Russia is of great importance. Whether or not such a study should remain under the auspices of this project or should be conducted independently is a point for discussion.

THE MILITARY DIMENSION

- *How are demonstrations of military force being used by Russia as a form of strategic communication?*

Research in this area would focus on the crucial topic of military communication, which would involve an analysis of communications regarding military drills, the NATO presence, the monitoring of military incidents, and other related issues. It would also link the demonstration of force to real-life political and other events of national or regional importance in the NB8.

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