

# TRANSFORMATION OF THE EUROPE'S CONCEPT IN WWII SPEECHES BY RUSSIAN PRESIDENTS (2004-2019)

Nataliia Steblyna<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

*Historically, the Europe's concept in Russian state discourse has been constantly transforming, due to current events. Nowadays, the concept's understanding can't be described without WWII topic – obviously a crucial point in the modern Russian ideology. To explore the image of Europe in this discourse, the speeches of the Russian presidents given on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May from 2000 to 2019 were content analyzed. The transformations of Europe in the Russian state discourse about WWII as were as Europe's roles in the WWII were defined. Up to 2009 the differentiation between the post-Soviet countries and "far abroad" Europe was constantly used. After the Russo-Georgian war, and mostly after the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas, the construction of a bipolar world started. Russian isolation can be observed in 2010-2019. Europe's roles have been changing. In early Putin's speeches (2000-2003) this topic seems not to be significant. Before 2008 Europe was described as both active and passive in the war. Afterwards "passiveness" prevailed. Thus, in the Russian state discourse, after 2008 the WWII was used to show the opposition between active/strong Russia and passive/weak Europe, which provide threats to peace on the planet.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Political communication, Political speeches, Europe, Russia, WWII*

## INTRODUCTION

For more than 20 years of Putin/Medvedev/Putin ruling, the Europe's concept representation in the Russian state discourse has been transforming and usually international speeches (addressed to foreign audiences) by the Russian presidents are taking into account to recreate their interpretations of desirable "world order", interrelations with the US, Western countries etc. As for internal speeches, texts about current affairs (Messages to the Federal Assembly or New Year Appeals) are studied. Nonetheless, the Europe's concept understanding in the Russian state discourse can't be described without WWII topic – obviously a crucial point in the Soviet and now in the

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<sup>1</sup> Information and Applied Technologies Faculty, Vasyl Stus Donetsk National University. Address 600-richchya Str., 21, Vinnytsa, 21021, Ukraine, E-mail [n.steblyna@donnu.edu.ua](mailto:n.steblyna@donnu.edu.ua).

modern Russian history. Trying to frame the relations between Russia and neighbouring EU-states (Poland, Baltic states), Russian journalists use the term “fascists”, and Russian politicians express their concerns about the fate of WWII monuments and ask Europe to unite against “fascism restoration” (Ru.sputniknews.lt, 2016). In the Ukrainian-Russian conflict, the terms from that period have been used very often. Donbas separatists associate themselves with WWII Soviet soldiers, who are fighting against fascists (Rusvesna.su, 2014). Nowadays WWII concept is a powerful message, it helps to gather Russian people around the state/strong leader and even go to the war against “fascist regimes” in neighbouring countries.

The Europe concept is a part of this modern Russian version of WWII. On the one hand, it's used to recall the USSR's “deliberation” of several European countries, on the other hand, to represent Russia's version of desirable Europe, where European countries are sorted and placed in an hierarchical structure: core countries/backward countries. Thus, speaking about this state discourse, Barthes's statement about the construction of symbols should be mentioned. The researcher said that a symbol loses its original content and is filled with the appropriate meaning, according to the situation (Barthes, 1989). Considering this observation, let's state the aims of the research.

The first one is to reconstruct the transformations of Europe in the Russian state discourse about WWII. Here European countries naming will be demonstrative; I assume, that changing the priorities in Russian relations with the West mirrors the mentions of some European countries as winners at WWII in the state discourse.

The second aim is to define Europe's roles in the WWII official speeches: passive as being “liberated” or active as the winner of the battles. Thus, it'll be possible to discover the periods of Europe's activeness/passiveness and to compare them with some current events (for instance, military conflicts).

Let's define research questions of the paper:

- RQ1. What individual countries, territories and blocks of countries are present in the Russian state discourse about WWII?
- RQ2. How does the meaning in the discourse changed in between 2000-2019? Is it possible to distinguish some periods?
- RQ3. How is Europe characterized in the WWII speeches and how this characteristic developed over time?

The paper is organized as follows: Russian understanding of Europe and the transformations of this understanding in the discourse by scholars

is studied. Afterwards CIS, anti-Hitler coalition and other countries and territories perception in the Russian state discourse about WWII is analyzed and transformations of the perception are defined. Europe's roles in the speeches by Russian presidents are observed and changes of the roles are discovered.

The material of the research is Medvedev's and Putin's speeches on the Victory day from 2000 (the 1<sup>st</sup> Putin's 9<sup>th</sup> of May speech) to 2019 on the Krasnaya Square. The period was chosen in order to compare relatively liberal periods in modern Russian history, periods of Putin and Medvedev presidency, and, of course, the times of the Russo-Georgian war, the war in Donbas and the annexation of Crimea.

The leading method was content-analysis; such units of the study were chosen:

- mentions of different countries, territories and blocks of countries (for example "the anti-Hitler coalition", "CIS" or Europe) as winners in the war;
- mentions of Europe, European countries as being active or passive during the war (for instance Soviet people "liberated the people of Europe from the fascists" (Putin, 2015) – passive; "we never divide the victory to be ours or foreign. And we will remember the help of our allies forever – the USA, Great Britain, France, other countries of anti-Hitler coalition, German and Italian antifascists" (Putin, 2005).

The Russo-Georgian war as well as Ukrainian Russian conflicts, the processes of European integration and other development have generated questions about European borders, European countries and European essence in Russian state discourse. And, scholars described some changes in the West and Russia relations and therefore defined reasons of the "new Cold War" rhetoric restoration (Harasymiw, 2010; Sakwa, 2015; Weiss, Pomerantsev, 2015). It was defined, that in the discourse the European affiliation of some European countries (mainly post-Soviet) was questioned and characterized as undefined, "contested" (Asmus, 2010), such terms as "buffer zone", "grey zone", "backyard" were used. Russian officials' reaction on the processes of democratization in the post-Soviet countries, NATO expansion was reconstructed, it was stressed on lack of proper recognition, unfair attitudes, even feelings of danger (Sakwa, 2015; Casier, 2016; Scazzieri, 2017). Russia's denial of some European values in the process of the national identity design was also observed (White, Feklyunina, 2014; Nunlist, Thranert, 2015).

However, if we speak about post-Cold war agenda restoration, WWII image in the modern Russian state discourse is crucial for understanding the country's current attitudes towards Europe and the transformations of these attitudes at the beginning of 21st century. Moreover, as far as WWII topic is one of the leading in the discourse, it's possible to track the changes of the perception in dynamics for a long period. So, the analysis of modern Russian WWII speeches can help to observe consistent attempts to create the "desirable" European space as a reaction on international agenda between 2000-2019. And to define Europe's borders (according to European countries mentions) and the borders' movements in Russian state discourse more properly.

## **1 EUROPE AND "RUSSIAN SPHERE OF INFLUENCE"**

Historically, Russia's perceptions of Europe, its' borders were unstable, there were some periods in the state discourse, when Russia was included in or excluded from Europe. And after the USSR collapse there was a small period of "Russia as Europe" image popularity (Casier, 2016, p.18). Afterwards the paradigm has been changed. There are some reasons for that. The first is inequality: Russia had to be perceived as equal among other European states, however, the model of "a pupil" / "a teacher" emerged (Casier, 2016, p. 18); Russia didn't gain proper treatment by Europeans (Weiss, Pomerantsev, 2015), and the USA (Harasymiw, 2010, p. 19). And the position about the Western countries' "victory" in the Cold War wasn't accepted by the Russian officials, the end of the war was called "asymmetrical" (Sakwa, 2015, p. 2) by them. The second reason is an imaginative character of the relations between Russia and the West, where the EU and Russia react not to the reality, but to some beliefs: "the EU acts on the basis of what it believes Russia has become... Russia is primarily led by the images it holds of the EU" (2016, p.13).

The date of the paradigm "Russia as Europe" change isn't clear. In some cases it depends on the figure of the president, where Yeltsin is perceived as pro-European, Putin – anti-European, Medvedev – pro-Putin. Sometimes the second Chechen war is mentioned as a cause of "losing the West" (Smith, 2014, p. 111). Usually Putin's Munich speech in 2007 is concerned to be the point. However, Russo-Georgian war, US missile shield construction plans by NATO in Poland and Czech Republic (2007-2008) are also named (World Freedom Foundation, 2015, p. 52). Thus, these changes must be represented in Russian state discourse as well. And we'll be able to see this in the texts.

If we speak about the new paradigm, where Russia isn't the part of Europe, non-European Russian identity is constructed. According to the official discourse, Russia has its own way and shouldn't copy European experience (White, Feklyunina, 2014). Youngs argues that "Putin did not even pretend that Russia should seek its identity as a Western state" (2017, p. 41). That's why the concept of Russia as a "sovereign democracy" emerged. Sovereign or neutral means declaring that a country is looking for its own way of development, and foreign influence can be harmful.

So, according to the Russian state, the discourse of the two ways of being a democratic state can be used: the European one and the Russian one: democratic values aren't universal, but have different peculiarities in different countries (Nunlist, Thranert, 2015, p. 4). Furthermore, in Russian authorities' point of view, these European democratic values can be used as a kind of soft power and destroy independent country's sovereignty: "Russian political leaders, starting with President Putin, are convinced that the West – through NATO and European Union expansion and their support for efforts at democratization – is interfering in its sphere of influence" (Loftus, Kanet, 2017, p. 15).

In Russia, European democratic values are also understood as an instrument, which was used to destroy the USSR (Slobodchikoff, Davis, 2017).

European influence in the Russian authorities' perception can even be regarded as a kind of aggression (Scazzieri, 2017), which can be dangerous even if this influence concerns neighbouring countries. This is also correlate with Dugin's vision of the eternal war between "Atlanticist sea powers" and "Eurasian continental land powers" (Umland, 2007).

Thus, the construction of "desirable" Europe becomes important in order to feel safe about the both: identity and independence.

According to the Russian presidents there are two Europes: "an experienced and pragmatic Europe of old member states and an inexperienced and emotional Europe of ex-Soviet states", and the latter is not independent from the US interference; according to Putin, these states need their officials to be approved by the ambassador of the United States (White, Feklyunina, 2014). Such countries as Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova sometimes even are not considered to be "the real Europe", as they are regarded as "Europe's Contested Neighborhood" (Asmus, 2010).

Thus, Europe is constructed as a kind of hierarchy with major countries and secondary ones. These secondary countries are sometimes referred to as Europe's "backyard" (for example, Baltic states (Nosovich, 2015) or Ukraine

(Regnum.ru, 2016)). After the visa-free regime Ukraine was perceived in the Russian state controlled media as a source of cheap labor for Poland, and Poland, in turn, is a source of cheap labour for the old Europe. And the borders of such secondary countries are questionable, if they are not in the Russian sphere of influence: “The recognition of Ukraine’s borders had broader geopolitical underpinnings from the Russian perspective... Ukraine’s territorial integrity was respected while Ukraine remained within Russia’s sphere of influence” (Wolczuk, Dragneva, 2015, p. 102). Additionally, the movement of Ukraine towards the EU during Euromaidan was interpreted by the Kremlin as the Western interference in the affairs of independent state (Wolczuk, Dragneva, 2015, p. 101).

One more Russian project for some post-Soviet states is Novorossia, “a classically geopolitical concept concerned with Russian territorial control over the belt of land extending from southern Ukraine through to Moldova and the Danube River” (Youngs, 2017, p. 41). Such terms as Novorossia or Malorossia are used to question and undermine the independence of the state and to show that, for instance, Ukraine is a part of Russia, thus, can’t be a part of Europe.

Therefore, speaking about the Russian state discourse, the first, so called “experienced” Europe has been trying to deliver some harmful for Russia values to the other one.

That’s why for the Russian state it was crucial to construct an alternative space for the contested European/Russian countries:

- to bring “other neighboring states into its orbit as permanent members” (Nunlist, Thranert, 2015, p. 4) and to use “the brotherhood narrative” (Kushnir, 2018, p. 5);
- to “integrate and promote common understandings through regional organizations—the CIS, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, the Eurasian Economic Community and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation” (Averre, 2009, p. 1696);
- to “regain the seat at the table of global leadership that Russia had lost with the collapse of the Soviet Union” (Slobodchikoff, Davis, 2017).

Speaking about Russian image of Europe with “core” or “true” European countries and contested ones, it’s also important to define the latter. Are there only post-Soviet European countries or some countries of Warsaw pact as well? Are there any changes in the list of the countries?

In the state discourse about WWII, these changes may be vivid ones. Europe may be perceived as active one only when it's not harmful for Russia. And, vice versa, when Russian "sufferings for all the humanity" (Slobodchikoff, Davis, 2017) are mentioned and European countries' passiveness is highlighted.

In Russian modern discourse the victory day is one of the main events of the year, and annual speeches of Russian leader contains appeals not only to internal, but to international audience as well. And in the speeches about the past current affairs, friends and enemies, and "desirable" spaces are framed. As far as in Russia, as well as in China, parades are used by the authorities "to construct their legitimacy", to connect present values of the country with its past, and for this reason "rebalancing and re-writing the existing historiography and discourses" can be done (Hwang, Schneider, 2011). So, president's speech analysis can explicate this process.

## 2 COUNTRIES-PARTICIPANTS OF THE VICTORY CELEBRATION IN THE SPEECHES OF RUSSIAN PRESIDENTS

On the basis of content analysis, we can have a general picture of references about different countries in the speeches by Medvedev and Putin on the Victory day from 2000 to 2019. In table 1 we can see that the list of the participants of the victory celebrations as well as the way to refer to them differ from one year to another.

**Table 1:** *References to the participants of the celebrations (the speeches of Russian Presidents)*

	The USSR	Russia	CIS	AHC	Other
2000					
2001					the world
2002					
2003					
2004					
2005					countries of Europe, Asia, Africa, Novaya Zemlya, Alaska, Egypt, Australia, the USA, the UK, other countries AHC, German and Italian anti-fascists
2006					countries of Europe

2007					
2008					far abroad countries
2009					other countries
2010					
2011					other countries
2012					
2013					
2014					
2015					German and anti-fascists of other countries, the UK, France, the USA, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, China, India, Serbs, Mongolia and 80% of world's population
2016					
2017					
2018					
2019					Our people

## 2.1 CIS member-states

The members of the Commonwealth of Independent States are shown as a whole: “the 9th of May is a sacred date for all the CIS countries” (Putin, 2005). And it is the WWII that united all of them. And one more point: CIS member-states are opposed to other foreign countries: “The Victory Day is celebrated by millions of citizens not only in our country, but in the CIS countries, and far abroad (Medvedev, 2008). This means that in Russian presidents’ speeches, the world is structured: there are near abroad and far abroad countries, and this division doesn’t depend on the distance. Ukrainian writer Yu. Andrukhovych in his essay “Let’s name the empire just a space” said: near abroad country for post-Soviet Ukraine is Kazakhstan, not Poland, Slovakia or Hungary (Andrukhovych, 2003).

CIS countries were mentioned between 2003 and 2009, when the ideas of common space for post-Soviet republics were popular in Russia. And after 2010 the abbreviation CIS hasn’t been mentioned; only in 2015, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan were included in the speeches.

2015 was the year of 70th anniversary of WWII victory, and in Soviet and Russian tradition, the 5th or the 10th anniversary is very important, and must be presented as something special. For example, in 2010 the military

from the USA, the UK, Poland and France were the honourable guests on the Red Square. In 2005, the leaders of the USA, Germany, France, Japan, South Korea, Serbia and Montenegro, Italy, India, Great Britain, several CIS countries, etc. were invited. After the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas, the relations between Russia and Europe have become tense, however, in 2015, there was a need to emphasize the importance of the victory day, as well as Russia's efforts to gather different states under the important issue. So the loyal CIS countries were mentioned along with the USA, Great Britain, France, China, Mongolia, Serbia, and India. A lot of European leaders didn't attend the parade, so it was important to invite as many allies as possible (as "Russia Today" wrote "Half of the planet is coming to Putin") (Russian.rt.com, 2015).

## **2.2 The anti-Hitler coalition**

The countries of the anti-Hitler coalition were mentioned between 2002 and 2015 (with exception of 2003, in 2006, the term "European countries" is used, "far abroad countries" in 2008, just "other countries" in 2009 and 2011, in 2013-2014 only Russia and the USSR were mentioned). The presidents usually don't specify the certain countries, only in 2005 and 2015 several of them are voiced. However, in the speeches, anti-Hitler coalition contains such European countries as France, Great Britain, Italian and German anti-fascists. Other European countries aren't noted. So, for Russian presidents the active countries, which participated in the war, are from the "old Europe", the second other ones aren't mentioned as winners.

Additionally, between 2003 and 2009 the concept of CIS was more important for Russia, and the Victory day was used to spread common ideas and values for post-Soviet countries, to remember the old times of glory. Other European countries were referred to as something distant, as "others".

In 2013-2014, 2016-2019 Russia and / or the USSR were the only countries mentioned in the speeches. And when Putin speaks about Europe, which was rescued by the Red Army, it sounds like the whole Europe was "liberated" by the USSR.

"There were our fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers who brought freedom to Europe, and peace to the planet" (Putin, 2017).

The role of other countries of the anti-Hitler coalition has been minimized from year to year. In their speeches, the presidents argued that it was the Soviet Union, which suffered more than any other country, which "took the main and the most severe blow from the enemy" (Putin,

2006). And after 2013 it was stressed that it was mostly the USSR, Russia, who won the war.

In the post-Soviet space, this discussion about “the main winner” of WWII is an old one. According to Soviet propaganda, it was Soviet people who played the leading role in the war. This point of view is being topical among veterans, according to the data of Russian sociologists: 60% combatants consider the role of allies in the WWII as minor, while 28% think that it was significant (Ivanov, Sergeev, 2015).

### 2.3 Passive / active Europe in WWII

Thus, speaking about Russia’s interpretation of WWII, the centrality of Russia or the USSR in the battlefields should be mentioned: the USSR was a “territory where the critical events were happening” (Putin, 2005), thanks to the Victory on the 9th of May 1945 (not the 2th of September) “the new period of history began” (Medvedev, 2008). That’s why in the presidents’ speeches, Europe and European campaigns are named above all. African and Pacific campaigns were mentioned only once (in 2005 – the year of the multiple-of-5th anniversary).

In every speech, mentions Europe and the characteristics given, were analyzed, after that, we divided these characteristics into two categories: active or passive Europe. Eventually, we have 12 mentions of “passive Europe”, which was liberated by the Soviet soldiers, 6 mentions of “active Europe” as a part of the anti-Hitler coalition (tab. 2).

**Table 2:** *Active/Passive Europe*

	active	passive	Other
2000			No mentions, however, “our soldiers buried on the European battlefields”
2001			No mentions
2002			No mentions
2003		“was enslaved”	
2004			
2005	“European people resisted fascism”	Liberated	

2006		was the war arena	
2007			
2008		Liberated	
2009		Liberated	
2010		Liberated	
2011			
2012			didn't pay attention to Nazism
2013		Liberated	
2014		Liberated	
2015		Enslaved, occupied; liberated	
2016			other countries retreated
2017		Liberated	"didn't pay attention to Nazism"
2018		Rescued	
2019		Liberated	

As far as we have CIS countries/ European countries differentiation in the speeches, Russian presidents' Europe still has Soviet borders without Ukraine and Belarus. One more fact is that the European countries liberated by the Soviet army aren't mentioned at all. Even Poland, which took part in the parade in 2005 on the Red Square, wasn't mentioned in the president's speech, whereas the GB, the USA and France as well as Italian and German antifascists were noted. And this can be the explanation of Europe as a passive war participant. Additionally, the periods of European "passiveness" can be taken into account: especially 2008-2010, 2013-2014, 2016-2019. And Putin reminded everyone that "European countries" (Putin, 2015) "the powerful countries of the world" (Putin, 2017) didn't pay attention to Nazism. The most interesting wording was in 2015: "The enlightened Europe didn't notice a threat right away..."(Putin, 2015). Here, we have this opposition again: progressive/backward. However, the progressive European countries turned out to be backward.

So Russian-EU relations can also be the reason of "passive" Europe perception. And even more so: European countries are guilty in WWII. It goes without saying that Molotov-Ribbentrop pact hasn't been mentioned in the speeches at all.

## CONCLUSION

So in the Russian state discourse several points of the Europe's concept transformation can be found: in countries naming and in Europe's roles differentiation. As for RQ2: how does the meaning in the discourse changed in between 2000-2019 and what periods may be distinguished, the first point is between 2007/2008. At the beginning of 2000s countries of AHC were mentioned more often, in 2005, 2006 the expression "countries of Europe" were used; afterwards – only in the anniversaries (and in 2012). European countries (in the state Russian discourse – Western European countries mainly) became something distant, "far abroad" or just "other". Additionally, 2009 – is the last year, when CIS countries were named (it's remarkable, that Georgia withdrew from CIS in 2009). So the idea of post-Soviet countries' "brotherhood" hasn't become as issue as well. Up to 2009 the Kremlin hoped to retain some post-Soviet countries in its orbit, and the differentiation between the post-Soviet countries and "far abroad" Europe was constantly used. The presidents demonstrated the wish to cooperate with other countries to support peace in Europe. The discourse "Russia as Europe" was working. After the Russo-Georgian war, and mostly after the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas, the construction of a bipolar world has been launched. Russian isolation can be observed in the speeches 2010-2019. Here the period of Russia's isolationism has been started, the countries-partners were named (for instance in 2015), however neither CIS nor any other block wasn't mentioned.

As for RQ1: what individual countries, territories and blocks of countries are present in the discourse, European countries, the GB, France, Germany, Italy, Serbia and Belarus were named. Here close relations with Russia are definitely the case for Serbia and Belarus. Other European countries, which territories were battlefields during WWII, weren't mentioned. By the way, it was only 1997 (Yeltsin's speech), when Ukraine, Belarus, Austria, Moldova, Baltic States, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Albany, Austria and Yugoslavia were characterized as "liberated" ones. Thus, the hierarchical vision of European countries is essential here. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe are not referred to in the speeches as 'allies', these countries become "Europe" only as "liberated" ones. Some countries can be visible only in connection to Russia (like Belarus, for instance). This tradition also has its roots in the Soviet times: to invite representatives of friendly countries to some ceremonies and to mention them in the speech regardless of their role in the event, which is being celebrated.

Thus, this vision of Europe with core countries and some “buffer zone” hasn’t been changed between 2000-2019. However, before 2008 there were more close countries among the Central and Eastern European countries (CIS-members), afterwards only Belarus and Serbia remained.

As for the USSR it is not shown as a part of the coalition, the presidents use separation: our country and countries of anti-Hitler coalition. In some speeches mentions of CIS and anti-Hitler coalition are situated in different paragraphs. And the USSR used more often after 2010.

Speaking about RQ3: how Europe is characterized in the WWII speeches and how this characteristic developed over time, it’s possible to observe that Europe’s roles changed due to situation as well. In early Putin’s speeches (2000-2003) this topic seems not to be significant. The speeches themselves are shorter (340-380 words), the speaker concerned predominantly on congratulations and commemorations. For comparison, in 2015-2017 the speeches’ length increased (570-760 words). And here speculations about Europe’s role in the WWII, some threats to international security were added. As a rule, Europe is shown as a passive one; however, before 2008 it was described as active and passive as well. Afterwards “passiveness” prevailed. Thus, in the Russian state discourse, after 2008 the WWII is used to show the opposition between active/strong Russia and passive/weak Europe. Western countries provide threats to peace on the planet, and Russia is ready to solve this problem. Like in the Soviet times, Nazism, fascism and 21<sup>st</sup> century threat – terrorism – are used to “expose” “far abroad” European countries. For instance, in Brezhnev’s speech on 8th of May in 1965, there was a reference to “German militarists”, who live in a circle “war – defeat – gather strength – new war” (Brezhnev, 1970). Nowadays these terms are the arguments in a domestic policy (for example, Anti-Terrorism Laws (“Yarovaya law”) and in foreign affairs as well (See Pugach, 2017). In 2017 the message “1941-1945 we are able to repeat this” was launched in Russia. However, there was only one war in Europe in 2017: the war in Donbas. So this slogan was perceived in two ways: we are ready to conquer Ukraine and we are ready to go to Berlin.

The structure of the speech on the 9th of May has a lot in common with Brezhnev’s speeches. For instance, the speech in 1965 had several subtitles: “The heroic feat of Soviet people will live forever”, “The historical changes of post war times”, “the lessons of WWII and modern international situation” (Brezhnev, 1970). In Putin’s (mainly after 2012) and Medvedev’s speeches, we can also see a historical part, where the main battles of the European campaign are mentioned and the significance of the USSR as the war

winner is underlined. And a brief analysis of modern threats is made. Putin and Medvedev don't specify the countries, which are guilty of extremism, terrorism etc., like Brezhnev did. However, constant mentions of the Russian state TV channels about cases of extremism and fascism in neighboring countries can be remembered by the audience, and mostly the countries of Central and Eastern Europe may come to mind.

There are also no vivid differences in Putin's and Medvedev's speeches: the texts have a similar structure and a similar way to distinguish Europe, to stress the USSR's leading role in the war. However, between 2013-2019, the tonality of Putin's speeches has become more aggressive.

The WWII topic in Russian interpretation is worth further consideration, and here some comparisons between Brezhnev and Putin speeches, Yeltsin and Putin speeches (structure, style), parades and ceremonies may be studied. The presidents' vision of the European and world security in the speeches and the transformation of the concept also may be important.

Thus, WWII speeches as well as the Russian representation of the topic itself are used in order to construct the desirable image of Europe, according to the current events. The concept of Europe has been transforming from the territory of partners/equal winners in the war to some far abroad, foreign and even hostile space. In parallel, Russia's image has been changing as well: as a country-member of some international unities to isolated state – the one, which won the war and is able to repeat this.

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