

Title: *Russian Media Coverage of the EU in Times of Pandemic: Does Ownership Matter?*

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Abstract

The thesis examines how Russian media frames the EU during the COVID-19 pandemic and whether its coverage differs depending on the type of the ownership.

To understand how ownership structures influence media portrayal of a foreign actor, online content of three Russian newspapers — *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, *Kommersant* and *Novaya Gazeta* — is analyzed. Selected outlets represent different types of ownership: state-owned, privately-owned by a person affiliated with the government, and employee-owned. Qualitative content analysis and T. van Dijk' approach of critical discourse analysis were applied to investigate: 1) How has Russian media portrayed the EU throughout the coronavirus pandemic? 2) How does media framing differ based on a media outlet's ownership structure? Two types of analysis were based on the assumption that the more media is affiliated with government structures, the more its discourse reflects these structures. The findings show the influence of ownership only in the case of the state-owned media outlet that reflects Russia's official discourses towards the EU.

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**RUSSIAN MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE EU IN TIMES OF PANDEMIC:
DOES OWNERSHIP MATTER?
MA thesis**

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Tartu 2021

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List of abbreviations

EU — European Union

EEAS — European External Action Service

HR/VP — High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission

WHO — World Health Organisation

RG — Rossiyskaya Gazeta

NG — Novaya Gazeta

CDA — Critical Discourse Analysis

Chapter 1. Introduction

Today the European Union is visible at a political, economic and social level on the world's stage. For that reason, the EU views itself as an important global actor and player. However, equally important is how Europe is seen in the third countries. From the external perspective, there might be a gap between the EU's international presence and its influence.

Previous studies on external perceptions show that different crises widen that gap, challenging the EU's capacity to address problems and consequently questioning its position as a global player — both internally and externally (Chaban & Holland, 2014). According to N. Chaban, a prominent example was the Eurozone sovereign debt crisis which undermined the EU's authority as an effective actor for the first time.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has potential to affect internal and external perceptions of the EU again, and media representations play a crucial role in these processes. The importance of winning “the battle of narratives” is highlighted by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission Josep Borrell (2021). In his recent book, *European Foreign Policy in Times of COVID-19*, he described the current situation as an “infodemic” (p.171) and explained that “political battles are won or lost depending on how issues are framed” (p.11). Russia is called one of the main state actors engaged in spreading misleading information on the EU and its response to international crises.

The way foreign actors perceive each other often mutate under the influence of domestic and international factors. After the Russian annexation of Crimea, the conflict in the Eastern Ukraine resulted in a sanctions regime against Russia and the subsequent reduction in mutual contacts with the European Union. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that Russia has “no relations with the EU as an organization today” during his visit to China in 2021 (TASS, 2021). Since 2014 the negative dynamic in EU-Russia relations has also been reflected in the portrayal of the EU in the Russian media and has led to the problem of disinformation from the Russian side (European Council meeting – Conclusions, 2015). As a response to Russian disinformation campaigns, East StratCom

Task Force was established as a part of European External Action Service in 2015. Since its launch, the “Kremlin’s propaganda trends”, based on news analysis, have been summarized in a weekly disinformation review (EU vs Disinfo).

A.Tyushka defines so-called ‘weaponized’ narratives of Russian authorities (mainly the President, foreign and military ministries) intensified since the annexation of Crimea and war in the Donbas (2021). EU’s ‘never-existing’ or ‘lost’ sovereignty narrative is used to portray the European Union as a shadow of the US; second, the ‘decadent’ or ‘declining’ European power, narrative is weaponized to delegitimize the EU’s identity and power in principle, and the ‘Russophobic’, ‘aggressive’ and ‘fascist’ Europe narrative, is utilized to “dismiss any remaining doubts, or criticism of Russia, on the grounds that they are apparently invented by xenophobes, rather than guided by real political developments” (p. 17). As it was noted in the study, that different crises give Russian authorities the opportunity to use additional narratives of bad-governed Europe. Brexit, for instance, reinforced the narrative about weak and differentiated Europe (Ananieva, 2020). The coronavirus pandemic is another crisis that allows Russian officials to exploit negative discourse towards the EU. The recent study of Makarychev and Terry (2021) shows how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced Russia’s portrayal of the EU, in particular, Italy that was depicted as a weak, unprotected country of the EU, which is unable to tackle the crisis without external (Russia’s) help.

Portraying the European Union and its member states is being used as a propaganda tool by the Russian authorities for several reasons. First, it distracts attention from domestic political and economic problems. Second, it undermines the legitimacy of European political structures and the EU as an institution, which is relevant for domestic consumption in terms of maintaining the myth of Europe’s decay. Finally, with tension in relations with the West, it helps to legitimize Russian foreign policy objectives and its turn towards the East. This causes skepticism towards Russian media that is considered a part of the pro-Kremlin propaganda machine (Van Herpen, 2015).

The idea that the Kremlin controls all Russian TV channels, newspapers and online platforms, which is prevalent in the western perception, is distorted. There are still a few nationwide media outlets that are not owned by the government and might present an

alternative view on political actors and events. Considering media coverage implications on international relations, this research examines how Russian media frames the EU and whether its coverage differs depending on the type of media ownership. The overriding need for this research is due to the fact that, although there are some studies regarding the relationship between media ownership and its coverage of foreign actors; current events: the global crisis since the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic in March 2020, make it especially important to deepen the findings that apply to prior studies; particularly in the context of media framing in Russia of the European Union.

Previous studies of the EU depicted in the Russian media mostly focused on pro-government media outlets. Moreover, their attention was predominantly concentrated on resources for international audiences in English language such as Russia Today and Sputnik.

This paper will broaden the knowledge about the influence of media ownership on news framing in Russia. Future research could use this study to compare the influence of media ownership in different countries.

Main Questions and Hypothesis

The research is focused on discourse narratives and frames around the European Union during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Based on differences in media ownership, I expect the framing of the EU coverage by the government-owned and private media in Russia to differ.

Hence, a double **research question** is the following: 1) How has Russian media portrayed the EU throughout the coronavirus pandemic? 2) How does media framing differ based on a media outlet's ownership structure?

I **hypothesize** that the more media is affiliated with government structures in terms of direct and indirect financing, the more likely its discourse will reflect the dominant agenda of these structures.

Ownership bias in foreign news coverage is not that obvious, as it may seem. Production of foreign news mostly relies on global news agencies that cover issues and events in a standardized and appropriate for western audience manner (Van Dijk, 1988).

Study of Hutchings and Tolz on Russian media supports this idea and emphasizes that the media has to conform to an internationally accepted narrative regardless of the autocratic regime (2020). By contrast, Humprecht and Esser note that different ownership types have consequences for national news production despite globalization (2018). Broader discussion on media ownership provided in this chapter below.

This paper aims to contribute to understanding of ownership influence on coverage of foreign actors and events. It addresses media representations of the EU and examines the argument that ownership structure influences its portrayal. The First Chapter presents a theoretical framework based on studies of framing, agenda-setting, media ownership and a literature review focused on previous research on Russian media.

Chapter two describes research methodology. The selection of outlets for the analysis together with the method of data collection are explained in this section.

Chapters three and four consist of content and discourse analyses of three Russian media outlets: *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, *Kommersant* and *Novaya Gazeta*. To answer the research question, they focus on articles related to the EU during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. In these chapters, I analyze visibility of the EU as an actor in headlines. I also investigate the main issues, frames and emotive charges concentrating on differences between coverage in state-owned and privately-owned Russian newspapers. Discourse analysis based on Teun van Dijk's critical discourse approach aims to demonstrate how the EU is portrayed by different media outlets.

Chapter 5 summarizes the findings of the research.

Theoretical Framework

Framing

The conceptual phenomenon of media framing is a dependent variable of the research. Framing can be interpreted as the ideological packaging of information to promote or exclude specific interpretations. Being one of the first scholars to have developed the concept of framing, Erving Goffman calls frames the “schemata of interpretation” that help to make meaningless succession of events into something meaningful (Goffman, 1974). Zhongdang Pan and Gerald Kosicki developed a concept focusing on its production and consumption processes. It is based on the assertion that how an issue is constructed in news reports influences how it is understood by audiences (Kosicki & Zhongdang, 1993).

According to Dietram Scheufele and David Tewksbury (2006), there are micro and macro levels of framing. As a macro construct, framing refers to the manner of presentation that media outlets use to present information. A micro construct explains how people use the information when forming impressions. The scholars also examined the relationship between news framing, agenda setting and the priming effect explaining that these three concepts answer (1) how news messages are created, (2) how they are processed, and (3) how the effects are produced, respectively (p. 12). “Framing is, in fact, an extension of agenda setting” (Scheufele, 1999: p. 103). This idea was supported by Maxwell McCombs (2005), who argued that framing is a broader version of agenda setting that focuses not only on issues in media, but public perception of issues in media. In other words, framing is consistent with a second-level agenda setting and determines “how to think” (p. 546) about issues.

Prevalent research examined news frames to understand how it tends to affect public opinion and understanding of events. According to agenda-setting theory, the intensity of the debate in the media matters. It influences people’s perception of certain events as important (Dearing J. & Rogers W, 1996). This argument was tested by Wayne Wanta, Guy Golan and Cheolhan Lee who investigated media influence on perceptions of foreign

nations. Using a national poll in the US and content analysis as research method, they found that “the more media coverage a nation received, the more likely respondents were to think the nation was vitally important to US interests” (Wanta W., Golan G & Lee C., 2004, p. 364). Their findings also revealed that negative coverage makes the public think negatively about other nations, while positive coverage does not significantly influence perceptions (p. 374). My study does not include an opinion poll and cannot test how individuals receive different frames, however, what it does do is provide a starting point to understand how varying frames emerge based on the ownership of media outlets.

Difference in the use of news frames among various types of national media outlets was assessed by Holly Semenko and Patti Valkenburg (2000). Their content analysis of Dutch press and television coverage on key European issues was based on five prevalent frames identified in earlier studies: attribution of responsibility, conflict, economic consequences, human interest, and morality. Semenko and Valkenburg found that attribution of responsibility and conflict are the most frequently used frames, whereas morality frame is almost not seen at all in Dutch news. The economic frame is frequently utilized in most serious newspapers, while the human interest frame is more common for television (p. 106). Scholars’ deductive approach to frame selection serves as a basis for this research. Five frames predetermined by them are utilized for the analysis. They will be defined for the purposes of this paper in the methodology chapter below.

Media ownership

Media ownership is an independent variable. This study is based on a media ownership theory which postulates that owners of media organizations have power over defining the news content of the outlets.

Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman proclaimed media ownership is one of the five filters the media operates through. According to their theory, mass media is an instrument of power that “mobilizes support for the special interests that dominate the state and private activity” (Chomsky & Edward, 1988). Besides ownership, another ‘ingredient’ of their propaganda model is media reliance on information provided by the government. This also has relevance for this paper. 30 years later, Christian Fuchs (2018) claims that

the model of Chomsky and Herman is still applicable in the age of the internet, although there is a need for it to be adapted and extended.

The influence of ownership on newspapers was previously examined in different countries. By surveying journalists of six main newspapers in Indonesia, Mala Ekayanti and Hao Xiaoming (2017) found that “newspapers owned by political figures or political party members do not necessarily affect how journalists operate in news production more than those without or with less political affiliation” (p. 9-10). The study on newspaper’s coverage in Canada, in contrast, showed the direct influence of media ownership on framing of homelessness (MS & Y, 2012). Vaclav Stetka investigated media ownership in Central and Eastern Europe and highlighted that business tycoons did not intend to interfere with their media’s editorial policies. However, the fact of ownership itself affects journalists’ self-censorship practices (Stetka, 2012). Along with this, the gate-keeper model must be mentioned; it focuses on how decisions of particular editors and journalists influence news production and news selection processes (Bennett, 2008). Pamela Shoemaker and Stephen Reese (1996) proposed their model of ‘Hierarchy of Influences on Media Content’. According to this framework, media ownership is a part of the organisational level, and both journalists and media owners can act as gatekeepers in affecting news production.

A media owner as a gatekeeper may open or close the news gates to some actors or events. While at the same time, gatekeepers whether the government, corporations or stockholders, are influenced by individual journalist preferences, outlook values and particularly by markets. The media operate on an organizational level guided by a market demand and business decisions that affect news creation and distribution processes (Lacy et al., 1989). In other words, owners aim to make profit attracting the readers desired by advertisers and shape news content in line with economic objectives. However, the political situation in the country is a significant factor. In Russia, the influence of the market is of secondary importance to political pressures (Kovalev, 2020). “Even private media owners are often deeply beholden to the state and are as susceptible to pressure from state agents and censorship as are outlets that are directly owned by the government” (p.1).

Literature review

To provide background relevant to the objectives of this paper, a literature review on the Russian media environment follows.

Sarah Oates (2007) defines the Russian media model as Neo-Soviet. According to the scholar, there is no significant distinction between the contemporary Russian media and media in the Soviet system in terms of government interference, self-censorship and lack of objectivity. In a more recent study, she describes the contemporary Russian media environment through three key points: “There is a large amount of media diversity except on key political topics; the vast majority of the media do not challenge the state on these key political topics; and Russian audience members are enthusiastic consumers of media content” (Oates, 2016, p. 402).

Stephen Hutchings and Vera Tolz, on the contrary, claim that “historically familiar methods of Russian state control of the media are transformed under the impact of global media culture” (2015, p. 250). In a later study, they point out that the digital era and neoliberal economics influence Russia’s media environment. Even non-democratic regimes have to conform foreign media narratives, because citizens have access to foreign news outlets, and “state-sponsored journalists are drawn [...] into the orbit of commercial imperatives and their associated professional norms which do not always coincide precisely with the needs of the state” (2020, p. 4).

Tina Burrett (2009) examines Russian television and concludes that one of the factors that undermines the autonomy of the non-state-owned media is “the dependence of Russia’s business elites on good relations with the state, and in particular with the presidential administration”. These findings can be relevant not only for television but all types of outlets in Russia.

Describing the current Russian media system, Peter Pomerantsev (2013) indicates the presence of informal practices that Russian authorities apply instead of transmitting direct top-down instructions, including regular meetings between presidential administration and the country's main media managers. Another mechanism of media control is ownership and pressure through the market (Kovalev, 2020). “Many formerly independent media outlets have been forced into mergers or have been purchased by

barely known offshore companies, which are indirectly controlled by the Kremlin” (p. 2). The author explains how the government influences independent media by imposing new rules on commercialized news aggregation programs such as Yandex, which plays an important role in generating traffic for outlets’ websites and helps them to attract advertisers and investors. With the implementation of the new law in 2017, Yandex was forced to source information exclusively from websites that are approved by the Kremlin.

Chapter 2. Methodology

Description of Outlets

It is necessary to explain how the choice of specific media outlets was made. For the study I selected three national newspapers — *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, *Kommersant* and *Novaya Gazeta* — taking into account differentiation of ownership.

There are different models of media ownership in Russia. They can be divided into two main categories: state-owned and privately-owned. Russian government finances and operates state-owned media. Direct government influence and closeness to its structures is not that explicit in the case of privately-owned media. However, most of them are concentrated in the hands of government-controlled corporations (Gazprom-media, National Media Group) or so-called oligarchs who have other businesses besides media and are personally affiliated with the government. Only a small percentage of outlets is not directly or indirectly financed by the government and can be called independent. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, *Kommersant* and *Novaya Gazeta* represent all described models of ownership.

Another inclusion criteria for these newspapers was their position in the ranking list of Medialogia, a leading developer of automated media monitoring systems and social networks in Russia. Its monthly ranking shows the most frequently cited media (Medialogia, 2021).

One of the largest Russian newspapers, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, was established by the Russian government in November of 1990 and remains the official media source of the same state body. It has a daily circulation of 132 000 and serves as an official government newspaper. Unlike *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, *Kommersant* has always been a private newspaper. It was established by a journalist and businessman Vladimir Yakovlev in 1989. He remained editor-in-chief from 1989 till 1999. In 1997, financial mogul Boris Berezovskiy became the new owner of Kommersant Publishing House. Later in 2006, 100% of its shares were sold to the current owner Alisher Usmanov, the majority shareholder of Metalloinvest, a Russian industrial conglomerate, and an ex-head (from 2000 to 2014) of Gazprom Invest Holding, a subsidiary of state-run conglomerate Gazprom. Despite the fact that *Kommersant* is not owned by state officials, it was put

under ‘soft’ censorship by the owner and remains loyal to the current Russian government. One of the reasons *Kommersant* was selected for the research is its changed ownership and censorship scandal that happened of 2019. At that time, 2 leading journalists were fired after the publication about a senator Valentina Matvienko. As a protest against this perceived censorship, 11 journalists of the newspaper's political section resigned.

Novaya Gazeta is known for its criticism of the government and stays one of the truly independent media outlets in Russia. Calling this media independent, I mean that it is not owned or controlled by Russian governmental structures and not financed from the state budget. It relies on the income from the advertisement and crowdfunding campaigns as well as private investments. The circulation is 184 400. The newspaper was organized by a group of six journalists in 1993. The newspaper’s organization has two titles: Autonomous Noncommercial Organisation ‘Editing-Publishing House 'Novaya Gazeta’ and Limited Stock Society 'Publishing House 'Novaya Gazeta'. The latter one is owned on parity by newspaper’s senior editors Dmitry Muratov and Sergey Kozheurov. 14% of Editing-Publishing House belongs to businessman Alexandr Lebedev. Two British newspapers — *The Independent* and *The Evening Standard* — are owned by his family as well. The former leader of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev has 10% of *Novaya Gazeta* shares, the remaining 76% shares belong to the editorial board (Novaya Gazeta, 2017).

Outlets	<i>Rossiyskaya Gazeta</i>	<i>Kommersant</i>	<i>Novaya Gazeta</i>
Type of Ownership	Official government newspaper	Privately owned by a billionaire Alisher Usmanov, who is personally affiliated with Russian government	Privately owned. <i>Shareholders:</i> Editorial Board - 76% Businessman Alexander Lebedev - 14% Former leader of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev - 10%

Selection justification	Serves as an official government newspaper	A business publication loyal to the current government. The Censorship scandal happened in 2019	The political opposition that gained a reputation for unbiased coverage
Circulation	132000	100000-110000	91575

Table 1. Selection of Outlets

Selected newspapers have both printed and online versions. Online articles are taken for the analysis.

Data Collection

To answer the research question **content analysis** of the outlets **and discourse analysis** are involved. The **timeframe** of the research is limited by the period of the first wave of the pandemic in Europe (March-June 2020). The Covid-19 was first declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization on March 12 (WHO, 2020). In the same month, the borders within the EU were closed and a lockdown regime was started in most of the member states. On June 15, the EU reopened internal borders. Hence, the selected time period is March 1, 2020 - June 30, 2020.

All articles for the research had to meet the following criteria: 1) to be related to the COVID-19; 2) to mention the European Union, EU institutions, EU leaders or EU member states; 3) to be published within the defined time period. Using internal site search and filling-in key words ‘coronavirus in the EU’, I found 275 articles of *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 381 articles of *Kommersant* and 131 articles of *Novaya Gazeta* that were relevant for a search query. All materials for further analysis were manually selected. Interviews and opinion pieces were excluded from the analysis for being an obvious place where the bias of the ownership appears. The ultimate goal of this study is to reveal how deep differences in media coverage are, if it is indeed the case that they are different. Analysis of regular news reports better corresponds to this goal. Moreover, Van Dijk’s news schemata used for discourse analysis of this research is not applicable to interviews, columns and editorials (1991, p. 121).

Articles that mentioned coronavirus, but not the EU, Europe, EU institutions, EU leaders or EU member states were not included in this study, as well as articles that mentioned one of these actors, but not related to coronavirus. In accordance with criteria, 92 articles of *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 71 articles of *Kommersant* and 36 articles of *Novaya Gazeta* were included in analysis (Table 2).

After filtration, the headlines of articles related to the study focus were collected and stored in an Excel spreadsheet with the respective dates.

Outlets	<i>Rossiyskaya Gazeta</i>	<i>Kommersant</i>	<i>Novaya Gazeta</i>
Total articles included in analysis	92	71	36
The percentage of articles which included the criteria	92/275 (33,5%)	71/381 (18,6%)	36/131 (27,5%)

Table 2. The number of selected articles of each newspaper

Prior to the content analysis, the coding categories were established: 1) Actor; 2) Topic; 3) Framing; 4) Connotation to the EU. Coding frame for each coding category included numbers or letters (1-10 or a-f).

As a first step of analysis, the headlines were assessed to determine who the main actors representing the EU are in Russian media discourse. This particular category aims to demonstrate how frequently the EU is mentioned as a consolidated actor handling crises, and whether there are other institutions that are perceived to play a more significant role. Actors related to the EU were coded as (1) - ‘The EU’, (2) - ‘Brussels’, (3) - ‘EU Institutions’, (4) - ‘EU Leaders’, (5) - ‘Europe’ (Figure 1).

In the Russian language, the word ‘Europe’ is usually used to define EU countries despite the fact that Russia itself geographically occupies a large part of Europe’s total area. Didelon-Loiseau C. and Grasland C. (2014, p. 64-65) underlined the complexity of interaction between the geographical notion ‘Europe’ and the notion of the European Union. Despite the lack of definition of what ‘Europe’ is, this notion is presented in EU

legislation as well as in the discourse of the public within the EU and outside. In this study, ‘Europe’ is considered as a synonym of the EU.

<p>Actor:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The EU (European Union, EU)2. Brussels3. EU Institutions (Council, Commission, Parliament, European Central Bank)4. EU Leaders (The President of the Commission, HR/VP)5. Europe6. Individual Member States7. National Leaders/Officials8. European Capital Cities9. Population (EU citizens/EU residents/Europeans)10. Other/Unknown
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Figure 1. Coding Frame for ‘Actor’

The next step of the analysis was the ‘Issue’ coding. First headlines that recognize the EU as an actor were coded. In some cases, the EU was mentioned in headlines while not being an ‘actor’. For example, in the headline “*Russia has limited air traffic with the European Union due to coronavirus*”, the actor is Russia that corresponds to the ‘Other/Unknown’ coding frame for ‘Actor’. Regardless, it was also considered as a way of showing that the EU is recognized. Headlines where specific countries or national leaders were the main actors were coded separately. The coding process was based on emergent codes (Boyatzic, 1998) that were developed from reading the articles. The selected materials from three outlets were coded according to six identified categories (a-f). This step allows to determine which issues are reported in connection with the EU facing the pandemic.

Issue	Description
a. Economics	Finance Trade Business Internal Market Employment Poverty
b. Public Health and Safety	Quarantine Coronavirus Infection rate Death rate Security Other sub-topics
c. Travelling	Tourism Border control Schengen Zone Travel restrictions
d. Migration	Migration Integration Refugees
e. Social welfare	Unemployment compensation Healthcare Financial Aid
f. Foreign affairs	International relations between countries EU-Member States Relations

Table 3. Coding Frame for ‘Issue’

Depending on how the issue is framed, the actor can be seen from a completely different perspective. According to John McNelly and Fausto Izcaray (1986), the mass media can contribute to people’s understanding, or misunderstanding, of other countries. Following this assertion, certain frames might influence public interpretation of issues and public perception of the EU. The next step of coding aims to show which frame is most commonly utilized and to compare the use of frames among different outlets.

An approach known as *a priori* coding was taken for the ‘Framing’ category. It focuses on certain frames identified by previous scholars. In the study of H. Semetko and P. Valkenburg (2000), five following frames were investigated:

1 - 'Conflict:' This frame emphasizes disagreement between countries, institutions, parties, groups or individuals.

2 - 'Human interest:' This frame reflects how individuals and groups are affected by a problem.

3 - 'Attribution of Responsibility:' This frame suggests that some level of government is responsible for the issue and/or has an ability to alleviate the problem.

4 - 'Morality:' This frame contains moral prescriptions or reference to morality.

5 - 'Economic Consequences:' This frame mentions the costs, financial losses or gains.

The 'Frame' coding was applied according to these predetermined frames. Each news story was read in its entirety for the presence of an issue frame. This step contributes to developing an understanding of variation in framing depending on media as well as understanding difference in the use of frames with specific issues.

Finally, all articles were coded according to the connotations towards the EU related to its ability to deal with problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 2). This level of coding examines whether there are specific topics where the EU is portrayed positively or negatively, and how the connotations vary among selected newspapers. Online articles which portrayed the EU using neutral language were coded as 'neutral'. Articles that combined positive and negative connotations were classified as 'mixed'. The 'Unclear' code was used for cases with unclear language.

Connotation towards the EU	
1.	Positive
2.	Negative
3.	Neutral
4.	Mixed
5.	Unclear

Figure 2. Connotations

Discourse Analysis Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis based on Teun A. van Dijk's discourse approach of media analysis has been applied for the purpose of the second stage of the research. The aim is to reveal whether there are any differences in framing patterns between state-owned and privately-owned Russian media, and to demonstrate whether there is ownership power over media discourse as such.

CDA entails the relationships between discourse and social power. This type of analysis describes and explains "how power abuse is enacted, reproduced or legitimized by the text and talk of dominant groups or institutions" (Van Dijk, 1995, p. 84). Discursive reproduction of power is closely linked to the access to discourse and may have different forms, such as "setting or selecting time and place, participants, audiences, possible speech acts (such as commands or requests), agendas, topics, choice of language, style, strategies of politeness or deference, and many other properties of text and talk" (p. 86). Van Dijk studied discourse in media as a distinct type of discourse focusing on the organizational structure of news production. CDA, which is based on his news schemata framework, consists of three different levels: superstructures, macrostructures and microstructures.

The **Superstructure** is a schema that describes the number of hierarchically ordered categories in a news story, such as the general Summary in a headline and a lead, Main Events, historical and contextual Background, Consequences or Verbal Reactions, and Comments (1991, p.118). All these elements are not necessarily present in news reports and can be shuffled. The most important element tends to be delivered first and may be seen as a subjective definition of the situation. This is the strategy of how schemata can manipulate topical implications of news reports, and therefore may have ideological implications (p. 121). Significantly, what is *unsaid* can also be considered as a part of the schemata and help to define the ideological nature of discourse in the media.

Possible biases in coverage may appear from the news sources, news actors, the use of their quotes and the way they are presented as speakers. An important function of quotation is "to allow the insertion of subjective interpretations, explanations, or opinions about current news events, without breaking the ideological rule that requires the

separation of facts from opinions” (p. 120). The sources and quotation patterns have to be examined. This tries to answer the question: ‘*who is speaking, and about what they are allowed to speak about?*’

The **Macrostructure** is a thematic organization of news discourse. More specifically, this is a main theme or topic discussed in a news story. Articles can contain several topics that are hierarchically or chronologically ordered. However, topics are usually placed according to their importance and newsworthiness (1991, p. 72). This level of analysis answers the question ‘*What does the media write or not write?*’.

The next question to be answered is ‘*How does the media write about an issue?*’. It refers to analysis of **microstructures**. The Micro-level focuses on a more concrete words, sentences and sentence connection. The microstructure of discourse is concerned with morphology, syntax, semantics and lexicon. Discourse analysis for this research is performed following these levels of analysis.

Chapter 3. Content Analysis

Actors

By analyzing the headlines of three Russian media outlets, this study aims to assess the visibility of the European Union in the news. Contrary to initial assumptions, that it might be underrepresented in the news headlines, the analysis shows that the EU is considered as the main actor addressing the challenges of COVID-19.

In *Rossiyskaya Gazeta's* headlines, the EU itself is mentioned a significant number of times (32/92), whereas EU institutions — 11/92, Europe — 6/92, Brussels — 2/92. EU leaders (HR/VP in this case) are mentioned only once. However, total mentions of actors related to the EU (coded 1-5) is 56.5%. The 'Individual member states' category is the second most mentioned actor in the headlines (28/92) and stands at 30.4% (Figure 3).

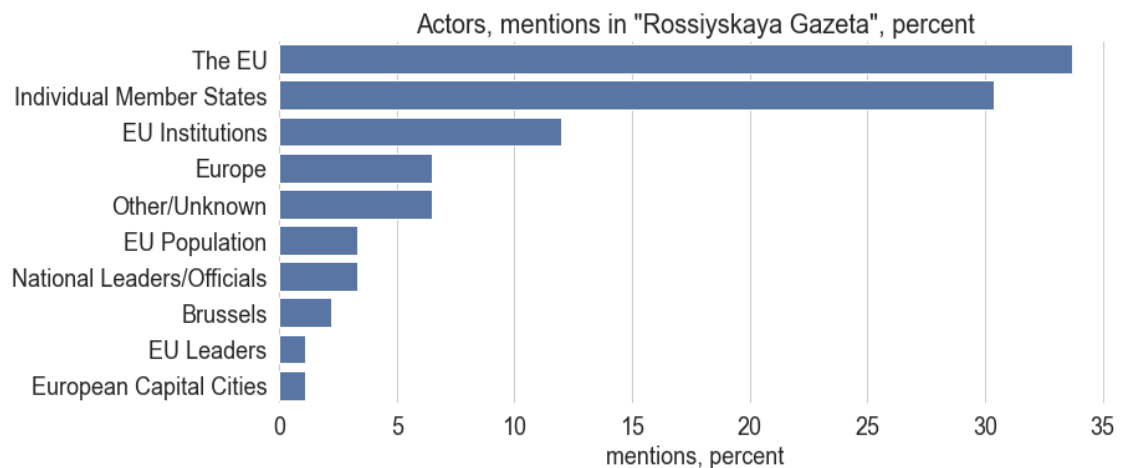


Figure 3. Actors in the Headlines

11 EU member states made RG headlines; Germany, Spain and France are the most mentioned among EU member countries. It is remarkable that Baltic States are represented as a consolidated actor in the headline and not identified as individual countries. French President Emmanuel Macron (two times) and Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Luigi Di Maio are among national leaders and officials mentioned by the outlet. Two European capital cities — Paris and Berlin — are mentioned in one headline. Despite statistical importance, this category is not substantively meaningful because the capitals refer to countries they represent.

The EU itself is the most covered actor in the headlines of *Kommersant* (24 mentions of 71), while EU institutions are in the second place regarding mentions (18/71). EU leaders are mentioned five times, the coding frame ‘Europe’ includes two mentions, while Brussels as an actor is mentioned once. Total mentions of actors related to the EU is 70,4%, that is much higher than in the case of *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*. The population of the EU is not seen as an actor by this media outlet. Emmanuel Macron is the only national leader represented in the headlines. Prague and Rome are the capital cities mentioned in *Kommersant*’s headlines during the collection period (Figure 4).

Six individual member states (Italy, Spain, France, Germany, Czech Republic and Hungary) represent the third most popular category in the newspaper.

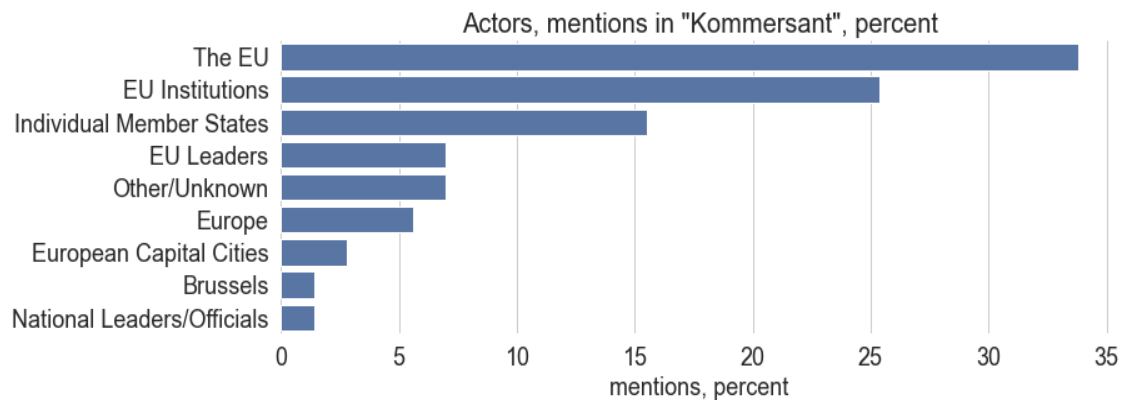


Figure 4. Actors in the Headlines

Unlike other outlets, *Novaya Gazeta* mentions individual member states more frequently (11 mentions of 36). It is equal to the number of mentions of the EU itself (11/36). Europe as an actor is mentioned six times, EU institutions and leaders — one time each, while the ‘Brussels’ category is not presented in the headlines. Thus, actors related to the EU represent 52.7% of NG headlines. The President of France is mentioned twice being the only national leader visible in the outlet. The category ‘European capital cities’ is not found in the headlines of *Novaya Gazeta* (Figure 5). Notably, in two headlines coded as ‘Individual member states’, the actor is being consolidated in a larger group of countries (Scandinavian countries, Nordic countries) and not identified by states. At the same time,

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, by contrast, to *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* are mentioned in one headline separately.

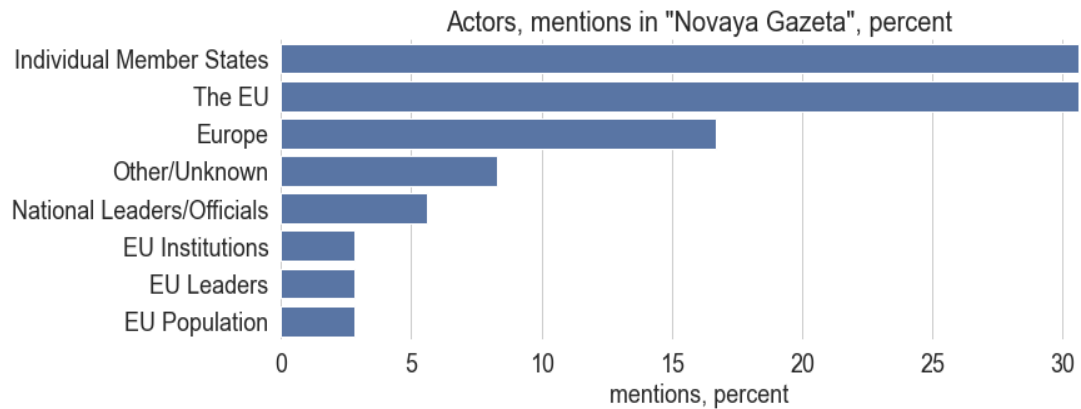


Figure 5. Actors in the Headlines

The analysis shows that the EU is a visible actor in both state-owned and privately-owned outlets. In the case of all the newspapers selected, the EU itself and the actors closely related to the EU are mentioned in more than half of the headlines. It is worth comparing the frequency of coverage each EU Member-state received in the outlets. Following the findings of Wanta W. and Golan G. (2004) study, the more coverage a nation receives, the more likely the public will perceive this country as important to Russian interests. Because some headlines mentioned more than one country at a time, all countries in the headlines were recorded.

Of the 27 EU-Member countries, 10 (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Luxemburg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Finland, Croatia) were not covered in the headlines of any of the outlets within the research timeframe. Some states such as Belgium, Ireland, the Netherlands, Denmark and Greece were mentioned less than others in RG and are not shown in Table 4.

	<i>Rossiyskaya Gazeta</i>	<i>Kommersant</i>	<i>Novaya Gazeta</i>
Most mentioned	Germany - 7	Italy - 4	France -3
Second mentioned	Spain - 6	Spain, Germany -3	Germany -2
Third mention	France - 4	France, Czech Republic, Hungary -1	Italy, Sweden, Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Slovenia - 1

Table 4. Member Countries by Mentions in the Headlines

Issues

Six issues related to the coronavirus epidemic in the EU (traveling, economics, public health and safety, foreign affairs, social welfare and migration) were covered in the outlets. Figure 6 displays the main issues of news stories during the time period of the study.

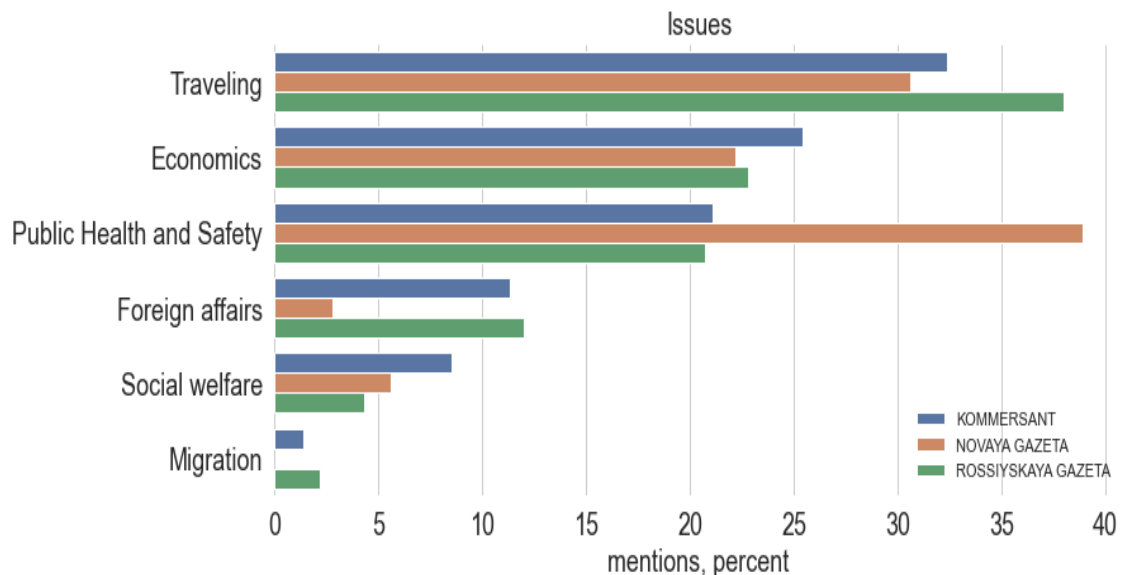


Figure 6. Issues Reported in the Outlets

There is a little difference between the popularity of the issues in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* and *Kommersant*. ‘Traveling’ (RG: 35/92, *Kommersant*: 23/81) and ‘Economics’ (RG: 21/92, *Kommersant*:18/81) are the most popular issues for both outlets. Meanwhile, *Novaya Gazeta* prioritizes ‘Public Health and Safety’ issues (14/36). ‘Foreign Affairs’, ‘Social Welfare’ and ‘Migration’ Issues were reported much less in three media outlets. The ‘Migration’ issue was not covered in *Novaya Gazeta*, ‘Foreign Affairs’ was not a priority either.

Framing

The way issues in the news are framed has implications for public understanding of political actors (Valkenburg & Semetko, 2000, Wanta & Golan, 2004). This step of analysis shows which frame is most commonly used, whether the frames vary in outlets and how they are varied by issues.

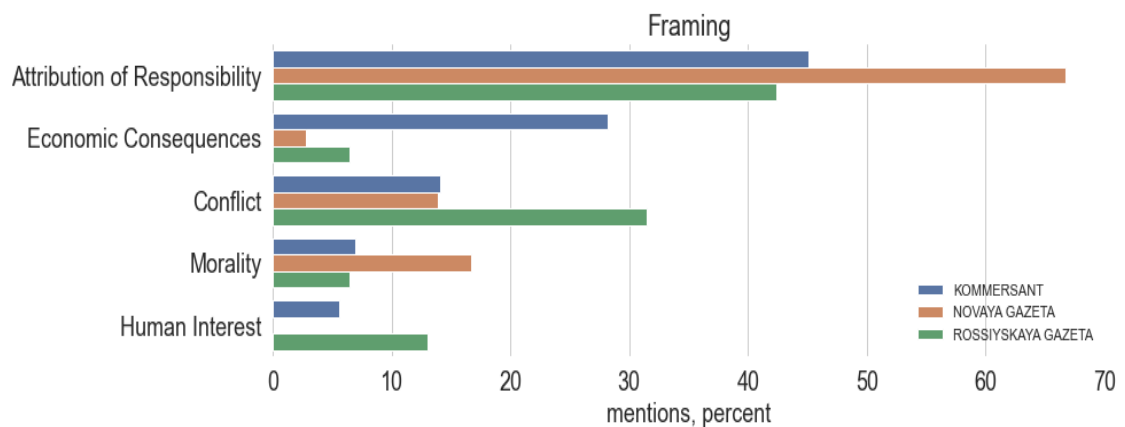


Figure 7. Frames Utilized in the Outlets

The ‘Attribution of Responsibility’ frame was mostly utilized by all outlets selected for the study. This frame suggests that some level of the government, the organization, groups or individuals (actors in this study) are responsible for causing or solving problems. The percentage of this frame used in *Novaya Gazeta* is higher (23/36) than in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* (38/92) or *Kommersant* (32/81).

The results of RG’s analysis correspond to the study findings of Semenko and Valkenburg (2000), where ‘Attribution of Responsibility’ and ‘Conflict’ are the most frequently used frames, and the ‘Morality’ frame is rarely mentioned. Table 5 demonstrates the use of frames to report on specific issues in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* (by number of stories).

	Economics	Public Health	Traveling	Migration	Social Welfare	Foreign Affairs
Attribution of Responsibility	4	11	19	2	0	2
Economic Consequences	3	0	2	0	0	1
Conflict	10	1	10	0	3	5
Morality	2	0	0	0	1	3
Human Interest	2	6	3	0	0	0

Table 5. Frames and Issues in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*

Stories linked to ‘Economics’ issues are often framed in terms of conflict, same as stories coded as ‘Traveling’ issues. ‘Public Health’ along with ‘Traveling’ are mostly reported in terms of attribution of responsibility in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*.

The second most commonly used frame in *Kommersant* is ‘Economic Consequences’. The frame reports issues in terms of consequences it will have on countries or individuals. The frequent use of this particular frame might be explained by the business orientation of the outlet. This frame tends to occur more often in “most serious and sober newspapers” (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 104). The “Economic consequences’ frame is mostly linked with ‘Economics’ issues while ‘Morality’ and ‘Human Interest’ frames are not noticeable in the outlet. ‘Public Health’ and ‘Traveling’ issues are mostly framed as ‘Attribution of Responsibility’, which is similar to RG. Table 6 displays results for *Kommersant*.

	Economics	Public Health	Traveling	Migration	Social Welfare	Foreign Affairs
Attribution of Responsibility	3	9	15	0	3	1
Economic Consequences	12	0	3	0	1	4
Conflict	2	3	2	1	0	2
Morality	1	0	1	0	3	1
Human Interest	1	2	1	0	0	0

Table 6. Frames and Issues in *Kommersant*

The ‘Morality’ frame takes greater priority in *Novaya Gazeta* because of the social orientation of this outlet. It is the second most utilized frame in the outlet. ‘Human interest’ frame did not occur. Stories linked to ‘Traveling’ and ‘Public Health’ issues are most frequently framed in terms of ‘Attribution of Responsibility’, which is common to all selected media outlets. ‘Public Health’ is also often reported in terms of morality. Economic issues are mostly considered in conjunction with the ‘Conflict’ frame (Table 7).

	Economics	Public Health	Traveling	Migration	Social Welfare	Foreign Affairs
Attribution of Responsibility	4	8	10	0	2	0
Economic Consequences	1	0	0	0	0	0
Conflict	3	1	1	0	0	0
Morality	0	5	0	0	0	1

Table 7. Frames and Issues in *Novaya Gazeta*

Three headlines exemplify the use of different frames in coverage of the same economic topic on the same date: ‘The European Union has not agreed on the creation of a recovery fund’ (*RG*), ‘EU leaders approve €540bn plan to support European economy’ (*Kommersant*), ‘The threat of a 15% fall in Europe's economy forces the search for a joint

solution to the crisis’ (*NG*). In the first case, the ‘Conflict’ frame with negative connotation is used. The headline in *Kommersant* is neutral and framed as ‘Economic Consequences’. The same way it is framed in *Novaya Gazeta*, but the phrase “joint solution” underlines Europe is perceived positively as a consolidated actor.

Connotation to the EU

The analysis of connotation towards the EU demonstrates significant difference among the outlets. While *Kommersant* uses neutral and positive language, most *RG*’s stories have negative connotations with regards to the European Union related to its ability to deal with problems caused by the pandemic. In *Novaya Gazeta*, the EU is portrayed positively in many stories selected for the study. Unclear language in most of the cases means that the EU was mentioned, but not assessed in the story (Table 8).

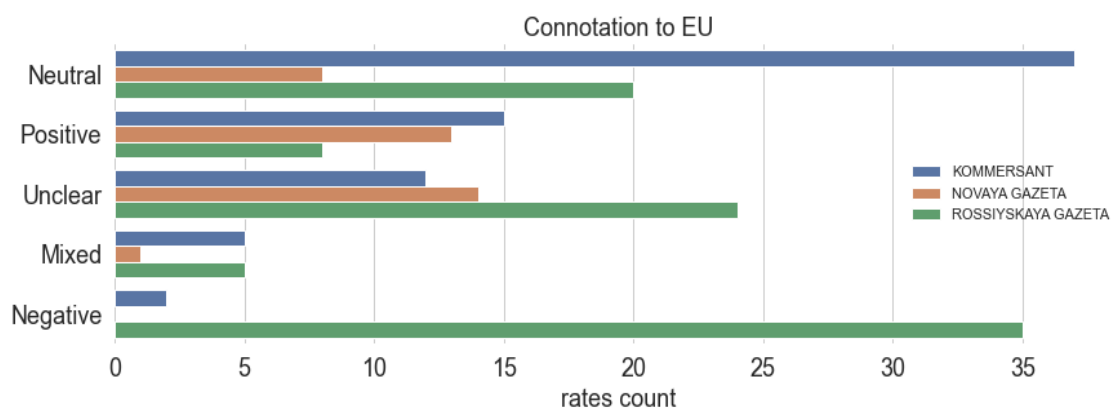


Figure 8. Connotation to the EU

There is an example of how comparable headlines published on the same date connote ‘Economics’ issues differently. While the headline ‘Eurogroup does not agree on €540bn economic support plan’ in *Kommersant* is neutral, ‘Eurogroup fails to negotiate "new Marshall Plan" for EU countries’ in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* is strongly negative.

It is noticeable that *RG* often uses negative language comparing EU actions with Member-states’ response to the COVID-19 crisis. Meanwhile, *Kommersant* portrays the EU more positively in comparison with individual Member-countries. Coverage in

Novaya Gazeta varies from these outlets starting from the topic selection and intensity of coverage. Despite the fact that no article from this newspaper was coded as solely ‘negative,’ there are a few stories that simultaneously connote the EU positively and negatively (coded as ‘mixed’).

The results of content analysis demonstrate differences and similarities in reporting. Each newspaper considers the EU as an important actor that addresses crises, however, individual Member states are represented as visible actors as well. While Germany, France and Italy occurred in the headlines of all outlets, there are 10 countries that stayed underrepresented during the time period of this study. ‘Traveling’ and ‘Economic’ are the most popular issues reported in relation to the coronavirus pandemic in the EU. These two issues were selected for further analysis. The ‘Attribution of Responsibility’ is the most frequently used frame in all outlets, which supports Semetko and Valkenburg’s hypothesis on the use of news frames. It is noticeable, that ‘Public Health’ and ‘Traveling’ issues are typically framed as ‘Attribution of Responsibility’ by three media outlets. The other four frames are exploited differently. It may be explained by the orientation of the media as well as its ownership. Connotation comparison demonstrated significant difference in coverage. The next step of analysis aims to investigate news coverage deeply in terms of which actors are seen in the outlets and how they are portrayed.

Chapter 4. Discourse analysis

The approach that is followed for the analysis is presented in detail in the methodological chapter above. Comparable (about the same events) news stories are analyzed according to Van Dijk’s schematic structures. The previous step of analysis found the ‘Traveling’ and ‘Economics’ issues are among the most popular in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic in the EU. They were chosen for in-depth analysis. Notably, there are not many comparable articles in RG, *Kommersant* and NG, because the outlets mostly selected different topics to cover. It points to substantial differences among the online newspapers. There are potentially multiple factors that can explain the agenda-setting strategies of the selected media outlets, and one of them is ownership structure. Conducting interviews with journalists, editors, media managers would contribute to better understanding of factors that influence topic selections. Due to research limits, the impact of individual journalists’ preferences, editorial policy, international and inter-media agenda on this process cannot be assessed, however, can be considered implicit.

Discourse analysis of comparable articles aims to demonstrate whether there is an underlying differences in the discourse of state-owned and privately-owned media. Following events connected either with ‘Traveling’ or ‘Economics’ issues and covered by three newspapers were examined: the closure of EU borders, publishing of a Joint European Roadmap towards lifting COVID-19 containment measures, European Council meeting on 23 April 2020 (Table 8).

Event	RG	<i>Kommersant</i>	NG
The closure of EU borders	EU closes borders to foreigners (“ЕС закрывает границы для иностранцев”)	EU closes borders to foreigners (“ЕС закрывает границы для иностранцев”)	EU authorities banned entry into their territories due to the spread of coronavirus (“Власти ЕС запретили въезд на свою территорию из-за распространения коронавируса”)

Publishing of Joint European Roadmap toward lifting COVID-19 containment measures	European Commission proposes plan to reopen EU countries after coronavirus (“Европейская комиссия предложила план по открытию стран ЕС после коронавируса”)	European Commission recommended opening EU borders last (“Европейская Комиссия рекомендовала открывать границы ЕС в последнюю очередь”)	Return of Europe. A roadmap for overcoming the pandemic has been prepared (“Возвращение Европы. Подготовлена дорожная карта выхода из пандемии”)
European Council meeting on 23 April 2020	The European Union has not agreed on the creation of a recovery fund (“Евросоюз не договорился о создании фонда восстановления”)	European leaders approve €540bn plan to support European economy (“Лидеры стран ЕС одобрили план поддержки европейской экономики на сумму €540 млрд”)	EU “firefighting” measures. The threat of a 15% fall in Europe's economy forces the search for a joint solution to the crisis (“Пожарные меры Евросоюза. Угроза падения экономики Европы на 15% заставляет искать совместный выход из кризиса”)

Table 8. Articles selected for discourse analysis

Event: the closure of EU borders

Rossiyskaya Gazeta (18/03/2020)

The superstructure deals with an introduction represented by a headline and a lead, content or main events of the story, and a conclusion. The different parts of the text have to be assigned to schematic news categories and commented on.

The headline “*EU closes borders to foreigners*” expresses the major topic of the report. The reason for this action and context is not specified in the title. Despite the seeming neutrality of the headline and the absence of ‘catchy’ words, it points to a potentially unjustified decision on the part of the EU.

Unlike the headline, the introduction, or a lead, underlines the compelled and temporary nature of the decision to close the borders. The context (the coronavirus epidemic) is also given in the first sentence. The lead presents *Spiegel* as a news source and summarizes the key information. German Chancellor Angela Merkel announced the decision and her words became newsworthy in their own right. She is quoted in the introduction of the report by indirect speech: “According to the head of German government, all participants [of the EU Summit] unanimously supported the European Commission's recommendation for temporary border closures.” RG presented the chancellor with an ironic characterization as “a former staunch supporter of the open-door policy.” Notably, the media outlet uses the quote that portrays the EU as a united actor, but at the same time downgrades the speaker and the author of the quote by the language used. This language strategy allows the credibility of her words to be put under question.

Reference to open door policy (Merkel’s decision to let more than 800,000 refugees into Germany in 2015) provides a wider context and makes connection with migration discourse that was often abused by Russian authorities and media in the previous decade. Further parts of the story emphasize the contrast between promotion of the open-door policy by Merkel in the past and being one of the main actors that initiated border closures in the current context.

The overall meaning of the text consists of the hierarchy of different themes (topics). In general, topics are not delivered chronologically, but ordered according to their relevance and importance. This news report focuses on travel restrictions at the external borders for the third countries citizens (Theme 1), it underlines the difference between EU member-countries and countries of the Shengen zone, and mentions that after Brexit, the restrictions also apply to the UK citizens (“*Notably, it will also apply to the UK, which has finalized its "divorce" from the EU as part of Brexit, as well as Norway, Switzerland, Liechtenstein and Iceland*”) (Theme 2). The story emphasizes the actions of Germany to enforce the ban (Theme 3).

Local meaning of words, phrases and sentences in the text are essential to the analysis as well. RG uses a metaphorical image of divorce to draw attention to the relations between the EU and the UK. The concept of divorce implies complicated relations between the

parties. Moreover, in this case it is presented as a one-sided action of the UK (“has finalized its divorce”), and the long bilateral negotiation process which preceded Brexit is not mentioned.

Germany is the only country whose actions to enforce travel restrictions are illustrated in the text. The newspaper uses the phrases: “immediately proceeded to implement the ban,” and: “law enforcement officers have brought crossing points under strict control” to provide the contrast to the previous German migration policy. Referring to *Reuters*, RG names German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer responsible for these actions. Significantly, he called migration the “mother of all political problems” in 2018 (DW, 2018), and significantly Angela Merkel did not share the assessment.

The analysis of the first article demonstrates that RG relies on foreign media as a source of news, but ideologically recontextualizes the given information. Another observation is that despite being an agent of the headline, the EU is almost not seen in the text in comparison with Germany, one of its member countries.

Kommersant (17/03/2020)

Kommersant uses the same headline ‘EU closes borders for foreigners’ as *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*. Similarly, German Chancellor Angela Merkel acts as a newsmaker, and *Spiegel* is a source of the news for this story. Despite this fact, there are significant differences between the two news reports.

The Lead specifies the circumstances for the decision to close the borders and gives more prominence to the EU as a main actor (“*Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, EU heads of state and government have decided to suspend entry for non-EU nationals*”). France is mentioned as one of the first member states that followed the recommendations of the EU Commission.

The substance of the text supports the introduction by the direct quote of Angela Merkel: “We all agreed with the European Commission's proposal to restrict entry to Europe from non-EU countries, the UK and other countries”. It demonstrates EU cohesion. The unity

of the EU is also underlined in the next paragraph by the quote of the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen ("This decision has been supported by all and will be implemented immediately")

Except the main topic, there are other themes included in the text. The story mentions nations that are allowed to transit passengers to return home (Theme 2) and provides COVID-19 statistics in some EU member countries (Italy, Spain, Germany, France) in the conclusion (Theme 3). Russia is mentioned in the background as a country that also closed its borders. Unlike RG, *Kommersant* does not transform the topical structure and supports the main topic defined in the lead by other elements of the news scheme. In this news report, emotionally charged language and literary devices are not used.

Novaya Gazeta (16/03/2020)

In the headline which is entitled "*EU authorities banned entry into their territory due to the spread of coronavirus*", the media outlet provides an explanation for this decision.

The headline and the lead are straightforward and express the main topic of the text. The lead is shorter than in other outlets and consists of two sentences. The first one mentions the period for which restrictions will be implied (30 days) and the second sentence points to the source of news (the President of European Commission Ursula von der Leyen).

The next paragraph gives information about categories of people who will not be subject to the new restrictions (Theme 2). It is followed by von der Leyen's quote: "Our health system is under great pressure. EU member states are therefore taking serious measures to stop the spread of the coronavirus. But they are only effective if they are coordinated." The quote supports the main theme of the news report and justifies the decision to close external borders.

The text closes with COVID-19 statistics in the EU and a background story about Russia having restricted flights to its territory amid the spread of coronavirus. The conclusion is similar to that of *Kommersant*. The language used in the article is neutral.

In terms of news schemata, *Novaya Gazeta* does not manipulate the structure of the news and does not involve discourses irrelevant to the main topic.

Event: Publishing of Joint European Roadmap toward lifting COVID-19 containment measures

Rossiyskaya Gazeta (15/04/2020)

The headline “European Commission proposes a plan to reopen EU countries after coronavirus,” and the lead, contain the main topic of the story (removal of coronavirus restrictions). The outlet does not refer to a written document (Joint European Roadmap) and does not provide a link to a news source. Each paragraph of the news report is based on an indirect quotation of Ursula von der Leyen. Open interpretation of her statements by a journalist cannot be excluded.

The introduction explains under which conditions the coronavirus restrictions will be removed. The next paragraph directs responsibility for implementing the plan to governments of the member states (Theme 2). The phrases “there is no standard solution”, “an individual way out” are attributed to the President of European Commission. The idea of the responsibility of individual governments is repeated three times in the text’s substance. The repetition of this idea aims to portray The EU as unable to address challenges as a united actor. The first (restart of community life in the EU) and the second (opening external borders) stages of lifting COVID-19 measures are described in the article (Theme 3).

The last paragraph calls special attention to economic losses of European countries. The citation “In this context, the EU announces a global fundraising for donors. The money should go to help the economy and to develop a vaccine” is an example of the manipulation of information and misinformation. The sequence of words and sentences and emphasis on economic losses allow RG to portray the EU as unable to solve its economic problems independently. In fact, the EU initiated a fundraising campaign exclusively for developing a vaccine.

Kommersant (15/04/2020)

With the headline entitled “*European Commission recommends opening EU borders last,*” *Kommersant* gives prominence to opening of European borders and indicates that this will not happen soon.

The introduction presents the European Commission’s recommendations to EU members to lift restrictions imposed because of the spread of coronavirus (main topic). The lead focuses on reopening external borders, which is not the main idea of the document *Kommersant* refers to. It shows that the most essential information to its readers in Russia is prioritized by the outlet. The last sentence of the lead indirectly quotes Ursula von der Leyen and opens a new topic of economic losses (“*EU quarantine measures against the pandemic already amount to almost €3 trillion*”). The second theme is not supported by any other part of the text and does not seem reasonably mentioned.

The next paragraph cites the document and thereby supports the headline (“*External border reopening and access of non-EU residents to the EU should happen in a second stage. Safeguarding social distancing measures taken by EU Member States and Schengen Associated Countries requires continued review of the need for restricting non-essential travel to the EU*”). Measures of the first stage that concern EU internal border control are described further in the text as less important for the newspaper’s audience in Russia.

In two following paragraphs the news report focuses on coordination and cooperation between member countries (Theme 3). “Uncoordinated lifting of quarantine in different countries can lead to political controversy,” the article claims. To develop the idea, it also uses the quote by the president of the Eurogroup Mario Centeno, published in *Corriere della Sera* (“*There is a need for coordination*”). The text does not portray the EU as divided or uncoordinated, however it does emphasize the negative consequences of a disjointed European approach. Whether there is any reason that preceded such concerns is left unsaid.

Novaya Gazeta (16/04/2020)

NG published a feature story about the event and entitled it as “*Return of Europe. A roadmap for overcoming the pandemic has been prepared.*” The phrase “*Return of Europe*” exaggerates the significance of the event, which is the publication of ‘the roadmap’. The use of hyperbole indicates high expectations for this plan.

The introduction illustrates the circumstances under which the joint roadmap was introduced — disagreements within the EU. This detail published in the lead of NG was deliberately ignored by *Kommersant*. The introduction stresses that EU member countries “pledged to do whatever is necessary to overcome the crisis and preserve European values.” The news source for this article is NG’s own foreign correspondent.

Contrary to the headline, the next paragraph describes the document as not important (“not a directive to be enforced,” “a symbolic act,” “a proposal, which is intended to help member states make their own decisions”). This is similar to RG’s narrative about the individual responsibility of member countries. The substance of the text portrays the EU as a divided actor: “each country tries to fight the virus and save the economy in its own way,” “every country has their own recipes for survival,” “different timing of recovery,” “the divisions are clear”, “sick South” and “healthful North”, “different approaches.”

The story is built on contrasts; in spite of the negative representations, the text provides positive examples of cooperation between EU countries (“Germany takes Italians and the French to intensive care units, and doctors and nurses travel to Italy, France and Spain from northern EU countries, and protective suits, masks and ventilators are supplied”).

According to the article, EU Institutions have a major role in bringing Member States together, and the Joint roadmap is one of the first steps. However, a background provided by NG devalues positive expectations for the plan (*The EU's draft seven-year budget failed to be adopted late last year due to different approaches to how much to spend and what to spend it on, before Europeans learned of the coronavirus*).

The conclusion emphasizes the reason that unites the countries: “the awareness that each of their countries may be a marginal dwarf in a post-crisis world, while in the EU they have a chance to remain an economic superpower.” The sentence draws attention to

positive characteristics of the EU, while individual countries are shown as weak. The EU image in this story is controversial.

Event: European Council meeting on 23 April 2020

Rossiyskaya Gazeta (23/04/2020)

The headline “*The European Union has not agreed on the creation of a recovery fund*” summarizes the results of the event. The title already points to disagreements between member states. More details are provided in the lead (“EU Member states failed to show sufficient solidarity”, “did not come to a consensus”). The source of the news is Austrian national broadcaster ORF. The substance supports the introduction and emphasizes the lack of cohesion between rich countries (Austria, Germany, Netherlands, Finland, Sweden) and poorer member states (not specified).

The third paragraph opens a new topic not signaled in the headline or the lead. It is about the intention of Germany to increase payments to the EU budget. German Chancellor Angela Merkel is quoted in the text (“For a limited period, we have to make significantly higher contributions to the European budget”). RG stresses Germany’s particular role in the EU as a leading country that addresses the problems of the Union.

Referring to Reuters, the media outlet returns to the main topic of the text and points to “large differences” among the countries that impede decision-making in the EU. In conclusion, the news report focuses on what has been done during a European Council meeting (“European leaders approved €540 billion package to help the EU economy”).

This sequence of the topic indicates which information is more prominent and therefore more important. In this news report, the positive outcome of the meeting is covered last, and attention is geared to the EU's inability to agree on the creation of a recovery fund. This illustrates possibilities for manipulation of the information within the news scheme, while emotionally charged language is not used.

Kommersant (23/04/2020)

Contrary to RG, *Kommerant*'s headline 'EU leaders approve €540bn plan to support European economy' gives prominence to positive outcome of the conference. In the lead, the negotiations were described as "difficult". However, the main topic of *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* was formulated differently by *Kommersant*: "EU's economic recovery fund has only been agreed in general terms". The media outlet refers to Reuters to stress that the decision has been left for a later date.

In the substance, an online press-conference following the meeting is discussed (Theme 2). Details are given about the disadvantages of video conferencing ("not all journalists were well heard"), which does not seem relevant to the main topic. To portray the EU positively, the quote of European Council President Charles Michel is used ("The European Union seeks unity and solidarity even in times of crisis").

The report closes with direct and indirect quotes from Ursula von der Leyen, who noted "unprecedented economic crisis" ("We must first deal with the devastating effects of the crisis and then start the economic recovery"). Both quotes relate to the press conference and support the main topic.

Novaya Gazeta (27/04/2020)

The headline entitled "*EU firefighting measures. The threat of a 15% fall in Europe's economy forces the search for a joint solution to the crisis*" summarizes the substance of the article. The metaphor "firefighting" means urgent reaction to a problem and implies that these measures were not planned in advance. The title also explains the context and its potential economic consequences.

The lead ("*EU Heads of State and Government approved a roadmap and urgent action package to end the coronavirus crisis*") expresses the main topic. As in the case of *Kommersant*, it focuses on the positive outcome of the meeting and tries to mitigate the negative effects of what have not been done ("*For the first time, they [EU Member states]*

have set the goal to launch a European Recovery Fund together, but they still have not agreed on what it will be”).

The third paragraph specifies the information about the economic situation given in the headline: “unprecedented crisis”, “deep recession is ahead”, “all EU member- countries were affected”. An explanation of why the measures are referred to as “firefighting” (the plan was prepared within only two weeks) is further given in the text.

The fourth paragraph illustrates the economic crisis by an indirect quote from Ursula von der Leyen which compares decline in production with the situation during the Second World war and the Great Depression. The newspaper also focuses on what Angela Merkel said (“in a spirit of solidarity" Germany will have to pay "much more" into the EU budget).

The final part of the text provides EU leaders' reactions to the outcome of the meeting. Portuguese Prime Minister António Costa, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte and President of France Emmanuel Macron, Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte and Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez are mentioned. Their rhetoric gives positive evaluations of the event and demonstrates their willingness to find a joint solution to the crisis.

Some elements of the article portray the EU as divided: “deep divisions between the notional "north" and the notional "south”, “disagreement remains”. However, the article mostly portrays the EU in terms of unity and willingness to cooperate: “The crisis discussions involve not only the 19 eurozone countries, but also those EU members with national currencies remaining”, “compromise”, “Europe moves closer to agreeing an economic package”, “progress towards the establishment of a Recovery Fund”.

Summary of discourse analysis

The results of the analysis display significant differences, but also similarities, in coverage of state-owned and privately owned outlets. *Kommersant* and *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* rely on international news agencies and foreign media in their coverage of the EU. Despite this,

their framing patterns and language differ, even in cases where these outlets use the same headlines or refer to the same speakers.

There are six narratives identified in the selected articles (Table 9).

Narrative	RG	<i>Kommersant</i>	NG
There is the lack of unity in the EU	+		+
The EU is united		+	+
The EU is unable to address the challenges	+		
The EU is secondary to its member states	+		
The EU plays a leading role in decision-making		+	+
Rich EU countries pay for poorer EU countries	+		+

Table 9. Narratives represented in the articles

The dominant discourse of the EU is negative in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*. The European Union is portrayed as a divided actor, which lacks responsibility for its members, by this outlet. RG draws a line between “rich” and “poor” EU members. The source of information is not disclosed in one of the selected news reports. There are also other signs of potential manipulation, such as the focus on negative stories, overuse of indirect quotation, involvement of additional discourses and misinformation, in this media outlet.

Kommersant, on the other hand, portrays the EU as a united actor that is able to take collective decisions. Some topics that are irrelevant to the main theme appear in the news reports of this outlet. They are neither supported in the substance of the text nor explained. This points to the absence of certain themes, and consequently, certain discourses. In comparison with the article in *Novaya Gazeta*, it was revealed that some negative topics

are uncovered to portray the EU from a better perspective. Being loyal to the Russian government, *Kommersant* is found as not critical of the EU. The explanation of this phenomenon requires broader research.

In its coverage of the EU, *Novaya Gazeta* mostly refers to its own foreign correspondent in Brussels and provides a significant number of details. Some negative discourses about the EU occur in coverage and are reminiscent of narratives of RG. Despite the closeness of narratives, the explanations behind them are different. The articles in *Novaya Gazeta* seem more balanced: there are more speakers and countries represented in the texts and more emphasis on contrasting narratives on the EU (positive and negative). As far as NG is employee-owned, the coverage reflects editorial policy and individual journalist's opinions.

The discourse analysis was based on the assumption that the more media is affiliated with government structures, the more its discourse reflects these structures. The results demonstrate the influence of ownership only in the case of the state-owned media outlet (*Rossiyskaya Gazeta*) that represents Russia's state discourse on the EU.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

This paper addresses Russian media coverage of the EU depending on the type of media ownership. Three newspapers — *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, *Kommersant*, *Novaya Gazeta* — representing different types of ownership were analyzed to answer the research question: 1) How has Russian media portrayed the EU throughout the coronavirus pandemic? 2) How does media framing of the EU differ based on the outlet's ownership structure? Two-step analysis was involved to answer these questions.

First, visibility of the EU as an actor in the headlines, main issues related to the EU during COVID-19 pandemic, frames and connotation of selected articles to the EU were investigated using content analysis. It allowed to compare a large number of articles and to get preliminary results about similarities and differences of the EU coverage by three media outlets. The results demonstrated that the EU is a visible actor tackling challenges, such as the coronavirus pandemic, in the headlines of all selected media outlets. Stories related to 'Traveling', 'Economics' and 'Public Safety and Health' Issues were most frequently covered. At the same time, within these three issues, different events were selected as newsworthy by RG, *Kommersant* and NG; there are only a few articles about the same events within the analyzed time period. The way issues were framed by media outlets may be explained by orientation of these media to business (*Kommersant*) or society (*Novaya Gazeta*), as well as by influence of their ownership. However, the most frequently used frame, which is 'Attribution of Responsibility', was common for all outlets. Connotation towards the EU is a category where the main differences among selected outlets appeared. Most stories in state-owned *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* had negative connotations to the EU related to its ability to deal with the problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. *Kommersant* used only neutral and positive language, while stories published by NG were mostly positive towards the EU. However, there were a few stories in *Novaya Gazeta* that simultaneously connotated the EU positively and negatively. It is noticeable that there were no solely negative articles in this outlet.

As a second step of the research the discourse analysis based on Teun van Dijk critical discourse analysis approach was applied. His news schemata was the main prism for the analysis of comparable articles. This step was crucial for understanding how the EU is

portrayed by state-owned and privately-owned media outlets. The discourse analysis revealed six narratives represented in the coverage: “There is the lack of unity in the EU”, “The EU is united”, “The EU is unable to address the challenges”, “The EU is secondary to its member states“, “The EU plays a leading role in decision-making”, “Rich EU countries pay for poorer EU countries”. Narratives which portray the EU negatively were mostly found in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*. *Novaya Gazeta* also used some negative discourses, while in *Kommersant* they did not occur. NG balanced news stories by using narratives that showed the EU from a positive perspective as well (“The EU is united”, “The EU plays a leading role in decision-making”).

The hypothesis, that the more media is affiliated with government structures in terms of direct and indirect financing, the more likely its discourse will reflect the dominant agenda of these structures, was only partly confirmed. The results of content and discourse analyses show that ownership matters only in case of state-owned media. Further research is needed to reveal explanatory factors behind the coverage in *Novaya Gazeta* and *Kommersant*, or privately-owned media as such.

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