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POLICY BRIEFS

RUSSIAN MEDIA DISCOURSES ON SYRIAN REFUGEES IN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIAN LABOUR MIGRANTS IN RUSSIA: RUSSIA FOR RUSSIANS, EUROPE FOR...?

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KEY POINTS

- Constant spotlighting of a certain issue makes it appear as most pressing by attracting the attention of information consumers, thus giving value to some events and not granting as much significance to others. In other words, there is a certain tone and volume in media, expressed by frequency and rhetoric of reporting. Furthermore, the media has become a weapon of political and even military fronts and is increasingly viewed as a weapon in hybrid warfare.
- Until its involvement in the Syrian conflict, Russian media portrayed Syrian refugees in Europe as tragic victims of external involvement in the internal affairs of Syria and the greater Middle East, linking the refugee inflow to consequences of failed policies of the US and NATO. This rhetoric was present in the Russian media up until 28 September 2015, when Russia entered the Syrian conflict.
- The so-called Russkiy Mir (Russian world) concept is spreading even on Germany where several million “Russian Germans” are under the influence of Russian media propaganda. Protests took place in Germany when official Kremlin expressed concerns over safety of Russian Germans, who allegedly fall victim to misbehaviors of refugees.
- The refugee crisis in Europe is being “domesticated” in the Russian media and parallels are drawn to the Central Asian labour migrants. Migrants from Central Asia in Russia are portrayed as rapists, uneducated, marginal, illegal/dishonest/law-breaking elements of non-Christian faith.
- Negative portrayal of refugees and labour migrants in media has several security implications including the spread of xenophobic attitudes in the Russian society and among minority groups in Europe.



INTRODUCTION

The media plays a significant role in the way we perceive processes and notions, as the majority of us do not gather all our data via a firsthand experience. The current policy brief attempts to highlight certain patterns and tendencies related to the portrayal of refugees and migrants in the Russian media and raises concerns over the ability of the Russian media to influence opinions, especially among people who associate themselves with the greater Russian world.

The study is based on qualitative content analysis of over 300 articles published by Russia Today (RT) and Argumenti i Fakti (AiF) between January 1, 2015 and April 30, 2016. These platforms were selected to represent the Russian media for several reasons, including their volume and popularity, as well as the fact that one is a broadcaster (RT) with an external focus and the other is a weekly newspaper (AiF) and is more domestic in nature. In 1990 AiF was listed in the Guinness Book of Records for the largest circulation in the world among any weekly publications with 33,400,000 copies worldwide.¹ Website aif.ru is accessed by 15 million people each month. RT content is viewed by 700 million every 24 hours in 100 countries.² Additionally, the study relies on semi-structured in-depth expert interviews and conversations with Russian Germans in Germany.

Qualitative media content analysis on media coverage of migration and refugees was inspired by the work of Samuel Parker who analyzes the portrayal of refugees in the UK and Australian media in his article "'Unwanted invaders': The representation of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK and Australian print media". In this work Parker highlights that as a

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- 1 About "Argumenti i Fakti", accessed 5 January 2016, <http://corp.aif.ru/page/89/>
 - 2 RT's 2016 budget announced, down from 2015, MSM too stumped to spin?" Russia Today, 10 October 2015, accessed 15 March 2016, <https://www.rt.com/op-edge/318181-rt-budget-down-msm/>

result of intensive media coverage, the asylum issue is perceived as a significant one both in the UK and Australia, while the actual number of refugees and asylum seekers in 2014 represented 0.23% of the population of the UK and 0.2% in Australia.³ Media can obscure the reality through its tone and volume.

The Russian media has been actively portraying refugees in Europe as a security threat. The volume in Russian media is correlated with the politicization of the refugee issue, while the tone with which refugees are portrayed has shifted from sympathetic to critical after Russia joined the Syrian conflict.

The study argues that while being under tight state control, the Russian media is instrumentalized to influence opinions among minority groups in Europe in order to discredit European policies via spotlighting Syrian refugees as Europe's political failure. Refugees are portrayed as invaders, opportunists and terrorists in order to seed fear among the population and spread rhetoric for European disintegration.

On the domestic level, refugees are compared to Central Asian labour migrants and both groups are marginalized and stigmatized in the media. Such rhetoric allows the state to justify military actions in Syria, as the media provides little sympathy to people running from war-torn zones. Drawing parallels to domestic migration issues in Russia helps personalize the refugee issue for domestic information consumers.

3 Samuel Parker, "'Unwanted invaders': The representation of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK and Australian print media", *Myth and Nation*, Issue 23, Spring 2015, accessed 12 February 2016, http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_404384_en.pdf

DEFINITIONS: REFUGEES, MIGRANTS, OPPORTUNISTS?

The terms migrants and refugees often get jumbled in media and sometimes several terms with various meanings are used in a single article in reference to one group of people.⁴ Terminology is essential for a comprehensive understanding of the issue at hand. Thus, the 1951 UN Refugee Convention defines a refugee as a person who:

*...owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinions, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.*⁵

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) an economic migrant is: *A person leaving his or her habitual place of residence to settle outside his or her country of origin in order to improve his or her quality of life. This term is often loosely used to distinguish from refugees fleeing persecution, and is also similarly used to refer to persons attempting to enter a country without legal permission and/or by using asylum procedures without bona fide cause. It may equally be applied to persons leaving their country of origin for the purpose of employment.*⁶

The UNHCR further defines key differences between the two terms in the following paragraph: *Migrants, especially economic migrants, choose to move in order to improve the future prospects of themselves and their families. Refugees have to move if they are to save their lives or preserve their freedom. They have no protection from their own state - indeed it is often their own government*

4 "Refugee runway: Migrants take to catwalk in famous Italian fashion show", Russia Today, 15 January 2016, accessed 3 March 2016, <https://www.rt.com/news/329083-italy-catwalk-refugees-fashion/>

5 The Refugee Convention, accessed 3 March 2016, <http://www.unhcr.org/4ca34be29.html>

6 Ibid.

*that is threatening to persecute them. If other countries do not let them in, and do not help them once they are in, then they may be condemning them to death - or to an intolerable life in the shadows, without sustenance and without rights.*⁷

These definitions are significant in the attempt of the current study to understand the portrayal of refugees and migrants by the media, as framing people as refugees who are running away from war and seeking asylum beyond the boundaries of their home country and framing them as economic migrants who are seeking an improvement of the quality of life has an effect on the very core of understanding of the issue and the concepts in question.

By using mixed terminology of “migrants” and “refugees” media platforms contribute to a swayed understanding of people being addressed in the article and contribute to a misuse of legal terminology. “There is a confusion in terminology and I am not sure the media is able or willing to clarify who is coming [to Europe] and for what reason.”⁸ Thus, the media creates a grey area in terminology and every foreigner essentially is viewed through comprehensive and all-inclusive lenses as both a migrant and a refugee - a person running away from problems back home and seeking any opportunity to stay in the host state and become rich. The power of the media in spotlighting refugees and migrants and constructing certain perceptions about them in the society should not be underestimated.

7 UNHCR, Asylum Seekers, accessed 3 March 2016, <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c137.html>

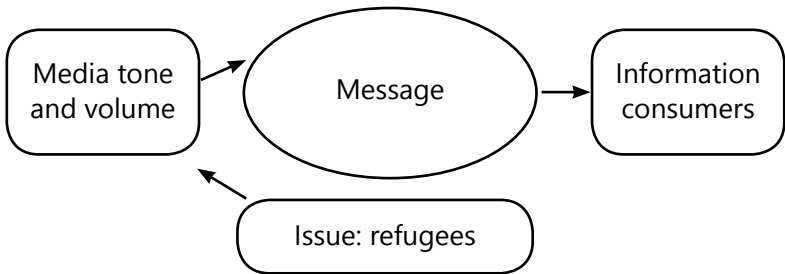
8 Expert Interview, March 2016, Dr. Guillaume Lasconjarias, Research Advisor in the Research Division of the NATO Defence College in Rome, Italy.

MEDIA

A. Tone and volume

The tone with which a selected issue is shown to information consumers has a direct effect on behavior and attitude towards the issue.⁹ As McCombs states: "Beyond attitudes and opinions, the pictures of reality created by the mass media have implications for personal behaviors, ranging from college applications to voting on election day."¹⁰ According to the agenda setting theory, media is a powerful tool when it comes to framing a certain notion and "cultivating" a respective perception among the information consumers. Thus, aside for the frequency, or volume, of coverage of a given issue, it is important to consider with what tone this issue is presented. The volume and tone with which the Russian media is portraying refugees and migrants frame the issue. Media volume and tone "tunneling" can be illustrated in the following scheme:

Scheme 1. Illustration of media tunneling



9 Maxwell McCombs, "The Agenda-Setting Role of the Mass Media in the Shaping of Public Opinion", University of Texas, 2003.

10 Ibid.

B. Traditional vs social media

It is important to distinguish between the traditional and social media. Where the traditional media is delivering messages to the public, on the social media platforms messages are shared horizontally and are generated by the public itself. However, these two dimensions do not exist in isolation from each other, and interact in various ways. First of all, some of the traditional media content from newspapers, radio and television is largely available online and the social media is referenced on television, on the radio and in the newspapers. Furthermore, social networks are used not only to produce an alternative vision to “mainstream” news, but also to reference, share and spread the content which was delivered by traditional media sources. Thus, traditional media not only remains relevant, but also adapts to the new mediums, such as online platforms. Social networks can generate content which is alternative to the mainstream media, or, on the contrary, draw attention to specific topic or content-generating platform which would otherwise not have been noticed or perhaps not available. Thus, social media does not undermine the significance of traditional media.



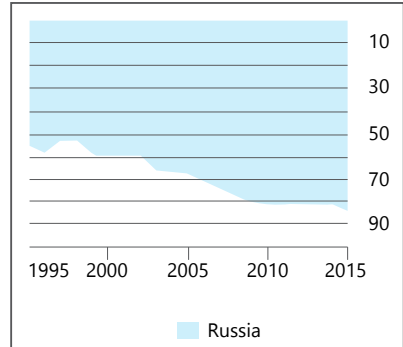
DISCOURSES ON MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES IN THE RUSSIAN MEDIA

As shown in Tables 1 and 2, in 2015 Freedom House ranked Russia’s freedom of the press as “not free”.¹¹ Table 2 indicates a steady decrease of press freedom in Russia throughout a 20-year period. The Freedom House report spotlights a growing pressure on journalists by the authorities.

11 Freedom House, Freedom of the Press Report, Russia 2015, accessed 10 March 2016, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2015/russia>

Table 1. Russia ranking in 2015

2015 SCORES	
PRESS STATUS	Not Free
PRESS FREEDOM SCORE (0=BEST, 100=WORST)	83
LEGAL ENVIRONMENT (0=BEST, 30=WORST)	25
POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT (0=BEST, 40=WORST)	34
ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT (0=BEST, 30=WORST)	24

Table 2. Russia ranking over 20 years

According to Freedom House assessment of the Russian media, in 2015 “nationalistic tone of the dominant Russian media continued to drown out independent and critical journalism”.¹² Aside for media control, Russia has the reputation of a state where being a journalist is a life-threatening calling.¹³

A. Russian media portrayal of Syrian refugees in Germany

When “Syrian refugees in Germany” (SRG) word combination is entered in the online database of RT, the following number of articles (volume) comes up in each of the 13 months addressed in the framework of the study. The volume increases in September 2015, due to the large inflow of refugees in this period and is large in January of 2016, following the Cologne New Year’s Eve events. Table 3 presents the volume of RT articles throughout the 16-month period covered by the current study.

12 Freedom House, Freedom of the Press 2016, Russia, accessed 17 September 2016, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2016/russia>

13 Committee to Protect Journalists, “65 Journalists Killed in Russia since 1992/ Motive Confirmed”, <https://cpj.org/killed/europe/russia/>

Table 3. Russia Today, volume of articles featuring SRG in the period between 01.01.2015 and 30.04.2016, presented by month

Month	Number of Russia Today articles featuring SRG
January 1 – January 31, 2015	4
February 1 – February 28, 2015	1
March 1 – March 31, 2015	0
April 1 – April 30, 2015	1
May 1- May 31, 2015	2
June 1- June 30, 2015	4
July 1 – July 31, 2015	1
August 1 – August 31, 2015	4
September 1 – September 30, 2015	52
October 1 – October 31, 2015	21
November 1 – November 30, 2015	19
December 1 – December 31, 2015	19
January 1 – January 31, 2016	20
February 1 – February 29	22
March 1 – March 31	33
April 1 – April 30	21
Total:	224

Russia’s most successful weekly newspaper, AiF, took relatively late action in featuring Syrian refugees in Germany in its online content, as the database gave results only starting with August 2015. An increase in the volume is again observed in September 2015 and January 2016 as is shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Argumenti i Fakti volume of articles featuring SRG in the period between 01.01.2015 and 30.04.2016, presented by month

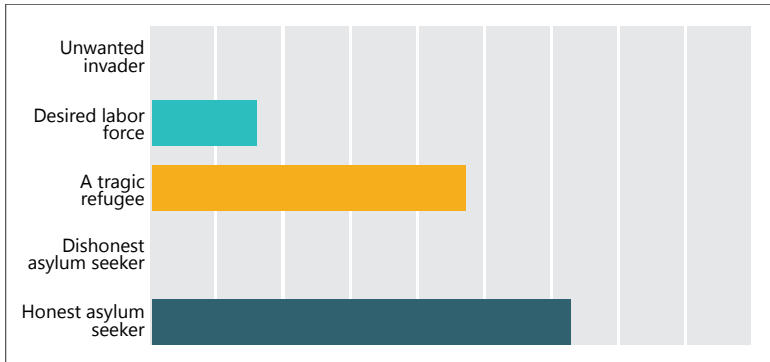
Month	Number of Argumenti I Fakti articles featuring SRG
January 1 – January 31, 2015	0
February 1 – February 28, 2015	0
March 1 – March 31, 2015	0
April 1 – April 30, 2015	0
May 1- May 31, 2015	0
June 1- June 30, 2015	0
July 1 – July 31, 2015	0
August 1 – August 31, 2015	1
September 1 – September 30, 2015	14
October 1 – October 31, 2015	4
November 1 – November 30, 2015	6
December 1 – December 31, 2015	1
January 1 – January 31, 2016	5
February 1 – February 29	4
March 1 – March 31	6
April 1 – April 30	1
Total:	42

Throughout 2015, Russian media was reporting on a foreseeable larger inflow of refugees in 2016, with the situation potentially getting out of hand. Refugees were increasingly portrayed as a security threat. Osama Mohsen, a refugee who was tripped by a Hungarian camerawoman, ended up scoring a football coaching job in Spain, was accused of potential links to Al-Qaeda in an AiF article. The article entitled: "Izobrazhaya zhertvu. Siriets, postradavshiy ot reportera, - boevik "Al-Kaidi"? (Pretending to be a victim. The Syrian tripped by journalist is an "Al-Qaeda"

militant?) refers to some Syrian Kurds who “recognized a terrorist” in Mohsen.¹⁴

Russian media tends to sway between highlighting the external involvement in Syrian affairs as a result of refugee inflow with such statements as: “Asylum seekers heading to the EU have been made homeless by Western interventions...”¹⁵ The narrative switches to domestic causes of outflow of people during the times that Russia engaged in Syria with military operations. Shift in the narrative of RT is observed in January 2016, where the emphasis is put on refugees being victims of domestic conflict and less so the victims of external intrusion in Syria’s internal affairs. While nearly 40% of RT articles featured refugees as “honest asylums seekers” in September 2015, this indicator fell to 0% in January 2016.

Table 5. Russia Today. Descriptive indicators on 100% scale. January 2015



14 “Izobrazhaya zhertvu. Siriets, postradavshiy ot reportera, - boevik “Al-Kaidi’? Argumenti i Fakti, (Pretending to be a victim. The Syrian tripped by journalist is an “Al-Qaeda” militant?), September 24, 2015, accessed 10 March 2016, http://www.aif.ru/politics/world/izobrazhaya_zhertvu_siriec_postradavshiy_ot_reportera_boevik_al-kaidy

15 “Refugees to EU made homeless by NATO interventions”, Russia Today, 17 September 2015, accessed 10 April 2016, <https://www.rt.com/op-edge/315742-eu-migrants-hungary-border/>

Table 6. Russia Today. Descriptive indicators on 100% scale. September 2015

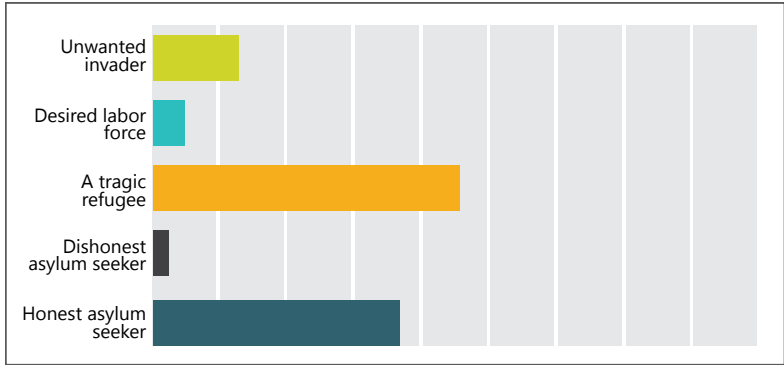
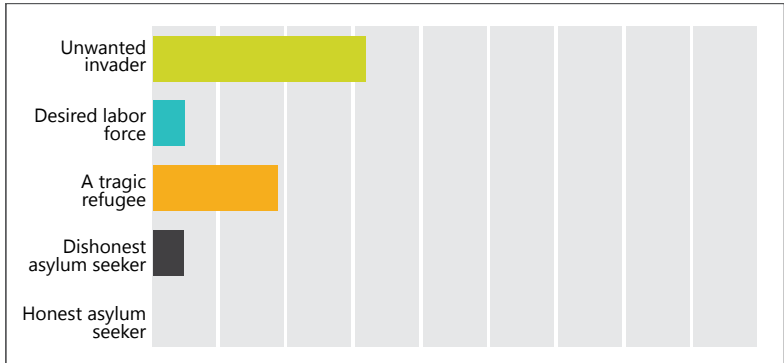


Table 7. Russia Today. Descriptive indicators on 100% scale. January 2016



Among the article headlines that feature refugees as unwanted invaders are the following: "Asylum seekers confirmed among Cologne assailants",¹⁶ "'Unsafe on streets': Danish women 'sexually harassed' by refugees in at least 3 towns",¹⁷

16 "Asylum seekers confirmed among Cologne assailants", Russia Today, 8 January 2016, accessed 12 March 2016, <https://www.rt.com/news/328312-germany-cologne-assaults-crackdown/>

17 "'Unsafe on streets': Danish women 'sexually harassed' by refugees in at least 3 towns", Russia Today, 13 January 2016, accessed 12 March 2016, <https://www.rt.com/news/329890-germany-refugees-isis-members/>

"Refugees claim ISIS militants living among them in Germany",¹⁸
"Women no longer feel safe': German city bans migrants from nightclubs after assault allegations".¹⁹ At the same time as these references to the dangers that refugees bring about are made, the importance of Russia's participation in solving the crisis is underlined: "Russia has a key role to play in the solution of both the Syrian conflict and the refugee crisis, German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble."²⁰ Thus, Russia made itself a party in the Syrian conflict and this was reflected in its media rhetoric which launched a campaign against refugees to discredit Western policies and present itself as protector of justice in the world, capable to stand up for anyone associating with the Russian World and whose rights are not protected in their respective states. "The concept of Russian citizenship is unique, as people who are not citizens of Russia anymore or have never been [Russian citizens] are culturally and emotionally attached to Russia and Kremlin uses this phenomenon well."²¹

The 2015 New Year's Eve events in Germany stroke debates, accusations and conspiracies over the reluctance of the media and the police to report on behavior of "young foreign men who spoke neither English nor German".²² As was stated later by the German authorities, only 3 out of 58 suspects arrested in Co-

18 "Refugees claim ISIS militants living among them in Germany", Russia Today, 23 January 2016, accessed 10 March 2016, <https://www.rt.com/news/329890-germany-refugees-isis-members/>

19 "'Women no longer feel safe': German city bans migrants from nightclubs after assault allegations", Russia Today, 26 January 2016, accessed 15 March 2016, <https://www.rt.com/news/330238-germany-nightclubs-migrants-banned/>

20 "Syria conflict, refugee crisis can be solved 'together with Russia' - German Finance Minister", Russia Today, 25 January 2016, accessed 15 March 2016, <https://www.rt.com/news/330061-syria-refugees-schauble-russia/>

21 Expert Interview, March 2016, Dr. Guillaume Lasconjarias, Research Advisor in the Research Division of the NATO Defence College in Rome, Italy.

22 Melissa Eddy, "Reports of Attacks on Women in Germany Heighten Tension over Migrants", The New York Times, 5 January 2016, accessed 10 March 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/06/world/europe/coordinated-attacks-on-women-in-cologne-were-unprecedented-germany-says.html?_r=0

logne were actual refugees and were unattended minors.²³ At the same time, Russian media accused German journalists and police in un-objective coverage of the these and other events in which refugees were alleged violators,²⁴ while the German media responded with accusation of the Russian media in having launched a “propaganda campaign against Germany”.²⁵

In the interview with Russian German families, rhetoric critical of Angela Merkel’s policies was prevalent: “Frau Merkel is going to ruin this country.”²⁶ “These people rape us, they are thieves, radical Muslims, we will soon all have to speak Arabic.”²⁷ Such narratives were common in the interviews, however, when asked about direct contact with refugees, many admitted that they have not seen them yet, but from the news they know what is going on. One interviewee confessed the following: “Actually, I don’t know how much harm refugees bring to this country, I have not seen a single one. Maybe the issue is exaggerated by the press.”²⁸

The Russian Federation has made attempts to build ties with the “Russian German” community via the infamous “Lisa case” involving a statement by Russia’s Minister of Foreign Affairs,

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- 23 Aubrey Allegretti, Cologne Sex Attacks: Only Three out of 58 Men Arrested Are Refugees, Prosecutor Reveals, The Huffington Post, 15 February 2016, accessed 15 April 2016 http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2016/02/15/cologne-sex-attacks-refugees-prosecutor_n_9235358.html “Evrope lezut v trusi. Pochemu migranty napali na zhenshin v Germanii?” (They are penetrating into Europe’s underwear. Why migrants assaulted women in Germany?), Agrumentii i Fakti, 13 January 2016, accessed 22 August 2016, http://www.aif.ru/politics/world/evrope_lezut_v_trusy_pochemu_migranty_napali_na_zhenshchin_v_germanii
- 24 “Evrope lezut v trusi. Pochemu migrant napali na zhenshin v Germanii?” (They are penetrating into Europe’s underwear. Why migrants assaulted women in Germany?), Agrumentii i Fakti, 13 January 2016, accessed 22 August 2016, http://www.aif.ru/politics/world/evrope_lezut_v_trusy_pochemu_migranty_napali_na_zhenshchin_v_germanii
- 25 Melanie Amman et al, “Russia’s Propaganda Campaign Against Germany”, Spiegel Online International, 5 February 2016, accessed 12 April 2016, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/putin-wages-hybrid-war-on-germany-and-west-a-1075483.html>
- 26 Field interview, woman, Russian German from Kazakhstan, Baden-Wurttemberg, January 2015.
- 27 Field interview, man, Russian German from Russia, Berlin, January 2015.
- 28 Field interview, man, Russian German from Uzbekistan, Baden-Wurttemberg, January 2015.

Sergei Lavrov, who even referred to a German citizen but Russian-speaking girl as “our Lisa”.²⁹ This statement took place after Russian television reported that “a 13-year-old girl from a Russian immigrant family was abducted in Berlin on January 11, 2016 by “Arab-looking men” and raped repeatedly over a “30-hour period.”³⁰ The girl later confessed of having made up the story in order to justify her absence from home.³¹ Protests took place in support of the Lisa case and Russia once again expressed criticism of Western media and German authorities.³² Experts explain Russia’s interest to the Lisa case is a strategic communication tool, which allowed building ties with the Russian German community. “These messages might actually bring the Russian German community closer to AfD.³³ We need to monitor the election.”³⁴ “Any claim that Western media is not objective is ridiculous as the media is free to publish anything here [in Germany] and there is no monopoly of state-controlled media here in Europe.”³⁵

Russian media analysis revealed a shift in the narrative related to root causes of people’s inflow to Europe. During Russia’s military operation in Syria refugees are increasingly portrayed as “dishonest”, “unwanted” and from mixed background – i.e.

29 “Moscow accuses Germany of hushing up Russian girl’s rape”, The Local, 28 January 2016, accessed 10 March 2016, <http://www.thelocal.de/20160126/moscow-accuses-germany-of-silencing-rape-of-russian-girl>

30 Ibid.

31 Adam Withnall, “Russian-German girl ‘admits making up’ claim she was raped by refugees in Berlin”, The Independent, 31 January 2016, accessed 23 March 2016. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russian-german-girl-admits-making-up-claim-she-was-raped-by-refugees-in-berlin-a6845256.html>

32 “Delo Lizi: MID RF prizval k obyektivnomu rassledovaniyu intsidenta s russkoi devochkoi v Germanii”(Lisa case: Russian MFA called for objective investigation of the incident with Russian girl in Germany), RT, 26 January 2016, accessed 15 September 2016, <https://russian.rt.com/article/144393>

33 “Alternative for Germany”, right-wing Eurosceptic, populist party. As of September 2016, represented in 10 German states of 16.

34 Expert interview, March 2016, Colonel Stefan Hinz, German Airforce Officer, currently Senior Programme Advisor at the Regional Development Programme of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy.

35 Expert Interview, March 2016, Lt.Col. Matthias Mielimonka, Deputy Chief of the Space, Cyber and Cooperation Policy Branch in the Directorate-General for Security and Defence Policy at the German Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

“Africans”, “Arabs”, “Muslims”, “Middle Easterners”. Condemnation of Western policies goes hand in hand with praising of Russia’s policies in the MENA³⁶ region and globally. “We only now start paying attention to the Russian media, although for the past 2 or 3 years there has been an active anti-West campaign in Russia Today, Sputnik and other media.”³⁷ “We need to unpack the refugee issue - who are these people who are coming, what is the condition of children, lost children, etc., unfortunately the media has not done a good job in refining such details. Investigative, high quality journalism does exist, but there is less and less of it on both sides [Russia and the West].”³⁸

B. Russian media portrayal of Central Asian labour migrants in Russia

The volume allocated to Central Asian labour migrants in the selected media platforms over the period covered by research was relatively low. However, the articles that featured Central Asian labour migrants used exclusively negative tone and portrayed the group as intruders who bring along criminal behavior, violate immigration law and engage in fights, rape and murder.

Table 8. Russia Today, volume of articles featuring Central Asian labour migrants in the period between 01.01.2015 and 30.04.2016, presented by month

Month	Number of RT articles featuring Central Asian labour migrants
January 1 – January 31, 2015	0
February 1 – February 28, 2015	0
March 1 – March 31, 2015	0

36 Middle East and North Africa.
 37 Expert Interview, March 2016, Dr. Guillaume Lasconjarias, Research Advisor in the Research Division of the NATO Defence College in Rome, Italy.
 38 Expert Interview, March 2016, Dr. Mohammad-Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou, Geneva Centre for Security Policy Deputy Director and Academic Dean.

April 1 – April 30, 2015	1
May 1- May 31, 2015	0
June 1- June 30, 2015	0
July 1 – July 31, 2015	3
August 1 – August 31, 2015	0
September 1 – September 30, 2015	0
October 1 – October 31, 2015	1
November 1 – November 30, 2015	0
December 1 – December 31, 2015	0
January 1 – January 31, 2016	1
February 1 – February 29	0
March 1 – March 31	0
April 1 – April 30	1
Total:	7

Table 9. Argumenti i Fakti, volume of articles featuring Central Asian labour migrants in the period between 01.01.2015 and 30.04.2016, presented by month

Month	Number of AiF articles featuring Central Asian labour migrants
January 1 – January 31, 2015	2
February 1 – February 28, 2015	0
March 1 – March 31, 2015	0
April 1 – April 30, 2015	1
May 1- May 31, 2015	1
June 1- June 30, 2015	0
July 1 – July 31, 2015	1
August 1 – August 31, 2015	3
September 1 – September 30, 2015	6
October 1 – October 31, 2015	2

November 1 – November 30, 2015	2
December 1 – December 31, 2015	2
January 1 – January 31, 2016	1
February 1 – February 29	1
March 1 – March 31	4
April 1 – April 30	2
Total:	28

The above tables illustrate a curious phenomenon – despite being a weekly publication, AiF’s volume in coverage of Central Asian labour migrants is louder than RT’s. This can be explained by the difference in audiences where RT is broadcasting internationally and AiF is pitching to domestic information consumers. While in September 2015 RT published 52 articles featuring Syrian refugees in Germany, search for “Central Asian migrants” on broadcaster’s Russian language webpage gave 0 results in that month. At the same time, the weekly AiF had 14 articles on Syrian refugees in Germany and 6 articles on Central Asian labour migrants in September 2015. The tone used to spotlight Central Asian labour migrants is rather alarming.

Some of the headlines in AiF include the following: “Polzuchiy apokalipsis. Smozhet li Rossiya protivostoyat’ naplivu bezhentsev?” (The sprawling apocalypses. Could Russia withstand refugee inflow?)³⁹ The scenario in which Russia would have to open its borders for refugees is compared with the end of times. This single article discredits the EU for taking in refugees, accuses the US of promising to take in refugees but not committing to the promises, predicts full dissolution of the Schengen zone by June 2016 and warns the readers that while it is pleasing to see Europe suffer at the moment as a result of its actions in the MENA region, Russia should be aware that Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan (no mention of Kyrgyzstan here, possibly due to the reference of

39 AiF, “Polzuchiy apokalipsis. Smozhet li Rossiya protivostoyat’ naplivu bezhentsev?” (The sprawling apocalypses. Could Russia withstand refugee inflow?), 20 March 2016,

authoritarian rule in these countries) are in the neighborhood and refugees from these countries may potentially destroy Russia. The article calls for immediate action, while there is still time. It is unclear what this action may be. The article underlines the old age of authoritarian presidents in the above mentioned states, although Emomali Rahmon and Vladimir Putin are of the same age (63) and Ilham Aliev is almost a decade younger (54).

Other articles include:

“Tiho pered burei? Chem opasna situatsiya s migrantami v Rossii?” (Quiet before the storm? How is the situation with migrants threatening Russia?)⁴⁰ The article warns that Central Asian migrants will take up their weapons in Russia when the time is right and will kill all “non-believers” and representatives of “other tribes” “much like the IS in Syria”.

“Svoi i chuzhie. Izvechet li Rossiya urok, glyadya na migratsionniy potok v ES?” (Ours and not ours. Will Russia learn a lesson from migrant inflow in the EU?)⁴¹ This is a curious text, which features statements of Semen Bagdasarov, former Russian MP and director of the Center for Middle East and Central Asian Studies in Russia. Bagdasarov (an ethnic Armenian who was born in the Fergana region of the Uzbek SSR) states that migrants from Central Asia were brought up in a different system of values and therefore impose a security threat on Russia as many of these migrants are “contaminated with Islamist and anti-Russian mentality”. Bagdasarov also calls for a visa regime with non EEU⁴² states of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and suggests full closure of “ethnic cafes, clubs and kindergartens” so as to help migrants integrate into the Russian society. Such rhetoric is dangerous and even the discussion of actions suggested by Bagdasarov creates barriers in the society rather than helping

40 AiF, “Tiho pered burei? Chem opasna situatsiya s migrantami v Rossii?” (Quiet before the storm? How is the situation with migrants threatening Russia?), 28 January 2016, http://www.aif.ru/politics/russia/tiho_pered_burey

41 AiF, “Svoi i chuzhie. Izvechet li Rossiya urok, glyadya na migratsionniy potok v ES?” (Our and not ours. Will Russia learn a lesson from migrant inflow in the EU?), 16 September 2015, http://www.aif.ru/politics/russia/svoi_ili_chuzhie

42 Eurasian Economic Union.

with assimilation. In a few sentences of this essentialist text, by linking all Central Asians to terrorism and denying their ability to ever integrate in Russia, Bagdasarov is jeopardizing Russian national security, inter-ethnic coexistence, unity, diversity and multiculturalism. The biggest threat to Russian security in this sense are people like Mr. Bagdasarov.

These articles indicate a tendency towards domestication of the European refugee crisis and drawing comparisons with Central Asian migrants in Russia. Central Asian migrants are compared to IS militants and warnings are made that one day all these migrants will kill everyone around.

Articles featuring Central Asian migrants published by RT are lower in volume but are not any more positive in their tone. References are made to the illegality of migrants, their engagement in mass fights, protests and murder.

Articles feature deportation and arrests of migrants. Some articles portray migrants as contagious:

Minzdrav RF: Tuberkulez iz Srednei Azii mozhet ugrozhat' rossiyanam" (Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation: Tuberculosis from Central Asia can threaten Russians).⁴³ There are articles featuring fights committed by Central Asians: "SMI: Migranti ustroili bunt v Chelyabinskoy spetspriemnykh UFMS" (Mass Media: Migrants made riots in Chelyabinsk Federal Migration Service detention center).⁴⁴

Another article calls for visa regimes with Central Asian republics and tightening of entry requirements into the Russian Federation: "Dlya v'ezda v Rossiyu grazhdanam SNG teper' ponadobitsya zagran pasport" (To enter Russia CIS citizens now

43 "Minzdrav RF: Tuberkulez iz Srednei Azii mozhet ugrozhat' rossiyanam" (Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation: Tuberculosis from Central Asia can threaten Russians), Russia Today, 20 October 2015, accessed August 1, 2016, <https://russian.rt.com/article/124643>

44 "SMI: Migranti ustroili bunt v Chelyabinskoy spetspriemnykh UFMS" (Mass Media: Migrants made riots in Chelyabinsk Federal Migration Service detention center), Russia Today, 7 June 2015, accessed 1 August 2016, <https://russian.rt.com/article/96055>

need international passports).⁴⁵

This piece states that passport control-related changes are predominantly aimed at the non-EEU states of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Curiously enough, in the Republic of Uzbekistan there is a single passport for domestic and international purposes and these changes are not applicable to holders of the Uzbek passport as the concept of domestic vs international does not exist. Exit visas are stamped into the passport for travel outside of the CIS and countries with which Uzbekistan has a visa regime, but, stemming from the above, the case does not apply to Russia.

Having brought to the surface all the problems that migrants and refugees bring along both in Europe and in Russia, the Russian media is concerned with system failures in the EU which have no control over migrant inflow and behavior. Yet, the media and even the International Organization for Migration (IOM) are rather satisfied with the Russian immigration system. RT features an interview with the Head of the Moscow IOM Office, Mr. Zlatko Zigic who praised the Russian immigration system and complimented it on being "one of the most effective in protecting migrant rights".⁴⁶ Effectiveness and protection are terms with disputed definition when it comes to politics. Labour migrants in Russia, however, have faced legal barriers, police abuse⁴⁷ and racist attacks.⁴⁸

The media certainly bares a level of responsibility for public

45 "Dlya v'ezda v Rossiyu grazhdanam SNG teper' ponadobitsa zagran pasport" (To enter Russia CIS citizens now need international passports), RT, 1 January 2015, accessed 1 August 2016, <https://russian.rt.com/article/67274>

46 "'Desperation': Top intl. immigration official rips into Turkey-EU refugee deal", Russia Today, 23 March 2016, <https://www.rt.com/news/336945-iom-migration-turkey-zigic/>

47 "A Hard Year for Migrant Workers in Russia", Radio Free Europe, 27 December 2013, accessed 16 September 2016, <http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-migrants-tough-year/25214624.html>

48 Tom Balmforth, "Nationalist Riots in Moscow Send Fear Through Muslim Migrant Communities", Radio Free Europe, 14 October 2013, accessed 16 September 2016, <http://www.rferl.org/content/moscow-migrants-feature/25136629.html>

perception over migrants. However, legal frameworks that make lawful employment an impossible task, the system that does not guarantee the rights of guest workers and realities in which thousands can be deported and put on the so-called “black list” are of core significance. Beyond the media, even state bodies in Russia dehumanize migrants, as is evident from the example of the information brochure released by St. Petersburg city administration in 2012.⁴⁹ Labour migrants in the brochure are illustrated as a roller, a brush, a broom and a putty knife. Can objects integrate into the society and become human beings at some point?

Image 1: Information brochure for migrants designed by St. Petersburg city administration⁵⁰



49 “Piterskaya pamyatka priez’zhim ponravilas’ migrantam, zadev obshchestvennost” (Petersburg’s brochure for newcomers taken well by migrants and offensive to public), Ria Novosti, 19 October 2012, accessed 15 September 2016, <https://ria.ru/society/20121019/904568214.html>

50 Ibid.



CONCLUSION

A. Syrian refugees

Indeed, when Russian media condemned the external involvement (US/NATO) in Syria and the Middle East, the tendency was to portray refugees as tragic and honest asylum seekers, who have fallen victim to the failed US/NATO policies supported by the EU. This tone fluctuated as Russia engaged in military operations in Syria. Thus, in January 2016 the emphasis was put on troubles that refugees bring about, with “unwanted invader” rhetoric dominating the articles. On the policy level the narrative differs between RT and AiF. RT focuses on failed domestic issues in Syria, while maintaining a reference to negative consequences of external involvement on behalf of US/NATO and EU. AiF dominates in condemning US/NATO and EU policies in the Middle East and Syria and puts an emphasis on positive consequences of Russia’s policies in the region, in a sense bringing the same ideas forth, but through diverging messages. Generally, the image of refugees in terms of tone was becoming negative throughout the selected timeframe - refugees are portrayed as unwanted invaders, potentially linked to terrorism and with economic intentions for migration prevailing over the actual need for protection from war.

B. Central Asian migrants

RT covers Central Asian labour migrants with lesser volume than AiF, but the tone in both platforms is negative. Migrants from Central Asia are not portrayed as desired labor force by the Russian media, rather as “unwanted invaders”, “unexpected guests”, people who impose a threat on the Russian society and constantly violate the law and commit crimes, rape women and fight. Parallels are being drawn in regards to the refugee inflow in Europe and scenarios are made for the potential inflow of refugees from Central Asia into Russia. Such rhetoric dehumanizes Russia’s southern neighbors and gets in the way of integration and assimilation of foreign laborers in the Russian Federation. This is taking place simultaneously with

Russia's promotion of integration through the EEU and can be interpreted as another form of "blackmailing" Central Asian states into joining the entity. At the same time, xenophobic rhetoric in the media is a threat to Russian national security in itself as it challenges unity and integrity of the Federation with 85 subjects via dehumanization of anything "non-Russian" - ethnic minorities, guest workers, foreigners generally, and even citizens of the Russian Federation of non-Slavic descent.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

A. For the Russian Government

Security of the regime provided at the expense of media freedom in the country that claims global superpower status is a dangerous path to take. No doubt, the Russian media will continue politicizing migration and refugee inflow in the EU out of its political and geo-strategic interests. However, when it comes to reporting on domestic migration issues, the government officials play a key role as their statements are quoted in the media, their perceptions on migration are passed down to the masses and should consider generating a different rhetoric. Xenophobic messages and demonization of anything "non-Russian" is a security threat in itself for the Federation with 85 diverse federal subjects.

B. For the Russian media

As media plays a key role in shaping opinion over a given issue, it can also spark violence and inter-ethnic hatred by portraying newcomers (refugees, labor migrants, foreigners generally) in a negative tone. Such media rhetoric provokes xenophobic mood in the society and creates barriers for peaceful inter-ethnic relations and for the construction of a diverse and multinational society that the Russian Federation strives to be. In the age of information technology boom the need for socially responsible,

balanced and objective reporting is in dire demand. Whatever the agenda, the media must use correct terminology when reporting and must differentiate between refugees, immigrants, emigrants, labor migrants and ethnic minorities, which is often not the case.

C. For the German Government

The German government should pay close attention to the Russian media and its ability to influence the Russian-Germans. Of course, a free and democratic society cannot afford such control and influence over media as can the Russian Federation, but understanding the potential impact of the Russian media, its ability to spark protest activity in Germany, to support right-wing nationalists and to discredit the German government in the eyes of the German constituency is of strategic significance.

D. For the Central Asian media

Central Asian migrants are marginalized in the host society – Russia – as well in their mother states, as there are few positive messages concerning this group of people. The Russian news reports that tend to spotlight threats and negativity linked to migrants are then domesticated in the home societies as frustrations come into play. That their motherland is negatively represented by fellow countrymen and women, who in the search for “quick” and “easy” money migrate to Russia. Central Asian media platforms should spotlight such themes as what motivates people to become migrants, what difficulties migrants face in the sense of registration and obtaining proper documentation in the host society and how/if the home diplomatic services are providing the necessary services to their citizens working abroad.

ANNEX I

IN-DEPTH EXPERT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Question 1:	How do you evaluate the role of media is shaping perceptions about the current refugee inflow into Europe?
Question 2:	Given the deterioration of relations between the Russian Federation and the West, how do you react to the accusations of the Russian media in having launched a full scale warfare against the West?
Question 3:	What are the media advantages and disadvantages in the Western liberal democracies?
Question 4:	In the case of the scandal with a girl named Lisa in Germany, Russian media and Russian-speaking community in Germany responded very actively to the alleged accusations of refugees in raping the child, even Russia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov, got involved in the case and demanded justice for "our Lisa". How would you react to such an active involvement of Russia in the German affairs and the sudden connection drawn between the Russian-speaking Germans and the wider "Russian world"?
Question 5:	Various Russian media outlets have been referring to Europe as "the old lady" lately, do you believe there is a certain greater meaning behind such adjectives given the context of the current relations between Russia and the West?
Question 6:	How would you address Russia's accusations of the German media of being too soft, too tolerant and not objective when it comes to reporting on behaviors of refugees in Germany?
Question 7:	Do you believe there is a clear understanding among the German constituency about the number of refugees the country can sustain, their legal status, employability, assimilation process and duration of intended stay?



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