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Political Myth as a Foreign Policy Instrument:  
Case Study of Russian  
Myth of ‘Great Patriotic War’  
Magister (MA) Thesis

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## **Abstract**

This thesis focuses on the strategic deployment of the Great Patriotic War (GPW) myth in Russian political discourse and investigates how this historical narrative shapes national identity and legitimises political actions both domestically and internationally. The GPW myth, deeply embedded in Russian historical consciousness, is pivotal for understanding contemporary Russian political strategies. In this study, a combination of computational content analysis and manual qualitative content analysis was employed. This approach allowed for an in-depth examination of presidential statements and social media posts from the Russian Embassy in Latvia, focusing on the period from 2021 to 2024. Computational analysis identified broad patterns and trends in the use of the GPW myth on both domestic and international levels, while manual analysis provided nuanced interpretation and contextual understanding. The analysis revealed that the GPW myth is systematically employed in presidential statements to reinforce national identity and support regime legitimacy within Russia. Internationally, the GPW myth is used strategically in the Embassy's social media posts to justify Russia's foreign policy actions and counter Western influence, particularly during the war against Ukraine. This research demonstrates that the GPW myth is a versatile and powerful narrative tool in Russian political discourse. It plays a critical role in shaping public perception, reinforcing political legitimacy, and supporting strategic geopolitical objectives. These findings highlight the importance of historical narratives in contemporary politics and suggest the need for further research into the broader implications of political myths.

**Keywords:** political myth, strategic narrative, narrative analysis, Russian political discourse, Russian foreign policy.

Niniejsza rozprawa koncentruje się na strategicznym wykorzystaniu mitu Wielkiej Wojny Ojczyźnianej (GPW) w rosyjskim dyskursie politycznym i bada, w jaki sposób ta historyczna narracja kształtuje tożsamość narodową i legitymizuje działania polityczne zarówno w kraju, jak i na arenie międzynarodowej. Mit GPW, głęboko zakorzeniony w rosyjskiej świadomości historycznej, ma kluczowe znaczenie dla zrozumienia współczesnych rosyjskich strategii politycznych. W niniejszym badaniu zastosowano połączenie obliczeniowej analizy treści i ręcznej jakościowej analizy treści. Podejście to pozwoliło na dogłębne zbadanie oświadczeń prezydenckich i postów w mediach społecznościowych Ambasady Rosji na Łotwie, koncentrując się na okresie od 2021 do 2024 roku. Analiza obliczeniowa zidentyfikowała

szerokie wzorce i trendy w wykorzystaniu mitu GPW zarówno na poziomie krajowym, jak i międzynarodowym, podczas gdy analiza ręczna zapewniła zniuansowaną interpretację i zrozumienie kontekstu. Analiza wykazała, że mit GPW jest systematycznie wykorzystywany w oświadczeniach prezydenckich w celu wzmocnienia tożsamości narodowej i wsparcia legitymizacji reżimu w Rosji. Na arenie międzynarodowej mit GPW jest strategicznie wykorzystywany w postach ambasad w mediach społecznościowych, aby uzasadnić działania Rosji w zakresie polityki zagranicznej i przeciwdziałać wpływom Zachodu, zwłaszcza podczas wojny z Ukrainą. Badania te pokazują, że mit GPW jest wszechstronnym i potężnym narzędziem narracyjnym w rosyjskim dyskursie politycznym. Odgrywa on kluczową rolę w kształtowaniu percepcji publicznej, wzmacnianiu legitymizacji politycznej i wspieraniu strategicznych celów geopolitycznych. Wyniki te podkreślają znaczenie narracji historycznych we współczesnej polityce i sugerują potrzebę dalszych badań nad szerszymi implikacjami mitów politycznych.

## Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	7
STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS .....	9
METHODOLOGY.....	10
CHAPTER 1. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	15
REFLECTIONS ON MYTH IN ACADEMIA .....	15
EXPLORING POLITICAL MYTH.....	17
FUNCTIONS OF POLITICAL MYTHS.....	19
MYTH AND FOREIGN POLICY .....	23
CHAPTER 2: GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR MYTH IN THE DOMESTIC CONTEXT .....	28
POLITICAL LEADER AND POLITICAL MYTH.....	28
DOMINANT MYTHS OF CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA .....	30
GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR MYTH AND THE RUSSIAN WAR IN UKRAINE .....	38
CHAPTER 3: GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR MYTH IN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT .....	44
MYTH AND STRATEGIC NARRATIVE.....	44
RUSSIA, POLITICAL MYTH AND STRATEGIC NARRATIVES.....	46
CONCLUSIONS.....	61
REFERENCES.....	64
ANNEXES .....	77
ANNEX 1 - 'RUSSIAN STATEMENTS' CORPUS .....	77
ANNEX 2 - KEYWORDS .....	80
ANNEX 3 - THE KEYWORDS QUERY .....	84

ANNEX 4 - CREATING THE 'RUSSIAN EMBASSY IN LATVIA' CORPUS .....	86
ANNEX 5 - 'RUSSIAN EMBASSY IN LATVIA' CORPUS.....	88
ANNEX 6 - THE 'UKRAINE QUERY' .....	90
ANNEX 7 - TOPIC MODELLING .....	91
ANNEX 8 - CODING THE DATA .....	93

### Table of Figures

FIGURE 1: ANALYSING THE FREQUENCY OF 'ОТЕЧЕСТВЕННЫЙ ВОЙНА' ('GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR') IN SPEECHES BY PUTIN: 2003-2023 .....	35
FIGURE 2: TRACKING THE EVOLUTION OF KEYWORD MENTIONS IN PUTIN'S DISCOURSE: 1999-2024.....	35
FIGURE 3: EXAMINING THE FREQUENCY OF 'НАЦИЗМ' ('NAZISM') IN THE DISCOURSE OF VLADIMIR PUTIN: 2013-2024.....	39
FIGURE 4: TRACKING THE EVOLUTION OF KEYWORD MENTIONS IN PUTIN'S DISCOURSE: JANUARY 2021 - APRIL 2024.....	40
FIGURE 5: ANALYSIS OF 'SPECIAL MILITARY OPERATION' MENTIONS IN PUTIN'S DISCOURSE IN COMPARISON TO KEYWORD MENTIONS: FEBRUARY 2022 - APRIL 2024.....	41
FIGURE 6: ANALYSIS OF 'MOBILISATION' MENTIONS IN PUTIN'S DISCOURSE IN COMPARISON TO KEYWORD MENTIONS: FEBRUARY 2022 - APRIL 2024.....	42
FIGURE 7: CODE RELATIONS MAP BASED ON THE DATA FROM THE RUSSIAN EMBASSY IN LATVIA'S TELEGRAM PAGE .....	48
FIGURE 8: ANALYSIS OF GPW KEYWORDS MENTIONS IN THE EMBASSY'S DISCOURSE IN COMPARISON TO ALL RECORDS: MARCH 2022 - MAY 2024. ....	49
FIGURE 9: TRACKING THE EVOLUTION OF KEYWORD MENTIONS IN EMBASSY'S DISCOURSE: MARCH 2022 - MAY 2024.....	50

FIGURE 10: ANALYSIS OF UKRAINE QUERY TERMS MENTIONS IN THE EMBASSY'S DISCOURSE IN  
COMPARISON TO ALL RECORDS: MARCH 2022 - MAY 2024 ..... 51

## Introduction

Among the myriad narratives that Russia crafts about its past, few are as laden with emotion and significance as Russia's Great Patriotic War (GPW) myth. This myth, which glorifies Russia's role in World War II and celebrates its 'Great Victory' over Nazi Germany, serves as more than just a historical account; it is a potent political tool. The GPW myth has been strategically manipulated by different Soviet and later Russian leaders to resonate deeply with the Russian citizens; it has been readapted and re-actualised to serve the changing political goals of the ruling elite. This myth is evoked to stir national pride, unify the populace under a banner of shared heroism, and reinforce the legitimacy of the regime.

Since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the importance of the Great Patriotic War myth has become especially noticeable. The GPW myth has been an essential aspect of the Russian narration of the crisis. The memory of the Great Patriotic War has been used by the Kremlin to secure the population's approval of the government's violent and unjust course of action. The narrative was manipulated in a way that made Russian citizens believe that they were, once again, 'fighting the Nazis' and 'liberating' their 'brotherly nation' from the illegitimate fascist government (McGlynn, 2017). By the time the full-scale invasion of 2022 occurred, such an explanation had taken root to a point when it could not provoke any serious questions in Russian society or prompt more comments from the government (Kashperska, 2022). This myth, which has become instrumental in providing moral justification for military violence in Ukraine, is essential for understanding contemporary war rhetoric.

This research follows the understanding of myths elaborated by Chiara Bottici (2007): they combine historical memory and aspirational narratives, shape collective social consciousness as well as mould political behaviours and policy choices. It borrows from Cassirer's (1961/1946) reflections on the mythological foundations of political power and contemporary discussions on narrative and identity politics; it also benefits from Edelman's (1975) and Geertz's (1983) theories on the symbolic and functional importance of myths in political societies. Myths support political power and keep government structures (governance) going. They can simplify complicated political concepts through relatable stories, thus helping political leaders gain a rapport with the masses. They influence contemporary political narratives and national identities. They exist in the space between mere imagination and reality, and create frameworks through which different societies make sense of their political and social environments.

The most important aspect of political myths in the context of this research is their mobilisation power. In this study, I do not look at the myth of the Great Patriotic War as simply a narrative about what happened in the past. Instead, following Sorel's (1975) explanation of "imaginary worlds", I perceive myth as a 'fiction that works', and can lead people into joint actions. The GPW myth in my understanding is an active instrument used by politicians to make citizens believe in certain notions about the state and to attract their support towards contemporary political goals. It constantly adapts to the developments happening in politics, while at the same time resonating in the Russian socio-political system since it is profoundly embedded in the people's historical remembrance.

This study relies on the understanding that the story of the Great Patriotic War is, indeed, a political myth. The construction and utilisation of the GPW myth have been discussed widely and extensively by various scholars (e.g., Walker, 2018; Domańska, 2019; Dawsey, 2022; Olchowski, 2023; Zavershinskaia, 2023; Kumankov, 2023; Bækken, 2023), and do not require any extra investigation. What I strive to do is contribute to the shared understanding of the potency and form of the GPW myth amidst the Russian full-scale aggression against Ukraine – an analysis that has been absent from the broader body of literature on the topic. This reasoning leads me to my first research question: How has the myth of the Great Patriotic War been employed in President Putin's rhetoric since the start of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022?

The ultimate goal of this study, however, is to contribute to our understanding of the utilisation of domestically established political myths in international settings. The connection between political myths and foreign policy is reflected in scholarly literature to a minimal extent, while the instrumentalisation of political myths for the justification of specific foreign policies is almost entirely omitted. In the case of Russia, ignoring the mythical foundation of its external narratives crafted around the invasion clearly deprives us of a deeper understanding of not only the Kremlin's reasoning but also of the broader image of the country the Russian government is actively building. It is not uncommon for European countries to use the memory of the wars and the myths surrounding them when building an international image; the Russian state, however, turned its war memory into an aggressive foreign policy tool that deserves proper attention (Pikulicka-Wilczewska, 2016).

In order to fill this gap, I use the case study of the Russian Great Patriotic War myth to explore how the domestic political myths are connected to strategic narratives of the state, aimed at



external international audiences. I attempt to trace the mythical foundation of the dominant Russian external narratives, thus gaining insights into how the political myth of the GPW creates the basis for various strategic narratives that promote a certain image of Russia and justifications for its crimes in Ukraine. My second research question, therefore, is as follows: How is the myth of the Great Patriotic War used in its current meaning by the Russian government as a foundation for its external strategic narratives?

All in all, this thesis aims to illustrate how the GPW myth can provide a distinct and intricate understanding of the present Russian war against Ukraine. It is rooted in a perception of political myths as active forces in politics which help in influencing public belief and justifying political choices. I aim at situating the GPW myth into broader theorising on the role of myths in politics, both local and international. While examining how the same political myth can strengthen social unity within a state and serve as an international instrument for justifying its militaristic undertakings, this work intends to illustrate the range and depth of myths as political tools.

### **Structure of the Thesis**

With an emphasis on how political myths influence national identity, political discourse, and foreign policy, **Chapter 1** offers a thorough analysis of the body of research on the subject. This chapter provides a theoretical foundation for the research by analysing diverse academic viewpoints on myths, their roles, and their relevance in modern politics. It also places the Great Patriotic War myth within the larger theoretical landscape, laying the groundwork for the thorough assessments in the following chapters.

The main goal of the analysis in **Chapter 2** is to methodically investigate how the Great Patriotic War myth is being used in presidents' statements aimed predominantly at the domestic audience. It contains an examination of the narrative re-actualisation and salience of the Great Patriotic War myth in contemporary Russian political discourse, focusing on how it maintains national identity and legitimises political activities. This chapter examines the Russian President's speeches to gain insights into the strategic use of historical myths to influence and mobilise popular emotion in Russia.

The main goal of **Chapter 3** is to uncover the strategic usage of the GPW myth in an international context, particularly during the Russian full-scale war against Ukraine. This chapter focuses on how the Russian Embassy in Latvia uses the GPW myth to influence international audiences through social media activity. By evaluating the posts by the Russian

Embassy, the chapter investigates how political myths are used to justify foreign policy activities, challenge Western influence, and achieve geopolitical goals. The research ends with **Conclusions**.

## **Methodology**

The research design of this study is divided into two parts, each corresponding to one of the research questions. It entails the utilisation of two separate corpora depending on the object of analysis.

In order to answer the first research question and gain insights into the utilisation of the GPW myth in the domestic context, I used computational content analysis. Berelson (1952) considers content analysis an ideal approach for systematically examining how things are expressed. This methodology is particularly suitable for analysing large datasets; it allows us to systematically track how frequently and in what contexts the Great Patriotic War myth appears. It is also fitting for an in-depth analysis over a longer period of time (Warde, 1997; Bligh et al., 2004). Moreover, quantitative content analysis is considered effective for the observation of the underlying meanings in political speeches where the intent is otherwise concealed (Konracki, Wellmann & Amundson, 2002).

The analysis was conducted on the Russian Presidents' Statements corpus<sup>1</sup> developed by the Hague Centre for Strategic Studies. This corpus constitutes a unique source containing over 11,000 statements made by Russian presidents Dmitry Medvedev and Vladimir Putin between the years 1999 and 2024<sup>2</sup>. Presidential statements were chosen as objects of analysis because they reflect official state narratives perfectly and help shed light on the purposeful use of myths to influence and mobilise public sentiment in Russia.

The key steps of analysis were conducted using Tableau (Tableau, 2024) and are as follows:

- I conducted frequency analysis, which involved quantifying the occurrences of references to the Great Patriotic War within the corpus. It provided insights into the temporal shifts in the prominence of the GPW myth in the presidential discourse. The main goal was to identify the periods of larger significance of the myth, as well as to

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to mention that all statements in the corpus are tokenised, sentencised, and paragraphised; the lemmatised versions are available too, making the corpus ready to be used for various analytical purposes. I am conducting my analysis on the sentence level.

<sup>2</sup> See Annex 1 for detailed information about the Russian Presidents' Statements corpus.

attempt to track correlations with significant events related to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

- Temporal analysis was performed to see if there was an increase in mentions of the GPW around certain occasions, such as key political milestones or military commemorations. It enabled a more accurate appraisal of the strategic usage of the GPW myth in political speeches.
- I used co-occurrence analysis to examine the contexts in which the Great Patriotic War was mentioned. This involved identifying the co-occurrence of GPW references with other key terms and named entities such as "special military operation," "mobilisation," "Ukraine," and "nazism".

Before conducting these analyses, the following steps were taken:

- Keyword identification: In order to analyse the GPW myth usage, the corpus had to be narrowed down to entries that only contained implicit and explicit references to the myth. To capture these entries, I started by identifying specific keywords related to the GPW myth. I took a snowballing approach to this task: I constructed an initial basic query containing lemmatised versions of "great patriotic war", "great victory", "fascism" and "nazism"<sup>3</sup> and extracted all paragraphs from the corpus containing at least one of these terms. Then, I manually went through the extracted paragraphs and created the first version of the list of key terms. I then repeated the same process, using the newly developed version of the list. This list was later given to ChatGPT-4 (OpenAI, 2023) for further enhancement: ChatGPT was asked to remove the terms that can yield false positives<sup>4</sup>, lemmatise the terms and construct a Tableau-compliant query (see Annex 3). I also selectively tested the query terms for false positives to ensure the accuracy of the results: I searched for selected terms in the dataset one by one and examined the search results to see if only data relevant to the GPW were returned.
- Data filtering: I created a calculated field in Tableau and used the query outlined above to filter sentences in the corpus. This step was important for ensuring that only content

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<sup>3</sup> "великий отечественный война", "великий победа", "фашизм", "нацизм" in original Russian.

<sup>4</sup> Meaning terms that could return sentences unrelated to the context of the Great Patriotic War.

that explicitly relates to the GPW myth was later analysed. I also filtered all data on speaker<sup>5</sup> to exclude statements that did not belong to President Putin.

- Time-series setup: To analyse trends over time, I organised the data by the date of each statement. This step was important when constructing time-series visualisations; the goal was to observe how frequently the GPW has been mentioned over the years.

When answering the second research question, a combination of computational and manual qualitative content analyses seemed most appropriate. Combining these two types of content analysis offered a deeper and more comprehensive view of the data and allowed for cross-verification of findings. Computational analysis can detect patterns, frequencies, and trends in the dataset, providing a general macro-level picture of how frequently and at what times various narratives are employed. It also identifies key topics (Annex 7) and trends that later guide the manual content analysis. Manual content analysis in turn delves into the micro-level details. It enables context-based interpretation of the data and captures details that automated approaches may overlook. Detailed manual examination of the data also validates the topics identified computationally. This enhances the precision and trustworthiness of the research, as the two methods complement each other by balancing width and depth. The iterative nature of integrating the two methodologies also allows for constantly refining the analysis.

To conduct this analysis and gain insights into the external dimension of the GPW myth and its reflection in the current Russian strategic narratives, I decided to focus on the online activities of the Russian Embassies in Europe. More specifically, I have used the data from the Telegram<sup>6</sup> page of the Russian Embassy in Latvia from 2021 to 2024. The reasons behind picking this particular Embassy are numerous:

- The Russian Embassy in Latvia is among the most active Russian embassies in Europe on social media. This high level of engagement yields a large dataset for analysis, ensuring that the study captures a diverse range of narratives and strategic messages.
- The Russian Embassy in Latvia, unlike other active Russian embassies, posts content primarily in Russian rather than the local language or a mix of languages. This linguistic

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<sup>5</sup> The corpus contains over 300 speakers.

<sup>6</sup> After Roskomnadzor, a federal executive agency responsible for monitoring, controlling and censoring Russian mass media, restricted the use of Facebook and Twitter on the territory of Russia in March, 2022, most diplomatic missions moved their social media communication to Telegram, thus making it a preferred source for the analysis of Embassies' communication after the start of the invasion. Moreover, scraping data from Telegram is significantly easier compared to Twitter and Facebook and allows a more comprehensive overview of the activity of the Embassies.

consistency not only allows for more accurate and efficient analysis, it also assures that the messages are immediately comparable without the need for additional translation, which may introduce biases or inaccuracies.

- The content posted on the social media of the Russian Embassy in Latvia is a microcosm of the online activities of all Russian Embassies in the region; its posts are indicative of those posted by other Russian embassies, making it an appropriate option for targeted analysis while maintaining the study's comprehensiveness (more on this in “The Role of Embassies” sub-section of Chapter 3).

The final dataset contains over 9,000 social media posts of the Russian Embassy in Latvia<sup>7</sup>. To create this dataset, I wrote a Python script that ensured that the data were systematically scraped, aggregated, and processed (more in Annex 4). The data processing steps included cleaning the text to remove irrelevant information (e.g., links), lemmatising to standardise variations of the same word, and data filtering to prepare the corpus for detailed textual analysis (see Annex 5 for details).

The quantitative aspect of the analysis consisted of two main parts:

- Temporal Analysis: I tracked the frequency and timing of references to the GPW and associated keywords over time. The aim was to find any temporal patterns or spikes in the usage that could be connected with key events in the war. This allowed me to gain an insight into when and how the GPW myth becomes selectively activated.
- Topic Modelling: Topic modelling is a sophisticated tool that automatically discovers word clusters that often appear together in the dataset. This step aimed to identify the data's underlying themes. The identified topics later guided the manual content analysis.

Following the computational analysis, manual content analysis was conducted:

- Data Preparation: Due to the large number of entries in the original dataset, the scope of the manual analysis needed to be narrowed down. I started with identifying the most relevant entries in the dataset by filtering it on the ‘Ukraine query’ (Annex 6) and storing it as a separate corpus. The logic behind this step was to ensure that only data related specifically to the Russian war in Ukraine would be analysed in depth. I then

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<sup>7</sup> See Annex 4 for detailed information about the Russian Diplomatic Missions corpus.

familiarised myself with the relevant sub-corpus by thoroughly reading through it and noting down initial observations and ideas.

- Coding: I identified initial categories (codes) in the data and developed a preliminary coding scheme, proceeding to code the relevant texts accordingly using MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2021) (Annex 7).
- Analysis and Interpretation: The coded data were examined to better understand how the GPW myth is strategically used. In this process, the coded elements were interpreted in light of the broader context of the post in which they appeared, taking into account the intended purpose of the posts.

The methodology for Chapter 3 is crafted to give a comprehensive understanding of the way the GPW myth is strategically deployed on the Embassy's social media platforms. This chapter aims to identify some of the less obvious means by which Russia makes use of political myths to shape or justify its foreign policy choices, particularly regarding Ukraine.

## Chapter 1. Literature Review

*Narrative is like poetry. It doesn't make sense to say a poem is untrue or inaccurate. Truth is irrelevant to poetry. What is relevant is that it strikes a chord in experience. The same is true of narrative.*  
(Ricks, 2024)

### Reflections on Myth in Academia

The concept of myth has been explored in scholarly literature extensively; it found its reflection across numerous disciplines and at different times in the development of human thought. This is not surprising, as myth was crucial for the spiritual, moral, and cultural development of early human communities, setting the framework for the subsequent development of religion, science, philosophy, and art (Stevanović, 2008).

In current times, the role of myth is arguably more prominent than ever. The complexity brought by rapid political changes and the globalisation of information has intensified the necessity for symbolic intermediation in political experiences (Bottici, 2007). Experiences that go beyond what an individual can directly experience become harder to grasp. In this context, political myths help create and carry forward meaningful interpretations of political realities. The existence of political myths does not depend on societal stability: they exist both in times of crisis and peace. They also do not depend on the type of regime; both authoritarian and democratic governments require collective symbols and images to uphold their authority (Stevanović, 2008). Political myth can exist in any setting as long as it is shared within a big social group.

The role of myths in modern societies, however, has been long overlooked and marginalised. Myth has been disregarded as a thing of the past that has no place in the developed and objective new world. The long-prevalent values of the Enlightenment era and its pursuit of objective truth created a legacy of separation between myth and logic that can be traced in studies on myth up until the late 1990s. For instance, Flood (1996) and Lincoln (1989) analyse political myths through the prism of how accurately they reflect reality and, to a certain extent, equate them to scientific hypotheses (Bottici & Challand, 2006). Ernst Cassirer and his famous book “The Myth of the State”, (1961/1946), is another notable example of such misperception. According to Cassirer's logic, myth is no more than an attempt to give meaning to the world that even the “uncivilised man” cannot live without (p. 47). His “myth” is more of an umbrella term for different rituals and religious practices than an operational stand-alone concept. For him, myth

(similarly to magic, worship, etc.) is a “great illusion”, a deception created by a human mind and disconnected from empirical reality (p. 21). Myth, however, can be reduced neither to “pure reason”, nor to superstitious beliefs; it exists in between the two extremes (Bottici, 2007).

As time passed, scholars adopted other approaches to studying myths. Myths became understood not as false stories but, as promoted by Lévi-Strauss, a way of providing people with meaning. Functionalists saw the practical value of myths as tools that could be utilised by politicians. For structuralists, creating a myth equalled creating “order, an intellectual, cognitive order principally, an order that has as its focus the always problematical relations between man and nature” (Lévi-Strauss, 1978). The later rise of social constructivism brought symbols, narratives and, consequently, myth back to the forefront of social sciences and laid the ground for connecting myth with politics; myths were perceived as constructed to serve the interests of particular groups within specific social and political contexts. Since then, numerous scholars, including first and foremost Geertz (1983), Blumenberg (1985), and Malinowski (1992), devoted significant attention to the symbolic role of myths in political societies. Hans Blumenberg, for example, claimed that without myth and metaphors, it becomes impossible for society to define itself, as the self-reflection of a certain society is closely linked with its ability to construct its iconography. Many of these early studies, however, showed a tendency to somewhat blur conceptual boundaries between myths and religion and explored the role of myths primarily in non-secular societies, thus limiting the applicability of their findings (Esch, 2010).

While these theories did not judge myths based on their factual accuracy or truthfulness, it does not mean that the connection between myths and reality should be disregarded. Myths, indeed, should not be evaluated only based on historical accuracy or factual truth. Instead, their worth and relevance stem from their capacity to express and respond to both concrete and intangible community needs (Stevanović, 2008). Myth does not exist in the dichotomy of true/untrue. Similarly, it cannot be perceived as good or harmful; the only certainty is that it is imperishable.

The pivotal role in creating a framework for contemporary studies of myth was filled by Georges Sorel (1975). His insightful reflection on political speech carved the way for a new understanding of myth as action-provoking. He claimed that myth drives social movements as it constructs a desired “imaginary world” that motivates people to sacrifice (p. 164). Edelman (1975) held a similar view and argued that mythical beliefs could be evoked in political settings and emphasised the role of language in this process. All in all, numerous scholars explored the



role of myth in contemporary societies (Bottici, 2007; Bottici & Challand, 2010; Stone, 2001), with Chiara Bottici's book "A Philosophy of Political Myth" (2007) arguably being the most comprehensive theoretical reflection on the concept so far.

## **Exploring Political Myth**

The exploration of political myth is best started by clarifying the connection between political myth and narrative, as those are closely linked and sometimes (for the wrong reasons) used interchangeably. Narratives touch upon every facet of human existence – from individual identity to collective consciousness, from cultural transmission to social organisation (Patterson & Monroe, 1998). They are fundamental when it comes to the construction of identity – both individual and shared. Narratives arise from the desire to understand and organise the otherwise disorganised social reality (Spenser, 2016). Shepherd (2013) saw them as tools for reproducing "cognitive frameworks" that we understand the world through.

Political myth is essentially a narrative that does more than narrate; it links historical events, political ideals, and societal norms in a way that resonates with people. The difference between them is best captured by Stone's (2001) concept of "narrative stories". Myths, similarly to narratives, provide a way to perceive the world that is consistent with people's beliefs and goals, fostering a sense of belonging, identity, and orientation, and explaining how the world works. Myths, however, do not offer any solutions to the issues around us, while narratives can. Moreover, not all narratives hold the same value for a given social group. Their importance, recognisability in the form of symbols, and ability to provide acceptable explanations of the social reality vary and can be very limited. These are the qualities that best describe myths, not narratives (Eason, 2023).

In a way, political myths create a simplified map of the social world that reduces its complexity to make it relatable (Flood, 1996). The narrative nature of political myth, its ability to explain why things are the way they are, is crucial for the main role that political myths serve – to ground the political and societal reality (Blumenberg, 1985). Political myths help people understand their place in society, the nature of their community, and the issues they face. As Sorel argued, it is because of the narrative nature of myths that people participating in social movements see their role as part of a series of events that might make their cause victorious. Cassier (1961) also emphasised the myth's ability to integrate past, present, and future events and thus become predictive of the future. This is the main practical value of a political myth: it

configures a certain whole out of scattered events. Political myth is a narrative that answers a need for significance (Bottici, 2007).

Significance, in turn, is closely linked with a process of narrative change/evolution. To become a political myth, a narrative has to be 1) continuously (re-)produced, and 2) received by society in a certain way. The entire process of production, reception, and replication constitutes the “work on myth”, a notion introduced by Blumenberg that later found its reflection in numerous studies, primarily those by Chiara Bottici (Bottici & Challand, 2006, p. 320).

Reproducibility comes from Blumenberg's line of argumentation: a narrative has to change with time to preserve its significance for a given group (1985). Joanne Esch (2010) called it “a process of layering meaning over a narrative”, meaning that significance is not static and can never be agreed upon by everybody once and for all. Blumenberg's notion of mythologems further emphasises the narrative structure of a myth; myths are made up of fundamental story components or motifs that may be rearranged in a variety of ways. This adaptability enables myths to be constantly reinterpreted and moulded to match the changing demands and situations of a community. Political myths are also always told from the standpoint of the present (Tudor, 1972). They must remain up to date with current conditions and evolve to reflect the present political and social reality. If they fail to do so, they risk becoming obsolete or transforming into mere historical relics.

Reception of political myths is equally important for their understanding (Flood, 1996, p.7). Political myths are rarely learned in a single, clear moment. Instead, they are absorbed over time, sometimes unknowingly, by continuous exposure to cultural narratives, symbols, and behaviours (Bottici, 2007). In their essence, political myths are deeply engrained in the social fabric, which is also why they are challenging to study. It is almost impossible to capture political myth without tracing it in different settings; it exposes itself in all kinds of social practices, including but not limited to political discourse, art, and rituals. Political myths are not confined to formal political discourse or historical narratives but can permeate all areas of social life; virtually any activity or practice can serve as a conduit for political myths. Therefore, it is by looking at the reception, at how a narrative works in a certain context that we can see whether it provides significance and consequently becomes a myth.

This section is best summarised by the definition given to political myth by Bottici and Challand (2006): political myth is “a continual process of work on a common narrative by which the

members of a social group can provide significance to their political conditions and experience” (p. 316).

### **Functions of Political Myths**

In its classic understanding, the primary function of myth is to “harmonise the community and, consequently, to prevent the situation in which chaos, incoherence, doubt and apathy can appear” (Stevanović, 2008, p. 30). This is what De Vriese (2017) called a cognitive function that myth performs in different ways; first and foremost, it influences our perception of everyday reality. As Edelman (1975) observed, myths can help us deal with anxiety by providing social cues about how to interpret problems and link them to ourselves. This does not necessarily mean that myths explain “how the world works”, which is more typical for narratives (Stone, 2001); they simply provide the lens through which we perceive reality. They can shape our initial perception of the world due to what Flood (1996) called “the primacy effect”, which essentially means that the first perception can become the core of all future generalisations that the person makes about the world, especially in modern globalised and informationally intense societies (p. 87). To illustrate this, Chiara Bottici (2007) used as an example of Huntington’s idea of the clash of civilisations: it is so highly mythologised that you no longer need to read Huntington to perceive the world through the lens of the clash of civilisations (p. 256).

Political myths are also intertwined with all sorts of societal practices (Bottici, 2007). The perception of the world that myths build is intertwined with rituals (Della Sala, 2010). The repetition inherent in rituals contributes significantly to the reinforcement of political myths, ensuring their continued influence and presence within the collective consciousness. This circularity refers to the self-sustaining loop where political myths shape societal rituals and practices, which in turn reinforce and perpetuate those myths (Lincoln, 1989, p.24). Moreover, political myths, like sacred myths, are frequently expressed in visual or iconic forms such as paintings, posters, and sculptured monuments (Flood, 2002, p.42). These forms function as physical expressions of the abstract and complicated narratives that myths transmit, making them more accessible and persuasive in the public arena. Essentially, all of these are the forms of “working on myth”, and the possibilities to do so in society are endless. Any action or practice that includes a narrative dimension—basically, any form that can tell a story or convey a message—may be used to spread political myths (Bottici, 2007). Even though rituals and

symbols will not be the focus of this study, it is important to acknowledge this aesthetic dimension of political myth.

Myths play a crucial role in identity building; they are common narratives shared by a sizable group of people with ascribed significance. As Bell argues, it is myths and mythologies that we must look at when we want to understand why a society chooses to characterise itself in a certain way (2003). Political myths offer the narratives, stories, through which collective identities are established, articulated, and preserved, affecting how people relate themselves to the larger community's beliefs, aspirations, and history, and creating a sense of solidarity (Hosking & Schopflin, 1997, pp. 22-23). Such understanding connects with Friese's (2002) concept of 'sameness'. According to Friese, regardless of the context (individual, communal, cultural, etc.), identity centres around 'sameness'. This 'sameness' refers to a constant core or collection of traits that characterise an entity (a person, organisation, or even an idea) as it exists across time. It is what distinguishes an individual or a group from others, laying the groundwork for self-understanding and identification. Having a shared identity is being able to tell the same story of self. Patterson (1998) made a reversed argument; they claimed that narratives can reveal the concept of the self of the speaker. Therefore, not only can myths offer a narrative for the group to relate to, but they also serve as autobiographical accounts of the group. This, however, does not mean identity is or can be something unified. On the contrary, identity "is the result of the many different and sometimes contradictory roles and actions that we perform in our lives, as well as how these generate recognition dynamics" (Bottici, 2007, pp.238–339).

It is precisely in this context that the concept of myth becomes intriguing. Myths provide a framework for integrating many aspects of a community's identity—such as ethnic characteristics, beliefs, or principles—into a coherent narrative. Myths themselves are plural, comprising numerous versions and mythologems. This plurality reflects the community's different experiences and viewpoints. At the same time, myths also possess the ability to create a coherent whole out of different narratives. This shared story, created through the "work on myth", maintains the diversity of individual experiences but at the same time also develops a sense of togetherness and belonging within the community.

Another function of myth that lies in its practical dimension, is providing significance and directing the determination to act (Sorel, 1975). Political myths form our vision of the world and how we feel about it; as a result, they influence how we behave within it (Bottici & Challand, 2006). Understanding this function is easier through a dichotomy of making sense

and making significance. Making sense of phenomena is a typical function of science that seeks to provide objective explanations. Myths, on the other hand, personalise and contextualise these phenomena, making them meaningful and significant to individuals and communities (Blumenberg, 1985). Myths incorporate phenomena into a framework of values, beliefs, and narratives that speak to a specific group of people or individuals, bringing them "closer" to the human experience. Bottici (2007) called this the "proximisation" function of myth, meaning that for something to have significance, it has to be personally relevant. This, in turn, also means that significance is subjective, as nothing can be significant to many to the same extent. Therefore, a certain myth might not work or work very differently depending on the social group.

The "proximisation" function of myth is also reflected in the literature that explores the connection between myth and policy-making. Cap (2007), for example, argued that the proximisation of political myth, meaning the effort to narrow the distance between the speaker (politician, policy-maker, etc.) and the audience (e.g., society), strengthens the effect of legitimisation in political discourse. Cap (2005) defined three rhetorical strategies of proximisation: 1) spacial proximisation, or depicting distant events as physically close or imminent (this strategy appeals to the listener's intuitive concerns about their immediate surroundings and safety, increasing the impact of the discourse); 2) temporal proximisation, which intends to make events seem more relevant through their timing or historical significance; and 3) axiological proximisation, or viewing of the events as signs of a developing ideological confrontation between "us" and "them" by appealing to values and ideology.

Jackson (2005) and Wilmer (2002) also underlined the importance of language and the power it can be given by a political myth. They argued that the social willingness to commit to a certain policy necessitates a common understanding of conditions and importance, which is produced through language. Another scholar exploring the connection between language and myth, Iyengar (1991), introduced the idea of rhetoric frames as links between the legitimisation of policy and myth. In his understanding, specific keywords, symbols, and concepts used in political speech may be grounded in political myth, which thus serves as tools for framing information in a certain way. Such 'encoding' of words is 'mythical' because it ties the words to the broader narratives of a society, thus becoming potent symbols or triggers within a culture's collective consciousness (Entman, 1993).

Leaders, whether consciously or subconsciously, draw on themes, goals, beliefs, fantasies, imagery, symbols, and legends that resonate in a particular group or community. They do not need to refer to factual truth to motivate people to act; what is needed is a capacity to address the present conditions for which bringing up shared beliefs is sufficient (Bottici, 2007). This process is encapsulated in Mazlish's (1981) concept of a "psychic repository", a "library" that contains the accumulated historical, mythological, symbolic, and value-laden narratives of a society. Leaders use this library to communicate, motivate, mobilise, and legitimise their policies and activities. A leader using a nation's foundational myths to explain a programme aimed at national unity or regeneration is one example of how to use the psychic repository. Yadgar (2006) uses an example of the Zionist meta-narrative to illustrate this process, showing how it legitimises the Zionist project and at the same time shapes its future.

Stevanović (2008) takes this argument even further by claiming that societies can conduct what he calls "a critical selection of myths" (p.39). In his view, it is possible to choose whether or not to preserve a certain myth or whether to reshape the existing myth. Stevanović uses a case study of Serbia, arguing that myths about Serbian monarchs, religious leaders, and the entire nation might be converted not only into symbols of the right to an independent state but also of the necessity for this state to be democratic. His understanding derives from a very state-centric view of the work on myth. While recognising that myths need to resonate with the masses to exist, he makes an argument that modern political myths are typically crafted by individuals (theoreticians, ideologists, propagandists or agitators) (Stevanović, 2008, p.34). Mueller (2005) made a similar point by claiming that it was a myth that lay at the foundation of the war on terror, and that myth should have been considered, as Esch (2010) put it, "a wild card" while analysing political decisions (p.365). Such a view on political myth might be perceived as controversial but it does capture an important element of myths – if they can be influenced by individuals, they might also be used by them to achieve their goals.

The legitimising power of myth should also be mentioned in this context. Political myths offer a common story that speaks to the symbolic values and identity of the society, therefore justifying the presence and activities of political authority. This process of legitimisation is necessary for political rule to be stable and accepted (Della Sala, 2010).

Myth can have both constraining and enabling effects within political discourse and action. They play a critical role in determining which policy options are deemed acceptable in the political arena, they shape the spectrum of viable or acceptable policy alternatives by creating

a narrative framework that reflects specific values, ideologies, and historical interpretations (Bennett, 1980). On the other hand, myth can also incite opposition among social groups seeking independence or change, offering a narrative underpinning for questioning current conditions (Stevanović, 2008). This is because myths should always be reinforced not only by the institution but also by the societal actors to survive. If civil society decides to create and spread its own myths, the legitimacy of the current political power is likely to be called into doubt (Della Sala, 2010, p.8). All in all, myth create significance and determination to act in the social group – two pivotal components in giving meaning to a policy.

For the purposes of this study, it is crucial to emphasise the historical component of the myth. Political myths always require some form of connection to past events to be persistent and resilient, even though they eventually take on a life of their own (Archand, 1995). Nations, as well as other social groups such as classes, races, ethnic groups, and genders, are all imagined communities that need stories rooted in a specific historical event or figure as a foundation (Anderson, 1990; Stråth, 2005). Political myth can play this role as it does not require historical accuracy to be meaningful and provide significance. Myths are also important for the construction of a collective memory. In the continuous process of interaction between collective memory and deep-rooted myths of the national community, myths set the bounds of memory, “defining what is possible and what is impossible to remember” (Stråth, 2005, p.260). Same as political myths, the connection between memory of the past and political myths can be used to achieve specific policy goals. The Kremlin, for example, uses the Soviet past to legitimise its authoritarian rule and achieve present-day policy objectives (Domańska, 2022). The Great Patriotic War, more specifically, has come to symbolise all subsequent ‘defensive’ wars waged by the USSR and later Russia (Domańska, 2019).

### **Myth and Foreign Policy**

The construction and execution of foreign policy are not purely rational or factual processes; they are significantly influenced by the creation and dissemination of myths (Legucka & Kupiecki, 2022). Foreign policy is a complex interplay of objective reality and subjective interpretation, where myths can hold significant power in shaping outcomes and perceptions. Kupiecki (2022) used the concept of betrayal to illustrate this phenomenon: though not formally

recognised in the lexicon of foreign policy, the narrative of 'betrayal' still influences international relations (IR) and the formulation of countries' foreign policy strategies (p.43).

In the field of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), scholars can (and sometimes do) incorporate myth through an interpretive approach. FPA researchers place more value on analysing meanings, attitudes, and discourses than on just relaying historical facts. They embrace a meta-perspective on foreign policy that considers ideas and practices as mutually constitutive, implying that how people understand the world has a direct impact on how they behave in it (Rhodes, 2018, p.3-4). Therefore, interpretivists view narratives, or storytelling, as a critical component in the building of political realities. They contend that narratives actively generate certain interpretations of the world that can shape perceptions and behaviours (Oppermann & Spencer, 2016). Even though the concept of myth is not clearly defined in FPA and is often misunderstood as a narrative based on falsehood (Schenoni et al., 2022), myths are akin to narratives in their political power. In fact, they are sometimes used interchangeably in foreign policy literature (e.g., Subotić, 2016). Myths are indeed powerful narratives that, as already discussed, construct specific versions of reality and normalise certain social orders and practices.

Such a point of view on myth, while valid, shall not constrain those seeking an understanding of how myths can be purposefully utilised as instruments of foreign policy. Many scholars acknowledge that myths are there and that they influence international relations and its actors' strategies but very few go beyond such an understanding. For example, in Chapter 5 of her book, "The US-Iran Relationship: The Impact of Political Identity on Foreign Policy", Penelope Kinch (2016) focuses on how myths have created foreign policy challenges in the relationship between the US and Iran. The focus is put not on the deliberate utilisation of the myths in foreign policy but on the side-effects of the already existing national myths on the decision-making of the political leaders. A similar limitation applies to Rosyidin's (2021) analysis of how the national myth of Indonesia has influenced the political elites in dictating foreign policy agenda.

Among the authors who attempted to describe how states utilise myth to achieve foreign policy goals is Nazerke Sadykova (2017), who explores the political myth of Eurasionism in Kazakhstan, the only country in the world that incorporated it into its official state ideology. She connects this myth to the self-identity building of the country as a sovereign and ambitious regional actor and to the decision of the Kazakh government to join the Eurasian Union.



Another relevant study was conducted by Mochtak and Turcsanyi (2021); they argued that when considering states as actors of IR, existing narratives can point towards their interests, as states use them to construct social reality. Narratives, in the authors' opinion, can significantly change political reality (if used correctly) and are essential for states with great power ambitions. The work of Kupiecki (2022) is also useful in this context, as the author reflects on the roles that mythologised narratives can play in foreign policy. According to him, such narratives can either create a certain frame of interpretation of the events or offer a rationale for a specific state behaviour or lack of it, for example violating international law (p. 44).

The connection between political myths and narratives lies in their so-called instability. Just as myths need to constantly adapt to the changing social reality to provide significance, narratives are undergoing cyclical progression (Liekis, 2019). It involves the initial development of narratives, their dissemination or projection to target audiences, and finally, the reception and interpretation of these narratives by those audiences. This cycle is continuous, as the perception of narratives can influence their future formation and projection. Importantly, when narratives circulate and are reinterpreted by audiences, the underlying political myths act as guiding principles for this reinterpretation. In this sense, political myths have a significant impact on the narrative cycle, guaranteeing that as narratives evolve, they are influenced by the myths that pervade the sociopolitical context. This interaction highlights the symbiotic relationship between political myths and narratives. Political myths not only serve as thematic and ideological foundations for narratives, but they also play an important role in how these narratives are viewed and modified throughout time. As a result, comprehending the narrative cycle necessitates recognition of the fundamental role performed by political myths in steering the direction and evolution of narratives. Similarly, strategic narratives can also contribute to the evolution of political myths themselves. As defined by Roselle, Miskimmon, and O'Loughlin (2014), strategic narratives are "stories that states tell about themselves, other states and a current state of world affairs by formulating a problem and proposing a solution that would create a positive image of their Selves on the international arena, help achieve their objectives and persuade others to follow suit" (p. 75). Strategic narratives, when used repeatedly in different circumstances, can reinforce, reinterpret, or even modify the focus of certain myths over time, reflecting changes in societal values or political goals.

To gain a deeper understanding of myths as an instrument in foreign policy, it is worth looking at the differences between a political myth and strategic narratives. Strategic narratives gained prominence in academia as a tool to study international conflicts and wars (Schmitt, 2018).

Indeed, they seem particularly suitable for strategic communications in times of instability; they connect different elements into a cohesive story giving the creator of a narrative a persuasive power (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, & Roselle, 2013, p.5). Both political myths and strategic narratives communicate a series of events, but they differ in their constitution. Political myths are an enduring element and undergo gradual changes over time. It is impossible to identify a single actor responsible for creating a political myth since it is constantly being re-actualised by various sources to suit the community's needs. Political myths offer a reservoir of themes, symbols, and values from which strategic narratives draw. On the other hand, strategic narratives are deliberately crafted by political actors to influence both international opinion and the behaviour of other states. They are aimed at audiences outside national borders, such as transnational players and foreign policy stakeholders. They utilise the inherent legitimacy and emotional power of political myths to strengthen their persuasiveness; states, in turn, use these narratives as part of their strategy to assert their global stature and justify their aims and actions in international relations. States use strategic narratives to legitimise their views, programmes, and aspirations with both internal and international audiences (Liekis, 2019).<sup>8</sup>

A strategic narrative can be one way to actualise a political myth; narratives can be selectively activated when there is a need for a policy change. One of the later studies on this process was performed by Oliver Turner (2022), who researched the construction of the foreign policy of the US through the prism of myth. He claimed that existing myths were reproduced over time to create strategic narratives that promoted a certain image of the United States that, in turn, was used to explain certain foreign policy choices. This process, as Subotic (2015) argues, can be done without discontinuation of the existing continuity of the state's image.

Speaking of continuity, Liekis (2019) claims that strategic narratives “enable us to explain causality in the political process and to connect seemingly different political events in the past, present and future into a logical chain and worldview” (p.179). They enable the integration of political issues and solutions into a single, coherent storyline. This simplifies and simultaneously makes potential solutions appear more reasonable and appealing. By presenting such a compelling story that resonates with people's beliefs and values, these narratives can motivate audiences to back specific policies or actions (Miskimmon et al., 2017).

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<sup>8</sup> Indeed, it is important to remember that foreign policy is not just about the external audience, it is also about how the external narrative connects to the domestic reality. Any foreign policy decisions are linked to the internal political agenda; governments take into account the interests of various domestic stakeholders as it strengthens the government's legitimacy (Kinch, 2016).

All in all, the role of myths in the foreign policy of states should not be ignored. Political myths serve as the bedrock of collective identity and values, providing the thematic depth from which states draw legitimacy and justification for the policies, including those in the international sphere. Myth inspires and unifies, providing fertile ground for strategic narratives that seek popular support or international collaboration. A strategic narrative's ability to garner support for a foreign policy action is frequently determined by its alignment with the nation's deeper, mythological story.

Now let us turn to the chosen case study – mythologised narratives that the Russian Federation instrumentalised in its assertive foreign policy.

## **Chapter 2: Great Patriotic War Myth in the Domestic Context**

For many countries of post-1989 Europe, the new geopolitical reality of the time created a 'mythical vacuum' and stimulated the emergence of the new (or at least a significant change in the old) dominant narratives (Judt, 1992). For Russia, it was the time for reinterpretation of the same old stories to meet the contemporary needs and ambitions of the newly established regime. The glorified periods of Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union, instead of being critically reevaluated in the face of the new post-Cold War reality, were used to construct a new cohesive national story. The collective memory of the imperial and Soviet history has not only survived but has been actively reinvigorated to consolidate the state power and forge a sense of continuity and legitimacy. To this day, historical narratives seem to be the core element of the identity of the Russian Federation, continuously influencing the trajectory of the country's development. Historical mythology has begun to function as a substitute for state ideology banned under the Russian constitution (Domańska, 2019, p.2; Pikulicka-Wilczewska, 2016).

The political myths of Russia have been discussed widely and studied extensively (Lo, 2002; Sakwa, 2007; Kupiecki, 2022; McGlynn, 2017; Petersson, 2017). Different scholars working at different times found traces of myriads of politicised (historical) – some of them withstood the test of time and proved themselves to be political myths; the others gradually disappeared. In this chapter, I will focus on one myth in particular – the myth of the Great Patriotic War (GPW) and Russia's 'Great Victory' in this war. Drawing from the existing literature, I will provide a general overview of the evolution of this myth and reflect on its current form and functions in Russian society. Later, I will conduct a data-driven analysis<sup>9</sup> of the usage of the GPW myth by the Russian leader in the context of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, particularly the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Such an analysis aims to complement the existing studies of the narratives surrounding the invasion.

### **Political Leader and Political Myth**

This section will elaborate on the reasoning behind the decision to focus on the statements of the political elites, specifically President Vladimir Putin, to analyse the evolution and the role of the GPW myth in the later parts of this chapter. Generally, the role of political myths in achieving specific political goals by politicians on different levels has already been recognised, with some arguing that they can be crafted to serve the political interests of the elites (e.g.,

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<sup>9</sup> Please, refer to the methodology section of this study.

Domańska, 2019). Myths are believed to become more pronounced during the electoral campaigns (Kenzhekanova & Dalelbekkyzy, 2014); they are essential in times of crisis as means of adaptation to the reality around them (Cassier, 1961/1946); they are used to construct a certain political brand (Kashperska, 2022); and they help boost the popularity of an autocratic leader (Treisman, 2011). Clunan (2014) goes as far as to argue that the existing national image is based on the perceptions of the political elites and the views of the national history that they possess. Political leaders, according to her, use a whole range of strategies – from aligning the national identity with that of a more prestigious group to inventing new ways in which their nation can be seen as superior – to achieve their identity-building goals (van Knippenberg, 1989).

The connection between legitimacy and political myths is another integral element of this discussion (Gill, 2011). Hobsbawm (1983) argued that political entities of different kinds needed to partially invent their histories and traditions in order to be perceived as legitimate. Some regimes go as far as to enforce a certain political myth to ensure their survival (Mellon, 2010). Petersson (2017) illustrates this claim with an example of the Joseph Stalin era, during which the idea that “the end justified the means” served as a basis for the legitimacy of the persistent violence and terror (p.238). Access to political leadership, however, does not guarantee the dominance of the elite’s political myths; they need to be more appealing than the alternative myths often propagated by the opposition. In Russia, the weak state of the opposition grants those in power their legitimacy without having to pass what Clunan (2014) calls the ‘fitness test’ of the political myths.

In the case of Russia, the scholars are also pointing out the role of the hierarchical structure of the management of the state in this context (Domańska, 2017, p.9). The political leader holds most of the power over the decision-making, with only his small circle of trusted associates having a say in matters of both domestic and foreign policies (Cako, 2018). Focusing on presidents’ narration of political myths of Russia, therefore, seems more than justified. To illustrate the role of Russian leaders in constructing political mythology, let us turn to the Petr Stolypin myth. As shown by Dr Wijermars’ analysis (2015), this myth was delicately and intentionally crafted by the president at the time, Dmitrii Medvedev, together with Vladimir Putin. Petr Stolypin was not a popular public figure among Russians; in fact, in 2008 only about 4 per cent of the population referred to him as significant in the world’s history (Gudkov, 2010). That same year, however, he was pronounced the second most popular Russian of all time on national television. The government made a deliberate effort to popularise this political figure.

The creation of the myth was driven by the interest of the political establishment and served as a tool to justify excessive state control (Wijermars, 2015). Interestingly enough, the study conducted by Blackburn 10 years after the poll was taken revealed that when talking about the popular 2000-2014 Putin era, Russians use similar terms as when they describe the Stolypin era (2018). This is a great example of how powerful the elite-driven mythmaking is in Russia, and what a potent instrument the past can be. The nature of political myth is such that the past it describes is always 'framed' in terms of the present.

As for the role of actual political discourse in identifying and analysing political myth: public statements of the political establishment offer insights into their priorities, intentions, and the narratives they deem most effective for securing their position. Authoritarian leaders wield substantial control over the media, the flow of information, and, to a large extent, the public discourse. This control allows them to craft and propagate political myths and narratives with greater ease and less opposition than in more pluralistic societies. Moreover, authoritarian leaders' public statements are usually carefully crafted to maintain their grip on power, manage public perception, and navigate the complex dynamics of internal and external politics. Such characteristics are ideal for those aiming to analyse how political myths can be crafted from above.

Tracing the rhetoric of Vladimir Putin throughout the years is important as a tool for understanding the development of the narrative, as well as extra proof that a specific narrative indeed is a political myth. Although the mechanisms for accountability differ in authoritarian regimes, leaders still face consequences for failing to deliver on promises or for contradicting previous statements (Pettersson, 2014).

### **Dominant Myths of Contemporary Russia**

Before I delve into the specific elements and the evolution of the GPW myth, it is important to situate it in the wider political mythscape of Russia and establish its connection to other dominant narratives. Positioning the GPW myth within the scholarly literature on the existing political myth of Russia will further enrich this analysis, as myths never exist independently of the broader context.

Perhaps the most widely recognised Russian myth is the Great Power myth, which is often referred to as the cornerstone of the Russian identity (Lo, 2002; Pettersson, 2013; Hutcheson & Pettersson, 2016). Pettersson, one of the prominent voices in the field of Russian political myth-

making, argues that this is the defining component of the sense of belongingness of Russians to their nation (2017). The Great Power myth is deeply entrenched in the hearts and minds of Russians, as well as persistent in the rhetoric of the elites even in times of economic downturn or political instability (*ibid.*).

Over the years, this myth was represented and later reinforced by various historical personalities: Peter the Great, Ekaterina the Second, and in later times, Joseph Stalin, to name the most obvious ones. The durability of the Great Power myth allows each new ambitious political leader to draw his political power from this myth, with them consequently becoming a part of the myth too. This process has been reflected upon by Anne Clunan (2014) in her discussion on aspirational constructivism: the 'past' selves influence how current elites evaluate the 'current' selves (p. 282). This is undoubtedly true for President Putin. As Petersson (2017) put it: "Putin's reputation as the most credible keeper and guarantor of the great power tradition is central to his continued legitimacy. He has come across as the leader who, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the protracted domestic chaos of the turbulent 1990s, resurrected Russia, restored it to greatness, and then kept it there" (p.242). Clunan (2014) made a similar point, claiming that with the commencement of the presidency of Vladimir Putin, the dominance of the myth remained stable. Putin was the representation of the broader elite's perception of Russia as the great state, with "the state's strength and modernity as the core methods to attain the country's interests" (p.288).

The Great Power myth has significant repercussions for the functioning of the Russian state and how the state is perceived by its population. It constructs a certain type of national identity based on the belief in the superiority of Russia over other countries and the ordinary Russians' projection of the 'glorious past' onto themselves. The myth entails the artificially created hostile environment with Russians perceiving the world in black and white (Domańska, 2017). International relations in this reality are nothing more than the rivalry of states based on the belief that other countries aim to undermine the greatness of Russia and make use of its resources (Bouzarovski & Bassin, 2011).<sup>10</sup>

The myth has a significant influence on the stability and the set of capacities of the regime. The artificial state of danger creates the need for the guarantor of security – the strong state, that often comes with the violation of civil rights. The often authoritarian nature of the regime

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<sup>10</sup> Simonov (2006) reflected on the energy resources of Russia from the perspective of the Great Power myth. According to him, the energy market is dominated by the feeling of the "state of war" and the constant (often artificial) rivalry with other countries (p.123).

created by the supposed need for a 'strong hand' becomes generally accepted by the people. This is because the self-perceptions of the citizens living in the constant state of mobilisation against an 'enemy' gets intricately linked to the state (Domańska, 2017).

Another foundational myth that is worth mentioning is the myth of the recurring "Time of Troubles", which is linked to the challenging periods of Russian history (Parland, 2005). This myth is also extensively studied by Petersson (2011; 2013; 2014; 2017), who claims that the purpose of the myth is to emphasise the cyclicity and even inevitability of the bad times in the country. What is considered 'bad times' seems to change together with the regime change. The Levada poll from 2016 showed that currently all given political eras, which included Stalin, Gorbachev, and Yeltsin, are viewed negatively, with only Putin's regime being considered to be "bringing more positive outcomes than negative" by 70% of the polled. Putin in this case is associated with the end of the Time of Troubles.<sup>11</sup>

The Great Power and the Time of Troubles myths are strongly intertwined; one exists because of the other, because of the opposition that they provide to each other (Kim, 2011, p.200). When Russia is not experiencing greatness, the myth of the Times of Troubles provides a narrative framework for understanding why. It implies that such downturns are only transient, cyclical phenomena in the larger framework of Russia's inevitable grandeur. Conversely, eras of strength and influence become more significant because they reflect the resolution of these recurring problems, bolstering the narrative of Russia's resilience and destined greatness.

The continual reference to potential threats and the historical memory of crises creates the already mentioned perceived state of emergency. What is missing from this equation is the force, the strong narrative that will fuel this state of emergency. It is precisely in this context that the myth of the Great Patriotic War becomes crucial.

The confluence of the dread of adversaries, the recurring Time of Troubles narrative, and the Great Patriotic War myth results in a powerful ideological framework. This framework constantly underscores the need for a strong state and a powerful leader, legitimises the population's sacrifices, and sustains the image of the nation as perennially besieged yet robust and powerful. It connects the country's present and future with the stories of its past, which are

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<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, it was during Putin's presidency that the myth of Petr Stolypin as a figure that signified the end of the Time of Troubles in the early 20th century emerged and signified the upsides of the stability-oriented state (Wijermars, 2015, p.51). The creation and evolution of political myths are inevitably accompanied by the emergence of symbols and/or rituals associated with them. The Stolypin myth encompassed the emergence of a massive statue of Petr Stolypin in Moscow and the pronouncement of a Stolypin year in 2012 (Wijermars, 2015).



used to defend current policies and attitudes. It is an exceptionally accurate example of how the nation's past can remain a potent force in its present.

### **Great Patriotic War Myth**

The Great Patriotic War myth, a central pillar of Russian national identity, portrays World War II as a heroic struggle against fascism and emphasises Russia's sacrifices and contributions to the defeat of Nazi Germany. Centring the identity around a military conflict is typical for many nation-states; so is the diversion from reality in its portrayal (Kangaspuro & Lassila, 2012). Indeed, the Russian GPW myth has little to do with the actual reflection of the mass tragedy that World War II was; it is rather concerned with presenting a Russia-specific version of events of that time. This myth is deeply ingrained in Russian society and has been used by the Kremlin to, among other things, foster nationalist sentiment, justify territorial expansion, and maintain control over Ukraine as a crucial strategic and cultural buffer.

Since the end of World War II, the story of Russia's Great Patriotic War (1941–1945) has been the only event in Russian history that has been actively invoked as a good symbol in the communications of all leaders (Malinova, 2011). It is also a subject of constant reinterpretation that has seen substantial changes – all due to shifting regimes and their different historical agendas.<sup>12</sup>

Immediately after the war, little attention was given to the commemoration of the GPW, with Joseph Stalin eagerly distancing himself from the 'heroes of the war' (e.g., Georgy Zhukov), who could become a threat to his leadership (Walker, 2018, p.21). It was only two decades after, during Leonid Breznev's 'developed socialism' era (1964-1982) that the GPW established itself as a cornerstone event in the state's history. The resurrection of the memory of the GPW served the goal of validating the regime in times of economic downturn (ibid., p.22). Thousands of monuments were erected, dozens of cities got the 'hero city' status, and 9 May Victory Day became the most important state holiday (Kangaspuro & Lassila, 2012; Tumarkin, 2003). The official version of the war had established itself, and the Red Army

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<sup>12</sup> Stalin oversaw the strict control of the war narrative in the immediate aftermath of World War II. Even while the huge suffering and casualties were acknowledged, the main focus was on Stalin's leadership and the Soviet Union's eventual victory, not on the war's heavy cost or the dire early failures in 1941. Nikita Khrushchev's "thaw" after Stalin's death permitted a minor loosening of the war narrative. A more strict, heroic narrative that reflected elements of Stalinist propaganda but placed a fresh focus on Soviet triumph, heroism, and sacrifice was significantly revived under Leonid Brezhnev.

solidified its place in the nation's history as the ultimate force that made the defeat of the Nazis possible.

The memory of the GPW went through the process of rethinking under Gorbachev's rule (1985-1991). During *perestroika*, the archives were made available to the public, and made silencing alternative views on the history of the war practically impossible (Walker, 2018, p.22). Questions about the high number of casualties, the unpreparedness of the state for the war, and the countless war crimes committed by the USSR were raised openly for the very first time. It was during this time that the Soviet republics started drafting their own histories of the war, often divergent from Moscow's version. The process of rethinking continued into the early post-Soviet Russia under President Yeltsin (1991-1999), with darker sides of the war (especially deportations of the Soviet citizens by their own government) attracting more attention than the heroism of the Soviet people (ibid.).

The first presidency of Vladimir Putin signified the start of another era of state-controlled past. Coming to power in the 1990s, a challenging period of economic reforms, Putin capitalised on the general feeling of longing for the stability of the USSR times that persisted within the population (Kangaspuro & Lassila, 2012; Hutcheson & Petersson, 2016). He brought back narratives and symbols from the Soviet era – such as the national anthem and the 9 May military parades. It was at this time that the GPW myth started regaining its prominence in Russia. By the 2000s, the myth of the GPW has become a central element of Russian identity politics (Kangaspuro & Lassila, 2012). Soon enough, in 2008, the commemoration events, including the 9 May parade, became less about memory and more about demonstrating the military might and readiness to win again (Olchowski, 2023).

The importance of the GPW myth for the regime became even more evident after Putin's return to the presidency in 2012 (McGlynn, 2021). In response to decreasing popularity, the Russian autocrat once again turned to history to solidify the legitimacy of his rule (Marples, 2012). As evident from graphs one and two, right after his return to power in 2012, there has been an increase in Putin's mentions of both the term Great Patriotic War, and the phrases typically surrounding it. In 2013 alone, the GPW was mentioned over 700 times.

## Occurrences

of отечественный война throughout the corpus by month-year, mentioned by Putin

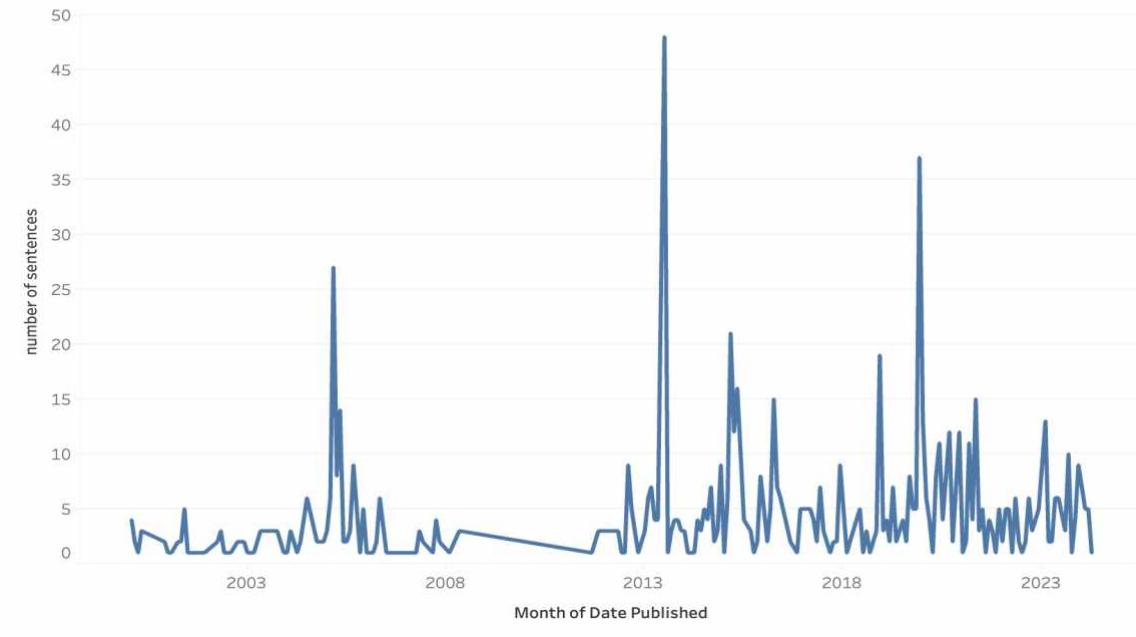


Figure 1: Analysing the Frequency of 'отечественный война' ('Great Patriotic War') in Speeches by Putin: 2003-2023

Keyword Mentions Over Time (1999-2024)

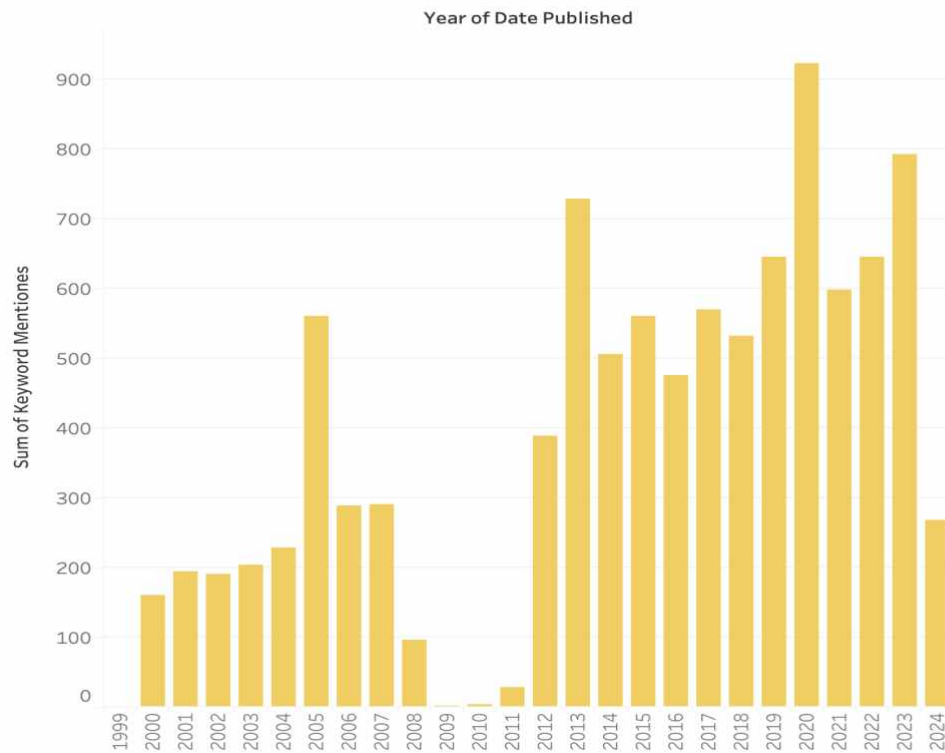


Figure 2: Tracking the Evolution of Keyword Mentions in Putin's Discourse: 1999-2024

The system of symbols created around the myth is also important, with the commemoration events held on Victory Day being its central element. The Victory Day celebration encompasses a myriad of elements, from presidential speeches to the construction of new monuments (Marples, 2012). Perhaps the most important element is the Victory Day parade. The symbolism and pageantry of the parade aimed to project an image of Russia as a formidable power that demands respect on the global stage. This is especially true after 2008 when for the first time since the collapse of the USSR (and only 3 months before the Russian invasion of Georgia), the Victory Day parade featured heavy weaponry (Walker, 2018, p.32). The annual parade reinforces the legitimacy of the governing regime by serving as a reminder of the power and defence offered by the present administration.

Despite being the most prominent symbol of the GPW myth, the Victory Day parade is far from being the only one. Rather, it exists in the larger context of numerous small symbols and rituals. As McGlynn (2022b) put it, “The Russian government has tried to make the (mythologised) events of 1941-1945 a mainstay of everyday life”. Indeed, the memory of the war is everywhere: in school books, city streets, subway murals, festivals, and many more.

The role of the Russian regime in crafting the narrative around the GPW is hard to deny, with any public initiatives, even those not explicitly diverging from the dominant discourse being suppressed (Legucka & Kupiecki, 2022). A perfect example of the state’s efforts to control the narrative comes from the story of the Immortal Regiment. It started as a movement aiming to provide space for Russians to connect around their shared memory of World War II and honour friends and family members they lost to the tragedy. In 2015, the movement was brutally taken over by the government. An identical organisation was created and the members of the original Immortal Regiment were forced to join it. The authenticity of the original apolitical Immortal Regiment was destroyed, and the government gained control over the personal narration of the past yet again. Now, the Immortal Regiment is an integral part of the symbolic domain of the GPW myth, with hundreds of people being forced to join parades on 9 May with the pictures of their ‘lost family members’, which often turn out to be pictures of random people (Walker, 2018). With the practically non-existent freedom of speech and increasingly controlled media, little space has been left for alternative narratives about the GPW<sup>13</sup>. Moreover, after the constitutional amendments of 2020, proposing alternative views of this page of Soviet history

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<sup>13</sup> In 2014, Russian TV station ‘Dozhd’ (‘Rain’) polled its viewers about whether Leningrad should have been surrendered to avoid the death of its inhabitants. Because of the poll, the channel faced a potential shut down, as well as countless accusations of rehabilitation of nazism from politicians and ordinary Russians (BBC News, 2014).

has also become illegal. Those proposing an alternative view risk imprisonment for 'historical falsification'. The memory of the war is now fully state-controlled.

It is evident that the narrative around the GPW is crafted in a particular way. It tends to (over)emphasise the sacrifices made by the USSR/Russia and the crimes committed against the USSR and its people, thus also playing into the Great Power myth – despite the horrors the state went through, it came out on the other side victorious. However, various tragedies that happened during the war years become part of the discourse only when they explicitly support the Kremlin's stance or specific political goals of the time. McGlynn (2021) brought the example of the Katyn massacre of 1943 as an event often used by the Russian establishment when talking about supposed nazism in modern Ukraine, but otherwise absent from the mainstream narration of the war. At the same time, the Holocaust on the territory of the USSR, the prosecutions of Soviet soldiers, who surrendered, and the crimes of the Soviet regime against its own people are purposefully omitted (Marples, 2012).

Similarly, the broader tragedy of the Soviet peoples comes to the forefront of the government's rhetoric when the 'solitude' of the USSR in the fight against nazism needs to be highlighted. Human suffering in this context becomes another way to pinpoint the 'special place' of the Soviet Union in World War II and plays into the myth of Western betrayal of Russia. McGlynn (2021) made a pertinent observation in this regard; in her analysis, she revealed a significant gap in discussing the events at the beginning of the GPW in 1941. The tragedies and military defeats that took place that year are practically absent from the governmental discourse (Marples, 2012). If they appear in a statement of a political figure, the defeats are always portrayed as something that, despite the heroism of the Soviet people, could not have been avoided due to the technological advantages of Germany (Moskwa, 2018).

In sum, the Great Patriotic War myth performs various tasks in the current Russian state. It distracts the population from the deepening economic issues that could potentially delegitimise the regime (Domańska, 2019). It unites the society by creating a feeling of belongingness, and, at the same time, creates boundaries for the group one belongs to. The existence of a unified interpretation of the war means that those falling out of the official narrative are 'outsiders' and can be grouped with the 'enemy' (Marples, 2012). It also constructs the philosophy of winning, or rather the feeling of absence of a choice to lose. The myth of the GPW is crafted around the success of the people in their fight, and it continues to work as a compass for society in their struggle against the enemy – real or not (Moskwa, 2018).

## Great Patriotic War Myth and The Russian War in Ukraine

In this part of the study, I will turn to the analysis of how the GPW myth influences and supports the Russian narration of the aggression against Ukraine. The aim of this subchapter is to show how the legacy of the GPW in its current form is being used to justify the foreign policy decision to invade Ukraine (twice) to the Russian audience. Specific focus will be put on the Second Invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Ukraine has a special place in the Russian myth of the Great Patriotic War. On the one hand, it is a 'brotherly' nation that fought and made sacrifices alongside Russians. On the other hand, however, it is also a country that has been actively rethinking the legacy of those years since 2004<sup>14</sup>. This prompted the narrative of Ukrainians attacking the memory of the shared tragedy and 'rewriting history'.<sup>15</sup>

The 'accusations' of compromising the memory of the GPW by Ukraine began way before the full-scale invasion, with the Revolution of Dignity of 2014 being arguably the most important event in this context. In fact, after the Revolution, the narratives shifted from falsifying the past to actually becoming part of the past that the Soviet people sacrificed so much to stop. The appearance of portraits of Stepan Bandera, a controversial leader of the Ukrainian Insurgence Army, the widespread usage of "Glory to Ukraine!", and the presence of some right-wing groups at the protests (who were not even a sizable minority) – all of these things were presented in the Russian discourse as signs of the 'rebirth' of nazism in Ukraine that needed to be countered. In Russia, as mentioned above, any divergence from the story about World War II told by the Kremlin constitutes a threat. Considering the importance of the GPW for Russian citizens and the unquestionability of the dominant narrative around it, presenting modern Ukraine as a threat to the legacy of the war resonates with Russians. For many Russians, Ukraine started to resemble the enemy it once fought.

The Nazi narrative became pivotal for the justification of the occupation of Crimea in 2014 (Spiessens, 2019). McGlynn (2022a), who conducted a thorough discourse analysis on news

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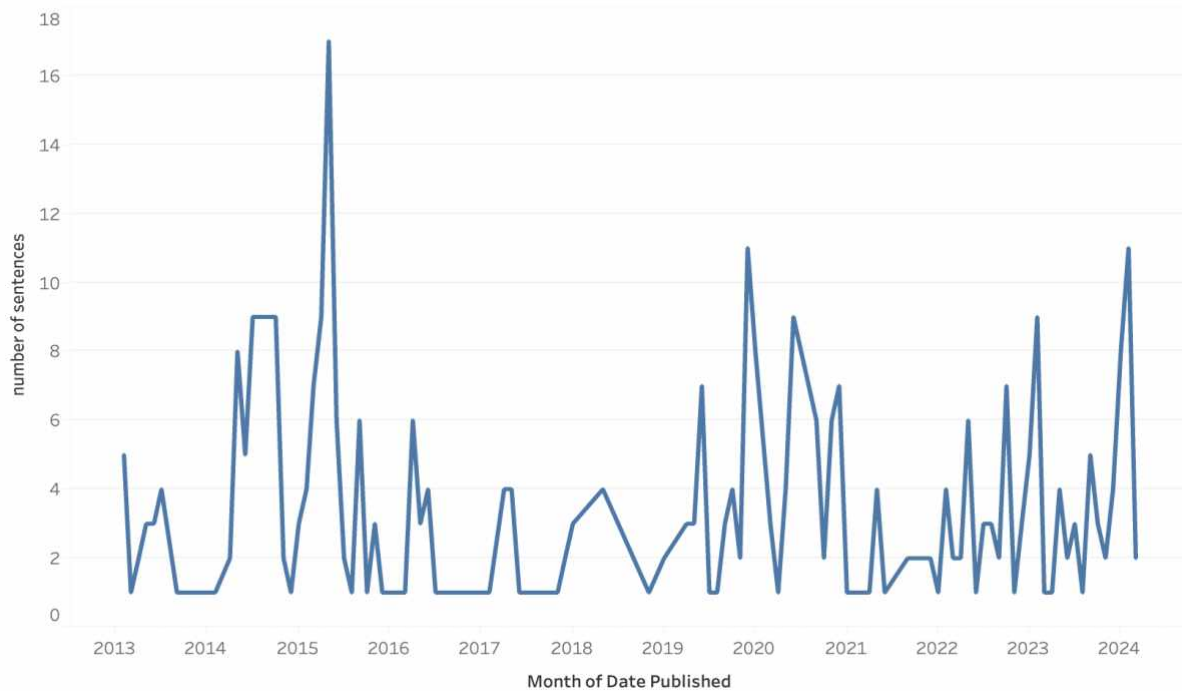
<sup>14</sup> The legacy of the second World War in Ukraine is extremely complex, as Ukrainians fought on both sides of the conflict – in the Red Army and briefly the Nazi army, as well as against both of these sides, as part of the Ukrainian Insurgence Army (UPA). In the Ukrainian state's memory politics, the outcome of the war is not perceived as a 'victory' of the Soviet people. Instead, the crimes committed by both the Soviets and the Nazis are considered equally significant. The government seized any celebrations of the 9 May Victory Day, and instated 8 May as the Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation. Soviet symbols associated with the Victory Day (e.g., orange-black ribbons) are strictly prohibited; so are the Nazi symbols.

<sup>15</sup> Efforts to counter the supposed 'threat' of such actions have even been institutionalised – in 2009 Russia created a 'Commission to Prevent Falsification of History to the Detriment of Russia's Interests' (Walker, 2018, p.34).

coverage of the first invasion, pointed out the deliberate historical framing of the conflict. The narrative of 'nazi-banderovtshy' in Kyiv and their 'counterparts' in other European governments was accompanied by GPW metaphors, convincing Russians that Ukrainians behave just like the Nazis did in 1941-1945 and that taking over Crimea is the new 'Great Victory'. Given that the invasions of Ukraine were widely accepted in Russian society as a way to defend the Motherland and its ideals, it is clear how powerful this narrative technique was. In fact, it worked so well that in 2017 when asked about the most important events in the country's history, Russians named the Great Patriotic War and the 'return' of Crimea (Walker, 2018, p. 244-45).

## Occurrences

of *нацизм* throughout the corpus by month-year, mentioned by Putin



*Figure 3: Examining the Frequency of 'нацизм' ('nazism') in the Discourse of Vladimir Putin: 2013-2024*

As evident from the graph above, after the start of the full-scale invasion in 2022, the GPW myth has been reactivated, and the Nazi discourse around Ukraine has become more explicit than ever. It has become a routine part of the presidential rhetoric, mentioned regularly since the start of the full-scale war. By 2022, the narrative was so well established that its usage to justify the invasion did not raise any significant questions in Russian society and did not require additional explanations from the government (Kashperska, 2022). Moreover, the scale of the

mythologisation was so large that it made it even harder to question the legitimacy of these narratives (Gessen, 2022).

It is not only the Nazi narrative itself that became instrumentalised; Putin deliberately turned to the symbols of the GPW more broadly intending to solidify the domestic support behind the decision to invade (Dawsey, 2022; Kumankov, 2023; Bækken, 2023). As evident from Graph 4, mentions of the GPW were more frequent before and during the first (April) and second (October) escalations in 2021, characterised by a significant buildup of Russian troops around Ukraine's border. Interestingly, there was a considerable spike right before and during the first anniversary of the invasion, with Putin referring to the GPW as often as 120 times in February 2023.

Keyword Mentions Over Time (2021-2024)

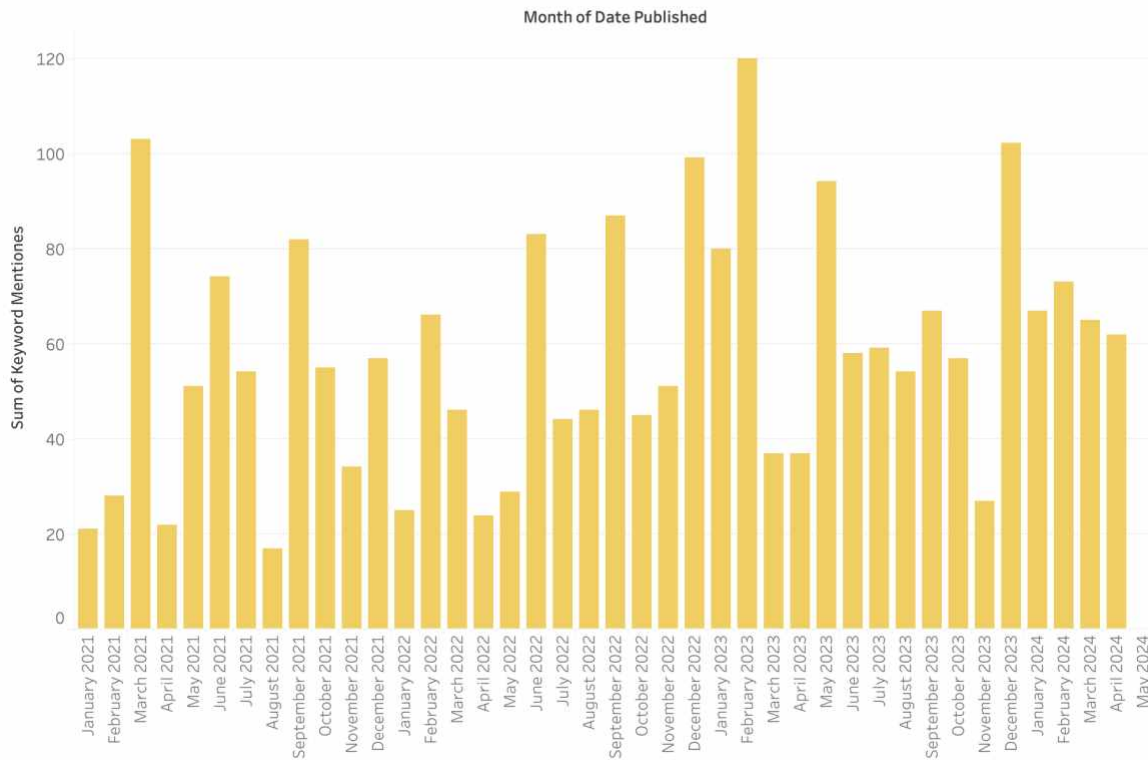
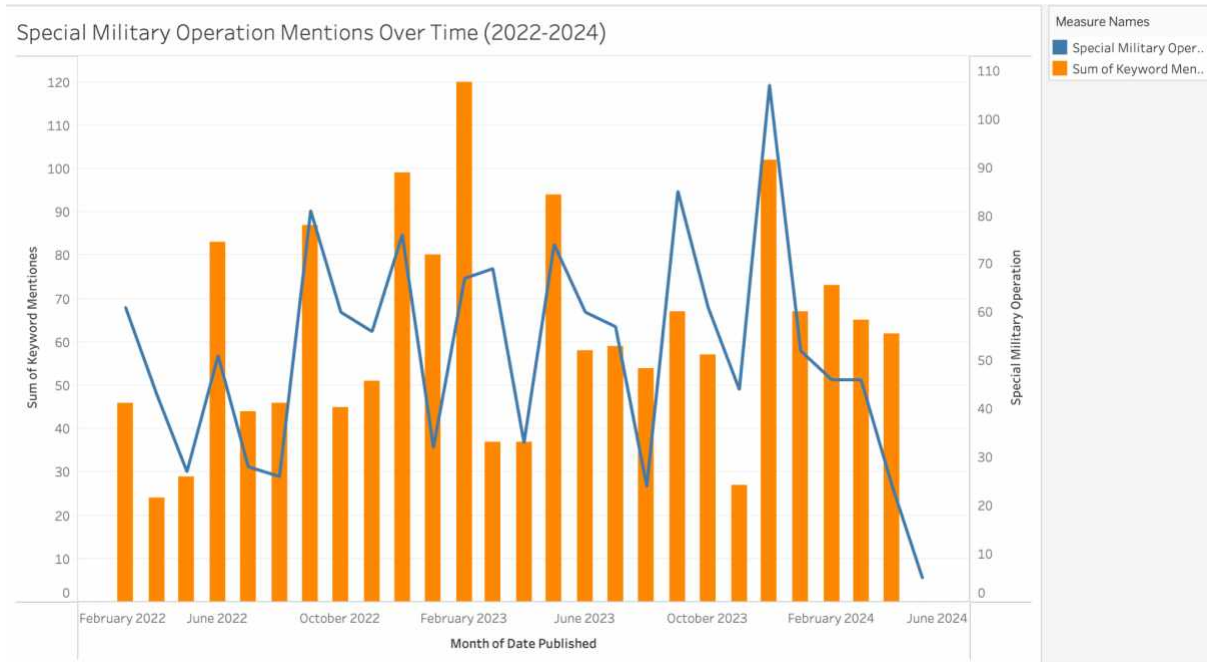


Figure 4: Tracking the Evolution of Keyword Mentions in Putin's Discourse: January 2021 - April 2024

Invoking the GPW myth is a well-thought-out attempt to blur the boundaries between the past and the present. The invasion is being framed as the most important event in modern Russia's history. It is not, however, taking the place of the Great Patriotic War (usually considered by Russians as the most important) but rather becoming a continuation of it. The soldiers fighting in the so-called 'special military operation' (SWO) since 2022 are considered as important as





*Figure 5: Analysis of 'Special Military Operation' Mentions in Putin's Discourse in Comparison to Keyword Mentions: February 2022 - April 2024*

the World War II veterans (Olchowski, 2023). Russian state television repeatedly reported on the cases of 'liberating' people and villages from the 'neo-Nazis' when talking about Russia occupying Ukrainian territories (Hermes Kalamos, 2023). The language around the invasion presents it as black and white: Russians are the 'heroes' fighting the 'holy' fight against the 'perpetrator' (Zavershinskaia, 2023).

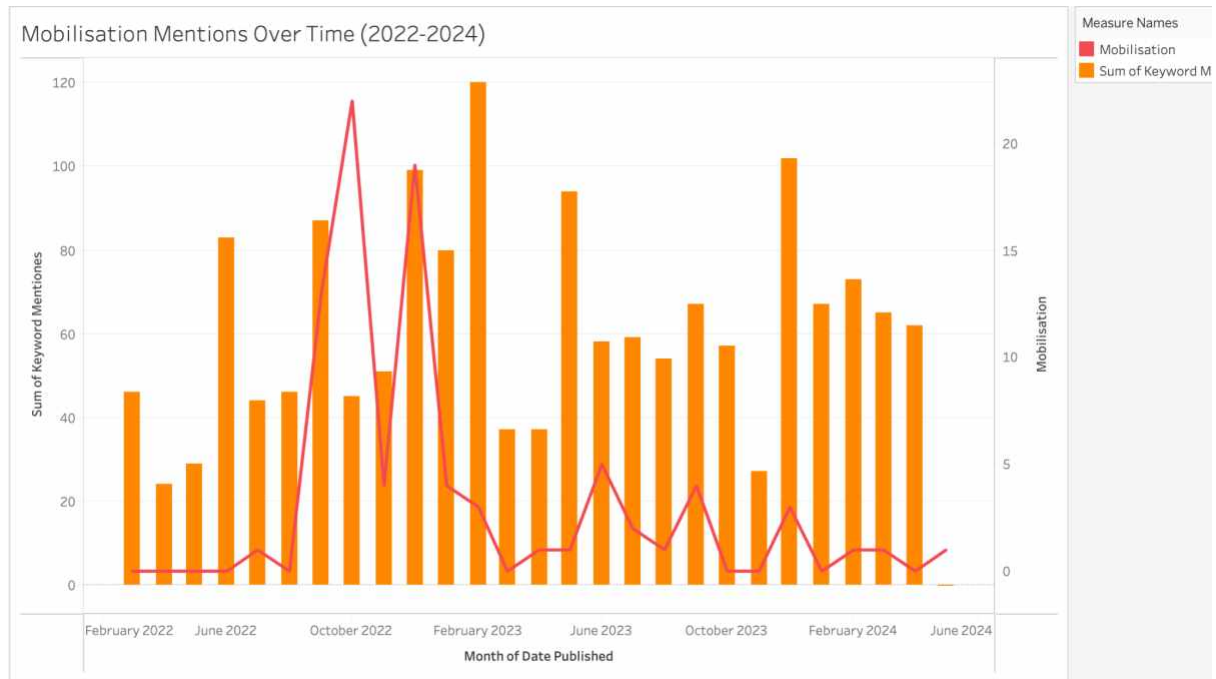


Figure 6: Analysis of 'Mobilisation' Mentions in Putin's Discourse in Comparison to Keyword Mentions: February 2022 - April 2024

Comparing the GPW and the SWO is an effective way to consolidate the population around the new war effort and overcome any potentially significant divides created by the invasion (Walker, 2018). The above graph shows how references to the GPW (shown by the orange bars) and the SWO (shown by the blue line) change over time. The co-occurring spikes in mentions (e.g., January 2024) most likely are a result of attempts to draw historical analogies at pivotal points in the current aggression. Another potential function of equating the SWO and the GPW is to provide familiar explanations for military defeats of the Russian army, which could explain the spike in September 2022, when Kharkiv oblast was liberated by the Ukrainian army. It is not the weakness of the Russian army but rather the strength of the enemy (Ukraine/collective West/the nazis) that is causing military defeats – the same as it was in 1941.

The memory of the Great Patriotic War also helps create a mobilisation drive (Olchowski, 2023). The GPW in Russian memory is the ultimate example of collective mobilisation for the greater good of the Motherland (Dawsey, 2022). In Graph 6, we can see a spike in mentions of mobilisation in Putin's statement around September 2022, when the first wave of partial mobilisation was announced. Similarly, there was a spike in December of the same year, when the active debates around the potential second wave of mobilisation took place. At that time, governmental officials, including the president, kept reassuring the population that enough soldiers had been mobilised or rather mobilised themselves.

In summary, the ongoing depiction of Ukraine as a potential neo-Nazi danger revives language from the war and frames the conflict as an extension of the long-running fight against nazism. This not only reduces the story to a simple hero/villain dichotomy but also strongly appeals to Russian nationalism and collective memory, garnering broad support from the populace. It also leaves the Russians little space for criticism. Any resistance to the Kremlin's conduct might be painted as unpatriotic or even treacherous by drawing comparisons between the current fight and the sacred battle against Nazi Germany. Thus, the government's narrative serves as both a justification for its conduct and an active attempt to keep control of the national conversation about the war on Ukraine.

The use of the Great Patriotic War myth by the Russian government is a great example of the capacity of myths to justify certain policies and decisions through historical parallelism. It is also exemplary of how a narrative can be reshaped to fit the changing context and yet remain effective and stable. The GPW myth, which was once a uniting emblem of bravery and triumph against an obvious enemy, has been twisted to further contemporary political objectives, highlighting the crucial role that historical memory plays in both local and international affairs. The consequences of this mythologisation will probably last as long as the war does, influencing Russian public opinion and policy for years to come.

## **Chapter 3: Great Patriotic War Myth in International Context**

This chapter will focus on Russia's strategic narratives and explore their connection to the country's foundational political myths. The concept of political myth and the myth of the Great Patriotic War specifically will serve as an analytical lens through which the external dimension of Russian narration of its aggression against Ukraine can be explained. The main idea behind this chapter is that the GPW myth grounds current events in the emotive story of Russia's role in ending World War II and, thus, facilitates the creation and boosts the impactfulness of modern Russian strategic narratives.

### **Myth and Strategic Narrative**

Strategic narratives are an important part of Russia's foreign policy strategy; they are employed to justify foreign policy decisions and help gather international support for a specific political choice (Liekis & Rusinaitė, 2019). They are disseminated in different forms – including propaganda and misinformation – as well as through various channels and resemble a connected web of smaller narratives that reinforce each other (Turner and Nymalm, 2019).

The connection between political myths and the international behaviour of the state is well-explored in the field of ontological security. Dominant state narratives (or political myths) are believed to influence the state's actions in the international arena; they subjectively guide the behaviour of the state, either serving or constraining it (Bachleitner, 2024). This is because myths construct the framework for political activities and set the broader direction for an event to be interpreted (Kinch, 2016). When an event happens, the reaction to it depends on this framework (De Vries, 2004)<sup>16</sup>. Thus, when analysing the evolution of Russian strategic narratives regarding the war in Ukraine, it makes sense to turn to the myth of the Great Patriotic War. As I show later in this chapter, it serves as a basis on which many of the country's strategic narratives are built.

Strategic narratives always relate to one or two components that define the storytellers' perception of themselves; they complement the stories already ingrained in the collective mind (Liekis & Rusinaitė, 2019; Autesserre, 2012). Strategic narratives allow for consideration of

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<sup>16</sup> For Russia, such a framework is often based on what seems more like an alternate reality, where the constructed narrative does not need to be based on factual truth; it only has to reflect what Russia believes to be the truth about itself. Legucka & Kupiecki (2022) illustrate this with a long-lasting Russian narrative presenting the country as a victim of Western betrayal. Despite lacking evidence, the story keeps evolving and informing policies, as well as being used to influence the decision-making process of Russian opponents (ibid).

the role of the creator's identity.<sup>17</sup> To be more precise, it is through strategic narratives that the process of the formation of identity can be traced (Tamm, 2022). Strategic narratives are not static and tend to shift together with the political reality around the state. At the same time, they always to some extent represent what the country believes itself to be:

*... similar to a stage play or film, the background or location in front of which the story unfolds is of importance for the narrative as a whole because it gives audiences clues about the kind of story in which they are about to indulge. (Spencer & Oppermann, 2016, p.689)*

Strategic narratives allow us to see what aspects of the country's history the government considers most important and in what way these aspects are presented. Shifting strategic narratives may be our window into seeing the shifts in the dominant political mythology of the state.

At the same time, strategic narratives surrounding a certain event cannot be crafted in a vacuum, they are embedded in the broader discourse. Governments all around the world continuously generate narratives about themselves and one another, thus creating a tapestry of often contradictory narratives existing in the same 'space' (Szostek, 2017). When the actors form and communicate strategic narratives, they (re)shape this discursive environment and, thus, the behaviour of other actors (Miskimmon et al., 2014, p.1-11). Oppermann and Spenser (2016) argue that the actors crafting the narratives are as much the authors as they are objects of the narratives (or myths) that already exist about them<sup>18</sup>. When the Russian government purposefully projects a certain idea about the Russian state to achieve its strategic goals, it simultaneously ascribes a certain characteristic to the other countries. The same happens when other countries create strategic narratives – they reflect what that country believes Russia is based on the dominant discourse surrounding them. This leads us to the idea that while strategic narratives can significantly influence international reality (Mochtak & Turcsanyi, 2021), they need to be rooted in the already existing discourse embedded in dominant myths to succeed.

While analysing the 'recipient's side' is not in the framework of this research, a discussion about Russia using its myths to influence the outside audience would not be complete without briefly assessing the actual success of its attempts. In this regard, an example of the rhetoric

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<sup>17</sup> Following Szostek (2017), identity here is understood as "a shared understanding of the collective self, where the collective self of principal interest is the state as an actor on the global stage" (p.575).

<sup>18</sup> This logic stems from the concept of 'narrative identity'.

adopted by the German far-right party 'Alternativ für Deutschland' (AfD) comes to mind. To a large extent, AfD mirrors Russian discourses regarding the invasion: it often uses historical analogies when criticising the decisions of the Bundestag regarding support for Ukraine (e.g., AfD Kompakt, 2023). The party members also refer to the German past, claiming that most German politicians forget what role Germany promised to play in the post-World War II reality, thus playing into Russia's 'spheres of influence' narrative (Zavershinskaia, 2023, p.141-142). Zavershinskaia (2023) also analysed the far-right media outlet 'Journalistenwatch' and found even more obvious traces of the Russian GPW myth. The journal accused Ukraine of hiding neo-nazism behind self-victimisation. Far-right actors rely on Russian discourse and create alternative discourses in their respective countries. Thus, analysing far-right discourse on the presence of the myth of the GPW could be an interesting continuation of this research. Schmitt (2018) argues that strategic narratives need to resonate with local political myths to be effective. The opposite, however, also seems to be true: strategic narratives need to also be based on internationally recognised and familiar political myths to bring results.

## **Russia, Political Myth and Strategic Narratives**

Before we delve into the analysis of the findings, it is important to outline the general role of the Russian Embassies in promoting the Kremlin's view on world events and the place of the Russian Federation in the international system.

### ***The Role of Embassies***

Russian Embassies function as the public face of a nation's foreign policy abroad. They are used not only for traditional diplomacy but also as active tools in a larger strategy of narrative control and geopolitical impact. The Russian Embassies are known to closely follow the guidelines set by President Putin; to a large extent, they represent his personal perspective on the world (Kravchyk, 2022). They follow the broader information strategy of the country, often aligning the content of their social media pages with the statements made by different governmental and non-governmental Russia-affiliated actors (Myth Detector, 2023; Kravchyk, 2022).

Since the start of the full-scale invasion, the accounts of Russian embassies have become one of the most active instruments for pushing the Kremlin's agenda (Myth Detector, 2023). The quantities of content produced on their social media pages monthly<sup>19</sup> and their level of

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<sup>19</sup> For the visual representation of the activity of the Russian Embassies on Facebook and Telegram, see *Embassy Tracker* by The Beacon Project <https://dash-iribeaconproject.org/embassy-tracker/>.

aggressiveness have increased significantly, with the Russian Embassy in Bratislava even being called the most virulent in Europe (Hajdari, 2023). In many European countries, such as Slovakia and Bulgaria, Russian embassies are not only active but also very good at influencing public opinion. The Russian embassy in Sofia, for instance, is well-known for having high social media interaction rates, indicating that its messages are well-received by the local public and perhaps reflecting a purposeful alignment with local narratives and views (Euractiv, 2023).<sup>20</sup>

The social media platforms of the Embassies provide a direct and immediate means to communicate with the public in host countries, bypassing traditional media filters. They allow to spread the information quickly and efficiently. This includes the strategic employment of narratives, which may be used to instil a Russian version of the truth, as well as to challenge Western narratives that Moscow regards as dangerous. Examining these posts can help understand how narratives are produced and changed in reaction to current world events, offering a dynamic glimpse of Russia's strategic narrative efforts in real-time. Such characteristics make the (online) activities of the Russian diplomatic missions in Europe particularly suitable for the goals of this analysis.

### ***Presenting the Findings***

In this section, the findings of the analysis of the Russian Embassy in Latvia's Telegram page content will be presented and contextualised. The analysis is based on the results of the computational topic modelling (Annex 7) and manual content analysis (Annex 8); the section is structured to reflect the main narratives discovered during the analysis.

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<sup>20</sup> Outside of the online space, a common way for the embassies to push a strategic narrative is to organise events in the host country that the national media will cover. Such events create a platform for disseminating the narrative, as they give voice to the foreign policy actor (Zhukova, 2023). Similarly, any media presence, be it a press conference, an interview or an official statement, works as a narrative promotion tool (Gilboa, 2001).

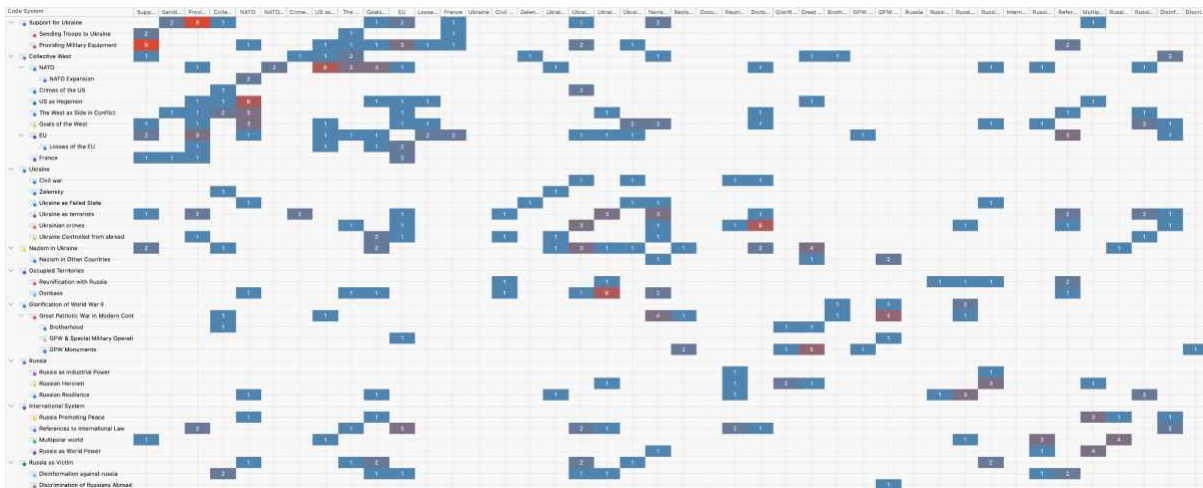


Figure 7: Code relations map based on the data from the Russian Embassy in Latvia's Telegram page

Internationally established political myths of Russia often exist in synchronicity and produce strategic narratives that relate to numerous myths at the same time. For example, the Great Power myth, discussed in Chapter 2, gives basis to many strategic narratives while remaining connected to the GPW myth. Makarychev and Yatsyk (2014) argue that hosting the Olympics in Sochi and occupying Crimea in 2014 – the events that gave rise to a lot of Russian external narratives – were both aimed at the same goal: normalising the Russian great power status in the international community (p.74). These seemingly different events, the authors argue, “are grounded in a similar type of political imagery and aesthetics of power” (ibid., p.63). Among the strategic narratives produced around these events are the narrative of Russia protecting its sovereignty, the narrative of Russia’s national supremacy, Russia having to act a certain way because other great powers do, etc. The authors point out that many of these narratives relied heavily on the Soviet past (ibid, p.67-71), thus invoking not only the Great Power myth but also the myth of the GPW.<sup>21</sup>

A similar tendency is visible in the analysis of the Russian Embassy’s data (Visualisation 5). Many posts contained references to very different strategic narratives and connected various political myths. For example, Russia’s capacities in the international arena (Russia as World Power code), its efforts in peace promotion (Russia Promoting Peace code) and the necessity to rebuild the current world order in favour of the multipolar system (Multipolar World code)

<sup>21</sup> Interestingly, opposing the ‘Ukrainian malign external forces’, often mentioned at the first stages of the Russian aggression, was also initially framed in terms of the Great Power myth. Now, however, we clearly see that the GPW myth took the central role when it comes to justifying the aggression.



have often been discussed in the same context, connecting three different strategic narratives and grounding them in the myth of Russia as Great Power:

*Through parallel play on several 'chessboards' at once, Moscow will be able to bring the reformatting of both domestic politics and the international system to its logical conclusion, leaving behind the period of unipolar hegemonism. We will undoubtedly come to a lasting and durable peace, but it will come through a show of confidence and strength, both internal and external. (207)<sup>22</sup>*

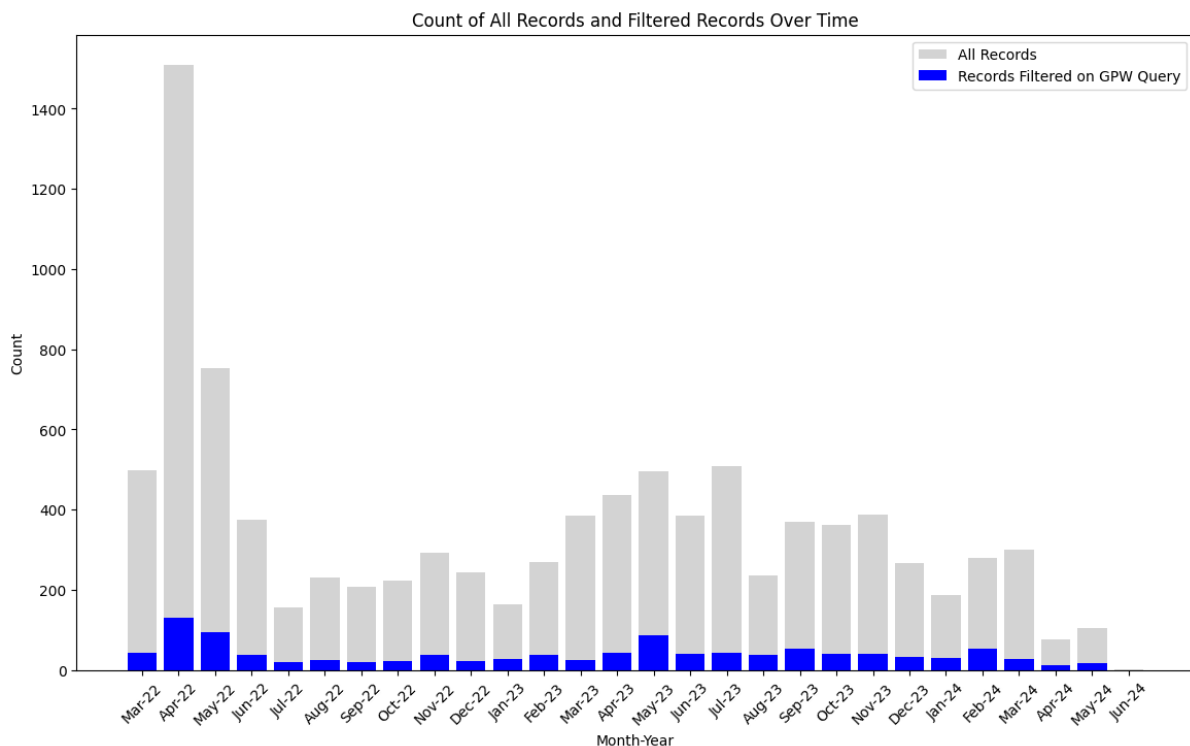


Figure 8: Analysis of GPW Keywords Mentions in the Embassy’s Discourse in Comparison to All Records: March 2022 - May 2024.

In the discourse of the Russian Embassies, the Great Patriotic War without a doubt holds an important position; references to the GPW account for about 6-10 per cent of all posts monthly, with only the first three months of the page’s existence as exemptions (Graph 6).

<sup>22</sup> In original Russian: “Через параллельную игру сразу на нескольких «шахматных досках» Москве удастся довести до логического завершения переформатирование и внутренней политики, и международной системы, оставив позади период однополярного гегемонизма. К прочному и долговременному миру мы, несомненно, придём — но придём через проявление уверенности и силы, как внутренней, так и внешней.” NB: all Russian text has been translated using DeepL Translator (DeepL, 2024).

The numbers in brackets correspond with the number of the entry in the [Full List of Coded Segments](#) file.

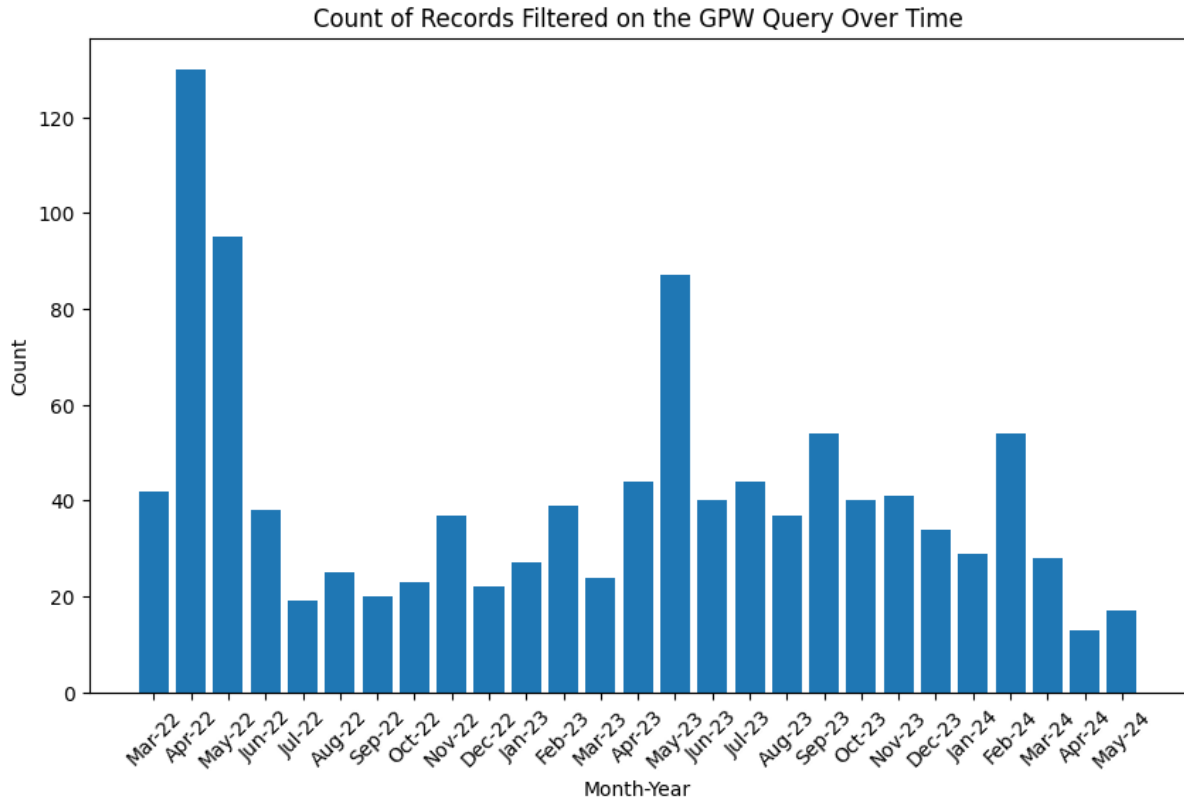


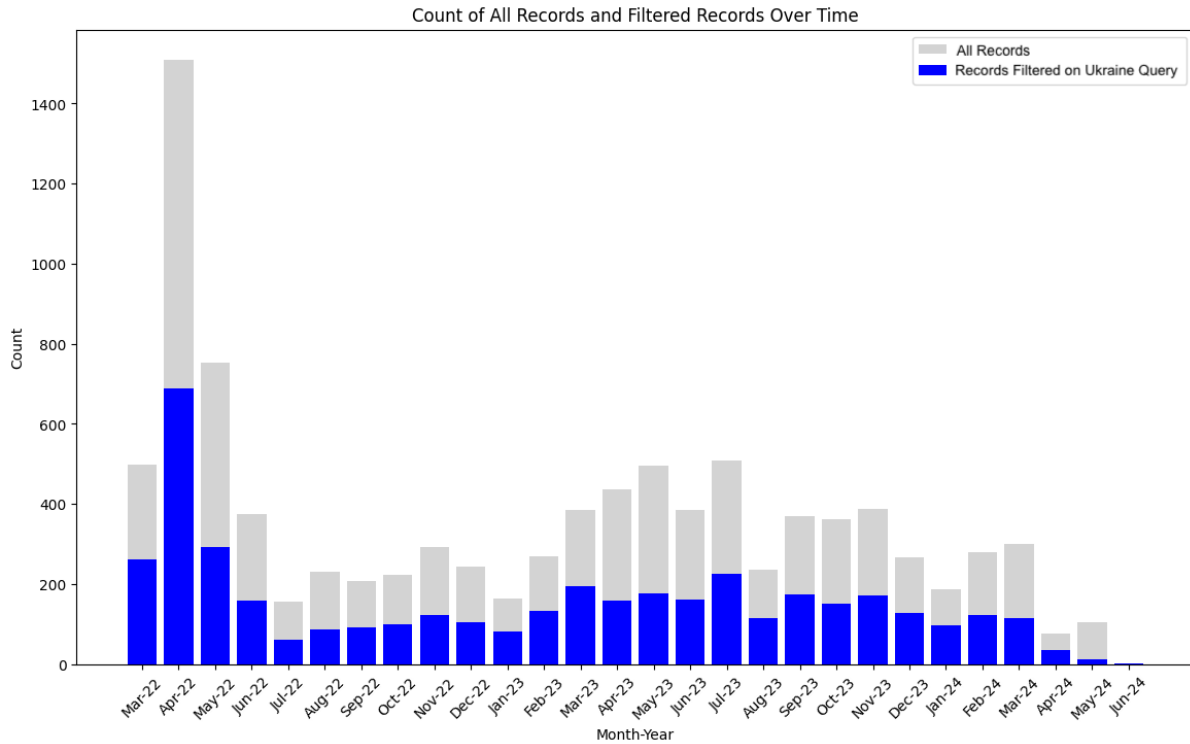
Figure 9: Tracking the Evolution of Keyword Mentions in Embassy’s Discourse: March 2022 - May 2024

As evident from Graph 7, the memory of the GPW was employed particularly often at the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, with almost 130 references made in April 2022 alone. The ways of using the GPW memory are numerous, varying from trying to win the battle of interpretations of the World War II events<sup>23</sup> to crafting the stories around the Kremlin’s current wars.

In the context of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the external dimension of the GPW myth plays an exceptionally prominent role. The 2013 large-scale informational campaign that preceded the first invasion was based on the GPW narratives (see Graphs 1&2). At this time, the emotional power of the war lexicon was first revived: pro-European Ukrainians were most often referred to as 'fascists ' or 'nazis ', responsible, among other things, for an alleged revival

<sup>23</sup> Some scholars reflected on the Russian narrative differences around the Second World War depending on the context and the recipient. Kangaspuro and Lassila’s (2012) discussion on the discourse around the Kurile Islands is a notable example. According to them, when justifying current borders to the domestic audience, Russia uses Soviet veterans’ sacrifices in the Great Patriotic War as a rationale for its sovereignty over these lands. At the same time, Russia is shifting its narrative focus from the Great Patriotic War to World War II on the international stage. This strategic change is important because while the GPW’s narrative has been exclusive to the Soviet Union and later Russia, WWII is a globally acknowledged historical event and has international agreements accepted universally on delimitation and land transfer.

of Ukrainian anti-Semitism. Such framing was expected to have a significant influence on international public opinion (Domańska, 2019, p.9). To this day, the Special Military Operation pretends to be a modern-day continuation of the Great Patriotic War and a noble fight against nazis that are holding Ukrainians hostage (Kumankov, 2023). Myriads of smaller-scale narratives were formed at this time (e.g., the political brand “Z”).



*Figure 10: Analysis of Ukraine Query Terms Mentions in the Embassy’s Discourse in Comparison to All Records: March 2022 - May 2024*

In the discourse of the Russian Embassy in Latvia, Ukraine, as expected, holds the most prominent role, with almost half of the content posted being about or in some way referring to Ukraine (Graph 8). The analysis of the Ukraine-related posts from the first five months of 2024 revealed the stability of the core Russian strategic narratives. The current story of the war is not too different from how it was told in 2022 or even a decade ago, in 2014. The core elements of the current narration are very similar to those outlined by Brown (2017): a narrative of Russia; a narrative of the United States and the European Union and their role; and a narrative of the situation in Ukraine (p.177). This creates an illusion of a three-sided conflict, where Ukraine is fighting, the West is controlling Ukraine in this fight, and Russia is defending itself and the rest of the world from their aggression.

The narrative of Russia is multifaceted and presents the country as an innocent victim that excels in its struggle with the unjust world order and military conflict due to its heroism,

resilience and industrial might. The greatness of the Russian people is the central element of this narrative and is often grounded in references to other 'heroic' events in Russian history. The references to history are numerous and aim to invoke feelings of pride and patriotism:

*In a complex world that is changing rapidly, we must be self-sufficient and competitive, opening new horizons for Russia as it has already happened many times in our history. (19)<sup>24</sup>*

This is where the memory of the GPW gains prominence yet again. It serves as an event that connects the enemy, its supporters and Russians in a coherent story. There is a clear continuous line drawn between the struggle of the Soviet Russians and the struggle of the modern Russians:

*In the 20th century, both at the dawn of the Civil War and in the Great Patriotic War, our enemies made a lot of efforts to inflict a mortal wound on Russia by playing the Ukrainian card. Their plans, fortunately, were not destined to materialise, but through Petliura's and Bandera's ideology, the seeds of modern Ukrainian neo-Nazism were sown. The bloody provocation on the Maidan was supposed to be a point of no return, literally forcing the majority of the inhabitants of Ukraine to accept the dictatorship of an aggressive minority on the outside. (291)<sup>25</sup>*

The speculations about the victory of Russia in the war are also rooted in historical analogies. Victory is presented as inevitable; it has happened before and will happen again. According to McGlynn (2022), "The historical events perform not only a comparative but also a causal function: because the present event is the same as the past event, we know how the present event will develop (exactly like the past event)." (p.145)

*But they miscalculated - this is an absolutely obvious thing today: they faced the firm position and determination of our multinational people. (257)<sup>26</sup>*

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<sup>24</sup> In original Russian: "В сложном мире, который стремительно меняется, мы должны быть самодостаточными и конкурентоспособными, открывать для России новые горизонты как уже не раз бывало в нашей истории."

<sup>25</sup> In original Russian: "В XX веке, и на заре Гражданской войны, и в Великую Отечественную наши враги предпринимали массу усилий, дабы, разыграв украинскую карту, нанести России смертельную рану. Их планам, к счастью, не суждено было воплотиться в жизнь, но через петлюровскую и бандеровскую идеологию оказались посеяны семена современного украинского неонацизма. Кровавая провокация на Майдане должна была стать точкой невозврата, буквально заставить большинство жителей Незалежной смириться с диктатурой находящегося на внешнем содержании агрессивного меньшинства."

<sup>26</sup> In original Russian: "Но они просчитались – это сегодня уже абсолютно очевидная вещь: столкнулись с твёрдой позицией и решимостью нашего многонационального народа."

Many of the Embassy's posts have an affirmation-like structure:

*We are a united and great nation and together we will overcome all obstacles and realise everything we have planned. Together we will win! (21)*<sup>27</sup>

When it comes to the role of the West, they also fall into the GPW-based framework. Russia is presented as being subject to an information war about World War II that is supposed to cover the fact that neo-Nazism is growing in the US, the EU, and Ukraine (Dyner, 2020). Various Western countries and leaders are openly accused of nazism:

*K. Kallas is known as an extremely hostile statesman towards Russia, its culture and history. She actively pursues a policy of demolishing monuments and mocking the memory of Soviet soldiers who liberated Europe from fascist enslavement during World War II. (355)*<sup>28</sup>

*We view Canada as an extremely unfriendly state, whose authorities have stained themselves with complicity with Nazism by betraying their own history. (435)*<sup>29</sup>

The so-called 'discrimination' against Russians is framed as a new form of nazism that Russia should and will defeat:

*We see how the results of the Nuremberg trials are actually being revised in our days. In some countries, not only is history being rewritten and executioners justified: revanchists and neo-Nazis have adopted the ideology and methods of the Nazis. In the Baltic States, tens of thousands of people are declared 'subhuman' and deprived of the most basic rights, subjected to harassment.*

...

*In a number of European countries, Russophobia is being promoted as a state policy. We will do everything - everything - to suppress and finally eradicate nazism. The followers of nazi executioners, whatever they call themselves today, are doomed. And*

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<sup>27</sup> In original Russian: "Мы единый и великий народ и вместе преодолеем все преграды, воплотим в жизнь всё задуманное. Вместе победим!"

<sup>28</sup> In original Russian: "К.Каллас известна как крайне враждебно настроенный государственный деятель в отношении России, её культуры и истории. Она активно проводит политику по сносу памятников и глумлению над памятью советских солдат, освободивших Европу от фашистского порабощения в годы Второй мировой войны."

<sup>29</sup> In original Russian: "Рассматриваем Канаду как крайне недружественное государство, власти которого запятнали себя пособничеством нацизму, предав собственную историю."

*nothing will be able to stop the aspirations of millions of people, not only in our country but all over the planet, for true freedom, justice, peace and security. (445)<sup>30</sup>*

The United States is portrayed as a lawless superpower that has abandoned its vows not to expand NATO. In this sense, the EU is assisting American crimes by backing popular upheavals in nations inside Russia's sphere of interest. In this scenario, events in Ukraine are part of a Western-led political operation in which Ukrainian nationalists loyal to the Nazi government staged a coup. Ukraine is given full agency only when its 'crimes' and 'terrorist attacks' are discussed.

### *Importance of the Great Patriotic War Myth*

Both political myths and strategic narratives are intertwined with the concept of power and create the space for power to be exercised, thus becoming integral to the security of states (Wibben, 2011). Pushing a unified Russia-curated narrative of the Second World War gives the Kremlin the power to advocate for its desired world order. The narrative about how the Soviet Union freed Europe as the sole genuine opponent of nazism helps justify the "Yalta order" – the peak of Russia/USSR's great power status (Domańska, 2019, p.6). Any disruption to this narrative could endanger the country, as it will harm the biographical narrative of the Kremlin that serves as a basis for its interstate relations (Budrytė, 2021). Thus, the reminders about who the 'liberator of Europe' is are frequent in the official discourse, and find their reflection in the Embassy's page content as well:

*The 'figures' of the West stubbornly ignore or bypass the sacrifice of the peoples of the USSR in the Great Patriotic War. (348)<sup>31</sup>*

The better-established narratives, or political myths, as discussed in previous chapters, are also an important source of legitimacy. While this is most often discussed in the domestic context, state actors can just as well draw legitimacy from political myths in the international arena.

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<sup>30</sup> In original Russian: "Мы видим, как в наши дни фактически пересматриваются итоги Нюрнбергского процесса. В некоторых странах не только переписывают историю и оправдывают палачей: реваншисты и неонацисты взяли на вооружение идеологию и методы гитлеровцев. В государствах Прибалтики десятки тысяч людей объявляют «недочеловеками» и лишают самых элементарных прав, подвергают травле.

...

В ряде стран Европы русофобия продвигается как государственная политика. Мы сделаем всё – всё, чтобы пресечь и окончательно искоренить нацизм. Последователи нацистских палачей, как бы они себя сегодня ни называли, обречены. И ничто не сможет остановить стремление миллионов людей не только в нашей стране, но и на всей планете к подлинной свободе, к справедливости, миру и безопасности."

<sup>31</sup> In original Russian: "«Деятели» Запада в упор не замечают или обходят стороной жертву народов СССР в Великой Отечественной войне."

Some of this legitimacy also comes from the crafted strategic narrative itself: narratives naturalise the worldview of their creator and, by doing that, authorise the speaker (Holland and Mathieu, 2023, p. 3).

Many of the activities of the Russian Embassies are also centred around the war commemoration. There were numerous posts reminding about the heroism of the Russian army and certain individuals, as well as ways to honour them:

*... We always keep this memory alive, we are inspired by their service to the Motherland. Today we remember our great predecessors. Traditionally, on this day we lay flowers at the monument of E.M. Primakov, whose 95th anniversary we will celebrate in October this year. (372)<sup>32</sup>*

Through the promotion of the “Yalta order”, Russia is pursuing the legally redundant division of the so-called ‘zones of influence’ between the great powers, meaning that the ‘post-Soviet space’ (the term as outdated as the ambition behind it) shall remain under Russian influence. When framed as a basis for Russia’s great power status, the most obvious way to utilise the GPW myth in the international setting is by playing on the feelings of a shared past of Slavic/post-USSR countries. Suppose the narrative about Russia’s place in the world, and its great power status based on the memory of the Second World War is undermined. In that case, the Kremlin loses the ability to craft strategic narratives about ‘zones of influence’.

The Great Patriotic War has been used as a way to keep the ‘brotherly nations’ of the former Eastern bloc close (Marples, 2012). President Putin presents the shared legacy of a ‘victory’ that the now independent states of the former USSR need to honour together; in fact, these shared commemorations have political rather than moral significance (Malinova, 2011). The commemoration events take place at a high political level; both Putin and Medvedev travelled to other Slavic countries for commemoration events on multiple occasions. The Embassy emphasised the shared legacy and the need for joint commemorative rituals on multiple occasions:

*Particles were taken from the Eternal Flame at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, which representatives of the [Popular Front], famous artists, athletes, journalists and TV*

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<sup>32</sup> In original Russian: “... Всегда храним эту память, вдохновляемся их служением Родине. Сегодня вспоминаем наших великих предшественников. По традиции в этот день мы возлагаем цветы к памятнику Е.М.Примакова, 95-летие которого будем отмечать в октябре этого года.”

*presenters will bring to 14 countries around the world - countries in Europe, Asia and Africa, including Belarus, Algeria, Cyprus, Azerbaijan and Serbia. (22)*<sup>33</sup>

The legacy of the war, at the same time, is only 'shared' if it is the Russian version of the past that the countries agree upon. Any deviation from the official narrative is met with evident displeasure on the Russian side. This becomes particularly obvious when the monuments and memorials of the Red Army are removed from public places (Domańska, 2019).

*The Russophobic attitude and the West's encouragement of the neo-Nazi regime in Kyiv have given a powerful impetus to efforts by Poland, the Baltic States, Ukraine and other States to intensify, under the pretext of 'condemning Russian aggression', the fight against monuments and memorials in honour of Red Army soldiers who died in the battles to liberate Europe from nazism. In addition, history continues to be rewritten and collaborationism whitewashed. (517)*<sup>34</sup>

Walker (2018) used an example from his interview, brought up by former Georgian president Saakashvili: in 2006, when the new Museum of the Soviet Occupation was opened in Tbilisi, Saakashvili was lectured by Putin for "twisting of the countries' common Soviet history" (p. 106). The Kremlin actively reminds the governments of Russia's neighbouring countries, who 'liberated' them from the Nazi occupation.

The security dimension of Russia's biographical myths has even been institutionalised. For example, questioning "Russia's role in history" is perceived as a threat to cultural security, as outlined in Russia's current National Security Strategy. Sometimes, the narrative securitisation goes as far as calling for making relations with other countries conditional on the recognition of the Russian version of the war. Natalia Narochnitskaya, an infamous Russian historian, proposed a (luckily, unimplemented) idea of aligning the prices for gas with the willingness of the Western states to respect the Russian view of the Second World War (Walker, 2018, p.35).

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<sup>33</sup> In original Russian: От Вечного огня на Могиле Неизвестного Солдата были взяты частицы, которые представители [Народного фронта], известные артисты, спортсмены, журналисты и телеведущие привезут в 14 государств мира – страны Европы, Азии и Африки, в том числе Белоруссию, Алжир, Кипр, Азербайджан, Сербию.

<sup>34</sup> In original Russian: "Русофобский настрой и поощрение Западом неонацистского режима в Киеве придали мощный стимул стараниям Польши, стран Прибалтики, Украины и других государств усилить под предлогом «осуждения российской агрессии» борьбу с памятниками и мемориалами в честь воинов Красной Армии, погибших в боях за освобождение Европы от нацизма. Кроме того, продолжается переписывание истории и обеление коллаборационизма."



Coming back to the notion of the separation of the world into 'zones of interest' justified by the Soviet 'victory' in the Second World War, Russia is using the shared past to limit the sovereignty of its neighbours, and ensure what is otherwise known as 'non-equal sovereignty'. 'Brotherly' Central and East European countries are expected to conform to Russian interests rather than their own; such a situation implies the formation of some buffer zone around this region (Liekis & Rusinaitė, 2019). Russia's perceived military might that stems from past victory is a big factor when it comes to 'maintaining' its sphere of influence. If such an order is accepted by international partners or rather if Russia believes that it is, this gives the Kremlin the justification for interfering – be it because of the Eurointegration of its neighbours or the NATO enlargement (Domańska, 2019, p.7).

*... the alliance's reckless expansion to the East, which has only led to fuelling confrontation in the post-Soviet space and creating threats to the security of the Russian Federation. (80)<sup>35</sup>*

The GPW myth also provides Russia with justification for its geopolitical projects in the former USSR space. Some of the international integration projects pushed by the Russian establishment, including a Customs Union, a Eurasian Economic Community, and a Collective Security Treaty Organization, were justified by the shared memory of the war (Marples, 2012).

Another way to use the memory of the GPW is to gain political influence on the broader international level – in intergovernmental organisations. The Kremlin aggressively tries to inscribe its 'victory' into the history of the world and to leave as little space as possible for seeing the Russian Federation as anything but a heroic state that deserves respect. Every year since 2012, The Kremlin would submit a draft of a non-binding resolution to the United Nations (UN) General Assembly against the glorification of nazism. It was first approved by 130 votes in 2021 and then again in 2022, with most European countries voting against it (Les Décodeurs, 2021). By promoting a unified narrative of the war year after year, the Kremlin tries to solidify the perception of Russia, the main successor to the USSR, as a protector of the world, capable of defeating evil. Suddenly, it is not only the CEE states that Russia supposedly has the right to interfere with. Framing itself as a protector creates an illusion of the right to influence the world order in general (Fusiek, 2022).

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<sup>35</sup> In original Russian: "... безоглядное расширение альянса на Восток, которое привело лишь к разжиганию конфронтации на постсоветском пространстве и созданию угроз безопасности Российской Федерации."

The annual resolution is not the only attempt of Russia to gain the UN's backing for its memory politics. In 2019, Moscow pushed for the recognition of the monuments and memorials to the USSR soldiers to be recognised as world heritage. The motivation behind proposing a relevant resolution to the UN General Assembly was, once again, to “prevent the rebirth of Nazism” (United Nations, 2020). Such a resolution, if passed, would give the Kremlin the right to pressure other governments if they were to remove the monuments (Domańska, 2019).

Another crucial narrative related to the ‘brotherly nations’, ‘great power status’ and ‘Russia as a besieged fortress’ stories is the narrative of the Russian World (*Russkiy mir*). The term ‘Russian World’ alludes to the notion of a civilization that exists beyond the Russian Federation's present national borders, with Russia seeing itself as its political and cultural hub (Tamm, 2022, p.148). The notion of ‘protecting the Russian people abroad’ is particularly interesting in this context. Putin repeatedly linked the recognition of Crimea as a Russian sovereign territory to the ‘protection of the rights’ of Russian speakers; so did the Embassy. Ensuring the neutral demilitarised status of Ukraine is also often linked to this ‘issue’ (Zavershinskaia, 2023). This discourse revolves around Russians fulfilling their ‘duty to the Motherland’ and having a moral obligation to protect all Russian people. Since the start of the full-scale invasion, Russia started actively seeking out reasons for this ‘protection’. They range from the more generic ‘widespread discrimination’ against Russians in Europe to stories about specific Russians having their documents taken away and sent back to Russia. The issue of the Russian language is particularly acute as many countries, especially in the Baltics, rethink their language policies in light of the new security situation.

*Russian-language education has been banned in the Baltic States, and Russian-speaking citizens are frankly being squeezed out of the country. Of course, monuments to Russian writers have already been torn down. Quasi-civilised Europe is happily stepping into a new Middle Ages. This cannot be allowed to happen. Therefore, together with the Russian Foreign Ministry, journalists, and all people who are not indifferent, we are doing much to protect the rights of Russian-speaking citizens abroad, so that they know that the Motherland is near, and in any situation, they can say: ‘We are the people of a great country - Russia!’.* (305)<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> In original Russian: “В Прибалтике запретили образование на русском языке, а русскоязычных граждан откровенно выдавливают из страны. Разумеется, памятники русским писателям уже снесли. Квазицивилизованная Европа радостно шагает в новое Средневековье. Этого нельзя допустить. Поэтому вместе с МИД России, журналистами, всеми неравнодушными людьми, мы многое делаем для защиты

page | 58

The idea of the Russian World and the need to protect the compatriots is based on historical politics, with Soviet history playing the dominant role (Tamm, 2022; Dyner, 2020). It exists in opposition to what is outside the 'civilisation' and belongs to the 'Western world'; this narrative goes hand-in-hand with Russia's core strategic ambition of establishing a multipolar world (Miskimmon & O'Loughlin, 2017).

Speaking of the multipolar world: the narrative about the necessity of building a new more democratic and inclusive world order is one of the most prominent Russian narratives of the last two years. The narrative emphasises the need for an 'equal system' as opposed to one dominated by the West/the US (varies based on the context) and based on colonialism that they, according to Russia, are not ready to let go of. It is unclear whether the multipolar system already exists or still needs to be established; as it often happens with the Russian narratives, the narrative is manipulated to fit the context. The same goes for the role of Russia in this new world order: it varies from being a great power that is willing to give up its status for the greater good, to the oppressed state that can fulfil its potential only in the multipolar system. Russia in this tale is sometimes even presented as part of the 'dominated south' that rebelled and started its plea for justice:

*The West's unwillingness to accept the end of the 'unipolar moment' and its desire to isolate Russia, which did not want to submit to the 'rules-based order', could not meet any other reaction than the decision to play ahead of the curve and create a security system alternative to the US-centric hegemonic vertical. (170)<sup>37</sup>*

*Many people in the world are looking at us, at what is happening in our country and in our struggle for their interests. <...> They associate our struggle for our independence and true sovereignty with their aspirations for their own sovereignty and independent development. (214)<sup>38</sup>*

Russian narration of achieving peace in Ukraine is closely interlinked with the narrative of the multipolar world. It is centred around the claim that the peaceful coexistence of all countries in

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прав русскоязычных граждан за рубежом, чтобы они знали: Родина рядом, и в любой ситуации могли сказать: «Мы - люди великой страны – России!»

<sup>37</sup> In original Russian: “Нежелание Запада смириться с окончанием «однополярного момента» и стремление к изоляции России, не желавшей подчиняться «порядку, основанному на правилах», не могли встретить иной реакции, кроме решения сыграть на опережение и создать систему безопасности, альтернативную американоцентричной гегемонистской вертикали.”

<sup>38</sup> In original Russian: “Многие люди в мире смотрят на нас, на то, что происходит в нашей стране и в нашей борьбе за свои интересы. <...> Нашу борьбу за свою независимость и истинный суверенитет они связывают со своими чаяниями на свой собственный суверенитет и независимое развитие.”

the world can only be possible if the West/Washington starts taking the interests of Russia/Global South seriously.

*... It will only be possible to reach a formula of peaceful coexistence with cooperation in certain areas once Washington actually recognises our fundamental national interests and begins to negotiate in a serious manner. (234)<sup>39</sup>*

The peace initiatives regarding the war in Ukraine that are proposed by the West are also framed as unfair, one-sided and 'not serious'. It is the "partners from the Global South and East" that need to be listened to, as they have a genuine interest in contributing to peacemaking; their efforts, however, are not appreciated by the 'party of war'.

*... I am convinced that there would be more such proposals if Kyiv did not immediately reject the ideas of mediation put forward by the countries of the World Majority. (317)*

All in all, in the current context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the GPW myth connects historical military achievements to current battles and galvanises nationalistic feelings against alleged neo-Nazi dangers. This persistent narrative serves as a historical and moral compass, guiding Russia's claims of self-defence and moral superiority in the face of international criticism while also reinforcing its position as a defiant world power against a Western-led world order.

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<sup>39</sup> In original Russian: "Выйти же на формулу мирного сосуществования с сотрудничеством в отдельных областях получится только после того, как Вашингтон на деле признает наши коренные национальные интересы и начнёт договариваться по-серьёзному."

## Conclusions

In this Master's thesis, I have addressed the puzzling phenomenon of the employment of political myths, specifically the myth of the Great Patriotic War (GPW), in the official rhetoric of the Russian state. I analysed the potency and form of the GWP myth amidst the Russian full-scale aggression against Ukraine and its purposeful utilisation in the domestic context by Russian President Vladimir Putin and in the international context by the Russian Embassy in Latvia. This thesis adds greatly to the academic subject of political mythology by giving a thorough case study of the GPW myth. It emphasises the functional importance of myths in modern politics by using Bottici's (2007) idea of myths as a combination of historical memory and aspirational narratives. It demonstrates the role of political myths in defining national identity and political legitimacy and encourages further investigation into other political myths and their effects on modern politics.

In the domestic context, the GPW myth acts as a communal memory that unites past glory with ongoing problems thereby perpetuating a feeling of coherence and nationalistic love for one's country. The GPW's myth is firmly established in the minds of the community and it plays a crucial role in determining how Russians see themselves and interpret their roles through time. This long-standing narrative continues to shape how Russians perceive their country's place in the world and their duties as citizens within it.

The Russian government, particularly under Russian President Vladimir Putin, strategically uses the Great Patriotic War myth to legitimise its rule. Through setting the latest political actions, particularly the invasion of Ukraine, in the heroic narrative GPW the government attempts to bring together the population to support its policies. The recurrent presentation of the Russian war against Ukraine as an extension of the longstanding battle against nazism serves to arouse intense feelings and personal responsibility in Russians thereby knitting today's politics with the past. The importance of such employment is exemplified by its assistance in entrenching political steadiness and leadership. GPW's imagery also makes ordinary political objectives understandable by everyone through emotional attachment thereby generating public support for activities performed by the government as a whole. This strategic framing not only consolidates support but also suppresses any opposition by appealing to strongly held patriotic feelings.

The GPW myth has its strength in adaptability. The myth changes to suit political conditions that shift over time. Its adaptability leads to resonance with diverse people across different

times, making it effective under a variety of political circumstances which preserve its potential for legitimating and activating a following. By changing to address current difficulties and concerns, the GPW myth maintains its power as a uniting and legitimising force.

The GPW myth does not operate in isolation but is integrated with other political myths both domestically and internationally. Such interweaving of interconnected concepts results in the emergence of a strong ideological base that provides for a consistent and convincing story of Russia being a tough, potent, and morally rightful player in the international arena. The combined nature of such myths helps in increasing their effectiveness by ensuring a coherent story, emphasising the historical basis of Russia's greatness and its relevance today.

When focusing on the international level, the concept of political myth and the myth of the Great Patriotic War specifically served as an analytical lens through which the external dimension of Russian narration of its aggression against Ukraine was explained. It has become evident that Russia's strategic narratives are strongly connected to the country's foundational political myths. The GPW myth grounds the events of the Russian war against Ukraine in the emotive story of Russia's role in ending World War II and, thus, facilitates the creation and boosts the impactfulness of modern Russian strategic narratives. The myth is repurposed into shaping political messages that justify Russia's foreign policy decisions and counteract any Western affluence. The use of the GPW myth enables Russia to display a sense of virtue and describe its past as a continuity story, it gives support for its international position.

When evaluating the narratives used by the Russian government locally and internationally, numerous major parallels and distinctions emerge. Domestically, the GPW myth is depicted with a patriotic tone, highlighting courage, sacrifice, and togetherness. Themes include national pride, resilience, and the moral soundness of Russia's past and present acts. Historical events and personalities are idealised, establishing the notion of a continuous lineage of valour from World War II to the present. Internationally, the myth adopts a tone of resistance and moral superiority. The GPW myth is reframed to portray Russia as a defender of global stability and a bulwark against Western aggression. Themes include opposition to Western hegemony, protection of traditional values, and support of a multipolar world system. Historical events are carefully employed to create similarities between the past and the present, establishing Russia as a constant force for good on the international scene. While both narratives rely on the GPW myth, the domestic focus is inward, encouraging national unity, whilst the international focus is outward, attacking external opponents and justifying Russia's foreign policy decisions. This

dual deployment highlights how easily the myth can be applied to shape both internal and external perspectives.

### *Limitations*

This study has a few limitations that stem from the choice of data sources. Focusing on the presidential and diplomatic rhetoric, while valid, does not represent the full picture of how the political myth of the GPW functions. Analysing political myths is a challenging task due to their deep-rootedness in communal awareness and the difficulty of capturing their entire influence. Thus, future studies should look at how these myths are integrated into society as a whole, as well as how different social and political actors understand them. There is a need for more research focused on discourse at various levels; subsequent studies should explore the degree to which the mythical narratives of the Great Patriotic War have been assimilated and reconstructed by the domestic and international mass media, political adversaries of the government, as well as scholars and intellectuals.

Another potential area for future research is related to measuring the impact of political myths on different societal groups on both domestic and international levels. This study concentrates on the production and distribution of the GPW myth, but it does not go into its reception by various audiences. Understanding how various segments of the Russian people and foreign societies perceive and respond to these narratives would provide a fuller picture of their effectiveness and consequences. Moreover, the study is significantly context dependent, concentrating on the Russian narrative within the unique geopolitical environment surrounding its invasion of Ukraine. This peculiarity may restrict the findings' applicability to other situations including other historical narratives and political mythologies. Comparative studies of how countries use political myths in situations of conflict may provide more significant insights.

Understanding the GPW myth's influence in Russian politics has significant policy consequences. Understanding how this myth is used to rally support and justify acts might help construct successful counter-narratives. Such techniques are critical for fighting Russian disinformation and influence activities on both a domestic and international scale. Policy-makers may more effectively contest and reduce the effects of the GPW myth by constructing counter-narratives that address its emotive and symbolic significance, resulting in a more balanced and nuanced view of Russia's actions and intentions.

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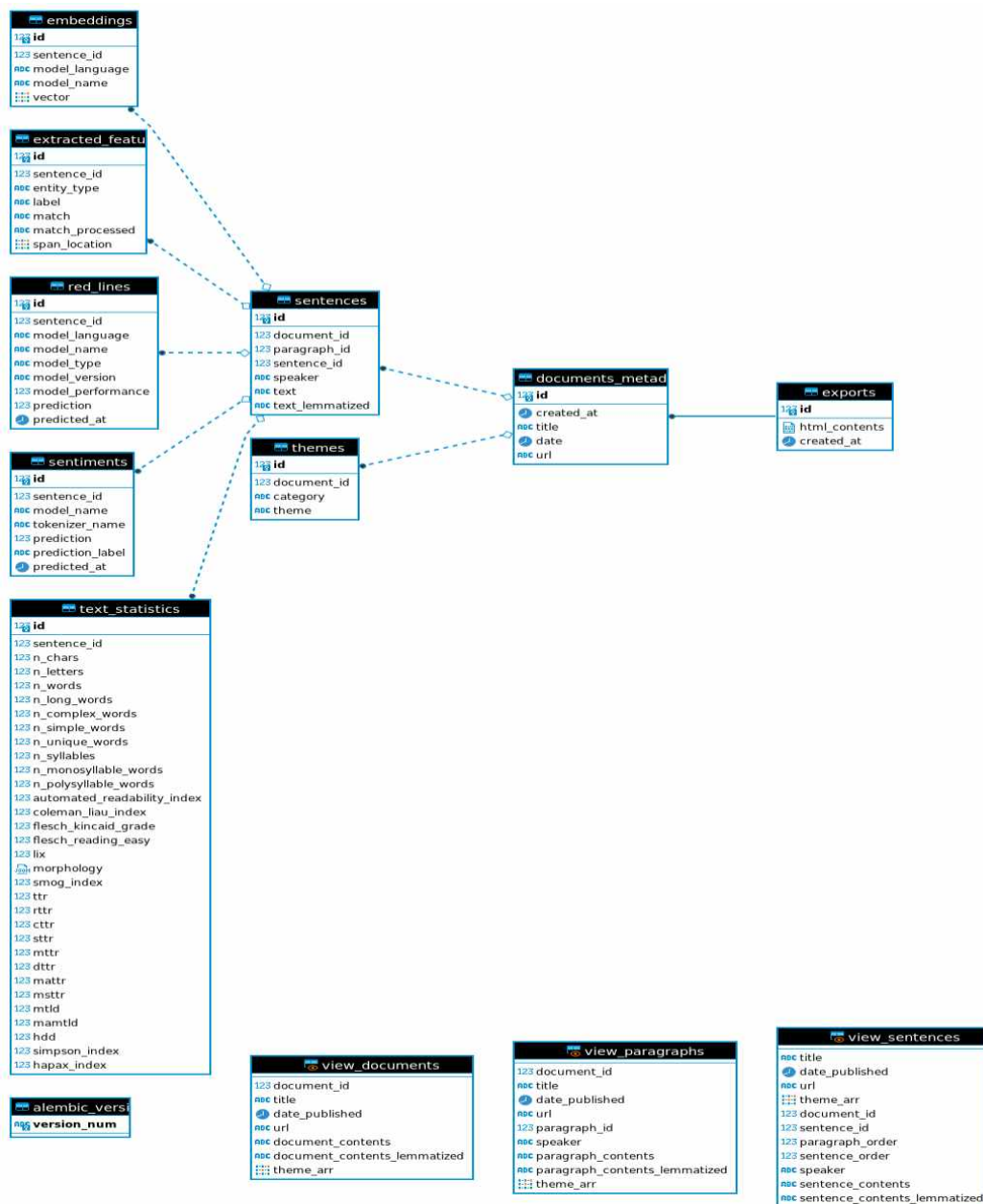
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## Annexes

### Annex 1 - 'Russian Statements' Corpus<sup>40</sup>

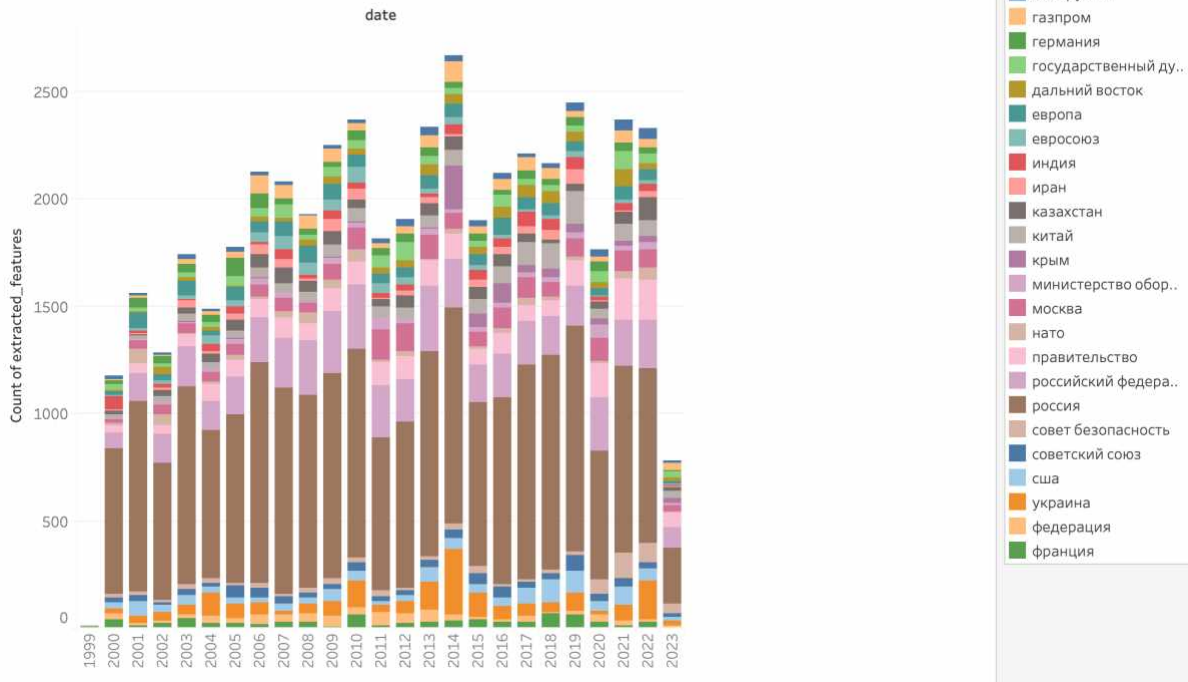
- **Information on the corpus:**
  - The transcripts of all presidents' statements as published on the official [Kremlin website](#);
  - N = 11,871;
  - Timespan: 31.12.1999 - now (the corpus is updated twice a week);
  - Data in the corpus:



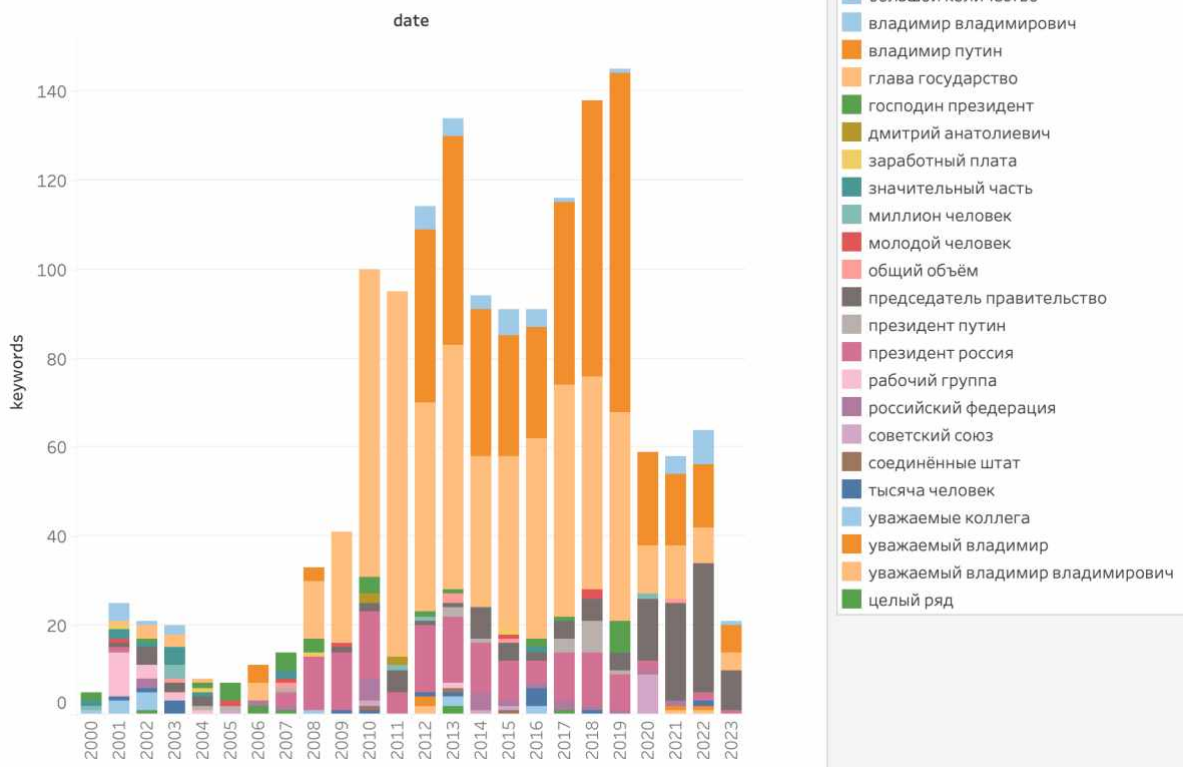
<sup>40</sup>Technical descriptions in the Annexes were written with the help from ChatGPT 4 (OpenAI, 2023).

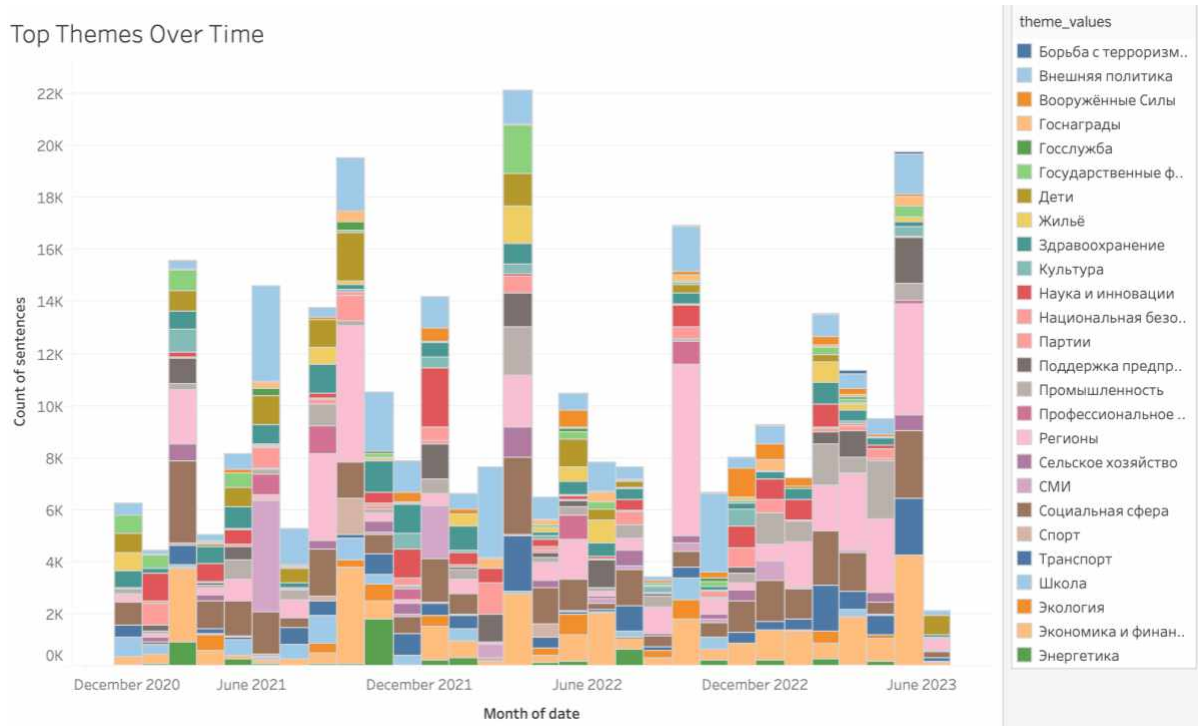
● **Contents of the corpus:**

Top Named Entities Over Time



Top Key Noun Phrases Over Time (2000-2023)





- **Example of other works using this corpus:** De Spiegeleire, S. (2021). *Putting it together by bringing 'influence' back in: Exploring European influencing options across different future Russias*. The Hague Center for Strategic Studies. Retrieved 14 May 2024, from <https://hcss.nl/report/rubase-bringing-influence-back-in/>

**Annex 2 - Keywords**

<b>Original Phrase</b>	<b>Translation in English</b>	<b>Lemmatized Russian Phrase</b>
9 мая	May 9th	9 май
Белградская операция	Belgrade Operation	белградский операция
Белорусская операция	Belarusian Operation	белорусский операция
Битва за Одессу	Battle for Odessa	битва за одесса
Битва за Севастополь	Battle for Sevastopol	битва за севастополь
Блокада Ленинграда	Siege of Leningrad	блокада ленинград
Блокадный хлеб	Siege bread	блокадный хлеб
Бои с нацизмом	Fighting Nazism	бой с нацизм
Борьба за родину	Struggle for the Motherland	борьба за родина
Брестская крепость	Brest Fortress	брестский крепость
Великая Отечественная война	Great Patriotic War	великий отечественный война
Великая победа	Great Victory	великий победа
Ветеран	Veteran	ветеран
Ветеранское движение	Veterans Movement	ветеранский движение
Виленская операция	Vilnius Operation	виленский операция
Военный парад	Military Parade	военный парад



Воинское товарищество?	Military Comradeship?	воинский товарищество
Героизм	Heroism	героизм
Героическая правда	Heroic Truth	героический правда
Герои Советского Союза	Heroes of the Soviet Union	герой советский союз
Гитлеровцы	Hitlerites	гитлеровец
Годовщина победы	Victory Anniversary	годовщина победа
Город-герой	Heroic city	город-герой
Геройский город	Heroic city	геройский город
День великой победы	Day of Great Victory	день великий победа
Добровольцы	Volunteers	доброволец
Жертвы войны	War casualties	жертва война
Защита Отечества	Defense of the Homeland	защита отечество
Историческая победа	Historic Victory	исторический победа
Капитуляция Германии	Capitulation of Germany	капитуляция германия
Красная Армия	Red Army	красный армия
Красный флот	Red Fleet	красный флот
Кронштадт	Kronstadt	кронштадт
Могила неизвестного солдата	Tomb of the Unknown Soldier	могила неизвестный солдат
Нацистская армия	Nazi Army	нацистский армия

Оборона Киева	Defense of Kyiv	оборона киев
Оборона Ленинграда	Defense of Leningrad	оборона ленинград
Общая Победа	Common Victory	общий победа
Освобождение Беларуси	Liberation of Belarus	освобождение беларусь
Освобождение Вены	Liberation of Vienna	освобождение вена
Освобождение Киева	Liberation of Kyiv	освобождение киев
Освобождение Праги	Liberation of Prague	освобождение прага
Освобождение Европы	Liberation of Europe	освобождение европа
Отцы и деды	Fathers and Grandfathers	отец и дед
Парад в регионах	Parade in the Regions	парад в регион
Парад на Красной площади	Parade on Red Square	парад на красный площадь
Парад Победы	Victory Parade	парад победа
Партизаны	Partisans	партизан
Победа над фашизмом	Victory Over Fascism	победа над фашизм
Победа над нацизмом	Victory Over Nazism	победа над нацизм
Подвиг солдат	Feat of the Soldiers	подвиг солдат
Подпольщики	Underground Fighters	подпольщик
Праведная война	Just War	праведный война
Праздник Победы	Victory Day	праздник победа
Разгром фашизма	Defeat of Fascism	разгром фашизм

Родина-мать	Motherland	родина-мать
Советско-германский фронт	Soviet-German Front	советско-германский фронт
Советские подлодки	Soviet Submarines	советский подлодка
Сталин	Stalin	сталин
Сталинград	Stalingrad	сталинград
Тыл	Home Front	тыл
Труженики тыла	Workers on the Home Front	труженик тыл
Форум победителей	Forum of the Victors	форум победитель
Вторая мировая война	World War II	второй мировой война

### Annex 3 - The Keywords Query

#### How does the query work:

- The query operates on a field named [Sentence Contents Lemmatized];
- It checks this text field for a series of specified keywords and key phrases (see Annex 1);
- Operators:
  - CONTAINS function searches for the terms within the lemmatized sentences;
  - OR is used to link these checks, which means the function returns TRUE if any one of the terms is found within the sentence.
  - IF assigns a value of 1 for each sentence where any of the specified terms is found, and 0 otherwise.
  - SUM aggregates these values across the dataset; it represents the frequency of GPW-related content within the dataset.

#### The actual query used:

SUM(

```
IF CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "9 май") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "белградский операция") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "белорусский операция") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "битва за одесса") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "битва за севастополь") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "блокада ленинград") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "блокадный хлеб") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "бой с нацизм") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "борьба за родина") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "брестский крепость") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "ветеран") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "ветеранский движение") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "виленский операция") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "военный парад") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "воинский товарищество") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "героизм") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "герой советский союз") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "героический правда") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "гитлеровец") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "годовщина победа") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "город-герой") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "геройский город") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "день великий победа") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "доброволец") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "жертва война") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "защита отечество") OR
```

```
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "исторический победа") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "капитуляция германия") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "красный армия") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "красный флот") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "кронштадт") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "могила неизвестный солдат") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "нацистский армия") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "оборона киев") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "оборона ленинград") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "общий победа") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "освобождение беларусь") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "освобождение вена") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "освобождение киев") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "освобождение прага") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "освобождение европа") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "отец и дед") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "парад в регион") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "парад на красный площадь") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "парад победа") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "партизан") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "победа над фашизм") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "победа над нацизм") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "подвиг солдат") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "подпольщик") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "праведный война") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "праздник победа") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "разгром фашизм") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "родина-мать") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "советско-германский фронт") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "советский подлодка") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "сталин") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "сталинград") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "тил") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "труженик тыл") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "форум победитель") OR
CONTAINS([Sentence Contents Lemmatized], "второй мировой война")
THEN 1 ELSE 0
END)
```

## **Annex 4 - Creating the 'Russian Embassy in Latvia' Corpus**

### Step 1: Data Collection from Telegram

This script automates the extraction of messages from specified Telegram channels using the Telethon library, which interfaces with Telegram's API. It initialises a session with credentials specific to the user, allowing access to channel data. Key functionalities include:

- **Connecting:** Establishes a connection with Telegram using an API ID.
- **Message Parsing:** Retrieves messages and associated details such as text, media presence, and reactions. It also parses replies to each message to create a comprehensive dataset.
- **Error Handling:** Includes retry logic to handle potential database lock errors during data extraction, ensuring robustness.
- **Output:** The parsed data, including channel metadata and message details, is serialised into JSON format and saved to a predefined directory.

### Step 2: Filtering and Visualising Data on GPW Keywords

Process Overview:

- **Data Preparation:** The script loads messages from a JSON file into a pandas DataFrame for structured data handling.
- **Text Normalization:** It employs the pymorphy2 library, a morphological analyser for the Russian language, to lemmatise the text of each message. Lemmatisation converts words to their base or dictionary forms, facilitating more accurate keyword searching.
- **Stopword Removal:** Utilises the nltk library to remove common Russian stopwords, which are words that do not add significant meaning to the text. This step helps in focusing data analysis on meaningful content.
- **Keyword Filtering:** A predefined list of keywords related to GPW themes (Annex 2) is used to filter messages. The script checks each lemmatized message for the presence of these keywords.
- **Data Saving:** Filtered messages are saved into a new JSON file for subsequent analysis or presentation.
- **Visualisation:** After filtering, the script visualises the distribution of messages over time using matplotlib libraries. It corrects any date inconsistencies, aggregates message

counts by month and year, and plots a bar chart showing the frequency of messages containing GPW keywords over the selected timeline.

### Step 3: Advanced Text Processing and Topic Modelling

- **Model Setup:** Uses BERTopic, a model that leverages BERT embeddings and clustering to identify topics within the cleaned text. This approach is well-suited for handling complex language data and extracting nuanced thematic structures.
- **Model Execution and Visualisation:** The script performs topic modelling, extracts topics, and visualises the distribution of documents across these topics. This provides a quantitative insight into the dominant discussions within the dataset.
- **Automated Label Generation:** Employs OpenAI's GPT-4 to generate concise labels for each identified topic. This is conducted by feeding selected documents and keywords into the model, which then suggests a label based on the content.
- **Integration and Output:** The generated labels are associated with their respective topics, providing an interpretable summary of the thematic content found in the Telegram messages.

### Step 4: Applying the 'Ukraine Query'

The process is very similar to filtering on the GPW Keywords Query and involves:

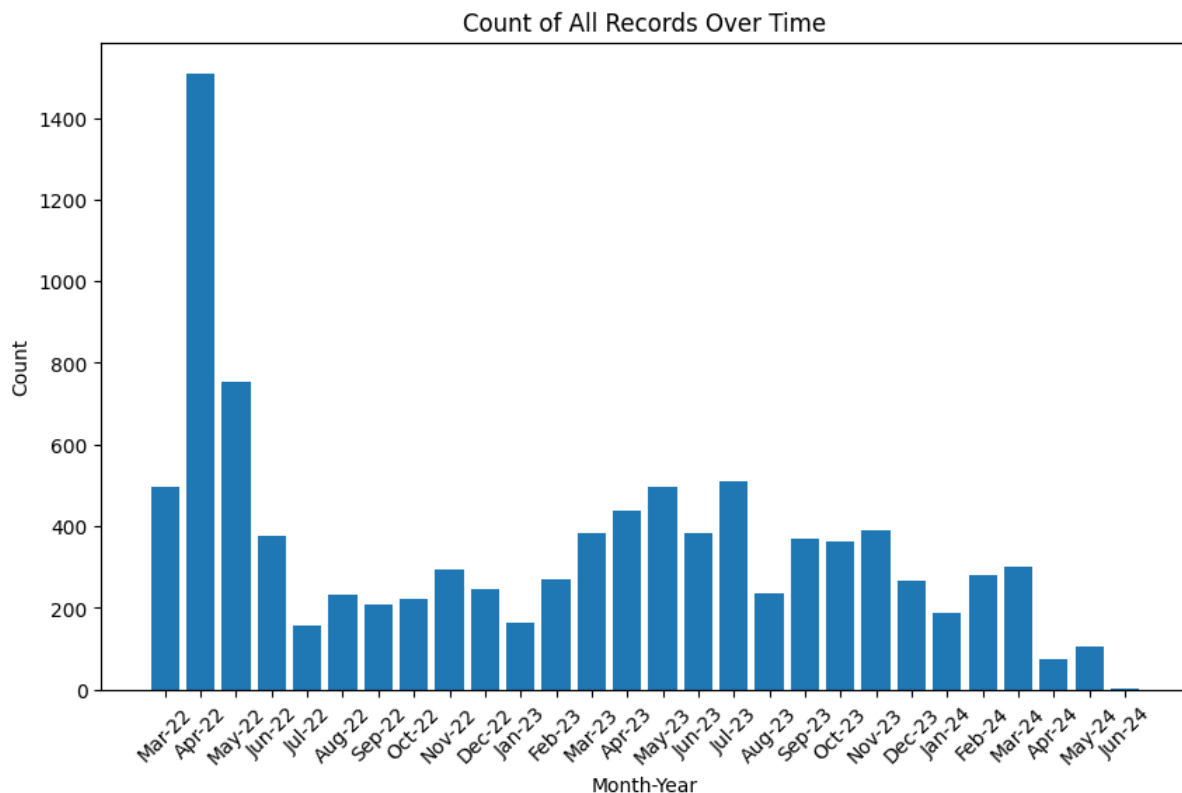
- **Data Loading and Cleaning:** Messages are loaded from a JSON file into a pandas DataFrame. URLs are removed from the text to clean up the data for further processing.
- **Text Lemmatization:** Similar to previous steps, the text is lemmatised using pymorphy2 to normalise the words to their base forms.
- **Keyword Filtering:** A new set of keywords specific to Ukraine-related themes (see Annex 6) is used to filter the dataset, isolating messages that are relevant to the research focus on Ukraine.
- **Temporal Analysis:** The filtered data undergoes a temporal analysis where messages are organised by their dates, and a bar chart is generated to visualise the count of records over time, providing insights into fluctuations in discussion volume related to Ukraine.
- **Topic Modeling:** Using BERTopic, the script performs topic modelling on the lemmatised and cleaned text to identify prevalent themes within the Ukraine-focused discussions (Annex 7).
- **Topic Label Generation Using GPT-4.**

## Annex 5 - 'Russian Embassy in Latvia' Corpus

- **Information on the raw corpus (before processing)**

- All the posts from the Telegram [page](#) of the Russian Embassy in Latvia;
- N = 9,714
- Timespan: 14.03.2022 - 01.06.2024
- [File](#)

Data in the corpus:



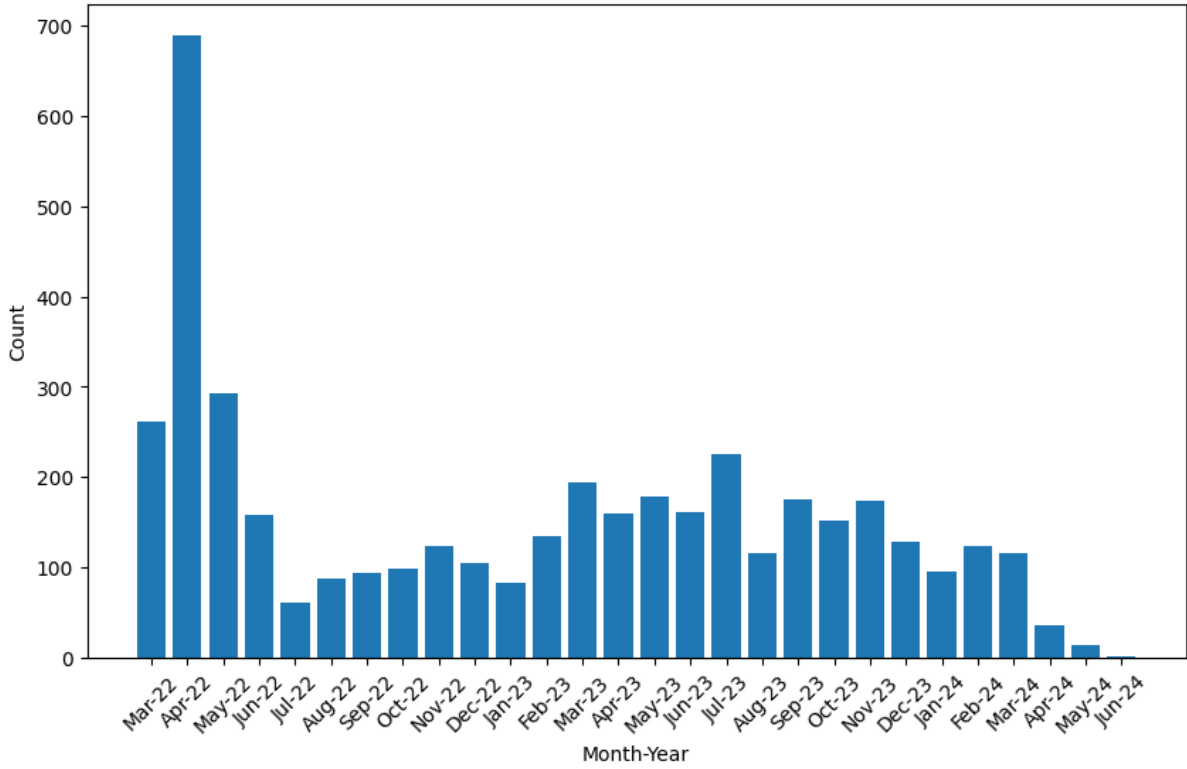
- **Information on the 'Ukraine Query' Filtered and Processed Corpus**

- Filtered on Ukraine-related keywords (Annex 6)
- N = 4,232
- Timespan: 14.03.2022 - 01.06.2024
- [File](#)



Data in the corpus:

Count of Records Filtered on the Ukraine Query Over Time



DocId	Date	Full date	source_text	Contains media	Reactions	Views	Forwards	Text without URLs	Normalized Text
9833	2024-04-01 08:14:29+00:00	2024-04-01T08:14:29+00:00	Президент России Владимир Путин и премьер Украины Владимир Зеленский в ходе переговоров в Париже обсудили ситуацию в Украине. Президент России подчеркнул, что в 1949 году этот праздник отмечался во многих странах, и в нашей стране в этот день вспоминают детей, убитых в результате военных действий. Жители все еще несут потери.	TRUE	(👍 11, 🗨️ 1, 📄 1, 📌 1)	315	7	Президент России Владимир Путин и премьер Украины Владимир Зеленский в ходе переговоров в Париже обсудили ситуацию в Украине. Президент России подчеркнул, что в 1949 году этот праздник отмечался во многих странах, и в нашей стране в этот день вспоминают детей, убитых в результате военных действий. Жители все еще несут потери.	президент россия владимир путин и премьер украины владимир зеленский
9838	2024-05-20 12:29:46+00:00	2024-05-20T12:29:46+00:00	Соблюдение качества и прозрачности является в результате курсом президента. Глубоко сожалеем о трагической гибели и результате курсом президента. Вклад будет платить эти выходящие политические детали как истинные переговоры. В России Президенту Сергею М. Рогову и Министру иностранных дел Сергею Лаврову. Инициатива соблюдения законов и борьбы с коррупцией, а также помощь украинскому народу. Имя С.В. ДИМИТРИЙ.	FALSE	(👍 18)	663	2	Соблюдение качества и прозрачности является в результате курсом президента. Глубоко сожалеем о трагической гибели и результате курсом президента. Вклад будет платить эти выходящие политические детали как истинные переговоры. В России Президенту Сергею М. Рогову и Министру иностранных дел Сергею Лаврову. Инициатива соблюдения законов и борьбы с коррупцией, а также помощь украинскому народу. Имя С.В. ДИМИТРИЙ.	соблюдение качество иностранных дел россия с в лавров
9839	2024-05-16 14:03:14+00:00	2024-05-16T14:03:14+00:00	Президент России Владимир Путин и премьер Украины Владимир Зеленский в ходе переговоров в Париже обсудили ситуацию в Украине. Президент России подчеркнул, что в 1949 году этот праздник отмечался во многих странах, и в нашей стране в этот день вспоминают детей, убитых в результате военных действий. Жители все еще несут потери.	TRUE	(👍 35, 🗨️ 5, 📄 4, 📌 1)	709	17	Президент России Владимир Путин и премьер Украины Владимир Зеленский в ходе переговоров в Париже обсудили ситуацию в Украине. Президент России подчеркнул, что в 1949 году этот праздник отмечался во многих странах, и в нашей стране в этот день вспоминают детей, убитых в результате военных действий. Жители все еще несут потери.	президент россия владимир путин и премьер украины владимир зеленский

## **Annex 6 - The 'Ukraine Query'**

### **How does the query work:**

Search for keywords within the text uses a function that checks each lemmatised text entry to see if any of the defined keywords are present. This is performed using a simple membership test where the function iterates over each word in the lemmatised text and checks if it is found in the set of keywords. Using the `contains_keywords` function, the script filters the DataFrame, retaining only those rows where the function returns True, meaning the text contains at least one of the predefined keywords. This results in a subset of the original data that specifically relates to Ukraine, based on the textual content of the messages.

### The actual query used:

```
ukraine_keywords = [  
    'украина', 'киев', 'київ', 'лавров', 'зеленский', 'путин',  
    'русский', 'россия', 'україна', 'российский', 'український',  
    'украинский', 'луганск', 'донецк', 'донбасс', 'керчь', 'крым',  
    'крымский', 'симферополь', 'одесса', 'харьков', 'харків', 'донецьк',  
    'луганськ', 'запорожье', 'запоріжжя', 'мариуполь', 'маріуполь'  
]
```

## Annex 7 - Topic Modelling

### Topic in Ukraine Filtered Dataset:

Topic 1:

санкция, ес, евросоюз, цена, страна, зерно, на, тонна, россия, газ

Topic 2:

международный, мир, государство, безопасность, оон, на, запад, страна, не

Topic 3:

украина, что, на, сша, не, зеленский, для, вашингтон, страна, запад

Topic 4:

советский, войско, армия, фронт, красный, город, операция, год, 1944, быть

Topic 5:

обстрел, погибнуть, донецк, мирный, ранение, ребёнок, удар, киевский, украинский, всу

Topic 6:

пункт, район, уничтожить, населить, ракетный, техника, военный, аппарат, беспилотный, летательный

Topic 7:

молдавия, график, брифинг, смотреть, ситуация, мид, официальный, россия, захаров, представитель

Topic 8:

путин, президент, мы, что, это, россия, то, наш, быть, не

Topic 9:

язык, университет, фестиваль, конкурс, участник, международный, русский, заявка, образовательный, иностранный

Topic 10:

экипаж, расчёт, противник, боевой, mod\_russia, всу, огневой, техника, позиция, работа

Topic 11:

наш, победа, праздник, путин, вы, день, президент, поздравить, флаг, весь

Topic 12:

министр, состояться, лавров, встреча, иностранный, дело, по, международный, российский, афганистан

Topic 13:

латвия, гражданин, гражданство, жительство, россиянин, латвийский, российский, право, посольство, россия

Topic 14:

атака, террористический, беспилотник, дрон, режим, бпнуть, беспилотный, аппарат, киевский, летательный

Topic 15:

украина, нацизм, украинский, еврей, нацист, оун, неонацист, националист, на, холокост

Topic 16:

выборы, голосование, избирательный, федерация, референдум, крым, наш, российский, россия, участок

Topic 17:

православный, церковь, упец, лавр,  
киево, печерский, канонический,  
религиозный, верующий, киевский

Topic 18:

гуманитарный, доставить, помощь,  
военнослужащий, ребёнок, житель,  
тонна, питание, область, более

Topic 19:

биологический, сша, деятельность,  
биологическая лаборатория, лаборатория,  
химический, исследование, военный,  
документ, пентагон

Topic 20:

сводка, министерство, mod\_russia,  
проведение, оборона, специальный,  
2023, ход, операция, федерация

### **Topic Labels Generated by GPT-4:**

1. Russian Response to EU Sanctions and Agricultural Policies
2. Russian Foreign Policy and NATO Relations
3. Russian Perspective on Ukraine Conflict
4. Soviet Union's Triumph in World War II
5. Terrorism Acts and Violations in Ukraine and Russia
6. Russian Defense Activities and Operations
7. Russian Foreign Ministry Briefings
8. Putin's Views and Diplomatic Relations
9. International School Olympiad and Russian Foreign Affairs
10. Military Operations and Equipment in Ukraine
11. President Putin's Speeches and Greetings
12. Russian Foreign Affairs and Diplomacy
13. Russian Citizens' Rights Violation in Latvia
14. Drone Attacks on Nuclear Power Stations
15. Western Influence on Ukrainian Crisis
16. Russian Presidential Elections and Foreign Interference
17. Russian-Latvian Relations and Cultural Identity
18. Russian Humanitarian and Military Activities
19. Chemical and Biological Warfare Activities
20. Russian Defense Ministry's Special Military Operations Report

## Annex 8 - Coding the Data

### Utilised Categories and Sub-categories

Codes	580		
Support for Ukraine	16	Occupied Territories	0
Sending Troops to Ukraine	3	Reunification with Russia	17
Providing Military Equipment	19	Donbass	9
Collective West	22	Glorification of World War II	23
NATO	17	Great Patriotic War in Modern Contexts	15
NATO Expansion	3	Brotherhood	7
Crimes of the US	8	GPW & Special Military Operation	5
US as Hegemon	15	GPW Monuments	11
The West as Side in Conflict	13	Russia	0
Goals of the West	16	Russia as Industrial Power	8
EU	14	Russian Heroism	13
Losses of the EU	4	Russian Resilience	21
France	7	International System	0
Ukraine	0	Russia Promoting Peace	22
Civil war	6	References to International Law	22
Zelensky	7	Multipolar world	24
Ukraine as Failed State	9	Russia as World Power	16
Ukraine as terrorists	37	Russia as Victim	19
Ukrainian crimes	35	Disinformation against russia	14
Ukraine Controlled from abroad	29	Discrimination of Russians Abroad	7
Nazism in Ukraine	34		
Nazism in Other Countries	8		

**Coding Table: Definitions and Categories**

A list of all original documents as well as the coded version of the primary sources can be accessed in a folder [here](#).

Category	Sub-Categories	Definition/Criteria	Examples of Coded Segments	Coding Rule(s)
Support for Ukraine		This category captures all mentions of support for Ukraine from the West, particularly focusing on how this support is perceived or discussed from a Russian perspective. It includes indirect references to international support actions or policies benefiting Ukraine, critiques of such support, or discussions about the implications of international aid to Ukraine.	<p>Today, as more than 70 years ago, the West provides the Ukrainian Nazis with military and financial aid, [using them only] as a tool to realise its geopolitical ambitions.</p> <p>[Сегодня, как и более 70 лет назад, Запад оказывает украинским нацистам военную и финансовую помощь, [используя их лишь] как инструмент для реализации своих геополитических амбиций.]</p>	Coded segments that reference international support for Ukraine, especially those that critique or analyse such support. Through interpretative coding, identified parts of text where support for Ukraine is implied through discussions of international actions, resolutions, or sanctions against Russia. Paid close attention to how these discussions are framed within the broader geopolitical narrative, capturing both explicit and implicit messages.
	Sending Troops to Ukraine	Focuses on mentions of present or potential international troop deployments to Ukraine, including training missions or direct military support.	<p>State Duma deputies call on the Bundestag of the Federal Republic of Germany to conduct an objective **investigation** into the participation of Bundeswehr servicemen in combat operations in Ukraine</p> <p>[Депутаты Государственной Думы призывают Бундестаг Федеративной Республики Германия провести объективное **расследование** участия</p>	Coded explicit references to the deployment of troops as presented by the Russian Embassy.

			военнослужащих бундесвера в боевых действиях на территории Украины]	
	Providing Military Equipment	Captures references to the international provision of military equipment to Ukraine, particularly focusing on how these actions are discussed or critiqued from the perspective of Russia.	<p>After the start of the special military operation, Ukraine received a flood of Western aid and arms. At the time of publication of the book, the total amount of support, including arms supplies from Western countries to Ukraine, totalled <b>**more than \$300 billion. **</b>The main suppliers of arms were those countries that supported and organised the Euromaidan. These facts leave no doubt about the role that the West prepared for Ukraine during the Euromaidan - <b>**to be an instrument of deterrence against Russia**</b>.</p> <p>[После начала специальной военной операции на Украину хлынул поток западной помощи и вооружения. На момент издания книги общая сумма поддержки, включая поставки вооружения западных стран Украине, составила</p>	Coded statements that focus military support provided to Ukraine, noting any criticisms or strategic implications discussed.



			<p>**более 300 млрд долларов.                  **Основными поставщиками вооружения стали те страны, которые поддерживали и организовывали «евромайдан». Эти факты не оставляют сомнений в роли, которую уготовил для Украины Запад ещё во время «евромайдана», –                  **быть инструментом сдерживания России**.]</p>	
Collective West		<p>This category encompasses discussions and references to Western countries as a collective entity, especially in their diplomatic, economic, and military interactions with Ukraine. It includes both direct mentions and indirect references to actions, policies, or statements attributed to Western nations collectively, as viewed through the lens of the Russian perspective.</p>	<p>What is happening to the West right now is an exasperation. ** The worse things get on the front, the more furious the West starts speaking out:** they say we have no right to let Ukraine lose and let Russia win.</p> <p>[То, что сейчас происходит с Западом, – это остервенение. **Чем хуже дела на фронте, тем более остервенело Запад начинает высказываться:** мол, не имеем права позволить Украине проиграть, а России позволить победить.]</p>	<p>Coded all mentions of the "Collective West" that refers to Western countries acting as a unified bloc in their stance or actions against Russia. Includes references that may not explicitly use the term "Collective West" but clearly discuss Western nations in a collective context.</p>

	<p>NATO</p>	<p>Discussions specifically related to NATO's activities, strategies, and influences on Russia.</p>	<p>- Positioning itself as a 'defence and security shield' for one billion people in the West, NATO has only led to <b>**increased crisis trends**</b> in the world. The results of the bloc's geopolitical engineering are known to everyone: the torn Balkans, the bombing of Iraq, Libya and Syria, the destruction of the statehood of Afghanistan, the alliance's reckless expansion to the East, which has only led to fuelling confrontation in the post-Soviet space and creating threats to the security of the Russian Federation. All this, of course, has not strengthened the security of the West.</p> <p>[Позиционирующая себя как "щит обороны и безопасности" одного миллиарда людей на Западе, НАТО лишь привела к <b>**усилению кризисных тенденций**</b> в мире. Результаты геополитической инженерии блока известны всем: разорванные Балканы, бомбардировки Ирака, Ливии и Сирии, разрушение</p>	<p>Code mentions of NATO's actions, policies, or military maneuvers directly.</p>
--	-------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------

			<p>государственности Афганистана, безоглядное расширение альянса на Восток, которое привело лишь к разжиганию конфронтации на постсоветском пространстве и созданию угроз безопасности Российской Федерации. Безопасность Запада всё это, разумеется, <b>**не укрепило.**</b>]</p>	
	.NATO Expansion	<p>This sub-category deals with references to NATO's expansion efforts, particularly how these are viewed in terms of threatening or encroaching upon Russian interests.</p>	<p>NATO is systematically <b>**increasing its military potential along our borders**</b> from the Barents Sea to the Black Sea. The term 'NATO's Eastern Flank' has even appeared in speeches and documents of the bloc's leaders, which includes all Eastern European countries bordering Russia and allied Belarus, as well as Romania and, more recently, Sweden and Finland.</p> <p>[НАТО планомерно <b>**усиливает свой военный потенциал вдоль наших границ**</b> от Баренцева до Чёрного моря. В выступлениях лидеров стран блока и документах появился даже</p>	<p>Coded any discussions about NATO's expansion into new territories or inclusion of new member states.</p>

			<p>термин__ «Восточный фланг НАТО», __к которому отнесены все граничащие с Россией и с союзной Белоруссией страны Восточной Европы, а также Румыния и, с недавних пор, Швеция и Финляндия.]</p>	
	Crimes of the US	<p>Captures specific mentions of actions or policies by the United States that are characterized as criminal or detrimental by the source.</p>	<p>The consequences of American policy in the region are understood by all to be roughly the same. None of the adventures Washington has undertaken in recent decades, citing 'fundamental security interests' 10,000 miles across the Atlantic, **has resulted in a situation where the country under attack is better off**.</p> <p>[Последствия американской политики в регионе всеми понимаются примерно одинаково. Ни одна авантюра, которую за последние десятилетия предпринимал Вашингтон со ссылкой на «коренные интересы своей безопасности» за 10 тысяч миль через Атлантику, **не</p>	<p>Coded segments that specifically accuse the US of crimes in a geopolitical context. Included the surrounding discussion that frames why these actions are viewed as crimes.</p>

			увенчалась ситуацией, когда страна, подвергшаяся нападению, стала бы жить лучше**.]	
	US as Hegemon	Focuses on discussions that portray the United States as a dominating force in international politics, especially in ways that impact Russia.	<p>The North Atlantic Alliance in the understanding of the politicians of the time was to be the key instrument for establishing and maintaining** hegemony of Washington** and its allies in the world. It remains so to this day.</p> <p>[Североатлантический альянс в понимании тогдашних политиков должен был стать ключевым инструментом по установлению и удержанию** гегемонии Вашингтона** и его союзников в мире. Таким он остаётся и по сей день.]</p>	Coded portrayals of the US exerting significant influence or control over international matters.
	West as Side in Conflict	This sub-category includes representations of the West actively participating or taking a side in conflicts, particularly those involving Russia.	Washington and its allies are waging **hybrid warfare** with our country** with the help of Ukraine, **without reservation** pouring billions of dollars into supporting Zelensky's neo-Nazi terrorist regime.	Coded explicit and implicit references to the countries of the West as active participants in the war.

			[Вашингтон и его союзники ведут с нашей страной** гибридную войну** с помощью Украины, **безоговорочно** вливают миллиарды долларов в поддержку неонацистского террористического режима Зеленского.]	
	Goals of the West	Covers discussions that speculate or assert specific past and present strategic or long-term goals of Western countries in their dealings with Ukraine, Russia and globally.	In fact, Washington, London and Brussels have nurtured an **aggressive nationalist, neo-Nazi** inherently **dictatorship** in Ukraine, whose sole objective, and it is not hidden, has been to inflict a 'strategic defeat' on Russia.  [Фактически Вашингтон, Лондон и Брюссель взрастили на Украине **агрессивную националистическую, неонацистскую** по своей сути **диктатуру**, единственной задачей которой, и это не скрывается, стало нанесение России «стратегического поражения».]	Coded any mentions of perceived or stated goals of the West.
	EU	References to the European Union's current political realities.	**M.V.Zakharova:** For months now we have been watching the	Coded segments that discuss EU. Paid attention to fragments discussing how

			<p>frantic attempts by the European Commission (EC) to reduce the <b>**heated**</b> discontent of European farmers, who have become victims of Brussels' <b>**ill-conceived**</b> policy and unilateral sanctions against Russia, which are hitting the EU economy and its citizens. All methods are being used, but not the revision of <b>**wrong**</b> decisions.</p> <p>[<b>**М.В.Захарова:**</b> Уже не первый месяц наблюдаем за судорожными попытками попытками Еврокомиссии (ЕК) сбить <b>**накал**</b> недовольства европейских аграриев, ставших жертвами <b>**непродуманной**</b> политики Брюсселя и односторонних санкций против России, которые бьют по экономике ЕС и его гражданам. В ход идут любые методы, но только не пересмотр <b>**ошибочных**</b> решений.]</p>	<p>the Russian war influenced the EU and how the EU policies adapt to the war.</p>
	Losses of the EU	This sub-category focuses on discussions about what the EU has	The direct losses of Germany alone, considered the 'locomotive of the EU', from the US-imposed	Coded segments showing Russian perception of the losses of the EU because of the war.

		<p>'lost' when it decided to be in confrontation with Russia.</p>	<p>anti-Russian sanctions amounted to at least \$200 billion. **What are the European interests here?</p> <p>[Прямые потери одной только Германии, считавшейся «локомотивом ЕС», от навязанных США антироссийских санкций, составили как минимум 200 млрд долларов. **В чём тут, собственно, европейские интересы?]**</p>	
	France	<p>Covers specific references to France's role and actions within the broader context of the Collective West's interactions with Russia.</p>	<p>Apparently, Paris is stubbornly unwilling to realise that increasing military aid to Zelensky's regime leads not only to **delaying** the Ukrainian crisis, but also to** the deaths** of French citizens. They have **enlisted as assistants to the thugs** of the Ukrainian armed forces and other formations.</p> <p>[Судя по всему, в Париже упорно не хотят понять, что наращивание военной помощи режиму Зеленского ведёт не только к **затягиванию** украинского кризиса, но и**</p>	<p>Coded mentions of France's specific actions, policies, or statements in the geopolitical landscape.</p>



			гибели** французских граждан. Они **записались в помощники головорезам** ВСУ и других формирований.]	
Ukraine		It captures the portrayal of Ukraine across a broad range of aspects as seen from the Russian perspective.	-	-
	Civil War	References to different events within Ukraine, described or framed as a civil war.	<p>22 February is the anniversary of the [anti-constitutional coup in Ukraine, which led to an armed civil conflict, **war between the Kiev regime and its own population, **crisis of international and European security.</p> <p>[22 февраля – годовщина [антиконституционного переворота на Украине, приведшего к вооруженному гражданскому конфликту, **войне киевского режима с собственным населением, **кризису международной и европейской безопасности.]</p>	Coded explicit mentions of ‘civil war’ in Ukraine. Coded implicit mentions of (historical) events and decisions in Ukraine that are characterised as part of a ‘civil war’.
	Zelenskyy	Discusses mentions of Volodymyr Zelenskyy, focusing on his role, policies, actions, and how these are perceived or critiqued from the	Zelenskyy destroyed the opposition and independent media in the country, literally hunted civil activists, and	Coded all segments that mention the actions of Zelenskyy and his role in the war.

		<p>perspective of the Russian Embassy.</p>	<p>subjected the Russian-speaking population to brutal repression.</p> <p>[В.Зеленский уничтожил в стране оппозицию и независимые СМИ, устроил в буквальном смысле охоту на гражданских активистов, подверг жесточайшим репрессиям русскоязычное население.]</p>	
	Ukraine as Failed State	<p>Covers discussions that depict Ukraine as a failed state that lost its independence, focusing on the historical events that led to it, governance issues, economic problems, and social instability.</p>	<p>Ukraine lost its sovereignty not now, but 10 years ago - in 2014 - in a coup d'état sponsored and organised by the US and the EU.</p> <p>[Украина потеряла свой суверенитет не сейчас, а 10 лет назад – в 2014 году – в результате государственного переворота, спонсированного и организованного США и ЕС.]</p>	<p>Coded descriptions of political instability, economic decline, or failure to provide public services.</p>
	Ukraine as Terrorists	<p>Includes portrayals of Ukraine or specific groups within Ukraine as engaging in terrorist activities or tactics, particularly in the context of the war with Russia.</p>	<p>Brussels has once again chosen to turn a blind eye to the act of terrorism by the Ukrainian armed forces - here they pretend that five days later they still do not notice the strike on civilian objects in Belgorod on 30 December 2023.</p>	<p>Coded segments that accuse Ukraine or Ukrainian groups of terrorism, including specific incidents or actions described as terrorist.</p>

			<p>[Брюссель в очередной раз предпочел закрыть глаза на акт терроризма ВСУ - здесь делают вид, что спустя пять дней по-прежнему не замечают совершенного 30 декабря 2023 г. удара по гражданским объектам в Белгороде.]</p>	
	Ukrainian Crimes	References to alleged crimes committed by Ukraine or Ukrainian forces, including war crimes, human rights violations, or other illegal activities.	<p>Daily shelling of peaceful neighbourhoods and civilian infrastructure are the methods used by the Kyiv regime. The figures on casualties and destruction are <b>**horrificing**</b>. Since February 2022, the territory of the Donetsk People's Republic alone has been subjected to more than <b>**32,388**</b> <b>**attacks**</b> by the AFU. On the territory of the Republic, 4,787 civilians <b>**have died**</b>, including 142 children.</p> <p>[Ежедневные обстрелы мирных кварталов, гражданской инфраструктуры – вот методы, которые использует киевский режим. Данные о потерях и разрушениях <b>**ужасают**</b>. С февраля 2022 года только</p>	Coded detailed mentions of specific crimes or illegal activities attributed to Ukraine.

			<p>территория Донецкой Народной Республики подверглась более чем **32 388** **атакам** со стороны ВСУ. На территории Республики **погибло 4787 мирных жителей***, в том числе 142 ребёнка.]</p>	
	Ukraine Controlled from Abroad	<p>Discusses the notion that Ukraine's political decisions and policies are heavily influenced or controlled by foreign powers, particularly Western countries.</p>	<p>To say, 'If we'd gone for it, it would have been finished a year and a half ago'. It just emphasises once again that **they're not independent people**'. It's clear to everyone, it's obvious to the whole world.</p> <p>[Прямо сказать: «Если бы мы пошли на это, уже всё давно бы было закончено, полтора года назад». Это просто лишний раз подчёркивает, что **они несамостоятельные люди**». Это понятно для всех, для всего мира это очевидно.]</p>	<p>Code discussions that depict Ukraine as being under the control or significant influence of external powers.</p>
Nazism in Ukraine		<p>This category focuses on discussions that depict or accuse Ukraine of having Nazi ideologies or practices, often used to characterize political movements,</p>	<p>All this shows that, no matter how hard the Kyiv Nazis try, they will not be able to break the will of the people and impose an alien anti-human neo-Nazi ideology on them.</p>	<p>Coded any mention of Nazism associated with Ukraine, including comparisons or analogies to historical Nazi practices.</p>

		military actions, or nationalistic sentiments within the country.	[Всё это говорит о том, что, как бы ни старались киевские нацисты, им не удастся сломить волю людей, навязать им чуждую античеловечную неонацистскую идеологию.]	
	Nazism in Other Countries	Captures references to Nazi ideologies, movements, or sympathies in Western countries other than Ukraine.	<p>A paramilitary gathering copying the torch processions in Nazi Germany and praising Hitler's collaborator has been held in the centre of the European capital (Sofia) for more than twenty years. &lt;...&gt; Today's Bulgarian followers of the Hitlerites have adopted** the Russophobic narratives** of their authorities and marched under slogans 'about the victims of the communist regime'.</p> <p>[Военизированное сборище, копирующее факельные шествия в нацистской Германии и восхваляющее пособника Гитлера, проводится в центре европейской столицы (Софии) уже более двадцати лет. &lt;...&gt; Сегодняшние болгарские последователи</p>	Coded explicit mentions of Nazism or neo-Nazi movements in Western countries.

			гитлеровцев взяли на вооружение** русофобские нарративы** своих властей и вышли под лозунгами «о жертвах коммунистического режима».]	
Occupied Territories		This category includes discussions about Ukrainian territories that are occupied by Russia, particularly focusing on areas such as Crimea and Donbass.	-	-
	Reunification with Russia	Discusses the integration of occupied territories into the Russian Federation, which are portrayed as acts of reunification from the Russian perspective.	The long-awaited reunification of the peninsula with Russia was the most important event in modern history for Crimeans and all citizens of our country, the embodiment of the right of peoples to self-determination and **the highest triumph of democracy.  [Долгожданное воссоединение полуострова с Россией стало важнейшим в современной истории событием для крымчан и всех граждан нашей страны, воплощением права народов на самоопределение и **высшим торжеством демократии.**]	Coded segments that discuss the process, events, or policies related to the reunification of specific territories with Russia.

	Donbass	Focuses specifically on the Donbass region in the context of the war.	<p>Ukrainian armed formations shelled Donetsk on New Year's Eve. As a result, several people were killed and more than 10 wounded. A school, residential high-rise buildings, a shop, a business centre and other facilities were damaged. Shelling was recorded in the very centre of the city, including in the main square.</p> <p>[Вооруженные формирования Украины в новогоднюю ночь обстреляли Донецк. В результате погибли несколько человек, более 10 ранено. Повреждены школа, жилые многоэтажные дома, магазин, бизнес-центр и другие объекты. Прилёты зафиксированы в самом центре города, в том числе на главной площади.]</p>	Coded all references to Donbass territories.
Glorification of World War II		This category captures general references to World War II that highlight or celebrate the Soviet Union's role in the war, often referred to as the Great Patriotic War.	Today, by tradition, we pay tribute to the memory of the employees of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs and our neighbours - our friends from the USSR Ministry of	Code any mention of World War II that glorifies or positively highlights the role of the Soviet Union.

			<p>Foreign Trade - who died a brave death on the fronts of the Great Patriotic War. We also remember comrades who died in the line of duty and those who were victims of political repression.</p> <p>[Сегодня по традиции мы отдаем дань памяти сотрудникам Народного Комиссариата Иностранных дел и нашим соседям – друзьям из Министерства внешней торговли СССР, павшим смертью храбрых на фронтах Великой Отечественной войны. Вспоминаем также товарищей, которые погибли при исполнении служебных обязанностей, и тех, кто стал жертвой политических репрессий.]</p>	
	Great Patriotic War in Modern Contexts	Focuses on the invocation of the Great Patriotic War within discussions of current events.	<p>Ukraine continues to <b>**destroy**</b> historical monuments and <b>**erase**</b> place names. Everything in a row is being scrapped - both those belonging to the historical period of the Russian Empire and the USSR are being 'erased with an eraser'.</p>	Code segments that directly connect GPW narratives to modern issues, decisions, or policies.



			<p>The country is afraid of historical truth and would prefer it not to exist at all.</p> <p>[На Украине продолжают <b>**разрушать**</b> исторические памятники и <b>**стирать**</b> географические названия. Под слом попадает всё подряд – как относящееся к историческому периоду Российской империи, так и СССР «стирается ластиком». В стране боятся исторической правды и предпочли бы, чтобы её не было вовсе.]</p>	
	.Brotherhood	Discusses themes of unity and brotherhood derived from the shared experiences and sacrifices of the Great Patriotic War.	<p>We are talking about a child in Belgorod being able to hug his grandmother in Kharkiv without being called a __‘Moskal’__ or being threatened with death. We are talking about a daughter from Moscow who could come and take care of her elderly father in Kyiv without fear. It is about being able to live as it has been for centuries - as <b>**one family with common values**</b> that cannot be destroyed by foreign hostile forces.</p>	Code mentions of brotherhood or unity that reference shared historical experiences during the GPW.

			<p>[Речь идёт о том, чтобы ребёнок в Белгороде мог обнять бабушку в Харькове, не будучи названным при этом __«москалём»__ и не подвергаясь угрозам убийством. Речь идёт о дочери из Москвы, которая без страха могла бы приехать и позаботиться о своем пожилом отце в Киеве. Речь идёт о возможности жить так, как это было на протяжении веков – как **одна семья с едиными ценностями**, которые не могут разрушить иностранные враждебные силы.]</p>	
	<p>II. GPW &amp; Special Military Operation</p>	<p>This sub-category explores the linkage between the Great Patriotic War and the "Special Military Operation," particularly how the former is used to frame or rationalise the latter.</p>	<p>But no one is going to retreat: the justification for continuing the anti-Russian course is the warning that ‘the Russians are coming’. History is repeating itself: just as it was almost eighty years ago, despite everything, more and more resources are being thrown at the ‘eastern front’. Hoping for a miracle. **But it did not happen then, and it will not happen today**.</p>	<p>Code segments where the GPW is used to draw parallels with or rationalise the Special Military Operation.</p>

			<p>[Но отступать никто не собирается: оправданием для продолжения антироссийского курса становится предупреждение о том, что «русские идут». История повторяется: так же, как это было почти восемьдесят лет назад, несмотря ни на что, бросаются все новые ресурсы на «восточный фронт». В надежде на чудо. **Однако оно не случилось тогда, его не будет и сегодня**.]</p>	
	<p>III. GPW Monuments</p>	<p>Covers references to monuments and memorials dedicated to the Great Patriotic War, focusing on their cultural significance, maintenance, and role in modern political contexts.</p>	<p>The Russophobic attitude and the West's encouragement of the neo-Nazi regime in Kyiv have given a powerful impetus to efforts by Poland, the Baltic States, Ukraine and other States to intensify, under the pretext of 'condemning Russian aggression', **fighting against monuments** and memorials in honour of Red Army soldiers who died fighting to liberate Europe from Nazism **fighting against monuments** and memorials in honour of the Red Army soldiers who died in</p>	<p>Code any events associated with the GPW monuments abroad.</p>

			<p>the battles to liberate Europe from Nazism. In addition, the <b>**rewriting of history**</b> and whitewashing of <b>**collaborationism**</b> continue.</p> <p>[Русофобский настрой и поощрение Западом неонацистского режима в Киеве придали мощный стимул стараниям Польши, стран Прибалтики, Украины и других государств усилить под предлогом «осуждения российской агрессии» <b>**борьбу с памятниками**</b> и мемориалами в честь воинов Красной Армии, погибших в боях за освобождение Европы от нацизма. Кроме того, продолжается <b>**переписывание истории**</b> и обеление <b>**коллорационизма**</b>.]</p>	
Russia		-	-	-
	Russia as Industrial Power	This category focuses on discussions that highlight Russia's industrial capabilities, economic advancements, and contributions to global industries. It includes	Now we are developing and walking together, feeling each other's elbow. Just this morning I was told that the railway from Rostov to Donetsk, to Mariupol	Coded mentions of major industrial projects, technological advancements, or significant economic strategies that showcase Russia's industrial strength.

		<p>mentions of significant industrial projects, technological innovations, and economic strategies that position Russia as a powerful industrial nation.</p>	<p>and Berdyansk has been restored. We will continue this work, and **soon railway trains will go directly to Sevastopol.** And this will be another, alternative road - instead of the Crimean bridge.</p> <p>[Теперь мы развиваемся и идём вместе, чувствуя локоть друг друга. Только сегодня утром мне доложили, что восстановлена железная дорога от Ростова до Донецка, до Мариуполя и Бердянска. Мы продолжим эту работу, и **скоро железнодорожные составы поедут прямо в Севастополь.** И это будет ещё одна, альтернативная дорога – вместо Крымского моста.]</p>	
	Russian Heroism	<p>Captures references to acts of bravery, courage, and heroism attributed to Russian individuals, groups, or the nation as a whole, particularly in historical or contemporary contexts. This includes military heroism, civilian bravery, and tales of sacrifice that</p>	<p>We have already proved that we can be together, **protecting Russia's freedom, sovereignty and security**, defending our values, traditions, history and culture, acting according to conscience and truth, according to justice. We have our own view</p>	<p>Coded both historical and modern instances where Russian heroism is highlighted.</p>

		are celebrated in Russian culture and propaganda.	<p>on how and what kind of country we should build and what plans we should implement. And today it is critical not to stray from this path, to achieve what we have set out, to achieve our ambitious goals.</p> <p>[Мы уже доказали, что умеем быть вместе, **защищая свободу, суверенитет и безопасность России**, отстаивая наши ценности, традиции, историю и культуру, поступая по совести и правде, по справедливости. У нас свой взгляд на то, как и какую страну нам строить, какие планы претворять в жизнь. И сегодня критически важно не свернуть с этого пути, добиться намеченного, достичь поставленных масштабных целей.]</p>	
	Russian Resilience	Focuses on discussions that portray Russia's ability to endure and overcome challenges, whether economic, political, or social.	No matter how hard the Kyiv Nazis try, they will **not** be able to break the will of the people, to impose on them an **alien** anti-human** neo-Nazi ideology.	Included discussions that emphasize the endurance, strength, and perseverance of the Russian nation or its people.

			[Как бы ни старались киевские нацисты, им** не удастся** сломить волю людей, навязать им **чуждую** античеловечную неонацистскую идеологию.]	
International System		-	-	-
	Russia Promoting Peace	This category captures mentions and discussions where Russia is portrayed as anchor actively promoting and trying to bring about peace in the context of its war against Ukraine.	<p>We did not start the war, we are only trying to **stop it**. At the first stage, we tried to do this by peaceful means - with the help of the Minsk agreements. As it turned out later, we were tricked here as well, because both the former Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany and the former President of France acknowledged and publicly stated that they had no intention of implementing** these agreements.</p> <p>[Мы войны не начинали, а только пытаемся её **прекратить**. На первом этапе мы пытались это сделать с помощью мирных средств – с помощью Минских</p>	Coded segments that mention Russia's involvement in peace talks, diplomatic missions, or international negotiations aimed at resolving conflicts. Included statements or public communications where Russian officials advocate for peace and stability in specific regions or globally.

			<p>соглашений. Как выяснилось позже, нас и здесь водили за нос, потому что и бывший канцлер ФРГ, и бывший Президент Франции признали и прямо публично заявили о том, что они и **не собирались выполнять** эти наши договорённости.]</p>	
	References to International Law	<p>Focuses on discussions where international law is referenced, particularly in the context of justifying or critiquing Russia's actions or the actions of other nations. This includes mentions of treaties, conventions, and legal principles that govern international relations.</p>	<p>Ten years ago - on 16 March 2014. - In a referendum, the inhabitants of Crimea independently, consciously **determined their future by reuniting with Russia.** In doing so, they realised their right to self-determination - **in full compliance** with the UN Charter and the Declaration on Principles of International Law.</p> <p>[Десять лет назад – 16 марта 2014 г. – на референдуме жители Крыма самостоятельно, осознанно **определили своё будущее, воссоединившись с Россией.** Тем самым реализовали своё право на самоопределение – **в полном соответствии** с Уставом</p>	<p>Coded specific mentions of international law, treaties, or conventions that are cited to support or criticize actions on the international stage. Included how these references are used within broader geopolitical discussions, particularly how Russia positions itself in relation to international legal norms.</p>



			ООН и Декларацией о принципах международного права.]	
	Multipolar world	Captures mentions of a multipolar world as part of the discussions indicating Russian preference towards a world where multiple countries have significant global influence.	<p>Answering the parliamentarians' questions, <b>**S.V.Lavrov**</b> touched upon the key trends in the formation of a multipolar world, stressed the growing influence of the cultural and civilisational factor on world politics, the importance of promoting the establishment of mechanisms of multi-format interaction that are resistant to destructive steps of unfriendly states.</p> <p>[Отвечая на вопросы парламентариев, <b>**С.В.Лавров**</b> затронул ключевые тенденции формирования многополярного мира, подчеркнул растущее влияние культурно-цивилизационного фактора на мировую политику, важность содействия становлению устойчивых к деструктивным шагам недружественных государств <b>**механизмов</b></p>	Coded discussions that advocate for or suggest the benefits of a multipolar world, particularly in terms of global power balance. Included specific instances where a multipolar world is referenced in relation to recent global events, international relations, or shifts in global alliances.

			разноформатного взаимодействия.**]	
	Russia as World Power	This category includes discussions that emphasise Russia's status and role as a world power, highlighting its influence, capabilities, and actions on the global stage. This involves military power, economic influence, or leadership in international forums.	<p>Not for the first time in its history our country is **on the edge of geopolitical processes**, and therefore it is from us, from our dedication, correct understanding of priorities depends not only what place Russia will occupy in the emerging multipolar world, but also what this world itself will be like.</p> <p>[Не первый раз в своей истории наша страна находится **на острие геополитических процессов**, и поэтому именно от нас, от нашей самоотдачи, правильного понимания приоритетов зависит не только какое место Россия будет занимать в формирующемся многополярном мире, но и то, **каким будет сам этот мир.**]</p>	Code segments that discuss Russia's global influence and capabilities with emphasis on the alliances it has or trying to build.
Russia as Victim		This category captures discussions that portray Russia as a victim of geopolitical maneuvers, sanctions, or unfriendly policies from other nations. Russia is presented as a	Demanding Russia to stop the special military operation, they understand perfectly well that if this suddenly happened, the Kiev regime, having licked its wounds,	Coded mentions of Russia 1) being targeted by international sanctions, criticisms, or aggressive policies; 2) needing to protect itself.

		country that did not have a choice and had to attack for self-defence.	<p>would continue its course of **extermination of everything Russian** and the Russian cultural, historical and religious identity that has existed on this land for centuries.</p> <p>[Требуя от России прекратить специальную военную операцию, они прекрасно понимают, что если бы это вдруг произошло, то киевский режим, зализав раны, продолжил бы курс на **истребление всего русского** и существовавшей на этой земле веками русской культурной, исторической и религиозной идентичности.]</p>	
	Disinformation against Russia	Focuses on discussions that claim or discuss instances where disinformation is spread about Russia, often in the context of international media or governmental communications from other countries.	<p>Obviously, the European Union has long ago decided who is to blame for the MH-17 crash.</p> <p>[Очевидно, что в Евросоюзе уже давно определились с тем, кто виноват в авиакатастрофе MH-17.]</p>	Coded segments that explicitly or implicitly mention disinformation about/against Russia being spread by the countries of the West and Ukraine.
	Discrimination of Russians Abroad	Covers discussions related to claims of discrimination against	Violations of the rights of Russian citizens in Western States remain **multiple**. The	Code descriptions of specific incidents or policies that are claimed to discriminate against Russians abroad.

		<p>Russian citizens or ethnic Russians living outside of Russia.</p>	<p>Russian Federation's special military operation to denazify and demilitarise Ukraine and protect the peaceful population of Donbas (SVO) continues to be used as a <b>**pretext**</b> to justify this unsavoury treatment of our compatriots.</p> <p>[Нарушения прав граждан России в западных государствах остаются <b>**многочисленными**</b>. По-прежнему в качестве <b>**предлога**</b> для оправдания этого неприглядного отношения к нашим соотечественникам используется проводимая Российской Федерацией специальная военная операция по денацификации и демилитаризации Украины и защите мирного населения Донбасса (СВО).]</p>	
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