

WHERE IS UKRAINE IN THE RUSSIAN WORLD?
CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF PUTIN'S SPEECHES IN REGARDS TO
UKRAINE WITHIN THE *RUSSKIY MIR* CONCEPT

By

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Abstract

This research aims to critically analyse the Russian nationalist language and its related nationalist identity construction around the concept *Russkiy Mir*, specifically through Putin's speeches, during 2014 and the ongoing 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. The study aims to scrutinise how Putin and Russia instrumentalised the concept of *Russkiy Mir* in political discourses, and how its core elements and main arguments were developed in order to justify and legitimise the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The study also draws on the historical development of the concept of *the Russkiy Mir* in the early 2000s with mere cultural connotation, and the eventual trending of the term in 2014 and now in 2022 with strong political and military implications, and with the construction of Russian nationalist identity. I bring in Norman Fairclough's and Teun van Dijk's framework of Critical Discourse Analysis, Eric Hobsbawm's Instrumentalist theory, and Laclau's Floating Signifier theory to analyse the data. The paper concludes that through and within the framework of the *Russkiy Mir*, Putin's official discourses offer a strong political narrative that legitimises and justifies Russian aggression in Ukraine, and the national and moral responsibility of Russia to militarily defend its historical homeland and bring together its people under one land and one nation.

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This thesis would not exist if Russia did not invade Ukraine in 2014, then later in 2022 causing hundreds of deaths and it would have been wonderful. But this is the current reality of Ukraine, therefore hoping this catastrophe will end soon so that people can continue their lives in peace.

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Abbreviations

CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
EU	European Union
GPE	Global Political Economy
IR	International Relations
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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Chapter One:

Introduction

On February 24, 2022, Putin declared a “special military mission” in Ukraine. This full-scale Russian military invasion started a war in the country and since then it has been ongoing to this very day. After the annexation of Crimea in 2014 - an illegal annexation of the territory that is internationally recognized as part of Ukraine, the situation’s escalation is simply a matter of time. For example, Novaya Gazeta, an independent Russian Newspaper, wrote in 2021: ‘While the escalation of the conflict is used as an instrument of political pressure, the next aggravation or even the transition of the war into a hot phase is a matter of time.’ This apprehension proved to be right as on the 21st of February 2022, Vladimir Putin, the President of the Russian Federation, announced the recognition of the independence and sovereignty of the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and the Luhansk People's Republic (LPR).¹ Three days later, the Russian military invaded the country of Ukraine.

For over a year now, Russia has remained in Ukraine continuing its military invasion. In this period Russian military force caused numerous deaths and war crimes, they bombed cities, also civilian areas like hospitals or kindergartens, sometimes even using aggressive weapons such as “explosive weapons with wide area effects, including shelling from heavy artillery, multiple launch rocket systems, missiles and air strikes.”² The UN's Office of High Commissioner

¹“Обращение Президента Российской Федерации”, February 21, 2022
<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828>

² “Ukraine: civilian casualty update 3 January 2023.” *UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, January 03, 2023*
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2023/01/ukraine-civilian-casualty-update-3-january-2023#:~:text=From%2024%20February%202022%20to%202%20January%202023%2C%20OHCHR%20recorded,6%2C919%20killed%20and%2011%2C075%20injured.>

reported 17,994 civilian casualties in Ukraine: 6,919 killed and 11,075 injured from 24 February 2022 to 2 January 2023.³

In his historic speech on February 21st addressing the Russians and the rest of the world, Putin had numerous things to say about Ukraine. Starting from what he views as the historical roots of the country onwards to the biggest challenges which Ukraine allegedly faces nowadays, such as being “taken hostage by neo-Nazis.”⁴ Perhaps, among them all, the most significant message Putin gave in his speech was that there never even existed a country like Ukraine. Instead, he asserts “that modern Ukraine was entirely created by Russia, or, more precisely, by Bolshevik, Communist Russia,” discrediting the very presence of a nation, its people, and international governments and **communities (Putin, 2022)**.

Putin's denial of the fact that Ukraine is indeed a country therefore was one of the main messages of the introduction on his views and understandings about Ukraine. The manipulation of historic facts has become Putin's main political and propaganda instrument for his aggression in Ukraine. The emphasis on the myth that Russia and Ukraine are one and the same country started being actively used for over a decade now, along with his *Russkiy Mir* (Russian World, Русский Мир) concept. According to Putin, Ukraine, which was leaning more on the side of the West, has to be brought back to the Russian world where it belongs no matter what. Putin's Russia-centric *Russkiy Mir* concept is very important in justifying his aggressive actions in Ukraine. This thesis aims to critically analyse the Russian official discourse regarding Ukraine within the *Russkiy Mir* framework.

³ “Ukraine: civilian casualty update 3 January 2023.” *UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, January 03, 2023*
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2023/01/ukraine-civilian-casualty-update-3-january-2023#:~:text=From%2024%20February%202022%20to%202%20January%202023%2C%20OHCHR%20recorded,6%2C919%20killed%20and%2011%2C075%20injured.>

⁴ “Обращение Президента Российской Федерации”, February 21, 2022
<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828>

Using a critical discourse analysis approach, this thesis seeks to examine the usage of the *Russkiy Mir* concept by the official Russian political discourse, specifically by Putin himself, in justification of the military invasion in Ukraine in both 2014 and 2022. In order to accomplish this study, I will focus on the following three research questions: 1) How did Russia instrumentalize the *Russkiy Mir* concept in justifying the invasion of Ukraine? 2) What key elements of the *Russkiy Mir* concept are being used? 3) What main arguments were made within the *Russkiy Mir* concept?

This research is structured in six main chapters. Chapter *One* is the Introduction which presents the research questions and thesis structure. Chapter *Two* focuses on the historical background which will provide a brief overview of information on Russian - Ukrainian relations in order to bring a context to the current developments of the conflict and roots of the *Russkiy Mir* concept. Chapter *Three* analyses the *Russkiy Mir* concept in the relevant theoretical framework, including nationalism theories such as Eric Hobsbawm's Instrumentalist theory and Laclau's Floating Signifier theory. Chapter *Four* explains chosen methodology and focuses on the empirical analysis part. Chapter *Five* is the Analysis. Chapter *Six* provides Discussions.

Definitions and Positionality

This thesis discusses the events in Ukraine in 2014 and 2022. For the issues in 2014, various definitions are used by different parties, for example, "reunification" used by the Kremlin, and the "annexation" by the international community. In this research, the term "annexation" will be used since the researcher is convinced that there were indeed a number of international legal norms as well as Ukraine's sovereignty violated in 2014 in the case of Crimea. The referendum, which was organised by self-declared authorities of Crimea was

illegal in accordance with the Ukrainian Constitution.⁵ In March 2014, the Constitutional Court indicated that only under an all-Ukrainian referendum, a proposed change to Ukraine's territory could be lawfully addressed and that only the parliament of Ukraine has the authority to call for such a referendum.⁶ That being said, the interference in Crimea was a violation of Ukraine's sovereignty, and thus the referendum is illegal and Russia's actions can be described as "annexing" Ukraine's territory. Therefore, the term "annexation" is the most relevant for the course of this research. In the case of the Russian Military invasion in 2022, Kremlin described its military actions as a "special military operation" (специальная военная операция, *spetsialnaya voennaya operatsiya*). Once again, this is the violation of Ukraine's sovereignty by illegally invading the country by military forces and using heavy weapons. Therefore, this research will use the terms "unprovoked military aggression", "war", "military aggression" and "military invasion" interchangeably.

The analysis of this study has great potential to contribute to the field of Nationalism Studies with its approach of researching current time conflicts from the perspective of the concept that centralizes one nation over others. The concept of *Russkiy Mir* is gaining academic attention in recent years, however, the studies that would analyse the intervention in Ukraine through this specific concept are quite limited. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the emerging list of scholarship on instrumentalising this concept when justifying an illegal and military invasion in another sovereign state.

⁵ "OPINION ON "WHETHER THE DECISION TAKEN BY THE SUPREME COUNCIL OF THE AUTONOMOUS REPUBLIC OF CRIMEA IN UKRAINE TO ORGANISE A REFERENDUM ON BECOMING A CONSTITUENT TERRITORY OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION OR RESTORING CRIMEA'S 1992 CONSTITUTION IS COMPATIBLE WITH CONSTITUTIONAL PRINCIPLES" EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR DEMOCRACY THROUGH LAW (VENICE COMMISSION) 21 March 2014, [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2014\)002-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2014)002-e)

⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Judgment of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine on All-Crimean Referendum (Mar. 14, 2014), available at <http://mfa.gov.ua/en/news-feeds/foreign-offices-news/19573-rishennyakonstitucijnogo-sudu-v-ukrajini-shhodo-referendumu-v-krimu> (unofficial translation of Decision No. 2-rp/ 2014)

Chapter 2: Background

The Annexation of Crimea - 2014 Invasion

The bloodiest period in Ukraine's independent history started after the pro-Kremlin President Victor Yanukovych refused to sign an association agreement that would strengthen the country's ties with the European Union.⁷ News items also report that he "was pressured" by Russia, which subsequently offered Ukraine economic assistance of 15 billion US dollars.⁸ On November 21st in 2013, a couple of thousand people that were unsatisfied with the President's actions went to the streets of Kyiv to protest. The protests grew bigger within a week after Ukraine's special police showed aggressive behaviour towards the protestants. The unrest escalated over several months and security forces attempted to clamp down on the protests.⁹ Dozens died on February 20th 2014, at Kyiv's Independence Square, the bloodiest day of the violence.

By late February, Yanukovych was turned down and fled the country to Russia. A new government, a pro-European one, was installed by the Ukrainian parliament. During these chaotic times in the country, new separatist movements started to emerge in the east of the country which is traditionally known to be leaning more on the pro-Russian side. Dozens of pro-Russia gunmen seized government buildings in Ukraine's Crimea region, which houses

⁷Traynor, Ian, and Oksana Grytsenko. 2013. "Ukraine Suspends Talks on EU Trade Pact as Putin Wins Tug of War." *The Guardian*, November 21, 2013, sec. World news. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/21/ukraine-suspends-preparations-eu-trade-pact>.

⁸ *Reuters*. 2013. "Special Report: Why Ukraine Spurned the EU and Embraced Russia," December 19, 2013, sec. Emerging Markets. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-russia-deal-special-report-idUSBRE9BI0DZ20131219>.

⁹Karmanau, Maria Danilova and Yuras. 2013. "Massive Anti-Government Rally in Ukraine Turns Violent." *CNBC*. December 2, 2013. <https://www.cnn.com/2013/12/01/massive-anti-government-rally-in-ukraine-turns-violent.html>.

Russia's Black Sea fleet, and hoisted a Russian flag.¹⁰ At the beginning of March 2014, as the unrest in Ukraine's Crimean peninsula continued to grow and left one person dead, Putin ordered major military exercises in western Russia by claiming that the request was submitted "in connection with the extraordinary situation in Ukraine and the threat to the lives of Russian citizens".¹¹

Couple days later President Putin announces an end to military exercises in western Russia and orders the troops back to base. On March 6, 2014, the local legislative organ in Crimea adopted a decree 'On All-Crimean Referendum'.¹² The resolution presented two options: "(1) Do you support the reunification of Crimea with Russia as a subject of the Russian Federation? (2) Do you support the restoration of the Constitution of the Republic of Crimea of 1992 and the status of Crimea as a part of Ukraine?"¹³ A declaration of independence of the Republic of Crimea was adopted on March 11, 2014.¹⁴ The Crimean referendum was held on March 16, 2014, and self-declared leaders of the region said that "some 95.5% of voters in Crimea have supported joining Russia."¹⁵ Later in that month, on March 18th, Putin announced, as he calls it, the "reunification of Crimea" with Russia.

¹⁰ "Crimean Parliament Seizure Inflames Russian-Ukrainian Tensions" *The Guardian*, 24 February, 2014 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/27/ukraine-pro-russian-gunmen-seize-crimea-parliament-live-updates?view=desktop#block-530efb46e4b0ddf5cbe7ba63>.

¹¹ Walker, Nigel. "Conflict in Ukraine: A timeline (2014 - present)" *House of Commons Library*. 24 February, 2023 <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9476/CBP-9476.pdf>

¹² Resolution of the Verkhovna Rada of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea No. 1702-6/14, On Holding of the All-Crimean Referendum (Mar. 6, 2014); see also Illegal Referendum Is Being Held in Crimea, UKR. CRISIS MEDIA CTR., Mar. 16, 2014, at <http://uacrisis.org/v-krimu>.

¹³ "European Parliament resolution of 15 January 2015 on the situation in Ukraine" *European Parliament*. 15 January 2015 https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2015-0011_EN.html

¹⁴ Siddique, Haroon, and Alec Luhn. 2014. "Ukraine Parliament Delivers Ultimatum to Crimea over Referendum." *The Guardian*, March 11, 2014, sec. World news. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/11/ukraine-parliament-ultimatum-crimea-referendum>.

¹⁵ "Crimea Referendum: Voters 'back Russia Union' - BBC News." 16 March 2014. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26606097>.

“Special Military operation” - 2022 Invasion

There is not one specific factual explanation on the reasons for Russia's invasion in Ukraine in 2022. Most of scholars, Mearsheimer 2014; Sakwa 2015, 2017; Cohen 2019 among others claim that it resulted from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) enlargement. From December 2021, Russia had amassed up to 190,000 troops – according to reports from the U.S.¹⁶ – on Ukraine's borders over the course of many months. The buildup of forces around Russia's neighbour and former Soviet Union state started in late 2021 and escalated in early 2022. Prior to the invasion, Russian President Vladimir Putin recognized the Russian-backed breakaway regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, both located in the disputed Donbas area, as “independent” people's republics and ordered so-called “peacekeeping” troops into those areas.¹⁷ This aggression started by the Kremlin caused what the Ukrainian foreign minister described as the “most blatant act of aggression in Europe since” World War II.

Russia's primary objective is to hinder Ukraine from becoming a member of NATO, a military alliance consisting of 28 European countries and two North American countries, aimed at upholding peace and security in the North Atlantic region. Unlike many Eastern European countries, Ukraine is not part of the NATO alliance. The Kremlin, in general, perceives NATO expansions as a matter of significant concern, as stated in a translated summary of a conversation between President Putin and French President Emmanuel Macron on January 28, 2022.¹⁸

¹⁶ “U.S. Statement for the Vienna Document Joint PC-FSC Chapter III Meeting - U.S. Mission to the OSCE.” February 18, 2022, <https://osce.usmission.gov/u-s-statement-for-the-vienna-document-joint-pc-fsc-chapter-iii-meeting-2/>.

¹⁷ “Обращение Президента Российской Федерации”, February 21, 2022 <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828>

¹⁸ “Обращение Президента Российской Федерации”, February 28, 2022 . <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67657>

Although Putin's real intentions for the invasion of Ukraine may be different, Putin himself explains them with the *Russkiy Mir* concept. Amongst other things, the *Russkiy Mir* concept views Russians and Ukrainians as one people of one nation. This thesis focuses on the invasion of Ukraine from Putin's lens - how he explains his political and military actions and justifies them. For this research, I have brought in 167 articles from 2014, 2015, 2022 and 2023 which widely discussed and covered Putin's speeches and articles on his discourse regarding Ukraine. I have taken and analysed these articles and papers to understand and critically scrutinise Putin's main arguments, what *Russkiy Mir* elements and framework he uses, and how these concepts change, and whether there are differences in Putin's *Russkiy mir* related discourse on two different invasions in Ukraine, that is in 2014 and the on-going invasion of 2022.

Russian-Ukrainian Interrelations in History

Ukraine means (окраина, ukraïna) "edge", or "borderland" in translation from Ukrainian. Throughout its history, this land, Ukraine, has indeed served as a middle ground in between Russia and Poland and has the second-largest territory in Europe after Russia. Despite getting its independence from the Soviet Union nearly three decades ago, Ukraine has a long and somewhat complicated history in the region, the importance of which is manifested in the country's current challenges.

Historian Kubicek lists several challenges of this state: the regional divisions between western and eastern parts of the country; its inexperience in both capitalism and democracy that has arguably made the post-Soviet transition more difficult; its lack of previous statehood that has complicated notions of Ukrainian identity; and above all else, its relations with

neighbouring states, especially **Russia (Kubicek, 2008)**. Russia ruled Ukraine for centuries, either as the Russian Empire under the tsars or as the Soviet Union under the Communist Party.

In order to understand the current state of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, it is most effective to consult the historical background of these states' relationship. The relationship between Russia and Ukraine has been a complicated one for quite a long time. For an illustration of not-so-easy relationships, I want to bring a poem which dates back to 1762 when Ukraine's official name was 'Little Russia' (Малая Русь, *Malaya Rus'*):

*In the beginning "Great Russia" asks "Little Russia":
What kind of people are you and whence have you come?
Tell me, tell me your origins, from what have you derived?*

Little Russia explains her heroic past, from the time of the Khazars, to rule under the kings of Poland, until her voluntary submission under the Russian ruler Aleksei Mikhailovich who guaranteed the restoration of her old privileges. 'Great Russia' replies:

*You know with whom you speak, or do you forget it?
I am Russia! Why do you disregard me?...
As if you would belong to another Russia, not to me!
Little Russia responds again:
I know, that you are Russia,
And this is my name too
Why do you frighten me? I am brave myself.
I have become subject not to you, but to your lord,...
Do not think that you yourself are my ruler,
But your lord and my lord are in command of both of us.
And the difference between us is only adjectives,
That I am called Little and you Great
Is not a strange thing to you or to me.
For your borders are wider than mine,...
Yet we are equal and form one whole,
We swear allegiance to one, not to two lords -
Thus I consider you equal to myself.
In the end "Great Russia" is convinced:*

*Enough, I accept now your truth, or
I believe all you said, I respect and recognize your braveness...*

*I won't give up my friendship with you forever.
We still live in the future in inseparable concord
And we will serve loyally one state¹⁹.*

As the poem illustrated, the discussions about whether Ukraine belongs to Russia, their equality or “Great Russia’s” dominance over “Little Russia” has been a central question in their political interrelations since the 18th century and a few centuries later, Russia still questions the same arguments which were showed later in the twentieth century during the Soviet Union and current century’s Russian military interventions in Ukraine. This conversation did not reflect the reality of Russian-Ukrainian relationships in that era, since in the later decades Ukraine lost all of its traditional rights and privileges and became a normal part of the Tsarist Empire under Russian rule, “as was also the case with the rights bank Ukraine which was annexed by Russia in the second partition of Poland in 1793.”²⁰ Nevertheless, this poem shows the Ukrainian national values and spirit in that epoch that wanted to be equal to Greater Russia and be independent of it.

“The same author discusses that Ukraine and Russia’s relationship got tense when nationalism emerged in Russia. The ‘Little’ or ‘Southern Russians’ were considered integral parts of the Russian state, the Russian people and, consequently, the Russian nation. During the development of their own national movement, Ukrainian intellectuals faced persecution and repressive Russification, which aimed to suppress the Ukrainian language and culture from 1863 to 1905. However, the dynamics of Ukrainian-Russian relations appeared to change with the February Revolution of 1917 and the establishment of an independent Ukrainian National Republic from 1918 to 1920. This positive shift in relations, however, came to an end under

¹⁹ Разговор Великороссии с Малороссией.(Литературный памятник второй по. Accessed June, 2023. http://wiki.kneu.edu.ua/EcoOpinionOfUkr/images/f/fd/Kievskaya-starina_313-325.pdf.

²⁰ Kappeler, Andreas. 2003. *'Great Russians' and 'Little Russians'*. Seattle: University of Washington. p.8

Stalin's rule, as Ukraine was subjected to brutal repression, turning it into a subservient subordinate of Russia.²¹

Under Stalin's regime, Ukrainians endured immense suffering, including mass deportations, forced labour camps, and a man-made famine “Holodomor” that resulted in the loss of nearly ten million lives.²² Eventually, the Soviet Union disbanded, granting Ukraine independence from the Soviets. With this newfound independence, Ukraine achieved equality with Russia, fulfilling the aspirations expressed in Divovych's poem dating back to 1792. Even after the official separation from Russia in the 1990s, Ukraine still remained closely tied to Russia through economic and cultural relations.

²¹Kappeler, Andreas. 2003. *'Great Russians' and 'Little Russians'*. Seattle: University of Washington.
p.8

Chapter Three: Literature Review

Russkiy Mir

Popular opinions by analysts, journalists, political scientists, etc. mostly explain the evasion in the context of the current geopolitical interests of Vladimir Putin and his worries about Western hegemony in Ukraine. Although these claims are not far from the truth, this question has deeper roots that go back to history. Putin explained the invasion using several arguments that include historical, diplomatic, humanitarian, and other components but the central one is the *Russkiy Mir*. *Russkiy Mir* is a concept and an ideology with no specific legal definition but with a general meaning that brings together all the groups of people who are related to Russia either historically, by religion, culture or language. This is how Putin explains *Russkiy Mir*. “The Russkiy Mir is not only Russians, not only citizens of Russia, not only our compatriots in the near and far abroad, emigrants, natives of Russia and their descendants. It is also foreign citizens who speak Russian, study it or teach it, all those who are sincerely interested in Russia, who are concerned about its future.”²³ *Russkiy Mir* does not have any legal power behind it, being rather an ideological strategy for Russian hegemony in a global world. “Mir” in translation from Russian means both “world” and “peace”. Such wordplay is impossible to recreate in English, therefore the direct transcription of the phrase in this thesis. This is one more piece of evidence that Russia is both the centre and Russians are the “super ethnos” in this imagined community of the Russian world where Russian peace will be prioritised.

²³ Informational Portal of Russkiy Mir Foundation, accessed May 2, 2023, <https://russkiymir.ru/fund/>

Scholars define *Russkiy Mir* in different styles which appear natural due to the concept's fluid nature. For example, Laruelle claims that "it is a geopolitical imagination, a fuzzy mental atlas on which different regions of the world and their different links to Russia can be articulated in a fluid way."²⁴ Wawrzonek's point in this regard is rather connected to the centrality of the Russian Orthodox Church in the concept of *Russkiy Mir* as he stated that it is an Orthodox civilizational community.²⁵ The Russian Orthodox Church indeed plays quite an active role in forming and promoting the concept, as this thesis will discuss it further. Kozdra sums up both points in his definition: "It is founded on the idea of building community space as a supranational geopolitical creation, a Russian civilization with a strong political and Orthodox component. This community would unite all Russian people, the Russian diaspora in the former Soviet republics, and even all those who simply learn Russian and feel the attachment to Russian culture."²⁶

The concept of *Russkiy Mir* has been rooted since the days of Putin's promotion to power in the 2000s, however, it was put to the media spotlight in 2014 as a means to justify the invasion of Ukraine. Since then it has been popularised and now one can quite often see its usage in popular and political discourse. Discourse on and about *Russkiy Mir* appears in different contexts: as an ideology, geographical region, community, diaspora, cooperation, public policy, and diplomacy. There is a foundation called *Russkiy Mir* which was founded in 2007 following a decree by Putin. Different conferences, cultural events and forums are organised on the topics surrounding the concept of *Russkiy Mir* quite regularly. For example, just recently, at the beginning of May, in the self-declared People's Republic of Luhansk, there was a forum called "Russkiy Mir" where discussions on the regions belonging to Russia,

²⁴ Laruelle, 2015, 1 <https://www.caa-network.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/FINAL-CGI-Russian-World-Marlene-Laruelle-1.pdf>

²⁵ Wawrzonek, "Ukraine in the "Gray Zone": Between the "Russkiy Mir" and Europe", 2014, p. 760

²⁶ Kozdra, M. (2018). The boundaries of Russian identity: Analysis of the *Russkiy Mir* concept in contemporary Russian online media. *Lingua Cultura*, 12(1), 61-66. <https://doi.org/10.21512/lc.v12i1.2004>

historically, spiritually and by meaning were held.²⁷ The above-mentioned “Russkiy Mir” foundation leads an informational portal which promotes propagandistic content related to *Russkiy Mir*. All these “activities” performed by the Russian government within the concept of *Russkiy Mir* have been actively promoted in various spheres on different levels for the last decade.

The concept is being promoted on different levels by different techniques. Marlene Laruelle, a French sociologist and historian claims that it was a necessity for Russia to create the concept of Russkiy Mir since post-Soviet Russian in the 2000s “did have a particular ideology to promote to the rest of the world.”²⁸ Although Putin has been supporting and promoting the concept since his first days as the President’s post, as mentioned before, the term got its strong grip after the invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea in 2014. Such development of the situation can be evidence that despite being multi-functional, the concept of *Russkiy Mir* is targeting Ukraine in its expansionist grand strategy. Alongside this ideology, Putin’s administration has been setting up informational space at the beginning of the 2000s by opening information agencies such as Russia Today and Russia Beyond that would work not only in Russia but go the global information space in order to accessible to the “potential” *Russkiy Mir* followers, “compatriots”, diaspora members.

The statement I made above regarding the importance of analysing the *Russkiy Mir* concept in order to understand the Russian invasion of Ukraine is rooted in the concept’s ambitions regarding Slavic nations. Official political discourse comments that *Russkiy Mir* does not aim to reestablish the Soviet Union (which I discuss later), but rather has cultural ambitions. The Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs commented on this back in 2015. In responding to the

²⁷ Astrakhan governor took part in the All-Russian Forum "Russian World" in Lugansk, accessed on May 17, 2023, <https://a24.press/news/misc/2023-05-12/astrahanskiy-gubernator-prinyal-uchastie-vo-vsrossiyskom-forume-russkiy-mir-v-luganske-130864>

²⁸Laruelle, 2015, 13

question by Lithuanian media, he criticises who connected the concept with the Soviet Union “I ask, if you have concrete sources, to show me the official Russian citations proposing to reestablish the Soviet Union or reunify the Russian world (*sobirat’ russkiy mir*). The “Russian world” is totally different. The Russian world is about culture, language, values, and religious orientations. One can draw an analogy (albeit imperfectly) with Francophonie, the Ibero-American community, and Confucius, Goethe, or Cervantes institutes. (...) Like any normal country [we] wish to preserve [our] cultural heritage.”²⁹ The *Russkiy Mir*, as a grand plan, is specifically interested in Eastern Slavs and in comparison to the idea of restoration of the Soviet Union, the various Russian authorities never rejected the idea of Eastern Slavik integration. Beginning from the Congress of Russian Communities in 2000s³⁰ and Russian Orthodox Church leaders,³¹ the discourse on integrating Belarus, Transnistria, Ukraine, (and northern Kazakhstan) into the Russian Federation. Patriarch Kirill claims about Ukraine, among Belarus and Russia is the central core of the *Russkiy Mir* “The core of the *Russkiy Mir* today is Russia, Ukraine, and Belorussia, and St. Reverend Lavrentiy of Chernihiv expressed this idea in the famous phrase: “Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus are Holy Russia. It is this understanding of the Russian world that is embedded in the modern self-name of our Church. The Church is not called Russian because of its ethnicity. This appellation indicates that the Russian Orthodox Church performs a pastoral mission among peoples who accept the Russian spiritual and cultural tradition as the basis of their national identity, or at least as an essential part of it”.

²⁹ “Vystuplenie i otvety na voprosy SMI ministra inostrannykh del Rossii S.L. Lavrova v khode sovmestnoi press-konferentsii po itogam peregovorov s ministrom inostrannykh del Latvii E. Rinkevich,” Russian Embassy in Washington DC, January 13, 2015, <https://washington.mid.ru/en/>

³⁰ Alan Ingram, “A Nation Split into Fragments: The Congress of Russian Communities and Russian Nationalist Ideology,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 51, no. 4 (1999): 687-704.

³¹ Address by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill at the solemn opening of the Third Assembly of the Russian World, accessed May 18, 2023, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/ua/db/text/1209822.html>

In Laruelle's analysis³², before 2014, Putin expressed the *Russkiy Mir* idea just twice and in 2014. On that occasion, it was used as a justification for the annexation of Crimea. He said that he hoped Germany, as a country formerly divided, would understand and support the "aspiration of the Russian World, of Russian history, to reestablish unity."³³ It can show that the *Russkiy Mir* is now a discourse instrumentalized in explaining Russia's role in Ukraine, regarding Ukraine. This is as well a propaganda machine in terms of the Russian military invasion of Ukraine, which at the same time strengthens Russian nationalism.

Pan-Russian Identity or Russian Nationalism

To explain and understand the Pan-Russian Identity and Russian Nationalism there are many aspects that have to be considered. In my view, one of the most important ones is the relation that modern-day Russia is still holding to its Soviet past as well as its glorification. This is especially evident in Putin's numerous celebrations of various war events, such as, for example, "Celebratory concert on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the defeat of the Nazi troops in the Battle of Stalingrad" that took place earlier this year on February 2, 2023, or Putin's congratulation of veterans of the Great Patriotic War and the people of Ukraine on the 70th anniversary of Ukraine's liberation from Nazi invaders" on October 28, 2014. These few examples show how Russia desperately holds on to its Soviet past. These influence deeply how we should view Russian identity and nationalism. Kuzio (2021) argues that the unwillingness of Russia to let go of and develop from its imperial past has created severe problems for Russian nationalism and led to its unstable and precarious situation. In contrast to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk who was able to create a new identity for the nation of Turkey after the end of the

³² Laruelle, 2015,14

³³ Vladimir Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation," *Kremlin.ru*, March 18, 2014, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>.

Ottoman Empire, Russian politicians were not able to do so in the 1990s. As there was no new aspiration for nationalist wishes Russian nationalists had to stick to their view that Russia is forever destined to be an empire. And for this aspiration to become fulfilled Russia has to extend its hegemony over Ukraine and Eurasia and not only over the Russian Federation. This failure in articulating a new identity leads to an ever-unstable identity. Several authors (Motyl 1990; Rowley 2000) therefore claim that the usage of the term ‘nationalist’ in relation to Russia is simply wrong and a misnomer, as there was never an aspiration for the creation of a state that is independent of the USSR and Tsarist Russia. It would be more appropriate to use ‘imperialism’ and ‘imperialistic’, according to Rowley, to avoid inaccurate and misleading terminology. The fact that Russians manifested their sense of national identity through the framework of imperialism instead of nationalism holds significant consequences for both Russian history and the theory of nationalism.

Within the USSR, the identities and nationalisms of both the Soviet Union and Russia were closely intertwined, with the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (SFSR) being the sole Soviet republic lacking specific republican institutions. (Kuzio 2007) According to Kumar (2000, pp.584–588, cited in Kuzio 2021), Russian nationalists viewed ‘Russia’ and the USSR as one and the same and never limited ‘Russia’ to only the Russian SFSR or since 1991, the Russian Federation“ Therefore the term ‘nationalist’ in the Russian Federation encompasses a broad range of ideologies, some of which endorse imperialist agendas, power politics, and Russian chauvinism. One of them is the trope of the West attacking Russian and Eurasian civilizations. The strong and masculine leader Putin combats both domestic and external challenges to Russian security. The invasion and annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 was presented to the Russian population as an act of great power as Russia refused to tolerate humiliation any longer and defended its national interests (Kuzio 2021).

One very important core idea that explains Russia's current-day nationalism, as put by Kuzio (2021) "Importantly, during Putin's presidency Russian views of Ukraine and Ukrainians have regressed to Tsarist imperial and White Russian émigré denials of the existence of Ukraine and the chauvinistic view of Ukrainians as one of three branches of the pan-Russian nation."

The one possible reason behind Russia's invasion of Ukraine, driven by nationalist motivations, can be understood by examining Russia's lack of a clear direction in nation-building. As Russia grapples with this process, it asserts its claim over Ukraine by arguing that Ukraine is inherently Russian. This entire process vividly demonstrates the formation of the *Russkiy mir* concept, which highlights the fluid nature of this concept and underscores Russia's struggles in nation-building within the contemporary global context. The recent escalations in Ukraine further indicate that Russia has yet to establish a distinct set of values for its national identity. Consequently, in the absence of clarity, Russia is attempting to expand its territories by invading Ukraine.

Mearsheimer, one of the most famous political scientists in the US stated in 2014 that everything that was happening in Ukraine back then and in 2022 was caused by the actions of the West. In an article by New Yorker, he said that "all the trouble in this case really started in April 2008, at the nato Summit in Bucharest, where afterwards nato issued a statement that said Ukraine and Georgia would become part of nato. The Russians made it unequivocally clear at the time that they viewed this as an existential threat, and they drew a line in the sand. Nevertheless, what has happened with the passage of time is that we have moved forward to include Ukraine in the West to make Ukraine a Western bulwark on Russia's border. Of course, this includes more than just nato expansion. nato expansion is the heart of the strategy, but it includes E.U. expansion as well, and it includes turning Ukraine into a pro-American liberal

democracy, and, from a Russian perspective, this is an existential threat.”³⁴ This would be the main argument for many western scholars that are analysing Russia’s invasion in Ukraine, however, historical facts show that the trouble started several centuries ago. The active promotion of “Russkiy Mir” by Putin since the 2000s is the biggest evidence for it.

Russkiy Mir as a Floating Signifier

Although several scholars have contributed to the Floating Signifier theory (Lévi-Strauss 1997; Chandler 2010; Laclau 2005;), this study will specifically focus on Ernesto Laclau's perspective due to its relevance in *the Russkiy Mir* concept and the aim of this study to look at the very concept. Laclau's approach emphasises the political and contingent aspects of meaning, proposing that social reality is shaped through ongoing hegemonic struggles rather than inherent essences or inherent laws.³⁵ According to Laclau (1990, 1996), the meaning of social reality emerges through the process of articulation, in which different moments are positioned and differentiated within a structured entirety through discourse. Given the purpose of this study, which is looking at the instrumentalization of the concept through discourse as a meaning-making tool, and the manipulation of the facts through language in order to construct/build social reality, the floating signifier theory explains the nature of the concept and a chosen research method very well.

The meaning of any given moment is always relational, as it derives from its connections to other moments, whether they are textual or material. Within this logic, truth is subjective and an event, the Russian invasion of Ukraine for example, shapes the following events and its

³⁴Chotiner, Isaac. 2022. “Why John Mearsheimer Blames the U.S. for the Crisis in Ukraine.” *The New Yorker*, March 1, 2022. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/why-john-mearsheimer-blames-the-us-for-the-crisis-in-ukraine>.

³⁵ Laclau, Ernesto. 1990. *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Times*. London: Verso. Laclau, Ernesto. 1996. *Emancipation(s)*. London: Verso. Laclau, Ernesto. 2005. *On Populist Reason*. London: Verso.

further development will depend on the discourse that surrounds the event. Discourse theory emphasises that discourses are contingent and historically constructed, evolving through conflicts and contestations over time. By prioritising difference and contingency, discourse theory builds upon Derrida's ([1967] 2016) argument that the closure of meaning inevitably involves exclusion and the creation of a constitutive outside.³⁶ In other words, meaning relies on the establishment of boundaries and the delineation between insiders and outsiders. Consequently, all discourses are founded on a fundamental absence: a radical negativity that impedes their ability to fully fixate on meaning (Laclau 1996, 2005). Structures that appear objective, neutral, or natural must be understood as products of specific meaning fixations resulting from political struggles that have suppressed alternative possibilities over time.

The concept of a floating signifier describes a specific historical context where a particular signifier (caught between opposing, antagonistic, hegemonic projects) is utilised as a part of a battle to impose the "correct" perspective on the world. The concept of *Russkiy Mir* is a priori polarising and carries a dividing character: the *Russkiy Mir* against the West, Russia against the so-called Ukrainian nationalists and illegitimate Ukrainian powers, thus, it is used as a tool in providing the correct perspective of the situation in Ukraine, and in general, the whole world. Laclau (2005) emphasises that floating signifiers predominantly emerge during times of crises, which are historical periods characterised by radical challenges to and eventual reconfiguration of underlying symbolic systems.³⁷ Since the *Russkiy Mir* argument is closely tied to the historical events, or myth and subjective interpretation imposed by the Kremlin, historical (misinterpreted by Putin) facts can be used as symbols.

³⁶ Derrida, Jacques. (1967) 2016. *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

³⁷ P. 132

Chapter Four: Methodology

Critical Discourse Analysis

The purpose of this study is to analyse the Russian official discourse in the context of Ukraine. In order to check the hypothesis that is “The Russian Mir concept is a main tool the Kremlin has been using in justifying its invasion in Ukraine both 2014 and 2022 years and answer the following research question which is "How Russia instrumentalized the Russkiy Mir concept in justifying the invasion of Ukraine?”, this study will be using a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach. Following the statement by Wodak and Meyer, “Any social phenomenon lends itself to critical investigation, to be challenged and not taken for granted.”³⁸ This MA thesis attempts to shed light on the ways of the instrumentalization of language of nationalism in politics.

This chosen approach is applicable for this study because it is a powerful framework to study power relations, ideologies and propaganda among others. Norman Fairclough and Teun van Dijk. van Dijk define CDA as “a type of discourse analytical approach that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context.”³⁹

Moreover, It was preferred because of its specificity within Discourse Analysis and given that this research has a very specific goal of looking at the utilisation of the language and a concept, CDA would allow this topic to be researched as much in detail as possible.

³⁸ Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p.3

³⁹ Teun van Dijk, “Chapter 18: Critical Discourse Analysis,” in *Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, London: Academic Press, 1987), 352.

Within the instrumentalist theory by Hobsbawm, nationalism is a construction by elites “to impose it on their people”⁴⁰. Following this logic, language will be the messenger that sends the message of nationalism to people or helps elites to “impose it people”. This is relatable in Russia’s case as well. Putin instrumentalized the nationalist language to make meaning in his own illegitimate actions in Ukraine. A statement by Fairclough and Wodak proves this “Since discourse is so socially consequential, it gives rise to important issues of power. Discursive practices may have major ideological effects – that is, they can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations between (for instance) social classes, Hobsbawm’s instrumentalist theory is useful when analysing the composition of the Russian official narrative that focuses on the threat the Ukrainian regime poses to ethnic Russians in Crimea.

CDA also aims to contribute to addressing the social ‘wrongs’ of the day (in a broad sense – injustice, inequality, lack of freedom etc.) by analysing their sources and causes, resistance to them and possibilities of overcoming them.⁴¹ Furthermore, Putin’s discourse on who is in Russkiy Mir and who is not changes over time, and the analysis part will discuss this thesis in a more detailed way. Therefore, in order to identify who is in the group, and who is in our group, CDA also provides a possibility to look at these questions closer: “the analysis of the relationships between the discursive construction of national sameness and the discursive construction of difference leading to the political and social exclusion of specific out-groups.”⁴²

In the course of this study, this approach will be applied in analysing Russian official discourse in order to reveal the main arguments and elements of the Russkiy Mir concept in the Ukraine-related rhetoric. For the empirical analysis of this study, Putin’s official discourse published on the official webpage by the Kremlin was chosen for the periods February 2014 - March 2015

⁴⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, “Ethnic Nationalism,” 358.

⁴¹ Insert the page and proper citation later

⁴² Wodak, “Critical Discourse Analysis,” 18.

and February 2022 - May 2023. These specific timeframes were selected following the logic of the subject matter - from the moment when Russian troops entered Ukraine on February 26 in 2014, following the annexation of Crimea. By sending the military to the east of Ukraine and the Crimean peninsula, Putin had to explain his actions to the domestic and international community, therefore this study aimed to examine the ways Putin would explain his actions. The period of analysis ended in February 2015 when the Minsk Agreement was signed by Russia and Ukraine which was aimed to put peace in their relations. The second time frame - February 2022 - May 2023 follows the same logic - analysis starts from February 21st when Russia officially declared LNR and DNR, and the Russian military invasion in Ukraine and the analysis is carried right until the the period where research has been carried because the subject matter still was relevant and discourse regarding Ukraine been going.

A total of approximately 300 articles sourced from the Kremlin's official website, www.kremlin.ru, were selected for this study. Among those, 168 speeches delivered by Putin were gathered from various contexts, such as diplomatic calls, interactions with journalists, meetings with both international and domestic politicians, concerts, and conferences. There were several criteria applied in data collection in order to choose relevant speeches efficiently.

These criteria included:

1. Source relevance and credibility: Given that the study aimed to analyse the official discourse, speeches published on the Kremlin's official website were the sole source of data. This criterion ensured that the speeches analysed were from a credible and authoritative platform.
2. Relevant time frame: Speeches delivered within the specific time frame, February 2014 - February 2015 and February 2022 - May 2023 were considered. This ensured that the analysis encompassed the period under research.

3. Speaker: Only speeches delivered by Putin were chosen for analysis. This restriction aimed to maintain consistency in examining the official discourse.
4. Subject matter: Only speeches that explicitly addressed Ukraine were included in the analysis. This criterion aimed to focus specifically on the discourse surrounding Ukraine.

Moreover, the list of “keywords” were set before the analysis in order to identify the Russkiy Mir concept in the empirical material. This list of keywords was set after consulting the literature review of the previous studies on the Russkiy Mir concept. The research analysis is not limited to these keywords, but they are rather to help to identify and categorise the speeches by topics. Throughout the empirical analysis, interesting new ideas were identified, but due to the fact that this thesis is limited to the Russkiy Mir concept, the detailed analysis will be focusing on this mainly. However, the description of those issues will be provided in the discussion parts and further suggested research ideas will be provided.

Table 1: Keywords in order to identify Russkiy Mir concept in the empirical material

Concept	Russkiy Mir
Keywords	Русский мир (russian world), русский народ (russian nation), русскоговорящее население (russian speakers, russian speaking population), русские граждане (russian citizens), соотечественники (compatriots), русская диаспора

Source: Author's analysis

The preliminary analysis and data collection, which was made manually, helped to come up with the list of arguments Russia used in order to justify its intervention in Ukraine and the list is provided here. This list was created in order to categorise the arguments and compare the results in the analysis part. The final analysis was made with the help of a software program Nvivo.

Table 2: List of themes of arguments used in the empirical analysis part:

What are the themes of arguments Putin used in his speeches explaining Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014 and 2022?
Ukrainian nationalists
Protecting Russian speaking minority
Protecting Russian compatriots
Ukraine is a brother nation
Ukraine is historically part of Russian
Humanitarian mission in Ukraine
West is at Russian borders through Ukraine

Source: Author's analysis

In-depth analysis of the speeches and arguments examined with the assistance of the keywords and the arguments' categorisation will be provided in the Analysis chapter. In other words, it will focus on how and in what ways Vladimir Putin was using the Russkiy Mir concept in his

discourse to justify Russia's invasion of Ukraine and my interpretation of those discourses and argumentation will follow.

Chapter Five: Analysis

This chapter is devoted to examining the empirical material and centres around interpreting the discourse. The main emphasis is on the types of arguments and certain statements, when they were made and to which audience, the manner in which they were articulated, and the potential underlying messages or connotations they may carry.

The official Russian narrative regarding the Ukrainian case may be divided into four main themes: 1) Protecting the Russian-speaking population; 2) Protecting Russian compatriots; 3) Against Ukrainian nationalists. 4) NATO Expansion and the other themes of his justifications that did not fall under these categories will be analysed in a separate chapter in “Other arguments”.

Each sentiment will be discussed separately and then a general analysis which collects all the main theses will be provided. These themes are prevalent in Putin’s official discourse.

Category 1: Protecting Russian-speaking population

At the beginning of March 2014, a few weeks prior to the annexation of Crimea, in various talks with Western leaders such as Angela Merkel, the Chancellor of Germany back then, Barack Obama, then President of the United States, Nursultan Nazarbaev, then President of Kazakhstan etc, Putin stressed that Russia had to intervene in order to prevent the dangers that Russian citizens and Russian speaking population are facing. This excerpt by him illustrates the statement: “With the development of events in Crimea and in Ukraine as a whole, V. Putin drew attention to the unrelenting threat of violent actions by ultra-nationalist forces,

endangering the lives and legitimate interests of Russian citizens and the entire Russian-speaking population. It was emphasised that the measures that are being taken by Russia are fully adequate to the current extraordinary situation.”⁴³ In that time period, the central argument for the intervention was “protecting the Russian speaking population” (русскоязычное население, *russkoyazychnoe naselenie*).

In a phone call with United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki Moon on March 2, 2014, Putin expressed that "in the event of an escalation of violent actions against the Russian-speaking population living in the eastern regions of Ukraine and in Crimea, Russia will not be able to stand aside and will apply the necessary measures within the framework of international law." Furthermore, nine other articles of his speeches in March 2014 showed that his key phrases during that period were "protecting the legitimate interests of the Russian-speaking population." Later, in his 2022 speech, when he declared a full-scale military invasion, this argument involving the Russian language was used once again as one of the main reasons why Russia had to start a "special military operation." The reason behind separating “protecting Russian-speaking population” in one category is that, first, it is one of the main arguments of his justification and second, it is different from “protecting Russian citizens” or the “humanitarian mission” one. The reasoning behind his argument is that the Russian-speaking population, which includes Ukrainians, Crimean Tatars, and Russians themselves, may be at risk of being attacked by Ukrainian nationalists or what he refers to as "neo-Nazis" simply because they speak Russian.

⁴³ “Телефонный разговор с Федеральным канцлером Германии Ангелой Меркель” March 2, 2014

<http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20359>

Category 2: Protecting Russian compatriots / helping local population

- Ukrainians

In Putin's justification, the rhetoric regarding the protection of Russian compatriots and local people was the most frequently used one. In most of the cases he addresses the latter as "local people" (местные жители, *mestnye zhiteli*) or "citizens" (граждане, *grazhdane*). Therefore, the rhetoric addressing local people was interpreted as meaning Ukrainians since he specifies regarding the Russian population when he talks about them. In The following excerpt, his response to journalists on April 17, 2014, he says "Both in the east and in the south-east of Ukraine, people were worried about their future, for the future of their children, meaning that they saw a surge of nationalism, threats against them, and a desire to cancel some rights of national minorities, including the Russian minorities. Although this is conditional because after all, Russians in this part of Ukraine are still indigenous people."⁴⁴ In this case, according to Putin, people are suffering because of nationalists and Russia's role in this case would be humanitarian.

In comparison to his rhetoric in 2014, the 2022 discourse had more elements in this category. In his main speech on February 24, 2022, Putin claimed that people, including Russians and Russian-speaking populations, were struggling with the genocide. In 2022, he addressed this "genocide issue" in Ukraine at least 7 times. "As I said in my previous address, one cannot look at what is happening there without compassion. It was simply impossible to endure all this. It was necessary to immediately stop this nightmare - the genocide against the millions of people living there, who rely only on Russia and hope only on us. It was these aspirations, feelings, and pain of people that were for us the main motive for making a decision

⁴⁴“ Прямая линия с Владимиром Путиным” April 17, 2014

<http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20796>

to recognize the people's republics of Donbas.”

Category 3: Against Ukrainian Nationalists

Since the previous pro-Kremlin Ukrainian President was overthrown in February 2014, Putin has been saying that the power has been taken over by nationalists, and consequently, these nationalists are abusing their power and being a threat to the people, especially Russian minorities and Russian-speakers. His official rhetoric addresses this question of Ukrainian nationalists very frequently. In 2014 he questioned “Why was it necessary to engage in illegal, unconstitutional actions and lead the country, dragging the country into the chaos in which it finds itself today? Until now, after all, militants in masks with weapons in their hands roam around Kyiv. There is simply no answer to this question. Did you want to humiliate someone, or show your strength? This, in my opinion, is an absolutely stupid action. We achieved, it seems to me, a result opposite to what was expected because these actions to a large extent rocked the east and southeast of Ukraine.”⁴⁵ As it was mentioned above, in 2022, he started claiming that these nationalists who doing genocide in Ukraine and therefore, Russia should intervene in order to prevent these bloody actions from happening to this brother nation.

Putin uses the term “unconstitutional actions” (*антиконституционные действия*, *anticonstitutsionnye deistviya*) quite frequently addressing the Ukrainian authorities in Kyiv. In his rhetoric, nationalists applied both to the authorities as well as ordinary citizens that are nationalistic. “Putin recalled that for eight years Western partners turned a blind eye to the genocide perpetrated by the Kyiv regime against the inhabitants of the Donbas republics, to the death of about 14 thousand people, including thousands of children. During the special

⁴⁵ “Владимир Путин ответил на вопросы журналистов о ситуации на Украине” March 4, 2014 <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20366>

operation, the Russian military is taking all possible measures to save the lives of civilians, and information stuffing about the alleged shelling of Kyiv and other large cities are gross propaganda fakes.”⁴⁶

Category 4: NATO Expansion / West is the enemy

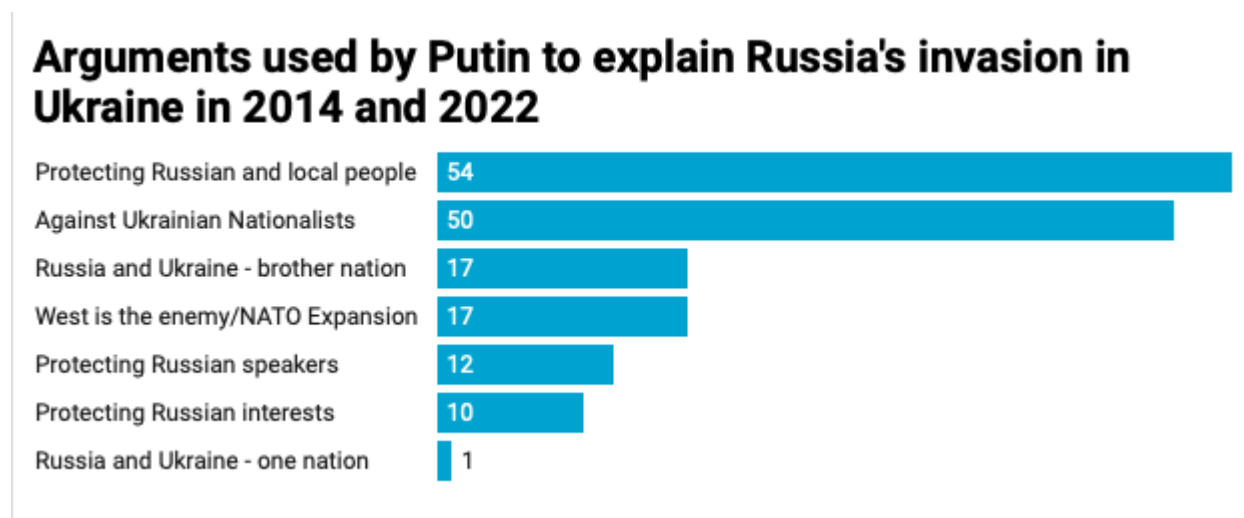
Putin's main address on February 24th of 2022 starts with mentioning the “tragic events in Donbas”, and then he mentions “the key issues of ensuring the security of Russia itself.” In his speeches, this anti-NATO expansion or looking at the West as the main enemy alongside Ukrainian nationalists and it was mentioned overall nearly 50 times in both years, 2014 and 2022. Coding for this category included “NATO expansion”, “security at Russian borders”, and “The intervention of the West”.

The security issue he talked about was NATO expansion: “We are talking about what causes us particular concern and anxiety, about those fundamental threats that year after year, step by step, are rudely and unceremoniously created by irresponsible politicians in the West in relation to our country. I mean the expansion of the NATO bloc to the east, bringing its military infrastructure closer to Russian borders.”⁴⁷ In his rhetoric, NATO is the foreign policy of the US and he connects it with the Ukrainian case as some “external forces” that support nationalists: “The leading NATO countries, in order to achieve their own goals, support extreme nationalists and neo-Nazis in Ukraine in everything, who, in turn, will never forgive the Crimeans and Sevastopol residents for their free choice - reunification with Russia.”⁴⁸ Additionally, he blames the West for Minsk's agreement's unfulfillment.

⁴⁶ “Телефонный разговор с Федеральным канцлером Германии Олафом Шольцем” <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67907>

⁴⁷ “Обращение Президента Российской Федерации” February 24, 2022 <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>

Table 3: Framing of arguments frequently used by Putin in justifying Russia's invasion in Ukraine in 2014 and 2022



Source: Author's analysis

Other arguments

It's not new that in Putin's rhetoric Ukraine is mostly addressed as a "brother nation", "inseparable part of Russia", "it is an integral part of our own history, culture, and spiritual space. These are our comrades, relatives, among whom are not only colleagues, friends, former colleagues, but also relatives, people connected with us by blood, family ties."⁴⁹ However, starting from the 5,000-word essay published in July 2021 which was called "On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians,"⁵⁰ and later in his speech during the meeting with the Security Council members on March 3, 2022 Russia and Ukraine were presented as "one nation" according to Putin. He says, "I will never give up my conviction that Russians and Ukrainians are one people, even though some of the inhabitants of Ukraine were intimidated,

⁴⁹ "Обращение Президента Российской Федерации" February 24, 2022
<http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>

⁵⁰ "Статья Владимира Путина «Об историческом единстве русских и украинцев» July 12, 2022
<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>

many were fooled by Nazi nationalist propaganda, and someone deliberately, of course, followed the path of Bandera, others minions of the Nazis who fought on the side of Hitler during the Great Patriotic War.”⁵¹

⁵¹ <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67903>

Chapter Six: Discussions

The main purpose of this study was to check the following chosen hypothesis “Russian Mir concept is a main tool the Kremlin has been using in justifying its invasion in Ukraine both 2014 and 2022 years and answering the following research question which is "How Russia instrumentalized the Russkiy Mir concept in justifying the invasion of Ukraine?”. By analysing 168 speeches by Putin during the time frames from February 2014 and March 2015 and from February 2022 - May 2023, the main themes of arguments were categorised. This chapter will discuss those themes of arguments in the frame of *Russkiy Mir* concept.

The analysis of the official discourse of the President Putin would fall under the polarisation strategy within the notion of the ‘ideological square’ introduced by van Dijk.⁵² Within the ‘ideological square’, polarisation would involve the idea of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. Putin used this tactic throughout the whole course of his speeches in justifying Russia’s actions in Ukraine. Russia, when it comes to the case of Ukraine, can be both a “protector” (in relation to Ukraine) and a “victim” (in relation to the West). However, besides the West, there are clear distinctions in presenting “others” in Putin’s rhetoric regarding Ukraine. Others would be “nationalists”, “neo-Nazis”, “fascists”, and “Russophobes”, who pose a threat to people in Ukraine, including the Russian minority, the Russian-speaking population, and Russia’s role here is to protect the latter from “others”. Accordingly, these people who Putin is trying to save are inside the Russkiy Mir, and Russkiy Mir need to be protected from “others”, the out-group.

⁵²Van Dijk, T. (1998). Opinions and ideologies in the press. In A. Bell and P. Garrett (Eds.), *Approaches to media discourse* (pp. 21–63). Oxford: Blackwell. (Van Dijk, 1998, p.33)

Discovering the Russkiy Mir in the Official Rhetoric

In his long address on February 21, Putin started off by arguing regarding the borders of Ukraine and Russia.⁵³ The border question takes on another central aspect of the *Russkiy Mir* concept since, according to the concept, *the Russkiy Mir* is bigger than Russia's current legitimate territories and one that includes but is not limited to Ukraine. Putin's longtime argument, "Ukraine is not even a state" continued in this address as well when he explained its borders being "artificial." Putin stated that "So, I will start with the fact that modern Ukraine was entirely created by Russia or, to be more precise, by Bolshevik, Communist Russia. This process started practically right after the 1917 revolution, and Lenin and his associates did it in a way that was extremely harsh on Russia — by separating, severing what is historically Russian land."⁵⁴ Fisher (2022) argues that the Soviet borders "reflected centuries-old cultural and political divides, as well as what Moscow's own census takers found to be an ethnic Ukrainian majority throughout that territory, including in what is now eastern Ukraine."⁵⁵ This idea of Ukraine being a nonexistent state and Ukrainians - a nonexistent nation, is promoted not only by Putin solely, but it's also by the practical rhetoric of other Kremlin officials. Vladislav Surkov, the previous Kremlin ideologist, said in an interview, "There is no Ukraine. There is Ukrainian-ness. That is a specific disorder of the mind. An astonishing enthusiasm for ethnography, driven to the extreme." Surkov went on to claim that Ukraine is "a muddle instead

⁵³“Обращение Президента Российской Федерации“ February 24, 2022
<http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>

⁵⁴ ⁵⁴“Обращение Президента Российской Федерации“ February 21, 2022
<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828>

⁵⁵ Fisher, Max. 2022. "Putin's Speech, Annotated: A Close Look at the Russian Leader's Ukraine Address." *The New York Times*, February 23, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/23/world/europe/putin-speech-russia-ukraine.html>.

of a state. [...] But there is no nation. There is only a brochure, ‘The Self-Styled Ukraine’, but there is no Ukraine.”⁵⁶ The analysis done by the Düben⁵⁷ shows that the same rhetoric was made by Medvedev, Russia’s then-Prime in April 2016 that there has been “no state” in Ukraine, neither before nor after the 2014 crisis. While these above-mentioned statements hold on the debates of legitimate borders, Putin and other nationalist Russian regimes’ arguments in more than one sense reflect a nostalgia and the want to go back to a certain old Soviet state existence, and the notion of bringing back the old great Russia together.

In Putin’s logic, the borders and lands once belonged to Russia should be given back to Russia or be taken back, and his further argument develops as follows: people living on Russian-Ukrainian borders willing to “reunite” with their historical Motherland, however, they are facing a threats by the nationalists, Russophobes supported by the West and also in danger of “being victims to a genocide”. People, i.e. compatriots, play a very important role in Putin’s justifications. Here within this framework of statements, Putin makes a clear division in terms of who belongs and wants to be part of *Russkiy Mir* and articulates legitimacy and assumes the authority to save the agency of the people, i.e., compatriots. On the other hand, anyone who stands against the alleged reunification of the greater Russia with Ukraine being part of it is characterised as the “other” or the “outsider” who is positioned spatially and ideology beyond *Russkiy Mir* and is delegitimized as the product of West in its process of wanting to destroy Russia.

⁵⁶ *Актуальные комментарии*. 2020. “Сурков: мне интересно действовать против реальности.” February 26, 2020. <https://actualcomment.ru/surkov-mne-interesno-deystvovat-protiv-realnosti-2002260855.html>.

⁵⁷ Düben, Björn A. 2020. “There is no Ukraine”: Fact-Checking the Kremlin's Version of Ukrainian History.” *LSE Blogs*, July 1, 2020. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lseih/2020/07/01/there-is-no-ukraine-fact-checking-the-kremlins-version-of-ukrainian-history/>.

The word “compatriot” (соотечественники, *sootchestvenniki*) is the word that Putin uses quite often and this word is quoted as central to the *Russkiy Mir* concept since it was built in 1990th^{58,59} *Russkiy Mir* focuses on the interests and rights of the so-called Russian ‘compatriots’ who reside outside of the Russian Federation.⁶⁰ According to Suslov (2018), “the pro-Kremlin constructors of the Russian compatriots abroad” ground their works on the assumption that these people have some kind of emotional attachment to the common Soviet past, some kind of loyalty to the Russian culture and some knowledge of the Russian language.”⁶¹ Based on this assumption made by the Kremlin, “compatriots”, in some sense the Russian Diaspora, are the inseparable part of the *Russkiy Mir*. Therefore, if they are under the threat, Russia, as the centre of the *Russkiy Mir*, should take a responsibility to help and save them. As discussed in the literature review part, the main function of the “compatriots” abroad shrunk to a more practical sense outlining the steps to convert the Russian "presence" in foreign territories into Russian "influence" in those same regions. Within this framework, the notion of the "Russian world" assumes a geopolitical significance and is intricately linked with the concept of a "sphere of influence." In other words, the presence of compatriots is an extension of Russia’s power beyond its borders and at times it is linked through the territory, as in the case of Ukraine, that is assumed to be brought back to the greater Russia, and further extends in the form of soft power through culture, language and connection of the compatriots to either the old Soviet past or the present Russia.

The following excerpt from the meeting of Putin with journalists dated on 22 December, 2022, in my vision, is the summary of the whole *Russkiy Mir* ideology promotion:

“This is a very delicate question - the unity of the Russkiy Mir. Divide and conquer – this slogan has been in force since ancient times and is still actively

⁵⁸ Suslov, 2018,p.337

⁵⁹ Suslov, 2018, p.333

⁶⁰ Pieper, Moritz. 2020. “*Russkiy Mir* : The Geopolitics of Russian Compatriots Abroad.” *Geopolitics* 25 (3): 756–79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2018.1465047>. P.757

⁶¹ Suslov, 2018, 336

used in real politics. Therefore, our potential adversaries, our opponents have always dreamed about this and have always been engaged in this, they tried to divide us and then lead separate parts.

What's new here? The idea was born long ago on its own Ukrainian separatism, still within the framework of a single country. You see, I talk about this all the time if someone thinks that a separate ethnic group has formed, and wants to live independently - for God's sake, you should never go against the will of the people.

But if this is so, then this principle should be universal, and in no case should one go against the will of that part of the people who feel themselves in a different hypostasis, considering themselves part of the Russian people and the Russkiy Mir, consider that they are part of this culture, part of this language, part of this history and tradition. And you can't fight against them either.

And against them launched a war in 2014 - a war. After all, this was discussed. And what is it if air strikes were carried out directly in the centre of million-plus cities? And what is it if troops with armoured vehicles are deployed against them? This is war, fighting. We endured, endured, endured and hoped for some kind of peace agreement. Now it turns out that we were just played by them. So a country like the US has been doing this for a long time. For a long time."

In the polarization strategy that presents positive in-group presentation, Russia plays the role of a political power that respects the will of the people, as Putin claims, "you should never go against the will of the people." The "will of the people" serves as one of the main arguments in instrumentalizing the concept in his discourse of justification since the annexation of Crimea, the cases of LNR and DNR, the will to unite with Russia, and finally, their will to be part of the *Russkiy Mir*. Furthermore, the presence of compatriots, Russian-speaking populations that are a priori a part of the *Russkiy Mir*. This strategy that aims to focus on language and minorities would allow Russia to place its sphere of influence and this analysis of Putin's discourse proves the point.

According to Fairclough (1995), ideology entails presenting the world through the lens of a specific interest or viewpoint. This highlights the significant potential of metaphor in critical discourse analysis (CDA).⁶² The essence of metaphor is in its understanding and

⁶² Fairclough, N. 1995. *Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Longman.

experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another. Metaphor strategy would be applied to most of the rhetoric which describes “nationalists” in Ukraine. Putin, when talking about “nationalists” or “neo-Nazis”, has at times compared to Hitler: “...other followers of the Nazis who fought on the side of Hitler during the Great Patriotic War.”⁶³

Furthermore, while describing the “violence” towards the local population in Ukraine, he described the violent acts as “using civilians as human shields.”⁶⁴ He speaks about the “numerous facts of the grossest violation of the norms of international humanitarian law by the Ukrainian security forces were cited: extrajudicial reprisals against dissenters, hostage-taking and the use of civilians as human shields”.⁶⁵ As for the lack of communication with Kiyv, he said “The legitimate interests of the people who lived there and the legitimate interests of Russia to protect these people were ignored, and all our demands were met with nothing but spit in our faces.”⁶⁶ The metaphor “spit in the face” illustrates how Russia tried to “communicate” in order to “protect” local people, however, was not welcomed by Kiyv, which positions Russia as “victim” in this case, the positive in-group representation tactic. Besides, by characterising Ukraine leaders and the anti-Russian population in relation to and in representation with Hitler and Nazis, Putin and Russia demonises the “other”, and takes on both the “victim” and the “saviour” role that grants him ultimate authority to justify the military invasion of Ukraine.

Further analysis for this study revealed that *the Russkiy Mir* concept was mentioned only once in the official discourse. In 2006 Putin, reiterating the cultural significance of the

⁶³“Совещание с постоянными членами Совета Безопасности” March 3, 2022 <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67903>

⁶⁴ “Телефонный разговор с Олафом Шольцем и Эммануэлем Макроном” March 12, 2022 <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67970>

⁶⁵ “Телефонный разговор с Олафом Шольцем и Эммануэлем Макроном” March 12, 2022 <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67970>

⁶⁶“Заседание Совета по развитию гражданского общества и правам человека” December 7, 2022 <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/70046>

term “Russian world”, encouraged the intelligentsia “to use this phrase more frequently,”⁶⁷ and the studies (Laruelle, 2015; Suslov 2018; Kuzio, Wawrzonek 2014;) show that over the time, the term was used and promoted quite actively by both Putin and the politicians as well. In addition, the want to create the supposed new but very old Russian world is assumed to bring in a sense of Russian identity and power which according to some scholars did not necessarily exist after the end of the Soviet Union.

Discourse Difference between 2014 and 2022

To begin with, one of the contributing factors to Putin's frequent engagement in discourse related to Ukraine was the numerous diplomatic phone conversations he had with leaders of various countries, particularly those from the Western nations. Detailed examination of the selected time periods revealed that in 2014, Putin engaged in continuous dialogue with Western leaders, including leaders like Angela Merkel, the then-Chancellor of Germany, as well as Barack Obama, the then-President of the United States, among others. These dialogues with Western counterparts and the inquiries posed to Putin concerning the situation in Ukraine provided him with a broader scope to justify and legitimise his actions. In contrast, the year 2022 showed the interruption of these dialogues due to the imposition of sanctions against Russia. For instance, the European Union alone imposed sanctions on 1,473 individuals and 207 entities, with both Vladimir Putin and Sergey Lavrov, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, finding themselves on the list of sanctioned individuals. Consequently, this creates a notable gap in the empirical data, as there are 106 speeches selected from 2014 compared to

⁶⁷ Mikhail Suslov (2018) “Russian World” Concept: Post-Soviet Geopolitical Ideology and the Logic of “Spheres of Influence”, *Geopolitics*, 23:2, 330-353, DOI: 10.1080/14650045.2017.1407921

merely 62 speeches from 2022, indicating a significant reduction in the available material for analysis.

As mentioned in the analysis part, Putin's rhetoric of "brother nation" has been changed to "one nation" lately. In his speeches and essays from 2021 and 2022, he referred to Ukrainian and Russians as one nation. This transformation of the rhetoric is tightly connected to the *Russkiy Mir* concept. Coming back to the requirements of the *Russkiy Mir*, Laruelle (2015) analyses that "Russia has been alienated from itself by the Soviet experiment not only ideologically, but territorially: it should forget about the South Caucasus and Central Asia, products of a sick imperial expansion, and resume privileged links with Belarus, Ukraine, and northern Kazakhstan, all to be united in a single state of Eastern Slavs."⁶⁸ Therefore, in my interpretation, the switch from "brother nation" to "one nation" is evidence of the progress of uniting the "eastern slavs" as one nation.

⁶⁸ Laruelle.p.7

Conclusion

Surkov, Kremlin's main ideologist and a mastermind behind almost every move that Kremlin has taken for almost two decades commented that Ukraine has never been easy to deal with, "even when Ukraine was part of Russia. Ukraine has always been troublesome for the imperial and Soviet bureaucracy. Either Ataman Polubotok will let you down, then the Westerners will go over to Hitler. Forced coercion into fraternal relations is the only method that has historically proven effective in the Ukrainian direction. I do not think that any other will be invented".⁶⁹ According to Suslov, he was the one who introduced and brought the *Russkiy Mir* concept to Putin, ... "the ideas of the "Russian world" reached the Presidential Administration apparatus probably with the help of Vladislav Surkov, the notorious "grey cardinal" of Russian politics." The purpose of this paper was to examine the links between the *Russkiy Mir* concept and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014 and 2022 and analyse the cause-effects of the topic. The hypothesis that is "*Russian Mir* concept is a main tool the Kremlin has been using in justifying its invasion of Ukraine both in 2014 and 2022 years" was proven right by consulting the existing literature and empirical analysis. This paper concludes that the Kremlin has been using the *Russkiy Mir* agenda as a floating signifier since the 2000s and in the case of Ukraine, it was heavily instrumentalized with the help of an official discourse.

A close look into the justifications that Putin has been using over the years, the main focus was given to the *Russkiy Mir-related* discourse through the chosen themes of arguments. In both years, 2014 and 2022, Putin mostly used the "humanitarian" language such as protecting the local people in Ukraine from "nationalists", "protecting Russian-speaking minority", "regional

⁶⁹ Düben, Björn A. 2020. "There is no Ukraine": Fact-Checking the Kremlin's Version of Ukrainian History." *LSE Blogs*, July 1, 2020. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lseih/2020/07/01/there-is-no-ukraine-fact-checking-the-kremlins-version-of-ukrainian-history/>.

peace” etc. Putin as well frequently used negative out-group strategy, for example, in speeches about the so-called nationalists, neo-Nazis, Russophobes, anti-Russia movement, and the West comparing them to Hitler. The interpretation of his speeches shows that his concerns regarding NATO expansionism are also framed through the *Russkiy Mir* concept since he claimed that the West will be at the borders of Russia, thus, supposedly threatening Russia’s hegemony and its very existence in the Russia-dominated world, or *Russkiy Mir*.

This MA research study is limited to the specific topic of the *Russkiy Mir*, therefore, other interconnected concepts such as the Right to Protect or Russian Foreign Policy was not considered for the analysis. I understand that this limitation might prevent this study from providing a broader explanation for the conflict that has been going on in Ukraine. Moreover, this study focuses solely on Putin’s official discourse in an attempt to analyse the arguments of his justification within the *Russkiy Mir* concept, which might also limit this study to provide a broader explanation of the concept that exists: from a religious and as a foreign policy perspective. In summary, this study provided an analysis of Putin’s perspective and instrumentalization of discourse in explaining the brutal invasion of Ukraine and his strategies for explaining and gaining legitimacy.

While this study is being carried out, Russia continues bombing various regions of Ukraine, and accordingly, more and more justifications from Putin are yet to come.

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