

A POSITIONING OF RUSSIA THROUGH THE LENS OF CITIZENSHIP
AWARDING FAST-TRACK CITIZENSHIP GRANTS TO THE WORLD-FAMOUS
CELEBRETIES

By

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Abstract

Russia, starting from 2013 has awarded Russian citizenship to several world-famous celebrities and thus reconfiguring its political membership. This thesis investigates this phenomenon and tries to answer the following questions why the Russian government grants citizenship to those with international fame, what these acts of granting citizenship might symbolize and what tools and techniques the Russian government used for portraying Russian citizenship. In order to explore these acts of granting citizenship and to understand Russia's motives behind it, this thesis will conduct a critical discourse analysis study. The study conducted suggests that the Russian government utilized citizenship for internal political purposes to rebrand its image as a great powerful nation on the world stage. The study also argues that Russia used nationalist discourses and public diplomacy tools while portraying its citizenship. The Russian case therefore shifts the focus of citizenship from the ideal of national identity and belonging to the public diplomacy or branding tool.

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Introduction

“To be Russian today is no longer about nationality, a house, and a street. It is about a geopolitical position and, to be more precise, a different mindset” (Ren TV, 2015).

These words belong to Igor Prokopenko – a TV host of the programme “Military Secret” broadcast by the Russian-state channel Ren TV and signify the growing popularity of the Russian citizenship in the world. Starting from 2013 the Russian Federation has granted citizenship to a number of influential western celebrities, who have demonstrated some form of affiliation to Russia and who have been engaged with Russia and the Russian president on several occasions. This list includes the French and American actors Gerard Depardieu (2013) and Steven Seagal (2016), the American boxer Roy Jones Jr (2015), the American mixed martial artist Jeffrey William Monson (2015), the Japanese-American actor Cary –Hiroyuki Tagawa, the Italian judo trainer Exio Gamba (2016) and many others.¹ These “gestures” of the Russian government have attracted a great deal of public attention, largely because they were portrayed in an extremely favorable dimension by the state-run media in Russia and were made personally by President Putin. For instance, the issue of the citizenship status of Gerard Depardieu was raised during President Putin's annual Year-End Press Conference and was broadcast by both international and local media. The official ceremony in which Steven Seagal was awarded Russian citizenship was held in the Kremlin and, as such, attracted even more public attention.

This thesis will argue that the Russian government utilized the notion of citizenship for the internal political purposes to reposition itself on the world stage to bolster its prestige and reputation. It is important to stress the fact that it is rare and unusual to grant citizenship to well-known individuals who do not bear kin ties with the nation state with such pomposity,

¹ The list also includes Ornella Mutti. The Italian actress who is currently applying for the Russian citizenship

celebration, and positive media coverage. This phenomenon highlights the ambiguity of the Russian citizenship regime that cannot be explained by the existing citizenship research which is built on the identity narrative of political membership. Ayelet Sharshar, in her ground-breaking work on the Olympic citizenship, detaches the notion of citizenship from the genuine-ties interpretations (Sharshar 2008). The author considers citizenship through the prism of a reputation-building resource aimed to enhance the nation's standing vis a vis its competitors (Sharshar 2008). However, Ayelet Sharshar's work does not go beyond the realm of the Olympic citizenship. The author focuses only on the high-skilled sportsmen but not the western celebrities whose fame may also contribute to the country's perception. Therefore, this thesis aims to fill this academic gap by answering the questions: why the Russian government awarded citizenship to the world-famous celebrities, what this act of granting citizenship might symbolize, and what tools and techniques the Russian government used for portraying Russian citizenship.

This thesis will also claim that there is an indissoluble connection between the phenomenon under consideration and the Russian Foreign Policy. The connection is based on the leading role of President Putin within both dimensions. Vladimir Putin's decisions navigate the course of the Russian Foreign Policy and to some extent Russia's membership realm. The ties between the current citizenship phenomenon and the Russian Foreign Policy can be traced in the similar branding and public diplomacy tools mastered by the government-run channels during the Ukrainian crisis. These tools and mechanisms are used for maintaining Russia's image as a great powerful nation, a reborn global player, capable of offering another alternative to the world. Another connection is found in the nationalist-theme discourse, taken from the concept of the Russian World and operationalized by both actors.

To explore the act of granting citizenship to famous celebrities and to understand Russia's motives behind it, this thesis will conduct a critical discourse analysis study. In order to bridge the momentum gap of Russia's citizenship phenomenon, “the concept of citizenship, its utilization and purposes” is first discussed in this thesis. Then the thesis turns to the analysis of the Russian citizenship configuration. The Russian citizenship appears to be an ambiguous phenomenon marked by different stages of development, varying from liberation in giving citizenship grants at the beginning of 1991 to the servitude in providing citizenship 2009 and then to the liberation again, in 2014. It will be shown that the last liberation benchmark was triggered by the Ukrainian crisis and was specially designed for the Russian Compatriots living Near Abroad. This statement leads us to the next part of the thesis, where the Compatriot Policy and its links with the concept of the Russian World and the Russian Foreign Policy will be revealed. The thesis then describes Russia's Foreign Policy tools and mechanisms for branding itself in the world arena, which can be narrowed down to the launching of multiple media initiatives for Russian-speaking and international audiences, namely Russia 24 and RT (Russia today). The thesis then overviews qualitative methodology and decides to focus on the critical discourse analysis, its socio-political approach as a source for identifying the dynamics of citizenship discourse in Russia and understanding the government's role in portraying Russian citizenship. With this methodology in mind the thesis examines 1) the corpus of “Vladimir Putin's citizenship performing procedure” available and 2) the programmes devoted to the theme of “the increasing popularity of Russian passport among Western celebrities.” This analysis showcases the various tools and mechanisms Russian channels utilized for promoting the theme “Russia is a great nation” with the help of the Russian citizenship. In doing so, the thesis will give a timely new approach to the concept of citizenship. It will also compliment literature on citizenship, Foreign Policy, and nation branding and add a more comprehensive analysis on the citizenship regime in Russia.

Chapter 1: Concept of citizenship: the utilization of citizenship and its purpose

This chapter analyses the main topical issues and academic perspectives related to citizenship, which is an interdisciplinary and widely -debated phenomenon aimed at contextualizing and providing insight into 1) the normative debates devoted to the institution of citizenship, such as discussions on the main principles embedded into citizenship practices, citizenship borders beyond the state and the cosmopolitan (post-national) citizenship, 2) the current tendencies in citizenship policies marked, on the one hand, by denationalizing component in citizenship acquisition, but, on the other hand, by the growing influx of nationalizing element often found in extraterritorial citizenship. The chapter also illustrates 3) the notion of the Olympic citizenship as a state policy mechanism of pursuing national glory and thus giving a framework to the current Russian phenomenon of granting citizenship to the world -famous celebrities for internal political purposes. However, this framework is not full, it can just partially explain the narrative of using citizenship for claiming national greatness through the most notable sportsmen who are capable of bringing new medals to the nation- state. The dimension of awarding citizenship to the western celebrities whose achievements are largely left behind but whose fame is still pivotal and can make a change in the image and attractiveness of the country is significantly underdeveloped by the scholars. Therefore, the chapter bridges the gap in the citizenship studies which would be covered and disclosed by the follow ups chapters.

Citizenship as an instrument of membership closure

Academic interest in the institution of citizenship has been growing steadily in the last three decades, since Rogers Brubaker's groundbreaking study of citizenship and nationhood in France and Germany(1992).

Citizenship, as Rogers Brubaker points out, is “an instrument of social closure, aimed to distinguish wealthy state from the migrant poor” (Brubaker 1992, 10) by enabling the former to regulate the terms of mobility through its boundaries. “Every state establishes a conceptual, legal and ideological boundary between citizens and foreigners and claims to be the state of, and for, a particular, bounded citizenry, usually perceived as a nation” (Brubaker 1992, 10). The rules for “bounded citizenry” though differ from country to country, and are usually shaped by ideals and traditions of elite-driven conceptions of statehood (Brubaker 1992). In other words, the selective conditions of citizenship for new members are largely regulated by those in power. Thus, Brubaker contrasted the French “state centered” understanding of nationhood with the German “ethnocultural” one, which, in turn, resulted in opposed definitions of citizenship. France gives preference to political integration of all residents within the state and grants citizenship via birthplace (*jus soli*), whereas Germany gives priority to the integration of the people across borders and, therefore, grants citizenship on the account of descent (*jus sanguinis*). It is necessary to emphasize the fact that this strict dichotomy between civic and ethnocultural citizenship legislations has changed over time. It is no longer possible to make a clear distinction between these models, since in most cases they are intertwined (Vink, Mp, and R Bauböck 2013).

When examining citizenship regimes in Europe, Maarten Peter Vink and Rainer Babock, give a broader understanding of the purposes of citizenship laws by developing a new typology. In their analysis, these scholars, come from the notion that citizenship legislation cannot be narrowed down to a specific instrument of inclusiveness. On the contrary, citizenship laws cover all the dimensions - from an acquisition to a loss of citizenship, within as well as outside a state territory (Vink, Mp, and R Bauböck 2013). Citizenship laws based on political, demographic and historical factors can be inclusive

either of the territory or the ethnocultural dimension (ethnoculturally and territorially selective regimes), can be inclusive on both dimensions (expansive regimes), and can restrict both inclusions (insular regimes) (Vink, Mp, and R Bauböck 2013).

Citizenship borders

After Roger Brubaker's notable citizenship study the academic interest slightly changed its course from the nation-centered approach and moved into the debates on the borders of citizenship which goes beyond the state. The analysis started with Rainer Bauböck's assertion that international migration not only challenges the dominating nation-state paradigm of citizenship but also creates an overlapping citizenship status within the nation states (Bauböck 2010). He drew this conclusion on the basis of the notion that international migrants trigger two mobility trends: creation of memberships of foreign residents within the state borders and the expatriation of citizens out of the state territory (Bauböck 2010). According to the author, to adapt to the mobility of individuals both receiving and sending countries generate a set of citizenship rights and statuses which can be narrowed down to the acceptance of dual nationality. Dual nationality or transnational citizenship, on the other hand, are used by the countries as a call for transnational political participation and, accordingly, raises the questions of the voting rights for those with double affiliation (Bauböck 2007).

As a multilayered institution, citizenship is capable of offering many different constellations - established legal status, government defense, practical experience within membership of a political community coupled with a political voice, other rights and, finally, national identity. However, in Bauböck's opinion the response to this multilayered ideal of citizenship from the migrant community is not that simple. On the contrary, it is complex and multipronged. It varies from the total integration and the acceptance of offered

citizenship goods, which leads to erosion of national identity, to the recreation of national diasporas within the hosting state (Bauböck 2010).

The question of the national identity in the institution of citizenship is inextricably bound up with the discussions on postnational or denationalized citizenship. Saskia Sassen pioneered the idea that in the era of globalization the practices of citizenship that earlier were associated with the nation state transformed significantly to the spheres of supranational, subnational and private organizations (Sassen 2002). In these circumstances, social groups have a strong sense of belonging and identification with the bigger (world citizenship) or smaller cultural communities rather than with their nation-state. In other words, the loyalties to the nation state are not that salient in the 21st century. According to Sassen, they were required only in the times of extensive warfare where the need for “citizen soldiers” was very crucial (Sassen 2002).

Another theme that supports the denationalized component of citizenship has been offered by Christian Jobbke, who believes that the last two decades have been marked by liberation of human rights norms and “the outlawing of ethnic and racial discrimination” (Jobbke 2010, 7). In this context, migration goes hand in hand with liberal human rights context and thus diminishing the trend of identity —lending dimension of citizenship (Jobbke 2010, 69), which ultimately leads to the inevitable easing of the citizenship granting procedure. Essentially, citizenship in Western liberal-democratic states no longer requires a national identity but only a shared political culture.

The purposes and motives of citizenship policies

Despite the growing changes in dynamics and constellations of citizenship, governments and the selective conditions of policies they create still play a vital role in determining patterns for membership closure. Consequently, in order to understand both

policy change and the construction of new categories of citizenship, we need to turn our attention to the motives of citizenship policies implemented by particular governments.

The works of Ayelet Shachar illuminate government motives by analyzing citizenship through the lens of a reputation building source, where the main goal of the countries is to advance their national prestige and image. In other words, the author highlights the common practice of governments picking up winners through the procedure of giving fast-track citizenship for outstanding talent and to highly skilled migrants. These policies could not remain traceless and had a significant impact on the realm of citizenship. According to the author, citizenship has transformed from “[the] concept that represents collective identity, belonging, loyalty, and perhaps even sacrifice, into the concept of a recruitment tool for bolstering a nation’s standing relative to its competitors” (Shachar 2011, 2090).

The politics of external kin-state citizenship in the context of Post -Communist countries can be considered as another example of state centered motives that regulate citizenship. Post -communist historical realities and political conditions, according to Maria M. Kovacs and Szabolc Pogonyi, contributed a lot to the emergence of kin-state activism related to kin-minorities living abroad (Kovacs and Pogonyi 2010). This activism soon transformed into preferential access to citizenship for ethnic minorities living in neighboring countries and, therefore, made citizenship a mechanism of external inclusion. For instance, the quasi and external citizenship laws have been introduced by a number of states in East and Central Europe, namely, Slovenia, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Serbia, Lithuania and Russia (Kovacs and Pogonyi 2010). Szabolc Pogonyi in his forthcoming book “Extra-territorial ethnic politics, discourses and identities in Hungary” further develops the theme and adds two conceptual categories on the issue of the use of citizenship in that region. He claims that citizenship can also be operationalized as an

instrument of internal exclusion of ethnic minorities to secure the ethnic domination and ownership of the titular nations, and apart from that , it can be exercised as an instrument of ethnic engineering (Pogonyi 2017).

As we can see there is a lot of literature devoted to the institution of citizenship, its modern dynamics and tendencies. However, the presented framework of the civic vs ethnic principles embedded in citizenship practices as well as the identity and belonging model cannot clearly explain why the Russian government so easily awards citizenship to the world -famous celebrities. Besides, the post national conceptions of citizenship, which have triggered the debates on citizenship being useless and outlived, cannot contribute much to explaining why the Russian government offers a “a soft landing “ to those with fame and certain degree of popularity. Thus, there is an important gap: few of the referred texts have considered citizenship as a part of a reputation building source that is used for both internal political purposes and claiming national greatness . And even if they have, they mostly look at Olympic citizenship, which cannot fully elucidate the current Russian phenomenon. Meanwhile, in this thesis, the Russian citizenship regime, its utilization and purpose plays a central role. It is, therefore, important to give an overview of the Russian citizenship configuration and one of its main constellations, namely, the Compatriot Policy.

Chapter 2: Citizenship configuration of Russia

This chapter, firstly, discusses the literature on Russian citizenship configuration, its utilization and purpose. Secondly, it sheds light on the debates devoted to one of its main constellations, the Compatriot Policy. The chapter concludes that Russian citizenship legislation passed through different stages from liberation in granting citizenship at the beginning of 1991 to the servitude in 2009 and then to the liberation again, in 2014. As for the Compatriot Policy, the discussion below outlines the inseparable interactions between Russian external citizenship (the Compatriot Policy) and the Russian Foreign Policy concept. It claims that Russia's external citizenship policies have primarily been discussed by scholars as a geopolitical tool or even a foreign policy weapon designed to pursue Russia's national interest by defending its citizens Near Abroad and, as a result, seizing opportunities in that very regions.

Russian citizenship regime: from liberation to restriction and again liberation

In an attempt to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Russian citizenship regime Alexandr Salenko compared and contrasted two citizenship laws of the year 1991 and 2002. (Salenko 2012). The argument that follows from this comparison is that a long transformation from liberal policies to stiff limitations regarding naturalization /admission into citizenship has taken place with regard to Russian citizenship regime. To be more precise, the Federal citizenship Law of 2002 is much stricter on naturalizations than the first post -communist citizenship Law of 1991. Notably, in 1991 the simplified naturalization procedure of obtaining Russian citizenship was exercised through the form of registration, which, in principle, made it possible for all former USSR citizens to apply for Russian citizenship by means of a written petition (Salenko 2012). At first, the application deadline for the Russian citizenship registration was on 6 February 1995. However, due to the large demand coming from the former citizens of the Soviet Union, the legislative procedure was

prolonged till 31 December 2000. It is not surprising therefore that acquisition of Russian citizenship in the period of 1991-2000 through the simplified procedure or registration appeared to be the most common method (Salenko 2012).

In contrast, under the 2002 citizenship law, particularly after the year 2009, many citizens of the former USSR were equated to foreigners and were obliged to acquire Russian citizenship by means of a general process of naturalization (art.13) (Salenko 2012). In other words, a special provision that regulates a simplified procedure of acquiring Russian citizenship on the basis of temporary or permanent residence permit was revoked.² In 2011, the Russian government made a further step to restriction by abolishing the simplified naturalization based on existing international treaties.³ According to Lukas Vetrak, the change in law was dictated by the intention to stop the stream of immigrants from Central Asian and Caucasus regions. Additionally, the last amendment made it somewhat difficult to gain citizenship for Russians as well (Vetrak 2014). As a result, a number of complex issues arose regarding the integration of former citizens of USSR, who failed to achieve Russian citizenship during the post-perestroika period (Salenko 2012).

Another change in the citizenship notion of Russia occurred in the year 2013, after the annual Year-End Press Conference with the Russian President, where the latter created the agenda of citizenship policies towards Russian compatriots. During this conference Vladimir Putin was asked why did he granted fast –track citizenship to Gerard Depardieu, “a person who is not bearing kin state ties with Russia”, while there are strict admission and

² Art 14 (4) Foreign citizens and stateless persons who used to be citizens of the USSR who have come to the Russian Federation from the states which formed part of the USSR, who are registered at the place of residence in the Russian Federation as on July 1, 2002, or have received a permit for temporary residence in the Russian Federation shall be admitted to citizenship of the Russian Federation in the simplified manner without observing the conditions provided for by Items “a”, “c” and “e” of Part One of Article 13 of this Federal Law and without presenting a residence permit if they, prior to January 1, 2009, declare their wish to become citizens of the Russian Federation.

³ Decree of the President of Russia from 19.10.2011. No.1391

permission-to-stay requirements for Russian kin state population living abroad” (RIA 2013). Answering this question, the President claimed that Depardieu’s case is the exceptional one, based on the French actor’s contribution to the Russian art⁴. As for the question of compatriots, the President underlined the necessity to simplify the admission into citizenship procedure not only towards Russian compatriots, but also towards all former citizens of the USSR (RIA 2013). It is important to note that in late 2012 Vladimir Putin had already ordered Russian parliamentarians to draft legislation and pass laws that would ease citizenship granting procedure to those with Russian heritage, including descendants of citizens of the Russian Empire and the USSR (Kremlin 2012). However, this law was not developed at the time; it may be suggested that it was postponed due to the absence of the “right” political environment. The new bill emerged only in the year 2014, as a reaction to Ukrainian Euromaidan and revaluation of Russian policies towards the Near Abroad.

The new bill refers to the individuals who speak Russian and have at least one ancestor who used to be a permanent resident of the USSR or the Tsarist Russian Empire (RG 2014). The law contains the provision which implies “fast-track citizenship procedures to Russian -speaking citizens of the former Soviet Union, irrespective of nationality, who are in danger of ethno-cultural, political, or professional discrimination” (Interfax 2014). Liberal amendments were also introduced into the language requirements so the complicated, rigorous language exam was replaced by a simple interview (Interfax2014). In the same year, Russia adjusted the new mechanism of granting fast-track citizenship to businessmen, investors and highly qualified specialists, who permanently reside on the territory of the Russian Federation and who speak the Russian language⁵. This act of the

⁴ The case of Gerard Depardieu will be elucidated in the detail in the Chapter 4 of the thesis

⁵ Decree of the President of Russia from 23.06.2014. № 157-FL- “About amendments to the Provisions about the order of the consideration of questions regarding acquisition of citizenship of the RF”. <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/38594>

Russian government may be interpreted as a response to the consequences of the Crimea annexation, namely the first round of the sanctions imposed on Russian businesses and businessmen by the United States and the European Union. Maintaining a favorable investment climate appears to be a non –realistic goal in the circumstances of isolation; therefore, the attraction of businessmen, investors and highly qualified specialists by means of facilitated citizenship laws was aimed to ease the aftermath of the economic sanctions. Interestingly, on the same date, the Russian President signed the decree that simplifies the procedure for recruiting highly qualified foreign journalists who work in the media organizations established specially for the dissemination of information in foreign languages⁶.

It is important to stress, that Russia was not a pioneer in offering privileged path routes for the “stars” in the fields of business, technology, art and academia (Shachar 2011, 2100). Such countries as the USA, Canada, Singapore and Australia have been operated by “specialized” admission policies for skilled migrants within decades (Shachar 2011). However, only the Russian Federation operationalized these citizenship models in the line with negatively changing political climate. By imitating the Western citizenship models the Russian government was intended to attract individuals who might contribute and restore Russia’s reputation through their special achievements.

In April 2017 a new bill on “facilitated naturalization for Russian -speaking citizens born in Russia or whose ancestors were born within the current borders of the Russian Federation” was introduced for consideration into the Russian Duma. This time the emphasis was redirected from the residence permit on to the birth certificates, which, according to

⁶ Decree of the President of Russia from 23.06.2014. № 164-FL- “About amendments to the Provisions On the Legal Status of Foreign Citizens in the Russian Federation”. <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46028>

the head of the Lower House Committee for Eurasian Integration and Ties with Compatriots, Konstantin Zatulin, should ease the application procedure (RG 2017).

Such serious amendments to the law would never have been made on the slight grounds, especially within such a short period of time. These changes have been triggered by the total reorientation of the political course of Russia the aim of which is to reposition itself on the world stage and oppose itself to the West. The Ukrainian crisis, in these circumstances, became a defining moment, where Moscow practically embedded to the following of the nationalist agenda in the incorporation of Crimea and the creation of Novorossiia project and thus adjusting the basic citizenship laws in accordance with these events. In general, the Russian citizenship regime appears to be an ambiguous phenomenon that serves multiple purposes and lacks a “modernist” national identity narrative (Pogonyi). It consists of bewildering citizenship policies that covers different dimension ranging from granting citizenship to businessmen, investors and other qualified specialists to western celebrities and finally to the former citizens of the USSR. The latter dimension of Russian citizenship regime has been changed many times, however, still lacks cohesive citizenship policy. The special provision of the Russian citizenship regime- Compatriot policy can partially uncover the complex relationship between the Russian state and its former citizens. Therefore, it would be logical to scrutinize the debates on the Compatriot policy of Russia, its main principles and stages of development, as well as give insights into the Foreign Policy concept of Russia and its links with this Russian extraterritorial citizenship.

Russian Citizenship Policy toward Compatriots in academic literature

The state is a main mechanism in determining the general rules on citizenship acquisition. In view of this, the decisions made by one state have an external impact on other states, especially on those connected to it via citizenship ties (Bauböck 2010). Such externalities are especially obvious in Russia, where after the fall of the Soviet Union the

former citizens of the USSR found themselves in the new state and political borders. Many of them who considered themselves Russian used the opportunity of the Federal citizenship law of 1991 and eventually acquired Russian citizenship. However, there were those who became citizens or stateless persons of other, newly independent states. For them, as an alternative to ordinary naturalization procedures, the Russian Federation introduced in 1999⁷ a highly debatable citizenship for compatriots. The term was not legally defined in the year of introduction and even now seems to be vague and dubious. Taking into consideration the complexity of the law and political realities which bounded it, it is not surprising that an overwhelming share of academic literature on Russian citizenship is largely devoted to this Russian citizenship constellation.

For instance, Salenko argues that the Law of 1999 was introduced to unite compatriots living abroad. However, some scholars see the law through the framework of kin-state policy which demonstrates the trans-nationalization of nationalism pursued by kin-state across borders (Ragazzi and Balalovska 2011). Eleanor Knott in her forthcoming article on “Quasi-citizenship as a category of practice: Analysing Engagement with Russia’s Compatriot Policy in Crimea” discusses the main concepts of Russian compatriot policies, namely, who the compatriots are, what their rights are and how compatriot policies work on the ground. According to her, the definition of compatriots stretches from “a civic core of expatriate citizens, to a broader group of people who are culturally and spiritually oriented towards Russia but avoids ethnic or linguistic definition of ethnic Russian”(Knott, 2016, 5) Similarly, Shevel argues that this definitional vagueness is

⁷ “Federal’nyi zakon o gosudarstvennoi politike Rossiiskoi Federatsii v otnoshenii sootchestvennikov za rubezhom,” March 5, 1999, <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-dgpch>

deliberate and allows Russia flexibility to modify over time who qualifies to be compatriots, without requiring a change of legislation (Shevel 2009, 4).

If there is almost a mutual consent among scholars with regard to compatriots' definition, the questions about the rights and policies on the ground are overwhelmed by different approaches. These approaches can be briefly divided into the passive one and soft power/ soft propaganda potential one (Knott 2016, 6). One example of the extensive literature on the passive approach is provided by Igor Zevelev. He argues that the Russian Compatriot Policy is the policy of passivity which is primarily aimed at enhancing the military and economic leadership in the territory of the former Soviet Union rather than at protecting and facilitating the rights of compatriots. Therefore, the Russian Compatriot Policy, according to Zevelev, is tough in the rhetoric, but very modest and moderate in practice (Zevelev 2008). Agnia Grigas considers the Compatriot Policy from a different perspective. The author draws parallels between the Russian citizenship policy and the crisis that arose in Crimea in 2014 and South Ossetia in 2008. The Compatriot Policy is seen as one of the drivers and methods of Moscow's Foreign policy aimed at seizing opportunities in the Near Abroad. She argues that handing out passports and ramping propaganda are new trends of Russian imperial revanshism (Grigas 2016).

Kuzio and Hedenskog in a similar manner consider Crimea as a region of Russian passportization together with other de facto independent states of Abkhazia, Transnistria and South Ossetia. These scholars claim that the estimates of Crimean residents holding Russian passports vary from 6000 to 100000 (Kuzio and Hedenskog 2008) before the annexation. According to another prominent scholar Kristopher Natoli, the proportion of the population that attained a Russian passport in Abkhazia and South Ossetia before the Russia-Georgia conflict in August 2008 was estimated to be at 90 per cent (Natoli 2010). As a consequence, Russia justified its intervention of Georgia by a sovereign right to bear

responsibility and protect South Ossetia's Russian citizens from the Georgian government's aggression (Natoli 2010). The passportization, according to Kristopher Natoli, may be considered as a "foreign policy weapon" that can be easily transformed into a tool of state aggression (Natoli 2010). Moreover, it may correspondingly trigger, as Szabolcs Pogonyi points out, fears that "passportization of external populations [is a] precursor to territorial revisionism" (Pogonyi 2017, 36).

Other scholars, for instance, Marlene Laruelle believe, that Russian policy towards compatriots can be seen as most pragmatic, since it supported them as an instrument of leadership entrenchment in the territory of the former Soviet Union (Laruelle 2015). Analogously, Eleonor Knott sees Crimea as a Russian ethnic enclave, that is, the region of Russian interest, where the acquisition of Russian citizenship might have taken place. However, she comes to a different conclusion – the Compatriot Policy failed in implementation in that very region. Residents of Crimea refused to move to the depressed and depopulated regions of Russia (Siberia) and were dissatisfied with the Compatriot Policy in general, since it fell short of offering full citizenship rights (Knott 2016). Instead, Russia was offering quasi-citizenship rights and benefits such as facilitated resettlements to those who were considered compatriots.

It is necessary to emphasize the fact that more and more scholars are examining the Russian Compatriot Policy through the prism of the Russian Foreign Policy concept. For instance, Lukas Vetrak underlines that the initial policy of the law to help Russians abroad later evolved into an integral part of the Russian Foreign Policy and, therefore, compatriots living abroad have appeared to be an object of Russia's interest (Vetrak 2014). Interestingly, a new concept of Russian Foreign Policy was introduced a year after the Compatriot law's enforcement. The new doctrine proclaims that "Russia would support in every possible way the rights and interests of Russian fellow countrymen abroad the RF

will seek to obtain adequate guarantees for the rights and freedoms of compatriots in the states where they permanently reside and to maintain and develop comprehensive ties with them and their organizations” (RFC, 2000).

Likewise, Marlene Laruelle argues that there is an intertwined connection between the law and the Russian Foreign Policy concept, but, her argument stems from the “nationalist story line”, which marks both of these phenomena. Laruelle calls this the nationalist theme of “Russia as a divided nation”, which occurred after the collapse of the Soviet Union. She identifies two major policies that developed because of it, namely “the state programme of repatriation of compatriots” and “the legitimization of the Russian World concept” (Laruelle 2015, 86).

Russia incorporated Crimea in March 2014, claiming it had no other choice but defend ethnic Russians from Ukraine nationalists regardless of whether Crimean residents hold Russian passports or not (Szabolc Pogonyi 2017). According to Szabolc Pogonyi, this action of Russia demonstrates that the latter “does not need the pretext of protecting its external citizens to violate the territorial integrity of a neighboring country” and that, in general, irredentist politics can be intensified by other factor, not necessarily extraterritorial citizenship (Pogonyi 2017, 40). In case of Russia, “these other factors” can take a form of geopolitical orientations of Russia’s neighbors towards the West camp and, thus, bringing about “what Russia perceives as its own state security and the feeling that its sovereignty is under threat by any anti-Russian environment in the Near Abroad” (Laruelle 2015). Therefore, the Ukrainian crisis indicates that the presence of Russia’s extraterritorial citizenship does not necessarily lead to the promotion of independence or incorporation of another territory. On the contrary, it shows that Russia has its own sphere of influence, namely, the Near Abroad countries over which it claims that it has a right to say (Laruelle 2015). Eventually, this right to say has transformed into a particular and drastic

voice of Russia that jeopardized the relationship between itself and the West and, ultimately, evolved into a new reassertion of the Russian Federation on the world stage.

To secure its position in the pantheon of excellence, Russia resorted not only to its military dominance but also to the reconfiguration of its political membership by awarding fast-tracked citizenship to influential western celebrities who have demonstrated positive attitudes towards Russia and who have been engaged with Russia on several occasions. The latter activity is the topic of my thesis, but, in order to elaborate about it in a detailed way, I believe it is necessary to carry out an analysis on the Foreign Policy concept of Russia, its public diplomacy, branding and marketing techniques. In addition to that, it is important to demonstrate the instruments which Russia has mastered over the last three years to enhance the prestige of the country.

Chapter 3: Foreign Policy concept of Russia, its public diplomacy and branding techniques

This chapter illustrates the overlapping discourses evolved with two concepts of “compatriots abroad” and the “Russian World”. Each of these concepts have different trajectory of history, however, yet have a lot of in common. Both ideas are embedded in Foreign policy decisions of the Russian Federation and mirrors the relationship between Russian neighbors and Russia. Besides, they question, as Igor Zevelev states, “ the actual Russian Federation state borders and the mental maps of “Russianness” that exist in the minds of many Russian” (Zevelev 2016). This chapter also elucidates the Russian public diplomacy tools that Russian Government used to brand itself on the world stage.

Ukrainian crisis and Russian Foreign policy

As it was briefly mentioned above, the Ukrainian crisis significantly influenced the Russian Foreign Policy and to a larger extent the image of Russia on the world stage, since it was the first time after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the Russian government had changed state borders. By doing this, Russia, according to Alexey Miller and Fyodor Lukyanov, drew a red line,” a sphere of influence, which it is prepared to defend with all available means, including military ones”(Miller, Lukyanov 2016, 4). To justify its action, the Kremlin used a terrain of narratives -from systematic teasing and trolling of the European Union and the United States to denouncing their insincerity and double standards with regard to Kosovo, Iraq and NATO’s enlargement to the East. Another set of arguments pertained to the promotion of the divided nation theme and underlying Moscow’s responsibility to protect Russian people living in the Near Abroad (Laruelle 2015, 96).

The nationalist discourse of “Russia as a divided nation” played a central role during the Ukrainian crisis and later, according to Laruelle, was transformed into one of Russia’s major tools. However, it was not always the case. The nationalist arguments, as Zevelev

states, were in the margins of Russian political life throughout the 1990s and just recently have been incorporated into the state-run narrative (Zevelev 2014). The reason for that could be partially the changing attitudes of the Russian President with regard to the West and by the growing impact of Russian nationalists on the tone of Foreign Policy (Zevelev 2014). Nationalists, as Anne Clunan accurately marks, can hardly be considered influential in terms of practical decision-making, but they do and can construct “an aspirational vision of Russia” (Clunan 2009). Laruelle also comes to the conclusion that “nationalists often react to a foreign policy decision, but they rarely forerun it” (Laruelle 2015, 90).

Yet, it should be underlined that the divided line of arguments in Russian Foreign policy in most cases remains instrumental. As Marelene Laruelle points out “it is a part of discursive repertoire of Russia’s foreign policy, deployed whenever the Kremlin needs to penalize a neighbor for its geopolitical or political disloyalty, but it does not appear as a driver of routine foreign policy decisions” (Laruelle 2015, 95)

The role of the President of the Russian Federation in the Ukrainian crisis cannot be underestimated. Putin personally articulated the state course and as usual resorted to the “divided nation” argument. He appealed to the shared historical memory of residents of Crimea and great power status, recalling the triumphant victories of the Russian army on the Crimea peninsula— during the Ottoman , Crimean (1853–56) and the Second World Wars. Putin stated that “the graves of Russian soldiers whose bravery brought Crimea into the Russian empire are also in Crimea. This is also Sevastopol – a legendary city with an outstanding history, a fortress that serves as the birthplace of Russia’s Black Sea Fleet”. Once he even declared that “the Russian nation became one of the biggest ethnic

groups in the world to be divided by borders”⁸ Interestingly, the latter argument was is on the “divided nation,” inextricably present in both concept of Russian World and Russia’s citizenship law on compatriot. However, only with regard to the Ukrainian crisis it became explicit and was used for the first time to justify violent action against a neighbor (Laurelle 2015).

The concept of the Russian world as a Russian public diplomacy tool

The concept of the Russian World in line with the Compatriot Policy was officially used for the first time in 2001 in the speech of Vladimir Putin before the first World Congress of Compatriots living abroad. The president declared, “The notion of the Russian World extends far beyond Russia’s geographical borders and even far beyond the borders of the Russian ethnicity” (Putin, October 11, 2001). The Russian World concept is aimed to popularize Russian culture in the world by different means, including sponsoring funds for developing the Russian language and culture abroad. Russia is also oriented towards supporting the Russian Orthodox Church abroad and other Russian organizations. By doing this, Russia intends to achieve the Russian diaspora’s identification with Russia (Laruelle 2015). The Russian World concept is not only a political and cultural concept. It has another-messianic side, which is mainly driven by the Russian Orthodox Church. From the Orthodox point of view, the concept of “Russian world” represents a common “civilizational space” that covers the former territory of historical Rus, resting on three pillars, namely: Orthodoxy, Russian culture and language, and, finally, shared Historical memory. It is important to draw that the concept of Russia World embraces not only ethnic Russians but also foreign citizens who speak or learn Russian, who are genuinely interested in Russia and care about its future (Euphemiy 2015).

⁸ Obrachenie prezidenta rossiiskoi federacii “Обращение Президента Российской Федерации,” *Президент России*, accessed June 5, 2017, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>.

In the second half of the 2000s, the Russian World concept became a more salient element in the official narrative of Russia and, therefore, represented an additional side of the compatriot project, namely, defending Russian people abroad who are not willing to return to their kinstate (Laruelle 2015).

It is noteworthy that from the first months in power President Putin introduced the new dynamic to the question of compatriots. Right after the Congress of Compatriots, the Kremlin adopted a new concept on the “Principal Directions of the Federation Toward Compatriots Living Abroad for 2002–2005” (Laruelle 2015). The document played a great role in the policy defined towards compatriots, since for the first time it clarified the spectrum of possible actions Russia might undertake. The document specified Russian’s intentions to defend compatriots abroad as well as its intentions to repatriate the latter for work-related and demographic issues (Laruelle 2015). For instance, “The Federation’s policy toward compatriots living abroad is oriented with a view to their adjustment in their adopted country, with a deliberate conservation of their ethnocultural specificity, but also with a view to the formation of mechanisms for their legal and controlled migration to Russia and the reaching of an optimal balance between both processes” (Russkoe slovo 2003,14). Thus, Laruelle argues that “the new policy infrastructure around “compatriots” and the Russian world was born” (Laruelle 2015, 7).

The privileged status of the concept of the Russian World in Russia’s state of affairs grew in the 2000s when it immersed into special historical events, namely Vladimir’s Putin presidency as well as the economic boom of the 2000s. During the 1990s the Kremlin had a perception that it was defeated in its neighborhood and so the will to invest into soft power and image-making of Russia arose with new intensity. Throughout this period of time the concept of the Russian World gradually transformed into a Russian public diplomacy tool, which the Russian Federation lost after the collapse of the Soviet Union. According

to Marlene Laruelle, the concept of the Russian World moved from the moderate rhetoric of the 1990s to the media spotlight in 2014, when Russian President Vladimir Putin used it to justify Russia's interference in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea (Laruelle 2015). The term is considered to be a crucial instrument for Russia to brand itself on the international scene and to advance its own voice in the world. According to the author, the Russian World may be seen as a floating signifier developed by diverse actors around the Kremlin, one that speaks to different audiences and that can take specific flavors to be utilized depending on the context (Laruelle 2015, 13).

One of the main drivers of the concept of the Russian World is the Russian information space. Since the second half of the 2000s, the Kremlin has made it's a priority to invest in the media realm. However, here we have to make a distinction between the Western countries and the Near Abroad. To ensure its role in the Near Abroad, Russia resorted to the dominance over information space, whereas in the western countries Russia can only rely on the "presence". After 2008 Russia launched new multiple media initiatives both for Russian-speaking as well as for the international audiences, namely Russia beyond headlines and Russia Today(RT).

Some scholars claim that there are particularly favorable contexts in which countries can mobilize their respective international broadcasting potential and demonstrate to global audiences the values that the nation and its national audience cherish (Hutchings, 2015). Price and Dayan believe that the Olympics could be one of such contexts (Price and Dayan). Ilya Yablokov and Alexander Voss underline that the Olympics can offer opportunities to "state-funded international broadcasters to function as a public and cultural diplomacy tool"(Yablokov, Voss 2015, 631). Thus, RT (Russia Today), as Marie Gillespie remarks, built a powerful myth of Russia's victorious return to the world state, "at ease with itself and the world"(Gillespie 2015, 631). This image, however, soon deteriorated after Crimea's

annexation. In the new circumstances RT devoted itself to the information war over Ukraine, struggling with the global media environment and claiming that there is no objectivity in the world (Voss 2015). Hence, with the end of the Sochi Olympic Games, RT has moved from a soft power strategy of promoting a triumphant image of Russia to a powerful propaganda campaign, which seeps into other government channels, such as the Channel one, Russia 24, Ren-TV. One of the tools that these state-sponsored channels used is catchy, scandal headlines. In the empirical chapter of my thesis I will elaborate on this in a more detailed way. The reference to the federal channels would be highly relevant to my thesis, since it is one of the main mechanisms of Russia's international and internal broadcasting arm used for promoting itself and its citizenship.

The short overview of Russian Foreign Policy concept reveals indissoluble bonds between the Russian law of Compatriots, the Russian policy Near Abroad and the concept of the Russian World. These constellations of Russian Foreign policy significantly changed after the Ukrainian crisis, but, the main line of arguments, i.e. bearing responsibility for compatriots, thus, preserving its own sphere of national interest, remained untouched. The latter argument triggered a new positioning of Russia on the world stage, where it sees itself as a reborn global player, a strong nation, capable of offering another alternative to the world. This new policy of influence is based on an extremely wide spectrum of activities and options, ranging from market economy principles and media wars to military involvement and fast-track mechanism to access citizenship for talents around the globe demonstrating an affiliation towards Russia. The Russian Federation acts as another constellation of attraction, which such celebrities as Gerard Depardieu, Steven Seagal, Roy Johnes, Jeffrey William Monson, Exio Gamba, Ornella Mutti and many others want to join.

Chapter 4: Methodology applied in the research

To analyze the research question and its validity I will rely on the qualitative method which enabling me to formulate a macro picture in the portrayal of citizenship. My methodology is centered on presenting a set of different external and internal mass media sources depicting “granting of citizenship” to world -famous celebrities in Russia and uses the critical discourse analysis method (CDA).

The choice of this particular method is relevant because it will provide the best explanation of why the Russian government uses citizenship for internal political purposes. The explanation of power pattern is a central concept of the CDA, as it often “examines the language use of those in power who are responsible for” different policies and construction of particular social environment (Wodak and Meyer 2009, 9). The critical discourse analysis is aimed at connecting the language and its methods of application to the significance of power and social difference within society. What is more, it helps to uncover the implicit meanings embedded into texts and to combine these meanings with social and political reality (Bryman 2008).

To answer the questions of my research , namely, why the Russian government grants citizenship to those with international fame and what these acts of granting citizenship might symbolize , we can use either content analysis or critical discourse analysis. The content analysis, according to Tischer et al. is “the longest established method of text analysis among the set of empirical methods of social investigation” (Titscher 2000, 55). In fact, the content analysis is fundamentally connected with the dramatic expansion of mass communication in the last 20 years, therefore it is often used in the analysis of mass media and international politics . The content analysis tends to uncover “the heart and the soul” of the text with the help of the coding forces (Ryan and Bernard 2000, 780). However, compared to the content analysis method, the critical discourse analysis has its advantages

applicable to this work. It allows not only to look at the normative level of what is being said about fast-track grants of Russian citizenship, by whom and with what frequency, but also to delve into the context surrounding Russian citizenship phenomenon, which intertwines with public diplomacy and reputation -building narratives. In other words, the CDA enables to analyze media sources beyond the sentence in order to assess the present and absent cultural and political meanings in a discourse. Such meanings are impossible to attain when one uses only qualitative or quantitative content analysis. Besides, quantitative content analysis is used as a descriptive - largely focused on numbers - but not explanatory tool of the research giving little space for revealing insights into the use of image, symbols and linguistic devices used by govern-sponsored national campaign in projecting Russian citizenship.

Another argument in favor of using critical discourse analysis method is that it helps to deconstruct “legitimation or relativisation of a social status quo, which is maintained and reproduced through the discourse (Wodak 2009, 8). In this thesis, I argued that the act of granting citizenship to those with international fame by president Vladimir Putin and its further portrayal via Mass media are attempts to “preserve the status quo desired by the regime” where the President Putin is the key figure of the system. This procedure compliments Vladimir Putin’s image of the Father of the Nation and adds a new element to Russia’s national greatness. Putin is portrayed in the Mass media as a nation’s absolute leader, without whom the existence of Russia is questioned⁹.

Noteworthy is the fact that the critical discourse analysis includes a number of different approaches some of which are: discourse analysis, socio cognitive approach,

⁹ First Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration, Vyacheslav Volodin, used the phrase “If there's Putin - there's Russia, if there's no Putin - there's no Russia, in 2014. Volodin backed up his statement with the results of a public survey, which showed that 66 percent of Russians could not see any candidates besides Putin running for president in 2018, the newspaper said.

corpus linguistics approach, social actors approach, dialectical-relational approach , socio-political and discourse-historical approaches (Wodak and Meyer 2009). In my research, I would be particularly interested in a socio -political and political approaches, which are essential for explaining the dynamics of citizenship discourse of Russia and understanding the government's role in portraying - advertising Russian citizenship for domestic audiences. As Pelinka argues "language must be seen (and analyzed) as a political phenomenon" whereas politics must be perceived and studied as a discursive phenomenon (Pelinka 2007, 129). It is obvious that politics cannot be conducted without language therefore the importance of language and communication accompanying fast-track grants of Russian citizenship cannot be underestimated. Indeed, it is important to highlight that the majority of studies devoted to political discourse are about the text and talk of professional politicians (van Dijk 1998) or political institutions, such as president or other members of the government. Apart from these institutional forms of text and talk, there are other prominent ways of doing politics, which can usually be traced through political genres such as external and internal propaganda, foreign policy doctrine, political advertising, media interviews, political talk shows on TV, party programmes, ballots, and so on (van Dijk 1998).

In order to elucidate the nationalist politics from a "top-down approach" and to reveal the construction mechanism used by politicians in depicting citizenship this thesis looked at the videos broadcast by Russian TV channels (Channel One , Russia 24, Ren TV and RT (Russia Today) where the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin grants citizenship to the celebrities. This thesis also looked into the state TV programmes that explore the theme of "increasing popularity of Russian passports among western celebrities". Due to the time limitations affected the research only two TV programmes were chosen for elaborating this theme, namely a seven minute news report "Foreigners come to live to

Russia”¹⁰ broadcast on December 6, 2015 by the Channel One in the weekly news programme called “Sunday Time”¹¹ and the episode “Russia’s popularity grows all over the world. It is time to be proud of your country”¹² of the TV programme called “Military Secret” broadcast by Channel Ren TV on June 22, 2015. The choice of these programmes was dictated by the desire to demonstrate different discourses in the Russian media landscape based on the political leaning of the Channels. The Channel One represents the centrist position in the Russian Media landscape and have the access to more than 250 million audience worldwide (Rusmedia 2015). The Ren TV does not have such a big audience, however, this video is of practical importance since it represents a small but significant discourse surrounding the Russian citizenship. What is more, this video got 60327 viewers and received 431 likes out of 490 in the YouTube, thus signifying that it has its own audience. The programme represents together with its TV host Igor Prokopenko the rightest position in Russian media landscape which openly supports government state course and actively spread anti-western propaganda. In 2015 the program won the nomination “the most patriotic programme of the year” (Aliperina RG,2015).

The CDA applied in this research revealed the underlying motives, narratives and beliefs that influence or could influence the direction Russian citizenship has taken, is taking or will take. It also provided insights in what type of citizenship regimes Russian citizenship legislation aims to develop. This exercise of the critical discourse analysis implied the investigation of each line of the selective texts with the help of the

10 “Foreigners come to live to Russia” (Inostrantsy yedut zhit' v Rossiyu- Иностранцы едут жить в Россию), Channel One, December 6 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GvCV0cn5gYY>

11 Sunday time -(Voskresnoe Vremya - Воскресное Время)

12 “Russia's popularity grows all over the world. It is time to be proud of your country”-(Moda na Rossiyu rastot vo vsom mire ! Gordis' svoey stranoy!, Ren TV, June 22 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cGa1C9LQr5A>

questionnaire developed by Carla Willing, though, slightly modified with regard to citizenship notion . For instance,

What sort of assumptions (about citizenship) appear to underpin what is being said and how it is being said;

What kind of discursive resources are being used to construct meaning within the texts:

What may be potential consequences of the discourses that are used in the texts. (Willing 2014, 344)

The analysis also included the definition of a set of thematic categories to which a number of specific related words corresponded. The process of analysis involved determining the frequency, content, and relation of the thematic categories in the media content. This allowed to observe how the portrayal of citizenship is interrelated with Russia's public diplomacy campaign.

Chapter 5: Analysis of the fast-tracked citizenship discourse in Russia

This chapter exposes the dynamics of citizenship discourse in Russia by 1) analyzing videos where the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin grants citizenship to the celebrities living on both sides of the Atlantic and by 2) examining state TV programmes that explore the theme of “increasing popularity of Russian passports among western celebrities”. The chapter concludes that by awarding fast-tracked citizenship to the world-famous celebrities, Vladimir Putin has created a ritual that elevates him personally and reinforces his image as “the father of the nation”. The Russian President controls the status of Russian membership and, in accordance with Item A of Article 89 of the Russian Federation Constitution, determines the relationship between an individual and the Russian state. The chapter also uncovers the tools and techniques used by the Russian media to claim national greatness, a theme which is intertwined with the alternative narratives.

Performing the citizenship granting procedure

This section of the chapter presents the trajectory and the development of the citizenship awarding process performed by Vladimir Putin, which moves from the moderate discourse in 2013 to the media spotlight in 2014 when Russian citizenship was operationalized in line with Ukrainian events and subsequent deterioration of Russia's relationship with the West. Since 2014, the significance of Western people coming to Russia has become more salient for Russian officials. Therefore, the discourse, rituals, and techniques of passport gifting procedure were instrumentally advanced by the Russian government. Several settings illustrate this personal performance of awarding citizenship: President announcing on the issue of Gerard Depardieu's citizenship at the Year-End Press Conference and subsequent granting of it in 2013, Putin meeting with the prominent US boxer Roy Jones in Sevastopol (Crimea), where the President promises to give citizenship to the famous sportsman, the President's awarding the Russian passport to the Italian coach

of Russian Judo team Ezio Gamba at a training session in 2016, and, finally, the most recent case of granting citizenship to the American actor Steven Seagal in the Kremlin. Each setting maintains one common trait – the citizenship awarding procedure was portrayed extensively by the state-run channels, namely Russia 24, Channel One, Channel Two, Russia Today, NTV, Life and many others. The videos in most cases are replicating each other. For this reason, our analysis focuses only on the symbolic act itself.

The case of Gerard Depardieu was the first and the most striking at that time. According to the All-Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM), 91 percent of the Russian population back in 2013 were aware of the fact that the notable French got Russian citizenship (VCIOM 2013). In another opinion poll on “the most memorable and important events of the year 2013” conducted by the Levada Center, this act came seventh in a list of seventeen major events (Levada Center 2013). In December 2012 at the annual Year-End Press Conference, the President was asked if he had offered Gerard Depardieu a citizenship status. In his answer to the journalist's question, Vladimir Putin emphasizes the importance of Russian -French relationship to Russia. He claims that “France stands out among all foreign partners”, ...[w]... “We have had close spiritual ties for centuries now, despite some tragic events in our common history” and expresses hope that this act will not cause any harm to the Russian-French relations (Russia 24, translation from the New York Times, 2013). It is necessary to highlight that in late 2012 the relationship with the West had not yet reached the escalating point. The President discourse regarding the “Western partners.” was neutral in tone. Putin stresses that he fully understands Gerard Depardieu’s feelings as an artist and, adds that “artists are people with a delicate psychological makeup, who easily take offense” (Russia 24, translation author’s).

It is noteworthy that president Putin does not hide his ties with the French actor. On the contrary, he openly speaks about their friendship admitting though that they have not met many times:

We have established very pleasant personal relations, friendly relations, even though we haven't seen each other often, and I know that he considers himself a Frenchman, he loves his country very much, its history and culture; he lives it.
(Russia 24, 2012, translation from The Telegraph, 2013) .

As a final accord, Vladimir Putin confirms that the question of Gerard Depardieu's citizenship status or resident permit will be readily resolved if the French actor ever asks for it (Channel One, 2013). Later on, almost all Russian channels broadcast the meeting in Sochi, where the President and the French actor shake hands and hug each other. In the year after, the President noted that Depardieu's case is exceptional due to the artist's contribution to Russian Art. "It is not a Kremlin project", warned the President ...[w]..."We had no other choice since Gerard Depardieu openly expressed his wish. So, we awarded him passport with pleasure and even thanked him for that." (Russia 24, 2012, translation author's)

In sum, by making this step, Putin and his advisers for the first time proactively utilized citizenship to enhance the country's prestige on the world stage. However, the political context behind it was not that obvious at the time. Many ordinary Russians considered this act as a simple gesture of goodwill to help the French actor avoid tax hardships, but not as an intentional political move (VCIOM 2013). It may be suggested that the Russian government simply used the opportunity with Gerard Depardieu to outline and promote for an attractive vision of the country for the internal and external audiences. Only later, when the crisis in relations with the West went into high gear in 2014, the citizenship granting procedure became more pronounced and politically oriented. Another narrative

created during 2013 is the association of the citizenship granting procedure with the President's image and, thus, accentuating his status of an absolute leader.

When asking for Russian citizenship over the tea with President Putin in Crimea, the US boxer Roy Jones Jr. stresses that the Russian passport will help him to do business in Russia. In response to his request, the Russian President notes that the fighter's name is very famous in the Russian sportsmen community and emphasizes that the question of Russian citizenship will be fixed if the boxer plans to spend a significant part of his life in Russia (LIFE 2015). The video features the animated conversation between the President and the sportsman. Both appear to be “pleased,” and projecting interest in each other. If in the case of Gerard Depardieu, the Russian President was cautious about possible harm that might be triggered by the citizenship, this time the relations with the West had already deteriorated. As a consequence, celebrities when being awarded citizenship, started to perform another role – a bridge between the West and Russia. Thus, Jones once said, “I hope that sport could help ‘build a bridge’ between the U.S. and Russia” (ESPN 2015). Filming the reportage in Crimea is a symbolic reassertion of the Russian state course and its policy in Ukraine meant to show Russian audiences that some western people recognize Crimea and sympathize with the Russian government. The theme of Crimea was reiterated in other Russian programmes, including the Channel One news reportage “Why foreigners come to Russia,” which will be discussed in detail later in the thesis.

The granting of fast-track citizenship to Ezio Gamba and Steven Seagal anchor the ritual of the Russian President. Notably, the techniques of the procedure were advanced during these cases. Apart from signing a decree on granting citizenship, the President starts to hand over passports personally and asks famous people to sign the documents, noting that “without a signature, the passport cannot be considered as valid” (LIFE, translation author’s).

The report devoted to the awarding of citizenship to a “glorified Italian” and judo trainer Ezio Gamba was broadcast by the state -owned Russian -language channel NTV in Sochi under the headline “special present” (NTV, 2016). “Present” in this case implies Russian passport whereas the adjective “special” refers to the exceptionality and the magnitude of the event. The metaphor “special present” is used by the journalists to attract the attention of the audience and demonstrate the prestige of Russian citizenship. Vladimir Putin, while giving the opening speech, notes that he has brought a Russian passport with himself. His words receive huge ovation, demonstrating the extraordinary honor of this act. Then the President continues, “the passport should be signed to be validated” (NTV 2016). The scene is followed by a handshake and hugs between the judo trainer and the President.

Let me congratulate our chief coach with this important step. We are very pleased.

If he made this decision, it means that he has much to do with our country, even more than just with judo (NTV 2016, translation author’s)

The most recent case of awarding citizenship to Steven Seagal is marked by another signifier. This time the ceremony took place in the Kremlin, the heart of Russian politics thus giving an additional status to the event. It is important to stress that the American actor has been a long-time supporter of the Russian state course and, especially, Vladimir Putin, with whom the actor shares the attitude towards the West and his love of martial arts. Once Steven Seagal personally praised the Russian President by saying “Vladimir Putin is the greatest leader in the world if not the greatest world leader alive today” (RT 2013). Therefore, the procedure of giving citizenship to Steven Seagal can also be considered as the act that solidifies the friendship between the two men. Another theme which can be elicited from this episode is the increasing narrative of the normalization of the relationship with the West. During the ceremony Vladimir Putin claims:

I want to congratulate you and express hope that this is another, albeit small, gesture and it might be a sign of the gradual normalization of relations between our countries [Russia and the USA] (Channel One, 2016, translation from Reuters 2016).

The American actor accepted the Russian citizenship with an aikido bow and Russian thanks – “Spasibo Bolshoi” (Reuters, Channel one, RT 2016). In his speech, Vladimir Putin “appointed” Steven Seagal as a mediator to improve relations between the two countries and thus, demonstrating the audience that Russia is a peaceful state seeking every opportunity to reestablish its “constructive” or at least “not hostile” relationship with the West.

The analysis made above clearly shows the apparent ties between the Russian President and Western celebrities. It also demonstrates that in every celebrity case, the relationship to the West always remained in the limelight of the citizenship discourse. The Russia -West relationship varies from the neutral in 2013 to the hostile in 2015, when the video was crafted in Crimea, and, finally to the increasing narratives of normalization in the relations in 2016. As for the ritual performances of the granting citizenship to the Western celebrities, the attachment between this phenomenon and President Putin was created. It is the President with the help of his advisors who defines, when and in which circumstances Russian membership may be granted.

The general trend of fast-tracked citizenship discourse in Russia

To further elucidate the general trend in fast-tracked citizenship discourse in Russia, it is important to analyze special reports that cover not only a single case of citizenship gifting procedure, but a set of cases, which share one major theme, namely “the increasing popularity of Russian passport among Western celebrities.” The first television source to

be examined is a seven-minute news report “Foreigners come to live in Russia”¹³ by the Russian journalist Irada Zeylanova and her colleague Ekaterina Berezovskaya, which was broadcast on December 6, 2015 by Channel One in its weekly news programme called “Sunday Time”.¹⁴ The second source is a TV programme called “Military Secret” and especially the episode “Russia's popularity grows all over the world. It is time to be proud of your country”.¹⁵ As I have already mentioned above, all these reports refer to one major theme – “the increasing popularity of the Russian passport.” However, the tools and mechanisms of representing it varies from channel to channel.

Channel One

This subsection of the thesis suggests that Channel One is operating with four major tools of portraying Russian citizenship, namely, 1) using metaphors that appeal to Russian symbols and Russianness, 2) using figures of speech that oppose Russia to the West and, thus, highlighting the alternative narrative, 3) operationalizing video methods that zoom in on Russian and USSR symbols, signifying Russia’s current and past greatness, 4) utilizing Photoshop techniques to craft Russian passports even for those celebrities who have not applied for Russian citizenship but have expressed the desire to be Russian.

Channel One enjoying the largest and at the same time the most diverse audience, uses a lot of metaphors when describing Russian passports to “activate national sensibilities” (Fox, Jon E., and Cynthia Miller-Idriss. 2008). For instance, Irada Zeylanova, in her opening sentence, underlines that more and more foreign citizens who are not originally Russians want to have “the right” to Russian “birches.” By referring to this figure of speech, Irada

¹³ “Foreigners come to live in Russia”-(Inostrantsy yedut zhit' v Rossiyu- Иностранцы едут жить в Россию)

¹⁴ “Sunday Time”-(Voskresnoe Vremya - Воскресное Время)

¹⁵ “Russia's popularity grows all over the world. It is time to be proud of your country”-(Moda na Rossiyu rastot vo vsom mire ! Gordis' svoey stranoy ! -Мода на Россию растёт во всём мире! Гордись своей страной !)

implies Russian “citizenship” and all the rights that come with it. The metaphor itself can be seen even more broadly as having a particular significance for the internal audience since it appeals to the central symbol of Russian nature -the birch tree. The allegory “bitch tree” contributes to the enforcement of national sensitivities and assigns citizenship’s association to this symbol of Russiannes. According to this report, now not only Russians fully enjoy this traditional Russian symbol, the “mature, wealthy and famous foreigners” are also eager to join the queue.

The appeal to the symbolic elements of Russian culture does not stop here. Later on, when describing the plans of a Japanese-American actor Cary –Hiroyuki Tagawa, - concurrently, the star of *Memoirs of a Geisha*, *Mortal Combat* and *Hachiko*, - to settle down in Russia, the journalist alludes to other cultural artifacts, such as felt boots and Russian folk shirts. The author stresses Cary –Hiroyuki Tagawa's desire to get the Russian passport by introducing the hyperbole “the actor is ready to internally contemplate the felt boots and Russian folk shirts until he gets Russian passport”, thus once more making emphasis on the increasing popularity of the latter. Ekaterina Berezovskaya, in order to bring about the component of affiliation with Russia, notes that the actor has applied for Russian citizenship and is waiting impatiently “to look at his image within the pages of it.”

Interestingly, Cary –Hiroyuki Tagawa when answering the question “why he wants to get Russian citizenship” sets a boundary between the East and the West. He claims that he chose Russian citizenship not because of the present trend on the Russian membership, but because he is “charmed by the deepness of the Russian soul.” For him, Russia is not exclusively the East or the West; it is something that is set in the middle and, thus, resembles his identity. The actor highlights that he is getting old and, therefore, wants to die Russian, but not American. In 2015 the actor converted to Orthodoxy and since then has borne the name of Panteleimon (RT 2015).

For the Japanese- American actor, Russian citizenship is not just a passport with its legal rights and obligations attached to its status, it is another constellation of attraction, which can offer him peace and serenity. This characteristic to some extent reflects the Russian World concept, especially its philosophical and messianic side with its universal message of salvation” (Laruelle 2015, 6). This distinction serves to underline the importance of the narrative that Russian authorities want to construct with the help of Russian journalists. Russian citizenship is nothing else but a new alternative to the world which Russia is currently willing to offer.

Another celebrity which is depicted in the report is Gérard Depardieu. The journalist describes him as “the most notable monsieur that holds the Russian passport.” The actor was granted Russia citizenship in 2013 for his contribution to Russian Art. However, the scandal which surrounded the actor regarding the tax exile in his home country, is omitted in the report. Instead, Russian journalists again introduce the alternative narrative of distinguishing “us” from “them,” in which the Russian tax system is shown as more transparent and fairer than the French one. The French tax system appears to be rigorous and equated to a nightmare which the French actor “managed to forget” by receiving the Russian citizenship and paying taxes in Russia.

Besides Cary –Hiroyuki Tagawa and Gérard Depardieu the announcers name two other “brothers in trade,” namely an American mixed martial artist Jeffrey William Monson and an American professional boxer Roy Levesta Jones Jr. This time the argumentation in favor of Russian passports sounds even more salient due to the political component embedded into the context. Both sports stars openly support the state course of the Russian government which is inextricably intertwined with the crisis in the Ukraine and Crimea question. The report about Roy Levesta Jones is purposefully crafted in Crimea to demarcate his ideological stance, namely his recognition of Crimea’s annexation. In the report, the

“legendary boxer” gives a press conference where he explains his feelings after getting Russian citizenship. He states,

Now that you have given me the Russian passport I feel that I am part of your [Russia] society. I am a Russian citizen, though, I am an American citizen, too. To be more precise, I am a Russian –American or an American-Russian. I have started to adapt to the Russian way of life, and now we are united. All people are united. But only the citizenship gives me the right to claim that officially (Channel One 2015, translation author’s).

The scene is followed by the images of Crimean's landscape and the video closes with the image of the handshake between Roy Levesta Jones Jr and President Putin.

To demonstrate love to Russia and everything that is “a la Russe”, the journalists went to Jeffrey William Monson's Miami house (Channel One 2015). The camera deliberately fixes on the images that to some extent mirror Russian or USSR legacy and, consequently, immerses the observer into the atmosphere of Moscow's Old Arbat. It zooms in on “Matryoshkas,” a T-shirt with the USSR sign, cups with Marks and Engels, and then pauses on the fur hat (shapka) that has a special meaning for Jeffrey William Monson. The mixed martial fighter wears this Russian symbol whenever he comes to Moscow. The camera also zooms in on Jeffrey Monson’s Russian tattoo – a five-pointed star which is encircled by the words freedom and solidarity written in Cyrillic. The explicit message that star conveys to the public is that of the communist ideology, which is meant to serve as another example of the sportsman’s love for the country and its past. During the interview, Jeffrey William Monson openly expresses his warm feelings towards Russia and concludes that the admission to citizenship was a natural step for him.

The mixed martial artist is famous for his anarchist –communist views and praise of socialism. In April 2016, he expressed his desire to join the Communist Party of the Russian

Federation and soon after was appointed as a special representative for international cooperation by the leader of the CP Gennady Zyuganov. Later Monson, together with Zyuganov, led a procession across the Red Square into Lenin's Mausoleum, dedicated to the anniversary of Vladimir Lenin's birth (RT 2015).

It is necessary to emphasize the fact that there is no diversity and pluralism in the political spectrum of Russia. Even though Gennadii Zyuganov can be included in the category of "constructive" and "systemic" opposition to the Kremlin, he, nevertheless, agreed on this Crimea's question, thus, rallying with Putin and the state course. As for Jeffrey William Monson's attitude towards Russian-Ukrainian relations, he is an evident supporter of the state course. The fact that in September 2016 he was granted citizenship by Luhansk People's Republic and in October 2016 Abkhazian citizenship gives an additional value to this argument. (Interfax 2016)

American star who is mentioned in the report is the vocalist of the band Limp Bizkit Fred Durst. In the interview to Channel One, the singer confesses his love for Russia and expresses the desire to become a holder of dual citizenship, that is an American and Russian one. The singer also adds that he wants to be a mediator between Russia and the United States, especially in the times when Moscow's political relationship with the US continues to deteriorate over the policy differences in Ukraine. In the interview to the American Foreign Policy Fred Durst underlines that Russia is largely misunderstood: "The way Russia is portrayed in the Media is far from reality, and I want to prove to everyone, that Russia is cool!" (Foreign Policy 2015)

For the duration of 7 minutes 14 seconds, the report visually sticks to its citizenship topic and carries the audience along by literally showing the images of passports of every celebrity emerging in the video. The image of Russian passport pops up with the personal

data of the star, including the name, the gender, the date and the place of birth after the end of each episode. Here the passport serves to be a symbolic acknowledgment of Russia's greatness. The passports, however, are not real, but purposefully crafted with Photoshop techniques to reinforce the value of Russian citizenship to the domestic audience. What distinguishes the real Russian passports and those showed in the report is the absence of standardized photo required for the Russian document. In other words, the pictures are cut from other published sources and pasted in the passports. Also, at the moment of the video creation some of the celebrities had just applied for Russian citizenship, for instance, Panteleymon Tagawa or, as in the case of Fred Durst, expressed their willingness to get the document without starting the bureaucratic procedure. However, despite these contradictions, the famous celebrities were by every possible means assigned to the Russian citizenship in the screen. This element of portraying the Russian membership illustrates the flash-like readiness of Russian authorities to grant fast-tracked citizenship to those who engage with Russia and express love for it without any hesitation.

In sum, the report "Foreigners come to live in Russia" is a drastic example of the emerging discourse on the Russian citizenship. This discourse practically merged with the new political agenda of Russia, forming a narrative about Russia's triumphant revival as a great power and another constellation of attraction and its revanche on the world stage. The citizenship image created by Channel One instills its audience with a sense of national pride.

Ren TV

Another video which is analyzed in this thesis is the episode "Russia's popularity grows all over the world. It is time to be proud of your country" in the TV programme called "Military Secret". This video also addresses the theme of Russian citizenship, however, the mechanism of representing it is dominated by the geopolitical discourse on Russia's place in the world. The tone of the programme, as well as the backdrop, reveals one of the

dominant Russian narratives of the Western hostility to Russia. In some parts, it resonates with Eurasianism ideology, especially its current version, which, according to Alexey Miller and Fyodor Lukyanov, is flooded with ideas of aggressive anti-Westernism and reactionist understanding of geopolitics (Miller and Lukyanov 2015, 15). Even the music that accompanied the programme immersed the audience in the atmosphere of alert and caution.

So far the following media tools can be assigned to the portrayal of Russian citizenship: 1) appealing to illogicality of the West by various phraseology, 2) referencing the western mass media sources which praise Russia to add value to the journalists' claims, 3) equating Russian citizenship to the geopolitical position, 4) adding every celebrity who once spoke positively about Russia to the list of those celebrities who got or applied for Russian citizenship, therefore creating a myth that everyone wants to be a citizen of Russia, 5) invoking the significant symbols of Russian national achievements, 6) bringing up new symbols such as Vladimir Putin's T-shirts to claim national greatness.

Opening the programme, Igor Prokopenko underlines that the Western Media is dazzled with Anti-Russian headlines. According to him, some of the Media, by making the comparison with Ebola, equates Russia to the biggest threat to the world. Others, as he highlights, believe that Russia has regained its superpower status and threatens Europe with the nuclear weapon. However, as he continues, the same Media also marks that Russia is weak and on its last legs. The TV host draws the conclusion that all the media coverage is controversial and illogical. The appeal to the illogicality of the West is traced throughout the whole programme, but more drastically in the following sentence: "Oddly, despite the exceptionally negative coverage directed against Russia, the popularity of Russia and its symbols is growing steadily" (Ren TV 2015).

By claiming this, Igor Prokopenko uncovers the truth about Russia, fulfilling the goal of the programme— reveal the military secret. The truth implies that Russia is a great country- the leader of international politics, and some Western people, in particular those depicted in the report finally come to realize that. Igor Prokopenko labels western celebrities “as ordinary people who are tired of being misled about Russia.” The recognition of Russia’s greatness appears to be exercised in two ways: some celebrities acknowledge Russia’s values and treat it as an equal partner, but not as a “barbarian at the gate” an “eternal apprentice” (Neumann 1999), others praise Russia and get Russian citizenship.

To attract the audience's attention, the programme starts with the focal figure of Russian citizenry - Gérard Depardieu. The journalist calls him a “legendary actor and a holder of the Russian passport” to remind the audience that a notable and talented person once expressed and eventually fulfilled his wish to become a Russian citizen. Another technique which was used in the report is the reference to other, valuable western sources. The appeal to the western sources serves to be an additional and more substantial argument in favor of the new positioning of Russia on the world stage. The programme presents the interview of Gérard Depardieu given for the French edition of the magazine *Vanity Fair* and specially accentuates the part where the actor expresses his warm feeling to Russia. The line “I am ready to die for Russia because strong people live here” (Je suis prêt à mourir pour la Russie parce que les gens y sont forts) is cut and zoomed in on for internal audience consumption.

Later the journalists stress that Depardieu is proud of being a Russian citizen. This phrase links the report with its geopolitical part. The TV host claims that the phrase “to be proud of being Russian” is not just an advertised slogan, it is a visible reflection of the current geopolitics. According to the journalist, in the era of geopolitical stance, to be a Russian citizen is a demonstration of an individual's position and, to be more precise, the

representation of the alternative set of mind that bears special values. However, the designation of these values has not been formulated either within a report or in the public discourse of Russia. It may be driven by the ideas of traditionalism which are based on the well-known triad Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality (Uvarov), but the exact formulation of the system of principles and images, according to Alexey Miller, is yet to be created in the Russian society (Miller and Lukyanov 2015, 26). As for the individual position, here the programme presumes the agreement with the government state course, its policy in Ukraine.

Along with Gérard Depardieu, the programme parades other western celebrities, who in the interviews, in the concerts, and at squared ring compliment Russia. The TV host introduces every celebrity in an upward order, first mentioning, those who just speak positively about Russia, then switching to those who wear T-shirts with Vladimir Putin's image on the front and ending up with celebrities applying for Russian citizenship. This stylistic device is used in the report to show that Russia's popularity is a widespread phenomenon.

The American singer and actor Jared Leto is shown at his concert in Moscow carrying the Russian flag and glorifying Russia. The actor points out that the United States loves and wants to become friends with Russia. However, the voice of the actor is removed and covered by the voice- over translation, therefore, the question about the validity of the actor's words remains open. This scene is followed by the fragment of the interview with the French actress Berenice Lim Marhole, famous for her role in the James Bond film "Skyfall." The actress underlines that Russian people are authentic and it is a pleasure for her to feel it. Here we again can observe the accentuation on pure, spiritual traits of the Russian people which also attract the West. The interview is followed by the image of the Italian actress Ornella Muti, who came to Russia for giving a theater performance in the Russian language.

It is interesting to note that in November 2016, she moved to Russia and expressed her will to apply for Russian citizenship. In the interview to the Russian opposition channel “Dozd” in December 2016, the actress underlines that she would be happy to get a passport from Putin's hands (Dozd 2016). David Duchovny is also mentioned in the report as a celebrity who recently featured in the advertisement of Russian beer. The actor wonders how his life would have turned out if he had been born in Russia. The actor thinks about what path and profession he would have chosen. The advertisement makes visual references to significant symbols of national achievements of Russia such as a Russian astronaut, a Russian ballet dancer, a Russia poet, a Russian hockey player and a Russian farmer.

Next, the report depicts the images of Steven Seagal at the biker festival in 2015, Sebastopol. The actor was granted Vladimir Putin's t-shirt by the leader of the motorcycle club “Night Wolves”¹⁶ Alexander Zaldostanov, nicknamed “The Surgeon”¹⁷. The journalist continues that not only Steven Seagal wanted to become Russian, the main American “tough guy” Mickey Rourke also wishes to acquire Russian citizenship. The link, however, with the Russian membership is not clearly defined here. The journalist makes this assumption only because Mickey Rourke proudly put on Vladimir Putin's t-shirt at Moscow's luxury department store, GUM in 2014. Answering the question “why he decided to buy the t-shirt with the President’s image”, the actor highlights:

If I didn't like him, I wouldn't buy the T-shirt, believe me. I met him a couple of times and he was a real gentleman, a very cool regular guy, looked me right in the eye. I think he is a good guy. If I didn't, believe I wouldn't wear the T-shirt (Ren TV 2015, translation from Independent 2014).

¹⁶ “Night Wolves”- (Nochnye Volki -Ночные волки)

¹⁷ The motorcycle club is well-known for its Pro-Putin orientation and supporting of the annexation of Crimea.

The last celebrity “who does not hesitate to speak fondly about Russia”, according to the programme, is the mixed martial artist Jeffrey William Monson. The report appeals to the video footage of mixed martial art's competition “First Start” in Saransk in the year 2015, where the American sportsman steps in the ring to the hymn of the Donetsk People's Republic. The journalist named this event “sensational” and claimed that the audience exploded with applause. As it was mentioned previously, the sportsman has evident links with both Donbas' republics, namely DPR and LPR and uses every chance to demonstrate his solidarity with the people of the republics. Later the broadcaster reveals the plans of “the world champion in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu” to obtain Russian citizenship, emphasizing that the latter spends more time in Russia than in the United States. It is noteworthy that by the time the programme was shown Jeffrey William Monson had not acquired Russian citizenship yet.

Conclusion

This thesis attempted to answer the following questions why the Russian government awarded fast-track citizenship to the world-famous celebrities, what this act of granting citizenship might symbolize and what tools and techniques the Russian government used for portraying its citizenship. The analysis and discussion made above argued that the answer would be found in the realm of citizenship and Russian Foreign Policy. In the situation of the strained relationship with the Ukraine and the West, the Russian Federation operationalized Russian citizenship with the help of western celebrities for internal political motives to enhance the image of the country.

This thesis contributes to the literature on the notion of citizenship by expanding it beyond the borders of national identity narrative. The recent amendments to the Russian citizenship laws, namely the introduction of the fast-track membership grants to businessmen, investors, highly qualified specialists and western celebrities, demonstrate that Russian citizenship is not being used for a single purpose but serves multiple aims and lacks a cohesive national identity narrative. Though the works of Ayelet Sharshar have shown that many countries omit the importance of cultural affiliation, collective identity and loyalty while offering privileged citizenship routes for the stars in major fields, the case of Russia is slightly different and does not fully fit into this narrative. The role of cultural affiliations and loyalties of “might be citizens” appears to be crucial in determination of citizenship grants. The body of sources examined in this thesis showcases that every celebrity who obtained Russian citizenship had praised Russia, its political course and its President beforehand. The findings of the research also reveal a huge media campaign that propagates these affiliations.

The analysis of the Russian media has revealed a variety of tools and mechanisms used to portray Russian citizenship. First of all, the media exploits the image of the Russian

President as the Father of the Nation. Vladimir Putin personally awards citizenship to the Western stars and masters his techniques from celebrity to celebrity. This act of granting citizenship has created a ritual that elevates the significance of the President Putin and thus preserves the status quo desired by the regime.

Secondly, Russian media exploits the theme of “increasing popularity of Russian passports among western celebrities”. However, here the research demonstrates the differences in approaches operationalized by Russian Channels. The research findings suggest that Channel One, which has access to the broader audience, appeals to a more neutral discourse than Ren TV. Channel One is operating with four major tools of portraying Russian citizenship, namely, 1) using metaphors that appeal to Russian symbols and Russianness, 2) using figures of speech that oppose Russia to the West and highlight the alternative narrative, 3) operationalizing video methods that zoom in on Russian and USSR symbols, signifying Russia’s current and past greatness, 4) utilizing Photoshop techniques to craft Russian passports even for those celebrities who have not applied for Russian citizenship but have just expressed their desire to be Russian. As for the Ren TV, the following media tools can be assigned to the portrayal of Russian citizenship - 1) appealing to illogicality of the West by means various phraseology, 2) referencing the western mass media sources which praise Russia to add value to the journalists’ claims, 3) equating Russian citizenship to the geopolitical position, 4) adding every celebrity who once spoke positively about Russia to the list of those celebrities who got or applied for Russian citizenship, therefore creating a myth that everyone wants to be a citizen of Russia, 5) invoking the significant symbols of Russian national achievements, 6) bringing up new symbols such as Vladimir Putin’s T-shirts to claim national greatness.

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