

For the ASN Convention participants: the paper here is a work-in-progress chapter of a forthcoming book that focuses on various aspects of nationalism and militarism in the post-Soviet Russia. The conclusive remarks are still preliminary, as well as many of the sections. All suggestions, comments, and questions will be warmly welcome!

Continuities and changes of the evolution of Russia's 'Others' in the presidential rhetoric 2000-2018

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Introduction: setting the stage for state nationalism

Despite ever intensifying globalization, nationalism has remained one of the most powerful ideologies of the modern history, an "ism" prevailing even when many others fail. In fact, nationalist argumentation in politics has become increasingly important in the post-Cold War world.¹ However, the notions of "rising nationalism", commonplace in the media in particular, do not help us understand the current developments unless the concept is properly defined: the meanings and connotations attached to nationalism are different in the academic use and in the everyday language.²

In this paper, I will analyse the development of state nationalism by specifically focusing on the evolution of Russia's Others in the presidential discourse. The theoretical starting point is that constructing a nation bases on creating and maintaining the boundaries between "us" and "them", which are drawn first and foremost in language but have real political consequences. I follow the studies of political identity that perceive othering as a dynamic, constantly

¹ Daphne Halikiopoulou and Sofia Vasilopoulou (eds.): *Nationalism and globalisation. Conflicting or complementary?* Routledge, Oxon & New York 2011, introduction; Umut Özkirimli: *Theories of Nationalism. A Critical Introduction*. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke & New York 2017 (3rd edition), introduction.

² Pauli Kettunen: The concept of nationalism in discussions on a European society. *Journal of Political Ideologies* 2018, 23:3, 342-369.

ongoing process.³ Thus, the paper analyses the emergence of state nationalism in the early 2000s, and how the Russia's Others, explained and portrayed by the state leadership, have evolved since.

In 1993, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when drafting the Constitution of the Russian Federation, the state authorities wanted to distance the new political circumstances from the Soviet ones by stating that "no ideology may be established as state or obligatory one".⁴ But the need to create a unified national narrative was acute. From the year 1996 onwards in particular, President Boris Yeltsin's administration made attempts to define a new, national 'Russian idea' by leaning onto the civic interpretations of the nation as a community of free citizens (*rossiyane*), that is, regardless of their ethnicity, for example by establishing a specific commission to carry out the work.

The attempts to enhance national unity this way brought, however, little success: they were criticized in public for not being the task of the presidential administration in the first place, but also their credibility was downplayed by the severe socio-economic and political challenges. In other words, it was simply not credible to refer to the great Russian (*rossiiskii*) nation that inhabitates a strong state when that state was in such an evident state of weakness because of economic crisis, political instability, crime, and the brutal war in Chechnya. Moreover, the memory of the Soviet Union as a great power was still vivid, and functioned as a contrast to the weakness of the state witnessed in the present.⁵

When Vladimir Putin was elected as the President in 2000, his administration started decisively to emphasize the strong Russian state as the basis of national unity. Now the narrative also gained more credibility in the eyes of the Russian people, to a large extent thanks to the simultaneous processes of rather remarkable economic growth and centralization of the power structures. At the same time, the state conducted policies that framed and strengthened their vision of the national unity: federal-level programs for patriotic

³ Iver B. Neumann: *Russia and the idea of Europe. A study in identity and international relations*. Routledge, London & New York 1996; Eleanor Knott: Nationalism and belonging: introduction. *Nations and nationalism* 2017, 23: 2, 220-226.

⁴ The Constitution of the Russian Federation, adopted on December 12, 1993: Chapter 1, Article 13. Available at: <http://www.constitution.ru/en/10003000-02.htm> (accessed 1.3.2019).

⁵ Tolz, Vera: Forging the nation. National Identity and Nation Building in Post-Communist Russia. *Europe-Asia Studies* 1998, 50:6, 993-1022, 1011; Laruelle, Marlene: *In the name of the nation. Nationalism and Politics in Contemporary Russia*. Palgrave Macmillan 2009, 18.

education were introduced⁶, the status of national symbols that had remained vague throughout the 1990s was confirmed with a new law⁷, and measures were taken to enhance the public image of the Russian army. Presidential speeches in the early years of 2000s stressed the key message: Russia had been weak, but now it had to – and would – become strong.⁸

The primary material of the chapter consists of the twenty presidential addresses held for the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation in the years 2000–2019. The selected speeches are not representative of the whole political discourse in the country⁹, and even the presidential rhetoric contains internal discrepancies. But, these speeches are understood firstly as valuable accounts of the state leadership's attempt to generate meaning to the national narrative, and secondly as a way to foster national policies in practice – since 2014 the Presidential address to the Federal Assembly has had a legal status as one of the key documents steering the strategic planning of the country.¹⁰ A qualitative content analysis focuses on exactly how 'us' and 'them' are described in the material, and what metaphors and concepts as well as parallels or contrasts are applied in those cases.

The time frame covers emergence of state nationalism in the early 2000s during first two presidential terms of Vladimir Putin, followed by the presidency of Dmitri Medvedev, who was perceived more liberal but appeared to be so only in rhetoric, and the so called "conservative turn" in Russian politics that took place after the beginning of Vladimir Putin's third presidential term in 2012, until the present day.

⁶ The first patriotic education program was signed by the Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov in February 2001. Gosudarstvennaya programma "Patrioticheskoe vospitanie grazhdan Rossiiskoi Federatsii na 2001-2005 gody", available at:

<http://www.consultant.ru/cons/cgi/online.cgi?req=doc&base=EXP&n=232519#040286912671585795> (accessed 27.3.2019).

⁷ In December 2000, Putin signed three laws that confirmed the status of the coat of arms, the tricolor flag, as well as the national anthem of Russia as the national symbols of the country and advised the proper ways to apply them. Gosudarstvennye simvoly Rossiiskoi Federatsii. Ofitsial'naya Rossiya website: <http://www.gov.ru/main/symbols/gsr1.html> (accessed 27.3.2019).

⁸ "But our position is very clear: only a strong, or effective if someone dislikes the word 'strong', an effective state and a democratic state is capable of protecting civil, political and economic freedoms, capable of creating conditions for people to lead happy lives and for our country to flourish." Putin 8.7.2000.

⁹ See e.g. Anton Barbashin: "Post-Crimean Political Discourse and Russian Foreign Policy Narratives" in Riccardo Mario Cucciolla (ed.): *State and Political Discourse in Russia*. Reser DOC, Rome 2017, p. 103–115, 110.

¹⁰ Law on Strategic Planning 2014.

State nationalism and the theories of the Other

In the political discourse, speaking about nation as "us" is truly a widespread metaphor that Michael Billig interprets as one of the subtle and thus powerful implementations of "banal nationalism". He argues that the naturalized, often unnoticed patterns of everyday language and practices reinforce nationalism.¹¹ In a similar way, nationalist argumentation aims to become "common sense" by using concepts and narratives that would be intuitively accepted by the people.¹² The primary material of this chapter represents presidential speech, which, on one hand, is intended as a message from the political leadership to steer the political work of the country, and on the other hand, attempts to tap into views and attitudes already existing in the society.¹³

For the purposes of this paper, an interpretation of the Other as fundamentally *different* – but not necessarily *worse* – is adopted. The image of the Other is understood primarily as means to construct Self: defining "who we are" is often times done by showing "who we are not", i.e. by defining the Other, the Self becomes visible.¹⁴ Sometimes the Other does carry a clear value judgement, but in these cases, it should be understood as a certain type of the Other: when the Other becomes dehumanized, or poses an existential threat to the Self, it is an Enemy. Therefore, the relationship between the Self and the Other is important, and should be also understood as a constantly changing one. Iver B. Neumann notes that "[i]dentity does not reside in essential and readily identifiable cultural traits but in relations, and the question of where and how borders towards 'the Other' should be drawn become crucial."¹⁵

An example of the changing relationship between the Self and the Other is provided in Julie Wilhelmsen's study on the changing representations on Chechnya in Russian public discourse between the first and the second Chechnyan war. She depicts the process in which the Other becomes the Enemy, and shows how the representations of Chechnya as existential terrorist threat during and after the year 1999 in particular served to create an image of strong and united Russia. Wilhelmsen even suggests that "the particular challenges facing such a vast and diverse country as Russia in seeking to articulate a positive common Self makes it

¹¹ Michael Billig: *Banal Nationalism*. London, Sage Publications, 1995, 13–15.

¹² Sutherland 2005, 195; Shenhav 2006, 250.

¹³ See e.g. Kolstø & Blakkisrud 2018, 7.

¹⁴ Vilho Harle: *Enemy with a thousand faces. The tradition of the other in western political thought and history*. Praeger, Westport 2000, 11; see also "Антизападничество решает одну из дилемм нашей коллективной идентификации". Republic.ru, 19.2.2019, available at: <https://republic.ru/posts/93076> (accessed 29.3.2019).

¹⁵ Neumann 1996, 1–2.

more prone to focus on the Other, and that the most efficient form of 'Othering' becomes one of radical Otherness".¹⁶ Political language and politics are intertwined, and discourses of 'Others' – especially those produced and distributed by the state power – frame the sphere of actual politics. This way, drawing the border between 'us' and 'them' often has clear political implications.¹⁷

The multilayered and intertwined Others in the presidential discourse

In the previous literature on the topic, Europe or, more generally, the West has been presented as Russia's main or constituent Other.¹⁸ And throughout the history, Russia's pronounced perception of and relationship to its Other has had real relevance in foreign politics. As Neumann writes in 1996, "[p]eriods like the present, when the Russian Westernisers have the upper hand in the debate, have in the past been superseded by a turn away from the concurrent political life of Europe".¹⁹ And, indeed, according to Marlène Laruelle, the Kremlin has ever since the late 1990s gradually developed an 'anti-Western European civilisation' narrative, which presents Russia as a definitely European country, but one that has chosen not to follow the Western path of development.²⁰

However, it is not only the Europe outside of Russia that is discussed when portraying the Others and the Russian approach to them in the presidential rhetoric. Neumann cites conservative historian Nikolay Karamzin, who in his critique towards Mikhail Speransky implies that the constitutionalists act as "the handmaidens of Russia's ancient European enemies".²¹ These "handmaidens" have come with many names but they all remind that like Self, the Other is also multilayered: the external Other has always had internal equivalents.

In the annual address for the Federal Assembly, the President might mean various in-groups when he speaks about "us". Sometimes he addresses clearly the policy-makers present in the event, his "colleagues". But, in other cases he refers to the 'nation' or the Russian people as "us", and in general, the cases are possible to distinguish from each other. Julia Galyamina argues that, in the beginning of his presidential career, Vladimir Putin used the word "us" to

¹⁶ Wilhelmsen, Julie: *Russia's Securitization of Chechnya. How War Became Acceptable*. Routledge 2017, 206.

¹⁷ Wilhelmsen 2017, page; Siddi 2017, 36.

¹⁸ Neumann 1996, 1; Tolz, Vera 2001, 69.

¹⁹ Neumann 1996, 2.

²⁰ Laruelle, Marlène: Russia as an anti-liberal European civilization. In Pål Kolstø, Pål & Blakkisrud, Helge (eds.): *The New Russian Nationalism. Imperialism, Ethnicity and Authoritarianism 2000–15*, Edinburgh University Press 2016, 278.

²¹ Neumann 1996, 15.

describe either government or the state power in general, but in the later speeches he uses the same word to describe the nation.²² I would maintain that the categories are actually more complex. There are certainly cases in the addresses held in early 2000s that refer to the “nation as us” (for example, when Putin discusses national values or history of the Russian people); he also sometimes clearly distances himself from the government.

In the following, I will first discuss the recent past as the (populist) Other, and then move on to analyse Russia’s relationship to its European or Western Others, aiming to pay sufficient attention to the external and internal aspects of othering in all of the cases.

“It was not we who built it”: the Other from the past

As was described in the beginning of this chapter, the difficulties of the 1990s – unstable socio-economic and political situation, war, and the evident weakness of the country – framed the circumstances in which Putin’s administration began their work to create the new national narrative. Moreover, the experience of the 1990s that the people had was an important factor in legitimizing Putin’s power, especially during his first term in the presidential office. In the beginning of his presidency, Putin makes several implicit references to the previous state administration as well as to the political leadership of the 1990s, for example by stating that “although strengthening the state has for some years been proclaimed as the goal of Russian policy, we have not moved beyond declarations and empty talk. Not at all!”²³ In a similar manner, particularly in his first two speeches to the Federal Assembly, Putin stresses the necessity to restore the trust among the people to the state.²⁴

Serguei Oushakine has described how the disillusionment of the Soviet reality had turned into a deep distrust among “us”, the people”, towards “them” – the politicians in the TV, for example.²⁵ The state administration, most likely, recognized the origins of the “trauma” Oushakine depicts. As a result, in Putin’s parlance, the Other is not the politician in the present, but the politician in the past. Speaking in the passive case, Putin implicitly suggests

²² Ю.Е. Галямина: Мы – Они: Как в дискурсе Владимира Путина разных лет конструируется идентичность. *Политическая наука*, 2016, № 3:2, 159–161.

²³ Putin 8.7.2000.

²⁴ The low trust towards the state or lack thereof is mentioned explicitly as a problem for example in the speeches for the Federal Assembly in 2000; 2001; 2006.

²⁵ Oushakine, Serguei Alex.: *The Patriotism of Despair. Nation, War, and Loss in Russia*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press 2009, 34-35; 261.

that “they” had made promises but not kept them, and “they” had made mistakes that “we” would not repeat.²⁶

In the Soviet political discourse that was highly ritualistic, the new leader would always mark the distinction between him and the predecessors by introducing new concepts or slogans, and sometimes condemning the past policies. This was a way to stress the beginning of the new era.²⁷ Definitely, there is similar quest for legitimacy in the way Putin speaks about the past in the beginning of his presidential term in particular. He creates a rhetorical break in the political continuum by criticizing his predecessors for not fulfilling the hopes that were projected onto them, and simultaneously presents himself as the one acting on behalf of the people. Philipp Casula has described Putin’s first two terms with “populism built from above”, where an additional dividing line was created to split the people and the institutional system, and where Putin would be on the side of the people.²⁸

Portraying the politicians of the 1990s as Others remains in Putin’s rhetoric long after the beginning of his presidency. With time, these references become also more explicit:

The changes of the early 1990s were a time of great hopes for millions of people, but neither the authorities nor business fulfilled these hopes. Moreover, some members of these groups pursued their own personal enrichment in a way such as had never been seen before in our country’s history, at the expense of the majority of our citizens and in disregard for the norms of law and morality.²⁹

In Putin’s rhetoric especially, the Other of the past develops from the dishonest and ineffective politician in the 1990s towards the corrupt, selfish official in the present day. There are several examples in the 2000s and 2010s, especially with regards to the discussion on anti-corruption measures, mentioning this type. The corrupt officials provide a logical continuation of the politicians of the 1990s in the presidential rhetoric: they are the Others that legitimate the presidential power, and thus provide material for the populist claims. In between the honest people and the high leadership of the country there are middle-level

²⁶ “In Russia today, promises are not enough. Promises have been made many times, and they have all passed their expiry date. Decades of difficult and unstable life are a long enough time to demand real changes for the better”; “Now that we are moving forward, it is more important not to remember the past, but to look to the future. [- -] Policies built on the basis of open and honest relations of the state with society will protect us from repeating past mistakes, and are the basic conditions of a new ‘social contract’, Putin 8.7.2000.

²⁷ See e.g. Ruutu, Katja: The main concepts and actors of perestroika. In Kangaspuro, Markku – Nikula, Jouko – Stodolsky, Ivor (eds.): *Perestroika. Process and Consequences*. SKS, Helsinki 2010, 62–71.

²⁸ Quoted in Lassila, Jussi: Putin as a Non-populist Autocrat. *Russian Politics* 2018, 3:2, 179–180.

²⁹ Putin 10.5.2006.

bureaucrats, civil servants and officials, of whom not all are honest – therefore, they are not “us”.³⁰ In a way, the rhetoric mirrors an old Russian proverb of the “good tsar and bad boyars”, which actually is often reflected in the surveys of institutional trust among Russians: the president enjoys wider trust than the state Duma, government, or regional policy-makers.³¹

When president Dmitri Medvedev introduced his ideas for comprehensive modernisation of the Russian state, economy and society in November 2009, he reminded the Federal Assembly that

[t]he foundation of my vision for the future is the firm conviction that Russia can and must become a global power on a completely new basis. Our country's prestige and national prosperity cannot rest forever on past achievements. After all, the oil and gas production facilities that generate most of our budget revenue, the nuclear weapons that guarantee our security, and our industrial and utilities infrastructure – most of this was built by Soviet specialists. In other words, it was not we who built it.³²

In the material of this chapter, Medvedev's rhetoric in 2009–2011 differs significantly from the addresses given before and after that in its clear future-orientation. The system built by the Others in the past is understood as a hindrance to the future development, which Medvedev is pursuing. The essay describing modernisation project carried the title “Go, Russia” (*Rossiya, vpered*).³³ Putin's rhetoric after 2012 is rich in (selective) past references, but much more limited in concrete or clear future visions.

The Other in the past is, indeed, internal Other, but what makes it “fundamentally” different from the Self? Adopting the populist style does not necessarily tell about othering, and as Jussi Lassila argues, “in light of populism's minimal definition and of comparison with Lukashenko, Putin's anti-institutionalist position has not manifested by increasing proximity with the people with clear-cut ‘other’, not even by evoking to the people in his speeches.”³⁴ However, I would maintain that there is certain seriousness in the way how the politics, experiences and realities of the 1990s are portrayed in the presidential discourse: the

³⁰ E.g. “The vast majority of civil servants are honest and decent people who work for the good of our country. But neither one's office, nor connections in high places or past services can serve as a shield for corrupt officials.” Putin 1.12.2016

³¹ *Одобрение институтов власти*. Levada Center Press release 28.3.2019, available at: <https://www.levada.ru/2019/03/28/odobrenie-institutov-vlasti-11/> (accessed 29.3.2019).

³² Medvedev 12.11.2009.

³³ Go, Russia! Kremlin.ru 10.9.2009, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/5413> (accessed 2.3.2019).

³⁴ Lassila, Jussi: Putin as a Non-populist Autocrat. *Russian Politics* 2018, 3:2, 180.

representation of the 1990s as chaotic in comparison to the new stability, especially in the early 2000s, lacks nuances that can be attributed to other periods of the national history in the presidential rhetoric. Moreover, the references to the 1990s carry a moral judgement of the Other: greed and corruption are presented as characteristics of the Other, not the Self.

"We are losing out in competition": The Other ahead of us

From the beginning of his presidential term, Putin was concerned of the global competition and Russia's position in it. In his perception, the military confrontation of the Cold War had ended, but the competition of global markets had immediately replaced it. In the speech for the Federal Assembly in 2002, he explained the logic explicitly:

Competition has indeed become global. In the period of weakness – of our weakness – we had to give up many niches on the international market. And they were immediately occupied by others. [- -] The conclusion is obvious: in the world today, no one intends to be hostile towards us – no one wants this or needs it. But no one is particularly waiting for us either. No one is going to help us especially. We need to fight for a place in the "economic sun" ourselves.³⁵

The "fight" had become qualitatively different, but it still existed, and the dire need to fare in this competition was a key driver of both domestic and foreign politics in the early 2000s. The Others in this discourse are rarely explicitly named, but it is clear that they are the Western market economy countries that are economically more developed and integrated. Despite those same countries sometimes being portrayed as exemplary, in Putin's parlance Russia must always follow its own path. In the speech of 2002, the resentment towards the Others in this harsh competition arose from the idea that Russia's 'natural' niches in the world economy had been occupied by others; that Russia's expectations of the post-Cold War economic reality had not been met; and that Russia was not included in the organizations where global trade was regulated.³⁶ Thus, the Other is also held partly responsible for the difficult situation in which Russia had found itself.

One of the clear conceptual innovations during Putin's first term in the presidential office was the concept of stability (*stabil'nost'*) that he started to use extensively from the year 2001 onwards in particular. Even though stability seems to be the conceptual innovation and a key

³⁵ Putin 18.4.2002.

³⁶ The organization meant here is WTO: "Our country is still 'excluded' from the process of forming the rules of world trade. We have not yet been allowed to take part in forming the rules in world trade. This causes the Russian economy to stand still, and its competitiveness to drop. Membership in the WTO should become a tool to protect Russia's national interests on world market." Putin 18.4.2002.

slogan for Putin's administration in the early 2000s, it is not depicted an end in itself but means: stability is needed in order to become strong. Still in 2000, Putin had explained that "Russia needs an economic system which is competitive, effective and socially just, which ensures stable political development", and continued that "a stable economy is the main guarantor of a democratic society, and the very foundation of a strong nation that is respected in the world".³⁷ Three years later, in 2003, Putin formulated the same idea more decisively:

Now we must take the next step and focus all our decisions and all our action on ensuring that in a not too far off future, Russia will take its recognised place among the ranks of the truly strong, economically advanced and influential nations. This is an entirely new challenge we must take up, and it represents an entirely new stage in our country's development.³⁸

Further in the same address he added, that the "ultimate goal should be to return Russia to its place among the prosperous, developed, strong and respected nations." Whereas the references to Russia as a strong country had been rather pragmatic in 2000–2002, in 2003 the view was motivated with references to history: Russians should not forget their national past, the victims and sacrifice, the historic fate of their country and the the way Russia had continuously emerged as a strong nation.³⁹ Presenting Russia's distinct history as a justifying cause for restoring strength in the global competition underlines the interpretation that this is the position Russia *deserves*, which can be seen influencing the relationship between Russia and the Others ahead in the global economic competition. The relationship with these Others is complex: they do not help Russia, and they even mistreat Russia, but they are nevertheless valuable partners.⁴⁰

In his first speech for the Federal Assembly, President Dmitri Medvedev stated that Russia had become strong "economically and politically".⁴¹ The speech reflected in tone and content

³⁷ Putin 8.7.2000.

³⁸ Putin 16.5.2003.

³⁹ "I would like to recall that throughout our history Russia and its people have accomplished and continue to accomplish a truly historical feat, a great work performed in the name of our country's integrity and in the name of bringing it peace and a stable life. Maintaining a state spread over such a vast territory and preserving a unique community of peoples while keeping up a strong presence on the international stage is not just an immense labour, it is also a task that has cost our people untold victims and sacrifice. Such has been Russia's historic fate over these thousand and more years. Such has been the way Russia has continuously emerged as a strong nation. It is our duty never to forget this, and we should remember it now, too, as we examine the threats we face today and the main challenges to which we must rise."

⁴⁰ On a separate note, in post-2014 Putin's parlance especially, words expressing cooperation or good relations such as "partners", "friends", and "colleagues" have been used in a sarcastic manner: "Our partners" imposing sanctions; "our colleagues" who consider Russia as an adversary; "our American friends" who influence Russia's relations with its neighbours, "either openly or behind the scenes". Putin 1.12.2016; Putin 4.12.2014.

⁴¹ "I am sure that we can achieve this ["to make the world a fairer and safer place"] because our country is economically and politically strong. The military operations in August and the worrying news from the world

the war in Georgia that had taken place the previous month: it was a speech given by a leader of a country in war, and as such not surprising. But a year later, Medvedev did not mince his words when he described Russia's economic backwardness, even weakness. In that address, the rhetoric was aimed at defending the modernization project.⁴²

Medvedev's examples illustrate that the political and economic weakness could be addressed, but military might was not put under question. The Russian army is discussed in critical manner, and the need of reforms (and further reforms) is expressed in several addresses especially in the early 2000s, but any critical evaluation of the overall military might of Russia is a topic that remains "untouched" in the addresses to the Federal Assembly. In the spring 2014, after the popular unrest in Ukraine had led to an open conflict between the people and President Yanukovich' regime, Russia invaded Crimea and the war in the Eastern parts of Ukraine started. The events shook the political, economic and social realities in Russia, Ukraine and in the whole Europe, and led to further deterioration between the "East" and the "West" in international politics. In December 2014, Putin's rhetoric is that of a leader of a country in war:

No one will ever attain military superiority over Russia. We have a modern and combat ready army. As they now put it, a polite, but formidable army. We have the strength, will and courage to protect our freedom. [- -] We will never enter the path of self-isolation, xenophobia, suspicion and the search for enemies. All this is evidence of weakness, while we are strong and confident.⁴³

The goal of creating "strong and rich" Russia has been a crucial element in the presidential speeches throughout the past two decades. It is a classic example of a conceptual metaphor in political language that portrays nation as person, or (nation) state as person: describing a state with human-like characteristics helps to construct the collective national identity. According to Andreas Musolff, metaphorical personification of a state this way creates an image of "a unified social collective that is able to speak with one voice and act as a singular, independent

markets have clearly demonstrated the maturity of our civil society and the political unity of our country. It was pleasing to see (and I say this with sincere gratitude) that our country's big political parties acted in a spirit of solidarity during the events in the South Caucasus, and that the anti-crisis measures aimed at stabilising the economy have also been met with understanding. I think it could hardly be otherwise when we are talking about a people with more than a thousand years of history, a people that have developed and brought civilisation to a vast territory, created a unique culture and built up powerful economic and military potential, a people who act on the solid basis of values and ideals that have taken shape over the centuries and stood the test of time."

Medvedev 28.9.2008

⁴² Medvedev 12.11.2009.

⁴³ Putin 4.12.2014.

agent".⁴⁴ In the presidential discourse, Russia's strength / might (*sila*) is expressed in relation to its Others, because the main condition in which it is needed, is the political or economic competition against them.

"The wolf knows who to eat": the Other that threatens us

According to Putin's perception in the early 2000s, Russia is not only witnessing bitter and harsh global competition in economic sphere, but also direct external aggression, even existential threat. Conflict and war in Chechnya is not described as separatism, but as a branch of international terrorism – it is an external Other, not an internal one, even if they are connected.⁴⁵ Terrorism is the main Enemy of the presidential discourse throughout the study period, even if the form it takes changes over time. Clearly, it is the evil that cannot in any circumstances be part of "us": it is the dehumanized Enemy, posing an existential threat. However, there are Others that are not clearly depicted as enemies, but which also can be threatening, and that definitely remain fundamentally different from the Self. The 'threatening Others' will be discussed next.

In his first speech to the Federal Assembly as a President, Putin referred to "a new type of external aggression" that threatened Russia's state sovereignty and territorial integrity. Referring to international terrorism, he continued that Russia had found itself "face to face with force that strive towards a geopolitical reorganization of the world"⁴⁶. The view is repeated in the address in 2002, when the need for joint efforts against international terrorism was stressed: that the Cold war had ended, but a different war had begun.⁴⁷ In Putin's rhetoric,

⁴⁴ Andreas Musolff: Nations as persons. Collective identities in conflict. In Birte Bös, Sonja Kleinke, Sandra Mollin and Nuria Hernández (eds.): *The Discursive Construction of Identities On- and Offline. Personal – group – collective*. John Benjamins Publishing Company 2018, 251; 261.

⁴⁵ See e.g. "Thus, in the conditions of a new type of external aggression – international terrorism and the direct attempt to bring this threat into the country – Russia has met with a systematic challenge to its state sovereignty and territorial integrity, and found itself face to face with forces that strive towards a geopolitical reorganization of the world." Putin 8.7.2000.

⁴⁶ Putin 8.7.2000.

⁴⁷ "Today, Russia is one of the most reliable guarantors of international stability. It is Russia's principled position that has made it possible to form a strong anti-terrorist coalition. In the context of allied relations, we have made according decisions along with the leaders of a number of CIS countries. For our country, which has faced terrorism for a long time, there was no choice whether or not to support efforts to destroy the 'den' of terrorism. Especially as these measures have indeed helped to increase security on the southern borders of our country, and to a significant degree have helped to improve the situation in this matter in many countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States. By joint efforts, we have been able to solve a very important strategic task – to liquidate the most dangerous centre of international terrorism in Afghanistan. To stop its negative effect on the situation in other countries, and to remove the threat to us that came from there. After 11 September last year, many, many people in the world realized that the 'cold war' was over. They realized that now there are different threats, that a different war is on – the war with international terrorism. [- -]" Putin

the Others that pose a threat – without necessarily being Enemies – are the forces that either dismiss the terrorist threat and therefore do not take the needed action, or who collude with the terrorists. After the short optimistic phase in the U.S.–Russian relations had passed and the Russian state leadership had become disillusioned about the future prospects of the common war against terrorism, Putin lamented that “[c]ertain countries sometimes use their strong and well-armed national armies to increase their zones of strategic influence rather than fighting these evils we all face.”⁴⁸

Andrei Kolesnikov has explained that the Kremlin pursues a “myth of permanent war”, connecting the wars of the past to the wars of the present and thus aiming to justify the conflicts of today.⁴⁹ This is visible in Putin’s rhetoric of the Other as well. Most often the references to the past war concerns the Second World War, but in his speech in 2006, Putin connected the memory of the veterans of the Great Patriotic War to the experiences of the Cold War arms race. He explained the importance of maintaining readiness of the armed forces as the biggest lesson learned in the World War II, and after comparing military spending in other countries, noted:

But this means that we also need to build our home and make it strong and well protected. We see, after all, what is going on in the world. The wolf knows who to eat, as the saying goes. It knows who to eat and is not about to listen to anyone, it seems. How quickly all the pathos of the need to fight for human rights and democracy is laid aside the moment the need to realise one’s own interests comes to the fore. In the name of one’s own interests everything is possible, it turns out, and there are no limits.⁵⁰

In December 2015, after the Turkish air forces had shot down Russian aircraft near the Syrian border in November, Putin held a furious speech to the Federal Assembly. He condemned the actions of the Turkish government and accused them of cooperating with the terrorists, but also draw a parallel between the Second World War and the war against terrorism:

Unwillingness to join forces against Nazism in the 20th century cost us millions of lives in the bloodiest world war in human history. Today we have again come face to face with a destructive and barbarous ideology, and we must not allow these modern-day dark forces to attain their goals. We must stop our

⁴⁸ Putin 16.5.2003.

⁴⁹ Kolesnikov, Andrei: “Do Russians want war?” Carnegie Moscow Centre, 14.6.2016: <http://carnegie.ru/2016/06/14/do-russians-want-war/j1u8> (accessed 2.3.2019); see also Harle 2000, 116.

⁵⁰ Putin 2006.

debates and forget our differences to build a common anti-terrorist front that will act in line with international law and under the UN aegis.⁵¹

In Putin's discourse in the 2010s, Russia, unlike its Others, is willing to, capable of and morally fit for fighting the evil.

"The Amoral International": the Other with different values

The presidential rhetoric in the annual addresses suggests that the Russian set of values have undergone a significant change during the past two decades. In 2000, Putin mentioned that "with all the abundance of views, opinions and the diversity of party platforms, we have had and continue to have common values"⁵². However, he did not explain what those common values actually were. In 2005, Putin described Russia as a major European power, and explained the values of the Russian society accordingly: "Achieved through much suffering by European culture, the ideals of freedom, human rights, justice and democracy have for many centuries been our society's determining values."⁵³ In 2008, Medvedev listed Russia's values, of which the first two were justice and freedom, and in addition to them welfare, dignity of human life, interethnic peace, and patriotism were mentioned. This set of values was still clearly rather liberal, at least in the way how Medvedev interprets them.⁵⁴ However, there are no mentions of "European origin" of those values in the address.

The biggest change takes place in 2012, after the beginning of Vladimir Putin's third term in the presidential office. From then on, the presidential discourse consistently stresses national narrative that bases on shared set of traditional, conservative Russian values. The massive street protests against electoral fraud and Putin's regime in the big cities of Russia in 2011–

⁵¹ Putin 3.12.2015.

⁵² Putin 8.7.2000.

⁵³ Putin 25.4.2005.

⁵⁴ "Now I would like to speak about our values. They are well known. There is justice, which we understand as political equality, honest courts and responsible leaders. Justice is embodied in practice as social guarantees and the fight against poverty and corruption, the efforts to give each individual a decent place in our society and give the Russian nation as a whole a worthy place in the system of international relations. There is freedom – personal, individual freedom. It means economic freedom, freedom of speech and religion, freedom to choose one's place of residence and one's job. And there is general national freedom, the independence and freedom of the Russian state. There is the welfare and dignity of human life. There is interethnic peace and the unity of diverse cultures. There is protection for small peoples, and the recognition of South Ossetia's and Abkhazia's independence is an example of this protection. There are family traditions, love and faithfulness, care for the young and for the old. There is patriotism, along with the most sober and critical look at our country's history and our far from ideal present, belief in Russia that shines through no matter what the circumstances, deep-rooted love for our native land and our great culture. These are our values, the foundations of our society and our moral beacons. To put things more simply, it is these self-evident things that we all understand that are what make us a single people, what make us Russia. These are the things that we will never give up no matter what the circumstances." Medvedev 5.11.2008.

2012 functioned as a significant driver for the “conservative turn” domestically, but the deteriorating relationship with the West after the late 2013 added nuances to the understanding the liberal, non-traditional or even “amoral” Other in both external and internal terms. In 2013, Putin calls the people who are “devoid of culture and respect for traditions, both their own and those of others” an “Amoral International”. The remark is connected to the discussion on ethnic tensions, which were at the time of that address extremely high. The internal Other here refers to radical ethnonationalists who were at the time seriously challenging the narrative of the (multi)national unity of the Russian people. Since 2002 at least, the radical nationalist Other had been described with “extremism”⁵⁵ but the notion of moral decay adds a new aspect to the Other: the other is not only criminal or extremist, but also amoral, attacking the values of the Self. The internal Other that does not share the common value basis can also be someone pursuing interests of a foreign country or acting against Russia’s interest.

As was pointed out above, according to Marlene Laruelle, the Kremlin has developed an ‘anti-Western European civilisation’ narrative, which presents Russia as an European country that does not follow the Western path of development.⁵⁶ In the presidential rhetoric after 2012, the European countries might still be the Others that are ahead of economic competition, but they have lost their “original”, Christian European identity, and have now become Others that have different values.

If for some European countries national pride is a long-forgotten concept and sovereignty is too much of a luxury, true sovereignty for Russia is absolutely necessary for survival. Primarily, we should realise this as a nation. I would like to emphasise this: either we remain a sovereign nation, or we dissolve without a trace and lose our identity. Of course, other countries need to understand this, too. All participants in international life should be aware of this. And they should use this understanding to strengthen the role and the importance of international law, which we’ve talked about so much lately, rather than bend its standards to suit someone’s strategic interests contrary to its fundamental principles and common sense, considering everyone else to be poorly educated people who can’t read or write.⁵⁷

Alongside with the change in rhetoric about values, the actual policies of excluding Others with “non-traditional” values have strengthened. In his speech for the Federal Assembly in April 2005, Putin cited in length the words of conservative philosopher Ivan Ilyin, stating that

⁵⁵ E.g. Putin 18.4.2002.

⁵⁶ Laruelle 2016, 293.

⁵⁷ Putin 4.12.2014.

the state power cannot “oversee and dictate the creative states of the soul and mind, the inner states of love, freedom and goodwill. The state cannot demand from its citizens faith, prayer, love, goodness and conviction. It cannot regulate scientific, religious and artistic creation... It should not intervene in moral, family and daily private life, and only when extremely necessary should it impinge on people’s economic initiative and creativity”.⁵⁸ Less than a decade later, the state leadership had clearly abandoned this idea. Maria Engström has explained the so called “conservative turn” in 2012 as “re-ideologization” of Russian domestic, foreign and security politics, in which the state authorities started to lean on already existing but marginal interpretations of Russian messianism.⁵⁹ The rhetoric of the Russian Orthodox Church and the state became gradually more intertwined, and after 2013 especially, the close relationship has been translated into legislative processes. In June 2013, offences against believers’ feelings were made punishable by imprisonment, and in February 2017, the penalties for domestic violence were eased – both changes had been, at least partly, concessions to the Russian Orthodox Church.⁶⁰ Moreover, the repression against gender and sexual minorities in the country has increased, as they represent “non-traditional” values, portrayed as “foreign” to Russia.⁶¹

On the other hand, the key value for unifying national narrative has remained in the core of the presidential rhetoric, gaining more importance. After 2014, Putin has declared in several occasions that he sees patriotism as a unifying idea, or “the national idea”, for all Russians.⁶² Federal-level patriotic education programmes with their increasing funding, emergence of various local, private or semi-official patriotic clubs and organisations, the endeavours of the Russian Orthodox Church in the domestic and foreign policy sphere⁶³, as well as the consistency with which patriotic ideas have been circulated in the official discourse have probably all contributed to the vision Putin shared with the Federal Assembly in 2016:

⁵⁸ Putin 25.4.2005.

⁵⁹ Engström, Maria: Contemporary Russian Messianism and New Russian Foreign Policy. *Contemporary Security Policy* 2014, 35:3, 356-379, 356-357.

⁶⁰ Laine & Saarelainen 2017 (https://storage.googleapis.com/upi-live/2017/11/wp98_russia.pdf), 16-17.

⁶¹ However, this is a topic that the president speaks rarely about, and is therefore outside of the scope of this chapter. See e.g. Елизавета Гауфман: “Старые новые враги националистов: сексуальная девиация как экзистенциальная угроза России” in А. Верховский (ed.): *Россия – не Украина: современные акценты национализма*. Moscow, Центр «Сова» 2014.

⁶² Путин назвал единственно возможную для России национальную идею. RBC.ru 3.2.2016, available at: <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/03/02/2016/56b1f8a79a7947060162a5a7?from=main> (accessed 1.3.2019).

⁶³ Boris Knorre: “Religion and the Russian Orthodox Church”, in I. Studin (ed.), *Russia. Strategy, Policy and Administration*. Palgrave Macmillan 2018.

Our people have united around patriotic values. We see this unity and we should thank them for it. They have united around these values not because everyone is happy and they have no demands, on the contrary, there is no shortage of problems and difficulties. But people have an understanding of their causes and, most importantly, are confident that together we can overcome these problems. It is this readiness to work for our country's sake and this sincere and deep-seated concern for Russia that form the foundation of this unity we see.⁶⁴

Conclusive remarks

This chapter has focused on the evolution of Russia's Others in the presidential rhetoric during the past almost two decades. The analysis has shown that despite significant changes in priorities, policies and discourses during this time, certain continuities remain. The worldview presented in the presidential discourse since 2000 until the today bases on the idea of constant competition, which, in the early years of 2000s was more clearly interpreted as an economic competition, and later, first as a war against terrorism in the early 2000s but especially after 2014 when the war had started in Europe, transformed into the worldview of "permanent war". I would argue that these notions stem from the same source, and portray similar Others: the Other, who first is the one ahead in the competition, or aiming at hindering Russia in that competition, becomes the Other that takes the side of the Enemy. The rhetoric here is connected to the metaphors of weak and strong Russia, which are always relational. In the economic competition, Russia's Others were stronger. But, with time, it becomes clear that Russia is stronger in military and moral sense – and those are the characteristics that count in the permanent war. The Other is not pronounced as Enemy: it is rather clear that Russia's only explicit Enemy is Terrorism (both inside the country and outside of it). Instead, Others are those who are either not willing to assist Russia, or assist the terrorists.

In the beginning of the 2000s, the past experience of the 1990s was often referred to as an Other. The critique towards the politicians in the 1990s was a way to enhance the legitimacy of the new leader, but with time, the Other became updated into a corrupt, dishonest and selfish "middleman" of Russian politics. This is definitely a change in the presidential rhetoric, but it also provides a certain type of populist continuum: there is someone else than the President himself to blame for the flaws of domestic politics. It is, however, interesting to

⁶⁴ Putin 1.12.2016.

see that portraying the 1990s as Other remains a central theme throughout the study period, even if simultaneously the references to the past in general change: whereas Dmitri Medvedev spoke vividly about Russia's future still in 2009, Vladimir Putin who followed him preferred to lean on the country's great past, and omit any concrete references to the bright future.

Finally, the perhaps most significant change in the Others of Russia during the study period is the emergence of the Other that has different values. Still in the early 2000s, the West was – often implicitly – depicted as Russia's Other mainly because it was ahead of Russia in the critically important economic competition. In the speeches after 2012, and after 2013 especially, the Other is fundamentally different because it holds different set of values. More precisely, it has abandoned the values that once were common to Russia and Europe. In the core of this thinking is the conservative emphasis of the presidential rhetoric in general that mainly arose from domestic drivers, but it is certainly being amplified by the difficulties in the foreign policy sphere after 2014. On one hand, the emphasis on different values might make it less likely that the Other could be portrayed differently any time soon, because values are often perceived something that change very slowly. But on the other hand, the change from the rather liberal understanding of "common Russian values" to traditional, conservative ones in the presidential discourse was also abrupt – which raises a question of how persistent, or how widely embraced, the idea of the Other that holds fundamentally different values actually is.