

CHAPTER 3

Evolution of Russia's 'Others' in Presidential Discourse in 2000–2020

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Abstract

This chapter analyses the Others of Russia reoccurring in presidential discourse in 2000–2020. The key speeches reveal three distinctive 'Others' of the Russian state and nation, evolving in space and time: first, an ineffective politician in the 1990s and, later, a corrupt bureaucrat, is framed as a historical and internal Other, whose figure legitimizes the current power. Second, the metaphor of constant competition in international relations describes the Other as an economically stronger, developed Western country, against which Russia's 'backwardness' is mirrored, especially in the early 2000s. As the economic competition becomes harder to win and the quest for national unity intensifies, the emphasis turns to the third Other, the one holding values that are fundamentally different from the Self's. Thus, it is argued that the metaphor of competition/conflict between Russia and its Others has undergone a qualitative transformation in presidential

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rhetoric, reflecting change in Russia's relative strength: instead of the previously admired economic performance, times of conflict show that Russia's true strength vis-à-vis its Others resides in the conservative, moral values and military might.

Keywords: Others, Putin

Introduction: Setting the Stage for State Nationalism

In January 2020, President Vladimir Putin, speaking to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, proposed amendments to be made to the Constitution in order to ensure the sovereignty of the country (President of Russia, 2020). The changes came into force on 4 July – less than seven months after Putin first voiced the initiative. The new Constitution secured the possibility for Putin to continue as a president for two more terms, but it also included other, ideologically loaded statements such as faith in God as a historical heritage of the nation, and protection of traditional family values as the government's task (Gosudarstvennaâ дума, 2020) – reinforcing, in this way, the conservative value basis that had been for years portrayed as distinguishing Russia from 'others'. Thus, the constitutional process demonstrated the swiftness of the president-centred decision-making within Russia's authoritarian system, as well as the full circle in the state administration's 20-year-long endeavour to define the characteristics of the Russian nation in the language of law.

When drafting the Constitution of the Russian Federation after the collapse of the Soviet Union, in December 1993, 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'. 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 engage the society in defining a national 'Russian idea' (Tolz, 1998, pp. 1010–1011). At the time, the presidential administration embraced the civic rhetoric of the nation, emphasizing the duties and rights of Russian citizens (*rossiâne*).

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 thin. It was simply not plausible to refer to the great Russian (*rossijskij*) nation that inhabits 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 that occupied a significant position in Cold War world politics was still vivid, and contrasted with the new Russian state (Laruelle, 2009, p. 18; Tolz, 1998, p. 1011).

When Vladimir Putin was elected as the president in 2000, his administration started decisively to build the national unity upon the strong state. Now the narrative also gained more credibility in the eyes of the Russian people, to a large extent thanks to the simultaneous processes of remarkable economic growth and centralization of the power structures. At the time, the state conducted policies that framed its vision of the national unity: federal-level programmes for patriotic education were introduced, the status of national symbols, which had remained vague throughout the 1990s, was confirmed with a new law, and measures were taken to enhance the public image of the Russian army. Presidential speeches in the early years of the 2000s stressed the key message: Russia had been weak but now it had to – and would – become strong (President of Russia, 2000).

In the pages that follow, I will analyse the contents of contemporary state nationalism in the presidential discourse from the perspective of othering. Constructing a nation is based on creating boundaries between 'us' and 'them', drawn first and foremost in language but having real political consequences. In this chapter, othering is seen as a dynamic, constantly ongoing process that has a strong temporal aspect: the past affects the representations in the present. The primary material consists of the 21 presidential addresses held at the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, which remain key speeches of Russian politics that have significance for both domestic and international audiences. The selected speeches are intended as top-down messages, but they

nevertheless attempt to tap into views and attitudes already existing in society (see e.g. Kolstø and Blakkisrud, 2018, p. 7). Since 2014, the presidential address to the Federal Assembly has also had legal status as one of the key documents steering the strategic planning of the country (Prezident Rossii, 2014).

Methodologically, the chapter departs from the notion that figurative language plays a crucial role in conceptual and, thus, political change (Schäfer, 2012). In order to map Russia's Others in the material, a qualitative content analysis was applied in two close reading phases. In practice, the material was first read with sensitivity to reoccurring key metaphors and concepts applied in the context of the 'Other'. Analysing the passages where the national 'us' was contrasted to 'them', metaphors such as competition (as world order) and strength (of a nation/state) were detected and manually coded. Then, the temporality of those metaphors was analysed: what implicative elements did these metaphors emphasize in different years, and how did these change?

The chosen time frame covers the emergence of state nationalism in the early 2000s, the presidency of Dmitri Medvedev in 2008–2012, which was perceived more liberal but appeared to be so only in rhetoric, and the so-called 'conservative turn' in Russian politics that intensified after the beginning of Vladimir Putin's third presidential term in 2012. The political significance of each of the speeches is not identical but they are comparable: it is important to note that Medvedev acted as a 'role occupancy' leader whose political status depended on his prime minister, predecessor and successor – Putin (Baturu and Mikhaylov, 2014). In this chapter, the presidential addresses are treated as evidence of the thinking within state power.

In 2000–2020, the address to the Federal Assembly was held each year, except in 2017, when it was postponed until spring 2018 because of the presidential elections. During these years, the speeches followed somewhat similar conventional patterns. In general, domestic matters such as the evaluation of the national economy and socio-economic themes form the main content of the speech. Yet, in certain years, foreign policy message

has dominated the address and, since 2015 in particular, it has been the most important deliverable of the president. Speeches given in the years 2008 and 2014 are similar in tone, as they both reflect the mentality of a country in a war. Whereas the rhetoric in 2009 returned to a more conciliatory mode, since 2014 this has not happened.

State Nationalism and Theories of the Other

This section draws from critical nationalism theory as well as previous studies of boundaries of belonging in international relations. Scholars of nationalism often approach the concept in a broad sense, as a view of the world as an entity of nation states (Halikiopoulou and Vasilopoulou, 2013, pp. 1–2; Özkırmılı, 2010, pp. 1–3). Their interpretation differs from the analytical use of nationalism in political science, where it is often understood as a political instrument, connected to state legitimacy in particular (Feldmann and Mazepus, 2018; Özkırmılı, 2010, p. 3). I would maintain that the various uses of the concept share the core idea: nationalism is a powerful 'ism' in politics precisely because it is based on a fundamental worldview, intuitively accepted by many.

In the literature discussing national identity in politics, the Other has been defined in many ways. In this chapter, the Other is interpreted as fundamentally different – but not necessarily worse. The image of the Other is understood primarily as means to construct Self: defining 'who we are' is often done by showing 'who we are not' (Harle, 2000, p. 11; Republic.ru, 2019). Sometimes the Other does carry a clear value judgement, but in these cases it should be understood as a certain type of the Other. For instance, the dehumanized Other, posing an existential threat to the Self, is an enemy. The view of Other as different but neutral vis-à-vis the Self is applied, for example, by Iver B. Neumann (1996). Having studied the idea of Europe in the Russian identity formation throughout its history, Neumann stresses the relationship between the Self and the Other instead of just their characteristics. 'Identity 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’ (ibid., pp. 1–2).

Since the process of othering is dynamic, so is the nature of the Other. In her study on the changing representations on Chechnya in Russian public discourse between the first and second Chechnyan wars, Julie Wilhelmsen (2017, p. 206) has depicted how the Other gradually becomes an enemy. According to Wilhelmsen, the representations of Chechnya as an existential terrorist threat during and after the year 1999 in particular served to create an image of a strong and united Russia. Political language and politics are intertwined, and discourses of Others – especially those produced and distributed by state power and having a hegemonic status – frame the sphere of politics.

In the previous literature, Europe or, more generally, the West has been presented as Russia’s main or constituent Other (Neumann, 1996, p. 1; Tolz, 2001, p. 69; see also Kati Parpei, Chapter 2, this volume). The idea of Russia’s ‘Europeanness’ has been connected to the modernization of the country: from the 19th-century debates onwards, the key question has been whether Russia should follow the ‘West’ as a model or seek its own, ‘organic’ path. Thus, the rhetoric of European/Western Other influences the making of foreign politics, but it also has significance in the domestic policy sphere. The Other functions as a mirror when arguing for the desired direction of domestic developments: the Other might serve as an example as well as a warning.

Finally, it should be noted that, like the Self, the Other in the political discourse is also multilayered. As Ted Hopf (2002, pp. 9–10, 155) points out, there is ‘no empirical reason’ to believe that the only Other for a state would be another state. In his analysis of the Russian discourses on collective identity in 1999, Hopf maps external, internal and historical Others, the latter of which is represented by various aspects of the USSR (ibid.). Following this line of thought, I would suggest that Russia’s Others have both temporal and spatial aspect: they can be identified both inside the country and outside it, and in space but also in time. Moreover, it seems that the historical Other of Russia has become more complex since 1999 and deserves recognition in the analysis.

The Multilayered Others in Presidential Discourse

In political discourse, speaking about a nation as ‘us’ is truly a widespread metaphor that Michael Billig (1995, pp. 1–2) interprets as a manifestation of banal nationalism. It is indeed an omnipresent strategy in the annual presidential address to the Federal Assembly. But, on these occasions, the president also refers to other in-groups as ‘us’: sometimes this means the policy-makers present at the event, his ‘colleagues’ in this sense. As John Wilson (1991, pp. 48–50) has pointed out, politicians may benefit from the ‘exclusive usage’ of the pronoun ‘us’, meaning that the speaker does not necessarily plan to personally take action he or she describes ‘we’ should take. It is a rhetorical tool intended to enhance the feeling of belonging and to blur the concrete responsibility of the subject. In the following, I will trace the various Others, portrayed against this national ‘us’, and their development over time.

‘It was not we who built it’: the Other from the past

As was described at the beginning of this chapter, the difficulties of the 1990s framed the circumstances in which Putin’s administration began their work to create the new national narrative. The experience of the 1990s among the people was an important factor in legitimizing Putin’s power, especially during his first term in presidential office. As Olga Malinova (2020, p. 1) depicts, ‘the opposition between the “turbulent 1990s” and the “stable 2000s” is an oft-used trope’ in Russian public discourse.

The presidential rhetoric emphasized the contrast between the representations of those periods of time in Russian history (ibid.). It was beneficial for the state administration to maintain and even strengthen the narrative of the ‘unstable’ 1990s and the 2000s of ‘restoring order’, and, by unifying this narrative of the recent past, the positive or optimistic perceptions that the Russian people had in the 1990s – simultaneously with the negative and fearful ones – became forgotten in the hegemonic discourse. According to Malinova, Putin’s critique of his predecessors was cautious at the

beginning of his presidency, and understandably so, as he himself was brought to power by them.

Particularly in his first two speeches to the Federal Assembly, Putin stresses the necessity to restore the trust of the state among the people (President of Russia, 2000, 2001, 2006). Serguei Oushakine (2009, pp. 34–35, 261) has described how the disillusionment of the Soviet reality had turned into a deep distrust among ‘us’, the people, towards ‘them’ – the politicians on the TV, for example. 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 voice, Putin suggests that ‘they’ had made promises but not kept them, and ‘they’ had made mistakes that ‘we’ would not repeat (President of Russia, 2000).

In the Soviet Union, in highly ritualistic political discourse the new leader would always mark the distinction between him and his predecessors by introducing new concepts or slogans, and sometimes condemning past policies, stressing in this way the beginning of the new era (Ruutu, 2010, pp. 62–71). Certainly, there is similar quest for legitimacy in the way Putin speaks about the past. Malinova explains that, when stressing the contrast between his policy and the previous one, Putin used populist rhetoric combining ‘a demonstration of “care” about the people with implicit criticism of “others” among the political elite’. Portraying the politicians of the 1990s as Others, however, 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. (President of Russia, 2006)

In Putin’s rhetoric especially, the Other of the past develops from the dishonest and ineffective politician of the 1990s towards the

corrupt, selfish official of the present day. There are several examples in the 2000s and 2010s mentioning this type, especially with regard to the discussion on anti-corruption measures. 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 bureaucrats, civil servants and officials, not all of whom are honest (President of Russia, 2016). In a way, the rhetoric leans on an old Russian proverb of the 'good tsar and bad boyars', the idea of which is often reflected in the surveys of institutional trust among Russians: the president enjoys, quite consistently, wider approval among the citizens than the State Duma, government or regional policymakers do (Levada-Center, 2020). The conventions of the speech to the Federal Assembly assist the president in this rhetorical strategy as they provide possibilities to give advice, assignments and critique to local and regional authorities.

When President Dmitri Medvedev introduced his ideas for comprehensive modernization 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. (President of Russia, 2009a)

In this way, Medvedev distanced the Soviet actors from 'us', Russians of the present, in order to enhance the legitimacy of his future policy initiatives. Medvedev's modernization speech is another example of 'new leader' rhetoric, distinguishing the past from the future he brings about. In the material of this chapter, Medvedev's speeches in 2009–2011 differ significantly from the addresses given before and after that in their clear future

orientation. Medvedev's essay describing the modernization project carried the title 'Russia, Forward' (President of Russia, 2009b).

As a part of his re-election campaign in early 2012, Putin published a series of newspaper articles setting his political agenda regarding, for example, nationality politics, economics and social policy of the country (Komsomol'skaâ pravda, 2012; Nezavisimâ gazeta, 2012; Vedomosti, 2012), but in 2018 new political initiatives were not introduced. In 2018, before the presidential elections, Putin described his speech to the Federal Assembly as a landmark event, 'just as the times we are living in, when the choices we make and every step we take are set to shape the future of our country for decades to come' (President of Russia, 2018). Despite the rhetoric of a 'turning point', the speech did not contain significant policy initiatives. Since 2012 in particular, Putin's parlance has been rich in the (selective) references to history but much more limited in future visions. Coming closer to the present day, the legitimacy claims that rest on the internal, historical Others have partly lost their political currency as the current regime has exercised state power for two decades: with time, the experience of the 1990s becomes more distant. In addition, the persistent portrayal of a corrupt, inefficient middle-level official as an internal Other may lead to the interpretation that the highest leadership of the country is not able to solve the problem.

*'We are losing out in competition':
the Other ahead of us*

Throughout the past two decades, creating a 'strong and rich' Russia has been a crucial goal in the presidential speeches. 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. As Paul Chilton and George Lakoff (1995, pp. 39–41, 44–45) describe, portraying foreign relations primarily as competition – race, fight or game – in political language stems from the conceptual metaphor that the (nation) state is a person. According to Andreas Musolff (2018, pp. 251,

261), the metaphorical personification of a state in this way creates an image of 'a unified social collective that is able to speak with one voice and act as a singular, independent agent'. Chilton and Lakoff (1995, p. 43) explain that conceptualizing the nation as a person is connected to the metaphor of a 'body-politic': from this perspective, the state aspires to be healthy and strong. With the reference to a 'body', health translates into national wealth, and strength into military force. Rieke Schäfer (2012) reminds us that metaphors are temporal: like political key concepts, they, too, change over time. The metaphorical force of a certain utterance may increase or decrease, and the emphasis on simultaneous, implicative elements that a metaphor applies may vary.

From the very beginning of his presidential term, Putin was concerned with 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 replaced it. 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. (President of Russia, 2002)

Putin's use of the competition metaphor highlights how the 'fight' had become qualitatively different. The Others in this competition were rarely named, but the context suggest that they were the Western market economy countries that were economically more developed and integrated. Despite those same countries being portrayed as exemplary models of modernization (Rutland, 2016, p. 337), in Putin's parlance Russia must always follow its own path. In this way, the presidential rhetoric reflects a centuries-old tradition of the Russian nationalist discourses. The views of the 'backwardness' of Russia in relation to Europe have been

countered with arguments of Russian ancient cultural heritage and a morally superior position already arising from it before the formation of Slavophiles' and Westernisers' currents of thought (Neumann, 1996, pp. 26, 30; Ryazanova-Clarke, 2012).

In the speech of 2002, the resentment towards the Other in this harsh competition arose from the idea that they had occupied Russia's 'natural' niches in the world economy, 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 (President of Russia, 2002). Thus, the Other is also held responsible for the difficult situation in which Russia had found itself. Throughout the material of this study, there is little self-criticism regarding the policy decisions made by the current regime. When the president discusses inefficiencies, or cases where the goals set earlier were not met, their root causes are usually not detailed. An exception in this regard is Medvedev's 'modernization speech' in 2009, in which he explicitly states that '[w]e should not lay the blame [on Russia's economic downturn] on the outside world alone, however. We need to recognise that we have not done enough over these last years to resolve the problems we inherited from the past' (President of Russia, 2009a).

In the early 2000s, strength, needed in the competition with Others, would follow from restoring order and creating stable conditions for economic growth. One of the conceptual innovations during Putin's first term in presidential office was the concept of stability (*stabil'nost'*) that he started to use extensively from the year 2001 onwards. The slogan was not an end in itself but a means: stability was 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' (President of Russia, 2000). 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. (President of Russia, 2003)

Further, 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 differently: Russians should not forget their long history, the victims and sacrifice, the historic fate of their country and the way Russia had continuously emerged as a strong nation. 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.

During Putin's first presidential term, the competition metaphor had an economic character but after that it was not restricted to world markets anymore. Simultaneously, the rhetoric on how to achieve strength as well as its characteristics evolved. Putin's key slogan in the early 2000s, stability, had been abandoned by the year 2008. In his first speech to the Federal Assembly, President Dmitri Medvedev stated that Russia had become strong 'economically and politically' (President of Russia, 2008). The speech reflected in tone and content the war in Georgia that had taken place the previous month; Medvedev stressed the strength and unity of the country, which were not to be questioned.

Medvedev's examples illustrate how political, economic, military and 'moral' strength started to grow apart in presidential rhetoric. Russia's military strength was no longer depicted as a goal; instead, it had been achieved, tested and proven in the war (*ibid.*). However, a year later, Medvedev did not mince his words when he described Russia's economic backwardness, even weakness, but the rhetoric of this particular address was aimed at defending the

modernization project (President of Russia, 2009a). In the war rhetoric of Russian presidents, the Others in the global competition might have had the lead in an economic sense, but Russia's strengths lay elsewhere. In the spring of 2014, after the popular unrest in Ukraine had led to an open conflict between the people and President Yanukovych's regime, Russia invaded Crimea and the war in eastern Ukraine started. The events shook the political, economic and social realities in Russia, Ukraine and the whole of Europe, and led to a further deterioration between the 'East' and the 'West' in international politics. In December 2014, Putin's rhetoric was that of a leader of a country at 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. (President of Russia, 2014)

The war rhetoric persisted after 2014. In Putin's parlance, the hard times in the recent years were trials that 'have made us even stronger, truly stronger' (President of Russia, 2016). In 2020, referring to nuclear weapons, Putin proclaimed that Russia was leading the competition:

[F]or the first time in the history of nuclear missile weapons, including the Soviet period and modern times, we are not catching up with anyone, but, on the contrary, other leading states have yet to create the weapons that Russia already possesses. (President of Russia, 2020)

Overall, the relationship with the Others ahead in the competition is complex: they mistreat Russia, but they are nevertheless valuable as partners. The ambiguous relationship with the American Other, especially, can be seen in Putin's parlance, where words expressing cooperation or good relations have often been used in a sarcastic manner, and increasingly so after 2014. 'Our partners'

imposing sanctions; 'our colleagues' who consider Russia an adversary; 'our American friends' who influence Russia's relations with its neighbours, 'either openly or behind the scenes' (President of Russia, 2014, 2016). Olga Malinova (2019, p. 232) has noted that, after 2014, Putin's statements of the American Other contained both criticism and admiration, and, being 'emotionally loaded' in such a way, she adds, the statements indicate the significance of the American Other to the Self. Interestingly, Malinova compares the complex American Other to the Chinese Other, the latter of which is described with respect but with no similar passion. In Malinova's material, China is mentioned a couple of times as 'an economic competitor' (ibid., p. 232.), but in the addresses to the Federal Assembly China is not seriously discussed, not even after 2014. The few references describe the partnership with China briefly as comprehensive, strategic or mutually beneficial (President of Russia, 2016, 2018, 2019). Thus, the main, constituent and significant Other ahead of Russia in the global, dynamic competition is either the loosely defined European or the American Other.

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

According to Putin's perception, Russia in the early 2000s was witnessing not only competition in the economic sphere but also direct external aggression, even existential threat. Conflict and war in Chechnya were not described as separatism but as a branch of international terrorism – it was an external Other, not an internal one, even if the two were connected (President of Russia, 2000). Terrorism is the main enemy in presidential discourse throughout the study period, even if the forms it took changed 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 depicted as enemies but which also can be threatening and which definitely remain fundamentally different from the Self. The 'threatening Others' will be discussed next.

In his first speech to the Federal Assembly as president, Putin noted that Russia had found itself 'face to face with force that

strive towards a geopolitical reorganisation of the world'. Again, these forces are not explicitly named but the position is clear: external forces either threaten Russia's 'state sovereignty and territorial integrity' or assist those who do so (President of Russia, 2000). In Putin's rhetoric, the Others that pose a threat – without necessarily being enemies – either dismiss the terrorist threat and therefore do not take the needed action, or collude with the terrorists. After the short optimistic phase in US–Russian relations had passed and the Russian state leadership had become disillusioned with 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' (President of Russia, 2003).

Since the beginning of Putin's third term in presidential office, he has connected the memory of Russia's past wars to the conflicts of present, which is reflected in the rhetoric of the Other as well. Most often the references to the past war concern the Second World War, but in 2006 Putin likened 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 the readiness of the armed forces as the biggest lesson learned from the Second World War, 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.
(President of Russia, 2006)

Animal metaphors are often applied in the realm of international relations. In this context, the wolf represents the enemy. Lara Ryazanova-Clarke (2012, p. 12), analysing Kremlin ideologist Vladislav Surkov's programmatic speech from the year 2006, highlights his use of a metaphor of the world as a spiderweb where Russia's sovereignty depends on its position – whether it is a spider

or a fly. Putin's metaphorical wolf that threatens to eat others portrays the world in a similar way: as a place of constant competition and rivalry, where only the winner survives.

In the speech that followed the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Putin called the Western sanctions a 'policy of containment', adding that they would have been implemented even without any conflict because 'whenever someone thinks that Russia has become too strong or independent, these tools are quickly put into use'. In what follows, Putin connects the sanctions to claims of former allies supporting separatism from abroad or, more precisely, 'from across the pond' (he does not name the United States in this passage). Both are intended to keep Russia weak and encourage her disintegration, which will not work, '[j]ust as it did not work for Hitler with his people-hating ideas, who set out to destroy Russia and push us back beyond the Urals. Everyone should remember how it ended' (President of Russia, 2014). The idea of foreign forces aiming at Russia's disintegration features strongly in the writings of Russian philosopher Ivan Il'in, as Katri Pynnöniemi's Chapter 4 in this volume shows.

In December 2015, after Turkish air forces had shot down a Russian aircraft near the Syrian border in November, Putin gave a furious speech to the Federal Assembly. He condemned the actions of the Turkish government and accused them of cooperating with terrorists, and drew, again, 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 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. (President of Russia, 2015)

This logic prevails in the speeches up to the present day. Even if the Other – the United States, backed by European countries –

would not directly threaten Russia, it aims to weaken Russia and, by doing so, assists the enemy. However, in 2018, Russia's new military capabilities were discussed in detail, and in 2019 Putin dedicated a long passage to condemn the withdrawal of the United States from the landmark arms control agreement, the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. In this speech, it was clearly stated that the weapons of the US pose a threat to Russia – even when the country itself is still referred to as a partner (President of Russia, 2019).

In Putin's discourse in the 2010s, Russia, unlike its Others, is willing to, capable of and morally fit for fighting the evil. In a similar vein, the wartime rhetoric – explicitly in 2008 and, perhaps, more ambiguously since 2014 – stresses that hard times have proven Russia's strength and unity. The evolving basis of the latter, national unity, will be discussed next.

*'The Amoral International':
the Other with different values*

After the so-called Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004, the project to enhance national unity gained new momentum. In early 2005, the need for a state-backed youth organization was voiced within the state administration, and some months later, the movement, called Naši, was created to fight the liberal tendencies among the youth (see Jussi Lassila, Chapter 5, this volume). The same year, a new public holiday, the Day of National Unity, was announced to commemorate the popular mobilization of Muscovites in 1612, led by Prince Dmitrij Požarskij and Merchant Kuzma Minin, to fight the foreign, Polish-Lithuanian invaders. The chosen date, 4 November, replaced the Day of Constitution as well as the Day of Accord and Reconciliation, by which name the former Day of Revolution had been known in the 1990s (Zuev, 2013, p. 108). The first groups to celebrate the new holiday were various nationalists organizing 'Russian marches'. Since then, the marches have focused mostly on anti-immigrant claims, but, as Denis Zuev (*ibid.*, p. 103) notes, the 'myth of national salvation from the West' inspired the early organizers of the event, such as

Aleksandr Dugin. The introduction of these symbolic measures reflects the trend of portraying the West as the constituent Other, as well as the increasing emphasis on the external threat.

Around the same time, the references to the shared values of the Russian nation became more commonplace in presidential rhetoric. A close reading of the addresses in 2000–2020 suggests that those values have undergone a significant change over the past two decades. In 2000, Putin was already mentioning that 'we have had and continue to have' common values, but did not explain what they actually were (President of Russia, 2000). In 2005, he described Russia as a major European power, and explained the values of 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' (President of Russia, 2005). The following year, Vladislav Surkov, presidential advisor at the time, framed human rights and democracy as negatively loaded propaganda of the 'West' (Ryazanova-Clarke, 2012) – a revision that became visible at large in the Kremlin's discourse and paved way for Surkov's conceptual innovation, 'sovereign democracy', to be the distinctively Russian alternative for political modernization. The turn was swift: in 2007, the European origin of the Russian value basis was no longer mentioned. Instead, Putin elevated the significance of 'spiritual unity of the people and the moral values that unite us' to being as important for development as political and economic stability (President of Russia, 2007). In 2008, Medvedev listed Russia's values as consisting of justice and freedom, welfare, dignity of human life, interethnic peace, and patriotism. This set of values was still rather liberal, at least in the way Medvedev interpreted them, but he no longer emphasized their common European roots (Baturo and Mikhaylov, 2014, p. 973).

Thus, the revision from shared European values towards distinct Russian values as Russia's strength started gradually from the mid-2000s. Rhetorically, the biggest change took place in 2012, after the beginning of Vladimir Putin's third term in the presidential office. From then on, presidential discourse consistently stressed a national narrative that was based on a shared set of traditional,

conservative Russian values, portrayed against an external Other. The massive street protests against electoral fraud and Putin's regime in the big cities of Russia in 2011–2012 functioned as a significant driver for the change. During the spring and summer of 2012, several measures were taken in order to limit civic participation and political contention in society. At the same time, a state-supported media campaign against migrants took off on national, state-controlled television (Tolz, 2017). Until around late 2013, migrants were portrayed as Russia's internal Other in the media, but this aspect was not visible in presidential rhetoric. However, in one of the newspaper articles of Putin's presidential campaign in 2012, dealing with nationality policy, Putin very clearly condemned 'Western' migration policies. Additionally, he stated that Russian identity rested upon a shared 'cultural code', and that the basis of the Russian 'state-civilisation' (*gosudarstvo-civilizaciâ*) lay within its shared culture and values (Nezavisimâ gazeta, 2012). It is important to note that this change in discourses also took place on levels in the state discourse other than just the presidential one (Østbø, 2017). The traditional Russian 'spiritual-moral' values became intrinsically connected to national security: Jardar Østbø speaks about the 'securitization' of those values after 2013 especially. One implication of this development can be found in the Strategy on National Security, confirmed by the president on 31 December 2015, where 'preserving and enhancing (*sohranenie i priumnoženie*)' the traditional values was mentioned as a 'strategic objective' of national security in the cultural sphere. In this document, the values were defined as including:

the priority of the spiritual over the material, protection of human life and of human rights and freedoms, the family, creative labor, service to the homeland, the norms of morals and morality, humanism, charity, fairness, mutual assistance, collectivism, the historical unity of the peoples of Russia, and the continuity of our motherland's history. (Rossijskaâ gazeta, 2015)

After 2013, the deteriorating relationship with the West added nuances to the understanding of the liberal, non-traditional or

even 'amoral' Other in both external and internal terms. In 2013, Putin called 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 seriously challenging the narrative of the (multi)national unity of the Russian people, but the internal Other that does not share the common value basis can also be someone pursuing the interests of a foreign country or acting against Russia's interest (the 'fifth column').

The rhetorical change in 2012 extended to the representation of external Other. As was described above, in the early 2000s, the presidential discourse portrayed global economic competition as a certain type of continuum of the Cold War political competition. In 2012, Putin introduced a new transformation: the global competition is no longer purely economic. Instead, in the era of globalization and intensifying struggle for resources in particular, the selection of future leaders 'will depend not only on the economic potential, but primarily on the will of each nation, on its inner energy which Lev Gumilev termed "passionarity": the ability to move forward and to embrace change'. Putin added that in this 'new balance of economic, civilisational and military forces' Russia needed to preserve national and spiritual identity (President of Russia, 2012). Gumilev, a conservative philosopher of the Eurasianist current to whom Putin referred, developed his theory of ethnogenesis upon the notion that 'passionarity' (*passionarnost'*), 'the ability of single-minded super-efforts', could characterize not only an individual but an entire ethnos (Titov, 2005, p. 52).

Marlene Laruelle (2016, p. 293) argues that the Kremlin has developed an 'anti-Western European civilisation' narrative, which presents Russia as definitely a European country but one that has chosen not to follow the Western path of development. This mirrors in a way the Russian discourses in the first third of the 19th century, when the French Revolution had turned the Russian debate on Europe around. During the reformist period of Peter

the Great, the modernizing debates insisted that Russia was European, and that Europe geographically extended to the Urals. As Neumann (1996, pp. 11–13) notes, the tsar managed to marginalize the resisting views, arising for example from within the Orthodox Church. After the Decembrist uprisings, the state interpreted the European movement away from enlightened despotism as a betrayal of the ideals once commonly held by all the monarchs of Europe and by their dependents (*ibid.*). In this way, the change in Putin's rhetoric – from the common European values towards the idea of Europe as Other that 'equates good with evil' (President of Russia, 2013) – reflects historical traits of understanding Europe as fundamentally different, even against the background of Russia's Europeanness. Thus, in the Russian perception 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 possessing 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. (President of Russia, 2014)

Interestingly, the presidential rhetoric portrays the Other with different values always as a Western country. For example, the Russian–Chinese 'comprehensive strategic partnership' works for ensuring international stability, but any value-based mutual understanding between the two countries is not discussed in those contexts (President of Russia, 2016, 2018). All in all, references to any other continents or countries than Western ones are brief and superfluous. Olga Malinova (2019, pp. 237–238) concludes in her analysis on American and Chinese Others in Russian political discourse in 2012–2014 that 'the pivot to the East' in Russian politics has not translated into replacing the West as the most important Significant Other for Russia.

The value-based Other is both external and internal, and those are often entangled: the internal Other is accused of supporting causes 'foreign to Russia'. Alongside the change in rhetoric about values, the actual policies of excluding Others with 'non-traditional' values have strengthened. In his speech to the Federal Assembly in April 2005, Putin cited in length the words of conservative philosopher Ivan Il'in, stating that the state power should not 'intervene in moral, family and daily private life' (President of Russia, 2005). Less than a decade later, the state leadership had clearly abandoned this idea of 'not intervening' in the private life of the citizens. Maria Engström (2014, pp. 356–357) has explained the so-called 'conservative turn' in 2012 as the 're-ideologisation' of Russian domestic, foreign and security politics, in which the state authorities started to lean on already existing but marginal interpretations of Russian messianism. 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 (Laine and Saarelainen, 2017, pp. 16–17). Moreover, the repression of gender and sexual minorities in the country has increased, as they represent 'non-traditional' values, portrayed as 'foreign' to Russia. Among the constitutional amendments of 2020, there was a statement that marriage as 'a union of a man and a woman' needs to be protected (Gosudarstvennââ дума, 2020).

A key feature of the unifying national narrative, patriotism, has remained at the core of the presidential rhetoric, gaining gradually more importance. After 2014, Putin repeatedly declared that he saw patriotism as a unifying idea, or 'the national idea', for all Russians (RBK, 2016). Federal-level patriotic education programmes with their increasing funding, the emergence of various local, private or semi-official patriotic clubs and organizations, and the endeavours of the Russian Orthodox Church in the domestic and foreign policy sphere (Knorre, 2018), 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:

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. (President of Russia, 2016)

Interestingly, in Putin's parlance the much-needed unity of the people had been achieved by 2016. The rhetorical change in 2012 was inspired by the intensified concern, even fear, of revolutionary actions in the domestic arena. Often described as the moment of 'conservative turn' in Russia (Feldmann and Mazepus, 2018), the tone describing the value basis of the nation changed: first, references to the common European heritage of those values, commonplace until mid-2000s, was omitted, and, second, the traditional values that united the Russian nation were portrayed to be under threat, so they had to be defended. Since then, the references to the key values of the Russian nation have remained rather consistent. Rhetorically, however, the future challenges to national unity may be more difficult to address once that unity has been claimed to be achieved. Moreover, a turn away from these conservative values, a move that could have still been possible earlier in the 2000s, seems unthinkable now that they have been introduced in the legislative language of the state at the level of the Constitution.

Concluding Remarks: from Stability to Morality

During the past two decades, the state leadership has portrayed Russia's Others in the context of internal political legitimacy on the one hand and global politics on the other. Since 2000, the

metaphor of international relations as constant competition has grown from purely economic in nature towards a distinctive form of economic, military and 'moral' competition. The Other, who was first ahead in the competition, later became the Other taking the side of the enemy. However, the Other is not pronounced to be the enemy: Russia's only explicit enemy is terrorism (both inside the country and outside it). Instead, Others are either those who are not willing to assist Russia or those who assist the terrorists. The rhetoric of competition is connected to the metaphors of weak and strong Russia, which are always relational. In the economic competition, Russia's Others were stronger than Russia, and 'stability' and 'modernization' were presented as conceptual innovations, indicating how to act against them. But, with time, it became clearly pronounced that Russia is stronger in a military and moral sense – and those are the characteristics that count when the competition transforms into a conflict, that is, after 2008 especially.

At the beginning of the 2000s, the past experience of the 1990s was often referred to as an internal, historical Other. Then, the critique of the politicians in the 1990s was a way to enhance the legitimacy of the new leader, but, with time, the same strategy was applied to the internal Other as a corrupt, dishonest and selfish 'middleman' of Russian politics. This rhetoric represents a certain type of populist continuum: there is someone other than the president himself to blame for the flaws of domestic politics. Yet, portraying the 1990s as a historical Other remains a central theme throughout the study period, even if 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, leaned on the country's great past, and past wars in particular, omitting proposals for the bright future.

Finally, the perhaps most significant change in the Others of Russia during the study period is the emergence of the Other as possessing different values. In the early 2000s, the West was still depicted as Russia's Other, mainly in the context of the critically important economic competition. Gradually, from the mid-2000s onwards, the state administration introduced new symbolic

policies to stress external threat, and, around the same time, the addresses to the Federal Assembly started to reflect shared values as the key guarantee for it. Interestingly, however, those values were not explicitly portrayed as fundamentally different from the values of the Other until 2012. But then, and especially after 2013, the addresses repeatedly pointed out that the Other held a different set of values, and, more precisely, it abandoned the values that once were common to Russia and Europe.

The conservative emphasis of the presidential rhetoric arose from domestic drivers, but it has certainly been amplified by the difficulties in the foreign policy sphere. It is rather difficult to evaluate how persistent (or how widely embraced) the idea of the Other holding fundamentally different values actually is. It is noteworthy that the change from the rather liberal understanding of common values to traditional, conservative ones in the presidential discourse was relatively abrupt – for instance, references regarding the ‘Europeanness’ of the Russian values disappeared from presidential discourse between the years 2005 and 2007. So, theoretically, a change towards an opposite direction could be implemented in a similar manner. But recent years have shown that any possibility of reversing this rhetoric has become unlikely for at least two reasons. First, the president has stated that the shared values have, by now, united the Russian nation against the external threat, and that the ‘moral’ strength of the national Self against its Other has been achieved. Second, the ideological tones have been brought into the sphere of Russian legislation, including the Constitution, which may prove essential in the future development of the country.

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