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**Representation of Russia by western  
correspondents in 2013-2015**

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## Introduction

Russia has always been on the top of the news agenda, but especially in recent years since the outbreak of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea, the level of interest in reporting from this country has risen. Foreign correspondents themselves have pointed out that Russia matters again in the way it had not in the long time. This change of the interest has impacted the nature of reporting and the situation foreign correspondents are finding themselves in. But how has this influenced the representation of Russia in their texts?

The media representation of foreign cultures and societies was always regarded as problematic, especially by scholars who follow the Orientalist perspective outlined by Edward Said (1978). The power of the West to construct the narrative of the Other employing the set of binary opposition is based on the division of power and can be traced back to the times of colonialism (Hall, 1992; Roberts, 1985). These narratives continue to exist and influence the representation and perception of countries and peoples nowadays.

These narratives are created by a whole variety of actors, including scholars, artists, writers and not the least – journalists. Media have a certain influence on how we perceive the world and what we know about it, especially when it comes to the far away countries, we have less access to and knowledge about. In contrast to analysts and foreign desk editors, who report being located in their home countries, foreign correspondents are on the ground and therefore are witnessing the events they are reporting about, and also the cultural, political and societal context in the foreign country. Researchers underline their potential to produce more detailed and balanced representation of the issues and environments they are living in (Sambrook, 2010).

At the same time the profession of foreign correspondent is undergoing dramatic changes in the beginning of the XXI century. With the shrinking of the foreign bureaus and abundance of stringers and free-lancers there is an ongoing scholarly debate on the future of foreign correspondence (Archetti, 2012).

All these points bring us to the aim of this article which is – to *examine the representation of Russia by foreign correspondents in the recent years*. By doing this we aim to contribute to the scientific debate about the potential of foreign correspondent to represent a foreign country. Since Russian Federation has becoming a prompt and conflicting issue to report on it represents an interesting case study for our research.

Latest political developments in the country have a direct impact on the foreign correspondents working in Russia. On one hand, these developments are the news reported by foreign correspondents and the representation of Russia is changing not the last according to the change of the 'nature of the story.' On the other hand, these developments directly influence the life and working conditions of foreign correspondents in Russia. Foreign correspondents are finding themselves between the realities of the country they are living in and expectations and assumptions of their home audiences and editors. In the context of current geopolitical confrontation between their home countries and Russia, their role presents an interesting case for investigation.

## 1. Political background

As of the beginning of 2016 Russia, the largest country in the world that stretches over two continents and eleven time zones, finds itself in the middle of the third term of Vladimir Putin's presidency. Former KGB intelligence officer, Putin was occupying the seat of Russian president from 2000 to 2008 and then starting from 2012 until nowadays. In the period from 2008 to 2012 he was the prime minister of Russia during the presidency of Dmitry Medvedev, who currently occupies the seat of prime minister.

The political regime in Putin's Russia is often described as "managed pluralism" (Balzer, 2003). On the contrast with the 1990s in Russia Putin's programme of 'normal' politics, accompanied by attempts to build a state based on 'order' and 'stability', represented a new stage in Russia's endlessly unforgiving attempts to come to terms with modernity (Sakwa, 2014). The crucial aspect of Putin's politics, as it is described by Sakwa (2014), is a tension between stability and order.

Important changes have occurred in the country in the end of 2011 – Putin's public approval had declined from over 80 percent to over 60 percent. At the same time we could witness anti-western shift in Russian politics (Lipman, 2015). It has caused the mass demonstrations on the streets of Russian big cities, especially Moscow and St. Petersburg, boycotting the results of the parliamentary elections in December 2011 and presidential elections in March of 2012. The general feeling that has brought so many people on the streets was described by Sakwa as following: "Russian politics appeared to have become an elite affair, with citizens little more than bystanders" (2014, p. 15).

Russian politics starting from 2014 is characterized by relative neglect of domestic affairs and expanding of the foreign policy. Putin is widely referred by national and international media to return the status of superpower back to Russia. One of the attempts to restore the positive image of the country in the international arena and to use soft power was undertaken by hosting 2014 Winter Olympic Games (Persson & Petersson, 2014).

At the same time the Euromaidan and the Ukrainian revolution took place in Kiev in the end of 2013 – beginning of 2014. It has resulted in the armed conflict in Donbass region in Eastern Ukraine between new Ukrainian government and pro-Russian groups in the cities of Donetsk and Lugansk. While Russian authorities deny the direct involvement of the Russian Federation in the conflict, western media and researchers go as far as to name it “limited war between Ukraine and Russia” (Freedman, 2014).

As a result of the Ukrainian revolution the population of Crimea, which has Russian-speaking majority, has conducted a secession referendum which resulted in 97% voting to join Russian Federation, according to the organizers. This referendum is condemned by most Western states as illegitimate. On 18th of March president Putin signed a bill to absorb Crimea into the Russian Federation. Hansen (2015) argues that Putin has deliberately “framed himself into a corner”, leaving himself with only one option of acting – to “save” the Crimeans from the Ukrainian Government by bringing them into Russia.

The international reaction on the annexation of Crimea, that was considered violation of the international law, has resulted in the economic sanctions against Russian individuals and companies imposed by The United States, European Union and some other countries. Russia has responded with contra sanctions against these countries, including the ban of food import. These sanctions have contributed to the ongoing economy crisis in Russia which was a result of the collapse of the Rouble in the beginning of 2014 because of the fall of oil prices.

And even though these latest political and economic events have influenced the rate of approval of Putin from the Russian citizens, it still remains rather high. The polls of the Public Opinion Foundation show over 70% support for the Russian president as of the end of 2015. Russia’s involvement in Syrian conflict in 2016 is regarded as demonstration of its “new strategic strength to break the unchallenged hegemony and unilateral actions on the part of the US” (Siddiqui, 2016).

In this situation when Russia is back on the international arena with its involvement in Syria and at the same time is struggling with its internal developments such as economic crisis and slow rise of discontent among the population, it has become an interesting destination to report about.

## **2. Representation and the Othering**

The concept of representation plays an important role in cultural and media studies. As was noted by Stuart Hall, representation is the central practice which produce culture and a key ‘moment’ of representation is what has been called the ‘circuit of culture’ (Hall, 1997b, p. 15).

Deriving from the constructionalist approach, specifically from Saussure's semiotics and Foucault's discourse studies, he states that the meanings are constructed through the 'language' that operates as 'system of representation' (Hall, 1997b, pp. 17-18). The meaning itself does not belong to the subject, nor belongs it to the sign (word), instead it is constructed by the system of representation. Hall lays out the argument that culture is about these "shared conceptual maps, shared language systems and the codes which govern the relationships between them" (Hall, 1997b, p. 21). This translatability is a result of a set of social convention that is fixed socially, in culture.

The term 'representation' came from the purely linguistic field and was firstly addressed by Saussure. Roland Barthes and Claude Levi-Strauss started to use representation in a broader context as they have brought the semiotic approach to bear on 'reading' popular culture, customs, rituals, myths and looks with its objects and signs (Hall, 1997b, pp. 37-38).

At the heart of the constructionist theory of meaning and representation lays the assumption that physical objects and actions exist, but they only take on meaning and become objects of knowledge within discourse (Hall, 1997b, p. 45). An idea of a discourse as a system of representation was introduced by Foucault, who unlike Saussure was concerned with the 'relations of power.'

Foucault has one of the first argued that "not only is knowledge always a form of power, but power is implicated in the questions of whether and in what circumstances knowledge is to be applied or not" (Hall, 1997b, p. 48). This means that the question of power and knowledge became more important than the question of truth which leads to 'the regime of truth.'

Following Hall, we will define representation as *the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture through the use of language, signs and images which stand for or represent things.*

'The regime of truth' plays an important role in construction of the representation of the Other. The othering is based on the notion of difference, which – as Saussure argues – is essential for the meaning itself, but which, on the other hand, is often reduced to the binary oppositions. One pole of the binary opposition is usually the dominant one which means that there are always relations of power between the poles of binary opposition (Derrida, 1972).

The Other is also fundamental to the construction of the Self, to us as subjects, and to sexual identity, argues Hall following Freud (Hall, 1997a, p. 237). This idea was introduced in his work "The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power" (1992). There Hall argues that "so-called uniqueness of the West was, in part, produced by Europe's contact and self-comparison with other, non-western, societies (the Rest), very different in their histories, ecologies, patterns of development, and cultures from the European model" (p. 187).

Tracing the discourse of ‘the West and the Rest’ back to its colonial history he argues that it was not only essential to the formation of the western society but also has become one of the most powerful and dominant discourses through which the West represented itself and its relation to the Other. Moreover, it continues to affect the language of the West, its sense of ‘us’ and ‘them’ and its relations of power towards the West (Hall, 1992, pp. 276-318).

One of the common representation practices employed in the process of the othering is stereotyping. Hall (1997a) examined stereotyping and highlighted its three main features. Firstly, stereotyping reduces, essentialises, naturalises and fixes difference. Secondly, it uses the strategy of splitting: sets up symbolical boundaries and excludes everything that does not belong, thus, setting up the frontier between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Finally, stereotyping occurs where the gross inequalities of power relations can be observed. According to Hall, stereotyping is a key element in the exercise of symbolic violence, the power to represent someone or something in certain terms – within a certain “regime of representation.” Therefore, the most powerful group in the process of establishing hegemony employs stereotyping to create a division between them and the Others.

One of the most significant works that has impacted the debates on the representation of the Other is Said’s landmark study *Orientalism* (1978). The whole idea of Orientalism comes from the perception of the world in binary oppositions. Edward Said defines Orientalism as “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and “the Occident” (Said, 1978, p. 2). Moreover, the division between Orient and Occident is a unique and crucial historical, political and cultural opposition as, according to Said, there is a whole systematic discipline by which “European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period” (Said, 1978, p. 3).

The relationship between Occident and Orient are the relationship of power, domination and varying degrees of complex hegemony. In order to understand how the West constructed the Orient as the Other, Said examines Orientalism as a discourse across various his works. According to him, the academic field of Orientalism, media representation as well as representation in literature and art foster bias against non-Western people (Said, 1978, 1997).

The ideas of Said have faced an extensive critique from numerous scholars. Most notably, Robert Irwin (2006) has built an argument in defense of the field of Orientalism and pointed out a few flaws in some of Said’s reasoning. Many reviewers of Said’s main work raised the question of whether or not the author engaged in reverse Orientalism, in “Occidentalism” and produced a vision of the West that is as essentialising and ahistorical as the image he criticises of the East (Clifford, 1980; Richardson, 1990).

Yet another critique comes from the scholars who see the way Said uses Foucault's ideas on power as problematic and argue that he overemphasizes the productive force of power (Adib-Moghaddam, 2013). The author argues that amplification of the power of the West or a discourse such as Orientalism "does not only threaten to contribute to muting the Other, it confuses the way resistance affect power" (Adib-Moghaddam, 2013, p. 33).

Numerous scholars, on the other hand, have defended the work of Said and perceived his work as a remarkable foresight. For instance, Abu El-Haj contextualizing Said's work in the light of the contemporary political moment, argues that "he and that for which he is seen to stand have emerged as key flash-points in the latest U.S. culture wars" (Abu El-Haj, 2013, p. 55). She goes on with the argument that after Said's Orientalism new global challenges such as Islamist movements are understood in culturalist and Orientalism terms on the contrary to the terms that framed the analyses of the Cold War for example.

Since the Orientalism and until nowadays the representation of the non-western Other in the western media is an ongoing debate among the communication and cultural studies scholars. The western coverage of the developing and post-communist countries is often criticized for its negative tone that contributes to the marginalization of these countries. However, some scholars argue that in many cases negative coverage of the Other is a result of the country's own policies and actions, rather than media biases and, moreover, media representation of Other is not always as negative and biased, as it is assumed (Huang & Leung, 2005).

Some argue that the othering as Said and Hall described is has in the modern reality transformed into new forms. One of such terms is '(an)othering' – "a process of transforming a predetermined Other, characterized by difference, into 'one of us,' characterized by sameness" (Mudambi, 2013). This process awakes commodification of the Oriental subject and allows intimate public to find the "subjective likeness" between themselves and the Other.

Different view on this issue examines media practices and highlights epistemological dilemma that journalists face when they cover the Others (Fürsich, 2002). The author calls for the "self-reflective and critical approaches towards traditional ritualistic reporting and production strategies can help to disentangle problematic media representations."

Various studies examine the repercussion of major global media trends on the depiction of the Other. The further penetration of the Internet has a potential to influence on the mainstream representation through the practices of participation and deliberation (Ogunyemi, 2011). Globalization as a worldwide trend has an obvious impact on our definition of 'us' and thus the construction of the Other can become problematic (Fürsich, 2002).

The criteria for division between ‘us’ and ‘them’ vary from the context. Differences in religion, social and political development, ideology, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation can act as a frontier for the binary opposition. Number of researchers examined the misinterpretation and stereotyping of Islamic world (Said, 1978; Yusha’u, 2012). Construction of African identity by western media is also a prominent area of the research (Ogunyemi, 2011; Tsikata, 2014). An example of the examination of ideological otherness is research on western coverage of communist Others in the case of China and Vietnam (Huang & Leung, 2005).

### 3. Russia as the Other

Russia has been also portrayed as the Other in media and cultural discourse. As some of the scholars argue, negative representation of Russia in the western society is not the legacy of the Cold War confrontation, but a much bigger trend, that can be seen over centuries (Paul, 2001). From the Paul’s point of view, during past five hundred years Russians were portrayed as not equal to the West in terms of civilization and civility. This image is true not only

for the Russian government, when it carries out uncivilized policies, but to Russian people who are often depicted as barbarians. This practice is not unique: many countries received negative coverage in the times of their colonial past and aggressive actions. Nevertheless, Russia perceived its bad image even in the times of peace.

Being what Hall called ‘the Rest’ to the western society Russia has contributed to the creation of the European identity, argues Neumann (1996). Deriving from the post-structuralist view that Europe is constituted by its exclusion of the Others, he underlines that “ongoing political debates about Russia are invariably tainted by the history of Europeisation.” The main metaphor in the European discussions about Russia is that of transition, that is why western media often portrait Russia as a learner of European economic and political practices.

The question of Russian belonging to the West is part of a larger debate about how one differentiates between ‘the West’ and ‘the Rest’, argues Gvosdev (2007). Going back to Slavophile vs. Westernizer paradigm, he sums up the ambivalence of Russian self-perception as “European but not western.”

Le echoes these scholars suggesting that Russian ‘barbaric’ Other is used to form European identity and the binary opposition aims not only to portray Other as a threat or an enemy, but also to construct the identity of Self (Le, 2006a). However, in her other work, *The Spiral of “Anti-Other Rhetoric”*, Le argues that the rhetoric of otherness doesn’t exist only on the one side. The ‘dialoguing’

between publications of different countries developing this rhetoric forms the part of the foreign politics and constitutes to what Le called 'the spiral of anti-Other rhetoric' (Le, 2006b).

Scholars are also concerned with the Russia's image construction in the popular content, for instance in western films (Goering, 2004; Lawless, 2014; Vartanova, 2014). These works mostly note that the binary opposition 'western – non-western' used in the representation of Russia and Russian people "minimized the importance of the political complexity, nonlinear social change, and multiculturalism of Russian society" (Vartanova, 2014).

Nevertheless, some authors describe a positive change in a way Russians are depicted after the fall of the USSR in the western popular content. The Goering's study of the American films with Russian characters made since 1990 has proved the expanding of the representations and the reconfiguration of Cold War era archetypes. Although old archetypes of "Russian-as-spy" or "Russian-as-fighter" are still evident, the images of people in more traditional roles contribute to the construction of a new identity for Russians. Such a change is explained by the assumption that the function of the representation of the Russians in American film has evolved since the Cold War times (Goering, 2004).

Significant change in the press coverage of Russia was revealed in the study by Ibold (2007). Based on the examination of The New York Times' articles from two years, one before and one after the 1991, author concludes that recent coverage has become predominantly focused on politics and the economy and more negative in tone. The development of the U.S. press coverage might have emerged from the political situation: thus Russia from a "Cold War enemy in the late 1980s" has evolved into a "target of aggressive democracy building in the 1990s" and finally to the "strategic, if vexing, ally that it is today" (Ibold, 2007). The very name of the Ibold's article "In From the Cold and Back Out Again" reflects these changes.

At the same time, other authors conclude that representation of Russia in the new millennium has hardly changed (Lawless, 2014). Based on the research of 23 movies of the James Bond series through 50 years (1962-2012) Lawless states that "the construction of Russian identity in Bond discourse is not just random, but ideologically patterned." Even after the end of the Soviet Union Russians are still depicted as "tough and ruthless people who often act mad and psychotic" and "involved in killing, stealing and betraying their countrymen", while the image of Russian female characters is limited to beauty and sexual availability.

An interesting insight on Russia as the Other is provided in Macgilchrist's study (2011). Russia is depicted as a "brutal Other that can still be civilized" or as "an Other that shares common concerns with the West", although dealing with those concerns in a different way. Islam, on the other hand, stands for "the dysfunctional Other with whom no dialogue is possible", "the relation of radically

antagonistic otherness, that threatens ‘our’ identity” (Macgilchrist, 2011). By finding two qualitatively different kinds of the Other created in the news texts Macgilchrist challenges the understanding of the Other as simply binary opposition.

Russians elites are very well aware of the negative image the country has received during Putin’s presidency in the West and consider it one of the major security threats to the country, argues Feklyunina, while exploring Russian PR campaign and the ‘desired’ image it aims to create for foreign policy in the West (Feklyunina, 2008).

The image articulated in the period 2000-2007 can be described as ‘Eurasiamism’ – Russia seen as being very different from the West, in some aspects closer to Asia, but the official rhetoric still marks its belonging to Europe. Author underlines following self-visions of the country: Russia as a great power, Russia as an energy superpower, and the emphasis on the non-imperial character of Russia’s policy in the ‘near abroad’. She also stresses the importance of historical characteristics, mainly connected with the Soviet period, for the creation of self-image of Russia (Feklyunina, 2008).

The self-image described by Feklyunina has undergone some big changes during the third presidency of Vladimir Putin. For instance, the statement about positioning itself like a country without imperial ambitions is certainly not true any longer. The self-perception of Russia now seem to make turn back to “century-long stereotypes about Russian imperialism.” Economic principles that were dominating Russian foreign policy and PR campaign are now far from being a priority.

On the other hand, the emphasis on the Russian role in the World War II coupled with the attempt to present the connections between Russia and Soviet Union in a more favorable perspective – is something that has remained since then.

Another scholar examines the role of media in representation of Russia during first two Putin terms (2000-2008). Basing on the analysis of the four western publications – the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Guardian and the Independent, Hubert (2014) argues that these western media have contributed to the creation of ‘russophobia’ in the West. Author goes further by groundlessly calling western journalists “masters of disinformation about Russia.” Russophobia, according to him, is a way to criticize Russian independence from the West and refusal to comply with western interests.

#### **4. Foreign correspondents**

The coverage of a country by foreign correspondents has proved to be a valuable source of the information from this country for the foreign audiences and the origin for the construction of the representation of that country abroad.

Field of enquiry on foreign correspondence is a rapidly developing sphere of research and the current study aims to contribute to it. As many scholars (Hahn, 2009; Self, 2011) argue, there is still a lack of a coherent theoretical foundation or model for research on foreign reporting.

Studies that deal with phenomena of foreign correspondence can be divided in several groups:

a) Studies on the *international news flow and foreign news*, that focus on the macro-organizational or cultural level rather than on foreign correspondence itself (Self, 2011). They generally argue that international or foreign news have become increasingly important as the world gets smaller and have a great effect on how we perceive the world and people of other countries (Wu, 1998). One of the main questions of their concern is “which news gets published and which not?” and “what does this depend upon?” These are studies by Schramm (1960), Hess (1996b), Shoemaker and Cohen (2006).

b) Studies on *socio-professional backgrounds of foreign correspondents* aim to create a portrait of foreign correspondents using mostly standardized questionnaire. Among those are well known books by Hess *International News & Foreign Correspondents* (1996a) and *Through Their Eyes: Foreign Correspondents in the United States* (2005) and Willnat and Weaver’s work with a similar title *Through Their Eyes: the Work of Foreign Correspondents in the United States* (2003). As we can see, those works are mainly focused on US.

c) Studies on *trends in foreign correspondence*, using various methodologies such as in-depth interviews and case studies, are to understand what do we mean today by foreign correspondence and in which way do technological, historical or societal changes influence it. “Are foreign correspondents redundant?” (Sambrook, 2010) and “Which future for foreign correspondence?” (Archetti, 2012) – are two fine examples of those studies. These studies often border with other fields such as international relations theory (Livingston & Asmolov, 2010) or address the impact on foreign correspondence of such crucial moments such as Terrorist attack on Twin Towers of World Trade Center on September 9 in U.S (Hahn, 2009). One of the most recent seminar studies in this area - *Mapping Foreign Correspondence in Europe* (Terzis, 2015).

d) Studies that describe a *single country across various media outlets* are the closest to our research type of study of foreign correspondence. A few studies have employed previously discussed Orientalism perspective. They are questioning whether foreign correspondents contribute to the othering of non-western countries and societies.

For instance, Hafez (2009) has drawn attention to the image of Middle East and Islam in German press, arguing that representation we see is a result of selectivity based on the news values rather than othering. In the study of BBC

coverage of Somali piracy, Way (2013) concludes that the representations are made “by the West and for the West,” legitimizing the West’s self-interested activities. Lester (1994) argues that the texts of *The Washington Post* follows the tradition of objectification and privileges the specific understanding of Cambodian Other and delegitimizes alternative understanding.

Deeper engagement may provide a strategy for avoidance of negative and dehumanizing representations, argues Thomas (2016). Slow journalism is presented as a strategy to counter othering because it represents “a richer, more nuanced and more culturally responsive form of journalism” (Thomas, 2016). Author admits that the situation has not evolved much since Hall posed his question “have the repertoires of representation around ‘difference’ and ‘otherness’ changed or do earlier traces remain intact in contemporary society?” (Thomas, 2016).

## 5. Foreign correspondents in Russia

For a long time Russia just as its predecessor Soviet Union has been an important player on the international political and economic arena. Therefore, news from Russia were always valuable for the media around the world. Major news agencies and newspapers from all over the world station their correspondents in Moscow. Even in the era of shrinking foreign bureaus (Sambrook, 2010), there are still a lot of foreign correspondents in Russian capital. The list of officially accredited in Ministry of Foreign Affairs correspondents contains 318 names of correspondents coming from all over the world.

There is certainly lack of studies that address the issue of foreign correspondents in Russia. This topic is however well described by foreign correspondents themselves in books such as David Remnik’s Pulitzer prize winner for book *Lenin’s Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire* (1994) or Arkady Ostrovsky *The Invention of Russia* (2015), that has recently won the Orwell Prize. Helpful overview of the books produced by foreign correspondents can be found in *Discovering Russia: 200 years of American journalism* (Seeger, 2005). Describing the history of the country through the eyes of foreign correspondents and argues that “few nations have attracted so much talent for so many years” (Shuster, 2005) A similar endeavor was undertaken by Whitman Bassow in the book *The Moscow Correspondents: Reporting on Russia from the Revolution to Glasnost* (1989), where he tells the story of three hundred US journalists reporting from Moscow during seventy years of Bolshevik rule.

More or less scientific historical records of the live and work of foreign correspondents in Soviet Union are quite widespread, mostly describing how “correspondents were manipulated by the Russians into giving <...> descriptive view of Russia to their readers” (Cockett, 1988) and the situation with press in

totalitarian regimes as well as their efforts to create a normal perspective on the antagonist within the Cold War framework (Müller, 2016). In his essay on the West-German correspondents in USSR in 50s and 60s Müller focuses on five correspondents in Russian capital, outlining their living conditions in Moscow, daily working routine, the information procurement and the contact to other media players (Müller, 2016).

One of the rare works examining routines of foreign correspondents in contemporary Russia, undertaken by Kester (2010), carries out an analysis of the strategies foreign correspondents employ to cope the restrictions encountered working in a (neo) authoritarian state. The main problem author comes upon with is the lack of the sources of the information in terms of incompatibility with the western journalism standards (Kester, 2010).

## 6. Methodology

Current study employs mixed methodology. First, semi-structured in-depth interviews with foreign correspondents were taken to establish their routines and get some personal background information as well as to discuss the situation with the foreign correspondence in Russia nowadays. Understanding and image of Russia correspondents have themselves and the representations they want/try to/try not to convey in their texts were also addressed. These interviews have also guided the research through its second phase – inductive qualitative content analysis of the texts produced by those foreign correspondents. Limited number of interviews was conducted because the main empirical base of the research was formed by the articles written by foreign correspondents.

Qualitative in-depth interviewing as a method aims at holistic understanding of the interviewee's point of view or situation and can be used to explore interesting areas for further investigation, which makes it a good method of data collection for explorative study (Berry, 1999). The correspondents were chosen for the interviews according to the snowball method of sampling (Babbie, 2008). The following criteria were important when choosing the interviewees: 1) Russia is their constant place of residence from 2013 to 2015, 2) journalism is their primary occupation and source of income, 3) from 2013 to 2015 they have worked as foreign correspondents for international media. All five interviews were conducted face-to-face.

The final list of foreign correspondents that took part in this study includes:

1. Correspondent1, male, 28 years old, comes from the U.S. (Wisconsin), is a freelance correspondent in Moscow starting from September 2010. He writes for *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *Foreign Policy*, *VICE News*, *Politico*, *The Slate*, etc.

2. Correspondent<sub>2</sub>, male, 32 years old, British, works exclusively for *The Daily Telegraph* in Moscow, where he is the only correspondent of this publication. He has been a foreign correspondent in Russia for about eight years.
3. Correspondent<sub>3</sub>, male, 34 years old, American from California who has written for various publications through his four years as a foreign correspondent in Moscow. Currently he writes almost exclusively for *The New Yorker*. He is also writing a fiction book about Russia with a working title “Wily Man.”
4. Correspondent<sub>4</sub>, male, 34 years old, British, Deputy Bureau Chief at *The Wall Street Journal* in Moscow. He has been working as a foreign correspondent in Russia and Ukraine since 2007.
5. Correspondent<sub>5</sub>, male, 39 years old, Spanish, freelance journalist, works for various media, including daily newspaper *El Mundo*, TV channel *Cuatro* and *Radio France Internationale* starting from 2012.

In the next stage of the research the articles these foreign correspondents wrote from 2013 to 2015 were examined. Five to six items per correspondent were chosen for the qualitative content analysis. When choosing the article, the following criteria were important. First of all, the sample for each correspondent represents the range of articles written from 2013 to 2015. (In one case, when the access to the articles was restricted the articles from the end on 2012 and the beginning of 2016 were included in the sample as well). Secondly, the articles mentioned in the interviews as examples of representation of Russia, work with stereotypes or addressing certain crucial issues, were included in the sample. Thirdly, articles on the events or themes described by foreign correspondents as turning points were also included in the sample. Finally, the priority was given to the feature stories over the news stories as they require deeper engagement with the subject that leads to potentially more full and nuanced representation (Thomas, 2016).

Qualitative content analysis was chosen as a method of data analysis for the current study as it represents systematic and objective means of describing and quantifying phenomena (Schreier, 2012). As described by Marying, it aims to preserve the advantages of quantitative content analysis as developed within communication science and to transfer and further develop them to qualitative-interpretative steps of analysis (Marying, 2000). The current study uses inductive category development and, following Marying’s suggestions, aims to develop the categories as near as possible to the material and formulate them in term of the material.

## 7. Representation of Russia

The way Russia is represented by foreign correspondents depends on many factors: the expectation of the readers and editors, the type of publication, personal interest of the correspondent, the simple nature of news. Having

analyzed 26 texts written by foreign correspondents from 2013 to 2015 we can admit the diversity in the portrayal of Russia. Nevertheless, in general, Moscow-centered, politics-centered and Putin-centered narratives are very prominent. Soviet and historical references play an important role contributing to the othering and negative representation of the country. Also the binary opposition 'Russia vs the West' can be traced in many stories, especially after the annexation of Crimea.

On the bright side, the fact of being on the ground gives the correspondents the opportunity to represent Russia through personal stories. Longer investigative pieces, reportages and analytical stories give are the attempts to draw portrait of Russia which is not trite. The awareness of the mainstream representation and common stereotypes about Russia allows journalist to use that background knowledge to revise the stereotypes or show more nuanced picture of reality.

This section is further structured according to the categories that were used for the qualitative content analysis and examines the texts of correspondents in detail. The findings for each category are discussed within the context of the interviews with foreign correspondents.

## **7.1 Russia and the West**

Depiction of Russia on the contrast with the western countries is, on the one hand, a logical thing for foreign correspondent that have to explain country to the audiences back home. On the other hand, basing their reporting on the binary opposition 'us vs them' – 'Russia vs the West', they are contributing to the representation of Russia as the Other. Basing on previously discussed principle of binary oppositions that lies in the core of the othering process, we have traced the opposition 'Russia vs the West' in the texts of foreign correspondents written before and after the Ukrainian crisis.

Binary opposition 'Russia vs the West' has resulted to be very prominent in the texts of foreign correspondents. Roughly, every third article in the sample mentions tensions between Russia and the West. However, one should address the usage of this binary opposition. Following, two possible use of 'Russia vs the West' narrative are presented. First contributes to the portrayal of Russia on the contrary to the West and the othering of it. Second, however, deconstruct the mainstream representation and contributes to the more nuances storytelling.

### **7.1.1 Contextualisation within 'Russia vs the West' narrative**

In many articles, even though they do not directly involve discussion of relationships with Russia and the West, the theme is introduced. These stories are contextualised within the Russia vs the West narrative. The example of such contextualisation can be found in the articles by *The Wall Street Journal* correspondent: "In Russia, Exhibition Seeks to Show Ivan Wasn't So Terrible"

(March 31, 2015) and “Russian Dig Through Past in Search of Fallen World War II Soldiers” (May 7, 2015). Both texts are based on the historical subject and therefore explore historical references, but put them in the context of contemporary political strengths.

The article “Russian Dig Through Past in Search of Fallen World War II Soldiers” portrays volunteers who are searching for the remains of the soldiers around Russia every spring. Starting with description of the motivation of those people, author proceed saying: “Those memories have now been projected onto Moscow’s standoff with the West over Ukraine.”

This remark brings new meaning to the story that could otherwise be focused on these searchers of remains. One could argue that this is not the conscious decision of foreign correspondent, but rather the requirement of the genre – to contextualise the story within the mainstream narrative. The strengths between Russia and the West are there, but to what extend they frame the understanding of Russian society and everyday life depends on the correspondent.

Author goes on building up the binary opposition on the more concrete example in the next paragraph:

*The Kremlin is planning a triumphant parade of military hardware Saturday to commemorate Victory Day and demonstrate a Russia unbowed in the face of Western sanctions. Western leaders aren’t attending the event, irking Russians who feel their country’s contribution to the victory is undervalued* (The Wall Street Journal, May 7, 2015).

However, on the contrary with someone who would write a story from his/her office in London or Washington, the author can provide the attitude from people on the ground towards this opposition. And that is what we see in the following sentence:

“It’s offensive,” Mr. Osipov says of the snub. “We freed the whole territory from fascists, and now we are occupiers? They are rewriting everything” (The Wall Street Journal, May 7, 2015).

The author fixates that this opposition exists as well in the understanding of Mr. Osipov, a builder and commander of a volunteer search brigade, and gives him a voice to respond.

‘Russia vs the West’ narrative is very prominent in the articles that address historical issues. This reference can be introduced just by half of the sentence like in the article about labour camp “Perm 36” from 6 May 2015: “The case has caused fury amongst Russian liberals alarmed by what they see as a creeping “rehabilitation” of Joseph Stalin’s legacy as *Vladimir Putin’s Kremlin grows increasingly hostile toward the West*” (The Daily Telegraph, May 6, 2015).

This narrative also often goes along with the representation of the president of Russia Vladimir Putin. For instance it is not rare to read the words like “Putin’s standoff with the West” (The Guardian, December 7, 2014). Putin is often described on the contrary with western leaders who are “pygmies next to him” (El Mundo, December 28, 2014).

Nevertheless, not only articles on politics and economy address this narrative. Pieces exploring cultural side of Russia are not getting away from the ‘Russia vs the West’ opposition either. For instance, in the article on Russia’s musical new wave that embraces Soviet chic published in July 2015, one can find the following passage: “The new Soviet chic has come amid *cold war-style tensions with the West and a raise in patriotism spurred on by Putin’s defiant rhetoric*” (The Guardian, July 29, 2015).

This repeated contextualisation affects the view of Russia as it is constantly portrayed on the contrary with West. The constant prominence of this narrative even in the pieces not directly related to the geopolitical relations between Russia and western countries suggests that this narrative also forms part of the understanding of contemporary Russia that foreign correspondents have in their minds so that it finds its way to most of the articles they write.

### 7.1.2 Challenging ‘Russia vs the West’ narrative

Yet another use of the ‘Russia vs the West’ narrative suggests quite the opposite. In some cases this opposition is shown in ridiculous and absurd way that challenges the mainstream representation of the strong geopolitical confrontation. Consider how the article entitled “American Pundit Russians Love to Hate Is in Hot Demand” (March 8, 2016) by The Wall Street Journal correspondent starts:

*When Russians want to see their country sock it to America, they tune in to a former insurance executive from a St. Louis suburb named Michael Bohm.*

*The Cold War-style confrontation between Russia and the U.S. has made Mr. Bohm, 50 years old, into a star on popular political talk shows here, such as “Time Will Tell” and “Special Correspondent,” which attract millions of viewers.*

The article portrays Michael Bohm that is perceived as a typical American, an enemy to Russia. But even this is only true when he appears on TV. A part of such TV spectacle is shown further in the article:

*Mr. Bohm’s biggest appeal, though, is his good-natured willingness to be bashed for the perceived wrongs that the U.S. visits upon Russia and the rest of the world.*

“We’re tired of you ruling the whole world,” Pyotr Tolstoi, the host of “Politics” and “Time Will Tell,” jabbed at Mr. Bohm in one show. When Mr. Bohm questioned comment by a Russian political analyst on another show, the man blared: “We’ll bomb you to hell!”

In the reality, as it is depicted by the author, the rivals of Mr. Bohm are “good-natured” and by no means as aggressive as on Russian TV. It suggests that this opposition is artificially constructed in Russian media. “People on the streets come and say thank you for telling your side of the story,” the author quotes Mr. Bohm. He even has his own fans in Russia – Russian babushkas, the old ladies, who send him supportive messages on social media.

Using the absurd depiction of well assumed fact, journalist distorts the mainstream portrayal of Russia in the opposition to the US. This moreover mean that correspondents are aware of the binary opposition ‘Russia vs the West’ playing important role in the portrayal of the country and try to tap into it to show how ridiculous it may sound sometimes.

Our analysis has shown that ‘Russia vs the West’ narrative has become much more prominent after the Euromaidan in Kiev and the annexation of Crimea. In the earlier texts of 2012-2013 and even in the beginning of 2014 this narrative was not so obvious, Russia and the West are mentioned occasionally and mostly in the quotes from the characters of the story. Later however, narrative ‘Russia vs the West’ formed significant part of the stories and can be traced nearly in every second article. This in most of the pieces it is coming directly from the journalist as a part of ‘background story’.

However, if we look at the bigger picture, we can find that ‘Russia vs the West’ narrative was present in Russian domestic media and politics for a long time already. Russian media analyst Vasily Gatov (2015) has traced this so-called “new Russian narrative” already in 2007. This may have also be an influence on the narratives of foreign correspondents. Several scholars have raised the question of the information war going on between Russia and the West; however most of them are focused only on the Russian hybrid warfare (Pomerantsev, 2015).

## 7.2 Stereotypes about Russia

As was pointed out by Hall (1997a), stereotypes play crucial role in the process of the othering. On the other hand, stereotypes are very convenient for the journalists as they help them to tell the stories based on the previous knowledge of their readers. As one of the correspondents puts it in the interview:

Readers and editors love stereotypes, it is just quicker and more easy to wrap your head on. Russia... Putin did this, Putin did that, Soviet-style this, Soviet-style that... this kind of stereotypes that keep coming out. Editors like

them, editors do like them. Just because it is really easy to sell, you know that people are going to read that article. You know that people are going to be able to understand that article quickly (Corr1, personal communication, March 23, 2016).

Working with generic images of Russia is part of the job, he said, but he admits trying to avoid just outline stereotypes by putting more nuances into these images that people have of “Putin orchestrating eastern Ukraine.” Corr5 echoes his colleague when arguing that readers love to read about what they already know and expect, rather than completely new stories.

The following sections examine the portrayal of Russia in terms of stereotypes named by journalists themselves. The most prominent among those happened to be ‘bizarre Russia’, ‘Soviet Russia’, ‘Russia as it is in Moscow’, ‘Russia is a dictatorship’ and specifically the portrayal of Putin in this regard.

### 7.2.1 Bizarre Russia

Foreign correspondents tend to search for the stories that represent Russia in an unusual, crazy and bizarre way. These stories are in demand among their readers because they fit with the wide-spread stereotype about ‘crazy Russians’. Explaining the expectations of his publications’ audience, one of the journalists said: “They [the readers] are fascinated as well by everything ludicrous in Russia, there are many things that are ludicrous... <...> It happens in many other countries, but in Russia especially” (Corr5, personal communication, March 24, 2016).

The satirical representation was regarded as problematic by a number of scholars (Zandberg, 2006; Zekavat & Pourgiv, 2015). The essential part of a joke is the notion of internal contrast (Zekavat & Pourgiv, 2015). In other words, satire employs binary oppositions, it is based on the difference, as it is the difference that makes the other funny. Moreover, the subject of satire does not necessarily need to identify with the butt of satire for the satire to contribute to its identity formation.

The examples of portraying Russia as ‘bizarre country’ can be found in two articles by the *The Wall Street Journal* foreign correspondent. The first one, “Yo: In Russia, Two Dots Can Mean a Lot” (December 20, 2012), as explained by the author in the interview, is an illustration of how far Russian bureaucracy can go. The journalist brings a story of a person who was not recognized as his son’s father because of a different inscription of one letter of the Russian alphabet. From this rather significant problem the journalist switches to a whole half-serious, half-ridiculous discussion pro and contra the use of the dots over the letter Yo. The author admits that Russia is not the only country to debate peculiar letters, but in Russia it “incites passions and debate that transcend orthography, touching on history and amusement at the letter’s hint of vulgarity.”

Yet another article of the same author employs similar approach. “The Stone Fox Wins Over Russia’s Underdogs” (June 20, 2013) is about a stuffed fox that has made a sensation on Russian internet. The author claims that:

Unbeknown to Ms. Morse, her fox – sitting cross-legged, with a vacant stare on its face – had become an Internet sensation here. *Russians had taken images from the auction website and doctored photos to create humorous and often satirical scenes making use of his unusual look.*

In this passage Russians are describes as a homogeneous group on the contrary to British, who didn’t care about the fox. Further the author quotes the self-perception of Russians: “Russians are so creative. They were able to make a whole movement out of a stuffed animal,” said 28-year-old Denis Gladyshev, who came to see the fox at a Moscow museum in May.

Switching to the other publication, we can also find representation of Russia as bizarre country. One of such articles from The Daily Telegraph is entitled “Gerard Depardieu 'building a wooden house so he can go fishing in Russia” (28 January 2013). The title itself suggests the irony of the author. In the first paragraph the author writes that Depardieu “was attracted to Russia not for its 13 percent flat tax rate, but for the fishing, according to the official”.

The ‘bizarre Russia’ narrative was noted to be slightly more prominent before the events of 2014 as all the analyzed articles date before 2014. This suggests that, first of all, journalist then had more time for such stories (because they are by no means hard news) as there were not so many important political stories. This further suggests, that even though ‘Russia vs the West’ and ‘bizarre Russia’ narratives are not mutually exclusive, the rise of one coincided with the decline of the other.

### **7.2.2 Soviet Russia**

Soviet past is part of the history of Russia, as well as colonial past forms history in Britain, slavery in United States and National Socialism – in Germany. However, Soviet references play an important role in construction of the image of contemporary Russia. They are used not only in historical features, but in analysis of today’s politics, and even in pieces on culture.

The frequent use of Soviet references suggests the continuity of the Soviet features in contemporary Russia. For instance, the article “V for Vladimir” compares the importance of the Victory day in Soviet times and today:

The memory of the war, with Victory Day as its triumphant and unchanging centerpiece, became the basis for an official mythology that heralded a new type of “Soviet man.” <...> Victory Day would therefore serve as a yearly reminder of the timelessness and incontestable virtue of the Soviet system (The New Yorker, May 8, 2014).

Two paragraphs below he continues: “The appeal of Victory Day for Putin, who has lamented the country’s “dire lack of spiritual ties,” is obvious.” The author suggests that the usage of the Victory day in USSR and Russia is similar, as similar is the use of history.

Constant comparison with the Soviet past can be traced in less political and historical articles as well. For instance, in the piece on Stoned Fox author compares the use of the “fox’s bizarre appearance to poke fun at figures of authority” with “Soviet-era humor aimed at powerful” (The Wall Street Journal, June 20, 2013).

Rarely Soviet references are used in more positive way, breaking the association ‘Soviet = bad’. For instance, in the article “Russia’s musical new wave embraces Soviet chic” (The Guardian, July 29, 2015) the author compares Soviet Russian past with “American golden oldies” as the moments of the rise of culture and shows the other side of Soviet times. Countering the mainstream representation of Soviet times as dark and restricting the freedom of creativity, it shows how contemporary musicians are searching for the inspiration in those years. “Young musicians most likely want to find a Russian continuum, to find a connection with the culture of the past,” author quotes the editor of Russian cultural publication. “For them it’s probably more Russian than Soviet.”

### 7.2.3 Russia as a dictatorship and the image of Putin

The stereotype of ‘Russia as dictatorship’ comes in most of the cases from the image western people have of Putin and his rule. “Putin is all this powerful dictator who controls everything in this country and who keeps the population captive or hostage against their will,” describes Corr3 a common American stereotype he has to fight against constantly.

Foreign correspondents are trying to get deeper and explain Russian thinking and position both on the official level (in the articles like “Can Putin get his way on Syria?”) and on the level of ordinary people (in the pieces like “Why Russia still loves Putin”).

In the last one of the journalists is trying to explain the popularity of Putin contrasting it with the described stereotype. The article begins with the phrase: “The ruling party will win in Sunday’s elections. And that’s *not just because of its dirty campaign against the opposition.*” The article is further trying to explain this “deep-seated support for Putin’s regime.” Author introduces the other side of the story with phrases like “in the eyes of the average Russian voter” or “most Russians place the blame on.” Getting from generalisation and statistics to the personal story of fisherman on river Volga, he creates this quite accurate portrait of an average Russia person. The article ends in the following way:

The roads were still bad and wages could be higher, but overall things were better than during the mafia wars of the 1990s, he said.

“They bought new equipment for the hospital,” Mikhail said. “I saw it on TV” (Politico, December 9, 2015).

With Russia coming back to the news agenda the obsession with Putin only grew bigger. Foreign correspondents in the interviews have even talked about the new genre emerging – “psychological analysis of Putin.” Corr3 explains this trend:

there is a great demand for stories about “what does Putin want to achieve in Ukraine?”, “what does Putin want to achieve in Syria?” And editors are always asking for it, even when they do not exactly describe it in this terms, basically this is what they all are asking for: “what is Putin thinking in this latest move?”, “what was Putin thinking annexing Crimea?”

He adds that these stories are something he wouldn’t be asked to write before 2014. The emersion of such a genre demonstrates the rise of the interest in Putin as a figure and interest in Russian position. Foreign correspondents try to contribute to the understanding of Russia by demonstrating this position and internal logic of the actions of Russia government. This can be seen in texts like “Can Putin get his way on Syria?” and “V” for Vladimir” by Corr3, and “For Vladimir Putin, this is a decade long mission to right Cold War wrongs” by Corr2.

These pieces are closed to the political analytics, but still have some features of the reportage. For instance, consider how “For Vladimir Putin...” piece begins:

Vladimir Putin is not an extrovert.

There was no smile of satisfaction, no crinkle of his brow, no flourish of the pen when he signed the document formalising the annexation of Crimea on Tuesday, March 18 2014. But as he crossed arms and joined hands with the three Crimean leaders who had added their signatures to the treaty, the tiniest flash of a smirk slipped through the passive visage. Perhaps later, in private, he might have allowed himself to punch the air (The Daily Telegraph, March 18, 2014).

This article attempts to present an opposite point of view and explain why Putin’s actions may have logic for the home audiences. The author uses the phrases like “many in Moscow see” and “what he [Vladimir Putin] regards as”. He confronts western understanding of the situation with a Russian view:

This means that, while *for many in the West the willful destruction of the post-Cold War consensus* is nothing short of alarming, *for Mr. Putin and many other Russians, it is about a restoration of historical justice* (The Daily Telegraph, March 18, 2014).

Even though we have a clear understanding which side the journalist supports, he presents the other side and quotes Russian leader through the article. Similar attempt is undertaken by author in “Can Putin get his way on Syria?” by describing things “from Putin’s perspective” (The New Yorker, September 28, 2015).

On the other hand, some of the articles only strengthen the stereotype about “powerful dictator” Putin. For instance, Corr5’s portrait of Russian president entitled “Vladimir Putin, a ‘czar’ to curb the West” (El Mundo, December 28, 2014) starts from this reportage:

Many people, who see Russian President Vladimir Putin in person for the first time, usually note one thing: the *imperial way* to take off his coat when entering the room dropping it with the assurance that the assistant will catch. The gesture is quite indicative of *the control he has over the country. Neither politicians nor businessmen, nor judges, nor media can challenge him.*

This description follows the logic of the stereotype of the unchallenged nearly royal power of Putin. This stereotype can be found already in the headline. Putin’s style of rule was compared with the czar’s more than once by foreign correspondents (VICE, November 27, 2015).

Some journalists say they “make a use of Putin’s prominence” to unfold other, more serious topics. Yet another reason for the abundance of the articles featuring Vladimir Putin is their popularity among the readers. Corr1 mentions in the interview that it is an open secret that any Russian story with Putin in the headline is going to get twice as many ads as the Russian story without Putin in the headline. That is why editors are trying to put the name of Putin in the headline. However, he also admits that there are stories where Putin is the one to be quoted and addressed, because, for instance, “what Putin does says about Crimea and about Eastern Ukraine has a greater value than what anybody says about it,” he says. “He has the most direct impact on what happens in the Eastern Ukraine and Crimea.”

Russia perceived via Putin’s narrative is a simplification of the country. Fixation on the politics is a problem of every foreign correspondent, but fixation on the one concrete political figure makes the readers perceive ‘Russia’ equivalent to ‘Putin’, which is a reduced and stereotypical view.

#### **7.2.4 More than Moscow?**

The majority of foreign correspondents in Russia are stationed in Moscow, if not all of them. Moscow is where the political decisions are made, the main offices of all corporations and media are. And that fact influences the representation of Russia, making it Moscow and politics centered. Correspondents are aware of that situation as all of them regarded Russian regions as underreported issue. As Corr3 puts it:

We are all biased to see Russia at it exists in Moscow. Every time I am in the provinces I realize that there is a whole another country out there. They live in a very different way, different thinking, the country is perceived very differently out there. And it is interesting and important and I don't do it enough, my colleagues don't do it enough.

The main reason of such misrepresentation of Russia, according to the foreign correspondents, is the lack of resources and the priorities of the editors. "It would be ridiculous if they [editors] told their correspondent to go to some village to write a story about the life in the village when secretary of United States is in Moscow," he explains. He said it is not a conspiracy, but rather the realities of the job.

The priority of political over human interest stories is a world trend. In Russia, though, it is coupled with the difficulty of getting around, long-distance traveling is expensive and time-consuming, says Corr2. He admits that everyone would benefit having a picture of Russia which is not just about Moscow and politics.

Especially when the publications have only one foreign correspondent in Russia it is harder for him to travel. Only the correspondent of The Wall Street Journal said his publication has enough money to send a correspondent anywhere, but even he would like to travel more to be able to tell stories for Far East, Siberia and Chinese border.

As our analysis demonstrates, regional Russia rarely provides news for international audiences. Two major places outside Moscow that draw attention of foreign correspondents are Sochi, where the Winter Olympic Games took place, and Crimea, for obvious reasons. Among the other places reported on by foreign correspondents are St. Petersburg, Perm, Kostroma, and Magnitogorsk – all the cities are situated in the European part of Russia.

A good example of story addressing Russian regions is piece "Why Russia still loves Putin" (POLITICO, September 12, 2015). The article portrays provincial city of Kostroma, 250 km northwest from Moscow as being very different from Moscow and St. Petersburg:

Of the four regions it had wanted to campaign in, Kostroma is the most difficult for the opposition, which draws its support mostly from affluent urbanites and is frequently derided as a small group of "marginals" that can't exist outside Moscow and St. Petersburg. Unlike more centralized Novosibirsk, the Kostroma region is largely rural, with only 40 percent of voters in the regional capital.

The news of the regional campaign of the opposition gives the correspondent an excuse to explore Russian regions and portray them on the contrast with the capital. That contributes to more diverse understanding of Russia and Russians not like one homogenous mass of people.

According to Zubarevich (2016), there are four different “Russias” in terms of economic and social differentiation: federal cities with post-industrial economic structure, medium-size cities that hold strong Soviet values, traditionalist and inert rural areas and Northern Caucasus and South Siberia region that finds itself at the earlier stage of the modernization transition. However, these distinctions rarely make it to the texts of foreign correspondents. Regions are being portrayed only when they become scenes for political action (like Crimea or Sochi). But even in that case local social and economic peculiarities are rarely addressed.

### **7.3 Use of historical references**

Historical references have an important function in the texts on Russia. As argued by Le (2006a) historical mentions play mostly negative role in construction of the image of Russia as they reconstruct and reinforce Cold War narrative. Based on the analysis of the texts by foreign correspondents, we can highlight two ways historical references are used in. First one is connected with the fascination about Russian history by western foreign correspondents and their audiences. That contributes to the deepening of the knowledge of Russia’s history and better understanding of the contemporary affairs. Second one, on the other hand, is the use of historical references as political arguments. As demonstrated by our analysis, this contributes to the strengthening of ‘Russia vs the West’ discourse and the othering of Russia.

#### **7.3.1 Fascination about Russian history**

Many foreign correspondents mentioned Russian history as the first ever knowledge of the country and a motivation to deepen that knowledge. Great historical debates that Russia has witnessed have influenced their view of the country. “One thing that I like very much about Russia is the feeling that you can touch the past, I mean, history,” says Corr5. “In Spain Russian history is mythologized.”

The correspondent illustrates this statement with two articles that were especially popular among his audience: one being about the rests of the czar family (El Mundo, September 25, 2015) and another – about the son of Khrushchev (El Mundo, March 8, 2014). The first one describes the murder of the czar Nicolas II as “one of the most mysterious acts in the Russian history.” The article brings alive the events of that night starting with nearly reportage description of it. The ‘news’ part of the story consists of the fact that Russian church, czar family and Russian government are close to the agreement to bury all the rests of the members of czar family murdered that day together. Without such a strong interest for the historical past among the readers it is hard to imagine this article making it to the international section of Spanish daily El Mundo.

The second article starts with the news hook – Crimean crisis – but goes back to explore the historical context of it by interviewing the son of Khrushchev. Even the visual elements of this article – a photo where Sergei Khrushchev is photographed alongside with the book cover with his father’s photo – suggests the importance of the fact who is talking over the actual content of the interview.

### 7.3.2 Use of history as political argument

Yet another reason to address history for foreign correspondents is the discussion of the use of it as political tool. Many foreign correspondents argue that history has become part of official ideology in Kremlin’s hands. An example of such a portrayal is the long reportage by Corr2 about reenactors (The Daily Telegraph, November 1, 2015).

People passionate about reviving history gather every autumn of Kulikovo Field to relive one of the most important in Russian history battle. The article shows a lot of details about the preparation, the battle itself and the life in the camp during this ancient ‘festival.’ Accompanied by beautiful shots of men and women in historical cloths it could have been a historical feature. But written in 2015, the article cannot avoid contextualisation of this totally apolitical event within the latest political changes in Russia. “<...> in contemporary Russia, where there is history, politics is never far away,” states the correspondent tying these who things together.

If Vladimir Putin’s air war in Syria is Russia’s newest military entanglement, Kulikovo was by some measures its first. And it is *a militaristic narrative that is firmly in minds of the organisers, if not the minds of the reenactors themselves,*

he writes further. Even though reenactors he interviews rejected this assumption, author still uses this historical illustration to show how one can find ideology everywhere in contemporary Russia.

Similar narrative can be traced in his article on “Perm 36” labour camp. There the nature of the story leads the use of history. The journalists simply described the action of Russian government towards historical past calling them “attempt to confuse history” and “hybrid history policy.” On the contrary with the previous article, contextualisation on the level of the politics here is more legitimate as the connection between history and ideology is the use by the state, therefore being a fact correspondent is reporting on, rather than his own conclusion. But even here, repetition of this narrative contributes to what Le (2006a) called “reinforcing Cold War stereotype.”

The majority of the articles from the sample that employ historical references were written in the end of 2015. By then the binary opposition ‘Russia vs the West’ has already become something usual and the historical narratives emerged in order to strengthen it. Except for the cases of the articles that are

aimed to satisfy ‘fascination with Russian history’, the use of the historical mentions can be summed up as strengthening ‘Russia vs the West’ narrative by addressing its historical dimension.

## 8. Potential of foreign correspondents

Despite fixation on politics and life in Russian capital, Moscow-based correspondents do have a potential to produce another stories of Russia, highlighting human-interest, cultural side of the country. And they are constantly doing it. *Human-interest approach* and *slow journalism approach* that are described below are only possible to apply when a correspondent stays long-term in a country he reports about and is familiar with local language and cultural background.

Those approaches were described by interviewees as highly desirable and contributing to more fair and detailed representation of Russia. They have a potential to break the mainstream and stereotypical representation of Russian based on binary oppositions. However, both approaches are time and effort-consuming enterprises, especially slow journalism. Therefore not many news organisations can afford them.

### 8.1 Human-interest approach

For many journalists interviewed a “good story” about Russia has to contain personal story. “A good news from Russia is when you can find a human part in an important story about Russia, <...> a personal story that explains a general one,” says Corr5.

There are quite a few examples of such stories in the sample: the story of former insurance executive Michael Bohm, the story of Sergei Osipov who searches for the bones of the soldiers, the story of the police general Kolesnikov and the story of gay person Olga Bajaeva from Magnitogorsk. Personal motivation and background of the characters are depicted in these stories; they are given voice to tell their stories.

“A Perfect Show-Trial for the Putin Era” (New Republic, June 24, 2013) – a longread about the Bolotnaya case – depicts one of the most resonant political trials through five personal stories of people detained during the riot. These five stories unfold throughout the article and give the reader understanding of background and motivation of the characters. Article convey an image of the protesters as diverse crowd, including young “political in the way that many young people in Moscow were a year ago” couple, medically disabled communist, former elite marine soldier and anarchist. Under these labels the journalist was capable to unfold real stories including personal dramas. Consider the following paragraph:

One night not long ago I sat at a café near Tretyakov Gallery with Sasha Kunko, Zimin's girlfriend, who is 25 years old and works at a Moscow publishing house. She and Zimin had been dating for just two months before he was arrested. The two met as swing dance partners – last year, they reached the finals of the Russian championship in boogie-woogie – and have now spent far more time as couple with Zimin in jail than when he was free. Theirs is a courtship of jailhouse letters and conversations through thick glass, giving their relationship an intensity both tragic and intoxicating.

Those who have participated in the protest are described like victims of the system, not like real oppositionists. Author tries to go deeper and describe the psychological underlines that influence the political actions of the characters:

Some [of the detainees] have remained apolitical; others have started to carry themselves as oppositionists. As Zoya Svetova, a noted journalist for The New Times who covers the prisons, and has visited many of the accused, told me, “They have been confronted with the lawlessness of the state, they see they are being held in jail for nothing. They see they are victims of a political decision. They read about themselves in Novaya Gazeta. They deny their guilt, and in so doing, begin to feel like heroes.”

Yet another example of approaching big news story from this personal angle can be seen in the article “Strange Invasion: On the Ground as Russia Takes Crimea From Ukraine” (Bloomberg Businessweek, March 13, 2014). Instead of portrayal of rivalry and conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the journalist found a story of Ukrainian navy captain, who not only doesn't hate Russian's but whose daughter's godfather is a Russian officer.

Explaining the fate of the Ukrainian minority of the peninsula, author writes:

Should that come to pass [Crimea becomes Russian], there will be little room for Goncharov: He'll be a foreign military commander at a naval outpost that will surely be liquidated or transferred to Russian control. When that happens, he'll head north to mainland Ukraine, to a land and life that *feels as foreign to him as it would to any of Crimea's ethnic Russians eager to escape Kiev's rule*. “I will be grabbed and evicted by force from the territory to which I gave all my years of service,” he told me. “I defended my nation, and now they consider me an occupier.”

The humanisation of the story makes readers compassion. They can understand the motivations of other people and feel identified with them. This is something that, contrary to portrayal Russian (or Ukrainian in this case) people as bizarre, can contribute to the countering of binary opposition and othering of Russia. And foreign correspondence has a great potential to provide these stories “from the ground.”

## 8.2 Slow journalism approach

During the analysis clear difference was found between shorter feature pieces/reportages and in-depth investigations that take up to several months to carry out. The examples of the last are the texts by Corr3. In his texts no clear binary oppositions can be traced as the abundance of details and characters allows the journalist to tell nuanced story.

He explains that it is the nature of his publication that allows him to do that: "...you really can tell complicated, nuanced story in The New Yorker. It doesn't have to have one clear obvious point; it can be something that is more nuanced, more settle, maybe even internally contradictory" (Corr3, personal communication, March 24, 2016).

One of the articles journalist himself is proud of is a story of Interior Ministry general Kolesnikov, who has committed suicide after being held in prison for abuse of authority and running an organized criminal organization. The story which is 22 pages long reads like a short novel, starting with the suicide and then going back in years to explain the personal background of the character as well as Russia's anti-corruption system, the rivalry between different ministries and money laundering schemes. Journalist has interviewed more than 20 people (those who are finally quoted in the text), including relatives, colleagues, investigators, lawyers of Kolesnikov, journalists, experts in Russian economy and politics.

Author reflects on this story this way:

What I liked so much about this story is that there were no clean heroes, even the supposed victims you were meant to feel some sympathy or sorry for and you should, because they were in fact victims of the systems, but they are also themselves members, participants of this system who were morally compromised and were far from pure victims, because they played role in continuing of the system and taking advantage of some of the darker more unsavory parts of the system until it turned against them. <...> one of the reasons I liked this story is because I felt like it provided this really unsimple portrait of Russia. Russia is not at all a simple place (Corr3, personal communication, March 24, 2016).

"Unsimple portrait of Russia" is something that can counter the mainstream, stereotypical representation that is tied to binary oppositions and is formulated in western terms. Creating of such a portrait is very time and effort consuming enterprise. Not a lot of journalists are lucky to have it, in most cases they have to write a piece a day or two-three pieces a week.

## Conclusion

In the period of time when the interest in the news from Russia has risen due to the latest political development, foreign correspondents have become an important source of information, reporting, verifying, contextualising and explaining those political developments to the western publics that have probably never been to Russia. At the same time the profession of foreign correspondent is undergoing dramatic changes: the lack of resources, abundance of alternative information from bloggers and citizen journalists, changes in the news cycle are impacting the role foreign correspondents are playing.

This study is interested in the representation of Russia by foreign correspondents and in filling the gap that exists between the studies focused on the routines of foreign correspondent and studies analysing the texts they produce. By bringing these two approaches together this paper aims to explain not only how the representation of Russia has changed from 2013 to 2015, but what stands behind this change.

Five in-depth interviews with foreign correspondents from different western media reporting on Russia in the last couple of years were conducted in order to discuss the way latest political developments have impacted their job and the way they portray Russia. 26 articles of these correspondents were examined in order to trace the representation of Russia and how it has evolved over the past three years. Basing on qualitative content analysis of the texts and interviews with foreign correspondents we have highlighted several trends on how Russia is being portrayed by foreign correspondents.

First of all, the rise of 'Russia vs the West' narrative can be clearly seen, especially in the articles written after the beginning of Ukrainian crisis. Foreign correspondents tend to contextualise most of the stories from Russia within the geopolitical confrontation between Russia and western countries. Moreover, this narrative is prominent not only in political and economic pieces, but in all types of stories. The narrative 'Russia vs the West' replaced the representation of Russia as 'bizarre' country, that was quite popular among the foreign correspondents before. The use of historical references in most of the cases strengthen 'Russia vs the West' narrative by tracing it in history. Russian history is commonly regarded as political tool in the hands of Kremlin and massively described in political sense by foreign correspondents.

All these trends contribute to the othering of Russia, as they reinforce the binary opposition between Russia and the West. Russia is portrayed as an important geopolitical player, but as a part of the other non-western world – the Rest, as it is described by Hall (1992). Constant differentiation between 'us' and 'them' can be seen in the texts of foreign correspondents even though they are constantly living in the societies they describe.

However, other trends in the coverage of Russia by foreign correspondents suggest the attempt to draw more complex and detailed picture that simply repeating stereotypical and mainstream representation. With the rise of the interest in Russia, there has been a strong demand for the pieces explaining Russia's position. Foreign correspondent admit that they are asked a lot to write such kind of pieces and even talk about the emergency of new genre – “psychological portrait of Putin.” Even when mentioning ‘Russia vs the West’ discourse, foreign correspondence try to show the local perception and attitude towards it.

Human-interest approach to stories about Russia was mentioned in many interviews as desired way of reporting on the foreign country. Having direct contact with various groups of actors, journalists have a possibility to contribute to the portrayal of Russia as diverse society, highlight internal contradictions and deconstruct stereotypes that depict Russians as one homogenous group.

Overall, foreign correspondents are trying to present more full and nuanced portrait of contemporary Russia. Moreover, most of them regard it as their role as foreign correspondent. By using human-interest approach, slow journalism approach and deconstructing stereotypes they can sometimes counter the mainstream discourse on Russia. But on the large scale their texts still follow the logic of binary opposition ‘us’ vs ‘them’ and reinforce ‘Russia vs the West’ narrative. Since events in Crimea and the Eastern Ukraine, Russia came back to the international arena as geopolitical player and is has become to be portrayed as such that by foreign correspondents.

However, foreign correspondents are not the only ones to blame for the othering of Russia. Even though they repeatedly highlight their independence from the editorial pressure during the interviews, their reporting is still not independent in the sense that it is being influenced by the news values, the expectations of their audiences and not the last – the clicks of the ads. Moreover, foreign correspondents are very well aware of their fixation on politics, Moscow and Putin and admit that everyone would benefit from more accurate and diverse portrayal of Russia.

Lack of resources coupled with the large distances, priorities of big political stories over human-interest stories makes it hard for them to avoid the representation of Russia that is politics-centered, Moscow-centered and Putin-centered. Overall, the division between the West and the Rest, Occident and Orient, argued by S. Hall and E. Said is still present. Foreign correspondents consciously or unconsciously employ binary oppositions that are based on division of power in their texts.

The study we have conducted is of exploratory nature. Using qualitative content analysis we have been aware of the limitations of this method. As most of the qualitative methods, qualitative content analysis has low generalisability and replicability. Nevertheless, this method allows the deep interpretation of the data

that is impossible when using quantitative methods. The method of in-depth interviews also allows for profound examination and contextualisation of the findings, yet making them more subjective. Bearing in mind limited research resources, we had to focus only on five foreign correspondents. The choice of foreign correspondents may have influenced the findings as well. The availability of foreign correspondents is yet another limitation of the study, as most of them do not agree to participate in the research due to their tight schedules.

In order to get deeper understanding of how contemporary Russia is portrayed by foreign correspondents this study may be expanded to include more foreign correspondents. So far, there was no attempt of big study of foreign correspondence on Russia, while the portrayal of other countries such as U.S. and Germany has been already examined.

Current study doesn't take in account the differences between media systems of the countries of origin of foreign correspondents. As argued by Hallin and Mancini (2004) even western media systems do differ significantly in various dimensions. It could be interesting to examine whether these differences impact foreign correspondents and the way they portray foreign countries.

Lastly, the cross-national study of foreign correspondents and the way they construct images is needed to overcome national perspective and draw conclusions on the more abstract level. Western representation of the Rest can be confronted to the representation of the West by non-western correspondents. Such a study could contribute to the discussion about the knowledge and power, discourse construction and othering as well as the potential and the role of foreign correspondents in these processes.

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