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Ethnicity and Nationhood on Russian State-Aligned Television: Contextualising Geopolitical Crisis

Stephen Hutchings and Vera Tolz

This article explores Russian state-aligned television's approaches to representing ethnicity and nationhood in its news broadcasts, considering the medium's effectiveness as a tool for forging a sense of belonging among the citizens of the largest transition state. The material on which it is based largely precedes the 2014 political crisis around Ukraine. But that material, and our reading of it, is framed by the crisis and by Russian federal television's role in fanning the flames that continue to engulf the actors at its heart. The pertinence and purpose of the points we make are not restricted to the Ukraine context. Their significance relates also to our understanding both of Russian nation-building and of the responsibilities of the media in complex multicultural societies more generally. However, central to our argument is the conviction that neither the conflict with the West that Russia's actions in Ukraine precipitated, nor the rationale for those actions promoted in news broadcasts on state-aligned channels, can be understood without reference to tensions within the Putin regime's nation-building project that had long been evident in television news broadcasts, and which we focus on below. Whilst our analysis is primarily historical with respect to the Ukraine crisis, it identifies several factors with a direct bearing on those later events. These have to do with contradictions between different versions of Russian nationalism; concerns regarding a disconnection between official policy on national cohesion and popular sentiment; and ambiguities surrounding the Kremlin's relationship with broadcasters. We summarise their bearing on the Ukraine crisis in our conclusion.

Historically, the media have been central to every nation-building project, as they disseminate particular imaginings of the community, of its shared values and its constitutive 'others' (Postill 2006). By selecting certain issues for coverage and by framing news reports in one way or another, the media contribute to building community consensus around particular perceptions (McCombs, 1997). Since the 1960s, television has remained the main news source for most Europeans. Moreover, precisely because of the spread of the 'narrow casting' modes favoured by newer technologies, television's unique capacity to 'broadcast' to an entire 'imagined community' paradoxically acquires still greater value (Morozov 2011).

Contemporary Russia is a new state, struggling to unify a plurality of identities in flux following the disintegration of the multi-ethnic Soviet state, and to formulate policies capable of dealing with that event's combustible aftermath. That it is doing so at the time when many European states face doubts about the efficacy of multiculturalist policies in ameliorating the consequences of the demise of their own empires, only adds to the complexity of the situation. Russia, one of the world's most ethno-culturally diverse countries, provides a distinctive angle on how globalisation is causing the radical rethinking of approaches to national cohesion. Russia's authoritarian, centripetal state, weak civil society and high vulnerability to extreme ideologies lends it particular importance in this context, since it tests to the limits the ability of the state, and of community-building led by public broadcasters, to withstand the pressures that they face across the European continent.

Official Russian discourse of national unity and identity is neither coherent nor univocal. A particularly strong contradiction pits the official rhetoric of a civic pan-Russian nation (*grazhdanskaia rossiiskaia naciia*) that embraces members of all nationalities as equal citizens, against the representation of Russia as the homeland of ethnic Russians (Shevel 2011; Laruelle 2009). In fact, this disjunction between civic and ethnic conceptions of nationhood is acknowledged by Russia's leaders who, as our analysis suggests, collaborate with state-aligned media in cultivating the ambiguity which the disjunction creates in order to render Kremlin-sponsored discourse simultaneously appealing to different societal groups and to different television audiences. The balance between the two sides of the disjunction is, however, highly unstable and liable to tilt heavily in favour of one or the other, depending on circumstances (we witnessed just such a tilt when the crisis in Ukraine exploded).

A potentially more complex fault-line, particularly as it remains un-reflected upon by broadcasters and politicians, is that which exists between the new rhetoric of Russian national unity and community cohesion on the one hand, and two reinvented narratives from the past, on the other. The first of these is the highly hierarchical account of cultural diversity in Russia and globally which has been reshaped in turn by imperial, Soviet and European New Right legacies (Hutchings and Tolz 2012). For, despite the vision of the *grazhdanskaia* multi-ethnic Russian nationhood promoted by the official discourse in the past decade, the rigidity of the hierarchies and of the boundaries between communities defined by ethnocultural markers has paradoxically increased in comparison with Soviet times and the 1990s. The second, related, narrative, rooted in Soviet ethnic 'federalism', is that of the non-Russian nationalities as belonging solely in their own sub-state administrative autonomies. This narrative limits the propensity of ethnic minorities to identify and be identified with the Russian Federation as a whole.

How Russian national television mediates the shifts and contradictions of the Kremlin's approaches to achieving community cohesion and managing ethnocultural diversity in Russia, as well as the currents of populist xenophobia and nationalist extremism which infiltrate public discourse from below, is the main concern of this article, which concludes with an evaluation of how those issues played out in the context of conflict in Ukraine. Television's mediatory role is central to our analysis. For even Russia's highly regulated media system, and even when in full 'propaganda' mode, as throughout 2014, must accommodate a circulation of meanings emanating from official, sub-official and unofficial sources. Despite the fact that Putin's leadership from the start has striven to align the main television channels closely to the Kremlin (Burrett 2011), the Russian media environment is different from its Soviet predecessor. Although the television news agenda is shaped actively by the Kremlin,¹ the media are nevertheless open to infiltration by ideas and forms formerly deemed 'alien' and there is a greater requirement to respond to grassroots voices external to approved discourse; indeed, as we shall suggest, the trajectory that culminated in the extreme univocalism characterising federal television news broadcasts in 2014 has its roots partially in the earlier perceived need to accommodate voices 'from below'. Most importantly, the very speed with which the trajectory was covered is but one indication of the fact that, in the absence of the single ideological framework that prevailed in the Soviet period, the current relationship between state and broadcaster is, and will remain, uncertain.

¹ This was confirmed by television journalists whom we interviewed in late 2012-early 2013.

Sources and Methods

We focus on Russia's two main television channels, Channel 1 and Rossiia, which are still viewed by the majority of its citizens as the most 'trustworthy' information sources.² Technically only part-owned by the state, Channel 1 follows the Kremlin's line closely.³ Rossiia is the main fully state-owned channel. Curiously, the financial constraints it operates under mean that it plays second string to Channel 1 as regards its information management function. It is therefore accorded less attention from its political overseers, often leading to a wider range of voices than might be expected. Rossiia has been assigned the task of integrating local interests with the national perspective. Therefore, it is expected to play a particularly important role in promoting national cohesion.

Television news is located at the intersection of the official policy positions of the state and the beliefs and concerns of citizens. With its unique mediatory capacity, the news bulletin is our source material in this article. We base our analysis on two years of recordings of the flagship news programmes: *Vremia* (Channel 1) and *Vesti* (Rossiia) for the period from 1 September 2010 to 31 May 2012. The sheer volume of material to be processed ruled out the possibility of a continuous analysis covering the whole two years. Instead, we recorded the material in equally spaced blocks. Three months of recording were followed by a three-month break in recording, producing four recording periods containing a total of 9352 items viewed, of which 654 were coded. To guard against omissions and arbitrariness in our analysis, we continued monitoring ethnicity-related news in between our recording blocks, relying on the two channels' comprehensive web-archives. Whilst we cannot trace the peaks and troughs in coverage in a continuous line, our blocks nevertheless reveal broad changes in emphasis over the entire period. Following the end of the recording period, we continued to closely monitor *Vremia* and *Vesti* via their archives up to the summer of 2014. We are, therefore, able to trace shifts in reporting which have been taking place during Putin's third presidency, including the new environment that ensued after regime change in Ukraine.

The period to which the recordings belong encompassed important changes in Russia's political landscape. The winter of 2011-12 saw the first major street protests Russia had experienced for nearly two decades, following the November 2011 parliamentary election (the election was mired in suspicions of falsification). Despite the scale of the protests, Putin returned to the presidency in March 2012. Putin's perceived manipulation of the constitution to permit him to run for a third term led to further mass demonstrations on the streets of Russia's cities. The period prior to Putin's re-election witnessed the Pussy Riot scandal and coincided with deteriorating inter-ethnic relations throughout Russia. It was also immediately preceded by major, Islamist-inspired, suicide bombings in Moscow's metro system in March 2010 and at Moscow's Domodedovo airport in January 2011, when the separatist insurgency in Russia's North Caucasian periphery dealt devastating blows to the (post-)imperial heartland. The state-aligned broadcast media bore responsibility for some of that deterioration, yet frequently resorted to suppressing the controversial topics associated with it

² According to Levada Centre polling of March 2013, federal television is still considered by over 57% of the Russian population as the most trustworthy source of information. See Available at <<http://www.levada.ru/08-07-2013/otkuda-rossiyane-uznayut-novosti>> (last accessed 17 October 2013).

³ Interview with a Channel 1 journalist, 29 January 2013.

in order not to fuel the conflict. Our news recordings captured some of the major milestones in this contradictory process, notably the media's confused reaction to the racially motivated riots in Moscow's Manezhnaia Square in December 2010. The period following Putin's re-election was marked by the intensification of riots similar to Manezhnaia and also witnessed increased attention by state-aligned broadcasters to migration-related issues.

In depicting the interpretative framework that news broadcasters applied to events ascribed, whether implicitly or explicitly, an ethnic dimension, we developed a coding system, applying both deductive and inductive approaches. As a first step, we selected the two primary categories dominating contemporary discourse on ethnicity-related topics throughout the world: 'migration' (stories centring on issues raised by population movements within and beyond the Russian Federation) and 'inter-ethnic conflict' (stories detailing clashes between individuals and groups, to which ethnic motivations are attributed by broadcasters and/or the public). We supplemented these with two categories based on our prior knowledge of the specific situation in Russia: 'ethnic [or community] cohesion' (which covers optimistic reports dictated by the Kremlin's agenda of creating a sense of common belonging among Russia's citizens) and 'separatist violence' (coverage of assaults on Russian interests launched by armed opponents of Russia's rule in the autonomous republics of the North Caucasus). We then watched selected news programmes for a month and, following an inductive processing of that material, identified three further categories: 'the Russian Orthodox Church' (the sheer weight of whose presence in the news agenda, and whose intimate connections to ethnicity in the Russian context, projected it to the centre of our analysis); 'other religions' (which incorporated the emerging emphasis on Islam's importance to inter-ethnic relations in Russia); 'other/miscellaneous' (to which we assigned few news items and which, because those items revealed no clear patterns, we do not include in the interpretation of our data).

We generally worked on the principle of thematic preponderance; thus, an item which dealt with issues other than ethnicity would only be coded if the invocation (implicit or explicit) of ethnicity outweighed that of other factors. This approach was not always applied to reports in the category 'separatist violence in the North Caucasus'. In their coverage of this topic, state-aligned broadcasters often denied religion- or ethnicity-related factors, using the alleged efficiency of the Special Forces as the most common frame. Our decision to incorporate such reports into our dataset is a response to the wide-spread tendency among the public to ethnicise developments in the North Caucasus. Furthermore, ethnic and religious factors were at times visually underscored in the news coverage, even if they were not verbally acknowledged. Reports about violence in the North Caucasus illustrate how state-aligned television confronts interpretations which are undesirable from the leadership's point of view, yet widespread in society and promoted by those media outlets which the government cannot control (e.g. the Internet).

Finally, items which dealt with more than one of our chosen categories would be assigned to the one which predominated, ensuring that no item was coded more than once. We catalogued every news item in every news bulletin, noting, for each item, whether ethnicity-related or not, the length of time allotted to it within the bulletin, and its position in the running order. This enabled us to gauge both the frequency (number of items) and the intensity (amount of time allotted) of the coverage, and to gain a sense of the topic's saliency (aggregate running order position) within the Russian news agenda.

Our categories included items in foreign countries. These fulfil a vital function for news broadcasters in providing points of contrast with, and similarity to, domestic events. The

categories are shaped both by our own understanding of the terms we selected to name them, and by what the broadcasters themselves believe those terms to mean. Thus, in a Russian context, inter-national (*mezhnacionalnyi*) often encompasses what we would define as 'inter-ethnic'; the latter term (*mezhetnicheskii*) is at times used by the Russian broadcasters interchangeably with what we might interpret as 'inter-racial'.

The very definition of 'ethnicity' is elusive and, as Rogers Brubaker argues, radically contingent (Brubaker 2002). Therefore some events without an obvious ethnic dimension, but ethnicised by our broadcasters, were included in the typology. We further agree with Brubaker's argument that ethnicity, race and nationhood should not be treated as separate subfields of inquiry, as they are closely interconnected (Brubaker 1997). This is particularly relevant to the Russian case, where the word 'nation' (*naciia*) is utilised not only to define the entire Russian Federation as the imagined community of all its citizens, but in line with the Soviet approach, continues to be used interchangeably with the term 'ethnos'. In the latter usage both 'nation' and 'ethnos' describe another type of imagined community -- a sub-state community of people who claim common ancestry, specific cultural traditions and even common behavioural characteristics. Race in the rigidly biological sense is utilised by marginal activists (Umland 2008). In Kremlin-sponsored discourse, race is not explicitly evoked, yet it is implicitly present.

Our statistical data relates primarily to coverage of 'ethnicity' and 'migration' in the sense that those terms are deployed in the Russian media. We do so because we are interested in building an inclusive picture of the variety of ethnicity-related meanings, legitimate and illegitimate, accorded them by Russian television news.

In presenting our content analysis, we begin by assessing the overall presence of ethnicity- and nationhood-related news on Channel 1 and Rossiia. We then look at coverage within each coding category, beginning with those relating to the positive promotion of the nation-building agenda ('ethnic cohesion', 'Russian Orthodox Church', 'other religions'). We next focus on the reporting of migration issues as we begin to discuss how news events liable to provoke national discontent are handled within the nation-building framework. Finally, we discuss items assigned to the categories dealing with events in which discontent explodes into interpersonal and inter-group strife ('inter-ethnic conflict' and 'separatist violence').

Analysis of the Corpus

The overriding impression produced by our data is that the stated importance of interethnic relations to the government's agenda is not reflected in the patterns of news coverage. Stories coded as relevant made up only a small portion of the total news coverage, between 6 and 8% respectively, both in terms of frequency (number) and intensity (time) (see Figure 1).

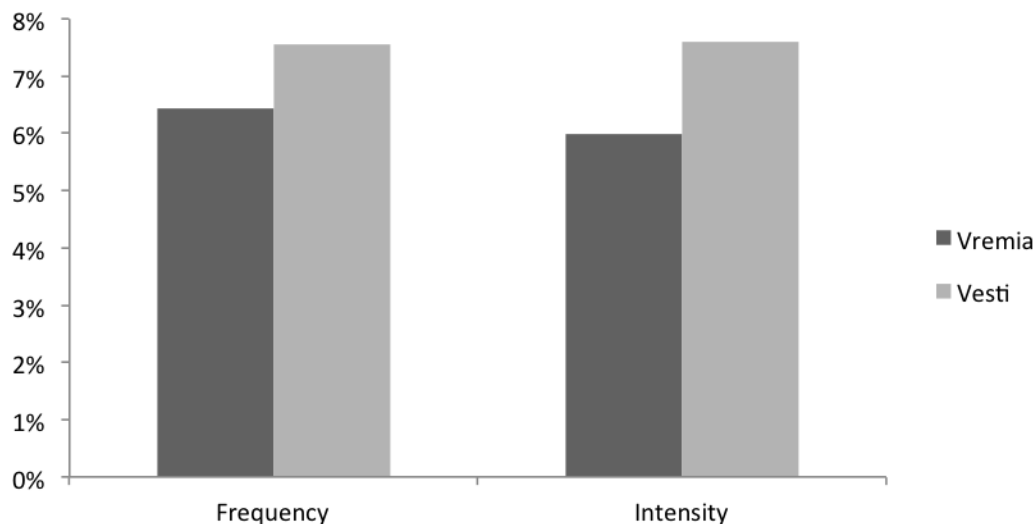


Figure 1: Frequency and intensity of ethnicity-related news as a percentage of the overall news content⁴

Of all inter-ethnic stories, a significant portion is accounted for by coverage of issues which relate to other countries (particularly migration and violent conflict) and which alleviate any impression that Russia is unusually plagued by inter-ethnic tensions (Figures 2 and 3).

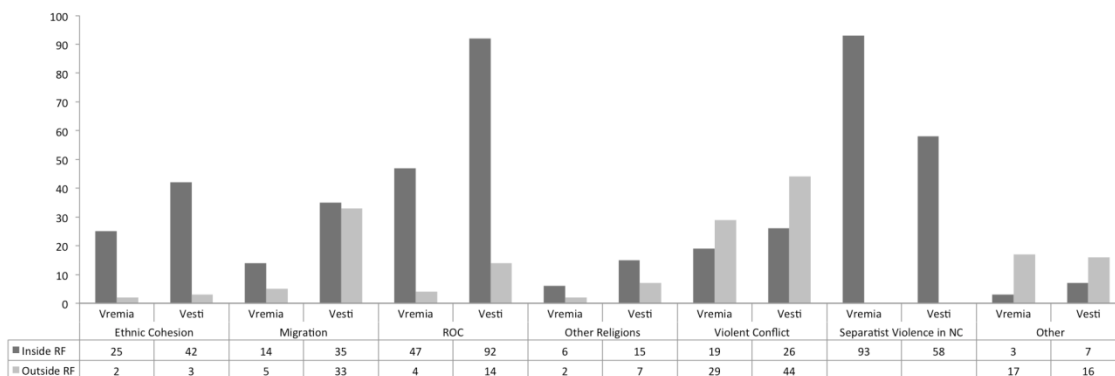


Figure 2: Frequency of ethnicity-related news inside and outside the Russian Federation: *Vremia* and *Vesti*

⁴ All the graphs cover the period from September 2010 to May 2012.

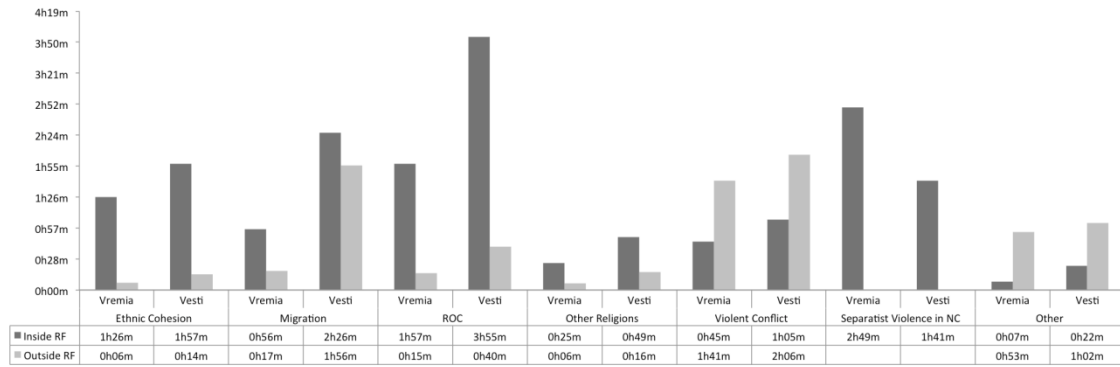


Figure 3: Intensity of ethnicity-related news inside and outside the Russian Federation: *Vremia* and *Vesti*

In the context of the barrage of conflicting messages that national television was compelled to disseminate in reaction to unanticipated crises such as the Manezhnaia riots (Hutchings and Tolz 2012), the paltry airtime domestic inter-ethnic relations normally receives indicates the extent to which the Kremlin had been struggling with its own nation-building policy.

Within this overall picture, however, the topic of separatist violence in the North Caucasus demonstrated a relatively high degree of salience, at least on *Vremia*, which follows the Kremlin’s line more closely than *Vesti*, and which aimed to reaffirm it in relation to a particularly sensitive problem. As we see from Figure 4, over 40 North-Caucasus-related stories featured among the first three items within the running order of *Vremia* bulletins during the recording period, with all other categories on both channels attracting fewer than 25 items in the top 3:

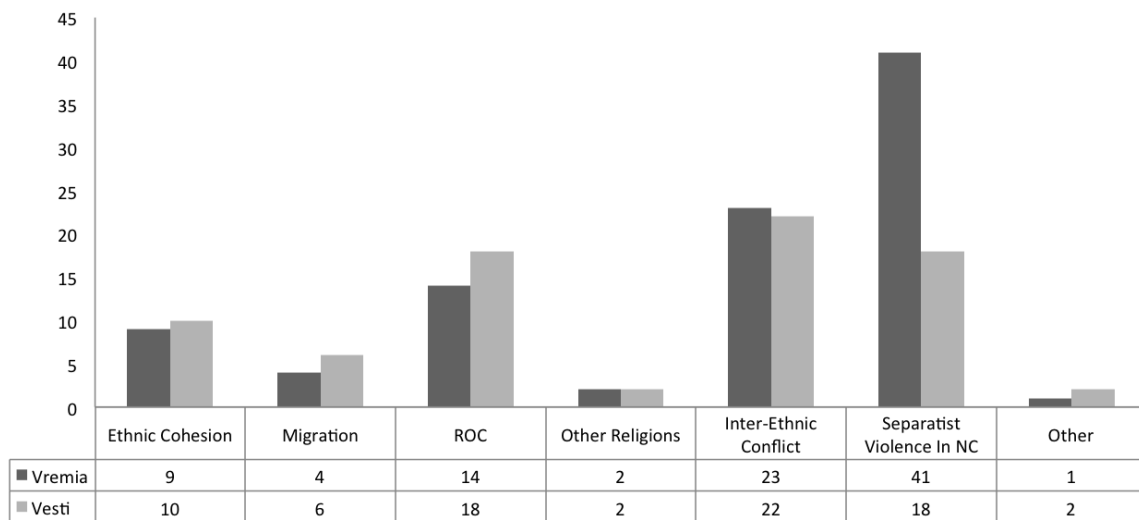


Figure 4: Salience of ethnicity-related news: *Vremia* and *Vesti*

To explore the tensions further, on the one hand, the Kremlin was consistent throughout most of our recording period in promoting an image of multi-ethnic harmony, underscoring ethnic diversity as the country’s strength. These assertions were, not unsurprisingly, highlighted in news bulletins. But the confidence these claims exude is not borne out by the fact that the level of news coverage of inter-ethnic relations actually drops at politically sensitive moments. At the lowest point it accounted for only 4.15% in May 2012, the time of Putin’s

inauguration as president. Already prior to this, during the entire presidential election campaign, the media largely refrained from reporting on related topics. According to our Channel 1 and Rossiia interviewees, reporters receive instructions during certain periods not to report on issues of a potentially inflammatory nature, including, specifically, inter-ethnic relations.⁵

The underreporting of ethnic issues is partly connected to unresolved tensions deriving from the Russian Federation's status as a multi-ethnic, multi-faith state. Russian nationalists traditionally see ethnic Russians as marginalised by the state, and other nationalities as favoured, but our word frequency analysis of the term 'Russian' (*russkii*) indicates that the state-aligned media are far from neglecting things Russian.⁶ In fact, as the context of those usages confirms, the Russian language, Russian culture and Russian Orthodoxy are seen as the key binding force in the Federation and the role of the state as a key factor in creating the pan-Russian (*rossiiskaia*) national community has remained without challenge throughout the Putin period. In his interview with us, the Channel 1 presenter, Maksim Shevchenko, acknowledged his own responsibility to contribute to resolving the tension:

Our task is to figure out how to ... establish a united political nation and at the same time preserve the diversity of ethnicities in Russia and give them the opportunity to develop within the country.⁷

We begin our more detailed analysis by focusing on the coding category designed to capture those reports most actively and deliberately deployed in support of the ambitious mission that Shevchenko describes: 'ethnic cohesion' or national unity.

Ethnic Cohesion

In terms of both intensity and frequency, and as we see from Figures 2 and 3, 'ethnic cohesion' amounted to a modest portion of all ethnicity-coded news. In percentage terms, this category accounted for approximately 12% of the intensity of news coverage relating to our topic area for both *Vremia* and *Vesti* (see Figures 5 and 6).

⁵ Interviews with a Rossiia journalist, 29 March 2013; and with a Channel 1 journalist, 29 January 2013.

⁶ The word Russian (as an ethnic denominator – *russkii*) appeared 1,483 times in our transcripts. The civic classification of Russian (*rossiiskii*) appeared slightly less often (1035 times) and predominantly in official contexts.

⁷ Interview, 3 April 2013.

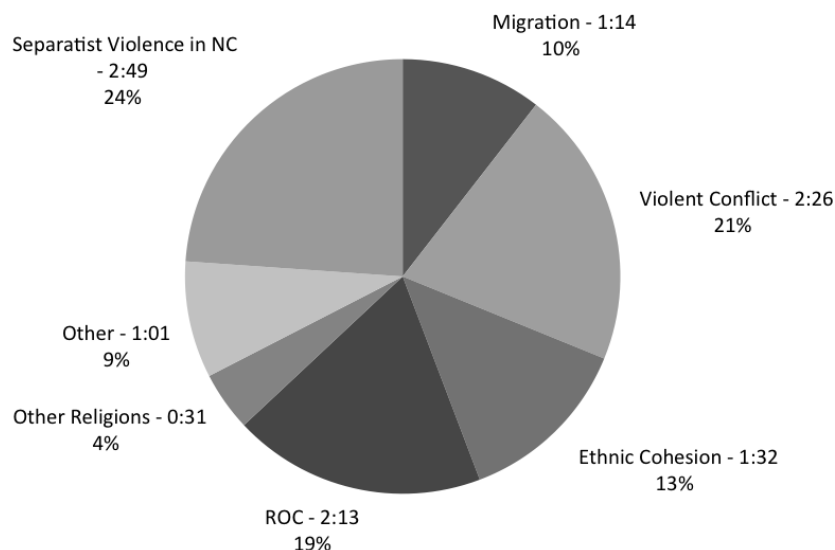


Figure 5: Intensity of each category as a percentage of all ethnicity-related news: *Vremia*

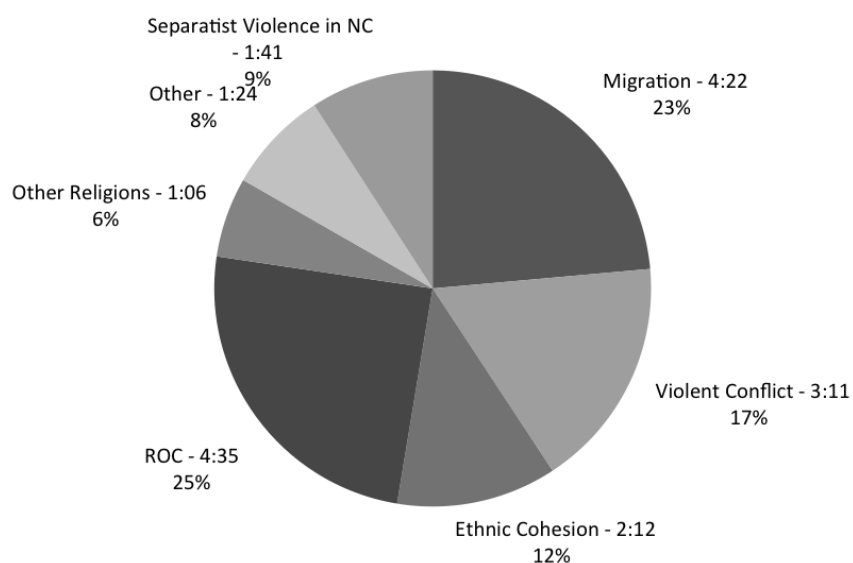


Figure 6: Intensity of each category as a percentage of all ethnicity-related news: *Vesti*

This is lower than the mean across all 7 categories, but still high when one considers the difficulties that stories in this category normally raise in terms of their newsworthiness (in the post-Soviet, semi-commercialised news environment, Russia's state-aligned broadcasters cannot afford entirely to ignore such factors). For all of the events we included in the category during the recording period amounted to regularised state-initiated activities like national holidays and anniversaries, none of which offered spontaneous narrative content. Other reports related to traditional regional and local festivities. These stories highlighted thriving minority cultures and harmonious ethnic relations. The arch, folk-cultural approach characterising them was reminiscent of the Soviet celebration of inter-ethnic harmony. Whilst this might resonate nostalgically with older viewers, the younger audience demographic that Channel 1 in particular has periodically hankered after would be less impressed.

The only negative news item in the 'ethnic cohesion' category covered a meeting in 2011 of the Federation Council in which President Medvedev stated that the 'inflation of inter-ethnic

conflict and religious dissension during the upcoming election campaign [would] be punishable by law'.⁸ This measure had received consistent legitimation from earlier points in our recording period, through regular reports on deteriorating ethnic relations in the West. Their key message – that in Europe, ethnic cohesion is doomed – was present in many reports belonging to other categories. Within all categories, these stories highlighted the *lack* of ethnic cohesion. Among them was a report on Angela Merkel's speech of 2010 on the 'absolute failure' of multiculturalism, presented as a 'failing battle' against an influx of migrants who have failed to integrate.⁹ Such events provided the Russian authorities with cover not only for announcements like Medvedev's, but also for the anti-migration and anti-Islamic rhetoric that took hold during Putin's third presidency. During the recording period, the channels systematically contrasted genuine Russian 'friendship of the peoples' with the 'cold', artificial and ineffective Western concept of 'tolerance'.¹⁰ Such comparisons recur in several of the categories discussed below.

After our recording period, 'ethnic cohesion' and national unity frames were used intensively during Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014. Western media accusations of aggressive Russian imperialism were thereby implicitly challenged. The annexation, described by *Vesti* and *Vremia* as Crimea's 'homecoming' (*vozvrashchenie domoi*), was often compared in terms of its importance for Russia's national cohesion and unity to Soviet victory over Nazi Germany. 16 March (the day of the Crimean referendum) was dubbed 'Victory Day' (*den pobedy*) with direct reference to the 9 May holiday.¹¹ In their highly scripted representations of a nation united by the events around Crimea, both channels towed the Kremlin's line, using identical terminology and turn of phrases. The celebration of the ethnic Russian core of the nation was foreground. *Vesti* quoted a prominent Moscow political analyst as saying that the Crimean referendum 'discovered for us Russians (*russkie*), those Russians who are much more Russian in spirit than we (Russia's citizens) are'.¹²

Yet the notion of ethnic diversity as Russia's strength was also highlighted and contrasted with Ukraine's reported aim of imposing a monoethnic straightjacket on its heterogeneous population. In a highly manipulative gesture, Crimean Tatars, among whom, according to the Western media, only a minority supported the Crimea's unification with Russia, were represented as a symbol of multi-ethnic support for the results of the referendum. *Vesti* quoted a Crimean Tatar as saying 'Ukraine does not need us. We are treated as bastards (*nezakonno-rozhdennyye*) [there]. Our place is in Russia...'¹³ This was contrasted with the situation in Russia, which was proud of its ethnic diversity.¹⁴ Sanctions imposed by the West could only further strengthen the Russian nation, whose values were distinct, the channels insisted.¹⁵

⁸ *Vesti*, 17 October 2011. We do not provide links to the *Vesti* web-archive, because, unlike in the *Vremia* archive, *Vesti* links change frequently.

⁹ *Vesti*, 18 October 2010.

¹⁰ This contrast was emphasized by the Rossiia Deputy Director Kiselev, whom we interviewed on 27 March 2013.

¹¹ See also the same comparison in a *Vremia* report of 18 March <http://www.1tv.ru/news/social/254436> (accessed 1 August 2014).

¹² *Vesti*, 17 March 2014.

¹³ *Vesti*, 17 March 2014 and *Vremia*, 18 March 2014. Available at <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/social/254436>> (last accessed 1 August 2014).

¹⁴ *Vremia*, 28 July 2014. Available at <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/social/264062>> (last accessed 1 August 2014).

¹⁵ *Vesti*, 17 March 2014.

Russian Orthodox Church

The contrast between Russian and Western values was also reinforced in coverage of the Russian Orthodox Church. It became particularly sharp towards the end of our recording period during the presidential election campaign and the unfolding case against Pussy Riot. In that period, leading journalists transformed Orthodox Christianity from an important national value into the very foundation of Russian statehood, which had historically protected the nation from harmful foreign influences.¹⁶ The Church's centrality to the state-sponsored nation-building project was reflected in the number of *Vesti* reports on Orthodox Christianity – more, in fact, than on any other of our categories (see Figure 2) on Rossiia. Furthermore, the *de facto* superior status of the Church compared to other 'traditional' Russian religions was confirmed by the fact that both *Vremia* and *Vesti*'s coverage of Orthodoxy was four times longer than that devoted to all other religions combined (see Figure 3).

Points when the coverage of Orthodoxy peaked during our recording period further point to the special relationship the Church, and Patriarch Kirill personally, enjoy with the state. There were two peak months in terms of both frequency and intensity of the relevant coverage: November 2011 and April 2012 (see Figures 7 and 8).

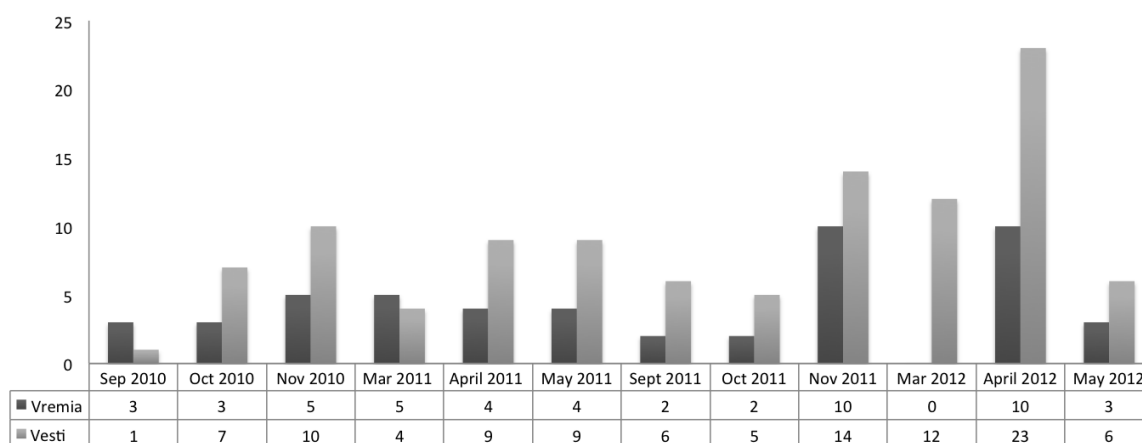


Figure 7: Frequency of Russian Orthodox Church-coded stories over the total recording period: *Vremia* and *Vesti*

¹⁶ *Vesti nedeli*, 22 April 2012 and *Vremia*, 22 April 2012. Available at <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/social/205068>> (last accessed 1 November 2012).

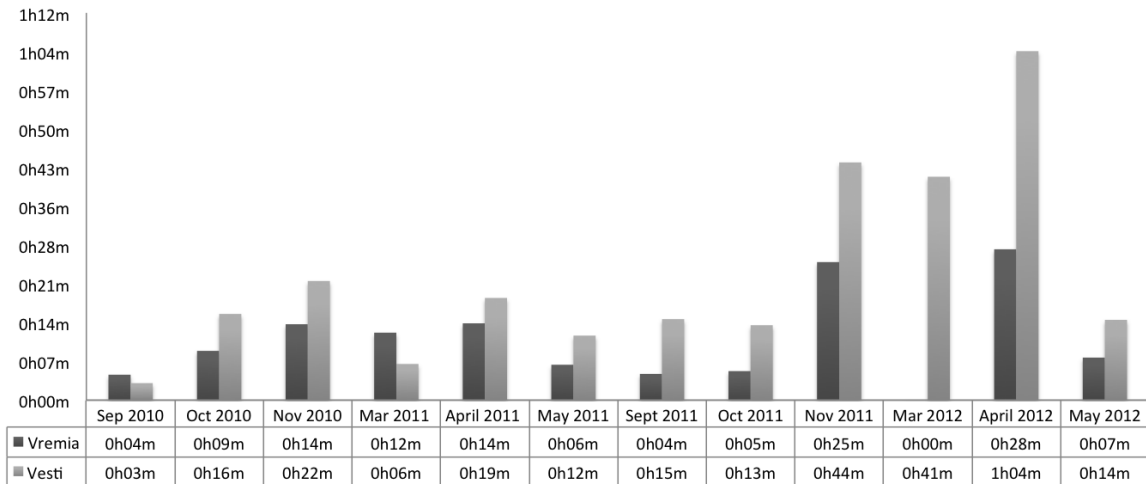


Figure 8: Intensity of Russian Orthodox Church-coded stories over the total recording period: *Vremia* and *Vesti*

Both peaks occur when the alliance between the Church and the state was becoming even stronger, following the announcement of Putin’s decision to run for a third presidential term in September 2011. The Church’s overt support for Putin provoked criticism from the opposition and the alternative media, which began featuring damaging revelations about the lavish life style of the Patriarch and examples of questionable activities through which the Church attempted to increase its material wealth. In response, and assisted by state-aligned television, the Church mounted a well organised public relations campaign. The first step was the bringing to Russia from Mount Athos of a revered relic – ‘Virgin Mary’s belt’. Its display in Moscow and a number of other cities attracted numerous visitors. The journey of the relic across Russia was systematically televised, and relevant reports accounted for the November 2011 rise in the coverage of Orthodoxy-related issues.¹⁷

The second peak was still more striking, as in April 2012 the Orthodox Church accounted for more than half of all our coded *Vesti* reports. There were three reasons for this increase. One was the particularly heavy coverage on both channels of the celebration of Easter - the most important holiday in the Orthodox tradition. Whereas in 2011 this extended only to the Easter weekend, in 2012 it stretched to most of Passion Week. The expansion provided an indication of the further elevation of the status of the Church in the context of Putin’s re-election. Secondly, Pussy Riot’s alleged desecration of an Orthodox cathedral triggered an intensification in the coverage of Church activities, with reports featuring the reaction of the clergy and ordinary believers. But, whereas *Vesti* began reporting the case in March, *Vremia* delayed its first report on Pussy Riot to 19 April.¹⁸

The final reason for the rise in coverage of the Church in April 2012 was another major public relations initiative organised by Patriarch Kirill. This was the so-called prayer vigil ‘of Orthodox believers in defence of their faith,’ held in Moscow and across the country on 22 April. With the state’s help, thousands of people from around Russia were brought to Moscow to pray with the Patriarch for the end of what he dramatically described as a ‘war’ against Orthodox Christianity, triggered by the Pussy Riot performance. *Vesti* and *Vremia*

¹⁷ *Vesti*, 2 November 2011 and 7 January 2012.

¹⁸ *Vremia*, 19 April 2012. Available at <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/social/204898>> (last accessed 11 November 2013).

covered the event at length,¹⁹ promoting an image of Russia as primarily the homeland of ethnic Russians, completely marginalizing the alternative state-sponsored vision of a multi-confessional and multi-ethnic society. The marginalization recurred throughout our recording period, as the minimal attention accorded to other religions attests. Subsequent Kremlin support for Russian separatists in South East Ukraine was to fit the narrative all too easily, but this was far less true of the proposition that, with its generous accommodation of the Muslim Tatar minority, post-annexation Crimea represented a microcosm of the multi-ethnic, multi-faith Russian Federation.

Other Religions

Under the category of 'other religions' we expected above all to see stories about Islam, Buddhism and Judaism, which, like Orthodoxy, enjoy an official status as Russia's 'traditional religions'. Yet Buddhism had no presence at all on the federal news, and Judaism had virtually none; the only relevant report related to New Year celebrations in Israel in September 2011.²⁰

Islam was less peripheral to the news agenda. In official discourse, Russia's multicultural nature is often described with reference to the centuries of peaceful co-existence between Orthodoxy and Islam. During the recording period, this line was strongly endorsed in coverage of the celebrations of Muslim religious holidays in Moscow. Reporting on one such celebration in September 2011, *Vesti* gave a brief history of the life of 'the Muslim community' in Moscow, stressing its beginnings in the fourteenth century, and noting that approximately 20 million Muslims live in Russia today.²¹

Nonetheless, in 2010 and 2011 overall coverage of Islam was limited, particularly on *Vremia* (six stories). On *Vesti* there were twenty one stories, many of which were about the celebrations of religious holidays in Russia's predominantly Muslim regions of Tatarstan and the North Caucasus. As with Orthodox Christianity, the display of relics was a familiar theme.²² These parallels helped to project an image of the harmonious co-existence of Orthodoxy and Islam. The message of harmony, in accordance with the official Eurasianist outlook, was further reinforced by the repeated characterisation of the form of Islam that was said to be 'historically traditional' to Russia as 'moderate and peaceful'.²³

With the exception of major terrorist events in the Russian heartlands, Islam was rarely evoked in the reporting of violence in the North Caucasus. Inter-confessional disharmony was stressed mainly in relation to Western Europe, usually in the context of stories we categorised as 'migration'. These pointed to growing societal Islamophobia in response to the policies of Western governments on multiculturalism, which were invariably described as a failure.²⁴

However, the period between Spring 2012 and Autumn 2013 witnessed dramatic changes. Alarmist representations of Islam as a violent religion, which had been common on Russian

¹⁹ *Vremia*, 22 April 2012. Available at <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/social/205068>> (last accessed 1 November 2012) and *Vesti*, 22 April 2012.

²⁰ *Vesti*, 29 September 2011.

²¹ *Vesti nedeli*, 4 September, 2011.

²² *Vesti nedeli*, 25 September 2011.

²³ *Vesti nedeli*, 20 November 2011.

²⁴ *Vesti*, 2 August 2011 and *Vesti*, 21 April 2011.

state-controlled television in the early years of the new millennium, but less from 2006 onwards, reappeared (Hutchings and Rulyova 2009: 86). A media campaign, in which the criticism of 'radical Islam' (*radikalnyi islam*) at times turned into the vilification of Islam in general, was facilitated by a public controversy in October 2012 over the wearing of hijabs in the Stavropol region by local schoolgirls. Parents who insisted on dressing their daughters in hijabs were represented by *Vesti* and *Vremia* as violent Muslim fanatics.²⁵ According to Dmitrii Kiselev, the moderator of the Sunday *Vesti* edition (*Vesti nedeli*), which played a key role in the articulation of a new narrative about (radical) Islam, the hijab incident prompted him personally to 'discover' a whole range of Islam-related problems in Russia and beyond.²⁶

New television representations of Islam deployed ideological frames used in the construction of official discourse during the electoral period. In late 2012 and 2013 both channels systematically blamed 'the liberal West' for the spread of 'radical Islam', arguing that, by pursuing their own short-term foreign policy goals around the world without concern for the plight of local people and the long-term stability in the regions, Western governments triggered the spread of 'radical Islam'.²⁷ It was further suggested that 'the West' deliberately supported the spread of radical Islamist literature in Russia and encouraged the corruption of the religious traditions indigenous to Russia's Muslim communities in order to destabilise the country.²⁸

As elsewhere, television in Russia tends to represent Islamism as a force which is 'disconnected from real people, places and histories' (Yemelianova 2010: 1; Jackson 2007; Hafez 2000). No analysis of the political, social and economic context in which radical Islamism might appeal to some Russian citizens was offered and the different forms militant Islamism took in different parts of the country remained unacknowledged. Although in parts of the North Caucasus the emergence of Islamism dates to the late 1980s (Yemelianova 2010), most news reports represented it as a new phenomenon. Likewise, when expressions of Tatar outrage at Russian actions in Crimea were linked to what were claimed to be extremist Islamist elements in the Council of Representatives of the Crimean Tatar people, no context was provided. This rendered subsequent portrayals of Crimean Tatars as 'Russia's new Muslims' unconvincing. Such twists in the Russian television representation of Islam impacted on the coverage of migration, the issue which broadcasters world-wide tend to link to the notions of identity, ethnicity and race.

Migration

In academic literature definitions of migration are complex and contradictory. As Bridget Anderson and Scott Blinder note, there is no consensus on a single definition of 'migrants', who can be defined by foreign birth and citizenship as well as by their temporary or long-term geographical mobility across and within national boundaries (Anderson and Blinder 2013). The confusion increases in media representations and in the discourses of politicians, who regularly politicise migration-related issues. Media outlets in many European countries have been criticised for their discriminatory treatment of migrants, for using criminalizing

²⁵ *Vesti nedeli*, 21 October 2012; *Vremia*, 21 October 2012. Available at <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/social/218107>> and *Vremia*, 23 October 2012 <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/leontiev/218271>> (both last accessed 1 November 2012).

²⁶ Interview with Kiselev.

²⁷ *Vesti nedeli*, 26 May 2013. See also Mikhail Leontev, 'Odnako' [However], 16 January 2013. Available at <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/leontiev/224101>> (last 20 January 2013).

²⁸ *Vesti nedeli*, 9 December 2012.

terminology and for engaging in a systematic process of 'othering'. When covering migration, journalists everywhere tend to ethnicise the social and economic issues at the roots of migration trends (King and Wood 2001).

In the absence of reporting guidelines dealing with sensitive issues, the danger that journalists will use discriminatory language further increases.²⁹ Particularly controversial is the application of the terms 'migrant' or even 'illegal migrant' to Russian citizens. Even the Kremlin-sponsored discourse lacks consistency on this issue. Putin has sometimes argued that no citizen of Russia could be called a migrant.³⁰ But he has also used the term 'migration' to describe the residency of North Caucasians in cities of central Russia (Putin 2012). Such contradictory pronouncements are reported without reflection. Likewise, Russian television news often covers stories about Russia's *cygane* (Gypsies) as part of the discussion of the impact of migration flows on Europe, even though Russia's Roma communities date back centuries and their members are Russian citizens.³¹ Such terminological laxity inevitably has social and political implications.

Migration stories concerning exhibited several striking features. From 2010 onwards, opinion polls have indicated rising resentment towards non-Slavic nationalities.³² Whilst the print media and television channels like NTV were already featuring alarmist reports on the effects of migration on Russia, in 2010 and 2011 *Vesti* and *Vremia* were avoiding opportunistic exploitation of these widespread perceptions, following the Kremlin's general view of migration as essential to the Russian economy.

As Figure 2 demonstrates, in frequency terms, migration was *Vremia*'s second least covered topic, and on *Vesti* it generated less coverage even than 'ethnic cohesion'. During our first recordings between September and November 2010, migration-coded stories were absent from *Vremia*, at a time when the controversial deportations of East European Roma from France were being criticised by the EU (*Vesti*, however, used the opportunity to claim better conditions for Russian Roma). Overall, *Vremia*'s coverage of migration remained minimal (See Figure 9). The amount of coverage on *Vesti* was greater (see Figure 10) and, unlike *Vremia*, it featured occasional reports on clashes between labour migrants and locals, particularly in Moscow. Thus, with migration, differences between the two channels became particularly noticeable.

²⁹ Interviews with a Channel 1 journalist, 29 March 2012; and with a RIA Novosti journalist, 15 February 2013.

³⁰ See *Vesti nedeli*, 29 January 2012.

³¹ *Vesti nedeli*, 26 September 2010.

³² Available at <<http://www.levada.ru/28-11-2012/natsionalnaya-politika-i-otnoshenie-k-migrantam>> (last accessed 20 May 2013).

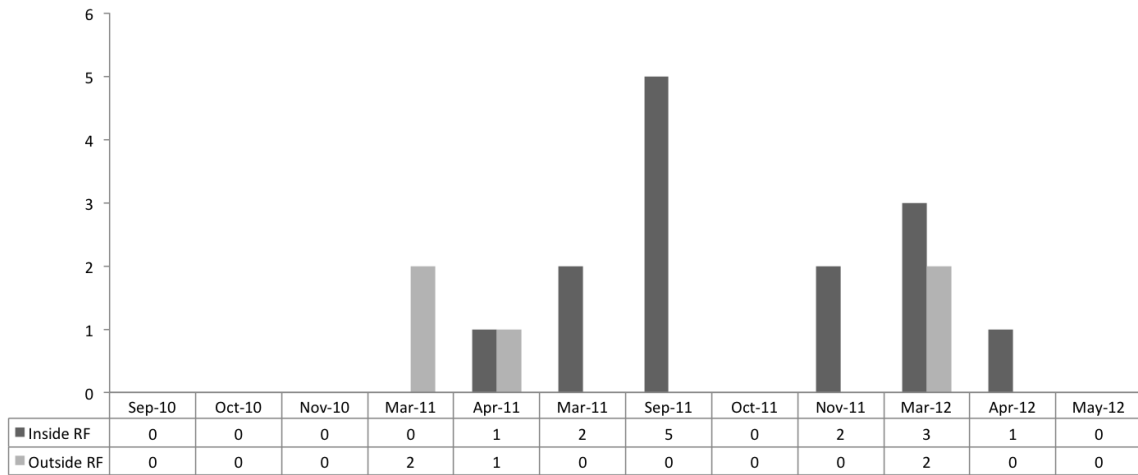


Figure 9: Frequency of migration-coded stories inside and outside the Russian Federation over the total recording period: *Vremia*

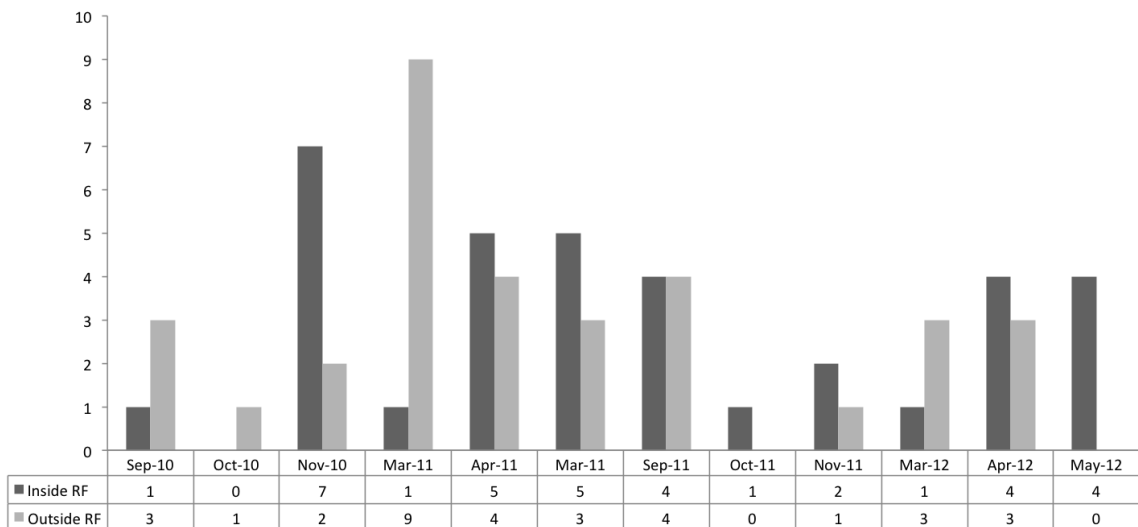


Figure 10: Frequency of migration-coded stories inside and outside the Russian Federation over the total recording period: *Vesti*

As Figures 9 and 10 indicate, both channels highlight migration-related issues outside Russia. During our recording period, the situation in Russia was contrasted to developments in Europe, where migration, it was argued, had fostered societal problems. Both channels linked the difficulties to Europe's crisis of multiculturalism. The broadcasters also claimed that the inevitable consequence of Europe's migration policies was a rise in radical right-wing popular support and electoral success. The message was that Russia should not mimic Western diversity management policies.³³

After the 2012 presidential election, several factors combined to create a context in which broadcasters drastically changed their treatment of migration. These included the legitimization of Putin's regime through the intensified identification of 'foreign' and 'internal enemies'

³³ *Vremia*, 31 March 2011. Available at <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/173811>> (last accessed 19 October 2012); *Vesti*, 30 March 2011.

supposedly keen to exploit the country's problems, increased concern in the Kremlin about Russian ethnonationalism; and the effect on reporting practices of journalists' prejudices unchecked by codified reporting guidelines. Soon after Putin's inauguration the two channels began an anti-immigration campaign that lasted until the autumn of the following year when a series of ethnically-motivated riots across Russia prompted a return to more restrained reporting. Rather than being depicted as 'compatriots' (*sootchestvenniki*), Central Asian migrants began to be represented as a major threat to Russian identity, and direct parallels were drawn between migrants in Russia and in the West.³⁴ North Caucasian citizens of the Russian Federation residing in Moscow were systematically described as migrants and 'parasites' (*glit*). Unlike in earlier coverage, the reported inability of migrants in Western Europe to integrate was linked to what was now depicted as the incompatibility of Muslim and Christian values.³⁵ Previously, migration reports rarely, if ever, evoked Islam (Tolz and Harding 2015 forthcoming). Dominated by anti-Western (and anti-Ukrainian) sentiment, the late 2013-early 2014 saw a significant lull in the anti-migrant campaign, but, as Paul Goble suggests, an article claiming extensive Central Asian migrant involvement in extremist activities posted on the *Svobodnaia pressa* portal in July 2014 indicated that its dormancy may be but temporary (Goble 2014).

Inter-ethnic Conflict

The overrepresentation of negative examples related to Western Europe was also noticeable in the coverage of 'inter-ethnic conflict'. More than half the items in this category concerned developments outside the Russian Federation. Most reports were of physical violence, often misrepresented as being motivated by ethnic or religious hostility. Conflicts in Europe were linked to wider social and political issues. *Vremia* reported at length on the serial killer shootings in Toulouse and Montauban, which targeted French North-African soldiers and Jewish civilians in early 2012, describing the event as a 'jihad at the heart of Europe' demonstrating 'the complete ineffectiveness of the modern West European state'.³⁶ The trial of the far-right Norwegian terrorist, Anders Breivik, was similarly linked to the failure of European immigration policies and the resulting spread of far-right extremism.³⁷ Those states of the former Soviet Union with which Russia had troubled relationships, like Ukraine, were also negatively represented. The Ukrainian police were particularly criticised for their allegedly lenient treatment of 'Ukrainian Nazis',³⁸ an allegation which the Russian media exploited intensively during the 2014 stand-off between Russia and the West over Ukraine.

In contrast to their treatment of ethnic conflict abroad, in 2010 and 2011 the two channels downplayed the ethnic and/or racist aspects of violence in Russia and devoted little attention to them. Extreme Russian nationalism is a sensitive issue for the Kremlin and, following the Manezhnaia riots, it began to take more stringent measures against their activities. Previously, liberal critics of the regime had accused the Kremlin of collaborating with Russian nationalists and of using radical nationalist groups to do the government's bidding (Kichanova and Buribaev 2013). The nationalists themselves regularly criticise the Kremlin for being too harsh towards ethnic Russian activists, while displaying leniency towards

³⁴ *Vesti*, 20 April 2013 and 30 May 2013.

³⁵ *Vesti nedeli*, 2 December 2012, 27 January 2013; *Vremia*, 26 May 2013. Available at <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/social/233810>> (last accessed 28 April 2014).

³⁶ *Vremia*, 25 March 2012. Available at <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/202466>> (last accessed 19 October 2012).

³⁷ *Vesti*, 21 April 2012 and *Vesti nedeli*, 22 April 2012.

³⁸ See, for instance, *Vesti*, 9 May 2011.

manifestations of extreme nationalism among minorities.³⁹ The issue represents a major challenge for broadcasters.

State-aligned television coverage of 'ethnic conflict' includes examples of responsible reporting. Our interviewees demonstrated a clear understanding that media reporting can inflame an already problematic situation.⁴⁰ So in addition to paying little attention to the activities of extreme Russian nationalists, the broadcasters also followed the Kremlin's position that certain conflicts, particularly those involving Russians and Caucasians, had social origins and were unrelated to ethnicity, even if the public thought otherwise. Yet today broadcasters must take popular perceptions into account and engage with ethnicised interpretations of cases which attract heated debates on the Internet and other media.

Such a conundrum emerged in coverage of an incident involving a well-known Sambo master, Rasul Mirzaev, who in August 2011 got into a fight with a youth in Moscow, as a result of which Mirzaev's opponent died. The incident attracted attention not only because of Mirzaev's celebrity status, but also because he was a Dagestani and his opponent a Russian. In the public discussion which followed, the case became ethnicised. The light sentence Mirzaev received provoked outrage among Russian nationalists, who argued that this was another example of the state failing to defend the *russkie* from systematic abuse. Whilst an inter-ethnic dimension was superimposed on the incident in certain talk-show discussions, news bulletins represented the confrontation as a private dispute which had nothing to do with their ethnic backgrounds.⁴¹ Yet when Mirzaev was released from detention at the end of the trial, *Vesti* became less cautious. A strong objection to the verdict from Russian nationalist activists was aired and the reporter demonstrated open sympathy for the victim's angry father who questioned the court's impartiality.⁴² *Vesti's* treatment of the case seems to have reflected the critical view of the outcome of the trial taken by the news production team, as our interview with the moderator of *Vesti nedeli* suggests.⁴³ Here we see how perceptions prevailing in society at large influence the frames through which events are interpreted in the media. Biases towards accessible ethnic frames which politicise social processes are common in the media everywhere (Brubaker 1997: 174).

During Putin's third presidency, the number of instances of violence, including not just individuals, but large groups, to which the public attributed ethnic dimension increased, particularly in 2013, when in July alone three large-scale riots took place in different Russian cities.⁴⁴ The two biggest incidents occurred in Pugachev in central Russia and in Moscow's Biriulevo district where 'everyday' fights between ethnic Russians and Caucasians ended with the death of the former, leading to mass attacks on Caucasians by local residents. Alarmed by the eruption of public disorder, yet unable to satisfy the rioters' unconstitutional demand for

³⁹ For example, <http://sputnikipogrom.com/politics/4126/pogroms_are_coming/, <http://krylov.livejournal.com/2319664.html>> and <<http://www.km.ru/v-rossii/2012/11/27/delo-rasula-mirzaeva/698206-natsionalisty-nameknuli-na-novuyu-manezhku-iz-za-osv>> (both last accessed November 18, 2013).

⁴⁰ Interview with a Rossiia journalist, 29 March, 2013.

⁴¹ Already in its first report, *Vremia* stressed that the conflict was of an 'everyday' character, 19 August 2011. Available at <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/social/183116>> (last accessed 1 September 2011). *Vesti* re-affirmed this, for example, on 31 August 2011.

⁴² *Vesti*, 27 November 2012.

⁴³ Interview with Kiselev.

⁴⁴ <<http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/emil-pain/from-protests-to-pogroms>> (last accessed 1 August 2014).

the expulsion of the Caucasians, the authorities were keen to calm the situation quickly. Under these circumstances, the broadcasters became cautious in their reporting, insisting that the locals misunderstood the situation by introducing an ethnic factor into an everyday alcohol-induced tragedy.⁴⁵

Separatist Violence in the North Caucasus

There tends to be no apparent continuity between the treatment of inter-ethnic violence in the Russian heartlands, and coverage of the separatist insurgency in the North Caucasus, though the situation changed somewhat in the second half of, and beyond, our two-year recording period. Whilst the 'international terrorism' theme continued to surface sporadically, the violent incidents in the North Caucasus were generally reported as acts of crime, sabotage and banditry, summarily dealt with by the law-enforcement agencies, rather than as examples of terrorism. Direct references to ethnicity and religion were rare, and accounts of the anti-imperial rhetoric and separatist ambitions of the perpetrators rarer still; the term 'separatist' in all of its contexts – Russian and international – occurred a total of only 28 times throughout the entire corpus. This is an irony in light of Russia's later support for Russian-speaking separatists fighting the post-Yanukovich Kiev regime, though Russian media sources used the positive term *opolchency* – volunteer fighters – with its historical connotations of popular uprisings against illegitimate rulers. When causality and motives were broached at all, economic and social factors were at the forefront, rather than the Islamist or political dimensions. If the link between Islam and separatist violence was acknowledged, the term 'Wahhabist' (*Vakhkhabit*), with its foreign origins (11 occurrences), was preferred to 'Islamist' (0 occurrences). References linking insurgents to al Qaeda and the broader 'war on terror' were occasional and perfunctory.

The lack of background analysis extended beyond the taboo on exploring the stated goals of the culprits. Heavy with the lexicon of military operations, munitions and impersonal casualty numbers, these reports were conveniently context-free. 'Militants' (*boeviki*), 'criminals', and 'terrorists' were routinely 'eliminated', 'destroyed', 'liquidated' or arrested by the Special Forces. The perpetual threat of indeterminate origin that the *boeviki* represented was cancelled out by the equally constant decisiveness of the regime as it dealt with each situation. The events described occurred in a disjointed temporality of self-contained incidents with minimal connection. The approach adopted is not unique to Russian broadcasters. In news reporting around the world war reporting tends to provide scant analysis of the circumstances under which conflicts erupt, or of the motives of the participants (Jackson 2005). In discourse on international terrorism in particular, the threat posed is indeterminate and without motive, yet never so great that it cannot be contained.

The most significant event in the 'separatist violence' category was an explosion in the North Ossetian city of Vladikavkaz in September 2010 which claimed nearly twenty lives and injured over a hundred people. Both channels avoided referring to the ethnicity of the suicide bomber, or speculating about his motives. Instead, they provided detailed accounts of what

⁴⁵ See *Vremia*, 10 July 2013. Available at <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/crime/237117>> and <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/crime/237099>> (both last accessed 1 September 2013); *Vesti*, 9 and 10 July 2013; *Vremia* 13 October 2013. Available at <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/crime/243976>>; *Vremia*, 15 October, 2013. Available at <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/crime/243862>> (both accessed 30 October 2013).

had occurred and the efficient work of the authorities.⁴⁶ In many reports belonging to this category, visual footage clearly (if inadvertently) revealed ethnic and religious content. A long story on *Vesti* recounting a special operation in Ingushetia in March 2011 claimed that Russian forces had captured terrorists involved in the organisation of the Domodedovo bombing in January 2011 in which nearly 40 people were killed.⁴⁷ However, the reporter's narrative was complimented by imagery of the Quran and footage of men whose long beards and Islamic attire connoted the fanaticism of al Qaeda, rendering the broadcaster's refusal to acknowledge the terrorists' demands all the more contradictory. The tensions were compounded when, not long after, *Vremia* ran a feature on Ingushetia presenting a picture of a republic whose calm stability was 'the result of constant and successful special operations'.⁴⁸

Around the time of the shocking assault on Domodedovo airport in early 2011, we begin to witness a gradual shift in emphasis. Following the comprehensive international coverage the event generated, it became more difficult entirely to suppress the threat posed by radical Islamism. Reporting on the Domodedovo assault itself was littered with references to, and ominous images of, the Chechen 'black widow' (*chornaia vdova* or *shakhidka*) fanatic who was implicated in the attack. At this point, although the state media re-invoked the strategy of inscribing Russia into the global 'war on terror' that has been deployed at intervals since the 9/11 attacks of 2001, it co-existed in tension with the reverse strategy of occluding the role of jihadist ideology and portraying a region undergoing a protracted process of normalisation (Flood et al. 2012: 120-2, 185-9). But the balance of references to Islamist extremism in the North Caucasus slowly increased. This preceded a deluge of scaremongering stories broadcast on Rossiia in 2012 and 2013, and linking the problem of 'illegal migrants' in Moscow and St Petersburg to jihadist groupings planning terrorist acts in Russian cities.⁴⁹

Conclusions: From Domestic Contradiction to International Conflict

Our analysis reveals that Russia's nation-building policy has, until recently, been replete with contradictions. On the one hand, television news reports presented ethnic and cultural diversity as one of Russia's uniquely positive qualities. On the other hand, with multi-ethnicity and migration proving to be a powder keg within the population at large, and with xenophobia growing, state broadcasters were caught between (a) attempting to preserve ethnic cohesion by underreporting inflammatory topics, and (b) acceding to popular sentiments by echoing the prejudicial fears to which those topics gave rise. Throughout, we noted certain discrepancies between the two channels. Rossiia, though state-owned, tended to be more provocative and swifter in responding to the public mood. With its more international audience, Channel 1 tacked closer to the Kremlin's line and was more cautious about ethnicising news.

Channel 1 and Rossiia are well aware of their responsibility to support state diversity management policy. This was particularly visible in relation to migration issues, where in 2010 and 2011 they differentiated themselves from other media outlets by exercising

⁴⁶ *Vremia*, 13 September 2010> Available at <<http://www.1tv.ru/news/other/161046>> (accessed 19 October 2012).

⁴⁷ *Vesti*, 30 March 2011.

⁴⁸ *Vremia*, 10 April 2011. Available at <www.1tv.ru/news/crime/174419> (accessed 19 October 2012).

⁴⁹ *Vesti*, 4 March, 2013; *Vesti nedeli* 2 December 2012.

restraint. A crude anti-migration campaign which the broadcasters, particularly Rossiia, waged following Putin's re-election as president proved short-lived, as a wave of anti-Caucasian riots across Russia in the summer and autumn of 2013 prompted a return to more careful reporting.

Notwithstanding the constitutional commitment to multi-confessionality, both channels consistently promoted Orthodoxy as an unchallenged pillar of Russianness transcending national and religious identities. Benefiting from the Eurasianist thinking underpinning elements within official rhetoric, Islam received more attention than other 'traditional religions', though nothing to rival that accorded to Orthodoxy. The hysteria about 'radical Islam' prominent since our recording period finished was foreshadowed in reactions to the terrorist attacks on the Moscow metro and at Domodedovo airport in 2010 and 2011 respectively. Major incidents such as the Vladikavkaz bombing were rarely reported in terms of ethnic or religious conflict, despite the popular importance attributed to such factors.

One of several paradoxes that we noted was the dual function played by the emphasis placed on Western Europe's failure to handle migration flows and ethnic tensions, and the perceived crisis within European multiculturalism. For whilst Russia's diversity management approach could be presented in a more positive light, the deadlock in Europe also provides an alibi for the strong measures that Russia itself has been forced to take with respect to its own problems in the area of inter-ethnic relations.

The contradictions we have identified and the unpredictable terrain we have mapped are cast into sharp relief when juxtaposed with television news coverage of inter-ethnic relations in present-day Western Europe, and also that of the preceding Soviet period. In each case we can speak of similarities and differences. Thus, whilst the baton of Soviet state television's obligations as an instrument of Kremlin policy has been passed to its post-Soviet successor, the relationship between policy and broadcast output is now more complex and less 'transitive' than in Soviet times. Until the events of 2014 there has been greater heterogeneity, more editorial autonomy and journalistic room for manoeuvre, more inconsistency in response to changing circumstances, and a stronger sense of the need to account for popular opinion than in Soviet times, and than many Western observers have acknowledged.

As for the comparison with West European Public Service Broadcasters, we must acknowledge that the latter are often grappling with similar issues to their Russian counterparts. They, too, fulfil a powerful nation-building function within their respective establishment. But the post-Enlightenment principles and language of tolerance are more deeply entrenched within their collective psyches than in that of their Eastern neighbour. Moreover, their public service ethos, sheltered by mature democratic systems within which they represent the outer limit of a powerful 'fourth estate', is lacking in Russia. For that reason, they exhibit more consistency in their approach to diversity management issues, and their adherence to a relatively narrow band of opinion on the subject is, ironically, stronger than that of either Channel 1 or Rossiia.

We move finally, then, to the significance of our research for the geopolitical crisis of 2014, and the role of Russian television in mediating it. That significance is twofold, relating to how our findings contextualise first Russia's actions in Ukraine, and the rationale it provided for them, and secondly federal television's part in creating the conditions in which that rationale might take root within Russian popular consciousness.

The pretext for Russia's behaviour focused on the protection of its 'compatriots' (*sootchestvenniki*), a term whose arbitrary conflation with 'ethnic Russians' (*etnicheskie russkie*) and 'Russian speakers' (*russkoiazychnye*) was replicated by many Western commentators, who also failed to distinguish the latter terms from the distinct notion of 'Russian citizens' (*rossiiskie grazhdane*). There can be no more graphic illustration of the consequences of the confused ethnicisation of national identity that we have traced.

Nor would the bemused alienation expressed in Western outlets at the jubilant crowds welcoming Putin's Crimean annexation have surprised readers of an article which has charted the progressive subjugation of Russian broadcasters less to the Kremlin, than to a Kremlin-endorsed ideology of Russian national pride that has threatened to breach the control of its instigators. The fact that it is an empty, short-circuited ideology whose lack of viable content means that it has nothing other to fill its hollow shell than an intensified version of itself, makes it no less dangerous. The core ideological concepts with which broadcasters frame their news programmes are in permanent flux, including such disparate ideas as unity in diversity; Orthodox Christianity as the primary pillar of Russian nationhood; and the 'Muslim migrant' as a threat to Russian identity. Against this backdrop, two currents dating to the 1990s have been constantly present in the public discourse -- Russia as a protector of its 'compatriots' abroad and the West as Russia's perennial foe. Since 2012, the likes of Kiselev have ensured that such ideological frames have been deployed in a particularly confrontational manner.

Kiselev was at the centre of the anti-Western rhetoric that gripped Russia following the imposition of punitive sanctions. Kiselev used the platform of his *Vesti nedeli* programme to point out that Russia alone among nations has the capacity to turn the USA into 'radioactive dust'.⁵⁰ He was echoed by right-wing commentator, Aleksandr Prokhanov, who announced that his long dream of a return to the cold war had been fulfilled (Barry 2014). The two commentators, both close to Putin's inner circle, demonstrated the dependency of Russian national pride in its distortive, Putinesque manifestation on the 'treacherous, conspiratorial West' that is Russia's nemesis.

The third corner of the familiar triad (Russia's internal ethnic other) was supplied by the Crimean Tatars, news coverage of whose predicament contained its contradictions. The *Vesti nedeli* bulletin of 2 March 2014, for example, acknowledged Tatar unease about the possibility of a Russian takeover. The 9 March broadcast developed this theme and included an open admission that many Crimean Tatars were not pro-Russian. Other reports, however, echoed Putin's triumphal annexation speech which insisted (against the evidence) that most Crimean Tatars supported reunification with Russia (Putin 2014). Here, the Tatars were used as a symbol of Crimea's and Russia's unity in diversity.⁵¹ This recognition and simultaneous denial of the 'Crimean Tatar problem' exposes the tension between Putin's neo-imperialist/Eurasianist variant on Russian patriotism (which like its nineteenth and twentieth century predecessors, aspires to square the need for inclusivity and inter-ethnic harmony with the imperative to maintain the dominant ethnic group's power), and the isolationist nationalism of media figures like Kiselev, for whom 'Muslim minorities' constitute a problem.

⁵⁰ *Vesti nedeli*, 16 March 2014.

⁵¹ *Vesti*, 17 March 2014.

But neo-imperialist pretensions towards Ukrainian territory (East Ukraine was frequently characterised by official sources from Putin downwards as Novorossia), Eurasianist indignation at Kiev's tilt towards the EU, and isolationist privileging of ethnic Russian interests, converge in Russian support for the separatist fighters. In short, rather than the actions of a geopolitical empire builder aspiring to re-establish the former Soviet bloc, Russia's illegitimate venture in Ukraine represents a deeply insecure regime projecting an inner struggle to coalesce around a coherent national identity onto its external environment.

Likewise, the anti-western bile which saturated the Russian media as the Ukraine crisis reached its peak cannot be seen outside the context of the more generalised 'othering' process we observed in relation to the coverage of migration issues. An illustration of the line of continuity came with *Vesti's* tarring of the Crimean Tatar leader, Mustafa Dzhemilev, with the brush of Islamist extremism, and its portrayal of his efforts to mobilise opposition to Russia's annexation of Crimea as the consequence of his prominence within a Euromaidan movement coordinated by hostile Western forces and determined to provoke sedition among the Tatars.⁵² In this paranoid cocktail, Islam, Tatar ethnicity, Western conspirators and Ukrainian dupes take turns in occupying the slot of a hostile Other whose precise identity mutates according to circumstance.

When contextualising the descent of federal television discourse into crude state propaganda designed to solidify public support for Putin's controversial Ukraine policy, we must recognise that, as our analysis showed, prominent media personae like Kiselev, rather than passively implementing Kremlin edicts, are also active players in shaping the Kremlin's media strategy. But the very ideological space accorded to the likes of Kiselev, and the speed of the trajectory from the (precariously) managed pluralism of the pre-2012 period to the rigid conformity of 2014, confirms rather than negates the fluidity and uncertainty which consistently characterises the Russian media environment. Whether the current level of uniformity and anti-western hysteria will prevail once the Ukraine crisis subsides is unclear. What is beyond doubt are the symbiotic ties binding the struggle to construct a coherent approach to nation-building within Russia, and the unpalatable postures Russia adopts on the international stage. The final outcome of the geopolitical stand off and the long-term future of the West's relations with Russia depend on a willingness among Western policy makers to appreciate the strength of those ties.

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