Russian Images of the European Union: Before and after Maidan

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This article probes into scope conditions for image change, investigating what changes in Russian images of the European Union (EU) have taken place as a result of the Russian–Ukrainian crisis. The crisis, a catalytic event, has been surrounded by uncertainty and strong emotions and is seen as a potential historical watershed in EU–Russian relations. The article examines Russia's images of the EU's intentions (good or bad?), capabilities (strong or weak?), and cultural and political status (inferior or superior?); and how they change in connection with the Russian–Ukrainian crisis. The article compares EU images across time found in Russian major newspapers and public opinion (studies undertaken in 2011–12 and 2015, before and after the crisis).

Introduction

The Russian annexation of Crimea and its involvement in eastern Ukraine fighting marked the return of war to Europe. A major theater of contention, the Russia–Ukraine conflict threatens the EU's eastern edges, confronts regional and international security, and challenges the EU's new leadership and its foreign policy focus on the exercise of global and regional political and economic stewardship. For Russia, the conflict is a question of national identity and national pride, and the EU is widely considered a "potential ally" to Ukraine. The Russian–Ukrainian crisis may be seen as a catalytic event and potential initiator of change in Russian images of the EU. It was surrounded by uncertainty, incited strong emotions, and could clearly be seen as a potential historical watershed in EU–Russian relations. All these factors are often associated with cognitive (Ahnlid and Elgström 2014) and emotive (Stein 2013, 364-394; Herrmann 2013, 403-433) changes in images.

The existence of these factors, or scope conditions, in the Russian–Ukrainian crisis leads us to predict changes in Russia's images of the EU—despite the presumed stickiness of images (Herrmann 2013, 403-433). We hypothesize that the result is stereotypical depictions of the EU as a hostile actor, an "enemy," but at the same time a weak actor. This is significant, we argue, as media and public opinion mirror, but also reinforce, the images of the political elite—thus making Russia potentially more prone to antagonistic and confrontational behavior toward the EU.

The aim of this article is to test this hypothesis by empirically investigating what changes in Russian images of the EU have actually taken place as a result of the Russian–Ukrainian crisis. Addressing the perennial empirical challenge of how to identify and measure images, we compare across time the EU-related media

images found in Russian major newspapers and the images found in public opinion (studies undertaken in 2011–12 and 2015, before and after the crisis). In analyzing these images, we ask the following questions: Does Russia see the EU as a) having benign or hostile intentions?, b) a powerful or weak actor, on the rise or in decline?, c) a similar or different actor; more advanced or lagging behind culturally, politically and economically?, d) recognizing Russia's great power status?, and, finally, have these images changed in connection with the Russian–Ukrainian crisis?

This longitudinal study of EU images in the context of the Russian–Ukrainian crisis is a novel contribution to academic writings about Russian images of the EU in general and to recent scholarship about the Russian–Ukrainian crisis. A dynamic research field focused on EU external images has emerged since the early 2000s (see Lucarelli 2014; Chaban and Holland 2014, 1-23, 2015, 672-686; Elgström and Chaban 2015 for overviews, 17-33). Within this field, studies of EU images in Russia are not numerous, and are often published in Russian, which make them less known to Western academic audiences. The majority of these works examine EU images in Russia pre-Maidan and do not undertake comparative longitudinal analysis (Nikitin 2006; Ordzhonikidze 2007; Engelbrekt and Nygren 2010; Secrieru 2010; Morozov 2009; Romanova 2011; Gretskiy and Treshchenkov 2012; Gulyaeva 2013; Chaban, Kelly, and Bain 2014; Chaban and Elgström 2014). Our article addresses these two gaps. Existing research has explored EU images in various discourses in Russia, but comparison across discourses remains rare, and this is where our article contributes—by elaborating changes in Russian media vis-à-vis popular images.

We start by presenting our theoretical framework. We outline the main features of image theory, probe into scope conditions for image change, and construct five hypotheses to be tested. Next, we present a brief overview of existing academic writings on Russia's images of the EU and Europe. Our special focus is on scholarly insights into perceived culture, intentions, capabilities, and recognition. In the following section, we describe our methodology and our data sources, emphasizing the advantage of empirical testing in image studies while having identical methodology, the same coder, and similar information sources from two separate periods of time when studying change. In the empirical part, we begin by outlining our methods of media and public opinion analysis. We continue with comparative longitudinal analysis of EU media images (in terms of their actor characteristics and emotive charge) and public opinion images (in terms of most visible descriptors of the EU with a distinct emotive charge). The paper ends with a discussion of the implication of our findings for our research questions and some suggestions for future research.

Images

Images can be conceptualized as mental pictures, composed of our cumulated experience-based "knowledge" of the surrounding world (Elgström 2000, 68). They refer "to some aspects of the world, which contains within its own structure and in terms of its own structure a reference to the act of cognition that generated it. It must say, not that the world is like this, but that it was recognized to have been like this by the image-maker" (Cohen n.d.). Images are cognitive organizing devices that help policymakers interpret and understand the complex "reality" (Cottam and Shih 1992). In the parlance of Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane (1993, 3-30), they serve as "road maps" and "focal points," telling policymakers how to define a certain situation and giving them clues as to how to relate to their environment. Images of Others and of the situation thus introduce two types of predispositions into an actor's decision-making: a diagnostic propensity, which influences the diagnosis of the situation, and a choice propensity,

which leads the actor to favor certain types of actions (cf. Cottam and Shih 1992; Shimko 1991).

In this article, we focus primarily on three actor-oriented image components: images of Others' intentions (good or bad?), capabilities (strong or weak?), and cultural and political status (inferior or superior?) (Elgström 2000; Herrmann 2013, 403-433). Perceived negative intentions of a powerful player may result in perceived threat and in the long run to the emergence of an enemy image (Herrmann 2013, 403-433). Conversely, perceived positive intentions suggest opportunities and potential cooperation. Herrmann and Fischerkeller (1995) underline the importance of images of regime characteristics (the literature on democratic peace is one example of this line of reasoning) and perceived cultural status, while Hermann and Kegley (1995) stress perceived similarity as a vital factor. Such culturally based judgments affect the perception of trustworthiness and the perceived likelihood that an agreement will be honored (Herrmann 2013, 403-433). The inclusion of culture-based assessments is particularly pertinent. This is due to the nature of the EU as neither state nor intergovernmental organization and to the double-edged nature of European culture (as modern and alluring but also as decadent and inferior)—and the EU's political culture in particular (as based on certain cosmopolitan norms and values but also as influenced by liberal market imperatives).

To add to these dimensions, several scholars have suggested that status concerns—concerns about an actor's rank in a particular social group—are for many countries at least as important as security and welfare goals. Russia is often mentioned as a case in point, and particularly so in its relations with the West (Forsberg, Heller, and Wolf 2014; Heller 2013). Status and rank are in Russia tied to the notion of honor, and thus to strong emotions (Tsygankov 2012; Forsberg 2014). Russia expects Western countries to recognize its status as a great power and to show Russia respect (Forsberg 2014). Against this background, we believe that attention must also be paid to images of the EU's willingness to grant Russia the recognition it feels itself entitled to.

Individual images—along the dimensions described above—are often combined to create stereotypical patterns, or "gestalts" (Herrmann 2013, 403-433). Scholars may delineate and compare individual dimensions, but it is at times preferable to treat them as a whole, as combinatorial constructs, "in which the subparts/do/not simply add up but instead/interact/to produce integrated results" (Herrmann 2013, 403-433). Such clusters of stereotypical images shape the interpretation of new information but also affect the search for new information. Herrmann and Fischerkeller (1995) argue that although stereotypic images may not associate strongly with individual actions, they would associate with sets of action. We will in the discussion of our findings investigate if the pattern of images that we discern can be interpreted in terms of stereotypical image clusters and what policy implications this may have.

Image Change

Images are change-resistant (Elgström 2000). Incoming information that contradicts a dominant image component is often ignored, or is interpreted in light of existing knowledge structures (Jönsson 1990). A number of psychological mechanisms have been identified that serve to prolong the life of and/or strengthen existing images: rejecting the validity of new information, discrediting the source, bolstering, and undermining (Jervis 1976, 291–96).

Under certain circumstances, however, images do change. We propose four *scope conditions* under which image change is more likely to occur. First, when new information strongly and persistently contradicts existing images. Peripheral components of the image are the first to go, but if the flow of new evidence that is

difficult to refute continues, a more fundamental transformation may take place (Jervis 1976). Relevant literature (Tsuruoka 2008; Chaban and Magdalena 2014) indicates that this new, "image-changing" information may originate a) within the perceiving country, without any control or involvement by the Other; b) within the Other, without any involvement/control of the perceiving country; and c) globally, without any control by the perceiving country or the perceived Other. To this typology, we would like to add a fourth point, new to the existing works: d) when both parties are involved and in control, e.g., during confrontational interchange between the perceived and perceiving country, or in the context of a productive, mutually beneficial collaboration between the two.

To illustrate the first point, changes in the domestic environment of the perceiving country may facilitate image change. We have in mind not only changes in leadership but also major trends in the ideological climate and/or media environment, for example toward a more authoritarian system. To illustrate the second point, the perceived Other could be embroiled in numerous internal crises, including some of an existential nature. How the crises are managed by the Other may change its external image. To illustrate the third point, changes in the global world order—*nota bene* the globalizing multipolar world with a new emerging cohort of powerful players—may change images of actors performing in the international arena. Finally, confrontation/conflict where both parties are actively involved may change the images—of the Self and of the Other.

Second, when decision-makers (as well as media gatekeepers and news writers) are confronted with a "history-making event," that is, a situation that is perceived to constitute a potential decisive watershed for the polity. Such situations are, third, often surrounded of a high degree of uncertainty; decision-makers have few clues on how the situation may evolve and where their actions may take them. Uncertainty also increases the propensity for image change (Ahnlid and Elgström 2014).

Fourth, images are more likely to be challenged when strong emotions are attached to events, not least those of great magnitude. Research in neuroscience has affected our understanding of the relationship between emotion, perception, and cognition (Brader and Marcus 2013, 165-204; Stein 2013, 364-394), showing that emotions play a primary and dominant role in perception and thought. Emotions "carry information to people about their unconscious processes, which then become conscious thoughts and feelings and affect their perceptions and beliefs" (Stein 2013, 364-394). We argue that emotions like fear, anger, shame, and pride (Brader and Marcus 2013, 165-204) may be closely associated with image change.

Under the circumstances enumerated above, new streams of information are more likely to challenge existing images. The Russian–Ukrainian crisis is, in our eyes, a likely candidate for image change. All the scope conditions seem to be there: the annexation of Crimea, the ensuing crisis, and the following war in Eastern Ukraine fueled by separatists supported by Russia are generally seen as events of a seldom encountered magnitude, and evoked strong emotional reactions in all camps, not least in Russia. The events are clouded in uncertainty: about short- and long-term outcomes and about effects on power and status. Changes in Russia's leadership, linked to erosion of media freedom, intensive patriotization, and "propagandization" of Russian news media—on the background of commercialization leading to media doing "the bidding of sparring elites in return for financial support" (Lowrey and Erzikova 2010, 275)—also put pressure on existing images. At the same time, the EU is challenged internally, by a series of ongoing crises from the euro to Brexit and migration, as well as globally, where its position is challenged by "emerging" actors. The relative perceptions of its global power and capability to cope with its crises may change images of the EU. Finally, post-Maidan Russia and the EU interact predominantly in a

confrontational mode (e.g., around EU sanctions against Russia following the annexation of Crimea). The altercations and discourses around them may trigger image changes.

We propose the following five hypotheses, associated with the four scope conditions and types of images delineated above, on the impact of the crisis on Russian images:

Hypothesis 1 (linked to images of intentions): The *highly emotive nature* of the crisis is predicted to result in stereotypical thinking, leading to black-or-white images of the actors involved. As the EU can be seen to obstruct Russian national interests, we predict that media and opinion will increasingly present the EU as an enemy.

Hypothesis 2 (linked to images of culture and capabilities): Information of the EU as being ridden by economic and political crises, *contradicting previous information* of the EU as economically strong, will, we predict, result in images of the EU as weak and decadent.

Hypothesis 3 (linked to images of capabilities): the *high uncertainty surrounding the situation* is predicted to engender images of opportunities (or threats). If the EU is seen as weak, we predict that Russian media and opinion will perceive the crisis as opening a window of opportunity.

Hypothesis 4 (linked to images of intentions and culture): perceptions of the crisis as a *history-making event* are predicted to result in stereotypical thinking and a preoccupation with actor intentions.

Hypothesis 5 (linked to recognition): the extent to which the EU is perceived to *recognize Russia as a great power* is predicted to serve as an amplifying factor. If the EU is perceived as not giving proper recognition to Russia, this will strengthen the enemy image of the EU.

We soon turn to the empirical evidence: what changes in media and opinion images can be detected in our material? Before doing so, we need, however, to describe what knowledge we already have on Russian images of Europe and the EU and to detail our methods and data sources.

Russian Images of Europe and the EU

Research on EU images in Russia undertaken before the Russian–Ukrainian crisis highlights particular patterns of perceived intentions, capabilities, culture, and recognition.[1] In terms of political *culture*, the EU has been seen as an unusual and very different actor in Russia. Its *sui generis* character and culture has not been well understood well either by Russian officials (Romanova 2011) or by the Russian general public (Gulyaeva 2013). Russian elites reject the integration philosophy of the EU and understand the processes happening in the EU from a rather different perspective (Secrieru 2010). The "European values" endorsed by the EU was another ill understood feature in Russia's imagination of the EU. There is a considerable gap between the EU with its self-visions as a "normative power" and Russia who refuses to accept the EU as a normative example (Romanova 2011; Engelbrekt and Nygren 2010). Tellingly, the EU's norms, values, and institutions were seen as different and strange—and often incompatible—by Russians. According to Ordzhonikidze (2007), such concepts as democracy, liberalism, and civil society are understood differently in Russia, with implications for Russian evaluations of EU policy. History was cited as a key explanatory factor to understand Russia's particular views on the EU's political culture. Engelbrekt and Nygren (2010) argued that years of ideological separation

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[1]EU images have been studied in a variety of discourses: official documents, elite views (including political establishment, business community, newsmakers, civil society), news media, and public opinion.

between Russia and Europe have influenced how the two regard themselves and each other in terms of political goals and instruments.

The pre-Maidan literature on EU images in Russia reflected on the EU's perceived *capabilities* in three areas: the EU's relations with Russia vis-à-vis its member states' individual relations with Russia; EU–Russia energy affairs; and the EU's influences on the shared neighborhood vis-à-vis Russia's. An analysis of Russian foreign policy documents by Engelbrekt and Nygren (2010) found that the Kremlin's bilateral affairs with the EU individual member states were perceived to limit the EU's ability to develop a cohesive Russia policy. In contrast, the EU energy affairs involvement and political activities with the states near Russia's border were seen as actions of a strong and capable actor. Especially when it comes to the perceptions of EU actions in the so-called "Russia's neighborhood," EU images of perceived *capability* team up with images of EU *intentions:* the EU is seen as suspicious and untrustworthy. In Secrieru's view (2010), Russia's mainstream perceptions of EU foreign policies toward Russia's "near abroad" mirrored a vision of unsustainable ambitions, which have led to mistrust and tensions in Russia–EU relations. In their analysis of Russia's foreign policy documents and statements of officials, Gretskiy and Treshchenkov (2012) noted an image of the EU as Russia's rival in the post–Soviet Union arena. This image triggered a shift in Russian foreign policy toward the EU—from "benevolent passiveness" to the "rigorous objection" (Gretskiy and Treshchenkov 2012). Once again history is seen as a defining factor shaping the visions of EU *capability* and *intentions.* According to these authors, EU perceptions in Russia are a composite of political concerns and misconceptions, which can be traced back to the period of the USSR's confrontations with the EC.

Images of the EU are intrinsically linked to Russia's self-reflection of whether Russia is a European state. Russia's internal debate on its identity and self-recognition influences Russia's relations with the EU in political, economic, energy, and social spheres (Morozov 2009), and this debate has deep historical roots. It involves a broader, civilizational concept of "Europe" and goes back in time stretching way beyond the USSR period and the EC/EU legacy. As one of the successors of the medieval state of Kievan Rus (882–1283), Russia has inherited historically negative attitudes toward Western Europe as a religious "Other" (Derbisheva-Sutherland 2009). As Derbisheva-Sutherland (2009) argues, seeing itself as the successor to the Byzantine Empire, Kievan Rus justified its empirical ambitions and even arrogance toward Europe through religion. The Orthodox faith was placed at the center of its identity and used to distinguish Kievan Rus from the Catholic Europe. In order to protect Orthodox Christianity from encroachment by other "not truly" Christians, Kievan Rus chose a strategy of "rejectional ethnocentrism" that led it to distance itself from Europe (Derbisheva-Sutherland 2009). However, a few centuries later, the chosen strategy of isolation from Europe led to economic and political stagnation of the Rus and its successor kingdoms. Only reforms by Tsar Peter I "the Great" (1672–1725) toward secularization and Westernization of Russian culture, alongside a wide range of economic reforms, moved Russia closer to Europe.

The relations between Russia and Europe have always received significant attention in Russia's intellectual discourse. In the nineteenth century, the Russian elite's ambivalent attitudes toward modernization brought to life two philosophical groupings: "Slavophiles" and "Westernizers." Slavophiles developed the idea that Russia is independent from Western Europe's historical, cultural, and sociopolitical experiences and legacies. The Slavophiles' firm belief in the historical and cultural creative power of the Orthodox Church determined their argument for the importance of religious difference between Western and Eastern Europe. The Russian Orthodox Church was used as the symbol of the Self and promoted a sense of "otherness" of Russia vis-à-vis the European civilization (Prizel 1998,

155). In opposition to the Slavophile movement, Westernizers saw Europe and civilization as synonymous terms, and argued that Russia's historical choice should be to follow Europe.

This divide—and ensuing visions of Europe and Russia—continued after the October Revolution in 1917. There were supporters of Slavophiles' and Westernizers' ideas among revolutionaries, as well as among leading decision-makers of the Soviet Union government. The Soviet ideology developed further the Slavophiles' image of Europe as a place where society is a site of struggle. This time, the conflict between the rulers and the ruled, the upper and lower classes, was stressed. The desire of the Soviet government to build a communal life characterized by the self-renunciation of individuals was an extension of the Slavophiles' discourse, which claimed social competition, financial rewards, and property to be destructive elements of human life.

Westernizers' visions re-emerged in the last years of the USSR and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, in the 1990s. Perestroika generally, and the concept of the "Common European Home" specifically, can be seen in this light. Yet, the end of the 1990s was marked by the revival of Slavophilism. Putin has been building Russia's self-understanding as a state surrounded by other states with different ideology. Critical attitudes toward the West have re-emerged and increased ever since.

To conclude, the complexities of Russia–EU contemporary relations and Russia's particular perceptions of the EU are rooted in understandings of what Europe is. Stent suggests that Russia's perception of Europe is based on three pillars: Europe as an idea, Europe as a model, and Europe as a geopolitical reality (Stent 2007, 393-443). *Europe as an idea* is a cultural concept meaning that Europe is Russia's "significant other" who shapes domestic intellectual debate between Slavophiles and Westernizers (Stent 2007, 393-443). *Europe as a model* means that Europe is capable to assist in the country's struggle against its structural vulnerabilities by employment of European experience and technologies (Trenin 2006). *Europe as a geopolitical player* is crucial for Russia's security concerns in its "near abroad." Yet, Russia's understanding of the concept of Europe is not equal to its understanding of what the EU is. One may argue that it is likely that Russia's media, elite, and general public have an overall view of the EU as a synonym to Europe. Research, however, shows that the concept of Europe is mainly associated with high culture, religion, and lifestyle, while the EU is perceived in the context of economic, political, and energy affairs (PPMI/NCRE/NFG 2015).

EU images in Russia have been traditionally studied through official documents and elite views. Scholarly attention to public opinion has been rare, and research of EU images in news media remains in high deficit. Our article examines these two overlooked discourses, offsetting them against each other and comparing them across time.

Methodology

Russia's images of the EU exist in many discourses. We venture that Russia's images of the EU are empirically best captured by analyzing the *frames* generated by influential news media and by public opinion. To frame is, according to Entman's seminal definition, to "select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (Entman 1993, 52). Entman (2003, 417) argues that framing is "the central process by which government officials and journalists exercise political influence over each other and over the public." This is especially pertinent in the media environments controlled by government (increasingly so in Russia). Importantly for our research, in less free societies, news coverage carries

political significance serving as a "prime indication…of current political attitudes" internally and externally (Rubin 1979). We thus argue that Russian media reflect or even amplify the images of political elites—for Lowrey and Erzikova (2010, 275), Russia is an example of a "system wherein media are instruments of the elite."

Overcoming empirical limitation of many image studies, this analysis tracks images in two time periods, juxtaposing EU representations in news media discourse against EU perceptions among the general public. Longitudinal studies are rare in the field of EU perception studies. Our research design emphasizes the importance of having identical methods employed in the analysis of media frames and public opinion, the same coder, and similar information sources from two separate periods of time when studying change.

Media Analysis

This case study rests on the longitudinal analysis of the influential papers in Russian news media space. In 2015, we analyzed two prestigious newspapers, *Kommersant* and *Rossiyskaya Gazeta,* popular among the country's elites, policymakers, and decision-makers, and a business daily *Vedomosti.* In 2011, we analyzed *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* and *Vedomosti* in addition to the *Moscow Times,* 9. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* is an official newspaper of the Russian government; *Kommersant* was formerly independent, yet was put under "soft" censorship of the owner in 2012; and *Vedomosti* is still considered independent. The *Moscow Times,* 9 is an English-language paper read by educated elites, students studying English at the secondary and tertiary level, and expatriates living in Russia.[2] These papers were monitored daily: January 1–December 31 in 2011 (1,323 articles), and April 1–June 30 in 2015 (509 articles), using e-search engine Press Display (now Press Reader) to ensure high accuracy in data collection. Key search terms included (full forms as well as acronyms and composites typical for the Russian language) "The European Union," "The European Commission," "European Parliament," "European Court of Justice," "European Central Bank," "European Presidency," "Council of the European Union," and "Eurozone."

We focus on the framing of actions carried out by EU actors (EU institutions, as well as EU member states, their officials and institutions) in key issue areas. By doing so, we reveal fundamental media images of the EU as a political, economic, and cultural actor. In all areas, we highlight perceptions of EU intentions, capabilities, and its political and cultural status.

We also examine the *emotive charge* in EU media representations. Herrmann (2013, 403-433) stresses "emotion's role in shaping cognitive models and connecting underlying motivational sentiments to imagery as a place where future research looks promising." In this light, evaluations of the EU in an article were first assessed along the continuum "negative–negative-to-neutral–neutral–neutral-to-positive–positive–mixed." The fine-tuning of the evaluations occurred by analyzing conceptual metaphors. Backed by cognitive metaphor theory (Lakoff and Johnson [1980] 2003), this study defines a metaphor as a cognitive process in which a familiar concept is used to understand a more abstract one. Importantly,

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[2]In 2011, media monitoring of the Russian media occurred within a transnational research project, "After Lisbon: The EU as an Exporter of Values and Norms through ASEM," supported by Jean Monnet LLP. Ten countries in the project included Australia, India, Japan, Mainland China, Malaysia, New Zealand, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, and Thailand. In 2015, media monitoring of the Russian media occurred within a transnational research project, "Analysis of the Perception of the EU and EU's Politics Abroad (EU Perceptions in 10 EU Strategic Partners)," supported by the European External Action Service. Countries in the project included Russia, China, India, Brazil, South Africa, Canada, the United States, Japan, South Korea, and Mexico. The *Moscow Times,* 9 was included into the 2011 sample for comparative purposes, as the 2011 ten-country study specified analysis of an English-language paper in each location.

metaphors are seen as not only a means of categorizing and understanding foreign policies and international actors, but a cognitive device, bringing to the fore emotional weighting (Chaban, Bain, and Stats 2007). The inclusion of metaphors into our methodological "toolkit" is in keeping with a renewed interest in the role of the metaphor in the construction of images of an international actor in the field of IR (Oppermann and Spencer 2013; Cienki and Yanow 2013; Neagu 2013).

Public Opinion

The online omnibus surveys were conducted by TNS Global in March 2012 and August 2015 (both polls were a part of larger comparative projects[3]). The respondents were surveyed in Russian. Both surveys were designed to be nationally representative with regard to age, gender and region. In 2012, the survey covered a total sample of 1,002 individuals within the 16–64 age group. In 2015, the survey covered a total sample of 1,321 individuals within the same age group. For the purposes of this investigation, we will focus only on two questions asked in both surveys. First, respondents were asked to identify how positive or negative their perceptions were of the EU in general. Respondents were also asked to describe the EU, choosing from the predefined list of descriptors, some positive and some negative.

Findings: Media Analysis

Both periods of observation resulted in a substantial volume of news that referenced the EU and its actors and institutions. A three-month sample in 2015 featured 509 articles, and a 12-month sample in 2011 came with 1,323 articles. Both periods of observation in Russia took place within the frameworks of larger comparative projects (see footnote 2). Noting that the greatest media attention was not given to the EU or any EU institution but to Germany, presented by media as the "locomotive" of the EU and its main actor, we analyze in the following section the contents of thematic frames—political, economic, and cultural—in 2011 and 2015. We detect changes over time and link these findings to the image components detailed in the theoretical section.

The EU as a Political Actor

In 2011, in terms of regional politics, the EU was reported to conflict with Ukraine, not Russia (specifically, EU–Ukraine political tensions regarding the verdict against Tymoshenko). Also, the press extensively covered the EU's restrictive measures against the government of Belarus, and, importantly, the development of Russia's regional initiative of the Eurasian Union. That year the EU's political framing was the second most visible theme after the economy, yet the newspapers usually reported the EU in this context only as a fleeting reference. The EU was not pictured as a regional leader, but as Russia's neighbor vigilantly watching developments in the shared neighborhood. Arguably, the newsmakers considered the EU as an important enough actor to mention, yet the audience's interest was not directed to the EU in a major way.

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[3]In 2011, public opinion survey in Russia media occurred within a transnational research project, "After Lisbon: The EU as an Exporter of Values and Norms through ASEM," supported by Jean Monnet LLP (ten countries in the project are listed in footnote 2). In 2015, public opinion survey occurred within a transnational research project, "Analysis of the Perception of the EU and EU's Politics Abroad (EU Perceptions in 10 EU Strategic Partners)," supported by European External Action Service (ten countries in the project are listed in footnote 2).

The EU news stories that reported EU political affairs in 2015—internal and external – chose to focus mainly on conflicts and on the EU underperforming in solving them. In 2015, the EU's political affairs were of main interest to the Russian non-business media, and specifically concerned EU relations with Russia over the Ukrainian crisis. The EU was depicted as a visible player in the region neighboring Russia, but not as *the* crucial regional actor. The *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* portrayed Russia itself as the key player in that region. In the words of its journalist, "The EU forgot about Ukraine…" (Likhomanov 2015, 8). In the *Vedomosti* and the *Kommersant*, the EU was portrayed as a political actor of secondary importance, with the EU's actions not considered as having a crucial impact on the region. The newsmakers framed the EU as a regional actor who has internal challenges in terms of institutional self-organization. In this context, the *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* explicitly stated that "The European Union without any special efforts is fragmented on most issues" (Lukyanov 2015, 8), while the *Vedomosti* pointed out that "not for the first year, a specter is haunting Europe—the specter of a split" (Kamishev 2015, 7). This reflects an image of the EU as a divided and weak actor.

The 2015 news stories on EU internal political affairs reported about internal clashes—Greece's negotiations with the EU and a threat of Grexit, the British referendum and a looming Brexit, elections in Poland, and corruption in the EU and its member states. Despite the fact that the EU had already built the foundation of its intergovernmental body back in the 1960s, Russia's media still debate the institutional architecture of the EU. A number of polemic articles written by experts/academics on the institutional nature of the EU appeared in 2015. The experts/academics acknowledged the EU's existence as a supranational union, the EU's contribution to the development of an idea of a supranational polity, and the EU's experience in political integration. However, they mainly provided critical—and sometimes rather skeptical—views of the EU's achievements. In this regard, the findings showed that the EU's ongoing work on optimization of its decision-making apparatus and supranational mechanisms attract interest in Russia's media, but they also—and more importantly—indicate an image of the EU as lacking in power due to its complex and convoluted institutional structure.

The EU as an Economic Actor

In 2011, the coverage of the EU in the economic issue area revolved around the EU's resilience to the debt crisis. Importantly, this period also includes the media's coverage of the impact of the crisis on Russia and Russia–EU relations. In this framing, the EU comes through as an equal partner, whose financial ills may affect Russia's economic health. Russia did not appear to contract this illness, and Russia saw an opportunity to step in and be a savior. In this context, particular attention was paid to Russia's plans to buy bonds (Zhebit 2011, 5). The newspapers employed professional economists and experts to write on the overall impact of the crisis on Russia's economy (Mau 2011, 4). In June 2011, the *Moscow Times*, 9 highlighted that while "the euro-zone decision makers have made nearly every conceivable mistake," as such, "Russians can proudly say they eliminated their public debt" (Åslund 2011, 9). In the drama of the crisis, the EU and its institutions were not presented as central actors. The EU was framed as an actor complementary to other global powers (the United States, China) or to its own member states. Interestingly, in the *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* there were no positive evaluations attached to the actions of the EU against the Euro debt crisis.

The 2011 articles focusing on trade topics featured Russia's negotiations with the EU over WTO accession. Also, the EU–Ukrainian free-trade negotiations and the effect of the Eurozone crisis on Russia's trade and business investments were among the dominant issues. Importantly, these articles reported the EU in a highly factual manner and refrained from any explicit evaluation of the EU's

actions. In terms of energy, in 2011, the press extensively focused on one import-
ant event—the opening of the Nord Stream pipeline project. Among the local-
focused news, the EU was presented in relation to its disputes with Russia regard-
ing long-term gas contracts and the EU antitrust investigation in Gazprom subsid-
iaries. Interestingly, the majority of these articles reflected a high degree of politi-
cization of energy issues. Most of the EU-focused energy news discussed the EU
initiatives to diversify gas-supply routes and to develop EU legislation in the gas
sector. The EU was depicted as an equal and important business partner in the
energy field. Yet, this partner was depicted to be increasingly difficult to trust, as
it had started looking for other counterparts to deal with. Still, the EU's actions
were reported neutrally, with journalists avoiding explicit evaluations.

Greece's debt crisis and prospects for Eurozone recovery were visible topics in
2015. The *Vedomosti* paid particular attention to the ECB's anti-crisis measures.
Yet, it was Russia–EU trade relations that dominated reporting in the economic
frame across the three papers, and mainly in the context of the Ukrainian crisis
(namely, the EU's trade sanctions against Russia). News on business/finance was
also related to the proceedings opened by the EC against Russia's gas company
"Gazprom." The pro-governmental *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* highlighted the conflictual
nature of the EU by stating that "The EU's desire to rebuild the existing architec-
ture of relations with traditional energy suppliers led to the appearance of a num-
ber unresolved issues in the gas sphere" and that the EU's energy proposals are
"outspokenly against the market" (Novak 2015, A1-A3).

In the energy frame in 2015, the EU's dependence on Russia's gas was a domin-
ant issue. Specifically, the newspapers covered the EU's negotiations with Iran to
supply gas to the EU bypassing Russia (Epple 2015, 6) and the EU's aim to con-
trol gas assets of the EU member states (Mordushenko 2015, 9). These stories
were followed by the stories on the negotiations over the construction of the
Turkish Stream Pipeline and the Russia–EU–Ukraine energy triangle. Russian
media predominantly focused on two aspects of Russia–EU energy relations. First,
they covered the issues of the transit of Russian gas and oil to the EU member
states, thereby emphasizing the cooperative element of Russia–EU energy rela-
tions. Second, the Russian media reflected on the considerable gap between
Russia's and the EU's energy policies and that this gap contributes to the conflict
element in EU–Russia trade relations. We can thus see indications of both an
image of the EU as a cooperative partner and as a competitor, or even an enemy.
This reveals an ambivalent picture of the EU's nature and intentions.

The EU as a Socio-Cultural Actor

In 2011, the EU–Russia visa facilitation negotiations dominated the coverage. The
Rossiyskaya Gazeta and the *Vedomosti* focused extensively on the progress of visa-
free negotiations, yet the controversies within the EU and the political nature of
the negotiations were also emphasized. The newsmakers particularly covered the
allegation that "Germany became the main obstacle to the abolition of visas for
Russians" (Himshiashvili 2011, 1), due to Germany's concerns about the flow of il-
legal immigrants from Russia. Yet, the newsmakers did not treat this as an insult.
However, when reporting on the refugees coming to Europe from Africa in 2011,
the *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* was highly sarcastic and negative about the EU. For ex-
ample, the newspaper prophetically suggested that the EU will turn its attention
to the refugees "only after the entire Mediterranean coast of the EU is in the state
of emergency" (Vorobjov 2011, 8).

In 2015, the issue of migration (particularly, the problem of boat refugees)
overwhelmingly dominated EU social affairs coverage in both the *Kommersant* and
the *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*. The *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* stressed that the EU's policies toward
Libya—criticized by the Kremlin—led to the current migration crisis: "one of the

key reasons for the large-scale migration from Libya became a military operation by the US-led coalition, which led to the fall of the Gaddafi regime" (Schestakov 2015, 8). The reportage thus rendered an image of the EU as shortsighted, ignoring Russia.

Emotive Charge

Most of the articles in 2011 and 2015 presented the EU in neutral terms. Yet, when the articles contained evaluations of the EU, more negative than positive representations were visible in both years (Figure 1). Interestingly, positive evaluations of the EU have almost disappeared from the papers in 2015. This may indicate a potential change in attitudes and images: from an emphasis on both positive (the EU as a modern and progressive example) and negative characteristics (the EU as a weak, hypocritical actor with dubious intentions) to a more uniformly negative picture. On the other hand, perhaps the most counterintuitive finding, taking into account the current state of dialogue between the EU and Russia, is the decrease of negative evaluations over time—as if a neutral (or perhaps indifferent, or careful, or even distant) tone was chosen for the time being by the leading papers of the state.

Importantly, in 2011 and 2015, the negatively colored news items contained a high level of sarcasm toward the EU's migration policy (social frame) (Pushkarskaya et al. 2015, 6), the EU's inability to deal with economic challenges (economic frame) (Chernenko 2015, 4), the EU's political weakness and incoherence of the EU's actors (political frame) (Chernenko 2015, 4) and the EU's ambiguous relations with the energy supplying countries (energy frame) (Novak 2015, A1-A3). These items in the EU-related frames seem to mirror an image of the EU as economically and politically weak(ening) with intentions and goals that often contradict Russian interests.

The use of conceptual metaphors was a telling device. In 2011, the most typical metaphorical descriptions of the EU in the political issue area compare EU politics to a battleground where the EU is compared to a person not fighting well (e.g., "The European Union has *failed to back* British and French plans for a United Nations resolution threatening a no-fly zone" [our emphasis in all examples]; "We Should Join Forces to Defeat Colonel Gadhafi" 2015, 9) or an exclusive divided clubhouse, with some members still being Russia's friends. In contrast, when the EU was reported in the political thematic frame in the 2015 sample, it was most typically compared with an animal or even a monster (these metaphors
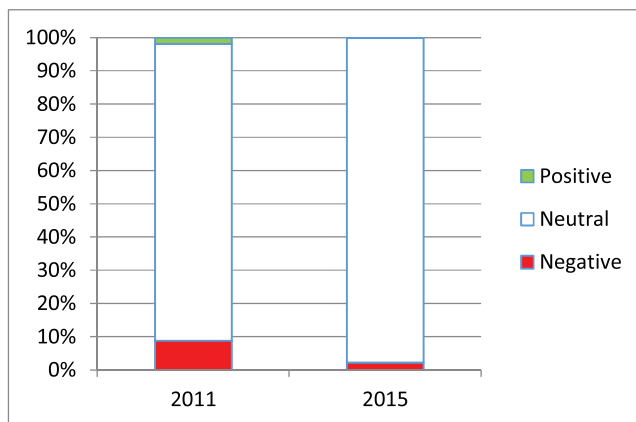

Figure 1. Evaluations of the EU, 2011 and 2015

indicating dehumanization are in contrast to the metaphors of personalization typical for media discourse when it covers IR (Chaban, Bain, and Stats 2006, 245-62). For example, consider the negative image of the EU as a complex and incomprehensible bureaucratic nightmare: "If Europe—I mean not the quiet *monster* that is called 'Brussels' but the states pulled apart—does not solve the pressing problems, the triumphant return to de Gaulle's 'Europe of nations' should not surprise anyone" (Zabrodina 2015, 3).[4]

Metaphorical images of the EU as an economic actor in 2011 were not overly dramatic. Most typically, the EU was compared to a person who makes mistakes (e.g., "In short, the EU has *made almost every mistake possible*"; and "it is obvious that the inclusion of Greece in the euro was *an expensive error* motivated by misplaced ideology" [Åslund 2011, 9]). In 2015, in its economic frame, the EU was frequently compared to a helpless and politically feeble person who cannot manage its disintegrating house or save its own members (e.g., "Europeans are quite *helpless*" [Chernenko 2015, 4]; or "Alexis Tsipras insisted that the European Union will *suffer with his country until the end of its days*, which will surely come if the EU does not continue *rescuing* Greece" [Kolesnikov 2015, 3]).

Zooming in on the energy frame, in 2011, the EU and its member states were compared to combatants on the energy front (e.g., "The moves against Bulgaria's only refinery, a key fuel provider and taxpayer, may . . . signal *growing tensions* between the European Union country and Russia on the *energy front*" [Reuters 2011, 5]). The dehumanization mechanism was again visible in 2015. The EU as an energy actor was often compared to a destructive force (e.g., "Having *considerably shaken* the old energy system based on mutual interests of suppliers and consumers, the EU authorities have not created any clear, comprehensive rules that would take into account the peculiarities of the energy sector and long-term investment" [Novak 2015, A1-A3]) and an animal (e.g., "if Brussels once again politicizes the issue of energy cooperation with Russia and the EU, as they say, '*pushes its horns*'[5] by refusing to allow funding" [Gasuk 2015, 4]).

In 2011, in the social affairs frames, the EU was compared to an annoying individual (e.g., "Russian officials have expressed *frustration* with the European Union after it largely ignored Medvedev's initiative for a new European security architecture and bowed to resistance from individual EU member states for visa free travel" (Von Twickel 2015, 1). In 2015, the EU experiencing the migration crisis was often compared to a creature/structure in danger (e.g., "So now the leaders of the EU countries will have to reflect on what to do with the 'Migration *bomb' placed under the united Europe*, when they gather in Brussels" [Pushkarskaya et al. 2015], 6]).

Findings: Public Opinion

Our study detected a dramatic "flip" of public opinion: in four years, the characterization of the EU shifted from rather benevolent to overwhelmingly negative imagery. In 2012, respondents were asked to identify how positive or negative their perceptions of the EU were. That year, total positive was 62 percent and total negative was 7 percent.[6] In 2015, the question was asked somewhat differently. Respondents were asked to express their general evaluative view of the EU compared to other countries first and then to organizations. In both cases, the total positive was around 23 percent and total negative was around 40 percent. Not only did the negative view increase significantly over time, but negative perceptions clearly overweighed the positive ones in 2015.

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[4]In this example, and in all examples below, the emphasis is ours.

[5]Idiomatic expression with animalistic imagery that could be roughly translated as "digs its heels in."

[6]In both surveys, "total positive" included answers to the categories "very positive" and "somewhat positive." "Total negative" included "very negative" and "somewhat negative."
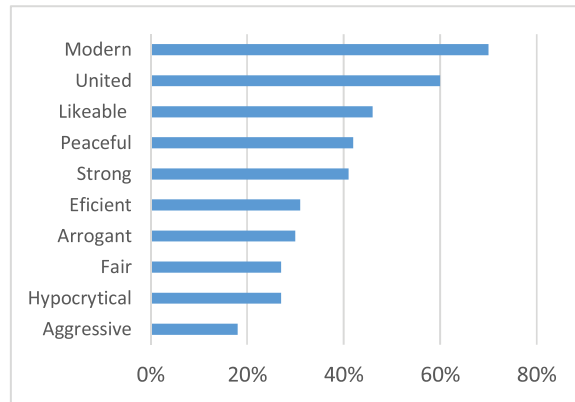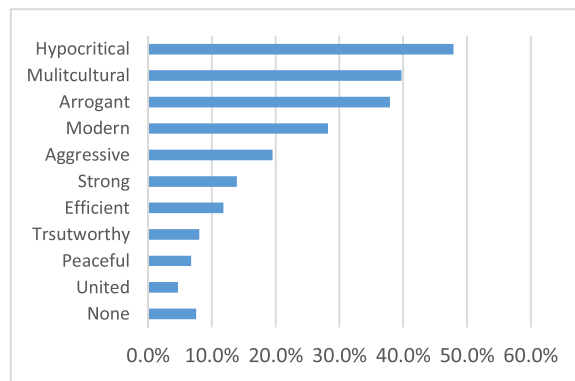
Figure 2. Descriptors of the EU, 2012

Figure 3. Descriptors of the EU, 2015

In 2012, the most common descriptors were "modern," "united," "likeable," "peaceful," and "strong" (Figure 2). In 2015, the three top descriptors were "hypocritical," "multicultural,"[7] and "arrogant," with "aggressive" in the fifth place (Figure 3). The EU is still considered "modern" by almost one-third of respondents (the fourth visible descriptor in 2015, at 28.2 percent). It indicates a lingering yet fading image of the EU as a positive model—in 2012, 70 percent of respondents used that descriptor. Significantly, all the other main descriptors depict the EU in unfavorable terms, presenting an image of it as a weakened and divided actor with dubious or even hostile intentions toward Russia.

Discussion

The diverse arsenal of methodological tools in our analysis allowed us to trace changes in EU images on the micro level. These nuanced insights provided us with the answers to a set of research questions outlined from the onset of this article. Our answers are provided below.

Does Russia see the EU as having benign or hostile intentions? The public's choices of EU descriptors indicated only a slight increase in opinions that

[7]"Multicultural" in 2015 is an ambiguous term due to migration crisis situation and the EU not coping well with the influx of diverse migrants.

described the EU as "aggressive"—from 18 percent in 2012 to 19.5 percent in 2015. Importantly, though, the descriptor "aggressive" moved from the least frequent descriptor in 2012 to the fourth most visible in 2015. An additional clue comes when we look at the descriptor "peaceful." In 2012, 42 percent of respondents saw the EU in these terms; in 2015, only 6.7 percent. The image of a "hostile EU" is becoming more salient when members of the general public are thinking about the EU.

This change in public opinion is supported by subtle changes in EU media framing. Specifically, many of the articles that paid attention to the EU in a major way dealt with controversial and confrontational topics: EU sanctions against Russia, trade/economic/energy contacts that were challenged, or EU–Russia interactions in the context of the Russia–Ukraine conflict. In these pieces of news, the EU was seen as being "on Ukraine's side." As such, the context of the Russia–Ukraine conflict served as a rich ground to picture the EU as an increasingly hostile interlocutor. Yet, this message was delivered in a very subtle way.

Does Russia see the EU as a powerful or weak actor, on the rise or in decline? Analysis of the public opinion poll demonstrates a sharp change in the views of the general public. In the 2012 poll, 41 percent of the respondents assigned the descriptor "strong" to the EU, whereas in 2015, only 13.9 percent did. Interestingly, its position in the hierarchy of responses did not change dramatically. It was the fifth most visible descriptor in 2012, and the sixth in 2015. This suggests that an attribute of "strength" still matters to the Russian public when they think about the EU. Still, the EU seems to be an actor in decline in the eyes of Russian public opinion.

Media analysis may give us some clues to this change in perception. First, one of the most visible topics in EU reportage in 2011 and 2015 was the EU's challenges in coping with the Euro crisis. The long-term frames of the EU as an actor in economic crisis render an impression of the EU as a weak(ening) actor, unable to cope with endemic difficulties. In 2015, the reportage of the migration crisis was a novel feature that added yet another touch to the image of the EU as weak and in decline, not being able to cope with the influx of refugees.

In addition, in both years of observation, the EU institutions were much less visible than individual EU member states. The Russian press prioritized portrayals of Germany when reporting EU news in 2015, with much stronger intensity than in 2011. Intense media attention to the EU's institutional architecture and questions about its viability and relevance in 2015 are symbolic in this regard. In a very subtle way, the EU is repeatedly introduced as something secondary to member states, almost an experiment that still has to prove its right to exist, and whose complexity makes it a weak and ineffective actor. And this framing was more visible in 2015 than in 2011.

Does Russia see the EU as a similar or different actor; more advanced or lagging behind culturally, politically, and economically? In the eyes of the general public, "efficient," as a descriptor, is in obvious decline—from 31 percent of responses in 2012 to 11.8 percent in 2015. We noted above the Russian press attention to the EU's economic ups and downs—the EU is repeatedly presented as a challenged economic actor. Importantly, though, Russia is not presented as superior to the EU in this regard. However, where it is presenting itself as superior in 2015 is in its resolution to prioritize economic connections over political conflicts, something the EU is not doing. The EU's internal political scandals—Brexit and Grexit—also presented the EU in 2015 as a political actor who cannot get its act together, something that Russia is doing differently. In the social affairs frame, the 2011 discussion of visa-free entry to the EU for Russian citizens (arguably, a collaboration-oriented frame) was ousted in favor of the migration crisis frame, with ensuing challenges in multicultural discourse (arguably, a hostile-to-migrants frame). Russia was presenting itself as immune to the crisis, and also emphasized

that it had warned the EU about this but had been ignored by the EU. The media also contrasted a united Russia with an internally fragmented EU.

Of interest is the Russian media's reluctance to report the EU in normative terms, so the media analysis in both periods points to media silence (intentional or accidental) when it comes to similarities or differences of political cultures between Russia and the EU. Still, the criticism mentioned above of EU incoherence and institutional weakness may indicate a feeling of superiority when it comes to political culture and consequent political strength. The EU is, however, similar to Russia when it comes to the shared neighborhood. It is obvious from the reportage that the EU, like Russia, would like to influence it. The reportage in 2011 and 2015 has covered the EU's actions in the former Soviet republics extensively, with an obvious increase in 2015, following the Russia–Ukraine conflict.

Does Russia see the EU as recognizing Russia's great power status? The public opinion poll gives us a taste that in the eyes of the Russia's general public, the EU is not a respectful interlocutor. It is seen as "hypocritical" by almost half of the respondents (47.9 percent), the top descriptor for the EU in 2015 (versus 27 percent of respondents in 2012, the penultimate position on the list then). Moreover, it is seen as "arrogant" by 37.9 percent in 2015 (versus 30 percent in 2012). These emotive descriptors indicate that the EU is not imagined as an actor that takes Russia seriously.

The media seems to provide a continuation to this sentiment, framing the EU as inferior to Russia. One of the most telling indicators of the EU being seen differently from Russia is the increasing dominance of the metaphors of dehumanization in 2015 vis-à-vis 2011. According to Herrmann (2013, 403-433), "when people dehumanize others, they are in effect diminishing the other's cultural status." Metaphors of animalization that became more visible in 2015 coverage are powerful ones—"when moral sensibility, refinement, civility, and rationality are taken out of a picture, the other person starts to resemble an animal" (Herrmann 2013, 403-433). Herrmann argues that such metaphors are a "common feature in intensely violent conflicts" (Herrmann 2013, 403-433)—yet another indicator that the Ukraine–Russia conflict triggered ongoing changes in the EU's images in Russia that now seem to present the EU as an increasingly hostile, weakened yet still able to hurt, increasingly different, and inferior counterpart to Russia.

Conclusion

This article contributes to EU foreign policy scholarship, and specifically to the nascent literature on EU–Russia relations after Maidan. The "perceptions" angle remains under-addressed in the works on EU–Russia relations at the time of the Russian–Ukrainian crisis. In this article, we have provided empirical evidence on change in Russian images of the EU post-Maidan. We argued that the characteristics of the Russian–Ukrainian crisis corresponded to four scope conditions of image change, derived from the literature. More precisely, we predicted change toward a more hostile image of the EU, but also an increased emphasis on the fragmented and therefore weak nature of the EU.

Our results tend to confirm these predictions, though much more clearly in the images of public opinion than in the reputable media we analyzed. Our study delivered results comparable to the results of previous EU perceptions studies. The images partly resonate. Media and public framing echoed the elite and policymaking images of the EU as an actor who cannot be trusted and who has potentially harmful intentions toward Russia—especially when the "shared neighborhood" is in focus. Media representations also highlighted a different understanding of norms and values and of the EU's normative culture, a theme that was also observed by previous studies of other discourses. Yet, media and public opinion study in 2015 revealed a previously not observed image of the EU as an

increasingly hostile and weakened actor, not lastly due to ongoing economic and nascent migration crisis.

We believe that our findings are indicative of the emergence of stereotypical patterns in Russian images. The characteristics attached to the EU on individual image dimensions seem to go together to create unified combinatorial constructs. In brief, we find that Russian media and, in particular, Russian opinion present two *stereotypical image clusters* when characterizing the EU post-Maidan:

1. The EU as a dehumanized, hostile actor.
2. The EU as a decadent and weak but at the same time condescending actor.

The first image cluster represents a typical enemy image: a hostile actor that does not recognize Russia's legitimate interests. The second cluster portrays the EU as a fragmented and therefore weak actor, culturally inferior while depicting itself as a normative actor that Russia should learn from. Taken together, these two stereotypical patterns may, we argue, create a potentially dangerous combination. Perceiving the EU as a hostile but weak opponent could arguably inspire Russian leaders to adopt a confrontational approach, and to see the situation as an opportunity to promote Russian national interests, in Ukraine and elsewhere. If this is the case, the prospects for an improvement of Russian–EU relations do not look promising.

Public opinion results provide us with a much more obvious indication of image change than media reports. Why may this be the case? This analysis focused on three reputable dailies targeting an educated middle-class readership. Yet, members of the Russian general public inevitably take their clues from a larger media environment—news (television, radio, populist tabloids, online sources) and, indirectly, institutional discourses (e.g., Putin's speeches). Most Russian respondents in 2015 (64 percent) stated that such information would reach them more or less every day, with a further 17 percent hearing or reading about the EU approximately once a week (17 percent).[8] This may indicate that other news sources use more stereotypical images of the EU than the newspapers we investigated. Future research should therefore include systematic comparisons between various news sources and media genres. Another promising research direction identified by our team is the analysis of the emotive component of images and its interaction with the cognitive and motivational aspects of the imagery.

Given EU images and their temporal dynamic, the prospects for an improvement of Russian–EU relations may be linked to an innovative EU public diplomacy strategy toward Russia. That would include systematic observation of EU images in various discourses and across time, and an empirically informed, discourse-specific outreach design. Importantly, prioritizing ongoing outreach to opinion-makers and -shapers in Russia—and among those media and education professionals—seems to be a valid tool to improve the dialogue between the EU and Russia in the future.

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[8]Based on the answers to survey Q27: Generally, how often if ever do you hear or read about the European Union? This can be on TV or the radio, via the Internet, or in newspapers or magazines…or simply by word of mouth… ($N = 1,321$).

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