

# **National Images in International Relations: Putin's Russia and the West**

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## **Abstract**

This study seeks to analyse the impact of the perceived, projected and self-images of a state on its foreign and domestic policies. It approaches this problem by exploring the evolution of international images of the Russian Federation in the 'West' in the years of Vladimir Putin's presidency (2000-2008) and by examining attempts by the Russian authorities to improve them with the help of foreign propaganda. Russian political elites have always been very sensitive to perceptions of Russia in Western Europe and later in the United States of America. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's images in Western countries underwent significant transformation. Although relatively positive in the early 1990s, they became more negative towards the end of Boris Yel'tsin's presidency before reaching their negative 'peak' during Putin's second presidential term. The energetic efforts of the Russian authorities in the years of Putin's presidency to promote a more favourable image of the country provide extremely rich material for analysis, which has largely not yet been utilised in the academic literature.

To facilitate the analysis of Russia's perceived images and the effectiveness of foreign propaganda, the thesis includes two case studies that examine the issues at question in greater detail in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Federal Republic of Germany. Based on extensive primary research (elite interviewing and discourse analysis), the study seeks to make a three-fold contribution to the academic literature. Firstly, it is the first systematic examination of Russian foreign propaganda in the post-Soviet period. By analysing Russia's attempts to improve its image in the international arena, the thesis contributes to the literature in the field of International Political Communication that has already examined public diplomacy campaigns conducted by other, mainly Western, countries. Secondly, it aims to provide a deeper insight into the role of subjective, non-material factors in Russian foreign policy. Finally, it seeks to make a contribution to the social constructivist IR literature by presenting a theoretical analysis of the role of national images in international relations.

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## **Author's Declaration**

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

## List of Abbreviations

AAPSO – Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Organisation

CDU – Christian Democratic Union

CIS – Commonwealth of Independent States

CPC – Christian Peace Conference

CPRF – Communist Party of the Russian Federation

CPSU – Communist Party of the Soviet Union

CSU – Christian Social Union

EU – European Union

FCO - Foreign and Commonwealth Office

FDP – Free Democratic Party

FIAC – Foreign Investment Advisory Council of the Russian Federation

FPA – Foreign Policy Analysis

FRG – Federal Republic of Germany

GDR – German Democratic Republic

IADL – International Association of Democratic Lawyers

IIP – International Institute for Peace

IOJ – International Organisation of Journalists

IR – International Relations

IUS – International Union of Students

LDPR – Liberal Democratic Party of Russia

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

OSCE – Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe

PD – Public Diplomacy

PR – Public Relations

RF – Russian Federation

SPD – Social Democratic Party of Germany

UK – United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

UN – United Nations

USA – United States of America

USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

WFDY – World Federation of Democratic Youth

WFTU – World Federation of Trade Unions

WIDF – Women's International Democratic Federation

WPC – World Peace Council

## Chapter 1

### The Revival of Russian Foreign Propaganda: An Introduction

This study seeks to address a problem that has been markedly under-researched in the academic literature – the impact of the perceived, projected and self-images of a state on its foreign and domestic policies. It approaches this problem by analysing the evolution of international images of the Russian Federation (RF) in the ‘West’ in the years of Vladimir Putin’s presidency (2000-2008) and by examining attempts by the Russian authorities to ‘correct’ them with the help of foreign propaganda. Putin’s Russia represents a unique object for a study of this kind for a number of reasons. Firstly, it has a long history of engaging in foreign propaganda: during the Cold War, the Soviet Union conducted large-scale propaganda campaigns in Western countries, as well as in the Third World on a regular basis. Secondly, Russia’s images in Western countries underwent significant transformation in less than two decades that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. Although relatively positive in the early 1990s, they became more negative towards the end of Boris Yel’tsin’s presidency before reaching their negative ‘peak’ during Putin’s second presidential term. The energetic efforts of the Russian authorities in the years of Putin’s presidency to promote a more favourable image of the country provide extremely rich material for analysis, which has largely not yet been utilised in the academic literature. Thirdly, following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russia faced a profound identity crisis which had a pronounced impact on its foreign policy and, inevitably, on its foreign propaganda. Russia’s search for a new identity in the context of mounting tensions in its relations with Western countries resulted in considerable incoherence among Russia’s projected images, thus making the task of foreign propaganda more difficult. All these factors make the Russian case particularly interesting for this analysis.

The research question that the present study seeks to answer is ‘in what ways do perceived, projected and self-images of a state affect its foreign and domestic policies?’ By answering this question, the thesis aims to fill a gap in the research that has been undertaken by scholars following the social constructivist tradition in International Relations (IR) studies. Although many works have been devoted to the role of national images in general, as well as to the role of various psychological factors, there has not been sufficient attention to the

link of images at the level of perceptions, images consciously manipulated by elites, and the effect of both on home and foreign policies. Addressing this issue requires reliance on the existing literature that the present work builds on, and aims to contribute to. To facilitate further analysis, this introductory chapter begins with an overview of relevant academic literature. This is followed by a discussion of the theoretical framework of the present study that introduces key concepts and outlines the most significant assumptions. The methodology of the present study, including the advantages and limitations of the research methods that were utilised, is discussed in the third section. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of the remaining chapters of the thesis.

## **1.1 Perceived, Projected and Self-Images in Academic Literature**

While analysing the impact of the perceived, projected and self-images of Russia on its foreign and domestic policies, this research seeks to contribute to the further development of image theory as a distinct direction within a broader social constructivism paradigm in IR literature. By doing so, it ultimately aims to bridge a gap between several subfields in IR studies that look at images and the interplay between international and domestic factors in general, from different perspectives: i) constructivist research in IR studies; ii) Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) with its attention to the interconnection between foreign and domestic influences; and iii) International Political Communication. Although the literature on national images is abundant, most scholars have tended to focus either on self-images of the state (its national identity) or on perceived images – images of the state held by other international actors. Moreover, in recent years there has been a significant increase of interest in studying Public Diplomacy (PD) and projected national images, with an emphasis on PD campaigns conducted by Western countries. Thus, national images have been analysed from three different angles, but the link between these three types of images and their impact on the state's foreign and domestic policies has largely remained under-researched. Before we proceed to present the theoretical framework of the present study, let us examine these three approaches and their key assumptions.

### **1.1.1 Perceived Images: Psycho-Attitudinal Perspectives**

The interest in the role of images in international relations can be traced back to the 1950-1960s when the general interest in psycho-attitudinal approaches led to increasing attention to psychological factors in politics. Earlier works on national images were characterised by

their emphasis on the significant role of perceptions in foreign policy decision-making while they did not largely question the rationalist nature of states' behaviour in the international arena. According to rationalist IR theories, such as (neo)realism and (neo)liberalism, which have traditionally dominated the IR field, states are always self-interested and rational in their decision-making process. They are guided in their actions in the international arena by their interests that are considered as pre-given, which implies that they exist as if separately from states and are known to those in power. The objectivity of these interests makes it possible for researchers, as Hans Morgenthau has argued in his *Politics among Nations* (1956), to anticipate the behaviour of the state as they can put themselves in the position of a statesman and see exactly the same as what he/she sees. Although national interests are different for every state, they still can be reduced to several basic needs – to survive and to have power. Kenneth Waltz in his authoritative *Theory of International Politics* (1979) has compared states to corporations struggling first to survive and then to maximise their profits in a self-help environment. While realists and neorealists have been preoccupied with studying predominantly material structures, they have still acknowledged the existence of nonmaterial factors and their impact on foreign policies. Morgenthau, for instance, has suggested that in their pursuit of national interests states resort to the politics of prestige, which he describes as 'the policy of demonstrating the power a nation has or thinks it has, or wants other nations to believe it has' (1956, p.71). Moreover, according to Morgenthau,

the power of a nation (...) depends not only upon the skill of its diplomacy and the strength of its armed forces but also upon the attractiveness for other nations of its political philosophy, political institutions, and political policies (1956, p. 136)

However, both realists and neorealists view national images only as instruments for achieving the goals that are defined by objective material interests of the state. Thus, in the (neo)realist tradition images, alongside other non-material factors, largely remain outside the focus of research.

This understanding of the driving force of states' behaviour has been challenged by some neo-liberalists who have suggested that national interests cannot be considered as the only factor shaping their foreign policies. As Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane have argued, the actions of states in the international arena can be explained not only by interests, but also by the ideas held by individuals. Although they have not questioned the rational character of the states' behaviour, Goldstein & Keohane have emphasised that 'ideas matter

for policy, even when human beings behave rationally to achieve their ends' (1993, p.5). However, the role of ideas in their interpretation is limited to some particular situations:

ideas influence policy when the principled or causal beliefs they embody provide road maps that increase actors' clarity about goals or ends-means relationships, when they affect outcomes of strategic situations in which there is no unique equilibrium, and when they become embedded in political institutions (Goldstein & Keohane 1993, p.3)

Thus, while recognising the importance of non-material factors, such as ideas or national images, rationalist theorists have looked at interests as exogenously given, and they have had very limited interest in how these interests emerge or transform.

Although earlier studies of national images largely agreed with this vision of states' behaviour as rational, they nevertheless placed perceptions at the centre of their attention. The works of Kenneth E. Boulding (1956; 1959), Robert Jervis (1970; 1976), Ole R. Holsti (1962), W. Scott (1965), K.W. Deutsch & R.L. Merritt (1965) have explained major characteristics of images and analysed psychological mechanisms of image formation and transformation. National image has been defined as 'total cognitive, affective, and evaluative structure of the behaviour unit, or its internal view of itself and its universe' (Boulding 1959, pp. 120-121). It has been argued that decisions in the sphere of foreign policy are often based on images of other international actors held by political elites. National images are historical in their nature, i.e. they contain not only the 'picture' of the given state at the present moment, but also the 'pictures' of its past and of its future. Moreover, national images are formed and transformed mainly through two psychological mechanisms. First of all, images tend to resist any changes, and as a consequence, any information that contradicts the existing image will typically be ignored. Therefore, only by being repeated many times can this information lead to changes in the image (Deutsch and Merritt 1965). However, Boulding (1959) has argued that in certain situations national images can undergo significant changes in response to some 'reorganising' events, as happened, for instance, with the image of the USSR held by US elites as a reaction to the successful launch of Sputnik in 1957. The second psychological mechanism, known as the 'Asch phenomenon', makes it extremely difficult for an individual to hold an image contradictory to the one held by the majority. As Urie Bronfenbrenner has put it, 'when all around me saw the world in one way, I too found myself wanting to believe and belong' (1961, p.50).

Moreover, as Boulding has argued, images held by both political elites and masses are 'naïve, self-centred, and unsophisticated' in their nature (1959, p. 131). Their major dimensions are those of hostility and friendliness, and of strength and weakness. Since images act as simplifiers of objective reality, states are always perceived as either friends or enemies, either strong or weak. Images held by political elites are to a significant extent close to those held by masses, since firstly, images are essentially mass images (they are transferred in course of socialisation), and second, political elites even in undemocratic countries in order to stay in power need to represent the public at large, and, thus, cannot go too far from the generally held images. On the other hand, elites can manipulate mass images for their own purposes.

It is noteworthy that most works of that time were of a purely theoretical character. Moreover, having accepted the rationalist interpretation of international relations, they did not attempt to demonstrate empirically the link between existing international images and interactions between states in the international arena. Holsti (1962), for instance, while examining the image of the USSR held by US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, has argued that foreign policy decision-makers perceive the environment through 'a set of lenses', but the impact of this perception on the states' behaviour stays beyond the focus of attention. Another distinctive feature of the research in the framework of image theory was its preoccupation with studying enemy images, most often limited to the images of the USSR and the USA. Obviously, this direction of research was of practical interest as it aimed at explaining the motivation of behaviour of the two superpowers during the Cold War. One of its most significant accomplishments was the discovery of so called mirror images - in Bronfenbrenner's words, 'the Russians' distorted picture of us was curiously similar to our view of them' (1961, p. 46). However, the emphasis on enemy images resulted in the negligence of other possible images when all perceptions were predominantly looked at from the angle of a conflict situation.

Yet, the most serious weakness of early image theory lies in the fact that it looked at national images in isolation from other elements of the international system, particularly material structures, and did not suggest how the images of one's own state and of foreign states could fit into such a system. One of the most successful attempts to develop a foreign policy model taking into consideration international images alongside other factors, both material and non-material, was made by Michael Brecher (1972). Using the foreign policy system of Israel as a case study, Brecher has argued that 'the link between image and



decisions is indeed the master key to a valuable framework of foreign policy analysis' (1972, pp. 4-5).

In the 1990s the image theory was further developed in the works of Richard Herrmann and Michael Fischerkeller (1995), James F. Voss, Tonya Y.E. Schooler and Joseph Ciarrochi (Herrmann *et al* 1997). Using the images of Iran, Iraq, the USSR and the USA from 1977 to 1992 as case studies in their research, they have developed 'a theory of strategy and international interaction' (Herrmann & Fischerkeller 1995, p. 422) which has suggested that ideas held by foreign policy decision-makers about other states are structured in the form of schemata, with perceptions of the past, present and future actions of the state in question and the evaluation of those actions being interconnected. One can distinguish ideal images that states may have of each other, on the basis of which decision-makers act. These ideal images are those of an enemy, a degenerate, a colony, an imperialist or an ally. When the image types that two states hold in relation to one another are established, the logic of game theory can be applied to predict the possible results of their interaction. This approach to national images has caused significant changes in the focus of research and the choice of research methods used by scholars following the tradition of image theory, making it more formal and quantitative than it used to be. Michele G. Alexander, Shana Levin and P.J. Henry (2005), for instance, in their examination of the image of the USA in Lebanon, have employed the method of opinion surveying, concentrating only on those issues that have been pre-defined as crucial (goal incompatibility, power, and cultural status), and leaving beyond their focus of interest any other aspects of perceptions. Moreover, the dimension of goal incompatibility, for example, has been measured by the attitude of respondents towards one single issue - the US-led 'war on terrorism', thus, suggesting, that any other actions of the US do not affect the US image in Lebanon.

One can argue that while being a valuable tool for analysing a broad picture of a possible foreign policy strategy, the theory of strategy and international interaction has been unable to provide a deep insight into the details of international images. There are several points that the theory appears to overlook. First of all, the ideal image types established by the researchers are extremely broad and all-embracing. The image of an ally, for instance, according to Herrmann and Fischerkeller, is formed when 'subjects' belief in the prospects for mutual gain outweighs the importance of perceived capability or cultural judgments' (1995, p.426). If we follow the logic of the theory, we would have to acknowledge that the image of the USA, for example, is close to the ideal type of an ally in many countries, whose attitude towards the USA and, as a result, whose actions in the international arena

are very different from each other (though for all of them, in accordance with the theory, the strategic script with possible policy tracks will be the same). The theory makes it difficult to trace differences between, let us say, perceptions regarding the USA held by decision-makers in the UK, France or Romania. In this respect it could be argued that five images are not sufficient to describe the variety of existing images. It could be suggested, for instance, that the image of a rival could be as useful as the image of an ally or the image of an enemy.

Moreover, even when a broad ideal type is adequate for a particular existing image, it cannot explain changes in actual policies of the state. This point can be illustrated by the example of the image of the Soviet Union held by political elites in the USA. As Herrmann and Fischerkeller have demonstrated in their research, the USSR was perceived as an enemy in 1977, 1980 and 1985, and as a moderate enemy – in 1990. These results suggest that in the period from 1977 till 1985 the image of the USSR remained the same, and, consequently, the foreign policies of the USA towards the USSR would be rather similar during these years, which, as we know, was not the case. Secondly, the historical dimension of international images is not taken into account, though it is an extremely important factor underpinning perceptions. Thirdly, the theory sets very strict rules in relation to the actions that are possible for each ideal image. If a state, for instance, perceives another state as an enemy, it, according to Herrmann and Fischerkeller, ‘will not cooperate with the target in any substantial way since it perceives that the target would take advantage of cooperative initiatives’ (1995, p. 431). One could argue that this would fail to explain the alliance of the Western countries and the USSR during World War II, as the image of the USSR was very negative both before and soon after the war.

Most importantly, studies of national images in the rationalist tradition have been unable to explain how national images emerge and why they change over time. Having accepted the rationalist vision of objective national interests as a driving force of states’ behaviour in the international arena, they have not examined the link between images of another state and self-images, and the impact of both on interpretation of national interests – which has become a primary focus of research in the social constructivist tradition.

### 1.1.2 Self-Images: Social Constructivist Interpretations

Social constructivism as a theoretical paradigm has challenged some of the key assumptions of rationalist IR theories, particularly their vision of national interests as pre-given. Unlike (neo)realism and (neo)liberalism, for social constructivists ‘understanding how actors develop their interests is crucial’ (Reus-Smit 2005, p. 197). Although social constructivism in IR is an extremely broad church rather than a well established theory, all constructivists are united in interpreting the world as socially constructed, i.e. ‘as intersubjectively and collectively meaningful structures and processes’ (Adler 2002, p. 100). Most constructivists also agree that one of the decisive factors in international politics is national identities, defined as ‘relatively stable, role-specific understandings and expectations about self’ (Wendt 1992, p. 397), that serve as a prism through which states see themselves and the world around them. Alexander Wendt in his influential *Social Theory of International Politics* has argued that

the daily life of international politics is an on-going process of states taking identities in relation to Others, casting them into corresponding counter-identities, and playing out the result (1999, p. 21)

The constructivist approach does not deny the role of national interests in international relations, but unlike rationalist theories that understand these interests as exogenous to the state and pre-given, constructivism claims that they are ‘created as a meaningful object, out of shared meanings through which the world, particularly the international system and the place of the state in it, is understood’ (Weldes 1999, p. 4). Moreover, according to Wendt, ‘actors do not have a “portfolio” of interests that they carry around independent of social context; instead, they define their interests in the process of defining situations’ (1992, p. 398). This explains why in certain circumstances the actions of states may appear contradictory to their seemingly objective interests: being shaped by the identity of the state, interests are defined according to what the state views as important. Even in similar situations states can behave differently from one another since their identities cause different understandings of the situation, and, consequently, different interpretations of their national interests. As Wendt has argued, ‘US military power means one thing to Canada, another to a communist Cuba’ (1999, p.25).

Furthermore, constructivism does not deny those basic objective needs that, according to rationalist theories, form national interests for any state such as physical survival, autonomy, and economic prosperity (see George & Keohane 1980). However,

interpretation of these objective needs is considered self-biased and subjective. Most importantly, apart from the three basic needs, Wendt (1999) has distinguished the need for collective self-esteem that, as he has argued, is particularly significant in shaping interests of the state. Whether the collective self-image is positive or negative to a large extent depends on how the Other (significant Other) perceives the state. A negative self-perception is often the result of perceived disrespect from other states, which can be illustrated by the example of the self-image of Germany after World War 1 or Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. When the self-image is negative for a long period of time, the state can redefine its interests in such a way that their pursuit may lead to its self-asserted behaviour in the international arena aimed at compensating the negative image. This assumption is particularly relevant for the present study.

Being a complex phenomenon, identities consist of various 'layers' which are organised in a hierarchical order, i.e. some of them are more salient than others. Therefore, in the case of an identity conflict it can be possible to predict the actions of a state as we can expect that it will be easier for the state to sacrifice its less significant identities for the sake of the more significant ones (Wendt 1999). However, states do not always follow this logic: when their less salient identities are threatened to a large extent, they can become more important for them, and thus, will be defended with greater effort. One should mention that in the constructivist camp there is no agreement on the origins of national identities. Whereas for Wendt national identity is the result of mainly international factors, in other words, a product of the interaction of states, this view has been challenged by both opponents of social constructivism and by its supporters. Ted Hopf (2002), for instance, has emphasised the significance of internal factors (i.e. the domestic situation), which, as he has argued, are even more important than external ones, while Ilya Prizel (1998) has shown that national identity is to a large extent the outcome of how the state interprets its history.

Another controversial issue is the question of 'the Other', i.e. 'they' against whom 'we' are defined. Although it is generally agreed that in national identities the concept of the Other is a fundamental one, there is no single answer to who this Other is. Most often it is understood as a different nation, relations with which have played an important role in the country's history. However, as Hopf (2002) has pointed out, the Other can be not only another state, but it can take various forms such as the state itself in the past. This point can be illustrated by the example of contemporary Russia, where an important constituent of the national identity is the attitude towards the USSR.

The range of the forms that the Other can take, according to Wendt, is not wide: the Other can be seen either as an enemy, a rival, or a friend. When the Other is conceived as an enemy, any actions that it takes, even if they are not directly related to the state, are viewed as aimed against it. As a result, in its foreign policies the state follows the logic of destroying the enemy first or being destroyed, i.e. it takes a revisionist position itself. The decisions are made without much thought about the distant future and are mainly oriented at achieving short-term goals. Seeing the Other as a rival rather than an enemy means that threats coming from it appear to be not so disastrous, though they are still substantial. This vision affects the foreign policies of the state in such a way that even in the case of a conflict the status quo approach to the Other's sovereignty will be taken. Unlike in relations with an enemy, in its relations with a rival the state thinks more about the future, and losses and gains in its politics are viewed as relative. The third type of image, the image of a friend, comes into being when the opposition between the state and the Other becomes not so significant: the Other is perceived as not very different from the state, and there seems to be much in common between the two entities. While in its policies towards both an enemy and a rival the state relies mainly on its military power, in its relations with a friend it is the economic one that becomes most important. As a consequence, even if a conflict arises between the states, there will be no war or use of violence. Moreover, in a situation when security of the Other is threatened by a third state, both states will act as a team in their efforts to solve the problem (Wendt 1999). As we can see from this typology suggested by Wendt, perceptions of the Other have a significant impact on foreign policies, though the types appear to be extremely broad and simplistic. It can be argued that under some circumstances they can overlap, and the difference between an enemy and a rival, for instance, might be not so clear. At the same time there can be various shades of attitudes even within one type, which would also have an effect on the policies adopted.

It should be mentioned that the constructivist approach has often been criticised by its opponents for the analytical difficulty of using identities as an explanatory variable in research. Maja Zehfuss (2002), for instance, has pointed out the impossibility of finding what the identity is by examining the behaviour of states, and, what is more, establishing the difference between a mere change in behaviour and change in identity. It could be argued, however, that though identities are indeed elusive, it is still possible to trace them by using a variety of methods, not purely by examining the behaviour of states. Being deeply rooted in the collective consciousness, identities are present in statements made by decision-makers, in official documents, and in various texts, and therefore may be open to discourse analysis. On the whole, studies following the social constructivist tradition have

provided an invaluable insight into the role of self-images in the state's relations with other international actors. However, while focussing on the evolution of national self-images in their connection with images of significant Others, the constructivist project has largely neglected another type of national image – images of the state that are projected in the international arena. Attempts by national governments to promote desirable images abroad have been the focus of research in another subfield of IR studies – International Political Communication.

### **1.1.3 Projected Images: Approaches in International Political Communication**

In recent years, a growing number of studies have analysed various aspects of what Joseph Nye has called 'soft power' in a state's relations with other international actors. According to Nye, soft power is 'the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments', and it is based on 'the attractiveness of the country's culture, political ideas, and policies' (2004, p. x). Efforts by national governments to enhance soft power by promoting a more favourable image of a state abroad have been only briefly examined in Foreign Policy Analysis. Christopher Hill (2003, p. 44), for instance, has mentioned 'projecting identity abroad' among the key functions of foreign policy, alongside such functions as protecting citizens abroad or advancing prosperity. However, this area of foreign policy has somehow remained on the fringes of foreign policy research while having become one of the most rapidly developing areas of studies in International Political Communication.

This focus on promoting a desirable image in the international arena is not a new phenomenon in the academic literature. Attempts to manipulate public perceptions in other countries were extensively examined in foreign propaganda studies, particularly in relation to the Soviet Union (e.g. Barghoorn 1964; Gordon 1988) in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Following the end of the Cold War, in both the Soviet Union and the USA foreign propaganda lost its prominent position on the foreign policy agenda, which inevitably affected the level of interest in propaganda in the academic community. However, a surge of interest in the subject occurred following the tragic events of 9/11 when many scholars, especially in the USA, turned to the problem of anti-Americanism (e.g. see Katzenstein & Keohane 2006). Having recognised the rise of negative perceptions of the USA on a global scale, particularly in the Muslim world, as a threat to the country's national security, the US authorities intensified their efforts to improve the international image of the USA with the

help of public diplomacy. At the same time, these developments led to the revival of academic interest in foreign propaganda and public diplomacy.

While discussing attempts by Western countries to improve their international images in the post-Cold War context, most scholars have tended to avoid the term ‘propaganda’ because of its negative associations with Soviet or Nazi propaganda campaigns. Instead they have predominantly used the term ‘public diplomacy’ which was coined by the dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University Edmund Gullion in 1965 (see Cull 2009, p. 19). This has resulted in a certain terminological confusion, as some researchers have argued in favour of differentiating between public diplomacy and propaganda (see e.g. Zaharna 2004, p. 223) while others have used both terms interchangeably. Moreover, several more terms have been occasionally used in relation to promoting national images, such as perception management, strategic communication or place branding (see Anholt 2004). Differentiating among all of these terms is especially problematic due to the fact that many propaganda/public diplomacy practitioners have often downplayed any distinctions between them. An illustrative example are the words of the US diplomat Richard Holbrooke in *The Washington Post* in 2001: ‘call it public diplomacy, or public affairs, or psychological warfare, or – if you really want to be blunt – propaganda’ (October 28, 2001).

Irrespective of the preferred terminology, most academic research in the past decade has tended to focus on the US context with an emphasis on assessing the effectiveness of US public diplomacy campaigns in the context of the post-9/11 world. Studies of public diplomacy efforts undertaken by other states have been noticeably less abundant although there has been a growing interest in examining the experience of other countries in this field, including but not limited to the UK (Fisher 2009), Germany (Zoellner 2009), Japan (Ogawa 2009) and China (Rawnsley 2009). Apart from the overwhelming dominance of US-related studies, much of the public diplomacy research has been oriented primarily towards the analysis of various means, techniques and channels of persuasion (e.g. see Zaharna 2009) or exploration of the most common practical problems, such as the issue of credibility (see Gass & Seiter 2009) or easier access to information as a result of rapid technological development in the sphere of mass communications (see Snow 2009, p. 7).

While most studies have been of an applied character, there have also been some attempts to approach the phenomenon of public diplomacy at the level of theory. Kelly, for instance, has argued that the activities that are usually associated with public diplomacy can be

divided into three broad categories – information, influence and engagement – which differ significantly in their time span and objectives. Firstly, these are short-term measures that are taken in response to a crisis when the distribution and management of information aims to minimise the damage to the country's image caused by some event. Secondly, these can be longer-term campaigns that seek to 'effect attitudinal change amongst a target population'. Finally, long-term activities are meant to encourage closer relations between people of two countries and build their trust in each other (Kelly 2009, p. 73). Only the latter type of campaigns can potentially succeed in overcoming the most deeply-rooted negative stereotypes, which is particularly relevant for the present study.

Although public diplomacy studies have made a significant contribution to our understanding of the effectiveness of various persuasion techniques in the foreign policy context, they have mostly explored the form rather than the content of information campaigns. Moreover, being focused on the 'communication' aspect, they have had very limited interest in establishing the link between images projected through public diplomacy channels, self-images, images of the state as perceived by other international actors, and foreign or domestic policies adopted by the governing authorities. As one can see, while the three types of national images mentioned above have been analysed from three different perspectives, no systematic explanation has been proposed as to how they relate to each other, how they evolve or how they affect foreign and domestic policies.

#### **1.1.4 Studies of National Images: The Russian Case**

In the area of Soviet and post-Soviet studies, academic research has broadly followed the same trend, as most studies of Russia's (and the Soviet Union's) perceived, projected and self-images have examined these phenomena from different angles and have not sought to conceptualise their interconnection or their combined impact on Russia's foreign or domestic policies. Predictably, interest in studying Russia's perceived images has varied considerably among Western countries. It has been particularly strong in the German academic literature, with one of the most developed areas of research within this field being an analysis of the emergence of the so-called *Russland-Komplex* in Germany and the transformation of images of Russia and the Russians from an historical perspective (see Böhlke 2002; Koenen 2005; Liszkowski 1988; Volkmann 1994). A particularly significant contribution to the field has been made by a number of studies that were conducted within the framework of a project on the history of German-Russian perceptions that was led by Lev Kopelev (see Keller 1987; Herrmann *et al* 1989; Kopelew *et al* 1998; Keller *et al*



1998; Keller & Korn 2000). Another well-established area of research has been sociolinguistic analysis of images of Russia and the USSR in the German mass media (see Crudopf 2000; Degtjarova 2007; Gavrilova 2005; Loew & Pfeifer 2001; Seifert 2003; Daniliouk 2006).

Studies of perceptions of Russia and the Soviet Union in other Western countries in the Western academic literature have been less abundant (but see, for instance, Bell 1990; Gleason 1972; Williams 1989; Wilson 1970 on images of Russia and the USSR in the UK). On the contrary, during the Cold War many scholars tended to focus on studying images of the West, particularly the USA, in the Soviet Union (see Barghoorn 1950; Schwartz 1978; Mills 1990),<sup>1</sup> as it was viewed as an effective way of predicting the general tendencies of the USSR's behaviour in the international arena. As Schwartz, for instance, explained his choice of research focus, 'among the problems confronting American policy makers, few are more vexing than that of assessing the images others, especially adversaries, have of the United States' (1978, p. 1). Yet, analysis of Russia's images abroad has become one of the most rapidly developing areas in Russian academic literature (see e.g. Pozdeeva 2000; Rukavishnikov 2005; Zashikhin 1994), which is discussed at length in Chapter Two of the present study. On the whole, however, both Russian and Western literatures on Russia's perceived images have tended to focus on examining the existing perceptions and explaining their emergence and transformation. Yet, they have not aimed to analyse the link between Russia's perceived images and projected images, or their link to Russia's self-images.

As was mentioned earlier in the chapter, Russia faced a profound identity crisis in response to the disintegration of the Soviet Union, which led to considerable attention in the academic literature to the problems of Russian identity and nation building (see e.g. Tolz 1998; Duncan 2005), and particularly to the impact of this crisis on Russian foreign policy.<sup>2</sup> Following the 'constructivist turn' in IR studies, a number of works have analysed the transformation of Russian national identity with an emphasis on the centuries-long public debate between Slavophiles and Westernisers concerning Russia's place in the world, and its relation with its significant Other – Western Europe (Neumann 1996; Prizel 1998; Hopf 2002). In this regard, several typologies have been suggested to differentiate among competing national identity discourses (competing self-images). Iver Neumann

<sup>1</sup> Images of the USA in the media discourse in post-Soviet Russia have been analysed by Becker (2002).

<sup>2</sup> The impact of the identity crisis on Russian foreign policy and the role of perceptions more broadly have been discussed, for instance, by Black (2004), Fawn (2004), Light (1996), Piontkovsky (2006), Pravda (1996), Richter (1996).

(1996), for instance, has analysed two major discourses – Romantic Nationalists who tend to praise Russia's uniqueness and consider any attempts to follow the Western way of development as contradicting the historical and cultural peculiarities of Russian society, and Europe-oriented Liberals who view the West as a model that Russia should copy in order to become a civilised country. Hopf (2002), on the other hand, has differentiated between four major identity discourses – New Western Russian, New Soviet Russian, Liberal Essentialist and Liberal Relativist.

Most other scholars have tended to speak of three major identity discourses although they have suggested different names for them: Liberal Atlantists, Eurasians and Centrists (Prizel 1998); Westernist, Statist and Civilisationist (Tsygankov 2006b); or Liberal Westernisers, Pragmatic Nationalists and Fundamentalist Nationalists (Allison *et al* 2006; also White 2007). It has been argued that these competing discourses articulate different foreign policy preferences, and, depending on their prominence in the public debate and particularly on the 'relative weight' of their constituencies among the political class, they are capable of having a significant impact on Russian foreign policy. Having made an invaluable contribution to the discussion of the role of Russia's national identity in foreign policy, these studies, however, have largely neglected the third type of Russia's images, namely projected images.

Images of Russia and the Soviet Union that were projected in the West received significant attention in the Western academic literature during the Cold War when Soviet foreign propaganda – its mechanisms and content – was analysed in a large number of studies (e.g. Barghoorn 1964; Gordon 1988). Smart (1992), for instance, argued that the Soviet political elite was very sensitive to the country's international image. Having analysed a selection of public statements by Nikita Khrushchev, Leonid Brezhnev and Mikhail Gorbachev, he demonstrated that the level of sensitivity to the image had a marked effect on the general character of foreign policy: a higher level of sensitivity resulted in erratic behaviour in the international arena, as was the case with Khrushchev and Gorbachev, while a lower level led to a more stable behaviour, as was the case with Brezhnev. Predictably, when Russia ceased to be viewed as a major security threat for Western countries following the Soviet Union's collapse, analysis of propaganda lost its prominence on the research agenda of Western scholars. Most studies of Russian foreign policy in the post-Soviet context have tended to show very limited interest in Russia's soft power ambitions, although they have acknowledged that 'the enduring goals pursued by Russia through its foreign policy have placed primary emphasis on (...) enhancing national prestige' in addition to their emphasis

on ‘ensuing national security’ and ‘promoting the economic well-being of the country’ (Donaldson & Noguee 2005, p. 4). While Moscow’s increasing ‘obsession’ with the country’s image and its energetic attempts to improve it were examined in several studies, the focus of attention was predominantly on Russia’s relations with members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) (e.g. Popescu 2006; Tsygankov 2006a).

It should be mentioned that Russia has not been the only post-Soviet country that has been pre-occupied with efforts to change its international image, as many other post-Soviet states in Central and Eastern Europe have also launched public diplomacy campaigns in an attempt to promote more favourable images in the West (e.g. see Serajnik-Sraka 2001). As György Szondi (2009, pp. 294-295) has demonstrated in his study, despite substantial differences in their approaches to public diplomacy, most of them have tended to position themselves as ‘reliable and eligible candidate[s] of the new system’ and as regional leaders who were ‘worthy of financial support’ while trying to distance themselves from the Communist political system. While the Western academic literature has largely ignored Russia’s attempts to improve the country’s image in the international arena, Russian scholars have been increasingly interested in the subject, mostly focusing on the analysis of various persuasion techniques that could be used to achieve the goal – as discussed in a greater detail in Chapter Two. However, neither Russian nor Western scholars have sought to conceptualise the role of Russia’s projected images at the policy level.

## **1.2 Theoretical Framework**

This study seeks to bridge this gap between different approaches to national images by analysing the efforts of the Russian authorities to project a more favourable image of the country in the West in 2000-2008, i.e. in the years of Vladimir Putin’s presidency. Conceptually, it follows the social constructivist tradition in its vision of national interests of the state as not objective or fixed but shaped by the dominant national identity and capable of change in response to transformation of the latter. However, it aims to go beyond an examination of national identity by focussing on the image of the state as a unit of analysis.

### 1.2.1 Image of the State as a Unit of Analysis

Although closely inter-connected with the concepts of identity, perceptions and stereotypes, the image has its distinctive characteristics as a unit of analysis. First of all, as discussed earlier in the chapter, images have a set of salient characteristics, and are usually ‘naïve’ and unsophisticated’ in their nature (Boulding 1959, p. 131). Moreover, one can speak of several types of images, namely self-images (visions of one’s own country), perceived images (images of the country held by other international actors) and projected images (those images that the country is promoting either for domestic or for foreign audiences) – this analytical distinction is particularly helpful for a study of this kind. The concept of the self-image is close to that of national identity, and the two are used in this study interchangeably. National self-images are not fixed: they are in constant change in response to changes in the internal or external environment. Moreover, one cannot speak about a single self-image of the state but rather about competing self-images which are articulated and supported by different groups in the society. One can agree with Tsygankov that

identity is a product of discursive competition among different groups and coalitions, drawing on different actions of the Other and interpreting contemporary international and local influences in a way that suits the groups’ interest (2006b, p. 17)

As a result of this competition, one self-image comes to dominate the discourse although sometimes it can include certain elements of competing self-images. It is the dominant self-image then that shapes the interpretation of national interests by those in power. Moreover, self-images or national identities are ‘embedded in a larger set of beliefs and policy preference’, not only in relation to foreign policy but also to various paths of economic and political development (see Shulman 2005, p. 68). Thus, changes in the dominant image can lead to the redefinition of national interests in the sphere of foreign policy, as well as to considerable variation in the political, social and economic agenda at home.

Similarly to the self-images of the state, its perceived images can vary greatly – across different countries, as well as within any foreign country. On the one hand, variations across countries are caused by various factors, ranging from geographic proximity to the history of interactions between the two states. Moreover, perceived images of the same state can differ substantially not only in their content, but also in their visibility, i.e. their

‘relative weight’ in the picture of the world in a foreign country. The same state can be perceived as merely one among many other states in one country and as a significant Other in another country. In the latter case, one can expect that the perceived image of the state would be considerably more stable as it would play an important role in shaping the self-image of the foreign country in question. On the other hand, perceived images of the same state can vary considerably within a foreign country – in perceptions of different elite groups, in the mass media and public opinion. Furthermore, although for the purpose of this study we define the image of the state as a unit of analysis, perceived images are not monolithic. They contain a number of components, such as an image of the authorities and the political leader, an economic image, an image of the country as an investment or tourist destination, etc. There can be a significant difference in perceptions of these elements: some of them can be viewed more negatively while others – more positively. Thus, while analysing Russia’s perceived images in the West, we should take all these factors into consideration.

Projected images can also vary across countries. On the one hand, they are shaped by the dominant self-image: the latter shapes the vision of national interests of the state, which then affects the way the state wants to be perceived in a particular foreign country. On the other hand, they are linked to the perceived image of the foreign country in question in the state itself. To illustrate this point, Russia’s projected image in the USA, for instance, is shaped by both Russia’s dominant self-image and the image of the USA in Russia. Although projected images tend to be positive, particularly more positive than perceived images, sometimes states may be interested in promoting more negative images that would perform a function of a deterrent (see Kunczik 1997). On the whole, however, all the three types of images – perceived, projected and self-images – tend to contain similar components, but their ‘relative weight’ within these images differs. The task of foreign propaganda is mainly to shift the focus of attention from negative to more favourable characteristics.

### **1.2.2 Defining Foreign Propaganda**

As discussed earlier in this chapter, in the academic literature there is no consensus on clear-cut distinctions between such terms as ‘propaganda’, ‘public diplomacy’, ‘marketing’ or ‘public relations’ (PR). While some scholars have restricted the notion of propaganda to the Soviet or Nazi propaganda of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, other researchers have broadened the definition. According to Nicholas O’Shaughnessy, for instance, ‘propaganda is not

synonymous with mere overt polemicism, but informs many cultural products, including such apparently politically neutral areas as entertainment and documentaries' (2004, pp. 1-2). This study comes from the latter perspective and uses the terms 'propaganda', 'public diplomacy' and 'state PR' interchangeably, without any negative subtext associated with the term 'propaganda'. A crucial question is then what exactly constitutes foreign propaganda. According to Richard Nelson, for instance, propaganda is

a systematic form of purposeful persuasion that attempts to influence the emotions, attitudes, opinions, and actions of specified target audiences for ideological, political or commercial purposes through the controlled transmission of one-sided messages (which may or may not be factual) via mass and direct media channels (1996, p. 232)

While this definition appears to capture the essence of propaganda in general, one can argue that in case of contemporary foreign propaganda it should be broadened to include 'transmission of messages through a variety of channels' since among the targets of foreign propaganda can be elite groups in a foreign country, and the transmission of information is not always controlled in the traditional sense as some activities can be conducted by non-governmental actors. Thus, the notion of foreign propaganda, as used in the present study, largely covers all activities that are pursued by the authorities of the state or any other actors with an aim of projecting an image of the state that they view as favourable for them.

While discussing the projection of positive images of the state that are meant to enhance its soft power, one of the key questions is how effective foreign propaganda can be. As Joseph Nye (2004, pp. 31-32) has argued, efforts to gain or increase soft power can be particularly successful when they meet three conditions: i) when the culture and ideas that are promoted 'match prevailing global norms'; ii) when a state in question 'has greater access to multiple communication channels that can influence how issues are framed in global news media'; and iii) when the message is confirmed by the state's behaviour both at home and in the international arena. An attempt to enhance the soft power of the state can be considered successful when its policies are perceived as legitimate by other international actors (Nye 2004, p. x).

### 1.2.3 (Un) Successful Foreign Propaganda

One can expect that successful or unsuccessful foreign propaganda would have a significant impact on the transformation of the state's self-images since 'construction of self is influenced by what other actors think about you' (Zevelev 2002, p. 450). In Russia's case, Western Europe has for centuries been one of the Significant Others for Russian identity (see Neumann 1996), and Russian political elites have always looked at Europe and later at the United States (or the 'West' in general) to see how they perceive Russia. Moreover, elites have become particularly sensitive to perceptions of Russia in Western countries in the context of the unresolved identity crisis that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. As Flemming Splidsboel-Hansen has pointed out in his study of Russia's relations with the European Union (EU), a 'state's new identity depends on acceptance by other states', and in the attempt to be recognised as a 'normal country' Russian political elites have looked to the West for approval of Russia's new identity (2002, p. 407). Similarly, Tsygankov (2006b) has argued that recognition of Russian liberal identity by the West has tended to strengthen it in the competition against other identity discourses, while lack of this recognition has, on the contrary, contributed to strengthening Russia's anti-Western nationalist identity discourse.

This explanation, however, does not take into account the fact that projected images of the state, as discussed earlier in this chapter, can differ to some extent from its dominant self-image even if they are shaped by the latter. In this case, one can expect that projected images, if successfully promoted, would themselves have an impact on the dominant image. While trying to construct a desirable international image, the state needs to reinforce it by certain signals or actions, and therefore is more or less limited in its foreign policy choices to those that would comply with the message. In this process the state can gradually accept some of the projected image characteristics as a part of its dominant self-image, since 'we are what we want to be' (Zevelev 2002, p. 461). On the contrary, one can expect that if foreign propaganda fails to promote more favourable characteristics of the state's image, the state may lose the incentive to comply with the message and may revert to old practices. Moreover, the inability to persuade the Other of the state's good intentions may strengthen enemy images of the Other, which may lead to its dominant self-image discourse relying more heavily on a self-image that is based on hostility towards the Other. This change, in its turn, may lead to a redefinition of the state's national interests in the international arena. Furthermore, one can expect that failure to promote a more favourable image would affect not only the state's foreign policy, but also its domestic policy. On the

one hand, the state might again revert to old practices at home as it might see no incentive in complying with the positive image. On the other hand, a shift in the dominant self-image may affect a broader set of social, political and economic preferences that are associated with a particular self-image in the dominant discourse.

It should be mentioned that the link between foreign and domestic has always been particularly problematic in the academic literature. While most IR studies had traditionally focused on analysing the international causes of the state's behaviour, the interconnection of international and domestic was first conceptualised in FPA research as it was increasingly interested in examining the domestic sources of foreign policy (see Rosenau 1967). It has been suggested that foreign policy can be affected by such domestic factors as, for instance, bureaucratic practices in various institutions (bureaucratic politics model – see Allison 1969) or public opinion (Risse-Kappen 1991). At the same time, it has been argued that 'the international system is not only a consequence of domestic politics and structures but a cause of them' (Gourevitch 1978, p. 911). While most scholars have agreed that domestic and international is indeed interconnected, or in Christopher Hill's words, 'foreign policy has its domestic sources and domestic policy has its foreign sources' (2003, p. 39), the nature of this interconnection has remained more or less unclear. According to Gourevitch,

We have developed strong research traditions that hold either system or country constant. We do not have very good theories to handle what happens when both are at play, when each influences the other, when the domestic politics of one country interacts with the domestic politics of another, an interaction which itself helps define a system that reverberates back on the parts (2002, p. 321)

Although this study does not aim to arrive at a theory that would explain this interconnection entirely, it nevertheless seeks to provide a deeper insight at the link between foreign and domestic by analysing the impact of national images on foreign and domestic policies.

### **1.3 Methodology of the Study**

Having examined the dominant approaches to studying national images in academic literature and the theoretical framework of this thesis, let us now turn to a discussion of the research methods that have been employed and the choice of case studies that have been used to explore Russia's perceived and projected images in greater detail.



### 1.3.1 Research Methods: Advantages and Limitations

Following the social constructivist tradition in IR studies, the thesis mostly relies on qualitative research methods, such as elite interviewing and discourse analysis. This choice can be largely explained by the fact that qualitative methods in general are grounded in the interpretivist philosophical position, i.e. they aim at uncovering how the social world is understood or constructed (Mason 2001). Moreover, they pay special attention to language (Spencer *et al* 2004), which is particularly advantageous for a study of perceptions and national images. Apart from qualitative data, the study has also made extensive use of publicly available opinion surveys which were conducted in Russia and a number of Western countries by the Moscow-based Levada Centre, and the German Marshall Fund of the United States and the Compagnia di San Paolo (Italy).

In-depth interviews have been used to gain a perspective on Russia's perceived images in two case study countries – the UK and Germany. Based on purposeful sampling, representatives of three groups of elites have been interviewed in each country – journalists with expertise in Russian affairs, representatives of political elites (members of the UK Parliament and the Bundestag, as well as high-ranking officials with expertise in Russia) and various experts, including academics. A large number of the interviewees have been directly targeted by Russian foreign propaganda (e.g. invited to various events organised by Russian propaganda agencies such as the Valdai Discussion Club), which has made their views especially valuable for this study. Moreover, the analysis of Russia's projected images has benefited from a series of interviews that were conducted with a number of high-ranking propagandists (mostly in Moscow, but also in several capitals of EU member states) who had first-hand experience of working in Russian foreign propaganda. The latter interviews have been particularly helpful in establishing changes in Russia's foreign propaganda strategy in the years of Putin's presidency and the development of the foreign propaganda machine. In total, twenty nine anonymous in-depth interviews have been conducted.

The results obtained with the help of in-depth interviewing have been supplemented with the findings of discourse analysis. As a method that 'illuminates the dominant ideas and identifies those who legitimate these ideas' (Burnham *et al* 2004, p. 247), discourse analysis has provided rich data on Russia's perceived, projected and self-images. The analysis of Russia's dominant self-image has been largely based on a number of Russian

official documents, including but not limited to the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (Kontseptsiya vneshnei 2000) and the National Security Concept (Kontseptsiya natsional'noi 2000), and on President Putin's statements, interviews and articles published under his name. In addition to that, the analysis has drawn on statements and publications by Russian oppositional politicians, such as Gennady Zyuganov or Grigory Yavlinsky, who have articulated competing discourses. Russia's perceived images in the West, particularly in the UK and Germany, have been examined by looking at discourses on Russia in the mass media, public statements of members of political and business elites, official documents, and transcripts of parliamentary debates in the respective countries. At the same time, the analysis of Russia's projected images in the dominant discourse has been undertaken by focussing on statements by President Putin and high-ranking officials that were targeted at foreign audiences, and on those texts that were published in foreign propaganda outlets, such as *Russia Profile*.

The use of a large number of primary sources has enabled the study to explore Russia's images and their transformation over time in depth. Yet, one should mention a number of limitations that are usually associated with the research methods employed in this thesis. Firstly, there is the question of reliability, which in quantitative methodology is usually understood as the replicability of research findings. However, while qualitative findings in general are largely impossible to replicate, one can still argue that the findings are reliable when detailed information has been provided on the research process (Burnham *et al* 2004). Secondly, there is the issue of validity, i.e. correctness or precision of the results. This problem, at least to some extent, may be solved by employing the strategy of triangulation, i.e. resorting to several methods and sources of research (Lewis & Richie 2004). This study seeks to address this problem by supplementing the findings obtained with the help of elite interviews with the results of discourse analysis. Moreover, it relies on a large number of secondary sources, including a vast number of Russian studies that touch upon the problem of Russia's images and perceptions. Thirdly, there is inevitable bias in the selection of interviewees and texts for discourse analysis as it has been purposeful rather than representative. It can be argued, however, that this study is concerned not with perceptions of particular individuals, but with shared meanings that are characteristic of groups in a society, which makes purposeful sampling particularly appropriate. Another problem that should be mentioned is connected with 'measuring' the effectiveness of foreign propaganda since changes in national images can occur in response to a variety of factors and it is often impossible to establish what exactly triggered the change. The study attempts to overcome this problem by reflecting on most noticeable

factors, and by relying on the results obtained with the help of elite interviews and publicly available opinion surveys.

### **1.3.2 Choice of Case Studies**

To facilitate the analysis of Russia's perceived images and the effectiveness of foreign propaganda, the thesis includes two case studies that examine the issues at question in greater detail in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK) and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). This choice of case studies can be explained by several factors. Firstly, Western Europe has traditionally been Russia's significant Other, and both Britain and Germany have been particularly important in this regard. Thus, one can expect that Russia's perceived images in these two states would have a pronounced impact on the evolution of Russia's dominant self-image. Secondly, both states, alongside the USA and other G8 members, have been among the primary targets of Russian foreign propaganda in the years of Putin's presidency. Thirdly, transformation of Russia's images in the UK and Germany is especially interesting due to the fact that these states are important actors in the European Union. As discussed in Chapter Three, one of the central elements of Russian foreign propaganda in 2000-2008 was promoting an image of Russia as a reliable energy supplier, which was particularly relevant for the EU as the largest importer of Russian energy. While both the UK and Germany sought to develop their relations with Russia in the energy sphere, the patterns of their relations differed to a significant extent. One can expect that this difference would have a noticeable effect on Russia's images as an energy supplier and the overall effectiveness of Russian propaganda in the two states.

Apart from the structure of economic relations with Russia, there are a number of other factors that might contribute to differences in the perceptions of Russia in the two EU member states. Among the most significant are the history of Russian-German and Russian-British relations, the presence of a large number of immigrants of Russian origin in both Germany and the UK (although they represent different social groups), and geographical proximity to Russia. It should be noted that although Russia-EU relations have been analysed from various perspectives in a rapidly growing literature on this subject (see Antonenko & Pinnick 2005; Johnson & Robinson 2005; Smith 2006a; Hopf 2008), Russia's ambitions to enhance its soft power in the area have been largely neglected, which makes the choice of the UK and Germany as case studies especially valuable for our purposes.

### 1.3.3 Overview of the Thesis

The study covers the period from 2000 to 2008. The following chapter (Chapter Two) sets a context for the remaining thesis by examining the emergence of the problem of Russia's negative image on the foreign policy agenda of the Russian authorities. Having highlighted the most significant moments in the evolution of Russia's images in the West in the post-Soviet period, it examines the way in which this problem has been conceptualised in the dominant discourse. This is followed by an overview of the key approaches to Russia's international image in the Russian academic and expert literature.

Chapters Three and Four focus on the propaganda campaign that was launched by the Russian authorities in an attempt to promote a more favourable image of Russia in Western countries. Chapter Three analyses the form of this campaign by exploring the structure of the foreign propaganda machine as it developed in the years of Vladimir Putin's presidency. Having discussed the mechanism of foreign propaganda that had been employed by the Soviet Union during the Cold War, it proceeds to examine the changes in Russian foreign propaganda – conceptual, as well as structural – that took place in 2000-2008. It should be mentioned that for the purpose of this study, the analysis is limited to foreign propaganda at the state level only while attempts to promote favourable images of Russian regions by various regional actors are not examined. Chapter Four explores the content of propaganda by analysing Russia's projected images and their link to Russia's dominant self-image, as well as its perceived images. It seeks particularly to identify the difference between the core elements of these three types of images in such areas as the image of Russian democracy, Russia's image as an energy supplier, Russia's image as an actor in the post-Soviet space and the vision of Russia's international status.

The analysis of Russian foreign propaganda at the general level is followed by two case studies that examine Russia's perceived images and the attempts of the Russian authorities to transform them in the UK (Chapter Five) and Germany (Chapter Six). Both case studies begin by looking at perceptions of Russia from a historical perspective and establishing a set of stereotypes of Russia and the Russians that had developed over centuries. The chapters then proceed to analyse the evolution of Russia's images in 2000-2008. Based on a series of elite interviews, they focus on competing images of Russia among the elites, as well as in the mass media and public opinion. Having explored peculiarities of Russian

foreign propaganda in the UK and Germany, the chapters reflect on the effectiveness of Russia's campaigns in these two countries.

The overall results of Russian foreign propaganda in Western countries are discussed in Chapter Seven. Based on examining perceptions of Russia by existing and potential foreign investors, Russia's position in the 'Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index' and a series of public opinion surveys in a number of Western countries that were conducted in the final years of Putin's presidency, the chapter analyses the increasingly negative character of Russia's perceived images and discusses possible reasons for the inability of Russian foreign propaganda to improve them significantly. The impact of this inability to transform the negative image on Russia's dominant self-image is examined in Chapter Eight. Having looked at the ways in which the continued prevalence of Russia's negative image in the West despite energetic propaganda efforts was explained in the dominant discourse, the chapter analyses the use of Russia's negative international image in domestic propaganda. The final chapter (Chapter Nine) explores the implications of Russia's unsuccessful foreign propaganda for Russia's actions both at home and in the international arena. It also presents the overall findings of the thesis by suggesting a theoretical explanation of the link between perceived, projected and self-images of the state and their impact on the state's foreign and domestic policies.

Overall, this thesis seeks to make a three-fold contribution to academic literature. Firstly, it is the first systematic examination of Russian foreign propaganda in the post-Soviet period. By analysing Russia's attempts to improve its image in the international arena, the thesis contributes to the literature in the field of International Political Communication that has already examined public diplomacy campaigns conducted by other, mainly Western, countries. Secondly, it aims to provide a deeper insight at the role of subjective, non-material factors in Russian foreign policy. Finally, it makes a contribution to the social constructivist IR literature by presenting a theoretical analysis of the role of national images in international relations.

## Chapter 2

### Russia's Negative Image: Views of the Problem

The problem of Russia's negative image in the international arena, particularly in Western countries, emerged on the foreign policy agenda of the Russian authorities at the beginning of Vladimir Putin's first presidential term. Although it had been extensively discussed in the Russian expert community and the mass media already in the late 1990s, only under Putin's presidency did it begin to be viewed as a serious threat that required immediate action. Before we move on to explore the form and the content of a foreign propaganda campaign that was launched as a result of this change (see Chapters Three and Four), we should examine the dominant views of the problem in the Russian official discourse. Moreover, understanding the role of national images in Russian foreign and domestic policies requires a thorough analysis of theoretical and applied image-related issues that have been debated in the Russian academic and political community over the past decade. The present chapter seeks to undertake this analysis, and is based on a number of open official documents and statements, theoretical works and applied research conducted by Russian academics, as well as newspaper and journal publications touching upon the problem of Russia's image.

This chapter is structured in the following way. The first part provides a brief overview of the transformation of Russia's images in the 'West' in the post-Soviet period. Although in the present study there is no scope for a detailed discussion of perceived images of Russia,<sup>3</sup> the chapter nevertheless attempts to examine the most significant elements of the country's images, with an emphasis on those characteristics which the Russian authorities viewed as particularly problematic. The second part explores the way in which the problem of Russia's negative image was conceptualised in the official discourse. The chapter then proceeds to analyse the approaches to the problem in Russian academic and expert literature: the third part looks at the main characteristics of Russian IR studies, which is followed by an analysis of Russian image literature in the fourth part. The chapter concludes by discussing the reasons for this pronounced significance of the image problem in the official and academic discourses.

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<sup>3</sup> Russia's existing images in the 'West' have been examined in a number of Russian studies (see Rukavishnikov 2005; Semenenko *et al* 2006; Solov'ev 2008). These works are discussed later in this chapter.

## 2.1 Russia's Image in the West: From 'Gorbymania' to 'Putinophobia'

While discussing the transformation of Russia's image in the West, one should note that it would be a serious over-simplification to look at it as a single image of Russia (and of any country in general). Russia's images differ substantially across countries as a result of various factors such as the history of their relations with Russia, the structure of economic relations, geographic proximity etc. Moreover, there are also competing images within each individual country – in public opinion, in the mass media and in the opinion of political, business or expert/academic elites. These differences are analysed in more detail further in this study in Chapters Five and Six which examine Russia's perceived and projected images in two case studies – the UK and Germany. Despite these differences, one can still uncover a number of broader trends that are typical of most Western countries.

### 2.1.1 Russia's Perceived Image among Western Elites and in the Mass Media

In the Western mass media and among the elites, Russia's images were predominantly positive in the early 1990s when many in the West shared hopes for the rapid democratisation and liberalisation of the country. The image of the USSR President Mikhail Gorbachev was particularly positive, which led some commentators to describe those attitudes as 'Gorbymania'.<sup>4</sup> The first Russian president Boris Yel'tsin also enjoyed a fairly positive image at the beginning of his presidency. Yel'tsin's regime was largely perceived by Western elites and the mass media as the only viable alternative to Russia's return to communism. Yel'tsin's victory in the 1996 presidential elections when he competed against the leader of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) Gennady Zyuganov was interpreted by many as a victory of democracy over authoritarianism. *The Washington Post*, for instance, praised Russian voters who 'showed the wisdom and fortitude to vote against the greater of the evils' (5 July 1996). Moreover, Yel'tsin's foreign policy in the early 1990s was pronouncedly pro-Western. As a consequence, although his image did tarnish to some extent, on the whole it remained more or less positive even following those President's actions which appeared to contradict the declared intention to democratise the country (e.g. Yel'tsin's dispute with the Russian Parliament in October 1993).

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<sup>4</sup> For a detailed discussion of Mikhail Gorbachev's and Boris Yel'tsin's images in Western countries, see Rukavishnikov (2005).

However, Yel'tsin's image (together with the image of Russia) began to change very rapidly in a negative direction in the middle of the 1990s. Among the factors that contributed to this process were the social and economic situation in the country, the war that was launched by the Russian authorities in the break-away republic of Chechnya, rampant corruption and crime, etc. At the same time, the Kremlin's foreign policy underwent significant changes. It became considerably more assertive and independent from the West under the newly appointed foreign minister Evgeny Primakov, which also had a crucial effect on Russia's images. A study that was commissioned in 1997 by the Council on Foreign and Defence Policy of the Russian Federation, a think-tank with close links to the Kremlin, arrived at extremely upsetting findings. While examining the image of the Russian business community in the Western mass media, it revealed that attitudes to Russian business were affected by several stereotypes concerning the country in general. The most significant of them were: 'a military threat of a new type' (i.e. a threat caused by weak state control over nuclear arms), 'a criminal and corrupt state', and 'Russia's inability to conduct reforms without guidance from the West'. The research concluded by stating the necessity to improve the perceived image in order to help Russian companies become more attractive for potential investors (Council on Foreign and Defence Policy of the RF 1997).

Having reached its negative peak at the end of Yel'tsin's presidency, Russia's images began to improve following Vladimir Putin's election as president. Predictably, some in the West were concerned with Putin's background in the security services and the arguably non-democratic manner in which Yel'tsin had 'appointed' Putin as his successor. As *The Washington Post* commented on the dominant attitudes of American political elites, 'US policymakers were apprehensive (...) about the no-nonsense former KGB colonel whose personal values remain unclear even to Americans who have worked closely with him' (1 January 2000). However, Putin's personality appeared to be in stark contrast to that of Russia's first president, which was beneficial for Putin's image. According to *The Times*, 'where Yeltsin was ageing, wobbly and barely coherent, Putin is 47, sober and a judo-belt who takes bracing walks in the country' (19 January 2000). Moreover, Putin's decisions in the early years of his presidency indicated a significant shift of Russian foreign policy strategy: from Primakov's balancing policy to closer cooperation with the West. The most illustrative example was Putin's decision to support the US-led war on terror that followed the attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in September 2001. On the whole, in 2001-2002, while Russia was still criticised for corruption and the war in Chechnya, its images in the Western mass media and among elites appeared to be changing in a positive direction.



A turning point in the transformation of Russia's images in the Putin years was the decision of the Russian authorities to join Germany and France in their opposition to the US-led intervention in Iraq in 2003. Predictably, it considerably damaged Russia's images in the eyes of pro-war elites and the mass media in the USA and other members of their coalition, particularly the UK. *The Christian Science Monitor*, for example, wrote about the 'Cold-war frost' that formed over Iraq (26 March 2003). More interestingly, however, it also had a negative impact on Russia's images in those countries that opposed the war. As Chapter Six will demonstrate, some members of the political and business elites in Germany, for instance, considered Berlin's alliance with Paris and Moscow against Washington as a serious mistake, which inevitably affected their perceptions of France and Russia. Another crucial event that significantly damaged Russia's images was the arrest of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, head of the Yukos oil company, on fraud and tax evasion charges in 2003. The Yukos affair was perceived by many in the West as a possible move by the Russian authorities towards reversal of privatisation and as punishment of a political opponent. *The New York Times*, for instance, reported that 'investors and Kremlin watchers said they [were] not convinced that the government's prosecution of M. Khodorkovsky (...) would be its last confrontation with Russia's business elite' (14 November 2003).<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, strengthening of the 'vertical of power', the continuing war in Chechnya, human rights violations, the murder of the journalist Anna Politkovskaya in October 2006 and Alexander Litvinenko's death in London in November 2006 had an increasingly negative effect on images of Russia and its leadership. More and more often Putin was accused of stepping aside from democratic principles and of creating an authoritarian state. This 'authoritarian' element in Russia's images among Western elites and in the mass media became particularly pronounced in the run-up to the parliamentary elections at the end of 2007. *The Guardian*, for instance, wrote about 'fraud, intimidation and bribery' during the parliamentary election campaign (30 November 2007).

Criticism of Russia's domestic situation was accompanied by growing concerns about its more assertive policies in the post-Soviet area, which were seen as neo-imperial in nature. *The Financial Times* expressed the opinion of many in Western countries writing that 'the West must resist Putin's claim on the old Soviet space' (22 November 2007). Illustrative examples of what was often interpreted in the Western mass media as Russia's attempts to punish those post-Soviet countries that had articulated their pro-Western rather than pro-

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<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the impact of Khodorkovsky's arrest and the Yukos affair on Russia's international image, see Sakwa (2009, pp. 314-321).

Russian foreign policy strategies were Russia's trade wars with Georgia and a series of Russia's disputes with Ukraine over gas prices. The latter incidents gained particularly extensive publicity due to Ukraine's status as a major transit country for Russian gas to a number of EU member states. It should be mentioned that in 2006, imports from Russia accounted for approximately 42% of total EU-27 gas imports. In comparison, imports from the other 3 largest suppliers – Norway, Algeria and Nigeria – accounted for 24.2%, 18.2% and 4.8% respectively (EUDG 2009, p. 31). Following the disputes with Ukraine, in the context of this considerable dependence of the EU on imports of Russian gas, the image of Russia as an energy supplier became one of the key elements of Russia's images in Western countries.

Moscow's dispute with Kiev over gas prices in 2006 had a particularly significant impact on Russia's images. The reaction of the Western mass media to Russia's actions during the crisis was predominantly negative. *The Times*, for instance, wrote about 'fears of new cold war as Russia threaten[ed] to switch off the gas' (30 December 2005). Many Western politicians hurried to publicly accuse Russia of using its energy resources as a political weapon.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, a number of commentators, although acknowledging Kiev's contribution to the development of the crisis, particularly Ukraine's rampant corruption, considered Ukraine as mostly a victim of the Kremlin's aggression and wrote about 'Russia's willingness to use its considerable energy resources for political blackmail' (Smith 2006b, p. 1). At the same time, a former high-ranking British diplomat who was interviewed for this study argued that Russia's decision to raise the price was justified but 'the way they did it got them the worst publicity they could think of'. One of the reasons for the negative reaction of the West, in his opinion, was a centuries-old stereotype that in case of a conflict Russia would necessarily very quickly resort to force: since Russia was not happy with Ukraine's pro-Western orientation, it punished it by turning off gas.<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, some scholars in their analysis of the crisis concluded that Gazprom's motivation was predominantly economic, but warned that in case of future conflicts between Russia and any transit country, Russia's decision to cut gas supplies would inevitably be seen by the Western mass media as politically motivated (Stern 2006, p. 16).

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<sup>6</sup> See, e.g. the reaction of U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice: U.S. Department of State (2006) 'Russia Should Act Responsibly in Dispute with Ukraine, Rice Says', 5 January, available at: <http://www.america.gov/st/washfile-english/2006/January/20060105160612btruevecer0.5403864.html>, accessed 2 May 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Anonymous interview with a former high-ranking British diplomat, London, 14 December 2006.

Furthermore, Russia's pro-active energy policy, combined with the re-emergence of great power discourse in Russian society, was interpreted by many in the West as an indication of the Kremlin's intention to turn Russia into an energy superpower – a concept that received substantial attention in both the mass media and the academic literature.<sup>8</sup> The significantly more assertive rhetoric of the Russian authorities in the sphere of foreign policy during Putin's second presidential term appeared to confirm these views. Putin's speech at the Munich Conference on Security Policy in February 2007 (see Putin 2007d), where he openly criticised the USA for unilateralism, was perceived by many as manifestation of the Kremlin's anti-Westernism and great power aspirations. Following Putin's speech, *The New York Times* wrote that the 'relationship between Russia and the United States (...) reached what [was] probably its lowest point since the Soviet Union collapsed a decade and a half ago' (18 February 2007). The dominant vision of Russian foreign policy at that time can be illustrated by the title of an article in *Financial Times*: 'A Cruder Kremlin: How Russia Is Reasserting Itself as a World Power' (1 August 2007).

On the whole, Russia's images in the Western mass media and among elites (although as Chapters Five and Six will demonstrate there were significant differences between them) reached their negative peak in 2006-2007. The dominant image of Vladimir Putin at the end of his second presidential term was skilfully captured by the *Economist*:

There is a prickly KGB officer in the Kremlin. He suppresses dissent at home and (...) abroad. He obstructs America's foreign policy, sells arms to its enemies and cosies up to its rivals (...) He uses his country's vast hydrocarbon reserves to bully the neighbours (30 November 2006)

The pronouncedly negative character of the Russian president's image led some commentators to label these views as 'Putinophobia' – as any action of the Russian authorities, both in domestic and foreign policies, appeared to be interpreted in a way that was unfavourable for Moscow (see *Russia Profile* 2008). Moreover, in the context of dramatic deterioration of Russia's relations with the USA and the EU during the last two years of Putin's presidency, some commentators, both in Russia and in the West, began to speak of a new Cold War. An illustrative example of these views is a book by the *Economist* correspondent Edward Lucas titled *The New Cold War* (2008). While many members of Western elites and the mass media disagreed with this vision, in the dominant

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<sup>8</sup> It should be mentioned though that some commentators have argued against this view, as the vision of Russia as an energy superpower, in their opinion, 'exaggerates Russia's ability to use oil and gas as «weapons» to augment Russian influence over its neighbourhood and on the world stage' (Rutland 2008, p. 209).

images the element of hostility between Russia and the West was still significant. As *The New York Times* described the relationship, there was ‘no Cold War, perhaps, but surely a lukewarm peace’ (18 February 2007).

### **2.1.2 Russia’s Position in Country Rankings**

While discussing the transformation of Russia’s images under Putin’s presidency, one should also examine changes in Russia’s position in various country ratings, such as ‘Freedom in the World’, published by Freedom House, or the ‘Corruption Perceptions Index’, prepared by Transparency International. These ratings are a valuable source for the present study for a number of reasons. Firstly, although these organisations seek to arrive at ‘balanced and unbiased judgments’, they nevertheless acknowledge ‘an element of subjectivity inherent in the survey findings’ (Freedom House 2008). Thus, they may be, at least to some extent, affected by perceived images of Russia (or any other country). Secondly, once published, these ratings are widely quoted in the Western mass media, which means that they themselves have an impact on Russia’s images. Finally, their findings tend to receive substantial attention among the Russian political elite and expert community, which indicates that they may affect Russia’s self-images and images of the West. In the Russian mass media there is an on-going debate whether these ratings are objective or politically motivated (see e.g. *The Moscow Times*, 17 January 2008). The latter view may have a negative affect on the images of the West, and contribute to strengthening the ‘siege mentality’ in Russian society – this will be discussed in detail in Chapter Eight of the thesis.

Let us now look at the changes in Russia’s positions in a series of ratings that occurred under Putin’s presidency. Table 2.1 illustrates Russia’s ratings by the US-based NGO Freedom House in the period 1991-2007. The evaluation is conducted by a group of regional experts and scholars who use a broad variety of sources of information: from news reports and academic analyses to individual contacts and visits to the region (Freedom House 2008). The organisation measures separately political and civil rights on a scale from one to seven, with one indicating the highest degree of freedom and seven the lowest. The combined average ratings then are used to define the status of a country: countries with combined ratings between 1 and 2.5 are designated as ‘free’, those with ratings between 3 and 5 – as ‘partly free’, and finally countries with ratings that fall between 5.5 and 7 – as

‘not free’ (Freedom House 2008).<sup>9</sup> As one can see from the table, Russia’s ratings for civil rights changed twice – in 1992 and 1999, i.e. before Putin was elected as President. However, political rights ratings increased substantially during his two terms in office: first from four to five in 2000, and then from five to six in 2004. Thus, since 2004 Russia has been classified as ‘not free’.

Year	Political Rights	Civil Rights	Freedom Status
1991	3	3	Partly Free
1992	3	4	Partly Free
1993	3	4	Partly Free
1994	3	4	Partly Free
1995	3	4	Partly Free
1996	3	4	Partly Free
1997	3	4	Partly Free
1998	4	4	Partly Free
1999	4	5	Partly Free
2000	5	5	Partly Free
2001	5	5	Partly Free
2002	5	5	Partly Free
2003	5	5	Partly Free
2004	6	5	Not Free
2005	6	5	Not Free
2006	6	5	Not Free
2007	6	5	Not Free
2008	6	5	Not Free

Table 2.1. Russia’s ratings by Freedom House, 1991-2008 (Freedom House n.d; 2007; 2008; 2009)

This negative trend is also evident in Russia’s ratings by Transparency International. The Berlin-based NGO measures perceived levels of corruption in the public sector in a large number of countries, using such methods as expert assessment and opinion surveys (of business people and country experts). In their annual ‘Corruption Perceptions Index’, Russia has consistently remained among the most corrupt countries in the world despite the declared intention of the Russian authorities to fight corruption. Figure 2.1 illustrates changes in Russia’s ratings over the last decade. The rating is based on a scale from 0 (highly corrupt) to 10 (highly clean). As one can see from the diagram, Russia’s ratings stayed very low over the period of Putin’s presidency. Although there was some indication of improvement in the level of perceptions of corruption during the president’s first term (with the highest score of 2.8 given in 2004), in his second term the ratings began to

<sup>9</sup> It should be mentioned that until 2003 these categories were different: countries with combined ratings between 3.0 and 5.5 were designated as ‘partly free’ while those with ratings between 5.5 and 7.0 as ‘not free’ (Freedom House 2008).

decrease again, down to as low as 2.1 in 2008. Moreover, Russia's ratings by Transparency International appear particularly low if one compares them with those of other countries. In 2000 Russia was the 82<sup>nd</sup> in the list of 90 countries. At the end of Putin's presidency, it was at 143<sup>th</sup> place in the list of 180 countries in 2007, and then at 147<sup>th</sup> place among 180 countries in 2008.

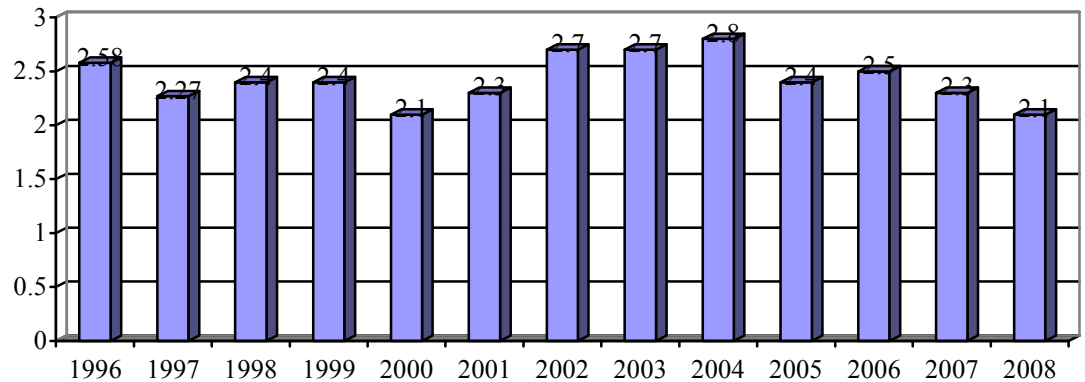


Figure 2.1. Corruption Perceptions Index for the Russian Federation, 1996-2008 (Transparency International 1996-2008)

### 2.1.3 Russia's Perceived Image in Public Opinion of Western Countries

As we can see, among elites – political, business and expert - and in the mass media Russia's image was predominantly negative. Although, as Chapters Five and Six will demonstrate, positive views did exist, they did not challenge the existing consensus to a significant extent. In the public opinion of Western countries, however, Russia's image was less negative and closer to neutral though there was also a clear negative trend in a number of countries, particularly during Putin's second term in office. This can be illustrated from the results of a series of public opinion surveys *Transatlantic Trends* that were conducted in 2002 – 2008 by the German Marshall Fund and the Compagnia di San Paolo (Italy) in a number of European countries (France, Germany, the UK, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Romania), the USA and Turkey. The respondents were asked to evaluate their feelings towards a number of countries and institutions on a scale from 0 to 100 'with 100 meaning a very warm, favourable feeling, 0 meaning a very cold, unfavourable feeling, and 50 meaning not particularly warm or cold' (German Marshall Fund of the United States 2008). The results of the survey related to the attitude to Russia are presented in Table 2.2.

	<b>USA</b>	<b>FR</b>	<b>GER</b>	<b>UK</b>	<b>IT</b>	<b>NL</b>	<b>PI</b>	<b>PT</b>	<b>SP</b>	<b>SK</b>	<b>TR</b>	<b>BG</b>	<b>RO</b>
2008	48	41	49	47	45	47	40	43	45	52	18	66	45
2007	48	42	48	46	45	42	37	43	44	49	21	65	41
2006	51	44	50	48	49	46	39	44	47	51	21	67	50
2005	53	45	50	50	49	45	35	43	47	52	24		
2004	57	49	54	54	54	51	42	44	48	52	21		
2003	54	51	55	52	51	48	41	46					
2002	55	47	44	50	53	46	42						

Table 2.2. Feelings towards Russia, 2002-2008 (German Marshall Fund of the United States 2008)

As the table demonstrates, in most Western countries the average feelings towards Russia were neither particularly warm nor cold although there was a considerable difference across the countries. Interestingly, somewhat warmer feelings were expressed by respondents from the USA despite Russia's negative images in the US mass media. Predictably, respondents in Poland held consistently more negative attitudes towards Russia, while in Bulgaria these feelings were pronouncedly warmer than in other countries. One can notice that in most countries, particularly in the 'West', average feelings tended to become significantly colder during Putin's second term in office reaching their lowest point around 2007. On the whole, however, one can agree with Andrei Tsygankov's view on the problem of Russia's image in the public opinion of Western countries:

people are often poorly informed about the country that "no longer matters" after the end of the Cold War, and Russia's problem here is a lack of visibility, rather than lack of a favourable image (*Russia Profile* 2005).

As this brief overview has demonstrated, the images of Putin's Russia in Western countries, particularly among Western elites and in the mass media, were predominantly negative. One can agree with Bobo Lo that Russia was still often perceived as 'an alien country, strange, unfathomable, even at times barbarous' (2003, p. 97). In a context in which the Russian authorities urgently needed foreign investment to modernise the Russian economy, these negative images represented a significant challenge for the successful implementation of Russian economic and foreign policies. The next section examines the way in which the problem of Russia's negatives images was conceptualised in the official discourse by focusing on the evolution of the views of the problem over the years of Putin's presidency.

## 2.2 Russia's Negative Image in Official Discourse

In the Russian mass media and expert community, the problem of Russia's negative images in the West had been discussed since the late 1990s. At the level of the Kremlin, however, it emerged on the agenda only in 2000 when a number of major official documents acknowledged the importance of solving this problem. The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation that was approved by Putin in June 2000 listed among the key tasks of Russian foreign policy

(...) communicating to the broad sectors of the world public objective and accurate information about its [Russia's] positions on the main international problems, foreign policy initiatives and actions by the Russian Federation, as well as on the accomplishments of Russian culture, science, and intellectual work (Kontseptsiya vneshnei 2000, p. 7)

The document stressed the need to improve Russia's image in foreign countries and to form 'a friendly attitude to it' (ibid, p. 7). However, it did not elaborate on any measures that had to be taken to achieve this goal.

The National Security Concept that was adopted earlier that year was more detailed in specifying what exactly constituted a threat to Russia's national security in the sphere of information. According to the concept, 'a serious danger arises from the desire of a number of countries to dominate the global information space and to oust Russia from the foreign and domestic information market' (Kontseptsiya natsional'noi 2000, p. 6). This vision of threats that Russia faced in the sphere of information was so significant that in September of the same year the Russian authorities presented a document that specifically dealt with the problems of national security in relation to information threats – the 'Information Security Doctrine of the Russian Federation'. Among those threats that the doctrine described as particularly serious was the 'dissemination abroad of disinformation on the foreign policy of the Russian Federation' (Doktrina informatsionnoi 2000). Thus, the document explicitly interpreted negative perceptions of Russia abroad as the result of deliberate efforts to tarnish Russia's image. To counteract these efforts, the doctrine, similarly to the Foreign Policy Concept, envisaged improvement in the information support of Russian foreign and domestic policies which would 'bring to the Russian and international public accurate information on the state policy of the Russian Federation, its official position on socially significant events in Russian and international life' (Doktrina informatsionnoi 2000). Among the measures that were supposed to achieve this goal, the



document referred to ‘strengthening the state mass media’, increasing support for Russian information agencies and ‘developing the scientific and practical principles’ of Russia’s information campaign (ibid).

Official rhetoric on this issue became more assertive following negative changes in Russia’s image in 2003-2004. In July 2004, while addressing Russian ambassadors, Putin (2004a, p. 12) emphasised the inadequacy of Russia’s international image, saying that ‘perceptions of Russia (...) are often far from the reality’. Moreover, he mentioned ‘frequent planned campaigns to discredit this country’, which took the blame for Russia’s negative images away from the Russian authorities. The president urged Russian diplomats to put more effort into promoting a positive image of Russia, and emphasised the centrality of the economic component in Russia’s projected image. In Putin’s words, among the priority tasks of Russian diplomacy should be ‘rais[ing] the investment attractiveness of Russia’. This idea remained crucial in official discourse throughout Putin’s presidency. In a context in which foreign investment was of enormous importance for modernisation of the Russian economy, Russia’s negative image as an investment destination was viewed in the official discourse as particularly problematic. Putin articulated this opinion on numerous occasions, including his speech at a meeting of the State Council on investment in the regional economy in October 2007. According to Putin, ‘(...) companies in a number of countries are scared off from investing in Russia, frightened away by tales of non-market methods of doing business and commercial risks’ (Putin, 2007a).

As we can see, Russia’s negative images in Western countries during Vladimir Putin’s presidency were viewed as a serious threat for Russian security, particularly in terms of Russia’s economic development. The need to substantially improve information support of Russia’s domestic and foreign policies was reiterated in numerous documents and official statements. In an attempt to develop the principles of this information support, the Russian authorities by various means (such as research grants, etc) encouraged the Russian academic and expert community to intensify research in this area. The remaining parts of the chapter focuses on the most recurrent approaches to Russia’s image problem in an extensive literature that emerged in Russia in response to this ‘state order’.

### 2.3 Academic and Expert Literature on IR and Foreign Policy Preferences

Before we move on to examine image studies as such, it is important to look at the key trends in Russian IR studies. There are at least two factors that should be considered in this regard. On the one hand, the way in which Russian IR scholars interpreted reality, and what they considered as the driving force of international political processes, casts some light on their vision of the role of national images, and, as a consequence, of the preferable strategy for the country in relation to its image abroad. On the other hand, examining approaches to key concepts within Russian IR, first of all the concept of national interests, should help to clarify any discrepancies between understandings of these concepts by Russian and Western scholars. It should be noted that Russian studies in the area of International Relations have not received sufficient attention in the West. Unlike the Soviet International Theory that was considered to be an important direction of research and, thus, was examined by a number of Western ‘Sovietologists’ (e.g., Light 1988; Lynch 1987), Russian IR has largely stayed outside the focus of research.

International Relations became an extremely popular and prestigious discipline in Russian academia in the 1990s. While in the Soviet Union it was an elite research area with a very limited number of scholars involved in research projects, after the disintegration of the USSR the situation changed dramatically. Not only were International Relations introduced into curriculum at many universities, but there also appeared a large number of research institutes and foundations specialising in IR and foreign policy research (e.g. the Council on Foreign and Defence Policy, or the Centre for Political and International Studies) as well as various academic journals, such as *Pro et Contra* or *Rossiia i Sovremennyi Mir* (Russia and the Contemporary World). This popularity did not, however, lead to the emergence of any new theories of International Relations. The discipline can be characterised as oriented more towards applied research rather than theoretical thinking. This fact to a significant extent might be explained by new international and domestic challenges that Russia faced following the disintegration of the Soviet Union (Sergunin 2004). Since one of the most urgent needs was redefining the country’s national interests and developing an appropriate foreign policy strategy, the academic community was focussed almost exclusively on solving these tasks (Tyulin 2002). At the same time theoretical questions were largely neglected.

Another issue that should be mentioned in relation to Russian IR studies is the question of their theoretical distinctness from Western IR. Although there is a general consensus that a Russian school of International Relations has not yet emerged (Tsygankov & Tsygankov 2005; Lebedeva 2004), there is no agreement on whether this school can and even should appear. The academic debate around this problem goes in line with a broader public debate on Russian identity, with two extreme positions being advocated – Westernisation and Isolation of Russian IR theory (Tsygankov & Tsygankov 2005). Westernisation implies borrowing Western theories and using them in studying political processes in Russia, while the Isolation approach is based on a belief that Western concepts are inadequate for Russian reality. Apart from its implications for the future of Russian IR research, this debate also has a serious consequence for the present study. It suggests that some of the concepts and terms used by contemporary Russian IR scholars might differ substantially from their meaning as understood by Western researchers.

### **2.3.1 Theoretical Approaches in Russian IR Studies**

There have been numerous attempts to classify theoretical approaches in Russian IR studies. According to Sergunin, for instance, there are four main paradigms: realism, idealism/liberalism, globalism and post-positivism (2003). Having used these terms, Sergunin, however, has admitted that these groups do not correspond directly to similar approaches in Western IR. Another classification suggested by Tsygankov and Tsygankov (2005) has reduced the number of theoretical approaches to three – realism, liberalism and post-structuralism. One should mention that in Russian social sciences in general there is a strong tendency to rely on the realist perspective. This tendency has its roots in the Soviet period when the theoretical base for social research was a mixture of realism and Marxism. Soviet scholars were not familiar with works of Western realists and neo-realists as these works were not translated into Russian, and were accessible only in specialised libraries open to a very limited number of researchers. Officially, Realist theory was considered to be a bourgeois approach that could not be used in the Soviet Union. However, as Lebedeva (2004) has argued, Soviet research was realist in its nature since it was state-centric, and concentrated exclusively on such phenomena as power and national interests. In the 1990s a number of works written by Western realists were published (e.g. *Politics among Nations* by Morgenthau), which made it easier for Russian researchers to refer to concepts and ideas used in Western realism. However, this familiarity with Western literature was very inconsistent, and often led to somewhat distorted interpretations of the theory.

### 2.3.2 Geopolitics in Russian IR

One of the most popular approaches within 'Russian' realism is geopolitics, although not all researchers consider it as realist (Solov'ev 2005). In the Soviet Union the attitude towards geopolitics was negative as it was portrayed as an ideological instrument that helped capitalist countries to justify their aggressive foreign policy in relation to the USSR (Kolosov & Mironenko 2002). Geopolitics was also often associated with German Nazism, which made it look even more ominous (Solov'ev 2005). However, in the 1990s interest in the geopolitical approach started to grow fast, and it became one of the most developed areas of studies. The new position of the country in the world including both its changed international status and territorial reduction (some of the new independent states had been part of the Russian Empire and then of the Soviet Union for hundreds of years) made geopolitical explanations of political processes particularly appealing to Russian scholars (see e.g. Gadzhiev 2007). To a certain extent, the discipline of International Relations as such was formed through the process of exploring geopolitical tendencies (Tsygankov & Tsygankov 2006). Unlike other theoretical approaches both within the realist paradigm and outside it, geopolitics went far beyond the purely academic sphere, and turned into a kind of an ideological and rhetorical tool for political elites. It began to be viewed as the key to any action taken by Russia or other countries in the international arena. As Solov'ev puts it, 'geopolitics in Russia claims solutions to some ultimate puzzles in global politics, offering both mystical and deterministic explanations for current and future events' (2005, p. 131).

A distinctive feature of Russian geopolitics is its traditional character. The country's past and future actions are explained through the notion of geopolitical interests that are seen as constant and independent of any non-material factors, such as, for instance, identity. These unchangeable interests are most often derived from the geographical characteristics of the state (Solov'ev 2005). This interpretation of national interests, although typical of realism in general, can be stimulated by at least two additional factors. First of all, Russian scholars are much more familiar with the works of those Western authors whose research falls within the framework of classical geopolitics, which might be illustrated by a large number of direct quotations or references to their studies. At the same time they are less familiar with critical geopolitics of a kind that emphasises the subjective nature of geopolitical interests. Apart from this, the predominance of the traditional approach in Russian geopolitical thought might be a result of the so-called Versailles syndrome: although the country lost the status of a super-power following the collapse of the Soviet Union, its geographical position, size, etc, were perceived by Russian scholars as sufficient reason for

regaining this status (Lebedeva 2004). The country was viewed as being destined to be a great power simply due to these pre-given geographical factors. In a situation in which economic and social situations in the state, as well as its position in the international arena, were far from ideal, this vision of the country's bright future compensated dissatisfaction with the present state of affairs.<sup>10</sup>

Within Russian geopolitics it is possible to distinguish several schools whose interpretation of the country's national interests, its major threats, and, consequently, preferable foreign policy strategies differ substantially. According to the classification suggested by Tsygankov and Tsygankov (2006), in contemporary Russian geopolitical thinking there are two main directions – Westernism (*Zapadnichestvo*) and Eurasianism (*Evrasiistvo*). While Eurasianists view Russia as being very different from the West and closer to Asia, for Westernisers Russia is a part of the West, most often understood as Europe. Thus, Westernisers consider the Western direction of Russian foreign policy to be the most important one, since only integration in Europe can help the country to solve its numerous problems.

Moreover, among Eurasianists there is no consensus on the most appropriate foreign policy strategy. Within this tradition there are several distinct groups, each of which offers its own vision of national interests and foreign policy priorities based on them. They are Stabilisers, Civilisationists, Expansionists and Geoeconomists (Tsygankov & Tsygankov 2006). Stabilisers see the main aim of Russian policies in stabilising Eurasia, which can, in their opinion, be done through a multi-vector foreign policy in the form of military and political balancing. Civilisationists place their emphasis on the uniqueness of Russian civilisation and take an anti-Western position in foreign policy discussion. While seeing the national interest of Russia in restoring the USSR, they do not, however, support expansionism beyond the borders of the former Soviet Union. Expansionists, on the contrary, view Russia as an empire whose key aim should be territorial expansion. Unlike the three approaches mentioned above, geoeconomists consider economic, rather than merely geographic factors as the most important in the contemporary international relations. Therefore, the national interest of Russia lies in increasing its economic prosperity (Tsygankov & Tsygankov 2006).

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<sup>10</sup> This understanding of geopolitical factors, although being predominant, is not the only one. Kolosov, for instance, has argued that the geopolitical position of a country cannot be stable as it is the result of the perceptions of political elites, and competing elites may have different visions of the country's national interests (Kolosov 2003). This critical approach to geopolitics is not, however, shared by most Russian scholars.

This overview of various theoretical traditions suggests that at least three tendencies in Russian IR may affect interpretation of international images and their role in foreign policy by Russian scholars. In the first instance, one of the main concepts used by researchers is national interest. Secondly, the predominant interpretation of this concept is realist in its nature. Finally, the position of Russia in the world and its national interest are often examined from a geopolitical perspective, although the vision of Russia's preferable foreign policy strategy varies considerably among supporters of several major approaches within geopolitics. Bearing this in mind, let us now turn directly to image-related studies in Russian academic and expert literature.

## **2.4 Image studies in Russia**

Although the problem of negative national images has been recognised in many countries (one of the classic examples being the USA where the rise of anti-Americanism has caused serious concern), in Russian academic and expert literature it became particularly prominent. Image studies in general became a rapidly growing area of research already in the 1990s when a large number of studies, mainly of an applied character, examined the role of personal (e.g. Shepel' 1997; Tsuladze 1999) or commercial (e.g. D'yachkova 1998; Gumennaya 1997) images and various ways to manipulate them. As the problem of Russia's negative international image emerged on the foreign policy agenda, within several years there appeared a large number of works either examining existing images of Russia or its regions (e.g. Rukavishnikov 2005; Solov'ev 2008), or offering recommendations for its correction (e.g. Galumov 2003; 2005; Pankrukhin 2002; Rozhkov & Kismereshkin 2008). As an example of a very wide range of questions that were addressed in Russian image-related literature, one can look at the paper 'Problems and Perspectives of Building the Image of Russia in the Context of Russian-Brazil Relations', presented by Alexander Bryantsev (2004) at the Third Convention of the Russian Association of International Studies, or the report 'Assessment of the Effect of the Image of Kaliningrad Oblast on the Development of Regional Economic and Social Sphere', prepared by the Foundation of Social, Economic and Political Research 'Regional'naya Strategiya' (Foundation of Social, Economic and Political Research 'Regional'naya Strategiya' 2003).

### 2.4.1 Main Approaches to National Images

Although Russian image-related studies differ in their level of analysis and material used, it is still possible to trace four major tendencies in this literature. Most of these works are i) interdisciplinary; ii) mainly of an applied character, with a special emphasis on manipulative techniques; 3) follow the realist paradigm; and, finally, iv) look at images from a geopolitical perspective. One of the most distinct features of Russian image-related studies is their interdisciplinary character. Among the scholars whose works touch upon this subject are not only IR researchers, but also psychologists, sociologists, geographers, etc. Moreover, in Russian academia there is a widespread opinion that image studies should be officially established as a separate discipline, which means that they should be included in the register of academic disciplines approved by the Education Ministry of the Russian Federation. On the one hand, the interdisciplinary character makes image studies richer in respects that might not be noticed by IR scholars, and broader in coverage of areas that either affect or are affected by national images. On the other hand, very often they become too broad, trying to explain everything.

Most of the studies are applied rather than theoretical, focussing on manipulative techniques or ‘political technologies’ that could be used in projecting a favourable image (e.g. Solov’ev 2008), whereas the mechanism of the influence of images on international relations receives far less attention. Similarly to the Western literature on public diplomacy, one of the key issues discussed in relation to image-making is the question of drawing a borderline between political advertising, public relations and propaganda (Drozдова & Ovcharenko 2006), or more recently – between propaganda and public diplomacy (Kononenko 2006). It should be noted that in Russian image-related studies there is a semantic differentiation between two words – *imidzh* and *obraz*, the latter being a Russian word and the former being its synonym borrowed from the English language. Although this differentiation is not obligatory, in practice the word *imidzh* is usually used when a study focuses on a purposefully created image, whereas the word *obraz* is employed when a piece of research concentrates on an already existing image. According to one of the numerous definitions, *imidzh* is a ‘specially created, corrected *obraz* that reflects a reality inadequately while trying to correspond to the expectations of those for whom it is being created’ (Dontsov 2006, pp. 38-9). Moreover, it is often emphasised that any image can be positive only if it has been built on purpose, since spontaneous formation would lead to its negative character (Sekach & Tarasova 2006, p. 106).

Another distinctive feature of Russian image-related works is their predominantly realist orientation with an element of constructivism. This striking theoretical mixture is the result of considering international images (not objective factors) as central to international relations, and at the same time considering the country's national interests as somewhat constant and independent of the attitudes and perceptions of political elites. According to Erast Galumov, 'the way how the country is perceived, its image, is the basis for developing political and economic relations with the international community' (2003, p. 85). This constructivist idea (it may be regarded as falling within a constructivist framework as it privileges subjective over objective factors) is used to demonstrate that a favourable international image should help the country to realise its national interests. However, the latter are interpreted realistically. Although Galumov refers to them as a subjective/objective category, this differentiation between subjective and objective interests implies that they are objective when political elites understand them correctly, and subjective – when they misunderstand them. Moreover, even Galumov's interpretation of the very notion of international interests is based on its understanding by Morgenthau with reference to his *Politics among Nations* (1956).

It should be noted, however, that although this realist-constructivist combination is predominant, it is not the only theoretical approach. Unlike the position of Galumov, the views of Zamyatin and Kolosov, for instance, may be described as more constructivist. According to Kolosov, 'the world is not described through systems of images, rather it is constituted by it' (2003, p. 237). This view, although appearing to be similar to that of Galumov, is in fact rather different from it, as it considers the position of the country in the international arena, and, consequently, its national interests not as stable and pre-given, but changing with changes in the perceptions of political elites (Kolosov 2003). However, as was emphasised in the first part of this chapter, it might be difficult, if not impossible, to draw parallels between the Western and Russian theoretical paradigms.

Apart from being interdisciplinary, applied, and mainly realist, research in Russia's images also tends to be geopolitically oriented. This tendency can be seen in several areas. In the first instance, it can be expressed simply in its usage of geopolitical terminology. Galumov, for example, speaks about the need to create an image of Russia that would make it easier for the country to realise its geopolitical interests. In this context, manipulation of images is interpreted as a geopolitics of images since it helps to solve geopolitical problems (Galumov 2003; 2005). Secondly, the focus of research may be on geopolitical images (*obrazy*) of Russia that affect the choice of foreign policy strategy by Russian political



elites. Zamyatin defines a geopolitical image as a ‘structured vision of a geographical area that includes the brightest and easily remembered symbols, signs and characteristics (...) that distinguish it from a political perspective’ (2002). According to Zamyatin, several geopolitical images have affected Russian foreign policy throughout its history, the most significant of them being Russia as Eurasia, Russia as Europe, Russia as Byzantium (with such variants as Russia as *Skando-Byzantium*, and Russia as *Slavoturkika*) and Russia as Eastern Europe (Zamyatin 2001). These images convey the idea of where Russia belongs to, what geopolitical interests it has, and, consequently, what foreign policy strategy it should choose. In addition to them, Tsymbursky has suggested one more geopolitical image that had played a significant role in Russian history – Russia as an island (*Ostrov Rossiya*). According to this image Russia is an island that has always been separated from Western Europe (as well as from many other parts of the world), and, thus, it should concentrate on developing its own territory (first of all, the Far East), on the island itself (Tsymbursky 1993).

#### **2.4.2 Reasons for Russia’s Negative Image in the West**

All of the studies examining the international image of Russia agree that the present image is extremely negative, and that it does not contribute to the successful implementation of the country’s foreign or economic policies. Most studies also agree that it is inadequate to reality as it is much more negative than it should be. The reasons for such a discrepancy between the image and the real situation are numerous. One of them is historical: some scholars agree with Neumann (1999) who has suggested that Russia has been a significant Other for Europe for hundreds of years, which means that most of the negative characteristics in its image cannot disappear easily as they constitute part of European identity (Kolosov 2003; Semenenko *et al* 2006). Those researchers who view Russia as a separate civilisation different from Europe suggest that this difference itself is the reason for misunderstanding. As Galumov has put it:

foreign journalists (politicians) are guided not by a social, but by a civilisational order that is fixed in their mentality, and there is no point in hoping that they could change their opinion about Russia quickly (2005, p. 21)

Another reason discussed by Russian scholars is the West-centric approach to democratisation shared by many in Europe and the USA. Seeing the Western model as an example that all other countries should follow, the West looks at Russia as if it were a pupil who cannot carry out the task correctly (Kolosov 2003). Lebedeva suggests that the roots of

misunderstanding may lie in the fact that Russia and Western countries exist as if in different systems of international relations, i.e. perceptions of the existing international system held by Russian and Western political elites are different. The West lives in a world in which principles of international law are becoming more and more important, and the attitude towards sovereignty is changing. At the same time, Russian elites consider the world to be the same as it was during the Cold War: they cling to the Yalta-Potsdam system where the value of sovereignty is indisputable, and non-interference in internal affairs is one of the main principles (Lebedeva 2001).

One of the most popular explanations, however, makes the West itself responsible for the negative image of Russia. Galumov, for instance, argues that Western countries see Russia as their rival in the global fight for natural resources, and use specially planned information campaigns against it. In the struggle for geopolitical and economic influence the West deliberately builds an image of Russia that accumulates only negative characteristics while ignoring any positive aspects (Galumov 2003; 2005). What is more, these information campaigns are seen as one of the main reasons for the collapse of the Soviet Union:

The international image of Russia as an economically and socially backward country to a significant extent was formed as a result of the information war waged by the US against the USSR, which actually led to the disintegration of the latter (Galumov 2003, p. 86)

Moreover, as Galumov has argued, although the image of the Soviet Union in the international arena was very negative, the image of contemporary Russia is even worse. While in case of the USSR this negativism was combined with some sympathy for the Russian people who were seen as victims of the regime, and with admiration for Russian culture, in case of Russia even the attitude towards people is negative (Galumov 2005). Some commentators have gone even further by attributing Russia's negative images in the West to an 'information war' against Russia (Panarin 2003; 2006). Among other explanations that are often discussed by Russian scholars are the negative effect of the Russian mass media who by criticising the Russian authorities provide additional material for Russia's critics abroad, and the negative role of Russian immigrants in Western countries (see Semenenko *et al* 2006).

Why does Russia's negative image in the West constitute a threat to the country? Apart from economic reasons (the negative image is an obstacle to foreign investment), one of the most serious factors discussed by Russian scholars is the effect of a negative image on the

self-image of the country in public opinion. As Fadeev, Povalkovich and Karavaeva have argued, in a situation in which the dominant self-image used to be more positive (as was the case with the Soviet Union), its rapid deterioration may lead to increased political activity, dissatisfaction and disagreement with the authorities (2006). Therefore, the government should take urgent measures to improve the image. It is suggested that a favourable international image would not only help to prevent mass dissatisfaction with the actions of elites in the sphere of foreign policy, but it would also provide elites with international support in case of internal conflicts. Moreover, it could be used in economic competition with other countries, as well as in resistance to any political or military pressure from outside (Derkach & Pereligina 2006). Interestingly, the notion of 'soft power', although it has become more prominent in the academic and expert discourse more recently (e.g. see Kononenko 2006; Solov'ev 2008, p. 10), has still largely remained on the periphery of academic debate.

#### **2.4.3 Views of Foreign Propaganda**

In the context of the increasing interest of the academic community in the problem of Russia's image, a number of scholars turned to re-examining the experience of Soviet foreign propaganda (see Fedyaikin 2007a; 2007b). It is noteworthy that the efficiency of Soviet propaganda was recognised by many Western experts who considered it very dangerous and capable of influencing mass attitudes not only in the Third World countries, but also in the West itself. According to a paper written in the late 1980s, i.e. only several years before the disintegration of the USSR,

the propaganda of the Soviet Union is a serious threat to the West because it is broad, integrated effort staffed by capable personnel who enjoy sustained and generous budgetary support (Gordon 1988, p. 8)

Unlike in the West, in Putin's Russia there was no consensus on the efficiency of Soviet foreign propaganda. While some Russian researchers had a rather high opinion of its results and viewed the destruction of the propaganda machine as a big mistake (Kashlev & Galumov 2003), there was also an opposite opinion. Vladimir Pozner, for instance, President of the Russian Television Academy, argued that Soviet propaganda was not as successful as it appeared to be. Speaking from his experience of working inside the propaganda machine from 1970 to 1986, he claimed that 'there were no results at all, and the money went in a bottomless barrel - no efforts could change the image of the USSR in the world' (*Argumenty i Fakty*, 22 June 2005). Moreover, some experts argued that the

problem of Russia's negative image could not be solved with the help of propaganda. In this view, the country's image would improve by itself as a result of positive changes, while any attempts to improve it without actual democratisation in Russia would be fruitless (e.g. Bovin 2001). The contrasting opinion was that propaganda techniques were a magical tool that could transform Russia's image in any circumstances. Galumov, for instance, argued that Russia's image could be improved without any significant changes in the country since 'image is not reality, but only the reflection of reality that can be made positive' (Galumov 2004).

The latter view gained additional support in Russian academic and expert circles due to the extremely prominent role of 'political technologists' in Russian national and local elections (see Wilson 2005). In the 1990s, after competitive elections had been introduced, a large number of PR companies entered the market. In a situation in which never before had image-making been used in political campaigns, they positioned spinning as a magical key to political and economic success. In the 1990s, these companies were mainly involved in electoral campaigns at parliamentary and then presidential elections. As their most significant achievement one could mention the re-election of Yel'tsin as President in 1996 with his support rating in December 1995 (i.e. half a year before the election) being 5.3%, and in May 1996 – 30% (*Novoe Vremya*, № 28, 2001). When the question of the country's negative image was raised at the state level, PR business contributed to placing this problem at the centre of the public debate, and, what is more, to the formation of the belief that the problem could be solved by purely manipulative measures. Thus, in one of the most often-cited articles on this issue, written by the President of *Imageland Company* Veronika Moiseeva, it was argued that a 'positive image of the country is the most important instrument in defending the country's national interests' (*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 11 April 2003). Many representatives of PR business sought to present PR measures as the only possible solution of Russia's image problem.

As this chapter has demonstrated, the problem of Russia's images in Western countries took an extremely high position on both the political and academic agendas during the Putin presidency. This was triggered to a large extent by the extremely negative character of Russia's image among Western elites and in the mass media. Negative perceptions of Russia in the West were viewed in the official discourse as a particularly serious problem in connection with its impact on the level of foreign investment into the Russian economy. An extensive image-related academic literature that developed in response to the perceived significance of this problem favoured the employment of 'political technologies' or foreign

propaganda as a possible solution to the problem. This view was further reinforced by the perceived success of Soviet foreign and domestic propaganda. Thus, in a context in which a number of other countries (e.g. the USA and the UK) were intensifying their attempt to improve their images with the help of public diplomacy, the Russian authorities followed suit by launching an energetic campaign that sought to construct a more favourable image of the Russian Federation. The key channels of the foreign propaganda mechanism that emerged in Russia under Putin's presidency are examined in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Mechanism of Russian Foreign Propaganda, 2000-2008**

The previous chapter has demonstrated that the problem of Russia's negative images in the West emerged on the foreign policy agenda at the beginning of Vladimir Putin's first presidential term. This chapter examines the mechanism of foreign propaganda as it developed in Russia in the years of Vladimir Putin's presidency. To provide a context for further analysis, it begins with an overview of the role that foreign propaganda played in Soviet foreign policy, focussing on its aims, targets and most significant channels. This is followed by an examination of how the strategy of foreign propaganda evolved after the collapse of the Soviet Union, particularly in 2000-2008. Having highlighted the most significant features of the reinvigorated propaganda efforts, the chapter proceeds to look at the key actors and their specialisation.

#### **3.1 Soviet Foreign Propaganda**

For the Soviet leadership, foreign propaganda was an extremely important task. A number of researchers have noted the significant role that propaganda and political influence techniques played in Soviet foreign policy (e.g. Shultz & Godson 1984). However, it can be argued that it represented much more than an instrument of achieving foreign policy goals. One can agree with Gerhard Wettig (1987, p. 174) who suggested that for the Soviet Union foreign propaganda was not 'something that accompanie[d] Soviet foreign policy. Rather, it [was] an integral part of that foreign policy'.

##### **3.1.1 Strategy of Soviet Foreign Propaganda**

Unlike the traditional objectives of public diplomacy in the post Cold War era – to project a favourable image of the country abroad – Soviet foreign propaganda performed several functions. On the one hand, it aimed at maintaining and promoting a positive image of the Soviet Union as a near-perfect society, a progressive force in the international arena and an ideal for the working class all over the world. On the other hand, it sought to discredit the governments of Western countries and to promote images of their aggressiveness,

imperialism and exploitation of the working class. Marxism-Leninism ideology played a crucial part in that as the achievements of the Soviet state were employed to demonstrate the inevitable victory of Communism over Capitalism. Soviet foreign propaganda was conducted on a world-wide scale although a number of target areas were viewed as particularly important, such as the United States, Western European members of NATO (where one of its main objectives, *inter alia*, was to drive a wedge between the allies) and Third World countries. It was targeted primarily at public opinion: by influencing perceptions of the publics, the Soviet leadership ultimately sought to affect the policies of their respective governments which would be under pressure from the electorate. Apart from the general public, Soviet propagandists paid particular attention to work with émigrés from the Soviet Union. They were viewed as an important target group as most of them were vehemently anti-communist intellectuals, hostile to the Soviet regime and politically mobilised. Thus, they represented a threat to the successful implementation of Soviet policies as their attitudes could impact on the policies of their respective host countries. To neutralise their influence, Soviet propaganda sought to drive a wedge between their leaders and ordinary émigrés, to cultivate contacts with less anti-Communist members of their communities and, most importantly, to discredit Soviet émigrés in the eyes of their host countries (Parming 1987, p. 310).

### **3.1.2 Structure of the Foreign Propaganda Machine**

Before moving on to foreign propaganda in post-Soviet Russia under Vladimir Putin's presidency, let us briefly examine the structure of the Soviet propaganda apparatus. It should be mentioned that foreign propaganda was part of a broader approach that Soviet propagandists referred to as 'active measures' (*aktivnye meropriyatiya*), and which included 'an array of overt and covert techniques for influencing events and behaviour in, and the actions of, foreign countries' (Shultz & Godson 1984, p. 2). Overt techniques implied that the source of information (i.e. the Soviet Union) was acknowledged, and they were applied through officially sponsored propaganda organisations, as well as through diplomatic channels and cultural diplomacy. On the contrary, when covert techniques were employed, the source of information was not acknowledged or the information was attributed to a different source. In addition to that, there were a number of propaganda channels that were on the borderline between overt and covert measures. Figure 3.1 demonstrates the organisation structure of Soviet foreign propaganda (and active measures) in the 1980s, i.e. less than a decade before the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

As one can see from the diagram, the strategy of foreign propaganda (and active measures in general) was developed by the Politburo of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), and two departments of the CPSU Central Committee – the International Information Department and International Department – and the Committee for State Security (KGB), in particular its Service A, 1<sup>st</sup> Chief Directorate, were responsible for its implementation. The International Information Department was in charge of overt propaganda. It supervised the work of two news agencies – the Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union (Tass) which was the official voice of the Soviet government, and Novosti which claimed to represent public opinion in the USSR. A significant role in Soviet foreign propaganda was given to international radio broadcasting, which was rapidly expanding in the 1970-1980s. In addition to Radio Moscow, a number of local radio stations, such as Kiev Radio or Radio Erevan, were also part of the propaganda apparatus. By 1980 Soviet radio stations were broadcasting in 80 languages, and the air time reached 2,762 weekly hours. This represented a considerable advantage over propaganda efforts by Western governments at that time. US radio stations - the Voice of America, Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty – were broadcasting in 46 languages, and their total number of weekly hours was only 1,927 (Shultz & Godson 1984, pp. 27-28).

Moreover, the International Information Department supervised publication and distribution of Soviet periodicals in foreign languages. By the early 1970s 91 Soviet periodicals, including such prominent outlets as *Sovetskii Soyuz* (Soviet Union), *Novoe Vremya* (New Time) and *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn'* (International Affairs), had foreign editions. An illustrative example of this aspect of Soviet foreign propaganda is the weekly newspaper *Moscow News* which was published in English, French, Spanish and Arabic with a circulation exceeding 800,000 copies. In addition to that, the Soviet Union published a large number of books in foreign languages: in 1982 alone the number of foreign languages reached 68 (Kanet 1987, p. 215). Furthermore, information departments of Soviet embassies played a key role in disseminating propaganda information about the Soviet Union.

Unlike the International Information Department, the International Department of the CPSU Central Committee was in charge of what some researchers refer to as 'grey' propaganda: the direct source of information was 'openly acknowledged, but the underlying Moscow connection [was] carefully concealed' (Wettig 1987, p. 168). In particular, the department oversaw co-operation with foreign Communist parties and revolutionary movements, which, although formally independent from the Soviet Union, in



fact were heavily involved in spreading Soviet propaganda. The department also worked with a large number of International Front Organisations, which claimed to be independent but in reality were often funded by the USSR. Among the most influential of these were: World Peace Council (WPC), World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organisation (AAPSO), World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY), International Union of Students (IUS), International Institute for Peace (IIP), International Organisation of Journalists (IOJ), Christian Peace Conference (CPC), Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) and International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL).<sup>11</sup>

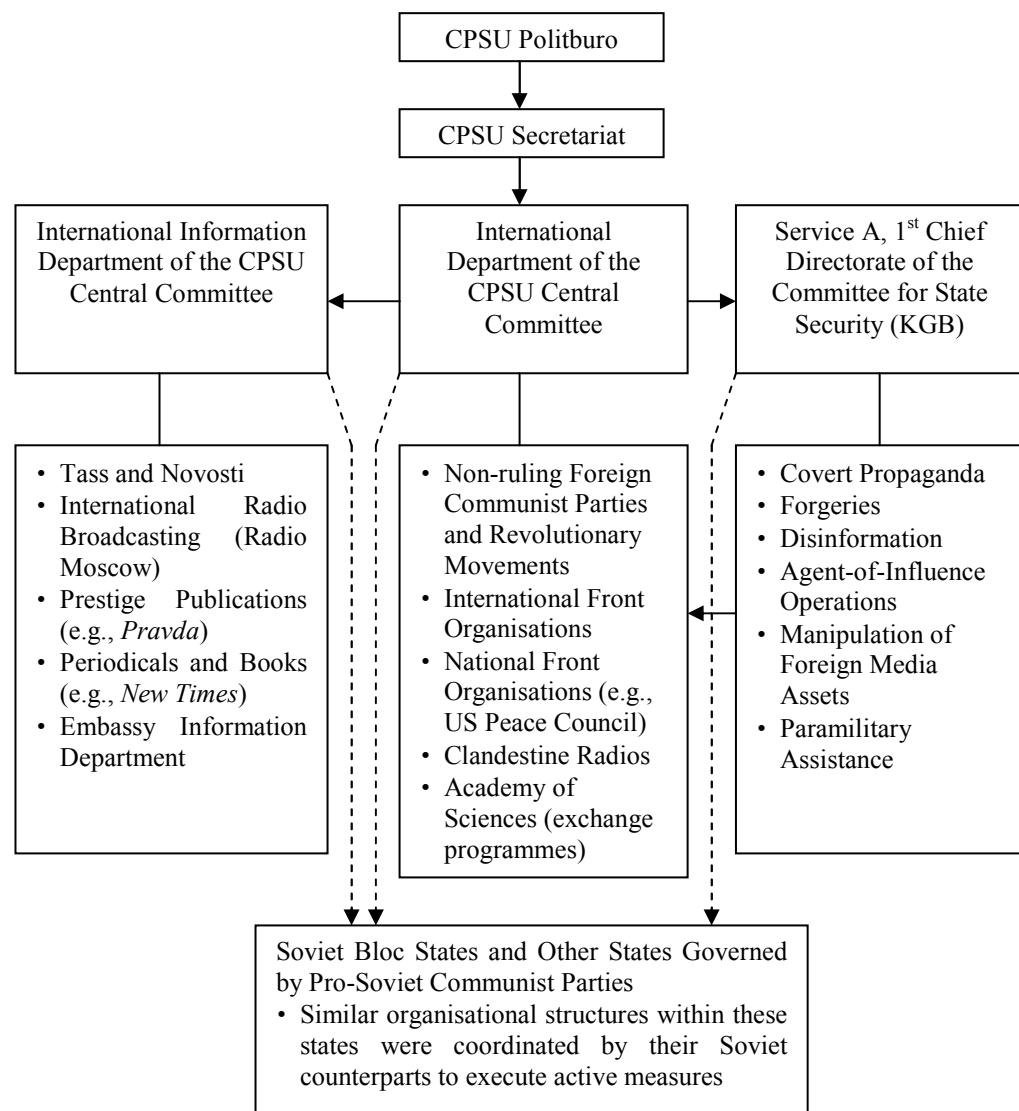


Figure 3.1. Soviet organisation structure for foreign propaganda and active measures (Shultz & Godson 1984, p. 20)

<sup>11</sup> For more information on international organisations linked to Soviet propaganda see Rose (1988).

By manipulating these organisations, Soviet propagandists to a considerable extent succeeded in setting the agenda of international discourse. Among their major achievements was the extensive use of ‘peace’ as a topic when the USSR was positioned as a peaceful state that was opposed to the military adventurism of Western governments. By transforming the very notion of ‘peace’ in international discourse, the Soviet leadership, according to Herbert Ellison (1987, p. 88), demonstrated ‘great skill in (...) mobilising public opinion in the West to support their policies’.

In addition to that, the Soviet Union used a wide network of *Doma Sovetskoi Kul'tury i Nauki* (Centres of Soviet Culture and Science) that were based all over the world and served the goal of promoting Soviet culture by holding various exhibitions or organising meetings with Soviet speakers. ‘Grey’ propaganda was also disseminated through clandestine broadcasting, i.e. broadcasting which did not admit its origin (or attributed it to a different source) and transmitted more inflammatory messages than overt radio would transmit. According to Hertzberg (1988), in the 1980s this kind of broadcasting took approximately 150 hours per week of air time. An illuminating example is the so called National Voice of Iran which was in fact operating from Baku (Shultz & Godson 1984, p. 25).

The KGB in its turn was in charge of covert operations (or so called black propaganda) which included, *inter alia*, spreading disinformation that aimed at discrediting the governments of Western countries. Ladislav Bittman (1987, p. 113) has defined disinformation as ‘a carefully constructed, false message that is secretly introduced into the opponent’s communication system to deceive either his decision-making elite or public opinion’. Although these activities were difficult to trace and, consequently, problematic to analyse in academic research, some of the operations became publicised. One of the examples is the forgery of a letter containing racist statements which was allegedly written by the Ku Klux Klan and mailed to the Olympic Committee Headquarters a short time before the summer Olympic Games in Los Angeles in 1984 (Bittman 1987, p. 114).

On the whole, Soviet propaganda was very well co-ordinated – in fact to a much more significant extent than similar organisations in Western countries: the pluralism of liberal democracies would not allow the degree of coordination that authoritarian regimes can achieve. The message conveyed by Soviet propaganda was extremely well defined and was strictly followed by every individual actor involved in campaigns. Moreover, Soviet propaganda campaigns were very intensive and, as a rule, were spread over longer periods

of time than any campaigns conducted by Western governments who could not engage in such lengthy activities due to, among other reasons, changes of governments as a result of regular elections (Shultz & Godson 1984, p. 15). Soviet foreign propaganda was also characterised by extensive use of deception and manipulation. The importance that the Soviet leadership attached to foreign propaganda can be demonstrated by the amount of resources that were allocated to this purpose. Although the exact information was classified, the CIA estimated the total cost of Soviet active measures in 1978 as approximately \$3 billion (Shultz & Godson 1984, p. 31). However, following the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, foreign propaganda ceased being a priority for the Kremlin. In the context of rapid economic and social de-fragmentation, the extensive propaganda apparatus was severely under-financed and many of its key elements were dismantled.

### **3.2 Strategy of Russian Propaganda in Putin's Russia**

Throughout the 1990s, the Kremlin largely neglected foreign propaganda. Although the problem of Russia's negative image emerged on the media agenda already in the late 1990s, only in the middle of Vladimir Putin's first presidential term did the Russian authorities begin to implement practical measures to revive foreign propaganda. The task was extremely difficult. Their attempts met a number of formidable challenges that stemmed from the Soviet legacy and radical transformations in Russia's domestic situation and international environment. Firstly, the disintegration of the Soviet bloc and re-orientation of the policies of Moscow's former allies to the United States and the European Union implied that the Russian leadership could no longer count on their support in disseminating propaganda. Thus, a large number of crucial propaganda channels could no longer be used. Moreover, as a consequence of chaotic changes in the management of state resources in the 1990s and rampant corruption, by 2002-2003 the gigantic propaganda machine was, in the words of a senior Russian propagandist, 'partly stolen, partly rotten'.<sup>12</sup>

Secondly, there appeared to be no obvious 'niche' for a number of Russian propaganda channels in the West. During the Cold War, as the contacts between people in Western countries and in the USSR were extremely limited, any information from the Soviet Union generated some interest, which was beneficial for Soviet propaganda. The situation changed significantly with the end of the Cold War as these contacts became far more

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<sup>12</sup> Anonymous interview with a senior Russian propagandist, Moscow, 29 January 2007.

extensive. At the same time, in the context of increasing globalisation and information flows, a vast amount of information about Russia was readily available. As another senior Russian propagandist noted, all that meant that Russian propaganda was forced to compete with well-established and reputable sources, such as a number of Western mass media outlets, Western news agencies and analytical materials of some broker companies. In the interviewee's opinion, Russia was significantly weaker in this competition due to a serious lack of trained specialists: a large number of personnel had a background in Soviet propaganda and they were often unable to adapt to the new requirements of the post Cold War public diplomacy. Thus, the quality of information provided by Russian propaganda outlets was often not sufficiently high as compared to the Western sources. Moreover, a number of senior Russian propagandists stressed that insufficient funding represented a serious problem for the successful dissemination of foreign propaganda.<sup>13</sup>

Thirdly, and probably most importantly, credibility constituted a major problem for any attempt by the Russian authorities to reinvigorate foreign propaganda. It should be mentioned that credibility is often recognised as the most formidable problem for any government that engages in a propaganda campaign (see e.g. Gass & Seiter 2009). However, in Russia's case it was even more significant due to a number of factors, such as memories of Soviet propaganda, centuries-old stereotypes about Russia and particularly the image of Russia as an authoritarian state (or as a state with pronounced authoritarian tendencies). As a consequence, propaganda outlets were looked at with inevitable suspicion, and Russian propagandists viewed overcoming this credibility 'hole' as one of the priority tasks.

Finally, positive images of Russia were challenged by competing interpretations of events that were promoted by various groups of actors, often as part of their own foreign propaganda campaigns. Among the most vocal of them were Russian oppositional politicians, such as Garry Kasparov, who cultivated their relations with the Western mass media. According to several British and German journalists, the Western mass media were often unable to access Russian officials and gain their position on a particular issue whereas oppositional politicians were always eager to share their views, which inevitably led to a wider coverage of their activities than it probably would have been otherwise.<sup>14</sup> Competing images of Russia (most often with an emphasis on the authoritarian nature of

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<sup>13</sup> Anonymous interviews with senior Russian propagandists, Moscow, 29-31 January 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Anonymous interviews with British and German journalists, London, 11-13 December 2006; Berlin, 11 July 2007.

Russia's political regime) were also projected by a number of ex-oligarchs who had lost their power under Putin's presidency. An illustrative example of the latter can be the activities of Robert Amsterdam, a lawyer of imprisoned Mikhail Khodorkovsky (see his Internet project <http://www.robertamsterdam.com/>). A less subtle approach was adopted by Boris Berezovsky, a Russian ex-oligarch living in the UK who openly called for the overthrow of Putin's regime (see *The Guardian*, 13 April 2007). A significant challenge to Russian propaganda was also posed by propaganda campaigns conducted by the government of the unrecognised Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. Among the most active Chechen 'propagandists' was Akhmed Zakaev, a foreign minister and since 2007 a prime minister of the Chechen separatist government in exile. Living in the UK, Zakaev, to a large extent successfully, sought to attract more publicity to the breakaway republic.

In addition to that, one should mention propaganda campaigns that were repeatedly carried out by the governments of a number of post-Soviet countries, including Georgia and Ukraine. At times of increased tensions in their relations with Moscow, the latter employed various techniques (often using the argument of the long history of Russia's imperial ambitions) to promote their interpretation of the crises. An illuminating example is Russia's dispute with Ukraine over gas prices in the winter of 2005-2006 when the government of Ukraine had far more success in advocating their position in the conflict in the Western mass media.

Thus, in order to overcome all the challenges discussed above, the Russian authorities had to make significant changes to the strategy of Russian propaganda. Firstly, in a context of limited funding (compared to the generous spending on propaganda by the USSR or by the USA) it was decided to target propaganda campaigns more narrowly. On the one hand, unlike Soviet propaganda campaigns which were conducted on a global scale, Russian propaganda was to focus on a number of priority regions. Among the most important of these were the G8 countries, but also China, India and the Middle East. Later, around 2004-2005, the CIS countries were also included in this list. On the other hand, the emphasis shifted from targeting public opinion to targeting elites – politicians, businessmen, journalists and members of expert and academic communities. While being more cost-efficient, work with elite groups was also viewed as more likely to succeed.<sup>15</sup> A series of public opinion surveys in the Western countries that were commissioned by the Russian authorities in 2003 revealed a large number of deeply rooted negative stereotypes about

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<sup>15</sup> Anonymous interview with a senior Russian propagandist, Moscow, 31 January 2007.

Russia, which suggested that it would be unrealistic to attempt to change mass perceptions. According to a senior Russian propagandist (ibid.), in each key country there were on average about 50 people who were viewed as the primary target of Russian propaganda, with the exception of the United States where their number was significantly larger – up to about 150 people. It should be mentioned, though, that some of the propaganda channels still continued to target mass perceptions as the following section of the chapter will demonstrate.

Moreover, to be able to counteract competing propaganda efforts, Russian foreign propaganda had to become more proactive, far more convincing and transparent. As the information on Russia was abundant in respectable Western sources, Russian propaganda sought to offer information that would be unavailable to Western journalists, in particular the views of insiders, i.e. the most senior officials and politicians. A number of the projects that were launched in 2004-2005 (such as the Valdai Discussion Club or *Russia Profile*) had the advantage of enjoying easier access to high-ranking decision-makers, which made them more interesting for the target groups. At the same time, Russian propagandists attempted to involve a larger number of Russian commentators and analysts in the discussion of Russian politics. In the words of a senior Russian propagandist, until then only a very narrow group of Russian commentators had participated in the discussion and their critical position ‘had already been known and predictable’.<sup>16</sup> Thus, Russian propagandists sought to introduce new experts whose views might be more sympathetic with the regime. Finally, the task of Russian propaganda was to broaden the scope of news from Russia. As it was obvious that it would be impossible to avoid coverage of negative developments in the country at all, more emphasis was placed on those areas where Russian policies were successful.

The revival of the foreign propaganda machine required a substantial increase in funding. According to the assessment of the Deputy Head of the Information and Press Department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Mikhail Troyansky in 2004, in order to achieve significant results the government would have to spend at least \$1-1.5 billion a year for a period of 3-20 years (*Novaya gazeta*, 21 July 2005). However, it is difficult to estimate the amount of funding that the Russian government in fact allocated to foreign propaganda under Putin’s presidency. Mikhail Zadornov, a member of the State Duma’s Committee on Budget and Taxes, mentioned that in 2004 the federal budget included a separate line about

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<sup>16</sup> Anonymous interview with a senior Russian propagandist, Moscow, 31 January 2007.

funding for propaganda purposes, though the actual amount was ‘made partially secret’ (*Vedomosti*, 29 November 2004). At the same time, a number of senior propagandists expressed their opinion that the funding was far from sufficient and a number of other countries, such as China, outspent Russia significantly.<sup>17</sup>

### 3.3 Main Actors

During Putin’s presidency, the structure of the propaganda apparatus underwent significant changes in at least two ways. On the one hand, a number of new bodies were created (such as the Russian World Foundation) while some existing bodies (such as RIA Novosti) launched a series of new projects. On the other hand, an attempt was made to improve the co-ordination of foreign propaganda activities by transforming the hierarchy of the actors involved in projecting Russia’s image abroad. Figure 3.2 illustrates the structure of the apparatus that emerged after all these changes at the end of Vladimir Putin’s second presidential term in 2008 (it should be mentioned that since then the structure of the Federal Government of the Russian Federation has been transformed again). The activities of the major elements of this hierarchy are worth examining in detail.

#### 3.3.1 Presidential Administration

At the top of the propaganda hierarchy, the Presidential administration handled the development of the strategy and co-ordinated (directly and indirectly, as will be discussed later in the chapter) the work of the other elements. The Presidential administration (or Presidential Executive Office) was established by Putin’s predecessor Boris Yel’tsin as a body that would support the President’s activities and would supervise the ‘implementation of presidential decisions’ (Willerton 2005, p. 25). Over the years, it was restructured several times. Following the latest re-organisation at the beginning of Putin’s second presidential term, it included 12 directorates, two of which were directly engaged in foreign propaganda. These were the Foreign Policy Directorate and the Press and Information Office. In 2005, as the need to improve Russia’s image in the former Soviet republics (i.e. not only in Western countries) emerged on the agenda, a separate directorate was created to supervise this direction of foreign propaganda – the Directorate for Interregional Relations and Cultural Contacts with Foreign Countries.

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<sup>17</sup> Anonymous interviews with senior Russian propagandists, Moscow, 29-31 January 2007.

One should note that the administration's influence on policy-making in general was profound, with the Head of the Administration and his deputies enjoying significant powers. As John Willerton has explained it, 'he [head of the administration] is not only a top aide but also the key conduit linking the president to all subordinate political actors' (2005, p. 26). However, in the case of foreign propaganda, the Administration's role became even more significant. To a large extent, this can be explained by the dominant position of Vladislav Surkov, Deputy Head of the Administration since August 1999 and Aide to the President since March 2004. During Putin's presidency, Surkov was viewed in the Russian mass media as the second most powerful politician after Putin himself (*Moskovskie Novosti*, 24 June 2005) and was often referred to as the 'Grey Cardinal' (*Vedomosti*, 22 December 2006). Being the 'chief ideologist' of Putin's regime, Surkov developed the concept of 'sovereign democracy' which then became the cornerstone of Putin's politics (Shevtsova 2007, p. 75).

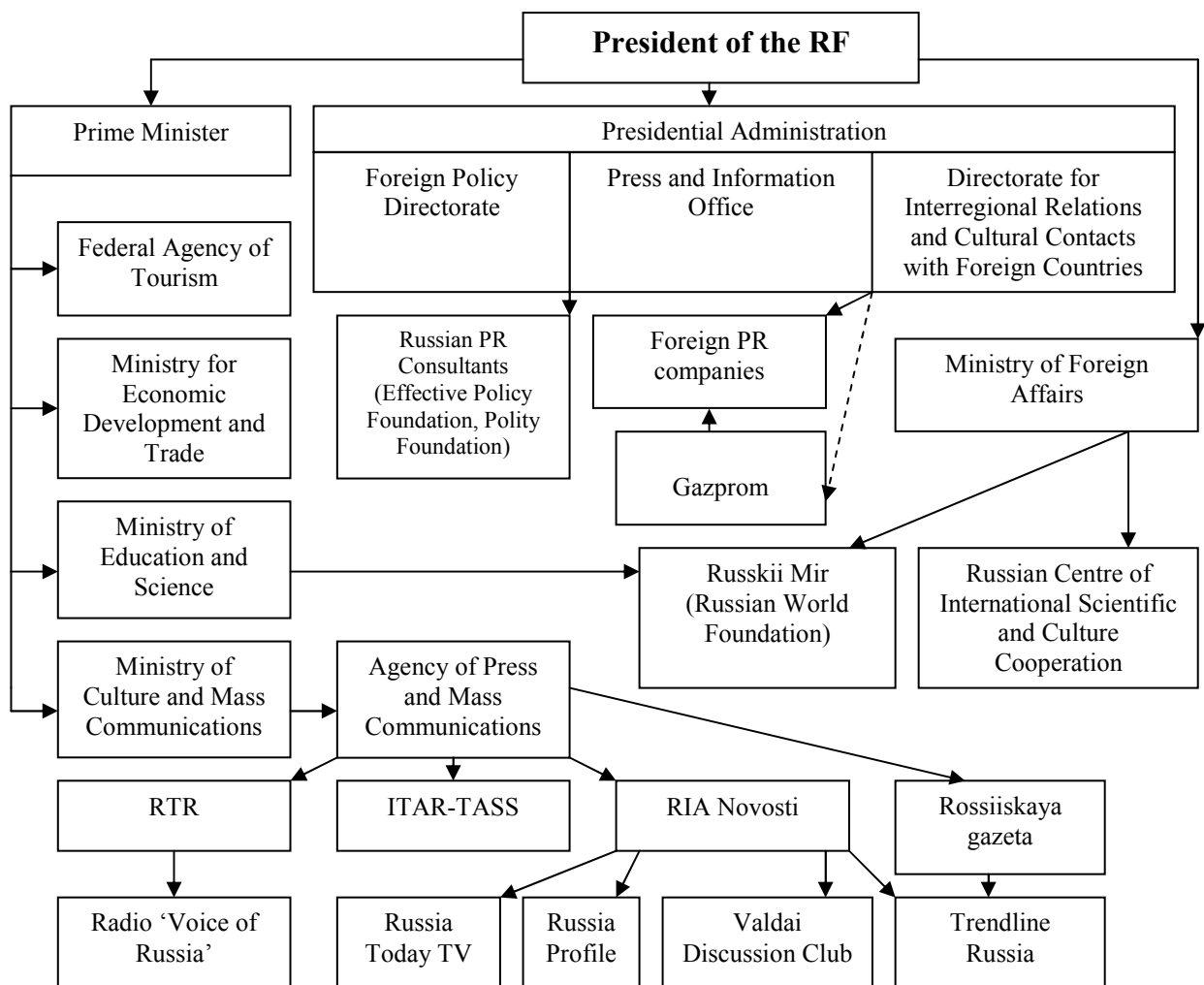


Figure 3.2. Structure of Russian foreign propaganda under Putin, 2008



Surkov's first-hand experience in advertising and PR – his earlier career included work for Mikhail Khodorkovsky's Menatep Bank and later for the ORT TV Channel in the 1990s – helped him become a master of 'political technologies'. He was often described in the Russian media as the 'Kremlin's chief piarshchik' – 'chief PR man' (*Vremya MN*, 15 February 2003), a 'skilful manipulator' or a 'political puppeteer' (*NG. Figury i Litsa*, 25 January 2001). It can be argued, that Surkov's vision of 'political technologies' as a powerful (if not the most powerful) instrument in achieving political goals, contributed to making foreign propaganda one of the top priorities in Russian foreign policy. Apart from Surkov, there were several other high-ranking officials in the Presidential administration whose role should be mentioned. Sergey Yastrzhembsky came to the administration from the diplomatic service and worked as Yel'tsin's Press-Attaché before becoming Presidential Aide in Putin's administration in 2000 and later his Special Representative in the European Union in 2004. During Putin's first presidential term, Yastrzhembsky acted as the 'main Kremlin mouthpiece' in relation to the conflict in Chechnya, and his views on the need to improve Russia's information policy, meaning first of all foreign propaganda, were widely publicised (see. e.g. *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 27 June 2001). Another example is Modest Kolerov, who headed the Directorate for Interregional Relations in 2005-2007. Similar to Surkov, Kolerov had a vast experience in 'political technologies' – he had been involved in electoral PR campaigns and prior to accepting the position in the Administration had headed the information agency Regnum. An important role in developing the strategy and implementing Russia's foreign propaganda was also played by the President's Press-Attaché Alexei Gromov and his office.

Although all of the officials mentioned above recognised the need for the Kremlin to conduct a more energetic foreign propaganda, in the Administration there was no agreement on its content or mechanism. According to the Deputy Press-Attaché of the President Dmitry Peskov, for instance, some officials initially 'were sceptical' towards the idea of contracting a Western PR company (*Vedomosti*, 2 May 2006). These internal disagreements may be seen as a significant factor that affected the overall effectiveness of the campaign: competing for the President's attention, different elite groups promoted their own visions of the campaign and their own projects, which resulted in Russia's foreign propaganda being often incoherent.

In addition to its internal resources, the Presidential Administration also relied on the work of independent PR consultants. The most prominent of them was Gleb Pavlovsky, president

of the Moscow-based Effective Policy Foundation. According to *Vedomosti* (28 May 2008), Pavlovsky provided extensive information and analytical services (including media monitoring) to the administration and collaborated mostly with Surkov. An indication of how important Pavlovsky's projects were viewed by the Kremlin is the fact that in April 2008 he was awarded with the medal 'Of Merit to the Fatherland' (*Vedomosti*, 28 May 2008). Another pro-Kremlin foundation with close links with the administration was the Polity Foundation, headed by Vyacheslav Nikonov who was later appointed by Putin as the head of Russkii Mir (Russian World) Foundation – a joint project of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Science.

While the Presidential administration developed the strategy of foreign propaganda, its implementation was overseen by a number of other actors. Two of them – the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Culture and Mass Communications – dealt with the largest number of projects and thus can be seen as the most important elements in the propaganda apparatus. It should be mentioned, however, that there was a significant difference in their 'place' in the hierarchy: the former reported directly to the President of the Russian Federation whereas the latter was subordinate to the Prime Minister (see Figure 3.2).

### **3.3.2 Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

Officially, one of the Ministry's key functions was to provide information support for Russian foreign policy. Under Putin's presidency, the Information and Press Department which was in charge of conducting foreign propaganda was one of the largest in the Ministry. According to the head of the Department Mikhail Kamynin, its personnel exceeded 100 people (Kamynin 2008). The Department's main responsibilities included work with the Russian and foreign mass media and international news agencies. Similar to other countries, day to day propaganda work was carried out by Russian embassies which monitored the coverage of Russian politics in the mass media of their respective host countries. As Russia's international image was deteriorating throughout Putin's presidency (see Chapter Two), one of the key tasks that embassies were assigned in this regard was to publicly counter those criticisms of the Russian authorities that were viewed by the Ministry as particularly damaging. In order to ensure that the embassies' responses were consistent across countries, the Ministry introduced a secure section on its Internet webpage that could be accessed only by Russian embassies, consulates and representations

in international organisations, and which provided detailed instructions on what kind of counter-arguments should be promoted (Kamynin 2008).

While the Ministry itself focussed on the political aspects of Russia's image, the Russian Centre of International Scientific and Culture Cooperation (Roszarubezhtsentr), as a body subordinate to the Ministry, handled the work on its cultural aspects. To a large extent, the Centre was a successor to the Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries which had been in operation from 1958 until the collapse of the Soviet Union, and which, in its turn, was a successor to the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries that had been established as early as 1925. In the post-Soviet period, the Centre had been renamed several times until it received its most recent name, and, most importantly, it was transferred by the President's decree № 146 from 5 February 2002 from the authority of the Russian Government to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It should be mentioned though that under the presidency of Dmitry Medvedev, the Centre changed its status again as it was transformed into the Federal Agency for the Affairs of the Commonwealth of Independent States, Expatriates, and International Humanitarian Cooperation (Rossotrudnichestvo).<sup>18</sup>

The Soviet leadership viewed culture as a powerful instrument in conveying ideological messages, and as a result the Soviet Union invested heavily in establishing Friendship Societies, organising art exhibitions and bringing carefully selected Soviet artists to Western countries (see Hazan 1982). The Centre inherited this wide network of Friendship Societies which were transformed into local Centres of International Scientific and Culture Cooperation. Their heads often had diplomatic status, and worked in close co-operation with the embassies. In the 1990s, similar to many other propaganda channels, the Centre was severely under-funded and became to a large extent ineffective. Its funding increased substantially as foreign propaganda returned to a high position on the Ministry's agenda under Putin's presidency. However, it retained some Soviet approaches to cultural relations (and to its management, more broadly speaking). In the opinion of a high-ranking Russian propagandist in one of the EU member states, this remained a serious obstacle to the Centre's work.<sup>19</sup> It should be mentioned that in the Putin years, in addition to traditional cultural events, such as art exhibitions, public talks by visiting celebrities or showing

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<sup>18</sup> For more information see the official webpage of Rossotrudnichestvo: <http://www.rs-gov.ru/node/565>, accessed 2 October 2009.

<sup>19</sup> Anonymous interview with a senior Russian propagandist, the capital of an EU member state, 12 May 2007.

Russian movies, the Centre began to put significantly more emphasis on work with Russian expatriates.

This direction of propaganda became particularly important during Putin's second presidential term. Russian communities abroad began to be viewed as an increasingly important target group. One of the key ways to promote a more positive image of Russia among them was to encourage studies of the Russian language and literature. President Putin declared the year 2007 as 'the year of the Russian language', and a large number of events in Russia and abroad were held within this framework (*Literaturnaya gazeta*, 5 September 2007). Moreover, in June 2007 Putin signed a decree (decree № 796 of 21 June 2007) that established a new organisation – Russkii Mir (Russian World) Foundation. The new foundation was 'to popularise the Russian language' and 'to support Russian studies programmes abroad' (*Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 23 June 2007). Being a joint project of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Science, Russkii Mir was to provide financial support (mostly in the form of grants, books or equipment) to various centres of Russian studies. The Board of Trustees, which was to include prominent Russian academics and civil servants, and the head of the Foundation were to be appointed by the President. Vyacheslav Nikonov, founder of the Polity foundation, became its first head.

Nikonov repeatedly denied that the main task of the Foundation was to improve Russia's international image. In his interview with *Itogi* he, for instance, stressed that the Foundation's main objective was to promote studies of the Russian language and by doing that Russkii Mir was not involved in the work with the country's image directly (*Itogi*, 21 April 2008). However, its mission statement on the Foundation's webpage includes the 'formation of favourable public opinion and dissemination of knowledge about the country' among its major tasks.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, according to the mission statement, Russkii Mir 'reconnects the Russian community abroad with their homeland, forging new and stronger links through cultural and social programs, exchanges and assistance in relocation'.<sup>21</sup> These stated objectives demonstrate that the Foundation is in fact directly involved in foreign propaganda, although its activities are limited to cultural aspects of Russia's international image.

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<sup>20</sup> For more information see the official webpage of the foundation: 'Tseli i zadachi', Russkiy Mir Foundation, available on-line at: <http://russkiymir.ru/ru/about/celi/>, accessed 16 January 2009.

<sup>21</sup> See the official webpage of the foundation: 'Mission Statement', Russkiy Mir Foundation, available on-line at: [http://russkiymir.org/en/about/mission\\_statement/](http://russkiymir.org/en/about/mission_statement/), accessed 16 January 2009.

### 3.3.3 Ministry of Culture and Mass Communications

In the years of Vladimir Putin's Presidency, the Ministry of Culture, in particular its specialised Agency of Press and Mass Communications, supervised an increasingly wide range of projects that aimed at improving Russia's international image. Mikhail Lesin, who headed the Ministry in 1999-2004, repeatedly acknowledged the problem of Russia's negative image. He was among the first Russian officials who openly called for the revival of foreign propaganda. As early as in February 2001, for instance, he declared that the Ministry was planning to invest a considerable amount of money into a project aimed at 'correcting' Russia's image in the USA (*Novaya gazeta*, 21 July 2005). Although Lesin's earlier projects did not get off the ground, he may be seen as one of the key personalities in bringing the problem of Russia's image into the official discourse. Later, as the need for an image policy became more apparent for the Russian authorities, Lesin initiated a number of projects that became key elements in Russia's foreign propaganda machine. In particular, as it was suggested in the Russian mass media, Lesin was behind the idea of 'Trendline Russia' project (*Kommersant Daily*, 18 October 2006). During Vladimir Putin's second presidential term Lesin's ability to influence Russia's image policy increased further as he was appointed Adviser to the President in 2004.

As Figure 3.2 demonstrates, the Ministry of Culture supervised a number of foreign propaganda channels that Russia had inherited from the Soviet Union, including Russia's two biggest news agencies – ITAR-Tass and RIA Novosti, and the radio station 'Voice of Russia' (successor to the Soviet 'Radio Moscow'). The latter was part of the gigantic state media holding RTR (All-Russia State Television and Radio Company, or VGTRK). Despite severe under-funding that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union, the 'Voice of Russia' remained a powerful actor with the size of its audience exceeding 100 million people in 160 countries by the year 2007. Its programmes were broadcast in 32 languages (*Vremya novostei*, 28 April 2007), and it succeeded in climbing to the third position among the largest international radio stations – after the BBC and the 'Voice of America' (*Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 29 November 2007). To a large extent, the 'Voice of Russia' was the most traditional foreign propaganda vehicle as its main objective was to provide information support to Russian foreign policy. As a result, it covered events both in Russia and abroad exclusively from the position of the Russian government. Although officially the radio station was subordinate to the Ministry of Culture, its conceptual approach to broadcasting and even day-to day work was largely defined by confidential instructions from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These guidelines specified which issues were to be

emphasised in radio programmes and news coverage, and provided detailed recommendation on how to counteract the most recurrent criticisms of the Russian authorities that had been voiced in foreign mass media.<sup>22</sup>

While for the ‘Voice of Russia’ foreign propaganda was the only function it performed and, as a result, it could legitimately focus on more positive aspects of Russian politics and economy and downplay any negative developments, the situation was more complicated in case of the news agencies. For both ITAR-Tass and RIA Novosti, foreign propaganda was, to a certain extent, a secondary function as their primary responsibility was to provide information, including on those issues that were extremely sensitive for the Russian authorities, to the mass media. ITAR-Tass, successor to the Soviet Tass, was one of the largest agencies in the world. According to its official webpage, it had more than 130 bureaus in Russia and around the world.<sup>23</sup> As Russia’s central state news agency, the role of ITAR-Tass in foreign propaganda was rather limited whereas RIA Novosti (Russian News & Information Agency RIA Novosti) was one of the key elements in the apparatus. At the end of Yel’tsin’s presidency, similarly to the radio station ‘Voice of Russia’ it was subordinate to the RTR media holding. Later, however, it was placed under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture.

The agency’s rapidly increasing role in Russian foreign propaganda, to a significant extent, dates back to the appointment of its new head Svetlana Mironyuk in January 2003. Prior to taking the position of Editor-in-Chief, Mironyuk worked in Media-Most, the media empire of Vladimir Gusinsky which, *inter alia*, included the NTV channel and the newspaper *Segodnya*. Gusinsky’s NTV and printed outlets were strongly critical of the Kremlin’s policies, and their often negatively coloured reporting on the actions of the Russian authorities had a certain impact on Russia’s international image. In this context, Putin’s decision to appoint Mironyuk to one of the key foreign propaganda positions was interpreted by some insiders as an intention to solve the problem by using the instrument that had created this problem: if the Media-Most team succeeded in damaging Russia’s image in the West, it would have sufficient expertise to improve it.<sup>24</sup> Mironyuk’s approach to foreign propaganda was in sharp contrast to the largely Soviet methods that were still employed in many other propaganda channels, including the Voice of Russia. Her team was younger and more business-minded, which in a way made it easier for them to see

<sup>22</sup> Anonymous interview with a senior Russian propagandist, Moscow, 30 January 2007.

<sup>23</sup> See the webpage of Itar-Tass for more detail, available on-line at: <http://www.tass-online.ru/?page=pages&pageID=24&langID=2>, accessed 19 January 2009

<sup>24</sup> Anonymous interview with a senior Russian propagandist, Moscow, 29 January 2007.

what kind of information/projects would have a chance of succeeding in Western countries. It is symbolic that in an attempt to distance the work of RIA Novosti from Soviet style propaganda, its senior members of staff would never use the word 'propaganda'. According to a senior propagandist, this term was not used even in internal documents.<sup>25</sup>

The agency's functions were numerous: they ranged from information support of foreign visits of Russian officials to organising press conferences with Russian news-makers, distributing press-releases and periodicals, etc. Moreover, RIA Novosti conducted extensive monitoring of Russia's international image in the key regions. Working in close co-operation with the privately-owned PR Company CROSS, it produced regular internal reports on Russia's image in foreign TV and radio broadcasting, with a separate report on Russia's image in the national mass media in the CIS and Baltic countries. Other reports included 'Russia and foreign think tanks', 'Russia and European Institutions', as well as a separate report on the new academic literature about Russia. These reports fulfilled several functions. On the one hand, this research served to reveal the most problematic aspects of Russia's image, which helped RIA Novosti to tailor its propaganda campaigns and to respond more effectively to the most recurrent criticisms. On the other hand (and this function became particularly important in the final years of Putin's presidency), it served to identify those decision-makers, journalists and academics in the key countries whose opinion on Russia appeared to be most influential in their respective countries or internationally. Once these individuals were included in this list of prominent 'Russia-watchers', they became a target of various propaganda projects organised by RIA Novosti. Two of these projects – *Russia Profile* and the Valdai Discussion Club – are worth examining in more detail.

The idea behind *Russia Profile* was to create a new English-language media outlet that would target this relatively small group of Russia-watchers and would provide 'unbiased' information and analysis of Russian politics and economy. This task was not easy. The agency's editorial team realised that in order to succeed, the new project would have to be substantially different from similar projects of the Soviet years. In particular, it would have to overcome the problem of credibility (since any information emanating from a state-sponsored source would undoubtedly be met with suspicion). Moreover, it would have to find some niche in the media market. Thus, one of the most urgent questions was what kind of information the project should provide to make the Russia-watchers interested. In an

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<sup>25</sup> Anonymous interview with a senior Russian propagandist, Moscow, 31 January 2007.

attempt to find a solution to these problems, in 2003 RIA Novosti commissioned a series of elite interviews with prominent Russia experts in the USA and Western European countries, asking them about their views on what could be done. In 2004 the agency launched the new project under the name of *Russia Profile*. It took the form of a website, a regular newsletter to subscribers and a printed magazine with articles focusing mostly on Russian politics and economy. Andrei Zolotov (Jr) whose previous experience included working as a journalist for the newspaper *Moscow Times* was appointed its editor-in-chief.

In search of a niche in the context of abundant information on Russia in Western sources, Zolotov tried to attract an audience by making the project *useful* rather than merely interesting. To achieve this goal, the most important element of *Russia Profile* was not the magazine but the Internet page that featured information on the structure of the Russian government, provided contact information and biographical details of high-ranking officials, information on the largest companies, etc. Moreover, in their commentaries on Russian politics and economy in the magazine, journalists were given the task not to deny criticisms of Russian democracy but rather to widen the scope of information. Thus, the motto was not ‘everything you know about Russia is wrong but we will tell you what is right’, but rather ‘everything you know about Russia might be right but there is much more to Russia and we will tell you about that’.

Taking into account some suggestions by Russia-watchers, RIA Novosti addressed the problem of credibility in a number of ways. Firstly, *Russia Profile* was launched as a joint project with the publishing company Independent Media, which, *inter alia*, published the newspaper *Moscow Times*. It was emphasised that although the agency provided funding for *Russia Profile*, Independent Media was in charge of its editorial policy. Secondly, a supervisory board, which included a number of prominent Russia-watchers (such as Bobo Lo of Chatham House or Alexander Rahr from the German Council on Foreign Relations), was established to ensure the editorial independence of the project and to create an image of maximum distancing from the government. Finally, *Russia Profile* commissioned David Johnson from the Washington-based think tank Center for Defense Information (CDI) – a very well known figure among Russia-watchers and a founder of the so-called Johnson’s Russia List – to publish materials on Russia on the *Russia Profile* web page. Similarly to his Russia List, Johnson’s task in *Russia Profile* was to select English-language articles or analytical pieces about Russia that, in his opinion, would be of interest for Russia-watchers. Commissioning Johnson was an extremely interesting decision, as he would inevitably include negative publications that might be damaging to Russia’s image. On the one hand,



it was meant to prevent possible accusations of *Russia Profile* in providing only information that was positive and favourable for the Russian authorities. Moreover, RIA Novosti hoped that Johnson's 'brand' would be an additional attracting factor for the potential audience. On the other hand, it served as a precautionary measure against the possibility of direct interference by the Russian authorities: in the event of pressure from the Kremlin to keep silent on a particular issue, it would be difficult for *Russia Profile* to do so since the issue would be likely to emerge in Johnson's section anyway.

To reach the target audience, *Russia Profile* was promoted at various business and academic events in the key regions, including the annual conference of the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies in Cambridge. Moreover, in the first years of its existence, the magazine was delivered to subscribers free of charge. A number of copies were sent to the institutions that were considered key propaganda targets, such as the Directorate-General for External Relations of the European Commission. It should be noted, however, that in late 2008 RIA Novosti made a decision to stop printing the magazine and continue with the Internet page only. It was justified by lack of available funding. It can be suggested that a more likely reason was a shift of priority projects in the propaganda campaign. In a situation when officials and representatives of various propaganda agencies competed for the President's attention and for funding, the decision to close a project or its part was likely to be the result of bureaucratic infightings. At the same time, it could be a consequence of a personality-driven approach in Russian politics: any project survived as long as its creator stayed in charge and was supported by the Kremlin. As Zolotov left the project in 2008 to go to Harvard University in Cambridge, MA, as a Fellow of the Nieman Foundation for Journalism (although he kept an advisory role in *Russia Profile* and remained an advisor to the chief editor of RIA Novosti), *Russia Profile* ceased being one of the leading tools of Russian propaganda.

Unlike *Russia Profile*, the Valdai Discussion Club - another project that targeted Russia-watchers directly - maintained its position as a key foreign propaganda instrument. It was created in 2004 as a joint project of RIA Novosti, the Council for Foreign and Defence Policy, the newspaper *Moscow Times* and the journals *Russia in Global Affairs* and *Russia Profile*. The club functioned as an annual semi-informal meeting of Russian high-ranking officials, politicians and experts with prominent Russia watchers. According to the information presented on its webpage,

the club's mission is to create an international expert venue, where top federal and regional officials could share trusted information on the country and society's development with home and foreign leading specialists studying various aspects of the Russian life<sup>26</sup>

Over the years, among its participants were a number of well-known journalists (mainly American and British but not limited to them) including Michael Binyon from *The Times* and Mary Dejevsky from *The Independent*, and researchers from Western universities and think tanks such as Richard Sakwa from the University of Kent at Canterbury or Alena Ledeneva from University College London. Each year the event was devoted to one central topic which was viewed by RIA Novosti as most urgent in relation to Russia's image. In 2006, for instance, the discussion focussed on Russia's role in energy trade, developing the theme of energy security which had been central to the G8 summit in St Petersburg in July 2006. The participants were invited to Khanty-Mansiisk, the centre of one of the most important oil production regions in Russia.

The main objective of the Valdai Discussion Club was to provide unmediated access for carefully selected Russia watchers to the most senior officials and politicians. Every year the event culminated in a meeting with the Russian President where the participants could ask him any question or raise any point. The idea behind Valdai was that the Russian authorities would be able to convey their message and their views on various issues to the Western expert community without the inevitable biases of the mass media. It can be argued that to a large extent the project succeeded in that. As one of the participants noted, most experts found these discussions extremely valuable as they allowed them 'to comprehend the logic behind the actions of the Kremlin'.<sup>27</sup> It should be mentioned that several participants from a number of countries expressed their doubts about the effectiveness of the club for Russian foreign propaganda.<sup>28</sup> In the words of one of them, 'the Russian government cannot buy us; they cannot make us say what they want'. However, they also acknowledged that the access to the key decision-makers, including the President, the Minister of Foreign Affairs or the Minister of Defence, as well as senior staff from the Presidential administration, enabled them to see more clearly the Kremlin's position.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See the webpage of the International Discussion Club Valdai, available on-line at: <http://en.valday2008.rian.ru/>, accessed 25 March 2009.

<sup>27</sup> Anonymous interview with a British scholar, London, 14 December 2006.

<sup>28</sup> Anonymous interview with a French journalist. Paris, 14 May 2007; anonymous interview with a British journalist, London, 13 December 2006.

<sup>29</sup> Anonymous interview with a British journalist, London, 11 December 2006.

After every meeting, which usually took place in September, RIA Novosti monitored publications written by the participants. It can be suggested that their tonality or the issues they raise were then taken into account when the decision was made on the list of participants for the following year. According to one of the participants, he/she was not invited to the club again after having published a series of sharply critical articles on Russian politics.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, a number of journalists and academics who continuously expressed critical opinions of the actions of the Kremlin were invited to the club every year, so it is difficult to say what criteria were actually used by RIA Novosti in selecting Russia watchers. On the whole, the Valdai Discussion club was probably one of the most significant elements of the Russian foreign propaganda machine under Vladimir Putin's presidency. The perceived success of the project gave an impetus to an idea to launch another Valdai Club that would target the expert community of Asian countries but at the time of writing these plans have not yet materialised.<sup>31</sup>

So far we have examined projects that aimed at a very narrow group of Russia watchers. However, RIA Novosti also launched several projects that targeted broader audiences. Among the most publicised of them was the English-speaking TV channel 'Russia Today' that was established in spring 2005 and went on air in December 2005. The idea of creating the channel allegedly was born in the Presidential administration and belonged to the President's Press-Attaché Alexei Gromov and Mikhail Lesin, who was already working as Putin's Advisor at that time (*Izvestiya*, 6 June 2005). 'Russia Today' was considered as a Russian alternative to the BBC or the CNN that would present to the audience Russian views on current affairs and, most importantly, would produce an unbiased portrait of the country – as opposed to the foreign mass media. In the words of the channel's editor-in-chief Margarita Simonyan, 'many foreigners are surprised to see that Russia is different from what they see in media reports. We will try to present a more balanced picture' (*Los Angeles Times*, 8 June 2005).

According to the then head of the Agency of Press Mikhail Seslavinsky, the budget of 'Russia Today' in 2005 was supposed to be \$30 million (*Novaya gazeta*, 21 July 2005). Although the project was conceived as global from the start – its broadcasting covered Europe, North America, Mexico, Asia, Africa, Australia and New Zealand – one of the main concerns for the TV channel was the size of its audience. According to Mironyuk, head of RIA Novosti, at the initial stages of the project the audience was likely to be

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<sup>30</sup> Anonymous interview with a French journalist, Paris, 14 May 2007.

<sup>31</sup> Anonymous interview with a senior Russian propagandist, Moscow, 31 January 2007.

around 5-10 thousand people, mainly researchers and political experts specialising in Russian politics. It was also expected that the audience might include business people if Russia became more attractive for foreign investors (*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 8 June 2005). Two year after 'Russia Today' first went on air, in May 2007, the agency launched an Arabic version of the channel, which was another indication of the Kremlin's ambition to broaden the geographic coverage of Russian foreign propaganda (ITAR-Tass Daily, 28 September 2007).

Furthermore, in late 2006 RIA Novosti in cooperation with the newspaper *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, an official media outlet of the Russian government, launched a project which was to target an even broader audience. 'Trendline Russia' took the form of a newspaper supplement inserted into a number of foreign newspapers on a monthly basis. In the Russian mass media it was suggested that the idea to create a printed foreign propaganda channel came from Presidential advisor Mikhail Lesin who stayed in charge of the project. Moreover, according to *Kommersant*, 'Trendline Russia' was published 'with the direct participation of the Kremlin' (*Kommersant*, 18 October 2006).

To reach the maximum audience, RIA Novosti and *Rossiiskaya gazeta* selected newspapers with very high circulation numbers, beginning with *The Washington Post* in the USA (approximately 1 million copies) and *The Daily Telegraph* in the United Kingdom (about 500,000 copies). According to the chief editor of 'Trendline Russia' Vladimir Bogdanov, the project was hoped to cover as many as 20 countries, including Bulgaria, Poland, Germany, India and China in the near future (*Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 16 November 2006). The supplement was published in the national newspapers as an advertisement, which made it rather expensive. The project was funded from the federal budget, and in the initial stages the Russian government provided to RIA Novosti approximately \$2 million for this purpose. Moreover, as *Kommersant* reported, the federal budget for the year 2007 included additional funding for *Rossiiskaya gazeta* to an amount of almost \$100 million (*Kommersant*, 18 October 2006). It can be suggested that the main objective of the project was to improve Russia's attractiveness as an investment destination as the main emphasis of the supplement's articles was on Russia's economic achievements. At the same time, much attention was paid to discussions of historical events, Russian culture and particularly Russian sport.

### 3.3.4 Other Federal Ministries and Agencies

Compared to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Ministry of Culture and Mass Communications, other federal ministries and agencies played a relatively insignificant role in foreign propaganda. Nevertheless, the problem of Russia's international image often emerged on their agenda. The Federal Agency of Tourism, for instance, repeatedly declared its intention to put more effort into improving Russia's image as a tourist destination. As early as in August 2000, Anatoly Yarochnik from the agency's department of image policy and information support spoke of the need to promote Russia's image as a country of 'cultural-educational tourism'. It was suggested that Russian trade missions abroad should be given a task to distribute information booklets about the Russian regions (*Novaya gazeta*, 21 July 2005). However, it appears that the agency did not become an important actor in the propaganda campaign.

Another example is the Ministry for Economic Development and Trade which on many occasions raised its concern about Russia's investment image. Throughout Putin's presidency, the Ministry took a series of actions that were aimed at improving the country's image in the eyes of potential investors. In 2006, for instance, it published 'Investor's Guidebook to Russia' which was positioned as 'an encyclopaedia of the investment climate and a source of reliable information on how to do business in the Russian Federation' (Ministry for Economic Development and Trade of the Russian Federation 2006, p. 4). The book, which was to be distributed by Russian trade missions and embassies, claimed that Russia was not 'a country depicted fairly by many foreign politicians and mass media' (*ibid.*, p. 4). By emphasising success stories of foreign companies in Russia, such as Toyota, BMW, Danone, or Siemens, it sought to counteract well-established stereotypes about Russia as a country of rampant corruption and to promote the image of a promising market. However, this publication was merely a one-off action, and it is doubtful that it could substantially affect investors' perceptions.

Recognising the inefficiency of this approach, the ministry developed a 'Programme of Improvement of Russia's Investment Image Abroad' which was introduced to the Russian Government in autumn 2007 (Ministry for Economic Development and Trade of the Russian Federation 2007). The rationale was that Russia's investment image was considerably more negative than its objective investment climate. Since foreign investors usually act on the basis of the country's investment image rather than its investment climate, the programme emphasised the need to bridge the gap between the two. Among

the measures that the paper suggested were creating a webpage with information for potential investors; more active participation of the Russian government in international economic, investment and political forums, conferences and seminars where the official position could be voiced; more energetic reaction of the Russian authorities to negative publications in the Western mass media, etc. Moreover, the programme envisaged more extensive involvement of the radio station Voice of Russia which was recommended to provide wider coverage of economic issues. Most importantly, the paper called for improved co-ordination of all foreign propaganda measures. It suggested establishing a separate agency that would be in charge of the overall campaign. However, the Ministry did not offer any practical recommendations on how to implement all these measures. It also advocated hiring a Western PR company that would work specifically on Russia's investment image and would target foreign investors, leading international rating agencies, international organisations, and international consultancies.

### **3.3.5 Western PR Companies**

The idea that Western PR companies could be more effective in dealing with the Western mass media than Russian companies or governmental bodies did not win support in the Kremlin until the winter of 2006. Earlier attempts to commission foreign companies were limited in scope. In 2003 RIA Novosti, for instance, hired Hannaford Enterprises to monitor Russia's image in the USA and to assist in cultural exchanges between the two countries (*Vedomosti*, 5 June 2007). The situation changed radically following Moscow's dispute with Ukraine over gas prices in December 2005 – January 2006 when Gazprom's decision to stop gas supply to Russia's neighbour received extremely negative coverage in the Western mass media. The Russian authorities had not expected that. According to a senior Russian propagandist, the prevailing opinion in the Kremlin at that time was that the conflict would damage Ukraine's image, not Russia's, particularly since Ukraine was allegedly siphoning gas that was meant for deliveries to EU member states.<sup>32</sup> The negative reaction of the Western mass media demonstrated the inability of the Russian authorities to promote their interpretation of events. As a result, the decision to commission a Western PR company to work on Russia's image gained significantly more support in the Presidential administration. This can be illustrated by the words of President's Deputy Press Attaché Dmitry Peskov: 'Perhaps if we had already been working then with some

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<sup>32</sup> Anonymous interview with a senior Russian propagandist, Moscow, 31 January 2007.

kind of communications company things would have been different' (*Financial Times*, 30 April 2006).

In the run up to the G8 summit that was to take place in St Petersburg in July 2006, the Kremlin signed a contract with a US-based PR company Ketchum which was part of Omnicom Group. The fact that Russia was hosting the summit was of extreme significance for the Kremlin. As it will be discussed in Chapter Four, it was perceived by many among the Russian political elite as an indication that Russia had regained its great power status. In this context, the Kremlin was particularly sensitive towards any negative changes in Russia's image, which resulted in a considerable intensification of the Russian foreign propaganda campaign in spring and summer 2006. In an attempt to minimise the negative consequences of the gas conflict with Ukraine, the campaign particularly focussed on promoting a positive image of Russia as a reliable energy supplier while energy security was suggested by the Kremlin as one of the central issues of the summit. In this regard, Ketchum's task was to advise the Kremlin on communications before and during the summit and to coordinate the work of its two sister companies – Brussels-based GPlus Europe, and Gavin Anderson & Company – which were also involved in the Kremlin's campaign (*Financial Times*, 30 April 2006).

While the three companies provided general PR support for Russia's G8 team, they also rendered more specialised services to the Russian authorities. Gavin Anderson focussed on promoting Russia's image as a business partner. In the words of the head of the company's London office, Gavin Anderson was 'helping Russian companies to improve their reputation in the eyes of the international financial community' (*Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 29 May 2006). At the same time, GPlus handled the work on Russia's image in EU institutions as the main specialisation of the company was in that area, and a number of its employees were former EU officials (Rettman 2009). Moreover, some of its members of staff were professional journalists, which was an additional advantage for the Russian authorities. An illustrative example is Angus Roxburgh, who had a vast experience of covering Russian politics including the conflict in Chechnya for the BBC, and who became one of the company's advisers for the Kremlin. According to *The Observer*, GPlus subcontracted part of its work to the UK-based company Portland PR which was founded by Tony Blair's former deputy Press Secretary Tim Allan (*The Observer*, 16 July 2006).

Although it is very difficult, if not impossible, to measure the results of the services provided by these companies during such a short period of time, the Russian authorities

considered them as positive, and extended the contract after the G8 summit. Moreover, following the example of the Presidential administration, Gazprom also signed a contract with Ketchum, GPlus Europe and Gavin Anderson in 2007 (*Vremya novostei*, 20 August 2007). It should be mentioned that as a state-controlled company, Gazprom had significant difficulties in conducting an effective PR campaign (see Orlov 2002). One of the main challenges was the need to co-ordinate any actions with the state authorities, which resulted in very slow reactions to negative changes in its image. It can be suggested that the decision to commission the same group of Western companies was meant to solve this problem as they would be able to conduct a coordinated image campaign. At the same time, another PR company, Hill & Knowlton was commissioned to provide information support to the Nord Stream, one of the key Gazprom projects that would bring Russian gas to Germany and then to a number of other EU member states (*Vremya novostei*, 20 August 2007).

It is noteworthy that the Russian authorities have provided very little information on the terms of these contracts, which provoked a wave of speculation in the mass media. It was not very clear how the companies were selected and even where the funding came from. According to Dmitry Peskov, the contract was paid by 'a commercial bank that acted as a sponsor of Russia's Presidency in the G8', though he refused to name the bank. He also said that there were some other sponsors (*Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 29 May 2006). *Vedomosti* reported that, according to the company's information to the USA Congress, Ketchum received about \$4 million for its work on Russia's image in 2007 alone. Moreover, it received \$1.2 million for its work for Gazprom in July-November 2007 (*Vedomosti*, 13 November 2008).

Among the key contributions of the Western PR experts was an attempt to change the style of Russia's communications with the West. In the words of Angus Roxburgh from GPlus Europe,

the main thing we're trying to persuade the Russians to do is to open up and provide more interviews than they were before, from the President down, in order to get their own message across (*The Times*, 6 July 2006)

To some extent, they succeeded in doing that. In the period before the G8 summit in St Petersburg and in the following years, Russian officials, particularly the President, gave a large numbers of interviews, participated in press-conferences and published numerous articles in the Western mass media.



### 3.3.6 Grey or Black Propaganda?

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, an important part of Soviet foreign propaganda and ‘active measures’ in general was played by covert measures, or in other words by so-called grey and black propaganda. However, following the disintegration of the Soviet bloc, the Russian authorities could no longer resort to most channels of grey propaganda, such as International Front organisations. Did the Kremlin attempt to establish any new organisations that would contribute to the work on Russia’s international image without being part of the state propaganda apparatus? It can be suggested that the Institute for Democracy and Cooperation which was founded at the end of Vladimir Putin’s second presidential term was the closest to performing the function of grey propaganda although its activities differed substantially from the grey propaganda actors of the Soviet time.

To a large extent, the main objective of the Institute for Democracy and Cooperation was similar to the one of the USSR-backed International Front organisations – to shape international discourse in a direction that would be favourable for the Kremlin. The idea that Russia needed to participate far more extensively in setting the discourse was voiced by the Russian president during the EU-Russia summit in Portugal in October 2007. In Putin’s words, the goal of the Institute is

to facilitate dialogue (...) on issues such as organising the electoral process, monitoring elections, the situation of national minorities and migrants in the territory of the EU and Russia as well, freedom of expression and other questions (Putin 2007c)

Moreover, Putin pointed out to the EU’s financial assistance to similar institutions in Russia, and insisted that ‘it is high time (...) that the Russian Federation can do the same thing in the European Union’ (Putin 2007c). Following this public approval of the concept by the President, the Institute was established at the beginning of 2008, with two regional offices in Paris and New York. It was headed by a well-known lawyer and a member of the Public Chamber Anatoly Kucherena, while the regional departments were headed by the historian Natalia Narochnitskaya, and a member of the Public Chamber professor Andranik Migranyan respectively. As a non-governmental organisation, the Institute did not receive any funding from the federal budget. However, it could apply for various grants provided by the Russian government, including grants from the Public Chamber. According to Narochnitskaya, there were hopes that part of the funding would come from donations by the Russian business community (*Novaya gazeta*, 7 February 2008).

The rationale for establishing the institute, as Migranyan explained to the Russian mass media, was the need for Russia to take a more active part in discussions on the definition of democracy and possible ways of measuring a level of democratisation. He referred to the idea, which was shared by many among the Russian political elite at that time, that the interpretation of democracy was ‘monopolised by certain states’ (*Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 29 January 2008). Kucherena, in his turn, expressed his doubts, also shared by many in Russia, about the methods that were used by various organisations, such as Freedom House, in their assessment of individual countries. In his opinion, the fact that the Freedom House described the elections in Iran, Afghanistan or Georgia as ‘free’ but those in Russia or Belarus as ‘not free’, was the result of the biased and ideologically prejudiced approach of the organisation towards Russia (*Profil*, 4 February 2008). At the same time, the leadership of the Institute declared their intention to examine the state of democracy and human rights issues in Western countries. Kucherena, for instance, mentioned plans to monitor the presidential elections in the USA, and raised the question of the role of ‘electors who make decisions against the people’s will’ (*Novye izvestiya*, 29 January 2008).

Although the Institute formally was not part of the foreign propaganda apparatus (it was not a state body but a non-governmental organisation), it can be suggested that it had the potential to become an important element of the Russian foreign propaganda machine. It should be mentioned that officially the Institute did not view work on Russia’s international image as one of its priority tasks. Moreover, the leaders of the project repeatedly denied speculation that the main function of the Institute would be that of counter-propaganda – to demonstrate that the situation in Western countries was as bad or worse than in Russia (*Profil*, 4 February 2008). However, according to Kucherena, the Institute was supposed to become a source of ‘objective information’ about Russian history and politics (*Argumenty i fakty*, 6 February 2008). On the whole, this was an interesting attempt to approach the problem of image from the position of changing the discourse on democracy, and it has yet to be seen how successful it can be.

As mentioned earlier, the Institute for Democracy and Cooperation can broadly be viewed as an instrument of grey propaganda since it was presented to the outside world as independent of the Russian authorities and as a voice of Russian citizens rather than its government although its concept had been clearly approved by the President and its activities followed the official line of Russian foreign propaganda. It is more difficult to say whether the Russian government still employed the methods of black propaganda that had been widely utilised by the Soviet Union. Although there is no direct evidence that it did,

there are some indirect indications that the Kremlin did resort to black propaganda techniques in order to create negative images of its opponents on at least several occasions. A number of Russian newspapers (as well as British and US media outlets), for instance, reported the propaganda-related activities of the Kremlin-supported youth group 'Marching Together' (Idushchie vmeste) in the UK and the USA. *Versiya* suggested that the youth group was assigned the task of discrediting a number of Russian émigrés, particularly representatives of the self-declared Chechen government, in their host countries. Promoting their negative images was meant to facilitate extradition requests by the Russian government (*Versiya*, 26 April 2005).

According to *The Sunday Times*, Marching Together were behind a series of protests in the UK in 2004-2005 that demanded the extradition of Akhmed Zakaev, a Chechen exile who had been granted asylum in Britain. The demonstrators targeted, *inter alia*, the British actress Vanessa Redgrave, who had publicly expressed her support for Zakaev. The group's leader Vladimir Yakemenko denied any links between Marching Together and the protests. However, the newspaper's unnamed source claimed that the group was directly involved in organising the demonstration. According to the source,

most of the activists (...) were paid £15 in cash to take part after they had responded to advertisements in a London-based Russian newspaper offering to pay people for giving out leaflets (*The Sunday Times*, 2 January 2005)

Moreover, the *Wall Street Journal* reported similar incidents in the US. According to the newspaper's source, the youth group provided funding to the amount of approximately \$400,000 for a series of demonstrations that were held in September 2004 and June 2005 in New York. Similarly to the protests in the UK, the demonstrators were pressing for the extradition of Chechen separatists, including Il'yas Akhmadov (*Wall Street Journal*, 24 June 2006).

Taking into account a long history of using black propaganda by the Soviet Union, the Kremlin's involvement in events of this kind appears to be fairly plausible. It should be mentioned, however, that some commentators have argued that the Kremlin was a victim, rather than the organiser of the protests. Mikhail Vinogradov from the Russian PR company 'Propaganda' suggested that the regime's opponents had been behind the demonstrations, and that the reports about the Kremlin's involvement could have been used to damage Russia's international image in the run-up to the G8 summit in St Petersburg (*Vedomosti*, 26 June 2006).

On the whole, as this chapter has demonstrated, the Russian foreign propaganda apparatus underwent a significant transformation in the years of Vladimir Putin's presidency. Over this period, a number of new channels were created, and there was a substantial increase in funding allocated for propaganda purposes. Having examined the 'form' of Russian foreign propaganda, let us now turn to its content and analyse the projected image of Russia by looking at the most recurrent messages to Western audiences in Russia's dominant discourse.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Projected Image: The Message to Western Audiences**

This chapter provides an analysis of Russia's projected image that was promoted in the West in the years of Vladimir Putin's presidency. One should note that there can be a substantial difference between the images projected for internal and for external use – if not in the elements of the image as such, then in their salience. An illustrative example of such a discrepancy can be the image of Russia as a great power: in the post-Soviet period, this characteristic used to be much more salient in the image that was projected for the domestic audience, although in the final years of Putin's presidency it became considerably more important in Russia's external image as well. At the same time, it might be difficult sometimes to define which audience – internal, external or both of them - a certain message is meant for. While acknowledging these limitations, this study nevertheless seeks to uncover the most recurrent themes in those texts – official documents, public statements of high-ranking officials and foreign propaganda outlets – that may be seen as targeting foreign audiences. The chapter begins by examining Russia's dominant self-image, i.e. the image of the country held by Russian political and business elites as it developed in the dominant discourse. This is followed in the second part of the chapter by a discussion of how the dominant self-image, as well as other competing self-images, shaped the vision of Russia's projected international image. Having analysed the core elements of the projected image, the chapter concludes by exploring the links between all the three types of Russia's images – its self-, projected and perceived images.

#### **4.1 In Search of Russia: Russia's Self-Image in the Dominant Discourse**

In a context of the profound identity crisis that Russian society experienced following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, several distinct visions of Russia and its place in the world became particularly prominent in Russian public discourse. As already mentioned in Chapter One, several classifications have been suggested in the academic literature to differentiate between these views. Neumann (1996), for instance, has spoken of Romantic Nationalists and Europe-Oriented Liberals – a distinction that goes back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century debate between Westernisers and Slavophiles. Andrei Tsygankov has argued that there are three main competing visions - Westernist, Statist and Civilisationist (2006b). Allison,

Light and White (2006; also White 2007) have also distinguished between three main directions, but have labelled them as Liberal Westernisers, Pragmatic Nationalists and Fundamentalist Nationalists. The latter two classifications appear to be fairly close, and for the purposes of this study we will adopt the one advocated by Allison *et al* (2006).

The views of Liberal Westernisers, Pragmatic Nationalists and Fundamentalist Nationalists on Russia's place in the world and a preferable foreign policy strategy vary to a significant extent. Liberal Westernisers perceive Russia as a European country whose natural allies are in the West. Thus, in their opinion, Russia should aim at closer cooperation with the EU and the USA, and abandon any great power ambitions. Unlike Liberal Westernisers, Pragmatic Nationalists tend to view Russia as 'mostly but not entirely European' (White 2007, p. 163) and as a great power, and they are more cautious in their assessment of the West. Although they favour practical cooperation with Western powers, they are unwilling to compromise Russia's independence in the sphere of foreign policy, and most of them share hopes for a multi-polar world in which Russia would become an independent pole. Thus, they consider it extremely important to develop closer relations with Asian countries, as well as to strengthen Russia's position in the post-Soviet space. While sharing the same view of Russia's great power status as Pragmatic Nationalists, Fundamentalist Nationalists perceive Russia as a Eurasian country, and many of them – as a unique civilisation. Seeing the West as a threat, they favour a multi-vector foreign policy and believe that Russia should develop closer ties with the East (White 2007).

While these are by no means fixed groups, they nevertheless have distinct 'constituencies'. As Stephen White (2007) has argued, among Liberal Westernisers during Putin's presidency were liberal intellectuals and some political parties (e.g. Yabloko and the Union of Right Forces), as well as several high-ranking officials, such as the Minister of Economics and Trade German Gref, or the Minister of Finance Alexei Kudrin. Pragmatic Nationalists were in the majority in the Russian government and the Presidential administration. The party of power 'United Russia' was also their 'constituency', as well as a number of largest Russian companies, particularly natural resource corporations. Fundamentalist Nationalists were represented by the so called *siloviki* (those with military and security background) in the government and Presidential administration and by a number of political parties, such as the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), the Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR) and *Rodina*. In addition to that, the Orthodox Church was also part of their constituency. The crucial question for this study is

which of the three competing self-images discussed above was dominant during Putin's presidency – as it was reflected in the official discourse.

#### **4.1.1 Vagueness of the Dominant Self-Image**

In the 1990s the official self-image of Russia was far from homogenous. Russia's foreign policy was affected by various, sometimes contradictory, visions of Russia. Under Putin's presidency, the Russian discourse of national images underwent significant changes. These changes were connected less with the content of the ideas as such, but more with their 'relative weight' and, consequently, their impact on foreign policy. Unlike Yel'tsin's period, the Putin era was characterised by a much stronger position of the President and the Presidential administration. Strengthening the 'vertical of power', which became one of the cornerstones of Putin's domestic policy, also impacted on foreign policy-making. There were numerous attempts to improve coordination of all the actions taken in the international arena, which made the official position concerning the country's major threats and strengths far more homogeneous than it used to be in the 1990s (Light 2005).

In general, Russia's self-image as articulated during the period 2000 to 2008, particularly during Putin's first term in office, may be described as somewhat centrist in comparison with other visions, combining some of their elements and at the same time avoiding their extremes. Broadly speaking, the official position may be described as Eurasianism, as Russia was seen as very different from the West and in some aspects closer to Asia. On the one hand, at the level of official rhetoric Russia was often portrayed as belonging to Europe, and, consequently, the European direction of foreign policy was declared as one of the top priorities. As Putin stated in his Annual Address to the Federal Assembly in 2005, 'above all else Russia was, is and will, of course, be a major European power' (2005, p. 3). On the other hand, the geographical location of the country was seen as demanding development in an Asian direction. According to Putin, 'Russia has always perceived herself as a Eurasian country. We have never forgotten that the main part of Russian land is in Asia' (2000, p. 1).

However, this Eurasian definition of the country's position remained very vague and did not answer the questions about its friends or foes. To a large extent, the unresolved identity crisis was one of the main problems of Russian foreign policy. This view was shared not only by foreign policy experts (e.g. Kortunov 2005), but also by representatives of Russian business. Russian businessmen were interested in improving attitudes to Russia in the

West, and were ready to invest in promoting a more positive image. Yet, the task appeared to be extremely difficult due to the unresolved questions of Russia's identity. A Vice-President of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, argued, for instance, that Russian business could help the authorities to project a favourable image far more effectively if it knew what position Russia had in the world. As Igor' Yurgens put it,

Now we have questions: are we enemies for Europe and the USA or are we their friends? What should the strategy be? When we answer these main questions – what coordinate system and what value system we are in – it will be easier for us, business people, to follow this direction<sup>33</sup>

Interestingly, both foreign policy experts and business people viewed the Kremlin as responsible for articulating characteristics of Russian identity, and considered its inability to do so a major failure of the Russian authorities.

#### **4.1.2 Russia as a Great Power**

While Russia's self-image as articulated in the dominant discourse during Putin's presidency remained fairly vague, one of its most stable components was the vision of Russia as a great power. To some extent, it was rooted in the perception of Russian history: the roles of the Russian Empire and of the Soviet Union in world history made it difficult for Russia to stay on the periphery of world politics. Although always present in the vision of Russia, this element underwent considerable transformations in the post-Soviet period. In the early 1990s, the idealistic vision of the West that was dominant among Russian political elites had the biggest effect on Russian foreign policy. Although declarations of the necessity to defend national interests, to pursue an independent foreign policy and to establish equal relations with Western countries were present in all major Russian official documents and statements of high-ranking officials at that time, these goals were not realised. It was soon evident that expectations had been too high, and that Russia was losing its great power status. 'Weakness' became one of the central elements of the country's dominant self-image, reaching its peak in the late 1990s. With its seat on the UN Security Council and possession of nuclear arms, Russia could still be considered 'great', but the reality of world politics and the worsening social and economic situation contributed to the perception that Russia was 'a developing country, and not even among the most developed of the developing ones' (Kosolapov 2002, p. 108).

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<sup>33</sup> See an interview with I. Yurgens, Yu. Slashcheva and D. Yakobashvili: 'Ishchem vykhod' *Radio Ekho Moskvy*, 17 November 2005, available on-line at: <http://echo.msk.ru/programs/exit/39998/>, accessed 5 May 2006.



This sharp contrast between the perceived strength of the Soviet Union and the Russian Empire and the obvious weakness of the Russian Federation led to growing dissatisfaction with Russia's role in the international arena. This dissatisfaction was shared not only by political elites, but also by many ordinary Russians, who welcomed a more active, even more aggressive foreign policy aimed at defending Russia's national interests and positioning Russia as an *equal* partner of Western countries rather than a *junior* partner. According to an opinion poll conducted by the Public Opinion Foundation (FOM) in June 2000, when asked what they wanted most for Russia, an overwhelming majority of respondents (76-85%) answered that they wanted Russia 'to become a great and peaceful country' (Public Opinion Foundation 2000). Therefore, the goal of restoring the status of a great power to some extent was inevitably going to appear on the agenda of the ruling elites. Unlike the image of Yel'tsin's Russia that was often portrayed, especially in the early 1990s, as 'catching up with' or 'running after' the West, the image of Putin's Russia for the domestic audience was built around the idea of 'strength'. The characteristic of a 'country that is getting stronger' became particularly salient during the second term of Putin's presidency. The results of national surveys conducted by FOM in June 2006 demonstrate that 46% of respondents in Russia believed that the country had become stronger while only 16% were convinced of the opposite. Moreover, when asked when Russia was at its strongest, 20% of participants chose the Putin era, which was almost as high a number as the 28% of respondents who chose Stalin's time or the 22% who opted for Brezhnev's years. At the same time only 1% thought that Russia had been strongest under Yel'tsin (Public Opinion Foundation 2006).

#### **4.1.3 Russia in the Post-Soviet Area**

Another central element of Russia's dominant self-image was the idea of Russia having special interests in the post-Soviet area. It should be mentioned that the vision of Russia as an empire has always been of utmost importance for Russia's self-identification. One could agree with Trenin (2001, p. 74), that '[i]f there was a «Russian idea», it was that of a universal Eurasian empire'. Nostalgia for the imperial past is fairly typical of all former empires, but in Russia it became particularly noticeable. One of the reasons for this widespread feeling can be that only a relatively short period of time has passed since the collapse of the empire. Although the Russian Empire as such disintegrated in 1917, some scholars have argued that it was then revived in the form of the Soviet Union, and, thus, finally collapsed only in 1991 (e.g. Gaidar 2006). In this context the question of whether

Russia could or should regain its empire became a popular topic in public and academic debate in the post-Soviet period. There were various opinions on this matter, some of them quite radical, particularly in Fundamentalist Nationalist discourse. According to the right wing geopolitician Alexander Dugin (2000), for instance, empire was the only form of natural existence for the Russian people. He argued that for Russia even the role of a regional power would be disastrous. Therefore, Russia needed to become an empire again, this time even larger than the Soviet Union. Another variant of a somewhat pro-imperial position was that of the communist leader Gennady Zyuganov (2001) who called for the reunion of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, while presenting it as a reunion of all Russian people.

Most liberal politicians and researchers, on the contrary, argued that Russia should abandon any imperial hopes, as they were not only inappropriate but also unrealistic. As Trenin (2001, p. 315) put it, '[t]he country's principal macroeconomic measurements are too modest for such an ambitious project'. A striking combination of liberal and imperial views was presented in the concept of a 'liberal empire' advocated by Anatoly Chubais, the head of the company Unified Energy Systems of Russia (RAO UES of Russia) and one of the leaders of the party 'Union of Right Forces' (SPS). In his article 'Missiya Rossii v XXI veke' published in *Nezavisimaya gazeta* in October 2003, Chubais suggested that Russia's mission in the international arena should be to build a liberal empire in the post-Soviet area. The core elements of the country's relations with the 'near abroad', according to Chubais, should be (i) promoting Russian culture and defending the rights of Russian speakers, (ii) expansion of Russian business, and (iii) support of democratic rights and freedoms. At the same time the concept envisaged that Russia should respect the sovereignty of those countries, and its actions should always comply with international law. Therefore, Russia would become 'an empire' not through political coercion, but rather with the help of economic means through its increasing economic attractiveness (Chubais 2003).

This project was quite close to the official position of Putin's Russia in relation to the 'near abroad'. The President's Addresses to the Federal Assembly also emphasised the priority of this area for Russian foreign policy, and stressed the necessity to support Russian speakers and promote Russian culture in the CIS countries. The 2005 Address, for instance, stated that Russia 'should continue its civilising mission on the Eurasian continent', which implied 'ensuring that democratic values, combined with national interests, enrich and strengthen our historic community' (Putin 2005, p. 4). At the same time, Russia's economic presence in the former Soviet republics increased substantially over the years of

Putin's presidency (Tsygankov 2006a). The crucial difference between Chubais's concept and the views articulated by the President and high-ranking decision-makers was not in their positions as such, but rather in presenting the final goals of Russia's actions in the 'near abroad' for both foreign and domestic audiences. While Chubais described his vision of Russia as of an empire, though not in the traditional but an economic sense, the Kremlin was trying to avoid any associations even with the word *empire* and put the stress on the opportunities for mutual benefits for Russia and other post-Soviet countries.

#### 4.1.4 Russia as an Energy Superpower

Another core component of Russia's dominant self-image was connected with the vision of economic backwardness as one of the major threats to Russia's security. In the official discourse, economic modernisation was considered as the most important task for Putin's Russia, and foreign policy was regarded as a tool for achieving this strategic goal. This led to seeing isolationism in the international arena as a very dangerous path to follow. The only way to become stronger was to integrate into the world economy, which meant to intensify cooperation with the West. According to Putin,

no country today, no matter how big and how wealthy, can develop successfully in isolation from the rest of the world. On the contrary, the biggest success comes to those countries that consciously use their energy and intelligence to integrate themselves into the world economy (2003, p. 4)

Connected with the understanding of economic prosperity as the country's main objective was the idea of the key role of energy resources in its economic development. Seeing the resource sector as a unique opportunity to modernise Russia's economy in a short period of time was always central to Putin's vision of the country's future. His attention to the topic may be traced back to as early as the late 1990s when he chose it as his research focus while doing a PhD in Economics at the St Petersburg Mining Institute. After Putin entered the President's office in 2000, his thesis and an article summarising its major research findings received considerable attention as scholars were trying to examine his personal beliefs regarding the country's political strategy (see Balzer 2005a; 2005b).<sup>34</sup> While Putin's PhD thesis was for several years inaccessible to Western scholars, his article titled 'Mineral

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<sup>34</sup> The authorship of Putin's thesis titled *The Strategic Planning of Regional Resources under the Formation of Market Relations* was questioned when in 2006 researchers from the Brookings Institution, USA discovered that at least a part of it had been based on a study written by American authors in the 1970s (*The Sunday Times*, 26 March 2006). It could be argued, however, that even if it was not written by Putin but was only published under his name, it would still be an interesting material for research. One could suggest that Putin, being already a high-ranking official at that time, would not have agreed to be associated with the texts if they had been contrary to his personal position.

Natural Resources in the Strategy for Development of the Russian Economy’ was openly available, and published in English in 2006. The key idea of the article can be formulated as the possibility to cope with the country’s economic crisis and to restore its leading role in the international arena with the help of efficient management of the resource sector. As Putin himself put it, ‘the natural resource complex remains the most important factor in the state’s development in the near term’ (2006b, p. 54).

This view was reflected in a number of Russia’s official documents. The ‘Energy Strategy of the Russian Federation for the Period until 2020’ (adopted in 2003), for instance, stressed that Russia’s energy resources were ‘an instrument of domestic and foreign policies’. According to this strategy, ‘the country’s role on the world energy markets largely determines its geopolitical influence’ (Energeticheskaya strategiya 2003). Moreover, energy exports, particularly exports of natural gas to EU member states, played an extremely important role in the country’s economy. In 2007, for instance, the energy sector generated approximately 64% of Russia’s export revenues (House of Lords 2008, p. 45). As Dmitry Medvedev acknowledged on leaving Gazprom’s Board of Directors after his election as Russian President in 2008, about 20% of the Russian federal budget was formed by Gazprom revenues (*Vremya novostei*, 28 May 2008, p. 4). Although the Russian authorities continuously emphasised the need to diversify the economy, it still remained hugely dependent on energy trade (see Hanson 2007).

In this context, the vision of Russia as an energy superpower (although Putin himself avoided using this term) became one of the key element of Russia’s dominant self-image, particularly during Putin’s second term in office. However, while it was shared by many members of the Russian political elite, it was continuously criticised by a number of prominent Liberal Westernisers. According to the leader of Yabloko Grigory Yavlinsky, for instance, ‘oil and gas are awful things, a real disease, a natural drug: there is oil in one vein, there is gas in the other, and there are economic hallucinations in the head’ (*Moskovskii komsomolets*, 2 December 2005, p. 4). One of the major dangers of the project was seen in the risk of repeating the mistake that turned out to be fatal for the economy of the Soviet Union - the overreliance on oil exports that led to a very serious economic crisis when oil prices plummeted in the 1980s. In addition to that, Russia’s turning into a ‘petrostate’ was viewed as a major obstacle on the way of the country’s modernisation and as a means to preserve the *status quo* in the political sphere (Shevtsova 2005).

On the whole, Russia's dominant self-image during Putin's presidency may be seen as mostly Pragmatic Nationalist as it viewed Russia as a great power with special interests in the area of the former Soviet Union. Moreover, similarly to the position of Pragmatic Nationalists, the official discourse favoured pragmatic cooperation with the West. At the same time, it included some elements of competing discourses albeit avoiding their extremes. Although Liberal Westernisers became a 'diminishing minority' (White 2007, p. 149) in the Presidential administration and the Russian government, their views on the priority of economic modernisation and cooperation with the West had a pronounced impact on the official discourse. On the other hand, Russia's dominant self-image was also affected by the vision of Russia as a besieged fortress, which was characteristic of Fundamentalist Nationalist vision. By combining these, often contradictory, elements, the official discourse sought to reconcile various interests among members of the Russian elite, particularly between liberals and *siloviki*. However, it resulted in a noticeable inconsistency of the dominant self-image, which represented a formidable challenge for Russian foreign propaganda.

## **4.2 Key Elements of the Projected Image**

Similarly to Russia's dominant self-image, Russia's projected image was also fairly inconsistent as it included elements of Liberal and Fundamentalist Nationalist discourses. Although Russia's projected images varied to some extent across target regions depending on the goals of Russian foreign policy, it is still possible to trace a number of key elements that they had in common. These were the visions of Russia as a great power, as an energy superpower, and the emphasis on the non-imperial character of Russia's policy in the 'near abroad'. In addition to these elements in Russia's image there were also a number of historical characteristics, mainly connected with the Soviet period of Russian history. Although the 'relative weight' of these elements changed depending on the economic and political context, they constituted the core of the country's projected image, and thus are of particular interest for this study.

### **4.2.1 Russia as a Great Power**

The emphasis on strength in Russia's image projected in the West may suggest some associations with the image of the USSR created by Soviet propaganda. There was, however, one significant difference between the two of them. While for the Soviet Union the image was based mainly on the perception of a military and ideological threat, for

Putin's Russia it was not military but rather economic strength that was positioned as important. This shift can be explained by the fact that due to numerous economic and social problems it would have been extremely difficult for the Russian army to pose a serious threat to Western countries. Another reason was the increasing role of economic considerations for Russian political elites in general. Although 'Russia as a nuclear power' was still an essential characteristic of the country's image, there was more stress on the concept of 'Russia as an energy superpower', on economic growth (although to a significant extent based on high energy prices) and on the readiness to defend the country's economic interests.

The aim to regain great power status made it particularly important for the ruling elite to demonstrate Russia's right to this status by active participation in solving international conflicts or by membership of prestigious international 'clubs', such as the G8. The Russian presidency of the latter in 2006, for instance, was depicted by Russian high-ranking officials, as well as researchers and journalists, as evidence that the other members of the G8 had acknowledged Russia as a great power. This view can be illustrated by the opinion of Sergey Rogov, head of the Institute of the USA and Canada (Russian Academy of Sciences): 'It is symbolic that Russia is enjoying full rights as the President of the G8, i.e. this fact demonstrates that our country has returned to the list of great powers' (RIA Novosti 2006b). It is noteworthy that these words coincided with the intensification of criticism of the state of Russian democracy, when even the fact of Russia's membership, not only its presidency in the G8 was called into question by some Western political elites and mass media. However, according to Putin, Russia should be regarded as a 'natural member' of the G8 because its involvement was essential for solving the most urgent problems of the West, as well as of the rest of the world, in particular the problems of energy security and the nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction (Interview with NBC Television Channel 2006).

Another key element of Russia's projected image, which was closely connected with positioning Russia as a great country, was 'Russia as an independent centre of power in a multipolar world'. The question of whether or not the world became unipolar with the US being the only superpower, or whether there were several competing poles, had been at the centre of public debate in Russia ever since the disintegration of the Soviet Union. While among Russian political elites there was no consensus on this question, in the official discourse there was a strong emphasis on the desirability of a multipolar world. According to the National Security Concept (2000), for instance, among Russia's national interests in

the international sphere was 'reinforcing the position of Russia as a great power and one of the influential centres of the multipolar world' (Kontseptsiya natsional'noi 2000, p. 4). This idea was present in many statements and interviews of the Russian President that were aimed at foreign audiences, which demonstrates its significance for Russia's projected image. In his interview with the French TV Company 'France 3', for example, Putin expressed his opinion that 'the world will be predictable and stable only if it is multipolar' (Interv'yu Prezidenta 2003c, p. 29).

Why was this element of Russia's image so important? Visions of the world as multipolar implied that despite any economic or social problems Russia could still be considered an influential world power centre, since poles may vary in their 'weight' in different spheres, and no country can be most influential in all spheres. This means that although Putin's Russia could not yet be considered the strongest actor in world economy, it would definitely be an important pole in the sphere of international law since it was a permanent member of the UN Security Council, or in the military sphere since it was a nuclear power (Torkunov 2002). Therefore, creating the image of Russia as an independent pole in a multipolar world could make it easier for the country to reclaim the status of a great power. It should be mentioned, however, that the feasibility of Russia becoming an independent centre of power was called into question by some researchers. Dmitry Trenin (2001, p. 316), for instance, argued that Russia would probably not be able to form a separate pole, but would rather be attracted to one of the more active poles.

Moreover, stressing the desirability of a multipolar world was meant to demonstrate that Russia was in favour of a more democratic world order: the co-existence of several independent centres of power would provide it with a plurality of positions that could not be achieved if one country dominated world politics. This emphasis on the country's support of more democratic international relations was particularly beneficial for Russia at a time when it was criticised by the West for authoritarian tendencies in its domestic policies. One of the core values declared in all major official documents was the supremacy of international law and the decisive role of the UN. According to the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (2000), for instance, one of the major objectives of Russian foreign policy should be 'to influence general world processes with the aim of forming a stable, just and democratic world order, built on generally recognised norms of international law, including, first of all, the goals and principles in the UN Charter' (Kontseptsiya vneshnei 2000, p. 3). The perceptions by Russian elites of the UN as the most important forum in the system of international relations became extremely significant

in the 1990s. In the context of Russia's rapidly decreasing power in world politics, its membership of international organisations began to be seen as providing an opportunity to defend the country's interests that would be difficult to defend otherwise. This idea was expressed in the Foreign Policy Concept in 1993 when the weakening position of the country left no illusions regarding the possibility of maintaining the status of a great power (Kontseptsiya vneshnei 1993). Thus, being a permanent member of the UN Security Council and enjoying the right of veto, Russia was especially interested in strengthening the UN's role.

On the whole, positioning Russia as a great power and independent centre in a multipolar world has remained among the most significant elements of Russia's image projected in the West since the early 2000s. During Vladimir Putin's second term this rhetoric became much more assertive, which was most clearly demonstrated in his speech at the [43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy in February 2007 \(Putin 2007d\)](#). The emphasis on the country's strength became especially pronounced in the context of rapid economic growth, when the image of Russia as a great power acquired an additional characteristic connected with seeing it as an energy superpower.

#### **4.2.2 Russia as an Energy Superpower**

Energy security was chosen as one of the main areas for discussion at the G8 summit in St Petersburg in July 2006. This topic was regarded by Russian political elites as especially important in a situation in which the disagreement over energy prices between Russia and Ukraine in the winter of 2005-2006 had a very negative effect on Russia's image (as demonstrated in Chapter Two of this study). In response to growing concerns over the possibility that Russia would use oil and gas as an instrument of putting pressure on other states, the Kremlin took a number of steps aimed at improving its image, including publishing an article under Putin's name in *The Wall Street Journal*. Its title – 'Energy Egotism Is a Road to Nowhere' – speaks for itself. The main message was that Russia was a reliable and responsible business partner, and it wanted 'to create an energy security system sensitive to the interests of the whole international community' (Putin 2006a). The article emphasised the interdependence of the world where not only consumers depended on suppliers, but also the latter, in their turn, depended on the former. Thus, it sought to convince readers of the impossibility for Russia of using energy as a tool of political pressure.



It is difficult to say how close the image projected with the help of this article was to the actual vision held by Russian political elites. On the one hand, the idea of interdependence of the forces of supply and demand was central to most public speeches of the President and most high-ranking officials on this topic. They attempted to avoid the use of the word ‘superpower’ in relation to Russia’s energy strategy, as it had negative associations with the Soviet Union, and, thus, would imply the imperialist character of Russia’s energy policy. President Putin, for instance, accused the Western mass media that portrayed Russia as an energy superpower of deliberate attempts at ‘reviving echoes of the «evil Soviet Union»’ (Stenograficheskii 2006). On the other hand, some Russian scholars argued that for the energy market the 21<sup>st</sup> century was an era of suppliers rather than consumers. Thus, having become an energy superpower Russia would be able ‘to regain its status and role in global political processes’ (Simonov 2006, p. 6).

Positioning Russia as an energy superpower sent two, to some extent conflicting messages to Western countries. On the one hand, there was an emphasis on Russia’s claim for a more important, even decisive role in international relations. Russian foreign propaganda sought to convey the idea that Russia was ready to defend its national interests, and had sufficient means in the form of natural resources to do so. On the other hand, there was a considerable stress on positive, business-like characteristics, such as reliability, predictability and stability, which were meant to convince Western consumers that Moscow did not consider oil and gas as instruments in geopolitical competition. Pragmatism was depicted as the main principle of Russian foreign policy, suggesting that in its energy policy Russia was guided by purely economic considerations. This conflict of messages contributed to the inconsistency of Russia’s projected image, which was also the case with some other of its core elements, in particular the vision of Russia as ‘not an empire’.

#### **4.2.3 Russia as ‘not an Empire’**

Considering the label of ‘empire’ as an extremely negative characteristic, Russian foreign propaganda sought to persuade the West that Russia did not cherish any imperial ambitions regarding the CIS countries. One of the arguments most often used to demonstrate the lack of imperial plans was the fact that Russia had not opposed the disintegration of the Soviet Union, but, on the contrary, facilitated it. As President Putin put it in his interview with German television channels ARD and ZDF in May 2005, ‘Russia was one of the main initiators of the break-up of the Soviet Union (...) And to say or to hint that Russia wishes

to regain the greatness of a superpower is simply nonsense' (Interview with German Television Channels 2005). Projecting the image of 'Russia as not an Empire', the Kremlin attempted to draw a rigid dividing line between being an empire and having legitimate strategic interests in the neighbouring countries, first of all in terms of security. This interpretation of the Kremlin's position has been seen as realistic by some commentators. According to Tsygankov, for instance, 'Russia cannot be denied its own political, military and economic interests' there, and its policy has been 'an effort to preserve existing influence in the region for the purpose of its greater stabilisation, rather than imperial control' (2006a, p. 1080).

Another key element of Russia's image in relation to the country's actions in 'the near abroad' was the idea that Russian policy was driven by economic considerations as opposed to geopolitical ones. One of the clearest examples of this approach was Moscow's reaction to Western criticism of its decision to turn off gas supplies to Ukraine in the winter of 2005-2006. While in the West Russian actions were interpreted mainly as an attempt to use energy as a means to punish Ukraine for its pro-Western choice (*The Times*, 5 January 2006), Russian officials emphasised purely economic reasons for stopping the energy supply. As President Putin explained to the participants of the Valdai Discussion Club in September 2006,

nobody wants to take on the load of subsidising another country's economy by three to five billion USD a year. Nobody wants to but for some reason everybody insists that we do so. And we did so for 15 years (Stenograficheskii 2006)

Moreover, when speaking about Russia's role in the Ukrainian gas crisis, Putin touched upon the topic of the Ukrainian presidential elections in 2004. While the Western mass media fiercely criticised Moscow for interfering in Ukraine's elections (as the Kremlin openly supported one of the candidates, Viktor Yanukovich), Putin referred to the fact that 'our European and American partners decided to support the orange revolution even against the Constitution' (Stenograficheskii 2006). These words were meant to convey the idea that, from Moscow's point of view, the Western mass media often applied double standards in their coverage of Russian politics.

Overall, positioning Russia as a country without imperial ambitions but with legitimate interests in neighbouring states was one of the most difficult tasks for Russian foreign propaganda. On the one hand, some of Moscow's actions in the post-Soviet area, such as trade wars with Georgia, did not comply with the projected image. In such cases the use of

PR techniques could not change the perceptions of Russia's policy to any significant extent. On the other hand, the centuries-long stereotypes about Russian imperialism held by political elites in the 'near abroad' were reinforced every time Russia gave a slightest occasion for doing so. For the former Soviet Union republics and the countries that were part of the Eastern bloc, any of Russia's actions that were not beneficial for them would appear to be neo-imperial.

#### **4.2.4 Historical Characteristics**

In addition to the components discussed above, Russia's projected image also contained a number of characteristics that were related to Russian history, in particular its Soviet period. This can be explained by understanding among the Russian elite that Russia's existing images in the West were inevitably affected by the image of the Soviet Union. Most of these 'inherited' characteristics (e.g. the imperial nature of the country's foreign policy) were extremely negative. As it was very difficult, if not impossible, to 'rub off' such links with the Soviet Union, Russian foreign propaganda aimed at presenting the connection between the Soviet Union and Russia from a more favourable perspective. Among the most significant of such characteristics were a vision of the Soviet Union as possessing not only negative, but also positive features; an emphasis on Russia's crucial role in the World War 2; positioning Russia as a victim of the Soviet regime in the same way as other Soviet republics; and finally, stressing Russia's contribution to the end of the Cold War.

Seeing the Soviet Union as an 'evil empire', which was still one of the most widespread clichés in the West, implied that most positive achievements of the Soviet period were almost completely overshadowed by negative developments. This view was not shared by the official position in Putin's Russia: although it did not dispute the disastrous consequences of the Soviet regime for Russia and other countries of the former Soviet bloc, it stressed the necessity of recognising that it had some positive results as well. As Putin stated in his article 'Rossiya na rubezhe tysyacheletii', 'it would be a mistake not to see, and especially to deny unquestionable achievements of that time' (1999, p.1). Moreover, in the Address to the Federal Assembly in 2005 the Russian President described the disintegration of the Soviet Union as 'the biggest geopolitical catastrophe' of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, meaning that it had separated many families and brought about tremendous economic and social difficulties to ordinary people (Putin 2005, p. 3).

Another significant element of Russia's projected image was positioning it as the main contributor to the Alliance's victory in World War 2. The victory over Nazi Germany was considered as one of the most important events in Russian history. Moreover, it was perceived by many among the Russian elite as legitimising Russia's status as a great power. The emphasis on the country's decisive role in the war was also one of the major elements in the image of the Soviet Union. However, while in the case of the Soviet Union the victory was depicted as being gained by the state under the leadership of the Communist party, in Russia's projected image it was portrayed as the result of the heroic deeds of ordinary people. As an example of such an approach one can look at the article 'One out of Millions: A Veteran's Story Tells That of a Generation' published by the main editor of *Russia Profile* Andrei Zolotov (2005). This interpretation showed the war as sacred for the Russian people, and sought to draw a dividing line between the victory and the events that had taken place before or after the war, in particular signing the secret protocols to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

The crucial role of this element in Russia's projected image (as well as in the dominant self-image) can explain the Kremlin's sensitivity towards the dispute with Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia concerning their incorporation into the Soviet Union. The situation became particularly tense in 2005 when Moscow was preparing to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the victory. While the Russian authorities attempted to use the celebrations to improve the country's image, the leaders of the Baltic States raised the issue of the appropriateness of holding celebrations in Moscow. As Latvian President Vaira Vike-Freiberga put it on LNT television in Riga in February 2005,

of course, we won't change the opinions of those old Russians, who will put their vobla (dried, salted fish) on a newspaper, drink their vodka and sing their chastushki (a type of musical folk limerick) on May 9, remembering how they heroically invaded the Baltic countries (quoted in Babich 2005)

In this context, the prevalent opinion held by Russian political elites was that the former Soviet republics were using the argument of the Soviet occupation as a tool to achieve their own political goals: first to become independent from the USSR, then to receive support from the West, and, finally, to justify discrimination against ethnic Russians living on their territory (Demurin 2005). Another example of this pronounced sensitivity of the Russian authorities and members of the Russian political elite in general to divergent interpretations of Soviet history was their extremely emotional reaction to the controversial decision of the Estonian authorities to relocate the so-called Bronze Soldier – a Soviet World War 2 memorial in Tallinn (*The New York Times*, 25 January 2007).

Another key element in Russia's projected image was challenging the 'equals sign' that was often put between the Soviet Union and Russia. While in the former Soviet republics Russia was viewed as the centre of the Soviet empire, and thus responsible for Soviet tyranny, in Russia's projected image there was an emphasis on differentiating between the two. Russia was positioned as a country that had been oppressed and had suffered from totalitarianism as much as all the other republics, as 'a similar victim of the international «red roller coaster»' (Pankin 2005). At the same time Russia was positioned as a country that had made the end of the Cold War possible: it was not a victory of the West, but the choice of the Russian people themselves. According to Putin, Russia 'made its choice at the beginning of the 1990s, and in fact this helped the countries of Eastern Europe to feel free and return to their normal state. The Soviet Union did everything to destroy the Berlin wall' (Interview with German Television Channels 2005). These components in Russia's projected image became especially salient when there was a need to respond to the criticism of Russian democracy voiced by Western countries.

A significant element in Russia's projected image (as well as its dominant self-image) was the idea of the country's special mission in the world. This characteristic may be seen as old and new at the same time since a messianic vision had always been central to Russian self-image, but it took different forms. For the Russian Empire it was the idea of Moscow as the third Rome that implied the mission of keeping original Christian values that had been lost elsewhere, for the Soviet Union – the idea of bringing freedom and equality in the form of communism to the rest of the world (see Duncan 2000). Putin's Russia was portrayed as serving the world by being on the front line in the fight against terror (i.e. in Chechnya) and acting as a barrier to drugs and criminals on their way to Europe (Putin 2002).

### **4.3 Shifting the Focus: Russia's Self-, Projected and Perceived Images**

While Russian foreign propaganda sought to bolster the components of Russia's image examined above, it also attempted to downplay a number of other components that the Russian authorities considered particularly problematic. Broadly speaking, one of its main tasks was to shift the focus of attention from one group of image characteristics to another. This point can be illustrated by the difference in the 'relative weight' in Russia's perceived and projected images of the characteristics related to democracy and to the war in

Chechnya. While for the Western mass media and researchers the state of Russian democracy, or, to be more precise, strengthening of authoritarian tendencies, was one of the main concerns, in Russia's dominant discourse it was one of the least emphasised topics. The understanding of how Russian democracy should be presented to the West underwent significant changes during the last decade. In the late 1990s the approach to this element of Russia's image was often reactive, as most statements related to democracy were made in response to Western criticism rather than being issued proactively. This situation began to change during Putin's second presidential term, when the official position became far more assertive in relation to this issue, with two main ideas being emphasised.

Firstly, it was argued that the country was building a system that would be different from the Western democratic model, but would still be democratic. According to Putin, it was inappropriate for Russia simply to copy the Western system without considering Russia's own circumstances. On the contrary, Russia should follow its own path of democratisation, 'taking into account [its] historic, geopolitical and other particularities' (2005, p. 4). One of the major elements of the vision of a democratic model that would correspond to these 'particularities' was seeing sovereignty as the highest priority for the country. This can be best illustrated by the words of Vladislav Surkov, Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration, who, in explaining the goals of Putin's politics, called the system that was being created 'sovereign democracy':

I often hear that democracy is more important than sovereignty. We do not admit that. We believe, that we need both of them. An independent country is worth fighting for (Surkov 2005).

Secondly, there was an emphasis on the possible dangers of democratisation in Russia for the West itself. Former director of Carnegie Moscow Center, Andrew Kuchins (2006), summarised President Putin's message to the participants of the Valdai Discussion Club in September 2006 as 'beware of what you wish for'. These words imply that although the situation in Putin's Russia was not as democratic as Western leaders would like it to be, it was still beneficial for Western countries in practical terms: the Kremlin was more open for cooperation with Western countries than it could have been if it had to take into account anti-Western attitudes of the population under a more democratic regime. As Kuchins put it, the 'Russian population is far more anti-American than [Putin's] pragmatic approach to Washington'. It also suggests that democratisation could lead to instability in both political and economic terms, which means that the present state of democracy in Russia may be the optimum variant for the country and for the world.

	Perceived image	Self-image (dominant discourse)	Projected image (dominant discourse)
State of democracy in Russia	Strengthening of authoritarian tendencies	(not significant)	‘Sovereign democracy’ (democracy that is different from the Western model)
Russia as an energy supplier	- Energy pressure on consumers for political reasons (geopolitics of energy, pipeline diplomacy)	- Growing strength of the country - Energy superpower (21 <sup>st</sup> century as the age of suppliers)	- Reliable business partner (stability, pragmatism, predictability) - Energy superpower (ready to defend its interests)
Russia and the Post-Soviet area	- Russia’s imperial ambitions	- Russia’s legitimate interests in the ‘near abroad’	- Russia as not an Empire - Russia’s legitimate interests in the ‘near abroad’
International status of Russia	- Russia as a former superpower - Russia’s growing strength and assertiveness	- Growing strength and role in international relations	- Great power - Independent centre in a multipolar world
Culture	Great Russian culture	Great Russian culture	Great Russian culture

Table 4.1. Core elements of Russia’s perceived, projected and self-images

Another element that differed substantially in Russia’s projected and perceived images was Russia’s policy regarding Chechnya. Similarly to the perceptions of Russian democracy, the vision of Moscow’s relations with Chechnya had a much lower ‘relative weight’ in the projected image. What is more, while in the perceived image the emphasis was mainly on human rights and military issues, in the projected image the focus was shifted to the political aspect of the problem. The core elements of this vision were positioning the Chechen crisis as Russia’s internal problem, emphasising that Chechnya was an integral part of the Russian Federation (i.e. one cannot question Russia’s territorial integrity), stressing the legitimate character of Chechnya’s status as it had been approved by

referendum results, and, finally interpreting Russia's actions in Chechnya as building a 'very strong barrier against the infiltration of fundamentalism in this part of Europe' (Interv'yū Prezidenta 2003b, p. 19). The latter component of Russia's image became particularly important in the context of the war against terror that was launched by the US following September 11, 2001. The key message that was sent to Western countries conveyed the idea that those fighting against Russian forces in Chechnya were 'the same people who (...) attacked American cities' (Interv'yū Prezidenta 2003a, p. 14). The emphasis on the possible link between Chechen separatists and Al-Qaeda was meant to add legitimacy to Russia's actions in the breakaway republic.

On the whole, Russian foreign propaganda sought to place more negative elements on the periphery of the projected image, and put more stress on those issues that would be more favourable for Russia. Table 4.1 illustrates the most significant differences and similarities between the core components of all three images of Russia, i.e. its dominant self-, projected and perceived images that were discussed earlier in the chapter. As we can see, these images coincided only in their positive assessment of Russian culture. At the same time, they differed substantially in all other categories. The emphasis of Russian foreign propaganda on the economic component of Russia's image, particularly on positioning the country as a reliable, pragmatic and predictable partner, sought to demonstrate the priority of economic rather than geopolitical considerations for the Russian authorities. This led some researchers to suggest that Putin's strategy might be described as that of a 'normal great power', which implied that regaining a great power status for Russia was not a goal in itself, but a 'necessary condition for Russia's more advanced engagement with the world' (Tsygankov 2005, p. 134). However, during Putin's second presidential term, the economic element of Russia's projected image was often overshadowed by positioning Russia as a great power and an independent international actor, which sent conflicting messages to Western audiences and limited the effectiveness of Russian propaganda.



## Chapter 5

### Russia's Images and Foreign propaganda in the UK

Having examined the mechanism of Russian foreign propaganda and having analysed the image that the Russian authorities sought to project in Western countries in general, this study now proceeds to explore these issues in greater detail in two case studies – the UK and Germany. As observed in Chapter Three, the strategy of Russian foreign propaganda during Vladimir Putin's presidency envisaged intensification of propaganda efforts in all of the G8 countries. The UK presents a particularly interesting case in this regard for a number of reasons. Firstly, apart from being a member of the G8 and a permanent member of the UN Security Council, Britain plays an important role in policy-making at the EU level. Moreover, in the early 2000s, in a context of its special relationship with the USA, the UK was considered by the Russian leadership as a 'potential bridge between Russia and the US' (Bacon 2007, p. 15). Secondly, Britain is the largest foreign investor in the Russian economy, particularly in its energy sector. In 2007 its level of investment reached \$26,328 mln, or 21.8% of total investment by foreign countries (Federal State Statistics Service n.d.b). However, in terms of trade with Russia the UK is significantly behind a number of other EU member states, such as Germany or France. In 2007 Russia's exports to the UK accounted for only \$11,024 mln or 3.7% of Russia's total exports to 'far abroad countries', while its imports from the UK were at the level of \$5,642 mln or 3.3% of Russia's total imports (Federal State Statistics Service n.d. a).

Another aspect that makes the UK case particularly interesting for the present study is the fact that the UK, unlike many other EU member states, is not dependent on imports of Russian energy to a considerable extent. At the same time, in recent years Russia's state-controlled gas monopoly Gazprom persisted in efforts to increase its presence in the UK energy market. Moreover, a growing number of Russian companies expressed interest in being listed on the London Stock Exchange, which according to Russia's ambassador to the UK Yurii Fedotov became 'a kind of compulsory quality stamp' for them (quoted in *Financial Times*, 5 June 2007). Thus, the Russian authorities viewed the task of projecting a more favourable image of Russia in Britain as extremely important for political and economic reasons. In addition to that, Britain has for centuries been one of the significant Others for Russian identity. Therefore, one can expect that its recognition and acceptance

of Russia's projected image would be extremely important for Russia's evolving self-image.

This chapter begins by placing Russia's image in the UK into a wider historical context and traces the most recurrent stereotypes and clichés concerning Russia that became deeply rooted in Britain's picture of the world in the course of history. This is followed in the second part by an analysis of the core elements of Russia's images in the UK in 2000-2008. The chapter then proceeds to examine peculiarities of Russian foreign propaganda in the UK, including the actions of the Russian authorities related to the so called Litvinenko case which had a particularly significant impact on Russia's images in Britain. The chapter concludes by discussing the results of Russian propaganda and implications of Russia's images in the UK for British-Russian relations.

## **5.1 British Images of Russia and the Russians: 16<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries**

National images are always affected by stereotypes that emerged in the course of history (see e.g. Boulding 1956; 1959). These stereotypes are usually very stable: even when a new reality contradicts them, and they seem to have almost disappeared, they tend to become stronger again whenever there is a slightest occasion that can confirm them. Over nearly five hundred years of British-Russian relations, a number of stereotypes about Russia and the Russians became deeply rooted in British culture. Russia was 'discovered' for Britain in 1553 by captain Richard Chancellor whose experience in Russia was the first in a series of voyage accounts that became the only source of information about Russia for Britons at that time. Many stereotypes about Russia and the Russians, including seeing Russians as drunkards and as people who could never be trusted, can be traced to that time. Moreover, for Britons who came to Russia in the 16<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and who quite often neither spoke the Russian language, nor understood the Russian way of life, Muscovy's main feature was its otherness, its difference from Britain and from Europe in general. According to *The Present State of Russia*, which was published anonymously in London in 1671, the Russians were 'a people who differ from all other nations of the world, in most of their actions' (quoted in Cross 1971, p. 27). By the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century barbarity, backwardness and particular otherness of Russia had become deeply rooted in the British picture of that country.

Although these characteristics were not positive, on the whole Russia's image in Britain at that time was more or less neutral rather than negative. Russia was not perceived as a

threat. Some Russian sovereigns, such as Peter the Great or Catherine the Great, were even seen in a more or less positive light and their policies aroused considerable interest in Britain (Cross 2000; 2001). What is more, Russia was Britain's ally in the war against Napoleon in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and its significant contribution to the victory added an element of heroism to its image. A profound change in British perceptions of Russia occurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Russian and British imperial ambitions came into conflict in Central Asia. Russia's growing power in the region was viewed in Britain as threatening to British interests in India. It is noteworthy that the vision of Russia as a threat had developed long before Russian and British interests clashed in a military conflict, i.e. in the Crimean War in 1854-1856. As early as in 1829 *The Times* wrote that 'there is no sane mind in Europe that can look with satisfaction at the immense and rapid over-growth of Russian power' (quoted in Gleason 1972, p. 86). The anti-Russian hysteria that gripped British society in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was, as Gleason (1972) has argued, the time when Russophobia emerged as an extremely important element of the British outlook on the world.

At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries Russia's images in Britain were predominantly negative. Apart from backwardness and otherness, their key characteristics were the aggressiveness of Russia's imperial foreign policy and a vision of the Russian political regime as an Asiatic despotism. These elements became particularly pronounced due to the fact that many Jewish émigrés from Russia came to live in London, and their negative attitudes towards the Russian regime had a noticeable impact on British public opinion (Zashikhin 1994). The same was true of Polish émigrés whose negative attitude towards the Russian Empire also had a profound effect on Britain's perceptions (Gleason 1972). In addition to that, Russians were seen as corrupt and inefficient. As George Buchanan (1923, v. 2, p. 86), who served as a British ambassador to the Russian Empire in 1910-1918, wrote in his memoirs, Russia was 'a vast empire (...) in which justice was ill-administered, and in which nearly every branch of the administration was as incompetent as it was corrupt'.

Although these negative elements constituted the core of the country's image, there were also some positive developments in British perceptions of Russia as a reaction to certain events that took place both in the Russian Empire and in the international arena. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century many masterpieces of the Russian literature, including works by Chekhov and Tolstoy, were translated into English, and thus Britain became familiar with Russian culture. Russia's image was also affected by the fact that Russia was Britain's ally in World War 1, which for some time made criticism of Russian internal affairs appear

as impolite. The year 1917 became another turning point in British perceptions of Russia. While the March revolution, which gave hope for Russia's democratisation, was welcomed in Britain, the Bolshevik revolution and the establishment of the communist state triggered a mixed reaction. For the majority of the British political elite these were very negative events. As Sir Curtis Keeble (1990, p. 45), who served as a British ambassador to the Soviet Union in 1978-1982, wrote in his study of British-Russian relations, the 'campaign of terror which followed the attack on Lenin and the accumulating reports of Bolshevik atrocities did much to harden opinion'. It should also be noted that the murder of Emperor Nicholas II, who was a cousin of British king George V, could not but affect British perceptions in a negative way.

On the whole, Britain's image of communist Russia and later of the Soviet Union was a very complicated phenomenon as it differed substantially for the conservative part of British society and for some left-wing politicians and their supporters. The ideals that were declared by the Soviet government were in many aspects close to those of the Labour Party (not to mention the Communist Party of Great Britain), which affected its vision of the USSR (Williams 1989). The 1930s are sometimes called the Pink Decade, as for a significant part of British intellectual and political elite it was a time of sympathy for the Soviet Union (Keeble 1990, p. 119). However, many of those Britons who were more or less positive in their attitudes to the USSR became more critical when the scale of Stalin's purges became known in the late 1930s, and especially when Soviet forces entered Poland in 1939, incorporated the Baltic States and attacked Finland. For the more right-wing part of British society these actions of the Soviet Union were only another confirmation of 'the old conviction that there was little to choose between Nazi and Communist dictatorship' (Keeble 1990, p. 158).

The image of the Soviet Union in Britain changed significantly during World War 2. Understanding of the crucial role that the Soviet army played in the Alliance's victory over Nazi Germany, and the unprecedented scale of Soviet losses, had an enormous impact on British perceptions (Bell 1990). The most widely spread feelings to the USSR at that time became sympathy and respect. This wave of positive attitudes reached its peak in 1942-1943 in response to the Soviet Union's victory at the Battle of Stalingrad (Pozdeeva 2000). However, with the end of the war the image very quickly reverted to negativism. As Keeble explained this rapid transformation, 'the bond between Britain and the Soviet Union, in so far as it existed, depended upon the common enemy and dissolved with his defeat' (Keeble, p. 168). However, a number of new characteristics that emerged during the war remained

central to the image of the post-war USSR. Among those were seeing it as a military power and as one of the key actors in world politics.

During the Cold War, the USSR was largely perceived as the most dangerous enemy and a military and ideological threat. This attitude was summarised in the words of British Prime Minister Clement Attlee, who, while making a speech for a party political broadcast in 1948, said that the ‘Soviet Communism pursues a policy of imperialism in a new form – ideological, economic and strategic – which threatens the welfare and the way of life of the other nations of Europe’ (quoted in Keeble 1990, p. 220). The vision of the USSR as a military threat became particularly pronounced in the 1950s when it came to be a nuclear power. In addition to that, the Soviet Union was perceived as threatening Britain’s security through espionage. After a number of major espionage scandals, the most notorious of them being the case of the so called ‘Cambridge five’ in the 1960s, the sinister figure of a Soviet spy became one of the most widely spread clichés in British mass culture. Perestroika, which was started by Mikhail Gorbachev in the late 1980s, was welcomed in Britain, and Gorbachev himself became one of the most popular political leaders (Braithwaite 2002). When the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991, and the Russian Federation appeared as an independent state under the presidency of Boris Yel’tsin, in Britain, as in the West in general, there were high expectations of its rapid democratisation. However, in the second half of the 1990s negativism began to return to British perceptions of Russia. In 2000, when Vladimir Putin took office, Russia’s image in Britain was already rather negative, though it still was much more positive than the image of the Soviet Union had been.

On the whole, over the centuries of British-Russian relations a number of stereotypes of Russia and the Russians, such as Russia’s otherness, untrustworthiness, despotism of its authorities and imperialism, became particularly prominent in Britain. Although at times of military alliances between the two states, Russia’s images did improve to a certain extent, they quickly reverted to predominance of negative characteristics once the need for such an alliance diminished.

## 5.2 Images of Putin's Russia in the UK, 2000 – 2008

Broadly speaking, the transformation of images of Putin's Russia in the UK followed the same trends as that of images of Russia in the West in general, as examined in Chapter Two. However, there were also a number of peculiarities. In the first instance, at the level of the British political elite Russia's image, particularly during Vladimir Putin's first term in office, was significantly less salient than the image of the Soviet Union. According to a survey of British experts on Russia commissioned by RIA Novosti in 2003,

most people in the UK, including decision makers, [did] not know what [was] happening in Russia. People certainly [knew] Putin, Berezovsky, vodka and 'kalashnikov', but they [were] not familiar with the present political or economic tendencies in Russia (RIA Novosti 2003)

This relatively low position of Russia on the political agenda stemmed from the fact that in the dominant vision of Russia among the British elite it was neither a serious military threat nor a promising democratising country.<sup>35</sup> Geographically, Russia was not Britain's neighbour. Moreover, compared to some other EU member states, such as Germany or Poland, Britain's trade with Russia was modest, and it was not yet dependent on Russian energy supplies. In the words of a former British diplomat, 'mostly we [British] do not think about Russia, unlike the Germans'.<sup>36</sup> Another diplomat explained this apparent lack of attention to Russia by what can be called as 'Russia-fatigue', i.e. a psychological reaction to having been exposed to excessive information about Russia in the 1990s.<sup>37</sup> The interest in Russia came in waves, most often in response to some negative or even catastrophic developments. In 2000–2008 these peaks of attention were caused, *inter alia*, by the Kursk submarine disaster in 2000, the Nord-Ost theatre siege in Moscow in 2002, the Beslan school siege in 2004, the gas dispute with Ukraine in the winter of 2005–2006, and particularly Alexander Litvinenko's death in 2006.

Secondly, at the level of public perceptions, Russia's image was even less visible. In preparation for Putin's official visit in the UK in 2003 RIA Novosti commissioned one of Britain's best-known research companies – MORI – to conduct a public opinion survey. The findings demonstrated that while the attitudes towards Russia were more or less neutral, the respondents did not know much about Russia. According to the survey results, the most typical spontaneous associations with Russia at that time were cold weather

<sup>35</sup> Anonymous interview with a former high-ranking British diplomat, London, 13 December 2006.

<sup>36</sup> Anonymous interview with a former high-ranking British diplomat, London, 14 December 2006.

<sup>37</sup> Anonymous interview with a former high-ranking British diplomat, London, 14 December 2006.

(26%), a communist past (22%) and deprivation (17%). Among the most recurrent associations with the Russians as people were such descriptions as poor (25%), hard working (12 %) and friendly (11%). As for the vision of Putin, the most popular answers of the respondents were such qualities as 'a good leader' (14%), 'good for Russia' (9%) and 'KGB trained' (8%) (MORI 2003). It should be noted, however, that the survey was conducted in June 2003, i.e. before Mikhail Khodorkovsky's arrest and the parliamentary elections, i.e. the events that had a particularly damaging effect on Russia's image.

Thirdly, Russia's images in the British mass media remained predominantly negative throughout Putin's presidency. A number of British journalists who were interviewed for this study insisted on the 'objective' character of this negativism.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, several prominent commentators pointed to a lack of balance in the coverage of Russia. Anatol Lieven, for instance, who covered the first Chechen war in 1994-1996 as a correspondent for *The Times*, expressed a fairly critical opinion of a tendency in the mass media to overlook the historical context. According to Lieven, the coverage of the second Chechen war was 'not necessarily (...) wrong in itself, but it (...) lacked historical and international perspective, and a sense of comparison' (2000b, p. 326). Another example that should be mentioned in this regard is an article by Jonathan Steele with the title 'The West's New Russophobia Is Hypocritical - And Wrong' (*The Guardian*, 30 June 2006). Written shortly before the G8 summit in St Petersburg, when criticism of Russian domestic and foreign policies became particularly severe in the West, the article argued against bias in depicting Russia. In Steele's words, 'some criticisms were legitimate, but many [were] wildly prejudiced'. However, remarks of this kind in the British mass media were rare.

Fourthly, images of Russia did not vary considerably across the political spectrum. According to a member of the House of Lords from the Conservative Party, among the British political elite there was more or less a consensus on the vision of Russia, and there was 'neither a pro-Russian, nor an anti-Russian lobby'.<sup>39</sup> This was in stark contrast to the image of the Soviet Union in the UK, as well as to the images of Putin's Russia in a number of other Western countries, particularly Germany, as will be discussed in Chapter Six. Putin's first meeting with the British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who came to St Petersburg on a private visit in 2000, appeared to give a start to a friendly relationship between the two leaders. By 2001 Putin had already had the reputation of a pragmatic and

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<sup>38</sup> Anonymous interviews with British journalists, London, 11-13 December 2006.

<sup>39</sup> Anonymous interview with a member of the House of Lords, Conservative Party, London, 12 December 2006. See Tsygankov (2009) for a discussion of an anti-Russian lobby in the USA.

efficient politician, ‘a great deal-maker’, in the words of Sir Menzies Campbell, an MP from the Liberal Democrat Party (House of Commons Hansard: 25 Apr 2001: Column 406). Putin’s high standing reached its peak in the autumn of 2001 when he took a decision to join the US-led ‘war on terror’. During debates in the British Parliament at that time Russia was referred to as Britain’s ‘new-found friend’ (House of Commons Hansard: 4 Oct 2001: Column 747). Furthermore, the UK government recognised Moscow’s interpretation of the Chechen War as part of the global war on terror. As Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) Ben Bradshaw summarised this position in his speech in the House of Commons in October 2001,

We talk to the Russians at every opportunity about human rights, but we recognise that they have a legitimate right to protect their citizens against a terrorist threat which we know is linked to Osama bin Laden (House of Commons Hansard: 30 Oct 2001: Column 741)

However, the situation changed when Russia, together with Germany and France, opposed the war in Iraq. The Chechen conflict returned to Britain’s political agenda, and the government was under more pressure not only from the opposition but also from the Labour MPs to publicly criticise Russia’s actions in the Chechen republic. This can be illustrated by the words of Calum MacDonald, an MP from the Labour Party, who argued shortly before Putin’s visit to the UK in the summer of 2003 that

President Putin certainly did not let his friendship with the Prime Minister get in the way of strongly condemning our role in the conflict in Iraq. It is time for the Prime Minister to start some serious arguments with the Russian Government (House of Commons Hansard: 18 Jun 2003: Column 73WH)

Despite this pressure, the British government remained reluctant for some time to change its stance on the Chechen war to a significant extent. As Denis MacShane, Minister for Europe, formulated this position, ‘there comes a time in inter-state relations when candour can be counter-productive’ (House of Commons Hansard: 18 Jun 2003: Column 85WH).

The year 2003 was a turning point for the transformation of Russia’s images in the UK not only regarding the increasing focus on the Chechen conflict but also in relation to Russia’s image as a democracy. Putin’s Russia was increasingly viewed as an authoritarian state as opposed to the rapidly democratising Russia of the Yel’tsin era. The dominant position of the British political elites at that time can be summarised in the words of the Labour MP David Drew:



(...) it seems that some of the good work that Yel'tsin began in opening up Russian society is being completely reversed under Putin; indeed, things are being screwed down (House of Commons Hansard: 18 Jun 2003: Column 71WH)

Interestingly, although these perceptions were shared by many among political elites,<sup>40</sup> they were challenged by a number of British diplomats with a background of working in Russia. Sir Roderic Lyne, for instance, who served as British ambassador to the Russian Federation in 2000–2004, repeatedly argued that authoritarian tendencies had become significant in Russia long before Putin took office. According to a report to the Trilateral Commission which he co-authored with Strobe Talbott and Koji Watanabe, Yel'tsin only 'spoke the language of democracy, but he did not rule by it or implant it'. Moreover, 'Yel'tsin started in one direction, but he changed course in 1993-1994, reverting to a traditional model of Kremlin rule' (Lyne *et al* 2006, p. 20).

A serious blow to Russia's images among British political elites was given by the arrest of Mikhail Khodorkovsky in October 2003, which was seen by many as an indication that the Kremlin had returned to 'Soviet measures' in domestic policy. As a Liberal Democrat MP Malcolm Bruce argued in his speech in the House of Commons, 'if the situation goes unchallenged, Russia could slide back into the bad old mechanisms of the Soviet Union and not move forward into pluralist democracy' (House of Commons Hansard: 10 Mar 2004: Column 422WH). At the same time there were growing concerns over freedom of speech and the fairness of the Russian parliamentary elections that took place in December 2003. Another line of criticism that became pronounced around that time was connected with Russia's actions in the 'near abroad': Moscow's actions in relation to Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia and the Baltic States were often interpreted as an indication of Russia's centuries-old imperial ambitions.<sup>41</sup>

The negativism of Russia's image in the UK reached its peak in November – December 2006 in connection with the death of Alexander Litvinenko, who was viewed by many as a victim of the Kremlin, and the diplomatic crisis in British-Russian relations that followed it. At the end of Vladimir Putin's presidency, Russia's images among members of British political elites were overwhelmingly negative. According to a report published by the House of Lords, 'Russian domestic policy has taken an illiberal direction which is unwelcome in the West and its foreign policy is increasingly assertive and pugnacious'

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<sup>40</sup> Anonymous interview with a member of the House of Lords, Conservative Party, London, 12 December 2006.

<sup>41</sup> Anonymous interviews with former high-ranking British diplomats, London, 13-14 December 2006.

(House of Lords 2008, p. 14). Moreover, in the annual report on human rights by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in 2007 Russia was listed among major countries of concern (Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2008, pp. 169-171).

Another distinctive characteristic of Russia's images in the UK was related to Russia's position as the largest supplier of natural gas to the EU. Unlike a number of other EU member states, Britain was not dependent on Russian gas. However, the prospect of becoming dependent on it in the future – it is expected that by 2015 Gazprom might be supplying up to 20% of British gas (House of Commons Hansard: 29 Nov 2006: Column 97WH) - made many among British political elites wary of possible negative consequences of such a dependence. Interestingly, fears that Russia would use energy to put pressure on consumer countries in case of a disagreement in foreign policy were widespread in the UK long before there was any evidence of Moscow's intentions to do so. This can be illustrated by the words of Richard Ottaway, MP from the Conservative Party, in relation to Russia's opposition to the US and the UK in the UN Security Council regarding the war in Iraq in 2003:

Tremendous leverage could have been used with the United Kingdom if Russia could say that it was free to turn off our energy supply overnight (House of Commons Hansard: 16 Sept 2003: Column 753)

One can argue that to a significant extent these fears stemmed from a centuries-old stereotype of Russia's imperialism and assertiveness in the international arena. Moscow's dispute with Ukraine over gas prices in the winter of 2005-2006 was viewed by many as confirmation of this threat. By the end of 2006 the vision of Russia as an unreliable energy supplier and a potential threat had become well established for a significant part of the British political elite and the mass media. Apart from fears that in future Russia would be able to put political pressure on the UK by threatening to stop its gas supply, there were also fears of price pressure, of a terrorist attack on the pipeline, and of possible competition with other EU member states for Russian supplies. The latter point can be illustrated by the words of Tim Yeo, an MP from the Conservative Party:

The gas that Russia sends to Britain may travel through a pipeline that runs across Germany. There are no prizes for guessing the country that will have priority if there are problems with supply (House of Commons Hansard: 16 Sept 2003: Column 728)

Most interestingly, while most members of British political elites viewed Russia as a threat in terms of energy security, the very nature of this threat was perceived differently by those

with an expertise in British-Russian relations and a broader political community. The former were more concerned with a prospect of insufficient supplies from Russia rather than with geopolitical considerations. According to Britain's Minister for Europe Jim Murphy, one of the major threats was a possibility that 'within five years with the level of current investment Russia [would] not be able to meet her domestic demand and international obligations' (House of Lords 2008, p. 48).

Despite this widespread image of Russia as a threat, Russia was also perceived by some members of British political and particularly business elites as a promising investment destination, first and foremost in energy production. However, this more or less positive image that existed during the Yel'tsin time and in the first years of Putin's presidency (although tarnished due to a very high level of corruption) changed significantly in 2003 following the arrest of Mikhail Khodorkovsky. For British companies, Khodorkovsky's arrest indicated they could face an additional risk in their operations in Russia. As Malcolm Bruce, a Liberal Democrat MP, put it in his speech in the House of Commons in March 2004,

Companies that are looking for Russian partners will inevitably be concerned that if their Russian partner falls foul of the President or central authorities, a case could be fabricated against the western partner and the Russian company in a way that would deeply damage the economic and commercial interests of both (House of Commons Hansard: 10 Mar 2004: Column 422WH)

The image of Russia as a business opportunity became even more negative during Putin's second term after a series of disputes between British companies and the Russian authorities. Being accused by the Russian authorities of producing insufficient volume of gas and thus breaking the terms of its licence, TNK-BP agreed to sell its stake in Kovykta gasfield in Siberia to Gazprom. Following another dispute, Royal Dutch Shell lost a controlling stake in the Sakhalin-II project to Gazprom (*Independent*, 3 September 2007). According to a British diplomat, the difficulties that TNK-BP and Shell faced with their projects in Russia were seen as an attempt of the Russian government 'to bully them to give up their shares'.<sup>42</sup>

Although damaging for Russia's image in the eyes of British business elites, these incidents did not force large British companies that had already been present in Russia to stop their investment projects but rather made them reconsider their strategies of operating in the

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<sup>42</sup>Anonymous interview with a former high-ranking British diplomat, London, 14 December 2006.

Russian market. As Andrew Gavan of the UK's company KPMG summarised these attitudes, 'the Russian administration's drive to restore control has appeared brutal and threatening. Yet business can and should continue, with eyes wide open to both opportunity and danger' (Gavan 2007, p. 61). Despite perceived risks, Russia remained an attractive investment destination for a number of UK companies. This attractiveness, however, was of an increasingly limited character as it appealed mostly to those large businesses that had already found their niche in the Russian market rather than to potential investors outside the energy sphere.

Finally, Russia's images in the UK were considerably affected by the presence of a rapidly growing Russian community, particularly in London. By 2005 an estimated 250,000 Russian speakers (mostly Russians but also from other CIS countries) lived in Britain's capital (*Forbes*, 23 May 2005). Their impact on attitudes towards Russia was of a dual character. On the one hand, it was relatively positive: most Russians living in the UK were well-educated and well-off, and, as *Forbes* commented, they 'injected hundreds of millions of pounds sterling into the UK economy, buying houses and luxury goods' (*Forbes*, 23 May 2005). One of the most illustrative examples was the purchase of Chelsea Football Club by Roman Abramovich, a Russian oligarch with close ties to the Kremlin and the then governor of Chukotka. Following the conclusion of the deal in July 2003, *The Times* wrote about Chelsea fans 'welcom[ing] Russian revolution' as they hoped for a sharp increase in investment (3 July 2003). However, these positive attitudes were not shared by some members of the political elite and the mass media. The Labour MP Tony Banks, for instance, argued for a more cautious approach saying that 'we need to know rather more about Roman Abramovich before saying this is a good deal'. He explained his position by referring to the fact that 'Russia [was] not settled politically or economically and lots of questions [were] asked about the rigours applied in Russian business' (*The Times*, 3 July 2003).

On the other hand, Russia's images in Britain were adversely affected by the activities of a number of Russian citizens who had been granted asylum in the UK, including a Russian ex-oligarch Boris Berezovsky and an 'ambassador' of the break-away republic of Chechnya, Akhmed Zakaev. While the Russian authorities unsuccessfully sought their extradition, Berezovsky, with the help of Zakaev and others, launched their own propaganda campaign against Putin's regime. In his interview with *The Guardian* in April 2007, Berezovsky admitted that 'he had dedicated much of the last six years to "trying to destroy the positive image of Putin" that many in the West held, portraying him whenever

possible as a dangerously anti-democratic figure' (13 April 2007). Moreover, he openly called for an overthrow of Putin's regime and speculated about providing financial support to the Russian opposition. In Berezovsky's words, 'we need to use force to change this regime (...) It isn't possible to change this regime through democratic means' (*The Guardian*, 13 April 2007).

The rejection of extradition requests caused serious damage to Russian-British relations (see Timmins 2006). One can argue that this was, to a significant extent, the consequence of divergent visions of the problem in Russia and the UK. The Kremlin's position can be best summarised by the words of its chief spokesman Dmitry Peskov: 'We want to believe that official London will never grant asylum to someone who wants to use force to change the regime in Russia' (*The Guardian*, 13 April 2007). The Russian authorities considered granting asylum a political move that demonstrated the hostility of the British government towards Russia. As a British journalist who was interviewed for this study put it, 'they don't understand that it's not the Foreign Office. It's a judge, a court - they *are* independent'.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, the decision to grant asylum to Berezovsky, Zakaev and others was 'a statement that they [the judge] recognised a threat for Berezovsky' (ibid.) and thus was affected by Russia's negative image in the UK.

### 5.3 Russian Propaganda in the UK

Having examined the most distinct characteristics of Russia's images in Britain during Putin's presidency, let us now look at the peculiarities of Russian foreign propaganda in this case study. As was discussed in Chapter Three, it was conducted at two levels: some of its elements were more general, while others were country-specific. At the more general level, British Russia-watchers became one of the core target groups in a number of RIA Novosti projects, such as the Valdai Discussion Club. Since its establishment in 2004, among the club's members there were a number of British journalists, including Michael Binyon from *The Times*, Mary Dejevsky from *The Independent*, Stefan Wagstyl from *The Financial Times*, Jonathan Steele from the *The Guardian*; several scholars, including Mark Bassin and Alena Ledeneva from University College London, Richard Sakwa from the University of Kent; and some politicians, such as Lord David Howell, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition or the Labour MP Robert Wareing, Secretary of the all-party Russia

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<sup>43</sup> Anonymous interview with a British journalist, London, 11 December 2006.

group. Moreover, the British public was targeted via another project of RIA Novosti – the newspaper supplement ‘Trendline Russia’ that was published in *The Daily Telegraph*.

As for country-specific projects, Russian foreign propaganda in the UK relied heavily on the services of British PR companies, as well as non-profit organisations. Although formally they were not part of the propaganda apparatus, these companies received financial support of the Russian government or the RIA Novosti. Moreover, their independence from the Russian authorities was a significant advantage as their message to the British audience sounded more credible. An illustrative example is Eventica, a company with offices in London and Moscow that positioned itself as ‘a multi-faceted organisation specialising in the Russian market, with extensive expertise in business-to-business and cultural events, corporate entertainment, publishing, communications and much more.’<sup>44</sup> The work of Eventica on the improvement of Russia’s image was conducted in two directions. On the one hand, it promoted a favourable image of the Russian economy, which was meant to encourage British investment. Its most significant project in this field was the annual Russian Economic Forum in London. Established in 1997, the Forum became one of the largest business events related to Russia. Its mission, according to Eventica’s webpage, was ‘to discuss and debate the business and investment climate of the world’s most exciting emerging market’. Eventica was also a co-organiser of a number of smaller events, such as the conference ‘Britain and Russia: Partnership and Progress’ in June 2003 that was devoted to Russia’s commercial ties with Britain, or the conference ‘Britain and Russia: The New Wave’ in December 2003 that was held in Russia and aimed at introducing a number of British IT companies to the Russian market.

The second direction of Eventica’s work was connected with promoting the image of Russia as an open country. In 2002 it organised its first British Press Mission to Russia, which later became an annual event. According to Eventica’s webpage, the Press Mission was ‘designed for editors and senior correspondents looking for a grasp of the political and economic climate of contemporary Russia’. In some sense, its goal was close to that of the Valdai Discussion Club, as it sought to give British journalists an opportunity to meet Russian officials, business people and politicians. During the several years of its existence, the Mission brought to Russia a number of leading journalists from *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *The Independent*, *ITV News* and some other media outlets. Another similarity between the approaches of the Press Mission and the Valdai Discussion Club was in their

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<sup>44</sup> See information on Eventica’s webpage: <http://www.eventica.co.uk/>, accessed 5 March 2007.

agenda. As the problem of energy security became one of the most urgent issues in British-Russian relations following Russia's conflict with Ukraine over gas prices, both the Valdai Club and the Press Mission chose to address this topic. Members of the Valdai Club visited a gas field near Khanty-Mansiisk in September 2006 while participants of the British Press Mission visited Gazprom's Urengoy gas field in November 2006.

Eventica also focused on promoting the image of Russia as a country of great culture. One of the projects in this category was Russian Rhapsody - a concert that was first held in London in 2002 as some sort of entertainment during the Economic Forum but then turned into an independent annual event. The emphasis on the cultural component of Russia's image became especially pronounced since 2005 with the establishment of an annual festival of Russian culture in London. The goal of the Russian Winter Festival, as it was officially called, was 'to introduce to Britain the riches of Russian culture and art'. It was held in Trafalgar Square in January and, according to Eventica's statistics, attracted more than fifty thousand visitors. Among its sponsors were RIA Novosti, Gazprom and Aeroflot, and it was supported by the Moscow city government and the Federal Agency for Culture and Cinematography of the Russian Federation, which indicates the very high profile of the event.

Apart from Eventica, the Russian authorities also supported Academia Rossica, a non-profit organisation that was established in London in 2000, by British academics, experts in Russia, and Russian and British individuals. According to Academia's webpage, it 'aim[ed] to promote a deeper understanding of Russian culture internationally'. The Russian government, as well as the British government, supported a number of events that were widely publicised in the British mass media, such as an exhibition of contemporary Russian art 'Moscow Breakthrough' in 2005, Days of New Russian Culture in 2004 or the annual Russian Nights Festival. Moreover, Academia published a quarterly journal ROSSICA (both in English and in Russian) which was distributed worldwide and was promoted as 'a unique international review devoted to the many facets of Russian heritage and culture'. It also awarded an annual ROSSICA translation Prize for the best literary translation from Russian into English.<sup>45</sup>

The Russian economy and culture remained two most significant topics for Russian foreign propaganda in Britain throughout Putin's presidency. At the same time, in the final years of

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<sup>45</sup> See information on its webpage: 'Academic Rosica Brochure', available on-line at: <http://academia-rossica.org/assets/files/PressReleases/AR%20brochure.pdf>, accessed 15 July 2009

Putin's presidency, Gazprom became more active in the UK in its efforts to promote a favourable image of the company and a positive image of Russia more broadly. In an attempt to gain access to end-consumers in EU member states, Gazprom established a number of subsidiary businesses, including Gazprom Marketing and Trading in the UK and Gazprom Germania in Germany, which became part of Gazprom Group. These companies, wholly owned by Gazprom, aimed to facilitate Gazprom's operation in foreign markets and, among other functions, to promote a positive image of Gazprom. Similarly to other Western countries, the key challenge that Gazprom faced in Britain was its image as a political instrument of the Kremlin rather than a commercial organisation. As an MP from the Conservative Party Sir Malcolm Rifkind put it,

as 52 per cent of Gazprom is owned by the Russian Government, any decision by Gazprom to withhold gas from Ukraine, Moldova or any other country must be deemed to have been taken on political, not business, grounds (House of Commons Hansard: 27 Mar 2006: Column 563)

This politicisation of Gazprom's image represented a significant problem for the company as it sought to strengthen its position in the UK, with their declared aim to attain 10% of the UK market (Gazprom Marketing and Trading Limited 2007p. 7). It should be mentioned, however, that Gazprom's campaign to improve its image in Britain, although it did become more intensive in recent years, still remained considerably less visible than, for instance, in Germany, as will be discussed in Chapter Six.

So far we have looked at the efforts to project a more favourable image of Russia in the UK. Another direction of this work was related to counteracting what was perceived by some Russian propagandists and members of the political elite as 'anti-Russian propaganda'.<sup>46</sup> The Russian Foreign Ministry on several occasions published official statements in response to negative articles in the British mass media. Since one of the most sensitive issues for the Russian authorities was the war in Chechnya, their reaction to the perceived bias in the coverage of this topic was particularly strong. Following the publication of Amelia Gentleman's article in *The Observer* in January 2000, for instance, the Minister Counsellor of the Russian Embassy in London wrote in his open letter to the editor about his 'disgust' at the publication, and emphasised the 'one hundred percent uncritical presentation' of the views of the Chechen side of the conflict (Embassy of the Russian Federation in the United Kingdom 2000). Another example is the statement issued by the Foreign Ministry in relation to a broadcast of an interview with Shamil Basaev on

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<sup>46</sup> Anonymous interview with a senior Russian propagandist, Moscow, 30 January 2007.



*Channel 4* in 2005 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2005). A distinctive feature of Russia's attitude towards negative publications was seeing the mass media as carrying out some sort of political order. The statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that was issued in response to an article on Russia's relations with Iran in *The Sunday Telegraph* in 2005, for instance, suggested that the article could have been 'politically commissioned', and raised the question of 'who did the commissioning and who paid for it' (Embassy of the Russian Federation in the United Kingdom 2005).

This tendency of the Russian authorities to accuse the British mass media of biased reporting, and more generally to view Russia's negative image in the UK as a result of anti-Russian propaganda became particularly pronounced in the context of the so called Litvinenko case.<sup>47</sup> Alexander Litvinenko's death in London in November 2006 and the events that followed it had a strong impact on Russia's image in the UK and led to a rapid deterioration in British-Russian relations in the final years of Vladimir Putin's presidency. Although this study does not aim to analyse the resulting crisis in detail, it is important nevertheless to examine its effect on the transformation of Russia's image and the actions of the Russian authorities in this regard. According to a journalist from one of the leading British daily newspapers, Litvinenko's murder contributed to seeing Russia as 'a gangster state'.<sup>48</sup> The main question that was discussed in the British mass media was whether President Putin himself was involved in Litvinenko's murder, as suggested by Berezovsky. At the same time, the position of the British authorities was cautious. It can be illustrated by the words of Denis MacShane who urged the members of the British Parliament not to 'point fingers', and said that the 'sensationalist rush to judgment by some of the newspaper reporting in this case [was] deplorable' (House of Commons Hansard: 27 Nov 2006: Column 830). The prevailing opinion of those journalists and members of the British political elite who specialised in Russia can be summarised by the view of a former British diplomat who was interviewed for this study: 'the fact is that you should choose between two options: either he [Putin] did order [to kill Litvinenko], or he can't stop it'.<sup>49</sup> Thus, one of the major effects of the Litvinenko case on Russia's image was the vision of Putin as not having sufficient control over Russia's secret services.

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<sup>47</sup> Alexander Litvinenko, a former FSB officer, was granted asylum in the UK in 2001 and received UK citizenship in 2006 (*The Times*, 22 November 2006). Working for Boris Berezovsky in London, he was a fierce critic of Putin's regime. In November 2006 Litvinenko was poisoned with radioactive polonium-210 and died several weeks later (*The Guardian*, 26 January 2007). His illness and death generated an enormous wave of media attention.

<sup>48</sup> Anonymous interview with a British journalist, London, 11 December 2006.

<sup>49</sup> Anonymous interview with a former high-ranking British diplomat, London, 14 December 2006.

Apart from its implications for the image of Russia as a criminal state, Alexander Litvinenko's death also had a negative effect on another core element of Russia's image – the image of the war in Chechnya. It brought to the attention of the British mass media Litvinenko's views on the allegedly criminal origin of the second Chechen war. According to Litvinenko, the apartment bombings in Moscow in autumn 1999 that triggered the start of the war were the responsibility not of the Chechen rebels, as the Russian official position claimed, but of the Russian special services. This theory was already known in Britain and was shared by some British politicians. Julian Lewis, an MP from the Conservative party, for instance, suggested in his speech in the House of Commons in June 2003 that 'if the Chechens are entirely responsible for some terrorist activities to which Russia has been subjected, at least since 1999, they have been extraordinarily bad tacticians' (House of Commons Hansard: 18 Jun 2003: Column 74WH). After Litvinenko's death this theory was further popularised in the book *Blowing up Russia: the Secret Plot to Bring Back KGB Terror* that was co-written by Litvinenko himself and Yuri Felshtinsky (Litvinenko & Felshtinsky 2007). All this contributed to seeing the conflict in Chechnya as an extremely dirty war. At the same time these allegations were damaging for Putin's personal image.

Why did Litvinenko's death have such a severe effect on Russia's image in the UK? On the one hand, there were a number of objective reasons. Firstly, the very method of murder – using a radioactive substance – was seen as extremely cruel and dangerous for ordinary people who happened to be at the same time and place with Litvinenko or his assassins. The information that traces of polonium-210 had been found in a large number of places, from Moscow to Hamburg to London, triggered panic in the UK. According to a journalist who was interviewed for this study, using radiation was perceived as using a 'weapon of mass destruction', which gave the story a different dimension.<sup>50</sup> Secondly, Litvinenko's death was viewed not as an isolated event, but as an episode in a chain of deaths. The attitude towards it was to a significant extent affected by the attitude towards the murder of the journalist Anna Politkovskaya, who had been well-known in the UK as a critic of the war in Chechnya, a month earlier. Thirdly, Litvinenko's death was seen as damaging not only Russia's, but also Britain's reputation, since Litvinenko had just become a British citizen when he was poisoned. As Greg Hands, an MP from the Conservative Party, put it, 'if dissidents and émigrés are being assassinated in public or semi-public places in London, this country will no longer be considered to be a safe haven' (House of Commons Hansard: 30 Nov 2006: Column 1237).

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<sup>50</sup> Anonymous interview with a British journalist, London, 12 December 2006.

On the other hand, Litvinenko's death was a perfect story for the mass media. It had all the necessary elements of a sensation. As it was not a single event but a chain of events (new evidence was found, new theories were suggested, etc), the story remained among the top news for a considerable period of time. Furthermore, the stereotype of Russian spies that had become deeply rooted in British perceptions of Russia during the Cold War, as discussed in the first part of this chapter, came to the forefront again, and made the involvement of Russian special services in this murder appear more realistic.

Most importantly for this study, the interest in the story was stimulated further with the help of PR measures (see Sixsmith 2007, pp. 63-69). According to *Financial Times*, a 'public relations guru' Lord Bell, who was famous for providing PR services to Margaret Thatcher, was consulting Litvinenko's relatives and his spokesman Alex Goldfarb 'on media handling on a pro bono basis'. In particular, Lord Bell assisted the Berezovsky camp in distributing what *Financial Times* called 'one of the most haunting images of the year':

that of Litvinenko, physically emaciated in his final hours, and of a statement - issued after his death and said to have been his final testament - in which he pointed the finger of blame at the Russian president (*Financial Times*, 2 December 2006)

This PR support was extremely effective. On the one hand, it attracted the maximum attention of the British mass media to the case. On the other hand, it succeeded in presenting Berezovsky's interpretation of the events, particularly Putin's involvement in the murder, as plausible. Moreover, this interpretation fitted perfectly with all those stereotypes about Russia that were examined earlier in the chapter – particularly perceptions of Russia as an authoritarian state ruled by security services.

On the whole, one can agree with Henry Plater-Zyberk that 'emotions and oversimplifications ruled the airways and daily papers' (2007, p. 9). While Berezovsky and his camp successfully used the events to project a negative image of Putin's Russia, the Russian authorities failed to counteract these accusations effectively. Instead of proactively promoting their interpretation of events and assisting the British authorities in the investigation, they resorted to blaming Berezovsky and the British mass media for anti-Russian propaganda. According to Konstantin Kosachev, head of the State Duma Committee on Foreign Affairs, 'Litvinenko's poisoning [was] a well-planned action that [was] aimed at damaging Russia's image (...) Most likely some ex-oligarchs [were] standing behind this tragedy' (quoted in BBC 2006b). Similar views were expressed by

Presidential aide Sergey Yastrzhembsky who emphasised the strange coincidence of sensational murders with very important steps by the Kremlin in the international arena. In his opinion, this was a ‘well-directed campaign to discredit Russia and its leader’ (ibid).

Moreover, as Scotland Yard named Andrei Lugovoi, a former KGB officer, as a prime suspect in Litvinenko’s poisoning, Russian foreign (and domestic) propaganda focused on countering accusations of his involvement in the murder. Lugovoi gave a number of interviews and press conferences to the Russian and British mass media that were broadcast by Russian state channels, as well as by the English speaking channel ‘Russia Today’, which suggests that Russian foreign propaganda sought to promote his interpretation of the events. Lugovoi repeatedly blamed Berezovsky and British special services for Litvinenko’s death, and referred to all the evidence against him and statements of the Crown Prosecution as ‘lies instigated by the British leadership and secret service’ (Russia Today 2007). Interestingly, Lugovoi appealed to dissatisfaction with Russia’s image in the West among the Russian elites and public opinion in general as he explained the media hysteria in the UK by Cold War stereotypes about Russia. Moreover, in his interviews he reiterated the central message of Russian foreign propaganda, namely Russia’s strength. In Lugovoi’s words,

(...) Russia will never be on the backyards of this World. It was the leading state in the World. Thank God now it has risen from its knees again. You may not like it, but Russia will be strong again, and you will have to live with it (Russia Today 2007)

It can be argued that by promoting Lugovoi’s story, Russian propaganda contributed to a considerable deterioration of Russia’s image in the UK. It is particularly striking that in a context of a developing diplomatic crisis in British-Russian relations, including *inter alia* expulsions of British and Russian diplomats, Lugovoi was elected for the Liberal Democratic Party as a member of the State Duma in the parliamentary elections that took place in December 2007, and later became a member of the Duma State Security Committee. Predictably, the reaction of the British authorities was extremely negative. According to the UK ambassador to Russia Anthony Brenton,

it is a pity that a man wanted for murder gains political recognition. It does Russia no good at all to have Lugovoi there in the parliament, it continues the suspicion’ (Reuters 2007)

Thus, by taking Lugovoi’s side, Russian propaganda appeared to undermine the declared task of projecting a more favourable image of Russia abroad. It can be suggested, however, that at a time shortly before and after Russian parliamentary elections, and particularly

before the presidential elections that were scheduled for March 2008, it was domestic propaganda rather than foreign propaganda that was considered by the Russian authorities as more important. The image of Russia surrounded by enemy forces – in this case the UK and Berezovsky – was used as an additional instrument to mobilise the electorate at the most crucial moment for the Russian authorities in the run-up to the elections.

## 5.4 Assessing the Results

The handling of the Litvinenko case by Russian propagandists as examined above showed the pronounced inconsistency of the Russian authorities' approach towards Russia's image in the UK and the West in general. This inconsistency – when in times of a crisis the image of a strong country that would not compromise its principles was prioritised over the image of Russia as a partner – had a significant impact on the effectiveness of Russian propaganda in Britain. As discussed in Chapter One, measuring the effectiveness of any propaganda campaign is problematic. Let us nevertheless attempt to analyse its possible results by looking at the most significant changes in perceptions of Russia during Putin's presidency that can be established, at least to some extent, with the help of public opinion surveys and elite interviews.

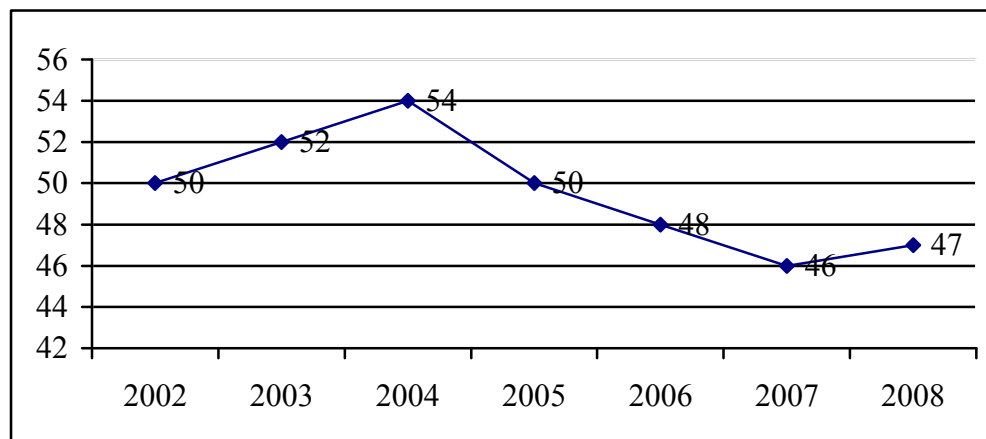


Figure 5.1. Feelings towards Russia in public opinion in the UK, 2002-2008 (German Marshall Fund of the United States 2008)

Figure 5.1 illustrates changes in feelings towards Russia that occurred in British public opinion in 2002-2008. As one can see, the average feelings towards Russia in the year 2002, when the German Marshall Fund and the Compagnia di San Paolo began their series of public opinion surveys, were neutral: they were at a level of 50 on a 0-100 scale with 100 meaning a favourable feeling and 0 meaning an unfavourable feeling. Moreover,

despite Moscow's disagreement with the UK government over the war in Iraq, there was a considerable increase in positive feelings towards Russia in the next two years with the peak of favourable feelings at the level of 54 in 2004. However, after 2004 average feelings towards Russia became significantly more negative. In 2007, during the diplomatic crisis in British-Russian relations that followed Litvinenko's murder, average feelings reached their lowest level, and recovered only slightly the following year – from 46 to 47. On the whole, however, since 2005 the average feeling towards Russia remained negative, as they stayed below 50.

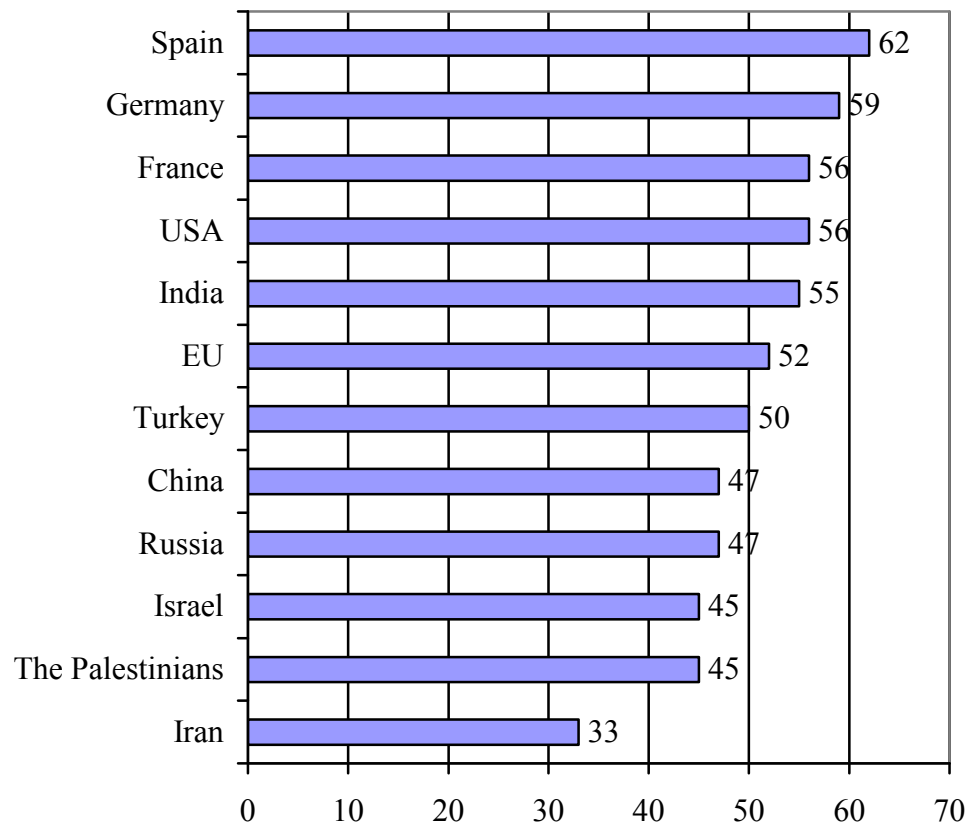


Figure 5.2. Feelings towards countries, peoples and institutions in public opinion in the UK, 2008 (German Marshall Fund of the United States 2008)

To put Russia's image in British public opinion in a wider context, one can compare feelings towards Russia to average feelings towards a number of other countries in the UK. Figure 5.2 illustrates Russia's position in relation to 11 other countries, peoples (e.g. the Palestinians) and institutions (the EU) in 2008, i.e. the final year of Putin's presidency. Predictably, feelings towards Russia were significantly less positive than towards the EU member states Spain, Germany or France, as well as towards the EU as a whole. They were also less positive than attitudes towards the US or India, with whom the UK traditionally had very close ties. Interestingly, the level of positive/negative attitudes towards Russia

was similar to those towards China, at the level of 47. One can conclude that despite the attempts of the Russian authorities to improve Russia's image in the UK with the help of foreign propaganda, at the level of public perceptions their efforts had not yet brought substantial results.

Moreover, Russian propaganda failed to achieve one of its key tasks, namely to project the image of Russia as an attractive investment destination among business elites. According to a YouGov poll of 147 senior British executives which was conducted in April 2007, nearly half of the respondents viewed further investment in the Russian economy as a 'bad thing'. At the same time, 62% of them described Russian businessmen as 'arrogant', 59% - as 'lawless', and 47% - as unreliable (*The Guardian*, 23 April 2007). It also did not succeed in promoting the idea of Russia's stability – another crucial component of Russia's projected image. According to a former British diplomat who worked as a consultant of a large British company, Russia's stability was viewed by many in Britain as short-term, particularly in comparison to the chaos of the Yel'tsin era. However, in the long term there was a significant 'risk of turbulence' since all power in the country 'belonged to a very limited number of people'.<sup>51</sup>

Furthermore, despite continuous efforts to promote Russia's image as a reliable energy supplier, Gazprom continued to experience significant difficulty in its attempts to increase its presence in the UK market. This can be illustrated by the extremely negative reaction of the British mass media and some members of British political elites to the supposed intention of Gazprom to buy Centrica, the largest supplier of gas to domestic customers in the UK, in 2006. Lord Jenkin of Roding, for instance, in his speech in the House of Lords in February 2007 expressed his hope that 'the Government [would] be wise enough and tough enough to knock that threat very firmly on the head' (House of Lords Hansard: 8 Feb 2007: Column 781). It should be mentioned that while this view was shared by many in the UK, some commentators argued against presenting the possibility of Gazprom's purchase of Centrica as a threat to Britain's energy security. Jonathan Stern of the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, for example, insisted in his evidence to the Select Committee on Trade and Industry of the House of Commons that '[British] press, and certainly some of the political establishment throughout Europe and the United States, [was] anxious to play up a threat involved in Russian energy supplies' (House of Commons 2006).

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<sup>51</sup> Anonymous interview with a former high-ranking British diplomat, London, 14 December 2006.

Although the Russian authorities failed to substantially improve Russia's image in the UK in the areas that were discussed above, they were relatively successful in some other aspects. Most significantly, they achieved their goal of decreasing the salience of the Chechen conflict in the mass media and on the political agenda in Britain. According to a journalist from one of the largest British newspapers, the apparent lack of attention to the Chechen problem during Putin's second presidential term could be explained by such factors as the impossibility of visiting Chechnya ('no one knows what is happening'), lower numbers of casualties and particularly a considerably less sympathetic attitudes towards Chechen rebels after the school hostage crisis in Beslan in September 2004.<sup>52</sup> Another area of success that should be mentioned was promoting the image of Russia as an increasingly prosperous country. In the words of a former British diplomat, Russia's image was actually 'more positive than reality' as Russia's growing inequality remained less visible than the luxury of Moscow or St Petersburg. Finally, the image of Russia as a country of great culture continued to be positive.<sup>53</sup>

On the whole, however, these positive elements stayed on the periphery of Russia's image in the UK. Despite the attractiveness of Russia's culture and, to some extent, its investment opportunities, it was the political rather than cultural or economic characteristics of Russia's image that remained predominant. While Russian foreign propaganda sought to promote favourable attitudes towards the country, a number of actions by the Russian authorities were sending a conflicting signal to the British audience. In January 2006, for instance, four diplomats of the British embassy were accused of spying with the help of fake rocks that allegedly contained some sophisticated transmission device. This incident was widely publicised by the Russian mass media and resulted in what *The Guardian* called 'the most embarrassing espionage scandal between Britain and Russia since the end of the cold war' (24 January 2006). The end of Putin's second presidential term also saw a scandal around the attempts of the Russian authorities to close the regional offices of the British Council in Russia over alleged tax violations and problems with registration (*Moscow News*, 13 December 2007). All of these incidents, and particularly the Litvinenko case and the diplomatic crisis that followed it, contributed to what some commentators referred to as an 'apparent decline in Britain-Russia relations' (Bacon 2007, p. 14). In this context, Russian foreign propaganda could not improve Russia's image to any significant extent. Moreover, as demonstrated earlier, in some cases it contributed to projecting the image of a more assertive, even aggressive Russia.

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<sup>52</sup> Anonymous interview with a British journalist, London, 12 December 2006.

<sup>53</sup> Anonymous interview with a former high-ranking British diplomat, London, 14 December 2006.



## Chapter 6

### Russia's Images and Foreign Propaganda in Germany

Similarly to the UK, the Federal Republic of Germany became one of the primary targets of Russian foreign propaganda during Putin's presidency, first of all for political and economic reasons. However, Russia's relations with Germany had a number of distinctive features that contributed to making Russia's propaganda there particularly interesting for the purposes of this thesis. In the first instance, the Russian authorities viewed Germany as one of the closest allies in political terms. Since the end of the Cold War, German-Russian relations were often described as 'special' (see Stent 2007). Moreover, Germany positioned itself and was perceived by other EU member states as an advocate of Russia's interests in Europe. Secondly, Germany traditionally was Russia's 'major trade partner' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the RF 2009c), particularly in the energy sphere. In the period from 2000 to 2007, Russia's exports to Germany rose from \$9,232 mln, which accounted for 10.3% of Russia's total exports to 'far abroad' countries, to \$26,290 mln or 8.8% of Russia's total exports. The increase of Russia's imports from Germany was especially noticeable – from \$3,898 mln, or 17.5% of total imports, in 2000 to \$26,572 mln, or 15.6% of Russia's total imports, in 2007 (Federal State Statistics Service n.d. a). Russia's trade with Germany was, however, imbalanced: its share in Germany's foreign trade accounted for only 3% in 2008 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the RF 2009d).

Unlike the UK, Germany's dependence on imports of Russian energy resources, primarily natural gas, was substantial throughout Putin's presidency. In 2007, for instance, imports of Russian gas accounted for 42.46 of Germany's total gas imports (BP 2008). Moreover, German energy companies BASF/Wintershall and E.ON Ruhrgas became shareholders (with 20% each while the controlling stake remained with Gazprom) in the Nord Stream project – a pipeline that would bring Russian natural gas to Germany, and then to other destinations in the EU, under the Baltic Sea. These facts led some members of the German political elite to speculate about the danger of so called 'silence for gas', i.e. unwillingness of the German authorities to voice any criticism of the Kremlin. In this context, Moscow's campaign to project an image of a reliable energy supplier became particularly intensive in Germany. Moreover, Gazprom Germania – a subsidiary of Gazprom – engaged in a wide

range of PR activities that were not limited to improving its own image but sought to promote a favourable image of Russia more broadly.

Apart from the intensity of Russian foreign propaganda in Germany, there are a number of other factors, mostly related to peculiarities of German national identity, that make Germany's case very distinct from Britain. Due to geographic proximity to Russia, German speaking lands have for centuries had much closer links with Russia and the Russians, and Russia's image has played an extremely important role in the evolution of German self-images. Moreover, the events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – the two world wars, the establishment of the German Democratic Republic in 1949 and the reunification of the two Germanies in 1990 – had an enormous effect on perceptions of the eastern neighbour. Another factor is a large number of Russian speakers living in Germany. According to the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in 1990-2007 as many as 2,916 thousand ethnic Germans moved to Germany from the former Soviet Union (692,824 of them from the Russian Federation) where they automatically received German citizenship (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the RF 2009a). Predictably, attitudes to these immigrants (who were often viewed as Russian even if they came from other post-Soviet states) had a considerable impact on Russia's image.

This chapter follows the structure of the previous case study. It begins by exploring perceptions of Russia in German lands from a historical perspective with an emphasis on the traditionally important position of Russia's image in the German picture of the world. Having looked at the most widespread stereotypes about Russia up to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the chapter proceeds to analyse the most distinctive characteristics of Russia's perceived images in Germany at the time of Vladimir Putin's presidency. This is followed in the third part of the chapter by an examination of Russia's foreign propaganda in Germany, its key vehicles and core elements of Russia's projected image. The chapter concludes by addressing the question of effectiveness of these attempts to improve Russia's image in the German context.

## **6.1 German Images of Russia and the Russians: Historical Perspective**

As in the case of Russia's images in Britain, German stereotypical visions of Russia and the Russians can be traced back to the time of the first publications by diplomats and merchants about Russia in the German language. Among the most influential accounts of

voyages to Muscovy was that of Adam Olearius who was a member of the Duke of Holstein's embassy between 1633 and 1639 (Cross 1971, p. 25). This work, first published in German in 1647, was then reprinted several times, as well as being translated into a number of European languages (Cross 1971, p. 26). In his book, Olearius described Russians as 'barbarians' (see Cross 1971, p. 90) who, among other things, were 'more addicted to drunkenness than any nation in the world' (in Cross 1971, p. 96). Moreover, he referred to Muscovy's political system as 'a dominating and despotic monarchy' (in Cross 1971, p. 99) – the vision which remained central to Russia's image in German lands for centuries.

In contrast to the British, the Germans had a significantly closer contact with Russia since at least the time of Peter the Great. In the following centuries, there developed very close links between Russian and German dynasties (Zaichenko 2001, p. 92). As a result, references to the eastern neighbour were always abundant in German public discourse. Moreover, Russia became one of the significant Others for the German identity. The core negative elements of its image – its backwardness, barbarity, the tyranny of its political regime, and the vision of the Russian people as Asians rather than Europeans – were reinforcing positive elements in self-images of the Germans (Zaichenko 2001, p. 93). Russia and the Russians were perceived as the opposite of what the Germans aspired to be.

It should be mentioned that there were times when attitudes towards Russia appeared to become more favourable. Similarly to Britain, Russia's images in German lands, particularly in Prussia, improved substantially following Russia's contribution to the victory over Napoleon's France (Brandt 2003, p. 42). However, the following decades saw a dramatic polarisation of attitudes towards Russia across the political spectrum, which was triggered to a large extent by internal developments in German lands, especially by the German Revolution in 1848 (Zaichenko 2001, p. 96). In the public debate on a preferable path of Germany's political development that intensified in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, images of Russia became a key reference point for both liberal and conservative circles in German society. While for conservatives tsarist Russia was a positive symbol of traditional monarchy, for liberals it was the embodiment of political oppression. The latter vision was further reinforced by the familiarity of German liberals with extremely negative publications about Russia in France and Britain (Zaichenko 2001, p. 99). Both conservatives and liberals extensively resorted to Russia's example in their justification of a preferred model for Germany. While doing that, they often over-simplified complex

Russian reality by limiting it to a set of either predominantly positive or negative characteristics respectively.

Thus, Russophobia and Russophilia became prominent phenomena in German society already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. On the one hand, a significant number of German intellectuals publicly expressed their hatred of Russia's political regime, Russian national character – the Russians were often viewed as slaves in spirit who deserved to live in tyranny – and Russia's expansionist policy towards neighbouring countries (Zaichenko 2001, p. 99). Moreover, Russia was seen as Asian rather than a civilised European country. These images were further promoted by anti-Russian propaganda in the unified Germany in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Mashkin 2001, p. 122). On the other hand, Russian culture, particularly literature and music, found numerous admirers in Germany who speculated about the mystery of the Russian soul as a unique Russian feature. These contradictory feelings towards Russia were often described by Germans themselves as *Hassliebe* - love and hatred at the same time (Zaichenko 2001, p. 92).

The first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw an intensification of German anti-Russian propaganda which succeeded in strengthening those stereotypes that had already been deeply rooted in the German picture of the world. As Russia fought against Germany during the World War 1, anti-Russian attitudes were encouraged by the German authorities. Moreover, the October Revolution of 1917 which brought Bolsheviks to power in Russia was met in Germany with 'a militant and, on the right, already partially anti-semitic anti-Bolshevism' (Brandt 2003, p. 45). Later, positioning Bolsheviks as Germany's most dangerous enemies was an essential element of a propaganda campaign which was conducted by Adolf Hitler's government and which became particularly intensive after Germany had attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941. Russian backwardness and the image of the Russian people as uncivilised Asians and slaves, which had traditionally been among the most widespread perceptions of Russia, were further promoted with the help of various persuasion techniques.

Following Germany's defeat in World War 2 and the subsequent division of the country into the Soviet-controlled German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the pro-Western Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), the evolution of Russia's images in the two states differed to a certain extent. In Western Germany, images of the Soviet Union remained overwhelmingly negative. With the start of the Cold War, 'the Federal Republic of the early years owed much of its identity to the continuity of hostility to the Soviet Union'

(Brandt 2003, p. 52). Moreover, due to their proximity to the Eastern bloc, Western Germans felt particularly vulnerable to a hypothetical attack by the Soviets. Although fears of the Soviet Union declined considerably in the course of time, they still remained substantial even in the 1970-1980s (ibid., p. 57). In contrast, the GDR was exposed to a large-scale Soviet propaganda campaign which sought to construct an entirely positive image of the Soviet Union. During the four decades of the state's existence, many eastern Germans visited the USSR. The Russian language was introduced into the school curriculum. As Brandt has argued, all these measures succeeded in substantially decreasing the level of Russophobia. However, some core elements of Russia's centuries-old image, particularly the vision of its backwardness, remained unchanged, and eastern Germans still enjoyed 'a certain Central European feeling of superiority over the unsophisticated East European' (Brandt 2003, p. 54).

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the non-interference of the Soviet leadership in the process of Germany's reunification had a markedly positive impact on Russia's images. Similarly to the UK, the image of Mikhail Gorbachev was especially favourable. As Angela Stent has argued, part of his popularity in Germany resulted from the fact that he came 'to represent a favourite German concept: he was *berechenbar*, 'predictable'' (1999, p. 156). The Soviet Union's collapse in 1991 introduced a number of new elements in Russia's images. On the one hand, similarly to the British, most Germans welcomed democratic developments in Russia. On the other hand, dramatic events taking place in the newly independent Russian Federation gave rise to new fears of the eastern neighbour as now 'Germany fear[ed] not Russia's military might, but its weakness' (Stent 1999, p. 16).

In this context, in the 1990s Russia came to occupy a far more prominent position on the German political agenda than on that of the UK. The German political elites, recognising 'a special responsibility toward Moscow because of German unification' (Stent 1999, p. 157), repeatedly emphasised a 'special' character of German-Russian relationship. At the same time, fears that Russia's weakness in the form of rapidly growing poverty and crime would have a spillover effect on other Eastern and Central European countries, including Germany, prompted the German authorities to view Russia's stabilisation as the highest priority. Thus, to support Russia in its transition to a market economy and a liberal democracy, Germany provided substantial economic assistance and became one of the largest creditors of the Russian Federation. Emphasis on Russia's stabilisation as the key objective can explain the continuous support by the German leadership of President Boris Yel'tsin, even at the time when his actions appeared to undermine Russia's democratic

development (e.g. his conflict with the Parliament in 1993). This vision of stability as the most important value remained central to Russia's images in Germany during Vladimir Putin's presidency in 2000-2008, as the following part of the chapter will demonstrate.

## **6.2 Images of Putin's Russia in Germany, 2000-2008**

Transformation of Russia's images in Germany in 2000-2008 was in many aspects similar to those changes in perceptions of Russia that took place in other Western countries (see Chapter Two). However, Germany's geographic proximity to the Russian Federation, peculiarities of its post-war and post-unification self-image and close economic ties with Russia had a significant impact on perceptions of the eastern neighbour. The most distinctive feature of Russia's images in Germany during Vladimir Putin's presidency was their pronounced visibility – at the level of political and business elites, as well as in public opinion and the mass media. Compared to the UK (and most other Western countries), Russia's position on the political agenda in Germany was relatively high. Moreover, President Putin and Chancellor Gerhard Schröder developed a strong personal friendship, which contributed to the vision of Germany's relations with Russia as 'special'. Interestingly, some German politicians and experts in German-Russian relations articulated a view that Russia's place on the German political agenda was still not as high as it should have been, and there was insufficient public discussion of Russia-related issues.<sup>54</sup> In the Bundestag, for instance, during the period of 2000-2008 discussions of the situation in Russia or German-Russian relations were rather rare although Russia was often mentioned in relation to other topics.

At the level of public perceptions, Russia's images in Germany, particularly in the eastern Länder, were also more salient than in the UK. On the one hand, this was the consequence of the GDR being part of the Warsaw Pact and its close links with the Soviet Union. On the other hand, images of Russia were affected by the presence of a rapidly growing Russian speaking community in Germany. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, in 1990-2007 nearly three million ethnic Germans moved to the FRG from the former Soviet Union (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the RF 2009a). They were mostly descendants of approximately 30,000 Germans who had been invited by Catherine the Great to establish colonies in the south of Russia in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (Stent 1999, p. 165). Having lived in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union for more than two centuries, most of these ethnic

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<sup>54</sup> Anonymous interview with a German expert in German-Russian relations, Berlin, 5 July 2007; anonymous interview with an advisor of a Member of the Bundestag, the Greens, Berlin, 10 July 2007.

Germans had become russified. They were linguistically and culturally different from the rest of Germany's population – many of them spoke either an archaic German of the 18<sup>th</sup> century or none at all. As the German economy struggled with the consequences of reunification, these Germans, who were often perceived as Russians disregarding their actual country of birth, were viewed with certain hostility (Stent 1999, p. 168). In particular, they contributed to strengthening the image of Russia as a criminal country as in the eyes of many Germans some of them were involved in organised crime.<sup>55</sup>

In the German mass media, Russia's images were also considerably more salient than in the UK. According to Jutta Falkner, chief-editor of the economic journal *Ost-West-Contact*, 'there [was] hardly any country that [was] covered by the German media as much as Russia' (2006, p. 33). In the opinion of a German journalist who was interviewed for this study, Russia did not rank first on the foreign policy agenda in the media as there was more coverage of EU member states and the US but it attracted much more media attention than any other country outside the Euro-Atlantic community.<sup>56</sup> Similarly to the UK, a vast majority of publications devoted to Russia in 2000 – 2008 were negative and often very emotional. It should be mentioned though that during this period there were some moments when there was a tendency to more positive coverage. The peak of positive attitudes was in 2001-2002 following President Putin's decision to support the US-led war against terror, and especially his speech in the Bundestag in September 2001. The number of positive publications also increased in late 2002-2003 when Russia joined Germany and France in opposition to the Iraq war, and following the school siege drama in Beslan in September 2004 when most German newspapers showed their sympathy for Russian children.<sup>57</sup> On the whole, however, Russia's images were predominantly negative, becoming particularly unfavourable during Putin's second presidential term.

Similarly to the UK, in the German mass media there was more or less consensus regarding Russia on political issues: those publications that might be seen as positive or even pro-Russian were rare and did not represent continuous support of the Russian politics. Most media in their coverage of Russia concentrated on political issues, with the main topics being authoritarian tendencies in Russian society, the rise of the FSB and neo-imperial tendencies in Russia's relations with the 'near abroad'. During Putin's first presidential term there was also much attention to the war in Chechnya, but it became less of an issue

<sup>55</sup> Anonymous interview with an advisor of a Member of the Bundestag, the Green, Berlin, 10 July 2007.

<sup>56</sup> Anonymous interview with a German journalist, Berlin, 11 July 2007.

<sup>57</sup> Anonymous interview with a German expert in German-Russian relations, Berlin, 5 July 2007; anonymous interview with a German journalist, Berlin, 11 July 2007.

during his second term. A distinctive feature of Russia's image in the German mass media was the very heavy relative weight of energy component in it, which became especially pronounced after Moscow's dispute with Ukraine over gas prices in 2005-2006. Germany's dependence on Russia's gas supply and fears that Russia might use energy as a political weapon in case of a dispute became one of the key topics.

At the same time, coverage of economic issues by the German mass media was substantially different from their approach to political topics, especially in specialised media outlets such as newspapers *Handelsblatt* or *Financial Times Deutschland*. While discussing the Russian economy or German-Russian economic relations, these newspapers were more or less neutral, or sometimes even positive. A German journalist who was interviewed for this study formulated the main message of the articles devoted to the Russian economy as 'you can make good business in Russia!'<sup>58</sup> During Putin's first term in office, alongside publications about Russia's debts to Germany or possibilities of a new financial crisis, there were articles that portrayed Russia as an attractive investment destination. *Handelsblatt*, for instance, wrote in October 2000 that BASF, a German chemical company, 'invested half a billion marks in Russia' (11 October 2000). Although Mikhail Khodorkovsky's arrest in 2003 had a negative impact on Russia's image, its effect was relatively short-term. As *Handelsblatt* admitted in November 2003, Khodorkovsky's fate 'left German investors in Russia cold' (3 November 2003). The situation, however, began to change in 2006-2008. Although articles about 'success stories' of German companies in Russia continued to be published, on the whole the tone of economic coverage became considerably more cautious. Following a series of disputes between the British companies British Petroleum and Royal Dutch Shell and the Russian authorities, there appeared a feeling of uncertainty about the future of German-Russian economic relations. According to a German journalist, 'there are now questions: What will be next? Will it continue to be good, or will it be like with Britain? What does all this mean for German companies?'<sup>59</sup>

As one can see, Russia's image remained much more visible in Germany than in Britain throughout Vladimir Putin's presidency. Another distinctive feature was the presence of a relatively strong pro-Russian lobby that had a noticeable influence on German foreign policy towards Russia. A leading role in this lobby was played by the *Ost-Ausschuss der Deutschen Wirtschaft* (the so called Eastern Committee of the German Economy) that

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<sup>58</sup> Anonymous interview with a German journalist, Berlin, 11 July 2007.

<sup>59</sup> Anonymous interview with a German journalist, Berlin, 11 July 2007.



represented German economic interests in Eastern and Southern Europe, the Baltic States and Central Asia. Among its members were a large number of German companies that operated in the Russian market. Being interested in a good political climate of German-Russian relations, these companies understandably sought to improve Russia's image. BASF/Wintershall and E.ON Ruhrgas, shareholders of the Nord Stream project, can be an illustrative example of this approach. Burckhard Bergmann, Chairman of the Executive Board of E.ON Ruhrgas, presented his views in the article 'Verlässlicher Versorger' ('Reliable Partner') in the issue of *IP* (Internationale Politik) devoted to the debate on the New *Ostpolitik* in March 2007. Speaking about the security of energy supply, Bergmann emphasised the need to have good political relations with all energy suppliers and transit countries, meaning first of all Russia. According to Bergmann, Russia had always been a reliable energy supplier and there was no danger in increasing the EU's dependency on Russian gas. On the contrary, as Bergmann argued, cooperation with Russia would help the EU solve the problem of energy security (2007, pp. 65-67).

Although energy companies did play a significant role in lobbying Russia's interests, there were also many other industries that were interested in closer cooperation with Russia (such as IT, telecommunication, the chemical industry, car companies, etc). According to the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there were approximately 4,600 businesses with German share in Russia in 2008 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the RF 2009d). Klaus Mangold, Executive Advisor to the Chairman of DaimlerChrysler AG and Chairman of the *Ost-Ausschuss*, described Russia as 'a market of 143 mln consumers' and as an extremely attractive area for German investments. In his article 'Unser Markt in Moskau' ('Our Market in Moscow') he pointed out the inadequacy of Russia's image in the West and argued that most Western countries, first of all the US, did not notice that Russia had succeeded in reforming its tax system, banking, etc. Moreover, Mangold argued that only through integration and closer cooperation would Russia be able to appreciate Western values and thus become a liberal democracy (2007, p. 72).

Finally, compared to perceptions of Russia in the UK, Russia's images in Germany were significantly more diverse. At the level of political elites, the difference in the visions of Russia could be traced along party lines, with members of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Party of Democratic Socialism (later 'Die Linke' – 'The Left') in general holding more positive images of Russia, although these parties were far from being united in their attitudes. In addition to that, perceptions of Russia varied considerably depending on which part of Germany – Eastern or Western - the particular person was from. On the

one hand, as a member of the Bundestag from the Left emphasised, those politicians who had lived in the GDR tended to know Russia much better; many of them had been to Russia and often spoke the Russian language. On the other hand, they were often more sceptical of the prospects of Russia's democratisation. Furthermore, perceptions of Russia varied significantly by generation: politicians of the older generation were often more suspicious of Russia's intentions and did not believe in the possibility of big changes.<sup>60</sup>

With this in mind, let us now examine the most significant changes in Russia's images in Germany at the level of political elites. One of the most decisive events that affected attitudes towards Putin at the beginning of his first term, as well as the image of Russia more broadly was his speech in the Bundestag on 25 September 2001 when the Russian President expressed his support of the US-led war against terror and spoke about the special relations between Russia and Germany (Putin 2001). Most members of the Bundestag were enormously impressed by the fact that Putin addressed them in their own language since 'very few leaders speak German'.<sup>61</sup> Although some German politicians were cautious in relation to Putin's past, the fact that Putin had served as a KGB officer in the GDR in the 1980s did not damage his image to a significant extent. Moreover, his work in Germany appeared to be an advantage as it implied that Putin had a good knowledge of the country. According to a member of the Bundestag, 'the main message was: he knows our country, he knows our culture, and he understands us'.<sup>62</sup> One of the core elements of Putin's image at that time was 'a German in the Kremlin', as he was called in his biography written by Alexander Rahr (2000).

At the end of 2002 – beginning of 2003 Gerhard Schröder's alliance with Vladimir Putin and Jacques Chirac against the US-led intervention in Iraq had a pronounced impact on Russia's image. German political elites were split in their attitudes towards this alliance. For a significant part of the political elite, most notably for the Christian Democrats, the Paris-Berlin-Moscow axis represented a serious threat of damaging German-US relations, which had been one of the most important directions of the German foreign policy since the end of the World War 2. Putin was perceived as the wrong partner for Germany in this dispute, which contributed to strengthening of a more critical approach towards Russia.<sup>63</sup> At the same time, due to various events in Russia itself positive elements in both Putin's and Russia's images began to give place to more negative characteristics. The focus of

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<sup>60</sup> Anonymous interview with a member of the Bundestag, Die Linke, Berlin, 18 July 2007.

<sup>61</sup> Anonymous interview with a member of the Bundestag, FDP, Berlin, 6 July 2007.

<sup>62</sup> Anonymous interview with a member of the Bundestag, FDP, Berlin, 6 July 2007.

<sup>63</sup> Anonymous interview with a German expert in German-Russian relations, Berlin, 5 July 2007.

attention shifted to the human rights sphere, including issues related to freedom of speech and the continuing war in Chechnya. A growing number of *siloviki* in key positions of the Russian state contributed to Putin's image as a former KGB officer. In this context Chancellor Schröder's personal friendship with Putin began to be perceived by many as inappropriate.

The SPD/Green government was criticised by the opposition and the mass media for turning a blind eye to any negative developments in Russia for the sake of closer economic cooperation between the two countries and Russia's support of Germany's position against the US regarding the war in Iraq. Schröder's words that he agreed that Putin was a 'flawless democrat' ('lupenreiner Demokrat') were quoted in almost every article or programme devoted to German-Russian relations, which could not but damage the Chancellor's reputation in Germany (see e.g. *Die Welt*, 21 January 2008). According to a member of the Bundestag who was interviewed for this study, Schröder was viewed by many German politicians, including members of the SPD and the Green Party, first as Vladimir Putin's 'good buddy' and only then as the Chancellor. What is more, Schröder was seen as ignoring opinions of the Bundestag members and conducting foreign policy in relation to Russia without proper consultations with a broader political community.<sup>64</sup>

Among the most controversial issues in German-Russian relations that had a significant impact on Russia's image was the Nord Stream project (formerly the North European Gas Pipeline). The fact that Chancellor Schröder had pushed this project to its conclusion just a few weeks before the parliamentary elections was perceived many as dubious. Moreover, Schröder's decision to accept a job offer from Gazprom to head the Shareholders' Committee of the Nord Stream AG following his defeat in the parliamentary elections was viewed as damaging not only Schröder's reputations, but the image in Germany in general (see *Der Spiegel*, 12 December 2005). As a member of the Bundestag put it, there was a widespread perception among German political elites that Schröder 'had broken the social contract' as he had been elected 'to represent interests of the Germans, not the Russians'. Schröder was seen by many as acting 'not according to the country's interests, but according to his personal interests'.<sup>65</sup> The scandal that followed Schröder's appointment damaged not only the ex-Chancellor's reputation, but also Russia's image: Russia was seen as a country where such deals were the norm and as such it represented a danger for Germany. As *Der Spiegel* wrote in December 2005, 'it might be how business is done in

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<sup>64</sup> Anonymous interview with a member of the Bundestag, FDP, Berlin, 6 July 2007.

<sup>65</sup> Anonymous interview with a member of the Bundestag, FDP, Berlin, 6 July 2007.

much of Russia, but even the hint of such shady dealings should make the whole affair untouchable for a former German chancellor' (12 December 2005).

The debate on the German *Ostpolitik* intensified after the victory of the Christian Democrats in the parliamentary elections in 2005 and formation of the grand coalition of the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) and the SPD. Conflicting images of Russia that were held by members of the CDU, the SPD and the opposition parties came to the forefront of this debate. The image of Russia held by many SPD members was that of 'a partner of crucial strategic significance', first of all in the spheres of energy supply and global security (Steinmeier 2007, p. 53). The motto of the new *Ostpolitik* advocated by the German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier – 'convergence through interaction' (*Annäherung durch Verflechtung*) – gave a clear indication of the foreign policy that was seen as preferable and had a direct association with the motto of Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* 'change through convergence' (*Wandel durch Annäherung*). In the article 'Interaction and Integration', published in March 2007, Steinmeier emphasised the necessity for Germany and the EU as a whole of deepening cooperation with Russia and of pursuing 'new goals, such as a closer energy partnership and the creation of a free-trade zone' (2007, p. 53). Speaking about energy issues, Steinmeier stressed the mutual dependency of Russia and the EU and therefore the reliability of Russia as a supplier. This image of Russia as a 'crucial partner' was shared by a significant part of the German political and business elite. According to Ulrich Weisser, who led the Policy Planning Staff of the German Ministry of Defence from 1992 to 1998, for instance,

those who are now arguing that the relationship between Germany and Russia needs to be rethought because of the situation in Chechnya and the two-day drop in gas pressure last winter, fail to appreciate the importance of the German-Russian relationship for energy security and political stability (2007, p. 57)

This position was also supported by the politicians from the Left. As a member of the Bundestag from *Die Linke*, put it, 'Russia should not feel disadvantaged, we should not send a signal that it is being rejected by the West'.<sup>66</sup>

Although Steinmeier did refer to the importance of a dialogue with the Kremlin on Russia's domestic policy in his public statements and the article 'Interaction and Integration' – 'interest in intensifying economic relations is not contradictory to interest in ensuring that

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<sup>66</sup> Anonymous interview with a member of the Bundestag, Die Linke, Berlin, 18 July 2007.

the rule of law and human rights standards are respected in Russia' (2007, p. 54) – the concept of 'convergence through interaction' was sharply criticised by many for its disregard of the human rights dimension. According to an advisor of a Bundestag member from the Green party, there was a widespread feeling that the SPD 'want[ed] to continue the Schröder Russland-Politik in a different guise - close trade cooperation without any conditionality attached to it'.<sup>67</sup> Christian Democrats also stressed that German-Russian dialogue should place more emphasis on issues related to Russia's domestic policy. In this respect, Angela Merkel's approach to this problem when she raised the question of human rights issues at her meetings with the Russian President on several occasions was viewed by many members of the CDU and the opposition parties as the right move.<sup>68</sup>

On the whole, although perceptions of Russia held by German political elites differed substantially depending on the party, personal experience, etc, there were a number of characteristics that were common to all these competing images. First of all, Russia was viewed as an important partner for Germany and the EU, albeit a difficult one. Secondly, Russia was seen as a country that 'had returned to the world stage' and as a growing economic power. Thirdly, there was a feeling of uncertainty regarding Russia's future which became especially pronounced closer to the presidential elections in Russia in 2008. As an advisor to a member of the Bundestag from the Green party put it, 'there emerged some sense of helplessness in relation to Russia: we don't know how to deal with it, what kind of policies to adopt, there is a sense of insecurity'.<sup>69</sup> At the same time, Russia was still seen by many 'as a stranger', i.e. as a country difficult to understand. Interestingly, while discussing German-Russian relations, those German politicians who were interviewed for this study, used the word 'huge' to describe Russia, which implied a potential threat as any negative development in such a large country would inevitably affect its neighbours.<sup>70</sup> The fact that even those members of the German political elite who held more or less positive images of Russia shared these negative perceptions, demonstrated the persistence of centuries-old stereotypes about Russia. Thus, Russian foreign propaganda in Germany had a difficult task in seeking to counterbalance these negative perceptions with more positive visions.

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<sup>67</sup> Anonymous interview with an advisor of a Member of the Bundestag, the Green, Berlin, 10 July 2007.

<sup>68</sup> Anonymous interview with a member of the Bundestag, FDP, Berlin, 6 July 2007.

<sup>69</sup> Anonymous interview with an advisor of a Member of the Bundestag, the Green, Berlin, 10 July 2007

<sup>70</sup> Anonymous interviews with members of the Bundestag, Berlin, 6 July 2007; 10 July 2007; 18 July 2007.

### 6.3 Russian Propaganda in Germany

Similarly to Russian propaganda in the UK, the Kremlin's information campaign in Germany was part of a wider effort to construct a more favourable image of the Russian Federation in Western countries in general. Probably, the most distinctive feature of the German case was an attempt to place the problem of Russia's image at the centre of public discussion. The question 'why Russia's image in Germany was that bad and what could be done to improve it' was raised every year at the St Petersburg Dialogue – a forum aimed at supporting the dialogue between the civil societies in Russia and Germany that had been initiated by Putin and Schröder in 2000. Both sides were encouraged to discuss the problem of Russia's image in Germany and conduct research in this topic (see e.g. Caspar & Galperin 2005). Moreover, participants of the forum suggested a number of practical measures that could be implemented to improve the image. In 2005, for instance, they spoke about their intention

with the support of businessmen, to organise a trip of German journalists to Russia (...), to use contacts with high-ranking representatives of the national economy and the Russian mass media with an aim of objective coverage of history and Russian reality in the German school textbooks, and to attract young German and Russian journalists to the work on developing concepts of improving the images of both countries<sup>71</sup>

The problem of Russia's image was often raised during official visits of German politicians to Russia, such as a visit of members of the German-Russian Parliamentary group of the Bundestag in April 2007. It was also discussed at a number of conferences, for example, in 2006 at the annual conference of the Deutsch-Russisch Forum – a private independent association that aimed at fostering German-Russian cooperation, and thus was explicitly interested in improving Russia's image. By emphasising the significance of the image problem, the Russian authorities initiated a discussion in German society on the factors that affected perceptions of Russia, which meant that more people began to question the objectivity of this image. At the same time, the Kremlin was sending a signal to the German political elite that Russia was very sensitive to its international image and therefore would not like to be criticised for its actions – the strategy that seemed to work rather well under the chancellorship of Gerhard Schröder.

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<sup>71</sup> See the official webpage of St Petersburg Dialog: 'Ergebnisse der AG Wirtschaft' (2005), available on-line at: [http://petersburger-dialog.de/de/2005/ergebnisse/ergebnisse\\_der\\_ag\\_wirtschaft\\_3.html](http://petersburger-dialog.de/de/2005/ergebnisse/ergebnisse_der_ag_wirtschaft_3.html), accessed 29 July 2007.

Interestingly, Chancellor Schröder took the problem of Russia's image in Germany so seriously that having left his position in the government he publicly declared his intention to help the Russian authorities in this matter. The Russian newspaper *Kommersant* commented on Schröder's idea to create a lobbying centre that would promote Russia's interests in Germany, work on improving Russia's image in the German mass media and provide information support to German-Russian projects, first of all to Nord Stream (28 March 2006). Schröder's initiative was met with sharp criticism in Germany. In the opinion of Guido Westerwelle, Chairman of the Free Democratic Party (FDP) faction in the Bundestag, 'an ex-chancellor should represent German interests in Moscow, not Russian interests in Germany. Herr Schröder would call others doing that 'unpatriotic'' (*Focus On-line*, 28 March 2006). Russian opposition politicians were also sceptical of the project and blamed the ex-Chancellor for helping the Kremlin in its propaganda in the West. Following a series of extremely critical publications both in Russia and Germany, Schröder stepped back and admitted that he had been misunderstood (see *Kasparov.ru*, 28 March 2006).

Another distinctive feature of Russian foreign propaganda in Germany was an attempt to shift the focus of attention from problems related to Russia's democracy and human rights to economic issues, particularly to prospects of closer economic cooperation. Although this objective was central to Russian foreign propaganda in the West in general, in Germany it became especially crucial due to the fact that Germany was Russia's main trade partner, as well as due to its significant dependence on import of Russian natural gas. In 2007-2008, for instance, the Russian authorities supported a number of events that aimed to promote Russian regions as attractive investment destinations, such as 'A Year of Siberia in Germany', etc (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the RF 2009c). The leading role in Russian foreign propaganda in this regard was played by Gazprom's subsidiary Gazprom Germania GmbH which aimed to improve Russia's (and Gazprom's) image as an energy supplier. Among its most widely publicised actions was investment into the German football club FC Schalke 04. As Sergey Fursenko, chief executive of OOO 'Lentransgaz', explained Gazprom's decision to sponsor the club,

the club's image, its history, its unique bond with its fans and the international ambitions of its team harmonise well with the spirit of Gazprom. We are convinced that our sponsorship will be an important step to optimise the brand awareness of GAZPROM and to improve the way it is perceived on European markets<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> See the webpage of Gazprom Germania: 'Gazprom Concludes Main Sponsor Contract With Schalke 04', available on-line at: <http://www.gazprom-germania.de/english/sponsoring/schalke04.php>, accessed 10 July 2007.

As this focus on ‘optimising brand awareness’ indicates, Gazprom’s campaign was targeted at German public opinion, rather than merely political or business elites. In addition to promoting its image as a reliable supplier, Gazprom Germania also sought to construct a more favourable image of Russia in general. In 2006-2007, for instance, it sponsored a large number of cultural events in Germany ranging from the ‘Russian Language Olympics’ to guest performances of Russian artists.<sup>73</sup>

Promoting the image of Gazprom as a reliable energy supplier was also an important element in the campaign that was conducted by the Nord Stream AG. Unlike Gazprom Germania, Nord Stream aimed to create a positive image not in the eyes of end consumers, but in the perceptions of political and expert elites in Germany and other EU member states, especially those countries that expressed their concerns about the project, such as Finland and Sweden. It is noteworthy that the official Internet page of the company that contained well presented information about the project and clearly performed a PR function was translated into the Swedish, Finnish and Danish languages (in addition to Russian, German and English), but not Polish, though the Polish government had been the most vocal critic of the project. A crucial element of the PR campaign was positioning Nord Stream not as a German-Russian project, but as an EU project. This was mostly achieved by referring to the fact that the project was declared to be part of the Trans-European Network – Energy (TEN-E), which meant that it was

a key project for sustainability and security of supply in Europe and must be supported by EU member states, as it contribut[ed] to the rapid implementation of the most important cross-border interconnection capacity<sup>74</sup>

Moreover, the company sought to persuade numerous opponents of the project that the pipeline would not endanger the unique ecosystem of the Baltic Sea – the argument that was particularly often used by Nord Stream’s critics. It repeatedly emphasised that the project would facilitate future studies of the Baltic Sea and thus, would contribute to preserving the ecosystem. According to the information on the company’s webpage, the research that Nord Stream AG commissioned prior to commencing the construction would be a ‘unique contribution to subsequent study of the Baltic Sea environment and [would] benefit scientists, environmental NGOs and other parties involved in Baltic Sea research’.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> For more information see the webpage of Gazprom Germania: ‘Interkulturelle Synergien nutzen’, available on-line at: <http://www.gazprom-germania.de/sponsoring/kunst-und-kultur.html>, accessed 28 July 2009.

<sup>74</sup> For more information see the webpage of the project: ‘Status TEN’, available on-line at: <http://www.nord-stream.com/en/the-pipeline/project-significance/status-ten.html>, accessed 28 July 2009.

<sup>75</sup> See the webpage of the project: ‘Baltic Sea Studies’, available on-line at: <http://www.nord-stream.com/en/safety-environment/balticseastudies.html>, accessed 28 July 2009.



In addition to the images of Russia and Gazprom as reliable energy suppliers, Russian foreign propaganda sought to promote the cultural component of Russia's image. The year 2003 was declared to be the year of Russian culture in Germany, and approximately 800 various events were held in 20 German towns and cities, including Russia's participation as a Guest of Honour in the Frankfurt Book Fair (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the RF 2009b). Another example is a series of Festivals of Russian cinema that were held in several German regions in 2006 (ibid). The Embassy of the Russian Federation in Berlin and the Russian House of Science and Culture played one of the key roles in this direction of Russian propaganda. Their efforts were primarily targeted at the Russian speaking community in Germany, especially in the field of promoting the study of the Russian language. Another direction of Russian foreign propaganda in Germany was connected with appealing to the history of German-Russian relations. An illustrative example of this approach can be the celebrations of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the victory in the World War 2 that were held in Moscow in May 2005, and where the German Chancellor was invited to join the leaders of the victorious allies. As Schröder wrote in his memoirs (2007), the fact that the German Chancellor was invited to the victory parade on Red Square was of an enormous symbolic significance for Germany. This gesture meant to emphasise the idea of reconciliation between Russia and Germany, and at the same time to demonstrate the important role of Russia in world history.

## 6.4 Assessing the Results

Despite the intensity of Russian foreign propaganda in Germany in 2000-2008, it did not succeed in transforming Russia's image to a significant extent. At the level of public perceptions, attitudes to Russia remained more or less neutral. Figure 6.1 illustrates the dynamics of changes in feelings towards Russia in German public opinion on a scale from 0 to 100. Interestingly, in 2002, when the German Marshall Fund of the United States and Compagnia di San Paolo began their series of public opinion surveys, the average feeling towards Russia in Germany was more negative than that in the UK – at a level of 44 compared to 50 in Britain. Among other factors, this could be probably explained by a more pronounced salience of Russia's image in Germany, as discussed earlier in the chapter, as neutral feelings to a country can often be a result of insufficient knowledge about it and its low position on the mass media agenda. Similarly to the UK, average feelings to Russia became noticeably more positive in 2003-2004, but then returned to the

neutral level in the following years. Unlike Britain, where the Litvinenko case and a series of diplomatic crises had a pronounced impact on perceptions of Russia, these neutral feelings remained at more or less the same level in the last years of Putin's presidency.

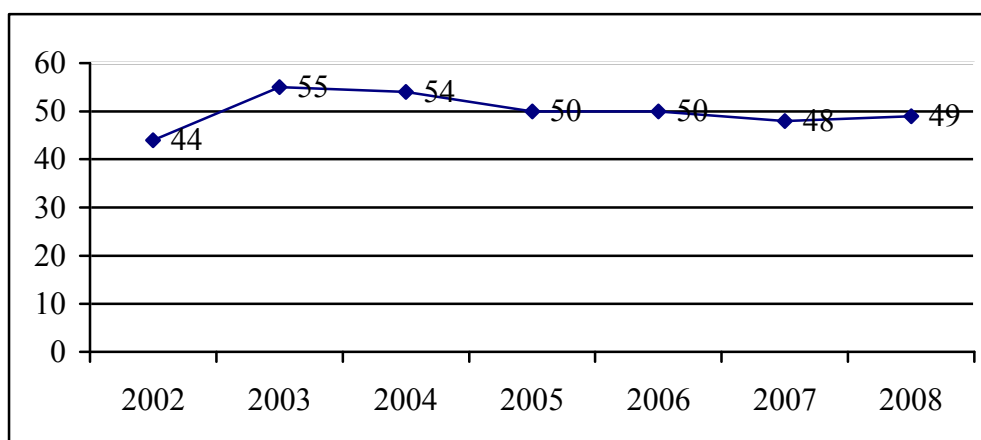


Figure 6.1. Feelings towards Russia in public opinion in Germany, 2002-2008 (German Marshall Fund of the United States 2008)

These perceptions of Russia as neither a friend nor a foe can be illustrated more clearly if one compares Russia's image with images of other countries in German public opinion. Figure 6.2 shows the indices of feelings to a number of countries, institutions and peoples as evaluated by German respondents in 2008. The diagram demonstrates that Russia occupied a somewhat middle position in the system of German perceptions of the world, with a number of countries or peoples, such as Iran, the Palestinians or Turkey being perceived more negatively and the EU member states being perceived much more positively than Russia. At the same time, compared to perceptions of Russia in Britain, the level of positive/negative feelings towards Russia in Germany was considerably more positive than that towards China. One should note, however, that the results of these surveys do not differentiate between the feelings of Western and Eastern Germans, although these can differ substantially.

How effective were the attempts to improve Russia's image in Germany as an energy supplier? On the one hand, one should admit that Russian foreign propaganda did begin to bring some results. Gazprom's sponsorship of various cultural events was perceived by many German politicians and journalists as a positive move. A member of the Bundestag who was interviewed for this study mentioned that Gazprom had sponsored a festival in her constituency and the reaction of most people towards its sponsorship was positive. She referred to the opinion that was expressed by some members of the public that 'now when

Schröder is with Gazprom, Gazprom should invest in Germany’.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, according to the results of a study that was conducted by the German research institute Media Tenor, the image of Gazprom in the German mass media at the end of 2006 was more positive than at the beginning of the year, i.e. right after Russia’s gas dispute with Ukraine (Media Tenor 2006).

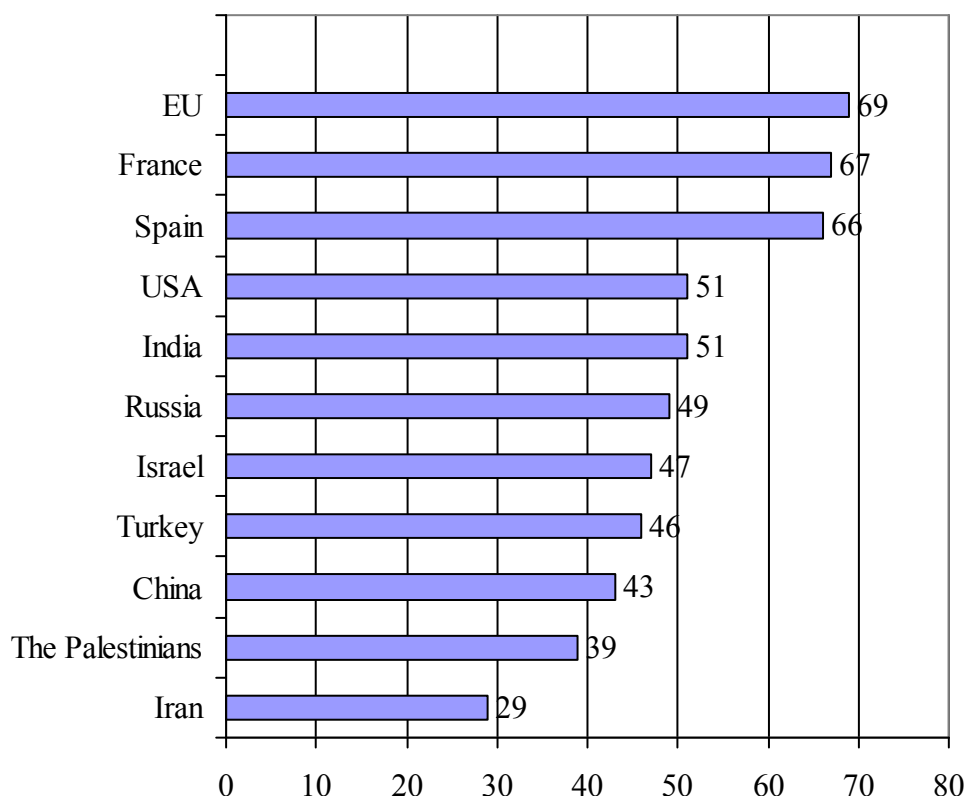


Figure 6.2. Feelings towards countries, peoples and institutions in public opinion in Germany, 2008 (German Marshall Fund of the United States 2008)

On the other hand, Gazprom’s attempts to improve its image clearly failed to resolve its main problem. Despite its efforts to emphasise exclusively economic characteristics in its image, Gazprom continued to be largely perceived as a political instrument of the Kremlin. In the words of a German journalist who was interviewed for this study, ‘it is not clear what Gazprom actually is. Is it a company, or is it Russia as such?’<sup>77</sup> A number of politicians with an expertise in German-Russian relations also stressed that Gerhard Schröder’s election as Chairman of the Nord Stream Shareholders’ Committee was a serious mistake in terms of PR. The ex-Chancellor’s connection with Gazprom was perceived particularly negatively in Eastern European countries where Schröder was seen as ignoring their interests in favour of his personal relations with the Russian president.

<sup>76</sup> Anonymous interview with a member of the Bundestag, Die Linke, Berlin, 18 July 2007.

<sup>77</sup> Anonymous interview with a German journalist, Berlin, 11 July 2007.

While discussing the PR campaign conducted by Nord Stream, interviewees repeatedly stressed its insufficiency. In the words of a member of the Bundestag, 'they [did] not do enough to convey their message'.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, the predominant view was that it might be more or less impossible to significantly improve Gazprom's image at all.<sup>79</sup>

At the same time, one can argue that Russian foreign propaganda had a certain success in shifting the focus of attention from issues related to Russian democracy to the benefits of economic cooperation. In the vision of some members of German political elites (and especially business elite), Russia's economic stabilisation and the prospects of closer economic cooperation did continue to outweigh the importance of human rights dimension. It should be mentioned though, that while defending the inadequacy of a more critical approach towards Putin's Russia, a number of German politicians tended to refer not only to economic factors, but also to the history of German-Russian relations. One of the most important factors in this regard was Germany's responsibility for the World War 2. As Schröder wrote in his memoirs,

We, the Germans, have a special responsibility that comes from our history not only for Poland and other European countries, but also for Russia. This awareness should determine our relations with Russia beyond all other interests (2007, p. 471)

According to a member of the Bundestag who was interviewed for this study, some of the German politicians shared the view that 'because of the war Germany [was] not the one to give advice'. Another factor was Germany's own experience of a difficult transition following the re-unification in 1990: 'if it was difficult for the former GDR, how can it be easier for Russia?'.<sup>80</sup> While under Schröder's chancellorship the German government was more attentive to the Kremlin's complaints about Russia's negative image, under Angela Merkel's chancellorship Germany took a much more critical approach towards Russia. The benefits of further development of German-Russian economic relations were viewed as important, but they did not overshadow the importance of human rights problems and issues of democratisation, and Russian PR did not succeed in changing that. Although some of the Bundestag members who were interviewed for this study argued that 'silence for gas' was still part of German-Russian relations and it would always be, its significance for German foreign policy towards Russia decreased substantially.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Anonymous interview with a member of the Bundestag, FDP, Berlin, 6 July 2007.

<sup>79</sup> Anonymous interview with an advisor of a Member of the Bundestag, the Green, Berlin, 10 July 2007.

<sup>80</sup> Anonymous interview with a member of the Bundestag, FDP, Berlin, 6 July 2007.

<sup>81</sup> Anonymous interview with a member of the Bundestag, Die Linke, Berlin, 18 July 2007.

It is noteworthy that German public opinion supported a more critical approach despite Germany's dependence on Russia's gas supplies. In a survey of February 2007, the Forsa Institute asked German respondents whether in their opinion the government should refrain from criticising the Russian authorities in order not to endanger gas and oil supplies. Interestingly, 80% of respondents answered negatively although the results differed significantly between the Eastern and Western parts of Germany. While in Western Germany only 14% of respondents agreed that the government should pursue the politics of 'silence for gas', in Eastern Germany this number was 22% (*Internationale Politik* 2007). Thus, one can conclude that Russian foreign propaganda did not succeed in improving Russia's image in Germany to a significant extent. Similarly to the UK, it achieved positive results in promoting Russian culture and projecting the image of Russia as an important trade partner. However, the negative elements of Russia's images remained considerably more visible. Having discussed the peculiarities of Russia's campaigns in Britain and Germany, the study now turns to a broader assessment of the results of Russian foreign propaganda in Western countries.

## Chapter 7

### The Effectiveness of Russian Foreign Propaganda

The analysis of Russia's images in the UK and Germany that was undertaken in the previous two chapters has revealed that a number of negative characteristics, mostly related to Russian politics, remained central to perceptions of Russia. Although these two countries were among the primary targets of Russian foreign propaganda in the years of Vladimir Putin's presidency, the Russian authorities largely failed to promote a more favourable image. The persistence of Russia's negative images in both Britain and Germany is particularly striking in the context of substantial differences in their historical experience of dealing with Russia, the pattern of their economic ties, and especially the existence of a relatively active pro-Russian lobby in Germany. Clearly, some of the actions by the Russian authorities both at home and in the international arena contributed to strengthening these negative perceptions, which to a certain extent explains inability of Russian foreign propaganda to substantially improve Russia's image. However, one should also consider a number of other possible factors, such as the importance of Russia's negative images as a significant Other for dominant self-images in a particular country, as it was demonstrated in the German case study, or the inefficiency of the Russian propaganda apparatus.

While discussing the effectiveness of Russian foreign propaganda, one of the key questions is whether Russia's existing images changed to a considerable extent in response to positive/negative developments in Russia or whether they remained more or less the same. Over the years of Putin's presidency, the Russian authorities achieved some positive results in a number of areas, particularly in the economy. As Table 7.1 illustrates, Russia's GDP growth was impressive throughout the period. Russia's reserves, including gold, increased tremendously from \$27.97 billion in 2000 to \$427.1 billion in 2008. In stark contrast to the 1990s, Russia's external debt was declining (Denisov 2006). Moreover, compared to the social and economic upheavals of the previous decade, the Putin era brought noticeable stability to the Russian population. Average wages, for instance, grew rapidly year after year – from \$80.19 in 2000 to \$694.3 in 2008. At the same time, unemployment level decreased substantially, from 10.4% at the beginning of Putin's presidency down to 6.1% in 2007 (although it rose again up to 7.8% in 2008). While this remarkable economic performance was to a large extent based on revenues from the export of Russian energy,

the actions of the Russian authorities did contribute to this success. The World Bank, for instance, admitted that ‘Russia (...) implemented important reforms in recent years, mainly fiscal’ (World Bank 2008, p. 13). It is particularly interesting to see then whether these economic achievements had a pronounced impact on perceptions of Russia or whether they remained on the periphery of Russia’s images.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
GDP growth, %	8.3	5.1	4.7	7.3	7.2	6.4	7.7	8.1	5.6
Reserves, including gold, billion \$	27.97	36.6	47.8	76.9	124.5	182.2	303.7	477.9	427.1
Average wage, US \$	80.19	112.4	138.6	179.4	237.2	301.6	391.9	532.0	694.3
Unemployment, %	10.4	9.0	8.0	8.6	8.2	7.6	7.2	6.1	7.8

Table 7.1. Macroeconomic indicators for the Russian Federation, 2000-2008 (World Bank 2001, p. 11; 2008, p. 26; World Bank 2009, p. 29)

This chapter seeks to place the two case studies into a broader context by discussing the results of Russian foreign propaganda in Western countries in general. As mentioned earlier in the thesis, any assessment of propaganda results is usually problematic for a number of reasons. On the one hand, changing deeply rooted stereotypes takes a long time, which makes it difficult to ‘measure’ the effectiveness of a propaganda campaign in a short-term perspective. On the other hand, there are a large number of factors that affect national images. It is often difficult, if not impossible to establish what exactly caused a particular change in the image. Most often it is a combination of factors rather than merely the effect of foreign propaganda or actions of the authorities. While acknowledging these limitations, the chapter discusses Russia’s existing images in Western countries at the end of Vladimir Putin’s presidency (2007-2008), and attempts to explain the changes.

The chapter begins by examining Russia’s investment image – the element of Russia’s image which the Russian authorities were particularly determined to improve. This is followed by a discussion of the ‘relative weight’ of different components in Russia’s image, with an emphasis on Russia’s ‘brand’ as presented in the Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index in 2008 and on the distribution of negative perceptions of certain aspects of Russia’s domestic and foreign policies across a number of countries in 2008. Finally, the chapter proceeds to discuss the reasons for the continued predominance of negative characteristics in Russia’s images, by looking at the role of negative stereotypes about Russia in the West, as well as at a number of weaknesses in Russian foreign propaganda.

## 7.1 Discussing the Results: Russia's Image as an Investment Destination

As was discussed previously in this study, Russian foreign propaganda sought to shift the focus of attention from the political to the economic components of Russia's image in Western countries. Promoting a favourable image of Russia as an investment destination remained one of the key objectives of the Russian authorities in the years of Putin's presidency. The effectiveness of foreign propaganda in this regard can be examined by comparing the perceptions of Russia's investment climate that were held by existing and potential foreign investors into the Russian economy. The Foreign Investment Advisory Council of the Russian Federation (FIAC) – a body that was chaired by the Russian Prime Minister and included among its members chief executives of major international companies operating in the Russian market – commissioned regular research on Russia's investment image. In 2007 the US-based company Peter D. Hart Research Associates conducted a series of surveys among 106 existing foreign investors and 51 potential foreign (mainly Western) investors (see Foreign Investment Advisory Council 2007). Their findings demonstrated a significant gap in visions of Russia as an investment destination between those who had first-hand experience of working in Russia and those who did not.

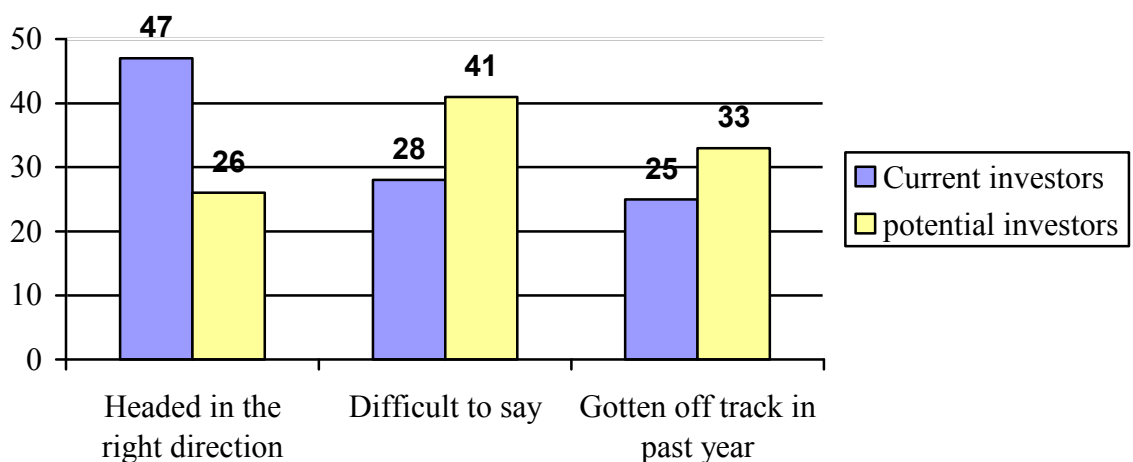


Figure 7.1. Assessment by existing and potential investors of Russian economic policies and laws that encourage foreign investment (Foreign Investment Advisory Council 2007)

The most substantial difference between the views of existing and potential investors was in their assessment of the actions of the Russian authorities. As Figure 7.1 illustrates, existing investors shared a considerably more positive opinion regarding Russian economic policies and laws that encouraged foreign investment. Nearly a half of existing investors (47%) believed that Russian policies 'headed in the right direction' whereas only a quarter of potential investors (26%) agreed with this assessment. On the contrary, only a quarter of existing investors described Russian policies as 'gotten off track in past year' (25%) while



among potential investors this view was significantly more widespread (33%). Most importantly, the share of those who had a difficulty in answering the question was large among both groups of respondents although, predictably, it was higher among potential investors – 41% as opposed to 28% among existing investors.

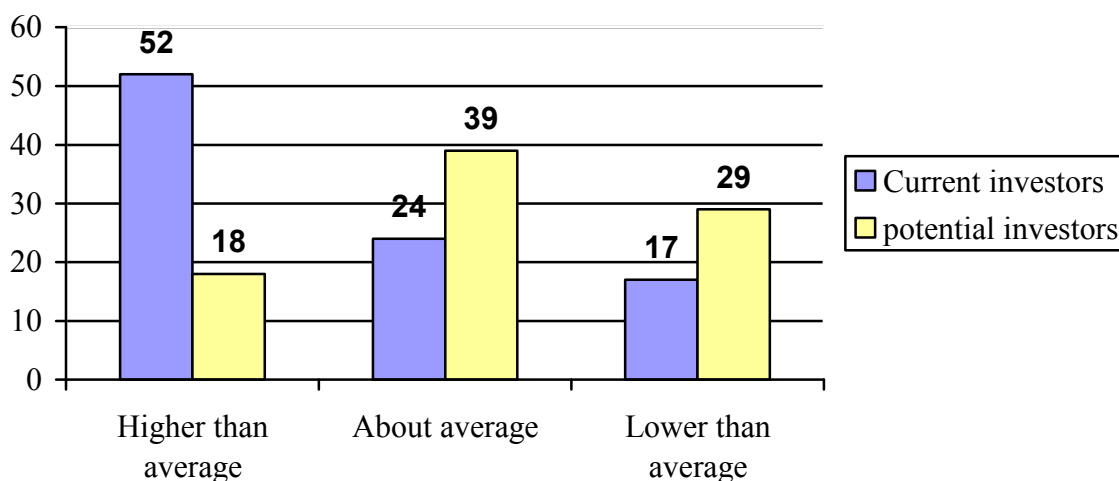


Figure 7.2. Assessment by existing and potential investors of Russia's return on investment, as compared with emerging markets in general, 2007 (Foreign Investment Advisory Council 2007)

Moreover, existing investors tended to be overwhelmingly positive in their assessment of Russia's return on investment whereas potential investors had considerably lower expectations. As Figure 7.2 demonstrates, more than a half of existing investors (52%) considered the return on investment as 'higher than average' and nearly a quarter (24%) as 'about average'. At the same time, the share of potential investors who viewed it as 'higher than average' was almost three times smaller (18%). In the vision that was dominant among potential investors, Russia's return on investment was 'about average' (39%) while almost a third of respondents in this group described it as 'lower than average' – 29% compared to only 17% among existing investors. Potential investors also tended to be more negative in their assessment of investment risks in Russia in comparison to emerging markets in general, as Figure 7.3 illustrates. A vast majority of respondents in this group (59%) believed that investment risks in Russia were 'higher than average'. On the contrary, most existing investors (53%) perceived investment risks as 'about average'. It should be mentioned, however, that the share of those existing investors who saw investment risks as 'higher than average' was also fairly substantial (39%).

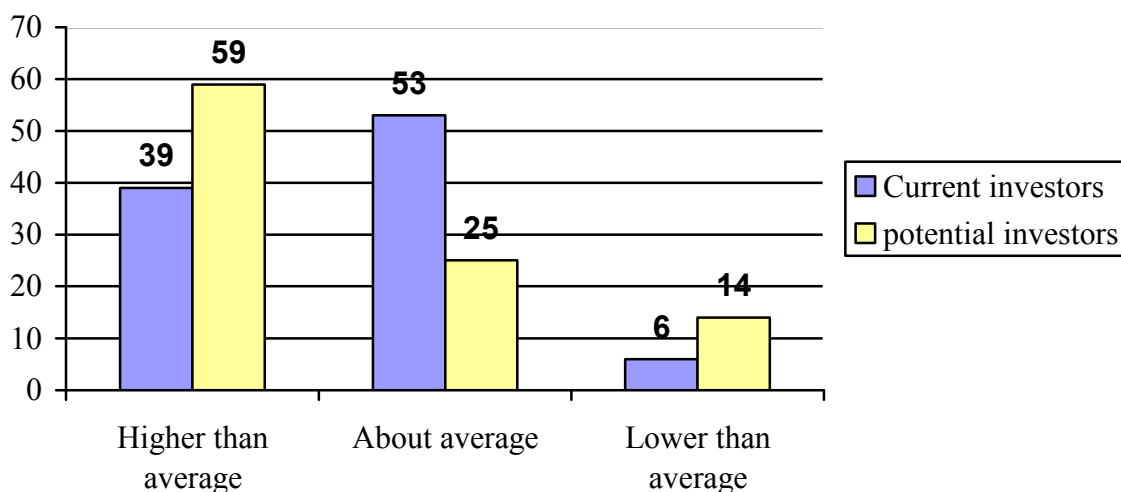


Figure 7.3. Assessment by existing and potential investors of investment risks in Russia, as compared with emerging markets in general, 2007 (Foreign Investment Advisory Council 2007)

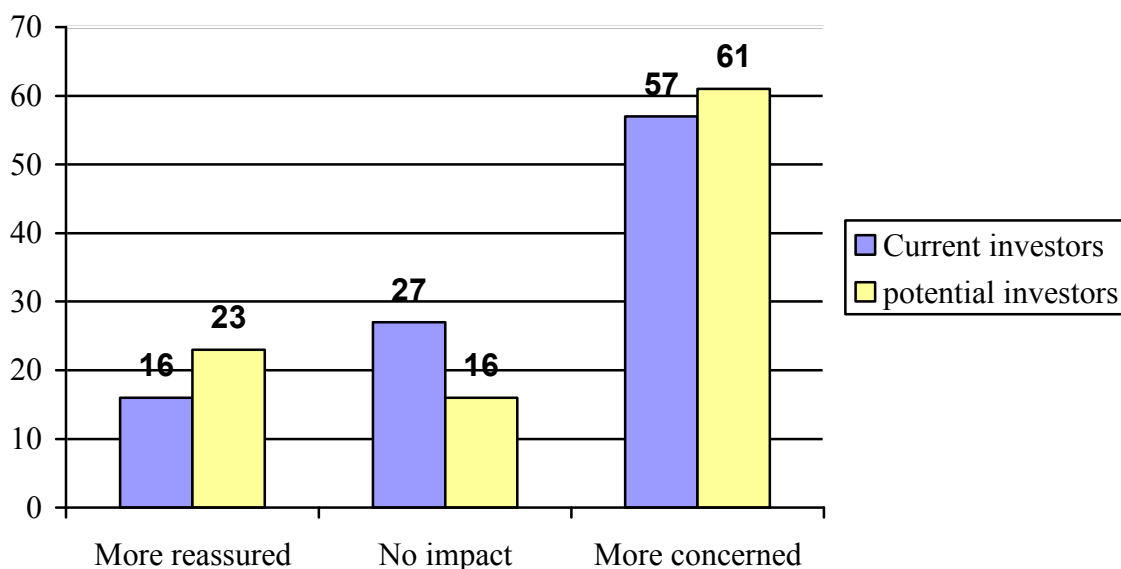


Figure 7.4. Assessment by existing and potential investors of impact of media coverage, 2007 (Foreign Investment Advisory Council 2007)

Finally, both groups of respondents acknowledged the negative impact of media coverage on their image of Russia. As Figure 7.4 shows, an overwhelming majority of both existing and potential investors admitted that what they ‘heard or read about Russia in the media in the past 12 months’ made them feel more concerned about Russia’s investment climate (57% and 61% respectively). At the same time, more than a quarter of existing investors (27%) as opposed to only 16% of potential investors believed that media coverage did not have any impact on their perceptions. Interestingly, 23% of potential investors, compared to only 16% of existing investors, felt ‘more reassured’ by media coverage.

One can conclude that those business executives who did not have first-hand experience of operating in the Russian market tended to hold significantly more negative perceptions of Russia as an investment destination, which indicates a substantial gap between Russia's investment climate and its investment image. Despite energetic efforts to promote a more favourable image of Russia, Russian foreign propaganda failed to close this gap. As Russia's stability, reliability and predictability were among the core components of the country's projected image, the fact that the share of potential investors who viewed investment risks in Russia as 'higher than average' exceeded the share of existing investors by 20% is particularly striking. Most importantly, Russian foreign propaganda largely did not succeed in counteracting the negative impact of media coverage although the fact that almost a quarter of potential investors felt 'more reassured' by media coverage implies that the coverage of the 'increasing stability and predictability of the Russian economy' (*Forbes*, 8 January 2008) and success stories of international companies did have a noticeable positive impact on Russia's images.

## **7.2 Discussing the Results: Components of Russia's Image**

Having analysed perceptions of Russia as an investment destination, let us now turn to other components of Russia's images. To facilitate the discussion, one can examine Russia's position in the 'Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index' in 2008, i.e. the final year of Putin's presidency. Looking at national images from a marketing perspective, Simon Anholt has argued that they may be considered as nation brands. In 2005 Anholt developed the Nation Brands Index which was expanded into the Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index in 2008 when he entered a partnership with the US based company GfK Roper Public Affairs & Media. The index claims to 'measure the image and reputation' of 50 nations, and is based on the results of a series of public opinion surveys of a total of 20,000 'consumers' across 20 panel countries (Anholt 2008). The list of these panel countries is not limited to the West: apart from a number of Western European and North American countries, such as the U.S., Canada, U.K., Germany, France, Italy and Sweden, it also includes some countries in Central and Eastern Europe (Russia, Poland and Turkey), Asia-Pacific (Japan, China, India, South Korea and Australia), Latin America (Argentina, Brazil and Mexico), and the Middle East and Africa (Egypt and South Africa).

The index takes into account ‘six dimensions of national competence’: i) exports; ii) governance; iii) culture, iv) people; v) tourism; and vi) immigration/investment. Respondents are asked a series of questions in relation to these parameters, and their answers are used then to develop a separate index of nations in each of these six categories. Thus, a country can score relatively high according to one of the six parameters but receive a significantly lower rating according to another. In Russia’s case, as Table 7.2 demonstrates, the difference in how respondents assessed the country’s attractiveness according to these six categories was dramatic. Predictably, Russia’s culture was the most positive component of the nation’s brand: Russia was ranked seventh in the list of 50 nations in this category. By contrast, the political component of Russia’s brand was perceived extremely negatively: in terms of governance (which included perceptions of both domestic and foreign policies), Russia was almost at the bottom of the list. Interestingly, Russia also scored relatively badly in the people index, which indicates that the Russians were perceived as not very friendly or welcoming, as well as not very valuable as potential (or existing) employees. At the same time, Russia was placed in the middle of the list regarding its attractiveness as a tourism, investment and immigration destination. The appeal of Russia’s exports was assessed more favourably, although still relatively low – Russia was ranked 17<sup>th</sup> in this category.

<b>Parameter</b>	<b>Russia’s rank</b>
Exports	17
Governance	43
Culture	7
People index	31
Tourism	22
Immigration/Investment	25

Table 7.2. Russia’s ranks in six dimensions of national competence (Anholt 2008)

Russia’s position in the overall Nation Brands Index in 2008, as Table 7.3 illustrates, was relatively low – it was ranked 22 out of 50 nations. It was behind all Western countries (with the exception of Iceland), although ahead of some Eastern and Central European countries, such as Hungary or Poland. Yet, one can argue that Russia’s overall ranking was somewhat inflated as its high score in the category of culture compensated for significantly low scores in the other categories, which brought Russia’s overall rank closer to the top of the list. This inflated position reflects the weakness of the index methodology as it treats all

the six parameters as playing a quantitatively equal role in defining the overall rank of a nation brand. However, the components of a national image discussed above may vary greatly in their relative weight. In Russia's case, for instance, the political component – or governance as defined in the index – is particularly prominent, especially in perceptions of Western countries. Therefore, Russia's extremely low position on the governance index (it was ranked 43 out of 50 countries) indicates that the impact of negative perceptions of Russia's domestic and foreign policies on Russia's overall image was substantial. Moreover, as it was mentioned earlier, this index does not differentiate between views of individual countries. One would expect that perceptions of Russia's governance would be more negative in Western countries than in the rest of the panel countries and, on the contrary, would be considerably more positive in authoritarian states.

Overall rank order	Country	Overall rank order	Country	Overall rank order	Country	Overall rank order	Country
1	Germany	13	Austria	27	India	40	Peru
2	France	15	Denmark	28	Hungary	41	Romania
3	UK	16	Scotland	28	China	42	Lithuania
4	Canada	17	New Zealand	30	Poland	43	Indonesia
5	Japan	18	Finland	31	Czech Republic	44	Estonia
6	Italy	19	Ireland	31	Egypt	44	United Arab Emirates
7	US	20	Belgium	33	South Korea	46	Cuba
8	Switzerland	21	Brazil	34	Thailand	46	Ecuador
9	Australia	<b>22</b>	<b>Russia</b>	35	Taiwan	48	Saudi Arabia
10	Sweden	23	Iceland	36	Turkey	49	Nigeria
11	Spain	24	Singapore	37	South Africa	50	Iran
12	Netherlands	24	Argentina	38	Chile		
13	Norway	26	Mexico	38	Malaysia		

Table 7.3. The Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index 2008 (Anholt 2008)

Most importantly for our analysis, perceptions of Russia's governance varied significantly across individual Western countries. The distribution of negative/positive perceptions of Russian domestic and foreign policies across a number of EU member states, as well as the US and Turkey can be illustrated by the results of the Transatlantic Trends survey in 2008 that were already referred to in this study on several occasions. Figure 7.5 shows the share

of respondents in 13 panel countries that admitted that they were concerned about the weakening of democracy in Russia. Predictably, the assessment of Russia's democracy was far more negative in the public opinion of well-established democracies, i.e. West European countries and the US, and considerably less negative in Turkey (27% of respondents) and Eastern and Central European countries which had not had a long history of democracy themselves. This is especially evident in Poland's case: although the overall feeling of Polish respondents towards Russia remained pronouncedly more negative than in other EU member states throughout the years of Vladimir Putin's presidency (see Table 2.2 in Chapter Two), perceptions of Russia's democracy were not crucial in this regard. Interestingly, among Western countries perceptions of Russia's democracy were most negative in Germany – 75% of respondents compared to, for instance, 65% in the UK. Among other factors, this can be explained by the traditional salience of Russia's image in Germany in general and fears that Russia's illiberal practices could have a corrupting effect on German political elites. The latter aspect manifested itself in continued criticisms of ex-Chancellor Schröder's friendship with Russia's president in the German mass media – as discussed in Chapter Six.

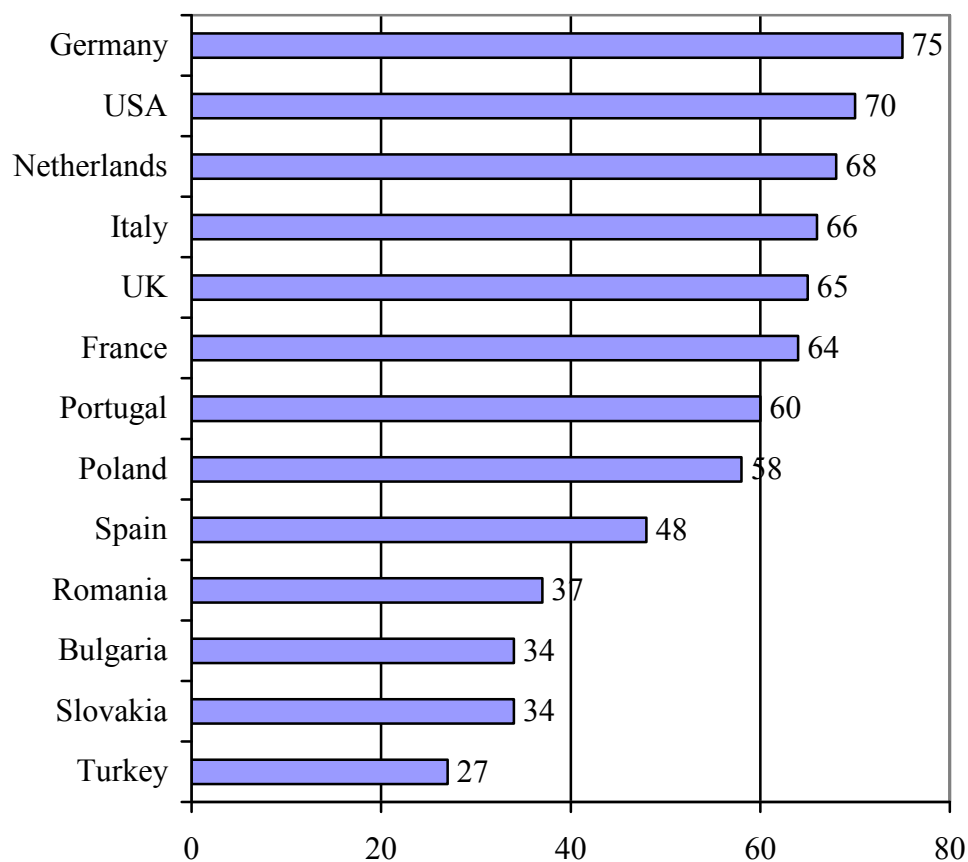


Figure 7.5. Percentage of respondents who were concerned about the weakening of democracy in Russia, 2008 (German Marshall Fund of the United States 2008)

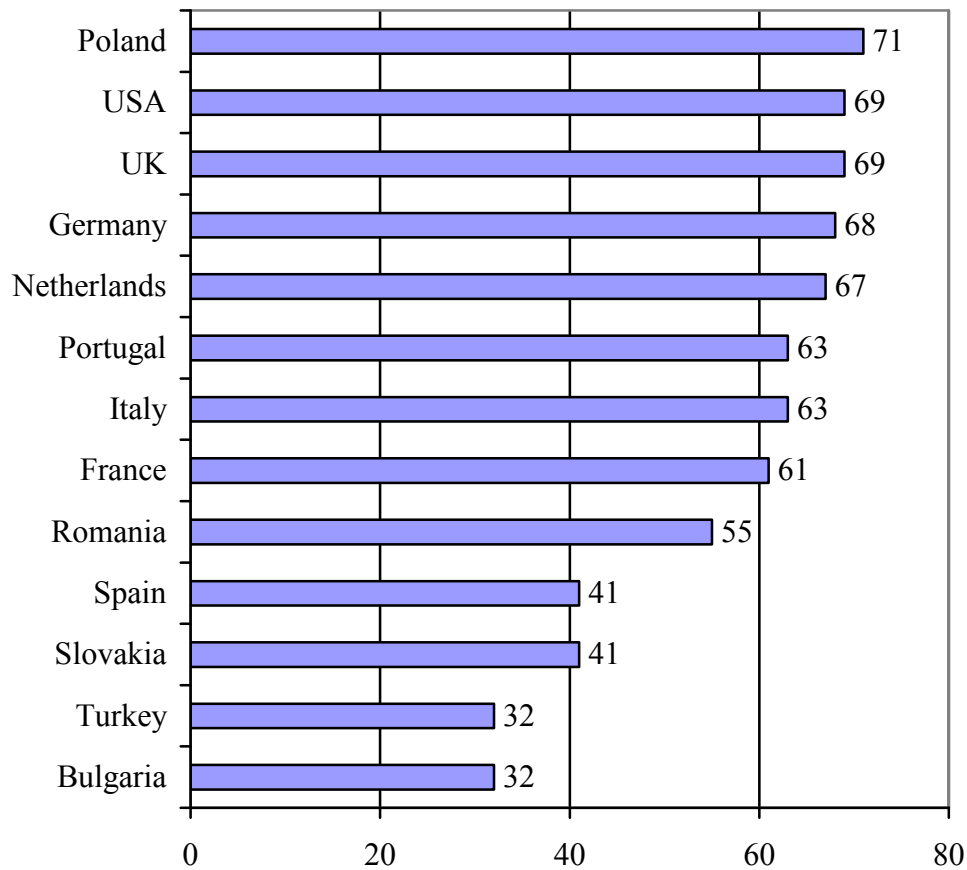


Figure 7.6. Percentage of respondents who were concerned about Russia's behaviour towards its neighbours, 2008 (German Marshall Fund of the United States 2008)

The distribution of negative perceptions of Russian foreign policy roughly followed the same trend, as illustrated in Figure 7.6. The share of respondents who expressed their concern about Russia's behaviour towards its neighbours was considerably larger in the public opinion of Western countries, especially the USA, Britain and Germany (69%, 69% and 68% respectively). At the same time, respondents in Turkey and Eastern and Central European states were significantly less concerned with Russia's actions. This is particularly striking since in case of the latter their geographic proximity to Russia and their history of being in the Russian and Soviet sphere of influence could have made them more wary of Russia's expansionism. The only exception among the Eastern and Central European countries that participated in the survey was Poland. Unlike perceptions of Russian democracy, the image of Russia as a threat in the international arena was extremely salient there. Compared to respondents in other countries, an overwhelming majority of Polish participants were concerned with Russia's actions (71%).

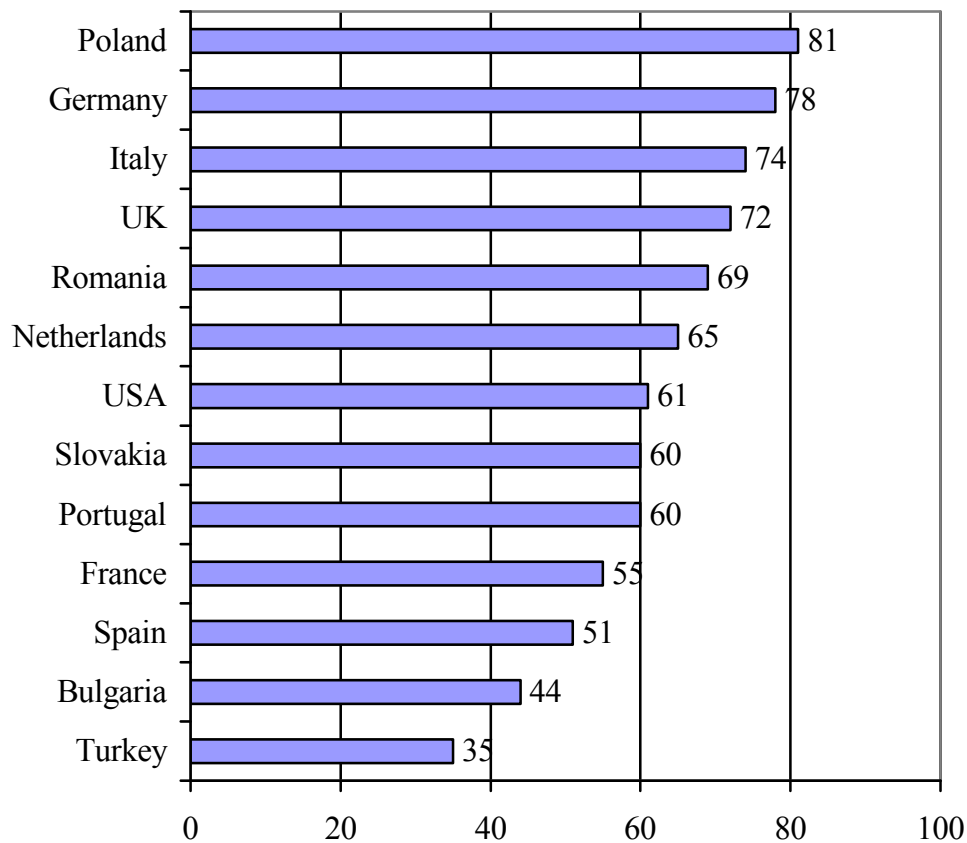


Figure 7.7. Percentage of respondents who were concerned about Russia's role as an energy provider, 2008 (German Marshall Fund of the United States 2008)

The vision of Russia as a threat in the sphere of energy security was also very pronounced in Poland with the share of respondents who expressed their concern about Russia's role as an energy provider (81%) significantly exceeding the share of those who were wary of Russia's behaviour towards its neighbours (71%). Germany and the UK, as Figure 7.7 demonstrates, were also among the countries with the highest percentage of respondents who shared negative views on Russia as an energy supplier. This is particularly striking if one takes into consideration different patterns of their relations with Russia in the energy sphere as was discussed at length in Chapters Five and Six. One should mention that the views of Russia as a threat to energy security differed substantially not only quantitatively across the countries, but also qualitatively in public opinion, the mass media and perceptions of political elites. While the mass media tended to focus on geopolitical questions and possibility that Russia would be dictating its will to consumer countries, members of political elites tended to have more fears in relation to Russia's underdeveloped infrastructure, underinvestment in researching new gas and oil fields and



other technical problems that might considerably limit Russia's potential as an energy supplier.<sup>82</sup>

On the whole, one can conclude that perceptions of Russia in Western countries, including Germany and the UK, remained overwhelmingly negative despite the attempts of the Russian authorities to improve its image. Moreover, there was a considerable difference in distribution of negative perceptions of Russia across the countries, with public opinion in most Western countries being more wary of Russia's actions than public opinion in Eastern and Central European states with the notable exception of Poland. Most importantly, Russia's images were often more negative than could be expected, as was demonstrated in the discussion of the views held by existing and potential foreign investors in the Russian economy.

### **7.3 Explaining the (In) Effectiveness of Foreign Propaganda**

Why did Russia's images in the West remain predominantly negative despite the efforts of Russian foreign propaganda? The most obvious answer would be the inability of any propaganda to construct a favourable image of a country in a context of increasingly negative developments in its foreign and domestic policies. However, in Russia's case it was not entirely true. Although Russia's economic performance, for instance, was impressive throughout Putin's presidency, foreign business executives whose companies did not operate in the Russian market tended to view Russia in a considerably more negative light than those familiar with Russia's economy – as demonstrated earlier in the chapter. Thus, Russia's negative image was not necessarily simply a reflection of the actual situation in the country. Russia's image as a threat to energy security is a particularly interesting example in this regard. One might expect that the level of negative perceptions of Russia's role as an energy provider would be closely linked to the level of dependence of a particular country on Russia's energy supplies. As Table 7.4 shows, dependence on supplies of Russian natural gas varied greatly across EU member states in 2007. Among EU members that were covered in the *Transatlantic Trends* project (2008), Russia's image as an energy supplier was most negative in Poland, Germany and Italy (see Figure 7.7). This is not surprising as the level of dependence on Russian supplies in those countries was considerable: in 2007 they imported about 45.26%, 42.99% and 30.59% of their gas from

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<sup>82</sup> Anonymous interview with a member of the Bundestag, FDP, Berlin, 6 July 2007; anonymous interview with an advisor of a Member of the Bundestag, the Green, Berlin, 10 July 2007; anonymous interview with a member of the House of Lords, Conservative Party, London, 12 December 2007.

the Russian Federation. However, a number of countries with a significantly higher level of dependence appeared to view Russia in a less negative light. In Slovakia, for instance, 60% of respondents were concerned about Russia's role as an energy provider although the country imported about 98% of its gas from Russia. At the same time, only 44% of Bulgarian respondents expressed their concern about Russia while imports of Russian gas accounted for 100% of total gas consumption in Bulgaria in 2007. On the other hand, the UK was not dependent on Russian gas but an overwhelming majority of British respondents nevertheless shared a negative view of Russia as an energy supplier (72%).

<b>EU Member State</b>	<b>Gas import from Russia (bcm)</b>	<b>Share of total gas import (%)</b>	<b>Share of total gas consumption (%)</b>
Austria	5.6	74.87	62.92
Bulgaria	3.1	100.00	100.00
Czech republic	6.43	74.51	72.25
Finland	4.3	100.00	104.88
France	7.63	22.60	18.21
Germany	35.55	42.46	42.99
Greece	2.89	100.00	72.25
Hungary	7.85	74.90	66.53
Ireland	0	0.00	0.00
Italy	23.8	32.85	30.59
Latvia	1.6	100.00	n/d
Lithuania	3.4	100.00	89.47
Netherlands	2.3	12.20	6.18
Poland	6.2	66.67	45.26
Portugal	0	0.00	0.00
Romania	2.5	52.08	15.24
Slovakia	5.8	100.00	98.31
Slovenia	0.56	50.91	n/d
Spain	0	0.00	0.00
Sweden	0	0.00	0.00
UK	0	0.00	0.00

Table 7.4. Dependence on import of Russian gas in EU member states, 2007.<sup>83</sup> Compiled by author from BP (2008).

<sup>83</sup> This table illustrates trade movements via pipelines only, and thus does not take into account the gas volumes sold by Gazprom's subsidiaries to ultimate consumers in a number of EU member states. According to the table, for instance, the UK did not import Russian gas in 2007. However, Gazprom's official documents indicate that

Thus, energy dependency on Russian supplies and potential vulnerability to Russia's pressure can not be seen as the most crucial factor in explaining negative attitudes towards Russia's behaviour in the energy sphere. Most likely, fears of Russia as an energy supplier were closely linked to Russia's negative images in general, particularly to centuries-old stereotypes of its expansionism and aggressiveness. In this context, Russian foreign propaganda could not improve the country's image to a large extent. One can suggest that deeply rooted negative stereotypes of this kind can take a long time to lose their prominence. Moreover, they could be overcome only if the actions of the Russian authorities did not contradict the projected positive image, as they often did in the years of Putin's presidency.

Another reason for the apparent inability of the Russian authorities to promote a more favourable image of the country was the inefficiency of the foreign propaganda machine. Although its overall performance definitely improved during the Putin years, especially if compared to the decade of Boris Yel'tsin's presidency, the Russian authorities still did not succeed in addressing several fundamental problems. Firstly, despite continuous efforts to synchronise actions of the constituent elements of the propaganda machine, there was still no single co-ordinating body. A large number of actors that were involved in performing a propaganda function did not consult with each other on a regular basis, nor were their activities regulated according to the same principles. There are at least two aspects to this problem that should be discussed in more detail: i) the formal structure of the propaganda apparatus; and ii) informal relationships between the actors. As far as the structure is concerned, the problem mostly stemmed from different patterns of subordination. Some of the actors, such as the Ministry of Culture and Communication, were subordinate to the Prime Minister, while others, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported directly to the President. Moreover, the hierarchy of subordination was somewhat broken. A number of the key bodies, such as RIA Novosti or the Russian World Foundation, were formally subordinate to the respective federal ministries, but their heads were appointed directly by the President. A series of interviews that were conducted for this study indicate that many senior propagandists tended to share the belief that ideally most of the bodies should have been incorporated into a single media holding.<sup>84</sup> However, in practice that would have been an extremely complicated process as it would have involved changing the legal status of these organisations, transforming their bureaucracies, etc.

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Gazprom's subsidiary GM&T began supply to ultimate consumers in industrial and commercial sectors in the UK through the BBL gas pipeline (pipeline between the Netherlands and the United Kingdom) (Gazprom 2008).

<sup>84</sup> Anonymous interviews with senior Russian propagandists, Moscow, 29-31 January 2007.

A more crucial problem, however, originated from the disproportionately important role of informal relations between the heads of various propaganda projects and senior officials, which resulted in the increasingly non-transparent nature of decision-making. This was largely the consequence of the favouritism typical of authoritarian regimes in general when, as Lilia Shevtsova has argued, ‘the authority of the state is inevitably privatised by the leader’s entourage’ (2007, p. 62). As the need to improve Russia’s image emerged on the agenda, high-ranking officials engaged in intense competition for the President’s attention and for funding by promoting their own propaganda projects. Thus, it is difficult to speak of a single foreign propaganda strategy, as it was constantly changing depending on who was winning this competition at any given time.

Secondly, the quality of foreign propaganda was compromised by corruption. With the considerable increase of funding allocated to various projects, propaganda unavoidably became a source of regular income for some officials. As an illuminating example, one of the senior propagandists interviewed for this research pointed out to the PR campaign which sought to promote Sochi as a host city for the 2014 Olympic Games. In his opinion, there was an evident mismatch between the funding provided to the organisers of this campaign and the actual output, i.e. the number and quality of publications, interviews, events, etc.<sup>85</sup> Some Russian commentators, such as Yulia Latynina, suggested that certain propaganda projects could have been used as an excuse to raise money from the business community on a regular basis (*Novaya gazeta*, 25 July 2005). In a context when patriotism was presented in domestic propaganda as one of the most important values, big businesses would be interested in positioning themselves as patriotic and would eagerly sponsor various propaganda projects. By doing so, they would demonstrate their loyalty to the Kremlin. At the same time, since this money did not come from the federal budget, it would be more difficult to trace what it was actually spent on.

Thirdly, the idea of openness remained fairly alien to Russian political elites. The access to key decision-makers was often problematic not only for the Western mass media, but for Russian propagandists as well. To a significant extent, President Putin remained the only news-maker: during his presidency he gave a large number of interviews and participated in many press conferences. As a senior Russian propagandist pointed out, this situation was very risky. In case of any negative development in the country, the mass media would inevitably rely on the President’s statements in their coverage of the event as they would be

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<sup>85</sup> Anonymous interview with a senior Russian propagandist, the capital of an EU member state, 12 May 2007.

unlikely to gain access to any other high-ranking officials. Instead of a balanced discussion that would examine the problem from various perspectives, the mass media would then focus predominantly on the President's words, and, as a result, he would be viewed as directly responsible for the crisis.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, as was pointed out in one of the interviews, it was often impossible to arrange an interview with a high-ranking official. When officials did agree to give an interview, they often did not have sufficient skills in dealing with the mass media, and, as a result, their words could sometimes have a negative impact on Russia's image.<sup>87</sup> At the same time, oppositional politicians were always eager to make a statement or to give an interview, and, as a result, their presence in the Western mass media was significantly more noticeable than it would have been if the Russian authorities had been more open. As a German journalist who was interviewed for this study put it, the Kremlin's intolerance of any signs of the opposition gave them an 'aura of saints' who 'suffered for the sake of Russia's democracy', which contributed to the increasing 'relative weight' of their views in the Western political and mass media discourse on issues related to Russia.<sup>88</sup>

Moreover, among Russian propagandists there was no consensus on what role propaganda should be playing in foreign policy. Some actors, such as *Russia Profile*, operated on the assumption that the image was not completely separate from reality, and used more subtle approaches to persuasion. A senior propagandist compared the work of his/her agency to powder – 'it can improve the appearance, but one still needs to have a nice face to look good'.<sup>89</sup> At the same time, other actors viewed the image as a picture that could be easily manipulated. From their perspective, a positive image could be constructed without any radical changes in Russia. As a result, they tended to resort to cruder techniques, and their work to some extent resembled that of the Soviet propaganda of the past. Another fundamental problem was the rigidity of the propaganda machine and its inability to rapidly adapt to a changing situation – a common problem for public diplomacy campaigns in general, but more pronounced in Russia's case due to the increasingly authoritarian nature of the regime. Despite the fragmented character of the propaganda machine, the Russian authorities attempted to retain a firm control over all the elements of the campaign. Whereas in Western countries public diplomacy involved a large number of non-state actors, the Russia authorities, on the contrary, sought to limit propaganda activities only to state or state-controlled actors. What is more, Russian foreign propaganda continued to be

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<sup>86</sup> Anonymous interviews with a senior Russian propagandist, Moscow, 31 January 2007.

<sup>87</sup> Anonymous interviews with a senior Russian propagandist, Moscow, 29 January 2007.

<sup>88</sup> Anonymous interviews with a German journalist, Berlin, 11 July 2007.

<sup>89</sup> Anonymous interviews with a senior Russian propagandist, Moscow, 31 January 2007.

largely crisis-driven and reactive. In this regard, one can recall the words of Edward R. Murrow, legendary director of the United States Information Agency (UCIA), who once said: ‘If they want me on the crash landings, I’d better damn well be on the take-offs’ (quoted in Kelly 2009, p. 72). As the previous chapters demonstrated, efforts to improve Russia’s image tended to intensify following major PR disasters, such as Russia’s gas dispute with Ukraine in 2005-2006. Thus Russian foreign propaganda tended to focus on the short-term goal of minimising the damage that had already been inflicted. However, in the last years of Putin’s presidency there was an increasing emphasis on the longer-term goal of promoting favourable attitudes to Russia more broadly, particularly among Russian-speaking communities in foreign countries.



Figure 7.8. Picture of President Putin kissing a boy on his stomach, June 2006 (BBC 2006a)

While Russian foreign propaganda became more elaborate, sometimes it was excessively energetic. On a number of occasions, efforts to promote a more positive image were counterproductive as they appeared to have caused a wave of media publications that viewed the intentions of the Russian authorities suspiciously. One of the most illustrative examples is the extremely unexpected gesture by President Putin when he kissed a five-year-old boy, who was among a group of tourists in the Kremlin, on his stomach in June 2006 (see Figure 7.8). One can hypothesise that Putin had been recommended to demonstrate the more emotional and humane side of his personality. Putin later explained his decision to kiss the boy as spontaneous. In his words, the boy ‘seemed very independent and serious (...) I wanted to cuddle him like a kitten and it came out in this gesture. He seemed so nice’ (quoted in BBC 2006a). However, this gesture was viewed by many as inappropriate and as merely ‘a clumsy attempt to soften Mr Putin’s image’ (*The Times*, 6

July 2006). Another example is the publication of a series of photographs that showed the Russian President fishing on the Yenisei River in Siberia in 2007 (see Figure 7.9). The image of a topless Putin in military trousers, demonstrating his muscles, provoked a somewhat hysterical reaction in the Western mass media. *The Times* was particularly critical of the decision to publish these photos:

unless Russia's best-known martial arts expert is using the rod as some novel kind of muscle-toning device – or possibly is sending a signal by some secret rod-grip known only to the KGB or maybe the masons – this picture, against all propaganda intent, is an appalling PR gaffe and a gift to the West in what it reveals. The advisers who set it up (...) should be shot (*The Times*, 3 September 2007)

Probably, the photos were intended primarily for an audience in Russia rather than for Western countries, as projecting the image of Putin as a strong leader was central to Russian domestic propaganda. However, as discussed earlier in this study, it is extremely difficult in the context of modern mass media to separate domestic and foreign propaganda.



Figure 7.9. Picture of President Putin fishing in the Yenisei River in Siberia, 2007 (*The Times*, 3 September 2007)

While Russian foreign propaganda to a large extent failed to promote a more favourable image of Russia in general, it nevertheless succeeded in some more narrow aspects, first of all in projecting the image of a strong country that had returned to the world stage. The fact that Russia was increasingly perceived as a world power while the Russian President was viewed as someone who made this comeback possible was reflected in the recognition of Putin as Person of the Year by *Time* magazine in 2007. *Time* wrote about Russia as a ‘nation that had fallen off our mental map’, but ‘led by one steely and determined man, [it] emerged as a critical linchpin of the 21st century’ (*Time*, 31 December 2007 – 7 January 2008, p. 36). Interestingly, the magazine repeatedly insisted that this title was neither ‘an honour’ nor ‘an endorsement’ but rather ‘a clear-eyed recognition of the world as it is and of the most powerful individuals and forces shaping that world – for better or for worse’ (ibid., p. 37). Moreover, Putin’s image as Person of the Year in *Time* was overwhelmingly negative as he was described on the magazine cover as ‘Tsar of the New Russia’ or as an ‘elected emperor’ in one of the articles of the issue (ibid., p. 41). Yet, this negative vision may be considered a major success of Russian foreign propaganda as it implied that Russia was seen as a country that other big powers, particularly the US, had now to take more seriously.

Among other achievements was selection of the Russian city of Sochi to host the 2014 Winter Olympics by the International Olympic Committee, as well as the emerging image of Russia as a rich country – although one should mention the negative impact on perceptions of Russia in Western countries of the ‘often less than endearing conduct of *nouveau riche* Russians abroad’ (Brandt 2003, p. 58). At the same time, Russian culture remained a positive element of Russia’s image. Its effect on Russia’s overall image was, however, fairly limited as it was primarily the culture of pre-Soviet Russia that was widely known in the West whereas Russian contemporary culture was considerably less visible. This is particularly noticeable if one compares the prominence of Russian contemporary culture to that of the U.S. where Hollywood and Madison Avenue are usually seen as the main assets of the country’s soft power (Snow 2009, p. 5).

Most importantly, despite all the achievements discussed above, Russia’s images in Western countries remained predominantly negative. This failure by the Russian authorities to significantly improve the country’s image while needing to gain recognition of the West was one of the central elements in Russian public discourse had profound consequences for the evolution of Russia’s dominant self-image. Moreover, being unable



to change negative perceptions of Russia in Western countries, the Russian authorities began to use Russia's negative image as an instrument in their domestic propaganda – as will be discussed in the following chapter.

## Chapter 8

### Russia's International Image at Home

Russian society has always been extremely sensitive to the country's international image. Both political elites and ordinary Russians tend to pay a great deal of attention to what Western politicians and the mass media say or write about Russia. Western observers have often pointed out that this interest is much more pronounced than in Western countries. Boris Reitschuster, Moscow correspondent of the German weekly newsmagazine 'Focus', has suggested that this obsession with the country's image is a 'traditional Russian feature' (InoSMI 2007). According to a public opinion survey conducted by the Levada Centre in 2007, the majority of Russian respondents (54%) considered it 'important what the West [thought] about Russia' as opposed to only 40% who did not view it as important (Levada Centre 2008c). This chapter seeks to analyse the role of Russia's international image in domestic policy. It begins by examining the way in which the failure of Russian foreign propaganda to promote a more favourable image of Russia in the West was interpreted in the dominant discourse during the Putin years, and exploring the main arguments related to this issue in the broader public discussion in Russia. The second part of the chapter looks at the use of Russia's negative image in domestic propaganda. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the impact that these interpretations had on Russian domestic policy.

#### 8.1 Explaining the Failure of Russian Foreign Propaganda

As the previous chapters of this study demonstrated, Russia's image in the West became increasingly negative in the Putin years. One of the most urgent questions that dominated the public debate in this regard was whether this vision was an adequate reflection of reality or not. Only a few Russian politicians and commentators, mainly those who can be described as Liberal Westernisers (see Chapter Three), publicly acknowledged that the negative image was predominantly the result of negative developments in the country itself. Alexander Bovin, a former diplomat and a prominent Russian journalist, argued in an article in *Nezavisimaya gazeta* in May 2001 that 'the most powerful generator of Russia's negative image [was] Russian reality' (Bovin 2001). His opinion was shared, among others, by the oppositional politician Irina Khakamada, who believed that 'if our situation is bad,

there is no point in taking offence with the neighbours who do not like us' (Khakamada 2005). This view, however, remained on the fringes of the public debate on Russia's image. In the dominant discourse, by contrast, Russia was presented as a victim of Russophobia that for centuries had been widely spread in Western countries and had further been promoted by the 'Kremlin's enemies'. Since the dominant discourse was articulated mainly by the President, an overview of the evolution of Vladimir Putin's views on the issue is necessary.

### **8.1.1 Western Criticism in the Dominant Discourse**

In the early days of Putin's presidency, his interpretation of the reasons for Western criticism of Russia was rather cautious. In relation to Chechnya, for instance, he stressed that although some criticism voiced by Western countries was (geo)politically motivated, most blame for Russia's negative image was to be laid on Chechen 'terrorists' who were promoting their view of the situation in the breakaway republic. In his interview with the state RTR TV channel in January 2000, Putin, who was acting President at that time, stated that

(...) there are people in the West who will always criticise us and take an anti-Russian stand out of geopolitical considerations (...) But a significant part of the international community does not understand what is going on there and is influenced by superficial information and terrorist propaganda (Interview with the RTR TV Channel 2000)

Following the events of 9/11, when Moscow allied with the USA in the subsequent 'war on terror', Putin's stance on Western criticism became considerably softer. As was demonstrated earlier in this study, by portraying the Chechen conflict as part of the global anti-terror campaign, the Kremlin to an extent succeeded in silencing its Western critics. In a situation in which the prospects of Russia's closer cooperation with the US and its allies appeared to be promising, Putin refrained from any accusations against Western countries of nurturing anti-Russian sentiments. In his annual address to the Federal Assembly in April 2002, Putin expressed the view that

After 11 September (...) many, many people in the world realised that the 'Cold War' was over. They realised that now there are different threats, that a different war is on – the war with international terrorism (Putin 2002)

However, in the following few years Putin's rhetoric underwent significant changes. Already in late 2002 and the beginning of 2003 the Kremlin was exposed to a new wave of criticism from the West. Among the reasons, as discussed in Chapter Two, were Moscow's

opposition in the UN Security Council to the US-led war in Iraq, the Yukos affair and particularly perceived anti-democratic tendencies in Russian domestic politics. This criticism intensified following Putin's re-election as President in March 2004. In response to the renewed criticism, Putin accused his Western critics of deliberate misinterpretation of the processes taking place in Russia. His annual address to the Federal Assembly in May 2004 emphasised the idea that

young Russian democracy has had considerable success in establishing itself. And those people who do not notice this success, or who do not want to notice it, are not quite honest (Putin 2004b)

Moreover, he spoke of Russia's deteriorating image being the result of anti-Russian propaganda. In July 2004, while addressing Russian ambassadors and permanent representatives, Putin mentioned 'frequent planned campaigns' which aimed 'to discredit this country' and which were 'damaging both for the state and for the national business' (Putin 2004a).

Since then, the idea of the existence of some kind of an anti-Russian plot has been a key element of the dominant discourse. It became even more evident in 2006 following the murder of the Kremlin's prominent critic, journalist Anna Politkovskaya, in Moscow. In his speech at the St Petersburg Dialogue on 10 October 2006, Putin offered his explanation of the murder:

We have reliable, consistent information that many people who are hiding from Russian justice have been harbouring the idea that they will use somebody as a victim to create a wave of anti-Russian sentiment in the world (Putin 2006c)

Although Putin preferred to remain unspecific while talking about these 'enemies of the Kremlin', it was clear that he meant first of all the ex-oligarch Boris Berezovsky who had lived in self-imposed exile in the UK since 2000 and 'Chechen terrorists', including Akhmed Zakaev, who also lived in the UK (see Chapter Five). Therefore, in Putin's vision, these were forces that represented a threat to Russia's integrity and political regime.

In addition to that, as Western criticism of Russia's democracy became more pronounced during Putin's second term, he began to put more emphasis on its political causes. Although he refrained from openly anti-Western comments, the idea that the attempts of Western countries (meaning first of all the USA) to interfere in Russian affairs represented

a threat to Russia was at the heart of his vision. At his meeting with the members of the Valdai Discussion Club in September 2007, Putin pointed out:

we do see attempts to use the lexicon of democracy to influence our domestic and foreign policy (...) It only undermines trust in the very institutions and principles of democracy (Meeting with Members 2007)

Putin was particularly critical of NATO's intention to deploy interceptor missiles and a radar tracking system in Poland and the Czech Republic. On a number of occasions he expressed the opinion that Russia's negative image was used by Washington as an instrument to solve domestic problems and to secure more substantial defence spending. During his visit to Jordan in February 2007, for instance, Putin stated:

I have an impression that some partners are promoting themselves and have started using the non-existent Russian threat to get more money from the U.S. Congress for military operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the expensive missile defence project (RIA Novosti 2007b)

Moreover, Putin stressed that the vision of Russia as a threat was deliberately promoted by Western political elites and that 'anti-Russian sentiment [had] been fuelled intentionally to create a moral and political situation conducive to deploying the [missile defence] systems' (RIA Novosti 2008).

On the whole, President Putin repeatedly interpreted any criticism of Russian democracy as an attempt to limit Russia's sovereignty, to pressure the Kremlin into acting against the country's national interests in the international arena or even to change the political regime. Putin's vision of how criticism was used to damage Russia's interests was summarised in his address to the Federal Assembly in April 2007:

our policy of stable and gradual development is not to everyone's taste. Some, making skilful use of pseudo-democratic rhetoric, would like to return us to the recent past, some in order to once again plunder the nation's resources with impunity and rob the people and the state, and others in order to deprive our country of its economic and political independence (Putin 2007b)

This self-image of Russia as a besieged fortress and the vision of the West as a threat that became increasingly prominent in the official discourse during Putin's second term in office indicated the growing impact of the Fundamentalist Nationalist discourse in Russia (see Chapter Three). The President's views of the reasons for Russia's negative image were continuously reiterated in the statements of high-ranking officials which displayed more open elements of the re-emerging anti-Western, in particular anti-American consensus

among the political elite. Russia's Minister for Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov, for instance, while speaking at a press conference in January 2005, suggested that the increasing negativism towards Russia was caused by Russia's improving position. According to Lavrov, not everyone 'like[d] that Russia [was] strengthening' and that Russia was 'becoming more independent politically and financially' (Lavrov 2005). In a number of his statements, Lavrov drew attention to the 'simply amazing' number of negative and 'non fact-based articles abroad' (quoted in *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 28 February 2007, p. 1). Moreover, he went even further by blaming some members of the European Union (meaning primarily Poland and the Baltic States) for conducting a 'propaganda campaign aimed at constructing a negative image of Moscow' the goal of which was 'to formulate a negative common policy of the EU towards Russia' (Lavrov 2007).

The sensitivity of the Russian political elites towards the country's negative image increased dramatically in the run-up to the parliamentary elections of 2007. An illustrative example is Moscow's reaction towards a letter to Lavrov that was written by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Miklos Haraszti, who voiced concerns over the situation with press freedom during the electoral campaign to the State Duma. The Russian Foreign Ministry responded with a statement that Haraszti's letter was 'a part of propaganda attempts to discredit Russian parliamentary elections made by certain forces in the West' (RIA Novosti 2007a). According to Mikhail Kamynin, head of the Information and Press Department of the Foreign Ministry, the West increased its information pressure on Russia around the time of the elections in order to 'force the Russian authorities into making decisions which would be contradictory to the interests of the Russian people' (Kamynin 2008).

Russian parliamentarians were also heavily involved in the discussion on Russia's image. Most Fundamentalist Nationalists, such as a member of the *Rodina* (Motherland) faction Nikolai Leonov, agreed with Lavrov that the negative image was the result of anti-Russian propaganda (see RIA Novosti 2006c). Moreover, another member of *Rodina*, Alexander Krutov, authored an instruction to the Information Policy Committee of the State Duma to request information from state bodies on the 'anti-Russian campaign in the Western media' (RIA Novosti 2006a). Interestingly, even those members of Russian political elite who could previously be described as Liberal Westernisers tended to articulate a significantly more critical position towards the West, which brought their views closer to those of Pragmatic Nationalists. Konstantin Kosachev, for instance, a member of *Edinaya Rossiya* and head of the State Duma's Foreign Affairs Committee, argued in his article in

*Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn'* that among Western countries few 'need[ed] a strong and stable Russia despite all their statements and even despite common sense' (Kosachev 2008).

While analysing the dominant discourse on Russia's image, it is essential to examine the position of the *siloviki*, most of whom could also be described as Fundamentalist Nationalists. A number of studies have demonstrated that during Putin's presidency there was a distinct tendency for an increasing role of *siloviki* in policy-making. According to Ol'ga Kryshchanovskaya and Stephen White, by the start of 2005 *siloviki* accounted for almost a quarter of the top leadership with their presence in the national government amounting to 34.2% and in both houses of the Russian parliament to 18.3% (Kryshchanovskaya & White 2005, p. 1065). These estimates were later challenged by some researchers who argued that their number was slightly lower (see, e.g. Renz 2006; Rivera & Rivera 2006), but it is still obvious that this elite group had a significant influence on Russian politics. Although some scholars have argued against looking at them as a coherent group (see Renz 2006), most *siloviki* were united in considering Russia to be a besieged fortress and holding anti-Western, particularly anti-American, views. As Richard Sakwa has pointed out, *siloviki*, especially *chekisty* (i.e. those who worked in the KGB or later in the FSB), can be generally characterised by believing that Russia 'was beset with hostile external forces and their domestic allies to reduce the country to little more than a vassal of the West' and that their destiny as a group was 'to save Russia' (2008, p. 76).

This approach can be illustrated by the opinion of Viktor Cherkessov who, similarly to Putin, graduated from the Law Department of Leningrad State University, and later worked as his First Deputy Director in the FSB, then as President's envoy to the North-West Federal District before being appointed head of the Federal Anti-Narcotic Service in 2003. In the article he published in *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* in 2004, Cherkessov spoke of the threat that any criticism of *chekisty* and the Russian authorities in general represented for the country. He argued that 'the real target [was] not these or those authorities, but the country', and that, if not confronted with adequate measures, this anti-Russian campaign would lead to the 'further disintegration of the country'. Moreover, he presented *chekisty* as saviours of the Russian state since 'the history placed the burden of retaining the Russian statehood to a large extent on [their] shoulders' (Cherkessov 2004).

### 8.1.2 Western Criticism in the Public Discussion

Let us now turn to the wider public discussion of Russia's international image in the Russian mass media which became particularly intensive during Putin's second term in office. A large number of political analysts and commentators participated in the debate, and although their views were not part of the dominant discourse as such (which, as we noted earlier, was largely articulated by the President), most often they reiterated its major points and developed them further. Thus, they to a significant extent can be seen as part of a broader (near-) dominant narrative which was based on a number of recurrent ideas. Firstly, it was emphasised that Russia's image was negative predominantly in Western countries while the rest of the world viewed Russia in a much more positive light, which meant that the West was not objective in its assessment of Russia's development. A prominent TV commentator Alexei Pushkov – the author and host of a popular analytical programme 'Postscriptum' (TVC channel) – stressed that 'China, India, Brazil, Mexico, the absolute majority of the people of the planet [saw] Russia as a positive factor' (Pushkov 2008). Moreover, Vyacheslav Nikonov, a 'political technologist' with close ties to the Kremlin, went even further by arguing that 'on a global scale the image of Russia and Putin [was] better than images of most G8 members' (Nikonov 2006b). This idea was extremely important as it resonated with the self-image of Russia as a country which supported a more democratic system of international relations, one based on multi-polarity and the prevalence of the UN role.

Secondly, the negative image of Russia was perceived as the product of a hostile reaction by Western political elites to Russia's recovery. According to this narrative, Russia was a potential economic competitor and a geopolitical rival to the West, which meant that Western countries did not need a prosperous and strengthening Russia. In this interpretation, Russia's image was positive only when Russia was weak, humiliated and dependent on the West. In the opinion of Vyacheslav Nikonov,

in the last century, Russia received applause [from the West] only twice – when it committed suicides which were accompanied by social disintegration and economic collapse – in February 1917 and in December 1991. It is always pleasant when there is one serious competitor less (Nikonov 2006a)

This view was also shared by Alexander Dugin, a prominent right-wing ideologist and the leader of the Eurasia Movement, whose views can be described as Fundamentalist Nationalist. According to Dugin, 'the stronger and more prosperous Russia is, the more the



West hates it, fears it and throws mud at it'. Thus, the negative character of Russia's image was seen as unavoidable. In this respect Dugin offered an original solution to the country's image problem: 'I suggest looking at the situation in the following way: if the West begins to hate us more and to scold us more, then we are going in the right direction' (*Tribuna*, 29 December 2006, p. 7).

Thirdly, the increasing criticism of Russian democracy was explained by the centuries-long Russophobia rooted in the mentality of Western political elites. As a prominent academic, member of the Russian Academy of Sciences Sergo Mikoyan put it in his article in *Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn'* (International Affairs),

It is clear to any attentive Russian reader of Western, especially US and UK press that Russophobia is not a myth, not an invention of the Red-Browns, but a real phenomenon of political thought in the main political think tanks in the West (Mikoyan 2006, p. 31)

According to Pushkov, 'the culture of a negative attitude towards Russia' emerged to a large extent as a consequence of Russia's choice in favour of Orthodox Christianity while most other Western and Central European countries were Catholic. As a result Russia began to be perceived as 'something that belong[ed] to Europe territorially (...) but not ideologically', and thus the Russians were always viewed as different (InoSMI 2008). In this narrative, Russia's image as an enemy was an essential part of Western identity and as such it could not be easily changed. Moreover, as Pushkov argued, the West needed an external enemy since having a common enemy would unite Western countries and would mobilise their electorates (Pushkov 2008). Therefore, Russia would always be seen as an enemy.

Fourthly, Russia's negative image was interpreted as a result of some kind of conspiracy. A number of prominent Russian commentators blamed Western elites and the mass media for conducting propaganda campaigns against Moscow and promoting Russophobia. According to Sergei Markov, director of the Political Studies Institute, 'Russophobia [had] almost become an official ideology for many in the West' (Markov 2006). In his article that was published in *Izvestiya* Markov accused the government of several post-Soviet countries, in particular Latvia, Estonia, Georgia and Poland, of deliberate attempts to promote anti-Russian attitudes. At the same time, in the Russian mass media it was often argued that in the West it was considered politically correct to criticise Russia and politically incorrect to justify any of the Kremlin's actions. In this atmosphere, as Vyacheslav Nikolaev pointed out in his article in *Rossiiskie vesti*, the Western mass media

‘attack[ed] those [Western] politicians and public figures who [did] not share pessimistic views [on Russia]’ (Nikolaev 2005).

Finally, a key element of this narrative was a very strict division between ‘them’ (the Western mass media and politicians who did not want a stronger Russia) and ‘us’ (the Russians who were continuously feared, hated and criticised by the West for no objective reasons). In this context, any Russian politicians or commentators who openly agreed with Western criticisms of Russian democracy or expressed their support for Western values (e.g. Liberal Westernisers) were portrayed as traitors or as a ‘fifth column’ who contributed to the promotion of Russophobia. Mikoyan, for instance, condemned those ‘Russian readers who view[ed] Russophobia as one of the ways in the struggle for democracy, for all-human values and for Russia becoming part of Europe’ (Mikoyan 2006). In a context in which it had become to a large extent politically incorrect to agree with any Western criticism, very few commentators openly denied or doubted the idea that the country’s negative image was the product of Russophobia or some kind of a plot against Russia. Liberal Westernisers who had already been a diminishing group among Russian political and expert elites, were further marginalised. At the same time, Fundamentalist Nationalist views tended to play an increasingly important role in the dominant discourse.

## **8.2 Russia’s Negative Image in the West in Domestic Propaganda**

The interest of the Russian electorate in the country’s international image was exploited and further stimulated by various political actors: oppositional politicians, foreign actors and the authorities. It should be noted that this was not a new phenomenon. Publication of Western articles translated into Russian had been widely used by the Soviet propaganda machine (see Fateev 1999). An illustrative example of using this technique is a weekly magazine *Za rubezhom* (Abroad) which was launched in 1932 with the prominent Soviet writer Maxim Gorky as its first editor. In post-Soviet Russia the idea of using Western publications for propaganda purposes was first picked up by Media-Most - the media empire of oppositional oligarch Vladimir Gusinsky. His Internet project *InoPressa*, which specialised in translating foreign articles about Russia and putting them on-line, was launched in 1999. Apparently, the idea belonged to Svetlana Mironyuk, who was then working for Gusinsky (InoSMI 2007).

### 8.2.1 Testing Patriotism of the Audience: InoSMI Project

In 2000 the Russian authorities made an attempt to employ the method for their own propaganda. The national information service *Strana.Ru* – a large-scale Internet project created by the pro-Kremlin Effective Politics Foundation which was headed by Gleb Pavlovsky – intended to launch a project *InoStrana* which would publish translated articles. However, the idea was later abandoned. Yet, *Strana.ru* launched a project ‘Foreign press about Russia’ (*Zarubezhnaya Pressa o Rossii*) which was then transformed into *InoSMI* (Smi.ru 2004). In 2002 *InoSMI* changed its owner: among a number of other Internet projects that belonged to Pavlovsky’s *Strana.Ru* it was handed over to the Internet Directorate of the state media corporation VGTRK (Russian State TV and Radio Broadcasting Company) (*Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 11 July 2002, p. 9.). In 2004 it was handed over to RIA Novosti which was also part of that media corporation (InoSMI 2007). In 2004-2008 the project succeeded in attracting a growing number of readers. According to its main editor Yaroslav Ognev, in 2007 about 70-90 thousand people visited the webpage daily. The project very quickly achieved unprecedented popularity in Russia, and its success was recognised not only by readers, but by the professional community as well. In 2005 and 2007 Yaroslav Ognev was awarded the title of editor of the year and producer of the year.<sup>90</sup>

It should be noted that *InoSMI* is a phenomenon which is not unique to Russia. In several countries there exist a number of Internet projects that specialise in translating materials from other countries. The webpage *WatchingAmerica.com*, for instance, is a US project. In Poland there are at least two sites: an Internet edition of *Forum* magazine and a big Internet resource *Onet.pl* (InoSMI 2007). However, only in Russia did the project become so successful. It can be argued that among other factors that contributed to its success was the modest knowledge of foreign languages among the Russian electorate. According to a survey that was conducted by the Levada Centre in 2008, only 15% of respondents acknowledged that they could speak more or less fluently at least one foreign language (Levada-Centre 2008a).

How did the project work? The editorial team conducted daily monitoring of about 800 foreign mass media and selected 30-40 pieces to be translated and published on-line

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<sup>90</sup> For more information see ‘Chitatel’ InoSmi – chelovek inosmifitsirovanny’, 27 November 2007, available on-line at: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/russian/in\\_depth/2007/rus\\_elecs/newsid\\_7115000/7115241.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/russian/in_depth/2007/rus_elecs/newsid_7115000/7115241.stm), accessed 20 August 2008.

(*Rossiiskie vesti*, 27 December 2006, p. 4). According to Ognev, the most important criterion for selection was ‘how remarkable’ the articles were: ‘these [were] materials that everyone notice[d] (...): they [were] quoted, commented, referred to and actively discussed in forums’ (quoted in Ermolaev 2006). In addition to these ‘pre-selected’ articles, there were translations that had been sent in by readers. Although the main emphasis of the project was on contemporary articles (they were translated on the same day), they also occasionally published translations of old articles – which were devoted to some ‘big events’ in Russian history. An interesting example is the publication of a number of articles about the Crimean War in the 19th century. Ognev pointed out that the interest in these translations turned out to be extremely high (InoSMI 2007). As the project developed, a range of materials other than newspaper articles was added, including translations of remarks by politicians, opinions from various blogs, forums of foreign mass media, video materials, etc. An important element of the project was a moderated readers’ forum, where articles were discussed by the audience, which was introduced at the end of 2003. By the end of 2006 the number of registered users reached 15 500 people (Ermolaev 2006).

What were the functions of this project? On the one hand, one can argue that, at least to some extent, it contributed to democracy promotion in Russia: while the Russian authorities were increasingly limiting freedom of speech, the project provided an open access to critical publications about Russia. On the other hand, being part of RIA Novosti, *InoSMI* was indisputably part of the propaganda machine. The use of predominantly negative publications about Russia suggests that the project’s main function was to reinforce enemy images (seeing the West as an enemy) and to strengthen the siege mentality in Russian public opinion. As one of the readers noted,

while reading translations of the foreign mass media, I have the impression that Russia (...) is encircled by implacable enemies and there will be no end to this confrontation (InoSMI 2005)

Yaroslav Ognev, the editor-in-chief, on several occasions denied accusations that the project deliberately selected only extremely negative publications while at the same time stressing that the project ‘test[ed] patriotism of the audience’ (Smi.ru 2004). However, the question of the project’s criteria for selecting articles is still open. Another problematic area is the quality of translation – whether translated articles may sound more negative than the original publications.

How significant was the impact of *InoSMI* on Russian politics? At first sight the number of visitors, although considerable for an Internet project, seems to be very small if compared to the size of Russian electorate. In the Putin years, the Internet was still a luxury for the overwhelming majority of Russia's population. In 2004 the number of Internet users in Russia amounted to only 14.9 million people, although it was growing very fast (see March 2006, p. 137). However, one can argue that the impact of the project by far exceeded the size of its audience. Firstly, the materials published on the webpage were then further disseminated by the Russian mass media. A number of Russian national and local newspapers, including *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, *Trud*, *Novye izvestiya*, *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, *Moskovskii komsomolets* and *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti*, occasionally published complete articles or extracts with reference to *InoSMI*. There were also examples when translated articles from *InoSMI* were published without reference to the webpage.<sup>91</sup> Secondly, many Russian journalists used the webpage to get an idea of what was written about Russia at the moment and then referred to this 'world (or most often Western) public opinion'. Alexei Pushkov, for instance, admitted that his editorial team was not able to 'trace the work of all the mass media'. Thus, the initial selection of Western articles about Russia (which were later referred to in the programme) was done on *InoSMI*, and only then were the selected articles translated by the editorial team (InoSMi 2008).

### 8.2.2 The Use of Western Publications in the Russian Mass Media

As was mentioned earlier, *InoSMI* was part of RIA Novosti and thus was directly involved in promoting views that corresponded to the picture of the West created by the Kremlin's propaganda machine. However, publications in many other Russian media outlets often conveyed the same message. To a large extent, this can be explained by the prevalent attitudes in public opinion: as will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter, the vision of Russia being surrounded by hostile external forces became widespread under Putin's presidency. At the same time, one can argue that a large number of media outlets, particularly national TV channels, acted as vehicles of the Kremlin's propaganda in this respect. Although many mass media outlets remained in private ownership, it was increasingly difficult for them to challenge the Kremlin's interpretation of events. Self-censorship became an essential element of the Russian media system. According to Sarah Oates, 'much as in Soviet times, tight control [was] not needed at every chain in the

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<sup>91</sup> Anonymous interviews with a Russian propagandist, Moscow, 31 January 2007

command. Rather, there [was] a good understanding of the “line” throughout the news organisation’ (2006, p. 28).

In the years of Putin’s presidency, the Russian mass media paid close attention to Western publications about Russia. These repetitive references created an illusion that Russia occupied an extremely prominent place on the Western mass media (and political) agenda. In some cases Russian journalists deliberately twisted the information to produce an impression of the salience of Russia-related issues. One of the most influential news programmes ‘Vesti’ (state channel ‘Rossiya’), for instance, mentioned an article about the oppositional oligarch Boris Berezovsky in *The Times* - ‘Berezovsky Is Playing Us, and It’s Embarrassing’, by S. Marsh (*The Times*, 30 July 2007). The picture of the newspaper that was shown in the programme (see Figure 8.1) created the impression that the article had been published on the front page – thus making it look as if it was news number one for the British audience, while in reality the front page on that day was given to a completely different article - ‘Criminal Trial Chaos over Lack of Judges’ by S. O’Neill and F. Gibb (Logutkov 2007).



Figure 8.1. Article about Boris Berezovsky in *The Times*, 2007 (Logutkov 2007)

Moreover, the Russian mass media often reproduced Western articles on their pages. In addition to more or less neutral reports (e.g. Western reaction to recent government appointments in Russia – see *Novye izvestiya* 2005) or curious facts, the Russian print media, similarly to *InoSMI* project, focused on negative publications about the country, thus reinforcing the image of the West as an enemy. However, positive publications were also used. Firstly, these were articles that conveyed a message which was contradictory to the mainstream opinion in the Western media. *Ogonek*, for instance, quoted an article from *The New York Times* (with reference to *InoSMi* but without the title of the article or its publication date) which appeared to argue against the opinion that the freedom of speech in Russia was under threat (*Ogonek*, 4 August 2008, p. 3). Secondly, these were publications

that acknowledged bias towards Russia in the Western mass media and thus, confirmed the Kremlin's argument that Western criticism was not justified. RIA Novosti, for instance, publicised a commentary from *The Guardian* which discussed the biased character of many Western articles on democracy promotion in post-Soviet space, in particular on the Orange Revolution in Ukraine (RIA Novosti 2004). The author of the article, John Laughland, argued that

Pora [youth group] continues to be presented as an innocent band of students having fun in spite of the fact that - like its sister organisations in Serbia and Georgia, Otpor and Kmara - Pora is an organisation created and financed by Washington<sup>92</sup>

Another type of Western articles was those publications which conveyed an idea of positive attitudes towards Russia by ordinary Western people as opposed to the political elites. *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti*, for instance, reproduced a letter, which had been published in *The Daily Mail*, from a British citizen who had fought in World War 2 and received a medal from the Russian Government. The author complained that he had not received a single medal from the British government and explained it by the unwillingness of the British authorities to emphasise Britain's alliance with the Soviet Union during the war (*Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti*, 2 June 2005). On the whole, the Russian mass media repeatedly emphasised the negative character of Russia's image in the West, which contributed to strengthening of a 'siege mentality' in Russian public opinion and promoted the vision of the West as an enemy.

### 8.3 Re-emergence of Enemy Images

The re-emergence of the enemy image in such a relatively short period of time can be explained by a number of factors. Firstly, perceptions of Russia being surrounded by hostile external forces have a long history, so any anti-Western propaganda would fall on fertile soil (see Shlapentokh 2009). A deep-rooted distrust of the West has also been widespread among some parts of the Russian intelligentsia and political elite since the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was most clearly manifested in the debates between Slavophiles and Westernisers (see Neumann 1996). It intensified following the Bolshevik revolution in 1917. In the next few years, as the newly established Soviet republic was struggling against counter-revolutionary forces – the White Army and Allied intervention - the vision of

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<sup>92</sup> For more information see RIA Novosti (2004) 'Gardian: zapadnye SMI osveschayut vybory na Ukraine predvzyato', 27 November, available on-line at: <http://www.rian.ru/politics/20041127/745365.html>, accessed 25 February 2008.

Russia as ‘a besieged fortress’ became central to the country’s self-image. It was further promoted in various ways by Soviet propaganda. An illustrative example is the poster *Nezyblemayaya krepost’* (Unshakeable Fortress) by Viktor Deni which was published in 1919 and was accompanied by a poem by the revolutionary poet Dem’yan Bedny (see Figure 8.2).

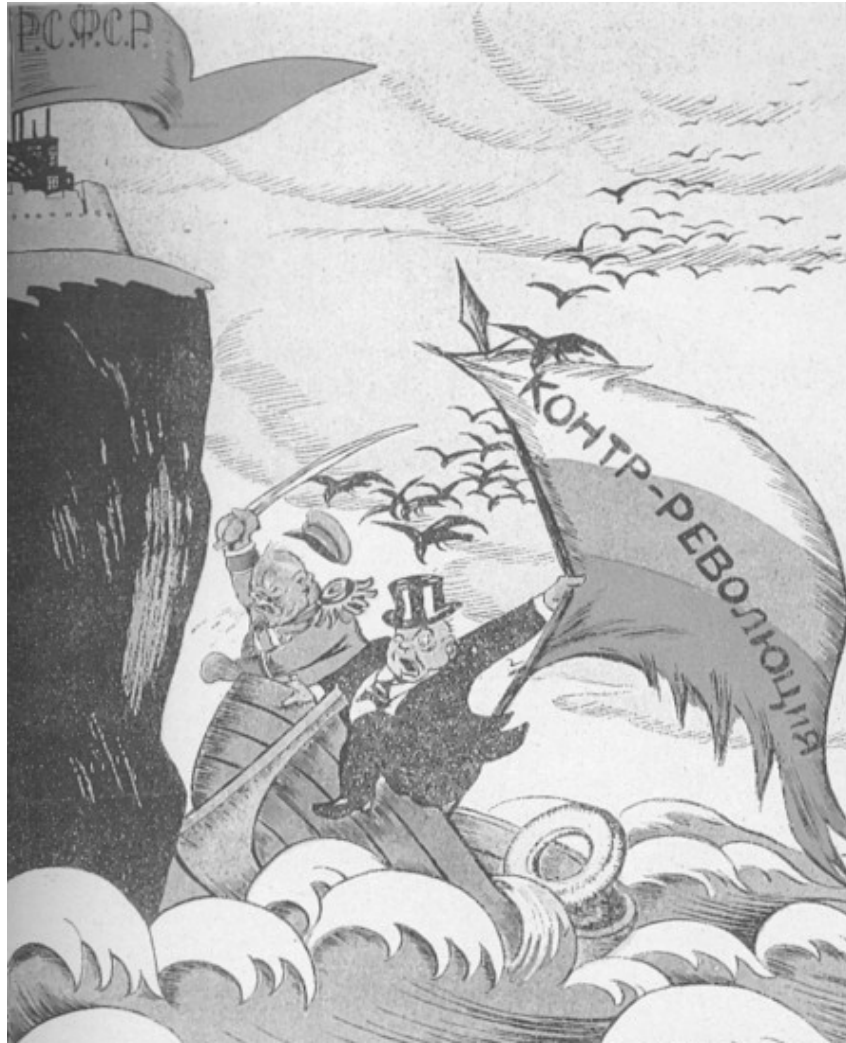


Figure 8.2. Viktor Deni, *Nezyblemayaya krepost’* (Unshakeable Fortress), 1919 (White 1990, p. 95)

Following the end of World War 2, portraying the West as an imminent external threat was one of the central elements in Soviet propaganda (see Fateev 1999). In the 1990s, with the collapse of the Communist regime, anti-Western sentiments in Russia gave way to some kind of an idealistic vision of Western countries for a short period. However, as Russia’s relations with the West deteriorated under Putin’s presidency, anti-Western attitudes strengthened again, albeit in a different form: unlike political values, the Western way of life and prosperity were still considered very attractive. As the Moscow-based film director Mumin Shakirov put it in his article in *Russia Profile*, in Moscow it was easy to meet ‘a



self-assured intellectual who uses Windows on his PC, wears Levi's jeans, drives a Ford and lambastes the United States' (Shakirov 2008). One can argue that the deep-rooted perceptions of Russia being surrounded by hostile forces (originating from the West) were relatively easy to manipulate, and the Kremlin used them for domestic propaganda.

Secondly, the idea that Russia's negative image in the West was the product of an orchestrated propaganda campaign, rather than a reflection of reality, corresponded to the belief, shared by many in Russia, that the mass media cannot be independent in principle. This view, to a large extent, was the result of the Soviet and post-Soviet legacy. In the Soviet Union the mass media served first and foremost as an instrument of Soviet propaganda. Then, in the late 1990s they were largely perceived as tools employed by oligarchs in extremely dirty information wars against each other and the authorities. Under Putin, the most influential mass media were brought under the direct or indirect control of the state again. As a consequence, as Sarah Oates has pointed out in her study of the Russian media, most Russians 'reject[ed] the idea of "objectivity" or even "balance" in their mass media'. Moreover, many Russians shared the view that no media system could be free from the influence of political or financial patrons (Oates 2007, p. 1285). Since the mass media were perceived as not independent, they were viewed as carrying out political instructions, i.e. being used by Western political and business elites as a propaganda instrument in their anti-Russian campaign. This can be illustrated by the words of a reader of *InoSMI* project:

The unanimity and the striking similarity of the German, American, Dutch [articles about Russia] seem suspicious, and I think someone has simply given an order to the editorial boards not to accept articles of a different type (Ino SMI 2005).

Moreover, this vision was reinforced by the efforts of Soviet propaganda throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to promote the image of venality of the Western press (see Fateev 1999).

Finally, the vision of the West as hostile towards Russia was, to some extent, reinforced by the Western mass media themselves, as a large number of publications about Russia were extremely negative indeed. The Kremlin simply publicised the most hostile and emotional of them with the help of such projects as *InoSMI*, and used them as propaganda material. While the predominant tone of the Western mass media publications about Russia was negative, a number of Western journalists and academics spoke of resurging Russophobia in the West. Richard Sakwa, for instance, argued that Putin's 'administration was vilified by Western analysts and much of the media in yet another outbreak of the deep-seated

Russophobia that has characterised the West since the early nineteenth century' (Sakwa 2008, pp. 42-43). These views, to an extent supporting the argument of the regime's ideologists that Russophobia does exist in the West, were also publicised by the Kremlin.

While there was fertile soil for the re-emergence of enemy images already, the Kremlin further promoted them by employing a number of techniques. Firstly, recurrent references to Western publications or statements related to Russia created the impression that Russia was higher on the political agenda in Western countries than it actually was. Secondly, criticisms of Russia were increasingly portrayed in the Russian mass media as a propaganda campaign or an information war against Russia aimed at weakening Russia's geopolitical position. Thirdly, Western criticisms were repeatedly presented as manifestations of the West's Cold War approach towards Russia, while the Kremlin was described as attempting to avoid confrontation and to maintain good relations with Western countries. According to Lavrov, for instance,

When criticism is constructive, we always consider it. When the analysis of our internal situation is used as an attempt to return us all to the 'Cold War', we will not agree with that (Lavrov 2005).

Furthermore, criticism of the Russian authorities was presented as criticism of Russia as a whole, so that any anti-Kremlin statements began to be perceived as anti-Russian and a manifestation of Western Russophobia. What were the functions of the enemy image, and how effective was the Kremlin's propaganda in this respect? It can be argued that the main functions were related to i) maintaining the status quo in terms of possible democratisation and preventing an 'Orange Revolution' scenario; ii) promoting state patriotism, and iii) mobilisation of public support for foreign policy strategy. Let us now examine these three areas in more detail.

### **8.3.1 Preventing an 'Orange Revolution' Scenario**

It can be argued that one of the purposes of promoting the enemy image was to neutralise any Western criticism and make it appear illegitimate in the eyes of the Russian electorate. It was particularly important in the context of rapidly developing communication techniques when the Internet, satellite TV and more opportunities to travel abroad made it much easier for the Russian people than ever before to gain access to Western views on events in Russia. The idea that Western elites had always been and probably always would be Russophobic was used to persuade the electorate that the West could not be objective in

its criticism of the Kremlin. It should be noted that the vision of Russia as a fortress surrounded by hostile (mainly Western) forces, although always present in a Russian society, became significantly more widespread at the turn of the centuries and remained very pronounced throughout Putin's presidency. This can be illustrated by the results of a series of public opinion surveys that were conducted by the Moscow-based Levada Centre in 1994-2008. Respondents were asked if they 'agree[d] that other countries have always felt hostility towards Russia, and that today no one wishes us good' (Levada Centre 2008b).

	1994	2000	2008
Completely agree	18	28	22
Mainly agree	24	38	43
Mainly disagree	26	21	22
Completely disagree	12	6	5
Difficult to say	20	7	8

Table 8.1. Russian public opinion on hostility of foreign countries towards Russia, 1994-2008 (Levada Centre 2008b)

As Table 8.1 demonstrates, the majority of participants completely/mainly agreed with the statement. However, while at the time of Boris Yel'tsin's presidency in 1994 this view was shared by only 42% of respondents (against 38% of those who disagreed with it), this number rose to 66% in 2000 and amounted to 65% of the respondents in 2008. It can be argued that the Kremlin to a large extent succeeded in promoting the idea that 'other countries' (meaning mostly the West, but also a number of former Soviet republics including the Baltic States, Ukraine, Georgia and Poland) had always been hostile to Russia. A logical conclusion then would be that since Russophobia had for centuries been an essential part of the Western world view, then Western countries would always see Russia in a negative light, no matter how successful Russia's development actually was. Thus, Western criticism did not have an objective basis and should not be trusted.

According to an opinion poll conducted by the Levada Centre in August 2007, i.e. at a time when the Russian authorities were particularly severely criticised in the West for authoritarian tendencies, 46% of respondents said that Western accusations of violations of democracy in Russia did not have any basis. At the same time, only 29% believed that the accusations were well-grounded (Levada Centre 2007b). While discussing the attitudes of the Russian electorate towards Western criticisms of the Kremlin's domestic policies, one should take into account particular features of widespread views of democracy in Russian society. For many in Russia democracy was associated with a decade of social disintegration, economic decline, chaos and continuous humiliation in the international arena under Yel'tsin's presidency (see Sakwa 2008, p. 43). In this context, stability and the relative economic prosperity of the Putin years were often viewed as more important than democratic freedoms. This also contributed to the vision of Western criticisms as ill-judged or self-serving.

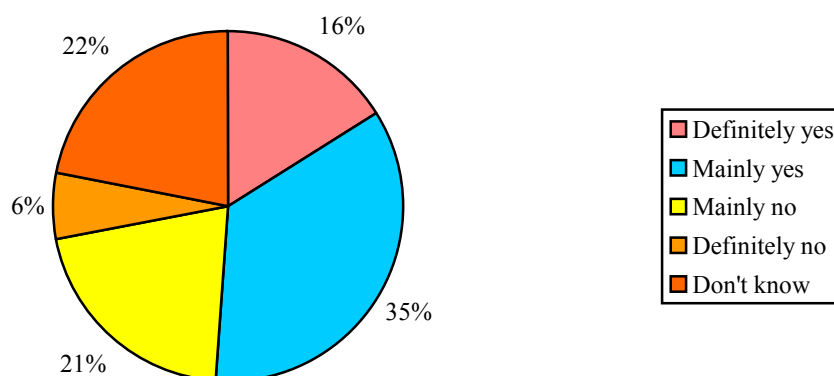


Figure 8.3. Russian public opinion on Western criticism of democracy in Russia as interference in Russia's internal affairs, 2008 (Sedov 2008)

The Kremlin also largely succeeded in promoting the idea that Western criticisms were aimed at weakening Russia's position in the world, which can be illustrated by the findings of another public opinion survey conducted by the Levada Centre in August 2007. Respondents were presented with the question whether in their opinion 'Western accusations of the violations of democracy in Russia were caused by their concern for Russian citizens or by their intention to discredit Russia and gain some advantages over it'. Only 8% agreed with the view that the reason for the criticism was actual concern for Russian citizens, while the overwhelming majority (68%) viewed the West as deliberately attempting to discredit Russia (Levada Centre 2007b). Moreover, many Russians perceived

Western criticisms as threatening to Russia's sovereignty. A clear majority of respondents (51%) in yet another survey conducted by Levada Centre in March 2008 admitted that they considered 'the criticism by Western politicians of the state of democracy and human rights in Russia as interference in Russia's internal affairs' while only 27% disagreed (see Figure 8.3). What is interesting, the number of those who agreed with the statement was relatively equal among supporters of United Russia (52%), the CPRF (51%) and Just Russia (52%), and was lower only for supporters of Yabloko and the Union of Right Forces (34%) as well as Moscow residents (42%) (Sedov 2008). Thus, the survey revealed a general consensus regarding this issue across the political spectrum.

In addition to neutralising Western criticism, promoting an enemy image also played a significant role in the marginalisation of domestic opposition. As Mendelson and Gerbner have pointed out, 'in the face of a supposed foreign threat, any challenge to the regime can easily be portrayed as treasonous' (Mendelson & Gerbner 2008, p. 133). Liberal pro-Western politicians were often portrayed as agents of the West and as anti-patriots who, by criticising the Russian authorities, were surrendering Russia's national interests. At the same time, this vision contributed to discrediting democracy promotion by NGOs supported by the West. In his address to the Federal Assembly in May 2004, Putin voiced concern that

not all of the organisations are oriented towards standing up for people's real interests. For some of them, the priority is to receive financing from influential foreign foundations (Putin 2004b)

Thus, making a link between NGOs and the West (which, according to this narrative, is not interested in a stronger Russia) the Kremlin presented the activity of Western-funded NGOs as a threat to Russia's sovereignty.

This view gained additional prominence in the dominant discourse following the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004, which was perceived by many in Russia and presented in official propaganda as being staged by Western-funded NGOs. In an attempt to prevent any possibility of an 'Orange Revolution scenario' in Russia, the Russian authorities limited the activities of such organisations. As Alexei Ostrovsky, a nationalist Duma deputy, put it:

We have seen what happened in Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova and how these local branches of foreign NGOs that are funded by the CIA functioned (...) We want to

defend our citizens from the chaos which our country can be dragged into by these foreign NGOs (quoted in *The Times*, 24 November 2005)

During Putin's second term, one of the main concerns for Russian political elites was the problem of the 2008 presidential election (see Sakwa 2008, p. 130). Since the Russian constitution prevented Putin from running for office for a third consecutive time, it was not clear how sustainable the regime would be without him as head of state. In order to maintain the regime, the most urgent task for the Russian authorities was to bring Putin's chosen successor to power. In this context, any possibility of Western interference around the time of the elections was viewed as extremely threatening. By promoting the image of the West as an enemy, the Kremlin made an attempt to minimise any impact of Western criticism or Western-supported activities of the Russian opposition or civil society on the political situation in the country.

At the same time, this vision of Western interference as a threat was used by the Kremlin's ideologists to promote the concept of 'sovereign democracy' (see Chapter Three). It is noteworthy that Putin tried to keep some distance from the public discussion of sovereign democracy, and the main elements of the doctrine were articulated by Vladislav Surkov, Deputy Chief of the Presidential Administration and aide to the President. However, a brief summary of the concept, or as Richard Sakwa called it 'the manifesto of sovereign democracy' (2008, p. 64), was nevertheless given by Putin in his address to the Federal Assembly in April 2005. According to Putin,

Russia is a country that has chosen democracy through the will of its own people. It chose this road of its own accord and it will decide itself how best to ensure that the principles of freedom and democracy are realised here, taking into account our historic, geopolitical and other particularities and respecting all fundamental democratic norms. As a sovereign nation, Russia can and will decide for itself the timeframe and conditions for its progress along this road (Putin 2005)

Thus, portraying the West as an enemy was used to prevent any possibility of Western interference, to counter any attempt at democracy promotion, and, on the whole, to maintain the regime at a time when it was particularly vulnerable due to the change of presidency. Moreover, the enemy image was used to consolidate the electorate, and to a certain extent to shift its attention from any domestic problems to the external threat represented by the West.

### 8.3.2 Promoting State Patriotism

Furthermore, among the major tasks of Putin's presidency was forging some sort of national consensus on Russia's new place in the world and finding a solution to the continuous identity crisis the country had faced following the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Seeking to overcome the 'debilitating pessimism, [and] sense of humiliation' of the 1990s (Sakwa 2008, p. 216), Putin viewed the promotion of patriotism as one of the most significant measures. The state Programme for the 'Patriotic Education of the citizens of the Russian Federation for the period 2001-2005' emphasised the role of patriotism as a 'basis for the consolidation of society and strengthening of the state' (Patrioticheskoe vospitanie 2001). The document envisaged the involvement of the mass media in implementing the programme and in the 'propaganda of patriotism'. One can argue that to a large extent the Russian authorities succeeded in overcoming pessimistic attitudes and in particular in promoting the self-image of Russia as a great power. As Sakwa notes, 'Putin appeared able to restore Russia's national dignity' (2008, p. 23).

The kind of patriotism promoted by the Kremlin, although based on genuinely positive values, such as pride in the motherland, respect for the country's history etc, also included some element of distrust of the West. To a significant extent, that could be a legacy of the Soviet propaganda of patriotism which had traditionally centred on the idea of resistance to an external threat. At the same time, the Kremlin's ideologists employed the enemy image of the West in patriotic propaganda as a means of mobilising public support for the concept of 'sovereign democracy'. This approach can be illustrated by the manifesto of the youth movement Nashi (Molodezhnoe demokraticheskoe anti-fashistskoe dvizhenie Nashi) which was created in 2005 with the support of the Kremlin in an attempt to prevent a possible 'Orange Revolution'. The movement viewed its primary task as 'maintaining the sovereignty and integrity of Russia'. Their manifesto provided a detailed description of Russia's enemies:

In the area of the former Soviet Union the West, under the disguise of democracy and freedom slogans, leads a big geopolitical game, the purpose of which is to 'squeeze' Russia out of the world politics and to introduce external governance in Russia<sup>93</sup>

Mendelson and Gerber in their study of youth attitudes in Russia have demonstrated a considerable rise in anti-American sentiment among the 'Putin generation' who, as they

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<sup>93</sup> See the webpage of Molodezhnoe antifashistskoe dvizhenie Nashi: 'Manifesto', available on-line at: <http://www.nashi.su/ideology>, accessed 14 November 2008.

have argued, ‘favor the restoration of a hypersovereign Russia that remains outside the Euro-Atlantic community’ (2008, p. 131).

### **8.3.3 Mobilising Public Support for the Foreign Policy Strategy**

Another area where official propaganda made extensive use of Russia’s international image and the image of the West is related to foreign policy issues. In Russia, foreign policy had traditionally been considerably high on the media agenda, and in Putin’s years the mass media continued this tradition by devoting significant attention to various state visits and to the coverage of Russia’s relations with foreign countries in general. Russian public opinion viewed Putin’s foreign policy as very successful, and Russia’s perceived achievements in this sphere contributed to the high approval ratings that Putin enjoyed throughout his presidency. In 2000-2007 his approval ratings were consistently between 65 – 73% of respondents (Sakwa 2008, p. 85). Moreover, according to the results of a series of polls that were conducted by the Levada Centre in 2000 -2007, Putin’s accomplishments in foreign policy were perceived as far more successful than his achievements in any other sphere. As Table 8.2 demonstrates, 58% of respondents expressed the view that Putin had succeeded in ‘strengthening Russia’s international positions’ in 2000. This number steadily increased over the following years, and reached 74% of respondents in 2007. By contrast, in 2007 only 48% of respondents viewed Putin’s actions aimed at ‘restoring order in the country’ as successful, and even a smaller proportion of the electorate – 43% - believed that Putin had achieved successful results in ‘improving the economy and well-being of the people’ (Levada Centre 2007a, p. 73).

Interestingly, despite increasing criticism of Russian democracy by the West, many in Russia believed that public opinion in Western countries, unlike the mass media and political elites, viewed Putin in a positive light. As a survey conducted by the Levada Centre in March 2007 revealed, 31% of Russian respondents thought the population of Western countries perceived Putin as a ‘far-seeing, peace-loving and responsible politician’. At the same time, 26% of participants said that in their opinion Putin was perceived as a ‘determined defender of Russia’s national interests’, while 25% believed that Putin was seen as a ‘cautious and pragmatic statesman’. Only 10% of respondents expressed their view that the Western public considered Putin as an ‘authoritarian leader who [had] abolished the elements (beginnings) of democracy in Russia’ (Levada Centre 2007a, p. 72).



<b>Very or quite successful</b>	<b>2000</b> (Nov)	<b>2001</b> (Nov)	<b>2002</b> (Nov)	<b>2003</b> (Nov)	<b>2004</b> (July)	<b>2005</b> (Nov)	<b>2006</b> (March)	<b>2007</b> (March)
Restoring order in the country	38	51	46	47	50	48	46	48
Improving the economy and well-being of the people	23	39	33	33	37	39	31	43
Protection of democracy and political freedoms	32	45	46	44	39	46	38	38
<b>Strengthening Russia's international positions</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>74</b>
Defeat of fighters in Chechnya	30	30	19	24	27	33	40	49
Political settlement of the situation in Chechnya	20	24	16	27	27	30	37	48

Table 8.2. Assessment of President Putin's achievements in Russian public opinion, 2000-2007 (Levada Centre 2007a, p. 73)

As one can see, the overwhelming public approval of foreign policy was a significant factor in Putin's popularity. Thus, the regime was particularly interested in maintaining a high level of popular support in this area. As Russia's relations with the West began to deteriorate at the end of Putin's first term in office and became particularly tense during his second, the Russian authorities started to put more emphasis on the vision of the West as a threat in order to explain why relations were worsening (e.g. the failure to start negotiations on a new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the European Union in 2007). Although some scholars have pointed out that Putin remained a Westerniser in his approach to foreign policy throughout his presidency (see e.g. Sakwa 2008, p. 224), the Kremlin increasingly resorted to great power nationalism in its rhetoric. By portraying Western accusations of authoritarianism in Russia as unjustified and a manifestation of double standards, the Russian authorities promoted an image of the Kremlin as successfully

struggling against foreign policy pressure that represented a threat to the country. It can be suggested that among the factors that affected Moscow's choice in favour of a more assertive foreign policy at that stage, a significant role was played by the necessity of further promoting the image of a successful foreign policy that would meet the great power expectations of the electorate. The Kremlin needed to mobilise popular support for its foreign policy strategy in order to maximise the domestic support of the regime. In the context of the mounting tensions in Russia's relations with the West, the Russian authorities achieved that objective by promoting the image of the Western criticism as a threat to Russia's sovereignty.

As this chapter has demonstrated, the Russian authorities were extremely sensitive to negative changes in the country's international image. However, during Vladimir Putin's presidency Russia's reaction towards Western criticism underwent significant changes. With the sharp improvement in the Russian economy, assisted by extremely high energy revenues, Russia became noticeably less dependent on the West financially, in sharp contrast to the Yel'tsin period. While in 1997 Russia's foreign debt amounted to \$110 billion, already by October 2006 it had fallen to \$50 billion which constituted only 18% of the country's GDP, whereas for the EU on average foreign debt equaled about 60% of GDP at that time (Sakwa 2008, p. 245). In this context, the Kremlin became more inclined to ignore Western criticism of Russia's democracy and resorted to a considerably more assertive rhetoric in relation to the West. Russia's self-image in the dominant discourse, while largely remaining Pragmatic Nationalist, tended to include more elements of the Fundamentalist Nationalist vision of Russia and the West.

Moreover, the Russian authorities used Russia's negative international image very effectively in their domestic propaganda. By presenting Western criticism as the product of the West's centuries-long Russophobia and the will of Western elites to diminish Russia's international position for geopolitical reasons, the Kremlin contributed to the promotion of anti-Western sentiments in Russian public opinion and the strengthening of Russia's self-image as a besieged fortress. It can be argued that the regime resorted to this measure in order to maximise public support for the concept of 'sovereign democracy' and, by doing so, prevent any possibility of events similar to the Orange Revolution in Ukraine and, more generally, to neutralise any Western attempts at democracy promotion. In addition to that, the image of a threat had a considerable impact on identity transformation, and was used by the Russian authorities to mobilise popular support for its foreign policy strategy.

## Chapter 9

### Conclusion: National Images in International Relations

As this study has demonstrated, the problem of Russia's negative image in Western countries remained very high on the political agenda of the Russian authorities throughout Vladimir Putin's presidency. The view that Russia's perceived images in the West were considerably more negative than 'Russian reality' was advocated in numerous statements by Russian officials and in the mass media. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter Two, the problem of Russia's image and possible ways to improve it were extensively debated in the Russian academic literature that rapidly developed over the past decade. In response to the perceived importance of the problem, the Putin administration made an attempt to promote a more favourable image of the country abroad by investing more effort into the information support of Russian foreign policy. These measures, as examined in Chapter Three, led to the revival of Russian foreign propaganda, which had largely been neglected during the previous decade. While a number of existing propaganda vehicles, such as the radio station 'Voice of Russia', received increased funding, a number of new outlets were established, such as the English speaking TV channel 'Russia Today' or the Internet project *Russia Profile*.

The main task of Russian foreign propaganda, as analysed in Chapter Four, was to shift the focus of attention from the political elements of Russia's perceived images, particularly the negative image of re-emerging authoritarianism and human rights problems, to more favourable cultural and especially economic elements, such as the image of Russia as a responsible business partner and – more narrowly – a reliable energy supplier. At the same time, Russian foreign propaganda increasingly emphasised Russia's strength in the international arena as one of the key components of the country's image. As this study demonstrated, the latter aspect of Russian foreign propaganda appeared to be more or less successful since Russia came to be perceived by many in the West as a country that had returned to the world stage. However, Russia's strength was not necessarily viewed in a positive light. One can agree with the view that

in the course of making itself heard in the international arena, Russia has succeeded in frightening many, while reassuring and winning over very few, if any, thus raising further questions about the long-term sustainability of its posture (Rumer 2007, p. 77)

Moreover, the Russian authorities largely failed to neutralise the negative elements of Russia's political image by promoting more positive elements of Russia's image as an emerging economic power and an attractive investment destination. Predictably, Russia's perceived images varied across Western countries and within individual countries – across the political spectrum in the perceptions of elites, as well as in the mass media and in public opinion, as demonstrated in Chapters Five and Six. In some countries, as in Germany (see Chapter Six), some sections of the political and business elite advocated closer links with Russia. However, despite these differences, Russia's images remained predominantly negative. Their political components continued to outweigh Russia's economic attractiveness while the appeal of Russian culture, which had traditionally been the most positive component of the country's perceived images, was not sufficient to counteract Russia's negative image as an authoritarian state. In addition to that, Russia was increasingly perceived as a threat in the sphere of energy security. What is more, its image as an investment destination, as argued in Chapter Seven, was not as positive as it could have been otherwise as it was severely damaged by Russia's political image.

Thus, the Russian authorities did not succeed in their attempts to enhance Russia's soft power by projecting a more favourable image. This failure had a pronounced impact on the evolution of Russia's dominant self image, which in turn affected Russia's actions both at home and in the international arena. The first part of this concluding chapter seeks to conceptualise the implications of Russia's unsuccessful foreign propaganda for Russian foreign and domestic policies. Having explored the Russian case, the chapter proceeds to present a theoretical explanation of the link between national images and a state's foreign and domestic policies. Finally, the chapter discusses the limitations of the study and suggests possible directions for future research.

## **9.1 The Russian Case**

Why did Russian foreign propaganda fail to improve Russia's image in Western countries to any significant extent? As was argued in Chapter Seven, there are a number of factors that can explain its lack of success. Some of them are related to problems that are internal to the propaganda machine (e.g. lack of coordination, insufficient funding, corruption, etc). To use Kelly's typology of public diplomacy campaigns (see Chapter One), Russian foreign propaganda remained crisis-driven and mostly sought to disseminate information

rather than to increase influence or promote engagement. Although there were some attempts to focus on influence or engagement (such as the activities of the Russkii Mir Foundation), they were not systematic and it is not clear yet how successful they can be. Other factors are connected to the existing negative stereotypes of Russia and the Russians that had developed over centuries and were further reinforced by anti-Soviet propaganda in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These stereotypes, although becoming less prominent at times of military alliance of Western countries with Russia, tended to strengthen again once a common threat had been defeated. One can agree with a Russian commentator that

when Western countries need Russia as a geopolitical or military ally, it is viewed as belonging to the West; when the need for this alliance decreases – Russia is viewed as a country whose interests contradict the interests of the ‘civilised world’ (Semenenko *et al* 2006, p. 118)

This tendency was reflected, among other instances, in the temporary improvement of Russia’s image, particularly in regard to the conflict in Chechnya, following President Putin’s decision to join the US-led ‘war on terror’ in 2001, as discussed in Chapter Two.

Among other factors that contributed to the negative character of Russia’s perceived images in the West were propaganda efforts by other actors, such as Russian oppositional politicians, ex-oligarchs and members of political elites in a number of post-Soviet states. A large number of Russian commentators have explained the country’s negative image as the result of a Russophobia that is widespread among Western political elites (see e.g. Markov 2006; Mikoyan 2006). This view is also shared by some Western commentators. Anatol Lieven, for instance, has argued that

Western Russophobia has various roots. One shoot is the continuing influence of (...) ‘residual elites’: groups and individuals who rose to prominence during the Cold War and have lacked the flexibility to adapt to a new reality. To these can be added others who have sought to carve out careers by advocating the expansion of U.S. influence into the lands of the former Soviet Union, in direct competition with Russia. Then there are various ethnic lobbies, whose members hate and distrust Russia for historical reasons and whose sole remaining *raison d’être* is to urge an anti-Russian geopolitical agenda. Finally, there are those individuals who need a great enemy, whether from some collective interest or out of personal psychological need (Lieven 2000a, p. 26)

One can argue that it would be simplistic to attribute Russia’s negative image solely to anti-Russian attitudes in Western countries. However, the existence of these attitudes did constitute a formidable challenge for Russian foreign propaganda. In addition to that, negative elements in Russia’s images in the West were reinforced by the inevitable emphasis on sensations in the Western mass media. The latter factor was especially

obvious in the coverage of the Litvinenko affair in the British mass media, as discussed in Chapter Five.

While all of the factors discussed above had a marked impact on the effectiveness of Russian foreign propaganda, the most serious damage to Russia's perceived images, as this study has demonstrated, was caused by the apparent conflict in the signals that Russian foreign propaganda and actions of the Russian authorities more broadly sent to Western audiences. While Russian propaganda focused on projecting the country's image as a reliable business partner, Russia's actions in the international arena, particularly in the 'near abroad', often appeared to contradict this message. An illustrative example was Moscow's dispute with Kiev over gas prices in the winter of 2005-2006 (and especially a similar dispute in the winter of 2008-2009). At first sight this seeming contradiction between words and actions may be explained by the disregard by the Russian authorities of the consequences of their actions for Russia's image. Probably, this would be, at least to a certain extent, true in some cases. However, one can argue that this inconsistency of signals arose not so much from the disregard by the Russian leadership of the country's image but rather from the conflict of several elements in Russia's dominant self-image. As discussed in Chapter One, in a situation of an identity conflict states may be more likely to sacrifice a less salient element of the self-image in order to maintain a more prominent one. At times of a crisis in Russia's relations with another country, Russia's self-images as a partner and as a strong country often came into conflict: being a partner implied being ready to compromise, which was perceived by many among Russian elites as being weak. As the self-image of Russia as a strong country was increasingly important, the Russian authorities tended to emphasise Russia's strength rather than Russia's openness for compromise.

To use Nye's criteria of a state's ability to enhance its soft power (see Chapter One), Russian foreign propaganda did not satisfy any of them. Firstly, as discussed above, the actions of the Russian authorities often appeared to contradict its message rather than to confirm it. Secondly, Russia's access to communications channels, although it considerably improved during Vladimir Putin's presidency, remained fairly limited. The English-speaking TV channel 'Russia Today', for instance, could not compete with the CNN or BBC World with their significantly larger audiences and well-established reputations. Most importantly, however, many of the ideas promoted by Russian foreign propaganda did not 'match prevailing global norms' (Nye, 2004, pp. 31-32). Presenting the Russian political system as a 'sovereign democracy' (with a greater stress on sovereignty

than on democracy) was especially problematic as this concept was clearly different from the understanding of democracy in Western countries. Moreover, projecting Russia's increasing strength as a central characteristic of the country's image was often counter-productive as it emphasised the growing power of the Russian authorities, which was inevitably seen as dangerous, rather than the strength of the Russian economy, which would be more attractive to Western audiences. This apparent mismatch between the ideas promoted by Russian propaganda and the norms shared by Western political elites can also explain why Russia has never been accepted by Western countries as a great power – a status to which the Russian leadership has always aspired. One can agree with Neumann that the reason for Russia's failure to do so lies not in a lack of material resources but rather in the absence of 'social compatibility' between Russia and the West. In Neumann's words, '[a]s seen from Europe, a Great Power cannot have state-society relations that are too different from those that at any one given time dominate European politics' (2008, p. 147).

In a context of the pronounced sensitivity of Russian political elites to Western perceptions of Russia, the failure of Russian foreign propaganda to substantially improve the country's perceived image had a profound impact on the evolution of Russia's dominant self-image. As discussed in Chapter Four, Russia's self-image in the dominant discourse tended to be closer to the position of Pragmatic Nationalists who viewed Russia as a great power while advocating a pragmatic approach to cooperation with the West. However, in the final years of Putin's presidency it moved noticeably closer to the position of Fundamentalist Nationalists who stressed the uniqueness of Russia and viewed it as a 'besieged fortress' surrounded by hostile forces. As argued in Chapter Eight, the fact that Russia was continuously criticised by Western elites and in the mass media was perceived by many as an indication of the unwillingness of the West to deal with a stronger and more independent Russia as compared with the Yel'tsin period. In the dominant discourse, the inability to promote a more favourable image was explained by the hostility of a West that did not want to accept Russia as an equal partner. In 2006-2008 Putin's rhetoric became increasingly confrontational. When asked by *Time* magazine about his opinion of American 'misconceptions' about Russia, the Russian President accused US elites of deliberate attempts to damage Russia's image:

I don't believe these are misconceptions. I think this is a purposeful attempt by some to create an image of Russia based on which one could influence our internal and foreign policies. This is the reason why everybody is made to believe (...) [Russians] are a little bit savage still or they just climbed down from the trees, you know, and probably need

to have (...) the dirt washed out of their beards and hair (*Time*, 31 December 2007 – 7 January 2008, p. 41)

This transformation of the dominant self-image affected the dominant vision of Russia's national interests in the international arena. The perceived strengthening of Russia together with growing dissatisfaction with perceived disrespect on the part of the West made it appealing for the Russian authorities to act more assertively in relations with other countries. These changes were reflected in the 'Foreign Policy Survey of the Russian Federation' that was prepared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and approved by the Russian President in March 2007. The survey sought to reconsider Russian foreign policy strategy in the new international environment and emphasised 'the newly acquired foreign policy independence of Russia' as 'the chief achievement' of the Putin years.<sup>94</sup> The document was openly critical of a number of states whose relations with Russia had become particularly strained in previous years. It blamed Georgia, for instance, for 'waging an incessant anti-Russian media campaign', and referred to the post-Soviet countries that had joined the EU in the 2004 enlargement round as 'turning the Russia-EU relationship into a "hostage" of their own narrow national interests'. The UK was mentioned as a 'difficult partner' due to 'the well-known stand of London on the problem of so-called "new political emigrants" and 'the avowedly messianic disposition of a considerable part of the British political elite, inter alia regarding the internal political processes in Russia'. Predictably, the strongest criticism centred on the USA, which was accused of 'a striving (...) to arrange [relations with Russia] according to the leader and led scheme' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2007).

In more general terms, the Survey repeatedly emphasised the hostility of the international environment in relation to Russia, which represented a considerable shift in official discourse as compared to the years of Putin's first term in office. In this context, the task of improving Russia's image in the West was still viewed as extremely important. According to the document, '[b]uilding up efforts to counter the stereotyped anti-Russian thinking in the United States and a number of European countries acquire[d] particular urgency and relevance' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2007). The Survey did not specify exactly what image Russian foreign propaganda had to promote. However, the predominant view on this question in the Russian academic and expert literature was increasingly hard-line. Since

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<sup>94</sup> Published a year before Putin was to leave his post as the Russian President, the 'Survey' did not have the same status as a Foreign Policy Concept. Its main purpose was to reassess Russia's position in the world and to suggest recommendations for the future Foreign Policy Concept. The new Concept was subsequently adopted in the first year of Dmitry Medvedev's presidency (see The Foreign Policy Concept 2008).



Russian propaganda had not succeeded in improving Russia's image by focusing on the image of a partner, as some scholars have argued, it should place more emphasis on positioning Russia as a strong country that was capable of defending its national interests (see Semenenko *et al* 2006, p. 119).

Most importantly, the perceived unwillingness of the West to accept a stronger and more independent Russia noticeably strengthened those discourses that depicted the West as hostile towards Russia, and undermined the position of those groups in Russian society that had advocated closer links with Western countries. One can argue that the whole spectrum of foreign policy opinion somehow moved in the direction of the Fundamentalist Nationalist 'pole'. A number of those experts who could previously been described as Liberal Westernisers, for instance, began to question the 'good intentions' of Western criticisms of Russia's democracy. In the words of Dmitry Trenin of the Moscow Carnegie Centre,

Western talk on democracy and values is essentially hollow and is used to put American or European interests at an advantage and Russia at a disadvantage. Western powers routinely use double standards in approaching similar situations, depending on their particular interests (2007, p. 76)

Thus, a vicious circle emerged. On the one hand, Russia's already existing negative images in the West tended to give rise to pessimistic expectations of Russia's behaviour in the international arena. In the event of a tension in Russia's relations with any foreign country, Western political elites (as well as the mass media) were more likely to expect that the Russian authorities would take disproportionate measures to punish the opponent. An illustrative example was a series of Russia's disputes with Ukraine over gas prices when, as discussed earlier in the study, the actions of the Russian authorities were perceived by many in the West as an attempt to punish Ukraine for its pro-Western choice. These expectations, in turn, tended to lead to a more critical assessment of Russia's actions by Western political elites. On the other hand, the mounting criticism of Russia's policies was increasingly perceived by many in Russia as a consequence of Western Russophobia and the determination of Western elites to prevent Russia from successful integration into the world economy. These views contributed to the growth of anti-Western attitudes in Russian society by undermining the position of more pro-Western groups and by strengthening the position of more nationalist forces. The resulting change in Russia's dominant self-image, in turn, affected the vision of Russia's national interest as the Russian authorities were more likely to pursue a more assertive foreign policy. Russia's

more assertive stance, in turn, appeared to confirm Russia's negative images in Western countries, thus making the circle complete.

The inability of the Russian authorities to promote a more favourable image of the country in the West had a pronounced effect not only on Russia's foreign policy, but on its domestic politics as well. As was discussed in Chapter One, self-images are embedded in larger sets of policy preferences, including those related to competing visions of the social and economic development of the country. A change in Russia's dominant self-image reinforced a change of priorities in domestic politics – particularly, in the direction of further centralisation and a greater role for the state in order to strengthen Russia in a hostile environment. Moreover, Russia's negative image in Western countries began to be extensively used in Russian domestic propaganda, especially in the run-up to parliamentary elections in December 2007 and presidential elections in March 2008. As demonstrated in Chapter Eight, the Russian authorities sought to promote a vision of Russia as a 'besieged fortress' surrounded by hostile forces in an attempt to minimise the effect of Western criticisms. By doing so, they aimed to discredit any efforts by Western actors, including NGOs funded by Western sources, to promote democracy in Russia. In addition to that, Russian domestic propaganda sought to mobilise support for Putin's foreign policy, as Russia's perceived success in the international arena remained one of the key factors behind Putin's popularity.

Predictably, the goals of Russian foreign and domestic propaganda often came into conflict. As discussed earlier, while Russian foreign policy could benefit from promoting the image of a partner, it was increasingly important for the Russian authorities to project an image of a strong country and a great power for their domestic audience. The Russian leadership was continuously faced with the need to somehow reconcile these objectives. To use Robert Putnam's metaphor of a two-level game (1988, p. 434), the Kremlin had to respond to domestic and international pressures by playing 'at both game boards' at the same time. The crucial question is which audience – foreign or domestic- tended to be a priority? This study has demonstrated that domestic propaganda was often considered as more important. This is hardly surprising as domestic propaganda remained among the key instruments that were used by the Russian authorities to ensure regime survival. One can agree with Shevtsova (2007, p. 8) that 'Russia's claim to great-power status remain[ed] an important means of rallying society and preserving the centralised state'. Thus, Russia's image as projected for domestic purposes inevitably affected the image that was promoted

in Western countries, which contributed to the failure of Russian foreign propaganda to construct a more favourable image of Russia in the international arena.

## 2. Theoretical Implications

What does the Russian case tell us about the role of perceived, projected and self-images of states in international relations? This study has followed the constructivist tradition in IR theory by looking at the vision of the national interests of the state by the political elite as shaped by the dominant self-image. At the same time, it has argued that understanding of the transformation of the dominant self-image can be enhanced if we examine its link to the state's projected and perceived images. Figure 9.1 illustrates the interconnection between these three types of state image. As the analysis of Russia's images has shown, the state is interested in projecting an image that would facilitate its pursuit of national interests in the international arena. The importance of projecting this favourable image drastically increases in the context of an identity crisis that usually follows a major change in the state's domestic situation or international environment, as was the case with post-Soviet Russia. Moreover, in the perceptions of the political elite, this task becomes especially urgent if the state's perceived image held by the significant Other does not appear to be objective and is more negative than 'reality' (i.e. reality as perceived by the ruling elite).

As Figure 9.1 demonstrates, the state's projected image is shaped by the dominant self-image. The former usually has the same elements as the latter although the relative weight of these elements may differ: we want to be perceived in a better way than we actually are. By promoting this projected image, the state (in our case Russia) ultimately seeks to change its perceived image in another state (state A in the diagram) that plays the role of the Significant Other in its dominant self-image. In the diagram, the link between Russia's projected and perceived images is shown with a dotted line as the state does not always succeed in transforming the perceived image. When it does succeed in constructing a favourable image and the significant Other recognises it in the way it wants to be recognised, the projected image will have a pronounced impact on the state's dominant self-image, which is also shown with a dotted line. In Russia's case, for instance, it sought to be accepted by Western countries as a reliable and predictable business partner. One can hypothesise that had it been recognised as a reliable partner, this projected image would have affected Russia's dominant self-image, as the Russian authorities would have had an

incentive to confirm the image by their actions and gradually would have accepted reliability and predictability as the most essential components of Russia's self-image. However, as the study has argued, Russian foreign propaganda largely failed to convince Western audiences of Russia's reliability.

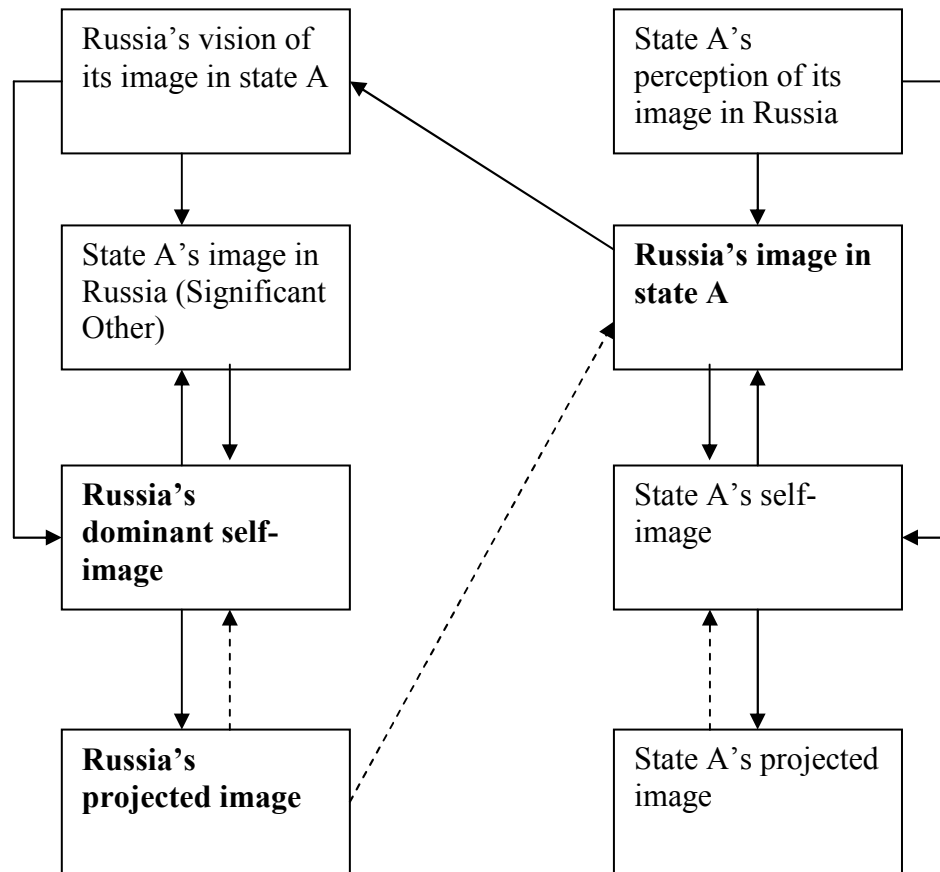


Figure 9.1. Russia's images in its relations with Significant Other

The task of transforming perceptions of the state in another state is always difficult and requires consistent long-term effort, as stereotypes that national images are based on are historical in nature and relatively stable. Changing an image is particularly problematic if the first state is perceived as a Significant Other by another state (state A), as is the case in Russia's relations with West European countries. The perceived image of the first state (Russia) is then closely linked to the self-image of state A, and thus tends to resist any radical changes. As this study has argued, Russia has traditionally been perceived in Western countries as a backward, expansionist and dangerous state under authoritarian leadership. This negative image has played an important role in the transformation of the self-images of Western countries. They have defined themselves as in many aspects opposite to Russia – they are what Russia is not, and Russia is what they are not. This made the task of improving Russia's perceived image especially difficult.

As one can see from the diagram, the state's image as perceived by the significant Other (state A) has a pronounced impact on the transformation of its dominant self-image, as well as on the evolution of the image of state A itself. One should stress that the state's vision of its perceived image in state A may substantially differ from this perceived image although it is clearly shaped by it: in the diagram an arrow links Russia's image in state A to Russia's vision of its image in state A. To illustrate this point, at the beginning of Vladimir Putin's presidency, for instance, Russia was not very high on the political and media agenda of most Western countries. However, Russia's image in the West, as perceived by many in Russia itself, appeared to be much more salient and even more negative than it actually was.

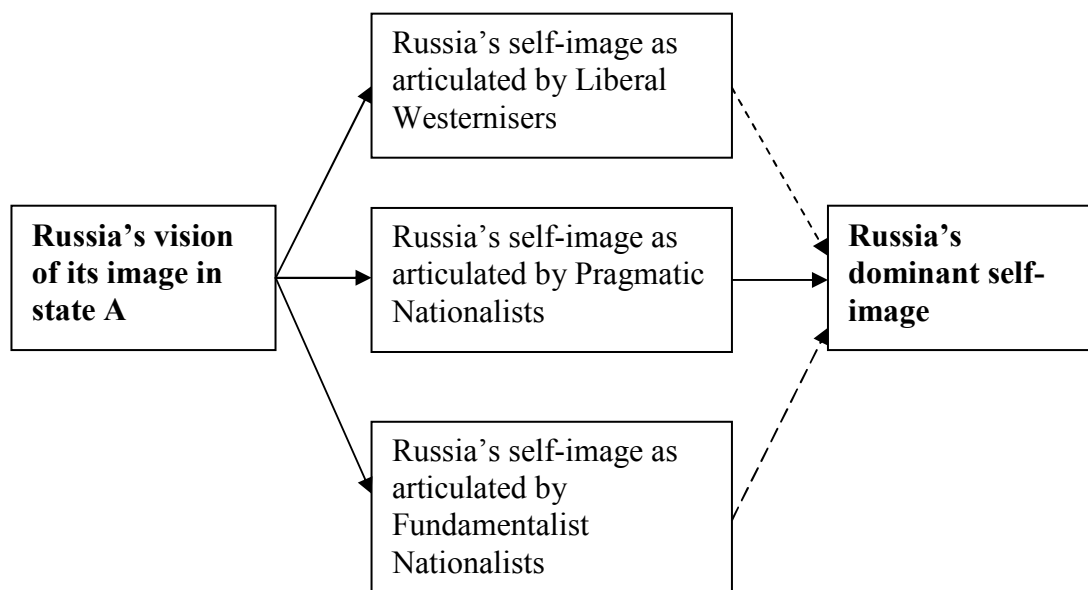


Figure 9.2. Transformation of Russia's dominant self-image

More importantly, the state's vision of its image held by the significant Other has a profound effect on the competition among the discourses of self-images that are articulated by different elite groups in the society. This point is particularly important as it contributes to the understanding of the link between foreign and domestic in policy-making. In Russia's case, as shown in Figure 9.2, the vision of Russia's image in the West varied among Liberal Westernisers, Pragmatic Nationalists and Fundamentalist Nationalists. The perceived disrespect and hostility of the West towards Russia supported the Fundamentalist Nationalist discourse while discrediting the position of Liberal Westernisers. Thus, Russia's dominant self-image, albeit still close to the position of Pragmatic Nationalists, began to rely more heavily on elements of the Fundamentalist Nationalist discourse. Moreover, each of the state's competing self-images is associated

with a set of broader issues, such as different preferences in terms of the social, economic and political development of the country. Thus, a change in the prominence of a particular self-image as a result of the acceptance or a lack of it by the significant Other may contribute to a significant shift in domestic policy. While this study has focused primarily on international causes of change in Russia's dominant self-image (i.e. changes resulting from Russia's interaction with other states), one cannot disregard various domestic influences. One can suggest that the evolution of the dominant self-image is also affected by changes in public support for these broader issues. In this case, the support of a particular elite group on the basis of their economic or political preferences in the sphere of domestic policy will enable them to promote their vision of the country's position in the world. Thus, the transformation of the dominant self-image is shaped by both international and domestic developments. At the same time, it has a strong impact on both foreign and domestic policies of the state as it shapes the vision of its national interest at home and in the international arena.

### **3. Limitations of the Study and Future Research**

This study has attempted to offer the first systematic account of Russian foreign propaganda in the post-Soviet period. By analysing the effort by the Russian authorities under Vladimir Putin's presidency to construct a more favourable image of Russia in the West, it has sought to explain the impact of Russia's perceived, projected and self-images on its foreign and domestic policies. However, it has inevitably been limited in scope. On the one hand, it has focused primarily on the transformation of Russia's images in 2000-2008, which is a relatively short period of time. As discussed earlier in the thesis, national images are very stable, and changing them may take a long time. Taking into consideration the fact that the Russian authorities launched a full-scale propaganda campaign in Western countries only around 2003, the period covered in this study might be insufficient for 'measuring' its results. Thus, any future analysis of Russian foreign propaganda would benefit from looking at the evolution of Russia's images from a longer-term perspective. Events that have taken place both in Russia and in the international arena after Putin left office would provide extremely interesting material for a study of this kind.

Following Dmitry Medvedev's election as President of the Russian Federation in March 2008 and the subsequent appointment of Putin as Prime Minister, one of the key questions in Russian studies has been the balance of power in the Putin-Medvedev political

relationship (see e.g. Badovsky 2009; Piontkovsky 2008). Will this tandem succeed in sharing power? Will Putin attempt to discredit Medvedev in the eyes of the electorate and regain the presidency? Will Medvedev seek to undermine Putin's position and become more influential? These questions would be central to a discussion of Russia's images in the post-Putin period.

Moreover, one can expect that the rapidly changing economic situation will have a pronounced impact on Russia's dominant self-image. As this study has argued, Russia's economic prosperity and stability as compared to the Yel'tsin era was one of the main sources of legitimacy of the Russian authorities at home. However, in the past year the Russian economy has been badly hit by the global recession. Its heavy dependence on energy export made it particularly vulnerable to the dramatic drop in oil prices from \$95.1 (Urals, a barrel) in 2008 down to \$45.5 at the beginning of 2009 (World Bank 2009, p. 2). According to a World Bank report, in 2009 Russia's GDP was expected to contract about 7.9 % while the level of unemployment was likely to reach 13% (World Bank 2009, p. 1). In the context of Russia's uninterrupted economic growth during Putin's presidency, these developments appear to be almost catastrophic. Although the Russian authorities hurried to announce an improvement in the economic climate in September 2009, they still emphasised that it was too early to say that the crisis was over (see RIA Novosti 2009).

Apart from the changing economic environment, Medvedev's Russia has also faced a number of foreign policy challenges, the analysis of which would be extremely important for a study of this kind. Russia's military conflict with Georgia over South Ossetia in August 2008, for instance, indicated Moscow's increasing assertiveness in the international arena. The Russian authorities sought to present the actions of the Georgian leadership as 'aggression and genocide' against South Ossetia and Russia's actions as an attempt 'to prevent a humanitarian disaster' (Interview of Dmitry Medvedev with BBC Television 2008). However, they largely failed to make their case, as the coverage of Russia's actions in Georgia by the Western mass media was predominantly negative. Some commentators have argued that 'Russia's military victory was accompanied by major failures on both the diplomatic and media fronts' (Antonenko 2008, p. 26). One can expect that this conflict and the information war that accompanied it (in both the Western and Russian mass media) will have a profound and long-lasting impact on the transformation of Russia's images.

An analysis of these recent developments would undoubtedly enrich any future study of Russia's images and their role in the country's foreign and domestic policies. More

importantly, however, the study would benefit from a wider geographic scope. This thesis has focussed on Russia's images in Western countries with Germany and the UK as two case studies. While this approach has yielded interesting results, it would be useful to include a number of case studies outside Western Europe. An examination of Russia's images in the USA would be extremely important due to the complex nature of Russian-US relations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and especially due to the USA's position as the only remaining super-power in the post-Cold War world. To enhance the validity of the project, another case study could look at the transformation of Russia's images in a post-Soviet country, such as Poland. An in-depth analysis of Russian-Polish relations would give an opportunity to examine the historical component in national images – particularly the impact of divergent views of the Soviet Union, including its role in the World War 2, on the dominant self-images in the two countries. Finally, future research should address the problem of wider normative issues related to projected national images. One can hope that the findings of this thesis will contribute to the conceptualisation of the role of national images in international relations, and that the issues it has addressed will be developed further in future studies.



## **Appendix 1**

### **A Note on Interviews**

Interviews for this thesis were conducted mostly in Russia (Moscow) and two case-study countries – the UK (London) and Germany (Berlin). In Moscow, five interviews were conducted with Russian propagandists who had first-hand experience of working in Russian foreign propaganda aimed at Western countries. In addition to that, two interviews were arranged with an independent PR consultant and a Russian scholar who commented on the actions of the Russia authorities related to propaganda efforts. Three senior Russian propagandists were also interviewed in capitals of EU member states. However, for the purposes of anonymity their exact affiliation cannot be disclosed. In the UK and Germany, interviews were conducted with members of the political elite (members of the UK Parliament and the Bundestag, and senior diplomats), journalists with a background in covering Russian politics, and experts in German-Russian and British-Russian relations. Moreover, additional interviews were arranged with a French journalist, a former European Commission Advisor and a Senior European Commission official, all of whom had a background in EU-Russia relations. In total, 29 in-depth interviews were conducted. All the interviews were given on condition that anonymity would be ensured. Thus, the list of interviews below indicates only broadly-defined affiliation of interviewees, as well as the location and the date.

One should mention a number of challenges that the use of interviews has posed for the present study. They are mostly similar to those limitations that are typical of elite interviewing in general (e.g. see Dexter 1970; Morris 2009). Firstly, there can be some bias in selection of interviewees as it has been based not on representative but on purposeful sampling (see Snape & Spencer 2004). This choice can be explained by the emphasis of the study on exploring shared images held by different elite groups in society rather than on investigating their quantitative distribution. Moreover, some bias can also be caused by a difficulty of gaining access to a number of potential interviewees whose views would have been extremely important for the analysis of Russia's images. This problem was particularly significant during the fieldwork in Moscow. As has been suggested in the academic literature, 'respondents in more politically unstable environments may be a good

deal more suspicious about the goals and purposes of the research project' (Rivera, Kozyreva & Sarovskii 2002, p. 684). Another typical problem in elite interviewing is inaccuracy of factual information: sometimes interviewees may have a limited picture of events, they may have convinced themselves in a particular vision of the situation in order to rationalise their behaviour, or, what is more, they may deliberately tell lies (Manheim & Rich 1986). This thesis, however, has been interested in studying shared perceptions and interpretations of events rather than in looking for some 'objective' information, which has made elite interviewing especially relevant. Finally, one should mention a possible interviewer's effect. It has been argued, that the interviewer's gender, ethnicity or other characteristics can affect the way in which an interviewee answers questions (Burnham *et al* 2004). While this study acknowledges all these limitations, it has sought to overcome them, at least to some extent, by supplementing results obtained with the help of elite interviewings with findings of discourse analysis of a large number of primary sources, as well as with reliance on extensive secondary literature.

#### **List of interviews:**

- 1) Senior Russian propagandist, Moscow, 29 January 2007
- 2) Senior Russian propagandist, Moscow, 30 January 2007
- 3) Senior Russian propagandist, Moscow, 31 January 2007
- 4) Russian propagandist, Moscow, 29 January 2007
- 5) Russian propagandist, Moscow, 31 January 2007
- 6) Russian PR consultant, Moscow, 1 February 2007
- 7) Russian scholar, Moscow, 30 January 2007
- 8) Senior Russian propagandist, the capital of an EU member state, 12 May 2007
- 9) Senior Russian propagandist, the capital of an EU member state, 15 May 2007
- 10) Senior Russian propagandist, the capital of an EU member state, 27 June 2007
- 11) Former high-ranking British diplomat, London, 13 December 2006
- 12) Former high-ranking British diplomat, London, 14 December 2006
- 13) Former high-ranking British diplomat, London, 14 December 2006
- 14) Member of the House of Lords, Conservative Party, London, 12 December 2006
- 15) Member of the House of Lords, Labour Party, Edinburgh, 15 December 2006
- 16) British journalist, London, 11 December 2006
- 17) British journalist, London, 12 December 2006
- 18) British journalist, London, 12 December 2006
- 19) British journalist, London, 13 December 2006
- 20) British scholar, London, 14 December 2006
- 21) High-ranking German diplomat, Brussels, 5 June 2007
- 22) Member of the Bundestag, Die Linke, Berlin, 18 July 2007
- 23) Member of the Bundestag, FDP, Berlin, 6 July 2007
- 24) Advisor of a Member of the Bundestag, the Greens, Berlin, 10 July 2007
- 25) German journalist, Berlin, 11 July 2007
- 26) German expert in German-Russian relations, Berlin, 5 July 2007
- 27) Former European Commission Advisor, Brussels, 2 June 2007
- 28) Senior official in the European Commission, Brussels, 30 May 2007
- 29) French journalist, Paris, 14 May 2007

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*Novaya gazeta*

*Novye izvestiya*

*Ogonek*

*Profil'*

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