

# **‘Gayropa’: Western Europe in decay or a beacon of modernity?**

A narrative analysis of the influence of Russian state propaganda on Russian media

Word count: 24.861

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A dissertation submitted to Ghent University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Conflict and Development Studies

Academic year: 2021 – 2022

*“There is a saying in Russian and English and other languages:*

*The dogs bark, but the caravan keeps walking.*

*One explanation is that nothing can hinder the progress of a caravan.*

*The government sometimes derisively say the same about journalists.*

*They bark, but it does not affect anything.*

*But I was recently told that the saying has an opposite explanation.*

*The caravan drives forward because the dogs bark.*

*They growl and savage the predators in the mountains and the desert.*

*The caravan can move forward only with the dogs around.*

*Yes, we growl and bite. Yes, we have sharp teeth and strong grip.*

*But we are the prerequisite for progress.*

*We are the antidote against tyranny.”*

**Dmitry Muratov on winning the Nobel Peace Prize (2021)**

## Abstract

Gayropa is a widespread term used by Russian politicians, journalists, and bloggers to refer to Western Europe, often in a disparaging way. It defines homosexuality as the essence of the Western European lifestyle and puts a label on Western European civilization as sexually deviant. The concept is used to outline the symbolic borders between Russia and Western Europe, wherein Russia is seen as the last bastion of 'normality'. Gayropa symbolises the clash between the two Europes: Western Europe versus Eastern and Central Europe. This clash of values is used in global geopolitics by both sides through sexual politics and politics of belonging.

Sexual politics is a rather broad concept. In this research it is narrowed down to the idea of heteronormativity together with homonationalism. In the West homonationalism prevails. It supports modernity and helps create boundaries towards the intolerant Other. In Russian political discourse heteronormativity is the core ideology, which sees homosexuality as created by the West (symbolised by words like Gayropa) and heterosexuality as 'natural'. Politics of belonging involves inclusion or exclusion of people, social categories within constructions of different boundaries by those who have the power to set these. Thus, creating certain boundaries that separate the world into 'us' versus 'them'. This research analyses how the narrative of Gayropa reflects the sexual politics and anti-Western rhetoric used by the Russian state in its project of national belonging in four well-known Russian newspapers. These newspapers are Rossiyskaya Gazeta, Novaya Gazeta, Izvestia and Komsomolskaya Pravda.

The first chapter gives an overview of the existing literature on homosexuality in Russia, the clash of values in Europe, visibility in the media, and the term Gayropa. Then the theoretical framework for the methodology is framed. This research uses the qualitative method of narrative analysis to explore the storytelling structures and tropes of the concept of Gayropa in Russian news articles. This narrative analysis will be based on different scientific theories: *Media Discourse* (1995) by and 'Narrative in Political Science' (1998) by Patterson and Monroe.

The three following chapters contain the analysis of the articles per newspaper. Chapter two discusses the narrative of Gayropa in the state-owned newspaper Rossiyskaya Gazeta. Chapter three delves into the state-affiliated newspapers: Izvestia and Komsomolskaya Pravda. And, at last, chapter four analyses the narrative of Gayropa in the non-state-affiliated newspaper Novaya Gazeta.

The last chapter is a comparison between the four newspapers. Here the results and patterns per newspaper will be cross-checked with one another. The comparisons will be used to research differences between the newspapers to see what the influence of the state discourse on homosexuality and anti-Westernism is. This is done to evaluate the importance of media ownership.



## Preface

I have always been interested in Russian culture, history, and politics. I previously studied Eastern European languages and cultures at UGent. My previous thesis was about the visibility of Tchaikovsky's sexuality in cultural events and media after the implementation of the anti-LGBTQ+ propaganda law by the Russian state. During my research I read a multitude of news articles from different Russian media outlets, who had very different views on sexuality. This piqued my interest to research the influence of the state discourse on media in Russia, especially now that there aren't many independent media outlets left.

I do think it is important to state that I, myself, am not part of the LGBTQ+ community. I am very aware of my position as a Western European cisgender woman taking on this subject in my research. I do realise that the attitude of the Russian state and media towards the LGBTQ+ community inside and outside Russia is hostile. As I will analyse the discourse on Gayropa in the Russian media, the politicizing of the LGBTQ+ community that happens in the media will inevitably be addressed as well. Herein lies the biggest possible ethical dilemma of me unconsciously adding on to the problem of politicizing the LGBTQ+ community. It is important to keep in mind that the LGBTQ+ community aren't just 'objects' in a political feud, but that we are still talking about humans.

Furthermore, when I started this research in September the conflict in Ukraine, which is a main event in articles on the term Gayropa, hadn't escalated yet into a war. The non-state-affiliated newspaper Novaya Gazeta was forced by the Russian state to stop because of its criticism towards the Russian state's interference in the war. It is here that my positionality becomes visible: for me as a Belgian citizen living in Belgium it is possible to finish my research, whose purpose is to expose the influence of state propaganda in the media. Yet one of my sources is forced to stop exposing and condemning Russian state propaganda. Dmitrij Muratov was attacked recently on the train in Russia. A lot of journalists from the newspaper have fled Russia. So, for my sources the situation as Russian citizens is more precarious than for me.

Taking my positionality into account, I do think this research of analysing narratives in Russian media is important, certainly in light of recent events. Even if it only briefly sheds a light on the workings of the Russian media.

At last, I want to thank a few people who have supported me during this year. First of all, I want to express my gratitude towards my promotor: Professor Dr. Bruno De Cordier. Thank you for your enthusiasm, your feedback, and your time.

A special thanks goes out to Kobe for giving me the idea of researching Gayropa, for patiently listening to me complain, for helping me solve some of my methodological struggles, and for reading and correcting parts of my thesis.

I would also like to mention Brix, Sara, Diego, Kevan, Marie and my sister-in-law Janne. Thank you for giving up your free time to read my thesis and correct the many unclear sentence structures and spelling mistakes that escaped me.

Thanks to my mental support: Anna, Leonie, and all the people from Woest. Thank you all for your patience, for listening to me talk non-stop about my research for the last couple of weeks, and for endlessly supporting me.

Finally, I would like to thank my steady rock. Thank you, mum for your eternal support and trust in me, for letting me finish two master's degrees, and for the many positive phone calls and words when I was feeling down and insecure.



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## **List of abbreviations**

SU	Soviet Union
EU	European Union
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
RG	Rossiyskaya Gazeta
IZ	Izvestia
KP	Komsomolskaya Pravda
NG	Novaya Gazeta
USA	United States of America
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
NMG	Natsionalnaya Media Gruppa
ECHR	European Court of Human Rights

## Introduction

After the fall of the Soviet Union (SU) in 1991, the economic and political system in Russia and other Central and Eastern European countries collapsed. The implosion of the SU led to the transition of these countries from a state-owned economy into a market economy and liberal society. This transition was implemented through ‘shock therapy’: a Western neoliberal idea that was applied to multiple ex-Soviet countries to establish a common market (Bukowski & Novokmet, 2021). On a political level the ex-Soviet countries transitioned from a one-party state to a multi-party system. This was part of the larger agenda of multiple countries to join the European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and eventually merge into one big Europe (Petrova & Aydin-Düzgit, 2021).

Now, a couple decades after the fall, this ideal has changed. Research conducted by Pew Research Center shows how about half or more of the population from ex-Soviet countries that joined the EU are dissatisfied with how things are going in their country today. Moreover, a lot of Central-Eastern Europeans and Russians see the dissolution of the SU as a misfortune (Pew Research Center, 2019). This belief is even present in Ukraine. According to research from 2017 about one third of the general Ukrainian public feels this way. Given its history and the ongoing war with Russia, this sentiment may seem like a surprise (Pew Research Center, 2017).

There is an overall discontent with the democratic transition of the former SU countries. According to Eszter Kováts & Katerina Smejkalova (2020) the evolution of Western Europe is no longer the ideal for many Central-Eastern Europeans:

...the West is no longer what they had longed to achieve through imitation: economic stability and prosperity, a model for a clear, traditional European identity, or even – narrowly interpreted – Christian values. Instead, ‘secularism, multiculturalism and gay marriage’ now suddenly appear as ‘normality’, as the ‘Europe’ to catch up with. (Kováts & Smejkalova, 2020)

Additionally, to this discontent, the crisis of collective identity after the fall of the SU is generating the reassertion of religion – catholic and orthodox – as an important part of the national identity in Central and Eastern Europe. In some countries, the orthodox identity is immersed with views of Russia as a bastion against the West (Pew Research Center, 2017).

These two factors – post-socialist transition and religion – are shaping the pessimistic attitudes towards the values of the Western Europe – especially homosexuality – in Central and Eastern European societies as explained by Kuhar (2013):

The consequent post-socialist transition is believed to have contributed to the non-acceptance of homosexuality, especially through the resurgence of nationalism in the late 1980s and early 1990s and the process of re-traditionalisation (closely connected with the rehabilitation of religion), which was seen as “coming home” to the true (patriarchal values of the nation, previously erased by the communist regime. (Kuhar, 2013: 8)

This is where Russia comes into the picture. Russia restored its place in the world by positioning itself as a leader in transnational conservative alliances (Edenborg, 2018). Russia plays a central role in the culture and geopolitics of Central and Eastern Europe. It holds the responsibility to protect the Orthodox population outside its borders. Most orthodox countries agree with the notion of

Russia as an important buffer against the West<sup>1</sup>. Even some EU countries – such as Greece – agree that Russia is needed as a strong buffer to balance the West (Pew Research Center, 2017).

Russia also positions itself as a global protector of ‘traditional values’. These traditional values are generally understood as conservative values that are in favour of ‘natural’ gender roles, family relations, patriotism, and Orthodoxy. They are strongly against LGBTQ+ rights, abortion and feminism (Persson, 2014). These sentiments have found their way into legislation. Conservative values form the cornerstone of laws such as the Russian federal law “for the Purpose of Protecting Children from Information Advocating for a Denial of Traditional Family Values” of 2013, also called the anti-gay law. The law and values are in clear opposition with the Western values of tolerance and inclusion (Edenborg, 2019). According to different researchers (Persson, 2014; Stella & Nartova, 2015; Sleptcov, 2017; Edenborg, 2018; 2019) the traditional values are constructed in opposition to Western materialism, globalism, and European ‘sexual democracy’. The values are produced to justify Russia’s (and other ex-Soviet countries) departure from Europeanization.

The rejection of LGBTQ+ rights and Western values calls into question the idea of a uniform modernity around the globe. Russia’s anti-gay narrative challenges the Western example of modernity (Persson, 2014). This anti-gay narrative must be seen against the broader background of how sexual politics came to be a part of geopolitics in the world:

... homophobic discourse is merged with anti-Western (or anti-European) rhetoric and deployed in projects of national belonging and state legitimization. The securitization and policing of queers is interweaved in counterhegemonic, anti-imperialist politics and part of efforts to entrench identity in communities seen as menaced by globalization and Westernization. (Edenborg, 2018: 73)

Russia's campaign of traditional values and homophobic discourse is strongly embedded into the context of global politics. The described Russian narrative is a struggle over identity, modernity, and its place in the globalizing world (Edenborg, 2018). However, it needs to be stated that the homophobic discourse in Russia isn’t a pure anti-Western discourse: it is also about demarking the ‘false’ Europe (Western Europe) from the ‘true’ Europe (Russia and other conservative, traditionalist countries) (Edenborg, 2019).

This distinction between the two Europes brings us to the narrative of Gayropa used by Russian politicians, journalists, and bloggers. Gayropa refers to Western Europe and is often used in a disparaging way (Secker, 2020). It defines homosexuality as the essence of Western European lifestyle. It puts a label on Western European civilization as sexually deviant (Riabov & Riabova, 2014). The concept is used to outline the symbolic borders between Russia and Western Europe, wherein Russia is seen as the last bastion of ‘normality’ (Riabov & Riabova, 2020). This Russian narrative is validated by the war in Ukraine: “The idea that Ukraine’s interest in European integration is bound to lead to the country’s downfall obviously allows the Russian authorities to demonstrate to the Russian public that, in Russia, it is the authorities themselves that are the sole guarantors of normalcy” (Riabov & Riabova, 2014). The term distinguishes Russia as the successor of the real, authentic Europe (Riabov & Riabova, 2014).

This leads up to the central question of this research: How does the narrative of Gayropa reflect the sexual politics and anti-Western rhetoric used by the Russian state in its project of national belonging in four well-known Russian newspapers? These newspapers are Rossiyskaya Gazeta, Novaya Gazeta, Izvestia and Komsomolskaya Pravda. To answer the central question, four sub-questions are distinguished: How is Western Europe presented in the articles of these newspapers?

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<sup>1</sup> Only Ukraine doesn’t see Russia as a buffer against the West due to its ongoing war with Russia.

To what various other themes or words is the concept of Gayropa linked in these newspapers? To what extent are the concepts of sexual politics and politics of belonging reflected in the articles that discuss geopolitics between Western Europe and Russia? How do articles on Gayropa differ between state-owned (Rossiyskaya Gazeta), state-affiliated (Izvestia and Komsomolskaya Pravda) and non-state-affiliated (Novaya Gazeta) newspapers? This analysis will be done by researching the articles of these four well-known Russian newspapers since the 2014 conflict in Ukraine.

To understand the research questions and the concept of Gayropa in the broader conceptual framework it is useful to explain the concepts of 'Sexual Politics' and 'Politics of Belonging'. One of the pioneer works around sexuality and politics is the work of George Mosse *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle-class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe* (1985). The book traces the relationship between nationalism, respectability, and the proper attitude toward sexuality in Western-Europe during the 20th century. According to him, what is seen as normal or abnormal is a product of historical development; it changes over time. It is not a universal law. Mosse proves that nation-building in Western Europe during 20th century is a heteronormative process based on the idea of manliness. Manliness is of importance to safeguard the existing order against modernity; manliness means normalcy. This heteronormative process identifies homosexuals as the internal other (Mosse, 1985).

Because sexual politics is a rather broad concept, the focus will be on this idea of heteronormativity together with homonationalism (Stella & Nartova, 2015; Edenborg, 2018; Essig & Kondakov, 2019). Nowadays, according to Stella and Nartova (2015), gender and sexuality are being used to reinforce certain political borders between the 'progressive' West and the 'traditional' East. Edenborg (2018) elaborates how sexual rights are entangled in contestations over geopolitics. These contests involve discourses of tradition and modernity. The heteronormative discourse focuses on tradition and manliness. It depicts homosexuality as a product of Western neo-imperialism. The discourse around modernity uses the inclusion of LGBTQ+ communities as a marker of national, European progress against a backward "Other". This discourse is called homonationalism (Edenborg, 2018). These two discourses are applied by Essig and Kondakov (2019) on Western - Russian geopolitics through the concepts of Homosexuality (homonationalism) and Heterosexuality (heteronormativity). Both concepts see same-sex desire as exceptional, but they react different to this exception, namely Homosexuality responds with tolerance, whilst Heterosexuality responds by suppressing homosexuality. Both concepts are part of sexual nationalism as they are used to promote national supremacy when played out in international relations. In the West Homosexuality mostly prevails. It supports modernity and helps create boundaries towards the intolerant Other. In Russian political discourse Heterosexuality is the core ideology, which sees homosexuality as created by the West (symbolised by words like Gayropa) and heterosexuality as 'natural' (Essig & Kondakov, 2019).

All this – nationalism, sexuality, boundaries – brings us to the concept of politics of belonging, which Nira Yuval-Davis explains as the following: "The politics of belonging comprises specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging in particular ways to particular collectivities that are, at the same time, themselves being constructed by these projects in very particular ways" (2006: 197). Politics of belonging involves inclusion or exclusion of people, social categories within constructions of different boundaries by those who have the power to set these. Yuval-Davis explains how identities are narratives, stories that people tell themselves, but in certain historical contexts the construction of self and identity are forced upon people. Thus, creating boundaries that separate the world into 'us' versus 'them' (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Floya Anthias (2009) elaborates on

the construction of these boundaries. According to him, boundaries change and can be a product of political rules related to membership in society (Anthias, 2009).

To connect the concept of politics of belonging to Gayropa in the media, it is important to look at the different degrees of belonging that can be adopted in the media. Persson (2014) applies this concept of politics of belonging to the political Othering of the LGBTQ+ community through visibility or non-visibility in Russian media. Visibility is used to control the narrative of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ by repeating certain links in the media, for example: links between the LGBTQ+ community and a global Western capitalist elite. Non-visibility is important as well because narratives are formed also by what is excluded. It is about the stories that are not told and the images that do not appear to delimit the space of appearance (Persson, 2014).

Edenborg (2019) further explores this concept of visibility and its importance for politics of belonging on a national and global level. He defines visibility as the object of continuous regulation, but also as a site of resistance. The controlling of visibility in the media is of great power for creating the boundaries related to membership in society. In the case of Russia, Edenborg explains how Russian Kremlin-friendly media succeed in effectively integrating national and international anti-state events into a narrative about Western capitalist elite attacking the Russian traditional values. The effects of these events have been mostly successfully appropriated into the narrative of the figure of Putin – signifying a masculine Russia – confronting the ladylike Gayropa. Edenborg explains how Russian media used this narrative on the conflict of Ukraine to confirm Russia as the international protector of ‘traditional values’ (Edenborg, 2019).

Riabov and Riabova (2014) also confirm how this narrative creates the need for a protector: “The spread of gay culture is seen as a threat to fundamental values and sacrosanct ideals; it is represented as a challenge not just to the gender order of society but to national identity” (Riabov & Riabova, 2014). They further elaborate how Gayropa in this narrative also has domestic purposes. The use of Gayropa in Russia’s politics of belonging also legitimizes Russia’s involvement in the war in Ukraine. Its involvement is depicted as the need to protect its people there from Western decay. The Russian state can establish themselves as the sole guarantors of normalcy by creating the idea that Ukraine’s interest in the EU will eventually lead to its downfall (Riabov & Riabova, 2014).

# 1. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework consists of the literature review, the choice of newspapers, the theories applied during the research, and the different methods per question.

## *1.1. Literature review*

This literature review covers existing research on the different attitudes towards homosexuality in Russia, the Russian state's narrative on homosexuality, the influence of the narrative in Russian media regarding homosexuality, and the state of the art on the term Gayropa, accompanied by the associated 'culture wars'.

### *1.1.1. Literature on different attitudes towards homosexuality in Russia*

A fair amount has already been written about the different attitudes of the Russian state towards homosexuality (Healey, 2001; 2003; Kon, 2010; Wilkinson, 2013; Gulevich, Osin, e.a., 2016; Sleptcov, 2017; Novitskaya, 2021). Dan Healey (2001; 2003) has written extensively about the history of homosexuality in Russia. In his article (2003) he discusses the creation of a sexual national mythology. The Russian mythology is one wherein the nation is seen as devoid of same-sex love. Heterosexuality is constructed as the nation's natural form of love. Sexual mythologies are of importance for modern nationhood: they help Russia in creating its position towards the rest of the world (Healey, 2003). His book (2001) explains more in depth how local and international influences have shaped the Russian developments on sexuality throughout history (Healey, 2001).

Kon (2010) goes even further and explains how the Russian state's changing attitudes towards homosexuality can be specifically linked to changing political relations towards the West. He explains how in the SU non-traditional love was seen as an internal threat. People who loved differently were painted as the internal 'enemies of the people' acting on behalf of the external enemy, the so-called 'Western spies'. In 1993, homosexuality was decriminalized in Russia to be able to join the Council of Europe. However, as the West and Russia began to diverge in their development policies, the position of sexual minorities changed again in Russia. Pro-government parties and the mass media in Russia claimed non-heterosexual sexualities to be a 'European Conspiracy' designed to undermine Russian statehood (Kon, 2010).

This is confirmed by Cai Wilkinson (2013), when she explains how the Russian anti-gay laws of 2013 were implemented to maintain the country's sovereignty and protect its Orthodox Christian values and non-Western civilization against Western influence. Homosexuality is depicted as the antithesis of Russia's traditional values (Wilkinson, 2013). Gulevich and Osin (2016) elaborate further on these values in their article. According to them, the LGBTQ+ community is seen as a manifestation of 'harmful' Western influence which threatens Russian culture and values. They call this the besieged fortress view (Gulevich, Osin, e.a., 2016).

The evolution of Russia's attitude towards homosexuality shows the contemporary emphasis on Orthodox Christian values in Russia. Homosexuality is instrumentalised to highlight the incompatibility of Western values with Russian. Western ideas and protection of LGBTQ+ rights are depicted as a threat towards the Russian nation. However, not everybody in the West holds the

same kind of values towards the LGBTQ+ community. There actually isn't a clearcut East/West dichotomy<sup>2</sup>. This leads to the clash of values between the different 'Europes'.

### *1.1.2. Literature on the clash of values between the different Europe's*

The 'clash of values' or the 'culture war' between Western Europe and Central-Eastern Europe is a very contemporary topic. Most of the current research has been done in recent years. Andrew Monaghan (2015) explores the misuse of the term 'Cold War' in contemporary discourses on geopolitical tensions between Russia and the West. The grouping of the countries has changed over time. The liberal-democratic/communist divide is no longer as polarized. The newest members of NATO are mostly former Soviet-countries which contribute to the different versions or perceptions of history:

These countries have completely different memories of the Cold War and subsequent interpretations of it. If, for some old member states, the Cold War is synonymous with both a common fear of total war between nuclear-armed parties and a 'long peace' in Europe – albeit punctuated with occasional periods of high crisis – for others in Europe it is synonymous with occupation and repression. (Monaghan, 2015: 7)

However, tensions are increasing in the global world over the importance of values. The understanding of the Cold War has evolved in Europe. According to Monaghan it is necessary to change the language surrounding the contemporary geopolitical tensions. New updated concepts are necessary, hence, the utilization 'clash of Europes'. The term symbolises the competing visions of the Euro-Atlantic security architecture and the clash over values between the EU and Russia. Monaghan suggests this term as the starting point for addressing these geopolitical tensions (Monaghan, 2015). In his work the focus lays mostly on the clash of values between the EU and Russia, yet this clash of values is also visible within the EU.

Research done by the Pew Research Center (2018) analyses this clash of values more in detail by dividing Europe in their study into Western, Central, and Eastern Europe. The focus lies on the difference between Western and Central-Eastern Europe in public attitudes toward religion, minorities, and social issues such as gay marriage and legal abortion. A general trend is how Central and Eastern Europeans are less likely to extend the right of marriage to gay or lesbian couples than Western Europe, even though tolerance towards same-sex relations is seen as a part of the European values. Research shows how European values can mean different things for different people: "For some, it conjures up the continent's Christian heritage; for others, it connotes a broader political liberalism that encompasses a separation between church and state, asylum for refugees, and democratic government" (Pew Research Center, 2018). Timofeev (2021) confirms this misunderstanding of European values. Different segments of the population of Europe hold completely different views than the general idea of tolerance that is being promoted. Again, it

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<sup>2</sup> This is important to keep in mind. I am very aware that not everybody in the Western world is tolerant towards the LGBTQ+ community, as not everyone in Russia is intolerant towards the LGBTQ+ community. This struggle for equality is still taking place everywhere in the world. However, in most research this dichotomy is used to make a very complex subject comprehensible. The sources and news articles that I study in this research also make use of this dichotomy. Because of this, in this research I will most of the time also use this dichotomy to give a clearcut picture of the narrative of Gayropa as it is used in these articles.

becomes clear that the East/West dichotomy isn't accurate. There is a need for awareness on the generalisation of these European values (Timofeev, 2021).

This clash of values can also be characterised by some as a culture war. Suslov and Uzlaner (2019) explain the characteristics of culture and how these have an influence on Russian moral conservatism. They note how conservatism is rising throughout the entire Western world. Russia's moral conservatism needs to be seen against the backdrop of this global rise. Further in their work, they explain how at the 'heart' of culture lie distinctions (such as gender difference, sexuality) between individuals to establish their 'identity' and 'community'. Enemies that try to erase these fundamental cultural distinctions form a threat to said community. From this idea of culture stems the rather simple narrative storyline of moral conservatism, namely that enemies will try to destroy the moral fortress of the traditional family values of the community (Suslov & Uzlaner, 2019). This is the storyline used by Russia to make Western Europe into the enemy of traditional values and the scapegoat of all problems. Chapnin (2020) also discusses this political rhetoric of values used by Russia. He explains how the notion of traditional values has been adopted by the Russian state since 2012. It not only holds a political rhetoric, but a military one as well. Traditional values are linked to destruction, because the values have to battle against those who stand against them. This rhetoric is used by Putin. He doesn't doubt that the whole modern (Western) world is holding a war against traditional values (Chapnin, 2020). These ideas of battles and incompatibilities of values form the basis of the contemporary culture war.

Another work by Uzlaner (2020) discusses how the clash of values causes the disappearance of meaningful rational exchange of arguments between different parties. Because of this disappearance the world is perceived from a black-and-white point of view. This creates the foundations for the culture war between 'Western' values and traditional values. Uzlaner uses the conflict of Ukraine as an example of a conflict with a clear value dimension. For the Russian state, the liberal West tries to subvert the Russian world. The Russian state adopts this reason to react in a protective and defensive way towards the West (Uzlaner, 2020). Verpoest (2018) also analyses the value dimension of the conflict in Ukraine. According to her, the EU is othering Russia and Russia is othering the EU to a similar extent in the war. The Russian state instrumentalizes the EU's support for LGBTQ+ rights to show the contrast with Russian traditional values; and focuses on homosexuality being 'foreign' to Russian society. This is applied in the case of Ukraine through words such as Gayromaidan and Gayropa. They resemble everything that is foreign to Russia's own, traditional values: "It is exactly this rhetoric on LGBTIs that is being used for geopolitical othering: contrasting Russia's traditional values with perverse 'demonic' influences from the West" (Verpoest, 2018: 152).

Luciani (2021) calls this the geopoliticisation of LGBTQ+ rights. According to her, this geopoliticisation has double-edged implications for LGBTQ+ communities in the 'in-between' countries of the EU and Russia such as Georgia. She concludes how it becomes visible in these countries that framing of the enemy or scapegoat happens on both sides of the values clash: Homophobic mobs are seen as part of the Kremlin's plan to undermine Georgia's pro-Western foreign policy; and on the other side homosexuality is seen as the EU's neo-imperial plan to undermine Russian influence (Luciani, 2021). Most of the time the culture war between the Western values and traditional values is framed through the politicisation of LGBTQ+ rights. These political value narratives on LGBTQ+ rights are being framed and supported through the media.

### 1.1.3. Literature on media coverage of the state narrative on homosexuality

More recent research (Sleptcov, 2017; Novitskaya, 2021) has acknowledged that homophobia and the idea of traditional values are politically used as an oppressive state strategy in Russia. According to Sleptcov (2017) homophobia was used to recreate a sense of national identity based on the construct of traditional values and heteronormativity in this globalised world. Novitskaya (2021) confirms this by explaining how state-controlled media has been instrumental in promoting this strategy by increasing negative visibility of the LGBTQ+ community in Russia and the world.

This brings us to the research of narratives on homosexuality in media coverage in Russia. Most of this research is focused on the period of the implementation of the anti-gay law in Russia (Persson, 2014; Edenborg, 2018; Kondakov, 2019) and on the Russian state narrative on homosexuality (Wiedlack, 2017; Khlusova, 2017). Emil Persson (2014) researched how increased public visibility of homosexuality since the mid-2000s, together with the growing anti-Western narrative, influenced the attitudes towards homosexuality in Russia. He analysed the coverage of the 2013 anti-gay law in *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* and *Vremya* and concluded that this coverage reconstructs the dominant state narrative of homosexuality as a threat, creating a negative visibility of the LGBTQ+ community in Russia to sustain this narrative (Persson, 2014).

Khlusova (2017) investigates how media reproduces the negative stigma of the LGBTQ+ community in Russia by applying a critical discourse analysis (CDA). Her research focuses on 58 news reports covering homosexuality on the television news discourse of *Vesti* and *Vremya*. She analysed how the stigma is used to justify discrimination against minority groups (Khlusova, 2017). Wiedlack (2017) also analysed the narratives of representation of the LGBTQ+ community in Russia and the West through CDA. She concludes that the focus of such research should not be on the homophobia of Russian people, but on the propaganda by the state and media of heterosexuality, family, and procreation as the foundation of the nation, which uses homophobia as a method. This focus shows how the heteronormative idea with a focus on family values is also present in parts and communities of the West, addressing the need to go beyond the East/West dichotomy (Wiedlack, 2017).

Edenborg (2018) focuses on this negative state narrative and East/West dichotomy as well. In his article he explains how sexual politics are entangled in contestations over geopolitics in the 21st century. He elaborates on how sexual politics are used in the discourses of 'tradition' and 'modernity'. The dichotomy of a 'gay-friendly West' confronting a 'traditional non-West' is a historically inaccurate dichotomy. He exposes this by investigating how events in the West and homosexuality are covered in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, *Komsomolskaya Pravda* and *Vremya* during the period of January 2013 until June 2013 (Edenborg, 2018).

Kondakov (2019) investigates the frequency of articles on homosexuality in the Russian media. His conclusion states that there are more publications on LGBTQ+ issues after the implementation of the anti-gay law of 2013. However, the content of these publications depends on the outlet. Materials aired on government-controlled media sources try to convince the public of the danger of homosexuality, whilst publications on oppositional or independent medias try to convey a more LGBTQ+-friendly approach (Kondakov, 2019). So, the attitude and narrative depend on the media outlet that produces the content.

#### 1.1.4. Literature on the concept of Gayropa

Recently, there has also been research conducted on Gayropa in Russian media. Kolesnikova (2019) wrote on recent neologisms in the Russian language. In this article *Gayropa* is defined as an ironic name for Europe with a hint towards homosexuality. Riabov and Riabova (2014; 2020) elaborate in their articles how the concept has become increasingly visible on Russian internet sources. It is used to characterise the Western European gender order. They explain how the term plays an important role in the contemporary geopolitical discourse of the Russian state, especially on the war in Ukraine. Gayropa is used to legitimise Russia's place in the modern world and contributes to the contemporary national idea of a traditional Russia and its family values. The concept is used to delineate the symbolic borders between Russia and Western Europe. It supports the idea of an East/West dichotomy. Russia with its discourse of tradition is seen as the 'successor' to the real authentic Europe. Non-traditional sexuality is seen as a threat to Russia's national identity and political stability. By defending sexual minorities, the West's position towards Russia is shaped as one of the intruders trying to change Russian internal affairs (Riabov & Riabova, 2014; 2020).

Foxall (2017) also explores the use of this concept in Russia's geopolitical discourse towards the EU. He traces the evolution of ideas on the EU in post-Soviet Russia. The paper discusses how Russia changed its narrative about the EU since the 'colour revolutions' between 2003 and 2005, slowly at first and then more drastically since Putin's return to presidency in 2012. The article criticises how Gayropa is used in the contemporary narrative to claim and visualise Russia as a great global power against Western Europe (Foxall, 2017). Morris and Garibyan (2021) investigated this conservative evolution in Russians' everyday life. They analysed how Gayropa resonates with the Russian people and if it reflects the anti-Western state discourse. Even though the state discourse and the term Gayropa are adopted by almost all of the Russian media, the state narrative of Gayropa hasn't really resonated with the Russian population yet.

This literature review clarifies how there is already extensive research on Russian attitudes towards homosexuality. In more recent research these attitudes are translated into the contemporary global culture war waged between liberal 'Western' values and 'traditional' values. There is extensive contemporary research on this clash of values in Russian media through the framing of the LGBTQ+ community since the adoption of the anti-gay law in Russia in 2013. Even the term Gayropa has already been examined in academic research, yet there has not been sufficient research conducted on the use of the term Gayropa by different Russian media outlets.

### 1.2. Methodology

This research uses the qualitative method of narrative analysis to explore the storytelling structures and tropes of the concept of Gayropa in Russian news articles. This narrative analysis will be based on different scientific theories: *Media Discourse* (1995) by Norman Fairclough and 'Narrative in Political Science' (1998) by Patterson and Monroe. These theories will then be incorporated in the method applied on each sub-question. As I have a background in the studies of Eastern European languages and cultures, I will translate the articles myself when examining the different narratives including the concept of Gayropa<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> As I am not a native Russian nor English speaker, there is a chance that the translations from Russian to English will not be correct literal translations. Although the literal translation might hold some discrepancies the general message of the articles will be clearly and correctly conveyed.

### 1.2.1. Theories

Relevant theories for this study of Russian articles about Gayropa are the theory of Norman Fairclough (1995) on media discourse and the theory of narrative analysis by Patterson and Monroe (1998). I will use different aspects from both these theories to conduct a narrative analysis that answers the different questions of this research.

#### 1.2.1.1. Media Discourse (1995) by Norman Fairclough

Discourse means anything from a historical monument, a lieu de memoire, a policy, a political strategy, narratives in a restricted or broad sense of the term, text, talk, a speech, topic-related conversations, to language per se. (Wodak & Meyer, 2016: 3)

Discourse has a very broad definition. There are various ways to analyse discourse, which is why the focus in this research is on *Media Discourse* (1995) by Norman Fairclough. Fairclough (1995) sees media as having the power to alter and shape social relations, social identities, certain knowledge, and values. Media can choose which social identities (versions of the ‘Self’) it will visualise and what values it demands. Media can also selectively represent the world. Hence media holds a certain power, which makes it interesting for governments to control certain media output. In certain cases, the state can have an input on media output, which makes it necessary to examine the patterns of ownership of the media. These patterns could directly or indirectly shape media discourses and their representation of the world (Fairclough, 1995).

Other essential aspects of Fairclough’s theory for this research are his theories around representations and narratives in the media. Firstly, looking at his theory around representations in media discourse, Fairclough (1995) specifies how the truth in an absolute sense is problematic. The focus should not be on whether the media is telling the absolute truth, but on how situations, people, relationships... are represented. Fairclough hereby considers that: “...media texts do not merely ‘mirror realities’ as is sometimes naïvely assumed; they constitute versions of reality in ways which depend on the social positions and interests and objectives of those who produce them” (1995: 103). Such representations can be compared and analysed by their partiality or completeness. Conclusions around these comparisons can show the truthfulness or untruthfulness of these representations and how certain representations fit certain discourses. Secondly, looking at his theory around narrative in media discourse Fairclough (1995) explains the complexity of journalism: “... journalists don’t only recount events, they also interpret and explain them, try to get people to see things and to act in certain ways, and aim to entertain” (1995: 90). There is this tension between giving or hiding information and at the same time having to entertain. From this, Fairclough (1995) distinguishes two aspects of a narrative, namely the actual story and the presentations of this story. The presentation of the story is of importance to understand the influence of certain discourses on narratives in the media.

#### 1.2.1.2. ‘Narrative in Political Science’ (1998) by Patterson and Monroe

In addition to Fairclough’s theory around media discourse, Patterson and Monroe’s theory around narratives is interesting as well for this research. Patterson and Monroe (1998) define narratives in the political sense as follows:

... refers to the ways in which we construct disparate facts in our own worlds and weave them together cognitively in order to make sense of our reality. Since these narratives help us understand ourselves as political beings, narrative becomes an invaluable tool in navigating the myriad of sensations that bombard us daily. (1998: 315).

Narratives are created to understand the realities that surround people. They can be created by individuals but also by collective units, such as nations and groups. The article explains how narratives are interpretations of how the world should be. Details of certain events are selected to fit a narrative that is noteworthy. This is most of all visible in narratives of national identity and history: “Stories about the origin and development of a nation provide a shared sense of who we are, where we came from, and how we fit together” (Patterson & Monroe, 1998: 322). Narratives are important for nationalist movements around the world. Politicians use narratives to rewrite history so that they can accomplish certain political goals (Patterson & Monroe, 1998).

Patterson and Monroe take four characteristics of narratives into account when analysing media articles. The first one looks at the relation between certain parts of the article. It describes how certain events are linked with other events. The second feature is ‘causal emplotment’, which looks at how certain elements in the narrative are localised to create a causal relationship between them. The third characteristic shows how people choose to include or leave certain details out of the narrative. The fourth feature looks at where the elements of the plot are situated towards one another (Patterson & Monroe, 1998).

A combination of these two theories will be used to examine the media content in different Russian media outlets. The focus of this research will be on content about the concept of Gayropa and the possible links with the political and cultural changes in Russia’s relation towards Western Europe.

### 1.2.2. *Methods*

This research uses the collection of digital materials, in specific: the collection of news articles focused on the concept of Gayropa from different Russian media outlets during the period of 2014 until 2021. The research of news articles containing the term Gayropa will focus on four Russian newspapers: *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, *Izvestia*, *Komsomolskaya Pravda* and *Novaya Gazeta*. All four of these papers exist in written form and online. Yet in this research only the online form will be examined as this is the most accessible format at this time. The collection of news articles is done by searching for the key term Gayropa in the search engines of each newspaper. The articles will be analysed per newspaper to see which newspaper adopts which narrative. I will compare the narratives of the newspapers with one another to discover differences and similarities between the storytelling of the different newspapers.

The timeframe is chosen based on the conflict in Ukraine. Gayropa is mostly used in terms of the Ukrainian conflict, so it is only logical to take the beginning of the conflict in 2014 as the starting point. I limit the research to the end of 2021, just before the escalation of the conflict into a war. As the field is now constantly changing due to the war, it is not possible to include the year 2022 yet.

#### 1.2.2.1. Choice of newspapers

The choice of newspapers is determined by their affiliation with the Russian state – state-owned, state-affiliated, non-state-affiliated – to conduct a broad and qualitative research on the concept.

Rossiyskaya Gazeta (RG) is the official Russian state newspaper. The newspaper is published from Monday until Saturday, has a daily circulation of approximately 166,675 copies, and is available throughout the whole country (European Press Roundup, n.d. b). The online newspaper has an average daily audience of 2,363,267 visitors (LiveInternet, 2021), with a traffic volume of 381,543 unique daily visitors (WEBrate, 2021d). Because the newspaper is state-owned, it will be interesting to see how the state discourse using Gayropa is reflected in its articles.

Izvestia (IZ) is a socio-political newspaper. It is one of the oldest and most popular newspapers in Russia: “Circulation of the Izvestia newspaper exceeds 150 thousand copies, the audience of one number makes 309 thousand readers” (TAdviser, n.d. b). The website of the newspaper is estimated to have around 844,505 number of visits daily (Nets4, 2021), with 312,567 unique daily visitors (WEBrate, 2021a). IZ is not state-owned, but by delving deeper into the background of its shareholders, the newspaper seems to be affiliated with the state. IZ is bought by the Natsionalnaya Media Gruppy (NMG). NMG, in turn, is owned by Bank Rossiya, Surgufneftegas, SOGAZ and Gazprom Media (TAdviser, n.d. d). Bank Rossiya owns the biggest share of NMG; and is owned – together with Gazprom Media – by Gazprom (TAdviser, n.d. e). Gazprom is an oil-company in which the Russian state holds the most shares (TAdviser, n.d. a). The general director of NMG is now Svetlana Balanova. She used to be the first deputy general director of Gazprom Media (BroadBand TV News, 2021). This information confirms that IZ is a state-affiliated newspaper.

Komsomolskaya Pravda (KP) is one of Russia’s best-selling daily newspapers. It used to be a leading Soviet youth paper that reached the height of its popularity in 1990. In that time, it hit a peak daily circulation of almost 22 million (BBC News, 2008). Nowadays the daily circulation is around 0.5 million (TAdviser, n.d. c). The website of the newspaper has an average of 443,449 unique daily visitors (WEBrate, 2021b). KP – just as IZ – is not state-owned, but its largest shareholder has affiliations with the state. The Russian energy group ESN (Evroseverneft’) is one of the newspaper’s largest shareholders. This energy company is led by Grigory Berezkin (Interfax, 2017). Berezkin is deferential towards the Russian president Vladimir Putin (Reiter & Lyrchikova, 2017). He is often addressed as being a pro-Kremlin publisher, who bought up several state-critical newspapers (RSF Reporters without Borders, 2021). KP is a state-affiliated newspaper.

Novaya Gazeta (NG) is best known for its investigative journalism, it is seen as Russia's leading opposition newspaper (BBC News, 2008). The editor in chief Dmitry Muratov has won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2021 due his efforts to safeguard freedom of expression (Nobel Prize, n.d.). The website has a traffic volume of 77,141 unique daily visitors in 2021 (WEBrate, 2021). The newspaper is not state-owned and is not affiliated with the state. The newspaper is mostly owned by its staff with only two other shareholders: Mikhail Gorbachev (former Soviet leader) and Alexander Lebedev (a wealthy businessman) (European Press Roundup. n.d. a). Gorbachev and Lebedev are leading critics of Russian authorities (Forbes, n.d.). NG is – or was<sup>4</sup> – an opposition newspaper with no affiliations towards the Russian state.

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<sup>4</sup> In 2022 - since the escalation of the armed conflict of Ukraine into a war - the publication of the paper was forced to stop by the Russian state. Muratov has been attacked with paint when he was on a train in Russia and several journalists of the paper have fled Russia. These journalists have now founded Novaya Gazeta Europe. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/2022/04/07/1091478334/dmitry-muratov-attacked-in-russia?t=1650185119743>

#### 1.2.2.2. Method per question

I will use different aspects from the above explained theories of Norman Fairclough (1995) and Patterson and Monroe (1998) with each sub-question. The answers to the four sub-questions will eventually lead up to the answer to my main question: How does the narrative of Gayropa reflect the sexual politics and anti-Western rhetoric used by the Russian state in its project of national belonging in four well-known Russian newspapers?

The first sub-question about the representation of Western Europe<sup>5</sup> in the articles on Gayropa is a descriptive question. It aims at sketching what is happening in the field. I will answer this based on the theory of Fairclough (1995) on media discourse. As already mentioned, the media can choose which social identities it will visualize and can also selectively represent the world, which is of importance here. Fairclough points out three sets of questions to have in mind when analysing media output concerning representations: “How is the world represented? What identities are set up for those involved in the programme or story? What relationships are set up between those involved?” (1995: 5). By answering these questions for each article, it will be possible to evaluate the different representations of Western Europe by newspaper.

To answer the second sub-question on the various other themes or words linked to Gayropa in articles I will use the theory on narrative by Patterson and Monroe (1998). This part of the analysis will be based on the four characteristics of narratives by Patterson and Monroe. I will use these characteristics to research how certain events and phenomena are selected and made relational so that they fit into a certain narrative, which is linked to Gayropa.

The third sub-question on the concepts of sexual politics and politics of belonging reflected in geopolitical articles is an analytical question aimed at understanding the political narrative in articles on Gayropa. I will answer this question using both Fairclough’s theory and the theory of Patterson and Monroe. Here I will focus on Fairclough’s theory of the two aspects of a narrative, namely the actual story and the presentations of this story. The presentation of the story is of importance to understand the influence of certain discourses on narratives in the media (Fairclough, 1995). Patterson and Monroe’s theory on narratives of national identity and history can add to this to better understand the different narratives used in articles on Gayropa. Details of certain events are selected to fit a narrative that is noteworthy (Patterson & Monroe, 1998). I will examine how sexual politics or politics of belonging can boost the geopolitical narrative of Russian media on Ukraine; and at the same time shape the Gayropa rhetoric.

My last sub-question on the possible difference between state-affiliated and non-state-affiliated newspapers will be based on the information taken out of the previous questions. According to Fairclough (1995) patterns of ownership of the media, can directly or indirectly shape media discourses. The patterns of ownership of the media outlets are already discussed in the paragraphs above. To answer this question, I will compare the four newspapers with one another to evaluate the importance of media ownership. I will compare all my results and the patterns per newspaper with one another. I will cross-check the representation on Western Europe, the use of the narrative of Gayropa during key moments and the different associations made in articles on Gayropa. These comparisons will be used to research differences between the newspapers to see what the influence of the state discourse on homosexuality and anti-Westernism is.

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<sup>5</sup> In the articles from the different newspapers the authors constantly switch between the West, Western Europe, the EU, and Europe when voicing their opinions. The assumption can be made that these terms are not delimited in meaning and are used alternately by different authors. For the sake of simplicity, the general term Western Europe is used in this study. Unless the authors themselves clearly demarcate the meaning of the denomination.

## 2. State-owned: Rossiyskaya Gazeta

RG is the state-owned newspaper of Russia. It has six articles in which the term Gayropa is present. These articles are spread throughout the period of 2014 until 2019. The first one appears in 2014, with two more articles following in 2015. Then it isn't until 2017 before another article appears that mentions Gayropa. At last, there are two more published in 2019. By having multiple articles, it becomes feasible to summarise all aspects of the image of Western Europe and to look deeper into the different themes, events and words linked to Gayropa in RG. As the articles are spread over a few years, it is possible to critically analyse how the geopolitical relations between Russia and Western Europe influence the narrative in RG.

### 2.1. *Western Europe - a sheep?*

The newspaper articles of RG paint a not so appealing picture of Western Europe. The articles are filled with talk about European exaggerations, Western imperialism, corruption, and political correctness. Some articles even go as far as to call Western Europe a sheep of the United States of America (USA). The overarching presentation of the world is the same in every article. The world is divided into two opposite sides: Western Europe versus Russia. Although the general presentation is nearly the same in all articles, the way the identities and relationships between Western Europe and Russia are set up strongly differs.

The most common identity set up for Western Europe is that of the aggressor. Western Europe is presented as a neo-imperialist entity in the world. This identity of an aggressor is visible in articles on Ukraine. Western Europe is made out to be the enemy in the conflict. The Maidan revolution is explained as a geopolitical move by imperialistic Western Europe to impose its values on Ukraine. Russia's identity is established as the defender of traditional values. The Russian state needs to stop the downfall of Ukraine brought about by Gayropa (Makarychev, 2015). In general, the relationship between Russia and Western Europe is one of adversaries. However, at one point the identity of Western Europe on the conflict wasn't only one as the aggressor, but also one as the lackey of the USA. Western Europe is painted as sheepishly following the USA in its sanction war against Russia. Russia is still painted as the victim that just defends its values and only reacts on the actions inflicted by Western Europe and the USA: “не мы инициаторы санкционной войны, и свои ограничения мы готовы немедленно снять, как только другая сторона сделает первый шаг”<sup>6</sup> (RG, 2019).

The idea of Western Europe as an aggressor is also visible in more trivial subjects. One article shapes the division of the world throughout dictionaries: English versus Russian. In this article English dictionaries are accused of being part of the linguistic imperialism of the English language:

Приведу высказывание Нунберга, лингвиста из Школы информации в Калифорнийском университете в Беркли: “Наше восхищение необъятностью английского языка возникает из своего рода лингвистического империализма - ощущения, что ‘наши словари больше, чем их

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<sup>6</sup> Translation: We are not the initiators of the sanctions war, and we are ready to lift our restrictions immediately as soon as the other side makes the first move.

словари'. Но это на самом деле не делает нас сколь-либо богаче лингвистически"<sup>7</sup>. (Novoselova, 2014)

The idea that Western Europe (or the West in general) goes so far as to make sure that its dictionaries are bigger than others to demonstrate its superiority above other languages creates this image of Western Europe as an exaggerator and neo-imperialist entity (Novoselova, 2014). It fuels the idea that Western Europe threatens Russia on all levels, even very trivial ones.

In other articles Western Europe's identity is established as being corrupt and too focused on political correctness. Western Europe is linked to the Oscars in the USA, which is a corrupted event according to RG. The Oscars are being criticised for giving prizes to people of minority groups just to reach a certain quota – even though their roles or films aren't that exceptionally good – and for being politically correct. However, as the Oscars is an event in the USA, it is surprising that Western Europe – or more specifically Gayropa – is dragged into this. The connection between Western Europe and the Oscars is constructed through the so-called European gay lobbies: Hollywood is supposedly corrupted by the gay lobby of Gayropa (Kichin, 2017). Even here the overarching identity of Western Europe is one of an aggressor spreading values such as political correctness, but now it is towards the USA instead of Russia. Furthermore, Western Europe's political correctness is not only used to shape the idea of the aggressor, but also the idea of Western Europe becoming weak: "огромные волны страшных бородатых "беженцев" (полубандиты и террористы, полупаразиты и попрошайки) заливают старую, вялую, трусливую, парализованную своей лживой "политкорректностью""<sup>8</sup> (Radzikhovskiy, 2015). Western Europe's political correctness is depicted as paralysing and creating a stagnation in Western Europe's evolution.

The overarching depiction of Western Europe in RG is aggressive, imperialistic, and at the same time weak. Although these are contradictory elements, they do work in the narrative of Russia as a leader and defender of traditional values in the world against the aggressive, yet soft (feminine) Western Europe.

## ***2.2. Shaping the narrative***

In the six articles of RG, Gayropa is linked to the following events: the situation in Ukraine, the Oscars, and a Russian play. The themes discussed in these articles are homosexuality, morality, corruption, political correctness, migration, and traditional values.

### *2.2.1. Events*

Most articles cover the situation in Ukraine. One from 2014 discusses the rise of new words (neologisms) in the Russian language following the conflict in Ukraine. The article gives a list of examples which contain: Gayropa, Maidany, Ukropy, Fashington and many others (Novosoleva, 2014). All have a rather damaging connotation. Gayropa is used to condemn the involvement of Western Europe in the situation of Ukraine. In 2015 an article even instils the fear of Odessa falling

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<sup>7</sup> Translation: To quote Nunberg, a linguist at the School of Information at the University of California, Berkeley: "Our admiration for the immensity of the English language stems from a kind of linguistic imperialism - a feeling that 'our dictionaries are bigger than their dictionaries'. But that doesn't really make us any richer linguistically".

<sup>8</sup> Translation: huge waves of scary bearded "refugees" (half-gangsters and terrorists, half-parasites and beggars) flooding the old, sluggish, cowardly, paralysed by their lying "political correctness"

into decay due to the new pro-Western governor Saakashvili. It discusses the possible organisation of a LGBTQ+ pride in Odessa approved by the governor and the taking over of Odessa's economy by American corporations (Makarychev, 2015). The connection between these events helps shape the idea of Western neo-imperialism happening in Ukraine. At last, in an interview by the Luxemburger Wort with Dmitry Medvedev the situation in Ukraine is broadly discussed: the sentiments towards the sanction war between Russia and the EU<sup>9</sup> are analysed. They talk about the deteriorating relations between the EU and Russia, which became even worse due to the sanctions. A picture is painted in which Medvedev wants to prove that not everyone in the EU, here specifically Luxemburg, agrees with these sanctions (RG, 2019). This gives the possibility to create a narrative in which the unity of the EU is questioned. By questioning the unity of the EU, the power of EU is made to look unstable and vulnerable instead of unbreakable.

Another event linked to Gayropa are the Oscars of 2017 in the USA. The Oscars are depicted as being weak and too busy with political correctness. The article is more a criticism towards the USA since the Oscars aren't even European. However, the term Gayropa is used in it to explain the so-called 'gay lobby' in the USA (Kichin, 2017). It shows that the use of Gayropa goes further than just Western Europe. It can encompass all the West. Gayropa is used to negatively criticise events and ideas from the West.

### 2.2.2. *Themes*

One of the recurring themes in almost all six articles of RG is the theme of sexuality. Gayropa is immediately linked to Western values on sexuality and sexual preference. Most of the time this theme is used to drag Western Europe through the mud. Fear for same-sex relations is installed in most articles. The following example shows how LGBTQ+ prides and queer festivals in Odessa are feared as they will take away the public space of people who still hold on to their traditional values: "На Украине и в солнечной Одессе они "отвоевывают все больше пространства" у людей с традиционной ориентацией"<sup>10</sup> (Makarychev, 2015). The theme of traditional values and sexuality are related to one another as being each other's opposite. They fit into the discourse of Russia (traditional values) versus Western Europe (liberal values towards sexuality).

The theme of sexuality is also often placed together with the theme of corruption. By doing this, the negativity linked to sexuality and Gayropa is amplified. Next to fear for LGBTQ+ prides in Odessa the new pro-Western governor Saakashvili is badly depicted as having corrupted his home country Georgia: "Полноте, одесситы. В ваш колоритный город фигурант уголовных дел в Грузии не собирался привезти дары, которыми славится его родина, от гражданства которой он так легко отказался"<sup>11</sup> (Makarychev, 2015). The concern is made that this governor will corrupt Odessa in favour of Western Europe. Western Europe supposedly corrupts countries by imposing its values on it. This narrative is also used on the Oscars, which are depicted as corrupted by the Western European gay lobby (Kichin, 2017).

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<sup>9</sup> This article explicitly focuses on Russia's relations with the EU. For this reason I here use the term EU instead of Western Europe.

<sup>10</sup> Translation: In Ukraine and sunny Odessa they are "reclaiming more and more space" from people with a traditional orientation.

<sup>11</sup> Translation: Come on, Odessans. The figurehead of criminal cases in Georgia did not intend to bring to your colourful city the gifts for which his homeland, whose citizenship he so easily renounced, is famous

However, one article containing different themes such as sexuality, corruption, morality, and even migration try to warn its readers about the usage of these linkages. It shows the extremes of media, such as the image of Western Europe as a Gayropa, filled with aggressive homosexuals, drug-addicts, unwelcome migrants, but also with declining child births and destruction of Christian morality (Radzikhovskiy, 2015). It refutes how Western Europe is linked to these themes and with this condemns the other articles of RG. The Russian state isn't addressed in the article, and both Russian and English media are criticised for their sensationalism. So, it is not so much criticism of the state itself, but it is still surprising that this article is in the state newspaper.

### ***2.3. Path to cooperation?***

As becomes clear from the above paragraphs, half of the articles mention or reflect the conflict in Ukraine. In the first article in 2014 on dictionaries the geopolitical relations between Russian and Western Europe come up through new lexemes, even though the subject has nothing to do with geopolitics. The lexemes Gayropa, which links Europe to homosexuality, and Fashington, which links America to fascism, come to life and become popular in Russian media when discussing the ongoing situation in Ukraine between Russia and Western Europe (Novoselova, 2014). Both these neologisms have a negative undertone and discredit the West. The following article written in 2015 further elaborates on this narrative of discrediting Western Europe in the conflict of Ukraine. The new pro-Western governor of Odessa Saakashvili will cause the demise of Odessa, according to the article. He is depicted as untrustworthy, and a pawn used in Western imperialist strategy that will corrupt Ukraine by implementing Western European values such as homosexuality (Makarychev, 2015). The article is used to defend Russia's interference in Ukraine and especially in Odessa. Through Russian media and the state's war propaganda, the idea is installed that Odessa needs to be saved from Gayropa and Western imperialism. This can allegedly only be done by Russia as the protector of traditional values.

Both these articles implement the heteronormative discourse which focuses on manliness and tradition. It reflects the sexual politics by Russia, which sees homosexuality as a construction and heterosexuality as 'natural'. LGBTQ+ prides, queer festivals, and the principles of the new governor of Odessa are described as an intrusion on the life of Odessans. According to the articles, these constructions are used by Western Europe to further its imperialist agenda. Western Europe is the aggressor (Gayropa) and Russia is just the defender and protector of traditional values. There is a clear boundary between Western Europe and Russia. This boundary constructs the world into 'us' versus 'them', which are made out to be two completely incompatible entities. Gayropa is used in Russia's politics of belonging to legitimise its involvement in the war in Ukraine as Odessans need to be protected from Western decay.

The interview of Dmitriy Medvedev is all about the geopolitics between the EU and Russia. They discuss the history and contemporary relations between Russia and the EU. They cover the situation in Ukraine and the subsequent sanctions of the EU, the USA's nuclear weapons in Europe, the growing cooperation between the EU and Russia, the differences in sexual values, and at last the future relations between EU and Russia (RG, 2019). Throughout the article positive insinuations are made towards the future relation between EU and Russia. The EU isn't the scapegoat of everything wrong inside and outside of Russia. The scapegoat here is the USA. Here the 'us' versus 'them' strategy changes compared to the other articles. The 'them' is no longer Western Europe, but the USA. Western Europe is depicted as a possible future partner, which means they lean more towards

the 'us' category. However, Western Europe is still not depicted as part of the 'us' category, which becomes clear when the subject of sexuality is discussed. Medvedev states that Europe has one history and Russia another, which they both must respect and not impose values on one another (RG, 2019). He insinuates that the EU tries to impose its values towards LGBTQ+ on Russia and the rest of the world. This shows how the EU is still painted as being aggressive on certain subjects, yet not so aggressive as the USA. In 2019, RG hints towards the probability for a better relationship with the EU.

### 3. State-affiliated: Izvestia and Komsomolskaya Pravda

There are two newspapers who are affiliated with the Russian state or Putin himself: Izvestia and Komsomolskaya Pravda.

#### 3.1. *Izvestia*

IZ only has two articles containing the concept of Gayropa, one from 2015 and one from 2016. The articles are opinion pieces from different journalists in which they are openly critical of Western Europe. Because of the limited number of articles, it is possible to delve deep into the details of each article. However, long-term changes in the narrative on Gayropa will not be visible.

##### 3.1.1. *A closed window to Europe (2015)*

The first article written in 2015 by Egor Kholmogorov is an opinion piece on the tensions between Western Europe and Russia due to the armed conflict in Ukraine.

##### 3.1.1.1. Hypocritical Europe

Ждать понимания, естественной справедливости, доверия в отношениях и подразумеваемого равенства от современного Запада нам не приходится. Любые «хорошие манеры» тут достигаются лишь на основе силового баланса.<sup>12</sup> (Kholmogorov, 2015)

The article discusses the hypocrisy of Western Europe's reaction to the implementation of a blacklist by Russia. This list is a response to the blacklist made for Russia by the USA and Western Europe a year earlier. According to Kholmogorov it is only logical that Russia also draws up such a list as a retaliation. Western European politicians and media condemning this Russian list are being hypocritical, in his opinion. He connects this hypocrisy of Western Europe to more general statements in relation to the West, such as the idea that the West has the right to judge Russian politicians and public figures, simply because the West assumes of itself that it is always right. This leads, according to him, to Western media outlets depicting the West as the 'Good'; and everything different from the West as the 'Bad' (Kholmogorov, 2015). The presentation of the world is thus through the division into two side: the West and the Rest.

Western Europe's identity is described through negative language containing words such as: наивный самовлюбленный западничество (naïve, narcissistic Westernism), Гейропа (Gayropa), беззастенчивость западного цинизма (shamelessness of Western cynicism), and истерика западных политиков (hysteria of Western politicians) (Kholmogorov, 2015). Western Europe is painted as hypocritical, self-righteous, and unfair, especially towards Russia. The relation established between both through the article shows a power imbalance. The powerplay of Western Europe against Russia is being condemned throughout the article. The idea is shaped that Western

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<sup>12</sup> Translation: We should not expect understanding, natural justice, trust in relations, and implied equality from the modern West. Any «good manners» here are achieved only on the basis of a balance of power.

Europe can afford more than Russia even when Western Europe is the igniter and Russia is just reacting to its actions. Russia is painted as a victim of Western Europeans media propaganda and hysteria.

#### 3.1.1.2. Shaping the narrative

The concept of Gayropa is linked to various other events and themes in Western Europe in the article 'closed window to Europe' (2015). The events discussed in the article are the lists of banned foreigners by Russia and the West against each other; and different 'scandals' in Western Europe such as the hijacking of FIFA, the scam in Odessa with the former Georgian national exiled from his homeland for systematic use of torture now being governor, and the Western hysteria regarding the spy scandal in Great Britain with following expulsions of diplomats from both sides (Kholmogorov, 2015). The events to which Gayropa is linked all have a rather negative connotation to them. Most of them are called scandals throughout the article, shaping an unfavourable narrative of Gayropa. In the article these events are narrated as if all of them were provoked by Western Europe instead of admitting that these events are often a confluence of reactions from both sides to the conflict in Ukraine.

The recurring theme in this article is hypocrisy and hysteria from Western Europe. This is visible in the vocabulary used in the article: 'истерика западных политиков' (hysteria of Western politicians), 'в ловушку обычной западной непорядочности' (in the trap of the usual Western dishonesty), and 'беззастенчивость западного цинизма' (the shamelessness of Western cynicism). It shapes the narrative of Russia as a victim of Gayropa and Western hysteria. According to the article, this hysteria is a move in the anti-Russian strategy of Western Europe to depict Russia as the enemy in the armed conflict of Ukraine (Kholmogorov, 2015). Ironically, this is exactly what the article also does towards Western Europe. The article leaves out certain facts when shaping this narrative. For example, it is stated that Russian don't even want to go to Western Europe, which is of course a generalisation as there will be some people who will want to travel to Western Europe. The article also concludes that Russians tolerated the bans without any complaints (Kholmogorov, 2015). This is yet again a generalisation to substantiate the narrative of untouchable Russia against the hysteric Western Europe.

#### 3.1.1.3. The travel banned lists

In the article it becomes clear that the tensions between Russia and the Western Europe are rising. It is a clear critique on the contemporary Ukrainian situation at the time. The actions and reactions of Western Europe towards Russia are condemned and deconstructed. The article focuses very hard on the 'us' versus 'them' dichotomy between Russia and Western Europe. The focus lays on this idea that Western Europe constructs everything non-Western as Bad and only the West as Good. Kholmogorov explains the 'us' versus 'them' through the eyes of the West:

Разумеется, и публикация закрытого списка в европейских СМИ, и последующая истерика западных политиков — не более чем очередной ход в антиросийской кампании и сооружении из России и русских полноформатного врага без чести и совести.<sup>13</sup> (Kholmogorov, 2015)

Whilst condemning Western Europe for creating this enemy, the article is doing the same the other way around. The boundaries are made to divide the world. The identities are also clearly constructed in the article wherein Western Europe gets an anti-Russian identity and Russia the identity protector of its people against the West.

### 3.1.2. *Dreadnought Russia (2016)*

The second article from 2016 written by Maxim Kononenko is an opinion piece on the different values towards sexuality between Western Europe and Russia.

#### 3.1.2.1. Europe's changing morals

The article discusses the case of two Russian women who went to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) when they couldn't get married in Russia. Kononenko is very critical towards the court's handling of this case. He is opposed to the idea the Russian state should endorse homosexuality and same-sex marriages. He believes that ECHR has no right to interfere as Western Europe and Russia have different values and ideas towards sexuality. He makes his argument by drawing parallels with Western Europe from two centuries ago. What once was permissible became criminal and what was criminal became permissible, which shows according to him how rapid public morality can change (Kononenko, 2016). The world is thus represented as one of holding all kinds of different values and morals that change over time. There isn't really a clear-cut division, more a realisation that values are incompatible and shouldn't be imposed on one another.

The language he adopts to negatively describe Western Europe is visible through the following words: 'громоздкая и медленная машина ЕСПЧ' (the cumbersome and slow machine of the ECHR), and 'гейропа' (Gayropa). He uses the phrasing 'the cumbersome and slow machine of the ECHR' to address how it took the court approximately 6 years to give an answer to the report of the two women. In this way he gives a critical view on the bureaucracy of the ECHR, which is linked to Western Europe. Gayropa is used in the same sentence and listing as 'sodomy' and 'Orthodox Iran' are used (Kononenko, 2016). Why these are all in the same list isn't explained in the article, leaving it open for suggestions. In general, throughout the article Western Europe's identity is described as rotten, in decay, and stagnated. As for the relation between Russia and Western Europe, the article makes it very clear that both should leave one another alone. Russians should not look up to Western Europe and its ideas; and Europeans shouldn't expect Russians to hold the same Western ideas and values.

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<sup>13</sup> Translation: Of course, the publication of the blacklist in the European media and the subsequent hysteria of Western politicians is nothing more than another move in the anti-Russian campaign and the construction of a full-fledged enemy without honour and conscience of Russia and the Russians.

### 3.1.2.2. Shaping the narrative

In the article Gayropa is linked to the event of two women trying to get married in Russia. The two women made an appeal against the refusal of same-sex marriage in Russia by invoking the discrimination law through the ECHR. Kononenko critiques this event by making drastic links to different themes such as discrimination, sodomy, morality, and even paedophilia. First, he links it to paedophilia. According to Kononenko the ground of sexual orientation is not on the list of reasons to invoke the law. It does mention 'any other reasons'. Because of this he associates the invocation of the discrimination law with how Western Europe would handle accusations of discrimination towards sexual attraction to minors. By making this association the author puts homosexuality and paedophilia in the same box. Even though he states that he doesn't want to compare 'respectable' homosexuals to paedophiles, the comparison is made anyways through these insinuations (Kononenko, 2016). This association of non-heterosexuality with paedophilia is a well-known technique used by media and the Russian state, according to Persson (2014). It makes advocating for LGBTQ+ rights, and even criticism towards homophobia in the public sphere precarious. People could perceive this as justifying paedophilia (Persson, 2014). That is why making the association, even though Kononenko doesn't 'want' to compare one with another, can already be damaging enough to suppress readers' positive opinions on LGBTQ+.

Further he links the event to themes such as sodomy and changing morality. In England, during the time of Lewis Carroll, it was permissible to draw naked young girls, yet criminal to be homosexual. Kononenko uses this example to show laws change. Nowadays what used to be permissible is criminal and the other way around. This is used as argument to support Russia's resistance towards changing the Russian laws according to Western laws, because what is to say they will not change again? (Kononenko, 2016). The article focuses on the changing ideas in Western history but doesn't mention anything about the changing ideas and laws in Russian history. Russian laws and morals have changed throughout the years as well, so this could be used to counter Kononenko's idea of blocking change. These details are of course left out of the narrative, as it doesn't add value to the idea of Western Europe in decay with its ideas, morals, and values.

### 3.1.2.3. Incompatibility of values

This article was written in 2016, which is around the same time that the EU extended its sanctions towards Russia due to the continuing undermining of Ukraine's independence by Russia (European Council, n.d.). However, the article doesn't discuss the continuation of geopolitical tensions between Russia and the EU. What the article does do, is reinforce the image of European values as being incompatible with Russian ones. The case of two women wanting to get married in Russia but couldn't legally, emphasises this. They turned to the ECHR with their case, who in return questioned the Russian government and its ruling. Kononenko uses this case in his article to enforce the idea of Western Europe trying to impose its values on Russia. He explains how Russia shouldn't give in because Russia's values are different from and even incompatible with those of Western Europe. He defends this idea by making the following comparison:

Да, конечно, две Ирины не мыслят в терминах столетий, им надо решить свои проблемы (совместно нажитое имущество, дети, законное представительство друг друга) прямо сейчас. И поэтому они поехали в Канаду и заключили брак там. Ну так вот вам и метод. Если в России нет тропического моря с пальмами, увешанными бананами и обезьянами, мы же не подаем иски

в ЕСПЧ о нарушении наших прав. Нет, мы покупаем билет и летим туда, где есть это море.<sup>14</sup> (Kononenko, 2016)

The workings of sexual politics are noticeable in this quote. Western Europe is supposedly imposing its values on Russia by defending the right to get married of these women. The article makes it out to be part of Western Europe's sexual neo-imperialism. Russia must defend itself against Western Europe's attacks, such as the case of the ECHR. Again, the idea of Russia as last bastion of normalcy is projected in this article.

### ***3.2.Komsomolskaya Pravda***

KP is a newspaper that focuses on sensational articles rather than serious matters. Most of the articles are about everyday things, arguments between people and people's comments on different situations. It has 10 articles in which the term Gayropa is mentioned. These articles are spread throughout the period of 2015 until 2021. The first article appeared in 2015 together with three more. From then on only one article containing Gayropa came out in 2016, and one in 2018. Then in 2019 three articles are published on Gayropa. And at last, in 2021 one more article appears on the concept. The amount and the timespan of the articles makes it possible to create a broad idea of the image of Western Europe shaped in KP. It also creates the possibility to look deeper into the different themes, events and words that are linked to the concept. As the articles are broadly spread over time, the influence of geopolitics on the narrative of Gayropa can be analysed as well.

#### ***3.2.1. Degenerated Europe***

Белая христианская цивилизация капитулирует перед нашествием варварских орд мигрантов и разгулом этнической преступности, засильем гомосексуальной и феминистской мафии, кощунством воинствующих безбожников и «бешеных вагин». Европа на глазах вырождается в Гейропу, повторяя судьбу Содомы<sup>15</sup>. (Razumkov, 2014)

This quote is the description of a book called *Закат Гейропы и России* (*The sunset of Gayropa and Russia*, 2014), which can be bought on the site of KP. The picture painted in this book is extremely dystopian. Western Europe is going to hell and is dragging Russia with it. Western Europe is depicted as being the end of European civilization as the Europeans and Russians know it (Razumkov, 2014). This exaggerated image of the world is visible throughout the articles of KP. The world is divided into two sides again: the West and Russia. However, in these articles this division is magnified. The image of Western Europe in these articles is formed by a variety of

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<sup>14</sup> Translation: Yes, of course, the two Irinas do not think in terms of centuries, they need to solve their problems (jointly acquired property, children, legal representation of each other) right now. And so they went to Canada and got married there. So there you have it, the method. If Russia doesn't have a tropical sea with palm trees hung with bananas and monkeys, it's not like we're suing the ECHR for violation of our rights. No, we buy a ticket and fly to where there is this sea.

<sup>15</sup> Translation: White Christian civilisation is capitulating to the invasion of barbaric hordes of migrants and rampant ethnic crime, the dominance of the homosexual and feminist mafia, the blasphemy of militant atheists and «crazy vaginas». Before our eyes, Europe is degenerating into Gayropa and repeating the fate of Sodom.

subjects. In some of them, Western Europe is portrayed in a reasonably good light, while in others – such as the quote above – it is razed to the ground. The articles in which Western Europe is razed to the ground portray it as an imperium in decay, foolish, following unnecessary hypes, and an enemy of the Russian state.

Western Europe is depicted as an empire with its values in decay. For example, one of the authors condemns Western Europe for mocking the Holocaust through an exhibition. This is supported by comments such as: ““О чём вообще говорить? Моральная педерастия шагает по Гейропе. Искажено всё. Скоро скажут, что японцы сами на себя скинули ядерную бомбу”, возмущён наш читатель...”<sup>16</sup> (Baltnews / KP, 2015). Extreme comparisons are made to amplify the identity of Western Europe as misleading and as incompatible with Russian values. This is also done in another article, where the link is made between fully booked hairdressers during the World Cup and Western Europeans. As soccer fans are mostly men, the only explanation for these fully booked hairdressers is ‘an invasion of metrosexuals’ from Western Europe (Adamovich, 2018). Here it is insinuated that Western Europeans hold more feminine values than Russians.

Another unfavourable presentation of Western Europe is sexual deviancy. Homosexuality is negatively described in different articles as a hype. For example, the same-sex wedding of the prime minister of Luxemburg was turned into a sensational article. The article expressed how this wedding was just part of the contemporary Western hype of homosexuality (KP.ru, 2015). Again, the idea is shaped that Western European values are incompatible with the Russian traditional values. The European values are mocked in these articles. Another article questions the sincerity of homosexuality. It insinuates that homosexuality rises due to homosexual propaganda such as the ‘satanic’ film called *Brokeback Mountain*: ‘...выгнал из дома жену и пустился во все тяжкие с местными ковбоями...’<sup>17</sup> (Korobatov, 2019). These further fuels the idea that homosexuality is a Western construct and hype.

One article portrays the West (and with it Western Europe) as the enemy of the Russian state due to the armed conflict in Ukraine. The article is a narration of a discussion between Russian journalists and a Russian film director. A journalist blames the director for being too friendly towards the West. The film director should give back his Oscar to ‘the nasty Americans’ and even his prizes from Gayropa in response to their sanctions (Khozhatelev, 2016). The use of the words nasty and Gayropa in this context show the very negative image that the journalists have on Western Europe and the USA.

There are some articles that put Western Europe in a positive light, yet these are in a minority compared to the others. The picture painted of Western Europe in these articles is one of a compassionate entity with a good welfare system. The compassion of Western Europe is explained through the empathic reaction of the mayor of Riga on the crash of the Russian aeroplane (Diveeva, 2015). The good welfare system of Western Europe is complimented in an article. It claims Russia should stop laughing at the way Western Europe copes with mental health issues and should instead start to learn from Western Europe (Mardan, 2019). It is the only article in which Western Europe is presented more positive than Russia.

From this it can be concluded that most authors of KP paint a rather negative picture of Western Europe as foolish, ignorant and in decline. Only a minority of the articles describe Western Europe as compassionate and developed. What all articles do have in common is that they are written in such a way to elicit a reaction from the reader. Their purpose is to sensationalise news.

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<sup>16</sup> Translation: “What is there to talk about at all? Moral pederasty is marching through Gayropa. Everything is distorted. Soon they'll say that the Japanese dropped a nuclear bomb on themselves,” outraged our reader...

<sup>17</sup> Translation: ...kicked his wife out of the house, and went on the rampage with the local cowboys...

### 3.2.2. *Shaping the narrative*

The ten articles all discuss very diverse events and themes ranging from serious to trivial news. There are no real recurring events or themes between the articles. Only one theme could be seen as recurring yet isn't explicitly mentioned in all articles – Western European values.

#### 3.2.2.1. Events

The following events are discussed in the articles mentioning Gayropa: A Holocaust exhibition in Estonia, the same-sex wedding of the prime minister of Luxemburg, the crash of the Russian aeroplane in 2015 and the terrorist attacks in Paris the same year, the Oscars of 2016, the World Cup in 2018, a Russian top model's Instagram post, the Western healthcare system, and Eurovision.

Multiple of these events are used to shape the negative image of Western Europe. The Holocaust exhibition in Estonia is described as an atrocious disrespectful event towards the Jewish community (Baltnews / KP, 2015). The same-sex wedding of the prime-minister of Luxemburg is portrayed as fabricated to go along with the so-called hype of homosexuality. The author mocks the whole event and every important Western European person or country involved (KP.ru, 2015). The Oscars are mentioned in an article as a corrupted Western event, in which Russian artists better not get involved (Khozhatelev, 2016). The World Cup is used to show the cleverness of Russians and the foolishness of Western Europeans when Russians succeed in swindling Europeans. It is also used to show the feminine values of Western Europeans in comparison with Russians (Adamovich, 2018). Even something as trivial as an Instagram post of a Russian supermodel is mentioned to install fear towards Western Europe. Western Europe is to blame for her 'liberal' values regarding raising her child (Danchenko, 2019).

The other events help shape a more constructive image of Gayropa. The crash of the Russian aeroplane and the terrorist attack in Paris in 2015 describe the compassion of Western Europeans and Russians towards one another. It calls for mutual solidarity and the need for supporting one another (Diveeva, 2015). The Western European healthcare system is described to create more awareness in Russia towards mental health and suicide. The system in Western Europe – especially Norway – is used as the perfect example of a developed healthcare system (Mardan, 2019). An article from 2021 on Eurovision condemns the haters of the Russian singer Manizha and of the event itself (Borovski, 2021).

#### 3.2.2.2. Themes

The following themes appear in the articles on Gayropa: morality, pederasty, homosexuality, language, neo-imperialism, mental health, corruption, and fake news.

The themes of morality and pederasty are included in the article on the exhibition of the Holocaust. The author describes how Western Europe is losing its morality and is being filled with pederasty. Here the association of non-heterosexuality (Gayropa) and paedophilia (pederasty) is made (Baltnews / KP, 2015). Gayropa in its name is intrinsically linked to homosexuality. So, by stating that Western Europe is filled with pederasty, the association between homosexuality and pederasty can be easily made by the reader. Here the technique by the Russian state and media to suppress criticism towards homophobia becomes visible (Persson, 2014). By linking homosexuality

to pederasty people will be less inclined to defend homosexuality or criticise state homophobia as this could possibly link them to defending pederasty.

The themes of homosexuality and neo-imperialism are reflected in the article on Great Britain's research on same-sex relations. At first glance it seems that the author Korobotov uses this research to debunk the Russian state theory on Gayropa, which assumes that Western Europe is being taken over by the LGBTQ+ community. Yet in a sentence later he states that Great Britain isn't quite part of Western Europe. With this Korobotov insinuates that the research cannot be tied to the rest of Western Europe. He isn't quite debunking the theory after all. In his article Korobotov also makes the following statement:

Тем не менее, людей издавна мучил вопрос: гомосексуальность - это генетический сбой или результат каких-то жизненных коллизий? Например, культурного влияния, женского воспитания или, не дай бог, пропаганды гомосексуализма?<sup>18</sup> (Korobotov, 2019)

Here he insinuates that homosexuality stems from propaganda. This idea corresponds to the Russian state discourse on Gayropa, which alludes to the idea that homosexuality or even LGBTQ+ in general is part of Western neo-imperial propaganda. Further he also refers to percentages of same-sex relations in different ways: "Если брать Биобанк Великобритании, то в этой базе данных приверженцев чересчур крепкой мужской дружбы насчитывалось 4,1 процента, а сторонниц лесбийской любви 2,8 процентов"<sup>19</sup> (Korobotov, 2019). He refers to lesbian relationships with the term 'love', but when talking about homosexual relationships he calls it 'strong male friendships'. This gives an idea of the degree of acceptance towards female and male homosexual relationships<sup>20</sup>. A relationship between two women is more likely to be accepted than one between two men<sup>21</sup>. Overall, homosexuality and Gayropa have a negative connotation in this article.

The theme of homosexuality also appears in another article along with two other themes, namely corruption and language. The article on the same-sex wedding of the prime-minister of Luxemburg links homosexuality with corruption and uses language to show how same-sex marriage can't even be properly described in Russian. Corruption is insinuated in the following quote: "Кстати, именно правительство Беттеля в прошлом году узаконило в стране однополые браки. Уж не воспользовался ли он часом служебным положением, а?"<sup>22</sup> (КР.ру, 2015). The prime minister would have used the power of his party to pass a law on same-sex marriage. The way it is written does not confirm corruption but insinuates it. The article uses the following sentences to show the incompatibility of same-sex marriages and the Russian language: "... с женитьбой? Или, простите, с замужеством?" (КР.ру, 2015). This quote isn't translatable as there is only one word for getting married in English. In the Russian language this is different, 'с женитьбой' is the Russian wording for when a man marries a woman and 'с замужеством' is used for when a woman marries a man.

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<sup>18</sup> Translation: Nevertheless, people have long been plagued by the question: is homosexuality a genetic malfunction or the result of some kind of life collision? For example, cultural influences, female upbringing, or, God forbid, homosexual propaganda?

<sup>19</sup> Translation: If we look at the UK Biobank, that database showed 4.1 percent of strong male friendships and 2.8 percent of lesbian love affairs.

<sup>20</sup> The article only discusses these two types of non-heterosexual relationships. Because of that only these two types are discussed in this paragraph.

<sup>21</sup> The degree of acceptance could stem from the fact that women are already seen as feminine in a heteronormative culture. Men who could possibly act more feminine are not accepted in a culture focused on manliness.

<sup>22</sup> Translation: Incidentally, it was the Bettel government that legalized same-sex marriage in the country last year. Did he take advantage of his position by any chance?

In the Russian language there is no wording for when people of the same sex get married. Another one is “...все, как обычно, да вот только «невеста» в штанах”<sup>23</sup> (KP.ru, 2015). Here the idea of a wedding without a bride is mocked (KP.ru, 2015). Language is used as a tool to demonstrate how same-sex relations do not fit into the Russian society and culture.

Two more articles – one on fake news and one on mental health – use Gayropa in a favourable way for Western European society. The one on fake news describes readers how to bypass fake news and uses the discourse on Gayropa as an example (Lapteva, 2015). This is surprising as it is the only article in Komsomolskaya Pravda that explicitly refutes the narrative on Gayropa. The one on mental health is more critical towards Russia than Western Europe. It condemns the mockery of Western Europe’s handling of mental health by Russians and its media. Mental health is important (Mardan, 2019).

### 3.2.3. *Geopolitical news*

As most articles discuss trivial news, it can only be assumed what the possible influence is of the geopolitical situation between Russia and Western Europe. For example, the article in 2015 on the Holocaust exhibition of a Polish artist in Estonia describes the European values as immoral (Baltnews / KP, 2015). This could be due to the changing political and economic relations between Russia and both countries at that time. Poland and Estonia agreed to strengthen their military cooperation with the USA and started to diversify their gas sources away from Russia (Easton, 2014). So, these political changes between the countries could lead to the image of the detrimental values in Poland and Estonia.

In the article from 2015 on the same-sex wedding of the prime minister of Luxemburg geopolitical relations aren’t discussed. However, the article does make clear that Western European values and Russian values are incompatible (KP.ru, 2015). The narrative used in this article fits the sexual politics applied by the Russian state. Western Europe’s sexual values are just a construction following the newest hype. This is irreconcilable with the Russian sexual values, which are traditional and ‘normal’.

Another article from 2015 is in sharp contrast with the rest, as it recommends rethinking carefully the narratives that are being disseminated in the media. Gayropa and the armed conflict in Ukraine are used as examples for bypassing fake news (Lapteva, 2015). This article goes against the narrative of the Russian state on the conflict. It also comes out a month after the EU announced that it would fund a project to counter Russian propaganda (EP Research Service, 2015). It is uncertain if there is a link between the article and the action by the EU, but not all authors writing about Gayropa with KP agree with the state narrative.

The last article from 2015 discusses the need for solidarity between Western Europe and Russia instead of the tensions between both (Diveeva, 2015). This call for solidarity brings on a change in the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ boundaries in the politics of belonging narrative. Western Europe is no longer the enemy of Russia in this article, but a partner in grief (Russian aeroplane crash and terrorist attacks in France). Both parts should console one another in its grief. This shows how boundaries of belonging change when political situations change.

The article from 2016 on the fiery discussion between a journalist and a director includes geopolitical tensions between Western Europe and Russia:

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<sup>23</sup> Translation: ...everything is as usual, except the «bride» is in pants.

Верните вашего Оскара мерзким американцам, которые «бомбят Ирак и Ливию» и «терзают» руководителей других стран! Вы же их не уважаете? А заодно и «гейропе» верните призы из Испании, Франции, Италии в ответ на их санкции.<sup>24</sup> (Khozhatelev, 2016)

The quote shows how the USA and Western Europe are painted as the aggressors in geopolitical conflicts with Russia and other countries. The sanctions against Russia due to the conflict in Ukraine are seen as highly unfair in most articles. Russia is depicted as the victim of Western aggression. Yet most of the time the USA isn't the only aggressor, Russia acts like one as well, but this isn't mentioned. Here the 'us' versus 'them' dichotomy becomes apparent. Russia is the big victim (us) against the great enemy and aggressor: the West (them). This distinction is of importance in Russia's politics of belonging. In the above mentioned quote the director is asked to give back its Western prizes as he should not respect the West but should respect Russia (Khozhatelev, 2016). He needs to show that he belongs with Russia by giving his prizes back.

In 2018 and 2021 there are moments of peace due to the World Cup and Eurovision (Adamovich, 2018; Borovskiy, 2021). Or at least these are moments in which the attention of the world is diverted from geopolitical tensions. The articles on these subjects are also more tolerant towards Western Europe. During these events it is acceptable to be linked to Western Europe. Most articles of KP discuss trivial news instead of serious geopolitics. Yet it is possible to link the trivial subjects to strategies of sexual politics and politics of belonging, whether consciously or not.

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<sup>24</sup> Translation: Give your Oscar back to the nasty Americans who «bomb Iraq and Libya» and «torment» the leaders of other countries! You don't respect them, do you? Also, give back the prizes from Spain, France, and Italy to «Gayropa» in response to their sanctions.

## 4. Non-state-affiliated: Novaya Gazeta

NG has a multitude of articles, 45 to be specific, in which the concept of Gayropa appears. A lot of different authors have used the concept in their columns or articles with all their own various opinions on Western Europe during the period of 2014 until 2021.

### *4.1. Gayropa and the Pindo's*

NG has throughout the years published a lot of articles in which the concept of Gayropa is mentioned<sup>25</sup>. This makes it possible to broadly analyse the image of Western Europe shaped in these articles. These will be examined per year to see if the image changes or not.

#### *4.1.1. 2014*

In the articles of 2014 several authors critically highlight the divide in the world: the West versus Russia. The substance of this divide – clash of values, international enemies... – is dissected and refuted by most authors. The newspaper is very critical towards both sides for trying to shape the other one into the ultimate enemy.

Different identities are set up for Western Europe and Russia in these articles. Most articles<sup>26</sup> try to expose the Russian state and media as propaganda machines telling lies and fake news on Western Europe. Western Europe is being described as liberal and free. These values aren't necessarily depicted as negative – as is the case in the Russian state rhetoric on Western Europe. Nevertheless, some articles<sup>27</sup> can also show criticism towards Western Europe. The idea that Western European models – such as the democracy model – should be applied on Russia is being questioned (Latynina, 2014, October 7). The image of Western Europe as neo-imperialistic is briefly addressed.

Western Europe as the ultimate enemy of the Russian state is questioned. The articles explain how the Russian state always blames everything on Western Europe and the USA. A couple of examples are: the decline of the Russian economy is the fault of Western Europe (Romanova, 2014); Western Europe is to blame for the armed conflict in Ukraine (Bessarabova, 2014); Western Europe is filled with Gayropa, Pindo's, Ukrofascists... (Kantor, 2014). The articles try their best to refute these images and argue how these images are lies by the Russian state. As the Russian state see Western Europe as the enemy of Russia, NG sees the Russian state as the enemy of its own people and country.

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<sup>25</sup> Because of the multitude of articles, I will briefly summarise the sources used in my analysis in each section in a footnote.

<sup>26</sup> Latynina, J. (2014, June 9); Romanova, O. (2014); Bessarabova, A. (2014); Kantor, M. (2014); Archangelsk, A. (2014)

<sup>27</sup> Latynina, J. (2014, August 6); Latynina, J. (2014, October 7); Kantor, M. (2014)

#### 4.1.2. 2015

При этом мне лично наплевать, что бестактной и неталантливой карикатурой по поводу перемирия в Донбассе публично недовольны также многие штатные герольды и толкователи кремлевской геополитической авантюры. Мол, вы с ними дуете в одну дуду. Нет, не в одну. Они продолжают разжигать милитаристские настроения и ненависть к украинцам, а мы хотим, чтобы в Донбассе установилось прочное перемирие, которое потом перешло бы в мирное урегулирование. Им надо «ущучить» либеральную «гейропу», а нам — защитить европейские ценности свободы и толерантности от пошлости и политической безвкусицы.<sup>28</sup> (Lipsky, 2015, March 3)

In the above quote, Andrej Lipsky – a journalist from NG – makes clear that being critical towards Western Europe doesn't equate agreeing with the Russian state's critique towards Western Europe. Western Europe is presented in most articles as powerful, important, and a force to be reckoned with. An article even describes it as important for Russia's future (Kharitonov, 2015). Further, Western Europe isn't scared by the different power strategies and sanctions of the Russian state (Latynina, 2015, May 14). This, however, doesn't mean that there isn't any criticism in 2015 towards Western Europe from NG. While articles from 2014 expose possible Western neo-imperialist sentiments, articles from 2015 chide Western Europe for turning into an international soft power. The soft approach of Western Europe is explained to be its downfall (Bykov, 2015, November 15). Furthermore, in 2015 religious tendencies shape a new image of Western Europe in certain articles, namely sexually deviant. When it comes to Western Europe's sexual values several articles<sup>29</sup> are rather negative. For example, the idea is shaped of a Holy Russia against a Corrupted Western Europe (Latynina, 2015, April 2). Even though the authors of NG want to protect the image of Western values against the Russian propaganda machine, it becomes clear that they do not agree with all the values of Western Europe.

The analysis of the relationship between Russia and Western Europe remains for the most part the same in the articles of 2015<sup>30</sup> as of 2014. The world is still divided into Russia versus the West. The articles highlight how both sides see each other as opposites and that this is working to no one's advantage. The newspaper stays very critical of these images as ultimate enemies. NG tries to refute this Russian state narrative of Western Europe as the enemy by installing a project called EuroRossiya (EuroRussia). The project wants to give readers a chance to get to know Western Europe through a more neutral lens (Lipsky, 2015, October 28). The newspaper tries its best to give readers other sources and information on Western Europe than the Russian state sources.

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<sup>28</sup> Translation: That said, I personally don't care that the tactless and untalented caricature about the ceasefire in Donbass is also publicly displeased by many of the Kremlin's staff heralds and interpreters of geopolitical adventures. They say you are blowing the same horn. No, they are not. They keep fomenting militaristic sentiments and hatred towards Ukrainians, while we want a lasting ceasefire in Donbass, which would then turn into a peaceful settlement. They need to «piss off» liberal «Gayropa», while we need to protect European values of freedom and tolerance from vulgarity and political tastelessness.

<sup>29</sup> Latynina, J. (2015, April 2); Latynina, J. (2015, April 16); Masyuk, E. (2015, May 14); Soldatov, A. (2015)

<sup>30</sup> Petrovskaya, I. (2015); Bykov, D. (2015, February 1); Lipsky, A. (2015, March 30); Masyuk, E. (2015, April 6); Latynina, J. (2015, May 14); Kharinotov, V. (2015, July 24); Lipsky, A. (2015, October 28)

#### *4.1.3. 2016*

The division of the world in West versus Russia remains highlighted in the articles of 2016. In these articles, the idea of difference in values is particularly important. The world is exposed as the stage for the battle of values.

The image of Western Europe is shaped in various ways. In the articles that are positive on Western Europe (Yamburg & Knorre-Dmitrieva, 2016; Latynina, 2016, September 2), it is described as polite and humane. One article praises Western Europe for its remaining respect towards Russia even though the Russian state tries to undermine Western Europe (Latynina, 2016, September 2). NG also created another project in which they take Russian people who have never gone outside of Russia to Western Europe to let them create their own opinion on Western Europe. The article describes the experience of a Russian teacher, who paints a picture of Western Europe as very humane and refutes the ideas of the Russian state that Western Europe is filled with Russophobes (Yamburg & Knorre-Dmitrieva, 2016). Yet other articles are not that positive when describing Western Europe's sexual values. European values are described as being different from Russian values, which doesn't mean they aren't acceptable. Yet they shouldn't be enforced or implemented in Russia as they do not fit with the Russian values (Zhilin, 2016). The battle of values is also explained in international contests such as Eurovision. This is where the picture of Western Europe as clueless is painted. Russia is fighting the battle of values through Eurovision, yet Western Europe is clueless of this fight. Eurovision is for Western Europe just a 'рей-тсцовка' (gay party) (Latynina, 2016, May 17).

In the relationship between Western Europe and Russia it becomes clear in these articles that Russia is an aggressor trying to defend its values and at the same time trying to erode its political and economic relations with Western Europe. Western Europe supposedly remains polite yet is sometimes depicted as aggressive as well.

#### *4.1.4. 2017*

In the articles of 2017 this division of the world into two incompatible parts – Russia versus the West – changes. The articles try to remove this division and look for unity in both parts. The articles see Western Europe as the future of the world. There is a change in the perception of Western Europe in these articles. Most of them are extremely positive towards Western Europe. Western Europe is being glorified. It is described as the source of modern civilization (Polikovskiy, 2017). Western Europe and its values are praised. A few articles denounce the idea created by the Russian state that Western Europe is filled with Russophobes. Western Europeans are painted as respectful and interested in Russian people and their cultures (Troitskiy, 2017; Lipsky, 2017). The Russian state is portrayed in a worse light than Western Europe. On the other hand, a small number of articles by the same author (Soldatov) are critical towards Western Europe, especially towards its values on sexuality. According to him, Western Europe takes its gender and sexuality politics too far. The acceptance of same-sex marriage and what is called 'experiments on gender identity' (Soldatov, 2017) are a bridge too far for him. He also portrays the Vatican as the last bastion of traditional values in Western Europe and needs to be protected by all means (Soldatov & Rebrov, 2017).

In general, the articles again expose the way the Russian state blames all its problems on Western Europe. By exposing this they try to reshape the image of Western Europe and Russia. In the newspaper, it is stressed how it is almost impossible to go against the Russian state propaganda machine, yet most journalists do try.

#### 4.1.5. 2018 until 2021<sup>31</sup>

И население нищей страны не могло знать, что есть другой, открытый, свободный мир, который вдруг сегодня обрушился на нас всей своей пестротой.<sup>32</sup> (Anin, 2018)

In the article of 2018, the different worlds are melted together due to the World Cup in Moscow. The Russian population is exposed to Western Europeans and their values. The article describes this as being exposed to a freer and more open world. Western Europe is painted fairly positive. The World Cup is described as bringing together these two opposites. The relationship between Russia and Western Europe is peaceful and even a bit hopeful (Anin, 2018).

In 2019 the image of Western Europe is again both positive and negative. One article describes Western Europe as a neo-imperialist entity, that was catastrophically for ex-Soviet countries as the collapse of their economy led to poverty and a rise in crime (Azar, 2019). Another article is positive of Western Europe and describes it as more evolved than Russia (Chernova, 2019). These two images are rather opposite to one another. The first one tries to defend Russian values against Western European values, yet the second one addresses how Russia could actually use some of these values and learn from Western Europe.

In the article from 2020 the world is divided into social myths. Russia is in the hands of the totalitarian myth and Western Europe is in the hands of the myth of consumption. According to the article, the myth of consumption makes society more unfree than the totalitarian myth, because it destroys the will to cope with new forms of unfreedom. Western Europe is painted as clueless, because it is not aware of its own forms of unfreedom. (Golubitsky, 2020). Western Europe and Russia are both painted negatively in this article.

The article from 2021 is exceptional in comparison to articles from previous years. This article condemns the negativity towards Western Europe's sexual values. It describes how Russian state media depict Western Europe as an aggressor trying to impose its LGBTQ+ values on other countries. The article refutes this idea and explains how this is just part of the Russian war propaganda. The article tries to fight the negative views against LGBTQ+ values (Levinson, 2021). This is one of the only positive depictions of Western sexual values. This could be because the author is accepting of LGBTQ+ or because general perception is starting to change within NG.

There is a small pattern visible in the image of Western Europe. For the most part the image is rather positive. Western Europe is described as the source of modern civilization. Its values – with a few exceptions - are praised and defended by the newspaper against Russian state propaganda. The sexual values and neo-imperialist tendencies of Western European aren't defended. They are used to criticise Western Europe. Even though the articles are more critical against Russia than Western Europe, this doesn't hold them back to also give out criticism towards Western Europe.

### 4.2. *Shaping the narrative*

In the newspaper NG the concept of Gayropa is linked to various events, themes, and concepts.

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<sup>31</sup> In the last couple of years less articles were written which mention the concept of Gayropa. Because of this the years from 2018 until 2021 will be put under one aline, yet they will be described per year.

<sup>32</sup> Translation: And the population of a destitute country could not have known that there was another, open, free world, which has suddenly descended upon us today in all its diversity.

#### 4.2.1. *Recurring events*

One of the recurring events in articles from 2014 until 2021 is the war in Ukraine<sup>33</sup>. The newspaper denounces the situation in Ukraine and the actions by the Russian state and even Western Europe. The newspaper takes an anti-war position. The articles respond to the very contemporary evolution of the conflict at that time. They try to analyse the situation and even try to warn its readers of the lies and consequences. Most of the articles are against the further isolation of Russia towards Western Europe, and against the Russian state propaganda on Western Europe and Ukraine. According to NG, the term *Gayropa* is used by the Russian state to justify its actions in Ukraine. The Russian state discourse built this idea that Russians must save the Donbass from neo-imperialist Western Europe with its rotten values. This discourse has been built up and integrated in the language on the armed conflict throughout the years. NG tried to deconstruct this discourse of the Russian state from the beginning of the conflict until they were forced to stop in 2022<sup>34</sup>. For example, in 2014 the newspaper pointed out how Russian propaganda uses a discourse that interweaves the war in Ukraine with the Second World War (called the Great Patriotic War in Russia). Ukrainian soldier defending their country are being compared to Nazis (Kantor, 2014). This comparison helps shape the narrative of Ukraine as the state enemy. The article in NG tries to deconstruct this idea, going against the state narrative.

Other recurring events are the different terrorist attacks in Europe<sup>35</sup>, such as the ones on Charlie Hebdo and Bataclan in France, and the one in the airport in Brussels. These events are used in NG as examples against the Russian state narrative. The newspaper exposes the use of the terrorist attacks by the Russian state in its narrative on Western Europe as a state enemy. The articles condemn the Russian state, except for one. This article blames the attacks on the fact that Paris is becoming too liberal and multicultural. France is too soft and should have never let migrants in (Bykov, 2015, November 15). This is a very different narrative than the other articles on the events. This shows the different opinions of journalists present at the newspaper, and how different opinions are tolerated.

One other event is mentioned in a couple of articles – Eurovision<sup>36</sup>. This event is used to explain how the Russian state utilises Eurovision in its discourse against Western Europe. According to one of the articles, Eurovision is just another playground for the Russian propaganda war. The state uses Eurovision to underline its narrative on *Gayropa* (Latynina, 2016, May 17). The other article explains the Russian state's hypocrisy through Eurovision. The Russian state wants to be part of Western Europe when there is a chance the Russian singers will win Eurovision, yet all other times it propagates against Western Europe. Russian state propaganda goes as far as to state Western Europe in 2020 invented the coronavirus to cancel Eurovision because the chances of Russia winning were big that year (Shenkman, 2020). The discourse of the Russian state against a corrupted Western Europe is heavily present in the events of Eurovision. NG exposes this discourse.

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<sup>33</sup> Latynina, J. (2014, August 6); Garmazhapova, A. (2014); Bessarabova, A. (2014); Kantor, M. (2014); Archangelsk, A. (2014); Bykov, D. (2015, February 1); Lipsky, A. (2015, March 3); Masyuk, E. (2015, April 6); Latynina, J. (2015, May 14); Kharinotov, V. (2015); Zhilin, I. (2016); Latynina, J. (2016, May 17); Musafirova, O. (2016); Latynina, J. (2017); Shenkman, J. (2017); Lipsky, A. (2017); Musafirova, O. (2020).

<sup>34</sup> Going against the discourse of the Russian state is actually very dangerous. This became extremely obvious when the conflict turned into a war, as it was no longer safe for journalists of NG to stay in Russia.

<sup>35</sup> Lipsky, A. (2015, March 3); Bykov, D. (2015, November 15); Latynina, J. (2017).

<sup>36</sup> Latynina, J. (2016, May 17); Shenkman, J. (2020).

#### 4.2.2. *Recurring themes*

Я сейчас провожу большую часть жизни в странах Евросоюза и могу сказать абсолютно честно: ни с какими проявлениями русофобии ни здесь, ни в Америке я не сталкивался ни разу в жизни.<sup>37</sup> (Troitskiy, 2017)

The quote above is the personal experience of a journalist of NG. He tries to debunk the Russian state narrative on Western Europe. Debunking the Russian state narrative is one of the biggest recurring themes in the articles. In every one of the 45 articles of NG there is to a certain degree criticism towards the Russian state, especially on its discourse towards Western Europe. Russian state propaganda describes Western Europe mostly through the term Gayropa and uses it as a scapegoat for everything wrong in Russian domestic and international politics and economy. Almost all articles try to change the perception on Western Europe so that readers wouldn't just blindly believe the Russian state discourse. Instead of just denouncing the Russian state narrative of Western Europe, NG even goes as far to get their readers involved in Western European history and culture. For example, the project 'EuroRossiya' (EuroRussia) connects Russians back to Western Europe. The project describes the ties between Russia and Europe (Lipsky, 2015, October 28). In 2016, NG even brings a Russian teacher to Europe with the idea of letting him shape his own opinion on Europe (Artemyeva & Girin, 2016). NG does everything to deconstruct the state narrative. That is why Russian state discourse is such a big theme in its articles.

Another recurring theme is criticism towards Western Europe. The criticism is mostly focused on politics and Europe's sexual values. Political criticism towards Western Europe has a broad range and is mostly focused on different aspects of Western Europe's idea on liberalism. For example, the Western idea of democracy is denounced (Latynina, 2014, October 7). Western Europe's extreme left-wing and right-wing parties are analysed and judged for their support to Putin and the Russian state (Kantor, 2014). One article even discusses how Western European liberalism is taking its gender identities and politics too far (Soldatov, 2017).

This leads up to the following recurring theme: sexuality. Although NG welcomes European values, not all articles agree with Western Europe's ideas on sexuality. LGBTQ+ prides are seen as something very Western European. An article even insinuates some neo-imperialist tendencies in these prides (Zhilin, 2016). Some articles even go as far as to link non-hetero sexuality to religion and paedophilia. Gayropa is linked to paedophile scandals in the Russian church (Masyuk, 2015, May 14; Soldatov, 2015). The scandals are national situations with an international scapegoat – Western Europe. Sexuality is also linked to religion in other articles. According to an article from 2015, only 'Holy' Russia stands against 'Corrupt' Europe (Latynina, 2015, April 2). Another one from 2015 describes deacon Kuraev's critique on Western Europe's way of handling criticism towards homosexuality. According to him if you openly denounce homosexuality in the West, you can end up in jail, which is a new kind of fascism (Masyuk, 2015, May 14). There is only one article in the newspaper that defends Western sexual values (Levinson, 2021). This theme of sexuality shows that the perception of the term Gayropa isn't black or white. On certain themes and events, the authors do support Western Europe and denounce the use of the term, yet on other subjects (sexuality) they tend to follow the concept in its negative narrative.

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<sup>37</sup> Translation: I now spend most of my life in the European Union and I can say with absolute honesty: I have never encountered any manifestations of Russophobia either here or in America in my life.

#### 4.2.3. *Recurring concepts*

Одновременно начались действия по дискредитации «пиндосов» и «Гейропы», по так называемой «национализации элит» и шельмованию оппозиционеров, правозащитников, контролеров честности выборов и им сочувствующих как пятой колонны и агентов западного влияния. А то и просто агентов.<sup>38</sup> (Lipsky, 2015, March 30)

In this paragraph two concept are mentioned that recur throughout the articles of NG: ‘Pindos’ and ‘Fifth column’. These words are adopted together with Gayropa in the Russian state discourse to discredit the West.

Pindos<sup>39</sup> is adopted in the discourse on the war of Ukraine. The word is slang for Americans. The origin of the word is not known, but it is assumed that its present use can be traced back to the war in Kosovo. Serbs applied this term on American soldiers in Yugoslavia, who were dressed in heavy packs and bulletproof vests. They looked like penguins, and the Serbian word for penguin is ‘pindo’ (Goble, 2014). The word has a negative, offensive connotation. It describes Americans (and Westerns in general) as helpless creatures (Klikushin, 2014). NG applies this term in its mission to deconstruct the Russian state narrative on the West. Its use in articles is mostly ironic, to expose the absurdity of the word.

The same can be said about the word ‘Fifth column’<sup>40</sup>. When employed in articles of NG, it is to disprove the anti-Western rhetoric of the Russian state. The fifth column is defined in Merriam-Webster dictionary as follows: “a group of secret sympathizers or supporters of an enemy that engage in espionage or sabotage within defence lines or national borders” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The word is used by the Russian state to condemn anti-Russian protests, ideas, and developments within the state. It supports the narrative of Western Europe as the scapegoat for everything wrong within and outside of Russia. Fifth column is applied to create fear and distrust among the people of Russia. For example, LGBTQ+ people in Russia are seen as part of the fifth column put in place by Western Europe. NG tries to deconstruct this narrative.

A final recurrent word in several articles is Russophobia<sup>41</sup>. Russophobia has a negative connotation. Russophobia is hatred and contempt for everything Russian, so not only Russian institutions but also of Russians themselves. Being called a Russophobe is tantamount to being called a hater of Russia as a whole. The use of this term blurs the boundary between state and country. The Russian state with its institutions and bureaucrats tries to convince Russian people that they are Russia. Hate for the state is equalised with hate for the country on its own (Troitskiy, 2017). This is part of the Russian state discourse to stifle protests, comments, and complaints against the state. People within and outside of the Russian state who protest the Russian state are now equated to protesters against Russia as a country. The newspaper NG asserts the opposite. They prove that Western Europeans aren’t Russophobes and that Russians who comment on the state do not hate the country Russia.

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<sup>38</sup> Translation: At the same time, actions began to discredit the «Pindos» and «Gayropa», to «nationalise the elites» and to smear oppositionists, human rights activists, election integrity monitors and their sympathisers as fifth columnists and agents of Western influence. Or even just agents.

<sup>39</sup> Latynina, J. (2014, June 9); Golubitsky, S. (2015); Lipsky, A. (2015, March 30); Masyuk, E. (2015, April 6); Latynina, J. (2015, May 14); Latynina, J. (2016, September 2); Troitskiy, A. (2017); Anin, R. (2018); Musafirova, O. (2020).

<sup>40</sup> Archangelsk, A. (2014); Garmazhapova, A. (2014); Lipsky, A. (2015, March 30); Masyuk, E. (2015, April 6); Yamburg, E., & Knorre-Dmitrieva, X. (2016); Latynina, J. (2017).

<sup>41</sup> Artemyeva, A., & Girin, N. (2016); Lipsky, A. (2017); Troitskiy, A. (2017).

### 4.3. *The Russian state's war propaganda*

Most of the articles of NG discuss the contemporary politics of that time on the Ukraine conflict. The frequency of the articles per year depends on the escalation of the conflict. In 2014 eight articles on the term of Gayropa are written in NG, five of them<sup>42</sup> discuss the conflict in Ukraine.

Людей убивают тысячами, миллион беженцев покинули Донбасс, но никто внятно не скажет, из-за чего воюют. Если настаивать на ответе, услышите: «Геополитика!» Волшебное слово. То есть тысячи людей возбудили, погнали на убой и умертвили — ради условных границ, ради фантазии, согласно которой у стран есть свои ареалы активности — и в своем ареале страна вправе убивать.<sup>43</sup> (Kantor, 2014)

The political situation at that time is condemned by most authors of those articles: the above-mentioned quote clarifies how the idea of killing people in the name of geopolitics is absurd for them. The articles lay bare how the Russian state uses a heteronormative discourse and the 'us' versus 'them' rhetoric to justify its involvement in the conflict. They denounce the idea that Ukraine belongs to Russia and needs to be protected from Western Europe's liberal and sexual imperialism. By exposing the 'us' versus 'them' rhetoric as nonsense they try to convince their readers of the senselessness of the armed conflict.

In 2015 there are sixteen articles written on Gayropa. Half of them<sup>44</sup> discuss Ukraine and the sanction war between Western Europe and Russia since the Maidan revolution. NG debunks the Russian state discourse on the sanction war. The Russian state creates a clear 'us' – Russia as a victim – versus 'them' – Western Europe as aggressor. Everything anti-Russian state and anti-war is distinguished as anti-Russia and part of the 'them'. The Russian state uses its strategies of sexual politics – in which they try to protect traditional societies from Western influence – and politics of belonging – using the 'us' versus 'them' strategy – to justify its sanctions towards Western Europe and its impact on Russian people. The newspaper counters these political strategies of the Russian state by unmasking the Russian state propaganda machine to its readers. NG explains how these retaliatory sanctions cause more harm to Russia and its people than to Western Europe:

Весь механизм блокировок и «ответных санкций», собственно, про это — власть закрывается от внешнего мира со всеми его грехами и раздражителями, но закрывает его от своих собственных граждан. И в результате получается не крепость, в которую нельзя попасть, а зона, из которой нельзя выходить.<sup>45</sup> (Kharitonov, 2015)

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<sup>42</sup> Latynina, J. (2014, August 6); Garmazhapova, A. (2014); Bessarabova, A. (2014); Kantor, M. (2014); Archangelsk, A. (2014).

<sup>43</sup> Translation: People are being killed by the thousands, a million refugees have left Donbass, but no one will say clearly what they are fighting about. If you insist on the answer, you hear: «Geopolitics!» The magic word. That is, thousands of people were stirred up, driven to slaughter and killed - for the sake of conventional borders, for the sake of the fantasy that countries have their own areas of activity - and in their own area a country has the right to kill.

<sup>44</sup> Bykov, D. (2015, February 1); Lipsky, A. (2015, March 3); Lipsky, A. (2015, March 30); Masyuk, E. (2015, April 6); Masyuk, E. (2015, May 14); Latynina, J. (2015, May 14); (Kharitonov, 2015); Lipsky, A. (2015, October 28).

<sup>45</sup> Translation: The whole mechanism of blockades and «retaliatory sanctions» is actually about this - the authorities close themselves off from the outside world with all its sins and irritants but close it off from their own citizens. And the result is not a fortress that cannot be entered, but a zone that cannot be exited.

In 2016, six articles were written that contained the concept of Gayropa. Two of them<sup>46</sup> discussed geopolitics between Western Europe and Russia. One article discusses the geopolitical situation of Crimea. The article recounts how the Deputy Prime Minister addresses the applicants for a LGBTQ+ pride in Simferopol, Sevastopol, and Yalta and told them to go to Gayropa. Sexual politics becomes very clear in this situation as an official expresses that prides are part of the West and do not belong in Crimea or Russia<sup>47</sup> (Zhilin, 2016). By doing this the borders between the modern Europe (Western Europe) and traditional Europe (Russia) are demarcated. Sexual politics is used to justify the annexation of Crimea by the Russian state.

The other article discusses how geopolitics seeps into the competition of Eurovision. The article explains how the Russian state is in a constant war of values with Western Europe, even during Eurovision. Eurovision is made out to be the peak of Gayropa by the Russian state. People like Conchita Wurst are used to show how Western Europe is 'filled with gays'. This is part of the Russian state narrative to emphasise how Western European values do not conform to Russian traditional values. The eccentricity of Eurovision supposedly illustrates how homosexuality is a creation by Western Europe and not natural (Latynina, 2016). NG exposes the hypocrisy of Russian politics as Russia takes part in the event.

In 2017 four<sup>48</sup> out of the seven articles on Gayropa discusses the conflict in Ukraine. The articles expose again how the Russian state uses certain narratives to create its state enemies. Ukraine is now the biggest enemy of the state for choosing Western Europe above Russia. The longer the conflict goes on the more the whole of Ukraine is painted as part of the 'them' rhetoric of the Russian state. NG describes the changing boundaries of Russia's politics of belonging, and how Western Europe and Ukraine are blamed for the impact of the sanction war on Russian people. NG debunks this by describing how the Russian sanctions cause misfortune inside Russia:

Надо признать, этот трюк удастся. Ведь в наших краях всегда склонны винить в своих бедах кого угодно, только не самих себя. И потому, когда в народных массах заходит речь о бесчеловечном коварстве «пиндосов» и «Гейропы», оказывается, что главными доказательствами этого коварства становятся почему-то не западные санкции в сфере финансов или закупке бурового оборудования, а домашнего производства антисанкции.<sup>49</sup> (Lipsky, 2017)

Western Europe and Ukraine are the scapegoats for what the Russian state inflicts on its own people. It is easier for the Russian state to put the blame of national problems on international politics as this allows them to avoid responsibility.

From 2018 until 2021 nearly all articles<sup>50</sup> focus on debunking Russian state propaganda in international politics. The content ranges from exposing propaganda during the World Cup and Eurovision, to exposing propaganda against Crimea and Ukraine. Most Russians only know Western Europe through what they hear on television or the Internet. This makes it very easy for the Russian state to use media as a tool to create a certain frame of Western Europe:

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<sup>46</sup> Zhilin, I. (2016, April 25); Latynina, J. (2016, May 17)

<sup>47</sup> The journalist of NG narrates this situation, but it is not clear what stance he takes towards these statements.

<sup>48</sup> Polikovskiy, A. (2017); Latynina, J. (2017); Shenkman, J. (2017); Lipsky, A. (2017)

<sup>49</sup> Translation: It has to be admitted that this trick works. After all, people in Russia are always inclined to blame everyone else for their misfortunes, but not themselves. That is why when the masses talk about inhuman perfidy of «the Pindos» and «Gayropa» it turns out that the main evidence of this perfidy is somehow not western sanctions in the sphere of finance or purchase of drilling equipment, but home-made anti-sanctions.

<sup>50</sup> Anin, R. (2018); Chernova, N. (2019); Genis, A. (2019); Shenkman, J. (2020); Musafirova, O. (2020).

Для большей части населения России вся планета помещалась в маленькую коробочку телевизора. А проводником в этот другой, неизвестный мир стал пожилой, щекастый, с лоснящейся лысиной и похожий на жабу ведущий с экрана, который сузил огромную Землю до песков Сирии, где мы воюем с пиндосами; разбомбленных кварталов Луганска, где мы воюем с жидобандеровцами; и переулков Брюсселя, где гейропейцы жарят друг друга.<sup>51</sup> (Anin, 2018)

Articles in NG analyse and uncover these frames for their readers. For example, the World Cup shows that when it is in the Russian state's benefit, Western Europeans are decent enough to be welcomed in Russia to watch football (Anin, 2018). The differences between values are put aside. The same happens during Eurovision. The Russian state sees itself as part of Western Europe when its candidate has a shot at winning Eurovision, yet otherwise it is 'to hell with Gayropa' (Shenkman, 2020). NG gives these two world events as example on how the anti-Western narrative disappears when it is favourable for the Russian state. Furthermore, some articles (Genis, 2019; Musafirova, 2020) dissect the language used by the Russian state in its geopolitical agenda. NG exposes the imperialist tendencies of the Russian state. Language is a key to legitimize imperialistic actions and war. Gayropa and the idea of Western Europe as the enemy is used to justify Russia's actions in Ukraine. The whole strategy of 'us' versus 'them' is of great importance to first have a scapegoat to blame everything on, and second to be able to justify one's actions that would normally be criticised heavily. NG dissects how the creation of Western Europe as a sexually deviant, neo-imperialistic entity helps the Russian state in its own imperialist tendencies; and to create an enemy.

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<sup>51</sup> Translation: For most of Russia's population, the entire planet fit into a small box of television. And the guide to this other, unknown world was an elderly, cheeky, balding, toad-like presenter on the screen, who narrowed the vast Earth down to the sands of Syria, where we are at war with the Pindos; the bombed-out quarters of Lugansk, where we are at war with the Jewish Banderas; and the alleys of Brussels, where the Gayropeans are grilling each other.

## 5. Comparison of newspapers

The content of the four newspapers holds similarities and differences in the use of Gayropa. It is necessary to acknowledge that there are even differences between the articles within the newspapers. There isn't one clearcut overarching narrative in each newspaper, except for IZ, but this is due to the minimal number of available articles on Gayropa. This makes it quite interesting to examine on which ideas the newspapers agree with one another and on which they disagree.

### *5.1. Image of Western Europe*

There are three main narratives on Western Europe visible: the ultimate enemy, the source of modern civilization, and sexually deviant. These images are either confirmed or refuted in the various newspapers.

#### *5.1.1. The ultimate enemy*

The first depiction as ultimate enemy is present in RG, IZ, and KP. The identity of Western Europe in IZ is an aggressor imposing its values. Western Europe should not impose its values on Russia and Russians should not look up towards Western European values. They are depicted as incompatible in IZ. This idea is also visible in articles of RG: the incompatibility of values is equated to painting Western Europe as the adversary of Russia. RG describes Western Europe as an aggressive and imperialistic geopolitical actor. This discourse of Western Europe as the enemy of Russia is present as well in the articles of KP, even though most articles of KP sensationalise trivial news and don't focus on geopolitics as in RG or IZ.

What is surprising in both the state-owned RG and state-affiliated KP is that they each contain one article which warns its readers of the negative enemy rhetoric used in the other articles. The article of RG (Radzikhovskiy, 2015) warns its readers about the extreme rhetoric used in media such as Gayropa. The article in KP (Lapteva, 2015) explains to its readers how to bypass fake news by using the discourse on Gayropa as an example. It is remarkable that they contest the narrative on Gayropa as these newspapers are linked to the state. IZ, for example, stays in line with the state discourse. So, it is rather unexpected that these articles exist in RG and KP.

#### *5.1.2. The source of modern civilization*

What the newspapers RG and KP briefly describe in a single article NG does in different ways in different articles. NG consciously goes against the state discourse. Most of the articles in NG try to debunk the Russian state narrative on Western Europe – Gayropa. In contrast to other newspapers, NG is generally positive about Western Europe. Western Europe is even described as liberal, free, and the source of modern civilization. Its values – with a few exceptions – are praised and defended by the newspaper. While other newspapers divide the world into two conflicting parts – West versus Russia – NG tries to unite both sides by showing its readers the similarities, and by debunking the idea of incompatible values. Here the difference between non-state-affiliated and state-affiliated on the image of Western Europe becomes clear.

### *5.1.3. Sexually deviant*

There are similarities within all newspapers on the sexual values of Western Europe. They do not defend the sexual values of Western European. RG, IZ, and KP use them to symbolise the decay of Western Europe. In their articles these values are mostly described as creating the death of Western Europe as they know it. KP describes Western Europe as sexually deviant in its articles. RG and IZ are less outspoken: the values of Russia and Western Europe are incompatible and should be kept away from one another. NG holds different views towards sexual values. In most cases the newspaper isn't that accepting and tolerant towards same-sex love. However by 2021, the sexual values of Western Europe and the LGBTQ+ community are being defended in NG (Levinson, 2021). The opinions of journalists in NG vary on the subject. Different opinions are accepted in NG, which makes this differentiation possible.

## **5.2.Events**

The recurring events in most newspapers range from serious events, such as the war in Ukraine and the terrorist attacks in Western Europe, to entertaining events, such as the World Cup, Eurovision, and the Oscars.

### *5.2.1. Conflict of Ukraine*

The event that recurs in every newspaper is the conflict of Ukraine. In RG most of the articles cover the situation in Ukraine. The articles discuss the involvement of Western Europe and the USA in the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. Western Europe is painted as the aggressor and Russia as the victim protecting its cultural border, only retaliating when it is being attacked. This Western aggression is also discussed through the election of Saakashvili as governor of Odessa (Makarychev, 2015). Saakashvili is depicted as corrupt and pro-Western. This is also reflected in IZ, where the appointment of the former Georgian is mentioned as well. The depiction of the governor in IZ is quite the same as in RG: a pro-Western politician that comes to Odessa to corrupt it (Kholmogorov, 2015). With this rhetoric a certain fear for Western European values is installed. The Ukrainian conflict is one of the main topics in the articles of NG as well. However, where RG and IZ take a pro-Russian stance in the Ukrainian conflict, NG takes an anti-war stance. Again, NG is going against the Russian state's anti-Western and anti-Ukrainian discourse. They try to analyse the situations and warn its readers of the lies and consequences. The newspaper doesn't shy away from being critical towards the Russian state's actions in the Ukrainian conflict. Nevertheless, NG can also be critical of Western Europe when it comes to the conflict in Ukraine. Western Europe's actions are considered insufficient to bring the conflict to an end.

As already mentioned, KP doesn't really discuss geopolitics. However, the conflict of Ukraine is briefly mentioned in one of its articles. In the article the sanctions by Western Europe are condemned. The general idea is that Russians should have nothing to do with Western Europe (Khozhatelev, 2016). So, even though KP doesn't specifically focus on geopolitics, this brief mention makes their position towards Western Europe clear.

### *5.2.2. Oscars, Eurovision, and the World Cup*

Other events linked to Gayropa are the Oscars in the USA, Eurovision, and the World Cup. In RG the Oscars are depicted as being too politically correct and corrupted by the Western European gay lobby (Kichin, 2017). The same rhetoric is used in KP, when they discuss the event. The Oscars are depicted as corrupt and Russian artists should stay away from the event (Khozhatelev, 2016). Even though the Oscars are an American event, they are linked to Western Europe through the usage of the term Gayropa. This can mean two things, first that the USA and Western Europe are one and the same for some journalists, as both entities encompass 'Western' values. Second, that Gayropa isn't only showing imperialist tendencies towards Russia, but also towards the USA. Again, shaping the narrative of Western Europe trying to impose its values on the world.

KP also discusses the World Cup (Adamovich, 2018) and Eurovision (Borovskiy, 2021). In KP, these events hold a more peaceful narrative towards Western Europe. During these events Western Europe is generally accepted by the newspaper. NG also illustrates this when talking about the World Cup (Anin, 2018). The World Cup is described as bringing together the two opposites. However, when it comes to Eurovision NG doesn't depict the same acceptance and peace as with the World Cup. Eurovision is just another playground for the Russian propaganda war (Latynina, 2016). The discourse of the Russian state against a corrupted Western Europe is heavily present in the events of Eurovision. NG exposes how Eurovision is used in the clash of values. Where, according to KP, there is peace in the tensions between Western Europe and Russia during the Eurovision, NG notes that these tensions just continue into the contest.

### *5.2.3. The terrorist attacks in Western Europe*

A final recurring event are the terrorist attacks in Western Europe. This event is discussed in the newspapers of KP and NG. Both condemn the terrorist attacks in Western Europe and call for sympathy towards one another. Both state that there is no reason to be vicious to each other during such incidents. However, KP calls out Russians who mock the attacks; and Western Europeans who mock the crash of the Russian aeroplane (Diveeva, 2015). NG calls out the Russian state for pausing its anti-Western propaganda for only a month after the terrorist attacks (Petrovskaya, 2015); and Charlie Hebdo for mocking the situation in Odessa (Lipsky, 2015, March 3). Even though the examples of the situation are different, the main idea in both newspapers towards the terrorist attacks is similar.

## **5.3. Themes**

Three themes reappear in the newspapers: sexuality, criticism towards Western Europe, and criticism towards the Russian state.

### *5.3.1. Sexuality*

One of the biggest themes is sexuality. Gayropa is intrinsically linked to Western values on sexuality and sexual preferences. This theme is used to drag Western Europe through the mud. In the articles of RG the fear for same-sex relations is installed. The idea that Western Europe wants to take over

the world by imposing its values is visible in almost all articles. This is also noticeable in IZ. The article on same-sex relations links homosexuality with paedophilia (Kononenko, 2016). This association is also made in articles of KP, which assume that Western Europe is filled with pederasty (Baltnews / KP, 2015). Both newspapers use the technique of associating non-heterosexuality with paedophilia to suppress support for the LGBTQ+ community in Russia. Even NG does not agree for most of the time with Western Europe's ideas on sexuality. Although it should be noted that NG isn't as negative as the other newspapers towards this theme. NG does differ from the other newspapers as it still describes Western Europe as the future, and an ally instead of a foe. Eventually by 2021, some journalists are already more tolerant and open towards same-sex love (Levinson, 2021). The newspapers all hold similar sentiments towards this theme. However, the intensity differs per paper.

### *5.3.2. Criticism towards Western Europe*

Criticism towards Western Europe is an overarching theme in most newspapers. In RG, IZ, and KP this criticism has been established through cases in which Western Europe is painted as imperialistic, corrupted, and rotten. Western European morals are questioned together with its intentions with the rest of the world. It helps to shape the image of Russia as a victim of Western European imperialistic tendencies. The theme is used in these newspapers to create doubt about the sincerity of Western Europe. In NG there is criticism towards Western Europe as well, but it differs quite a bit from the criticism of the other newspapers as most journalists do believe that Western Europe is the future. The same trend as with the theme of sexuality is visible here: all newspapers contain articles on the theme, just the intensity differs.

### *5.3.3. Criticism towards Russia*

Criticism towards Russia – or better, the Russian state – is the main theme within articles of NG. This isn't the case in the other newspapers. IZ has no articles criticising Russian politics or the state. KP and RG both have one article that warns its readers of the consequences of just believing the narrative of Gayropa without thinking, but these are focused on narratives specifically in the media and not by the government. NG, on the other hand, is filled with articles that warn its readers of the narrative of Gayropa used by the Russian state. Almost all articles try to change the perception on Western Europe so that readers wouldn't just blindly believe the Russian state discourse. NG does everything to expose the Russian state and its propaganda to the wider Russian public. This is the biggest difference between NG and the other three newspapers KP, RG, and IZ. As they enable the Russian state rhetoric on Western Europe, NG disproves the whole discourse of the state.

## **5.4. Geopolitics**

The sexual politics and politics of belonging used by the Russian state in its geopolitical strategy are displayed in a diverse set of articles from the newspapers.

#### *5.4.1. Sexual Politics*

The use of sexual politics in the media to support the Russian state's geopolitics is apparent in the articles of RG, KP, and IZ. They implement a heteronormative discourse when discussing Russian geopolitics with Western Europe. Homosexuality is seen as a construction and aberration from 'the normal'. This construction is supposedly used by Western Europe to further its imperialist agenda. Russia 'needs' to defend its people and culture against Western Europe. Russia is depicted as the last bastion of normalcy. Thus, creating the narrative that Western modernity is just a creation and hype to attack Russia and its traditional culture. NG does everything in its power to expose and debunk this narrative. The newspaper counters the Russian state's strategy by unmasking the Russian state propaganda to its readers in almost every article on Gayropa. NG dissects how the creation of Western Europe as a sexually deviant by the Russian state, helps the state in justifying its own imperialist tendencies. Therefore, NG separates itself from the other newspapers.

#### *5.4.2. Politics of Belonging*

The same trend is visible when looking at politics of belonging. In the articles of RG, IZ, and KP there is a clear 'us' versus 'them' division taking place. The overarching division of the world is that of Russia versus the West. In these newspapers Russia and Western Europe are made out to be incompatible with one another. Western Europe is depicted as the enemy of the Russian state and people. In RG the narrative is used to legitimise Russia's involvement in the conflict in Ukraine as Odessans need to be protected from the Western enemy. This idea is also shaped in the article of IZ on the sanction war between Russia and Western Europe (Kholmogorov, 2016). The 'us' versus 'them' identities are clearly constructed in the article wherein Western Europe gets an anti-Russian identity and Russia the identity of the protector of its people against the West. Western Europe is the aggressor and Russia the victim. This is apparent in some articles of KP as well. In one of the articles, the politics of belonging is made very clear: A director is asked to give its Western prizes back to the West to show that he supports the Russian state and belongs with Russia (Khozhatelev, 2016). The boundaries are plainly established. NG disproves this 'us' versus 'them' rhetoric used by the media and Russian state in its articles. The whole strategy of 'us' versus 'them' is of great importance for the Russian state to first have a scapegoat to blame everything on, and second to be able to justify one's actions that would normally be criticised heavily. NG exposes this strategy that the Russian state applies on Western Europe.

### ***5.5. Influence ownership on the newspapers***

Most of the articles in all newspapers discuss the same events and themes. However, the representation of these events and themes differs. For example, in all four newspapers sentiments of non-tolerance towards the LGBTQ+ values are visible. The degree and intensity of non-tolerance is different in each one. Nonetheless, all newspapers describe the Western sexual values as incompatible with Russia and its values.

The newspaper who stands out the most in comparison to the others is NG. On multiple events and themes, the ideas of NG are in stark contrast to the ideas in the other newspapers. NG openly opposes the Russian state rhetoric on Gayropa and with it the state's sexual politics and politics of belonging, while the other newspapers support the state narrative. While NG sees Western Europe

as the source of modernization and the future, RG, IZ, and KP see Western Europe as the ultimate enemy of Russia. RG, IZ, and KP blame Western Europe for the conflict in Ukraine. NG takes an anti-war stance on the matter and is critical of both sides in the conflict. On these matters the difference between non-state-affiliated and the others becomes apparent.

The differences between state-owned and state-affiliated newspapers are less outspoken. In most articles the three newspapers – RG, IZ, and KP – take the same stance as the Russian state narrative towards Western Europe. Most articles depict Gayropa in a negative light and support the sexual politics and politics of belonging by the Russian state towards Western Europe. All of them contain mostly criticism towards Western Europe and its values, only a few articles in RG and KP show some criticism towards Russian media and the Russian healthcare system. These articles do not specifically criticise the Russian state, so this is probably the reason why they are available on the state-owned newspaper RG and state-affiliated newspaper KP. IZ on the other hand follows the state narrative down to the last detail in its two articles. One would assume that IZ is the state-owned newspaper. However, this conclusion is based only on those two articles. It could be that IZ differs from the state narrative on different subjects. All in all, the differences between state-owned and state-affiliated newspapers are not significant in this research.

The differences between the state-affiliated newspapers are mostly visible in the way the news is presented. They take the same stance, but the style of the articles differs. Both newspapers write their articles in a way that provokes reactions from their readers, but IZ contains opinion pieces that are long and underpinned by arguments (whether correct or not), while KP's articles are sensational articles that are short and mostly filled with reactions plucked from the internet.

## *Conclusion*

The narrative of Gayropa which reflects the sexual politics and anti-Western rhetoric by the Russian state is present in the articles of the state-owned newspaper RG, and the state-affiliated newspapers KP and IZ. Homosexuality is depicted as a construction, or even an aberration from the 'normal'. The 'normal' described in the articles of these three newspapers corresponds to what is seen as normal in the heteronormative discourse on sexual politics. Tradition and heterosexuality form the cornerstone of Russian society and its values according to these newspapers. The Russian values supposedly must be protected from the so-called modernity of Western Europe with its liberal and sexual values. The narrative of Russia as defender against Western Europe's aggression is (consciously or unconsciously) present in the articles of the three newspapers. Russia is depicted as the last bastion of 'normality' in this world. Heteronormativity is omni-present in most articles of RG, KP, and IZ. Heteronormativity is also the main discourse followed by the Russian state when it comes to its sexual politics. The state uses this discourse to position itself as the opposite of the liberal West in the global world. The content of the articles of RG, KP, and IZ support this position.

The position of Russia versus the liberal West fits into the political Othering of 'us' (Russia) versus 'them' (the liberal West). This political Othering forms the basis of politics of belonging. By simplifying the complexity of the global world into an 'us' versus 'them' format, it is easier to define who belongs where in the world. As already stated, the Russian state positions itself opposite of the liberal West. Russia describes itself as a beacon of tradition against a world turning into decay. This narrative is visible in the articles of RG, IZ, and KP. Most of the articles hold a rather anti-Western perspective in their content. The LGBTQ+ community together with liberal sexual values are supposedly used by Western Europe to further its neo-imperialistic agenda. This turns Western Europe in the ultimate enemy of the Russian state in the contemporary world. In these newspapers Western Europe is the scapegoat for everything wrong inside and outside Russia. The anti-Western discourse of the Russian state is excessively present in these three newspapers.

However, one newspaper is in stark contrast with the others, namely NG. NG does everything in its power to expose and debunk the narrative of Gayropa and with it the sexual politics and politics of belonging of the Russian state. NG exposes the anti-Western strategy of the Russian state. According to this newspaper, Western Europe isn't to blame for everything wrong inside and outside Russia. The Russian state is to blame for its own mistakes. The newspaper describes Russia, not as a victim, but as an instigator and aggressor. Accordingly, NG describes both sides as having certain imperialistic tendencies. However, the newspaper calls for unity between both sides as it sees Western Europe as the source of modernization. Both sides should try to learn from one another and be more tolerant. For NG this means not imposing values on one another, yet also not degrading the values of the other. Although it condemns Russia's sexual politics, certain journalists do not agree with the sexual politics of the West either. The newspaper is thus very critical towards the Russian state but doesn't shy away from also being critical towards Western Europe. The newspaper holds a multitude of diverse opinions, not all journalists express the same opinion or agree with one another. This is very different from the other three newspapers.

This research focuses on the politicisation of the LGBTQ+ community by the Russian state and media. However, this research could just as well be executed on politics and media in the West. The heteronormative discourse forms the basis for different religious, traditional, or certain political groups in the West. The LGBTQ+ community is often depicted as the internal other within this discourse. The discourse of homonationalism prevails as well in the West. A pro-LGBTQ+ stance is taken by certain political groups to create a narrative against different Muslim migrant groups.

This creates the narrative that the LGBTQ+ community needs to be protected from the intolerant other. Politicisation of the LGBTQ+ community takes place in many forms everywhere in the 'Western world'. Even in international discourses: the LGBTQ+ values are geopolitically used by the West to propagate liberalism throughout the world. The West does this all the time, not only about LGBTQ+ rights, but also about the position of women, separation of church and state... The Western liberal politicians and certain parts of the population are convinced that Western liberal principles on these matters are the only correct way to live and propagate them. Although there is no doubt that everyone has the right to be who they are, the underlying reason and authenticity of Western politicians for pushing Western values, specifically sexual values, and its ways into other parts of the world may be questioned. Furthermore, homophobia and intolerance aren't just present in Russia, but also in the West itself. Sexual equality is certainly not a reality yet, even in the 'progressive West'. It should be noted that discrimination of the LGBTQ+ community has not disappeared in any part of the world. There is still a lot of work to be done here, which of course does not alter the fact that the situation in Russia for the LGBTQ+ community is extremely distressing at this moment.

At last, the cessation of NG – forced by the state – shows the rather bleak future of the Russian media landscape. This opposition newspaper was one of the last non-state-affiliated sources to reach a large audience. Their coverage stood in stark contrast to that of the state-affiliated newspapers. NG gave the Russian public the opportunity to consult sources different from the state narrative to form their opinions. The disappearance of this newspaper is a step closer to full state control of the press in Russia. What this will mean for press freedom and media reporting in Russia is still in limbo. The journalists, who fled Russia, have started a new newspaper in Western Europe independent from NG. Whether they will still reach the same audience, or the same scope is yet to be determined. All of this is interesting material to investigate further as the situation evolves, but it is also important. The degradation of Russia's press freedom should be examined in various ways. There is a need to research how the state indoctrinates its citizens further now that there is virtually no opposition in the media. How the narrative of Gayropa continues to evolve in Russia without NG is of importance to study the further influence of Russian media on the already existing stigma around Western Europe. Also, the possible influence of the new newspaper by the NG journalists on the Russian media landscape from outside of Russia should be analysed. The field of media, freedom of press, and journalism in Russia is during these times an important field for further research. In the hope that research can help turn the tide in Russia. That's why this study will be concluded on the same note as it began, with the quote by Muratov (2021):

*The dogs bark, but the caravan keeps walking.*

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