



RUSSIAN-WESTERN BLIND SPOTS:

From Dialogue on Contested Narratives to
Improved Understanding

Imprint

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Disclaimer

The Process is the Author

This report is the result of a collective effort by the participants in the Russian-German Dialogue Project 'Reflecting on Conflict Narratives'. It draws on a dialogue process of two workshops held in Moscow and Berlin in September and November 2018. All chapters in Part 1 have been intensely discussed within the group and reflect a broad consensus on the overall findings. As one workshop participant has framed it, the process is the author.

Nevertheless, not every single statement in this report necessarily represents the position of all conference participants or their institutions. While the report conveys the main themes, conclusions and recommendations, it is not a full account of the very rich and productive discussions. It aims to highlight the main points of convergence and divergence among the participants and to stimulate further work on historical narratives on European security and a possible way out of the current political stalemate.

The texts in Part 2 of this report also reflect on certain aspects of the dialogue, yet they are clearly authored by individual participants.

The project has been implemented and designed by inmedio peace consult gGmbH, Berlin, and the Institute for Law and Public Policy (ILPP), Moscow. It was funded by the German Federal Foreign Office under the 'Expanding Cooperation with Civil Society in the Eastern Partnership Countries and Russia' Programme.

This report is available for download in English and Russian at www.contested-narratives-dialogue.org.

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Disclaimer

Implementers and Advisory Board

inmedio peace consult gmbh is a non-profit consultancy and implementing organisation for mediation and dialogue projects. As the third member of the inmedio group, the organisation, which was founded in 2017, can draw on a wealth of experience from twenty years working in the field of mediation and mediation training. inmedio conducts mediation processes, mediation/dialogue projects and training events abroad for NGOs and governmental actors engaged in development cooperation, humanitarian aid and peacebuilding. In 70 extended mediation courses, inmedio has trained more than 1000 professional mediators. With its own projects and by supporting local initiatives through training and consultation, inmedio has been active in Nepal, Sri Lanka, South Caucasus, Ukraine, Egypt, Ethiopia and other countries in recent years. The founders and directors of inmedio peace consult, Ljubjana Wüstehube and Dirk Splinter, started their professional life as organisers of German-Soviet youth exchange programmes in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Inmedio is a member of Initiative Mediation Support, Germany (IMSD), an informal network supporting the systematic implementation of mediation in German foreign policy in regular exchange with the German Foreign Office. Publications, downloads, videos and references can be found on www.inmedio-peace-consult.org.

ILPP is a Moscow-based independent non-profit organisation, one of the leading Russian think tanks conducting research, educational activities and publishing in the sphere of constitutional and political processes since 1993. Until 2000, the Institute was part of the Moscow Public Science Foundation as a Centre for Constitutional Studies. The establishment of the Institute for Law and Public Policy (24 July 2000) was an important step on the way to meet the latter objective and create an “intellectual centre” that would unite the best Russian and foreign constitutionalists, professionals in the area of public law and experts in the area of administrative, legal and court reforms. In 2007, the Institute received a prestigious MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions. In 2014, it won a Main Prize of Yeltsin’s Foundation among the academic projects devoted to the 1993 Russian Constitution. Since 2009, the Institute has been a member of the International Association of Constitutional Law (IACL). The ILPP produces two academic periodicals – *Sravnitelnoe Konstitutsionnoe Obozrenie (Comparative Constitutional Review)* (since 1993) and *Mezhdunarodnoe Pravosudie (International Justice)* (since 2011).

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Executive Summary

The competing, radically divergent historical narratives on the evolution of European security since 1989 are a crucial impediment to a way out of the common confrontation between Russia and the West and the return to diplomacy, dialogue and cooperative security.

This report summarizes the results of a German-Russian dialogue project, which was implemented and designed by inmedio peace consult gGmbH (Berlin) and the Institute for Law and Public Policy, ILPP (Moscow) and funded by the German Federal Foreign Office under the 'Expanding Cooperation with Civil Society in the Eastern Partnership Countries and Russia' Programme. Using a mediative dialogue approach, 20 experts from academia, think tanks and NGOs as well as journalists and cultural exchange/dialogue practitioners 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.

Reconstructing the core threats of the Russian and Western mainstream narratives from a meta-perspective, a number of collective 'blind spots' that figured prominently in the narrative of one side, but were overlooked or neglected in the narrative of the other side, could be identified. They can serve as 'bridges of understanding', by focussing 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 2013-4, 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 mediative dialogue on the competing narratives applied here, and the future-oriented 'islands of cooperation' approach should be seen as distinct but complementary strategies. While the former naturally focuses on the past, the latter identifies possible small steps that

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can be made without returning to 'business as usual' and thus without addressing the fundamental differences from the past. Both will be more effective if disentangled. Although this report focuses on the narratives approach, some islands of cooperation are highlighted in Part 1, namely visa dialogue, EU-EAEU cooperation and military risk mitigation.

In our discussion about the portrayal of the other side in the media, we realized that a lack of knowledge about the structural differences in the media systems makes this sensitive type of conversation even more complicated. For that reason, an explanation of these structural differences is included in Part 2 of the report. Based on previous research, the role of populism in the entrenchment of the contested narratives is analysed in this report as well. It plays a relevant but different role in Russia and the West and it can thus be seen as a common challenge.

The features and added value of applying a mediative dialogue approach are outlined in the last chapter. Working with a rather small and continuous group for a rather long time (compared to traditional conference-style events) allows trust-building on a personal level, and rather than sequences of statements, this creates space for facilitated discussions, including the use of facilitation techniques, such as reformulation of statements, in order to bring about more clarity and mutual understanding (see Part 2).

If we do not want to let go of the vision of a positive turn, at some point the future we will need to arrive at a situation in which we are able to refer to the time period from 1989 until today without attaching blame to one side only. That does not mean negating the differences but finding a way of describing and interpreting them from meta-perspective. It is worthwhile preparing for this moment by starting already now to reflect on and analyse the competing narratives right now.

Part I

Introduction: What Went Wrong since the End of the Cold War?

The Ukraine crisis marks an important turning point in European security. The events in Crimea and Donbas since 2014 challenge the European security order that was established in the end phase of the Cold War in 1989-1990. Almost five years after the outbreak of the conflict, the war in Eastern Ukraine still goes on. But the Ukraine crisis has much deeper roots and is embedded in a much larger Russian-Western confrontation. In particular, it is not possible to understand the current crisis – that some describe as a new “Cold War” – without having a deeper look into contrasting historical narratives that are held in the mainstream public both in Russia and in the West.ⁱ

As was already made clear in the report “Back to Diplomacy” by the OSCE Panel of Eminent Persons, chaired by Ambassador Wolfgang Ischinger, the West and Russia have completely different views on the root causes of the Ukraine crisis and on the reasons why the cooperative spirit between Moscow and the West, as evidenced most clearly in the landmark CSCEⁱⁱ Charter of Paris in November 1990, eventually broke down between 1990 and 2014 and gave way to a path that led from “cold peace”ⁱⁱⁱ to “hot wars” in Georgia in 2008 and currently in Ukraine.

The competing, radically divergent historical narratives on the evolution of European security since 1989-90 are a crucial impediment to a way out of the current confrontation between Russia and the West and a return to diplomacy, dialogue and cooperative security.

Why Talk about the Past?

Basically, three overall strategies to tackle this problem can be observed. The first one is the call for comprehensive negotiations about a new security architecture, a return to the existing one, or a ‘new Helsinki’, as it is sometimes framed. However, this approach finds itself in a deadlock because from a Western perspective, first the Ukraine crisis needs to be solved first, and from a Russian perspective, first the West needs to accept the new status of Crimea. Secondly, there is a fear that this approach will become a ‘grand bargain’ between the big powers on the extent of smaller countries. Fears of a ‘new Yalta’ are triggered, particularly in East European countries. There is a perception that Russia wants to secure zones of influence, which the West insists must not happen.

i It goes without saying that there is no monolithic ‘West’. For a very nuanced analysis of the narratives, see for example, Wolfgang Zellner (ed.), *Security Narratives in Europe: A Wide Range of Views* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2017).

ii Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the predecessor of the OSCE.

iii See Boris Yeltsin’s speech at the CSCE summit in Budapest in December 1994.

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In reaction to this deadlock, a second strategy, often labelled as ‘islands of cooperation’, attempts to identify possible fields for cooperation – focusing on small steps, which can be realised even though there is no ‘business as usual’ on an official level, in order to keep lines of communication open, contribute to incremental trust-building and/or mitigate risks of military escalation. Applying this approach, it is agreed to not talk about the past, because that would quickly poison or end discussions. As a Task Force initiated by the Russian International Affairs Council and European Leadership Network had put it in a statement in July 2018:

“Every single principle underpinning the mutual relationship has been violated. Trust has completely broken down. Members of this Task Force themselves hold strongly differing positions about who is to blame. For many, responsibility lies squarely with Russia and is linked with its aggression against Ukraine. Others point, for example, to NATO’s enlargement eastwards as the primary source of instability. But focusing on mistrust or debating competing narratives do nothing to reduce rising risks. Whether one likes it or not, relations between NATO and Russia will persist. If the two sides are to mitigate current military risks, they must address common crisis management goals, despite their profound disagreements.”ⁱ

However, a third strategy would not agree with the last sentence: If one does not want to let go the vision of a positive turn, at some point we will need to arrive at a situation in which we are able to refer to the time period from 1989 until today without attaching blame to just one side or the other. That does not mean negating the differences, but finding a way of describing and interpreting them from a meta-perspective. It is worthwhile preparing for this by starting to reflect on and analyse the competing narratives right now, even though negotiations are blocked at an official level. This must not be seen as an alternative to the ‘islands of cooperation’ approach. On the contrary, both are needed and both strategies are likely to work better if done separately. It is nearly impossible to negotiate concrete measures while having the contested past ‘at the table’. Conversely, (self-critically) reflecting on the narratives while having to make decisions about specific steps forward will not work.

Generally, in escalated interpersonal and organisational conflicts which involve broken relationships and deep mistrust, it is a common strategy of mediators to focus on the time period when the relationship started to gradually deteriorate. That is because even if it may be impossible to ‘step into the other’s shoes’ regarding the level of escalation which has been reached, it is much easier to recreate mutual understanding on how things *started* to go

i Future of Greater Europe Task Force, “Towards a NATO-Russia Basic Understanding”, 10 July 2018, RIAC, <http://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/towards-a-nato-russia-basic-understanding/>.

wrong and how this – in hindsight – could have been prevented. This is not just a theoretical exercise but helps to redevelop trust.

Contested Narratives: Genuine or Strategic?

Time and again, it is argued that the narratives are guided by interests and are thus used strategically by governments in order to manipulate their own public. If that holds true, dialogue about narratives is a waste of time at best. However, while it is obvious that the conflicting narratives *are* used in such a way by some actors, there are many reasons to believe that at the same time, they are *genuinely* held by relevant parts of the public, even political actors and intellectual elites. Face-to-face dialogues help to provide a clearer picture in this regard, as pointed out in the report of an earlier expert dialogue:

“A particular advantage of this meeting was that many participants had not had the opportunity to engage with the others’ viewpoint first hand. The facilitation of interpersonal exchanges served to highlight that the Russian and western narratives are not simply products of official propaganda, but they often reflect deeply held beliefs reflecting well developed intellectual and legal perspectives.”ⁱ

Building on similar projects discussing the historical narratives on European security,ⁱⁱ this German-Russianⁱⁱⁱ dialogue project, funded by the German Foreign Office, applied a different method from conflict mediation. It brought together representatives from Russian and German civil society, think tanks, academia, and journalists. During two four-day workshops held in Moscow (16-21 September 2018) and Berlin (12-15 November 2018), the 20 workshop participants compared the two competing mainstream historical narratives in Russia and in

i Thomas Frear, Thomas and LukaszThomas; Kulesa, Lukasz (eds.): .), *Competing Russian and Western Narratives on the European Order: Is There Common Ground?* Conference report, (London/Moscow: European Leadership Network/Russian International Affairs Council, 2016.).

ii See Richard Sakwa, *Russia against the West: The Post-Cold War Crisis of World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Christian Nünlist et al., *The Road to the Charter of Paris: Historical Narratives and Lessons for the OSCE* (Vienna: OSCE, 2017); Wolfgang Zellner (ed.), *Security Narratives in Europe: A Wide Range of Views* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2017).

iii It seems to be inconsistent, yet is very deliberate, that a German-Russian group reflects on Russian-Western (not Russian-German) relationships. Germany clearly does not represent ‘the West’. However, we opted for a bilateral design, firstly in order to enable a variety of options from each country to be represented in the group but, secondly, because focusing only on German-Russian relations would have meant not talking the most relevant actors from a Russian perspective (US/NATO) and would have reinforced existing suspicion about creating a special German-Russian relationship.

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.**

The findings presented in this paper are the direct outcome of a dialogue process which was moderated applying a ‘mediative approach’. Certainly, dialogue among conflicting parties is a value in itself – if only for the sake of de-escalation. Due to its particular mediation-like methodology (see Part 2), the workshop therefore moved beyond a mere dialogue setting and came to a degree of common understanding that allowed the development of a jointly drafted text. It was the mediative approach – focusing in particular on mutual trust-building and intense communication – that channelled the group dynamic among the experts into a creative and productive procedure which generated the finding of “collective blind spots”.

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.’ⁱ 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 to each other (see also figure on page 22/23). This report follows this logic. First, it will outline the mainstream narratives that are today dominant in the general public in Russia and the West. Based on a comparison of these two narratives, so-called “blind spots” are identified – both for the West and Russia. Finally, the report identifies key takeaways that arise from the project and tentatively elaborates on how blind spots could be avoided in the future.

i 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).

Part I

The Competing Narratives

The Russian Mainstream Narrative on Russian-Western Relations: How is the Timeline Constructed?

If we turn to strategic documents,ⁱ official statements by top Russian policy makersⁱⁱ and analytical reports by think tanks close to the Kremlin,ⁱⁱⁱ we will find that the mainstream narrative on relations with the West is built around two main topics. The first one is *disappointment in Western partners*; the second is *the refusal of Western actors to recognise Russia as an equal partner*. Key events in the Russian-Western relations timeline are emphasised in accordance with these two topics. Placing the “focal points” mentioned in the indicated sources in chronological order, we find the following sequence: (A) Western positioning of the collapse of the USSR as a victory; (B) the war in Yugoslavia and the military intervention of NATO bypassing the UN Security Council; (C) NATO eastward enlargement in 2004; (D) colour revolutions in CIS countries; (E) obstacles to Russian business in the West (primarily related to the politicisation of the energy issue in the EU and the frustrated efforts by Russia to invest in Western companies); (F) Russian-Georgian conflict; (G) Libya and the Arab Spring.^{iv}

(A) As we mentioned, the narrative in question is built around the assumption that the Western powers have **no desire for equal dialogue**. In the sources considered, this argument is applied even in relation to the periods of Russia’s greatest openness to cooperation with the West. They include the early 1990s, 2001 (after 9/11) and 2009-2011 (“Russian reset”). Speaking about the collapse of the USSR and the early 1990s, Russian politicians and experts often note that the West initially treated Russia as a “defeated” country. They claim that the collective West demanded that Russia fully adapt to the “winner’s” rules, and at the same time did not create real opportunities for Russia’s integration into the international security system.^v

i On the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020, <https://www.prlib.ru/en/node/353849>; Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/Cp-tlCk6BZ29/content/id/122186.

ii Munich speech by Vladimir Putin, 2007; Vladimir Putin (2012): “Russia and the Changing World” in *Moskovskiy Novosti*.

iii Karaganov S. et al. (2011) *The U.S.—Russia Relations after the «Reset»: Building a New Agenda. A View from Russia*; Miller, A., Lukyanov, F. (2016): *Detachment Instead of Confrontation: Post-European Russia in Search of Self-Sufficiency*; Miller, A., Lukyanov, F. (2017): *Restraint Instead of Assertiveness. Russia and a New Era in World Politics*; Valdai Club’s Report: *The European Union’s Uncertain Future: What Should Russia Do?* (2017).

iv It is noteworthy that the campaign in Chechnya is considered an internal Russian affair and is not mentioned in these sources.

v See: Miller, A., Lukyanov, F. (2016): *Detachment Instead of Confrontation: Post-European Russia in Search of Self-Sufficiency*, p.4. https://www.kreisky-forum.org/dataall/Report_Post-EuropeanRussia.pdf

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(B) The next key episode in the narrative on changes in Russia's attitude towards the West is the **war in Yugoslavia and especially the bombing of Belgrade** in 1999.ⁱ This event is described as a violation of all norms of international law, undermining the foundations of the UN. In the optics of the Russian political mainstream, Russia's position was de facto ignored at that moment due to the fact that Russia was perceived as a weak international actor. According to the dominant narrative, this explains the significant decline in confidence in the West that could be observed within the Russian establishment and Russian society.

(C) A commonplace in Russian political discourses is that the attempt to improve relations in connection with 9/11 was also unsuccessful. The deterioration of Russian-US relations is associated with a military campaign in Iraq, the bypassing of the UN Security Council in 2003, and NATO's eastward enlargement in 2004. **NATO enlargement** is perceived by the Russian political mainstream as a violation of the agreements of the early 1990s, on the one hand, and a challenge to Russia's security in the CIS region, on the other. Similar criticism will subsequently concern the deployment of the US missile defence system in Europe. In Russian sources, this is described as a restart of the arms race.

(D) Due to the **colour revolutions** in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004) and Kyrgyzstan (2005) – and later the Arab Spring, which is interpreted in a similar way – **the sacralisation of state sovereignty** emerged in Russian political rhetoric, as along with explicit hostility towards international NGOs.ⁱⁱ It is important to note that, starting with Putin's Munich speech 2007, the mainstream narrative often postulates not only the need for transition to multipolarity, but also a diminishing role for the EU as a priority partner for Russia. The image of a united Europe is often drawn in a negative way, and the EU's independent foreign policy capacity is increasingly being questioned.ⁱⁱⁱ At the same time, the United States is portrayed as more unpredictable and threatening for global security. Here, the main criticism is built around the violation of existing international law due to unilateral US actions aimed at spreading democracy.

(E) The economic aspect of the narrative is connected with the **loss of investment opportunities** for Russian companies and the deterioration of hydrocarbon supplies to Europe.

i *ibid.*, p.20.

ii Munich speech by Vladimir Putin, 2007; Vladimir Putin (2012): "Russia and the Changing World" in *Moskovskiy Novosti*.; Also: <https://www.ft.com/content/6b79c31a-14fb-11e5-9509-00144feabdc0>

iii Miller, A., Lukyanov, F. (2017): *Restraint Instead of Assertiveness. Russia and a New Era in World Politics*; Valdai Club's Report: *The European Union's Uncertain Future: What Should Russia Do?* (2017).

Russian sources interpret this as a consistent transformation of economic issues into a political instrument in order to restrain Russia.ⁱ They also include failed deals relating to the purchase of a stake in Opel, investment in Airbus, Arcelor, etc., which, according to the mainstream narrative, showed that the technology market is still closed to the Russian Federation.

(F) The **Russian-Georgian conflict** is represented by the mainstream as a defensive reaction from Russia, caused, among other things, by the Western powers' excessive intervention in post-Soviet affairs. In this sense, the "Russian reset" that followed in 2009-2011 provoked an illusion among some Russian officials that the offensive approach could really work. It is noteworthy that even during the period of the "Russian reset" in 2010-2011, neither side produced a new vision of common goals. The emphasis was placed on the old formats of cooperation inherited in many respects from the bipolar system. Thus, even in the period of 2010-2011, the "reset" was perceived by the Russian side more as a respite than as a real opportunity to change the essence of Russia-US relations.

(G) At the moment when the UN Security Council supported **intervention in Libya**, Vladimir Putin, then prime minister, claimed that Russia was responding by strengthening its defence capability. In addition, he placed the Libyan case on a par with Western military interventions in Yugoslavia, Iraq and Afghanistan.ⁱⁱ As a result of the Arab Spring, another line of criticism of Western states has opened up. The main value of the international community, according to Russian foreign policy doctrine, should not be the spread of democracy, but respect for sovereignty.ⁱⁱⁱ At the same time, the right to defend Russia's national interests in the post-Soviet space is taken for granted and a logical contradiction with the previous thesis is not detected.^{iv}

From the description of these events in various official documents and expert reports, it becomes obvious that the confrontation with the collective West that emerged after the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in 2014 is not perceived by the Russian side as an unexpected phenomenon.

i Munich speech by Vladimir Putin, 2007; Vladimir Putin (2012): "Russia and the Changing World" in *Moskovskiye Novosti*; Miller, A., Lukyanov, F. (2016): *Detachment Instead of Confrontation: Post-European Russia in Search of Self-Sufficiency*, p. 20.

ii Gorst, I., Buckley, N. (2011) "Medvedev and Putin clash over Libya," *Financial Times*, 21.13.2011. <https://www.ft.com/content/2e62b08e-53d2-11e0-a01c-00144feab49a>

iii On the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020; Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation.

iv Vladimir Putin (2012): "Russia and the Changing World" in *Moskovskiye Novosti*.

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Moreover, the Western position towards Russia is considered, if not as monolithic, then for the most part as dictated by US interests. In general, this narrative places on the United States the main blame for ignoring Russia as an equal partner and is considered to be a demonstration of its superiority as the “winner” in the Cold War.ⁱ Besides, the Russian leadership does not recognise its own role in the escalation of the confrontation.ⁱⁱ

The mainstream narrative suppresses the main stumbling block in that the expansion of the Euro-Atlantic community eastward is a violation of the agreements reached at the end of the Cold War. The Russian establishment resents the fact that any proposals for the European security system submitted by Russia, be it an alternative solution to the problem of deploying a missile defence system in Europe or President Dmitri Medvedev’s 2008 proposal for a European security treaty, was arrogantly rejected. It is noteworthy that the Russian mainstream narrative represents the Euro-Atlantic community as a revisionist powerⁱⁱⁱ interfering in the sphere of Russia’s privileged interests. Since Russian foreign policy after 2014 is also perceived by Western elites as a form of revisionism, one can speak of mutual accusations. However, we are dealing with two different types of revisionism. If Russia is accused of revisionism in connection with the retreat from international law, then the Russian leadership considers the West to be a violator of the status quo from a “geopolitical” point of view.

Western Mainstream Narrative on the Evolution of European Security, 1989-2014

The Western mainstream narrative on the evolution of European security from 1989 to 2014 emphasises Russia’s estrangement from the shared vision of the Charter of Paris of November 1990.^{iv} Two important preliminary remarks: First, it should be noted that Russia and Russian-Western relations did not have absolute priority in Western capitals until early 2007 in contrast to the importance of the West in Russia at the same time. In the 1990s, the stabilisation of Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkan Wars dominated the Western agenda,

i See: Zagorski, A. (2017) “Russian Narratives: Preliminary remarks” in Security Narratives in Europe:

A Wide Range of Views, ed. by Wolfgang Zellner, Baden-Baden: Nomos, p.103.

ii See: Putin V. (2016) “Vladimir Putin’s annual news conference”, December 23, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53573>, cit. by Zagorski, op. cit., p.103.

iii Zagorski, A., op. cit., p.7.

iv See, for example, Wolfgang Ischinger, Back to Diplomacy (Vienna: OSCE, 2015), pp. 21-24; Thomas Frear and Lukasz Kulesa (eds.), Competing Western and Russian Narratives on the European Order: Is There Common Ground? (London: ELN, 2016). For mainstream Western (transatlantic) views, see e.g. Michael McFaul, From Cold War to Hot Peace (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2018); Anne Applebaum, “The Myth of Russian Humiliation”, in: Washington Post (17 October 2014).

and from 2001 the war against al-Qaeda and jihadist terrorism absorbed most Western attention. It was only with Vladimir Putin's speech at the Munich Security Forum in February 2007 that a broader public in the West became aware that Russia was no longer just a sometimes difficult partner but had alienated itself so strongly from the West. In hindsight, it appears that February 2007 was the starting point of an estranging process that led to an image of Russia as an enemy and eventually made the picture of a "Cold War" conceivable again. Secondly, the notion of a "Western mainstream narrative" is misleading, as it is very simplistic: what follows is a transatlantic narrative, as it prevails in the United States and countries such as the United Kingdom, Sweden, Poland, and Estonia. However, as recent studiesⁱ have shown, the narratives in Germany, France, Italy, and Austria are more diverse and differ quite strongly from this transatlantic Western mainstream narrative.

The Western mainstream narrative (transatlantic style), to put it simply, feeds on the following **11 key moments** until the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis in 2014:ⁱⁱ

(1) The 'collapse of communism (...) was not a victory of the West but a **victory for freedom and democracy**'. Numerous countries 'now had the freedom to determine their own future'.ⁱⁱⁱ In the spirit of Fukuyama's thesis of the "end of history", there was hope that the Soviet Union and later Russia would also become part of the new Europe "whole and free".

(2) Domestic political events in Russia in the 1990s were still viewed relatively favourably because Yeltsin was believed to be an important partner of the West. Against the background of the results of the 1993 parliamentary election, where right-wing populists and communists performed strongly, **Yeltsin was seen as a beacon of stability** who needed to be supported.

(3) Russia's positive image in the West first cracked during the First **Chechen War** from 1994 to 1996, especially after the artillery fire and the air raids against Grozny at the 1994-95 turn of the year, with serious war crimes and human rights violations on both sides.

(4) **Russia's support for Serbian leader Slobodan Milošević** in the Balkan wars with reference

i Wolfgang Zellner et al., *European Security: Challenges at the Societal Level* (Vienna: OSCE, 2016); Wolfgang Zellner (ed.), *Security Narratives in Europe: A Wide Range of Views* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2017).

ii These points are formulated very pointedly (as are the narratives in the report 'Back to Diplomacy', quoted above), whereas the Russian mainstream narrative in our report is written in a distanced and descriptive way. This is purely because the drafting process happened in different sub-groups and has no other meaning.

iii Ischinger 2017, see above.

to ethnic-religious and historical ties was met with displeasure in the West. Nevertheless, after the peace talks in Dayton and Rambouillet, the West tried to involve Russia as a partner in international peacekeeping efforts (IFOR/SFOR) as a model for a future strategic partnership.

(5) **NATO enlargement in 1999** served to stabilise the former Warsaw Pact states in Central and Eastern Europe, took place at their request according to the Helsinki principle of free choice of alliances and was cushioned by a strategic partnership between NATO and Russia. NATO's eastward expansion was not directed against Russia.

(6) After Putin took office, the politically motivated arrest of oligarch and Yukos CEO Mikhail **Khodorkovsky** in October 2003, the dioxin poisoning of the Ukrainian presidential candidate (and later president) Viktor **Yushchenko** (2004), the assassination of the human rights activist, Kremlin critic and reporter Anna **Politkovskaya** in October 2006 and similar cases made international headlines. Assuming that the Russian Government was at least implicitly complicit, this demonstrated a loss of democratic/human values.

(7) The "**colour revolutions**" in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004) and Kyrgyzstan (2005) were legitimate civil society movements protesting against electoral fraud and corrupt elites. They led to peaceful transfers of power.

(8) **Putin's speech at the Munich Security Conference** in February 2007 surprised many in the West and led to a reassessment of Russia as a partner.

(9) Even though it is widely agreed that the military assault started from the Georgian side, Russia indirectly started the **war in Georgia in August 2008** by deliberate provocation. Russian aggression was characterised by a disproportionate use of military force by a large country against a small country.

(10) Following **election fraud** in the Russian Duma election in December 2011, Russians protested against Putin's announced return to presidential office. This Russian "colour revolution" reached wide sections of Russia, not just urban and student circles. It was brutally crushed by Putin.

(11) Russian actions in the **Ukraine crisis** demonstrated the revisionist and expansionist foreign policy agenda and can only be contained through increased deterrence. Putin has used the narrative of humiliation and 'having-not-been-taken-seriously' by the West strategically, playing the anti-Western propaganda card to rally Russians around the flag.

Part I

Russian-Western Blind Spots

Comparing the two narratives allows the identification of “blind spots” – i.e. events that figured prominently in the narrative of one side, but were overlooked or neglected in the narrative of the other side (see figure on page 22/23)

To be more precise, *first*, “collective blind spots” arise from the mainstream narratives that are today dominant in the West and in Russia. It is clear to the authors that Russian-Western history experts do not necessarily see them as “blind spots” since they may be well aware of these elements and that they are overlooked by one side or the other. *Second*, “collective blind spots” refer to the present mainstream narratives in the West and in Russia. It could be the case that events that are overlooked or neglected today were relevant and known in the past when they took place. The categorisation of an issue as a collective blind spot therefore does not depend on whether the issue is viewed correctly from a historical perspective. Collective blind spots can also be issues that were once clearly a part of the other country’s collective memory but now tend to be forgotten.

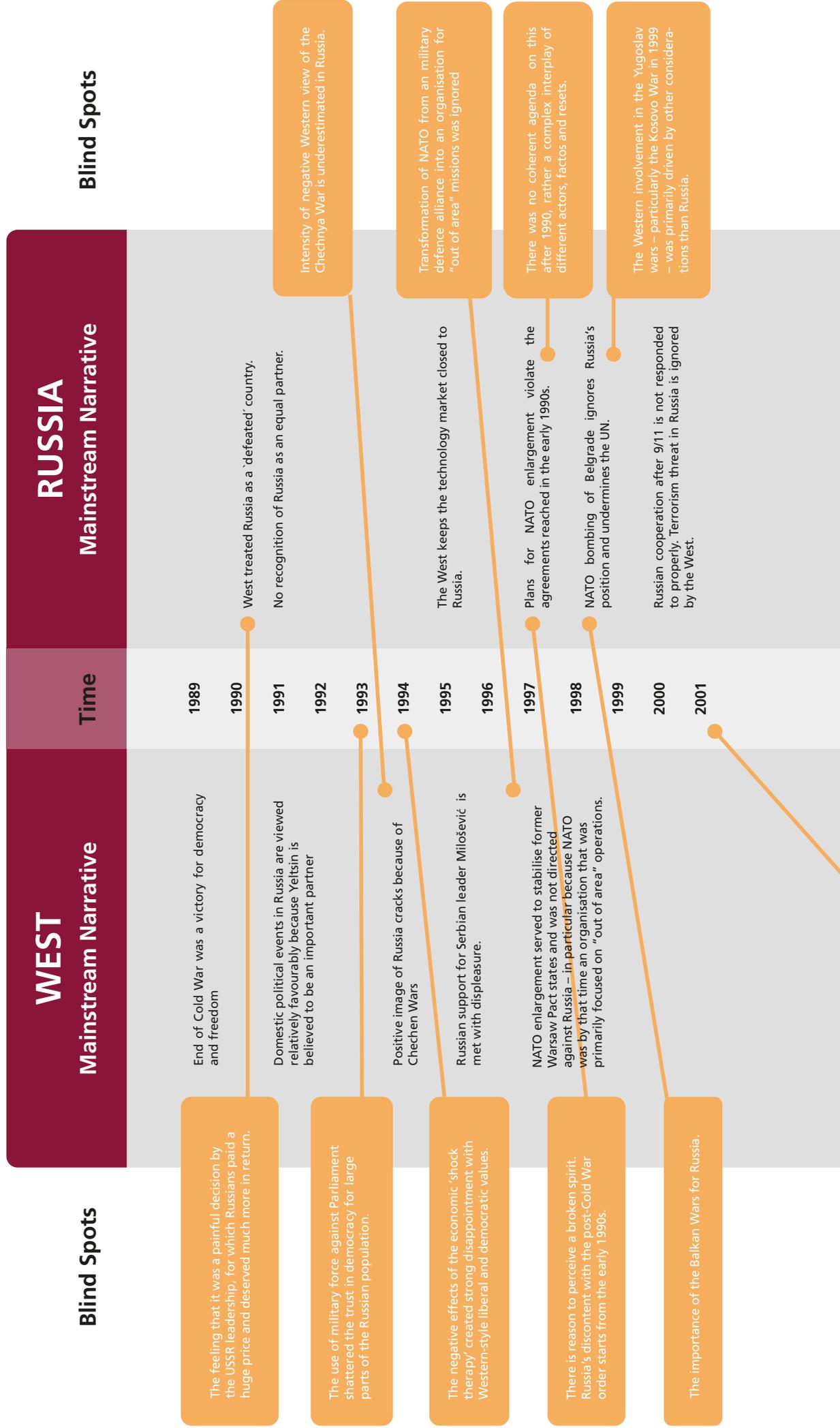
Blind spots may be starting points for better understanding and for attempts to reduce the degree of mutual misperception and alienation. In the following section, we will highlight and describe some of the “blind spots”, albeit with the caveat that there may be more potential blind spots not yet discovered at our workshop but which become evident when reading the Russian and the Western mainstream narratives in parallel.

The blind spots presented in this chapter have been pointed out in the dialogue process, based on the experience and expertise of the group. However, they should be seen as tentative findings. Further investigation, based on existing data such as opinion polls, key documents and media analysis, is needed to determine whether they genuinely constitute collective blind spots.

Blind Spots in the Russian Mainstream Narrative

First, the Chechen Wars (starting from 1994) mattered to the West far more than is recognised in Russia today. The Chechen Wars triggered lively debates in the Westⁱ and triggered a critical view of Moscow’s foreign policy. Since the Chechen Wars are framed in the Russian narrative primarily as military campaigns that clearly fall within the scope of internal affairs, the nature of the Western debate is often missed.

ⁱ cf. William H. Hill: No place for Russia. European Security Institutions since 1989. Columbia University Press, 2018, p.126.



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.

The use of military force against Parliament shattered the trust in democracy for large parts of the Russian population.

The negative effects of the economic 'shock therapy' created strong disappointment with Western-style liberal and democratic values.

There is reason to perceive a broken spirit. Russia's discontent with the post-Cold War order starts from the early 1990s.

The importance of the Balkan Wars for Russia.

RUSSIA Mainstream Narrative

Time

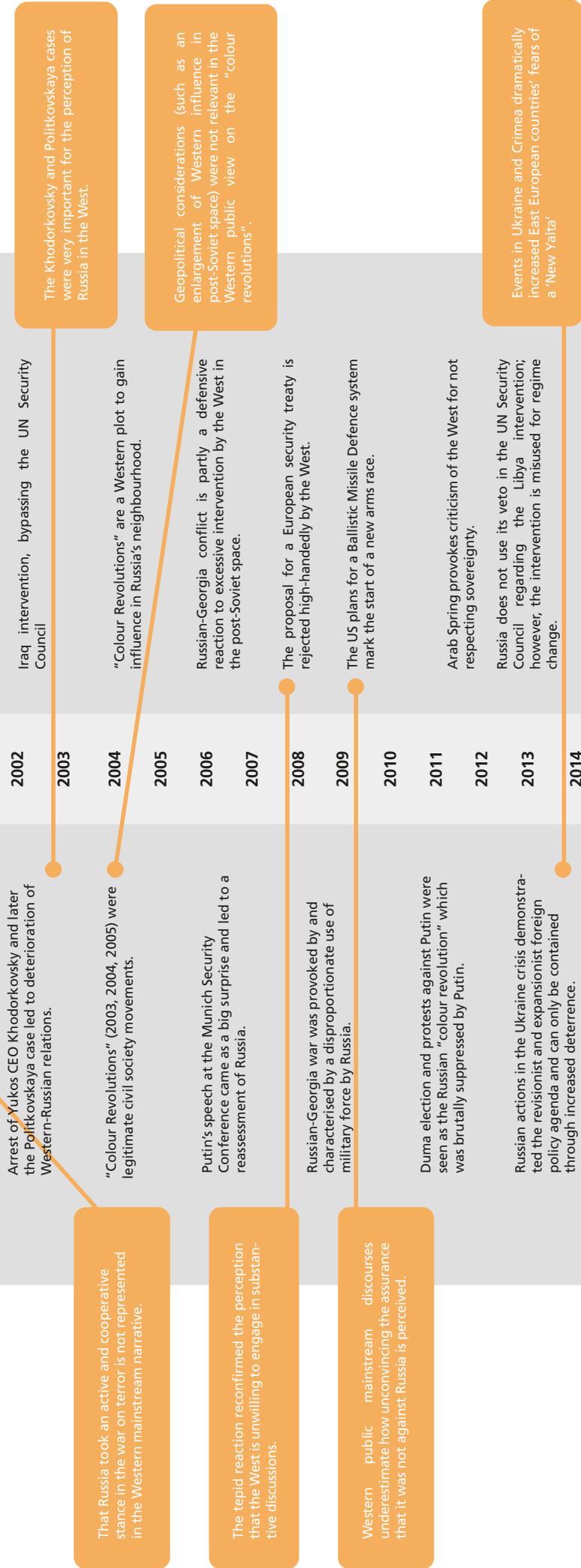
Blind Spots

Intensity of negative Western view of the Chechnya War is underestimated in Russia.

Transformation of NATO from an military defence alliance into an organisation for "out of area" missions was ignored

There was no coherent agenda on this after 1990, rather a complex interplay of different actors, factors and resets.

The Western involvement in the Yugoslav wars – particularly the Kosovo War in 1999 – was primarily driven by other considerations than Russia.



Part I

Second, by in the mid-1990s, NATO was transforming itself from a military defence alliance opposing the Warsaw Pact to a crisis management organisation that was primarily focused on threats beyond its traditional territorial scope. “Out of area” operations played a crucial role in NATO’s self-perception at the time and deeply changed the mandate and the nature of the Alliance – particularly after the start of the war in Afghanistan in 2001.ⁱ The Russian mainstream narrative seems to overlook the nature and the degree of NATO’s transformation. It can be partly interpreted as a tragic self-fulfilling prophecy that Russia acted on the basis of the traditional paradigm (‘NATO is against us’) until in a way NATO actually reverted to it. For example, when the Baltic States joined NATO in 2004, NATO’s defence plans were not adapted for many years, as Russia was not considered an antagonist at the time, but a strategic partner. The defence of the Baltic States was only taken seriously by NATO military planners after the Russian-Georgian War in 2008.ⁱⁱ

Third, the wars in former Yugoslavia, particularly in the late 1990s with the 1999 Kosovo war, are seen by the West as an interplay of numerous genuine processes that emanate first and foremost from the Western Balkans region itself. From the Western point of view, Russia’s role in the region – such as its support for Russia’s traditional ally Serbia – played little or no role in the Western engagement in the Western Balkans. The fact that the Western debate about the Yugoslavian Wars was primarily focused on considerations other than Russia seems to be a blind spot in the mainstream Russian narrative.

Fourth, the Russian mainstream narrative tends to overlook how strongly the case of Yukos CEO Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the murder of journalist Anna Politkovskaya and the poisoning of Ukrainian presidential candidate Yushchenko resonated in the Western debate (see above). For many in the West, they continue to shape the view of Russia until today.

Fifth, in the Western view the “coloured revolutions” in Eastern European countries – the “Rose Revolution” in Georgia in 2003, the “Orange Revolution” in Ukraine in 2004, and the “Tulip Revolution” in Kyrgyzstan in 2005 – are seen as genuine dynamics that were primarily described as people-driven campaigns for freedom, justice and democracy.

i cf. NATO’s new Strategic Concept, adopted at the November 1991 Rome Summit: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_23847.htm.

ii See Mark Kramer, “Russia, the Baltic Region, and the Challenge for NATO”, in: *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo* no. 267 (2013), p. 5. A revised military contingency plan called “Eagle Guardian” was only adopted in January 2010, thus making Article 5 for the Baltic States finally credible.

Using these events as an opportunity to exert influence in the region and increase the Western grip on the post-Soviet space is at best a minor position in Western public debate. It seems that the Western stance towards the colour revolutions is framed differently from the Russian narrative.

Sixth, there seems to be a general tendency in the mainstream Russian narrative to see the West as a more or less single actor which has by and large a single strategy and acts in a unified manner. However, as a recent study has shown, the Western view of Russia is relatively complex and characterised by different layers that vary between the different Western countries.ⁱ Furthermore, archival material indicates that “ (...) Russia’s alienation from the security of the rest of Europe from 1990 to 2013 (needs to be seen) as a process that happened due to mistakes and unintended side-effects of well-intentioned decisions on both sides – and not to a hidden master plan of the US to harm Russia.”ⁱⁱ For example the Clinton administration’s shift on the issue of NATO expansion was based on a complex interplay of factors, which are not necessarily ‘against Russia’.ⁱⁱⁱ The fact that Western policy-makers changed over time – for example, there were various resets and cycles in US policy on towards-Russia – further supports the view that there was no consistent agenda.^{iv}

Finally, the East European post-Soviet countries’ fears of a ‘new Yalta,’ i.e. agreements between big powers made without their participation and at their expense, seem to be strongly underrepresented in the Russian narrative.

i Zellner (2017), *ibid.*

ii Nünlist et. al (2017), p.33, *ibid.*

iii In Russia’s first free parliamentary election in December 1993, right-wing populists and communists won, while the liberal, democratic forces won only about 15 percent of the vote – thus questioning the vision of a democratic and peaceful Russia. Furthermore, Russian support for Serbian President Slobodan Milošević heightened fears of instability in Europe and lent new arguments to supporters of NATO’s eastward expansion. Domestic political factors in the US (in particular the Republican campaign in the 1994 midterm elections and the lobbying of Eastern Europeans in the USA) also played a role.

iv In this line of thought, Charap/Colton describe the spirit of 1989/1990 as a quid pro quo: „The policymakers who subsequently chose to enlarge NATO, to be fair, did not think that such a quid pro quo ever existed.” (Charap, Samuel/Colton, Timothy (2017): *Everyone loses. The Ukraine Crisis and the Ruinous Contest for Post-Soviet Eurasia.* London: Routledge, p. 37).

Part I

Blind Spots in the Western Mainstream Narrative

First, it is generally perceived in Russia that the West sees the end of the Cold War as its victory, rather than a painful decision by the USSR. The fact that free elections could be held, that non-communist governments were elected in many of the Warsaw Pact countries, without the USSR using violence (contrary to the situation in Hungary in 1956 and in Prague in 1968 etc.) and that the Soviet leadership consented to German reunification within NATO are interpreted as (too) far-reaching concessions, for which Russia, as the formal successor to the Soviet Union, had to pay a heavy price (mainly in the form of economic turmoil in the transformation phase) and deserved to get much more in return.

Second, although the alleged broken promise that NATO would expand ‘not an inch eastwards’ after German reunification was merely a verbal, non-binding statement and referred only to the territory of the former GDR, Russia has a point in perceiving a broken *spirit*: It had already been decided by April 1990 not to follow up on the ‘CSCE option’ – the idea of pan-European security based on the CSCE (later OSCE).ⁱ Verbal promises to include Russia in this pan-European security structure, to be designed together with Russia, were not followed up. Later, under Bill Clinton, the US reversed the promise made to Boris Yeltsin in October 1993 of a “NATO partnership for all” (including Russia) instead of a “NATO membership for a few” (Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic).ⁱⁱ The failure to recognise that Russia was unhappy with the post-Cold War order from the beginning must be seen as a Western blind spot: “Western powers mistook Moscow’s inability to block the post-Cold War order as support for it.”ⁱⁱⁱ For most of the Western general public, it was Putin’s speech in Munich in February 2007 that is seen as the first sign of frustration at not being treated as an equal partner.

Third, starting with Yeltsin’s presidency, the “economic shock therapy” was implemented in a rush with massive Western support and had disastrous consequences for the population,

i Nünlist et. al (2017), *ibid*.

ii Interestingly, this “broken promise” so far has received far less scholarly and public attention than the myth of the broken promise of expanding NATO “not an inch eastward” in February 1990. See James Goldgeier, *Promises Made, Promises Broken? What Yeltsin Was Told About NATO in 1993 and Why It Matters*, in: *War on the Rocks*, 12 July 2016, <https://warontherocks.com/2016/07/promises-made-promises-broken-what-yeltsin-was-told-about-nato-in-1993-and-why-it-matters>; James Goldgeier, *Bill and Boris: A Window Into a Most Important Post-Cold War Relationship*, in: *Texas National Security Review*, 28 August 2018, <https://tnsr.org/2018/08/bill-and-boris-a-window-into-a-most-important-post-cold-war-relationship>.

iii Reinhard Krumm: *Europe’s Security Governance and Transatlantic Relations*. Friedrich Ebert Foundation, 2016.

with a dramatic increase in poverty and decrease in life expectancy. The disillusionment and the humiliation at being the originator of the end of the Cold War, turning to democracy and trusting the West to help to install a free market economy, have thus become a very deep-rooted feeling in Russia. The Western narrative overlooks that this is perceived as a failure of liberal values in general, including democratic principles. This resonates when democratic deficits and human rights violations are criticised by foreigners and results in the perception of being treated in a high-handed manner by Westerners who see themselves as 'morally better people' with no consideration of the socio-economic context.

Fourth, the constitutional crisis and the use of military force against shelling of the Russian Parliament in 1993 on the orders of President Yeltsin shattered the trust in democracy for large parts of the Russian population. This fact is widely unknown in the mainstream Western narrative. Extensive Western support for Yeltsin's re-election campaign in 1996 (even if for the sake of stability) in hindsight triggers the perception of hypocrisy when it comes to the West's promotion of democracy.

Fifth, the Kosovo War and the fact that Russia was too powerless to have any impact on avoiding the war against a long-term historical ally (especially the bombing of Belgrade) are perceived as a shock. This first military intervention by NATO ended a decade of partnership forged by Yeltsin and Clinton. The wars in the Western Balkans also triggered intensive debates within Russia. The importance of the wars in former Yugoslavia from in the Russian perspective, is widely overlooked in the West.

Sixth, after 9/11 Russia proactively cooperated with the West on countering terrorism, for example by granting access to a military base in Kyrgyzstan for use in the war against Afghanistan. Russia called on the US for a common front against international terrorist infiltration in the North Caucasus, but the US did not really respond, refusing, for instance, to shut down Islamic organisations accused by Moscow of funding the Chechen underground. Later, Russia's cooperation was quickly forgotten in the West.ⁱ

Seventh, even though Russian President Medvedev's 2008/9 proposal for a European security treaty may have been 'deeply flawed',ⁱⁱ the tepid Western reaction (rejecting high-level talks; just dialogue at OSCE working level, the '-Corfu Process') was perceived from a Russian

i Hill, p 176; <https://jamestown.org/program/sergei-ivanov-accuses-west-of-double-standard-on-chechnya/>.

ii Charap/Colton (2017): cit. op., p. 110.

Part I

perspective as showing again the West's general "unwillingness to discuss a substantial revision of the European security system".ⁱ

Eighth, while NATO expansion is discussed in the Western media quite often, the Ballistic Missile Defence seems to be seen as the bigger strategic threat. Explanations that this was not aimed against Russia are not perceived as convincing. However, it does not tend to feature much in Western discourses and should thus be seen as a blind spot.ⁱⁱ

3. How to Avoid Future Blind Spots

The genesis of "blind spots" can be diverse and they may be caused by a variety of factors. Consequently, there are various potential measures that may help to avoid future "blind spots" and reduce the impact of those that already exist.

Some of the blind spots seem to arise from a certain path dependence and inertia in the perception of the other side's motivation. It is a type of blind spot that emerges from outdated assumptions about the other side's strategic consideration and orientation. It would therefore be worth considering allowing the other side to take part to a larger degree in debates and processes that are intended to lead to the development and crafting of new strategic directions and new strategic key documents. In the military field, mutual observations, for example during military drills and manoeuvres, are a common and traditional element in the confidence-building toolbox in East-West relations. These mutual visits were established during the heyday of the Cold War and still take place today. It is worth considering that an approach that worked for military-to-military contacts during military manoeuvres might also work for key spin-doctors and idea-generators (such as think tank, ministries and influential journalists) during the development and drafting of key strategic documents. Since most key strategies are public documents anyway, the aspect of confidentiality would be of little relevance here. And given that several countries in Western Europe – including Germanyⁱⁱⁱ – have, in recent years, tended to develop strategic documents in a relatively open and interactive manner, e.g. through open citizens' dialogue formats – the step to such a procedure would be not too difficult to take. If key strategy documents are developed in

i Krumm, cit.op. p 9.

ii Richard Sakwa: Russia against the Rest, p. 90

iii See, for example, the development of the new strategy of the German Foreign Office, the process leading to the recent White Paper on the Bundeswehr and the drafting of the German guidelines on "Preventing Crises, Resolving Conflicts, Building Peace."

ways that allow open and confidence-building observations by the other side, it is more likely that new strategic developments and considerations might find their way into the general public debate. Consequently, there is a greater chance that this particular type of “blind spot” can be avoided.

Part I

In search of a third narrative: Reconstructing the stories (un)told about Ukraine

The situation in Ukraine is the most divisive issue for the Western-Russian relationship. This text summarises our discussion on the various existing narratives about the events in Ukraine after 2013. We used the method of Conflict Process Analysis (CPA)ⁱ to reconstruct the different narratives on Ukraine. Using this method, our aim was not to fact-check any claims made by one or the other side but to contrast how the story is told differently by the two narratives. Although most of the participants were well aware of many aspects of the narratives, it took a great deal of time and effort to reconstruct how exactly both sides frame the events and which aspects are ignored by both narratives. This exercise was thus a valuable endeavour even for those participants who were already quite familiar with the different viewpoints. Our diverse professional and personal backgrounds were essential for the discussion.

We came to the conclusion 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”. Besides, we are well aware that there are more than two narratives and these two in particular are often told in more nuanced ways. For the sake of clarity, however, we decided to concentrate on the two most prominent narratives in their moderate versions. Of course, this list of events is not exhaustive and we discussed many more details and nuances than can be mentioned here. This summary is therefore a necessary simplification, although we would claim to have covered the most important events that shaped both narratives.

We acknowledge the fact that the narratives did not start in 2013 but stem from different understandings of Ukrainian history and identity. In particular, the role of Ukrainians in the Second World War and the assessment of Ukrainian independence and the dissolution of the Soviet Union are controversial within Ukrainian society and beyond. As participants from Germany and Russia, we are aware of the sensitivity of talking about events in Ukraine without any Ukrainian participation. To some extent, the narrative about the “Russian aggression” is shared in Ukraine. However, the narrative as it is depicted here is understood as the narrative that is most prominent in Germany, as we avoided speculating about the Ukrainian perspective without Ukrainians present. It would therefore be appropriate and desirable, as a next step, to expand the dialogue by involving Ukrainian perspectives.ⁱⁱ

i Wüstehube, Ljubjana: Konflikt-Perspektiv-Analyse. In: Perspektive Mediation 1/2004; Walter, Willibald; Dirk Splinter; Ulrike Pusch: Basic Guide to Mediation. DVV international, 2014 (pp.28-36); GIZ/inmedio: Shimgelina under the shade. Addis Ababa, 2013 (pp. 71-75).

ii At our second meeting, one participant from Ukraine was present and contributed many valuable insights to the discussion. This was, however, only one perspective, which was not sufficient to reconstruct Ukrainian narratives.

The aim of the article is twofold: Firstly, it aims to reconstruct the two competing and irreconcilable narratives on Ukraine. Secondly, it points out aspects of the story that both sides miss and that challenge both narratives. These aspects are mainly related to internal dynamics and actors' interests and strategies. Even if these aspects do not present a coherent "alternative narrative", they do provide important starting points for further thinking and discussion beyond the two confronting narratives.

The narrative about "Russian aggression"	The narrative about "Russia as a protector" "The crisis as a Western plot"	Internal dynamics that do not play a role in both narratives
1st period: Maidan		
<p>Yanukovych did not sign the agreement with the EU as he was worried about economic damage for Ukraine from Russia (higher gas prices and trade sanctions). Also, he did not want to release Tymoshenko, which was a demand made by many Western countries.</p>	<p>Not signing the agreement with the EU was a legitimate decision by Yanukovych.</p>	<p>Yanukovych played his own game (e.g. negotiations with China). Because Yulia Tymoshenko's imprisonment was a matter of great concern to the Western public, Western politicians and negotiators made her release a precondition for signing the agreement. They thus overlooked Russia's interests in Ukraine as the main obstacle to the agreement.ⁱ</p>
<p>Russia played a zero-sum game, because it was unwilling to cooperate during the negotiation of the agreement.</p>	<p>The EU and US presented Ukraine with an either/or option.</p>	<p>The conflict between the prospect of Ukraine becoming a member of the European single market and becoming a member of the Eurasian Union in a single market with Russia could have been addressed by talks at the level of the two regional organisations with the involvement of Ukraine.</p>
<p>There was a genuine Ukrainian protest for human rights and European values, and against corruption. The Western support for NGOs aims to develop an independent civil society.</p>	<p>The Maidan protests were right-wing protests ("fascists"). The West (mainly the US) supported the protesters with considerable financial resources. Western politicians and media showed bias in their support for the Maidan.</p>	<p>Euromaidan consisted of a huge variety of actors and groups and was therefore unpredictable. Most of the funding for the protests came from within Ukraine. Profound differences in understandings of the role and function of civil society in both narratives are genuine and date back to the 1990s.ⁱⁱ</p>

i „Gipfel des Scheitern“ (Spiegel 48/2014), <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-130458613.html>. Charap/Colton (2017): cit. op, p 120.

ii See 'Russian blind spot' No.5; 'Western blind spots' No 3 and 4, p.22/26f

The narrative about "Russian aggression"	The narrative about "Russia as a protector" "The crisis as a Western plot"	Internal dynamics that do not play a role in both narratives
Russia supported the shooting of Euromaidan protesters, which led to the Yanukovich government losing its moral legitimacy.	Euromaidan was a coup d'état by the US aimed at dividing Europe and Russia. As a consequence, the Ukrainian state is no longer a legitimate state.	Internal EU processes caused time pressure for EU actors. Hence, EU institutions did not anticipate sufficiently the consequences of Ukraine signing the agreement in Vilnius and were not prepared for this scenario.
Yanukovich ran away.	Yanukovich could not return to office following the seizure of power.	Yanukovich made a strategic mistake and therefore lost power. ⁱ
The February 21 agreement between Maidan activists and the Yanukovich government, mediated by the French, German and Polish foreign ministers with Russian and US support, was obsolete after the overthrow of the regime.	The West dropped the February 21 agreement too happily and quickly.	While some Western actors made enthusiastic comments about the agreement not being needed any more, the mediators urged the new Ukrainian government to respect it. There was no explicit agreed-upon joint strategy. ⁱⁱ

i Stanovaya, Tatiana (2013): The Fatal Error of Viktor Yanukovich, Institute of Modern Russia <https://imrussia.org/en/politics/617-the-fatal-error-of-viktor-yanukovich>.

ii МИД Франции, ФРГ и Польши призывают Киев наладить диалог с регионами, <https://ria.ru/world/20140331/1001783829.html>. Gemeinsame Erklärung zur Ukraine der drei Außenminister des Weimarer Dreiecks Frank-Walter Steinmeier (Deutschland), Laurent Fabius (Frankreich), und Radosław Sikorski (Polen) in Weimar <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/140331-gemeinsame-erklaerung-zur-ukraine/261270>.

The narrative about "Russian aggression"	The narrative about "Russia as a protector" "The crisis as a Western plot"	Internal dynamics that do not play a role in both narratives
2nd period: Crimea		
<p>Russia denied the existence of their troops ("green men") in Crimea and then admitted that they were present. They lied and therefore cannot be trusted any more. Russia used a window of opportunity to illegitimately invade a strategically important piece of land, using the historical connection as an excuse.</p>	<p>Russian speakers and Russians in Crimea were under attack. The Russian speakers in Ukraine were afraid of trains with Ukrainian nationalists coming to Crimea. The Russian forces had to protect the military basis in Sevastopol, because the new NATO-friendly government in Ukraine would not necessarily stick to the agreement on Sevastopol. Quick and covert action ("green men") was the only option.</p>	<p>The events in Crimea were to a certain extent part of a regional political power struggle between regional elites. One fraction of these elites gained power by calling Russia to help. This was not a spontaneous decision but rather a long-term strategy.ⁱ</p>
<p>US ships cross the Black Sea all the time. They come and go and do not pose a threat. Russia is paranoid, as the US would not have risked a nuclear war for Crimea.</p>	<p>US ships were close to Crimea.ⁱⁱ If the Russian military had not interfered, the Russian fleet would have been blocked by US ships.</p>	
<p>The Russian government deliberately incited nationalist sentiments ('Krim nash') in order to legitimise its decision, which was in fact based on a different motive, namely to undermine the Ukrainian state. The Russian government profited from</p>	<p>Since the early 1990s, there has been a strong desire by the people to repatriate Crimea, which became part of Ukraine in 1954 as a result of an arbitrary decision (it was a "gift" by Khrushchev, who was himself Ukrainian).</p>	<p>Public sentiment in Russia regarding Crimea has become even stronger since the West's rejection of Russia's action.</p>

i Matsuzaton, Kimitaka (2016): Domestic Politics in Crimea, 2009-2015, *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 24(2), pp.225-256 <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/619862/pdf>. Hughes, James/Sasse, Gwendolyn (2016): Power ideas and conflict: ideology, linkage and leverage in Crimea and Chechnya, *East European Politics* 32(3), pp. 314-334 <https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2015.1124091>, p. 319.

ii Крым. Путь на Родину (2016), documentary shown on Russian state TV <https://youtu.be/t42-71RpRgl>.

The narrative about "Russian aggression"	The narrative about "Russia as a protector" "The crisis as a Western plot"	Internal dynamics that do not play a role in both narratives
<p>the nationalist sentiments as its approval ratings skyrocketed after a long-term low related to the economy. The Russian government used Crimea to legitimise its own authoritarian regime.</p>		
<p>The referendum was not conducted according to international standards (including time pressure, military presence and the question asked in an unclear manner) and was therefore not legitimate.</p>	<p>The referendum was a legitimate decision by the Crimean population.</p>	
<p>Kosovo was different from Crimea as the issues have been discussed over 10 years, the referendum was conducted under different circumstances and the country became independent and not part of another country.</p>	<p>The Crimea case is similar to Kosovo. The West should therefore accept the Crimean people's democratic decision.</p>	<p>Criteria under which a 'responsibility to protect' and/or the right to self-determination trumps national sovereignty are strongly debated (even between Western actors). There is no clear black and white. Actors therefore refer to different principles to justify their actions.</p>

The narrative about "Russian aggression"	The narrative about "Russia as a protector" "The crisis as a Western plot"	Internal dynamics that do not play a role in both narratives
<p>The annexation of Crimea is a direct breach of the Budapest Memorandum that guaranteed the territorial integrity of Ukraine.</p>	<p>In the aftermath of Euro-aidan, a new state came into existence. The Budapest Memorandum was signed with the "old" Ukrainian state. Russia therefore has no obligations towards this new Ukrainian state.ⁱ</p> <p>Russia did not violate the Memorandum as it contained only one obligation, namely not to attack Ukraine with nuclear weapons.ⁱⁱ</p>	<p>There is a natural tension between the legal principles of territorial integrity and self-determination, which can only be reconciled through negotiated agreements.</p>
<p>3rd period: Donbas</p>		
<p>The conflict in Donbas is a conflict between Ukraine and Russia.</p>	<p>The conflict in Donbas is an internal Ukrainian conflict ("civil war").</p>	<p>Three layers exist: For the separatists, the Ukrainian government is the opponent (intra-Ukrainian); for the Ukrainian government, Russia is the opponent (regional); for Russia, the West is the opponent (global).</p>
<p>Russia orchestrated the protests against Euromaidan.</p>	<p>The protests were genuinely driven by the population of Donbas, who felt threatened by the coup in Kyiv and by the prospect of losing the right to speak their mother tongue, Russian.</p>	<p>There were also protests against Euromaidan and especially against the repeal of the law about language autonomy in Kharkiv, Odesa and Mariupol. However, events turned out differently in these regions, for various reasons. The Ukrainian authorities treated the protests in these regions differently.</p>

i Пресс-конференция Владимира Путина. Онлайн-репортаж <https://ria.ru/politics/20140304/998082399.html#13939354343213>

ii Russian Embassy to the UK on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy/status/692321689254830080> ; Лавров разъяснил слова о соблюдении Россией Будапештского меморандума <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/news/2016/02/10/628380-lavrov-budapeshtskogo-memoranduma>

The narrative about "Russian aggression"	The narrative about "Russia as a protector" "The crisis as a Western plot"	Internal dynamics that do not play a role in both narratives
		<p>The old oligarchic elites (mostly associated with the Party of Regions) were afraid of prosecution, mainly for corruption, by the new Ukrainian government. A power vacuum thus arose. In Donetsk and Luhansk, this vacuum was filled by the warlords/separatists.ⁱ In Kharkiv, a strong mayor, who was initially anti-Euro-aidan and a member of the Party of Regions, changed his mind, made a deal with the new government and prevented a power vacuum.ⁱⁱ</p>
<p>Regular Russian forces have been present on the ground. The Russian government is – again – lying about this fact and waging a hybrid war against Ukraine.</p>	<p>The war in Donbas is fought by Ukrainians with help from volunteers who happen to be members of the Russian military.</p> <p>Ukrainian volunteer battalions are fascists. They are unlawfully supported by the US, which is waging a hybrid war against Russia.</p>	<p>A variety of actors are fighting in Donbas. Some of them are mercenaries who have fought in other armed conflicts in the former Soviet Union and beyond.ⁱⁱⁱ Different groups have their own interest in mind. The separatists have their own agenda even if they are supported by Russia.^{iv}</p>

i Matveeva, Anna (2016): No Moscow stooges: identity polarization and guerrilla movements in Donbass, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16(1), DOI: 10.1080/14683857.2016.1148415, p. 11. Skorkin, Konstantin (2018): A Counter-Elite Takes Power—the New Leaders of the Donbas, Carnegie Moscow Center, <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/75549>. Matsuzato, Kimitaka (2017): The Donbass War: Outbreak and Deadlock, *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 25(2), pp. 125-201, <http://muse.jhu.edu/article/657202/pdf>, p. 188. Kuzio, Taras (2015): Rise and Fall of the Party of Regions Political Machine, *Problems of Post-Communism* 62, pp. 174-186.

ii Shapovalova, Natalia/Jarábik, Balázs (2018): How Eastern Ukraine Is Adapting and Surviving: The Case of Kharkiv. <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2018/09/12/how-eastern-ukraine-is-adapting-and-surviving-case-of-kharkiv-pub-77216>.

iii Sakwa, Richard (2015): *Frontline Ukraine.: Crisis in the Borderland*. London: Tauris, p 148-182.

iv Matsuzato, Kimitaka (2017): The Donbass War: Outbreak and Deadlock, *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 25(2), pp. 125-201 <http://muse.jhu.edu/article/657202/pdf> . Kudelia, Sergiy (2014): Domestic Sources of the Donbas Insurgency, PONARS Eurasia, Policy Memos, <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/domestic-sources-donbas-insurgency>.

The narrative about "Russian aggression"	The narrative about "Russia as a protector" "The crisis as a Western plot"	Internal dynamics that do not play a role in both narratives
The Russian side commits war crimes.	The Ukrainian side commits war crimes.	Civilians are suffering severely in the conflict. ⁱ
The separatists are dependent on Russia. Russia is therefore responsible for their actions.	Russia is not responsible for the actions of the governments of the Donetsk and Luhansk independent republics. The Ukrainian government consists of Western "puppets". The West is therefore responsible for their actions.	There is no full control of the DPR/LPR by the Kremlin. ⁱⁱ The relationship between the Ukrainian government and Western governments is very complicated and sensitive.
<i>Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are not mentioned in this narrative (blind spot).</i>	Ukraine is not supporting IDPs from Donbas. There are a great many conflicts between Ukrainian host communities and IDPs. This demonstrates that protection from Russia is needed. Because of the hostility against the IDPs, many refugees from Donbas have fled to Russia.	The intra-Ukrainian layer of the conflict resurfaces in local conflicts with/about IDPs. However, many 'pro-European' Ukrainian NGOs also support IDP integration.
The Minsk agreement needs to be implemented by all involved actors. Russia, as a co-signatory of the Minsk agreement and a participant in the Normandy format, bears a special responsibility for implementing the agreement.	Ukraine should implement the Minsk agreement.	Against the background of the domestic political situation in both Ukraine and Russia, and from the perspective of a cost/benefit analysis, it is 'better' for both sides to maintain the current state of affairs and not to make significant steps to implement Minsk II.

i Daily reports from the Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) to Ukraine <https://www.osce.org/ukraine-smm/reports>. International Crisis Group (2018): "Nobody Wants Us": The Alienated Civilians of Eastern Ukraine, Europe Report N°252, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/eastern-europe/ukraine/252-nobody-wants-us-alienated-civilians-eastern-ukraine>.

ii International Crisis Group (2016): "Russia and the Separatists in Eastern Ukraine".

Part I

Key Takeaways: most important insights that emerged during the workshops

1. It was generally agreed among Russian and German participants that the **Ukraine crisis was not the direct cause** of the current confrontation between Russia and the West, but rather one building block in a longer chain of historical events and developments. Many crucial root causes of the current crisis go back to the early phase of the post-Cold War period and indeed to the end phase of the Cold War. In the 1990s, Western-Russian relations were still relatively cooperative despite setbacks (Balkan Wars, NATO expansion, internal chaos in Russia), but became more contested after 1999.

2. Historical context can explain many **policy decisions** that were taken by one side at a particular moment in time and **made good sense at the time – but had long-term negative effects** on Russian-Western relations.ⁱ Many Western decisions in the 1990s, for example, were aimed at improving stability in Central and Eastern Europe, but had no anti-Russian intent. By excluding Russia, however, they contributed to a new division of Europe and Russia's isolation from European security.

3. **Russia did not figure as prominently** in Western decision-making in the 1990s and up to 2007/8 **as is presumed** in the Russian narrative. There is thus a certain imbalance that has to be recognized. Russia was very focused on the West, but Russia did not have a prominent place on the Western policy agenda. The assumption of a consistent and coherent 'Western agenda' should therefore be reconsidered.

4. The collective blind spots identified above can serve as **'bridges of understanding'**. Bridges of understanding are 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.

5. Dialogue about the contested narratives should be separated from discussions about the present situation and future steps. It is easier to reflect on one's own narrative, maybe even admit one's own blind spots, without having a direct link to current demands. Such an approach would complement the other strategy of disentangling past and present by deliberately deciding not to talk about the past, as in the OSCE's Structured Dialogue.

ⁱ An argument also made in detail by William H. Hill, *No Place for Russia: European Security Institutions since 1989* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

6. Using an approach which involved joint **reconstruction of the mainstream narratives from a meta-perspective** was extremely helpful in facilitating a productive dialogue even on the strongly divisive issue of what has happened in Ukraine since 2013. In escalated conflicts, the involved parties tend to increasingly overlook the **internal dynamics** of their opponents. Focusing on the internal dynamics can serve as a bridge of understanding in the Ukraine case as well.

7. **Structural differences** between the German and Russian **media systems** are not well known on either side and make direct comparisons misleading. Increased knowledge here can be seen as a potential 'bridge of understanding' to make critical conversations about each other's media landscapes more effective.

8. A clear added value was achieved by using a **mediative dialogue approach**, working with a rather small and continuous group for a rather long time (compared to conference-style events), which allows trust-building on a personal level, and rather than sequences of statements, creates space for facilitated discussions including the use of facilitation techniques such as reformulation of statements, in order to bring about more clarity and mutual understanding (see Part 2).

9. The added value of the sharing of **individual biographical experience** ('sha:re approach', see Part 2) for the dialogue was highlighted by a number of participants. It also showed an interesting parallel: The dynamics of the complex relationship between those who see the collapse of communism as humiliation/had an active role in the system and those who view it as liberation/were victimised by the system exist in Germany (in relation to the former GDR) and in Russia. They are reflected in the German East-West conflict as well as in the relationship between Russia and the West. **Dealing with the legacy of the past** is a common topic and hence another bridge of understanding.

10. The **role of empathy** on an emotional level (not just on the level of interests) remained a topic of discussion in our workshops. While some participants argued that this does not help much in overcoming the differences that exist, others found it crucial not only to use cognitive empathy in assessing the other side's intentions, but also to share perspectives on a more emotional level.ⁱ

ⁱ For the latter position, see Splinter, Dirk (2018): Empathy versus Realpolitik?; <https://isnblog.ethz.ch/peace/mediation-perspectives-empathy-versus-realpolitik>.

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What is to be done? Islands of cooperation

A number of harsh disagreements between Russia and the West will not be resolved in the foreseeable future. The confrontation, if it remains limited and controlled, may even work as a preferable option for a number of interest groups engaged in decision-making. Neither in Russia nor in the West is there a critical mass of people, be it among voters or policy-makers, who would seriously argue that the potential benefits of a more constructive relationship are so appealing that the proclaimed principles would have to be dropped and compromises struck in order to get to this brighter future faster. On the contrary, the vision of a world that could emerge from advanced Russian-Western cooperation is vague at best, and cannot currently work as a guideline for policy-makers. Future opportunities to overcome mutual alienation and distrust could easily be missed unless there is an increase in interaction that would allow people on both sides to understand what they can gain from the relationship, if it improves, and what there is to lose, if it gets worse.

Although many of the existing disagreements are often framed as US-Russia rivalry, the road to de-escalation runs through Europe, both geographically and mentally. The US has a true interest in Russia only in narrow fields, primarily weapons of mass destruction, and both great powers tend to use each other's image as a political scarecrow, which makes short-term progress difficult. The EU's interest in Russia is more profound. For better or worse, it is difficult for the EU and Russia to cut the multiple ties that bind them in various fields. For them the problem is real, and even if the available short-term solutions are not much more than painkillers, it still makes a lot of sense to use them.

The following suggestions are based on the 'islands of cooperation' approach, which attempts to identify possible small steps to mitigate tensions without addressing the fundamental differences. While this report mainly points out these fundamental differences and how they are reflected in the competing narratives, we see the two approaches as complementary and thus find it worthwhile highlighting some possible steps.

Visa dialogueⁱ

When ordinary people assess the quality of a relationship with other countries, the most obvious criterion is how easy it is to obtain a visa. Most Europeans nowadays are unaccustomed

ⁱ See Konstantin Baranov: Aspects relating to human rights and the rule of law in the visa dialogue between the EU and Russia. In: EU-Russia Visa Dialogue Reloaded: the Political, Economic and Social Dimension, EU-Russia Civil Society Forum, Warsaw, 2015; <http://www.batory.org.pl/upload/files/Programy%20operacyjnej/Otwarta%20Europa/EU%20Visa%20Code%20reform.pdf>

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to travelling on visas. A large number of EU partners, now including Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia as well as most the Western Balkan countries, have agreed visa-free travel with the Union. Armenia is planning to reach this goal within a few years. The visa dialogue with Russia has been suspended as part of the sanctions regime, introduced by the EU during the course of the Ukraine crisis, in spite of the fact that the EU officials and politicians repeatedly stated that people-to-people interaction had to be promoted even at a time of troubled relationships.

Due to security considerations, which have only become more complicated in recent years, the EU and Russia will probably be unable to reach an agreement on visa-free travel any time soon. However, the visa dialogue could still be an important platform that would facilitate the use of e-visa technologies and information exchange between border control services, and eventually lessen the burden for ordinary citizens.

EU-EAEU dialogueⁱ

Russia is an important exporter of raw materials, primarily for the EU, and a lucrative market for EU producers. This naturally makes the EU more interested in good relations with Russia than is the case for the United States. Decisions taken on infrastructural connections, including in the energy supply sector, have long-term consequences. Opportunities missed today because of the tense political atmosphere create gaps that remain with us for decades, or even centuries – such as divergent standards for important technologies and sub-optimal preferred trading routes. Since Russia, along with Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan, transferred certain trade policy competences to the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), which includes customs union between these nations, a growing number of issues related to trade and business cooperation would have to be resolved in negotiations with the Eurasian Economic Commission. So far, the EU has kept the dialogue with the EAEU on the technical level, since a number of countries reject “business as usual” with Russia, and the EAEU is seen as Russia-dominated. Although Russia does indeed carry most of the economic weight within the EAEU, decisions in the EAEU are taken by consensus. The EU could admit that, if there are agreements reached by the EU-EAEU, this would create long-term benefits for both Unions. Moreover, negotiations that involve representatives not only of Russia but of other countries as well, including, most importantly, the technocrats of the

ⁱ See Andrea Dienes, Reinhard Krumm: Time to Act: why cooperation between the EU and the EEU has its merits. In: Riga Dialogue Afterthoughts, Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 2018.

Eurasian Economic Commission, may help to decouple the dialogue from the acute political topics on which the EU and Russia have divergent views.

Risk-reductionⁱ

In some areas, the risk of military incidents between the West and Russia is already evident. The hope that a sole incident will not have major consequences is not completely unfounded but a combination of poorly developed crisis management mechanisms with growing political tension may lead to a cumulative effect. Ideas of a new and better European security architecture will remain a dream in the foreseeable future, which does not mean that nothing can be fixed. There is potential to revive the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) as a risk reduction mechanism. NATO's position is that the member states cannot return to "business as usual" with Russia and that risk reduction and basic confidence-building measures are an urgent necessity.

If some of the NRC capabilities remain blocked, there is an option to update the relevant mechanisms of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). To that end, the participating states of the OSCE have already launched a Structured Dialogue.ⁱⁱ If it runs out of steam without any deliverables, this would only lead to further mutual disappointment and to the decay of the European security structure – a new low in the Russian-Western relationship. The efficiency of the Structured Dialogue is to a large extent a function of participating states' sincerity and seriousness. The experts' community and the public at large have the potential to push policy-makers in this direction by explaining the perils of not doing anything in that field for too long.

Broaden dialogue on contested narratives

In order to complement measures that follow the 'islands of cooperation' line of thought, dialogues on the contested narratives need to be expanded at the civil society level and should attempt to engage with a broad range of actors with opposing political views. This can help to prepare the ground for more fundamental, future-oriented debates, once this is politically feasible. Basically, all OSCE participating states need to be included but at the

i See <http://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/towards-a-nato-russia-basic-understanding/>

ii See Christian Nünlist, «Under Pressure: The Uncertain Future of the OSCE Structured Dialogue», in: Security and Human Rights Monitor, 29 November 2018, <https://www.shrmonitor.org/under-pressure-the-uncertain-future-of-the-osce-structured-dialogue>.

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same time, formats in which the internal diversity of opinion in each country can be reflected are essential for a productive dialogue.

A historical approach, focusing on the factual level, needs to be combined with a social constructivist approach, focusing on the 'subjective truths'. It is also important to define how this could feed into existing dialogue formats and how mediative dialogue facilitation techniques can be integrated into formal settings.

Part II

Eva Steinlein & Alexandra Ogneva: Media landscapes in Russia and Germany – Clarifying mutual misconceptions

“Comparing journalists across national boundaries and cultures is a game of guess work at best.”

(David Weaver, The Global Journalist. News People Around the World, 1998)

Whenever the topic of media outlets and/or practices of news coverage in Russia and Germany is brought up, the conversation seems bound to steer towards the enumeration of each other’s individual mistakes and structural shortcomings, tied to mutual accusations of creating propaganda and voluntarily deceiving and manipulating their audience.

The project “Russian-German Dialogue on Conflict Narratives. Russia and The West” was no exception, but succeeded in creating an atmosphere of discussion that provided space to express these mutual perceptions of mistakes and shortcomings. This allowed the group to discover some of the underlying misconceptions that lead to mutual misunderstanding, mistrust and, ultimately, accusations of propaganda and of voluntary deception of the audiences in Germany and Russia.

The goal of this article is to summarise the main insights of the discussion. It focuses on the (news) media landscapes of two nations, Germany and Russia, as a structure comparable to the monolithic “Western media system” does not exist in Russia and the German and Russian media landscapes were the participants’ area of expertise.

Is there no opposition media in Germany?

The group started off with the intention to discuss the role of German and Russian news media in the current situation of mutual mistrust and suspicion between the two countries. To form a grounding definition of “news media”, the group started listing examples of quality print, online, radio and television information outlets in Germany and Russia and then tried to group them into a side-to-side comparison of the two nations. This approach failed as it became clear that a direct comparison between the Russian and German media landscapes was not possible due to structural differences.

The Russian participants in the discussion made an effort to distinguish between oppositional and government-leaning news outlets – and then discovered that this approach did not apply to the German media landscape in the same way. They therefore asked: Was there no opposition media in Germany at all?

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They pointed out that in Russia a news outlet's political stance was defined by its **position towards the government**. The establishment of the first Russian newspaper **Vedomosti** by Tsar Peter the Great in 1703 became the first reflection of **top-down relations between the Russian state and journalism**, which has lasted for almost three centuries and has always defined the nature and underlying conditions of the Russian media system. In the Soviet Union, the government was the sole owner and publisher of the media.

Today, media outlets can be classed as

- a) state media (TV: VGTRK group, including Vesti 24 and Russia 1; Print: Rossiyskaya gazeta, Parlamentskaya Gazeta),
- b) **oppositional media** (TV: *Dozhd*, Radio: *Echo Moskv*,ⁱ Online: *gazeta.ru*, *meduza.io*) and
- c) independent media financed by corporate structures or philanthropists (TV: NTV financed by Gazprom Media, Channel 1 financed by oligarch Roman Abramovich and billionaire Yuri Kovalchuk; print: *Vedomosti*, *Kommersant*, Internet: *lenta.ru* financed by Vladimir Potanin, *rbc.ru* financed by Mikhail Prokhorov).

The German participants then explained that the political stance of a German news outlet, especially a newspaper, was not defined by its position towards the government. Nor is it characterised by general support for or rejection of any particular political party, as they pointed out.

Germany's media landscape largely developed **after the Second World War** when –under the supervision of the Western alliance – newspapers, TV and radio stations were opened. After the appropriation and misuse of the mass media for propaganda purposes by the National Socialists, the founders placed great emphasis on **keeping news outlets** out of the hands of the state.

Currently, there are

- a) twelve **public broadcasting companies**, financed by obligatory fees (nine *Landesrundfunkanstalten*, *ZDF*, *Phoenix*, *Deutschlandradio*) and the international broadcaster *Deutsche Welle (DW)* which is funded from the federal budget.
- b) Additionally, there are **commercial broadcasting companies** (*Privatsender*), the largest being Bertelsmann, Axel Springer und ProSiebenSAT.1.
- c) The largest **newspaper publishers** are Verlagsgruppe Südwestdeutsche Medien Holding

ⁱ Echo Moskv is held by two thirds by Gazprom Media. This, can contribute to its perception as a corporate-financed news outlet, although its content and reporting style is characterized as oppositional.

(*Süddeutsche Zeitung, Stuttgarter Zeitung*) Axel Springer SE (*Bild, Die Welt*), Funke Mediengruppe, Verlagsgruppen Ippen, Madsack and DuMont. Publications like *Der Spiegel, Die Zeit, Stern* and *taz* are considered influential newspapers of record, but are less profitable.

The German participants in the discussion outlined that news outlets in Germany defined themselves by their **world view and general outlook on core issues** – informally, this is described by the term *Blattlinie*. German newspapers especially pride themselves on their **expert reporting on certain topics**, such as economy and business in *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, environment issues and social equality in *taz*, and investigative journalism in *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

This point led to another topic of discussion, namely the **role of international broadcasting** in Russia and Germany.

The **Russia Today news network (RT)** has become increasingly visible and important in recent years as Moscow expanded its investment in these tools and focused its efforts on Europe and the United States.ⁱ It was argued that the Russian government used RT to disseminate key messages about Russia's foreign policy agenda and to promote Russia's role in the international system.

At the same time, the Russian participants underlined that Germany's *Deutsche Welle (DW)*, like RT, received funding from the federal budget and pursued a similar agenda on the international stage. Indeed, Section 4 of the Deutsche Welle Act underlines that the offerings of DW "provide a forum in Europe and on other continents for German points of view on important topics, primarily in the areas of politics, culture and economics, with the aim of promoting understanding and the exchange of ideas among different cultures and peoples".ⁱⁱ That surely makes DW Germany's most important cultural ambassador abroad.

Who makes the news?

During the talks, the group discovered that the social and demographic background of Russian and German journalists could hardly be more different.

i Since 2005, the Russian government has increased the channel's annual budget more than tenfold, from \$30 million to over \$300 million. Russia Today's budget covers the salaries of thousands of employees and freelancers worldwide, many of them in English-speaking countries. See: Bidder, B. (2013, August 13): Putin's Weapon in the War of Images. Retrieved 14 November 2018 from <http://www.spiegel.de/international/business/putin-fights-war-of-images-and-propaganda-with-russia-today-channel-a-916162.html>.

ii See: Deutsche Welle Act. Retrieved 19 November 2018 from <https://m.dw.com/downloads/36383966/dwgesetzen.pdf>.

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A 2006 study found that a **typical German journalist** was a 41-year-old middle-class man who works as a permanently employed editor for a print outlet (newspaper and/or magazine)ⁱ. He has at least one university degree and has completed a *Volontariat* and one or more internships as part of his professional training. He also seems to be leaning left-of-centre in terms of politics: According to a 2006 study, 34% of all journalists surveyed favoured *Alliance 90/The Greens*, 25% favoured the *SPD* and a full 19% claimed not to be inclined towards a particular party.

The **typical Russian journalist**, however, is a highly educated woman under 35 who works as a permanently employed editor for a television broadcaster.ⁱⁱ She has a university degree in journalism and gained practical experience during at least two internships that are a mandatory part of her studies.

A journalist's social and demographic background is not only likely to influence their perspective and their professional decisions, but is also certain to influence their image and standing within the media industry and journalists' community.

What exactly is a journalist's job?

Journalists' self-assigned roles and their understanding of their professional duties differ according to their cultural, social and educational background. This became apparent as the group debated one participant's question as to whether journalists intended to manipulate their audience, and what this alleged manipulation looked like.

i See Weischenberg, S.; Malik, M.; Scholl, A. (2006) *Die Souffleure der Mediengesellschaft*. Report über die Journalisten in Deutschland. Konstanz: UvK 2006.

ii There are no exact statistics on the size of the journalists' community in Russia. Experts estimate that there are more than 150,000 full-time journalists in Russia and that 90 percent of them have a university education in various fields. Those who have specifically studied journalism constitute approximately two-thirds of the journalistic labour force. Recent research suggests that "the profession is evidently becoming a female one" with a share of about 70 percent women in the younger groups. Journalists in Russia are also generally younger now: about 70 percent are under 35 years old, 23 percent are between 35 and 50, and only 7 percent are over 51 years old. Despite their youthage, these "young professionals" are well educated. See: Vartanova, E. (2018) *Russia - Media Landscape*. Publication of the European Journalism Centre (EJC).

The study "The Global Journalist in the Twenty-First Century" from 2013 indicates that the percentage of journalists with a university degree is considerably higher in Russia (90%) than in Germany (60%). In Germany, female journalists make up little more than one third of journalists (also see survey by the European Federation of Journalists from 2006.)

The Russian participants in the dialogue project pointed out that in Russia, the job of **journalists working for the state media** was to **broadcast and explain the government's position** to the public – a function that was emphasised by framing the President's viewpoint as "*the official position*". The journalists working for other media outlets take **opposition to the government** and make it their key task to **argue, or even agitate, for their world view**. Indeed, in the Russian mass media, it is still a common practice for reporters to state their own opinions and assessments. Although some news services, like *Vedomosti* or *RBC*, have taken the completely opposite approach, this has not become the dominant trend.

According to the participants in the discussion, German journalists have a different understanding of their role: The majority consider that their job is to **enable the public to form their own opinion** rather than to argue for or against a specific agenda. The distinction between information and opinion pieces (*Trennung von Nachricht und Meinung*) is a key principle that every journalist in Germany feels obliged to observe. The **output of media outlets that are committed to arguing or agitating for a specific political agenda** in Germany is not considered journalism, but **activism** or – to use a more derogatory term – **propaganda**.

However, it was admitted that German journalists failed to live up to or deliberately compromised on their own high standards at times. At this point in the conversation, the Russian participants in the dialogue emphasised that some Russian journalists were also committed to these principles, whereas others were not.

Another difference between German and Russian journalism concerns their **training and specialisation**. A journalist in Germany is usually considered to possess **a set of general skills**, implying that s/he is able to cover local or international news, economy or culture adequately. Russian journalists, however, choose **one area of expertise** early in their careers. They thus become experts on a rather narrow range of issues instead of broader and more theoretical topics. This enables German journalists to migrate from one subject to another, whereas Russians often demonstrate scholarly levels of knowledge of their field because of their specialisation.

These differences, of course, have implications for journalists' understanding of their professional duties. Academic research in the field of journalism studies indicates that **German and Russian journalists understand their job** and its obligations **very differently**.

According to studies, German journalists firmly regard it as their job "**to be an impartial observer**" and "**to provide citizens with the information they need to make their own political choices**".

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ⁱMost of them strongly repudiate the idea that it is their job “to support official policies, to bring about prosperity and development” and “to convey a positive image of political and business leadership”.

Russian journalists tend to be **less rigorous in any of their stances**. They mostly agree with the statements about impartiality and facilitating citizens’ decision-making, but at the same time do not reject the suggestion that their role is also “**to support official policies aimed at bringing about prosperity and development**” and “**to convey a positive image of political and business leadership**” as vehemently as their German colleagues doⁱⁱ. Remarkably, Russian journalists tend to feel much more entitled “to influence public opinion” and more repelled to “act as a watchdog of business elites” than German journalistsⁱⁱⁱ.

Why is there such a strong tendency towards conformism among journalists?

At this point in the discussion, the Russian participants wondered how German mainstream media seemed so uniform and conformist to them, considering the restrictive professional standards and their afore-mentioned specialisation on key topics in news journalism. The same could be said vice versa. Wasn’t this a paradox?

The tendency towards a certain degree of conformism among news outlets was not neglected outright by the German participants, but was explained by the fact that journalism is a complex system that is formed, challenged and changed or reproduced by a plethora of factors.

i In a study entitled “The Global Journalist in the Twenty-First Century”, issued in 2013, 77.8% of Russian journalists canvassed agreed it was their job “to provide analysis of events”, whereas only 40% of German journalists in the study did. 53% of the Russian journalists expressed an obligation “to be a watchdog of the government”, whereas only 7% of the German journalists agreed. However, roughly twice as many Russian journalists (24.8%) as German journalists (13%) stated it was part of their job “to provide entertainment”.

Findings were validated by an extensive academic research project entitled the Worlds of Journalism Study which investigated the culture/s of journalism around the world by surveying 100 journalists in 21 countries, including Germany and Russia, between 2007 and 2011.

ii See: Dossier from the Federal Agency of Civic Education (8 March 2018): „Die russische Medienlandschaft. Alles Propaganda?!“, retrieved 15 November 2018 from <http://www.bpb.de/internationales/europa/russland/47996/medienlandschaft>

iii The World of Journalism Study identifies four global professional milieus of journalists which described journalists’ perceived roles in simple terms: The populist disseminator, the detached watchdog, the critical change agent and the opportunist facilitator. According to the study, 69% percent of German journalists identify as detached watchdogs, followed by 17% who may be regarded as populist disseminators, whereas in Russia detached watchdogs make up just 8% of journalists. 41% of Russian journalists saw themselves as opportunist facilitators and 39% can be described as populist disseminators.

Generally, people tend to associate with whoever they perceive as **similar and “matching”**. This will impact on the recruitment and, consequently, the demographic composition of editorial staff and, to an even greater extent, the management of a news media outlet. Therefore, a certain degree of conformity within the journalists’ community and media industry is manifested simply by demographics.

Besides the psychological tendency towards social conformity which also plays out within the media industry and the journalists’ community, the group brought up the phenomenon of co-orientation. **Co-orientation** between competing news media in Germany is not regarded as a deficiency but rather as a form of validation, the German participants argued: If their own selection of “topics that matter” is mirrored by other media outlets, it is thus legitimised within a professional framework.

Other factors influencing the selection of news that were mentioned by the dialogue participants were the concept of *news values (Nachrichtenfaktoren)*, the **social and demographic background of journalists** and the **necessity of most news outlets to work in an economically sustainable way**.

News values according to Galtung and Ruge (1965), i.e. factors determining whether a topic/event is worth reporting or notⁱ, are internalised by all news journalists in Germany. Whilst their **individual weight in a particular decision** is debated, the **canon itself is not questioned**, although the prevalence of the singular values and the outcome of deliberation processes may differ from the perception of the media’s audience at times.

Scientific researchers of journalism in Russia have arguedⁱⁱ that editorial decision-making is guided firstly by the **political and economic interests of the publication owners and editors-in-chief** and secondly by news values. However, the **perceived “hierarchy” among the twelve values** and their prevalence in particular decisions differs from the Western standard. In a paper published in 2013, the author admitted that the **sensationalism** sometimes overruled the importance of news content and noted a recurrence of popular frames, such as the focus on prominent figures, e.g. Vladimir Putin, as the main protagonist in any political event.

i News values as postulated by J.Galtung and M.H.Ruge (1965) include: frequency, intensity and intensity increase (called threshold), unambiguity, meaningfulness in terms of relevance and cultural proximity, unexpectedness, continuity of coverage on an established topic, the overall composition of a publication. The list is expanded by the culturally divergent factors of reference to elite nations, reference to elite people, reference to persons and reference to something negative.

ii See: Rossoshansky, A.V. (2013): “News Values” of the Russian Mass Media. In: Izvestiya Saratovskogo universiteta. Novaya Seriya. No. 4. p.88-92.

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Conclusion

When consuming news media from another country and assessing its journalistic style and content, it is crucial **not to judge them by one's own standards**, but to bear in mind the differences between media landscapes. The Russian and German media systems differ greatly in terms of industry structures, journalists' understanding of their role, demographics and the considerations behind the news-making process.

There is a **lack of awareness** of these differences among both the audience/news media consumers and journalists/news media producers not specialised in German-Russian affairs in both countries. This has led to mutual misconceptions and, ultimately, accusations of propaganda between Russia and Germany. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the Russian media system has undergone one or more transformational periods. However, this has not led to informational convergence between Germany and Russia, and it is unlikely to appear in the future. The **gap of understanding** between Russia and Germany has **shrunk, but has not disappeared**.

The ability to assess the news media of the other country thus remains a key competence for both sides. Being able to recognise the influence of different conditions of production on the outcome, i.e., the news, is a crucial skill not only for the process of informing oneself about current events, but also for any attempts at mutual understanding.

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Andrey N. Medushevsky: The Role of Populism for Collective Narratives in the West and in Russia: a comparative Perspective of Similarities and Differencesⁱ

Populism plays an important role in the development of collective narratives, particularly the process of narratives becoming more and more inert to facts or information which question their core story. It has developed as a contemporary social phenomenon both in the West and in Russia. The comparison of both Western and Russian forms of populism has significance, as it allows clarification of the general and specific traits of populism, including its ideological and political peculiarities, and the study of potentially effective counteractive measures against it.ⁱⁱ

A Right Turn: Conservative Values in the Service of Modern Western Populism

The turn to the right is a visible trend in the modern political development in both the West and Russia.ⁱⁱⁱ The nature of populism reveals how its various expressions are connected, both with general societal tendencies, and with the situational specifics of different regions: it is based on the assumption that the will of the people is always right, and that those who understand the “true” will of the people will win. Several rightist populist parties and their leaders have rapidly risen on this wave: Eurosceptics in Great Britain and the Netherlands, the “People’s Front” in France, AFD in Germany, “Five Stars” and the “League of the North” in Italy, for example. A special situation exists in Eastern European countries, where conservative impulses have appeared because of difficulties within the EU, while the typical sentiments of the post-Soviet electorate have accumulated as well. It is noteworthy that this is occurring in countries where, during the period of decommunisation, civil society possessed a high level of self-organisation, having survived “velvet” revolutions and the “counter-revolutions” that followed (Fides in Hungary, and Law and Justice in Poland – whose coming to power signalled radical constitutional counter-reforms). The Baltic countries and Ukraine witnessed a similar trend with the growth of ethno-nationalism and rightist radicalism. In these cases, they compared “natives” to “non-natives,” “citizens” to “non-citizens”, the official language to the non-official one, all as attempts to present nationalism as a policy of “cultural identity” in parallel with the rewriting of history and the indoctrination of so-called “historical memory” and an “image of the enemy”.

i This is a shortened and modified version of the article: Medushevsky A. N. Populism in the West and in Russia: a Comparative Perspective of Similarities and Differences/Populism as a Common Challenge / edited by Claudia Crawford, Boris Makarenko, Nikolai Petrov. Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2017. pp. 47-57.

ii For a comprehensive definition of populism see Medushevsky 2017, *ibid*.

iii Liberal’niye tsennosti i konservativniy trend v evropeyskoy politike i obschestve. [Liberal Values and the Conservative Trend in European Politics and Society.] M., 2015.

In direct contrast, in Southern (Mediterranean) Europe, populism possesses a “leftist” (and more “ideological”) taint. However, in essence, it exploits infantilism and the irresponsibility of the masses (Seriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain and others). We can discuss a number of differences between leftist and rightist populism: left-populist trends have a clearer ideological orientation, and can be considered an example of a fairly successful anti-system movement that opposes globalisation, capitalism, financial oligarchy and, in general, the neoliberal mainstream, and which utilises the experience of related movements in Latin America in its strategy. Notwithstanding criticism of integration with Europe and of decisions made in the EU (by Brussels), they do not call for an end to the EU or for their own countries’ exits from the EU. Their protest is more of a way to pressure institutions with the aim of restructuring them to take a different ideological approach, with the additional goal of economic autonomy. With all their seeming external differences, all European populists employ similar methods: demands to restore “sovereignty” (lost as a result of absorption by globalist structures and certain countries, the US and Germany, specifically), “respect for the country and its people”, criticism of the existing elites, who supposedly surrendered the country to “transnational capital”, and the exploitation of the popular sentiment that the national elites do not protect the “people” as they face new challenges.

In Russia, the populist trend has turned out to be even more visible, defining the appearance of an unprecedented “symphony of power, elite groups, and the population in a new “neo-conservative consensus”. This is based on the long-term interests of those already in power, the support of elite and bureaucratic groups, the effective use of mobilization propaganda, protectionist actions for the middle-classes, and also on predominant mass sentiments.”ⁱ

The methodology for conflict resolution offered by these populists is a nationalistic mobilisation against “Euro-mobilisation” and its associated limitations, responsibilities and costs, as well against real challenges – identity blurring (cultural, national, religious); “a deficit of democracy” which is quite natural in a more centralised system; the migration crisis (cultural incompatibility, the need to pay for migrants, loss of available jobs, crime, and the impression that the opinion of smaller nationalities is ignored).

Regarding the narratives of Russian-Western relations, German right-wing populists basically defect from the mainstream narrative and argue for a much ‘softer’ approach towards

i A. Yu. Mel’dvil’. Konservativniy consensus v Rossii? Osnovniye komponenty, faktori ustoichivosti, potentsial erozii [Conservative Consensus in Russia? Main Components, Stability Factors, Erosion Potential] // *Politiya*, 2017. P. 29-45.

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Russia. Against the background of allegations of the Kremlin's support of right-wing populists, this indirectly delegitimises others who also call for a better understanding of Russia, because they are confronted with the argument that they have the same position as the AfD, for example.

Undeclared Soviet Legitimacy and the Specifics of Contemporary Russian Populism

At the heart of the development of populist projects in post-Soviet Russia lies the unrestricted legacy of Soviet legitimacy. First, it is said that the basic values of Russian culture have essentially remained unchanged. In post-Soviet society, the conflict between the law and justice is solved from the position of an egalitarian interpretation of social fairness, which rejects the ideas of liberal democracy, a state ruled by laws, and individual freedom as a priority. Second, there persists an overriding influence of Soviet legal stereotypes relating to the interpretation of the principles of freedom, justice and equality, and social and political rights. Third, the problem of succession has yet to be completely resolved: after becoming the successor to the USSR, Russia took on the burden of post-Soviet reorganisation (unlike Western countries that moved on from their respective colonial heritages). In these conditions, there is a risk that the democratic civil consolidation of society will be replaced with a new imperial identity and a subsequent development of associated politics based on that power. Fourth, it has been acknowledged that the issue of the artificiality of the Soviet model of federalism (built on national-territorial lines) was not solved in its post-Soviet construction. Inability to solve this problem establishes an identity problem (the idea of building a new civil nation), limits the scale of democratic changes, and encourages a move toward authoritarianism. Fifth, it has been proven that, in the sphere of economic regulation, there exists a gap between the legal (written) constitution and the actual constitution (considering law enforcement practices and the condition of the economic system). Sixth, it should be emphasised that the transformation of the Soviet judicial system is still incomplete, and it is still based on the principle of rigid centralism, which, in the end, assures the system's manageability. Seventh, it should be noted that there are dangerous signs that the Russian system's own division of powers is moving in the direction of being transformed into a personality-driven regime.ⁱ

It is worth mentioning the fundamentally different results of the post-communist transition

ⁱ Konstitutsionniye printsipy i puty ih realizatsii: rossiyskiy kontekst. Analiticheskiy doklad. [Constitutional Principles and Paths to Their Realisation / Achievement: Russian Context. Analytical Report.] M., 2014.

periods in Russia and in most Eastern European countries, where in the latter, the principles of a law-based state became the basis for building a modern political system.ⁱ The incompleteness of the modernisation of Russian society is a stated fact: its objective is still to “modernize the country through reforms based on the universal values of humanism, rights and the dignity of the human being, trust, collaboration and the solidarity of the people”, and disputes exist over the concept of reforms, their priorities, and the information agenda.ⁱⁱ In general, a low level of trust in political institutions is noticeable, as is the general composition and cultural continuity of the modern Russian elite, as related to its Soviet counterpart. It can thus be concluded that “the Soviet love for imitation possesses a strong inertia which continues to hold back the establishment of a law-based state in Russia”.ⁱⁱⁱ

This largely determines the specifics of the style of Russian populism – its general restoration impulse, the parameters of its conservative-romantic philosophy, and its opinion about cultural, social and political changes.^{iv} Key elements of this programme are criticism of Western liberal democracy, the justification of Russia’s own “special path”, and the rejection of the “imposed” Constitution of 1993. Based on these beliefs, the idea of Restoration (return to the institutions of “Soviet parliamentarism”) has been born. “Soviet parliamentarism” is a quasi-democratic system that hides the one-party dictatorship. Alternatively, Restoration can mean the return to the pre-Soviet power model that appeals to the principle of unity, or in its extreme form, the recreation of the imperial power model. This trend includes a negative attitude in relation to the programme of liberal constitutional changes.^v It defines the dynamics and specifics of the interaction between different flows of populism and political power in the post-Soviet period.

Russian populism is very skilled at using the “Soviet myth” in order to reach its goals. This is proven by: a) attempts to revitalise it at the state level; b) the fact that populists of all ideological flows use it (including, by the way, the almost-liberals);

i See materials on international discussion: Put’ v Evropu [The Road to Europe] M., 2008.

ii Predlozheniya III Obscherossiyskogo grazhdanskogo foruma 21-22 noyabrya 2015 g. [Proposals of the 3rd All-Russian Civil Forum, 21-22 November 2015] M., 2015. p.1.

iii A. Akhiezer, I. Klyamkin, I. Yakovenko. Istoriya Rossii: konets ili novoye nachalo? [History of Russia: the End or a New Beginning?] M., 2013. p.428.

iv A. Medushevsky. Conservative Political Romanticism in Post-Soviet Russia // Power and Legitimacy – Challenges from Russia. London and New York, 2012. pp.169-187.

v A. Medushevsky. Problems of Modernizing the Constitutional Order: Is it Necessary to Revise Russia’s Basic Law// Russian Politics and Law, Vol. 52, N.2, March-April 2014, p.44-59.

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c) the connection of this myth with a view of the future (projects focused on social changes and, above all, on political reforms).

Regarding the contested narratives of 'Russia and the West' Russian populists therefore reinforce the tendency of conflicting narratives to 'seal themselves in', that is to become more and more inert to contradicting information and perspectives.

The Principal Traits and Specifics of the Russian Version of Populism in Comparative Perspective

We can summarise the differences between Russian and the Western populism as follows:

1) Populists in Europe and in Russia differ in the goals that they wish to achieve, and in the challenges faced by their societies. For Western Europe, it is a crisis of national identity in the context of globalisation (primarily, addressing the issue of migration from African countries). For Russia, it is solving the problems of post-Soviet reorganisation: building relations with the countries of the post-Soviet region, who are themselves engaged in a torturous search for national identity (and who often see the automatic opposition of themselves vs. Russia as a solution, thus provoking a naive rewriting of history).

2) A key object of criticism in the West is European integration, and the solution populists consider valid is their countries' exit from the EU. In Russia it is the criticism of destructive tendencies which caused the collapse of the USSR (and earlier – the Russian Empire), and nostalgia for what was once a strong and united country. The solution is the integration of post-Soviet countries into a space of Russian influence (the Eurasian Union project and the "Russian World" concept serve as a means to this end). In this way, the key slogan of Western populists is "More Decentralisation", while Russia's populists promote "More Unification and Centralisation".

3) Western populism is based on an ideological postmodernist conglomeration, specifically, uniting the ideas of conservative nationalism with the ideas of anti-globalism and the anarchist protests against capitalism, Atlanticism, transnational monopolies and the depersonalisation of the individual by European bureaucracy. Although Russian populism pays homage to these ideas (mainly in order to be able to criticise the unipolar world and US dominance), its ideological base is much more traditional. It is based on the conservative-ro

mantic ideas of European populism of the 1920s and 1930s (associated with discussions about Weimar Germany), clericalism ("the spiritual revival of the nation"), the stereotypes of Russian post-revolutionary emigrants (Eurasianism), and the general ideology of identity and a special path (emotionally coloured by a one-sided definition of "patriotism"), but typical, however, of many developing countries in different parts of the world.

4) The difference between the Western and the Russian versions of populism is a result of the differences in the political regimes. Western populist movements that are forced to act in an environment of representative democracy use its mechanisms – they appeal to the masses with the aim of securing their votes during elections. Russian populists, who operate in an environment of more traditional society and a system of limited pluralism, associate their rise to power with the politics of the state and with the figure of its leader – the President, the guarantor of the Constitution, who defines the overall direction of the country's internal and external policy. A typical trait of Russian populism in a European comparative perspective is its close connection with the institutions of the imitation democracy. Unlike functioning Western democracies, Russian populism is not represented by independent parties; they are all integrated into one vertical of power (if their popularity increases, they start to be viewed as destabilising and go through a process of "voluntary dissolution"). It can be said that the "people's" populist ideas are in fact delegated at the initiative of those in power.

5) That is why in Russia, populist impulses that come from the bottom (from society) feed the populism of those in power, and provide them with room to manoeuvre (with a choice between more, or less, rigid versions). However, at the same time, they are limited by it so as to avoid losing control of the situation (the suppression of extreme rightist and leftist movements that question preserving stability, e.g. with regard to inter-faith and inter-ethnic consensus, social stability and that of those who would use these positions to argue for the legitimacy of the existing regime). Positioning itself as "centrist", the political regime evolves to the right, substituting populist for constitutional legitimacy, and gradually includes in its official rhetoric the arguments of its conservative-populist opponents.

6) This is the reason why these two types of populism, Western and Russian, differ in terms of how they enter into the ideology of a country and into the dynamics of its political development. Populism is more dangerous in democratic political regimes, where the masses influence the decision-making process directly through elections, and it is less evident in

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regimes with limited pluralism, where the authorities are able to neutralise and correct extreme displays of populism.

7) If in democracies, the life of populism is limited (at least, in terms of remaining in a static form) by one or several electoral cycles, in regimes of limited pluralism it is more stable because the responsibility to the voters is blurred between the parties and the regime (within the public movements and organisations that are controlled by the state). It is notable that “Narodniy Front” [The People’s Front] was created as an alternative to traditional parties, including the ruling “Edinaya Rossiya” [United Russia] party.

8) The functions of Western and Russian populism are different – in the former case, it is a form of accumulated protest against imperfect institutions in order to enter into power and in the latter, it is a form of mobilisation to support the existing regime, and an instrument of its legitimatisation. Schematically, in the West, populism is an instrument used to come to power (a change of elites), and in Russia it is an instrument used for preservation (retention of power by the current elite). In this context, populist regimes in Eastern Europe act as a type of transitional option, because their respective parties have already come into power by democratic means, but aim to strengthen their dominance in society, including by placing limitations on existing democratic procedures.

9) The attitudes of the various political elites toward this phenomenon also differ: it is perceived as a real threat to their hegemony (in Western democracies), while in Russia it is viewed as an instrument that generally serves to strengthen the regime.

10) If in the West, populism is a side-effect of democracy (faced with the difficulties of globalisation), in Russia it is a bastion for the defence of traditional authoritarianism, and a full-scale basis for the ideology of the restoration of the political regime.

The Prospects for Overcoming Populism

It is obvious that, to overcome populism it is important to define what anti-populism is. It can be defined as “responsible politics”. It is politics that is based not on emotions but on knowledge, not on changing collective sentiment, but on professional scientific forecasting; it consists of policies that protect not only the short-term, but the long-term interests of society as well. Using this logic, the following suggestions are worth considering:

1. Rethink the impression that it is possible to defeat populism using its own methods. The vicious circle of populism in this interpretation is like an inescapable “loop”: in order to maintain their positions, modern democracies have to use populism (to win the masses), but by using it, they then become hostages to their own (unfulfillable) promises. The refusal to fulfil these promises then causes louder protests which take on increasingly radicalised forms. At the same time, the traditional elites have to incorporate representatives of the counter-elites within their structures, leading to what amounts to a marginalisation process. This process does not necessarily end with the complete victory of populism; it may end with a partial victory (which implies the erosion of political institutions), offering variations on proffered solutions and a functional diversity of populist initiatives. In any case, degradation of the “political class” and of the leadership is the result.

2. Western democracies face the need to turn their “faces into the wind”, i.e. to stop ignoring the real problems which divide society (from information alienation and loss of identity to migration problems and the political participation of marginalised social strata). The solution is not to keep these problems hidden, or attempt to overcome them verbally, but to readjust the liberal paradigm so that it takes these new challenges into account.

3. It would be a promising development to justify proposals which oppose populism, along the lines of “intelligent democracy”: a system of barriers and filters that allow for the avoidance of populism, and which guarantees that responsible politicians will come to power, i.e. parties and leaders who take responsibility for their promises to voters by means of their reputations and political authority.

4. The cognitive reorganisation of the liberal-democratic paradigm assumes a departure from the dramatic opposition of ideological clichés that appeared during the Cold War period, and before that – during the Empire period. Instead, it means movement to a professional, pragmatic and rather precise construction of concepts that, on one hand, are easily understood by the masses, and on the other hand, are able to oppose any impulses leading to reactionary restoration. This means giving convincing answers to tough questions (identity, migration, financial dependence, borders, visa regimes, etc.) that are able to protect the liberal tendency in the competition among parties.

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5. A meaningful dialogue between those in power and society on critical problems is important: holding opinion polls (consultative local referendums?) with clearly stated analytical goals before these go before a final vote (parliamentary or presidential elections). Such an approach allows for the improvement of the electorate's awareness, and shows the real costs of decisions and their possible consequences before the final verdict. In addition, on the other hand, it demonstrates the mistakes of certain types of populism that have come into power in some countries or regions (as a rule, a victory for populists usually reveals their overall lack of professionalism and short-term planning windows, mainly due to the mechanical nature of their reactions to critical current challenges).

6. It is critical to review the thesis about the uniqueness of Russia's development. It is a traditional, ideologised formula about the fatal historical choice Russia faces, a choice between West and East, which is then narrowed down to schemes of some sort of unchanging "civilisation matrix" rut, a special "Russian system" that is supposedly defined by its inability to avoid going back to authoritarian tendencies. From this point of view, it makes sense to critically review Soviet legitimacy as a whole in the context of its influence on public consciousness and institutions. In reality, today we are talking about the definition of Russia's place in the globalisation space, the information space, and about integration processes implying not the outright rejection but the pragmatic use of other countries' cultural and technological achievements. These are then directed at strategies and technologies of change that are able to transform the political and legal system of Russia toward sustainable democratic development.

7. The practical steps and the direction Russia should take can be supported by the following measures: 1) clearly stated goals for reforms (and their cost) which apply to the predominant reform project offered by the elite: it is critical to develop its platform with professional-level expertise (which is possible, even in a closed regime, usually in order to avoid populism), however, with a subsequent public-wide discussion of the final product in order to make society understand it and "buy in"; 2) signing an agreement (contract) on the inviolability of compliance with its underlying principles in the long run (with a potential formal or informal fixation of the terms of this contract between the parties and societal groups); 3) putting policies and procedures of public control and mediation in place for the process of conflict-solving (which will inevitably occur due to varying societal interests and the need of the actors in the political process to "achieve consensus"); 4) the creation of institutions that will be autonomous from state power, and which will monitor the realisation of the

predominant reform project (expert assessments of the effectiveness of reforms during their realisation process should be aimed at highlighting problem situations, and not be used to legitimise those in power); 5) a provision for the succession of the elite who initiated these reforms, i.e. the creation of clear channels for its basis, and a shift towards meritocracy and predictability in the procedures for changes in leadership.

Conclusion

This article has shown that populism in Russia and populism in the West have very different, but in both cases problematic effects on the conflicting narratives of Russian-Western relations in the last 25 years. They both directly or indirectly contribute to the polarisation of the discourses about those narratives and make it harder to generate a constructive debate. Tackling populism is therefore an important aspect of paving the way for a more constructive way of dealing with the contested narratives.

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Maxim Kruschwitz and Evgeniya Sayko: On the Methodology – the Mediative Dialogue Approach

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 usually they are standing monolithically 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 of 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 value. This also creates free space for the unexpected and encourages participants in their ideas.

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

Understand ≠ Agree: 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 Analysisⁱ: The 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.

"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."

Share Approachⁱⁱ: 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."

i Wüsthube, Ljubjana: Konflikt-Perspektiv-Analyse. In: Perspektive Mediation 1/2004; Walter, Willibald; Dirk Splinter; Ulrike Pusch: Basic Guide to Mediation. DVV international, 2014 (pp.28-36); GIZ/inmedio: Shimgelina under the shade. Addis Ababa, 2013 (pp. 71-75).

ii https://www.inmedio.de/sites/default/files/60_Korea%20Forum%20special%20no%20%20EPRIE%202014_SHARE-02.pdf

Part II

“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.”

● 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.”

Part II

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.

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

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.

Small groups: In order to build trust and deepen the discussion, 16-20 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. However, the results of the group are always brought back to the plenary, which means 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 such complexity, as they can support each other or split if necessary.

Time: The Mediative Dialogue Approach requires more effort than conventional formats.

● Challenges

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

Part II

Complexity for facilitators: The complexity of the approach requires much 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 to come up with new thoughts, or are you going to step in more directionally to move forward in the process?

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

However, our results show that this 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, the 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, it can be seen as a chance to expand and improve conventional conference formats to initiate a dialogue *with* and not *about* each other.

