

TARTU UNIVERSITY
Faculty of Social Sciences
Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies

Justina Karpalavičiūtė

HOW TO PREPARE FOR WAR? INVESTIGATING THE DISCOURSES IN RUSSIAN
FOREIGN POLICY AROUND THE FULL-SCALE INVASION OF UKRAINE

MA thesis

Supervisor: Prof Andrey Makarychev

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Authorship Declaration

I have prepared this thesis independently. All the views of other authors, as well as data from literary sources and elsewhere, have been cited.

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Abstract

The 2022 Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine was a turning-point in contemporary European history. Between the first reports of solid preparations for invasion and 24th February morning, Russian foreign policy discourse was largely focused on Ukraine and the West. By looking at the utterances of the main policy makers (the President and the Minister of Foreign Affairs), the sometimes-divergent narratives and ideas that were expressed are investigated through the lens of securitization and Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia and polyphony, by identifying the most relevant themes, languages, and voices that were used in the three-month period. This approach contributes towards a different way of understanding securitization and particularly the securitizing speech act, by including the notions of languages and voices into one's analysis. The different languages and voices used in familiar themes and contexts helped produce a shared knowledge between the securitizing actors and the audiences, which contributed to the securitization move being successful, and legitimised the eventual invasion in the eyes of the Russian public.

Keywords: securitization, Bakhtin, heteroglossia, polyphony, performativity, legitimation, Russia, Ukraine.

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List of abbreviations

BRICS – an intergovernmental organisation comprising **Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the United Arab Emirates**, initially named after the first five states

CSTO – Collective Security Treaty Organization

DNR/DPR – Donetskaya Narodnaya Respublika/Donetsk People’s Republic

LNR/LPR – Luganskaya Narodnaya Respublika/Luhansk People’s Republic

MID/MFA – Ministerstvo Inostranij Del/Ministry of Foreign Affairs

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

OSCE – Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

PoR – President of Russia

UN – United Nations

US – United States

WWII – World War II

Introduction. The topic and its importance

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24th February 2022 was, to many, a somewhat unexpected turn of events. It was the first truly large-scale conflict in Europe since World War II and has since caused many nations around the globe to reconsider their foreign policy and security strategies. Germany has moved on from the decades-long 'culture of military restraint' by supporting Ukraine with significant amount of materiel – a turning point in time, *Zeitenwende*, that is of significant importance considering the state's background of militarist history (Wittmann, 2024). The United States appear to still be struggling between interventionism and isolationism (Nye, 2023), although the support provided under Joe Biden's administration is unquestionable. Countries outside of the Western-led groupings, however, have had different reactions, although still having to reconsider their policies. China, for example, may be considered an economic beneficiary of the war due its grown entanglement and trade with Russia in military and energy sectors (Skrypchenko, 2024), but it has also shown interest in mediating for peace – just how genuine the peace plan proposed in 2023 is remains a questionable matter, however.

Nevertheless, the fact that the invasion was a significant and shocking event is difficult to argue against. What came as another surprise on the back of it, at least for those living in democratic states, was the relative indifference of large parts of the Russian public. This time aggression was clearly from the Russian Armed Forces and aimed at more than just the Eastern part of Ukraine, whose rights to self-determination were widespread in the official narrative and whose independence was officially recognised just two days prior, with the claims of mutual assistance and cooperation (PoR, 2022n, 2022o). While there were protests, they were not of mass-scale. In part, this was due to the harsh reprisals by the regime that certainly cannot be overlooked. Over 15,000 people have been detained due to their expressed stance against the war. However, there were also those who genuinely believed in the need of intervention and agreed with the 'special military operation' (Archagov, 2024). Of course, the invasion did not happen in a vacuum of a public space, it and its preparations had to be introduced to the public in some way that would connect to the political story line, and, importantly, make sense to those listening. This was at least in part done through foreign policy discourses and their dissemination in public.

Therefore, the thesis will address the December 2021 – February 2022 period investigating the discourses presented to the Russian public and international society via Russian foreign policy-related statements, speeches, addresses. While this is a short period of time, it was of particular significance to the events that took place afterward, culminating in the full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24th February 2022. At this point in time the Russian military had amassed 100,000 troops by the border with Ukraine, but it was still unclear what this ‘military exercise’ may result in. Will the focus be the Eastern part of Ukraine? Will any military action actually take place at all, or is it just a matter of trying to achieve one’s goals through threatening behaviours? Will there be an attempt to connect Crimea with continental Russia? Few thought about a real possibility of a full-scale invasion.

An analysis will be conducted into how the discourses built in these three months may well have contributed to the eventual result of Russia’s war against Ukraine. This will be done with the aim to understand how the audiences were prepared for the idea of the ‘special military operation’ and its consequences. Viewing this period as a moment of flux, destabilisation, for construction of the ‘self’ which was arrived at and contributed to by speech acts and discourses analysed in the thesis. In this flux discourse can be used to ‘arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre’ (Laclau and Mouffe in Edkins, 1999: 132).

This piece will not answer the question of the reasons behind the decision to begin a full-scale invasion, which is not to say that this does not warrant investigation for which the theories presented here may also be useful. However, it would be a matter of significant scope an effort. Thus, the thesis submitted here will focus on a matter smaller in scale and time interval, but one certainly worth exploring, analysing, and understanding. A slightly different view at the securitization theory will be suggested for this analysis, although it is not the only way of being able to conclude it and perhaps deduct somewhat differently.

The aim is **to address and provide at least a part of the answer the question of how Russian foreign policy discourse contributed to the Russian public’s apparent acceptance of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.** The idea for the conceptual framework was born while trying to **better understand how the often conflicting and at times opposing narratives appear to cohabitate peacefully in Russian foreign policy discourse.** For example, the brotherly nation of Ukraine also being an enemy, or that NATO capabilities in Eastern Europe are a threat to Russia’s safety, while Russia’s capabilities pose no threat to its neighbours. This is where

Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia and polyphony appeared to offer some answers. Through the use of different languages, voices and narratives, the practice of securitizing issues within Russia's foreign policy discourse can be viewed with some understanding behind the seeming cognitive dissonance of its statements. This is far from the only possible answer to this question, but an attempt to capture one piece of the puzzle while also addressing the discrepancies in narratives that may be difficult to reconcile rationally.

The thesis aims to contribute to the slowly growing body of research on Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and aim to help understand the underpinnings of the perceived relative acceptance of the invasion among the Russian public as well as large parts of the world (particularly non-Western states and societies). Since most academics, diplomats, officials, as well as political pundits struggled to predict the kind of extensive military action, which was launched in February 2022, this piece may also help shed some light on what discourse practices and analysis methods may be worth consideration in the future. In this way the thesis aims to contribute to the study of securitization theory, expanding on what a 'speech act' may involve and how it relates to the contextual realities for the securitizing actors. The audience is not understood to be homogenous or apathetic, thus different languages and voices even when used in the same theme or narrative may be more convincing to different parts of the audience, resulting in a by and large positive outcome for the securitizing actor.

Firstly, a brief outline of the thesis will be presented, alongside the methodology section, where methods and the reasoning behind their choosing will be explained. Then the existing literature around the conceptualisation will be addressed. While some literature already connects securitization and the Bakhtin's concepts of heteroglossia and polyphony, it is usually done through the lens of resistance, focusing on the language and voices of those who attempt to challenge securitization moves, rather than those who attempt to securitize from a position of authority and power, which is the focus of this piece. The concept of legitimation will also be discussed as it heavily informs the discourse analysis conducted in this paper. This will be followed by a more detailed look at the conceptual framework: securitization and the 'speech act', Bakhtin's polyphone and heteroglossia, and performativity. The concepts are considered to connect through the heteroglot and polyphonic view of the securitizing speech acts, which in turn have a performative aspect.

Upon reviewing the conceptual part, the empirical section will be introduced. Firstly, the wider themes of Russian foreign policy discourse will be introduced, as each connects to the languages (political, diplomatic/legal, and emotive) and voices (peacekeeping/unifying, historical, and nationalistic) identified in the next section. The themes focus on the commonly addressed topics related to the case at the hand: Ukraine and Russia being one people; Russia not being a threat, but rather being threatened itself; Russia's historical and moral righteousness; and (de-)nazification and (de-)militarisation of Ukraine. Finally, the repetition, reproduction, and dissemination of the discourse analysed will be discussed, in an attempt to gauge the success of the move to securitize the issue of Ukraine in Russia's foreign policy discourse. The conclusion will show that languages and voices can also contribute to the securitizing speech acts as a means of persuasion, perhaps sub-conscious, but recognisable to the audiences and effective in reaching them.

Before moving on to the next section, it is of import to note that this thesis does not aim to find, disclose, and challenge each inaccurate or purposefully untruthful statement made by the relevant actors. In some cases, where the author finds it pertinent, short descriptors or notes may be added to explain and contest the statements, but the focus is very much on the languages, voices and themes brought up in the creation of a wider narrative. Truthful or not, it is about learning more of the reality that was being constructed at the time, and how it was done. However, the question of accountability also deserves a brief comment: if forming a threat is a normative act, those who constructed it should be accountable for the consequences of their product (Balzacq, 2011: xiii). The Russian foreign policy makers decision to make Ukraine an existential issue has had significant consequences on Ukraine, but also on Russia.

Outline and methodology

To begin with, a brief literature review will be conducted, focusing on the previous writings on securitization theory, its meeting point with Mikhail Bakhtin's literary theory and the notion of legitimation introduced by Theo Van Leeuwen, which will be informative of the study. Following this, the three main conceptual bases will be introduced in more detail: securitization, heteroglossia and polyphony, and performativity. The thesis aims to connect the three conceptual points by explaining how Bakhtin's literary theory can contribute to the study of securitization as a process, its reasoning based on legitimation, while performativity helps

inform the dissemination of the speech acts to the audiences and their acceptance or rejection of the securitizing move. Since the discourses are interconnected with other discourses (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 277), it is important to understand the contextual basis for both the audience and the securitizing actors. This is of importance when trying to understand the meanings of texts, which are shaped by particular contexts. While discourse analysis of itself may not be the most accurate or impersonal method to research questions, understanding the previous assumptions makes its results more reliable (Balzacq, 2011a: 40). This will be addressed before digging deeper into the empirical research of the Russian foreign policy statements released within three months before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

The reasoning behind the examination of the three months prior to invasion (including some of the statements from the very last days of November) was that the end of November and beginning of December 2021 was a pivotal point in the view of what followed. The first reports came from the US intelligence agencies that the invasion was truly planned to take place and was not an exercise or simply an attempt at scaring Ukraine into submission. Documents showed clear evidence of deployments, movements, and planning for an invasion on multiple fronts in the near future with about 175,000 troops, although numbers at the time were still lower (about 94,000 by Ukrainian estimates, about 70,000 according to US). The evidence was supported by Moscow's sudden mobilisation of reservists, too. While for many doubts remained about the eventual inevitability of the full-scale invasion, the US intelligence insistently repeated from around this point onwards that the invasion will take place in early 2022 (Manson, Politi and Ivanova, 2021; Wilke and Macias, 2022).

This is an interpretive study where the main method of investigation is discourse analysis, borrowing largely from discourse theory, knowledge of the world being socially constructed. This will be conducted primarily on official Russian foreign policy discourse that is built by main foreign policy actors and their spokespersons (Vladimir Putin, Sergey Lavrov, Maria Zakharova, Dmitry Peskov). Since our access to the world is done primarily through language, the language does not simply reflect it (and not necessarily reflect it all), but also constructs it: the meaning that physical objects or actions have is gained through discourse (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002: 8, 9). The different voices and languages are socially constituted (Paz, 2013: 193). Following this reasoning, the thesis will delve into the kind of reality that was being constructed for the Russian public, and the decision makers themselves prior to the full-scale invasion. This is the clear point of connection with the concept of performativity, as these

actions, the speech acts discussed here ‘not that much reflect but mainly produce reality, and have ontological effects through multiple reiterations’ (Makarychev, 2021: 114).

The main sources for the study will be speeches, interviews, public discussions, press conferences by the Russian foreign policy makers, that is, the President and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and their spokespersons. Most of these are easily available on their official websites with translations into English, additional material was sourced from the TASS Russian News Agency, where concise content was difficult to find, this was particularly the case with statements by the Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov. The selection process was completed by skim-reading each text for relevant topics and information, as selecting via word search proved to be less reliable. Additional findings would possibly be discovered by doing the research in the Russian language; however, the researcher would need to have this skill available to them at a native speaker level to better understand the nuances and intricacies.

Upon consideration, the number of texts published in the three-month period was found to be acceptable for such a task. Altogether, a little over 200 texts¹ produced by Russian foreign policy makers were analysed. The texts were of varying lengths and content but each relevant to the examination at hand. Some of these texts will be directly referred to in the study, others may just be used as a frame of reference, as word-for-word repetition is often abundant. Particular attention was paid to texts that were aimed directly at the Russian audiences and press, such as presidential addresses, essays, and the annual conference, and press briefings by the foreign ministry officials, as the major discourse aimed at explaining policy choices to the public. When analysing the texts, different languages, voices and thematical narratives were identified, which will be discussed in turn with relevant examples provided to illustrate the categories and narratives.

Before concluding, the dissemination of the said languages, voices, and narratives will be discussed. This section will be informed by the concept of performativity, and aimed at trying to discern whether and how successful the securitizing attempt has been. Additional difficulties do arise when attempting to gauge the acceptance level: there is little possibility of conducting any research within Russia currently, the survey data is not necessarily reliable (for multiple reasons), and empirical observations, such as few protests, do not necessarily depict the actual

¹ For a full list of texts consulted see the references section.

public sentiment. This is where the concept of performativity and some studies on securitization and audiences prove beneficial for the overall argument.

Literature review

Securitization theory

What is now known as the Copenhagen School is a body of work completed by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and others focused on the theory of securitization. While it is no longer a particularly new approach in security studies, it remains influential and has been considerably expanded by other scholars making it a dynamic and promising view on security issues. The basic definition suggested by the Copenhagen School describes the process in this way: ‘...when a securitizing actor uses a rhetoric of existential threat and thereby takes an issue out of what under those conditions is ‘normal politics’, we have a case of securitization’ (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998 in Balzacq, Léonard and Ruzicka, 2016: 495).

Essentially, security in this understanding is not so much a thing in and of itself – it is an act. Meaning that an issue becomes a security issue when it is defined as such. For Copenhagen School this act is a *speech act*, spoken, received, and accepted by the audience, if it is successful. However, other scholars have aptly pointed out that speech acts are not always quite as obvious as spoken words. Lene Hansen accurately described instances where silences can also be securitizing acts (2000), while Michael Williams has spoken of imagery that can achieve the same result (2003). Each identified variability of the speech act, silences, images or other, contribute to the wider understanding of how exactly securitization takes place, and there are likely to be other ways that would benefit the analysis further. While these focuses on speech and language that is used in the securitizing attempts, there is a differentiation between a straightforward speech act and the languages, voices and themes that will be identified and discussed below.

While the Copenhagen School agrees that securitization does not happen successfully until the audience accepts the issue as a matter of security (Buzan, Wæver and Wilde, 1998: 30, 31), it also fails to reiterate this significant condition by arguing it is the securitizing actor who truly determines what is a threat, and what is not (ibid.: 34), adding some confusion to how an audience should be considered. Although the contradiction remains, the audience does play a role in securitization processes, indubitably, even if it is underdeveloped in the CS

securitization framework (Léonard and Kaunert, 2011: 58). The issue of the audience is particularly important as securitization attempts cannot be successful unless they are accepted. In this instance, where audiences are multiple, at times overlap and entwine, where survey data may not be as reliable as a researcher would like, the acceptance of the securitizing attempt is difficult to judge and measure. For this purpose, the concept of performativity has been included into the framework. Developing further on the ideas of literature on speech act as a performative act (Searle, 2010), with power to construct and shape reality, it appears to have potential to explain the processes of securitization and particularly audience acceptance.

There are some additional difficulties with the theory as understood by the Copenhagen School. Balzacq accurately points out that the units of analysis: referent objects, securitizing actors and functional actors (2011a: 35) are insufficient. The lack of context is particularly visible in this case, and the vast majority of the empirical analysis focused on in this thesis will have to do with the ‘acts’ (2011a: 36) – the strategy of using heuristic artefacts that would resonate with the audience. Although Balzacq himself does not include heteroglossia or polyphony in his suggested list, it will be argued that they are no less effective in constructing and disseminating a narrative framework than other speech acts.

The Copenhagen School approaches the speech act in philosophical terms, by contrast to Thierry Balzacq’s suggestion to approach it in a more pragmatic way. By this is meant that the speech acts do not happen in empty spaces, they require awareness of and familiarity with ‘the constitution of the political field and the relation between this field and the broader space of social positions and processes’ (Thompson 1991 in Balzacq, 2011b: 22). Contextualising securitizing moves is crucial for better understanding their aims, successes, and failures. It is important to understand “what the audience already knows” (Balzacq 2009 in Williams, 2011: 215), although securitization can also create audiences by ‘bringing it to consciousness of itself as a unified audience (Williams, 2011: 215). Considering that audience is central to securitization, the Copenhagen School leaves this element of the theory somewhat lacking in analysis (Williams, 2011: 213). For Balzacq, however, audience is not only central, but it also needs to be an ‘empowered audience’, one that has direct connection to the issue and the ability to enable the securitizing actor to adopt the security measures required (Balzacq, 2011b: 8, 9). In this particular case it is difficult to establish what exactly the ‘empowered audience’ may be, since the different audiences addressed are not the same, even though at times overlapping. It is difficult to see these audiences as having the ability to enable, considering the nature of the

regime, although some audiences may have more power here than others (such as business elites or power structures). However, what the wider audience may have is the ability to disable through protests, civil disobedience, refusal to participate by the armed forces and similar. In this case the securitizing attempt contributes to convincing the audience to remain as is: not actively enable the measures, but to not heartily attempt to disable them. The different audience understanding between different regime types is something that would benefit from future research, however, it is beyond the extent of this piece, even if it would, without a doubt, be beneficial to it.

While some research has been done on the connections of political texts and Bakhtin's theories (for example, Jasinski, 1997), the connection between heteroglossia, polyphony, and securitization remains under-explored. Elaine Campbell has used a similar concepts to investigate how securitization narratives can be challenged through stand-up comedy in the context of the post-September 11th United States (Campbell, 2011), although her article focused mainly on the heteroglot resistance to the dominant narratives, rather than their formation or success of the securitizing attempts. Stefano Bonino similarly explores the heteroglot resistance to securitization in the context of counter-terrorism efforts in Britain and their consequences to the Muslim society there, when exceptional measures become normalised (Bonino, 2013). It appears that the inverse connection, whereby heteroglossia and polyphony contribute to securitizing attempts and acts, which is discussed in this piece, is not widely brought up or discussed in much detail. It would be of interest and benefit to do so to better understand the process of securitization and, possibly, its effectiveness, as the less obvious elements of heteroglot and polyphonic discourse may contribute to the level of acceptance of the securitizing move.

Legitimation

‘...securitization can never only be imposed, there is some need to argue one's case’ (Buzan, Wæver and Wilde, 1998: 25) – Copenhagen School envisages this dialogical attribute needed for securitization to be successful. In the case of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, some protest action against it could be seen in Russia and by Russian outside of the country – this shows that the narrative was not entirely accepted by all, however, those in dissent are unlikely to have been the target audiences for the regime in the first place, even if some crossovers may be noticeable. While this piece largely focuses on the securitizing moves of the securitizing

actors, it is absolutely crucial that the audience would accept those moves as legitimate, and would not, by and large, actively question their validity. The question of achieving legitimacy in discourse, even if apathetically perceived, is another key point for this study.

Van Leeuwen's notion of legitimation focuses on the use of language to establish authority and legitimacy in discourse. According to Van Leeuwen, legitimation involves the strategic deployment of authoritative language and discursive techniques to justify particular actions, decisions, or social arrangements. This can include the use of formal language, technical jargon, and appeals to expertise to convey credibility and persuade audiences of the validity of certain claims or positions. Such view is particularly suitable for this study, as the key question of preparing the public for an extraordinary measure, such as war, is making them measure appear legitimate: not necessarily particularly attractive or righteous, but explained and justified, 'giving a normative dignity to its practical imperatives' (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 111 in Van Leeuwen, 2007: 93). The power to present such arguments and be persuasive with them rests with the assumed knowledge of the securitizing actor and their presumed actions being based on common interests. That is, knowledge, trust, and power position are all linked (Bourdieu 1979; Lupia and McCubbins 1998: 43-60 in Balzacq, 2011b: 26).

Legitimation involves not only the strategic deployment of authoritative language but also the negotiation and interaction of multiple voices and perspectives within discourse. While the following analysis will not be entirely based on Van Leeuwen's contribution, it is highly informed by it and its reflections will be clear to the reader familiar with the four major categories of legitimation: authorisation, moral evaluation, rationalisation, and mythopoesis (Van Leeuwen, 2007: 92). These categories can be found in each of the languages and voices described below, be it by at times somewhat oblique references to the irrationality of Western thinking and judgment on Western values, or in the more obvious narrative building and references to authoritative sources in law, politics, and history.

In general, within the category of authorisation the political and diplomatic/legal languages can be observed. Moral evaluation can be found in the emotive language and nationalistic voice and plays a significant role within most of the narratives identified, particularly the idea of the historical/moral upper-hand and the denazification/demilitarisation discourse. Rationalisation is seen in the diplomatic/legal language as well as throughout the narrative of Russia being the

threatened party, but is generously distributed throughout statements, with frequent interjection of ‘common knowledge’. Mythopoesis is most common in the emotive language and the historical voice, creating particular narratives that may not always be entirely truthful, but back particular viewpoint while disregarding or even denigrating others. It is worth noting that at times this is used not just to legitimise Russian invasion of Ukraine in the bigger picture, but often to delegitimise narratives, voices, languages from the West and within Russia itself that oppose or do not fit within the official line of thought and eventual goal. This is particularly obvious in the statements that have been included to the Russia is not the threat narrative, and is often worded not entirely diplomatically in the emotive language section, for example, by doubting the cognitive abilities of fellow diplomats from other states (MID, 2022b, 2022c). As mentioned before, this does not mean that the different categories of legitimation can only be applied to these languages, voices, and narratives listed above, but it allows for an illustration of the way of thinking applied throughout the thesis.

Conceptual framework

Securitisation and the ‘speech act’

The definition of securitization proposed by the Copenhagen School and considered in the literature review, that securitization happens “...when a securitizing actor uses a rhetoric of existential threat and thereby takes an issue out of what under those conditions is ‘normal politics’” (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998 in Balzacq, Léonard and Ruzicka, 2016: 495), is a good starting point for understanding the theory. However, the expanded and more nuanced definition suggested by Balzacq is much wordier, but also better fitting and more detailed. Securitization, therefore, should be considered as:

“...an articulated assemblage practices whereby heuristic artefacts (metaphors, policy tools, image repertoires, analogies, stereotypes, emotions, etc.) are contextually mobilized by a securitizing actor, who works to prompt an audience to build a coherent network of implications (feelings, sensations, thoughts, and intuitions), about the critical vulnerability of a referent object, that concurs with the securitizing actor’s reasons for choices and actions, by investing the referent subject with such an aura of unprecedented threatening complexion that a

customized policy must be undertaken immediately to block its development”
(Balzacq, 2011: 3).

Essentially, by studying securitization, one aims to understand the processes by which a securitizing actor persuades the audience to agree with the actor’s reading of a particular issue or event, blending persuasion and linguistic competence (Balzacq, 2011: 22).

While Copenhagen School focus on the speech act as a more philosophical practice, Thierry Balzacq advocates viewing it more as a pragmatic practice (2011: 18). In this view, securitization success depends on the securitizing actor’s ability to employ such arguments and in such a way that would resonate with the audience. For this the securitizing actor needs to be able to identify the feelings, needs, and interests of the audience, and then ‘to tune his/her language to the audience’s experience’ (Balzacq, 2011: 9). To do this successfully, securitizing actors acquire knowledge of their target audiences based on stereotypes that the audience holds of the referent subject, and that they hold themselves, which they believe would be successful in that segment (Schneider and Ingram 1993 in Balzacq, 2011). It is the belief within this piece that similar logic can be applied not just to stereotypes uttered, but to the way those utterances themselves are constructed by language and voices used, basing them around themes revolve around certain familiar narratives promoted by the Russian foreign policy, including those escalated long before the period in question. This understanding indicates that threats, essentially, cannot be considered without intersubjective representations through which audiences recognise them – there is a shared knowledge of insecurity (Balzacq, 2011: xiii).

Conceptualising an issue as an issue of security makes the public identify the presumed threats that would make such conceptualisation valid by activating or concealing certain properties of the concept (Balzacq, 2011: 13). If the audience is in the right perceptive environment, and the situation is seen as grave enough, the securitization move will be successful, and the described threats will be accepted (ibid.: 13). Security appeals to the knowledge that we do not possess: the fear of unknown and unpredictable, the fear of grave possibilities, and can thus ‘mobilize a more radical fear of an unforeseeable future and the limits of knowledge (Williams, 2011: 215). It is the ‘if-then’ character of securitization identified by the Copenhagen School, and it can be seen particularly in the emotive language section, where the ‘if-then’ formulation is used to justify Russia’s supposedly pre-emptive action against Ukraine.

Bakhtin: languages and voices

Heteroglossia and polyphony complement securitization theory by emphasizing the multiplicity of voices and languages within discourse. Heteroglossia refers to the diversity of languages, dialects, and styles that intersect in communicative acts, reflecting the plurality of social perspectives and viewpoints. Polyphony, meanwhile, highlights the dynamic interplay and interaction of the voices, which can either harmonise or clash in the construction of meaning (Bakhtin, 2011). In the context of security discourse, Bakhtin's theories suggest that securitization is not a monological process but rather a dialogical one, wherein multiple voices vie for attention and influence. In this case the voices largely act in harmony, bringing particular aspects and traits to the table that often intertwine. For example, Lavrov adds clout to a technocratic, rule of law-focused tropes, while Zakharova's statements are often spoken in a language closer to that of everyday, recognisable to most, while still referring to the same principles. Since language is socially constructed, its meaning is essentially created between the speaker and their audience (Francis, 2012: 4). And while Bakhtin's own theory focuses on the novel, it can be in a way expanded to include practical rhetorical performances, too (Jasinski, 1997: 24). To put it in a more illustrative way, heteroglossia and polyphony can be seen as a choir: the goal, that is, the melody, is the same, and remains so even if one voice has not joined in perfectly, or sings in a language one may not comprehend. This way, discourses that may not be acceptable to some audiences do not necessarily affect the effect of the discourses that are convincing to them. This does not turn into a cacophony as long as the goal in sight remains the same.

What is of particular significance for this idea is that when trying to convince an audience, a language that is purely authoritative is unlikely to succeed – the speaker must use the language that is relatable and recognisable to the audience to which it speaks. In this case the audience is the Russian public, but this audience is not singular, either, hence the employment of different languages and voices makes for an argument that can convince different sub-groups of this audience within the same speech acts and narratives. In other words, the intertwining languages, voices and themes help address the fragmentation of the audiences. Thus even for speakers with authority, as in this case, due to their position in the state and extensive experience in those positions, there remains a form of dialogue, if not obviously active (Jasinski, 1997: 26, 27). The speakers are very aware of how their choice of words, linguistic tropes, narratives, and so forth might be perceived and received by the audiences, and adapt

their language accordingly. Legitimation can be seen as a process of managing heteroglossia and polyphony within discourse, wherein certain voices are privileged and others marginalised to uphold existing power structures and reinforce dominant ideologies. The use of authoritative language and discursive techniques serves to legitimise particular perspectives and positions while silencing alternative viewpoints and dissenting voices.

For Bakhtin, 'agreement' is an important part of dialogue (Gardiner, 2004: 39). In this case, this would be considered to be the audience's acceptance of a securitizing move, however, even so retaining dialogic character – without 'a merging of voices and truths in a single impersonal truth' (Bakhtin 1984 in Gardiner, 2004: 40). Thus, the different voices and languages remain, even upon a successful securitizing move – it does not consolidate the truth in a monologic manner. The participants, securitizing actors and audiences, do not speak as unique selves: 'they always draw on, invoke, and position their discourse in terms of sociolinguistic variation' (Paz, 2013: 195-196). This explains the different, although it is by no means a finite list, languages and voices introduced in the empirical part of this thesis. They are ways of governing meaning (Park-Fuller, 1986: 2). There are no words that can be considered 'voiceless' – utterances take shape through performances of the speaking subject, and in them (Gardiner, 2004: 36). Thus voices and languages are of performative nature, as are speech acts – each a way to shape reality.

Performativity

Following from the two conceptualisations described previously, performativity, as theorised by Judith Butler and others, further complicates our understanding of discourse by highlighting the constitutive role of language in shaping social realities and identities. Performativity suggests that speech acts not only describe the world but also have the power to enact and transform it. This adds to the understanding of securitizing 'speech acts' as performative practices, or as '...cases in which the speaker may utter a sentence and mean what he says and also mean another illocution with a different propositional content'. (Searle, 1979: 30). There is more to language than the obvious meanings of words or phrases, also implied understandings.

By performing certain identities and subject positions through language, individuals and groups contribute to the construction and maintenance of social norms, hierarchies, and power

structures. In the realm of security discourse, performativity emphasises the role of rhetoric and symbolic gestures in shaping perceptions of security threats and legitimising the exercise of state power. Thus, discourse and action are connected. Discourse is part of agency, as it operates in the shared knowledge, shapes relations, and creates discourse content. But it also creates and targets the manifestation of a communicative action (Balzacq, 2011: 23). The success of a communication (and in this case, a securitizing attempt), is the gaining of mutual knowledge that urges the audience to some kind of action (or in this case, inaction) (ibid.: 22).

All the statements, addresses, speeches, and other communications analysed are very public and the nature of them ensures that they will be further disseminated by the news agencies, television, papers, social media, and other channels. The aim is largely to subvert other discourses, particularly those arising in the West, and persuade the audiences that Ukraine has become an issue requiring exceptional and immediate measures, otherwise the consequences may be calamitous. The languages and voices employed in these discourses are not quite the same as strategic political decisions that are straightforward – these are less substantial and more difficult to navigate. In this case the performative speech acts are related to the ‘politics of emotions’ (Bleiker and Hutchinson 2008 in Terry and Makarychev, 2022: 84): they are often laden with sentiment, feeling, and construct the referent object and referent subject of the securitization move through this emotional prism.

Securitisation**: themes, languages, voices**

As the focus is on the environment in which the speaker and the audience meet, rather than just the utterances, the analysis will start with the common themes of Russian foreign policy to establish a degree of context. Through these themes, narratives are built, by first establishing a connection among different characteristics that direct to the threat, then contributing to the routinisation of it, and finally, creating common understandings (Balzacq, 2011: 43). The power to secure an issue also helps the actor join their points of view with the audience’s, who has the power to acknowledge the claims (Luke 1974 in Balzacq, 2011: 25, 26).

While the themes developed by both the president’s office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs remain much the same, the languages used in their presentation are often more specific. The Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov often sticks to the more diplomatic language, commonly cites treaties and international law cases, steers clear of the more emotive elements, similarly to the

president's spokesperson Dmitry Peskov, who, while allowing himself some more informal expressions with the press, normally uses language that is fairly dry, diplomatic and matter of fact. In stark contrast to this stands out the MFAs spokesperson Maria Zakharova, who uses emotive, colourful language freely and at will, inserting colloquialisms, metaphors, allegories, jokes and similar. As for the president, Vladimir Putin's statements differ significantly depending on the occasion and purpose of them. When speaking to the media he often asks rhetorical questions, evoking emotion and judgment; when addressing the public directly he commonly uses emotive language and historical voices, underlining them with political statements, stressing the nation's peace-loving nature, yet willingness and capability to defend itself when assumed under threat. When speaking at news conferences after high level meetings, the language is usually diplomatic and business-like, up until the time arrives for press questions – then a change occurs.

Throughout the period investigated, it was also notable that when answering the press questions the answers in any way relating to Ukraine or the West were often lengthy and elaborate, at times moving quite far from the original question to reiterate the narratives commonly found in the foreign policy statements and discussed in more detail below, such as Ukraine's unwillingness to implement the Minsk Agreements, the 'hysteria' of Western politicians when it comes to Russia, or the unfairness of treatment of Russia. This stands in contrast with answers to questions relating to other regions, which are often answered briefly and with very diplomatic language, without going off at tangents on history, values, or fairness, unless the speaker has a chance to insert the aforementioned narratives relating to the West or Ukraine into that answer, too. This shows the importance that the Russian foreign policy representatives and makers put towards the dissemination of these narratives, through their constant repetition (at times nearly word-for-word) and insertion and is particularly noticeable in Maria Zakharova's weekly foreign policy briefings.²

It is also important to note the frequency with which some of the actors address the public. While the main foreign policy-maker, President Putin, addressed the public only four times in the first two months analysed (two official addresses, one news conference, and a brief

² For example, see the 14th December, 2021 Foreign Policy Briefing by Maria Zakharova. The questions relating to Russian citizens arrested in the US or Sweden and Finland's military integration with NATO are paid much more attention than those of Nagorno Karabakh or potential CSTO enlargement (MID, 2021d); or the 9th February, 2022 Briefing, where questions relating to the West and EU are discussed at length, while those relating to Azerbaijan, for example, are answered in a few sentences (MID, 2022c).

congratulations), it is noteworthy that there about twice as many occasions in the three weeks prior to the full-scale invasion where he took the spotlight (three news conferences, two official addresses, an article, a greeting, and an interview). This indicates the importance of messages delivered, and the keenness of the actor for them to be disseminated. Similarly, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Maria Zakharova, who is rather active with her comments (in addition to usual press briefings), issuing them several times a month, was quiet in the period of December-January. It is of some oddity that in this tense period in international politics the spokeswoman had little to say, although it is difficult to establish the reasons why, yet worth of note. Granted, some of that time was part of the festive period, but other briefings took place regularly.

Dividing the languages and voices into groupings was helpful for analysis, however, this is not to establish that these are the only ones that appeared or that the groupings are unchallengeable. In the relatively short period of time analysed, these appear to have been the most frequent and significant categorisations based on the texts. While these are frequent in Russian foreign policy discourse altogether, other categorisations may be more beneficial in other frames of analysis (such as economic language, for example, or the use of regional/cultural voices, depending on the research question at hand).

While these are the main themes that were identified through texts, additional themes could also be explored, such as the focus on partnerships (China, BRICS, Belarus, among others), support for multipolarity and rejection of Western hegemony³. These are often invoked in showing that Russia is not alone in its mission and is by no means internationally isolated (becoming further evident following the invasion). However, this would deserve a separate and detailed, wider look, which is beyond the framework of this study.

Themes and narratives

Ukraine and Russia – brotherly nations

The notion of Russia and Ukraine being brotherly nations emerged as a powerful propaganda concept aimed not only at Russian domestic audiences, but also at Ukrainians, and the West

³ Some examples can be found in the following documents: MID, 2021a, 2021b, 2021d, 2021e, 2021c; PoR, 2021, 2021, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c; TASS, 2022.

(Lototska, 2023: 43). The idea is by no means new, and dates back all the way to the Russian Empire, with the idea of a common Russian nation for all nations under the Empire's rule. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the narrative was slowly utilised to bring the Commonwealth of Independent States closer together under the umbrella of *Russkiy Mir* (ibid.: 43-44). This is certainly a rather complex theme, as depending on Russia's relationship with Ukraine at a given time, the sentiments appear to shift: prior to the Revolution of Dignity the 'little brother' narrative was popularised in the Russian media, but it was replaced by the enemy narrative soon after (Khaldarova, 2021). It is not quite as clear-cut throughout the period of 2014 to present-day, as the focus lies often with the Ukrainian government being the enemy, rather than the people. For example, Putin's whole answer to journalist Irada Zeinalova's question asked at his annual news conference (PoR, 2021f) is a reiteration of this narrative: two brotherly nations, sometimes at odds, but working together, their cooperation abruptly stopped by a coup (that is, the Revolution of Dignity), not without the help of the West (MID, 2022r, 2022d, 2022y; PoR, 2022a), which left Russia no other choice but to support Crimea in joining the Federation; the Donbas area always thought of itself as Russian anyway, so when military force was used by Ukraine and Russian-speakers came under danger, Russia still did all it could to resolve the matter peacefully via Minsk accords but was forced into this contentious position by the actions of others. This very same narrative is reiterated frequently and in rather similar wording throughout the period analysed (PoR, 2022a, 2022l; MID, 2022j).

"...Ukraine is not just a neighbouring country for us. It is an inalienable part of our own history, culture and spiritual space. These are our comrades, those dearest to us <...> Since time immemorial, the people living in the south-west of what has historically been Russian land have called themselves Russians and Orthodox Christians. This was the case before the 17th century, when a portion of this territory rejoined the Russian state, and after." (PoR, 2022a).

This recurring theme focuses on the supposed historical likeness of the Russian and Ukrainian peoples, that is distorted by poorly made political decisions historically (in the early days of the Soviet Union) (PoR, 2022a), and later on by the Ukrainian government's, the Kiev regime's, as it is often referred to, insistence on separating the two and radicalising the population of Ukraine against Russia and Russians (PoR, 2021f, 2022a, 2022b). The blame is laid at the feet of the political decision makers here, rather than the people themselves, perhaps in an attempt to attract those sympathetic to this narrative.

“The aggravation began in 2014. Before that, even though the Soviet Union had ceased to exist and part of historically Russian territories with a historically Russian population, primarily in Ukraine, had found themselves living outside Russia, we accepted that as a fact of life and felt more or less comfortable about it. We even helped those new republics to get back on their feet, and we worked, were ready to work and are still working together with their governments, whatever their foreign policy priorities.” (PoR, 2021f).

One finds a clear repetition of the familiar historical narrative built by the Kremlin over the last few years, with the use of historical voice and with the help of moral authority (specifically, the sacrifice and the good will of the Russian people in helping other ‘brotherly’ republics).

A different part of this narrative is that Ukraine is not even really a country; Soviet Union created it, and therefore it is essentially Russia.

“But we are trying to avoid talking about the creation of Ukraine as well. Who created it? Vladimir Lenin did, when he established the Soviet Union. This is set out in the 1922 Treaty on the creation of the Soviet Union and in the 1924 Constitution.” (PoR, 2021f).

By this logic, the very legitimacy of Ukraine’s existence is brought into question. It becomes nearly an extension of Russia and is questionable as a viable state. To the point that during his 24th February address President Putin felt comfortable addressing the Ukrainian Armed Forces in attempted persuasion that the Ukrainian government is illegitimate, it is a ‘junta’, an enemy of the Ukrainian people, and that the people themselves would not need any protection from Russia if they do not support it (PoR, 2022b). Even just three weeks prior to the invasion Maria Zakharova called any military attack absurd, due to the closeness of the two peoples and their common history (MID, 2022c).

Russia is not the threat, it is being threatened

This narrative was perhaps the most addressed in the period analysed. The argument that the West is actively threatening Russia through NATO enlargements is not novel and well

documented. NATO was commonly portrayed as an existential threat due to its material and military support to Ukraine and its government throughout the years, particularly from 2014. However, the threat portrayed may not be the threat actually perceived by the Kremlin. It is not so much that NATO was prepared to take military action against Russia – it is more that Ukraine accession would make it more complicated for Russia to be the dominant power in the region (Person and McFaul, 2022).

This narrative is quite wide and therefore all languages and voices identified below can be found here – there are references to security, international agreements, emotive utterances, claims of peace making, historical perspectives, and nationalistic tones. One of the main points of contention is NATO enlargement:

“We remember, as I have mentioned many times before and as you know very well, how you promised us in the 1990s that [NATO] would not move an inch to the East. You cheated us shamelessly: there have been five waves of NATO expansion, and now the weapons systems I mentioned have been deployed in Romania and deployment has recently begun in Poland. This is what we are talking about, can you not see?” (PoR, 2021f).

While the claim that NATO had promised to never expand East has been rebutted by those who were actually part of the conversation at the time, like General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev (*Gorbatschow Interview 2014 zur Nato Osterweiterung*, 2022), this is a pivotal point for Kremlin’s discourse. By continued expansion over the years since the collapse of the Soviet Union and dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, it was NATO itself that created the security crisis in Europe (PoR, 2021f; 2022a). The claimed reason behind the mistrust in NATO’s peaceful and purely defensive intentions is that NATO has conducted military operations against other states, usually focusing on Belgrade bombing, Libya, Iraq, and Afghanistan (PoR, 2022i). The so-called ‘whataboutism’, Russia’s justification of its actions by suggesting the West are no different (Gorenburg, 2019), is abundant in this theme.

NATO and the West are also blamed for essentially corrupting Ukrainian authorities into anti-Russian action by supplying it with weapons and conducting joint exercises, even ‘forcing’ Georgia and Ukraine to join (PoR, 2022a; MID, 2021b; 2021r; 2021aa). Thus, the threats that Russia faces can be constructed in different ways. At times the threat is the West and its policies,

in other cases it may be Ukraine (not without Western support), particularly when the question revolves around amassing troops near the border:

“The President [Emmanuel Macron] said that Russia is conducting exercises and has amassed a large group of forces. But has Ukraine not amassed them also? They have the same 100,000 or 125,000 troops concentrated in Donbass.” (PoR, 2022l).

Thus, the reason to attack Ukraine is that it would be a pre-emptive operation, as, seemingly inevitably, the West would attack Russia in the end through Ukraine. NATO already clearly states that Russia is a threat, and that it aims to contain it, which in turn is a threat to Russia (PoR, 2022a; 2022b; 2022i; 2022m; MID, 2022d). Multinational military drills are mere cover-up of for the rapid build-up of NATO military forces at the Russian border (PoR, 2022a; 2022k; MID, 2021r; 2021u). All this is portrayed in the light where Russia itself has done nothing wrong, and does not pose a threat to anyone: its public statements are entirely peaceful (MID, 2022v), and its armed forces stay within its territory (MID, 2021m).

Historical and moral righteousness

This theme revolves around the past wrongs that need to be righted, and the moral degradation of, mainly, the West, in comparison to the strong value system of Russia. These themes are not particularly complex but are frequently brought up in relation to the bright future of Russia and the West’s inevitable downfall.

Some of the need historical righteousness remains connected to the theme of betrayal that is perceived to have been committed by NATO. Their mistake was in not treating Russia as a true ally, and then making promises that they would refuse to keep as they were not recorded on paper (PoR, 2021f). This was done despite Soviet Union, and later Russia, having completed all its obligations towards its Western neighbours (PoR, 2022a).

Another mistake was the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It disrupted the balance in the world, allowing for Western arrogance to take hold, coupled with the feeling of absolute superiority (PoR, 2022b). This feeling, however, is not new, if mistaken – the West is, in fact, the root cause of most the world’s problems, and has been for the past half a millennium (MID, 2021x).

In the meantime Russia tries to resolve them through respect o cultural and religious identities, without imposing their own model on anyone, focusing strictly on independent development and following the rules of the UN Charter (MID, 2021ae).

While others try to rewrite history, such as the Polish government showing their ‘gratitude’ by dishonouring monuments of the Soviet heroes of WWII (MID, 2022e), Russia continues its thousand-year legacy, reflected in ‘a concentrated form the accumulated wisdom of humanity (MID, 2022r). However, historical truth promises that alliances such as NATO, created particularly against someone, rather than for something, not only contradict international commitments, but also will not be beneficial to those states taking part (MID, 2022b).

The moral righteousness lies within the Russian value system, which, first and foremost, respects the human life and dignity, denouncing the abuse and killing of the elderly, children, and women in Donbas. The horrors which the West simply ignores (PoR, 2022a). The situation in Donbas is described as a ‘genocide of the millions of people who live there and who pinned their hopes on Russia’ (PoR, 2022b), in order to justify the February 24th invasion of Ukraine. The same protection had to be awarded to the people of Crimea, who chose to return to their historic homeland (PoR, 2022b), and the more the West oppose it, the better Russia understands that it is the right thing to do (MID, 2022f). The West does not even bother trying to comprehend the historical truth of the Eastern regions of Ukraine (MID, 2022z). The use of force is considered a positive thing, when done for the greater good:

“Regarding the question if all issues can and must be resolved by force or if it is possible to remain on the side of good. Well, why do you think that good must always be frail and helpless? I do not think that is true. I think good means being able to defend oneself. We will proceed from that.” (PoR, 2022w).

Russia’s actions are justified as morally correct, while Western states consider themselves above others (MID, 2022r). Such arrogance and their attempts to force false values onto others are ‘contrary to human nature’, and simply cannot be allowed fester (PoR, 2022b). With justice and truth on Russia’s side, it becomes a strong state: independent, sovereign, with a bright future (ibid.). These narratives tend to play with the emotional evocation, often using the historical voice, and at times political language, adding to the authoritative aspect of the statements.

(De-)nazification and (de-)militarisation

When speaking about Nazism in Ukraine, it appears that the Russian foreign policy discourse conflates several terms: Nazism, fascism, neo-Nazism (Rossoliński-Liebe and Willems, 2022: 2, 3), and the very meaning of what is attempted to describe still remains unclear. However, references to Nazism abound in Russian foreign policy of the period, and it was one of the main reasons cited during the 24th February address for the invasion of the country (PoR, 2022b). The radical elements ‘natsi’ are supposedly so strong in Ukraine, that they have overtaken the running of the state, after escalating the 2014 protests into a coup d'état (PoR, 2021f). What allowed for nationalism to flourish was the right of secession from the Soviet Union (PoR, 2022a). This nationalism would eventually grow into aggressive Russophobia and neo-Nazism (ibid.). It is these nationalists that abuse the peaceful citizens of Donbas, refuse to allow them to preserve their language, identity, and culture (ibid.).

Combating Nazism, xenophobia, and racism is, in fact, one of the priorities of Russian foreign policy (MID, 2021y). A policy that the US and Ukraine refuse to support in the form of a UN resolution (MID, 2021z). Maria Zakharova even went so far as to claim that ‘lawlessness and rabid neo-Nazism have become a fact of life in Ukraine’ (MID, 2021c). Verkhovna Rada’s Resolution No. 6406 “On the celebration of memorable dates and anniversaries in 2022-2023” was also deemed glorification of Nazism (MID, 2021d) – even regulating national holidays appears to raise issues. Ukraine’s attempts at decommunization became an issue too, as ‘with Nazi collaborators and henchmen elevated to the rank of heroes of Ukraine’ (MID, 2022y).

While far-right neo-Nazi groups do exist in Ukraine, as they do in Russia and other countries, referring to Ukrainian government as neo-Nazi is a purposeful misrepresentation of the situation at hand. The connections of this theme made with the historical voice are used to rationalise Russia’s actions in Ukraine, giving them historical legitimacy and allowing for a degree of emotional connection with the cause due to the importance of the victory of Nazism in WWII (MID, 2021ab). The Ukrainian Nazis are supposedly supported by the West (PoR, 2022b), and in turn militarise Ukraine by providing it with weaponry, technical support, military training, and so forth (MID, 2021ad). The ‘hysterical’ campaigns launched by the West and Ukraine addressing Russia’s at the time still future invasion of Ukraine are simply another

excuse to militarise Ukraine even further (MID, 2021a). Zakharova jibed that ‘if one is for peace, one is pumped full of weapons’, even though Russia’s (MID, 2022c) – Western partners delivery weapons to Ukraine became unacceptable, thus adding to the list of reasons for the full-scale invasion. In reality, Ukrainian military, with all the Western support that it got, was not a match, and certainly not a credible threat, to the Russian military power, thus demilitarisation and denazification attempts may not seem legitimate to most, but for those who follow the Russian foreign policy discourse as it is presented, the connections to WWII and historical parallels may be persuasive and appealing.

The languages

Political

The political language focuses on political decisions and terminology, without much attention to emotional depth of statements, dealing more with political calculations, power, and political aims. This language is largely spoken from a point of authority, often including statements rationalising acts and decisions, and at times also offering moral evaluation. The issues most prominent in the political language over the three months in question mostly referred to self-determination and sovereignty, and defence and security. Not only does it speak of defending Russia’s interests and sovereignty, but it speaks of it in a way that suggests those things are in real danger. These questions are already very much a part of the political domain, so there is little input from the public in the discussion on their significance. The self-determination aspect is most commonly brought up in the cases of DPR, LPR, and Crimea, the referenda completed there years prior, but with the final recognition of the two republics on 22nd February 2022 the topic was unsurprisingly brought up quite frequently, especially since the recognition was recommended by the Duma deputies earlier on. It is also accompanied by the more legal, authoritative language, referring to UN Charter (MID, 2022j). What is stressed, however, is not Russia’s role in the endeavour, but specifically the right to self-determination under international law, avoiding the nuance within the law itself or the legitimacy of the said referenda.

“We signed treaties yesterday, and these treaties with the Donetsk People's Republic and the Lugansk People's Republic contain relevant clauses that say that we will provide these republics with appropriate assistance, including

military. Since there is an ongoing conflict there, we make it clear by this decision that, if need be, we plan to fulfill [sic] our obligations.” (PoR, 2022w).

While in the case of the two separatist republic the topic was self-determination as independent states, the question of Crimea joining the Russian Federation was treated in much the same manner, yet also with little attention to any complicating details:

“A few words about Crimea. The people of the peninsula freely made their choice to be with Russia. The Kiev authorities cannot challenge the clearly stated choice of the people” (PoR, 2022a).

The will of the people appears to be the ultimate deciding factor, in this narrative, in spite of other international obligations and treaties. Comparisons are at times made between Crimea and Kosovo, stating that the expression of popular will is in no way lesser, even if Kosovo’s decision was made by its parliament and Crimean decision to join Russia was approved by a referendum (PoR, 2022w). By drawing these parallels, a justification is sought, although in a somewhat confusing manner, since Russia itself does not recognise Kosovo’s independence. This may be aimed more at posing the issue this way for the Western audiences, but the domestic public could also see it as confronting the Western hypocrisy and different sets of rules for friends and foes.

Additionally, there is an interesting twist in the Russian foreign policy logic when it comes to considerations of self-determination of peoples.

“UN Charter is the Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States. It was adopted in 1970 and remains relevant to this day. It has never been put in question anywhere. The Declaration says on the matter of the principle of sovereign and territorial integrity that it must strictly apply to “states conducting themselves in compliance with the principle of equal rights and self- determination of peoples (...) and thus possessed of a government representing the whole people belonging to the territory without distinction as to race, creed or colour.” I believe nobody

can say that the Ukrainian regime has represented the whole people living on the territory of the country after the 2014 coup.” (Lavrov in MID, 2022j).

By considering the 2014 Revolution of Dignity a coup, a door is opened to take away the right to self-determination from the people of Ukraine. In a way, this allows for the separated self-determination of the two republics in Donbas, but it is also alarming what it suggests Russia’s view is on the sovereignty of Ukraine itself, and all its regions, if, according to this logic, it cannot determine its own future. This narrative allows for differentiation in levels of sovereignty between states, such as, for instance, Lebanon, where Russia proclaims its commitment to the state’s sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity (MID, 2021s), while Ukrainian government is blamed for losing the state’s sovereignty (PoR, 2022a). While claiming that Ukraine is essentially not even run by its own government but receives its orders from elsewhere (that is, the US and NATO) (PoR, 2021f), Lavrov insists that Russia does the opposite and never exerts its influence onto other states:

“Unlike Western countries, we never tell our partners who to be friends with and who to avoid. Our US and certain European colleagues are running around the globe demanding an end to trade, economic, investment and defence industry cooperation with Russia and China. They are not even trying to hide it. Russia never puts such conditions on anyone. We respect sovereignty and our partners’ sovereign right to choose colleagues with whom they want to cooperate in the international arena.” (MID, 2021s).

On the one hand, this supports the picture painted of Ukraine, as a state that cannot take care of its own people and territory, but it also adds to the wicked, immoral image of the West in contrast to Russia’s respectful approach to international norms and laws. Similar claims rang even in the announcement of the ‘special military operation’: “It is not our plan to occupy the Ukrainian territory. We do not intend to impose anything on anyone by force” (PoR, 2022b). Certainly, hindsight has informed the world’s knowledge and understanding of these statements considerably, and since the issue was framed more in the terms of liberation than occupation (Kirby, 2022), the following annexation of territories did not require further justification.

Sovereignty remains an awkward issue for coherent discussion in the wider context, too. When asked by a journalist whether Russia would respect Finland's and Sweden's sovereignty in their decision to join NATO, Lavrov provided the following answer:

“Russia fully respects the sovereignty of both Finland and Sweden. We believe that the policy of neutrality pursued by these countries is one of the most important contributions to the common European architecture and to ensuring stability on the European continent. It's those who are trying, by hook or by crook, to get these two countries to join NATO that don't seem to respect their sovereignty.” (MID, 2022r).

This brief answer suggests two things: that neutrality is more appreciated than sovereign choice is accepted, and that the agency of both Finland and Sweden becomes irrelevant in relation to NATO, as they are being shepherded into the alliance, rather than actively joining it of their own accord. However, when asked about other states potentially joining CSTO, Lavrov had a rather different answer:

“Regarding the expansion of the CSTO, everything is written down in the CSTO Charter. Anyone wishing to join should make a request. In the last 18 months, the heads of state signed the Protocol, which amends the Charter and, in addition to the full members of the Organisation, partner and observer institutions are being created. <...> We don't usually invite anyone anywhere. There is an approved procedure, according to which we consider any applications constructively. It is our Western colleagues who like to issue invitations. They are urging everyone to join NATO. This is not the way we operate. We are polite people.” (MID, 2022r).

This clearly shows duplicity in the view of NATO and CSTO. States are free to join CSTO of their own volition, but joining NATO becomes a matter of near enough coercion. A common line that is added in this case is that the states have no obligation to admit those countries that may want to join, thus suggesting that NATO had no reason to enlarge, and certainly does not need to grow further just because some states are interested in joining (PoR, 2022l). The two utterances were made on the same occasion, yet the difference between the outlooks was not

in any way addressed or questioned by the journalists. A similar line of argument is followed when discussing military exercises within Russia and within the NATO member states.

“Russia holds regular military exercises on its territory. We had exercises in the western part of the country, and now there is a snap exercise underway along Russia’s eastern borders. This is our affair, and our decisions. When military assets are concentrated along the Russian borders with the Americans sending tens of thousands of their military personnel, and the UK dispatching hundreds, thousands of weapons, we must understand what they are doing in the Baltic countries, in Poland or other countries, because some of these weapons can effectively target the territory of the Russian Federation. I would not look for any hidden agenda here. We always respond to security threats the Russian Federation faces.” (Lavrov in MID, 2021b).

Such statements attempt to portray Russian military exercises on Russian soil as different from NATO military exercises within NATO borders, as in the thousands of Brits or Americans exercising in the Baltics are a cause for major concern as they are near Russia’s borders, while thousands of Russian soldiers exercising by the borders of Ukraine is nothing for Ukraine to worry about, since they are within their state limits.

“Russian troop deployment on our own territory seems to be causing incomprehensible anxiety and very strong reactions from our British colleagues and other Western representatives.” (Lavrov in MID, 2022v).

Even in the most simplified terms where deeper nuance is not taken into account, such as the annexation of Crimea and Russia’s participation in the conflict in the Donbas region, these ideas sound far-fetched. It is a duplicitous view concisely expressed in a few sentences while following the below expanded upon narrative that Russia is not itself a threat, it is being threatened, primarily by NATO. Eventually, these formulations become the basis for the ‘special military operation’, as they build on the narrative of Russia ‘facing a permanent threat from the territory of today’s Ukraine’ (PoR, 2022b).

Sovereignty and security issues are given substantial attention by each of the actors and are paramount to the building of narratives and themes that turn Ukraine into an existential security

issue for Russia. They often intertwine when the topic is Russia's own situation. Security, peace, and order are claimed to be the foundations of Russia's development, yet it is approached by strengthening and modernisation of the Army and the Navy (PoR, 2022d). With such preparations and the threats faced, including that of Ukraine's supposed aspiration to acquire nuclear weapons, it appears that Russia is back into a corner and simply must 'take bold and immediate action' to firstly, protect the security and sovereignty of its own, but also the right to self-determination of the people in Donbas (PoR, 2022b) – this is the argument made by President Putin on 24th February 2022. In the same speech Putin carefully tries to distance the 'special military operation' from any expansionist goals and focuses on the protective explanation for the start of the operation.

Diplomatic/legal

The diplomatic/legal categorisation of language identified here encompasses diplomatic vernacular and references to international law, including treaties and cases. Most prominently featured in this language is the authorisation category of legitimation, through recurrent references to law. Russian foreign policy makers speak this language well, particularly Sergey Lavrov, who can fluently cite treaties, articles, and agreements in different contexts and settings. This language is often employed when discussing Russia's predicament of perceived NATO threat (MID, 2022n), general security situation in Europe (MID, 2022r), and when discussing Russia's security proposals presented to NATO and the US towards the end of 2021 (MID, 2021m). All these issues are approached with diplomatic means and suggested solutions, but the requirements announced are so presumptuous that it makes one question the sincerity of these attempts at peaceful resolution:

“Russia's core proposals which contain three key points. First, to prevent further NATO expansion. Second, to have the Alliance refrain from deploying assault weapon systems on Russian borders. And finally, rolling back the bloc's military capability and infrastructure in Europe to where they were in 1997, when the NATO-Russia Founding Act was signed.” (PoR, 2022a).

Not only such demands undermine the sovereignty of nations to choose their own alliances and to have control about what happens within their borders, but it is quite clearly a bogus attempt at diplomatic efforts, as the request would not be acceptable to the Alliance. For NATO to agree

to such demands, all member states would have to agree with them too, which is not a realistic prospect, but this is noted as unwillingness to cooperate (Zakharova in MID, 2022b). Such statements brazenly clash with the international law norm of equality among states, even if the President Putin claims to respect it (PoR, 2022i). The logic of this demand is based in the idea of not *‘undermining indivisible European security and strengthening one’s own security at the expense of others’* within the OSCE framework (Lavrov in MID, 2022r). It is arguable whether NATO enlargement truly hampers Russia’s security, but the legal line of argumentation could be found plausible. However, since the claims come from an authoritative source, refer to legal norms and treaties, they might hold sway with the audience as reasonable and legitimate, without much need for challenging or questioning. They give the impression that it is NATO that does not follow the agreed-upon policies, and while there is a dispute over the fact, there is effort to resolve it by legal and diplomatic means. What might make it more convincing, is that similar claims are made in different contexts, too. The supremacy of international law, principles and values enshrined in the UN Charter (Lavrov in MID, 2021r), attempting to mediate between countries in conflict (PoR, 2022s; MID, 2022w) support the wider narrative of dedication to peaceful resolution of conflicts.

Aside from addressing security issues, the diplomatic/legal language appears to have two other purposes: to either justify and explain Russia’s own actions, and criticise the actions of others, particularly the West and Ukraine. The justifications are normally based on the UN Charter as the legal basis for the actions. The principle of self-determination is once again brought up here in connection to justification of the annexation of Crimea (MID, 2021c), and the recognition of independence of DNR and LNR (PoR, 2022b), as does the argument that Ukrainian government does not represent its people as a whole since the Revolution of Dignity (MID, 2022j; 2022ab). The very same Charter is cited as the legal foundation for the ‘special military operation’ under Article 51, Chapter VII (PoR, 2022b). The article provides that self-defence is allowed under the Charter in the case of an armed attack against a member of the UN, until the Security Council can arrange for measures to maintain international peace and security (UN, no date). The reasoning is at the very least problematic, as neither DNR nor LNR, even if considered under military attack, are members of the UN, thus the self-defence and the mutual assistance treaties with DNR and LNR are unlikely to be applicable. On the other hand, the content of the article is not actually discussed, thus an image may be formed among the audience of a legitimate claim. Within the critique and justification a common thread of what is commonly referred as ‘whataboutism’ can be detected, the line of reasoning that other states

engage in much the same activities they criticise Russia for (Gorenburg, 2019), stressing their hypocrisy and deceitful nature.

For all the discussions of international legal commitments, the Minsk Agreements with their goal of ending hostilities in Eastern Ukraine are mentioned frequently and often spoken about at some length, usually claiming that the government in Kyiv is not following them and has no intentions to do so in the future (PoR, 2021f, 2022a, 2022k, 2022l, 2022m, 2022w; MID, 2021s, 2021r, 2021z, 2021t, 2021aa, 2022j, 2021f), while the Budapest Memorandum, which was supposed to provide security guarantees to Ukraine by Russia, Great Britain and the US, appears to have been mentioned only once by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov (MID, 2022v), and not in significant detail, and only because the UK Foreign Secretary brought it up in their meeting.

The criticisms, however, are more varied in reasoning, if not in their addressees. NATO is often criticised for its supposed violation of the Russia-NATO Founding Act, for deploying military personnel into the states that joined after the signing of the Act (PoR, 2022m; MID, 2022d), and the aforementioned requests addressed to NATO were also based on this agreement. NATO is also criticised for its ‘open-door’ policy towards new members (PoR, 2022l), for reading Article 10 of the Treaty as an obligation to invite, rather than an option:

“We know what Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty is about, and I have already spoken about this here in this room at previous news conferences following talks with our European partners. Article 10 says nothing of the kind. It says, “the Parties may invite,” not they “must invite.” This is all it says.”
(PoR, 2022m).

This is another occasion of disagreement on interpretations of the legal language. It is true that NATO bases its ‘open-door’ policy on Article 10 and its provision that when unanimously agreed any European state that is ‘*in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this Treaty*’ (NATO, no date) may be invited to join, stressing the idea of furthering the Treaty principles. Whether it is right to interpret it in the way President Putin has done in the quotation above is a matter of discussion. This question based on semantics may not be his strongest argument – they appear

to have more substantial messaging when the articles and treaties are not directly quoted, but it retains rationalising and authoritative traits which may be appealing to audiences.

Other criticisms may hold up better both in the emotive response, and the legal aspect. The NATO bombing of Belgrade is another topic that gets brought up as an illegal endeavour. The lack of the UN Security Council's consent to the operation would suggest so. This narrative builds on the wider theme of Russia in danger, as, consequently, NATO cannot be viewed as a peaceful organisation (PoR, 2022l). This argument was also used in the 24th February speech in justifying the 'special military operation', alongside the invasion of Iraq and military action in Syria and Libya (PoR, 2022b). All are brought up as examples of disregard for international law and validate Russia's own actions without delving into the more nuanced choices made by policy makers both in Russia and the West. As if the West acting in a particular vein is a proverbial white flag for Russia to do so, too. This is not to say that all these Western actions were legal and appropriate, but they are not entirely comparable to the Russian actions either. For example, no territories were annexed by NATO, the US, or other Western countries in the long-term.

The question of application of international law also includes issues such as sanctions, where the West is accused of caring '*about it only when they stand to benefit. When there is nothing to gain, they conveniently forget all norms of international public law.*' (PoR, 2022k). There is also a recurring theme of the West attempting to replace international law and the UN Charter with concepts such as a '*rules-based international order*', where the West sets its own rules in closed partnerships that other states must follow (Lavrov in MID, 2021x; 2021z). It is not entirely clear what rules are being referred to exactly, but the portrayal of division and preferential treatment stands out in this argument. Additionally, and perhaps somewhat amusingly, an occasional gibe is also taken at the expense of Western diplomatic efforts and failures, for example, referring to hysteria of the Western countries surrounding both Russia and Ukraine (MID, 2022d). Some more serious criticisms are present too, based on '*ideologically charged approaches, ultimatums, threats and moralising*' (Lavrov in MID, 2022m). Such teasing may not be of much use diplomatically, but they connect to a different language, emotive, which will be discussed next.

Emotive

This categorisation includes the language that attempts to evoke an emotional response from the audience, some of it may consist of rhetorical questions, emotion-laden wording, in forms of metaphors, allegories, slang, colloquialisms, mockery, drawing terrifying narratives, allusions to irrationality or mental capacity of actors, and so forth. The narrative of betrayal, having been cheated, disrespected, or treated unfairly revolves around NATO and the West, as untrustworthy partners on the international stage.

“You cheated us shamelessly: there have been five waves of NATO expansion, and now the weapons systems I mentioned have been deployed in Romania and deployment has recently begun in Poland. This is what we are talking about, can you not see?” (PoR, 2021f).

NATO enlargement is a sore topic for Russian foreign policy makers, and references to it are abundant, but what matters here particularly is the language used: the cheating, the shamelessness, raising the point that it should be obvious and clear: *‘they have deceived us, or, to put it simply, they have played us. <...> Where is justice and truth here?’* (PoR, 2022b). Western states supposedly talk down to Russia, treat it with disdainful attitude and refuse to listen to Russia’s requests (PoR, 2022b), not only is there a lack of mutual respect, they are also Russophobic (MID, 2021z). The Western bloc has been described as an ‘empire of lies’, formed in the image of the US (PoR, 2022b), being deceitful ‘at every turn’ (Lavrov in MID, 2021m). In comparison, the idea of Russia as the speaker of truth is framed, and the West cannot be trusted, as their statements are ‘superficial, populist and conflicting’ (Zakharova in MID, 2021f). Ukraine is also blamed for stealing gas, and a general ‘parasitic attitude’ towards Russia (PoR, 2022a). In some ways this language might rouse anger, but it also aims to create mistrust and distance between the audience and the Western actors, who may aim to influence the audience themselves.

The arguments are discredited not through better arguments, however, but through emotional conditioning to be suspicious and wary, threatened. Ukraine is described as the ‘bridgehead’ (PoR, 2022a) for a wider conflict with the West and NATO, which would start with Ukrainians, compared to Hitler’s accomplices (PoR, 2022b), bringing the war to Crimea, just as in to Eastern Ukraine.

“Do you realise that if Ukraine joins NATO and decides to take Crimea back through military means, the European countries will automatically get drawn into a military conflict with Russia? <...> But there will be no winners, and you will find yourself drawn into this conflict against your will” (PoR, 20221).

Russia being surrounded by NATO is presented as a widely known fact, something that ‘any school pupil knows’ (Lavrov in MID, 2021x). Thus, it becomes seemingly unquestionable. In contrast, while NATO prepares for war, Russia only wants peace, although it is prepared to answer any provocations.

“Our philosophy has been well known for a long time now. It can be found in the lines of a popular song titled “Do Russians Want War?” We do not want war. President Putin conveyed this once again. <...> We will strictly ensure our security with the means that we deem necessary. We want the hotheads out there be mindful of this.” (Lavrov in MID, 2021m).

In this case this is expressed by a popular culture reference, but in other cases it can be done through a degree of ridicule, like, for instance, Maria Zakharova’s near enough counting of days that Russia still has not invaded Ukraine (MID, 2022d), or joking that ‘If you watch CNN, you should know that we have ‘invaded’ Ukraine several times’ (MID, 2021f). The tastefulness of the jokes may be questionable, but humour does have an effect on audiences. The mocking undertones are altogether rather common in this period in Russian foreign policy discourse. The word ‘hysteria’ appears to be a favourite, for example, in the 16th February 2022 briefing Maria Zakharova mentioned it no fewer than ten times in the context of the West behaving hysterically and spreading such notions about Russia’s imminent invasion of Ukraine (MID, 2022d). It can be found commonly in statements made by others, too. Lavrov finds it perplexing, and blames the West for lacking good manners (MID, 2022q), other references may be more generalised (MID, 2021d; 2021x; 2021ac).

But the mockery does not stop at such generic claims of hysteria, it also includes taunting fellow diplomats of other states. At one point Lavrov refers to Michael McFaul’s, for ambassador’s to Russia, questions as ‘absolutely ignorant’ and suggest he should improve his

knowledge of the region's history, calls him an 'unsophisticated learner' (MID, 2022l). Such wording is difficult to consider diplomatic. Other Westerners also receive similar scorn. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has been encouraged to find a new job as he is underachieving in his current role (Lavrov in MID, 2021m). Liz Truss, the Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom at the time, was also mentioned for her poor geographical knowledge (TASS, 2022k). But, perhaps unsurprisingly, Ukraine's Permanent Representative to the UN, Sergey Kisliitsa, receives the harshest comments, that his statements make 'one question his mental condition and competency' (Zakharova in MID, 2022c). Colloquially such statements would be called 'cheap shots' – those they are aimed at are not even there to defend themselves. However, they seem acceptable to the officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is an interesting peculiarity of Russian foreign policy discourse, although perhaps commonly noticed elsewhere, too. It may well be more attractive to certain socio-economic than others, but this would warrant a separate investigation.

Another example of attempts to evoke emotions are the references to the exasperation and the exhaustion of patience that Russia had for the NATO and the West, and the disappointment it causes. The discussions appear like 'conversations between a mute and a deaf (Lavrov in MID, 2022v), ending in 'cynical deception and lies or attempts at pressure and blackmail' (PoR, 2022b), with NATO continuing on the same path, its potential future ability to deploy attack weapons in Ukraine being like 'a knife to the throat (PoR, 2022a).

“Our patience has been exhausted. We are very patient. You know what they say about how long Russians take to harness their horses? We harness them slowly but then it's time to ride. Now we are waiting for the coachman over there to give specific answers to our proposals.” (Lavrov in MID, 2022r).

Minister Lavrov's reference to colloquial wisdom here appears to suggest that it is the continued exasperation caused by the West, draining Russia of its patience, that is the fulcrum of the eventual decision to begin the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Depicting the situation as one where all reasonable measures have been exhausted and military action is the only possibility left on the table, although all effort was put towards a peaceful resolution, with the purpose to shift the guilt to the opposing party as the aggressor and instigator of the larger stand-off between Russia and the West.

The voices

Peacekeeping/unifying

The peacekeeping voice can be often found speaking a diplomatic or political language and contributes to the narratives of Russia not being a threat, as well as its moral righteousness. There are also different aspects to this particular categorisation. On the one hand, there are plentiful references to Russia's role as a keeper of piece (MID, 2022r), particularly within the region it considers its 'sphere of influence'.

Lavrov: "Russia, as the largest Eurasian and Euro-Pacific power and a permanent member of the UN Security Council, will continue to help strengthen global and regional security and stability in all dimensions, and work to confront the many challenges of today's world on the solid basis of international law, primarily the principles of the UN Charter." (MID, 2021y).

In the three months preceding the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russia was involved in the trilateral negotiations with Armenia and Azerbaijan over the future of Nagorno Karabakh (Artsakh) (MID, 2021z), it led the CSTO mission in Kazakhstan, which was also portrayed as a peace-keeping operation (MID, 2022e, 2022f; TASS, 2022av), not to mention its continued insistence on the position of a mediator in 'the conflict in Donbas', rather than a party to it (MID, 2021z; TASS, 2021an), as well as humanitarian help to the Afghan people (MID, 2021o; PoR, 2021f), involvement in the situation surrounding Iran's nuclear programme (PoR, 2022m, 2022l), and promoting better relations between Turkey and Armenia (MID, 2021e).

The positive aspects of these peacekeeping missions and unifying attempts are discussed fairly briefly, but in a dignified tone, with patent pride in the role Russia plays and its capacity to offer such assistance:

"The Azerbaijani side praised the activities of the Russian peacekeeping contingent and Russia's overall contribution to stabilisation around Nagorno-Karabakh. Our peacekeepers monitor the situation round-the-clock, ensuring that ceasefire regime is maintained, conduct mine clearance operations, take part in humanitarian actions and render assistance to the local population." (PoR, 2022s).

It offers the opportunity to portray Russia as ‘the bigger person’, not easily dragged into crises, stable, powerful, and cooperative. It helps with positive Russia’s image abroad, when such ventures go smoothly, and also adds to pride and perceived prestige within the domestic setting. ‘Concrete contributions’ (MID, 2021z) to settlements of crises in the neighbouring states are a welcome declaration in the neighbourhood with several frozen conflicts that occasionally heat up.

“While reviewing the situation around Nagorno Karabakh, we noted the positive role of the Russian peacekeepers who are ensuring compliance with the ceasefire regime and helping the region return to peaceful life.” (PoR, 2021).

On the other hand, such peacekeeping missions have a shade of colouring other than just peace as the highest value. Russia has disputed the Western ideas of what peacekeeping and peacebuilding may mean. By interpreting the post-Soviet region as its sphere of influence and interests, Russia assumed a particular kind of responsibility and even a perceived right to take part in the processes of conflict resolution within that space (Blinova, 2023). Thus, while the peacekeeping voice utters words of harmony and reconciliation, it should not be viewed purely as an appeal to egalitarian and fair peace and its processes. At the same time, the importance of the UN Charter and non-intervention is also present in the discourse, both in relation to others towards Russia, and in relation to Russia towards others:

“...there can be no reasonable alternative to Russia’s independent and open foreign policy line. We are not imposing anything on anyone, nor are we teaching anything to others. We are always ready to expand equitable interstate dialogue with everyone on the solid foundation of international law and principles of the UN Charter” (MID, 2021z).

Another trait common to this voice is that of reluctance and inevitability. What is often stressed and sprinkled throughout the speeches and addresses is the matter of Russia’s reluctance to any kind of confrontation. It is commonly stated that Russia supposedly has done all in its power to avoid any kind of conflict anywhere at any time, but the other side of this coin states the inevitability of its actions as its hand is forced by the agenda of others, particularly the West (meaning NATO, the US, and any of their partners in Europe and elsewhere that in general

agree with their policies and values). However, this talk is often coupled with ‘unconditional guarantees for Russia’s security’ (PoR, 2021f), which is rather difficult to reconcile with the expressed reluctance towards conflict and real diplomatic efforts. However, coupled with the claims that other parties, that is, the West, is actively working towards achieving the goals opposite to peace and de-escalation (MID, 2022r) and the statements about ‘the aggressive plans of the Ukrainian warmongers’ (MID, 2021s) support the argument.

What is stressed in this case is that Russia has made every possible effort to arrive at an agreement with NATO and the US, but those efforts bore no fruit (PoR, 2022b). It may not be easy to resolve the commitment to peace and then the announcement of a ‘special military operation’, but the emphasis on having done everything in Russia’s power to avoid it stands as the logical outcome, supposedly.

“...the difficult international situation and the threats posed by current challenges, such as the erosion of the arms control system and NATO’s military activities. And yet, Russia’s appeals to build a system of equal and indivisible security that would reliably defend all countries, remain unanswered.” (PoR, 2022d).

This line of reasoning suggests that the fault for all and any conflicts lies at the feet of NATO and the West, who appear deaf to reasonable security requests expressed by Russia. One cannot continuously attempt to reason with those who refuse to listen.

The third aspect is the more generic unity declarations that essentially claim the wish and effort to live harmony with one and all. This varies from statements about religion and ethnicities within Russia itself (PoR, 2021a), to insistence on the desire to build friendly relations with Ukraine ‘at any cost’ (PoR, 2021f), which might also sound quite ominous to some audiences, and with respect to its interests (PoR, 2022a). The theme of non-politicisation of sports and arts contributes to this voice, drawing a picture of an international community that is able to separate the lowly politics from the higher values of unity in such activities, done together with other nations in a peaceful setting without seeking political gain (PoR, 2021f). Whether these goals are at all achievable is a question of significant doubt, but the messaging is appealing and engaging, especially for those who are tired of politics in each sphere of their everyday lives.

Sports and arts often offer people a break from the daily grind and routine, thus it is not surprising that it is tempting to believe that neither have underlying political significance.

Historical

The historical voice is a powerful tool and Russian foreign policy deploys it frequently and with flare. As Maria Zakharova herself admitted, “we pay special attention to historical memory” (MID, 2022f). A significant quality of the historical voice in this case is the implied continuation between the past and the present, to such a degree that the differences may appear imperceptible. This type of dialogue is not specific to Russia, it is widely employed across the globe, with narratives that are both truthful, embellished, have parts omitted or are simply deceitful altogether. Statemen often refer to a particular character, will, or courage of their people, originating from historical events, and so do Russian foreign policy makers (PoR, 2021a). Historical inconsistencies rarely trouble states when trying to draw upon a useful historical narrative, even if it is often stressed that historical truth is of utmost importance to them, including, in Russia’s case, setting up commissions and similar ‘*to preserve the historical truth, including about the Great Patriotic War - World War II, and to counter Russophobia*’ (MID, 2021w). The connection between the historical and nationalistic voices is complicated and significant, as national identity is commonly constructed through history, and in Russia the Great Patriotic War (the more common name for WWII) is a big part of that identity (Kolesova, 2022). However, they are not entirely the same. The ‘official memory’ (propagated by the state) within memory politics is a powerful tool (Bernhard and Kubik, 2014: 3, 4), although deeper investigation into its workings and effects is outside the scope of this thesis, while being a worthy endeavour for scholars.

Nevertheless, historical narratives have a power to shape not only the past, but also the future – they contribute to the conditioning of groups, their feelings, and actions. A particularly common tool is the narrative surrounding World War II, often used to construct hostile narratives contemporarily in support of Russia’s policy aims (Vihmand-Veebel, 2024: 50). References to WWII events are common throughout the period investigated and are often spoken about at some length, at times with mention of present-day connections, other times they remain implied rather than explicitly stated. The historical voice is particularly prevalent in the narratives surrounding historical righteousness of Russia’s actions, denazification, and demilitarisation of Ukraine, but also appear in the explanations behind why Russia is the

threatened party, and not vice versa. It is a rather versatile and effective way to construct narratives where there is already some commonality in perceptions of historical contexts. WWII has grown to hold great importance in Russian identity building and official discourse to the point where some describe it as obsession (Vitkine, 2023), or even a cult (Polegkyi, 2016). While some of this may be written off to journalistic flair, it is true that the significance of the Great Patriotic War is enormous, and particular events are commonly referred to and remembered in foreign policy briefings, for example. The siege of Leningrad was mentioned both on the anniversary of its beginning and ending, at first with a thankful note to those who persevered and those who sacrificed their lives and encouragement to live in peace and mutual respect (MID, 2021a), but also with a later reminder that we live in the times of ‘rewriting the history of the great feat, we need to remind others of and retell even seemingly well-known facts’ (MID, 2022f).

In the now infamous speech announcing the full-scale invasion Vladimir Putin attempted to draw clear parallels between WWII and the present, particularly focusing on the reluctance to and inevitability of an armed conflict:

“...we know that in 1940 and early 1941 the Soviet Union went to great lengths to prevent war or at least delay its outbreak. To this end, the USSR sought not to provoke the potential aggressor until the very end by refraining or postponing the most urgent and obvious preparations it had to make to defend itself from an imminent attack. When it finally acted, it was too late. As a result, the country was not prepared to counter the invasion by Nazi Germany, which attacked our Motherland on June 22, 1941, without declaring war. The country stopped the enemy and went on to defeat it, but this came at a tremendous cost. The attempt to appease the aggressor ahead of the Great Patriotic War proved to be a mistake which came at a high cost for our people. In the first months after the hostilities broke out, we lost vast territories of strategic importance, as well as millions of lives. We will not make this mistake the second time. We have no right to do so.”
(PoR, 2022b).

While speaking of the reluctance to war, it appears that Putin also considers it to be a mistake, hence the inevitability in this day and age to act in a manner of preemptive attack instead of supposedly appeasing the aggressor. By portaying the events of 1941 in a certain light, it draws

near enough exact parallel to present day, making several points. For example, Ukraine and the West clearly represent the Third Reich, with all its crimes and wrongdoings, and NATO enlargement is portrayed in a similar light to that of Germany's expansion (Vihmand-Veebel, 2024: 53).

Moreover, when telling of the Soviet Union's dutiful cooperation with its allies, an silent implication may be perceived that those allies were the ones who abandoned the partnership and now threaten Russia, first with the Cold War but also presently, which is the threat for peace in Europe, as suggested, for example, by one of Zakharova's statements:

“Committed to the allied duty, the Soviet side announced its determination to enter the war in the Far East after the surrender of Nazi Germany. <...> The outcome of the Tehran Conference pointed to the productive military and political cooperation of the great powers of the anti-Hitler coalition, aimed at the victorious completion of World War II and establishment of lasting peace.”
(MID, 2021a).

Certainly, without the wider background the statement may read simply as meaning what it says. However, the context informs the reader that another meaning can be observed in this use of historical voice, a meaning that connects to the present and delivers a message of distrust and doubt. The notes of betrayal and unfairness are strong in the historical voice when the topic of NATO is considered:

“In 1990, when German unification was discussed, the United States promised the Soviet leadership that NATO jurisdiction or military presence will not expand one inch to the east and that the unification of Germany will not lead to the spread of NATO's military organisation to the east. This is a quote.” (PoR, 2022a).

It is unclear who the quote should be attributed to, but this is a commonly referenced sentiment: the betrayal of an agreement that Russia insists existed, and thus another betrayal by the supposed partners with whom Russia was supposed to build a common European security space hand in hand. The same partners that then went on to start their own war in Europe (referencing Yugoslavia and the NATO operation in Belgrade). Moreover, the

agreements, yet again, were not followed, and the need UN Security Council's approval was simply ignored, turning the unimaginable idea of war in Europe into reality (PoR, 2022m).

The historical voice, however, does not always limit itself to Russian history – there are often references to the history of other states, blocs, conflicts, not only those relating to Russia, such as the Soviet Union. For example, Putin feels comfortable comparing the historical circumstances of Texas and California to those of today's Crimea when discussing deployment of missiles in the neighbouring countries:

“What would the Americans say if we stationed our missiles on the border between Canada and the United States, or between Mexico and the United States? Haven't Mexico and the US had territorial disputes in the past? Which country owned California? And Texas? Have you forgotten? All right, nobody is talking about this now the way they are talking about Crimea.” (PoR, 2021f).

On a different occasion Lavrov attempts to draw parallels between Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the reunification of Germany in 1989:

“...I answered a question about Crimea. I told my partners in the discussion that they should remember how our country supported the reunification of Germans. I said Germans should understand that Russians living in Crimea (they form the majority of its population) also have the right to unite with their Motherland, all the more so when militants with neo-Nazi and “out of Crimea” slogans were set on these Russians” (MID, 2022r).

In both of these instances there is no question of the mentioned states attempting to go to war to settle historical disputed, thus the implication suggests that the annexation of Crimea should also be written off to a historical issue and simply accepted as a fact by those who may wish to return the region to Ukraine.

In a way, this is a similar argument to that of the creation of Ukraine as a nation state president Putin even refers to it as “Vladimir Lenin's Ukraine”, and cites archival documents that corroborate his claim that Ukraine was the result of Bolshevik policy, and not an national state

entity in its own right (PoR, 2022a), ignoring the 1917 Declaration of Independence altogether, and seemingly forgetting about Russia's support for the principle of self-determination repeatedly declared presently (PoR, 2022b; MID, 2021c; 2022ab). It attempts to create an idea that Ukraine's sovereignty is somehow connected and dependent on Russia historically, therefore such a connection and dependence would not be mistake in the present, either. The creation of Ukraine was a Bolshevik mistake, that caused a lot of suffering, and continues to do so:

“...modern Ukraine was entirely created by Russia or, to be more precise, by Bolshevik, Communist Russia. This process started practically right after the 1917 revolution, and Lenin and his associates did it in a way that was extremely harsh on Russia – by separating, severing what is historically Russian land. Nobody asked the millions of people living there what they thought.” (PoR, 2022a).

This particular statement prefaces multiple paragraphs of historical-adjacent arguments about the creation and development of the Soviet Union (or 'historical Russia' (PoR, 2022a)), and another Bolshevik mistake of setting it up in a way that would inevitably collapse, which appears to be aimed at explaining and justifying Russia's behaviour in its neighbourhood as a natural course of history and a corrective action of past mistakes made by others. It is an issue created in modern times, and thus needs to be rectified in some way, so that the region can return to its historical equilibrium:

“Since time immemorial, the people living in the south- west of what has historically been Russian land have called themselves Russians and Orthodox Christians. This was the case before the 17th century, when a portion of this territory rejoined the Russian state, and after.” (PoR, 2022a).

Some of these justifications connect to the compatriot policy, and the view of the so-called *Russkiy mir* as a legitimate sphere of Russian government's influence and political proximity . The issue of compatriots abroad is high on the priority list for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID, 2021f), and has been so for a while. The idea of *Russkiy Mir*, has been popularised by Putin since the early 2000s, and revolves around the the global community of Russian-speakers

whose ‘identity is firmly connected to Russia’s history, culture, and language’ (Soldatov and Borogan, 2019: 5). The notion of compatriots is a little narrower, but there is some overlap between the two, thus both can be discussed in this particular setting. By 2014 Dmitry Peskov went as far as announcing that Vladimir Putin is the security guarantor for the whole of *Russkiy Mir*, challenging the idea of state borders and state sovereignty over them (Zevelev, 2016). Such ideas have prompted those outside Russia to reconsider the supposedly purely cultural nature of this connection, and the results suggest that this had solid reasoning behind it, based on state interests and security, particularly for those states with significant numbers of Russian-speakers or ethnic Russians within their populations⁴.

Considering the large numbers of Russian speakers in Ukraine, it is no surprise that similar statements were common, often discussed at wordily by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, usually focusing on the rights around language protection and education, sometimes relating to perceived violations of rights to both in Ukraine and the Baltics, or even claiming that Russian compatriots are facing persecution (MID, 2022r). By and large the cultural, educational, economic framing of the issue continues (MID, 2021z), without answering many questions as to other activities of some of the compatriots. However, a degree of duplicity is also seen in this case, and the definition of what is allowed in the space of those speaking the same or similar languages compared to those who at some point lived in the same country (even if not entirely historically accurate throughout) can be observed when policies of other states in the same geographical area are implemented:

“There is nothing wrong with maintaining ties with one’s kinfolk and compatriots. On the other hand, compatriots are those who lived in the same country – in this instance, the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union.” (MID, 2021z).

This was the statement made by Sergey Lavrov in relation to Turkey’s policies towards Turkic-speakers in the post-Soviet space. It appears that distinctions are attempted to be drawn that would not work for Russia’s own policy towards Russian-speakers abroad, and fails to address

⁴ For a detailed description of how the policy is enacted and its results see *The Compatriots: The Brutal and Chaotic History of Russia’s Exiles, Émigrés and Agents Abroad* by Andrei Soldatov and Irina Borogan (2019).

even how come it is so that there are plentiful Turkic-speaking nations in the post-Soviet space, and why they should be considered only Russian compatriots.

Nationalistic

The nationalistic voice often interacts with the historical, the two often complement one another, in the sense that Russian nationalistic narratives are also frequently presented through the prism of historical events, such as WWII. However, its distinct in its emphasis on the nation itself, rather than events that may be compared among state histories or their relations. The concept of the Russian nation appears to be quite flexible and is often used depending on what exactly is needed or convenient. Russianness is defined in broad terms linguistically, culturally, and ethnically, which at times overlap (Melvin, 2024). Therefore, Russianness can be reconciled with the concept of *Russkiy Mir*, but can also be used in the narrower sense. Post-Crimean annexation Teper identifies a change in Russian identity construction, moving from state to ethnic basis (2016: 379). Identifying what exactly the Russian nation is becomes further complicated by the use of slightly different terms of *rossiyskiy* and *russkiy*. The first implying citizenship, thus a state-based connection, considered even anti-ethnic by some (Rutland, 2010 in Teper, 2016), the second implying ethnicity. Russian identity and its protection, however vague the definitions may be, is one of the main points within nationalistic voice. Particularly, Russian identity in opposition to others, as independent and significant, and not determined by foreign influences, and a matter of immense pride:

“...the West determined that Russia would now follow a course reflecting its interests. This continued for a rather long time in the 1990s. In the early 2000s, Russia restored its historical and national identity.” (Lavrov in MID, 2022i).

The stress very much lies with Russia walking to the beat of its own drum and the rejection of the notion that others may attempt to define what and who Russia and Russians are.

“We will strive to ensure that they are independent, so that the country is cohesive, efficient and forward-looking. And in the end, it will be up to the Russian people to choose their system of society and state, not up to those who you serve today.” (PoR, 2021f).

There is an apparent connection not just on the basis of Russian identity in language, but also of values and moral sentiments that are perceived to be un-Russian and unacceptable to Russians.

“The strength and power of our thousand-year-old society lie in the fact that Russia was formed as a multi-ethnic and multi-faith state, and we have learnt to treat each other with respect. With respect. What does that mean? It means that we respect the foundations of our traditional spiritual culture. All the peoples of the Russian Federation – I want to stress “all” – have a certain inner moral protection against the obscurantism [transgender] you mentioned. Let them do whatever they want over there [in the West].” (PoR, 2021f).

This also clearly touches upon the moral authority and superiority question of values, which are not uncommonly presented through the prism of gender identity and sexuality. This is another way of identity building and political regime legitimation that has been referred to as political homophobia (Sleptcov, 2018). This is not unique to Russia necessarily, but it is another way to pose oneself as the protector of traditional values, whatever they may be, which juxtaposes Russianness against Westernness. The continuation of this identity is also stressed, as of great meaning for the future of the Russian youth:

“It is extremely important that young people can see and are aware of this continuity, and that love for our country, our native land and our people becomes a reliable and solid foundation in their lives.” (PoR, 2021a).

In spite of the recurrent vagueness around definitions, certain key matters are consistently addressed in the nationalistic voice. Firstly, the importance of the Motherland or Fatherland (often capitalised), and the idea of the interests of the state are the national interests (Volkov and Kolesnikov, 2023) (as opposed to the interests of the nation, for example), although peace, perhaps as the main interest of the people, is often mentioned alongside the national interests. For example, when addressing Russian Armed Forces, president Putin expressed his belief that they would ‘...guard the peace of our people, and stand up for the national interests of our great country’ (PoR, 2022d). It is not uncommon for President Putin’s statements portray patriotism in connection to military service and state security and defence:

“Patriotism and the unity of our nation, the exploits of its devoted sons and daughters have always been the foundation of the martial history of our thousand-year-old country, its glory and victories. We are proud of the many generations of its defenders: the guards of Alexander Nevsky and Dmitry Donskoy, the warriors of Minin and Pozharsky and the heroes of Poltava and Borodino, Stalingrad and the unstoppable assault on Berlin, all those who brought glory to our Fatherland according to the great traditions of our ancestors” (PoR, 2022d).

In such statements a considerable degree of Russia’s pride in surviving as a state in different forms but continuing can be distinguished. For instance, the Soviet Union was the state that fought in WWII, alongside allies and with considerable support, but the victory is often perceived as a Russian feat:

“...we have sincere, heart-felt words of gratitude for the Great Patriotic War veterans. We will always remember that you, the valiant generation of victors, crushed Nazism and saved our country and the entire world from this barbaric, merciless force.” (PoR, 2022d).

As well as in another statement by Maria Zakharova, where the millions of lost lives remain attributed to Russia rather than including any of lives lost by the people of the other Soviet Republics into the count or in any way addressing the fact that even though Russia is the successor state to the Soviet Union, the two states cannot be used interchangeably:

“We are a country that survived World War II but not in the way the United States survived it – there were no Nazi troops on its territory. In our country, these troops occupied much of the territory, burned down towns, drove people into captivity, destroyed our cities and killed civilians, including women and children. We lost tens of millions of human lives. Peace is priceless to us. Our only goal is to keep it” (MID, 2022c).

Since the victory against Nazi Germany is one of the main points of historical and national pride, the contemporary connections to Nazism are also very much a part of the nationalistic conversation. It is not necessary for those deemed Nazis to proclaim Nazi ideology as the

political science would understand it: over the decades, Nazi is synonymous with enemy, the word is used to discredit raise enmity (Naughton, 2022), rather than to meaningfully define.

“The fact that they are now trying to prop up an overtly neo-Nazi, Banderite regime in Kiev is also a manifestation of genocide in both cases. This is an attack against Slavs, against Orthodox people, and in Ukraine’s case, against everything Russian.” (MID, 2022s).

As is later revealed, denazification becomes one of the main reasons for the ‘special military operation’. Nazi in this case appears to mean anything anti-Russian, or anything that refuses to be specifically Russian. It is not so much an ideology with specific prescriptions. Nevertheless, Russian foreign policy makers appear to double-down on this view. One of the main arguments is that Russian citizens and Russian-speakers, particularly in Ukraine, are discriminated against, and denied the right to speak Russian and receive education in this language in their Russian-speaking homeland within Ukraine (PoR, 2022i). Often, the matter of human rights is cited in this context.

“Ukraine is systematically violating human rights on a large scale and continues to endorse discrimination against Russian speakers at the legislative level.” (PoR, 2022m).

And reminding the Russian public of the plight of the Russian speakers in Ukraine not just because of the linguistical issues, but also due to Ukrainian military action in Donbas.

“Russian speakers in Ukraine are denied the right to receive an education in their native language and have only limited access to Russian-language literature, television programmes and films. Russian has been banned in nearly all spheres of life in Ukraine. I hardly need to remind you about Donbass, where people have no time for films and libraries or anything else apart from survival.” (Zakharova in MID, 2021a).

Considering the wide processes of passportisation in the Donbas region, Russia has built itself a wider claim than just the protection of Russian-speakers, also. It appears that by mid-August of 2021 over half a million people in Donetsk and Luhansk Republics had received a Russian

passport and thus became citizens of Russia, that the Foreign Minister had promised to protect and take every necessary measure to do so (MID, 2021). Through such processes the nationalistic voice becomes unhinged from the normally presumed national borders and allows for a degree of authority over another nation's space, at least from the point of view Russia. Maria Zakharova also puts this in comparison to supposed differences making it appear that Russia respects Ukrainian culture, while the opposite is not true:

“...the Rossotrudnichestvo office and the Russian Centre of Science and Culture in Kiev have been closed. How many times have they been attacked by local nationalists and thugs? How many protests have we made about this? How many people did the local far-right groups intimidate to stop them from visiting these offices? Our compatriots have been deprived of a place where they can meet or hold cultural, academic and educational events. Meanwhile, the National Cultural Centre of Ukraine in Moscow is still working freely.” (MID, 2021a).

Such comparisons, truthful or not, are aimed at supporting the very same Nazi narrative, but are uttered in the voice of nationalistic pride and mutual support to cultures of other nations. They paint a picture of anti-Russianness elsewhere and a kind Russian approach to others within. Once again, Russianness is determined by othering, distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’, where ‘us’ is good, reasonable, and trustworthy, whereas the ‘other’ is deceitful, disrespectful, and morally corrupt.

Repetition, reproduction, and dissemination

Securitization in itself is not instantaneous, and a securitizing move may be accepted to differing degrees within different settings and audiences, even when talking about the same issue (Salter, 2008: 324). In other words, what is particularly relevant to this case, is that acceptance is not strictly dichotomous. Different narratives, languages, and voices may be more convincing in some cases than others, and to different audiences. That is, the issue does not have to be enthusiastically accepted as a security problem, there just has to be enough doubt about it not necessarily being an issue to not contest the actions that follow, on balance. As noted in the literature review, in this case the audience may not necessarily be encouraged to actively take action, but rather perhaps to engage in inaction.

While there are some opinion surveys that suggest that about three quarters of the Russian population support the ‘special military operation’ (Volkov and Kolesnikov, 2023), it is not a certain method of judging the varying attitudes towards it, especially since taking surveys in Russia became further difficult after the start of the invasion. However, what matters in this case is the creation of a shared knowledge between the securitizing actor and the audience (Balzacq, 2011: 23), which one may be able to judge to a degree by looking at the dissemination of the statements, addresses, speeches, and so on. As discussed, audiences are central to securitization, and without their acceptance of the securitizing move it cannot be considered successful. While studies of securitization often lack in their research around audiences, some have been concluded and might help shed some light on the issue.

Firstly, there is the matter of the issue being securitized by those in the highest positions within the state apparatus. Although that does not automatically guarantee a securitization success, the audience does tend to rely on discourses produced by state officials, as they ‘must have “good reasons” to assert <...> that “X” represents a threat to a state’s survival’ (Balzacq, 2011: 25). The authoritative quality and expertise on the matter supports the legitimising effects of state officials’ discourse. But the audiences still have the agency to deliberate the meaning.

Although the Fred Vultee’s research was done on an American public, some traits may be considered for the general human population too. For example, he found that ‘...systematic processing is not needed, and it appears to work as predicted among audiences that do not follow security issues closely – particularly those in the middle ground between apathetic and the attentive’ (2011: 93). Research suggests that Russian audiences are fairly evenly split between those who follow politics closely, and those who are not particularly interested (Statista, 2019), but they do actively watch the news. State television channels are the most prominent vehicles for information and dissemination of official state discourse. While the number may be somewhat different now, not that long ago, in 2022, 83 per cent of Russian people received their news from television (Inglehart *et al.*, 2022). All this may suggest that they do fall somewhere in the middle between the apathetic and attentive, possibly making them more susceptible to securitization attempts, coupled with high-intensity media coverage.

While some researchers suggest breaking the audience into those who can offer ‘moral’ support to the policy-makers, that is the general public, and those who can formally support a security issue by adopting laws or introducing other measures, such as the legislative branch (Roe 2008

in Léonard and Kaunert, 2011: 62), for instance, this may not be entirely fruitful considering the largely autocratic nature of the regime. A differentiation is lacking between effective policy makers and those who do not have an active say in policy making, particularly when it comes to questions of security and foreign policy. In this case Salter's way of thinking about audiences and securitization appears more convincing. Salter suggests that the relationship the securitizing actor has with the audience is of particular importance, and structures how the securitizing move is received (Salter, 2008: 330). Additionally, non-democratic systems are more likely to use security discourse when attempting to legitimise the use of extraordinary means to support regime longevity by avoiding the competition from other political actors, whose arrival is would be less likely in other, more competitive settings (Vuori, 2011: 205).

While this would benefit from additional research that deserves its own space, it might explain why the securitizing move appears to have been largely accepted. Vladimir Putin, as the main foreign policy maker, is largely trusted by different slices of the Russian society. It would also explain why some of those slices were less likely to go along with the securitizing move than others, and chose to leave Russia (for example, political activists, civil society organisers) (Matusевич, 2024). Nevertheless, high approval of Putin's actions (Faulconbridge, 2024) appears to have had some influence. Even though some may argue that regimes belonging on the more authoritarian end of the spectrum care little for public approval on their policies, which may be the case in certain examples, research suggests that this is far from the truth in Russia. The Kremlin constantly orders public opinion surveys to gauge approval, particularly that of the president (Rogov and Ananyev, 2018: 204, 205). Again, surveys are not necessarily the most reliable source of information, but their guidance is nonetheless useful and valuable.

According to Vultee, although security is organised by political actors, the narratives, importantly, are either amplified or tamped down by the media, '...securitization works as both an independent variable – an effect *in* media – as well as a dependent variable, or an effect *of* media.' (Vultee, 2011: 78). Considering that the media field in Russia is dominated by the state-controlled networks (Lipman, Kachkaeva and Poyker, 2018: 185, 186), particularly that which attracts the lion's share of the audience, the narratives presented by state officials are unlikely to be 'tamped down' but rather amplified, and even escalated. Firstly, the narratives are introduced by state officials in their addresses, speeches, briefs, and so forth. However, there are also interviews where the media and the officials meet eye to eye. Some of the media questions that are addressed to Vladimir Putin or Sergey Lavrov are answered briefly and

without much back and forth, but occasionally there is a detailed interview with a trusted media face, like the interview Vladimir Solovyov conducted with Lavrov on his YouTube channel at the end of 2021 (MID, 2021n). Solovyov himself contributed much of the content.

The discussion they had revolved very much around the same themes as the general foreign policy discourse at the time. Solovyov, according a Levada survey, is the most trusted anchor in Russia. He has daily shows on Rossiya-1 television channel, as well as finding airtime on radio and YouTube, and since 2022 he was awarded his own television channel, Solovyov.Live (Ostapchuk, 2023). While it is difficult to access the recordings of the shows that took place at the time due to Western sanctions on Russian state-affiliated media, a couple of examples will be provided below for illustrative purposes. During the period in question, Solovyov suggested that the only acceptable thing to do is for the West to capitulate altogether (Julia Davis [@JuliaDavisNews], 2022a). That Russia with Chin have the tools to bring the West to its knees (gilbertdoctorow, 2022). On another show, one of Solovyov's panellists even encouraged to put in place plans to attack London (Doctorow, 2022). Another famous pro-Kremlin host, Margarita Simonyan, announced her support to intervention in Eastern Ukraine citing simply not having a choice (Julia Davis [@JuliaDavisNews], 2022b). It would be a worthy task to study how the Russian foreign policy narratives are escalated and what effect does that have on languages/voices used, however, it is far beyond the scope of this piece. The narratives do get disseminated, however, and reach a wide public whose worldview they help shape.

Conclusion

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine was certainly a turning point in contemporary history of Europe, and its effects, reasons, and pretexts will be studied for a long time to come, fittingly so. The conceptual framework suggested here may be of benefit for future studies of the topic, as well as for better understanding of other security issues. The languages and voices represented in the Russian foreign policy discourses have been used to understand how Ukraine became an existential threat to Russia, that is, was successfully securitized, and the invasion became a legitimate course of action to a significant enough part of the different audiences addressed. It helps explain the at times seemingly irreconcilable policy-related statements uttered by the foreign policy makers, how those dissonances can work in the same vein, and remain meaningful in the wider discourse. The interpretive discourse analysis method did not aim to undoubtedly define the issue and give a definitive answer, but rather to present an

interesting view of how the discourse can be perceived and what can also be considered in the securitizing speech act.

By integrating securitization theory, Bakhtin's heteroglossia and polyphony, and performativity, a slightly different, more complex view of security issues, language, and power connection can be gained. These theoretical frameworks highlight the performative nature of security discourse, the plurality of voices involved, and the ways in which language constructs and reinforces social realities. The different languages and voices used in familiar themes and contexts helped produce a shared knowledge between the securitizing actors and the audiences, which contributed to the securitization move being successful, and legitimised the eventual invasion in the eyes of the Russian public. Although this piece is but a small case study in exploring the connections among these three theoretical conceptualisations, additional research would be welcome to investigate and analyse securitizing practices in other contexts, places, surrounding different issues, but within a similar framework. Additionally, analysis could be expanded to include statements from military leaders, this would be particularly interesting in cases where there may be a mismatch between views. Depending on the case, research could be expanded into the plurality of voices outside of the authorities' purview to shape a more elaborate and comprehensive picture.

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