Dirk Splinter, Ljubjana Wuestehube (eds.)

Contested Narratives Dialogue

A Methodological Toolkit

IDEAS FOR CHANGE

inmedio
peace consult ggmbh

ИНСТИТУТ ПРАВА И ПУБЛИЧНОЙ ПОЛИТИКИ
INSTITUTE FOR LAW AND PUBLIC POLICY

Developed in the framework of a
German-Russian and German-Russian-Ukrainian
dialogue process from 2018 – 2021

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Content

Foreword by Olena Zakharova (Centre of Public Initiatives “Ideas for Change”, Kyiv)

Why is the dissolution of the Soviet Union the greatest catastrophe for some and a bringer of new possibilities or victory of freedom for others? Why is the “Holodomor” for some a genocide comparable to the Holocaust, while for others the “Great Famine” was a result of the natural causes? Whilst another group has no narratives regarding the Holodomor at all.

Narratives are a central part of all societies and groups. People possess and share different narratives about the historic events depending on their life experience. These stories play a key role both in the escalation and potentially in the de-escalation of conflicts.

Telling and listening to these stories not only helps to overcome the trauma, but promotes understanding of “the other”. To understand doesn’t mean to agree. But this understanding provides one with a powerful instrument for getting known one’s counterpart better. It helps to humanize adversaries and as a result to understand not only the positions, but also the interests and fundamental needs of the opposing party, paving the way for integrative negotiations in different conflicts. Thus, the deconstruction of narratives can open the door for peacebuilding and peaceful coexistence.

This toolkit will be of great value to dialogue facilitators, mediators, peacebuilders and other practitioners working with the conflicts on the axis Eastern Europe – Western Europe, Russia – Ukraine – the West. It can also be of help to experts and decision-makers interested in building inclusive societies and looking for relevant instruments to analyze the perceptions of current events and build a common humanistic vision of the future. The outcomes of the deconstructed narratives can be used by negotiators who are trying to make sustainable peacebuilding agreements without being trapped by exaggerated expectations or rotten compromises.

Why has NATO for Germany been the foundation of stability in Europe since the Second World War, while for Ukraine NATO membership appears as a precondition for European integration and an instrument of protection? While for Russia, NATO is an instrument of USA domination in Europe. Why won’t Germany provide lethal weapons to Ukraine and why is it not eager to support the NATO Action Plan for Ukraine?

The Contested Narratives Dialogue approach, developed by inmedio and tested by a trilateral group of experts from Germany, Russia and Ukraine, provides the tools to answer these and many other “whys”.

Introduction

This methodological toolkit is based on the understanding that a civil society dialogue, moderated in accordance with a mediative approach, is possible and needed in order to achieve a better understanding of contested narratives and their respective gaps, overlaps and blind spots. This can be done in parallel with political processes and can help to prepare the ground for more constructive official negotiations.

This toolkit offers practical guidance to anyone who intends to become engaged in the facilitation of dialogue on historical and political narratives. It describes key methods and approaches of the Contested Narrative Dialogue approach developed by inmedio peace consult gGmbH and implemented in a series of German-Russian and German-Russian-Ukrainian dialogue projects between 2018 and 2021. Our aim is to portray the methodology and tools in a clear manner, making them applicable to other (regional or political) contexts.

We encourage you, the reader, to make use of this toolkit for your own work. It is mainly designed to be used by professors, teachers and moderators who want to use mediative approaches in conference and group settings. This is due to the background against which this approach was developed: The experts who participated in our dialogue requested a practical guideline for working with conflict narratives using our dialogue methods, especially in the context of working with (history) university students and in the context of facilitating expert workshops and focus group discussions on conflict narratives, e.g., with political advisors.

> For a more detailed description of the multi-stage process in which the methodology evolved, please see the last chapter on the background of the Contested Narratives Approach, where you will also find an overview of further materials and resources.

The Contested Narratives Dialogue approach (Larissa Kunze, Ljubjana Wuestehube)

What is dialogue?

In everyday language the term dialogue is used in the sense of "conversation". In professional discourse, on the other hand, dialogue describes a specific way of talking to each other: it is the serious attempt to understand the other side better and to make oneself understood.

Dialogue and debate are fundamentally different. In a debate, the aim is to convince the audience of one's own opinion. Dialogue is always a risk. To make a difference, it must be open-ended. Some authors speak in this context of temporary suspension, i.e., putting aside their own opinions. "Listen to learn" - listening in order to learn something new - is a good description of this process.

Behind every "bad"/destructive behaviour there are always "good"/comprehensible reasons. Conflict parties tend to have certain claims or positions like: "He needs to apologise", "She has to pay for the damage", "He lied", "This belongs to me" or "She needs to be fired" etc. In their mind they suggest a solution: "If others would only agree to my claims/positions, the conflict would be solved." The problem is, however, that conflict parties have positions that mutually exclude each other.

One general problem: Motive attribution asymmetry, a more recent, empirically based concept, shows that we tend to perceive our own motivation as human, morally superior and value-driven, while at the same time we assume the opposite from the opponent: a morally humanly low, if not malicious motivation for his demands.

What is a narrative?

A narrative refers to the way in which historical facts, political events, media representations and personal experiences are interwoven and given meaning in the reproduction of history. Among other things, by highlighting certain events and facts and blanking out others, different interpretations arise. The term thus reflects subjective truths.

The comparison of narratives is not primarily about the attempt to recognize objective historical truth. Rather, the comparison acknowledges that each narrative focuses inevitably on particular events and facts against the background of different life realities, and that individual biographical backgrounds also influence which particular facts are perceived.

Narratives are both genuine and strategic. The media, politicians and other powerful stakeholders have an influence on which interpretation of history prevails. This means they can be guided by unconscious interests or even conscious propaganda in order to legitimise their own goals. However, at the same time, narratives often reflect deeply internalized beliefs that are based on well-developed intellectual thought processes. The role of conscious disinformation should not be belittled. However, if you take everything that contradicts your own point of view to be propaganda, then dialogue becomes impossible.

In case of conflict, narratives are increasingly "sealed", which means that contradictory facts tend to be made to fit into them; new perspectives, new starting points are not integrated.

Reconstructing and deconstructing narratives from a meta-perspective has proved to be highly effective in fostering constructive discussions. It helps dialogue participants to refrain from discussing what is wrong or right about a certain interpretation/portrayal of events. Rather, it enables them to outline step-by-step the diverse interpretations by assuming the perspective of the different narratives one after the other. This approach does not negate differences but helps to find a way of describing and interpreting perceptions of events (and the creation of meaning that comes along with these perceptions) from a meta-perspective.

The Mediative Dialogue Approach

The mediative approach to dialogue creates a space for in-depth dialogue which, rather than consisting in a mere exchange of statements, focuses on learning about the other's point of view. It is guided by an appreciation of each participant's perspective and the acknowledgement that each has the right to be voiced and heard. It goes further by focusing not only on the factual level, but also on the interpersonal level. The moderators/facilitators ask questions to understand the background of the statements, attitudes and perspectives of the participants. The approach builds on the consideration of the participants' personal and biographical backgrounds. Therefore, it is usually conducted in smaller groups and over a longer time period in order to allow for a process-oriented format that fosters trust building.

The facilitators are called upon to step away from their own positions and instead support every position of the participants in equal measure. Every development or statement is seen as a contribution to the discussion.

A core element of the Mediative Dialogue Approach is a **facilitated change of perspective**. Changing perspectives means that the participants can truly/honestly understand (maybe even feel) why other participants hold their points of view, with which they may not at all agree.

In human interaction there is no objective truth. We perceive situations according to experiences we have had previously in our lives. As experiences differ, people may also have different perceptions of one and the same situation. Conflict parties often insist on their own perspective as the only truth.

Constructive conflict resolution encourages both parties to adopt the perspective/step into the shoes of the other conflict party in order to understand how they see and feel in this situation. Having understood the other party's perspective, parties can drop the need to be right and are able to move towards finding solutions. The change of perspective is thus a turning point in constructive conflict transformation.

Very helpful are so-called "empathy-hypotheses". Using uncompleted statements such as: "We, the 'a' feel 'x'"; "we the 'b' wish to 'y'"; "we, the 'c' fear 'z'", the groups slip into the skin of their opponents in the conflict and try to find out their emotions and wishes. At the end each group present their empathy lists to the adversary group and show them what they believe they do feel, wish and fear.

It is very important that everybody steps into the shoes of the party the list is compiled for. It is not simply a question of thinking about what somebody else might feel etc. Instead, it must be a complete stepping into the position of the other person. That means thinking and feeling from an inside l-perspective.

It is the change of perspective that makes the life of the other person comprehensible and his decisions, even if they may be alienating or in need of criticism, in many cases understandable or even acceptable.

Reaching out to sceptics of dialogue

Respect and real, honest listening u not be confused with justification of problematic behaviour. Especially in emotionally heated situations, conflict parties worry that they are automatically approving the reasons of the other's behaviour if they try to understand them. Therefore, to be on the safe side, they avoid any attempt to understand the backgrounds, feelings and fears of their opponent.

Understandably, in political discussions, this is difficult, as public discourses often follow the strategy of "demonizing" political enemies, and the willingness to understand is equated with agreeing and labelled as naïve and weak. The term "understanding" gets a negative connotation. It is often perceived that dialogue even rewards the opponent for his misdeeds, that dialogue is appeasement and strengthens the opponent. However, the central principle of the mediative approach to dialogue is: Being willing to understand the other's perspective does not mean being in agreement! Understanding does not mean agreeing! Rather, the dialogue process acknowledges that "there are always 1,000 'good' (=humanly plausible or comprehensible) reasons for 'bad' (=destructive or violent) behaviour. The goal of a dialogue is to reveal these 1,000 reasons.

Five aspects of mediative dialogue (Maxim Kruschwitz, Evgeniya Sayko)[1]

As a result of the escalation witnessed in recent years, parallel narratives have developed and consolidated in German-Russian talks. The situation is often characterised by disappointment and resignation, since these narratives usually stand intractably next to each other. To lead a constructive dialogue, many ask themselves what should be the key issues to talk about. The result is all too often a dialogue focusing on talking about each other's flaws and letting off steam while controversial issues are avoided. The more burning question, however, is how we need to talk in order to engage in dialogue with each other. This is what the Mediative Dialogue Approach, which was applied in this project, explores, presenting an alternative perspective on engaging in more constructive dialogue. Here, we let the participants speak by using quotes from semi-structured interviews held during the first workshop on a systematic evaluation at Friedrich Schiller University (Jena) and from written and oral feedback from the second workshop. The special feature of inmedio's Mediative Dialogue Approach is evident on the following five levels. While not every aspect is new, in combination they make for a new approach to dialogue facilitation.

Attitude of the Facilitators

Appreciation: Every development or statement is seen as a contribution to the discussion. This attitude motivates the participants to speak truthfully and honestly since they feel respected and listened to in their comments.

> "She dared (to speak out), because she felt allowed to do so. She is not bullied but is taken *seriously by the participants and the facilitators and her comments are not simply shoved off the table."*
> *"Here I see no teaching. Nobody destroys anything. I can rebuild my opinion myself."*

Multi-Partiality: The facilitators are called upon to step away from their own position and instead support every position of the participants in equal measure. This also creates free space for the unexpected and encourages participants in their ideas.

Rolling Planning as an Opportunity: Due to the process design, there is no rigid structure which one could hold onto as facilitator. Unstructured moments allow space for unexpected and new thinking.

Understanding ≠ Agreeing: Being able to understand a position is different from agreeing with it. On this basis, participants find it easier to empathise with different viewpoints.

Core Methods of the Facilitators

Conflict Perspective Analysis: CPA is a structured multiple-level analysis. It uses empathy to create hypotheses regarding the well understood interests and motivations behind the actions and standpoints of each party. This analysis focuses on the party's wishes, fears and feelings.

1 See Kruschwitz/Sayko 2019.

"I think that was the core of the official programme. In normal life we do not get to it – we are too focused on ourselves. I think it was not easy, but we came up with a lot of things, which were surprising for us all."

Sha:re Approach:[2] Participants' personal biographical experiences associated with the topic are shared. This softens strong positions by making their plausible backgrounds visible. As a result, the discussion is more profound. Furthermore, the method is highly trust-building.

"It's much harder to judge another person and her political beliefs if you know where it *comes from."*

"Usually in this type of disagreement, people think the other side is just brain-washed. But *here I cannot think this, because they are the people I love most." (About the rift within the participant's own family regarding Crimea)*

Techniques of the Facilitators

Paraphrasing & Mirroring: Paraphrasing structures focus the conversation. In addition, with the mirroring of emotions the participants feel that they are fully understood by the facilitators. This encourages them to address even sensitive issues more easily.

"That pulled the strings. You said something, then the facilitator repeated it again so you *are sure that it was understood correctly and from this concentrated summary the others can go out and say something."*

Grounding questions: It is a set of questions helping the participants to reflect critically on their own position. These questions reveal underlying wishes, concerns and emotions. Moreover, they structure and concretise the dialogue.

"It helps you to empathise with others. It really puts you in the other party's shoes, so you *develop an understanding of the other's point of view."*

Documentation by visualisation: The permanent recording of content on flipcharts and moderation cards makes results immediately visible and structures the dialogue.

"We have results every step of the way. Usually, we have a lot of talks without results and *I'm used to these debates without result. Everybody makes his self-presentation and no more. And in this case I see results."*

Sociometry: In the intensive introductory session in particular, the technique gives a quick overview of moods, opinions, attitudes, etc. At the beginning, this is helpful to initiate conversations and make the participants aware of the numerous points of contact.

"By lunchtime, I had already figured out who's who. He's doing something with the OSCE, *so I can talk to him about it; Ah, this is a journalist, I can discuss with him. It actually creates links for the more informal talks*

2 See Splinter/Wuestehube 2017.

Process Design

Process orientation: The procedure of the dialogue is constantly re-evaluated in order to adapt it spontaneously to the situation. Doing so allows the facilitators to focus on content relevance and fertility of the topic as well as on the participants' preferences.

> "The flexibility is actually the key criterion determining whether you can moderate a discussion well *or not. Planning ahead and then simply seeing your plan through doesn't make you a good moderator. The spontaneous deviation from the actual script is a key factor and makes for a good facilitation.*

Leaving the result open: The content-related aim is deliberately left to the participants themselves, as they are the experts on the topic. This allows the discussion to break new ground. In addition, the participants feel that they are acting subjects and not just executing objects. They thus create true ownership of the result.

> "The facilitators tried not to be pushy and give as much freedom to the group as possible and at least *in this group I think it worked. People were active, they didn't try to just stay on the sidelines. The facilitators were able to leave the initiative to the group."*

Mutual understanding: The approach aims to make the participants feel listened to. The arguments thereby gain in authenticity and appear more credible.

Transparency: The open communication of the procedure by the facilitators makes it possible for the participants to follow the process. This is particularly important with this process-oriented approach and builds trust towards the facilitators.

> "It can break out of this polemical political discussion and make us see politics for what it is: *constructed and lived by people."*

Small groups: In order to build trust and deepen the discussion, 16 to 20 people is the ideal number of participants. This ensures that everyone is involved.

Working in small groups: Dividing the participants again and again into heterogeneous small groups will further intensify the exchange. It is important that the results of the groups are always brought back to the plenary, so that the participants continuously give each other new food for thought.

> "All people are different – everyone has a different kind of logic and life experience, so the group is *very diverse. I think the interaction within the group is the most interesting thing that happens. Because no group is like the other."*

Informal setting: There are, for example, no tables to reduce the distance between the participants and to promote a direct and lively exchange. This face-to-face situation makes the other person more open and approachable, especially with regard to their emotions.

"What I consider a big advantage in comparison to a conventional conference is that people really *engage in dialogue and exchange arguments and that you are not so inhibited. You don't have to use some kind of scientific language or method, which restricts you a lot and makes you talk about the little things and not about the bigger picture."*

Two facilitators: Two facilitators are key in order to deal with the complexity of the group interaction, as they can support each other or split if necessary.

Challenges

Effort: Compared with more conventional formats the approach requires more resources, especially time.

Complexity for facilitators: The complexity of the approach requires a great deal of knowledge and experience from the facilitators. A particular challenge for them is finding the right balance between giving the group freedom whilst also leading them to take direct action. Do you, for example, let a discussion run free, hoping it will generate new thoughts, or do you step in more directively to move the process forward?

Complexity for participants: The high degree of complexity can be exhausting or even annoying for the participants. It requires from them a certain degree of openness towards new approaches.

Despite these challenges, our results show that the additional effort is worthwhile because this is a chance to generate new impulses for dialogue. At the same time, it enables a deeper understanding of other perspectives. Through this Mediative Dialogue Approach, we have succeeded in enriching the discussion between participants. Issues that may have already been discussed in great detail previously can now be seen in a different light. This reveals new nuances and details that can help with a genuine solution. The approach encourages participants to leave familiar paths and think outside the box. This opens up new perspectives and blind spots can be revealed. In particular, trust among participants and towards the facilitators is crucial in order to critically question one's own perspective. Subsequently, participants then accept different perspectives and finally develop new creative approaches to discussion. Therefore, this approach can be seen as a chance to expand and improve conventional conference formats to initiate a dialogue with and not about each other.

Methods and Tools for mediative dialogue on contested narratives (Dirk Splinter, Ljubjana Wuestehube)

Most of the methods can be easily adapted to online formats if your video conferencing tool supports breakout rooms/subgroups. The tools are designed for workshop groups composed of two or three identity-based groups or nationalities.

Warm up and get to know each other

Sociometry

Ask participants to position themselves in the room according to their answers on various questions or requests like:

- How long did your travel take to this place? (The person with longest travel places himself/ herself in one corner, the one with the shortest one in the opposite corner.)
- Place yourself in an alphabetical order of first name.
- Place yourself according to where you live/ where you were born (the facilitator explains an imaginary world or country map on the floor).
- Build groups according to your fields of work.

Ask some participants after each question why they stand where they stand, to get an overview for everybody. In online formats, this can be done if you send them the link to a google doc with small text boxes in which everybody inserts their name. Then everybody can move his/her box simultaneously. Padlet or other online tools can be used similarly.

Partner Interviews

Build pairs or groups of three according to identity group/nationality. Give them some guiding questions to interview each other, e.g., name, organisation, work experience, experience with dialogue, personal experience or relationship to the topic at hand. Ask them to present their interview partner(s) to the whole group afterwards.

Red buttons

Ask the identity groups separately (e.g., in separate preparatory meetings) to list their own 'red buttons' - that is, things they don't want to hear from the other side, e.g., insulting comments. Then ask them what they think are the red buttons of the other group. Ask for permission to show the results to the others. Most likely there will be many overlaps. This shows that the ability to step into the shoes of the others already exists.

Naming and systematising the narratives

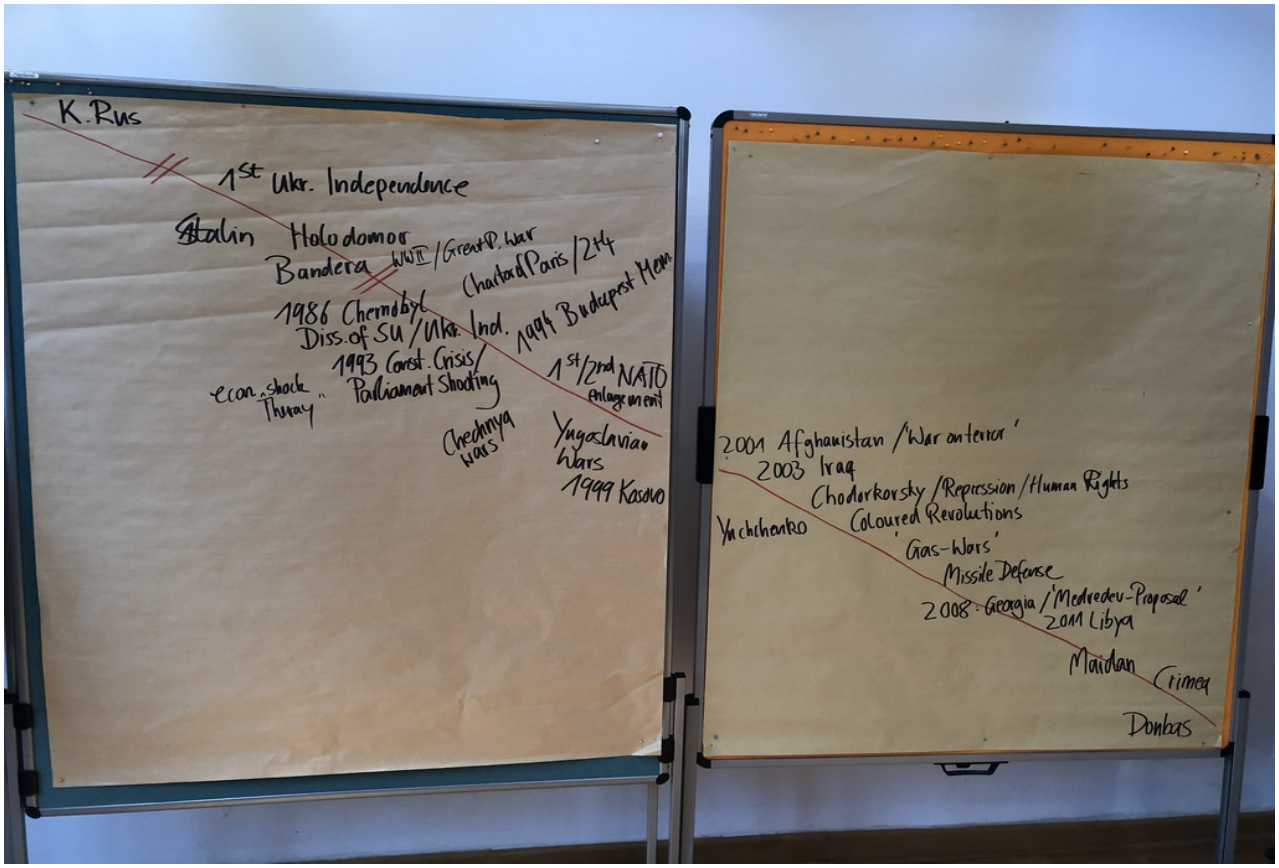
Naming main narratives

If you want to highlight that there is not just one monolithic narrative per country, give the task to working groups of about five individuals to come up with the three, four or five most relevant narratives of the respective topic in the society at hand. Ask the group to name the narratives in a way which is not insulting for those who hold the narrative. This is already a

challenging task, because a certain shift of perspectives is needed. Compare the results of the working groups and try to find a common version. If you know of any scientific research, surveys or opinion polls related to the existing narratives, present and compare the results with what the group came up with. If there is not much existing research or knowledge about the core point of the narratives, you can then build working groups – one for each of the selected narratives – and ask them to outline and present the core points of it.

Timeline

Task: 'Please make a list of the six most important historic events that shape how the relationship between countries A and B and the respective narratives developed?' A time frame (last 30 years? Last 1000 years?) should be defined beforehand according to the purpose/task of the dialogue. A comprehensive list of possible events could be presented as a first step if deemed necessary. The question should be discussed in binational pairs (or trinational teams if it is a trinational meeting), for about 20 minutes. Afterwards, two pairs/teams merge, compare their lists and try to come up with a consolidated common version. Again, two groups merge and try to find a consensus. As a last step, two pre-final version are presented to the full group and the plenary discusses a joint version. Don't be too rigid with the number of events. You may end up with eight or ten. Blind spots will already become visible (=events that one party brings up, while they are not important for the others).

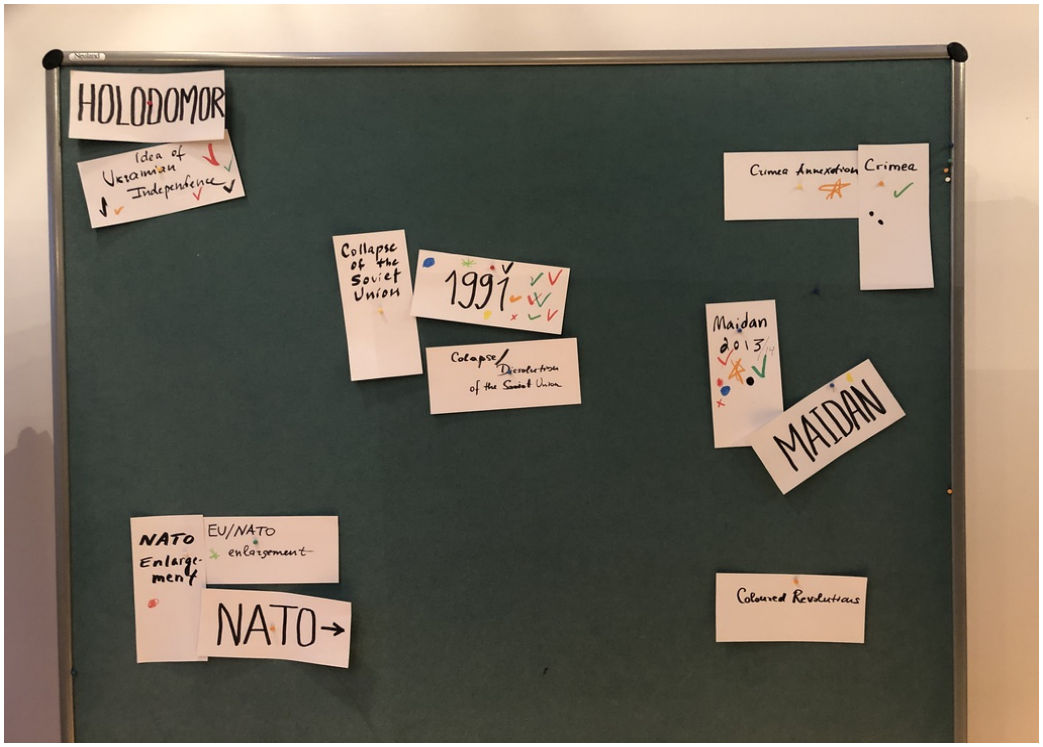


Prioritizing the timeline

Ask for some statements on why participants think one of the events on timeline is of particular importance. Then start a voting process as follows: Everybody can allocate in total three (if

you have only six events) or four stickers (or draw little smileys) next to the events. It is possible to put them all next to one event or distribute them to different events according to one's priorities. The whole group is asked to come up to the bulletin board so that everyone does it simultaneously (not only by one). This way, the process is quicker, a bit chaotic, lively and semi-anonymous. People usually wouldn't observe closely where everyone else puts his/her votes, although theoretically it is possible. If there is low trust and people might be suspected of cheating, distribute the respective number of stickers to each person. Afterwards, you have a ranking and can decide which topics to focus on with detailed discussions.

In virtual formats, the voting process can be done, for example, in a pre-formatted google doc or by using the whiteboard function in Zoom. The whiteboard function has the advantage that participants can distribute 'anonymous' stickers (in the shape of hearts and stars) and it is not visible afterwards who put them where.



Reconstructing and deconstructing the narratives

If your group is larger than eight, build two subgroups and discuss two different topics at the same time in order to have smaller groups. This allows for more intense dialogue and reframing, summarizing and asking of questions by the moderators/facilitators. Use different methodologies to structure the conversation and visualise the main points. The following are some examples.

Conflict perspectives analysis (CPA)

CPA was originally been developed by inmedio in the late 1990s to map and analyse interpersonal conflicts. It turned out later that CPA can also be used for organisational, inter-group or political conflicts.[3] In a modified version, it can be applied to analyse conflict narratives and en-

3 See Wuestehube 2004; GIZ/inmedio 2013 (ppf. 71-75); Walter/Splinter/Pusch 2014 (pp.28-36)

courage individuals to step into the shoes of supporters of an opposing narrative. The modified version follows five steps:

First, you need to identify two or three main opposing narratives and name them. Ideally the names refer to the essence of the story told, rather than to a country or group, because this implicitly acknowledges that even if one narrative is held by the majority in one country it may be held by a minority in the other country, too, and vice versa. For example, discussing events on Maidan in 2013/14 in a workshop in 2018 we refrained from calling the two main narratives 'Russian' or 'Ukrainian' narrative. Instead, after some discussion the group decided to call them 'Russia is the aggressor' versus 'Russia is the protector/It's a western plot'.

Focus on three narratives as a maximum for the next steps; otherwise, it will be too confusing.

Second, collect facts and arguments to which the narrative-holders would refer in order to validate their position. Visualise on moderation cards and arrange them on a pin board in a systematic manner – e.g., columns or mind-map style. Write down arguments as condensed quotes, e.g. 'We have been treated unfairly for centuries. If facts are disputed, write down the argument for why a certain fact is not seen as credible as a quote, as well as the facts that the other side would refer to. You may arrange the cards in chronological order, if helpful. Make sure that you don't collect too many cards. If you want to look in depth at one incident or specific period of time, then chose rather to just focus on this or make a separate analysis of it.

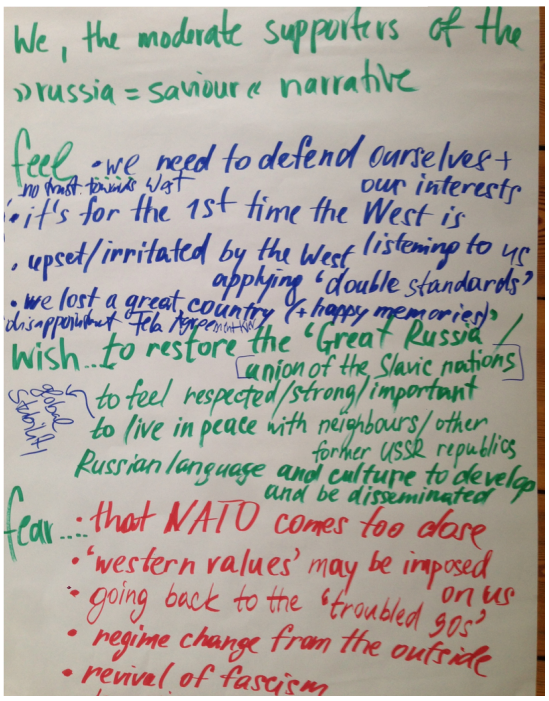
The third step is the crucial one. Ask the participants to put themselves into the shoes of the supporters of the different narratives. You can build subgroups for each narrative and go to different rooms or different corners of a big room. Ideally, the group members would join the subgroup for the one narrative they find the least understandable. If somebody is undecided, she/he can join either group. Ask each subgroup to prepare a flip chart with the headings: "We, the supporters of narrative x, feel … wish … fear …" Ask the group members to come up with statements about emotions, wishes and fears, starting with 'We …' even if the group members don't support the narrative. Building sentences starting with 'We …' ensures that participants really try to see things from the perspective of the others rather than just repeating their assumptions and accusations about the others. If group members start talking about the others from a third person perspective ('I think that *they*…') the facilitator will kindly bring them back into the we-perspective by reformulating: "So as supporters of the x narrative, *we* …" Write down the statements on the prepared chart. Allow contradicting statements because the ambivalence makes opposing positions more understandable. Ask grounding questions[4] to dig even deeper, e.g. 'Why do you (as supporters of the x narrative) feel like this?' 'What make you fear that?' 'What would be better for you if that wish would be fulfilled?'

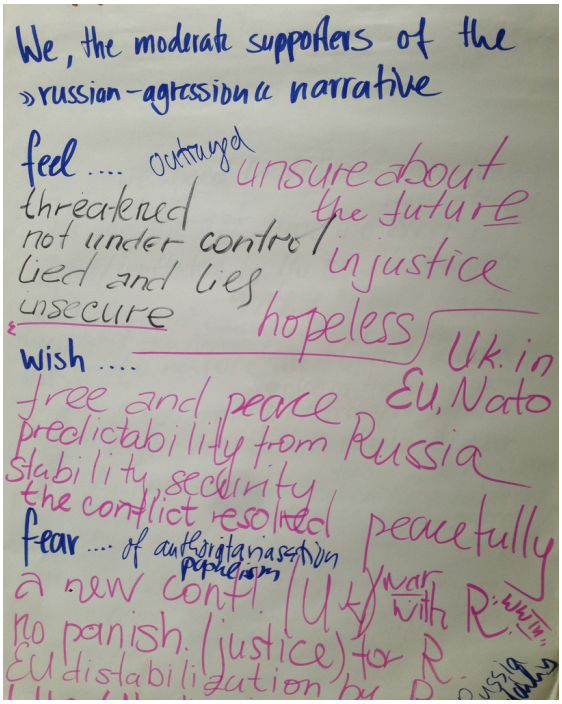
As a fourth step, the subgroups re-convene and read out the statements – empathy lists as we call them – to each other. Other group members are asked to comment on whether the narrative-supporters portrayed by one empathy list will feel well understood. Is something missing? If, for example, your dialogue group is comprised of two ethnic groups who have been in conflict for a long time – let's call them A and B – the two subgroups will have analysed the main A-narrative and the main B-narrative. For the empathy lists, mostly A's will have made the 'We, the B-narrative-supporters feel, … wish …, fear …' empathy list and vice versa. When the A's read out the list for the B's and the B's are given the opportunity to comment, the latter are

4 For a detailed explanation of grounding questions see Walter/Splinter/Pusch 2014, pp23-24

usually surprised at how well they are understood and vice versa.

Fifth, you can ask the group to reflect on common emotions in the empathy list or potential bridges of understanding that emerge. Wrap up the exercise by asking the participants to summarize their insights or lessons learned. Depending on how extensively you plan to do this and you overall timeframe, the CPA should take between 1,5 and 3 hours.





Photographs: Example for Empathy lists

Fishbowl

Ask one identity-group to sit in an inner circle (like in a fish bowl), while the others sit behind them in an outer circle. One facilitator sits inside the circle and asks the inner group about how they feel about a certain (historic) event. Try to ask on a personal level rather than for political statements, because that creates more understanding. For example: "Do you remember the time you first heard about … (the event)? What was your first reaction? How did you feel in that moment? How did your friends and family members react? How did you feel about their reaction?" Ask additional 'grounding questions', e.g.: "Why did you feel like this? What was your concern/worry?"[5] After everybody has had the chance to express him/herself, ask the outer circle for some feedback on what they heard, and vice versa. At a later stage, the fishbowl can be used for a shift of perspectives: The inner group is interviewed as representatives of the outer group, so they have to put themselves in their shoes.

Unfortunately, in most online-formats you cannot arrange the participants in a certain seating order, so you just have to announce that in a next step that you are going to ask some questions only to group x while the others are requested to listen.

5 Ibid

Including biographical aspects

Focusing on biographical aspects is important in order to make better understandable how opposing worldviews and political positions relate to difference personal/family experiences. This can be done e.g. through storytelling, for example. Ask participants to draw a picture of how their personal or family experience (including friends', parents' or grandparents' lives) have shaped their individual political beliefs. Ask them to present and explain their pictures and the respective life stories one by one. Allow questions for better understanding and compassionate comments by the others. However, don't allow discussions about the truth of the stories or the validity of the subjective interpretation. For a detailed description see Splinter/Wuestehube 2017.

Approaching Blind Spots

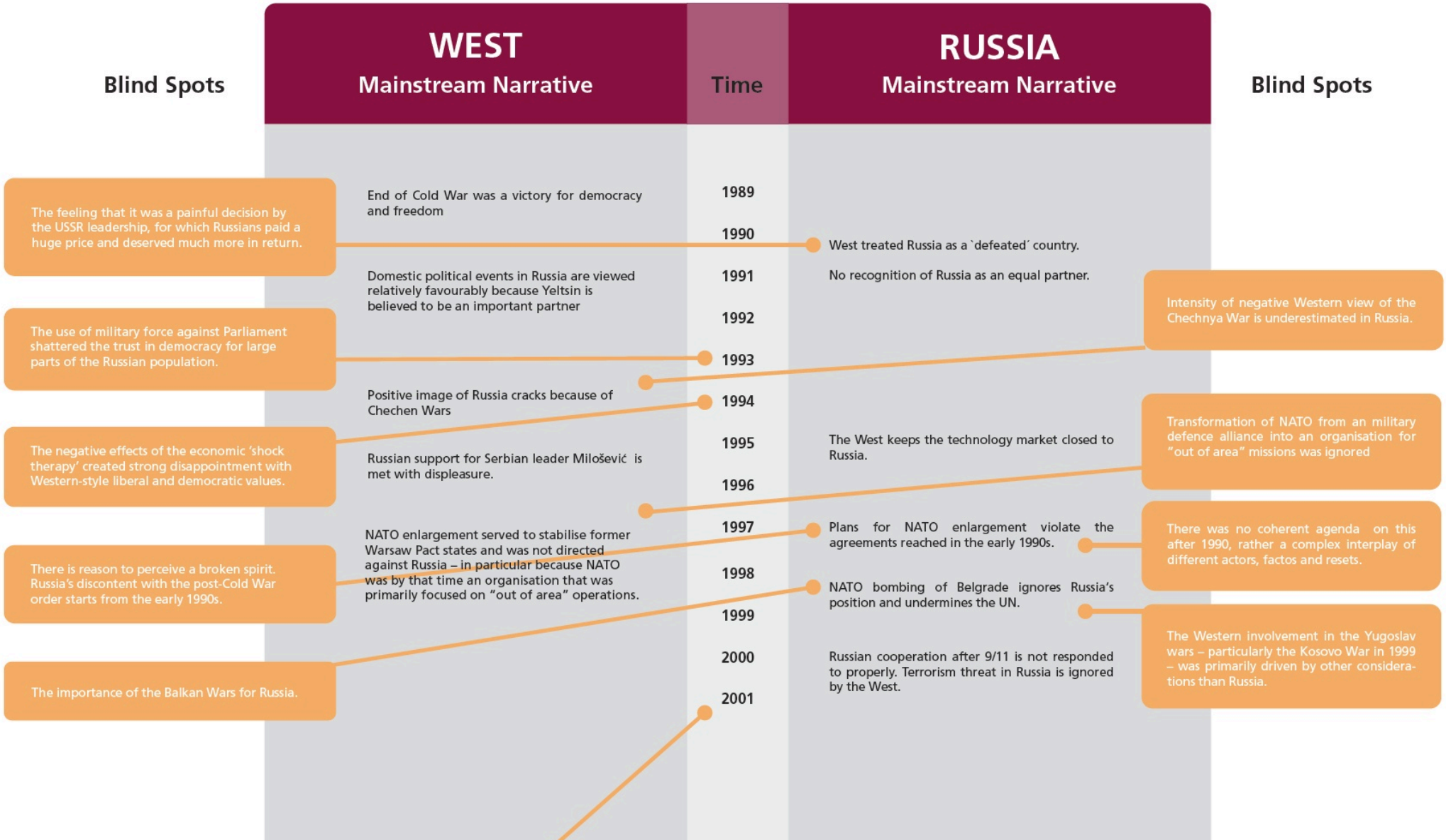
The blind spots approach was used in the first year of the project series in 2018, during the bilateral German-Russian dialogue. The 20 workshop participants compared the two competing mainstream historical narratives in Russia and in the West and discovered "**collective blind spots" – events that figured prominently in the narrative of one side, but were overlooked or neglected in the narrative of the other side.**

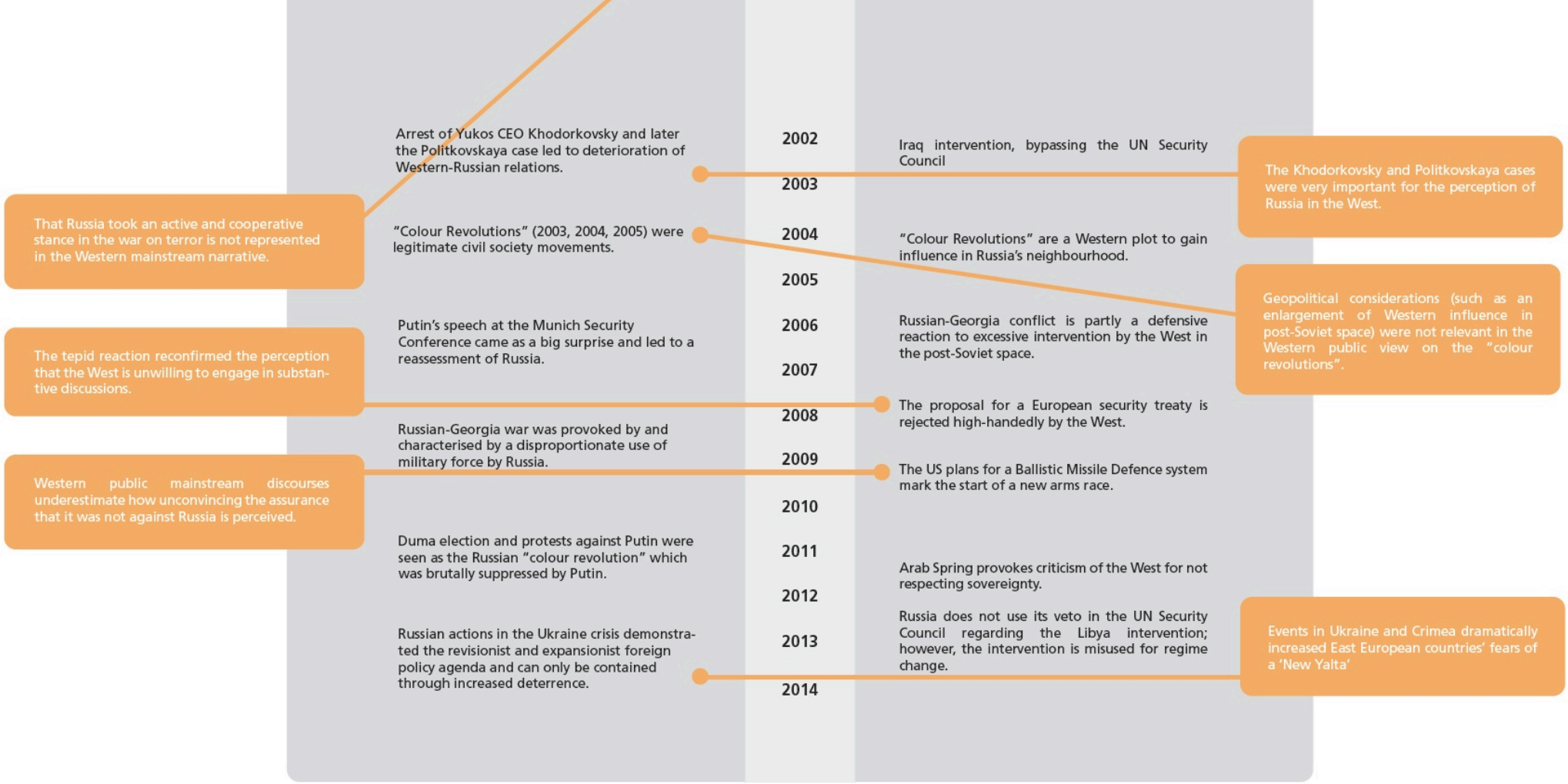
By focusing on these blind spots, the German-Russian dialogue allowed constructive debates about the narratives without aiming to put the blame for what went wrong since the end of the Cold War exclusively on the other side. The dialogue rather tried to better understand the other perspectives and develop 'historical empathy'[6]. The aim of the two workshops was not to produce a shared narrative or to convince others to share a competing narrative, but rather to add more nuances and historical context to the increasingly poisoned and politicised debates on the historical process leading from cooperation to confrontation. The finding of "collective blind spots" does not come about by chance and, of course, if each side – be it the West or Russia – stays within the realm of its own particular narrative it is impossible to identify "blind spots". Consequently, the finding of "collective blind spots" arises from a particular method. "Blind spots" come about when contrasting mainstream narratives are read in parallel and compared with each other.

The approach was carried out in three stages:

- **First**, the dialogue group outlined the mainstream narratives that were dominant at that point in the general public (in our case: Russia and the West), using methods of de- and reconstruction of narratives outlined above.
- **Second**, the group identified blind spots by comparing the two deconstructed narratives.
- **Third**, the group jointly worked on key takeaways that arose from the process and the results of the dialogue. One focus may be the question how blind spots could be avoided in the future.

6 On "historical empathy", see Nünlist et al., Road to the Charter of Paris, p. 31; O.L. Davis Jr. et al. (eds.), Historical Empathy and Perspective Taking in the Social Studies (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001).


Blind Spots
WEST
Mainstream Narrative
Time
RUSSIA
Mainstream Narrative
Blind Spots
The feeling that it was a painful decision by the USSR leadership, for which Russians paid a huge price and deserved much more in return.
End of Cold War was a victory for democracy and freedom
1989
1990
West treated Russia as a `defeated´ country.
Domestic political events in Russia are viewed relatively favourably because Yeltsin is believed to be an important partner
1991
No recognition of Russia as an equal partner.
The use of military force against Parliament shattered the trust in democracy for large parts of the Russian population.
1992
1993
Intensity of negative Western view of the Chechnya War is underestimated in Russia.
Positive image of Russia cracks because of Chechen Wars
1994
The negative effects of the economic 'shock therapy' created strong disappointment with Western-style liberal and democratic values.
1995
The West keeps the technology market closed to Russia.
Russian support for Serbian leader Milošević is met with displeasure.
1996
Transformation of NATO from an military defence alliance into an organisation for "out of area" missions was ignored
1997
Plans for NATO enlargement violate the agreements reached in the early 1990s.
There was no coherent agenda on this after 1990, rather a complex interplay of different actors, factos and resets.
There is reason to perceive a broken spirit. Russia's discontent with the post-Cold War order starts from the early 1990s.
NATO enlargement served to stabilise former Warsaw Pact states and was not directed against Russia – in particular because NATO was by that time an organisation that was primarily focused on "out of area" operations.
1998
NATO bombing of Belgrade ignores Russia's position and undermines the UN.
1999
The Western involvement in the Yugoslav wars – particularly the Kosovo War in 1999 – was primarily driven by other considerations than Russia.
2000
Russian cooperation after 9/11 is not responded to properly. Terrorism threat in Russia is ignored by the West.
The importance of the Balkan Wars for Russia.
2001


Arrest of Yukos CEO Khodorkovsky and later the Politkovskaya case led to deterioration of Western-Russian relations.
"Colour Revolutions" (2003, 2004, 2005) were legitimate civil society movements.
Putin's speech at the Munich Security Conference came as a big surprise and led to a reassessment of Russia.
Russian-Georgia war was provoked by and characterised by a disproportionate use of military force by Russia.
Duma election and protests against Putin were seen as the Russian "colour revolution" which was brutally suppressed by Putin.
Russian actions in the Ukraine crisis demonstrated the revisionist and expansionist foreign policy agenda and can only be contained through increased deterrence.
2002
2003
2004
2005
2006
2007
2008
2009
2010
2011
2012
2013
2014
Iraq intervention, bypassing the UN Security Council
"Colour Revolutions" are a Western plot to gain influence in Russia's neighbourhood.
Russian-Georgia conflict is partly a defensive reaction to excessive intervention by the West in the post-Soviet space.
The proposal for a European security treaty is rejected high-handedly by the West.
The US plans for a Ballistic Missile Defence system mark the start of a new arms race.
Arab Spring provokes criticism of the West for not respecting sovereignty.
Russia does not use its veto in the UN Security Council regarding the Libya intervention; however, the intervention is misused for regime change.
That Russia took an active and cooperative stance in the war on terror is not represented in the Western mainstream narrative.
The tepid reaction reconfirmed the perception that the West is unwilling to engage in substantive discussions.
Western public mainstream discourses underestimate how unconvincing the assurance that it was not against Russia is perceived.
The Khodorkovsky and Politkovskaya cases were very important for the perception of Russia in the West.
Geopolitical considerations (such as an enlargement of Western influence in post-Soviet space) were not relevant in the Western public view on the "colour revolutions".
Events in Ukraine and Crimea dramatically increased East European countries' fears of a 'New Yalta'

Using asynchronous online dialogue tools to work on a joint text

In **asynchronous dialogues** – as opposed to synchronous (mostly video-based) events – individuals can join in independently at any given time. This provides for even more flexibility and a big number of people can engage. Many attempts have been made in the recent years to use the internet for this type of online dialogue. However, in most cases it just gives the opportunity to citizens to state their opinion on a topic. If this is used for a public dialogue, the tendency is that – just as in social media – provocative comments and hate speech come to the surface. Moderation would be needed but is not practical when dealing with a large number of statements. Statements tend to stay on the level of positions and do not focus on underlying interests and needs as would be necessary for a real dialogue. The added value of asynchronous dialogue lies rather in the fact that they provide an opportunity to generate in a transparent manner a sort of opinion poll. In a best-case scenario, creative ideas for the solution of a given problem can be collected (www.policykitchen.com) or the structure of pro and contra arguments can be mapped and visualised in a systematic manner (https://schnaq.com).

However, when it comes to **decision-making**, few tools exist. Most online-dialogue formats – and the same is true for joint collaboration on a document via google docs or similar apps – would regularly deliver many comments and suggestions but no way of structured decision-making. DelvyDialogue (www.delyv.de) is one of the few existing tools trying to facilitate decision-making. It requires registration in order to participate and attempts to create a safe space in this way. In a modified version it could be used in a **semi-anonymous** way, revealing the identity of a participant only to the organisers but not to the other collaborators. In sensitive and hostile contexts, this could facilitate a more open exchange where individuals do not expose themselves too much. The core feature of delvy is a mechanism to rank/assess the suggestions of others, not with a binominal yes/no-vote but with a consensus-oriented 'graded consent' ("I agree"/"I am okay with this/disinterested"/"I disagree but would tolerate"/"I veto this") which is based on the systemic consensus principle (https://pollunit.com/en/questions/20/how-can-i-make-decisions-online-through-systemic-consensus). In case of contradicting suggestions on a proposal, one can rank the different suggestions or make an agreement-request. An algorithm automatically inserts the option into the text that (according to the ranking of others) is closest to a consensus, while all other options can still be seen and voted upon.

The tool was developed and tested in the context of a Ukrainian-Russian-German dialogue and used for the joint work of about twenty individuals on a joint publication. It is available as an open source software and anyone can upload texts for joint collaboration (https://demo.delvy.de/users/sign_in).

In order to mitigate the risk of provocative statements, which undermine mutual trust in asynchronous dialogues, peer-moderation could be a cost-effective solution. Experienced members of a dialogue group could volunteer to be moderators who either unlock each and every comment or react on complaints about insulting statements made online. They would contact the authors of those statements and assist them in reframing the problematic statements in a mediation-like way. They would deal with vetoes in a similar way, trying to mediate between the concerned individuals (online/telephone or face-to-face), which is needed as a default alternative to automatic mechanisms of decision-making.

Mind Map and Cognitive Map Method for Narrative Investigation (Ekaterina Chimiris)

Participants: Moderator and up to 10 participants.
Target Group: Wide audience, student groups as well as expert sessions.
Result: The structured mind maps of several narratives on one issue.
Materials: flipcharts, markers of different colours, stickers and sheets of coloured paper
Time: 80 min

1st Round (15 min) ***Preliminary Brainstorming Session***

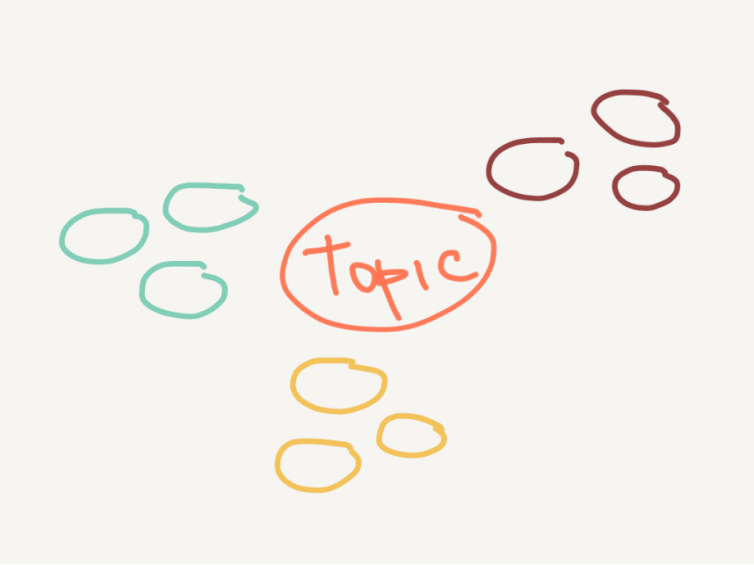
The group engages in a brainstorming session, while the moderator writes down the main ideas on coloured stickers or sheet of papers and puts them on the board.

The the main topic for brainstorming and discussion is put in the centre of the board, and all the stickers with ideas are arranged around it in a more or less structured way, forming branches. **One branch – one subtopic**.

Useful questions to enforce the creativity process are:

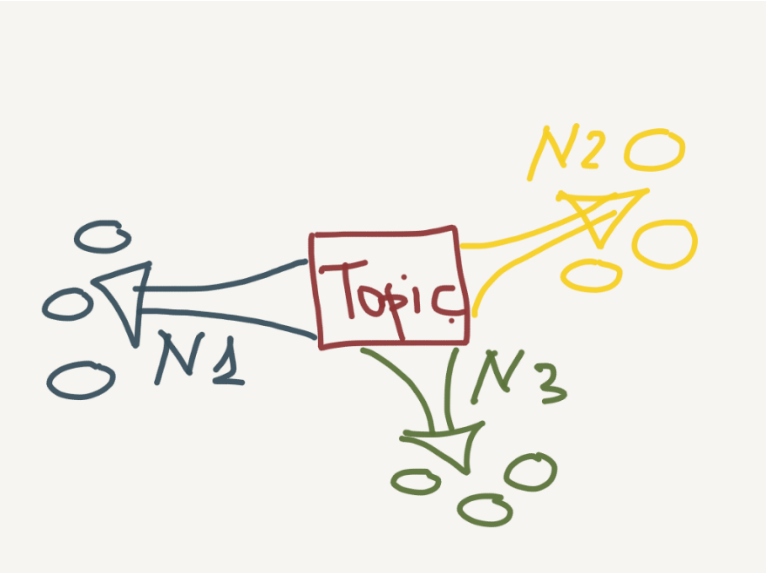
1. Who are the main stakeholders in the situation? What are their goals?
2. What were the main events?
3. What were the reason for these events?
4. What are the results and effects of these events?

The result of this round of discussion will be a collection of ideas written on stickers and arranged on the board.



2nd Round (10 min) ***Finding Out the Main Narratives***

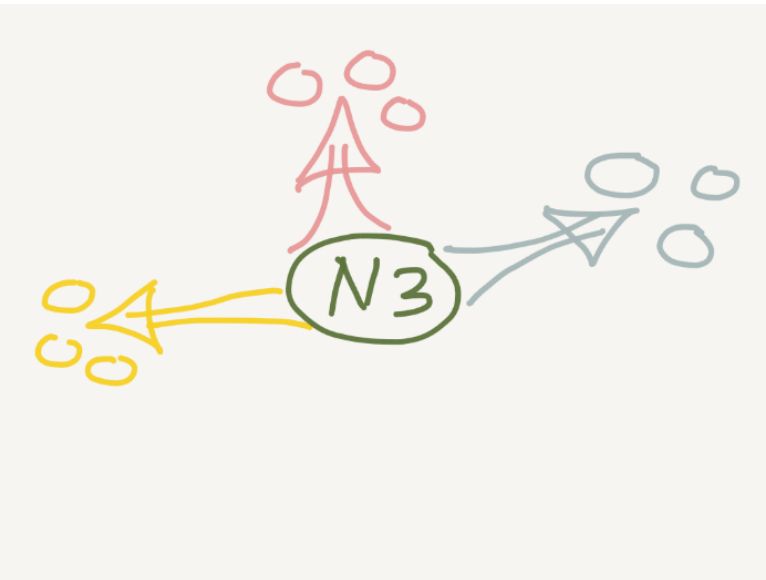
The participants, with the help of the moderator, discuss the results of the brainstorming session. Their task is to structure the results and to identify the main narratives. Perhaps the moderator will restructure the stickers. One branch – one narrative.



3rd Round (20 min) ***Brainstorming on Narratives***

The main group is divided into small subgroups – each one chooses the narrative it wishes to discuss. They take a separate board or flipchart and proceed to brainstorm on additional facts and details regarding the narrative.

The name of the narrative is placed in the centre and additional ideas, names, facts are arranged around it. The main task is to structure the ideas and facts into a tree structure. **One branch – one subtopic**.



4th Round (15 min) ***Presentation***

All the groups unite in one room and present the results of their work. The mind map for each narrative will help to show the full complexity of the ideas. The task of the moderator is to highlight the common or opposite ideas and facts in confronting narratives.

5th Round (20 min) ***Cognitive Map for all the Narratives***

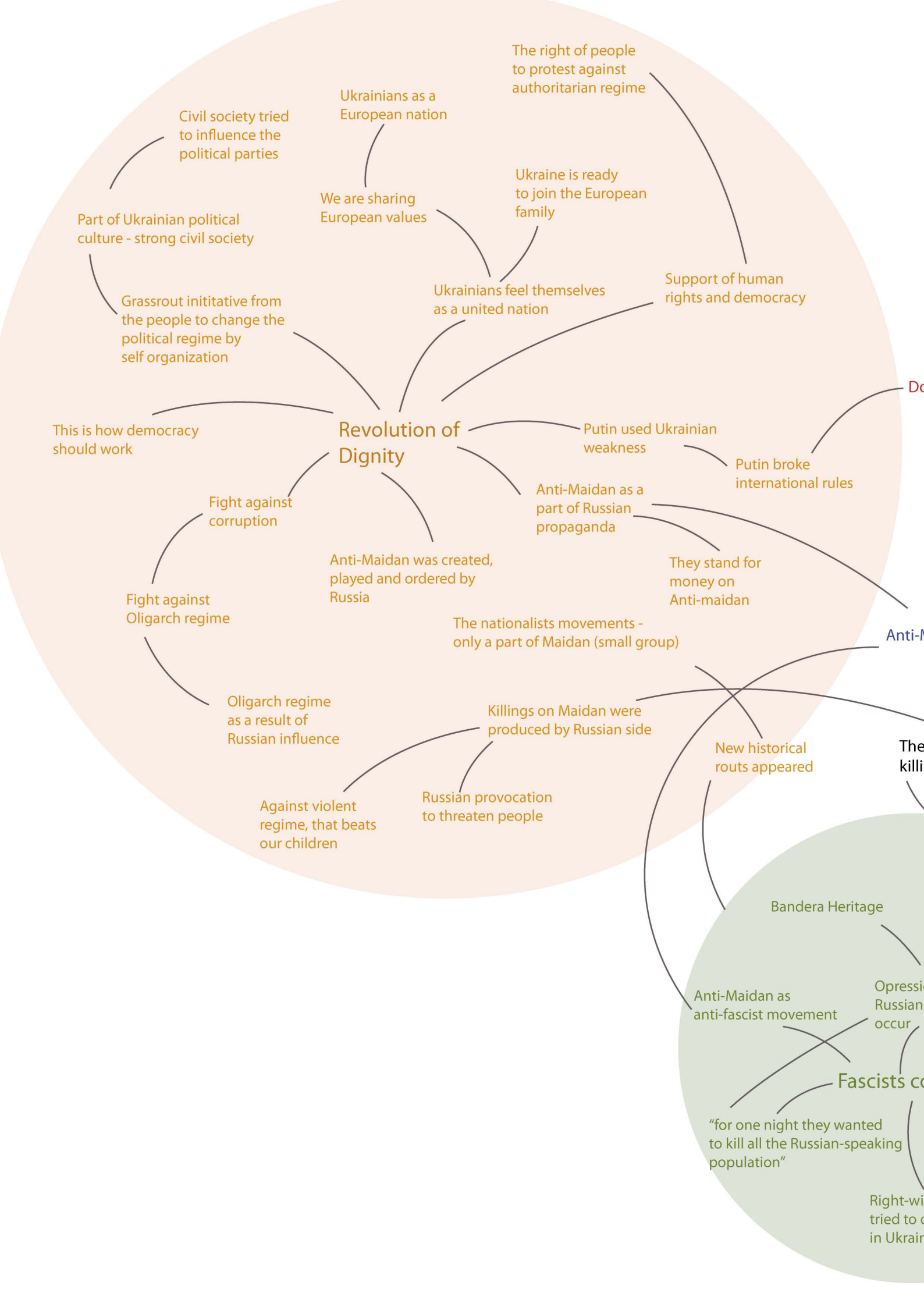
The main task of all the participants is to reflect on several narrative mind maps and to build one common cognitive map.

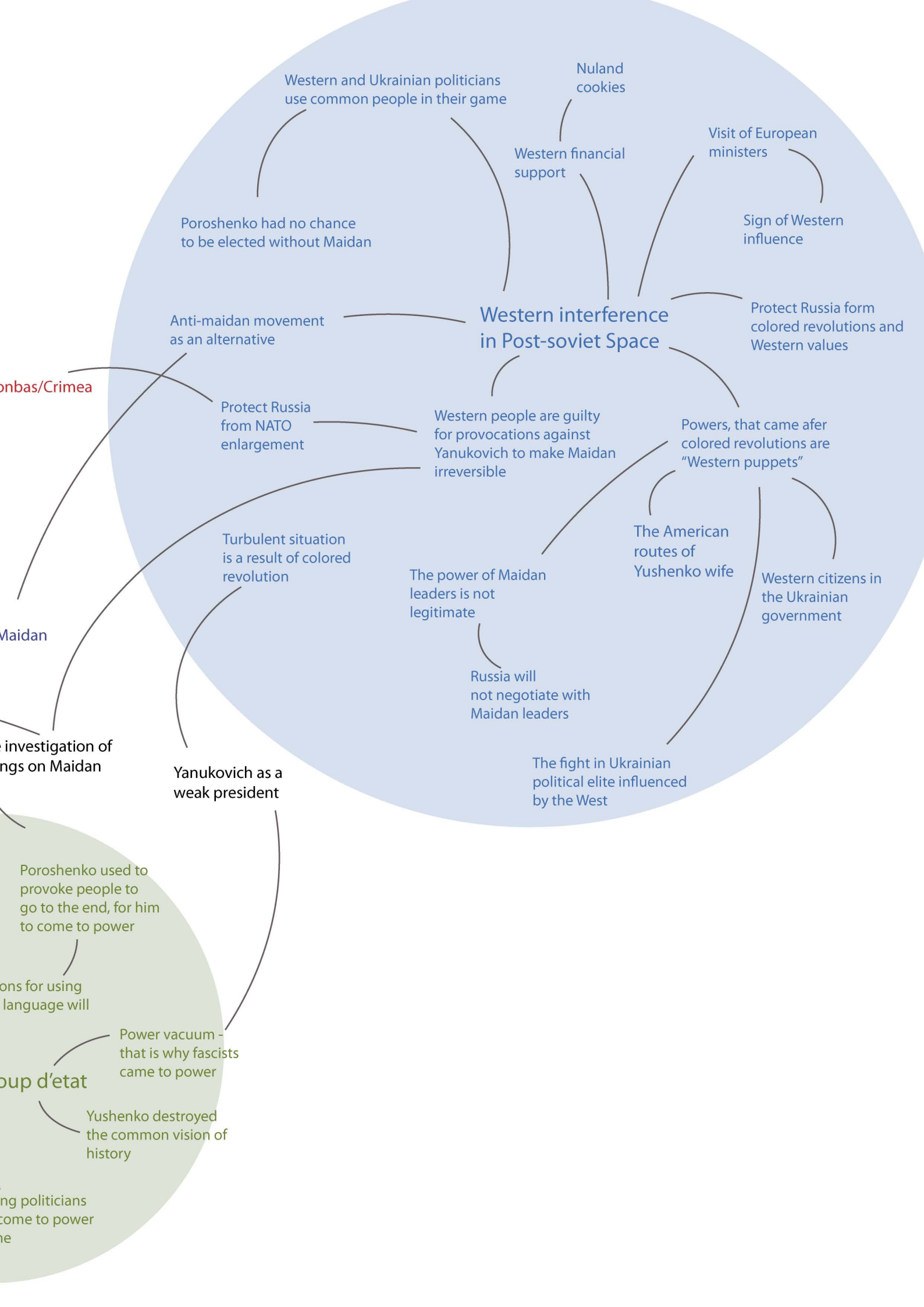
*The main difference between the mind map and cognitive map is that the facts and ideas in the mind map are arranged in a hierarchical structure, whereas in the cognitive map they are presented as a network.

The moderator put all the separate narrative mind maps on one board. The task of the group is to find:

1. What are the common facts, ideas, names in all narratives?
2. How we can connect the ideas and facts in narratives?
3. Where we can find places for potential dialogue between narratives?

After the session, the results should be transformed to a digital format – some special open source programs may be used (for ex. yEd Graph, etc.).


The right of people to protest against authoritarian regime
Ukrainians as a European nation
Civil society tried to influence the political parties
Ukraine is ready to join the European family
We are sharing European values
Part of Ukrainian political culture - strong civil society
Support of human rights and democracy
Ukrainians feel themselves as a united nation
Grassrout inititative from the people to change the political regime by self organization
This is how democracy should work
Revolution of Dignity
Putin used Ukrainian weakness
Putin broke international rules
Fight against corruption
Anti-Maidan as a part of Russian propaganda
Anti-Maidan was created, played and ordered by Russia
They stand for money on Anti-maidan
Fight against Oligarch regime
The nationalists movements - only a part of Maidan (small group)
Oligarch regime as a result of Russian influence
Killings on Maidan were produced by Russian side
New historical routs appeared
Against violent regime, that beats our children
Russian provocation to threaten people
Bandera Heritage
Anti-Maidan as anti-fascist movement
"for one night they wanted to kill all the Russian-speaking population"


Western and Ukrainian politicians use common people in their game
Nuland cookies
Western financial support
Visit of European ministers
Sign of Western influence
Poroshenko had no chance to be elected without Maidan
Western interference in Post-soviet Space
Protect Russia form colored revolutions and Western values
Anti-maidan movement as an alternative
onbas/Crimea
Protect Russia from NATO enlargement
Western people are guilty for provocations against Yanukovich to make Maidan irreversible
Powers, that came afer colored revolutions are "Western puppets"
Maidan
Turbulent situation is a result of colored revolution
The American routes of Yushenko wife
The power of Maidan leaders is not legitimate
Western citizens in the Ukrainian government
Russia will not negotiate with Maidan leaders
investigation of ngs on Maidan
Yanukovich as a weak president
The fight in Ukrainian political elite influenced by the West
Poroshenko used to provoke people to go to the end, for him to come to power
ons for using language will
Power vacuum - that is why fascists came to power
oup d'etat
Yushenko destroyed the common vision of history
ng politicians come to power
ne

Checklists and basic communication tools for dialogue (Dirk Splinter, Ljubjana Wuestehube)[7]

Checklist for planning dialogue processes

- ☑ A well-founded **conflict analysis and clarity about the goal/strategy of the dialogue** are the first steps: who should talk to whom about what and why? What exactly is to be achieved? Which actors are relevant? On which level of society (track) should the dialogue take place? Is it possible to involve several tracks at the same time? How else will the impact be broadened? Will the conflict parties be invited together right away or will individual discussions take place first?
- ☑ **The earlier, the more promising**: do not wait until the situation has escalated before inviting people to a dialogue. Break the vicious circle of postponing dialogue for too long precisely because the issue is so conflictual - which only increases the conflict.
- ☑ Allow **more time than you think will be needed to assemble the appropriate dialogue group**. Those who come on their own and can be approached at very short notice are not necessarily the ones you need. Often, due to time pressure, dialogue groups have to be put together at the last minute, which unfortunately achieves little in the end. Expect that identifying, selecting and approaching suitable participants with individual approaches, etc. will take much longer than initially assumed.
- ☑ Think carefully about what can/should be negotiated and what not. Especially if you, as the 'initiator', provide this leeway. Make sure that all parties are **transparently** informed about these margins and agree to them. Otherwise, the dialogue will be perceived either as a fig leaf or as superficial! Ask the parties in advance what they expect from the dialogue and what their limits are.
- ☑ **Do not expect a linear process**. Setbacks and multiple back-and-forth decisions by the actors on how to start the dialogue are normal. See this as an opportunity to add depth to the dialogue. Remain flexible in planning and build in intermediate steps or individual work within the parties. Approach the difficult issues slowly.
- ☑ **Involve relevant bodies, stakeholders and affected people in the planning process**. After all, you do not only want to talk to those who are easy to talk to, but also to the 'difficult' groups. For this, it is highly relevant who issues the invitation to the dialogue. Is the inviting organisation considered sufficiently neutral and credible? Involving other organisations as organisers, patrons, supporters can help to reach groups of people to whom you would not have access on your own.
- ☑ **Make sure you are inclusive and include the so-called 'hardliners' as much as possible**. Involving people (groups) who behave destructively and may not even be interested in constructive problem solving makes dialogue more difficult, but the better we succeed in involving them, the easier the implementation of the results becomes later. Of course, this has limits, because there are circles of people who want to disrupt the dialogue. Neverthe-

7 Translated from: Splinter, D./Wuestehube, L. (2020) pp 298 – 305.

less: go to the pain threshold. Perhaps 'hardliners', if not sitting directly at the table, can at least be persuaded not to torpedo the dialogue through symbolic gestures, individual discussions and accompanying events. Or invite so-called 'proxies', people who do not formally represent the group in question, but who are close to it and communicate with it.

- ☑ **Be aware of 'trench warfare' within the groups represented**. Whether it is a citizens' initiative, an armed rebel force or a political party, there are often strong ideological, strategic and/or personal tensions and fragmentation within the groups. If you invite only the representatives of one group, it is likely that the other side will act against it - at the latest when you are trying to implement results. Therefore, try to invite several representatives of the internally conflicting parties or ensure that there is constructive debate on the issue within the parties as well.
- ☑ **Avoid 'one-day events'**, i.e., individual events that stand alone. Dialogues that take place regularly or recurrently over a longer period of time achieve more impact in the long run. External communication is also important. If possible, interim results and final documents should be made available to the public in order to have a broader impact and to promote further dialogue. Find the balance between confidentiality, which gives participants a safe framework, and transparency – creating public relations.
- ☑ **Systematically plan follow-up activities**: Your dialogue group alone usually cannot promote major social change. But it can show in joint events, publications and activities that understanding is possible. It can incorporate the results of the dialogue into political processes, journalistic work, art and culture. Make sure that this can happen in the early planning stages. This plays a central role, especially with regard to the selection of suitable persons for the dialogue. Allow time for planning such activities within the dialogue process.

Checklist for facilitation

- ☑ **Ensure a suitable seating arrangement** in which the conflict parties do not sit confrontationally opposite each other at large conference tables, for example. In a circular arrangement everyone can see each other as equal dialogue partners. An amiable remark at the beginning can help to counteract the discomfort that this may cause to some ("Are we in a kindergarten morning circle?"). Concentric circles or half circles are a good compromise for more than 25 people. If the number of people is well over 50, an alternative seating arrangement (for example, many small tables in the room) makes it easy to form small groups as the event progresses.
- ☑ **Engage in meta-communication**: talk about how to talk to each other. Collect the participants' expectations in this regard (if time allows) and develop a framework for the dialogue. This can also refer, e.g., to rules for breaks, mobile phones and taking photos. Be sensitive to certain taboos and linguistic sensitivities. If you think about possible 'red buttons' of all parties in advance, you can avoid them yourself and have an alert ear for subliminal aggression in the group.
- ☑ If necessary, **clarify confidentiality** with the dialogue participants in advance. Establish concrete rules and explain them. Ask for everyone's consent and, if necessary, get it in writing. Especially in the case of sensitive topics or if people are already putting themselves in danger by participating in a dialogue, you must absolutely guarantee this form of security.

- ☑ **Disturbances**, i.e., irritations, **have priority**. However, this does not mean that everyone can put their own sensitivities above those of everyone else at all times. You are the 'boss in the ring' and at the beginning you ask everyone for permission to intervene so that you can step in if the conversation gets out of hand. In this way, you provide security for the participants, protect them from attacks by the other party and set limits if necessary.
- ☑ **Avoid lists of speakers** where the floor is given in the order in which people have asked to speak (or - not uncommon at conferences - have their name badge placed upright in front of them). This leads to long unconnected speeches and lengthy repetitions. The conversation breaks up, in-depth questions to explore the background of the opinions become impossible. If there is no other way, make do with a 'flexible list of speakers' in which at least those contributions that relate directly to what has been said before are given preference.
- ☑ **Structure as much as possible**. **Use different methods** of setting up small groups in order to bring as many different people as possible into in-depth discussion with each other. Think carefully about which questions it would be helpful to ask the working groups. Use methods such as the fishbowl (see above), empathy lists of conflict perspective analysis, open space, world café or scenario building.
- ☑ Despite all the planning and structuring: **stay flexible**. Be prepared for things to turn out differently than expected and for the eventuality that you may have to develop a new strategy spontaneously. Remain open to the demands of the situation. Dialogue is more than a series of methods. And if you can't go any further, murmur groups, in which the participants talk briefly (e.g., for 3 minutes) in threes with the person sitting next to them, allow everyone to 'let off steam' and refocus.
- ☑ **Summarise statements again and again**. This avoids misunderstandings, participants feel understood and are more willing to understand others. **Ask deepening questions** about what is behind a statement. Often positions and actions of one side are not comprehensible to the other side or to yourself. Open empathic inquiry about the emotions, desires and fears behind these attitudes and actions often makes the 'plausible reasons' for problematic behaviour understandable after all.
- ☑ **Remain impartial**: actively support all parties equally in articulating their needs and goals. Equally does not mean equally long! This is not a TV duel. Rather, it means: until it is clear what is at stake. If you find a participant unpleasant or demanding, assume that there are 'good reasons for bad behaviour' and adopt the inner attitude of a researcher: it is interesting to find out how and why others think and act in a certain way.
- ☑ Create **space for biographical narratives**. Often a person's convictions can only be understood against the background of their life story (and that of their parents or grandparents, if applicable). This does not justify problematic behaviour, but it does allow for more constructive interaction.
- ☑ **Pay attention to the body language** of both yourself and the participants. This can often give you clues as to how people feel about certain statements and, for example, address participants who do not agree with a statement. But be careful: body language is subjective and its interpretation is individual. So, take non-verbal expressions as clues for good questions and do not try to 'see through' others. Keep an open and approachable body posture yourself. Participants are sensitive observers and feel taken seriously or rejected by you also because of your gestures, facial expressions and posture.

☑ **Moderate as a team.** In co-moderation it is usually easier to support even larger groups in leading the discussion. You also have the option of splitting the group and then working in more manageable groups with one facilitator each. If the atmosphere is so charged that even small groups are better off not discussing without facilitation, then work with an appropriate number of facilitators in the team.

Checklist for dialogue partners and participants in a dialogue

☑ **Speak for yourself**: Do not hide behind generalisations and platitudes such as "It is normal that ...", but say what you are really concerned about. This helps to avoid misunderstandings. It is also important to express and show your own emotions, both for yourself, so that you do not 'sit on them', and for the other participants in the dialogue. Emotions are the bridge to mutual understanding. Others may not understand your beliefs and actions, but they can often understand the emotions involved and thus better understand your behaviour.

☑ Find a **balance between honesty and openness versus diplomacy** and what you think you can expect from yourself in the current moment. Excessive authenticity can turn into pushiness or naïve self-revelation, too much diplomacy into façade-likeness and intransparency.

☑ Enter the inner mode "I want to listen and understand the **'1,000 good reasons of the other side for their bad behaviour**'". Try to free yourself from judgement and especially devaluation. It is amazing what we learn about others and ourselves through good listening that is otherwise easily overheard. And remember: understanding is not the same as agreeing!

☑ **Take three deep breaths** when you are so outraged, provoked or offended that you feel like shooting back verbally. Some people find it helpful to count to 10 inwardly or to think of a certain inner image. Wanting to launch a counter-attack when you yourself feel attacked is a normal human defence measure. However, this usually leads to an escalation spiral. It is more effective, and therefore more helpful for the person who feels attacked, to first remain calm.

☑ **Summarise what your counterpart has said before**. This is especially true if they are angry or disagree with what has been said. Summarising is the only convincing proof to your partner that you are really listening and not already preparing your own next argument. Suitable sentence starters are e.g. "If I understand you correctly, do you mean ...?" or "So you are concerned with ...?", "For you it is important that ...?". Be sure to leave room for the speaker to correct him/herself or your summary, because this is how a clarification process begins. This requires a lot of self-discipline.

☑ After the summary: misunderstandings can be cleared up more easily, rejection can be formulated more precisely and agreement with certain arguments of your counterpart can be expressed in a more differentiated way. Your own arguments become more focused as a result. **If you find something understandable, say so!** If you show your counterpart understanding in certain aspects, this will also be more likely to happen the other way round.

☑ **Express your anger**, disappointment, despair and concern. Use, for example, the well-known four-ear model of the communication scientist Friedemann Schulz von Thun, the model of non-violent communication according to Marshall Rosenberg or our 'complete messages'. The following sentence starters can help: "When you said y just now, I felt. ... ",

"Every time you say / do x, ... then I feel...". This makes the factual level and the inner experience as well as relationship wishes or boundaries transparent. The messages become 'complete'.

- ☑ **Avoid killer phrases** such as: "That's normal", "That's not possible", "You can't ask that question like that" and also insinuations such as "As a reasonable person you would have to ...", "If I were in your position, I would also talk my way out of it. In doing so, you will only provoke defensive reactions in your counterpart, which will impair their willingness to talk.
- ☑ **Don't let yourself be taken for a ride by the rhetorical tricks** and killer phrases of the other side. Stay objective and on topic, explain the background of your position again. If necessary, switch to the meta-level and address rhetorical tricks as such.
- ☑ **Pay attention to your body language**: stay turned towards your counterpart and maintain as open an attitude as possible. However, do it in such a way that you are still comfortable. In this way you signal your willingness to talk and at the same time literally put yourself in a position to listen attentively.

Narrative Interviewing as alternative to the workshop setting (Georg Albers, Yulia Nikitina, Iryna Starovoyt, Olena Zakharova)

In the framework of the German-Russian-Ukrainian dialogue process, a working group conducted a sub-project on narrative interviewing.

Rationale

The German-Russian-Ukrainian dialogue opened up space for exploring, understanding and debating different narrative versions of political events and their processing in private, personal and political discourses. In order to intensify the dialogue, involve more actors and deepen the understanding of narratives, it was agreed to conduct the subproject on narrative interviews.

Within the context of a dialogue and peacebuilding initiative, we understand narrative interviewing to be an element of intervening practice. In other words: the purpose of the interviews in this context is not primarily to collect data on different narratives but rather to retell, differentiate and enrich the existing narratives. By conducting the interviews in a narrative way, the main objective is to open up space for dialogue. It is the opposite of generalization: only a "rich" and detailed story provides opportunities for others to relate to it. In other words: similarities can be only found in two opposing narratives if the stories contain the viewpoints, effects, values etc. that are behind them.

An indicator for success is the willingness of interviewees to participate in future narrative dialogues, in particular with "representatives" of opposing perceptions and views.

Scope

The sub-project was conceptualised as a test of the methodology in order to develop a tool for future follow-ups. Therefore, particular attention was paid to qualitative issues such as guiding questions, setting, analysis etc. The result was a revised version of the interview guide and a vision for how to utilize narrative interviewing in the future and in different contexts.

Thematic issue

Out of the different narratives we chose to focus on the "Donbas conflict", since this is currently the most escalated conflict.

Target group

The interviewees were persons from track 1 or track 1,5. A precondition was that they be (to some degree) both professionally and personally affected by the Donbass conflict. We refrained from interviewing people who would just "echo" an official perspective because their professional function simply did not allow for the integration of personal perspectives.

General setting

- The interviewee was interviewed by someone from a different country. The purpose of applying this principle was to create some "alienation"; interviewees are encouraged to explain, differentiate and reflect on their narrative without being able to assume that the interviewer understands because he/she has a same or a similar cultural background. So, the interview situation was itself already a dialogue situation – with the interviewer being equipped by the setting to "listen to learn".
- The interviewee talked in his/her native language. This required a translator from German/Russian/Ukrainian into English. It would have been possible within the technical frame of an online interview to translate simultaneously. However, a *consecutive* translation is and was more appropriate here since
  - it gives the interviewee time for reflection during the translation of his/her own narration;
  - it slows down the process, giving time for the interviewer as well to think about the best follow-up question during the "non-listening" time;
  - it allows the interviewer to pay attention to the way the interviewee talks and to body language;
  - it symbolizes the need to listen to each other and demonstrates the dialogue nature of the situation.
- The initial contact, the communication with the interviewee, the trust building phase etc. were done by the fellow project participant in the respective country.
- In addition to the interviewer and the translator, the fellow "countrymen/women" was also present at the interviews in the role of notetaker.
- Confidentiality: There were different requirements for confidentiality depending on the interviewee:
  - Some wanted to keep everything confidential, even the fact of the interview and the name of the interviewee;
  - Some were OK with sharing their names and an oral report for fellow project participants without putting it in any publication;
  - Some were OK with sharing names and (written) notes about the interview with project participants and maybe even putting them in a publication;
  - Some were OK with the interview being recorded (without being published as such).
- The level of confidentiality needs to be agreed upon during the trust-building phase. It might happen that there are different levels of confidentiality among the interviewees. However, since the scope is not to conduct research there is no aiming at comparability, but search for space for dialogue. It has proven to be good practice to share everything, even the handwritten notes at the end of the interview with the interviewee, this could be done as well with a transcription of the interview before moving on with anything else.
- The translator needs to be trustworthy, committed to confidentiality and trained in the methodology. It is crucial for him/her to understand the nature of the questions and the purpose of the interview. The interviewee needs to trust this person as well, so we need to take that into account when setting up the actual interview team.

Interview Guide (attached)

- The interviews were given direction by means of guiding questions. There was and should be no (controversial) discussion with the interviewee at any point.
- Standard communication techniques were active listening, paraphrasing and summarizing.
- The summarizing technique was utilized not at the end of the conversation but soon after the interviewee has stated something important.
- Four categories of "inquiry" were employed in the narrative interviewing concept/approach, which was inspired by narrative mediation.[8]
- These four categories provided a structure and framework for the conversation.
- It is important to understand that these four categories were and in general are not necessarily worked through in one given order. In fact, the interviewee may jump between the categories and sometimes comes back to issues which already have been touched upon.
- The conversation should "feel" like a normal conversation. It is not an investigative conversation!
- The categories and the questions work like a scaffold. Like climbing on a real scaffold, you could move up and down, back and forth. In other words: thinking about and answering one particular question may stimulate thinking and answers to other categories.

Important principle: if the interviewee focused on political events only without any reference to personal issues, we asked guiding questions which prompted to integrate the personal aspects; if the interviewee talked primary about personal experiences, we added questions on political events and his/her take on it.

- Technically, we started with an introduction of all persons involved, the framework in terms of purpose, time, roles, confidentiality and of course the right of the interviewee to terminate the interview at any time.
- The starting question after this was a short trigger question: tell us about what happened and what happened to you since the conflict in Donbas broke out.
- We allowed for some uninterrupted storytelling before following up with some guiding questions.

Takeaway and experiences

- The methodology proved to be functional and helpful, despite all the constraints due to the online format. In particular, body language is very difficult to read in online interviews. However, we can recommend this way of interviewing as a preparatory step in those many cases where physical meetings are not possible.
- Interviewees from track 1 or 1,5 are often not used to integrating a personal perspective in their answers, in particular if they consider emotional bias as unprofessional. With additional encouragement and explanations of why these aspects matter for a "dialogical" purpose, it was possible in our project to integrate this perspective in a productive way.

8 Winslade, John / Monk, Gerald 2000: Narrative Mediation. A New Approach to Conflict Resolution. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass; White, Michael 2007: Maps of Narrative Practice. New York, London: W.W. Norton and Company

- The role allocation – interviewers not coming from the same country as the interviewees, and letting countrymen/women be responsible for the trust-building phase – worked quite well. In the introduction phase during the interview, it proved to be helpful to hand over the responsibility to the interviewer.
- Even if the interviewee is able to understand/speak the language of the interviewer translation should be provided. Nuances and differentiation of meaning are richer if expressed in the mother tongue. The translation can serve as a double check for correctness of understanding and as an additional trust-building activity.
- In our project we used the methodology for settings with just one interviewee. It is important to note that this can be used in multi-party interviewing as an element of a dialogue and mediation session. Our approach is very useful in situations where preparations have to take place, physical encounters are not possible and trust in the facilitators and mediators have yet to be built. Additionally, it can be used in caucus situations when separate talks make sense for process designs reasons.
- Extensive training for the interviewing team makes sense. In order to make the interview feel like a normal conversation for the interviewee the categories for inquiry need to be internalized by all members of the interviewing team. This is particularly important for the translator, who is an integral part of the process and needs to understand the rationale of the undertaking. Translation here is far beyond technical reasoning; it is in fact a form of mediation.

Attachment: Interview guide

Overview:

Phase/Purpose	**Task/Questions**	**Remarks**
Naming and characterizing	Agreeing on a definition of the problem that is rooted in experience	As opposed to a generic/global definition, such as “armed conflict” or “forced migration”, we are looking for a definition which exactly reflects the situation of the interlocutor. But: do not push – if the answer is not available right away, it may pop up later!
Effects and connections	Mapping the effects/ influence of the conflict/ problem	
Evaluation	Evaluate/take a position on the effects	This is an invitation to pause, reflect on these developments of their live and share it. It is as though the interviewee iswriting an “editorial” about his/her life. It is important to ensure that the interviewee has the opportunity to articulate the

Phase/Purpose	Task/Questions	Remarks
		complexities of their position on the effects of the problem. Do not make assumptions here since we do not know – the evaluation will be most likely beyond just good and bad, black and white etc. The events gone through and the narrative evolving likely will have a complex outcome and assessment – it is important to register these for future conversations! The conflict has a "function" and we will get a glimpse of it here (hopefully).
Justification of the Evaluation	Inquiry into the "why" of the interviewee's evaluation	This is about the interlocutors understanding his/her purposes, aspirations, goals, quests, commitments, like • Value(s) in life • Knowledge about life and life skills • Prized lessons and realizations Furthermore, it may help to think about positive identity conclusions. Justification does not mean challenging the evaluation! This is *not* about a moral judgement!
Naming and characterizing	*Negotiation of a definition of the problem rooted in experience* • What would you call what is going on? • Do you have a name for the problem? • If you would tell your story to someone who does not know anything about the conflict and does not know you – what would be the headline? • If the problem were a character – what kind of character would it be?	Conflict as a problem General reference: the conflict and what it means to the interviewee. The definition/name should be as individual and subjective as possible. The name of the problem should be written on a flip chart/separate screen so that it is visible all times. When during the conversation the name gets changed/more precise, change it. Maybe: history/novel chapter grid?

Phase/Purpose	Task/Questions	Remarks
	• What would you call this whole cycle of events that has happened to you? • If you would have to write your autobiography covering the time since the conflict broke out – what would be the title? • If this biography since the conflict broke out had chapters, what would they cover and what would be the title of those chapters?	
Effects and connections	*Mapping the effects/influence of the conflict/problem* • When the X (name of the problem) takes control, what does it have you doing? • How does it affect your actions? • How does it affect your relationship with others? • What other areas of your life does it affect? • How does it affect your relationship with people who do not have the same experience/point of view? • How does it affect your hopes for life? • How does it affect how you see the future? • What does it tell you about the sort of person you are? • How does it affect how you see yourself in your community?	Important from now on: in terms of language and translation: treat the problem as a third party! The various aspects of living are of interest Avoid at this point an assessment/evaluation of whether the effects are good or bad. Priority should be given to the effects as such.

Phase/Purpose	Task/Questions	Remarks
	• How does it affect how you see yourself as a member of this society? • How much has it dominated your life? How much has it dominated the life of your community? (Scaling question here maybe appropriate) • What effect would a good friend say it had on you? • What difference would a person notice who last met you before the conflict broke out and will meet you again next week?	
Evaluation	*Evaluate/take a position on the effects* • What's that like for you? • Do you see some of these effects as a good thing or as a bad thing or something else? • What in these effects is a positive or negative development? Or would you say both, or neither of these? Or would you say an in-between development? • How do you feel about the described effects? • What out of the described effects is ok with you, what is not? • When you look at it in five/ten years' time - what do you think will be your assessment/evaluation • Will it be/what will be different or the same?	

Phase/Purpose	Task/Questions	Remarks
Justification of the Evaluation	*Inquiry into the "why" of the interlocutor's evaluation* • Tell me why you don't like the effect this is having. • Can you tell me a story about your life that will help me to understand why you don't like the way this problem is affecting things? • What is it that you want for life that this is spoiling? • What hope or ambitions is the problem sabotaging? • Tell me about how you would like to live your life/relationships instead of the way the problem has you living it? • What is it about this way of living that is important to you? • Why do you feel this way about the developments? • Guess what others (relatives, friends etc.) would answer about your justification.	These questions may take some time to be "digested" and answered. Do not try to fill silence if the interlocutor does not respond/answer immediately! The "I do not know" answer will be very likely here, at least in the beginning. It may be helpful to come back to important effects of the conflict on his/her life. Another option: provide as examples answers that other interlocutors have given as a response.

Annex

The background and development of the Contested Narrative Dialogue approach (Larissa Kunze)

The Contested Narrative Dialogue approach was developed by inmedio peace consult gGmbH in the framework of a German-Russian and a German-Russian-Ukrainian dialogue process in co-operation with the Institute of Law and Public Policy, Moscow, and the NGO Ideas for Change, Kyiv. The dialogue process consisted of several consecutive dialogue activities between summer 2018 and January 2021. In order to offer a better understanding of the practical background in which the methodology developed, we briefly outline the three consecutive stages of the dialogue process:

First stage: 2018 bilateral dialogue

The radical divergence between competing historical narratives concerning the evolution of European security since 1989 is a crucial impediment to finding a way out of the mutual confrontation between Russia and the West and a return to diplomacy, dialogue and cooperative security.

Therefore, it is necessary to first deconstruct these narratives in order to make dialogue on future-oriented cooperation possible. For this purpose, we invited 20 experts from academia, thinks tanks and NGOs as well as journalists and cultural exchange/dialogue practitioners with prior knowledge and expertise on historical narratives. Using a mediative dialogue approach, they met near Moscow in September 2018 and in Berlin in November to analyse and reflect on the Russian and Western narratives on what went wrong since the end of the Cold War regarding the deterioration of Russian-Western relations.

By reconstructing the core threats identified in the Russian and Western mainstream narratives from a meta-perspective, a number of collective 'blind spots' (a term for events that figured prominently in the narrative of one side, but were overlooked or neglected in the narrative of the other side) could be identified. Blind spots can serve as 'bridges of understanding', because by directing the focus of attention on aspects of a conflict narrative where a shift of perspective – stepping into the other side's shoes and relating to the emotional meaning – seems to be comparably easy and possible without compromising on one's own core values.

Discussing the events in Ukraine in 2013-14, we concluded that it is misleading to speak about a "Western" and a "Russian" narrative, as there are supporters of both narratives in Russia and in "the West". Rather, we see a dichotomy of two narratives: "Russia is the aggressor" versus "Russia is the protector". In addition to reconstructing these narratives, the focus was put on aspects which are overlooked in both narratives. We realized that most of these aspects relate to the internal dynamics of the conflict actors, e.g., time pressure for EU institutions for domestic reasons; the focus of public attention in EU countries on the Yulia Tymonshenko case during most of 2013; the regional power struggle involving local politicians in Crimea; the complex and thus unpredictable mix of protesters at Euromaidan. Both the blind spots and these aspects of an 'internal dynamics narrative' can serve as bridges of understanding.

The results from the 2018 dialogue process were published in the joint paper "Blind Spots".

Second stage: 2019 trilateral dialogue

In the first stage, it became very obvious that most discussions and narratives circled around the events in Ukraine in 2013-14. As a logical conclusion, we decided that it was necessary to invite Ukrainian participants and experts in a follow-up dialogue, in order to incorporate Ukrainian narratives and perspectives into the process.

We deemed it important to start with separate national kick-off workshops in order to build trust between the facilitators and the participants. The 1.5-day workshops took place in September and October 2019 in Moscow, Kyiv and Berlin. The idea of starting with separate workshops proved to be very useful, especially with regard to the Ukrainian subgroup. The possibility to talk openly about one's own narratives and the pros and cons of a dialogue with the Russian side in a nationally homogeneous group proved to be indispensable for building trust.

A first important moment of the change of perspective came from the following exercise: We had asked the Russian participants to collect their own 'red buttons' (things that would provoke one from the other side) as a preparation for the dialogue, as well as what they suspected to be 'red buttons' of the Ukrainians. At the end of the kick-off in Kyiv, we did the same exercise with the Ukrainian group and then showed them (with permission obtained in advance from the Russians) the corresponding flipcharts we had worked on in Moscow. It was striking for us, but especially for the Ukrainians, how congruent the mentions were.

In November, the group of 18 experts from academia, think tanks and NGOs as well as journalists and dialogue practitioners from Germany, Russia and Ukraine met in Berlin for a trilateral dialogue workshop. Besides their expertise in e.g., security, international affairs, sociology or discourse analysis, many members of the group had a Russian-Ukrainian family background. Many had been affected themselves by the events around the violence on the Maidan square in Kyiv, the war in Donbas, political repression or family separation due to the existing conflicts – or their ancestors have been victimized, e.g.by the Great Famine/Holodomor or the persecution under Stalin. The group was selected in such a way that different political beliefs and attitudes and professions from all three involved countries would be represented. Our dialogue process started with a visual reconstruction of a timeline of events going back in history for more than 1,000 years. In an interactive process, it was agreed to focus on the following five events seen as most relevant for fostering an in-depth understanding of the narratives regarding Ukrainian-Russian-Western relations: Holodomor/the Great Famine of the 1930sand its impact on the idea of Ukrainian independence; 1991 – different perceptions on the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Ukrainian independence; attempts and failures of cooperation with NATO; competing narratives on the Euromaidan of 2013/14 and the events in Crimea and Donbas since 2014.

In intense group work, we reconstructed the most relevant narratives regarding those events, trying to grasp their inherent inner logic. We considered not only the mainstream narratives, but also the diverse variety of narratives held by different parts of society in the respective countries. The aim was certainly not to agree on one narrative. Rather, the aim was to help the societies concerned to better understand the differences between the existing narratives.

The results of the 2019 dialogue process were published in the joint paper “Gaps and Overlaps”.

Third stage: 2020/2021 dissemination of results and outreach activities

The objective of the third stage was to disseminate the results and findings of the previous two years of dialogue. The participating experts from Germany, Russia and Ukraine were the key actors in this process, highly motivated and engaged as changemakers in their countries.

The goal of the project was to contribute to depolarising and objectifying societal debates on conflict narratives by strengthening the willingness of actors to think about the historical perspective of the other side – especially with a focus on actors who are sceptical about dialogue and who influence public and political discourses in the target countries.

Due to the ongoing restrictions caused by COVID-19, we had to make far-reaching changes to the content of the project. During a series of online workshops between June and the end of August 2020, the new project activities were elaborated in a multi-stage participatory process with all participants and the partner organisations.

Due to the fact that the costs for the originally planned kick-off workshop in Berlin (travel costs, room rental etc.) were not incurred, it was possible to allocate the part of the budget originally planned for this to the project activities of the participants. The following additional activities took place:

Podcasts

A team of experts with previous journalistic experience under the professional direction of participant Andreas Westphalen created a podcast on the personal experience of the impact of dialogue approaches. This was recorded in German, Russian and Ukrainian and resulted in an appealing contribution of about 45 minutes. The participating experts from the current and previous project years were interviewed. They explained their own view and experience of dialogue on conflict narratives. They focused on the personal change of perspective and its influence on the life and work of the participants. The podcast was underpinned by professional reports on the impact logic and methodology of our dialogue approach. This was also intended to reach dialogue sceptics. The aim of this sub-project was to process the personal experience of the impact of dialogue and make it accessible to a broad audience. (Available in Ukrainian, Russian and German at www.contested-narratives-dialogue.org.)

Narrative Interviewing

A Russian-Ukrainian-German team of experts conducted narrative interviews with people who are professionally and personally affected by the conflict in Donbass. The activity aimed to determine how the personal narratives are interwoven with the respective public (mainstream) narratives on the conflict (see chapter by Georg Albers et al).

Expert workshops and focus group discussions

The face-to-face dialogue workshops originally planned in Germany, Russia and Ukraine all took place online or in a hybrid format due to the coronavirus pandemic. The great benefit of the online approach was the increased inclusivity, which led to the participation of new audiences and an overall increase in the number of participants.

Between July 2020 and January 2021, more than a dozen workshops and focus group discussions were facilitated by our experts in Germany, Russia and Ukraine. They reached a broad au-

dience, from university students, to political advisors, think tanks, the mediation community and the broader public. The workshops were always conducted in cooperation with other institutions and resource persons from at least two of the three participating countries. These were, amongst others: the Russian International Affairs Council, the National Kyiv Mohyla University, the National Institute for Strategic Studies Ukraine and Kharkiv National University, the National Research University Higher School of Economics, St. Petersburg, the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv and the Institute for Law and Public Policy in Moscow.

The feedback from participants was characterised by a great interest in the approach, results and methodology.

Practical example: re- and deconstructing narratives and finding blind spots around the topic of 'Dissolution of the Soviet Union' (Andreas Westphalen, Sergei Akopov, Yulia Kaplan)

1991– Dissolution of the Soviet Union and Ukrainian Independence

Although the event of the dissolution of the Soviet Union is in itself an undisputed fact, it triggers extremely different narratives.

Russian narratives

Looking back from 2019 to 1991, we can clearly see the end of the Soviet Union as the topic of a contested narrative for contemporary Russia. Two distinct narratives can be identified in relation to that event.

The Dissolution: a catastrophe narrative

The official Russian narrative represents 1991 in a very negative way. It pronounces it a catastrophe. Already back in 2005 Russian president Vladimir Putin characterized the dissolution of the Soviet Union as "the collapse" and a major geopolitical disaster of the 20th century. This narrative emphasizes how after the fall of the USSR many ethnic Russians overnight appeared to be outside of Russia, their motherland.

The latter situation led to various forms of relative deprivation of Russian-speaking diaspora left outside of Russia. This included issues of deprivation of certain political (including voting) rights, especially in comparison with the local "native" population.

Regretting the collapse of the Soviet Union and economic hardships that came upon Russia after 1991, the Russian narrative describes the process of the disintegration of the USSR as unfair, particularly because Soviet people spoke in favour of preserving the USSR in the 17 March 1991 Referendum, in which 77.85% of Soviet citizens positively answered the question: "Do you consider it necessary to preserve the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as a renewed federation of equal sovereign republics in which human rights and freedoms of any nationality will be fully guaranteed?"

While at the point of the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the USSR the Russian government did not negotiate with the former Soviet *republics* borders of the so called "historical" or "Big Russia", it expected to preserve with them close "brotherhood relations".

Russia's self-confidence that it "did its partners a favour" when it did not negotiate borders of the former Russian Empire after the end of the Cold War and collapse of the USSR can be seen as a "blind spot" in Western and Ukrainian narratives about Russia. In their 2003 book,[9] James Goldgeier and John McFaul noted that "even after December 1991… Russia's political and territorial definition, its very identity, was still uncertain".

The Russian official narrative about the collapse of the USSR as a story of Russia's frustration, *exclusion, and even humiliation developed into the idea of Russia's loneliness in current world politics.*

While for Ukraine and other newly independent states the collapse of the USSR can be seen as a fresh start, for the former Russian Empire its disintegration was largely perceived as a defeat, partially driven by the personal rivalry between the President of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev, and the newly elected President of Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, Boris Yeltsin. The blaming of Gorbachev for the defeat of Soviet Union is evidently another blind spot in the Western narratives about the events of 1991.

The view that Russia's independence from the Soviet Union creates a weird "You-cannot-be-independent from-yourself-feeling", can be interpreted as part of a narrative of identity crisis due to the heavy burden of responsibility for the Soviet 'colonial' and ideological past. The latter identity crisis was aggravated by a feeling of incompleteness, after its "brother-Ukraine" started its quest for membership in the EU and NATO.

Alternative narratives in Russia

In the early 1990's, the fall of the USSR was narrated by Russian liberal parties as a victory of freedom and the defeat of the totalitarian regime. It was seen as an achievement of which Russian can and should be proud: "I am also grateful to Russians for their courage and patience. They should take a great deal of credit for the fact that the world community is breaking with its totalitarian past," said Boris Yeltsin at the UN Security Council on 31 January 1992. Among the achievements of society after the fall of the USSR were the loosening of ideological control in culture and sciences, freedom of speech (*Glasnost*), the lifting of the iron curtain and the opportunity to travel, full rehabilitation of the repressed victims of Stalin's regime, the introduction of capitalism and the liquidation of food storages. In respect to the latter, even then the President of Russia Dmitry Medvedev in 2011 noted that "Russians of his age are probably the "happiest generation" for being able to appreciate how far the country has travelled since the empty shop shelves of the dying Soviet era". However, today, in 2019, it's hard to call this 'liberal' version of the story a full-fledged narrative, perhaps, because liberal parties have significantly reduced their influence both in public and international spheres, but also because many of their leaders approve the dismantling of the Communist regime, but regret the political and economic disintegration of the "big Motherland".

9 James M. Goldgeier/Michael McFaul:Power and Purpose: U.S. Policy toward Russia After the Cold War. Brookings 2003.

"Why you, Ukraine?": The unexpected-divorce-narrative

This narrative in a way connects the two above-mentioned ones because it has overlaps with both, but has a different focus: it emphasizes that for many Russians, the Ukrainians' wish to separate came very unexpectedly because Russian-Ukrainian relations were seen as very positive before 1991. Supporters of this narrative would say that in late Soviet times it didn't matter whether one was Russian or Ukrainian, there were many family ties and mixed backgrounds. Although paternalistic views on Ukraine did exist in Soviet times, for many Russians in daily life it felt as just one country. That's why the separation came as an unexpected divorce and left many with no understanding of why. Some perceived it as a loss, some even as a betrayal by certain politicians who manipulated public opinion in favour of independence for their own vested interests.

Ukrainian narratives

In Ukraine there are mainly two narratives concerning the dissolution of the Soviet Union. One focuses on the independence of Ukraine. The other puts its emphasis more on the new economic possibilities.

Dissolution of USSR = Independence of Ukraine

The creation of an independent Ukraine is the main prism through which Ukrainian society looks at the fact of the Soviet Union's dissolution. The general focus is on Ukrainian "identity" as a key narrative.

The decision for Ukraine's independence was supported by an overwhelming majority - 90.3% at the all-Ukrainian referendum on 1 December 1991. (In the earlier referendum of the USSR on 17 March 1991, 70.2% of the Ukrainian SSR inhabitants voted to preserve the Soviet Union, but as a federation of equal sovereign republics. However, this referendum didn't contain the independent state option. Compared to the other Soviet Republics, the Ukrainian SSR had the lowest support for preserving the Soviet Union, even as a federation. However, this referendum was boycotted in some Soviet Republics, namely Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Georgia, Armenia and Moldova, so its legitimacy has been questioned.)

The independence of Ukraine is perceived as a long-awaited result and a consequence of the centuries-old struggle for an independent Ukrainian state. It is seen as part of a process of Ukrainian identity. Also, the independence of Ukraine made it possible for the country to free itself from pressure on and restrictions of Ukrainian culture, language, history etc. within USSR co-existence. This narrative sees Russian/Soviet policy vis-a-vis the republics as neo-imperialism and thus the reason for the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union.

For Ukraine, gaining independence and a national identity created the opportunity for a new approach to forming bilateral relations with the Russian Federation as the interaction of completely equal and independent partners. Ukraine and Russia were good neighbours (until 2014). And Ukraine, from its point of view, did a lot to build and maintain constructive relations.

New opportunities for Ukraine

This key narrative is about advantages or new opportunities to get rid of negative aspects of the Soviet past – political repressions and restrictions of human rights and property. This process became more obvious and widespread as a result of Gorbachev's policy – access to the taboo pages of Soviet history, freedoms of speech, a new dimension of human rights protection.

A significant part of this narrative is a positive perception of the favourable economic conditions caused by the Soviet Union's collapse. First of all, the establishment of a liberal economy and, secondly, new economic opportunities. These are associated with the rejection of the socialist system and the transition to market relations. On the one hand, private property and entrepreneurship are factors of prosperity and equal opportunity for everyone. On the other hand, they provide opportunities for building new relationships between workers and authorities (specially for industrial regions). This can impact public policy and the protection of workers' rights through the political parties' help. Another aspect is the opening of borders for contacts with other countries. This enables business contacts, education and tourism. All of this provides new opportunities for the development of Ukrainian society in different fields: public, socio-economic, cultural, etc. The West is perceived as a reliable partner. The West is also perceived by Ukrainians as a neutral judge with respect to the current conflict.

The metaphor regarding the Ukrainian-Russian "family" is perceived with great irritation and disdain. "*If Russia is the older brother, I have already grown up*." However, more doubts than ever regarding "kinship" have appeared due to the armed conflict. "*Maybe we weren't even / never been connected*."

Western / German Narratives

In Germany and the West, perceptions differ deeply regarding the question whether or not the dissolution of the Soviet Union marks the end of the Cold War. By some, it is seen as the final victory of the West ("By the grace of God, America won the Cold War," as George H. Bush stated in his State of the Union speech in January 1992), the final victory of capitalism.

The opposing perception insists that the end of the Cold War had already taken place before the dissolution of the Soviet Union (it had already ended with the Charter of Paris and the NATO declaration in 1990) and that therefore these are two distinct events.

Independently of this fundamental question, there are in general in Germany and the West two distinct narratives about the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Narrative: End of the Cold War

This narrative is very much in favour of the numerous declarations of independence in the post-Soviet space and Eastern Europe. Especially from today's vantage point, the collapse of the Soviet Union is seen in this narrative as newly gained freedom and the possibility for a fresh start offered to many countries. This story is close and sympathetic to the narrative "Dissolution of USSR = independence of Ukraine" and quite indifferent to the question of how the dissolution was experienced in Russia.

Narrative: Gorbachev's resignation

In this narrative, the dissolution of the Soviet Union in itself creates ambivalent feelings or even indifference. The emphasis is rather on Gorbachev's resignation. From a German perspective the politics of Russia was very personalized and Perestroika less a mass movement than a "fragile flower" that needed its founding father Gorbachev. Therefore, December 25, 1991 remains in the collective memory not so much because of the dissolution of the Soviet Union but because of Gorbachev's resignation the very same day. This is because it was feared that without Gorbachev, all the positive changes in the world could easily be undone and the "wind of change" could very soon evaporate. The event of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the independence of many post-Soviet states such as Ukraine and the consequences for Russia are very much pushed to the background.

Even if partly forgotten today, "the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 was considered a mixed blessing by some Western capitals. For the many officials in the Bush administration, the collapse of the Soviet Union presented not so much an opportunity as a danger, a danger that everything the administration had achieved with Mikhail Gorbachev would go up in a puff of smoke."

One narrative that is prevalent in Germany (and the West) today should also briefly be mentioned: Seen from a distance of almost 30 years the dissolution of the Soviet Union seems not to be a big deal. This narrative sees neither its impact on Ukraine nor its impact on Russia sufficiently.

Collection of possible blind spots:

- In the West it is often forgotten that in the beginning the support for independence of post-Soviet countries (besides the Baltic states) was far from strong. In August 1991, US-President Bush told the Ukrainian parliament in Kyiv: "Freedom is not the same as independence."
- Those who have good memories of Ukraine-Russia relations in Soviet times often neglect the fact that paternalistic views did exist.
- Those who see mistreatment of dissidents etc. by Soviet authorities as anti-Ukrainian or part of neo-colonialism tend to overlook that it happened against Russians and others to a certain extent as well.
- The fact that Russia didn't insist on renegotiating the borders and the complicated issue of around 15 million Russians finding themselves living overnight outside the borders of Russia is often a blind spot outside Russia.
- The fact that Russia had to take the burden of the debts of the Soviet Union while Ukraine could financially start afresh is often a blind spot outside Russia. On the other hand, it is often overlooked in Russia that Russia received, in return for this, Soviet foreign assets.
- The events of the negotiations about the future of the nuclear weapons based in Ukraine create blind spots in Russia and the West.
- The problem of Russian identity, the question what exactly it should be independent of and the burden of Stalin's crimes is often a blind spot outside Russia. On the other hand, the fact that Russian independence also could be considered by Russia as liberation from a totalitarian past and to try a new fresh start is often a blind spot in Russia.

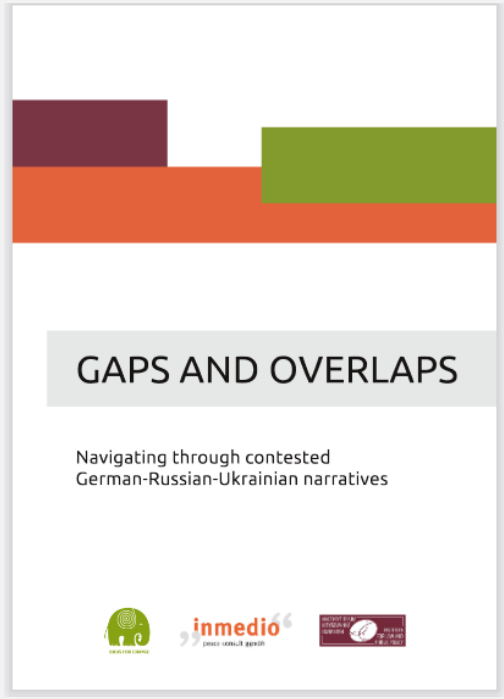
Conclusion

On a meta-level the very different narratives can be easily explained by the fact that even when one is talking about the very same event, the Ukrainian and the Russian focus is very different: while the focus of Ukraine is on its independence, the Russian centre of attention is Russia and the question of the near-abroad.

The reason why this topic triggers extremely different narratives and emotions is the fact that it is directly linked in Russia and Ukraine with the existential topic of identity. So even if the very complicated event of the dissolution of the Soviet Union triggers, especially in Ukraine and Russia, very strong and often contradicting emotions, the underlying issue of identity seems to be paradoxically quite easily understood empathetically by both sides. A bridge of understanding could be the deliberate effort to step into the other's shoes in order to realize how hugely different the emotional significance of the dissolution of the Soviet Union is for the other side.

Overview of Materials and Resources

The results of the 2018 dialogue process were published in the joint paper “Blind Spots”.



The results of the 2019 dialogue process were published in the joint paper “Gaps and Overlaps”.

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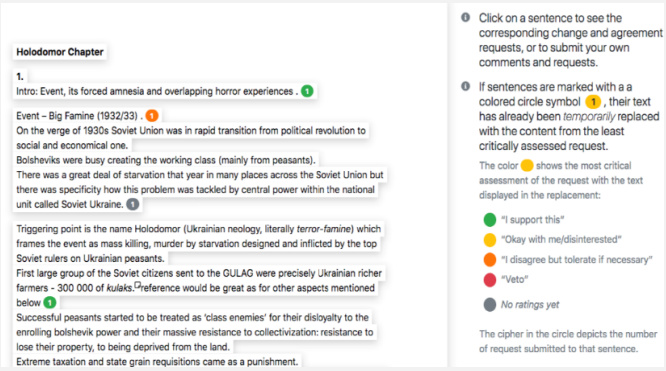
German-Russian-Ukrainian dialogue on contested narratives

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bz7z5nETyM

A brief explanatory video about the 2019 dialogue process.



https://delvy.de/

delvyDialogue facilitates consensus-oriented collaboration on a joint text. It is available as an open source program.

Podcasts (45 min.) by Andreas von Westphalen about the results and methodology of the dialogue are available in Ukrainian, Russian and German on www.contested-narratives-dialogue.org

All materials are also available on the online platform:
www.contested-narratives-dialogue.org

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