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IMAGE OF RUSSIA IN POLISH PRESS – STUDY OF COLLECTIVE REPRESENTATIONS¹

Abstract

Field of research pointed out by the author refers to constructing collective identities, problem of media representations or consolidation of the stereotypes and clichés. Presented analysis is focused on Russia's image emerging from news in Polish press published from 1991 to 2005. The main aspect taken into consideration refers to general dimension of creating texts which located nowadays Russia in historical and cultural context. Such approach involved revealing the hidden motivations and investigating the profound meaning of texts.

Abstrakt

Problematyka podjęta w artykule koncentruje się wokół konstruowania tożsamości zbiorowych, tworzenia reprezentacji medialnych oraz konsolidacji stereotypów i klisz. Autorka analizuje obraz Rosji wyłaniający się z tekstów informacyjnych i publicystycznych publikowanych w polskiej prasie w latach 1991-2005. Głównym aspektem analizy pozostaje mechanizm tworzenia tekstów, odsłaniający ukryte motywy sytuujące Rosję w określonym kontekście kulturowo-ideologicznym.

¹ Text of this article presents findings from doctoral dissertation: *The image of Russia in cultural and ideological discourse. Study of collective imagination in Polish press from 1991 to 2005*, written under supervision of dr. hab., Prof. Adam Bartoszek, and defended at Silesian University in July 2009.

1. The subject of research

Presented analysis is focused on twofold insight into set of press news concerning Russia, published in years 1991 -2005. The first aspect referred to general dimension of creating texts which located nowadays Russia in historical and cultural Such approach involved revealing the hidden motivations and investigating the profound meaning of texts – I concentrated on components building frame for Russia's representation in Polish press. Looking at Russia's image with reference to the theory of discourse understood as a "text in context"², provide the field of observation this image through the keynote press topics and cultural and ideological contexts accompanying them. The second aspect of analysis was based on the assumption about the existence of lasting and sustained mental structures forming the Polish collective imagination towards Russian issue. Insight into the press discourse as the source and seedbed of collective representations enabled to show the regularity, invariabilities, petrified meaning in the area of depicting Russia. Both directions of research constructed the basis for empirical description how texts exist and function in culture. As so I tried to define what do we mean saying and thinking of 'Russia', what does this term consist of, in what way this notion functions in the process of communication, and finally – what substance it refers to?

On the ground of the communication theory I read 'Russia' as a certain password – idea signifying particular content. Michael Fleischer claims, that having discussion about Russia, or similarly created categories, (like e.g. Germany, Europe, etc.) we actually "are debating about cultural constructs rather than about facts, or inversely – what is being speechlessly accepted by participants of culture as facts is a constructive

² Nijakowski L., *Domeny symboliczne. Konflikty narodowe i etniczne w wymiarze symbolicznym*, Wyd. Scholar, Warszawa 2006, s. 17.

concept indeed, concept which was generated to due to communicational purposes and while conducting proper communication they serve as material. In point of fact we are not talking about e.g. Germany, but about collective construct Germany, since this object in other form than the construct generally speaking represents nothing"³. Subject of this research can be defined as an attempt to obtain answers to question of collective representations pertaining to the construct of Russia. In order to realize the established issues, the following hypotheses were established: First hypothesis – In Polish press publications exists a so-called 'Russian code', that is a fixed tendency of depicting Russia in the schematic and stereotypical way, which appears as the culturally and ideologically formulated manner of the representation of Russian issues. Second hypothesis – Culturally and historically formed way of thinking about Russia is reproduced in press and documentary texts - set of images closed in the 'Russian code' has no inclination for change, what can be described in terms of Durkheim's collective representations.

Third hypothesis – Press texts often exploit the myth of Poland as the 'bulwark of Christianity', emphasizing the particular role Poland performs on frontiers of the Western civilization, underlining the Polish historical mission. The myth of bulwark is being activated in context of international politics is being activated and prevents the content of themes from the renegotiation their meaning.

Fourth hypothesis – In spite of diversities between analyzed newspapers and magazines the 'Russian code' remains constant and unchangeable

2. Method of analysis and research material

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³ Fleischer M., *Europa, Niemcy, USA i Rosja w polskim systemie kultury*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2004, s. 7.

I was examining Polish press discourse from two points of view, assuming the following criteria: 1) formal criteria: evident and hidden contents of messages, linguistic and nonlinguistic means of persuasion, language axiology – value judgments in text; 2) interpretative criteria: contents implied by cultural, political, situational context – stereotypes and prejudice activated in texts. By interpretative criteria I meant the contents appearing in consequences of cultural, political, social or ideological implications. I identified and described this set of criteria as keynote motives – themes, thematic topics, in frames of which Russia was being presented. These certain motifs became the main tool of analysis: provided with interpretative and operational categories they were used as units of organizing research material. Preliminary research let me to distinguish the themes, around which the image of Russia was being built:

Empire – aggressive and expansive country not hiding its imperial aspirations; noticeable in political context of the news such as dominating role in international affairs, upholding position of the main player in region.

Wild East – country plunged in normative and organizational chaos, which was being characterized by lack of rules, lack of civilization and far behind from western patterns.

The Possessed (Devils) – Russian Federation described by political elites and officials of the state: president, secret service, clerks, governors etc.

Dead souls – Russia depicted through citizens; in this case community with the brand of *homo sovieticus*, apathetic, indifferent and formless.

Friends Muscovites – positive context of presenting Russia in terms of Slav brotherhood, cultural closeness as well as sympathy and solidarity with Russian people against Russia's authorities.

European (traveller) – looking at Russia through superiority of the Western civilization and stressing that Poland is an equal member of European community. Metaphorically – emphasizing the role of Poland as a peculiar interpreter of the Eastern issues to do West.

In order to realize research issues the critical discourse analysis was applied. To reveal the structure of press discourse one should establish the connection of studies text with the context, that is to read the message through the interpretative frame of knowledge, values and aspirations assigned to the recipient. In discourse's structure a permanent reproduction of the society is occurring. In conducted research I used diverse range of tools – rhetorical analysis, semiotic analysis, pragmatic analysis and content analysis.

Semantic content of each of the motives mentioned above was characterized in two dimensions – literal an discoursive (including surplus of meaning noticeable in applying metaphors, hyperboles, metonymy, etc.). Category of motif allowed me to classify the research material into six main groups. Articles, where more than one theme was identified, were ascribed to as many themes as there were found. Research material was newspapers (Gazeta collected from Polish Wyborcza, Rzeczpospolita, Super Express) and weekly magazines (Polityka, Wprost, Newsweek Polska) with high number of edition. Analysis included insight into press reaction to 17 occurrences which took place in mutual Polish-Russian relationships between 1991 – 2005:

\mathbf{V}	Ascribed situation
alue X	
1	Beginning of withdrawing Soviet troops from Polish
	territory, analyzed period: 15.04. – 22.04.1991.
2	Celebration of the 50 th anniversary of Warsaw
	uprising without the participation of president Boris
	Yeltsin, analyzed period: 02.08. – 16.08.1994.

	3	Beginning of the 1st war in Chechnya, analyzed period: 12.12. – 24/26.12.1994.
	4	Poland's accession to NATO, analyzed period: 13/14.03 – 26.03.1999.
	5	Beginning of the 2nd war in Chechnya, analyzed period: 01.10 – 14.10.1999.
	6	Dismissing 9 Russian diplomats from Poland underthe charge of espionage, analyzed period: 21.01 – 03.02.2000.
	7	Election of Vladimir Putin for the Office of president, analyzed period: 27.03 – 08.04.2000 .
	8	Catastrophe of submarine 'Kursk', analyzed period: 16.08 – 29.08.2000 .
	9	Terrorist attack on the Moscow Dubrovka Theatre, analyzed period: $24.10 - 07.11$. 2002.
	1	Re-election of Vladimir Putin, analyzed period:
0	_	16.03 – 29.03.2004.
	1	Poland's accession to European Union, analyzed
1		period: 04.05 – 17.05.2004 .
	1	Terrorist attack on the school in Bieslan, analyzed
2		period: 02.09 – 14.09.2004.
3	1	Beginning of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, analyzed period: 01.12 – 14.12.2004
4	1	Decision of naming one of the Warsaw's roundabouts with Dzhokhar Dudaev name, analyzed
-		period: 04.03 – 17.03.2005.
	1	60th anniversary of the end of world war two in
5		Moscow, analyzed period: 10.05 – 22.05.2005.
	1	The robbery committed on children of Russian
6		diplomats in Warsaw and batteries of Poles in Moscov, analyzed period: 02.08 – 15.08.2005.
	1	Celebration of Day of National Unity, analyzed
7		period: 05.11 – 19/20.11.2005 .

Table 1: Appendix of analyzed situations

Two events set the turning point of the studied material — withdrawing Soviet troops from Polish territory as the initial event and establishing the establishing the Day of National Unity as the final one — were not chosen by accident. The idea was to make the most of their symbolical overtone. For each of events the period of analysis was made in order to show how selected topics were presented in press. The period of examining each event took twelve editions for daily newspapers (two weeks) and two editions of weekly magazines (2 weeks) from the day selected as initial for every event, including holidays and special editions. According to the mentioned criteria, 467 articles were being collected and 123 among them made up a sample for content analysis.

3. Presentation of findings

Empirical analysis resulted in showing the manner of functioning of the image of Russia in the documentary and press discourse, i.e. selecting the set of components which constitute it's social image. Analysis of symbolical practices gave me an insight to the society from the point of view of dominating ideology and Foucault's complex of power and knowledge⁴. Studying the discourse is an attempt to descript the social knowledge about Russia existing in Polish society.

An image of Russia is getting out of the corpus of analyzed texts as a mental structure formed on the sources of cultural knowledge. Critical insight into "Russian discourse" illustrates the persistence of these structures reduced into catalogue of conventional images. The image of Russia broadcasts the social content assigned to Russian issues, sets up the common meaning through the recipients of discourse and

⁴ Foucault M., *Archeologia wiedzy*, przeł. A. Siemek, PWN, Warszawa 1977, s. 94.

explains this element of reality. In this study I want to report the findings concerning processes of building cognition through six main motives and present the photography as a part of text, which can be examined as discourse⁵.

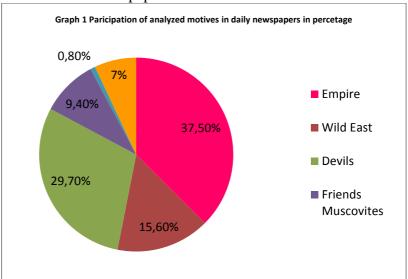
The themes in frames of which Russia is being presented are concerned as examples of petrified meaning. Reconstruction of the cognitive organization is possible on the basis of premises coming from the text – lexical and discursive indicators of appearing of particular motives⁶.

The identification of the motif proceeded with reference to appropriate language units. Units meaning and standing for the Empire, Devils, Wild East, Dead souls, Friends Muscovites and European were treated as empirical premise of the occurrence of given mental structures. The process of building the cognitive organization in the discourse was depicted with the application of content analysis – quantitative characteristics of appearing distinguished motives. The quantitative element in studying the discourse enables to notify the general features of the Russia's image in press, and also provides with observation of changes in the tendency of depicting Russia in period of time. The volume of obtained research material forced me into applying restrictions in content analysis – the conducted examination was partial and included 188 editions of newspapers and magazines (102 editions of daily newspapers and 86 editions of weeklies). Conducted analysis enabled to situate Russia on a "mental map" of communication community, map created by newspapers and magazines having highest positions in Polish press market. Press sources selected to analysis differed in both of world view and

⁵ Reconstruction of discourse proceeded according to the interpretative key emphasizing five dimensions: 1) the purpose of discourse, 2) the process of building cognition, 3) the axiology of the discursive space, 4) the structure, 5) the photography as the component of discourse.

⁶ Content of motives was defined in two dimensions – lexical (dictionary meaning) and discursive (including surplus of meaning hidden in metaphors, irony etc).

the style of the presentation the news, what allowed to observe the dominating, "global" tendency in creating the image of Russia in the polish press discourse. Graph 1 shows the use of analyzed motives in newspapers⁷:



In the set of texts coming from daily newspapers the Russia's image is mainly constructed on the motif of *Empire* (37.50%) – scheme enhancing the image of Russia mostly as political power and referring to the imperial historical legacy. The exposition of the *Empire* motif appears already on the level of superstructures, i.e. in titles, subtitles and leads. The *Empire* is functioning both in the form of intertextual references, such as "the Empire strikes back", as well as of lexical units meaning the supremacy or the dominance – i.e. *Russia invades*, *Moscow*

 7 All the presented graphs come from the author's study.

⁸ Porowski B., *Imperium kontratakuje*, "Super Express", nr 281 (1099), 12.12.1994.

⁹ Łomanowski A., *Rosja wkracza do Czeczenii*, "Gazeta Wyborcza", nr 288 (1672), 12.12.1994.

reprimands¹⁰. Commonly used expression "Russia of Putin" stands for the metonymy of the empire – indicates the particular way Russia is govern. Motif of Empire includes also a suggestion of danger Russia can cause.

On the second position in analyzed texts the motif of Devils is placed (29.70%). Whereas the motif of Empire is an abstract political-symbolic structure, the motif of Devils is an exemplification, personification of the action of the Empire. *Devils* are seen as figures of Empire – acting subjects responsible for the politics of the Russian Federation. Devils realize the idea of the *Empire*, they introduce it into reality. *Devils* are seen as a synonym of the Russian power, towards which accusations are uttered, i.e. of concealing the truth: Authorities knew the truth¹¹. The third place in the percentage use of motives is gained by the Wild East with the result 15.60%. The structure of this motif is based on the opposition between East and West, between western rationalism and modernization and backwardness and underdevelopment. The geographical space fuses with the symbolical one, what determines perceiving Russia in the paradigm of eastern barbarity and chaos. Wild East is being used in all texts concerning the rank regained by Poland among the European countries; it is the metaphor of entering the bright and civilized western community, leaving behind unwanted and imposed by force eastern legacy. The way of perceiving East is connected with discourse production and distribution. This relation is evident on the example of delivering information on so-called "Orange revolution" in Ukraine. Authors marked the regions supporting Wiktor Janukowycz with "eastern stigma" of apprehension and backwardness¹². The

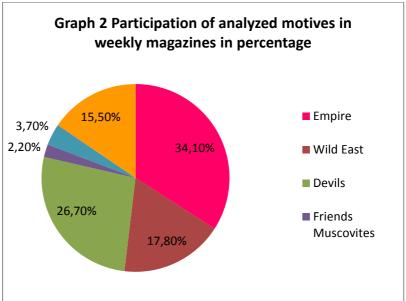
⁽maw) Moskwa karci, "Gazeta Wyborcza", nr 59, 11.03.2005.

¹¹ Popowski S., *Władze znały prawdę*, "Rzeczpospolita", nr 2094, 23.08.2000.

¹² Reszka P., *Niebiescy pod okiem Lenina*, "Rzeczpospolita", nr 3395, 01.12.2004:

Wild East is a label of relic of a past – imaging Russia and eastern Ukraine as the post-communistic wreckage or curiosity.

The use of motives in weekly magazines is presented in Graph 2:



In the set of texts from weekly magazines the leading theme is *Empire* as well with the result of 34.10%. *Empire* appears both in lexical and discursive meaning – very often in ironic context. Effect of irony is achieved by juxtaposing lexical meaning with its actual reference, e.g. *rickety Empire*¹³. Imperial idea accompanied with the contrary expression situates *Empire* in quotation marks, changing its meaning into opposite. Motif of *Empire* was exploited also in lexical dimension – appealing to political and military contexts. Applying the lexical dimension of theme, authors identified Russia in terms of economic,

bp, Rosja i Kuczma: cała wstecz dla Ukrainy, "Gazeta Wyborcza", nr 287, 08.12.2004.

 $^{^{13}}$ Laskowski W., $\it Rozklekotane$ imperium, "Wprost", nr 36 (927), 03.09.2000.

political and military aspirations. The *Empire* is also the convenient metonymy of Russia governed by Vladimir Putin for example by making comparisons Putin to tsar, like Vladimir the Great¹⁴, or almighty Putin¹⁵, what significantly marks supremacy and imperial origins of Russian authorities. Applying the figure of tsar is an example of negative evaluation the way Russia is governed. 'Vladimir Putin' is a structure connoting negative features of the political system in Russia. 'Vladimir Putin' as the rhetorical structure is a pillar on which the theme of Devils relies. The motif of Devils is most often used in weekly magazines (26.70 %). Devils turn up mostly in the metonymic form - the figure of Putin constitutes a mental shortcut, which refers to sinister intentions and portentous action of the Russian state – Putin's victory¹⁶, the war of Putin¹⁷. Devils theme appears also in the dictionary meaning: depicting Russian authorities with the stigma of devilish features – for example Moscow devils¹⁸. Third position in weekly press is obtained by the motif of Wild East, which appeared both in lexical and discursive dimension. Wild East is a category of political and aesthetic nature, confronting Russia with Europe. This motif is a convenient way of presenting Russia in terms of backwardness, chaos and barbarity - becoming the main metaphor for the negative situations taking place in the territory of the Russian Federation. The metaphor of East enables to apply two techniques of persuasion - firstly it lets to classify strategic events such as Polish accession to NATO or EU as improving and declaring the European identity of Poland; secondly it locates Russia on the other side of the barricade, as not fitting in

¹⁴ Laskowski W., Giziński J., Władimir Mocny, "Wprost", nr 14, 02.04.2000.

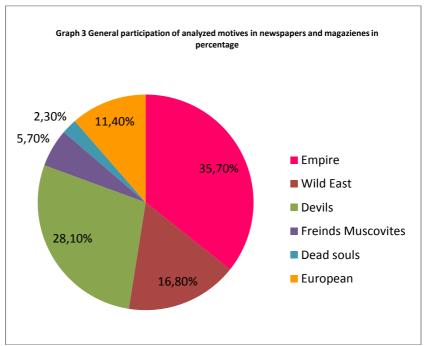
bp, *Putin wszechwładny*, "Polityka", nr 12 (2444), 20.03.2004.

Lubowski G., Putinowe zwycięstwo, "Wprost", nr 44, 03.11.2002.

¹⁷ Caryl C., Conat E., Wojna Putina, "Newsweek", nr 45, 10.11.2002.

Laskowski W., Moskiewskie biesy, "Wprost", nr 32, 14.08.2005.

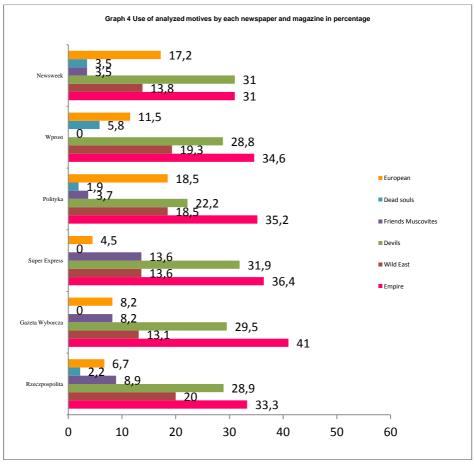
with the western standards. General usage of motives both in daily and weekly press is shown in the Graph 3:



Motif of the *Empire* is the one which acquired the status of the discourse keystone with the result 35.70 %. Systematic analysis showed that this theme was the most willingly used rhetorical scheme both in daily newspapers and in weeklies. A symbolic dimension of the *Empire* is persistent and invariable – Russia is perceived with the etiquette of the "empire of the evil", in the system of the collective thinking Russia represents the dangerous and aggressive model of the administration. In terms of the frequency of usage in analyzed press the motif of *Devils* is the second one. *Devils* are seen as the exemplification and the personification of the action of the *Empire*. High result – 28.10 % in the general scale – confirms the thesis about identifying the image of Russia with representations of particular persons. The

empire has the face of Vladimir Putin who is the central figure among Devils. Third position (16.80%) is obtained by a motif of the Wild East - in Polish collective imagination the East invariably remains the area of evil, and the permanent confrontation between the East and West is a natural component of Polish ethos. East indicates moral, aesthetic and political threat against which one should resist. As fourth in general usage motives the European was classified (11.40%). Content of the motif of European refers to western identity of Poland, which results in common belief of cultural superiority over Russia. The metaphor of Europe allows to exclude Russia from the family of European countries – adjective Russian becomes an antonym of the positively estimated expression *European*. In analyzed daily newspapers and weeklies the motif of friend Muscovites achieved the total result of 5.70%. Basis of this cognitive structure exploits the division between Russian (authorities) and Russian citizens, who are victimized by the methods of government. In the examined sampling friends Muscovites personified the scale of suffering and dramas, which became obvious to the inhabitants of Russian Federation. Friends Muscovites are a symbolical image of victims of the empire. The lowest share in general usage of motives by daily and weekly press is reached by *Dead souls* (2.30%). Motif of servile attitude towards authorities, stagnation and resentment turned out to be marginal.

The question of persistence of "Russian code" in spite of diversities between analyzed newspapers and magazines is illustrated in the Graph 4:



The use of analyzed motives in each daily and weekly newspaper let observe keystone of discourse in press carrying different outlook options out. Image of Russia in chosen newspapers is not homogenous. It is caused mainly by significant differences in the number of articles concerning studied issues. Content analysis allows to notice, that differences in numbers of articles referring to particular events are connected

with diversity of press outlooks¹⁹. In the set of 70 texts from daily newspapers 29 comes from "Gazeta Wyborcza", 27 from "Rzeczpospolita" while only 14 from "Super Express". Twice low number of articles related to studied issues in "Super Express" is caused the style of this paper - orientated to discourse of sensation²⁰. As a tabloid, "Super Express" delivers twice fewer texts to events of strategic and political rank which are not directly connected with Poland. Analyzing 12 editions of this daily newspaper for each of event shows, that presenting politics in its institutional form is not attractive for "Super Express". E.g. after Vladimir's Putin victory in presidential elections 2000 (event No. 10) in next 12 editions of "Super Express" we can find only two texts referring to this event. Socalled "orange revolution" in the Ukraine (event No. 13) did not also turn out to be noticeable topic – in the next 12 editions of "Super Express" there were only four articles, including one concerning style of Julia Timoshenko²¹. "Super Express" is focused upon the sensational, dramatic and disastrous situations. Among analyzed issues widely related were terrorist attacks and incidents. Twelve next editions for the event No. 12 (terrorist attack in Bieslan) brought 19 articles published in 9 editions, including two front pages. Disaster of the atomic submarine "Kursk" (event No.8), beating Poles in Moscow (event No.16) or resuming the warfare in Chechnya (event No.5) were also

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¹⁹ E.g. Texts concerning the event No.12 (attack on the Dubrovka Theatre) appeared in each daily newspaper in two editions taken into consideration in analysis – delivering six articles to study. However event No. 6 (re-election of Vladimir Putin) found the response only in the first analysed edition of "Gazeta Wyborcza" and "Rzeczpospolita", whereas "Super Express" published no information related to this event. It means that in relation to the event No. 6 daily newspapers provided with only two articles.

²⁰ See also: Grzymała-Kazłowska, A. *Konstruowanie "innego". Wizerunki imigrantów w Polsce*, Wydawnictwo UW, Warszawa 2007, s. 127 – 129.

²¹ Suchar M., *Sto twarzy Madame Ukrainy*, "Super Express", nr 289 (4136), 10.12.2004.

willingly commented in "Super Express". Differences in numbers of articles are noticeable in the set of texts from weekly magazines. Fifty three texts were collected; among them 22 come from "Polityka", twenty from "Wprost" and only eleven from "Newsweek Polska". But in this case lower number of articles does not mean lack of interest in Russian issues in "Newsweek" – it results only from the fact, that this magazine appeared on the Polish press market in 2001. Conducted content analysis let to notice the general tendency in portraying Russia on the basis on percentage values for the use of each motif. Moreover, applying the quantitative method in studying the discourse enables to answer the question, in what way each of chosen newspapers carry out cognitive organization based on the set of themes.

4. Final conclusions

Conducted research enabled to draw the following conclusions:

Analysis enabled to confirm the first hypothesis, assuming the existence of 'Russian code' in the Polish press. By 'Russian code' I mean collective forms of perceiving Russia, preserved in linguistic and visual paradigm. The image of Russia is subjected to ideological and political purposes of discourse.

Second hypothesis, concerning the invariability of meaning among Russian issues was also confirmed. Culturally formed way of thinking and depicting Russia is closed into archetypical motives. Motives as mental structures demonstrate the temporary continuity, what was presented in content analysis. Differences in the frequency of applying particular motives are determined by variety of analyzed events and press sources.

Conducted research confirmed the third hypothesis, assuming the activation of myth of the 'bulwark'. Starting the complex of symbolic-mythological ideas justifying the particular role of Poland in Europe was evident in the context of strategic

events – accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union. Opinion press locates Poland as a 'link' between East and West, as a teacher of democracy for the East and as a 'translator' of East to the West. Myth of the 'bulwark' was also activated while supporting 'orange revolution' in the Ukraine; it was suitable to convey Polish aspirations to be perceived as a sign of liberty. Myth of the 'bulwark' organizes the content of motives and blocks the renegotiation of meaning concerning Russia. Idea of Poland as a 'bulwark' requires reproducing the polarized vision of the world, it provides with persistence of negatively constructed 'Russian code'.

The fourth hypothesis was partly confirmed. The 'Russian code' functions in all analyzed press sources, but conducted research revealed significant differences between opinion-forming and sensational press. The discourse of the sensational press is more radicalized, openly assessing, overusing colloquial style. Russia in "Super Express" has a face of Putin – overuse of personalization distinguishes "Super Express's" style among other press sources.

Final reflection coming from the analysis of ideological motives building Russia's image in Polish press realizes, that cognitive structures based on collective representations are invariable way of presenting Russian issues to Polish readers. Motives serve as habitual labels imposing black and white perceiving Russia in Polish discourse.

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